

The Garrison Institute Presents: The Common Good Podcast Transcript

Konda Mason: Regenerative Justice and Ancestral Healing (Episode 7)

[Please note: Although the transcript is largely accurate, in some cases it may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages or transcription software errors.]

[00:00:00] **Konda Mason:** Then it was at one point when I'm sweating, sweating, and sweating in the hot summer and harvesting rice, and I realize: this is my ancestors. I am here as a result of causes and conditions coming together, me and Russ, and knowing that what happened to not only my family in the great migration, but hundreds of thousands of other black families, that my path now is to try my best to reverse the harm and to heal.

[00:00:36] What happened to so many of us?

[00:00:49] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Welcome to the Garrison Institute, presents the Common Good. I'm your host, Jonathan FP Rose, a co-founder of the Garrison Institute. Today I'm honored to welcome Konda Mason. Konda Mason is a Buddhist teacher, a regenerative farmer, an arts leader, and a justice advocate. Konda's work weaves together deep spiritual practice, ecological stewardship, and the pursuit of social healing as she tends to both the soil and the soul of community.

[00:01:16] Together we'll explore the profound connections between land, art, activism, the common good, and discover how cultivating the earth can help us repair our bonds with each other, and nature, with our own true purpose.

[00:01:54] Welcome, Konda.

[00:01:55] **Konda Mason:** Thank you Jonathan. It's really quite a pleasure to be here.

[00:02:00] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yeah, it's wonderful to be with you. So let's go back to the beginning of Kondaland. So where were you born?

[00:02:09] **Konda Mason:** I was born in Southern California, and I was actually born in a place that doesn't even exist anymore. It was a base in the middle of the desert in southern California that's gone.

[00:02:18] But then my family moved to, and I grew up in another little town in southern California called San Bernardino. Mm-hmm. And that's where I grew up until we moved to the suburb. Which was a whole other experience.

[00:02:36] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And what was it as an experience?

[00:02:40] **Konda Mason:** Well, first of all, I grew up with a family that was pretty amazing.

[00:02:47] I'm one of those few, unfortunately few fortunate individuals who comes from a very, very, very loving family. Hmm. And they were, you know, it was, I was born in the fifties, mid fifties, and by the sixties, you know, the activism was rampant. And particularly in California. And my parents and my siblings, I'm the younger of four siblings.

[00:03:13] So I also have the benefit of everybody else putting a lot in me and making the mistakes before I did, and getting our parents used to all kinds of things. But what happened is, they were activists and you know, my parents, they were very clear about the civil rights movement was huge. And I remember when Dr.

[00:03:34] King was murdered and you know how that affected my mother and Bobby Kennedy and John Kennedy and all of that. I was. Um, but what happened at, when I was 12, we moved from the place where I was raised, which was San Bernardino, which was, uh, we lived in a black community next to a Mexican community and we were right at the center point of Mexican and black and, and it was wonderful, you know, running around and it was totally different being a kid in that there was so much safety.

[00:04:07] And then we moved to better the family, to an entirely white town suburb. And it was, um, it was hard. I was 12. And suddenly I was thrust into a city. There were only maybe three or four other black families in the whole city, and I was terrorized by the white children and I didn't understand a lot that was happening.

[00:04:39] But luckily, like I said, I had a very cool family and my mom in particular who was like feeding me the truth of who I am and, uh, not listening to the things that were being said. So yeah, so that was my part, my growing up.

[00:04:55] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. And then you ended up going to Berkeley, right?

[00:05:00] **Konda Mason:** I do it. I did, I followed my older brother.

[00:05:03] My brother Larry, who was - Larry is no longer alive now, and he's the most special, special person in my life. He was seven years my senior, he went to Cal Berkeley and he was there, you know, '68 at the height, and I followed right behind him. I got there in '73. And um, yeah, it was, it was an incredible time to be in Berkeley, in the Bay Area

[00:05:30] during that period of time. The music was amazing. The activism was amazing. Everything was together. The music, the activism, the art and the, and the politics and feeling like we could do anything and that, you know, that we are gonna change the world. And, um, it was an incredible time to grow up.

[00:05:54] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So I was also growing up, I'm just slightly older than you, but I was also arising at that time and actually I lived in the Bay Area in 1975, '76 too, in Berkeley.

[00:06:07] **Konda Mason:** Really? I was there.

[00:06:08] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yeah.

[00:06:09] **Konda Mason:** I, I was directly,

[00:06:10] **Jonathan FP Rose:** I didn't go to Berkeley, but I was living in Berkeley. I worked at KPFA. Uh,

[00:06:14] **Konda Mason:** You worked at KPFA?

[00:06:16] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yeah, I actually started their environmental news program.

[00:06:19] **Konda Mason:** Oh my god, Jonathan.

[00:06:20] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yeah. And I worked in the, um, this is all digression, but anyway, I worked in the music department with an amazing guy named Charles Amer Conan, who is doing new music there. And, uh, anyway.

[00:06:31] **Konda Mason:** That's crazy. Okay, well our paths crossed 'cause I was doing the Berkeley Jazz Festival then, so I'm sure you went to the festival. Yeah, the '76 '77 festival, '75, '76 and '77 festivals. Were the ones that I produced.

[00:06:44] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Amazing. And also, by the way, there was an amazing world music program at, um, something called the Pacific Center, I think or something.

[00:06:52] Anyway, Berkeley had an amazing world music program. I remember seeing credible Indian musicians there and yeah, so yeah, so you're absolutely right. There was a moment in time, and I wanna get back to this, where culture and spirituality and economics are, uh, not the big economics that we have today, that Wall Street dominated, but the sense of how people made livings and how people were entrepreneurs and all those things wove together.

[00:07:16] By the way, it was also incredibly affordable. So I lived in a house, as many people did then where I rented rooms with a bunch of, you know, there was a bunch of us, we all got together and rented a house, and I think my rent was \$20 a month or something like that, you know, and there were like six of us, and together we rented a house for 120 or whatever, right?

