

Finding Fulfillment in a Purpose Larger than You by Tami Simon

What follows is the transcript of an interview between Tami Simon and Lynne Twist. You can listen to the audio recording [here](#).

Tami Simon: Hello friends, my name's Tami Simon, and I'm the founder of Sounds True. I want to welcome you to the Sounds True podcast, Insights at the Edge. I also want to take a moment to introduce you to Sounds True's new membership community and digital platform. It's called Sounds True One. Sounds True One features original, premium, transformational docuseries, community events, classes to start your day and relax in the evening, special weekly live shows, including a video version of Insights at the Edge with an after-show community question-and-answer session with featured guests. I hope you'll come join us, explore, come have fun with us, and connect with others. You can learn more at join.soundstrue.com.

I also want to take a moment and introduce you to the Sounds True Foundation, our nonprofit that creates equitable access to transformational tools and teachings. You can learn more at soundstruefoundation.org, and in advance, thank you for your support.

Let me introduce you to Lynne Twist. She is a global visionary and activist, cofounder of the Pachamama Alliance, working to preserve the Amazon rainforest and engage in community-based climate action. She's the founder of the Soul of Money Institute and the author of the bestselling book, *The Soul of Money*. She's been instrumental in raising tens of millions of dollars for social change projects over the last four decades, helping to end world hunger, alleviate poverty, and address all kinds of issues that relate to our health and the sustainability of the planet. She's the author of a new book, *Living a Committed Life: Finding Freedom and Fulfillment in a Purpose Larger Than Yourself*. Certainly something Lynne has done—living a committed life—and it's my great pleasure now to introduce you to Lynne Twist and to have her be with us here on Insights at the Edge.

Lynne Twist: Thank you, Tami. I'm so excited to be on your program and love you and love Sounds True and just love talking to you—who doesn't?

TS: In your new book *Living a Committed Life*, you write that one of your superpowers, and I'm going to emphasize one. But one of your superpowers is seeing possibility and speaking about it. And I thought to myself, I need to know more about this. I need to know more about it, because often, I'm someone who sees kind of like the worst-case scenario. That's the first thing I see, and then I have to talk to other people and I start seeing possibility—but I don't have that. I have it as a power but certainly not a superpower. And

I see how valuable it is, and I'd like to develop it. So talk to me about how this capacity lives in you?

LT: Oh my goodness, no one's ever asked it quite that way—so you're so good. Well, I don't know if there's any formula. I think it's a little bit the way I kind of was born, because I was a very happy child. But I also have learned that possibility is vital for us to create the future we want. When people don't have possibility, when it's tamped down, when it starts to evaporate, when it starts to disappear, that generative capacity that we all have to source ourselves and create a new future is also hampered. Especially when we're having a downer, a bad day, or when we have a breakdown, which everybody has. It's part of being human. So maybe one way of saying it, to you in answer to that question, is I realized I have a special love for possibility, a special love for generating futures that lift us out of the darkness, and I committed to that. When I used to work at The Hunger Project many years ago, people really counted on me for that, because that work was beautiful and continues to be, and it's also really hard.

When you're in a refugee camp after a war and people are starving and very few people have food and water and the situation is so dire, I learned somehow to see the spirit in people—the magnificence of their commitment to stay alive, the love they have for their children—to focus on that, which would give me access to generating possibility for them. So in many ways I think I developed it. I had it maybe to begin with and then I developed it, because it was necessary to get through the dark passages that I was in when I was working on hunger and poverty, and now it's just a muscle. I think it's a muscle, just like gratitude, which I know you're really good at. The more you exercise your tennis serve and practice it, the better you get. Same thing with generating possibilities, same thing with finding gratitude for anything and everything. So it's become a muscle, and people count on me for that. That's the other thing—when people count on you for something, you have to deliver.

So in terms of how you get there, just when it's there, exercise it, strengthen it, and know that there's always a possibility. It's always there.

TS: So we're going to exercise this muscle together here, Lynne. You're my possibility trainer, so thank you. Seriously. Right now, during this time that we're in, I think for a lot of people it's hard to see the possibility of this time. We see the despair and feel the pain of this passage that we're in—hopefully a passage to something filled with possibility. How do you see this time we're in?

LT: Well, I see it as a massive breakdown in every sector of society: the economy, our health, our democracy, our political landscape, our education system, even our religious faiths. In many cases, in breakdown—and the big one is the climate crisis, global warming, everything related to that, species extinction. I could go on and on with that one, it's so gigantic. So I see this big giant breakdown as an epic passage for the human family and as massive, uncompromising feedback for us. If you look at it as feedback and look at it as a message from the mother, the Earth, everything comes from the Earth. I mean everything. This computer that I'm looking at, the microphone I'm speaking on, my coffee cup—not just the plants, the animals, and the humans. But everything comes from

the Earth, including the virus. I sometimes—without stepping over the pain, the suffering, the loss of life, the dissolving of thousands of businesses, probably millions of them, economic downturn in country after country. Without stepping over that, acknowledging that and knowing you got COVID, I got COVID.

