

# **THE BREATHING PROCESS**

**JAKEEL "SPEAKS" HARRIS**



*To everyone on the road to self-discovery, I am here with you.  
Let's take this one day at a time. One breath after another.*

THE BREATHING PROCESS



## **THE BREATHING PROCESS**

the breathing process is intentionally focusing on your development  
by reflecting on and growing in all aspects that make you, you

inhale who you are  
in other words  
take in all that makes you unique  
combine that with learning about yourself

exhale who you used to be  
meaning  
expel negative or toxic behavior you were socialized to believe  
get rid of the parts of you that were once riddled with uncertainty

do this naturally  
without thinking  
but don't get mad at inconsistencies  
making something routine takes time  
and mastering yourself is never a complete project

this is the breathing process

## HOPES FUNERAL

chosen to speak on behalf of the deceased  
I pick up the obituary of my dreams  
push my grief to the front of the stage  
and tell false stories of optimistic moments  
that I shared with her  
speaking to an audience of two  
celebrating the life of someone  
I never took the time to understand

and the gravestone read  
here lies Hope  
gone before she had the chance to live  
the beautiful daughter of aspiration and inspiration  
how tragic  
is it for a parent to have to bury their kid

no one really knew she existed  
but left a legacy so vast  
generations of children  
will benefit from her contributions  
if you ask her mother about her  
she'd say  
Hope was so gracious  
she'd give up her voice  
to hear someone else's satisfactions speak volume  
her father would say  
that happiness danced in her smile  
that joy lived inside her pupils  
and on most days  
he would see love cartwheeling around in her innocence  
they would say  
that Hope was perfect

at her funeral  
only her parents were present  
but it didn't matter if there was one person  
or a million in attendance  
their sadness could make disaster feel their pain  
and when they lowered the casket into the grave  
I was reminded  
that cemeteries are fields of memories  
some of us didn't take time to cherish when they were here

**EXPIRATION**

when you don't take the time  
to pay attention to what's important  
appreciate your value  
or give yourself more credit  
having motivation will start to have a time limit  
and when that expires  
you start to throw away your worth  
as if  
it is no longer important

## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **LOSING INTEREST**

kissing each other  
started to feel more like a chore than a privilege  
the opportunity for manifesting our love diminished  
when did being together  
get so unfulfilling

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### **FEARFUL**

condemned to darkness  
wondering  
pondering  
questioning  
if his thoughts will be positive enough  
to keep his will to love ignited  
he hopes his prayers don't become a burial site  
decorated with the ashes of his dreams

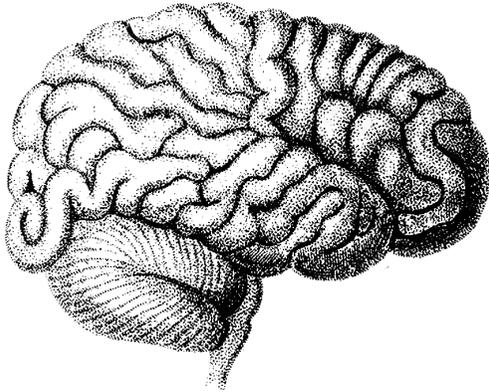
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### **AWARD CEREMONY**

We are taught to put on award ceremonies celebrating the attention  
potential partners give us  
we place their interest in us on a pedestal  
displaying it for everyone to notice  
forgetting that commitment is the one who deserves to be honored



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### **FREE FALLIN'**

your emotions are beginning to transform into an outpouring flow of love  
this abundant stream of overwhelming energy runs you like a river  
but be cautious of the activities in those canals when the darkness comes  
and when you decide to let someone jump into those currents  
be sure to be hard like oak  
but soft like leaves  
allow them  
to fall into you

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### **BRAIN TALK**

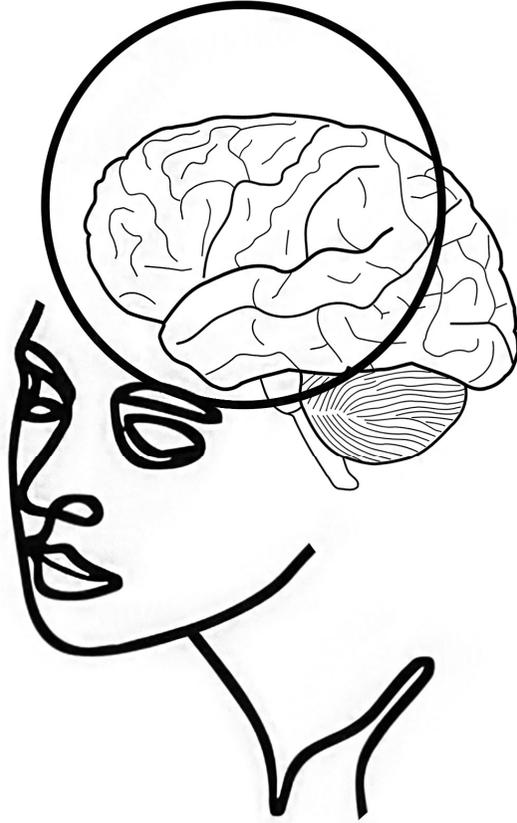
be patient  
I'm still learning how to let go of people  
who made me believe  
that they would be next to me  
even when hard times surfaced

I'm still trying to figure out  
how to feel whole  
while recovering the lost pieces of a broken soul

I've learned  
that it takes time and sacrifice  
to accept the fact  
that you once placed love into things  
that was never built  
to hold it for more than  
a temporary amount of time

**- *The Heart talking to the Brain***

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### **ENERGY**

don't match people's energy anymore  
just maintain yours  
and understand that you'll eventually align with the right people

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### **GLOWING**

I see you glowing  
it must be from all that time  
you spent growing in the sunlight  
learning how to root for yourself  
it's like your existence is tracked by the sun  
and it shows  
keep exceeding your own limits  
until you become the sunflower  
you aspire to be

**TIMES**

There will be times where pain embeds itself in your life  
to remind you that you are still alive  
and when it begins to cause you anguish  
remember to take the time to breathe in the process

THE BREATHING PROCESS



**SHE ASKED**

after breaking my heart  
you had the nerve to ask me  
if I still loved you  
in my head, I responded with  
loving you was a series of unfortunate events  
loving you was like a jail sentence  
with no chance at parole  
it was  
tripping over the idea of a future together  
falling face-first on the disaster of the present moment  
shattering  
a belief that you were placed on this planet  
just for me to admire for eternity  
or at the very least  
until death did us part  
loving you was my emotions dying slowly  
while my fantasies lived a lie  
loving you was time  
loving you was effort  
loving you was frustration  
loving you was all I knew how to do  
and of course  
I didn't forget  
how good I was at doing it  
loving you is something I'm still trying to erase without leaving a  
trace of it ever existing  
loving you doesn't disappear  
even though I want it to  
loving you will always be the elephant in the room we choose to  
ignore  
when we are in the same space together  
but what came out of my mouth was  
"you know I do"

## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **REWARDS**

you are the reward to someone's discipline  
a gift worth ignoring simple pleasures for  
the consequence of focused attention and commitment

always remember  
while the good things in life are worth waiting for  
the best things  
are better appreciated  
when you've worked for them