[00:07:35] So the whole, there was a tremendous amount of freedom, in part because we had economic freedom. Mm-hmm. And there was this unified culture. It was so expansive. It was so liberated. It just felt liberated to be there then.

[00:07:48] **Konda Mason:** Yeah. You know what you're pointing to, I think, is that the experience, the absolute, the full experience of abundance.

[00:07:59] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yeah. Right. And possibility.

[00:08:02] **Konda Mason:** Yeah. Yeah. Well, possibility comes from abundance thinking, right? That abundance mindset is one that allows us to expand. And not to contract and not to think of scarcity, which is what we know. The economic system is based on scarcity. And when you have a society based on abundance, where the economics is based on abundance groups between each other, our own, our internal selves, our spirit, our culture, all of that comes together under the kind of abundance based agreements that we make with each other and with ourselves.

[00:08:35] It changes everything.

[00:08:37] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Exactly.

[00:08:38] **Konda Mason:** And that's what we had been. And they, and, and it, what has happened has collapsed into, when you talked about the, not the big, you know, wall Street version, the scarcity that has always been on that level has trickled down to all parts of life.

[00:08:55] **Jonathan FP Rose:** We act totally differently.

[00:08:57] Actually. Something happened, so in 1972 to pay for the Vietnam War, Nixon went off the gold standard. So before that, our economy was actually tied to physical reality. And after that you could just make money with money. Money didn't have any reality basis to it, and that led to enormous inflation.

[00:09:19] But that led to this whole also - so 1966, it turns out, was the peak time in America for income equality. That was the time in which there was the least disparity between the wealthy and the working class, 1966. And once we went off the gold standard, then the guys who made money with money were doing much better than the people who were making money with labor and the people who were making money with labor.

[00:09:40] Right. Unions were in decline. And anyway, so I'd have to go in that whole thing. Right? So that time in the seventies there was this time of potential and abundance and we didn't have this vast financialization. So much of what we did then was out of relations and out of love, and out of friendship, and out of excitement and generative.

[00:10:00] And it wasn't financialized. That's right. So then you moved to New York?

[00:10:05] **Konda Mason:** No, no. From Berkeley, I moved actually to DC. Mm-hmm. I went to DC working with, I got a postcard about a group called Sweet Honey in the Rock. Mm-hmm. Who didn't know who they were. And anyway, out of circumstances, I ended up moving to DC to work with him and to expand an organization that was just forming, that was booking them called Roadwork.

[00:10:34] Mm-hmm. Um, I co-founded Roadwork with Amy Horowitz and some of the members, uh, Bernice Reagan, who has just recently passed. And I moved in to Bernice's House, actually, I was living with her, and Toshi at the time was in the house too. And, I moved in with the Regan family and started, uh, working with Sweet Honey in the Rock.

[00:10:57] And then I moved to New York after that.

[00:11:02] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And then, so when along the way did Buddhism enter into your life?

[00:11:09] **Konda Mason:** I go back to Berkeley. So when I was at Berkeley, at Cal Berkeley, I met a man who was my bestie in the whole world. He introduced me to yoga. And so every morning at six o'clock, we would go on Hasting street right up from the campus and go to a Kundalini yoga class with the Sikhs and the turbans and the swords and all of that.

[00:11:36] The Yogi Bajan. Remember that? Yeah. Yeah. And I fell in love with yoga, completely fell in love with yoga, and at the end of Savasana there was a meditation. And so I fell in love and that was about 1974 that, and that's when I changed my diet. I stopped eating meat, I stopped doing dairy at the time, that's all it was called.

[00:12:00] Now it's called vegan. And I've been that ever since then, since '74. And I basically was taken by yoga and meditation. So that was the beginning of my spiritual journey. And particularly the part after the physical body being so in sync and going into savasana and allowing all the layers and to feel that and to go into meditation.

[00:12:32] It was, it was amazing. It was so divine. And that kept my interest into, and I ended up, so that's how it began, really. And then down the road, I don't remember when I first got my

first books on Buddhism, but I could tell you in 1982. Fast forward to 1982, I'm living in New York. I'm managing an all female band outta Brooklyn called Ibis.

[00:12:56] And we had a tour to New Zealand that was a mess. We got there and the guy wasn't real. All these horrible things happened. And I met this woman who helped us and she put the band into a club and she said, you come with me. Because I was totally stressed out as the manager of a band that had been lied to.

[00:13:18] And I ended up going with her and I went, I was going to a Buddhist retreat, now I'm thinking I'm going to retreat and you know, get a spa, you know, that kind of retreat. And it was amazing. It was actually Lama Zopa, I don't know if you know it was - Sure. Absolutely. FPMT. Yes, it was Lama Zopa and I met him in 1982 in New Zealand and that was my first retreat and was amazing.

[00:13:47] Hmm. And I had the experience of, like I said before, the meditation and the yoga. And so all of it started to. Jail and come together as a central part of my being. And I just fell in love with Buddhism.

[00:14:04] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. That's a very good lineage.

[00:14:07] **Konda Mason:** Yeah. He, he, and then after that I was reading books after I went home. And then in fast forward to 1993 or four, I get a phone call from Jack Kornfield outta nowhere. Somebody said Kornfield's on the phone at my job. And I said, Jack Kornfield. And I had one of his books, so, and he asked me, he had heard about me as a yoga teacher and he wanted to know if I would go with him to teach with him at a place called Vatos and teach yoga for this, um, activist.

[00:14:46] It was a retreat for activists of color. And I said, absolutely. And that began. My thread in the Theravada lineage and with Jack and Spirit Rock, and I became his yoga teacher. Then I became the teacher myself, and that was, it started in '92, I think it was, '93 like that.

[00:15:10] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And it is an amazing place. It's in New Mexico.

[00:15:13] Yeah. Out, way out in nature.