I got it several times, losing people we love, the tragedy of the pandemic. I also see the power of that disruption. And in many circles that I'm in, with indigenous people, they see it as the response from the mother to a primordial yearning of the human species, to help us disrupt the way we were living that is inconsistent with the long-term future of life. We couldn't disrupt or interrupt the way we were living. We're so powerful, but not powerful enough to disrupt the trajectory that we're on that is inconsistent with our own survival and the survival of human life, at least on this planet. So the mother has disrupted us and will continue to, I hope—funny to say that, but in a way—until we find our way to a path that is consistent with the long-term future of life. So another way of saying it, there's a metaphor to use which I want to suggest.

I've had three children. Many people listening, perhaps, have had children or know people who've had children. And when you're pregnant and you don't know you're pregnant and you're in what's called morning sickness. You think you're sick, you really do feel ill, you throw up in the morning sometimes, you are exhausted, your energy is different, you want to eat strange things, you can't sleep sometimes. Until you go to the doctor, you think you're really sick. And then you find out you're pregnant. Oh, my God. Especially for people who wanted to get pregnant. There's a child in me, there's a new life forming. Then that context, that holding, that frame changes everything about the illness. You're still throwing up in the morning, you still need a nap in the afternoon, you still feel tired, but you're so excited to have people help you with your groceries. You're kind of proud of throwing up in the morning. You're kind of excited about having to take a nap because you're giving birth to new life.

So one way of looking at what's going on right now that's so troubling is, we're in morning sickness for a species that's lost its way and that is pregnant with a new kind of human being. The pregnancy may be very, very long, and not every pregnancy produces a baby. But the pregnancy also will probably lead us to a very painful birth. Birth is not easy. The more it hurts, the closer are you to having a baby—I remember that when I was having my kids. So that's a metaphor. It's merely a metaphor, but it's a conversation to live in, to understand that perhaps this is happening, as Paul Hawkins says, "not to us but for us." If we can receive the feedback, incorporate it, and know that the great mother, the Earth or life or the divine, the power greater than us—it's not a punishment. It's an ally to help us do what we all know deep in our hearts we need to do, which is change the trajectory of the way the human family is living on this planet and in the community of life.

So that's generating a possibility for you, for me, and with every single breakdown that we have on planet Earth and the breakdowns we have in our life, which happen all the time. That's part of being human. One of the things that I like to remind us, perhaps, or name is that I think in the seeds of every breakdown, no matter how dark, are the seeds of a breakthrough that's bigger than that breakdown. Whether that's true or false, I live that way. And so far it's been pretty darn true. So what are the seeds in this breakdown that will give us a breakthrough that's way greater than the breakdown, that perhaps we've been waiting for? So that's one way to look at the mess we're in and how to hold the light for the possibility.

TS: Now Lynne, you use this phrase, “Telling a new story.” It goes right along with what you’ve been saying. If we tell a different story—we’re pregnant, we’re not just suffering with an illness—it changes everything. You write, “We don’t necessarily live in the reality of the world, we live in the conversation we have about the reality of the world. And that narrative, that conversation, is malleable. We can tell a new story.” It seems to me that this is part of the muscle work of being a “possibilitarian,” or whatever word you use for it, is telling a new story. My question to you is, how do you know? This malleable story, how do you know it’s a real story and not just kind of the story you want to have happen? Or is there a difference? Or how do you see that?

LT: Well I would say that, Tami Simon, your work is about this. Your work is about so many things, but in one dimension, all the Sounds True podcasts that I listen to, the beautiful books, the recordings, are all about creating conversations that empower us, that nurture us, that uplift us, that tell the divine truth. I think that’s why you named it Sounds True. What is the sound of truth coming through? So I’ll repeat what you said in my own way, and I know you read my words, but I don’t think we really realize that we don’t really live in our lives even. We don’t really live in our relationships, we don’t really live in our communities and our world. We live in the conversation we have about our lives. We live in the conversation we have about our relationships. We live in the conversation we have about our community and we have about our world. We can’t always change immediately what’s going on in our relationship, if we’re having a snarl with someone that we care about, or we can’t necessarily change immediately what’s going on in our community.

But we have absolute omnipotence over the conversation we have about our lives, the conversation we have about our relationship, the conversation we have about our community. That’s where the levers and dials of life are, where we can find access agency, sovereignty. So it’s not true/false, because I don’t know that there’s true/false, really, in what I’m talking about here. It’s, how do you empower yourself so you stay centered in who you are and be able to generate the best possible self, the best possible me? I did a little course last week with a group of women, some of whom are having a downer about Christmas, Hanukkah, whatever it applies to. Because the holidays can be dark for some people who grew up in a divorced family where people were fighting at the table, or they were so sad when their mom or dad left or someone died. This time, sometimes it’s not a joyful time for them. And we were looking at, what is it that people in those situations can do to use the levers and dials of conversation to have a holiday season that starts to change that mood, that way of feeling, that way of being.

And then the constant consumerist franticness and pressure. We have to buy, buy, buy, buy, buy. And so we talked about just exactly this. What are the levers and dials to shift that conversation from loneliness to being in the communion of life? To being in the “all one,” which is the source of the word alone, and realize these are holy days? That’s the source of the word “holidays.” And how can we get in touch with the wholeness, the holiness of life, the sacredness of life during this time, and not be going into that dark hole for some of those people? It’s really, what is the conversation you’re going to generate about the day? What is the conversation you’re going to generate about the holidays? Rather than commiserate, where are you going to go to and who are you going to talk to? What’s that conversation going to be that lifts you out of that and creates some joy?