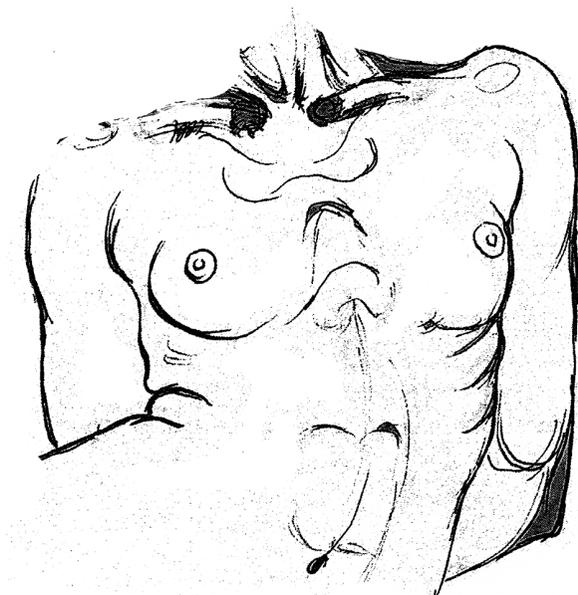
**YEARNING**

my bed has been asking for you  
it wonders  
if someone else  
has been granted the privilege  
of caressing you at night  
it tells me  
it has been waiting to feel your embrace again  
the warmth from your body heat is hot enough to raise the  
temperature in the room

my bed has been craving you  
it wants to cradle you with care  
hold you with purpose  
provide you with enough comfort  
that you wouldn't even think about leaving

my bed has been missing you  
and we are both patiently waiting  
for the day you decide to come back

# THE BREATHING PROCESS



**DISCIPLINE**

when someone devotes their time  
to chasing dopamine highs  
you'll notice  
the boredom at the end of each thrill  
the regret in the aftermath of what did I get myself into  
the doubt in the adrenaline rush  
but consistent pleasure  
can make momentary  
feel like forever

when someone dedicates themselves to patience  
they will no longer need to be occupied by temporary  
satisfaction

**TO BE A BLACK WOMAN IN THIS SOCIETY**

to be a black woman in this society  
is to be  
both royalty and warrior in the same body  
constantly forced to protect a lineage that has been targeted,  
beaten, uprooted from its ancestral grounds  
it's learning that your mannerisms are seen as weapons  
but appropriated  
as a sassy attitude that means you're not to be fucked with  
that you can be the loudest person in the room  
and still feel silenced  
it's waking up every morning to shower the world with love  
without receiving any thanks  
supporting everyone with your all  
but still not viewed as giving enough  
it's being too strong, too opinionated, too resilient to be included  
too smart, too beautiful, too confident to be neglected  
to be a black woman  
is to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders  
while society steps on your back  
teaching others what love feels like  
even when the world isn't reciprocal  
to be a black woman  
is to be  
the spinning image of heavenly  
an example of perfection  
a living fantasy  
to be a black woman  
is to be  
the goddess of everything

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### **BLUSH**

he got her attention  
by recognizing her worth

gazed into her future  
seeing a woman all deserving of love

screamed his passions  
from the top of his lungs  
whispering vulnerabilities  
so only she could comprehend

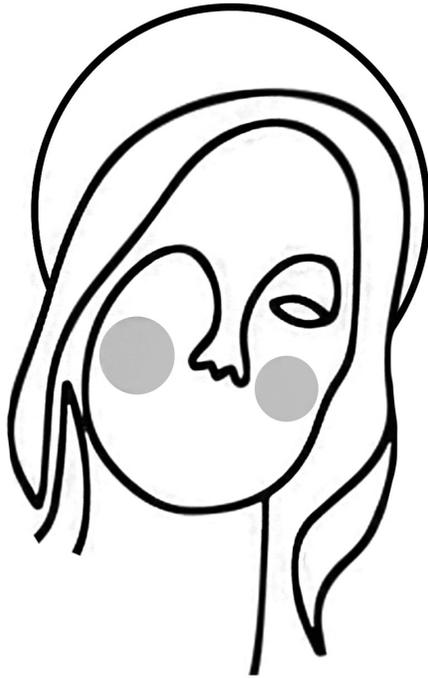
complimenting her being

the pleasantness of stimulation  
flooded her cheeks

adrenaline rushing through her bloodstream  
like it forgot what patience was

heartbeat pounding in Morse code  
loud enough  
for her thoughts to hear the message  
I like him  
he makes me feel so special

I wonder  
if I'm giving him the right signals



## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### MEMORIES

the most important part of a memory  
is the emotions it brings

#### **admiration.**

the first time you walked into the room  
my heart dropped like Nagasaki bombs of fondness  
you extended your hand to greet me  
and nervousness possessed my body like a warm spirit

#### **enjoyment.**

I listened to your laughter  
heard the voice of angels  
singing lullabies to my desires  
I could fall asleep to the sound of your amusement

#### **fascination.**

when the corners of your lips  
decided to flex their muscles  
you smiled  
and I swear  
I saw the sunshine enter the room  
I was blinded by your beauty  
but still noticed how your skin was  
dipped in melanin  
as if you were nurtured with cocoa butter sentiments your whole life

#### **curiosity.**

I wonder how you do it  
how do you manage to maintain sanity  
in all this chaos  
how do you continue to stay on my mind without trying

**MESSAGE FROM HER BODY**

I see that I am getting some attention  
it's probably because of how you make sure  
I'm looking right  
my stomach  
nice and toned  
brown and melanated  
like you swam in  
shea butter kisses  
my legs  
strong and magnificent  
and don't get me started on my booty  
padded and alluring  
I love the way you care for me  
and other people notice how you do too  
I appreciate all that you do for me  
but with that being said  
and not to sound ungrateful  
get some sleep  
we work so much better  
after we've laid together  
remember to hydrate yourself  
I don't want you to sweat out your purpose  
I can feel that we haven't stretched in days  
please exercise your right to take a break  
baby girl I get you're hurting  
you're in pain  
the soreness on us both is gaining momentum  
take this advice from me  
and once you get back on track  
trust me, you'll feel alive again

**- from her body**

## THE BREATHING PROCESS

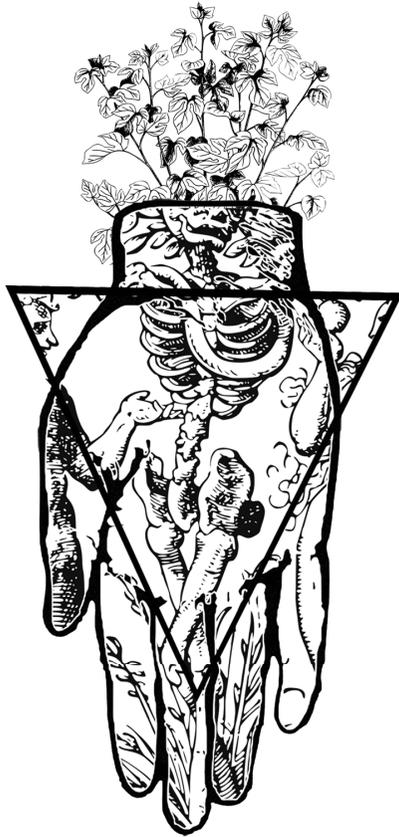
### **PRECIPICE OF GREATNESS**

formed by resistance  
you will not simply  
weather away  
because rainy days  
have become normal patterns

despite being shaken up by trauma  
these earthquakes of seismic vulnerability  
will not cause you to crumble

you will not deteriorate because defeat has entered your routine  
forcing itself on your coasts  
you are too familiar with boundaries  
not to notice the disturbance

you have been prepared to deal with those  
who attempt to practice studying your fault lines for reassurance  
those who can't seem to admire the beauty of your natural movements  
a landform formed on this land to be mountainous  
you've been on the precipice of greatness your whole life  
and you don't even know it