[00:15:15] **Konda Mason:** Yeah.

[00:15:15] **Jonathan FP Rose:** The balance of humans in nature is much in favor of nature, and it's a place that was specifically designed for retreats, for social activists and environmental activists.

[00:15:26] **Konda Mason:** Yeah, it was a wonderful time. And then the next year I did it a couple years in a row. The next year I did, actually Joseph Ghosting taught it, and I was with Joseph.

[00:15:37] I think maybe I did it two years with Jack and then one year with Joseph, something like that. And so it got me into the whole, you know, spirit rock IMS community.

[00:15:46] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. Yeah. Which is a really a, an amazing community that has been a center for many people's lives in America. Yeah. And then somewhere along the way, that path led you to the Impact Hub.

[00:15:59] Are there pieces before the Impact Hub you wanna talk about?

[00:16:03] **Konda Mason:** Yeah, just that before the Impact Hub, when I was doing, I got very ill at one point in my life and it didn't look like I was going to survive it. I had lupus and it was devastating me. And I was in the hospital back to back to back and went to Mexico.

[00:16:17] All kinds of things happened, and I obviously made it through, but during that time, I decided that I had already been, as I said, a vegetarian or what you call a vegan, but I was still eating chemicals. Hmm. I didn't know about organic and that's when I learned about organic. And so I started organic food business while I was ill, as I was getting better.

[00:16:42] And it was a home delivery service of organic food. 'cause that's what I needed. Like if somebody had been able to deliver me organic food at home. And so I started that business and it was called Yoganics. Hmm. And it was, uh, Woody Harrelson and his wife Laura were my partners. We were friends from yoga. And uh, we started that business together.

[00:17:03] And so that was a really important business because we really failed. And it was really important to have that. We didn't, in many ways, we did not fail. Economically we failed, you know, we had too much money. What? He just gave us money. We had too much money. We, we just didn't know what we were doing. But we did a lot of education in the community and to ourselves around organic food.

[00:17:25] And I always was a foodie. And so that was really an important business that I started was Yoganics. And that was in Los Angeles. And we brought food to the studios and stuff 'cause Wood worked there. And so that was another business that I did that was really crucial too. The following and where I am right now actually.

[00:17:45] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And so were you at that point seeing an integration of Buddhism into your life? Or was Buddhism the kind of your life on one side and the Buddhism on another side?

[00:17:56] **Konda Mason:** No, no, no. All fully integrated. I mean, there's no separation between the wellness of, the thing about organic food was about the plant, the soil, and the being who ate it.

[00:18:09] Mm. And that connection, that connection, and it was through working with organic food that I started to learn about land and that I started to learn about soil. And that I started to learn about the biome, the microbiome within our guts and within the, the little beautiful, invisible creatures that make it all possible.

[00:18:29] And so that was the beginning of that education. And of course, and then Buddhism is very, all of it is interconnected in terms of who we are, a spirit and what we need to. What this body, the connection between this physical body and the internal, the internal soul that we have, and then of course the world outside and all of the interconnectedness and, and understanding that there is really no, that's when I really understood that separation is really at the core of our, because it's really a myth, this notion of all this separation and how separation is used to divide.

[00:19:27] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So, you know, we even have, I think, an English language problem in that we don't really have a, I, maybe you can think of a word that describes. I was about to say the inner and the outer, but even that kind of has like a, you know, a positive and negative or you know, two different spaces when it's really one continuum.

[00:19:47] That's right. And you know, really interesting, just last weekend I learned about this thing called vertical genomics and horizontal genomics. So you know, the vertical is the stuff we, our great grandparents, grandparents, the DNA, we get all the way through our parents, but horizontal, we're continually getting DNA from the biome, from all those bacterias and viruses and nature and all that thriving life around us is exchanging DNA with both the DNA that's living within us, the microbacteria and stuff in our own cells.

[00:20:21] And so we're really, really in just a million ways: we are not separate beings. We are part of this continuum. I have a Hopi friend who says that. You Westerners think in terms of nouns, we think in terms of verbs. So we wouldn't describe something as an object ever. Our words would describe it as a process.

[00:20:42] **Konda Mason:** As a process. Yeah. Big difference of, you know, worldview is everything. This worldview that we have, again, going even back to our earlier conversation, the worldview about scarcity versus abundance, the worldview of separation. One of the things that is so popular today, because I think we're yearning so much for it, is to be connected.

[00:21:05] And so the indigenous ways of thinking and being are so prevalent today because you know that all of us are indigenous to something, to someone, to somewhere. And that indigeneity understands the basic thing is connection. And so we're yearning for it. We're yearning for it on so many levels.

[00:21:28] That is what is, that's why I say, you know, it's interesting because I had an opportunity to do a little work at San Quentin Prison in San Francisco Bay Area and being in there working with the men who, my God some of the most amazing people are in prison. And being there and understanding how we use separation to harm people and how them, in being incarcerated into this community of other incarcerated people, separating family, separating community.

[00:22:09] And then you have your cell and then when you, when you go into, what's it called, um, solitary. Solitary. Solitary is an intentional way of making you crazy. Because we know, we know that we absolutely are beings that need connection, that are connected. And when you cut that much off, what do you do? But lose it.

[00:22:42] And it is the most cruel way, the most cruel way to treat a human being is to put 'em in solitary confinement.

[00:22:52] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Mm-hmm. You know, they say that the pain of social isolation or separation actually neurologically occurs in the same part of the brain that we feel physical pain and is as painful to us. Yeah.

[00:23:11] So imagine if you're in solitary 24 hours a day, it's like somebody driving a nail into your head 24 hours a day.

[00:23:18] **Konda Mason:** Right? Right. Yeah. And it's the kind of punitive system that we have, like that is so inhumane. But there's a lot of things we do to each other that are just, just, um, it's pretty unbelievable some of the things that we could do to each other.