Because I say—this is another thing that I think is really useful to imagine and this is once again what empowers us. Whether it’s true or false I can’t say, I don’t know, but I think

pain and joy are related. They're one. The more pain and suffering we are willing to allow ourselves to feel deeply, the more capacity we have to express joy. It's almost like it expands our capacity for joy, it expands our capacity to live fully. So to be in pain for as long as that's useful and you can tolerate it and really feel it can be helpful, and then coming out of it, is something that one needs to generate a new conversation.

So I don't know, I can give you an example. Yesterday I was cranky and crabby when I woke up. I don't know why, but I was cranky and crabby and I was supposed to make a fundraising video for the Pachamama Alliance. My colleague Sara Vetter came over and was with her video camera and set up a whole thing and I said, "I'm too crabby, I can't do it." So what we did was, she sat with me, across from me on a stool, and I sat on the other side of the stool. We did this process where I complained and complained and complained and complained and complained and complained and said, "I know I'm right about this, and this makes me mad, and I'm discouraged about this, and this made me upset, and I didn't like this about this and this when someone said this." She sat there, she said, "I got it, thank you. What else? I got it, thank you. What else?" She didn't try to fix it, she didn't try to make me feel better. She didn't do anything, she just let me what I call kind of dump. And at the end, when there was nothing left and she just kept saying, "What else? What else? What else? What else?" Then we reversed it, and I was a witness for her without trying to fix it or make her feel better or anything. Then we went for a walk—the trees are so beautiful right now—it made us cry. It was raining in the Bay Area, that's like heaven sent. We've been desperate for rain, so the rain was glorious. We came back, and life was completely transformed.

So we shifted our conversation. And we're the same people, the circumstances are the same, all the things we complained about were still there. But we knew that we had the power to shift our conversation and therefore our experience of life. So whether you asked what's true, I don't know, I feel nature is true actually. That's one place where I can always find the truth for myself, or what I'm calling the truth. But how I relate to what's going on is where I have power and where I have levers and dials—where I have sovereignty.

TS: In *Living a Committed Life*, one of the sections that impacted me the most—so it's interesting here that you're talking about the relationship between great joy and deep pain—is the section on being proximate to suffering, and that willingness that you've had in your own life as an activist to get right close to suffering, and how that's changed you. I wonder if you could share a story about that, your own willingness to be proximate to suffering and how you did it? That's part of what I'm really into, how you did it without saying, "No way, this is too much. No thank you, I'll go back to the hotel." Or whatever in your travels. How you did it and how it changed you?

LT: Oh, God. Well gosh, I did it because it was there. But I realized how powerful it was and that's why I wrote about that. Also, Bryan Stevenson is one of my great heroes, and I don't know if you've interviewed him. But he started the Equal Justice Initiative and he works with people who are on death row and that phrase actually directly comes from him: "Stay proximate to suffering." I think if we don't allow ourselves to have some experience of suffering—and now we all have our own suffering—but really profound suffering of other people, we may live a more inauthentic life, if I can put it that way. But let me tell a story, so I'll tell the story of the Ethiopian women. Would that be the right

one?

So I worked for The Hunger Project for many years and after the 1984, 1985 famine in Ethiopia, which was one of the most horrendous famines in the history of the world. A million people died, most of them children under five, in the Rift Valley of Ethiopia, and I was there after that famine. I wasn't there during that famine, but after that famine. I found myself in a setting that was sitting around a dry well with seven Ethiopian women, all of whom were mothers who had lost every single child to starvation, their babies, their teenager, their 10-year-old, every single woman, every single child had starved to death in their arms. It's unimaginable to lose a child. I think any of us who have children can't even imagine it or have lost one. It's the most profoundly tragic thing you could possibly experience or imagine. These women lost every child and they were there and could not feed them, had no water, had no food, and in one case, a woman shared that the baby died at her breast because she had no milk. She hadn't had water in so many days and she looked down, and the baby had stopped suckling and even trying and was dead. So anyway, it's a long story but we sat around the dry well and, consistent with their tradition, they wanted to acknowledge the life and death of each child and tell the story of each child and tell the story of their excruciating death. And so one woman had lost 11 children. I mean this took a long time. It was five days and five nights, and they would tell the story of little Muhammad. The mother would say, "Little Muhammad was four, he was walking towards a mirage. He thought he saw water on the ground and then he fell. And I went to get him and he was dead." Then she would talk about what that was like, and then she would start crying, and we would all cry. You couldn't help it. And they would wail and keen, is another way of talking about what they're doing. Keen, screaming, crying for little Muhammad. Then we'd take a break and then we would talk about Malika, who died at her breast. And same process, keen, cry, and it went for days and nights, days and nights.

