

Speaker 1: Welcome to Change Making Connections, the podcast where transformative talks on social justice, leadership and beyond become more than just words. I'm your host, Beth Barilla. Each month I invite a global change leader to talk with me about the strategies and tactics that they use to cultivate deep transformation in their lives, their communities, and their organizations. Tune in to change, making connections for your monthly dose of inspiration and insight. Let's create a ripple of change together.

Speaker 2: Hello and welcome back to Change Making Connections. Today I'm very excited to talk to Dr. Camila Majeed, who is a contemplative inclusivity and equity consultant, mental health therapist, clinical educator, researcher, and internationally engaged consultant on building inclusivity and equity using meditative practices. After 15 years of teaching at Howard University, Dr. Ji joined the faculty at California State University Monterey Bay as Professor of social work. She teaches clinical practice to graduate students as well as research methods, social and organizational policy analysis and community organizing through a social justice lens. She is also the author of the forthcoming book, joyfully Just Black Wisdom and Buddhist Insights for Liberated Living to Be published by Sounds True in April, 2024, which I am. So I've already pre-ordered my copy. I can't wait to hold it in my hot little hands. Welcome. I'm excited to talk with you today.

Speaker 3: You too, Beth, thank you so much for wanting me here today, and congratulations on this wonderful forum that you've established this change-Making Connections podcast. I think it's a great way for people to think about leadership. I'm an inclusive and anti-racist and just perspective.

Speaker 2: Well, thank you. Thank you. It's been a joy to talk with changemakers in a variety of different contexts and learn with and from all of y'all doing important work. So thank you for that. So tell me about this book. I'm so excited we're recording it now, this podcast in February, 2024. So the book is available for pre-order. It will probably go live in April or May, by which point people should be able to just order it, right? It's out in 2024. Sounds true.

Speaker 3: Absolutely. It will be out on 23rd. So people, and if you, you have it as soon as it comes out, you don't have to wait a few days. So that's the benefit of that. But yeah, I'm very, very excited about it. I feel like I've had the opportunity to just share insights from my decades of contemplative practice and teaching and being a mental health therapist using some black wisdom traditions and contemplative practices like mindfulness and other kind of Buddhist derived interventions for wellbeing. And the main thing that I'm talking about joyfully just is how when we engage for social justice and for personal justice, which are inextricable, they're completely connected. When we're active for justice for ourselves and justice for other people, we have more joy. I was talking Alice Walker's birthday, I think it was February 9th. This every year. It's February 9th and I think she turned 40.

Speaker 3: She did turn 80. And I was talking about how I'm encouraged by her work and the work of so many other black authors and artists, and I actually talk about their work as wisdom transmissions. I also talk in the book about different genres of black music as

wisdom transmission that help us learn how to navigate the sufferings of life with joy and buoyancy. So you can see that in lots of genres of black music, that it helps us navigate the sufferings of life with buoyancy. And you see that in the work of black artists and black authors, but there's one book by Alice Walker possessing *The Secret of Joy* where she talks at the very end about the line is the quote is resistance is the secret to joy. And what she's seeing and what I have understood as I have practiced with the wisdom in that book and other books from her and Toni Morrison and other folks who I've kind of studied for their wisdom, I realize that what she's saying is that when we resist our lower impulses, when we resist internalized oppression, internalized sexism, internalized ableism, but also when we resist injustice in the world, we have more joy.

Speaker 3: And it's like, so this book is kind of the metabolization of so much black wisdom that I've had the great fortune to absorb and study in my life as well as insights from my 40 plus years of Buddhist practice. So I feel like I'm just like, I'm a vessel and I'm able to just kind share this because both these things, right? Toni Morrison writes very deeply about the psychology of people in America, both white racialized people and black racialized people and indigenous racialized people. So it's like a study. Her psychological reflections kind of married my curiosity about mental health, and that's what drove me to do the master's in social work and work as a clinical psychotherapist and to teach clinical psychotherapy and social work practice to graduate students. Now that I really wanted to understand the psychological causes of human suffering and how we heal. And my learning about that has not just happened in education. I have learned maybe at least half much about that from these wisdom transmission and from the Buddha who was an incredible mind scientist. Buddhist traditions, Buddhism is a science of the mind. So as you can see, I talk about this.

