

Staying Loyal to Who You Are and Your Dreams by Tami Simon

What follows is the syndicated transcript of a SoundsTrue Insights at the Edge interview between Tami Simon and Dr. Tererai Trent. You can listen to the audio of the full episode [here](#).

Tami Simon: You're listening to Insights at the Edge. Today my guest is Dr. Tererai Trent. Dr. Tererai Trent grew up in a cattle herding family in rural Zimbabwe, and is now one of today's most internationally recognized and respected voices for education and women's empowerment. She was named Oprah Winfrey's all-time favorite guest, and received a \$1.5 million donation to rebuild her childhood elementary school. Tererai Trent is the author of the book, *The Awakened Woman: Remembering and Reigniting Our Sacred Dreams*. Tererai Trent has an amazing story to tell, and I'm eager for you to hear it from her in her own words. It's a story that inspires each of us to stay true: to our ancestors, to our deepest inspiration, to our heart, and to our desire to make an offering of our lives to other people. Here's my conversation with Dr. Tererai Trent.

Tererai, it's a great blessing here to be able to speak to you all the way from Zimbabwe. Thank you so much for making the time for this.

Tererai Trent: Oh, thank you for having me. Thank you.

TS: I have to say I feel a little nervous interviewing someone that Oprah called her "all-time favorite guest" out of 37,000 guests. That's quite an accolade. I know. It's true.

TT: Yes. In many ways, I think what Oprah did was giving a platform to the silencing of women, and making sure that there's more awakening to women's issues. And more awakening to education of women and girls. It wasn't about me at all, though I am very grateful for being the vessel to carry the message, to continue to make sure that women own their voices, and they own their own spaces in life.

TS: Here you are now, you say, this vessel for helping women own their voices and not be silenced. And I want our listeners to get a sense of the depth of obstacles that you encountered being born in rural Zimbabwe, and what it took for you to break the cycle of being silenced.

TT: Wow. Gosh, it's... I will always talk about coming from this long line of generations of women, women who had been married very young before they could define their own dreams. Pretty much women who were silenced because of their gender. But also because of the environment in which they grew up. We grew up during a colonial system that never respected black people and especially women. And my great-grandmother was married off when she was very young. My grandmother would follow the same pathway as my mother, and when I was 18 years of age I had four babies, and one of the babies died

as an infant because I failed to produce enough milk for the child. I was a child myself. And when I look at all these women, including myself, we were all exchanged for a cow. I mean, the marriage, to be married you have to be exchanged for a cow. It further silenced me and silenced my great-grandmother and my grandmother and my mother. And I see many women being silenced.

This is where I'm coming from. I grew up during the war. The war that liberated my country. For me, to have babies at that young age without a high school education, with nothing. So when I talk about carrying this baton, and being in a race where you ran holding this baton, I always visualized my great-grandmother, because she was married when she was young, before she could define her dreams. She was running into this race that she never defined. And she's running so fast holding this baton, the baton of poverty, early marriage, the baton of abuse, and the baton of a colonial system that never respected her worth.

She runs with that baton, she hands it over to my grandmother. My grandmother grabs the same baton of poverty, early marriage, abuse. She runs with that baton, she hands it over to my mother. My mother grabs that baton in a race that she never defined, in a race that was defined by others because of their agenda. She ran so fast with that baton of poverty, the baton of illiteracy, the baton of early marriage, the baton of a colonial system that never valued her. She runs and she passes on that baton to me. I never wanted that baton. It was not my race. It was never part of who I am. I wanted to be me. To be Tererai, to define my own pathway. But when my grandmother talks about this baton, and my mother, they say, "You are not a victim, I don't want you to think that you're a victim because you're finding yourself in a situation where you never defined." In that passing on of that baton, I was made to believe there was also the passing on of the wisdom.