I mean, it's hard to even talk about this without crying myself, because it was so exhausting. Emotionally huge, like nothing I ever had before or since. And by the time we were done—five days and five nights—we were just completely wiped out, but they were free. The women were free. In a way, I can't really put words around it, but they were free. So that last day, each one of them made a commitment, and I was their witness, to spend the rest of their life getting educated. They didn't read or write. So that they would be able to live in a way that would at least contribute to having no other mothers have that horrible, horrendous experience of having their children starve to death in their arms. So I was a witness to that, and it was super inspiring. I mean, it was just incredible that they made that commitment, and they bonded together, we hugged, you can imagine it. So right after that, I had an appointment, or in my schedule a commitment, to meet with an investment club in New York of women investors.

I've been fundraising all my life, as you pointed out, and I've raised hundreds of millions of dollars, and they wanted to talk to me about The Hunger Project. But they also want to talk to me about their relationship with money. And so I went to New York right after Ethiopia, and I was sitting in a Park Avenue apartment that was so beautiful and so opulent. It happened to be seven women, same number, women dressed to the nines in designer clothes. Just beautiful, gorgeous wives of Wall Street merger and acquisition guys probably. I don't know, but whoever they were married to had made plenty of money. And I couldn't tell them anything except about the women in Ethiopia. It would just come out of me like a fountain and we cried, all seven of us and myself, about these women and what they'd gone through from the tragedy. But also from how inspired I was by them actually. And then at some point, all of us realized seven women, seven women, and the women I was meeting with in New York had a different kind of hunger.

The Hunger Project really has always been about the front and the backside of the hand of hunger. The front side of the hand of hunger—hunger, malnutrition, physical hunger, starvation, malabsorptive hunger—the backside of the hand of hunger it's related, it's the same. It's the hunger for meaning in our lives, the hunger to make a difference, the hunger to matter. And the women in New York were desperately starving here while the women in Ethiopia were hungry here or had gone through that experience. So we put these two hungers together and The Hunger Project—and here it was in front of my face: seven women in New York desperately hungry for meaning, seven women in Ethiopia hungry to make a difference with their life also now. And we put them together. We decided to put them together and, as you can imagine, it was a miraculous, not have with have nots—not H-A-L-V-E-S, H-A-V-E-S, H-A-V-E-S.

These women had incredible skills, courage, depth. The women in Ethiopia knew the local language, knew how to navigate a corrupt government, got themselves educated from kindergarten all the way through getting—three of them got PhDs, one became a lawyer, and these women made resources available to these women. But the resources that these women gave to these women were resources that they needed: strength, courage, spirit, inspiration, vision, making a difference with their lives and the children of these women who were entitled, kind of. Raising kids with a lot of money is hard to do well, and their kids went to Ethiopia. I mean, it was miraculous for all of them and that was when I... These women, being proximate to these women's suffering when they had to pull themselves out of poverty and hunger. These women, being proximate to the suffering of the people in the affluent world, this deepened all of us. Deepened, expanded our hearts—like busted us open, broke our hearts open in a way that I don't know what would've happened otherwise. So that's what I mean. And I've had thousands of experiences like that, and I've taken people to the places maybe they would never experience. That deep understanding and proximity to suffering and pain is not something to be afraid of. In my life, I've always moved toward it.

At first, I thought I could be helpful, and maybe I have been, but I want to just quote Rachel Naomi Remen, who I think we both know. She says, "Helping acknowledges that who and what you're working on is weak, fixing acknowledges or says that who or what you're working on is broken. Serving says who and what you're working on is whole." I moved from helping and fixing to serving. The closer I got to suffering, the more of a servant I've become.

TS: Well, Lynne, I mean that's such a powerful and amazing story. I'm also struck by you saying that it's one story of many in your life. I have one little question. When you said at the end of their days of grieving together, of which you were a part of, they were free. I was really moved by that. What in it, in the grieving, was so deep and thorough that they were free?

LT: I don't know how to answer that Tami, I just know that they were altered in their being. And it's almost as if there was some honorable closure, which I also write about in the book. They started to see they had something to live for. And before that, I think they might have taken their own lives, because being a childless mother in Ethiopia is not acceptable, and yet they were all childless mothers then. So they were free to live a new life, they were free to choose life, you might say, to go on. You give me the opportunity to

say something else that you're not asking, but I'll say it anyway.

TS: Please.

LT: One of my friends, Tracy Apple, who I worked very closely with. When her husband died very suddenly... She's a Buddhist, and she went into a very, very horrendous grief process, like anybody would when they lose the person they love most in the world. Her teacher's a wonderful Buddhist teacher out at Green Gulch here in the Bay Area and her teacher said to her, "Grieving is really, really, really important. And what it is, is medicine for the attachment." I say that because there's something about that that's so powerful. Grieving is medicine for the attachment. And he said, "When the grieving is complete, all that will be left is love, love not rooted in the attachment or colored by the attachment." This is a Buddhist phrase. But what will be left is unconditional love. And that's kind of what happened, I think, when I look at that. I've never really thought about what you asked me to say. The attachment to being a mother maybe, and knowing that that's the only identity they had and there was no other. Perhaps they were free to choose a new identity. I don't know.

TS: Lynne, what would you say to that person who heard what you just described and heard you say, "I've never shied away from suffering when it's been right in my face, I've turned towards it." And the person who says, "Actually, I don't know if I can handle it so I've turned away. I don't know if I can handle it. I want to help from a distance or something. But I don't know if I could." What would you say to that person?

