

Finding Our Way Podcast

hosted by

Prentis Hemphill

#MeToo, Power and Grace

with guest Tarana Burke

Transcript



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Legend:

[actions]

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[Music]

Prentis: Movements have catalyzed action or called us to attention more over the last several years than me too. It has spoken to the often unspoken dynamics of power violence and sexual abuse that seem to flow just underneath. What many of us call reality Tarana Burke coined the term, 'me too,' and in that was conjuring the possibility of belonging beyond shame and a sense of safety that could be collective. It has been a way to tell the truth and to join the near majority of people who shared silently a similar pain. Me too, as a movement has created seismic shifts, shaking whole industries, moving through companies and through relationships ushering us to make a stand against violence and exploitation and towards healing. Our responses to the movement. And the hashtag also reveal so much to us about power and how it shapes who we listen to, how we define me to who we see as its leaders and who we hold at the center of it has as much to do with power and privilege. as the issue at hand. Tarana Burke is a long-time organizer committed to racial justice

and ending sexual violence. She has for decades worked to make it possible for young Black girls survivors to tell their stories and ultimately to heal. These experiences, sit at the very root and center of how and why she does her work. This interview is the more intimate side of a heartfelt and generous leader who has never forgotten the possibility of our transformation.

Prentis: Tarana I feel so excited that you're here. I feel so honored that you're here. I love you. *wow* And I'm excited to be in conversation with you.

Tarana: I love you too. I would always say yes. So I don't know why you feel so honored. [laughing]

Prentis: Come on, come on. [both laughing] There's so many things I want to talk to you about. I'm so excited to talk to you about them, but I wanted to, um, we start this podcast, so it's Finding Our Way, and we're always trying to assemble those thinkers, those leaders, those poets, those visionaries that we feel like have some kind of key or at least some, uh, insight on what our next step is given that these times are so um, at times chaotic, there's just so much unknown. So you're one of the people that I think about is, is leading in terms of what is possible for us in our relationships. The first question that I usually ask people is, just to talk about where you see us being headed, just as a collective. You can situate yourself anywhere, but where are we headed? What do we need to know? What's possible in this moment? What do you see from where you are?

Tarana: I guess I want to answer that thinking about, first of all, I'm glad to be here. So nice to just be able to rap a taste with your people, you know? Not have a lot of pressure. Um, but I, I feel like I want to answer that from where I want us to be. I don't know if this is exactly where we are, but I think a lot about, because we talk so much about healing and trauma and those kinds of things like people right now need to be in a place of healing like this, this last year in particular was so traumatic. And I think, you know, we get, we get by, by making a lot of jokes about it and we got the means and the blah, blah, blah. But really, it was like one thing after another, after another, after another, in a pandemic.

Tarana: You know?, So now we're not really out of it, but we are out of it enough, I think to maybe breathe a little bit better and like look around and see our way to some kind of possibility, a little bit of a roadmap, so I really want us to be in a place where we're thinking about not how we get back out in the world and where are we going to travel? I mean, I'm doing that right. Where we going to travel? And all the rest of that. I get

that. But also like, how are we going to like, just not forget, let's not just let it pass and just keep moving. Like nothing happened. I'm hoping that people are being reflective, are acknowledging what they went through, how it hurt or what it left them with, like the impact of it. Because I feel like the, the remnants of it are going to last even longer if we don't do that, you know? So that's where, I'm, so I'm hoping people are, I don't, I don't notice, I don't know that that's necessarily true. I do hear a little bit more though about healing from, or dealing with what we went through that I've heard in the past from when people, so that's a good thing.
mhmm Um, yeah, that's a good thing.

Prentis: Yeah kinda in that vein. I wasn't going to ask this, but I'm just curious, uh, what have you learned or what do you think we've learned in this last year of pandemic, elections? So much grieving and life-long, it's just been, uh, uh, so many things that have happened in the last year, but what are some of the lessons that have come up for you or some of the learnings for you?

Tarana: I think we have learned that collective trauma is real, right. And we can simultaneously experience something and be devastated by it. And it may not land the same way with everybody and affect us exactly the same, but everybody will be affected. Um, nobody can say, I think, honestly, that they were not affected by something in the last year. Right. It's just too much stuff that happened. I think for me, some of, some of my personal learnings is that, and I'm still kind of walking through this one. It's like, kind of resilience is not enough. You know, like we, we talk a lot about resilience and it's like, 'Oh, how you got up and how you, how you bounce back.' But I'm like, I might have gotten up, but I'm wobbly as a motherfu*cker [laughing] *mmhmm*. You know what I'm saying like, I don't know if resilience is enough. Like I might need something else. So I'm just trying to like, and I think to my previous point, I think I'm thinking about that so much cause this, this last year really was a lot for me. And I don't think I acknowledged it as much as I should. I'm just, now starting to think about it. I'm like, like I'll say something and I'll have a friend and be like, 'you do realize that such and such and such happened.'