My great-grandmother, when she was running, she passed on her own wisdom to my grandmother, who passed it on to my mother, my mother passed it on to me. I could have decided in my early life to say, "I am a victim," and I am refusing to say that. And I am encouraging your listeners, and especially women to say, "Yes, we can recognize our past. But it is not our past that is going to define who we are." We can decide to pick the wisdom from our ancestors. The wisdom from our grandmothers, from our elders, and run with that. My great-grandmother was the healer, my grandmother was the healer. My mother was always referred to as the psychologist of the community, despite her poverty-ness, despite this soul wounding baton that she ran with. She was the healer, she was the wisdom whisperer, and she passed on that.

So I decided, that's how I'm going to define myself. I am a dreamer, I am the master and mistress of my own destiny. I am refusing to let the past to define who I am. I am refusing to let the current challenges in my pathway become the narrative for my future. I defied the norms of my culture, I defied the rules of my father. I refused to keep silent about societal expectations that marginalized women and girls to be submissive at the expense of their dignity. But wait a minute, I was married when I was young, it means I picked that baton. But I also decided, I'm not going to hand over this pattern to my girls. I grew up during the war, so when the war ended, all of a sudden we had Australians, Americans, New Zealanders, British women coming into our rural areas, even the local universities that I didn't even know existed at that time, because most of the universities were in the urban areas, and there was only one university, the University of Rhodesia. And there were not that many black women attending that university.

When these women were now coming after independence, I would watch these women. They had a kind of a walk to them, confidence. And they would always carry backpacks,

and bags, and wearing glasses or spectacles. And they would always fish something out of their bags, open these notebooks, and put on their glasses, remove them, speak to one another. And I would always think, "When I grow up, I want to be like these women." I thought wearing glasses was a sign of education. And this woman, she sat down with me and other women in the village, and she asked me one question that no one had asked me before. I was probably around 20 years of age, expecting my fifth child, number five. No high school education, nothing. Living in an abusive relationship. And she asked, "What your dreams? What are your hopes?" I kept quiet. I had no idea that me—black woman, marginalized, living in an abusive relationship, five kids—I'm supposed to dream. I kept quiet.

Other women talked of their desire to see their own children getting an education. I kept quiet. The woman looked at me. She was blonde with blue eyes. She leaned towards me, and she said, "Young woman, you have been quiet. What are your dreams?" When I opened my mouth, I became a chatterbox. And I don't know why I opened my mouth. Maybe it was the way she kept on looking at me, the way she kept on nudging at me. And when I opened my mouth, I said, "I want to go to America. I want to have an undergraduate degree, a master's and a PhD." She looked at me, because there was silence when I said that. All the women looked at me like I was crazy, and I believed it for a moment. Because I could hear them even though they were not saying anything, "How dare you can say that? You have no high school education. You have an abusive husband. You talk of going to America, a PhD." And I began to dwindle in my own space. And this stranger, she said, "Now, I want you to understand, if you believe in these dreams that you just shared with everyone here, and you work hard, they are achievable." And maybe that's all I wanted to hear as a poor mother.

And she used the word, tinogona. Like "tino" and "I'm gonna dance," you put those into two, tinogona. In my language it means, "It is achievable." She emphasized that word, tinogona. I don't know what she saw in me. She really made me believe I can achieve these dreams. I ran to my mother and I said, "I met a woman who made me believe in my dreams." That was music to my mother's ears. My mother looked at me and said, "Tererai, if you believe in what this stranger has said to you, and you work hard like she said, and you achieve your dreams, not only would you have defined every life that came out of your womb, but you'd also define generations to come." I realized in that moment, my mother was handing me an inheritance. My mother was a very poor woman, but she wanted me to break that cycle, the cycle of poverty in my family.