[00:23:36] And, you know, I'm not exempting myself. I think that I, you know, I try my best to do, to live a life, not to harm, but, you know, I harm. Hmm. Not intentionally, but I do. I drive cars, I

get on planes and, you know, I harm the earth, you know, so it's like, you know, I turn the lens on myself just as much as anyone else.

[00:23:59] And all we could do is do as least amount of harm as possible.

[00:24:03] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Mm-hmm. That is hopeful. But you can, we can also heal. Remember I was talking about the vertical genomes and the horizontal genomes? Well, those exist socially too. And they exist in history and in practice, and essentially they're karmic.

[00:24:20] So what I'd love you to talk about this amazing work you're doing now because I really view, it feels to me like it's healing. So how'd you get to Louisiana, and tell our audience what you're doing?

[00:24:32] **Konda Mason:** So, you know, let me just preface it by saying I did not have any grand plan. Hmm. I am a person who has lived my life basically deeply listening, understanding that my life is of service, one.

[00:24:51] Secondly, and how that looks on the outside is not like working as a waitress or anything like this, because I've really never had a job, like a real job. Job that, you know, your mother would call a job. I have been self-actualizing jobs and I live listening to myself and to the inner voice that says yes.

[00:25:15] And so I'm, I just wanna be really clear that what I'm doing now, I am, me, Konda Mason, have followed the lead. And so that's kind of honestly was happening. I was living in Oakland. I had Impact Hub Oakland. I was making a change. I started another organization with some friends, and we called it Jubilee Partners.

[00:25:42] What we knew is that we wanted to talk about and be a part of an alternative to capitalism as we know it. And it's, um, the kind of harm that it causes, right? And extraction, and to talk about a more regenerative earth, a more regenerative economics. And so that's was all that we knew that we were doing.

[00:26:06] From that there was, uh, 1, 2, 3, there were four of us and we ended up doing some stuff together, but then we ended up separating and not separating as in totally separating 'cause we're still very much in each other's lives. Um, but we spun off, better word. I spun off to what I call Jubilee Justice Jubilee Gift got spun off in another organization that was called Replant, that spun off from that coming together.

[00:26:36] Jubilee Justice is talking about verticals and horizontals. That's kind of how I look at it as well. The vertical of Jubilee Justice. Right now I have two programs. One, the vertical is that I work with black farmers throughout the southeast helping to heal the historical harm. That has created almost a group of people who will, if we don't do something intentionally soon, will no longer even exist.

[00:27:09] And so that's the vertical. The horizontal, as I think of it, is the other program, which is called Jubilee Justice Journeys, and the Journeys program is a horizontal because it's, it has to do with changing hearts and minds because I, you know, the world where we have all these verticals, these nonprofits that are doing great work, I think of that as verticals.

[00:27:29] All these incredible verticals doing great work. If we don't change the mindset that caused the system that we have, that we're trying to change. If we don't change the heart, then

we greenwash or we fall back into what we have. Because the pressure of the dominant society and dominant capitalism, racial capitalism is so dominant that it is hard to, to get the, your, your grips.

[00:27:54] Away from it. And we're so indoctrinated. I mean, this is just how society works, any society. And so this changing hearts and minds needs to be, in my opinion, really put a spotlight on it and really, uh, make it prominent and do something. And so the Journeys program was, is that The Journeys program is looking at, I came up with these four pillars when I realized what my life at this point is about.

[00:28:26] It's land. It's about land, what we have done to land, the most credible thing we have on the planet is land and soul. And stolen land. And toxic land. So land is a real important part. What grows on the land? Land and then race. Race is the second pillar. We know we have a really good knowledge, well, some of us don't, of what has happened on, particularly on this continent around race.

[00:29:03] And I know that, you know, our society that we have right now with the administration is trying to erase the truth of race and what has happened here and the history of black people and white people. And it is a shame in my opinion. And so it's really important that we bring forward because what you don't know, what you don't learn, you are apt to repeat.

[00:29:29] And so there's land and there's race and really talking about race. From a place of truth telling and compassion. Those two things together. So there's land, race, and then money, money, money, money, money, money. Nobody wants to talk about money. I love talking about money because it is really that place that there's so much mystery about it or economic.

[00:29:53] I have never taken an economics class in my life. I have no learned knowledge about money. I just have experiential, and a lot of that. And being a black woman in America and growing up, black parents and you know, money don't grow on trees and all of that. And so the idea of what, the role that money has played.

[00:30:12] In all that we are doing. And is this really a climate crisis or is it really all about money and, and finance? So there's land, race, money. These three colors to me, are some of the hardest places that exist that have tentacles out to all things that have created harm. And they can also create joy, land raise money.

[00:30:43] And the last one is spirit. Spirit, spirit, spirit. Because if we have these conversations about land rates and money without spirit, then we're, we're in our heads. We're talking at each other and nothing is happening. But it gets worse. But with spirit, when you really bring in spirit and in spirit, I mean, we bring in ritual and we bring in deep depth of going inside and coming back out and going in and coming out and being a part and allowing spirit to penetrate land, race, and money that is different, and that creates a society, I believe, that is going to learn together without harm.

[00:31:26] As least amount of harm is, I'm not gonna say without harm. This stuff hurts. Okay? There's harm. As a matter of fact, if there's no harm, you are not doing the work. You know? But you could do it again.

[00:31:39] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Wait, wait, wait, wait. I would say if there's no pain, but pain may not be harm.

[00:31:45] **Konda Mason:** Yeah. Pain and harm. Well see.

[00:31:47] We have harm because we're ignorant. And when I say ignorant, I'm talking about lack of understanding, lack of knowledge,

[00:31:55] **Jonathan FP Rose:** right? No, ignorance is the opposite of wisdom. Yeah. Opposite, right? So I wanna get more specific. So you got two things. You got Jubilee Justice and Jubilee Journey. So first start with what does Jubilee Justice actually do?