**TESTS**

some say  
I ask too many questions  
many of my assessments  
cause anxiety  
I'm judgmental and confusing  
I've been known to be quite vexing  
along with that  
I tend to display an erratic personality  
where I sometimes blend  
procedure  
with an absurd level of biases  
I get a thrill out of watching people struggle through my obstacles  
and for those who make it past the many challenges I have created  
your welcome  
without me  
how would you know you retained anything from your life  
experiences

**A DREAM DEFINED**

laying here awaiting your next direction  
I've followed you for as long as I can remember  
even chased you on days  
where the lack of motivation had my mind disoriented  
enthusiasm coursing through my veins  
pumping aspiration into my bloodstream  
passion fills these lungs with purpose  
dedication in every deliberate breath  
I'm anticipating my next steps  
but I have questions  
how do I know if it's all worth it  
will my hard-work turn into some form of satisfaction  
if I fail  
will someone still  
be proud of me  
at the end of it all  
where do you suggest  
I place all this ambition

**LOSING FRIENDSHIPS**

we were  
two peas in a pod  
cut from the same cloth  
attached at the hip like Siamese twins  
we shared more than just secrets  
or at least that's what it felt like  
despite all the doubt  
I showed you the parts of my identities  
I didn't deem as masterpieces  
to be displayed in this museum  
we call life  
I tossed you my trust like a hand grenade  
watched it explode into closeness  
gave you mountains of my time  
knowing damn well  
an avalanche of my uncertain thoughts  
would come tumbling down  
you chose to hike it anyways  
a few bumps and bruises  
didn't stop you from making it to the top  
and when you made it back to the bottom  
you sailed the rampaging rivers of loyalty  
and discovered the island of our friendship  
sometime after the voyage, you became distant  
began to drift away  
but tell me  
why does that feel so close to home  
why don't I see you around my museum anymore  
when did you become so afraid of heights  
I heard you've been practicing magic  
you got really good at that disappearing act  
and just like that  
everything we had was lost



**THUNDERSTRUCK**

we were taught to fear you  
we were told to flee  
if we ever saw a glimpse of your power  
we heard  
your roar could shake the atmosphere  
that the sound of your rumbles  
could shatter windows  
we're supposed to be afraid of you  
but when I hear your cries  
from the safety of my bedroom  
I am convinced  
that you  
like ever storm before you  
is just tired of being ignored

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**PAY ATTENTION**

pay attention!  
heartache isn't just measured in  
how loud someone's calls for help are  
or how much fear  
their burdens carry  
look closely at the journey they have been forced to undertake  
notice the pain embedded in their footsteps  
as they try to escape tragedy with their identities intact  
listen to the silence of sacrificing opportunities  
and you'll understand  
that oppression  
is counting on you  
to disregard its behavior

## **THE ART OF NOTICING**

people need to feel that their experiences  
aren't imaginary  
they shouldn't have to convince a world of ignorant individuals  
that their suffering is real

people need to hear  
that they aren't crazy for having boundaries  
they shouldn't have to encounter a barrage of questioning  
when creating borders around the possibility of being exposed  
to agony

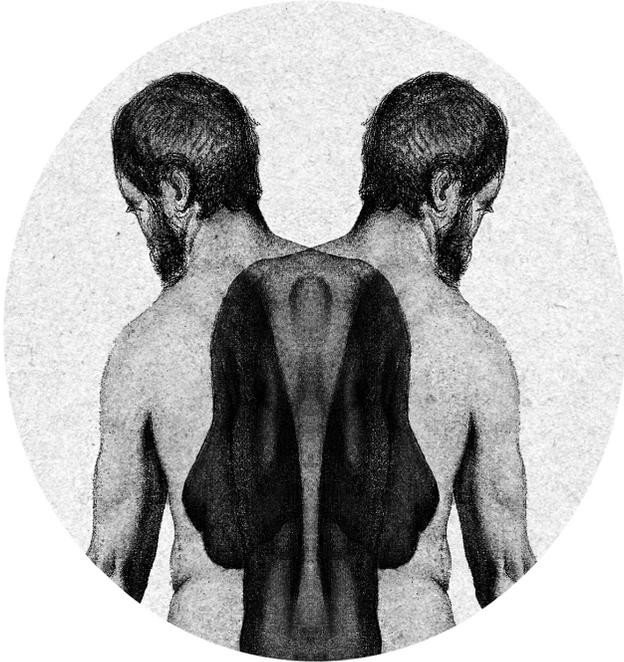
people need to know that they are noticed  
loved without limits  
supported without judgement

and with an astute observation  
we can help them  
come in contact with validity  
this is the art of noticing

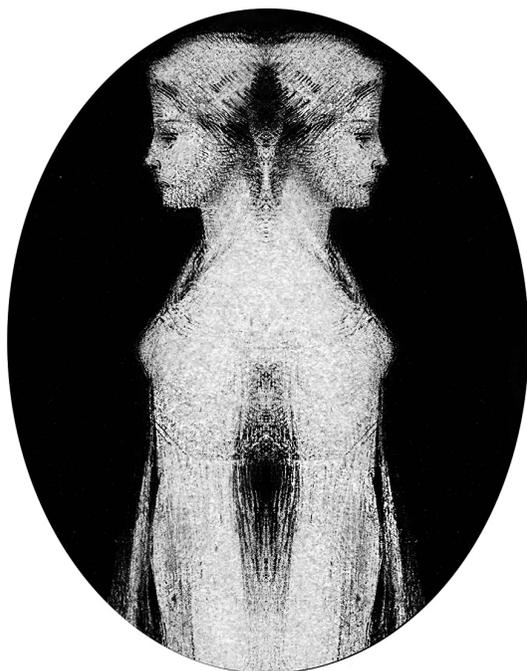
**STRANGERS**

have I seen you before  
I swear  
you've been in my memories  
you've got me questioning  
bathed my thoughts in curiosity  
I think  
we've met in one of my daydreams  
you were there  
living vicariously through my soulmate  
you demanded my attention like a command  
I followed your orders  
and took a glance at your intentions  
saw the beauty in your demeanor  
I remember  
how comfortable your laughter was  
your smile was so natural  
I recognized the happiness on your face  
it reminded me of something familiar  
like peacefulness  
serenity soothes unknown speculations  
which I why I feel like I know you  
you bring my mind at ease  
until it's silent and calm  
giving it the rest it so desperately needs  
the inactivity causes me to ponder  
why are we just living perfectly  
as strangers

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THE BREATHING PROCESS



**DREAMING ABOUT GHOSTS**

I reminisce about the day I met you  
me, lying in bed  
basking in my innocence  
you, hidden in the shadows  
dressed in charm  
I could feel your haunted eyes

gazing upon my craving soul  
possess me  
place your translucent body  
against mine  
whisper your desires into my ears  
entice my memories  
with the thought of seeing you again  
and when I do  
my heart will start racing  
I'll be immersed in your love  
until I lose my breath