I come from a culture where when a child is born, the female elders of the village, they would snip out or cut the infant's umbilical cord, or the birth cord. Find the mother's old address, cut a small piece, tie the umbilical cord into that small piece, bury the contents deep down under the ground, with the belief that when this child grows, wherever they go, whatever happens to this child, the umbilical cord will always remind them of their birthplace. I want women to believe in the power of our rituals, our daily rituals. They help us to ground us, to hold that space for our faith. My mother said, "Write down your dreams and bury them the same way we bury the umbilical cord. Wherever you go, no matter the abuse in your life, the beatings from your husband, those buried dreams will always remind you of their importance. That you need to break this vicious cycle of poverty, that you need never to pass on this baton to the next generation, you don't have to pass on this baton to your own children. And remember, we have now gained independence, you are in a better place than your great-grandmother, your grandmother, and myself."

I wrote down my dreams. I had four: to go to America, undergraduate, masters, PhD. And I

was ready to go and bury those dreams. In my culture the word “bury” and “plant” are the same. So I was planting, but when you use the word bury, you are burying from the weather, you’re burying from the termites, you’re burying from discouragement, so that you could see your own dreams grow and grow, you are providing them with that fertile soil, that nurturing ground, so you can watch your dreams grow. And so my mother said, “Tererai, I see only four dreams. But let me remind you this, your dreams in this life will have greater meaning when they are tied to the betterment of your community.” I looked at my mother, I had no idea what my mother was talking about. And I am thinking, “Gosh, what does that even mean?” My mother, I think she saw the confusion in my face, and she said, “Tererai, your dreams in this life will have greater meaning when they are tied to the betterment of others.”

In many ways my mother was saying, “It’s not only about your personal goals in life, your personal dreams in life. It’s not only about the degrees that you’re going to achieve in life, or neither the personal financial goals in life, but it is about how those goals are tied to the betterment of others. That’s what is going to make you a successful woman.” I’d never heard about that. And I would end up writing my fifth dream, my number five dream. “When I am done, I want to come back and improve the lives of women and girls, so the girls, they don’t have to go through what I had gone through. They don’t have to be married young, they don’t have to be exchanged for a cow, they can achieve their own dreams in life.” And I buried my dreams.

It would take me eight years for me to achieve a high school diploma. Eight years of failing. Yes, I failed. But eight years of never giving up. My mother was a poor subsistence farmer. She would sell groundnuts and maize so that I could take correspondence classes. I was already an adult, I could not fit into a classroom, it was unheard of to have a mother of five going back to a classroom. During that time, we were still under the British system of education, so I would take two to three classes at a time. I needed five classes—English, math, science, commerce, geography—for me to qualify for a GED diploma. So because I was poor, my mother was poor and I needed about \$20 to \$40 per class, and my mother would sell her groundnuts, and she would give me money for one or two classes. And I would write my exams and go to this rural post office where I would mail my exams to a place called Cambridge.

I had no idea where Cambridge is, and I would wait for my results to come back and walk to that rural post office. After three, six months, the result would always come in a brown envelope. And I would open that brown envelope, and I would see I have a U-ungraded, I have an F-failure. Go back to my mother, “I have failed.” My mother would say, “Let’s wait, I’ll try to sell more groundnuts and mangoes for you.” She would do that, give me another \$20, \$40. I would go enroll again, wait six months. The brown envelope comes, I open them, I have U-ungraded, I have an F. I go back to my mother, “I have failed again!” My mother said, “We can sell more groundnuts, they are about to finish, but I’ll do the best that I can.” Eight years. Finally, I have an A, and I have a B. My grandmother and my mother, in those eight years they would always say, “Tererai, go to that place where you buried your dreams, sit and visualize, and make those mental images as though you have already achieved your dreams. Feel the dreams, smell them.”

And I would sit in that place, and visualize myself getting into the airplane—and remember I had never been in a plane in my life. And had never seen one. The only airplane I knew were the war helicopters that used to come during the war. And I would visualize myself getting into that helicopter, find a seat, and it flies me to this place called America. And I would visualize these tall buildings, and I would find myself carrying books, walking into a classroom, and visualize these people that I had never seen, sitting and I

become a student. I would actually visualize the teacher standing in front of the classroom.