Prentis: That's right. That's right.

Tarana: You know, so I'm like, yeah, I gotta find something. It's gotta be something more than just resilience.

Prentis: You know, that's one of the things that I, um, I really appreciate about you, about how you do your work. It always feels clear to me that what is

really important is that more of us be included in this work, especially, uh, Black women, especially obviously survivors all across the board. Um, but you, you always, to me remain really grounded in who this work is for and, uh, making it more and more accessible. So even those things like resilience. Yeah. We need resilience, but maybe we need something more than that. It just always feels like to me, a kind of reaching beyond what we've been given as the solutions and thinking, how can this be relevant, useful to more of us. I appreciate that about you.

Tarana: Yeah. Yeah. Well, thank you. I appreciate that too. I think that's connected. We talked about this before, and I think that's connected to the, from a very young age. And I feel like it's kind of, this is a gift and I don't want to call it a curse at all, but being able to recognize injustice *mmhmm* and not just recognize it, but be really bothered by it. Even small injustices, right? Not my mother tells the story about how I gave my, my family, we always have bangles, the women in our family get bangles when they're younger. And I gave a set of my bangles away to a little girl in a bakery. My mother had to get them back and cause I said, 'it wasn't fair. She didn't have bangles and dangled stuff' [laughing] like that. She's like, "you, and it's not fair. Life is not fair, you know?" Um, but just like recognize the injustice, just so you know, it's just so wrong to me and, and not look at things sometimes and I'm always asking "Why? Well, why this and and that? Well, why can't, these people have it? Why?" Especially when it's just so much in the world, the so so so much like you can't, "you can cut off a little bit." *Yeah.* You can extend this a little more. We can think of, look, it's like particularly Black folks and other people of color, marginalized people, whatever. Always given a little allotment and told to work in that allotment *mm* and be very happy with this little allotment, you know? But they, like, you got, "we gave you basketball, all your fancy sparkly clothes, what else?" But yeah, there's more and we deserve it and we should at least explore it.

Prentis: That's right. That's right. Yeah. So I want to talk to you a little bit about me too, in particular. And, um, uh, I want to put it in a little bit in this context, which is that I've been thinking a lot lately about how oppression really shapes who we are, and what we pay attention to, and who we're able to listen to for how long, at what depth, who we think are experts. And I think about that a lot in relationship to you and me too, given that my own assessment is that people could be listening to you more, to what you're actually saying. [Tarana laughing] And I guess I wonder how you feel about that, but also what are the, what are the pieces that you feel like get missed about what me too is?

Tarana: Yeah. I think it's a mixture of things. I think that, you know, I remember, I remember when it first went viral and I would say all the time, nobody's going to listen to a 44 year old black woman from the Bronx. Right? Know, I'm not trying to hear what I got to say. Um, so there's that. I think there's race, and gender, and age mixed there. I also think the subject matter is just people don't want to hear about it, not for real. And that is to your second point about what gets missed in one way, #metoo opened up this conversation about sexual violence that allowed people who do this work, space, that they didn't have before. Right? Like a larger space, a bigger platform. Um, some took advantage of it in really great ways. Others still quite haven't figured out how to, cause I think some people were like, we're just going to conform to what the media is doing, what the mainstream is doing, instead of owning it in a different way of saying, "that's not what it's about." And so what happens is that what people miss is that the millions of people said 'me too', were talking about experiencing sexual violence. But the media used it to bolster stories, right. About powerful white men who did terrible things or, or about, you know, things that are not, not, not important, but not as important as 12 million people who respond to a hashtag in 24 hours. Right? Like, so the main thing that people miss is the story of survivors is that there are millions of people out here who not only use the hashtag, but felt a sense of relief to having a vehicle, and avenue, an outlet, to talk about this thing. There's so much to unpack. And even the using of in the viral moment, even the viral moment, wasn't really unpacked in the way that it should be not in the mainstream.