LT: Well, I would say that they probably do turn towards suffering but in a different way than I do. When they lend a hand to someone in their life, maybe not an Ethiopian woman who lost all their children from starvation. That was an extreme example. But when a friend is hurting, when someone has a cancer diagnosis and you go to them right away and say, "I'm here for you." That's what I mean. Or when your daughter or son gets bullied at school and you hold them when they come home from school, just hold them close to you while they're crying or—we all have suffering around us. We have our own suffering. We do move towards suffering in many, many ways other than the drama that I just described. So in my life, I've had the opportunity and the circumstances to move towards the kind of suffering that, for some people, is totally unconformable, and it used to be for me too. I don't want to skip over that. It used to be for me too.

But part of the purpose of my book is to tell people, if you make a commitment larger than your own life, that commitment will come back and shape you into who you need to be to fulfill it. It's really powerful. We often think that Gandhi was born a genius and then he found a way to express it, yeah maybe. But maybe he was born and then he made a big commitment and it came back and shaped him into who he needed to be to fulfill that commitment. I say that's really the way it works. You make a commitment to run a marathon and it comes back and makes you someone who has the courage and the resolve to get through the days you don't want to run. And then you have that new strength, and then you have that new resolve. So I'm suggesting that I made a big

commitment, ending world hunger, and it made me into a kind of person who could be in those circumstances and tolerate that.

But if your commitment is to be the best friend you can possibly be and make a difference in people's lives who move into your field, then you'll find a way to be with the people you care about in their darkest moments and be there for them. So it really depends on what your commitment is. I think all of us want to be of service, want to be of use, want to make a difference with our life. I think we want that almost more than anything, that's my ground of being. I can't prove that that's true, but that's been my experience. So I invite people to know that when your heart is breaking and people come into your field and hold you, that's something that you've been doing all your life too, and that you'll do more and more and more of it. If you have a commitment larger than your own life, you'll have those opportunities. And when you step up to them and step into them, it expands your capacity for everything, not just to be with suffering but to be with this world and who you are.

TS: Now Lynne, you have had several commitments that you've made in your life to purposes that are bigger than anything personal. After your commitment, for two decades, to end world hunger, a new commitment emerged in your life that I learned surprised you. You weren't expecting it. And the story of how that happened is, dare I say, mind blowing. I wonder if you can share it with our listeners.

LT: I would love to, thank you. Well, I was very, very deeply engaged and committed to the Hunger Project and had a role as the chief fundraiser for the entire world. So I managed fundraising operations in 53 countries and I also was very engaged in Sub-Saharan Africa. All the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal, Zambia, Zimbabwe, places like that, Namibia, and also the subcontinent of Asia: India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka. I had responsibility for hundreds of thousands of volunteers. I mean they didn't directly report to me, but I was in charge of our volunteer network, which was hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people, and then raising hundreds of millions of dollars. So I was very, very, very busy, I had my hands full and I had three kids and my plate was overflowing. So I thought I'd do that for the rest of my life, there wasn't a free second. And then a large donor and friend of mine—and his name is Bob—had a project in Guatemala. We at the Hunger Project weren't working in Guatemala or South America at all. We were working in Asia and Africa at the time.

He said, "I have a pet project, an organization I started in Guatemala and we love the way the Hunger Project fundraising is designed and it's so heartfelt and not manipulative. I want you to train my development director. I want you to come to Guatemala and, with some of our donors, train my development director. You could take a two-week break, a little bit of a leave. I'll make sure all your targets are met, my financial targets." Which was a little bit of a bribe, but I accepted it willingly. OK, yay. So he made a very large contribution. So I went to Guatemala. I went with John Perkins, and I don't know if you've interviewed John. John's an extraordinary guy who was in the Peace Corps in the 60s and got very involved with Indigenous people in Ecuador, the Ecuadorian Amazon with the Shuar people, and he became a trained shaman himself.

So we are in Guatemala, John and I coleading a group of donors for our mutual friend Bob, and we realized there's a shaman involved in these Mayan projects. But the shaman is not

part of any of our meetings and we don't know who he is, and people kind of won't talk about the shaman isn't part of this. So John, whose instincts were, let's see if we can have a meeting with this guy. Eventually we—through a lot of very magical things that I'll skip—we ended up with 12 of us on a mesa in the mountains of Guatemala with this remarkable Mayan shaman named Roberto Pose. I'll never forget this, man. And John Perkins, my dear friend, knew a lot about shamanism and he spoke Spanish fluently and a little bit of Mayan, enough to kind of translate for the shaman Roberto Pose, who spoke only Mayan. So the shaman asked us to meet him at midnight—that's when we were starting the ceremony, at midnight—on this mesa of this mountaintop in near Totonicapán, Chichicastenango area of Guatemala, for people who've been there.