When I finally got that letter that said I had been admitted at Oklahoma State University—and for the past 8, 10 years, I'd been doing some peace work with non-governmental organizations—there was a rise in the demand for the empowerment of women. Even with those who were not educated, we're encouraged to join in. So I started working with women in what we call Savings Clubs. Rallying women together to save whatever pennies that they were getting from their husbands, so that at least we could start our independence. And I would work with different NGOs. When I got that letter, I realized I was short. Because I lived with an abusive husband. So I would hide my money in every place that I could think of. In my book, *The Awakened Woman*, I talked of giving my money to my sisters, my sisters-in-law to hide it. Finally, when I got that letter, I gathered all my monies and I realized I was short \$640 to come to America.

I went to my mother and I said, "I can't do this. I'm giving up." My mother said, "I don't know what to do. But I know you've worked hard, but I also know the universe has been guiding you, it will never let you down." I remember spending... I would spend a week, I couldn't even wake up. I went through a depression. All I could think of was that \$640, where I was going to get it from. And then one morning I woke up. In fact, my mother said, come to this small hearth where we used it as a kitchen, "Come, come." And I said, "No. I'm not coming." "There's somebody to see you." So I woke up and I walked into that kitchen, and I saw the village headman counting pennies and dollar notes and said, "The whole community, some sold their chickens and some sold mangoes and we have managed to come up with \$640 so you can go to America."

I came to America. The first time I got on to that airplane, there was this feeling of "I've been here before." As I found my seat on the airplane, it was such an emotional moment for me. I cried. I couldn't believe that finally I'm here. When I arrived in Oklahoma and then finding myself carrying books, that *deja vu* feeling, I've been here before. In my spirit I was poor, visualizing helped me to see this place that I had no idea that I had never seen in my life. Coming to America was a dream I wanted, but I came with five children. It was tough. I didn't have any scholarship. One day my kids were brushing their teeth and I realized their gums were bleeding, and I knew they were missing fruits and vegetables. Because I used to work in these restaurants and get french fries and burgers, and I would feed my kids with sodas and all these things that they had never eaten in their life. It broke my heart.

And I went to the university and I said, "Enough is enough. It's one thing to have a dream but it's another to see your own children suffering. I think I'm done. I want to go home." But there was something at the back of my mind, and I'm thinking, "Even if I go home, I'm letting down my girls." I had a daughter she was nine years old, and there was another one she was five, and another one who was probably around 14 months old. I'm thinking if I take these babies with me back home, I'm passing on that baton. The fear of passing the baton grounded me. So the university said, "Well, here's what we are going to do. We're going to go to the local store. At the end of the day, many of these shops, grocery shops, they throw away fruits and vegetables that are going bad. I hope you don't mind feeding your kids." And I said, "No, I don't mind."

The manager, the store manager says, "No, I'm not going to give you these fruits and vegetables because if you consume them, if anything happens to your family or to you, you'll end up suing us." I raised my hand, and I am crying and I said, "I have no money to sue anyone, please help me." The manager looked at me and somehow I think he felt my

tears. And he said, "I'm not handing you the fruits and vegetables. I'm going to put them in a cardboard box. And we are going to put that cardboard box outside near the trash can. Make sure by four o'clock every day come and pick your cardboard box, don't miss four o'clock." Well 99% of the time I was always late to that cardboard box because I used to work three jobs. And I used to take 18 hours of course work and taking care of the children.