Tarana: Um, so people miss that and then about my work, I mean, you know, I joked last summer when, when all the uprisings were happening, sort of Black Lives Matter and Movement for Black Lives had this re-emergence of a fight, "Oh, I get to be Black again". Because, I've joked about it, but I also meant it in a way that was like, I got all this visibility around me too, as the woman who talked about sexual violence. Um, but not as the Black woman who talked about sexual violence in the Black community and how that relates to the larger, you know, how that relates to larger society. How I talked about censoring, Black women and girls and how that is never to the exclusion of anybody else. *Right. right* And like beating my head against the wall for two or three years around this topic and getting dragged in and outside of my community. It's like, I think people willfully missed the point. It's easier to, to lean in some, to some of these other ideas. Right. And say, "you're just trying to take down black men" or "you just trying to take down a white men" or you just, you know, just for some times the trolls would just have like a convention,

get it off. *mmhmm* [laughing] Yeah. But yeah, I do think it's willful. I think that, um, people don't want to understand, cause it's not that hard. It's not easy to listen to, but it's not hard to understand.

Prentis: Hmm. It's not easy to listen to, but it's not hard to understand. Yeah. That's such a powerful point.

Tarana: Yeah. Right. Cause nobody wants to hear the reality of this violence in their community and their families and their lives. Nobody, even those of us who've experienced it. We don't want to talk about it. *yeah* You don't want to relive it. You don't want to acknowledge it, but it's real. It happened. It's here. That's hard. You don't want to hear it, *mmhmm* but it is not hard to understand that 60% of Black girls will experience sexual violence before they turn 18. Those numbers, are what they are. It's not hard to understand that Black women have the second highest rate of sexual violence in this country. That's just facts. That's just data. It's information. It's not an algorithm. It's not, it's not hard. You get that now unpacking why getting to the heart of how we got here; much more nuanced and difficult conversation, but we have to have it. Which means you have to hear it. You have to understand it, so that we can move to the next phase, which is dealing with how we, how we deal with it. What do we do about it? But we're so stuck in the, I don't want to hear it. And I don't understand it part, that we can't get past it.

Prentis: Woo, Okay. So this is like so many things popping off when you share. Cause I'm, I'm thinking about, you know, the way that the media, and I think some people willfully, as you're saying, have wanted to concentrate only on kind of celebrity instances, because what you're talking about is actually really intimate. It, we're talking about 60% of Black girls it's in our communities. It's in our families, as you said, is it's up close. And it's, it's asking us to reimagine our relationships, our accountability, who we're protecting, who we're not, our power relations. It's just, it's asking so many critical questions. And it seems like it's just a lot easier to be like, 'Oh, let's just talk about these people that seem far away.' And let's talk about us,

Tarana: Right. Is even asking us to re-examine our definitions and our, our norms, right? Because is she fast or is he a predator?

Prentis: Mmhmm, Come on, come on.

Tarana: We don't have to turn some of these things around. Like we all have to, we're going to have to really examine our complicity, which is difficult. But the thing is, if we could, if we could hold a little bit of nuance, we

could understand that our complicity doesn't make us. It's not like we are inherently evil. There are reasons even behind the complicity. Right. And some of those relate back to white supremacy, cause everything does that's right. Side note.

Prentis: Side note!? Yeah. [laughing]

Tarana: But, but I mean, there's, there's so much to unpack but what, what I guess I get so frustrated is that we can't get in the front door. We can't even have a conversation. We can't, you know, we can't have a conversation. And when we do is it's folks who agree with each other. So if you come in to hear me speak, or you're even like listening to this podcast, you're going to tune in because you already are predisposed to this kind of information.*mmhmm* You have an interest in this conversation. I have an interest in obviously talking to the people who are interested because, that's how we build up, you know, a cadre of folks. But also we got to talk to our cousins and aunties and uncles and the folks who are not connected, who are still putting out misinformation. Like there's a barrier there, that we can't get comfortable with, that we have to get into the muckety muck around. Lots of things, not just sexual violence, obviously there's a lot of, *yeah yeah* a lot of this that we've just drawn these lines. We've gotten comfortable, like whether I'm over there, those ignorant ones. *mhmm* And we're just over here and that's, it's not that simple.

Prentis: So I've, uh, I've a question for you there because you know, I've done trainings around transformative justice and all these, these ways of addressing harm. And I remember I was doing one just before quarantine hit and it was at a, at a school and it was at a room full of folks who were there for this training. Almost, I mean, it's hard to say almost everyone, but a significant number of people either shared, or somehow it came up that they were also survivors. And I thought, this is a training about transformative justice. How we're going to intervene? But everybody in here is a survivor. How do we get people who may not have that experience to even care that we are having this kind of training? Cause it ends up being, like you said, us in the room talking about what we're going to do, but we can't really do what needs to be done without everybody in the room. So I have a question for you around, like, what have you learned? What are you learning about? What it takes for us to really listen to each other. I've heard you talk about empathy in this movement, but what is it really gonna take for us to listen across experience? That's not my experience, but because we belong together,

because we're part of the same community I want to listen. But just what do you think it will take?