[00:32:07] And then we'll talk about what a Jubilee journey is like.

[00:32:10] **Konda Mason:** Sure. So Jubilee Justice, the farm project,

[00:32:13] **Jonathan FP Rose:** right?

[00:32:13] **Konda Mason:** Is I, I, Ooh, there's a story there.

[00:32:18] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yeah, there's a journey story in the justice.

[00:32:22] **Konda Mason:** There is a journey everywhere. Everywhere, you know, nothing is, nothing is just like, you know, just on surface what you see.

[00:32:29] See everything has roots. So I met up with a friend who has a company called Lotus Foods, and her name is Carol Levine, and she and I happen to be at in a gathering. And I asked her, I love her rice. They sell rice. They sell beautiful, beautiful varieties. We buy her rice, Lotus foods is the best rice company ever, please everybody.

[00:32:53] And so I was asking them about the rice, 'cause I eat it, love it. And she explained to me the system of rice intensification, SRI, the way the rice is grown and how it is better for the planet and better for the farmer. And one thing that I learned is that rice creates a lot of methane, a huge amount of methane in the atmosphere.

[00:33:13] Rice does, uh, the flooded fields because in all the flooded water are microbes that are off gassing methane. So it's like, in Ag it's like the second biggest emitter is rice. And so the system of Christ intensification reverses that because it's not flooded fields. So she was telling me all that and I was just listening and having a good time, but it didn't change my life until she said

[00:33:36] that she is looking to create a supply chain of farmers here in the US at that time. Because all of her farmers were from Asia and Africa and South America. And I said, first thing outta my mouth was, what about black farmers? Because I - back up. I come from a family, my grandfather, my grandfather, my dad's dad, he was chased out of Georgiana, Alabama.

[00:34:03] In the middle of the night he took my dad and family and left because he was gonna be hung. He was getting ready to, to be lynched because he was a very successful black man. He had land, we had a store and he was somebody that they thought was too uppity, just, you know, getting too uppity. So he left. We lost our land, we lost everything.

[00:34:25] My parents ended up in, they made their way from Alabama to California where I was born. My mother's from Texas, she ended up there too again. So we are a byproduct of the great migration. So. I have loved land. I have loved farming my whole life. They ended up my

grandparents with a little bitty farm. And because of that, we were actually food secure because we had a cow, we had a pig, we had chickens, and we had land for collard greens and those kinds of things.

[00:34:53] And every year, all our family. And so I grew up in that and I loved it, except for the killing of the animals goes back to me becoming what? Right? Connect the dots. So that's the background that I have. And so I know the plight of black farmers and how 90% of black farmers are gone. Right now that the land is gone.

[00:35:16] We went from 20 million acres down to around 2 million now. And how systematically the government, the USDA plus private business plus banks, all colluded. The takeaway land from black farmers, right? And we're down to nothing. And we're down to very small, and it's not because we don't know how to farm, we're the ones who fed this country, okay?

[00:35:38] From the very beginning, we know how to farm and that was not the reason. It was all through the economics and all the shenanigans. So that said, when I talked to Carol and she said that she wanted a supply chain of farmers here, I said, what about black farmers? And she thought that was a great idea. That ended up in a next Zoom meeting with, with her, some other people, including the people from Cornell University, who are the folks who discovered this idea of the sSystem of Rice Intensification in Madagascar.

[00:36:11] It started there, they saw it anyway, they've duplicated it, and they are the ones who have taught farmers how to do that. So I'm in this conversation with Cornell. And next thing I know, I've got someone on that call who had access to black farmers, who was helping them. I had the market to sell rice.

[00:36:31] That was Lotus Foods. I had the technical assistance from Cornell University and all that needed was a organization to hold it and to make it happen. And that's when I raised my hand and I said, I guess that's what I'm doing. Yeah. We did not plan it, but that's how it happened. So what we are, we are a cooperative of black farmers.

[00:36:50] I am now, I left Oakland, California and moved to Louisiana. That is because also my dear friend, Elizabeth Keller, whose family owns a plantation in Alexandria, Louisiana. Her family got this in 1927. And she is someone who has been trying her best to rectify the harm that has happened on this land. And she made it an organic farm, and she's been trying to figure out what to do about what happened to people here.

[00:37:21] When I came up with this project and I told her what I was doing, she said, oh my God, Kanda come to Inglewood, Inglewood farm. So she said, come to Inglewood and bring your project here. I have lots of land. So it was COVID, it was 2020, it was, this all happened at the end of 2019, and then it was 2020. And I'm like, oh my God, okay, how do I do this?

[00:37:43] So I ended up buying an RV. Me and my sister, our dogs, packed it up with a friend and we took ourselves to this place where I am now. I thought I would be here for about four months or so. I don't know what I was thinking. It's five years later and I live on this plantation, which is just, again, who would've, you know, I, I obviously didn't plan that.

[00:38:07] And then Jonathan knows, at one point when I'm sweating, sweating, sweating in the hot summer and harvesting rice. And I realize this is my ancestors. Hmm. Ancestral. I'm here as a result of causes and conditions coming together. Me saying Russ, and knowing that what

happened to not only my family in the great migration, but hundreds of thousands of other black families, that my path now is to try my best to reverse.

[00:38:49] The harm and to heal what happened to so many of us and to adopt the land, loss.

[00:38:59] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And the land that you're on. So this healing process. As I understand it, number one, you're healing the soil which had been depleted. You are healing the lies of the farmers, but you also have this regenerative relationship with the landowners who own what had been a plantation.

[00:39:20] So talk about that. Yes.

[00:39:23] **Konda Mason:** Oh my God, I could talk forever. My relationship with Elizabeth Keller is one that is just like, I don't even know what to say about it. I met her in California when I left my business Impact Hub Oakland. And when we were joined, the business that I said that was called Jubilee Partners, we had a gallery.