Speaker 2: Yes. Well, good. We have an hour. Well, wonderful.

Speaker 3: I'll tell you about it though, is that not, yeah,

Speaker 2: Please do.

Speaker 3: It shares information, but it's practices so people can kind of actualize things like these are things you can do every day. I encourage people to put justice work on the calendar. Just like you schedule your physical workouts, you maybe schedule some things for your mental health. You can think about scheduling your engagement in justice activities as part of how you take care of your wellbeing. And I have some practices in the book to help people do that. So I'm very excited.

Speaker 2: Yes, good. You should be. It's a real gift to the world. I've gotten a little glimpse the first couple chapters, and it really is this beautiful, wider context weaving together these framings, worldviews, wisdom traditions with practical guidance that we can set the book down and engage in and really apply to our lives so that we can really explore how these wisdom traditions move through us and we move through the world collectively and individually. So it's really beautiful. I'm curious about the role of art in this. I was really just delighted. I come from an arts background. My PhD is in literature, and I love

that this book is so rooted in literature and music, at least in the parts that I've seen so far. What do you think that offers in particular to whole list, to justice work, to joy,

Speaker 3: A reframe, a positive and more inclusive reframe because one of the consequences of limited inclusivity in educational context in most of our secondary and elementary, secondary and advanced education is that we're exposed to limited literature and limited arts and limited artists. And so our view of the world has what Dr. Morrison, what Toni Morrison refers to as this white gaze, this kind of presumed reader who comes from a singular cultural background and mindset. And when we have that kind of limitation on our understanding of the world informed by music can be informed by limited exposure to music or a diminished perspective on the value of different types of music, depending on who it counts from. The way that we think, for example, about, well, classical music is erudite, right? But is black music erudite? Of course it is. That's why people listen to it and copy it the world over, and people are making up hip hop songs and Yugoslavia because it's empowering.

Speaker 3: So I think that some of the ways that racism compromises our appreciation of art or limits our exposure to it in the case of literature, certainly limits our worldview. And when our worldview is limited, our insight is limited and relationships, our relationship with the world is limited. So it's very freeing to read Broadway, and it's very much a resource to building relationships and understanding ourselves in right relationship with other people, not as the center, but yet as completely intricate and as a part of one another, so integral to one another's experience. So yeah, that's why it's so important because especially it's important for leaders. And honestly, Beth, I'm going to tell you, I think everyone is a leader. We're all leading our own lives. So there's not certain people who, yes, there are certain people who have more recognition for their leadership roles, and yet those leadership roles are supported by other leaders who are leading from behind the scenes.

Speaker 3: So when I think about developing our leadership capacity, I think about living an empowered life where you are really leading your life. It's not being led by confusion, it's not being led by residuals of colonialism and racist perspectives that are all over the media and that have compromised your literature understanding and the breadth of how much you've read. Our lives are so limited by those things. So that's why I think that engaging for justice within our own interior lives, by connecting with black wisdom traditions and also multicultural wisdom traditions that are outside of our comfort zone, expands set comfort zones and allows us to really be leading our lives and not be having our lives led by the dictates of and the limitations of residuals of racism and colonialism. Does that make sense? You what

Speaker 2: I mean? It does. It does. And it strikes me that it also opens possibilities for different visions, values and forms of leadership or leading, I don't even necessarily even like the word leadership, but from the feminist anti-racist, socially just perspective that I understand leadership from. It's collaborative. It's not the person in charge necessarily that could possibly be the case, but that's not how I'm thinking about leadership. It's learning from each other. It's embodying your values in everything we do to the extent

that we can in this world. It's about interconnectedness and amplifying others. And I think the most effective and needed form of leading is reconnecting to wholeness in this world that has severed us from it in different ways based on who the US is, which lived experience we're talking about. But many of us have been severed from ourselves, from the natural world, from these traditions you've been talking about connecting to and from each other. And I think that's led to this world that we're in. And so one important element, not the only one, but one important element I think is reconnecting to that wholeness. And your book just is so alive with it on every page of how to do it, but also that you're on the journey and you've got some insights because you've learned from others that we're all connected. It's just, yeah, it felt very life affirming reading your chapters.