Tarana: Absolutely. ListenPrentis. I wish I could. I wish I had this magic bullet right here. This is what, this is sort of the goal before *yeah* all of this, before me too went viral. When I was just in community, you know, my vision for this work has always been to create sort of first responders. I always compare how we respond to gun violence in our community versus how we respond to sexual violence. Right? And it's a lesson that I've learned. I come from my, my stepfather, you know, he was the number man in the community, but he also was sort of the organizer, even though he didn't have that title. So him and his group of friends were the people you went to when you were hungry, when you couldn't pay your rent, they organized the block party, right? They took care of things in the community.

Tarana: If somebody was shot in our, not even shot. I remember when there was a man who was robbing houses, that somebody was breaking into the apartment and my stepfather and his people, made it their business to find that person. But not only that, they made it their business to make sure that the homes that were robbed didn't go without, right? *yeah* That they had food, that they had a rent party or whatever. This is what I saw growing up. I saw us take care of each other and community sexual violence is so individualized that when somebody, when it's experienced in the community, people are like, "Oh, we need to get you some resources. You as an individual, get you to the doctor or get you some therapy. I'll go to the police department," But there's no wrap around. Right? So somebody gets shot in the community and you got people rallying around. We don't get matching. T-shirts made, we don't come to the community center. And we're going to have a meeting about this violence. We're going to have a drop the guns off program. *yeah* You know, we're going to preach on this corner every, every Sunday, until there is a response that is collective, because there's a collective responsibility that we feel. For the safety of the community, whether it's for the children or the elderly or the women, whatever way that people couch it, we feel collectively responsible for the people in our community safety. Child gets molested in the community, "We say, be quiet." "You don't know what really happened." "You don't want to ruin that person's reputation." "You know how she is, you know, her family, right?" It's a litany of reasons why this can't be public why we can't protect this person. It's just a different, so this doesn't answer your question, but it's the way I think about, I think about your question all the time.

Tarana: What do we have to do for us to feel collectively responsible for a different kind of safety, right? Not just safety from gun violence or street violence, but from sexual violence? And, and unfortunately, since me too has gone viral, the only way we are seeing sexual violence played out is either through like some sort of celebrity thing, or sexual harassment in the workplace. We're not talking about child sexual abuse really, right? We're not talking about these situations of manipulation and exploitation that's happening with young girls, right? Statutory, we're not really talking about these really, really more everyday kind of situations that are happening in our community that are violence. That are absolute violence. And so, you know, I would love for shift to happen. So we can really talk about what it looks like. And one of the programs that we're doing in the organization are these community healing circles.

Tarana: Well we want to flip that on its head and the way we used to do, when I was back in Alabama, the way we used to do community healing circles was to bring survivors in. To talk about, you know, healing for themselves. And we do that in a different way now, it's just much bigger. So we can't quite do it the same as more virtual with now we're doing with, I probably shouldn't be talking about this because we haven't developed yet, but we're toying with this idea of bringing people from the community, different communities together into healing circles, because we need to acknowledge this violence happens in our community. And we need folks in the community to come together with survivors, to talk about what accountability looks like, and what healing looks like and people to take individual, like to take collective responsibility. So what's the church going to do? What's the businesses in the community gonna do? *come on* What's the education community going to do, right? That's what a community healing cycle to me looks like. What kind of plan of action are we going to put together so that we can protect folks in our community? That's, that's what we are, are working on now to try to flip community healing circles. I want to see people actively take responsibility and be proactive about safety in the community. I want on a grassroots level. I want you all to make matching t-shirts. *mmhmm* I want y'all to get those community t-shirts and be out in the community, talking about sexual violence in the same ways we talk about other forms of safety in our community. So that's, that's, that's coming around the pike and 21 to 22, something like that. We, you know, we gotta raise a little money, get people together, but it's going to happen,

Prentis: Tarana that's beautiful. Because when you said that, like wearing matching t-shirts, it just really hit me so hard. I thought about myself as a young kid growing up and what that would have meant to me, to see community members in those shirts. *Can you imagine?* Instead of getting the whispers out, "don't get too close to that person" or "make sure you don't stay too long." "Don't go in that person's house." Instead of that, if I felt the presence of safety and love in the community, what that would have transformed around my sense of safety. Yup,