[00:39:45] She was invited. I didn't know who she was. I sat, happened to sit next to her in the bus, gonna our gathering, and we were, we were gathering that spirit rock. They had given me a room, actually, I was on the board of Spirit Rock at the time, and she sat next to me and she said, hi, I am Elizabeth Keller and, and I'm from Louisiana.

[00:40:02] My family owns a plantation. I thought, girlfriend, whatcha doing here? I was like, who thanked you? I immediately thought, oh my God. But when we got into the place that we, we, we had a circle of women and, um, the men circled the women's circle and her story, and she told her story about this place and her personal path that has been since time to do the healing here, and how she didn't know what to do, how to heal it, and she did some healing of the land.

[00:40:35] She turned it organic, which was huge. So we met. Then I decided, I asked her, what about us bringing a group of healing people to your land? And she said no, first. And then I, and then I finally convinced her. She finally said yes. And so the next year we had a group of incredible beautiful people come here and we did a retreat for about four days together.

[00:41:01] Then the next year we did it again. And then when next year is when COVID hit, and we were online with it, but my relationship with Elizabeth grew and grew - a white woman of wealth who owns a plantation, who also the family has oil is such a far cry from anyone that I would think would be my best friend.

[00:41:25] But this woman, this Bodhi Satva is incredible. And what we have gone through over the years that we've known each other, we have told the truth. We have been in tears, we have hugged, we have cried, we have, we laugh now more than anything, but she is all about reparations. And her idea is to make good on what has happened to not just black folks, but indigenous folks too.

[00:41:58] And she's doing a lot of repair work in Indian country, as well -

[00:42:02] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And I want to just delve into that word reparation because it's, the word means repair. And unfortunately, I think in our culture, people think it means you take my money to heal a past wrong. And it doesn't mean that. It means we need to recognize that we tore something apart and we're going to repair it in a healing way.

[00:42:27] And that tearing, obviously it was much harder on the black people than on the white people. But it also tore something apart on the white people too, so that we, it's not a one-sided repair. No. It's really about restoring a mutuality.

[00:42:45] **Konda Mason:** It's not only a mutuality, but white people really have a lot of healing to do.

[00:42:49] Because what happened, in my opinion, is that in going back to money, going back to capital, going back to material things, white folks sold an inner knowing, a soulfulness in exchange for materialism. The idea of allowing the kinds of harm that happened between to black people and feeling it, you know, you feel it and yet, but you keep on going and you go back to your beautiful big homes and you do your thing and you have the fences around it, and you have all the material stuff, stuff.

[00:43:33] The repair that white people need to do is huge. The soul, I mean, that's why I really feel, you know, when you look at black culture and you think about how. Alive it is. And how beautiful and colorful and all the things and white folks, you know, they want some of that in general. I'm not saying everybody, but Yes.

[00:43:53] You know, because it is, because we, we ex, we live our harm. We live our joy, we live it all in one piece and expressions and white folks don't have that opportunity or don't know, I don't know what it is. I'm not white. But there's something that stops that ability to release and what is being caught up in the psyche and the body from all the harm that must, because if y'all don't.

[00:44:48] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So I wanna get a little, just more specific for our audience. So what you actually now have is on this land, there are families, black families who live there, who are farming in, they're making rice in this traditional, in a contemporary version of the traditional way. And you're selling it to this amazing rice company, right?

[00:45:09] **Konda Mason:** Well, not quite yet.

[00:45:11] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Oh, okay.

[00:45:12] **Konda Mason:** That's the plan. We are growing the rice. We're growing the rice in, okay. So we started a cooperative. Yeah. And the co-op is in Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. That's where we have our farmers. Okay. And everybody's learning the system of rice intensification, which is difficult.

[00:45:34] It's a very difficult thing to do in America. That's a whole nother story. So it has been years of US trials, trials, trials. We here are the home base of trialing, so we are like the lab and we continue to work with the farmers who are trialing it on their farms. We are doing production now. And also we decided, I decided to build a rice mill when I found out that basically the farmers take all of the risk of growing rice, whether they have a Goodyear pet or whatever, and the person who owns the mill makes the lion's share of the money.

[00:46:07] And I was like, no, no, no, no, no. We ain't given this away. So I have a nonprofit and blessings that so many incredible people have supported Jubilee justice financially, and we have been able to build a rice meal with no debt that the farmers own. And so it is a vertical integration. And we are also going into other grains like corn and wheat as well.

[00:46:35] And we have a grist mill and a mill. Hmm. So now we're this grain company that is a cooperative that I hope to grow bigger and bigger and bigger and become something that is, I believe in cooperative economics. I think that when I think about abundance and when I think about scarcity, I think that it is one of the, the ways to show abundance and how we live together, the agreements that we make, it is one of those healthy ones, in my opinion, and that we lift each other up and that there's no particular one person, just like when we talk about the commons and when we talk about enclosures, it's more in the commons area of community ownership.

[00:47:19] And so. That is what we have created. And I'm super excited because this is the first year that we are actually going to be selling rice. We don't have a whole lot to give to Lotus Foods, but if Carol and Ken are watching this, they know that, um, you know, we're trying to get there. But in the meantime, we will be selling it to chefs and it's all specialty food, specialty rice.

[00:47:41] We are not doing Uncle Ben's stuff. I'm talking like beautiful black rices, and red and fragrant rices. It's amazing what we're doing. And so it's all specialty and organic and regenerative. We are growing regeneratively on this farm to heal the land, to heal the soil, to heal each other. And the young people that I work with who are learning so much and understanding all the different connections, it's, it's three full circle.

[00:48:11] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. You know, I just wanna refer to, uh, Leah Pitman's book, black Earth Wisdom. Yeah. Which, uh, just for our audience to know, which, which talks about the wisdom that came from Africa through the African slaves that brought to the agriculture and how actually the seeds, this, there was so much wisdom in, in their practice and there's so much wisdom to be known today about how to heal the earth.