Speaker 3: Thank you for saying that. I feel like I was just pouring out into it and then refining and editing and then pouring some more. So it was really a beautiful journey. And one of the things I admire about the work, the anti-racism work that you've been leading for long time is the way that you particularly have been able to help white racialized folks kind of lean into noticing the ways that racism has compromised their wellbeing, their wholeness, as you say, their insight, their freedom. And I talk a lot about that in joyfully just that white privilege is the privilege to have a very limited existence. And so to free yourself from that is actually liberating and allows that leadership of your own life that I'm talking about, that one's life is not led by the limitations of that or by the limitations of white supremacy culture, which I talk a lot about in the book as well, that white supremacy culture is someone that something that impacts and limits the ways that we think about what's valuable.

Speaker 3: And white supremacy culture does not just impact white people. Like Tema Okun talks about it as the water that we're all swimming in. And so if you think about things like perfectionism or one right way, these kinds of residuals, the right to comfort in particular, she talks about as a limitation. And I spent a lot of time talking about what I call discomfort resilience in the book, increasing our capacity to engage discomfort makes us free. We can really lead, you know what I mean? It's probably a little uncomfortable at first when you think about doing a podcast, but you question asked that, so bravely said, I'm going to do a podcast and then you free. So that's what it's like. And I feel like people do this in lots of different kinds of ways. And when we do it with an intention to create a more just world for ourselves and for others, then it's leadership that enriches everybody.

Speaker 3: It's not just leadership kind of pushed past our personal limits, which is fine, but there's so much more that's possible for us. And what's behind the door of that possibility is our own joy and freedom. So it may feel like service when we're doing engagement for social justice, but it's really for our own wellbeing. One of the quotes in the book that I share a lot is that well minds nurture justice and just minds nurture wellness. They're integrally related. Justice and wellness are integrally related, and if we can engage for justice, we are engaging for our own wellness and wholeness as he saw.

Speaker 2: Yeah, I highlighted that quote in the book. I was like, woo, this is wisdom here. You were saying something that I just wanted. Oh, yes, it was one of my questions to talk a little bit more about discomfort, resilience, and you pair that with fierce compassion, and I'm curious if you can say a little bit more about both of those. They seem so important.

Speaker 3: Absolutely. Well, when I talk about fierce compassion, I'm talking about this holistic view of compassion where compassion is not just associated with soothing compassion is more than soothing. Fierce compassion especially is more than soothing that yes, you get a massage when you want to show yourself some compassion, but you also get a colonoscopy or a breast exam when you want to show yourself some compassion. So the fierce compassion is what propels us to grow to do things that are challenging towards our growth, that we do that out of compassion for ourselves, including look at the ways of our biases and our privileges limit us. So if there are things that as a person with economic privilege or educational privilege I don't have to pay attention to, then having fierce compassion for myself means learning more about that experience and considering how I can, in what ways that privilege has limited my perspective on reality and in what ways I can support others in having access so that my relationships with the world, my relationship with the world is a just one, not one where I'm resting and let privilege, and that's something I'm doing out of compassion for myself as much as out of compassion for other people, and that when I do that, it may not be comfortable.