Tarana: Exactly. And it doesn't have to be a call out. It doesn't have to be a witch hunt. It can be just, we are people who represent safety in this community. We are, we care about it. We're concerned about the most vulnerable people. And we are proactively looking for solutions. That's just that alone, that presence, like you said, that I don't even know what I would've done to see something like that, because then you have the young people. And conversely, what we have is young people who are watching stuff like 'Surviving R Kelly' and seeing the, the next day people making jokes and talking about it and dragging the survivors and blah, blah, blah. And then where do they go, who do they talk to? Right. There's no alternative to that in their communities. And this really has to be, I mean, I come from a grassroots, you know organizing background. So for me, it really has to be on a grassroots level. We need to be in community in the street and it can grow up from there. But I just don't see, we don't need big national organizations and hotlines for this. We need door-to-door, person, to person, community about community, for people to take this on many first responders.

Prentis: Mmm. That's a beautiful vision. Um, I love everything about that. We need that so much. And that would, that would really change so many futures. So many lives to feel something like that. It's powerful.

Tarana: I pray so. I pray. That's the, that's the best part about this, this, this moment in my life is that [laughing] I said this in an interview, like stuff that I jotted down on a legal pad, like 10 years ago, I'm like, Oh, I got another idea. You got some money. [both laughing].

Prentis: Le'ts make it happen, it's time.

Tarana: what'd you say, y'all put me on TV. Come here. Let's go.

Prentis: You, you said something earlier about like, you know, when the uprisings hit over the summer, you're like, "Oh, I get to be Black again. or I get to bring this part of myself into this work." What are the, what are the kind

of nuances around just who you are. That get missed in this moment who Tarana Burke is

Tarana: Man so much. I think so. Yeah. What I was saying about that moment is that it, it, the, the world doesn't get to see this as much, but people want to, want for the last several years. Want to hear from me about just a very particular thing. They want to know my opinion on some powerful white man or black man, whatever, some powerful man that is caught up in whatever. Or, you know, they want my presence at some thing to say, look, we care about this issue, you know, but, but as a Black woman, when I start talking Black stuff, it, it gets really, you know, it's, that's dying out. And so I'm like, and it was funny because when I started posting, obviously not, not really about sexual violence, but just about violence against Black people last year, folks coming into my social media pages saying I was clout chasin' *hmm*. I'm like, 'I'm a thousand years old. I do not give a about your clout. Are you serious?' I was like, 'Oh, now there's something new on Black Lives Matter.' *come on y'all* "This is not about Black", "This is not about me too," Oh no. Yeah. The kids went crazy. Um, and I was just like, how, how do y'all jump to these kinds of conclusions? Like one thing that people don't understand, I think I have not spent my whole entire life working on sexual violence. My from 14 years old, I've been organizing since I was 14. Most of that work has been about racial injustice and the *mm mm* many ways that that's manifested economic injustice, you know, criminal justice *yep* is just criminal injustice. You know, it's been all kinds of different things. I've organized around in areas, even arts and culture, but always Black, right? Blackity, black, black, black, like I am dreaming red, black, and gray. It's so crazy to separate, to separate me from anything Black is incredible. It just, it's such a funny thing to me now, my friends, we laugh about it. Like people don't even, they don't even know. It's just incredible. [both laughing] But, um, and I come from such a super Blackity, Black family is, you know, but it's cool. But yeah. So I think people miss miss that. And so last year, I mean, I was joking about that, right. Because I can happen in my Blackness wherever I am, but, but it did give me a chance to sort of yeah, sort of pull back from what people used to me hear, hearing you talk about and kind of talk about some other things. So that was good.

Prentis: Mmhmm, there's a question I have for you just about, um, I guess kind of related to that, because when we talk about sexual violence, we're often talking about power, power dynamics. *mmhmm.*, but power is, uh, is a force across realms. Like the tower is such a significant force for how things get done in the world, how things, what becomes the norms

inside of society. And I've heard you talk some about power in relationship to sexual violence, but I'm just interested in general on your kind of vision for what power could be. Cause it's not, I guess I, haven't heard you say that power in and of itself is a bad thing, but I guess I wonder if you have a vision for how we might hold power as individuals, how we might be thinking about power collectively, just what do you see inside of power? Um, right now.