I'm awaiting your silent touch  
a feeling that sends shockwaves to my fantasies  
so I'll cling on to your every passion  
until I disappear with you

**EXERTION**

out of breath is how you leave me every night  
after releasing all of this tension from my body  
I'm relaxed  
comfortable  
vulnerable  
my masculinity too weak to stand a chance  
couldn't defend itself with the strength of a super-man  
man its crazy what you do to me  
I'm exhausted following such an energy consuming performance  
but you  
you still have the energy to sprint towards another climaxing moment  
the way you jumped my bones  
and touch me with intimacy  
sent tremors of vibrations encompassed in chills  
down my spine  
without realizing it  
I hadn't prepared a large enough meal  
to satisfy your sexual appetite  
but I wanted to try to fulfill your needs anyways  
Good GOD  
my vision may be clouded from our erotic sessions  
but I can still see you for what you are  
you temptress  
you master of pleasure  
you sexual goddess  
how do you lay in our fragrance with so much vivacity  
is the thought of seducing me invigorating  
it must be  
and I'm willing to give you all of me  
until my passion is exerted  
I'm here to worship your every desire



THE BREATHING PROCESS



**ETERNITY**

I'll always be here for you  
meaning  
the care I give you is timeless  
meaning  
I will travel to the depths of infinity  
to assure you that my love is forever  
even if our connection begins to fade  
I will remain  
stable  
strong enough to keep our bond  
formidable  
you'll never have to worry  
about losing me to attention  
or me leaving our trust in the atmosphere  
waiting to be consumed by the unknown  
what I'm saying is  
my loyalty ain't conditional  
it's not some provisional aspect of character  
some limited amount of devotion to show when the  
circumstances are favorable  
I place value in being faithful  
this loyalty I hold for you  
is simply eternal

**MYSTERY MUSIC BOX**

open me  
lift my lid  
and listen to the tone of sensitivity  
soft and rhythmic  
reminiscent of seraphs singing  
don't I sound like heaven  
look at how my insides are turning  
to create this enchanting melody  
the trauma spins around like a carousel  
rotating in my conscience  
I'm a beautiful tragedy  
contained in this vessel  
are experiences so vast  
the universe would be jealous  
the stars dance to my wisdom like ballerina routines  
but if you look behind the mechanics  
push the instruments to the side  
you'll see  
the charm in the center  
operating like a kidney  
not always vital to survival when present  
but needed when missing  
feeling a lot like home



## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### SELF-LOVE: LETTER TO MYSELF

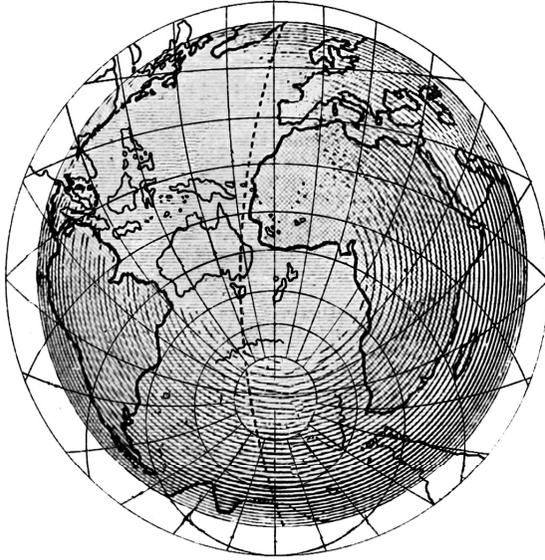
Dear me,  
2019 contained a profound quantity of clarity  
and more awaits you in 2020  
you've adjusted to your circumstances by staying focused on your  
journey  
remain balanced  
I am writing you again to provide you some advice  
in hopes to help you obtain a propitious start to the new year let me  
start by stating  
give yourself more grace  
it's okay to make mistakes  
understand  
you are attempting to complete pending milestones  
without becoming a familial burden  
you are trying to take advantage of the opportunities created from your  
ancestor's struggle  
remember  
oppressive systems don't give a fuck about your mental health so  
engage in more self-loving  
there's nothing more important than establishing a healthy mentality  
also  
acknowledge harmful character traits that can potentially cause trauma  
or add to it  
even if they are the result of it  
in other words  
work on your toxic tendencies  
don't forget to give people compassion without losing authenticity  
never underestimate the warmth of expressing empathy simply enjoy  
life  
love always  
be grateful  
promote positivity and watch the impact you have on people your  
influence goes a lot further than you think  
more lovingly appreciate your blackness  
uplift women  
elevate kindness  
let it rise to the surface  
watch it spread like wildfire  
most importantly,  
continue to remind yourself to BREATHE  
and admire who you grow into  
sincerely again  
The Future You

**NEW YEAR, SAME ME**

for those who know me know that  
I actively avoid any space with a crowd of people large enough to  
cause unnecessary traffic  
not that I dislike human interaction  
in fact, I crave it  
I lust for connection  
I'm just tired of putting on the facade of fake smiles  
acting as if everything is all sunshine and rainbows  
in moments when I am not okay  
most of the time I am navigating being okay  
sometimes I am not okay but I am okay, not being okay  
not being okay, is okay  
I know it sounds crazy  
but I am comfortable with my depression  
my anxiety  
my tendency to obsessively obsess over the things that are running  
around in my head  
the things that I do  
I'm always aware of the consequences of my behavior by embedding  
myself in self-reflection  
I find it difficult to be intentionally mean because I am authentically  
kind  
I make a habit out of transforming negative thoughts into positive  
actions and call it conversion  
a formula for Jakeel's benevolence  
I learn a lot about myself in that process  
my love for skittles is still present  
despite changing my diet to one where a 27-year-old man doesn't feel  
like he's 80  
I finally divorced narcissism, started catching feelings for humility  
we went on a couple of dates  
she's kinda my boo thang  
needless to say, we're taking it slow  
I know I still have toxic patterns that were developed during my  
previous marriage  
but love can make you change for the better  
and I like the direction I'm headed  
I still have a passion for turning life experiences into metaphors  
sharing moments of my morality like stories  
editing the chapters but not changing the content  
as I learn to appreciate the author  
I'm beginning to understand the meaning of self-love  
and in the new year  
I'm giving myself so much of it

**SEARCHING THE WORLD**

some people will search the entire globe  
for a little bit of validation  
navigating against negative vibrations  
from the Earth's rotation  
without guidance  
not knowing  
that affirmation gets closer  
the further you get away from  
those who are eager to give you directions  
without understanding  
where your destination is  
you have to build confidence in your instincts  
finding the center within yourself  
and gravity will do what it is designed to  
....pull you towards positivity



**FORGETTING**

lately  
it's been difficult to remember events from the past  
faces and names are becoming faded stains of distant memories  
common situations  
I once knew as familiarity  
has transformed into forgetfulness  
basically  
my depleting ability to recollect meaningful moments have blossomed  
into confusion  
it feels like a disastrous curse  
has stolen my identity  
stripped me of my personal stories  
and auctioned my thoughts off to a nightmare in my mind  
time has been arguing with me lately  
he says he's done a lot of growing  
since our last disagreement  
he says he wants to visit me soon  
and honestly  
I probably wouldn't even recognize him