I would find the cardboard box straight into the dumpster, into the trash can. Some of the fruits have already spilled out, and I would collect everything, wash the fruits and vegetables, feed my children. I asked myself, "Who am I to complain that my children are eating from a trash can when I know there are thousands, if not millions of children out of Sub-Saharan Africa, who are homeless, who are eating from dirty trash cans. At least the American trash can, someone is washing it. Who am I even to complain? I live with my children in a trailer house in Oklahoma, where the roof is falling apart, and we have no electricity. During summer time it was so hot. But who am I to complain when I know there are thousands if not millions of women who are on the streets? There are individuals, both men and women, who I have seen with cardboard boxes asking for food and asking for shelter. Who am I? At least I can see at the end of this dark tunnel, I can see the light."

Those thoughts grounded me. I graduated my undergraduate in Agriculture, and I did my Masters in Plant Pathology. And I thought, "Goodness, Lord, I need to take a break. I'm not going to do my PhD." I applied for a job, and got accepted at a place called Little Rock, in Arkansas. One day I'm walking in the corridor, in the passageway, and I met this woman, she's a white woman. And she looks at me and she says, "I know you. I think I do." And I'm thinking to myself, "No, I don't." And she said, "I think I do." And I am thinking to myself, "I have met so many Americans, I don't think I've met this one." And she said, "Are you not from Zimbabwe?" In that moment, it dawned on me that this was the very woman that I had met some 14 years ago in my village. The woman who had seen something in my eyes that I hadn't seen. The woman who had encouraged me to dream big. The woman who never saw my poverty-ness. Who never saw this poor person. Never saw my vulnerability. She saw a giant.

And here now is Jo Luck, and now she is the President and CEO of Heifer International, the organization that had just employed me. And I am thinking, "What are the odds that you could have someone to inspire you, and you meet them later in life?" And I learned that when I met her she was a program officer with the organization, and over the years she had now become the President of the organization. I remember my grandmother and my mother they used to say, "The universe is always there to connive for our success. If we become loyal to who we are, remain grounded in our dreams, somehow the universe, God, will honor our dreams."

Well my first trip back home, now I am the Deputy Director for Monitoring and Evaluation for this global organization, and my job is to travel all over the world. And I am thinking, "Dear God." So I went home to my village, dug my dreams, checked off going to America, checked undergraduate, checked masters, reburied those dreams, because I could see there were two dreams that needed to be achieved: my PhD, and giving back to my community. I reburied those dreams, came back to the United States of America, enrolled myself at Western Michigan University, where I achieved my PhD in Evaluations, which is statistics and measurement. And I remember the day that I walked to that podium, where they were now going to give me that paper that now says you are a PhD holder. I felt like a lawyer who had rested her case to herself and to the world. And my closing argument, or my closing statement was, if we gave education opportunities to those who are torn

down and marginalized by the social ills of our time, they can achieve their dreams.

If we gave education opportunities to women and girls, they can also achieve their dreams. Because it is one of the best investments that anyone, that any country, any society, any community could do to give opportunities to women and girls. And if we believe in the dreams of others and create opportunities for others, and be loyal to the universe, we can achieve the dreams. Because the silencing of women is global, it's not only in Africa, it's everywhere, even in the United States of America. But when women are awakened, there is healing for everyone. So now I'm thinking, "Now I have my PhD. Dear mother, why did you make me write down that number five dream? Where on earth was I going to get the money to achieve that dream?"

I was devastated. I went home and I couldn't think of anything. I would think of that dream and I was overwhelmed, because I wanted to go home. And then that's when I got the idea to sell t-shirts. And I said, "I'm going to design these t-shirts. I'm going to have tinogona on the t-shirts, that word that Jo Luck used, tinogona, 'it is achievable.' My t-shirts are going to have that logo, and I'm going to sell many and go home and build schools." Well, I only sold 20 t-shirts, and mostly to my American friends. I realized I didn't have a marketing degree. I was devastated. That's when I got a phone call, the most memorable call of my life, the call from Oprah Winfrey. And the universe had remained loyal, and she donated \$1.5 million US towards that number five dream, that I am now calling the "sacred dream." Because my mother knew it wasn't about my personal dreams in this life.