So we're in a very rural [area], no lights anywhere around us, and we arrive at this place on the map that he drew for us. There's a big fire and a very, very brilliant starlit sky. I mean a million stars, it was so clear and gorgeous, it was just breathtaking. You could practically read from the stars, and there was no moon. There's this fire, and the shaman asks us to lie down around the fire with our feet towards the fire. So we made a kind of wagon wheel around this fire, and he told us to lie down. This is all through John's kind of rough translation. And so we do, and John and the shaman begin to chant and drum. John had the drum and the shaman starts chanting and this drum and this whistling and chanting, and this guy had the most mesmerizing voice, I mean just incredible, and his whistling. It was transporting. He told us to journey, and I had no idea what he meant by that.

But I kind of thought that meant go to sleep and have a dream because it was midnight, why not? But it didn't happen like that. His voice and the drum and the whistling and the chanting and the night air and the crackling fire and the incredible experience of the stars overhead was just hypnotic, and I started to have a quiver in my right arm. It started to tremble, and I had this experience that I absolutely had to extend my right arm and it started shaking and it became so much larger and felt like this giant wing. Then my left arm started to quiver and I couldn't have held it close to my body for one more second, and I had to extend that. And then this sort of strange hard thing started growing on my face, which I realized was a beak. And then I had to fly. I could not lay there for one more second.

I had to lift my body up in slow motion with these huge amazing wings that had grown on my body. I started to lift myself up to the starry sky that was so glorious, I flew up toward the stars. At a certain point I looked down and there I was, down below still with all the other people around the fire and the shaman's voice, his whistling and the drumming was still very, very present right in my ear. I wasn't somehow far away from that, but I was way up in the sky and I was in a state of enormous bliss. And then, at a certain point, I looked down. Because it started to dawn and I looked down and I was flying in slow motion, this beautiful experience of flight over a vast unending forest of green that went forever and ever and ever and ever. It was magnificent and beautiful and breathtaking. As I'm flying over this vast forest, I look down and I have this amazing, acute vision.

I can see all the way down to the forest floor if I focus. I can see little critters, but if I lift up my head and look ahead I can see very, very far. So I'm having this experience of absolute nirvana, some amazing peace and bliss. Then these disembodied faces of men with orange geometric face paint on their faces started floating with yellow, red, and black feather crowns on their heads. These disembodied faces of men started floating up from the forest floor through the canopy up to the bird, to me, calling in a strange tongue, like a plaintive kind of call, beautiful and also hypnotic. Then they disappeared down into the forest and I just kept flying and then, maybe a minute later... There was no time. So

just then it would happen again. They would come up, float up and call to the bird, the disembodied faces of men with their headdresses, and then they would fall down into the forest again and again. So it was in a language I didn't understand, but it was beautiful and it was magical and mystical, but it was real.

This really was what was so—and then there was this loud bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, drumbeat, really loud. It startled me. I remember sitting up and opening my eyes and realized that I didn't have wings, I didn't have a beak, I was just me and this was this shaman, what he had produced or what he had made possible. And I looked across the circle and the fire was all gone. It was in embers. So it was very, very hard to see him, his face, he had face paint on too. And there was no medicine in any of this, just his voice and the drum and John. So then he asked for what happened, and we went around the circle and every single person shared that they become an animal, including me. And then, at the end of the ritual, he completed it and everybody left on the little minibus. But he asked John and I to stay.

John had had very much the same vision. Even though he was part of the ceremony, he also had a vision very similar. And so the shaman said, "You need to go to these people. This was not a vision, this was a communication. You're being called and you need to go to these people."

And I didn't know what he was talking about and John knew immediately. He said, "Lynne, I know who they are, I know where they are. I recognize the face paint, I recognize the crowns. It's the Achuar in Ecuador. I was just with the Shuar. The Achuar came into our camp, they're seeking first contact. They've been dreaming, they're trying to dream people to them. That's how they communicate. They want to bring some people from the modern world to them for first contact, they want to initiate contact. This is that."

I said, "No way, John. I mean, it's not that I don't believe you. I can't go to the Amazon, I don't know anything about the Amazon. I don't speak Spanish. I'm ending world hunger, I have a meeting in Ghana next week. You go, I bless you. Go, thank God. But I can't do that, that's not my work."

He said, "They won't leave you alone till you come." Like a warning, and I kind of got mad at him. I thought this is just too much for me, so I left. It was amazing and really inspiring. But I finished the trip and I went to Ghana for a board meeting for the Ghanaian Hunger Project. And I'm in the Novotel in Accra, Ghana, on the ground floor in the small meeting room with five men and three women, five men and three women in the conference room. And the Ghanaian people have very blue-black skin. It's so dark, it's almost blue-black, beautiful, beautiful people. And they were having their Ghanaian Hunger Project board meeting and I was sitting in from the global office, so I wasn't leading the meeting. So this meeting's happening, it's very powerful dialogue, and at a certain point the men, only the men, started having orange geometric face paint appear on their blue-black faces, and no one says anything about it. So I think I must be hallucinating.

So I excuse myself and go to the ladies' room, like us ladies do whenever possible. When you don't know what to do, you go to the ladies' room. I splashed water on my face. Then I went back and sat down again and everybody was normal and they're still talking. Then five minutes, 10 minutes later, it happened again. Orange geometric face paint just appeared on the faces of the men. I burst into tears and everybody, including the men, you know, "What's wrong?" And I realized nobody else saw this but me. So I said, "Well, I'm feeling very, very ill. I'm so sorry I can't stay, please just keep going on with your meeting. I'm going to go up to my room, pack my bag and go straight to the airport. I've

been in too many time zones, too much travel, I can't stay. I was going to stay for five days, but I'm too sick I'm going to go home." And they all were very worried, but I made them stay there and I went up packed my bag, went to the Accra airport, got the first plane to Europe.