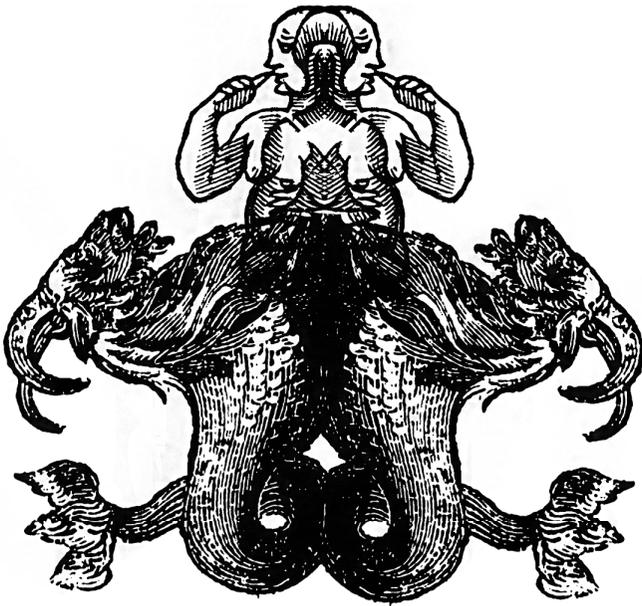
**SELF-LOVE**

time heals all wounds  
so be patient  
focus all your energy  
on raising your confidence  
yes, you have a battered history  
with people taking advantage of your kindness  
don't let that develop into weakness  
start protecting your feelings  
be guarded but never attack  
be rational although love isn't  
love although it is irrational  
it doesn't make sense  
but embed yourself in it anyway  
stop letting your past relationships  
dictate your future ones  
but learn from your experiences  
make adjustments  
and proceed  
lastly  
shower the seeds of your growth with love  
and you will sprout into something  
strong enough to stand tall

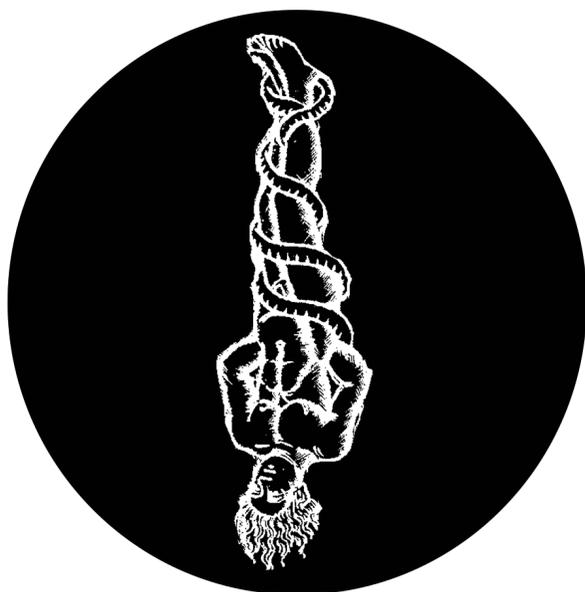
## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **FLEXIBILITY**

when doubt is heavy  
and fear is strong  
the easier it is to break you  
but if you strengthen your path  
with reassurance  
you'll learn how to treat life like a balancing act  
always remember  
to never let anyone tell you  
how you're supposed to bend



THE BREATHING PROCESS



## **DEAD WEIGHT**

people who spend a majority of their  
energy gossiping are just dead weight  
stop believing you need to carry them with you  
in every avenue you're destined to be great in  
you can't change someone who doesn't see an issue with their actions  
you aren't exempt from this  
stay focused on what's real  
and you will weed out the imaginary things  
trying to attack the logic in your decision making

## RACISM IN GAY PORN

occasionally....well  
frequently  
I have a tendency  
to watch erotic sex scenes in my spare time  
attempting to satisfy all my solitary sexual needs  
porn  
being a staple on these lonely days  
sporadically I'm scrolling and clicking through videos  
from big booty women to amateur wannabes  
the boredom of heterosexual intercourse begins to overtake me  
vanilla at best  
basic in its natural habitat  
then I stumble upon the gay category  
my masculinity erupts  
testosterone dancing in my veins like go-go performers  
I can feel the excitement of queerness exploding in my toes  
but the feeling doesn't last very long  
I see the title "thugs gang-bang white boy"  
and I'm reminded of asphyxiated lynchings  
cross burnings setting the mood lighting in the room  
police batons used for anal foreplay  
I'm reminded  
that racism is an abusive partner  
doesn't care about anyone's satisfaction  
but their own  
doesn't use safe words but still feels the need to be aggressive  
**feels the need to be aggressive**  
**feels the need to be aggressive**  
**feels the need to be aggressive**  
racism seems to find a way to ruin all of life's simple pleasures

**JOKES ON YOU**

have you ever heard the repeated joke  
about the chicken who crossed the road  
with the end goal  
of getting to the other side  
deep down inside  
I feel like I am the chicken in that scenario  
looking for safety  
while navigating through the danger in between  
escaping reality  
hoping for greener grass  
on the land of the free  
because on this edge of the American town  
there are far too many people  
who want to use my presence for profit  
those who want to make a meal out of this body  
those who'd love to see me imprisoned  
because my clucks sound too aggressive  
saying I look too wild and uncontrollable  
to understand the pecking order of whiteness  
as if racism isn't bred like farming  
except on these acres  
no-one bothered to pull out the intrusive weeds  
impeding growth  
still feeding ignorant nobody's  
nutrients for violence  
other times I feel just like the joke  
my experiences used for amusement  
I remember this one time  
a cop pulled me over just to see if I would tremble in fear  
his experiment at testing my terror levels  
was like torture  
his laughter sounded like oppression being validated  
I bet he thought the shakiness in my voice was hilarious  
but I should be grateful right  
because I got off with a warning  
for a crime I never committed  
I hope this story brings you insight  
I hope the next time you hear that joke  
about the crazy chicken crossing the road  
you ask yourself  
who or what is the chicken running from

**MOVING TO BETTER**

I've been told  
that happiness will move into my home  
once I find the courage  
to unpack the room  
our memories once lived in  
I remember how they slept with so much comfort  
until nightmares of disloyalty  
haunted their dreams

I've been told  
that trying to let go of you  
can cling onto my worries  
keeping my feelings  
in a struggling fight  
between my stability and sanity  
I've lost more battles than I care to admit

I've been told  
that learning from my past mistakes  
will help me grow  
but what happens when the seeds  
become so afraid of the sunlight  
that the possibility of sprouting in the future  
becomes foreign

I've been told  
that moving on from you  
is the next step in the process  
yet  
no one ever shows me  
how that's supposed to be done

JAKEEL HARRIS



**FOREIGN-HOME**

I call this foreign land my home  
because where I'm from  
corruption is paved into the sidewalks  
streetlamps aren't bright enough to shine light on those suffering  
the alleyways hide the darkness of poverty  
violence spreads through the city like a sickness  
plaguing the streets  
and to avoid catching that illness  
my family decided to sail on open waters with their wits and courage  
just so we could swim out of travesty  
carrying their cultural roots above their heads  
and landed here to chase after the American dream  
but sometimes it feels like we escaped a nightmare  
to be living in terror  
we are deemed as illegal  
immigrants  
penalized for attempting to improve our situation  
told our behavior is too criminal  
that we are thieves of job openings  
that we feast on the opportunities of others for supper  
but understand  
we risked our lives for this opportunity  
we renounced our traditions for this opportunity  
we sacrificed our culture for this opportunity  
this opportunity isn't even a guarantee  
we are here to get a taste of freedom  
even though  
most days the drink is more bitter than sweet  
I'm grateful  
because where I'm from  
survival was the only thing we had to quench our thirst