I want your listeners to know the secret to our success in this life is to allow others to stand on our shoulders, to allow others to stand on our shoulders. Because it's not about our personal goals in life, but it is about how those goals can be part of the society at large. And today, in partnership with Oprah, I have money to rebuild 11 schools, and one of the schools has become one of the largest rural schools in Zimbabwe, benefiting 38,000 children, 19,000 girls are sitting in large numbers in our schools. And for the first time in history, we have 11 kids graduating and going into university, with seven girls doing Auto Mechanics Engineering, which is unheard of, which is unheard of. Then I begin to ask myself, "What made Jo Luck reach out to me? What inspired my mother and my grandmother to reach out to me? What really made me want to achieve my dreams?"

The answer has always been my great hunger, Jo Luck's great hunger. Everyone who came, who crossed my path had their great hunger. There are two kinds of hungers in our life. There is the little hunger and the great hunger. The little hunger is all about immediate gratification, "I want it now." You can never satisfy the little hunger. It remains to demand more and more and more. But the great hunger, the greatest of all hungers, is hunger for a meaningful life. Ultimately as individuals and especially women, we become more silenced, more bitter, when we lead a life without meaning. And I think that's one of the reasons why I decided in my life, I wanted to write my book, igniting our dreams, *The Awakened Woman*, to awaken women everywhere. To let women know that it's not our past, it's not the soul wounds we carry. But it is what we expect out of us. It is how we believe and become grounded in our dreams.

And in my book, I always encourage women to do daily rituals that can help them to ground themselves in believing in their dreams, in believing in their great hunger. Their ability to tap the solutions within, you have to be more grounded.

TS: Now, Tererai, there's something I want to talk to you about in this image of the baton being passed to you, from your great-grandmother, to your grandmother, to your mother,

to you. And how you said this was not the baton you wanted, to be in a situation where there were so many obstacles to you receiving the education—and the great hunger that was inside you, so many obstacles to realizing it. But yet, you have this great reverence and relationship with your ancestors, in spite of the fact that you were born into such a difficult situation. And that's what I want to talk about, because I think one of the aspects of the wisdom of Africa is this ancestral honoring and relationship that many of us in the West, we don't quite know how to connect with it. Maybe we want to distance ourselves from our family line, because it's a bunch of alcoholics or because they weren't deep spiritual practitioners, we don't want to associate with them. We don't know how to take the good and leave the parts we don't. I'm wondering if you can speak to that? How to have a healthy and empowered relationship with your ancestors?

TT: Consciously or not, so much of who we are and what we know is handed down to us from the wise guides, the storytellers, our ancestors who came before us. I grew up with my grandmother and my mother and the village elders, and we would find ourselves sitting around an open fire, listening to stories that have been passed from one generation to the next generation. My umbilical cord is long, and I know my umbilical cord, I am tied to it, because that's who I am. We do rituals to remember our ancestors. To know they passed on wisdom to us, despite the difficult circumstances that they went through. It's important for us to remember where we came from, to remember our roots, to remember who we are. If we don't know who we are, and I always say to my sisters, "Come home to yourself," because when we know who we are, we become more grounded.

I have lived in the Western world, where sometimes, I wonder, because people they no longer relate to their great-grandmother, or to some cousin from a far distance. Those bones needs to be recognized, they are sacred. There are Native Americans, they do it, they always say, "Humankind has not woven the web of life, we are one thread within it." Whatever we do to the web, to the ancestors who are part of the circle, when I am born, I am joining this circle of women before me, even if they are not there, but I can see them as part of this circle, so I am part of that circle. Whatever we do to the web, whatever we do to our ancestors, we are doing it also to ourselves, carrying their wisdom with us. Because my grandmother, despite the fact that she was poor, despite the fact that she was marginalized, she was colonized, I don't want that narrative to be the only narrative, there's another narrative. She was a wise woman, the healer of the world, the one who passed this knowledge of healing and wisdom that I carry with pride and dignity.