Tarana: Yeah. You know, I think about this a lot in relation to power and privilege I've talked to before about privilege and I guess in the same way, power not being inherently bad, but it's the ways in which we abuse it, right? It's the, it's the unchecked, the accumulation of power, right? And the abuse of privilege is when tip into, um, to the places where we find ourselves when we see abuse, and violence and things like that. And so I, you know, I obviously, when I think about how I think about it being balanced and shared, and I don't know that the world is set up for there not to be power. But one thing that I have been thinking about a lot lately is this, um, article that a friend sent me about sexual violence and powerlessness.*mmhmm* It's so interesting to me, it's really, it's really rocking my thinking about it in relation to people of color and marginalized people. Right? Because what the premise was was that- we always talk about sexual violence as an act of power, not sex. Right. And what they were essentially talking about in this article was that it is more so an act of powerlessness and not power, like a person feeling powerless. And I thought, Hm, if you relate that to people of color, you relate that to Black folks and folks who feel the least amount of power, then it might bring us to explanations that start explaining those high numbers and those dynamics that we're talking about and experiencing. And I'm I'm, I mean, we are way far, there's no research.*Yeah yeah* This is me pontificating. This is nothing like that, but it's, it's a really, I really want to, it's like a puzzle to me. I really want to understand, because I know there's no, there's nothing that says that Black people, Indigenous people, Latinx folks have any predisposition to violence or, you know, any sort of anything that would say that, that our rates of sexual violence would be higher. But I know that the violence that we experienced mostly particularly in Black and Latinx communities is inter-communal. So it makes me want to, um, explore that idea of powerlessness. Uh, so as soon as just, I'm just ruminating on something that's been on my mind, but because it's related to what you're saying about power, cause that means if we could shift power, then maybe we could shift some of these other ways that powerlessness manifests in our community. Um, and therefore, you know, maybe it would lead to less violence and, and

less of the things that we see. So this is, this is where I've been. My brain has been *Ooh,* kinda in the back of my head. You know,

Prentis: There's a lot there, Tarana.

Tarana: There's a lot there. right? There's a lot there. It's just, it's another one of my nuggets, every, every now and again, when I'm just sitting quietly, I'm like, Hmm, powerlessness. [laughing]

Prentis: I just want to say though, your nuggets, these little nuggets, you have, you called them little nuggets. I be like, Tarana that is more than a little nugget. That's actually like a profound piece of something that we need. It's not just a little nuggets.

Tarana: Well, I just want it, you know, it's not based on anything. So I just be like, let me not. I mean, I'm on a daggon podcast, something about it right now. [Prentis laughing] So just want to make sure you know, that that's not based on anything but something in my brain. Don't go repeating that and be like, 'I heard once in a podcast,'

Prentis: I will just say, it's based on your brain, but it's also based on your experience, which, you know, what you have done, someone who has committed a significant portion of the life to looking this issue in the face. So it is not ungrounded and yes, we can still explore it, but I'm like, that, there's something there. And I think it, if anybody else listening feels the way I do something gets stirred up in me when you said that it felt resonant,

Tarana: Right? It's something that I'm glad to hear that there is something there. When I think about it, I'm like, yeah, I want to, it's one of those things that you like when you have a stack of books and I have a notebook full of like when I get 10 extra minutes, [both laughing] I'm gonna flesh this out.

Prentis: I'm already 50 books. *Yeah.* Um, okay. I just have maybe a couple more for you. I want to ask this question, but I don't want it to be corny. So I'm trying to figure out how to do it. [laughing] So it might just be corny. You're gonna have to forgive me. *just, yeah* Um, yeah, but it's actually something I'm really curious about. Do you consider yourself courageous?

Tarana: Oh yeah, No. Short answer. Right. Like I struggle with this question. I get asked that a lot or I get acused, not acused, but people accuse me of courage all the time. And I'm like, I don't know that this is courage. What I, how I normally reply to that is I feel dutiful. I feel more dutiful than I feel