[00:48:40] **Konda Mason:** Well, one of the things that I wanna say, I really wanna talk a moment about rice and why rice? Why am I doing rice? So the history of rice in this country is that when the Europeans were, you know, enslaving West Africans and as they were there near the shores of the Senegal/Gambia area, they saw rice production that was.

[00:49:06] Very sophisticated. The West Africans had different topographies and they would adapt rice to any one of 'em, whether it was high land, low land, wetland, dry land, and they had different ways of growing rice. Rice was a staple that they needed, that the Europeans wanted. And so not only to grow, when they got to this land, you know, they had to, you know, the colonies were starting.

[00:49:28] They needed to feed people, but also on the slave ships. Right? And so they intentionally captured the rice farmers. And so the rice farmers got here and they actually to South Carolina and South Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina was the capital of rice. It was actually Jonathan, the capital of of the whole monetary upliftment of the colonies, was because of rice.

[00:49:55] Before, it was cotton. It was rice on the backs of these enslaved people who, if you've been to South Carolina, you know it is swamps and they had to clear out swamps and forest. They don't have the kind of tools we have now to clear it out, hundreds and hundreds, hundreds of miles, and make an entire new industry of rice that they brought their wisdom to.

[00:50:24] And interestingly enough, one of the ways that they grew rice in West Africa with the tide, it was very similar to the topography of South Carolina. So they adapted it immediately and

it became the rice capital of the world because then they started exporting it back to Europe and everywhere. And so the enslaved people worked.

[00:50:50] So hard. It was one of the agricultural crops that actually had more deaths because of the swamp, the lands, you know, you're looking at snakes, you're looking at mosquitoes, you're looking at all kinds of things. And so alligators and so that's Rice is the, it is the, the food of West African people. It is our food ways.

[00:51:13] And we brought it here and we brought that industry here. At the end of emancipation, the people who were enslaved and rice farmers said, I'm out, I'm done. The rice industry now is in Arkansas, and we stopped by and large growing rice. And so what we're doing here at Jubilee Justice is reclaiming rice as our food waste, reclaiming that we grow rice, we are rice farmers, but this time.

[00:51:46] It is in a way that is regenerative, that is organic, that is helping the planet in ways that obviously nobody knew then and, and it wasn't even so bad then. So that is what we are all about, is really reclaiming rice as black people and as our food ways. And so it's a real important crop. This is not an accident.

[00:52:05] This is a real important crop for us.

[00:52:08] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. And now talk about Jour Jubilee journeys.

[00:52:12] **Konda Mason:** Oh Lord. The Journeys Program, it is so deep, so deep. The Journeys program, it started out with those two coming here twice. And In Circle with basically the people who were on the invited list. The people who came were primarily white people of great wealth, very wealthy white folk and black and brown people who weren't financially wealthy, but thought leadership, spiritual leadership, wealth? Off the chain.

[00:52:46] We came together in a circle with people who would never, ever have met each other in a million years. And what we did is we talked on a plantation about land, race, money and spirit with truth telling and with compassion. And that morphed into an online when COVID came, that wasn't good enough. At some point, I stopped, I said, something's missing.

[00:53:22] And I realized what we needed. And it was a course. It then morphed into a two year course of 40 people, 20 black people, and 20 white people intentionally, who were willing to be in Circle together. And it was called our Ancestral Journey. Because in my opinion, in order for us to actually heal forward, we have to heal backward.

[00:53:49] We have to tell the truth about what has happened. We have to know who we are, we have to know our lineage. And so our ancestral journey was around so many things, but again, the pillars of land, race, money, spirit, and coming together for two years, learning about what happened, learning our own ancestry, everybody went back and had to do deep ancestry.

[00:54:14] I even had somebody who was part of our team who was a semi-professional in ancestral research. And so when you get stuck, you just keep going. And she gave us clues of how to keep going. We had to tell the truth about our ancestors to each other in front of each other and with each other. People told me, Jonathan, people said, Konda don't do that.

[00:54:35] Not together. Black and white people can't do that. There's gonna be too much harm. And I was like. Yeah, there's gonna be harm, I'm sure. And yes, there are times when we need

to separate I, I'm all about that. But I know that for me right now in this lifetime, it's about if we can't do it together right now with the kind of atmosphere of love and compassion and all of the things that my background has brought, as well as we had the other spiritual teacher among, this was a woman named Louisa Tee, who was a Yoruba priestess.

[00:55:15] So we had a convolution of mindfulness in Yoruba together holding space for these 40 individuals, for all of us to learn from each other and to see if we can heal and to face white supremacy and all of its tentacles of what it is today and what it has brought and can we together. Internally so that we can impact our external world.

[00:55:45] Jonathan, I cannot even tell you. We started that journey with people being shy, you know, hesitant, not willing, safe, all kinds of stuff. As you can imagine, holding back, not saying anything. You know, white folks don't wanna say the wrong thing, so they don't say nothing at all. And by the end, by the end, nobody wanted to to stop.

[00:56:12] They were like, we met twice in person. Right here on the plantation. And our last retreat together, we learned so much. So much has spun off so many combinations, so many collaborations. It is unbelievable. At the end, nobody, nobody wanted, they said "This can't stop." And I said, well, I'm done for right now. I said, this is a very leaderful group, and I had a group of us, it wasn't just me, we called ourselves the J six.

[00:56:42] There was six of us. I said, this is a Leaderful group, and a committee arose, and this committee has kept it alive. It's been two years now. This committee is doing incredible, and right now I'm in the process of raising the funds so that we can really make it real again. We were funded to do this work by the Kataly Foundation.

[00:57:04] Mm-hmm. They supported the whole thing for two years and it was incredible. And so that's where we are right now. But, oh, I can't even tell you. I think the Journeys program, when I think about my whole life and all the stuff I've done, which has been so much, I'm a serial entrepreneur. It's the best work I've ever done, the most impactful work I've ever done.