TS: For people who don't feel a connection with their ancestors in the way that you're describing, what do you suggest? How can they make that connection?

TT: I always think about even for suggesting to them, I go back to science, I don't know... You know epigenetics?

TS: Yes.

TT: Epigenetics tells us that within our DNA, if there was an ancestor with some emotional trauma, or some wisdom, it's passed on to the next generation. If we want to know who we are, we have to know the soul wounds that we carry and the wisdom that we carry. Because the soul wounds that we carry, they manifest in fear, they manifest in these little hungers, addictions. But when we confront that past and we know our soul wounds, we are able to heal from those soul wounds. I advise my sisters in the world, if you don't know where you come from, try to find the elders. If you say, "Well, I was adopted, I don't know my mother." There's always a mother in the community, find a mother in the

community, find a grandmother. Because their stories they share with us, they're stories of healing, they will heal us. I truly encourage women to believe in this power of the umbilical cord, to be connected to our ancestors, to find our own rituals, our own daily rituals, that we can learn from the ancestors.

I always think that in the Western world there are elders, but somehow we have abandoned the idea that our elders have something to offer us. We always want to run away from aging. How many times we have forgotten that ailing grandmother, how many times even ourselves, we don't want to be associated with age. And yet in my culture, if you are old you are more respected because you bring wisdom. I'm not saying young people, they don't have wisdom, but there is the ancient wisdom that we need in our societies.

TS: Now, Tererai, something else I wanted to ask you. You said how it's not just the women in Africa who have been silenced through the cultural situation, the colonization, the being sold off to marriage for the price of a cow, and everything that comes with that, that you described. But that in your experience in coming to America, you saw that Western women also, in certain situations, seemed to you to be quite silenced. How do you see that?

TT: I was surprised when I first came to America, because I had very high expectations of my Western sisters because I had seen the way they walked, the way they put on their glasses. There was that freedom within them, and I wanted that. But when I lived in the US, and I began to see, and I would look at universities—in many cases, the dean is always a man. And I would go to the banks, the head of the bank is always a man. And I would look at the Presidents, it's always a man. I begin to think, "What is it about women in this country?" Yet we talk about the empowerment of women, and we don't see women being represented in these places that we think this is where there is power for them to make decisions, policies, and they're nowhere to be found. Then you see the Me Too movement, gosh. And I realized the silencing of women is a global disease.

Women, we need to stand up, we need to come together collectively as women, and use our feminine energy to bring solutions to our silencing. We are smart. We are the caregivers. But sometimes we don't take care of ourselves, because we are busy taking care of others. We don't take care of our own dreams, because we're busy trying to take care of other people's dreams, and we become more silenced. I am saying no more for a Western woman to be silenced. For a Third World woman to be silenced. Together, collectively, we can begin this journey of our awakening.

TS: Now, Tererai, there's just one more thing that I want to underscore from your book *The Awakened Woman* and talk to you about, which is, I'm imagining as people listen to your story, your story of staying loyal and true to your five dreams, they might be thinking, "This woman has incredible grit, incredible perseverance. I mean, what a strong will." And yet at some point in the book, this is what you write, you write that you don't view your own success through the ego filters of accomplishment. Instead, and this is a quote, "I recognized my life's achievements as something inconceivably simple and yet deeply profound. At the most difficult points in my life, I had superhuman strength, because of other people who gave me opportunity."

That moved me so much, it moved me because it made me want to be a source of opportunity for other people, it made me want to be that type of opportunity. I thought, "What a beautiful way to put it." That it's not like we're just going out and getting our own dreams checked off. But we can actually be a living opportunity for others. And I wonder if

you can comment on that? You call it “an invisible ladder.”