Speaker 3: Nobody enjoys necessarily when they decide, okay, I'm going to look at my ableism today, or I'm going to look at my heterosexism today, or I'm going to look at my ageism today. And yet when we do it, we grow in our capacity to do it. So discomfort, resilience is frustration tolerance, yes, it feels a little uncomfortable and it's not pleasant. It's not pleasant, but it can lead to joy, the joy that can only come from growth. And I also talk about discomfort, resilience, and fierce compassion as they show up relationally. So if you kind of correct me, and if I say something that's sexist or transphobic that reflects my own internalized sexism, and you correct me, if I have the discomfort resilience to receive it with gratitude, then it's expanding me as opposed to shutting me down and making me angry. So if someone corrects someone for making a racist or homophobic comment, that person, if they have fierce compassion for themselves and discomfort resilience, they can receive that correction with gratitude and it takes fierce compassion for the person, for someone to make such a correction, right?

Speaker 3: Because if I don't care about you, I'm just like, okay, you can just live in that ignorant world forever and I don't care. But fierce compassion says, no, I actually do care, so I'm going to correct you here. I did it yesterday. Someone was talking about we're at a black history event. They said, we're celebrating the descendants of slaves. And I said, Nope, enslaved people. It's important for you to say, and it's not just semantics, but because I understand that your heart is in the right place and you're really going to continue to lead in this way. Let me help you understand that the humans who were enslaved did not morph into another kind of entity called slaves. When they were kidnapped and trafficked. They remained humans and artisans and builders and agriculturalists and musicians, and so much of their work was stolen by the people who had kidnapped them. But that took fierce compassion for me to make the correction and the person

received it with discomfort, resilience. Wow, you're right. That's so good. And language, that's why reading widely is so valuable because language is one of the ways that we do justice towards ourselves and those we interact

Speaker 2: With. Thank you for naming that and offering an example of it. I have learned over the years to see when people correct me in missteps that it is in the service of relationship and in the service of justice that they offer it no matter how it comes across, right? Sometimes I may not love receiving it, but they could choose not to say it and just write me off. So the fact that they are making that effort, and sometimes it does require effort, particularly if they were the one who was harmed then to honor that they made the move. And then I have an obligation to both, to the relationship and to my wider vision of what I care about in the world. And I was thinking as I was reading about the discomfort resilience piece in your book, that that's also something leaders and people who lead need to cultivate in ourselves and one another, especially when we're thinking about equity and inclusion work.

Speaker 2: And I'll take it to an individual example just so I can think through it in my head that I might get uncomfortable if somebody tells me I did something harmful, and yet living out of alignment with my values is a deeper discomfort for me. And I don't want to harm people. I care about justice. I know I have been socialized in this world to think certain things, to not see certain things to reproduce harm because it's a constant unlearning process. I think in the world that we're in, at least we're not in a liberated world yet, so we keep getting saturated with these messages. And so yeah, I'm going to make some missteps, and yes, that's uncomfortable, but the deeper discomfort for me is being out of alignment with what I care about and out of alignment with connection with others in the world. And so it's worth it to me to learn how to move through that initial discomfort to get to a deeper wholeness. And I think your book offers a lot of really beautiful ways of developing that as a practice. It is like a muscle I think that we build, and the more we do it, the more comfortable we get with doing it. And that it widens that zone that you were talking about.

Speaker 3: Exactly. Exactly. I like the way you put it in terms of the fact that we're inundated with disinformation and misinformation, that that's just the context of our world. We see a lot of tyranny representing itself as leadership, and that's why it's really important that we have dialogues like this where we consider what leadership really is because leadership elevates the humanity of everyone, not just the, so-called leader or people who look like the, so-called leader in the way it's articulated in the examples it uses. So in order to really do that, we have to expose ourselves to more than what the limited messages that are available in conventional media. And even when we expose ourselves to conventional forms of media television to be able to have dialogues where we think critically about those together help us to grow and expand that insight of what in this film or this piece of art depicts justice and what depicts injustice, what in this book or this poem or this music reflects inclusivity and what doesn't, right?

