

GATHER

OCTAVIA RAHEEM



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www.octaviaraheem.com

GATH·ER

/'gɑtHər/

noun

part of a garment that is drawn in or pulled together

verb

Assemble, accumulate

Bring together from scattered places. Draw in.

Come together.

Get together.

For Karen M. Mason

Your question, “So, what are you waiting for?”

It gathered me.

GATHER

INTRODUCTION

I was four years old and in love with reading when I realized the words on a page, those small curved black-bodied things were scribbled together and created by someone.

When I realized humans could create books, I wanted to be a human who did that.

I grew up hungry, dusty, and trailer house poor. Still, I'd take my last coins, toss them into wishing fountains, and pray, *"God, pretty please let me make books."*

"You can't eat stories for dinner and grow meat on your bones."
"Get your education and get you a good job with insurance."
Despite my unrivaled love for reading and writing, I internalized these messages from my family and the world around me. In fear and hunger, these messages became the ones that created my reality instead of the poems and musings I dreamed up.

Does everything have to be about "bread?" When your Ancestors and mama 'nem have survived off less than crumbs, the answer has been yes for many generations.

That *yes* owned me. That *yes* owned us.

So, I jumped into that wishing fountain and snatched all of my pennies back. I pushed "writer" into a safe corner within me where

she wouldn't be touched by a world that would ravish her, including my own mind.

All these years later and after feeding myself many things that never left me full, I am remembering my first love.

Remembering what is real to me is the gift of my yoga and meditation practice and the awakening I have experienced within it.

My practice allows me to remember what I feel like beneath my surface level, that level that I allow the world to see. Through devotion, my practice has softened and opened the tough and hidden cords around my heart and unraveled a holy thread of memory and truth.

The deep-eyed Black girl who loved the sound and feel of words on her tongue more than the sour taste of green apple Now and Later candy or the small beads of pure sugar in the first few chews of Bubble Yum gum, and my Cabbage Patch doll, Annie. That little country girl with imagination bigger than ancient oak trees, that me, is awake and present.

I no longer need writing to yield "surance," as my granny would say. It's about more than "bread." It's salvation and soul food.

I only need to assure my inner four-year-old that she is worth the effort and offering.

Writing allows me to practice imperfection. Through practicing imperfection, I am able to access the wild beauty of my humanity in a deeper way. In the words of Outkast, "Now that's liberation."

I choose to show up to my altar (my desk) with devotion each day. I choose to sit there and listen until I hear that pigtailed child who was brave enough to toss away pennies on a wish - I wait to hear her laugh and say, "*You came back for me. You remembered me.*"

In that spirit of reverence and remembrance, I share *Gather*. *Gather* is a place to be human, to be imperfect, and to remember. May the words guide, nudge, whisper, or even shout you awake. May you hear the sound of my voice, now, as a woman unapologetically reclaiming her gifts and dreams. In these words, hear the voice of the little girl I had to remember in order to create *Gather*. May you hear your authentic voice.

Gather is not a book to be rushed or read from cover to cover.

Many of the insights within this book came to me during my Empowered Wisdom Yoga Nidra practice, meditation, or while giving myself permission to be easy and rest. After those experiences, I journaled, allowing whatever needed to be released into the pages of my journal to flow with no restrictions. No filter. No judgement. I organized the book in this same way for you –for you to read the short quotes and simply write what it means to you in the moment you encounter it. My meanings are on the back page following each quote. Another important part of my personal practice is self-inquiry. I've included questions that invite reflection and allow you to create an even more meaningful experience with *Gather*.

There's also another way to engage in the wisdom of this book.

Take a moment. Be quiet. Close your eyes. Breathe.

Allow your hands to touch the pages.

Turn to a random page and spend some time with the message. You may want to read the words aloud.

In whatever way you choose to use this book, my prayer is that you encounter a message that calls the scattered pieces within you back to wholeness.

I hope you gather and remember your Ancestors.

I hope you gather courage.

I hope you gather at your own heart.

I hope you rest in the gathering places you find throughout this book.

Octavia F. Raheem
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