TT: My mother used to say, “Here on earth, especially for women, we are climbing this invisible ladder.” And the invisible ladder has rungs. There are other women who are at the bottom of that ladder, trying to climb going to the top. And there are women who are at the top. The women who are the top, we have a sacred, a moral responsibility to pull up the women who are at the bottom of that rung so that they can also achieve their dreams. When people say to me, “Tererai, you must be lucky to have achieved your dreams.” And I say, “No, I don’t believe in lucky.” I had opportunities. I had others who looked at me and provided me with an opportunity. I stand on the shoulders of giants. Every one of my dreams, I can tell you the giant on whose shoulder I stood. I stand on the shoulders of champions.

This idea that you can just do it on your own, you can pull up yourself, we are social animals, we need one another. And I think that’s what’s driving me to go back to build schools, to provide education to others. Because I realize, for me to be in this position it was others would gave me that opportunity. They lended me their shoulder, and now it’s a responsibility. A sacred and moral responsibility. No one is forcing me. It’s an ancient, sacred one that I’m following, to allow others to stand on my shoulder. If we live in this world where we all do that, we recognize that there are others who are struggling. And what is my role? How is my dream connected to the struggle of others? Because if you ask yourself, how do you find your great hunger, that great hunger that connects you to others by asking this fundamental question, “What breaks my heart?”

It is in those moments of our brokenness, that’s when we begin to feel that yearning that says, “I can do what it takes to help others.” And I’ve seen it in America. Whenever we have hurricanes, we have these things, there are others who are asking themselves, “What is breaking my heart at this point?” And they find themselves getting out of bed and saying, “I am going to help.” They are not being forced to do that. What a beautiful world we can all live if we ask, “What breaks my heart?” And connect our goals in life, to the betterment of others.

TS: Now Tererai, I want to just make sure we address that person who’s listening, who says, “I know what my great hunger is, I knew from when I was young,” or “I knew when I was in my early 20s, and I’ve given up on it. That’s not how my life turned out. And I’m hearing this talk by Tererai.” I know you call yourself a midwife for this awakening process, and I think there are a lot of people out there who gave up on giving birth to some of their sacred dreams. And they may be rustling a bit, hearing this conversation, but saying, “Maybe I’m too old, or maybe it’s just not meant to happen, or maybe that was too big a dream.”

TT: Not to dream, not to have a vision is almost like living a life without meaning, it’s almost like being dead. I would rather live on my dream, age should not be a fact here, because you want to be happy. Go for it. Try it. So, if one has two choices, not to dream and just live this life of silencing, this dead life, and you have two choices, dead life or a dream? Which one would you take? I would take the dream life. I would pursue it, and see where it takes me. That’s what I can advise the listeners. To say, “Why not? Why not?” Especially if you ask yourself, “What is my dream? What breaks my heart at this moment?”

Maybe you want to be an artist. In my book, I’ve met a woman. She was a lawyer. But I think she was trying to just fulfill what her parents wished for her, but it wasn’t her dream, she wasn’t happy. She would say during lectures she would find herself drawing and doing

artwork. And after she graduated from the degree as a lawyer, she didn't want it. She's now pursuing art and she has some pieces that she sells all over the world. But if she had denied herself to dream, she'll be sitting in some office and being a lawyer and never be happy.

Get out. Find that dream. Chase that dream, because that's who you are. We are all born to dream. Our purpose is to find that dream. And once we do, we find the joy.

TS: I've been speaking with Dr. Tererai Trent, educator, humanitarian, and author of the book, *The Awakened Woman: Remembering and Reigniting Our Sacred Dreams*. Dr. Tererai Trent has been speaking to me all the way from Zimbabwe. What's it like there? We are in the evening hours as we're recording this, yes?

TT: It is, and it's warm. Yes, it's beautiful, it rained a few days ago. Zimbabwe is a beautiful country, yes.

TS: Thank you so much for all your good work and for the midwifing that you're doing, helping to create awakened women everywhere. Thank you.

TT: Thank you. Thanks for having me.