[00:57:31] Everyone was changed and fell in love and fell in love.

[00:57:41] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So I have a question for you. The first words that came to my mind were, how do you scale this? And immediately, I realize those are the wrong words. It has an intimacy, it can't scale, but how can it spread? How can, without you having to do it, how can that work of spirit, money, race, the wisdom that came, that you unfolded from it.

[00:58:11] We're in a time in which every good thing that we thought we created in the last 40 or 50 years is being brutally, cruelly, viciously and ignorantly. Yeah. Destroyed in many ways. And my sense is of course, that doesn't mean we can't go back to what we had, but in some ways it's creating this space to go forward.

[00:58:33] And it's, I actually think it's creating the most space in what I'll call the forgotten areas in, in the Appalachia's and in the Black Belt of the South and in places like that, where the big system really doesn't even care about it. Mm-hmm. So my sense is there is fertile soil. You know what, what's interesting about that ignorance?

[00:58:54] Is it, it's also ignoring some things. So how would you take those ideas and try and seed their spreading?

[00:59:04] **Konda Mason:** Well, you know, it's so interesting. It's interesting. I've been asked that a few times before. Question is, how do you take what transpired in this group of 40 and. Yeah, light up the world. And I don't know the answer because it was intimate, and I do believe there was nothing about it that was artificial other than me picking those 40 people.

[00:59:41] And it's what came through. I didn't even tell you the last year of how the transformation happened. I mean, there was this methodology that just came through and none of this was planned. Again. It's like I really am so grateful that I have this ability to listen, listen, listen, listen. And to work with people who are just amazing.

[01:00:07] 'cause again, there was a group of six of us. I led the whole thing, but there were, I mean, it was amazing the group of us who brought our own beauty to the leadership. But Jonathan. It just needs to happen again, happen again, and again and again. And maybe, maybe there's some way to train the trainer.

[01:00:32] Mm-hmm. You know? But it's so deeply rooted. It's so not up here in the head. It comes from a deeper place. It comes from listening. Hmm. It comes from a deep listening to know how. 'cause did harm happen? Of course it did. Was it irreparable? No. Is there love at the end? Absolutely. We all learn uhhuh, but an unskillful way of doing it would cause a lot of harm that couldn't be fixed.

[01:01:12] I and my colleagues are at a place in our lives. We knew we could do this. No question in my mind, even as folks were saying kind of don't do it, I was like, of course we're gonna do this. I'm at that place in my life. I couldn't have done it years ago, and I don't know what that thing is.

[01:01:38] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So I do have one question for you. As we bring this conversation to an end, is there a practice from it that you can offer to our listeners of this podcast? Is there an exercise, a meditation or a practice that came from that? From that you would offer to us to hear and carry out ourselves?

[01:02:03] **Konda Mason:** Yeah. I find that most, that I think, I think this is true, a lot of, I will say most.

[01:02:13] White Americans do not have ancestor altars. I think it begins, I know it. It begins there. It begins by creating an altar. Some of us have pictures of people who have passed in our lives, but we don't think of it as an altar. I think that, so there's this natural tendency to create an altar, but we just don't go all the way.

[01:02:38] You know, I believe that creating an ancestor altar is where it all begins. The practice of understanding that your ancestors, whether you like them or not, are a big part of who you are. They're you, you're them, right? And so gathering them, the ones that you, you know, the Uncle Billy, that you know, whatever he did, you know all of them.

[01:03:06] You know, gathering your ancestors, creating an altar. Creating a space, a sacred space in your house, in some room, in someplace. Create a sacred space where you can create this altar. And then start really doing more understanding of each of them, their context, when they lived, what was happening, where were they, who were they?

[01:03:34] What do you know about them? What can you find out? What can you infer from what you found out? And can you then work on? And there's many practices online and places working. No forgiveness

[01:03:48] **Jonathan FP Rose:** and gratefulness

[01:03:49] **Konda Mason:** and gratefulness. Yes, gratefulness and forgiveness, and being able to, that practice opens up a channel.

[01:04:00] It opens up something and not to do it alone. Don't do it alone though. Even if we don't have the group of 40, find a friend and both of y'all do it together, two or three, whatever. Don't do it alone because you need witness, you need a witness and you need to witness each other and create that kind of space.

[01:04:24] That is the beginning of all of this, and that is a lifetime practice.

[01:04:35] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Thank you, Konda. That is really, really beautiful. I really appreciate you sharing your journey with us. Your thoughts, though we could hear some of the pain of the world, but also its joys and I'm very, very grateful for that.

[01:04:52] **Konda Mason:** Oh yeah. You know, you gotta dance all the way, right? You just gotta, you gotta.

[01:04:57] Even today with all that's happening, boy, don't let them take your joy. There will be moments when you'll be crying. I know there's moments when I am, but then, you know, find that joy in life. 'cause it's not that, that is not that that is happening. It's not who we really are. It's not what we are going to accept.

[01:05:18] And don't let it beat you down to where you lose your joy. Because we need joy. We need everybody to be joyful and engaged. Engaged in whatever that looks like. Don't shut your eyes, get engaged. Whatever your thing is, there's enough madness you could plug in on any door, you know? But stay joyful. Life is a miracle.

[01:05:53] Get next nature no matter where you are. That's so easy. It's so easy to be joyful when you're there. Connect, connect, connect. That's the thing. That's what I have to say. I'm done.

[01:06:13] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Thank you to our guest, Konda Mason. The Common Good is a production of the Garrison Institute and is hosted by me, Jonathan FP Rose. We'd love to hear your thoughts about the podcast. Please send us a note at podcast@garrisoninstitute.org and let us know what you think. If you've enjoyed this episode, please consider leaving a positive review on Apple Podcasts.

[01:06:38] This show is produced by the Garrison Institute with production and marketing from the Podglomerate. Its theme music was composed by Jonathan FP Rose, and performed by Jog Blues. We look forward to being with you again soon.