Which was to Frankfurt, New York, New York, San Francisco, and finally got home and the whole way, whether my eyes were open or shut, the faces just kept coming. So when I got home, I was just frantic and a mess and a wreck, actually. I told Bill I was having these weird dreams and I didn't tell him like I'm telling you, because I thought there was something wrong with me. I was embarrassed. Then I tried to reach John Perkins and he was back in the Amazon, so I couldn't reach him. So I sent him a million faxes, that's what we could do, and voicemails. That's all we could do, this is 1994. Eventually he came back and he called me right away and he said, "They're waiting for us, Lynne. We have to go. We need to take 10 other people, 12 of us altogether. It's an incredible privilege to be first contact. It almost never happens. We have to go." So I took another leave, I invited Bill, my husband, he didn't want to go. He had sailing regattas and business deals and everything.

I made him come and he came and we went down to Quito, down the valley volcanoes over the eastern side of the Andes. The 12 of us took small planes, one, three at a time, into the Achuar territory, which is roadless and pristine. Eventually we all were there, and they came out of the forest with their orange geometric face paint, their yellow, red, and feather crowns and spears, loaded us and our gear into canoes, and took us to a clearing where we camped. And we began our relationship with the Achuar people of Ecuador, which became the beginning of the Pachamama Alliance. Pachamama meaning Mother Earth, and Alliance between the Indigenous people of the Amazon. Now 30 indigenous groups and conscious, committed people in the modern world, like all the listeners of Sound True, for the sustainability of life. And just one more brief thing. I was still in charge of all this stuff at the Hunger Project and then, now we had this thing happening in the Amazon, and it really became a partnership like nothing I'd ever known before in my life.

So I tried to do Pachamama Alliance and the Hunger Project and then thank God... I don't recommend this, but I got malaria from Ethiopia actually and India. I got two strains at the same time and it just felled me. It took me down for nine months. So I couldn't do anything for anyone, and that was my quiet time to realize that God, the universe, the natural world, the mother, the greater, the divine, wanted me to... I had a second chapter in my life, I was 50 years old, something new was calling me. So the Hunger Project, in nine months of my illness, was able to replace me and Bill, and I started the Pachamama Alliance. That's long, but that's it.

TS: It's such a dramatic story, Lynne, of this being called and then answering the call and then having the breakdown you had with the malaria illness that allowed for the breakthrough of you to commit to the work of the Pachamama Alliance. I'm wondering for someone right now who's listening who says, I've never felt a call with that kind of drama and, kind of, it's indisputable. I've never felt like the Earth or a group was interfering with my visions, I've never had that kind of thing. How would you suggest they hear the call in their life? Because it seems like you believe everyone does have a call.

LT: Yes. Well in retrospect, it all sounds so almost like a movie or something, but it was so

confusing and it wasn't so obvious to me then, and it sounds so wonderful. So it is the stuff of a book my life. At the same time, I want to say that it's my view, as you said, that everybody who's born today has a role to play. I really believe that. I can't prove it, but it's such an epic time in human history. I mean it's epic, everything's epic. All the breakdowns are epic, the challenges are epic, the darkness is epic. The possibility is also epic though. So I feel that it's one of the reasons I wrote this book, is that if you really think about it there's a through line in your life. Not just you, Tami Simon, which I know you're probably very aware of. Everyone is, because we love you and Sounds True so much and you make so much available. I want to say a lot about that.

But there's a through line, we look back at when we were little, and if you were the person who, on the kickball team, chose the best player first, you're one kind of person. If you picked the person who was the worst player first, then maybe that's a sign that you're all about justice and social justice and making sure everybody has a chance. Maybe that's your commitment and that's a calling and you've always kind of been that like that, and then you kind of formalize it by making a commitment to live the rest of your life with more emphasis on that. Or maybe you've always been someone, since you were little, who was drawn to trees, to sit under them, to protect them, to know about them. Then maybe you got involved in forestry and then you realize that you want to be involved in protecting the forest. People if they look at their life, who are your heroes and heroines all the way through your life? Those things give you clues to what's yours to do, and I say that we all have a role to play.

When I say that it's not a big role or a small role, it's just your role and if you play it, your life will have a kind of meaning and freedom and fulfillment that you've dreamed of. It takes just being conscious and paying attention to things. One way, when I'm working with people directly on this, I sometimes ask them what breaks your heart? That's a clue. What breaks your heart? Not just touches your heart, breaks your heart. And then what calls to you, that you're drawn to, that you feel it has to do with this part of our anatomy. It has to do with being more than doing. But usually there's a through line and lots of times it's many things. Maybe it's just being a unconditionally loving kindergarten teacher that every child that comes into your kindergarten, you have a commitment to see and really mirror back to them their own magnificence in a way that they never forget that for the rest of their life. It doesn't need to be ending world hunger.