JAKEEL HARRIS



**TRAPPED AND CONFUSED**

it's happening again  
you're getting stuck in the mud of confusion  
you've been tracking footprints all over the place  
your thoughts have been running amok in your mind  
hoping that eventually  
they will come to a different conclusion  
I can see you've been pacing back and forth like you're trying to  
walk off that anxiety  
impatiently waiting to be given honesty  
from people who have a difficult time confronting their feelings  
because avoiding loyalty is easier than disappointing someone  
who decided to love loving you

JAKEEL HARRIS



## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **POKER**

I spent years being a joker  
fooling myself into thinking  
that you needed me to be perfect at one thing, us  
now I understand  
that being the jack of all trades  
means I am not content with satisfaction  
I am constantly learning different ways to love without always  
needing to bluff  
though it's second nature  
because every time I put my heart on the line for someone  
I thought was worthy enough to become a pair  
it ended up being a bad gamble  
but with you  
I feel lucky  
and scared  
even when things seem to be straight  
the odds of being suited together was still not in my favor  
I try to count on my poker face to hide my worry  
but after checking myself I knew  
that a full house of children is what I want with you  
I went all in on a diamond bright enough  
to sparkle in a room dark as a spade  
and if this isn't any indication of the type of king I'm ready to be  
let me show you  
what happens when royalty meets commitment  
let me show you  
what it feels like  
to be with someone who loves you  
like they are prepared to serve a queen

**HOMEMADE**

mothers put so much love into every dish they cook  
that when people try to replicate their excellence  
the flavor always seems just a bit off  
as if  
something strange was added to the mix  
or the timing was simply imperfect  
when was the last time you had love  
served to you on a consumable platter  
each ingredient  
prepared with purpose  
each aspect  
concocted with the intention to send your taste-buds on a  
memory filled journey  
to a place where attachment lives  
and when they reach that destination  
they'll build a safe haven  
in commemoration to this experience  
one bite  
and you'll realize  
that nothing  
beats the fulfilment  
of a home cooked meal

**FAKE FRIENDS**

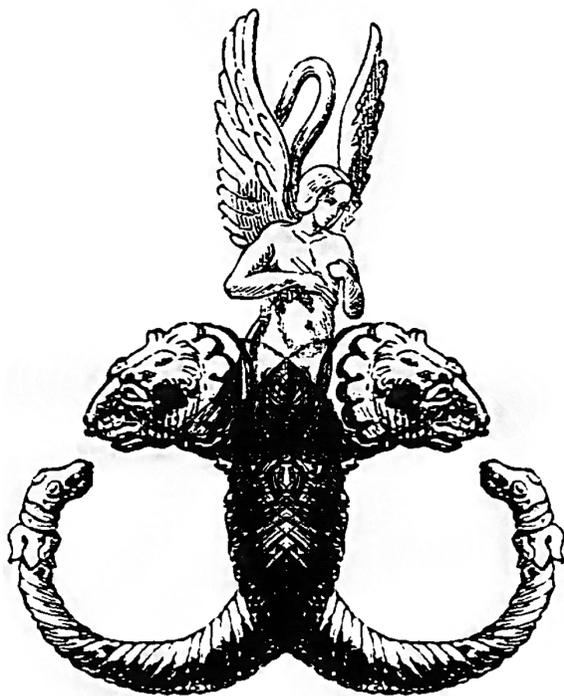
don't legitimize invalidating language  
where you are the subject  
because the person saying  
the destructive sentences of unfaithfulness  
is someone  
who you once shared moments of laughter, trust and friendship with

there is no need to accept negativity  
from anyone  
let alone individuals  
who embed themselves  
in disloyalty for attention

JAKEEL HARRIS



THE BREATHING PROCESS



## **PREFERENCES**

there's a difference between being disinterested in someone  
and having a predisposition  
to pursuing those with particular characteristics  
both should never come with oppressive intentions

anyone saying they don't like you because of an aspect of your  
identity is socialized to believe that prejudice is okay in the dating  
process disguise this as preference  
when all it really  
sounds, feels and looks like  
is hidden discrimination

THE BREATHING PROCESS



**WHAT I SEE**

in my eyes  
you will always be a goddess.  
you will always be held as someone worth praying to.  
you will always mean everything to me.  
never forget that.

**- *Ode to Black Women***

## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### REMEMBERING

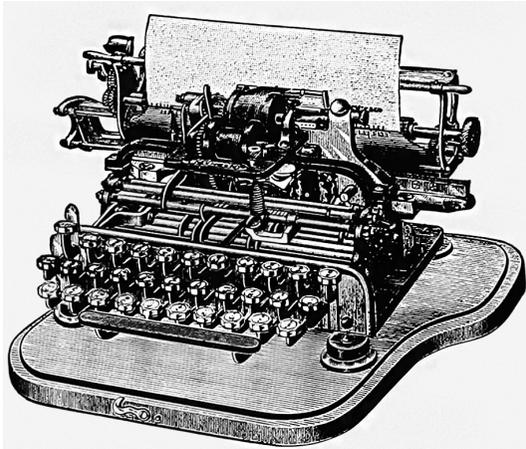
love grows out of the roots of my soul  
spreading care throughout this vessel  
I call my body  
compassion inserted into my bloodstream  
my lungs filled with gratefulness  
every breath  
taken with appreciation  
in my exhales  
a thought creeps from the back of my frontal lobe  
and my brain begins processing  
realizing  
that she is still known  
as the girl  
whose voice  
could plant comfort into my heart

JAKEEL HARRIS



**TO BE A POET**

to be a poet  
is to be  
deemed as a wordsmith  
expected to transform feelings  
into stories  
meaning  
mastering imagery and brachylogy  
to turn conciseness into expression  
to be a poet  
is to be  
the mediator between  
your values and your actions  
and when they clash  
you must decide  
how to approach the situation  
through open communication  
even when your voice is silent  
to be a poet  
is to be  
confident on stage  
echoing certainty  
in sentences with complex syntax structures  
crafty diction  
and a tone of reassurance  
while behind the scenes  
doubt screams out from the pages of the notepad  
fear bleeds through the lines of paper like hemorrhaging insecurities  
profusely escaping the body for a moment  
to be a poet  
is to be  
a walking memory  
evoking emotion on command  
challenging vulnerability  
by dueling with insane societal standards  
to be a poet  
is to be heard  
even when  
utterly speechless



**BEING A POET**

sometimes  
a poet is just a person  
who decided that it was easier  
to write about their traumas  
instead of confronting those responsible for them  
because at least that way  
their feelings will be heard  
and validated  
that there would be no guilt  
or pressure  
just control  
being able to determine  
how and when they  
want to process

**FEELING IT WITHOUT GUILT**

nothing feels different  
our interactions still provoke calmness in my temperament  
seems to always transform my attitude into happiness  
it's relaxing  
and effortless  
sometimes it feels like a dream  
not because I don't believe it's real  
but I must admit that sometimes it's temporary  
there was a time where the space between us  
became all too resemblant of disappearing relationships  
it shifted my thoughts into believing  
I was only destined to experience you from a remote distance  
scaring me to the core  
forcing my courage to stay dedicated to our connection  
but nothing's different  
whether you're far away  
or graciously in my presence  
I'll always love you  
for everything you were  
and are becoming

## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **MAKING ROOM**

most days  
I pretend that  
I am the moon  
trying to convince the stars  
to shine a little light on me  
and when the opportunity comes  
I'll gain the courage to ask them  
to make room for me in their sky  
as I am attempting to be someone  
people want to look up to



**TRAPPED AND CONFUSED PT.2**

it's happening again  
self-loathing is trapping you  
it's clinging onto your guilt  
squeezing the will out of your self-esteem  
I know you feel this pressure  
this pressure to dedicate yourself to be putting your effort into people  
even in times where you need it to be mutual  
but if you release all of this energy constantly  
how will you ever have enough  
to give to yourself



## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **MOURNING BEFORE PASSING**

there's nothing more difficult  
than trying to grieve over someone  
while making efforts toward keeping their memory alive

disconnecting from their presence  
without staying attached to their influence

but if you truly love them  
you'll learn how to simultaneously  
let them go  
and hold them tight

**COLONIZE**

after being exposed to their culture  
I saw the survival instincts in their methods  
the tradition in their family units  
and became envious of their happiness  
so I disguised betrayal as comradery

they taught me their customs  
showed me what welcoming danger  
looked like

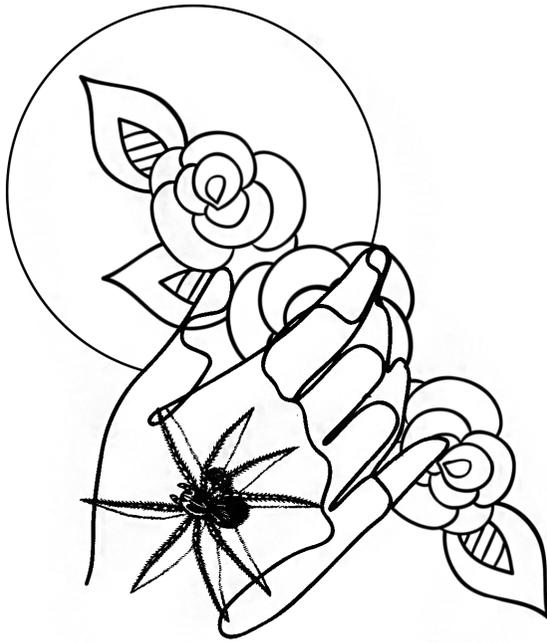
I waited until they could no longer see me as an outsider  
ceased the opportunity  
raped and pillaged  
my way into destroying their tradition

forced them to learn a false history for generations  
these folklores will be passed down in the form of lost identities  
the children of their children's children  
will hear my name told to them in stories  
they will worship me for all the wrong reasons  
I will become like GOD to them

**- A Colonizer's Experience**

**BRAVERY**

gallantry only exists  
to silence the threat of fear  
since fear is a dispositional pessimist  
courage must become visible  
to balance out the negative  
bravery is what happens  
when you've decided  
not to put any more energy  
into the things you're afraid of



## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **HEALING**

don't smother your pain with guilt  
it will blur your senses  
and you won't be able to see  
the path to your healing  
your heart needs comfort  
not hesitance  
or disturbances from regret please  
give it positive attention



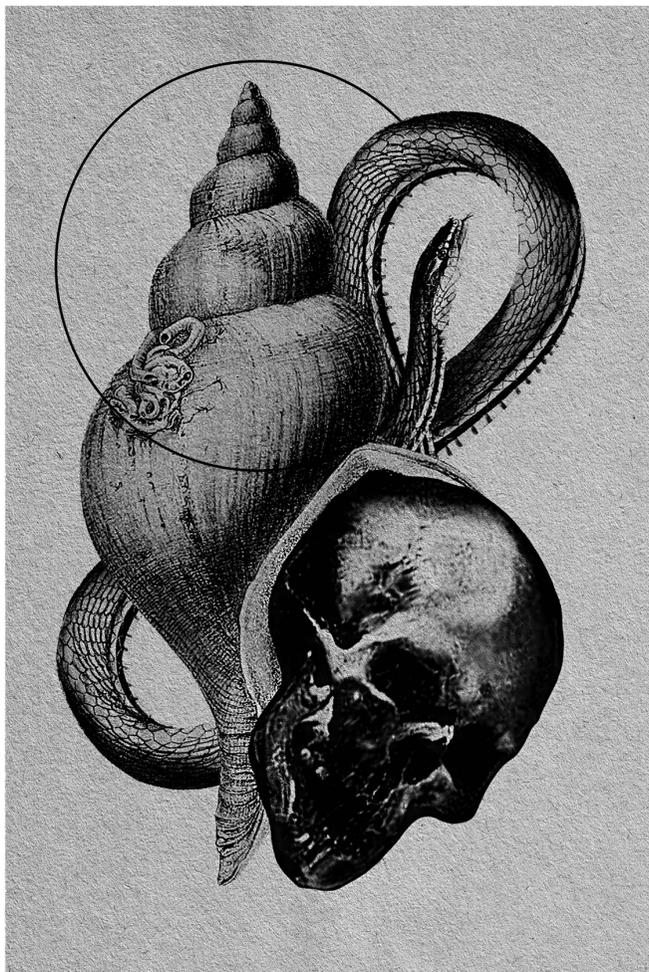
THE BREATHING PROCESS



**LOVE MOVES**

no matter how the world  
tries to taint us with hate  
we are made of love  
we must move with it  
let it direct our actions  
and consume nothing but it  
to become exactly what we need to heal

THE BREATHING PROCESS



**BREAKING BOUNDARIES**

embrace possibility  
and it will  
shape your comfort zone  
into something  
incapable of restriction

**WAVES**

this depression  
it comes in waves  
I've yet to learn  
how to let it flow

JAKEEL HARRIS



**MESSAGE TO THE OLD ME**

you were so bad at being authentic  
but that didn't mean  
I had to hold back on loving you  
for that  
I apologize

you didn't deserve to experience abandonment without compassion  
leaving you  
was the hardest thing I ever had to do  
and I'm so much better for it

**FORGIVE NOT FORGET**

we get so mad at people  
that the rage from the anger  
inside of us  
starts to block our judgement  
and we begin to hold grudges

the lack of hearing  
the vocalization of mistakes  
in their behavior  
makes us impatient

we occupy our minds  
with the thought of a damaged relationship  
unable to recover from the situation

but we often forget  
that we don't have to wait  
for an apology  
to forgive someone

**DANGEROUSLY CLEVER**

as a black man  
with an education  
and a heartbeat  
try not to forget  
where you came from  
you've surpassed  
societal expectations  
but you're still  
carrying burdens  
remember how much of a privilege it is  
to be alive

***- Advice from the Black Community***



THE BREATHING PROCESS



**NEVER AGAIN**

what terrifies you  
as you learn to navigate this world

honestly  
losing you again

**- *Me talking to Me***

**CHORES**

my thoughts are that  
terrible roommate  
that doesn't know  
how to clean up after themselves  
and when I bring up the subject  
they always find a way to distract me  
helping me forget the mess they've made