courageous. Like there are some things that I feel like God gave me. Right. *mmhmm* That's just what I feel. I feel like of, of decile to some degree could have, he could have woke up and gave it to anybody. He decided to give me some understanding about some things or a particular kind of empathy, compassion, whatever it is. And when, when something is given to you like that, there's not really much, you can do it, but give it to the world. Right. That's what she is supposed to do. *mmhmm* And so in some ways I don't feel it doesn't. Yeah. I don't feel courageous. Feels like it makes me cringey a little bit. I don't know. I shouldn't, I guess probably some I just got to work through, but I just feel like dutiful like this, what else am I supposed to do? *mm* I also related back to what I was saying earlier about injustice - It sits in my chest. Literally. I'm just like, I'm, I'm very much that way, even about my people watching my people, you're my people. And I'm not, I just will not tolerate anybody dealing with my people out of pocket. At all. So it feels like it's my duty, you know? And then have my friends be like 'that's enough. We don't. Ok enough.' And I'm like, "No, I'll take care of it," but it's just like, this is your, my family. This is my duty, you know? And this is, this is like, I'm very much not a person. It's like the world in my family. Nah, I'm not saying that. But yeah. I just felt like this is a duty and once you know a thing, you can't un-know it. So you got to figure out what to do with it. So, yeah. I don't know.

Prentis: See that's why I asked you. Cause I thought you were going to bring me something like that.

Tarana: Oh, did you? [laughing].

Prentis: Yeah, I knew it would be.

Tarana: Yeah. I don't know. Courage is such an, I mean, it's so interesting. Cause it's like, I think about these little kids who have disclosed to me over the years and how much courage that takes. You know, like you don't know what's going to happen. Is some lady, I have so many kids over here just be like "miss or lady," just like, they're like "somebody told me you might be safe. My friend said, I can come and tell you this." And they take a chance. And like, that's courage to me. I'm like, wow, you really just, you know, trusted me with this thing. I didn't tell anybody for a long time. I was like, ya "our business is our business."

Prentis: Ooof, that just, that really hit me just now. It just hit me that, um, just how many people, I mean, I'm sure it can feel overwhelming, but just how many people feel like they can trust you because of your willingness to say things that so many of us, have just hidden. It, it seems like a kind

of weight that I can't really imagine, but also what a responsibility that has been bestowed on you. What a duty.

Tarana: That's what I mean about the duty. Right? It's like the other day I opened my inbox and I found a message. You know, if I have the Instagram works, there's messages you don't see. *mmhmm* And, and long story short there's a celebrity who, two years ago wrote me a note to disclose, and I felt so bad. Like just terrible. Like I, I just, and I wrote them back and I said, "you know, I'm so, so sorry." And I just took a chance that they would see it. Cause it's literally two years ago, if not longer. And um, and I was like, "I'm so, so sorry. And this got lost." And I mean, I don't look in this box or whatever. And they wrote back the nicest note, just saying, you know, "I've never felt any way about you not answering. I just wanted to put this out to you in particular, because I knew if you ever saw it, you would understand." I was like, man, it's just, you know, it does, it's definitely feels like a privilege. It is heavy to some degree, but also not as heavy as what the other person is carrying. Right. If all I have in the cycle that you are dealing with is to hold a piece of that. I'm okay. Right.*mmm* It's not as heavy as what you have in like people been carrying in the pit of their stomach for 20 and 30 and 40 years sometimes, you know? So I'm good. But also that's why we have me too. Like the words, you know, exactly just is going to give me one word then. I'm good.

Prentis: Exactly. I got one last question for you here. Um, I've heard you talk about grace, just a little bit, [laughing] and I wonder if you could just leave us with a word maybe about what grace can do. Why grace now, if there's anything on your heart to share,

Tarana: Well, you know, this is my other nugget. I think a lot about grace and a lot because of the last, you know, three or four years since having all this visibility, but also the last three or four years of watching the way movements have grown, and the way, social justice issues have been pushed to push to the forefront and leaders have emerged and that kind of thing. And you know, I come from a very, I talk a little bit about it, a very community minded upbringing. Both where I physically live and then when I joined this organization that trained me to, to do organizing, and we were very, very much about grassroots community organizing. And I just, it really bothers me how little space and grace we have for each other, right? *mm* Like ultimately we are working, most of us are working towards the same thing. *yeah* Some of us disagree rabidly about how to get there. Right. And I get that. But I think in the places where your version, my version, your version is if your version is not going