I tell the story about a bus driver that really impacted my husband when he was in business school. He always wanted to get on this guy's bus because this guy was committed to having everybody on his bus have a good day. If you took the 39 from this place or wherever you were to the end of the line or anywhere along the way, you got Joe the bus driver and it was a good day for you because you got on his bus. It's available to all of us. And there's clues in your life and only you can see them if you awaken yourself to see, yes there's something that I'm here for and I'm going to find out what it is and I'm going to do it with all my heart.

TS: Lynne, as we come to a conclusion I'm just going to make a circle back to where we began about your superpower of being a possibilitarian. You write, "The greatest threat to creating the future we want is fear, discouragement, and cynicism. It's easy to be cynical, it's easy and cheap because it asks nothing of us. Cynicism is like a disease, an infection, and it's cowardly. What takes courage is to hold a vision and live into it." I'm coming back to this note because I think sometimes people think cynicism is a form of intelligence, something like that. Look, I read the news, I'm aware, I'm intelligent, of course I'm

cynical. And the statement of yours, "It's easy and cheap because it asks nothing of us." I found that quite searing, and I wonder if you can make a comment about that here at the end.

LT: Well, I don't want to insult people who think they might be cynical. I just want to invite you to consider giving more of yourself, because it gives you permission to withhold. And I think we're all needed now. We're needed to step up, and you called me a possibilitarian. I like that. The possiblelist, I got that from Frankie Lappé, Frances Moore Lappé, she calls herself a possiblelist. I don't think everybody needs to be like me. I really want to make sure I say that, and there are things that are really dark and I don't step over them. I'm not Pollyanna. I worked on poverty and hunger, I worked with Mother Theresa. I've held lepers in my arms, I've held dead babies in my arms. So I know about the darkness and I'm not afraid of it. So I don't step over that. I want to make sure I say that. I also know that we're in a time when... There's another quote I'm going to use from somebody I think you've interviewed, Michael Beckwith. He says, "Pain pushes until vision pulls. Pain pushes until vision pulls."

And pain does push us, but you can't get out of it without a vision to pull you through. And we all have a role to play, and maybe some people's role is to point to the pain. Maybe I'm missing something here. I do point to the pain, but I also know where I'm committed because I'm a pro-activist. I call myself a pro-activist, not an activist, because I'm an activist for, not against, and I'm committed to pulling people through the pain into their vision, because that's where I stand and I know that works. So even the things that many people are against, I see them. I want to hospice their natural death with some respect and dignity. Respect comes from re-see, re-spectate, re-look and they'll die faster. I don't attack. I think I have found that to be enormously effective, it takes a lot of patience, generosity, and kindness. But it's good for me to be that way and it actually is very practical.

So pain pushes until vision pulls and I have a muscle that I've developed to help people see the vision, to pull them through the pain, and it's a privilege to do it and it's a joy.

TS: Just one final follow up here. Because as part of your vision you mentioned the metaphor of here we are, we're pregnant. We're pregnant with a new human, a new way of being together as a species, a new Earth. What is it that we're pregnant with? What's the vision, Lynne?

LT: I wish I knew exactly. I mean in the Pachamama Alliance, the organization that came from that big shift in my life, we say our work is to bring forth an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, socially just human presence on this planet. That's a pretty good definition of a new kind of human being, a new kind of humanity. Environmentally sustainable, environmentally generative, really, socially just and spiritually fulfilled humanity. A humanity that understands its role in the community of life. A humanity that's committed to ending human supremacy in its ugliness, when it's domineering and crushing other species and other forms of life. A human family that finds its role, its place in the beauty and unfolding story of the universe. And I have a great trust in that. I know there's people who think we're going extinct. I know that we are

useful, our species is important on this planet.

We've kind of overtaken things, so we're a little bit way out of line. But we have a contribution to make and we belong here and what is our role now, in the next 100 years? This is the first century of the third millennium. If you think of it that way, what is our species going to establish as our role in the next millennium? Are we going to continue to destroy everything around us? Or are we going to play the kind of role that I think is getting born in us. Which is to be earthlings, you could say, global citizens, universal humans, that are rooted in the power of our humanity and the incredible, infinite power of unconditional love, generosity, kindness, reciprocity, and what I wrote about in my last book, sufficiency. Enoughness. Gandhi, said, "There's enough for our need but not for our greed." We need to get ourselves there so we realize that. And I think we're on our way there, and this is a technical or surround-sound expression of how off we are.

Which is helpful, in its ugly way, to wake us up and get us on track and have us be reborn. So that's the best I can do right now. Whatever it is we're pregnant with, I want us to do everything we can to have a beautiful new kind of human being be born out of all this chaos.

TS: I've been speaking with Lynne Twist, she's the author of the new book, *Living A Committed Life: Finding Freedom and Fulfillment in a Purpose Larger Than Yourself*. If you'd like to watch *Insights at the Edge* on video and participate in after-the-show Q&A conversations with featured presenters and have the chance to ask your questions, come join us on *Sounds True One*, a new membership community that features premium shows, live classes, and community events. Let's learn and grow together. Come join us at join.soundstrue.com. Sounds True: waking up the world.