**DIFFERENT SIDES OF LOVE**

love that is forced  
imprisons  
hurts  
scars  
manipulates

love that is natural  
frees  
heals  
protects

in order to gain love  
we must give it

THE BREATHING PROCESS



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**WRECKED**

don't let this wreckage  
scare you  
someone will love the remains

**- *From the broken parts of you***

THE BREATHING PROCESS



**BEING A DAD**

my daughter  
will not be reduced  
to being told  
that she is pretty  
for a black girl  
I will engrave self-love  
on the inside of her eyelids  
she will see the beauty in her skin

my son  
will not be limited  
by the amount of range on his jump shot  
he will be  
just as clever  
as he is naturally gifted

my children  
my kids  
my babies  
will never have to walk  
out into the world  
wondering what love feels like

the day I decide to have a child  
will be the day I promise  
to not be some deadbeat story  
I will be more than a single mother's memory  
more than disappearing acts of missing involvement  
I promise

to redefine FATHER

**UNSPOKEN EXPECTATIONS**

unspoken expectations  
could never get the attention  
of open ears  
no matter how important they are

JAKEEL HARRIS



**DEATH BED CONVERSATIONS**

before you take the eternal sleep  
I will read you the stories  
of our adventures together  
you will hear about  
the many attempts I made  
to get you to fall in love with me  
you will be reminded  
how with me  
laughter was effortless  
honesty embedded in my sentences  
you never had to question my intentions  
I wanted to prove there wasn't a reason to  
I intended to love you for forever  
and even on your death bed  
let my whispers of reassurance  
put your insecurities  
to rest  
I love you  
and when we meet in the afterlife  
we'll have the chance  
to reminisce about these memories again

**STANDARDS**

the lack of attention  
shouldn't be a reason  
for you to lower your standards

you will still be a beautiful soul  
with a purposeful future  
even if it takes  
people a little bit longer to notice

## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **IS TODAY**

will today  
be the day  
you understand  
that opportunity  
has been smiling in your direction  
hoping that you notice them

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THE BREATHING PROCESS



**FUTURE**

from the moment I saw you  
I knew  
you were exactly  
who I wanted  
my eyes to see  
when they mustered up the strength  
to open in the morning

## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **ALIVE**

despite the disorder  
in the midst of all this chaos  
there is still consistency  
in your breathing patterns  
reminding you  
that you have lived to see another day  
cherish it

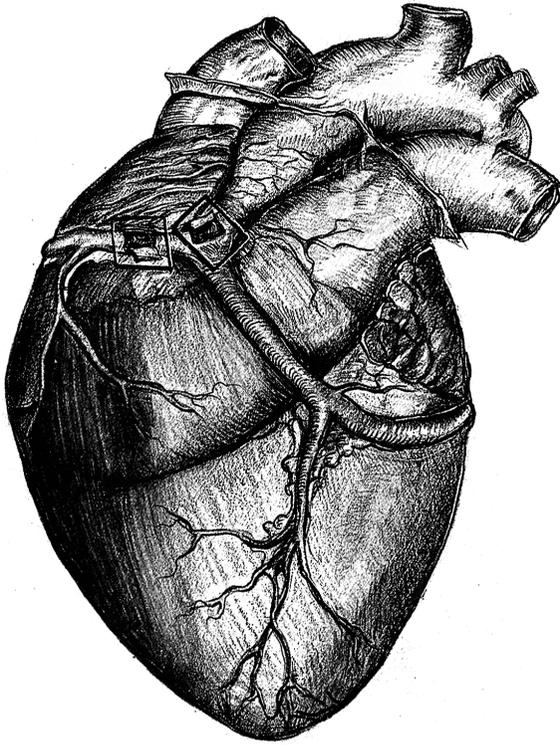
**QUESTIONING QUARANTINE**

contained behind the doors  
of my room  
wondering  
will it ever be safe enough  
to leave this anxiety in the past  
when I depart from this comfort  
will I know  
how to be myself again

## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **GIVING HER WHAT SHE DESERVES**

women deserve  
validation  
love  
care  
compassion  
respect  
and everything in the world  
made of kindness  
without the doubt  
alienation  
fear  
or questioning  
from men  
and anyone who dares to challenge  
their impact with opposition



**PANDEMIC**

I will not last forever  
but I will make a lasting impact  
you better notice how I'm affecting those around you  
don't wait for something tragic  
to start valuing what's important  
I'm trying to teach you a lesson  
you will heal eventually  
even though right now  
that seems impossible

**PRAISE**

when you see strong women  
don't forget to praise them  
they learned how to grow up  
in a world  
where society  
is trying  
to see them broken

## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **LETTER FROM NEHA**

To Jakeel,

no amount  
of sentences I phrase  
songs I sing  
essays I write  
or poems I recite  
will ever match up  
to the infinite ways  
your words have helped me  
get through life

***Thank you for being my best friend***

## Communication Redefined

communication

noun

to effectively express thoughts, attitudes and opinions

or simply

the transfer of information from one thing to another

I am considered to be someone who is literal

directly stating how I am feeling about something

no reading in between the lines is necessary

just bluntness in my verbiage

it also means that I take words for what they mean

this method relies heavily on clarity

any confusion will have me asking questions

but questions have always seemed to rub me the wrong way

I know it's a little hypocritical

I'm working on shifting that habit

I used to believe that

effective communication meant

being able to verbally express anything to anyone

that consistent explanations of what I am doing

was enough to provide context to anyone asking

how my day was

I used to believe that

consistent communication was the way to manage

any relationship

romantic or situational

that it was the key to providing reassurance

I realize that consistent communication

can consistently cause concerns

when a lack of detail is present

that feeling out of the loop has nothing to do with frequency

and everything to do with understanding

both need to be existing within the same conversation

**that communication ain't shit without comprehension**

**that communication ain't shit without comprehension**

**that communication ain't shit without comprehension**

and I'm repeating it like giving myself

positive affirmations in the mirror

so I can see and believe it

## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### **HIM**

HIM (n.) - King of masculinity, master of trying

Synonyms: toxic, privilege

**HER**

HER (n.) - the goddess of everything; perfection

Synonyms: underappreciated, neglected

**Ode to Black Men**

your ability to constantly  
disappoint your oppressors  
is inspiring  
you are a magnificent gift  
a King amongst civilians  
you mustn't forget you are royalty  
I love you and will always show you  
no matter how much society tries  
to convince me  
that I shouldn't

- *from one black man to another*

### **Minecraft Lessons**

sometimes you have to  
destroy your entire foundation  
to see the issues in how  
the groundwork was laid  
and once you realize  
it was always unstable  
find the right resources  
and build something  
you'll be proud to call home

- ***A place where your values live***

## THE BREATHING PROCESS

### 3 Steps to Healing

when you're sitting in all that **discomfort**  
and you've finally **accepted** that those setbacks  
were necessary for your personal **growth**  
you will have started  
the healing process

**Step 1: Discomfort**

it will sit in your stomach like acid  
scorching the feeling of security from the inside of your body  
which will become a crater filled with uneasiness  
fear will start to break down your comfort  
crumbling your idea of safety

you must not let that stop you  
from learning about your resilience  
let it bring you to the current moment  
and push you towards accepting  
the reality of your experiences

**Step 2: Acceptance**

just because you accept something or someone  
doesn't mean it will come with positive feelings  
or ideal outcomes  
sometimes  
the decisions that are best for us to make  
often come with a sacrifice  
like the end of a relationship  
we thought was important

**Step 3: Growth**

the fact remains  
that even under unfavorable conditions  
you will bloom  
into something beautiful

*To my readers, thank you for validating me.*