to harm anybody. Right. *mmhmm* Um, and it's just like your ego versus my ego. You see these fights erupt and these like, this like bitterness, or this canceling, and I'm not getting into the whole cancel culture thing, but this, like, it's just, it just bothers me. And I don't know if I'm just getting softer my old age, but we don't have enough grace. Just give us a little grace like wish there was a talk and it's on YouTube now, so I'm so glad people can go reference it. A couple of years ago, Bradford Young, who's a cinematographer, brilliant cinematographer, Black cinematographer and Rashad from Color of Change, did a talk at Blackstar Film Festival. It's one of the best talks. And I'm not a person who's like moved often by public speaking. I hate to say that, [Prentis laughing] but they did a talk. It was the most beautiful conversation. And people should go listen to it cause this grace nugget actually started from that conversation, because one of the things that Bradford talked about was our inability to grapple in public, *Yes, yes, yes* right. For us to *yes, yes* Right, right. We don't have space to grapple with things to critique things too, but lovingly right. I should be able to, to lovingly say, "this doesn't resonate with me, but let's talk about why. Let's, let's unpack that." Let's, you know, where is the bitterness and the meanness and this, this, this client to be the first, and to be the best. It's just too much. It just it's really overwhelming to me. And it's like, we will not, when we get. We are ultimately working towards liberation. There should not be any type of liberation politic that doesn't have a politic of grace included. It just, I just can't imagine that it's going to be useful for us. So to work towards liberation, that doesn't include grace and space. So I was just, that's just like my, my thing I need to, I know I need to think there was someone I just, you know, again, there's probably somebody that's gonna be like, "but what about you can say grace, but then there's that?" And I'm like, "all right all righttt." *One thing at a time*. Yeah, sure. Pick it apart. That's great. Right. But also pick it apart. That's fine. But we don't have to fight all of the little undermining and the cause, you know, people, there was a lot of critique of like, "Oh, well, why does she go to the golden Globes?" And "She's hanging out with these white actresses" and these blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Y'all, the thing went viral one day. The next day I was on good morning America. The day after that, I was on the cover of Time Magazine. They are very few people who experienced what I experienced. Right. *mhmm yeah* Very few. It was like literally a handful, handful. I don't think I got my bearings for probably a year, to be quite honest. I was making the best decisions I knew how to make at the time. But also a lot of y'all know me for 25 and 30 years. So 25 years committed to the Black community, 25 years of being in the trenches of doing this work hardcore doesn't count for

anything because I put on a dress and went to the Golden Globes?. Now, all of a sudden I'm a complete sell out like stuff. This is what I'm talking about. Stuff like that. There's no grace and space for trying to figure shit out. You know, I didn't harm anybody. This is not harming anybody. I'm trying to figure out the best way to use this visibility to use this moment to whatever opportunities, to figure it out. But there's not enough. There's no space to figure it out. It's just like, "Well now you hear you famous what you're going to do be perfect." And so I think a lot of it came from like that, those kinds of experiences, like, come on, y'all seriously. This gotta count for something. I did all this work for what, but y'all, for us to be discounted now because of a few days,

Prentis: You know, I think, um, I think if I were going to just add my little 2 cents in here, I think there is a connection between this, this powerful piece that you're sharing about grace and how necessary it is. And the earlier piece you shared about powerlessness and that question inside of there, *mm* I think that there's a relationship between how little bandwidth it can feel like we have between one another and our sense of our own power, our awareness of our own power. Yeah. Yeah. *,mm.* I don't know. I haven't thought it through either, but it just feels like there might be some kind of thing. *See Prentis you always do that?* I'm just picking up the pieces you put down.

Tarana: No no no, you come in with the tie in, [both laughing].

Prentis: we need each other. That's why we be in conversation because we need each other.

Tarana: No, that I feel that

Prentis: Yeah. Yeah. Tarana. *Amen Absolutely.* You know? Absolutely.

Tarana: Yeah. I agree with that. Yeah.

Prentis: Thank you for taking the time. Thank you for sharing from your heart. Thank you for sharing. Just a little bit more about who Tarana Burke is, what you see, your brilliance, because I think we all need it. And I'm just grateful that you took the time today. I'm serious Tarana.

Tarana: Thank you so much. I, you know, [Prentis laughing] *ok* I'm serious too!! *Sorry* I'm serious [both laughing].

Prentis: The delay had me messed up, the delay had me mess up.

Tarana: I'm saying thank you. This is great. [laughing] No, nah. I appreciate you. I really, really do. I just thank you for allowing me the space and time and you know, always again, love to rap a taste with my people.

Prentis: Yeah, for sure. Appreciate you.

Prentis: [music playing] Finding Our Way as co-produced and edited by Eddie Hemphill. Co Production and visual design by devon de Leña. Please make sure to rate, subscribe and review wherever it is that you listen to this podcast. You can also find us on Instagram @findingourwaypodcast or email us with questions, suggestions, or feedback, and findingourwaypod@gmail.com. You can also sustain the podcast by becoming one of our Patreon subscribers. You can find us on Patreon at Finding Our Way podcast. Thank you for listening to Finding Our Way.

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