Speaker 3: I don't have blinders on. I know that there's lots of music including in say, for example, hip hop that really needs to be looked at for, oh no, that does not reflect a wisdom



transmission that reflects kind of a narrow, oftentimes sexist or misogynist viewpoint. So I think that the more that we can engage critically with the world that is around us and find the gems that have been hidden from us by racism and other forms of oppression, then the more free we are. And like you said, wholeness, when you talk about wholeness, wholeness I feel is very much the foundation, the wellspring for joy, because it's not like pleasure. Pleasure is more superficial. To get to joy, you got to go a little deeper. You got to feel some pain, you got to face some pain. That's how you get to joy. Can you say more about that?

Speaker 3: I can, in the book, I talk a little bit about suffering and how we can learn to suffer without being insufferable. And what I mean by that is that we don't have to be insufferable to ourselves. We can be companions to ourselves as we suffer. So as opposed to being bitter or angry, if we get injured or experience any of the sufferings of life related to aging, that they could make us very bitter. But if we're in a companionable relationship with our suffering and draw from the wisdom transmissions that exist either from black wisdom or Buddhist traditions or many of the other cultural traditions that talk about how to navigate suffering, then we can get past suffering to see our own resilience and to see our own freedom that you can be very sick. I have been in a great deal of pain, had some serious physical pain, and I think I talk a little bit about that in the book as well as emotional pain and still have joy.

Speaker 3: They can be complete partners with one another. However, it requires intention setting. It requires a resolve to approach it this way, to have this perspective that there's something behind this door suffering, or I'm going to walk through this door of suffering knowing that there's growth for me on the other side and in the journey and in the walk through the door. And when you have that mindset, then you're looking for it. You're looking for the beauty and the grandeur of it. I had a surgery a while back and difficult to kind of take a shower and all these kinds of things during the surgery, but I was figuring it out. But a friend of mine was visiting me and she was like, oh, you're taking a shower. Well, let me come in and wash your feet because it'll be hard to do that with your reset surgery.

Speaker 3: And I was like, I what? And you just came in and did it. Matter of fact, this is the most natural thing to do in the world. And I was like, it was just such a moment of grace. I was like, wow, I would never have felt this particular experience of grace if it wasn't for this suffering. So I give that as an example of just, I mean, there's thousands of examples. You could think about funerals and memorials that you've been to, and people laugh so hard and celebrated the deceased person in a particular kind of way. So I feel like if we approach the sufferings of life with this commitment to be just towards ourselves by embracing the whole experience, because a lot of the times we're hedonistic and very pleasure seeking, I just want to feel good all the time, then we're not going to get all the growth that we can get. And because there's so much suffering, that means there's that many opportunities for growth.

Speaker 2: Yeah. Yeah. The generative somatics tradition that I briefly studied talks about, you don't practice to feel good, you practice to feel more. And this idea that it's sometimes it's

going to be really hard, and yet there's a depth of humanity there that we even have the capacity to feel those kinds of things. And it brings me back to art that people who have been suffering, targeted with racism or transphobia or any of the hard colonization, they've also always been creating something to express those experiences. And you talk about some of that in your book gospel or hip hop or oral traditions or other things that express their truth and also help, I don't want to use the word capture, reflect the depths of that experience.

Speaker 3: Absolutely.

Speaker 2: And that there's deep insight in all of that.

Speaker 3: Absolutely. That's why black music is so popular from gospel to blues, to jazz, to r and b, to hip hop, that they're so popular and so emulated because they speak to navigating the sufferings of life with a spiritual connection to the meaning of life, with a kind of lofty philosophy of connectedness to life. No matter what experience you're having for enslaved people to be singing in. The experience of enslavement was often dismissed as, oh, they don't know how bad their situation is. They completely understood the depth of the injustice they were experiencing, and their suffering was not clearer to anyone than it was to them. And they made the decision to have this self-transcendence and to use the song to express the deep humanity that was being denied to them in those very moments and to affirm it for one another. So that's why that music is emulated.

Speaker 3: And Herbie Hancock, who's also a Buddhist in the sga in the SGI where I practice, and he talks about this a lot in his book about how jazz emerged out of what couldn't be said about what was happening to black musicians in the thirties and forties and fifties. They couldn't even walk in the front of the place where they were going to get on the stage. How absurd is that? And they couldn't sleep in the hotels where the people who had driven in to see them perform could sleep. They had to sleep in their trucks were abused just constantly. So it's just kind of inexpressible what it's like to live as an artist and have that level of oppression. And black artists still experience a lot of discrimination and unfair treatment with regards to rights to their music. So that's kind of the legacy of that.

Speaker 3: However, it never stops people from creating, it expressed the unexpressible, and I talk a little bit about r and b too, that the particular capacity to love black relationships during the enslavement of black people, but also during Jim Crow and also in contemporary in the contemporary world, that that's what Black Lives matter mean, that our relationships to one another matter too. And so when you think about the carceral systems, not just the criminal justice system, but many other systems, foster care systems, the mental health care system has a lot of problems in it, and there's a lot of fissures caused in black families because of those. However, when you think about r and b music, it is really often about that reclamation of connection and love. We obviously couldn't even marry and didn't even have the right to stay with our family members during enslavement in this country.



Speaker 3: And the legacy of that is that the separation of us from family members is not seen as a big deal. However, black people continually find ways to affirm our love for one another. And it's so profound that r and b is another genre that's emulated all over the world. And hip hop started out as fight the power is speaking truth to power, and that's why it's emulated worldwide because it helps people access that sense of empowerment and say things in a voice and in a tone that this genre has taught them to do. So that's why I encourage people to kind of take a look at black music and other black wisdom traditions. I talk about communicative kinesics, but we probably don't have time to talk more about that now, but there's so many black wisdom traditions that we already, that are part of many of our lives, but we don't kind of yet have a relationship with them as contemplative practices or meditative practices. So that's what I invite people into in the book because it's a fun way to be mindful and to drop into insight and awareness that I think that part of the challenge of the westernized notion of mindfulness is that it's one thing, but there are multiple ways to drop into the present moment with deep insight.

Speaker 2: And that last piece, what you just said, multiple ways to drop into the present moment with deep insight is one way of defining contemplative practices. And I'm thinking about the audience for this podcast comes from a lot of different spaces, and you and I connected through contemplative practice and social justice together. So for those who aren't familiar with contemplative practices, do you want to say a little bit about how you think about them or how you practice? I

Speaker 3: Thought you were going to do that hard part of the,

Speaker 2: Well, I can, but I did just read your book where you talk so beautifully about it, so Well,

Speaker 3: Yeah. I mean, it's funny because the word contemplative makes people go sometimes, especially if you're not in academia, and it's not a word you're familiar with, but it really just means actually that something that we're giving a moment to think deeply about giving our space some time for reflection, giving ourselves some space and time for reflection. So when we are allowing the contemplative aspect of ourselves to arise, because we all have a reflective side, privilege sometimes gives some people more space for reflection than others economic privilege, where you don't have to be going and on the wheel of exploitative capitalism every moment of your life, it's harder to drop into contemplative practice, yet as my ancestors demonstrated, you can do it as you engage this challenging and difficult world that we live in. In fact, it's bullying for the spirit to be able to do so.

Speaker 3: By contemplative, I mean any practice that helps you come to the present moment with power and awareness, right? Aware of your own agency because present, yes, and present in your possibilities, present in your capacities for good and for harm that if we're weak, we are present with, I can make every situation better and I can make every situation worse. And with insight, with a kind of just mind looking at this moment, I can arouse the capacity to make each moment better for myself and everyone that I'm engaging with. So that's what it means to be contemplative or reflective as we move through our lives that we're trying to stay awake, we're trying to stay present with our

power and with our capacity to positively influence and awareness of ways we can harm, right? At the same time, we're staying present with the limitless power possibilities of everyone us.

Speaker 3: So that in that way, we're leading when we're having conversations at the grocery store, checking out, because we are bringing forth the leadership of the person who's checking us out, saying, thank you so much for this support that you're giving to me. Being able to get food, whether or not we say those words, if we're present, if we're in a contemplative inclusive space, then we are creating justice and bringing forth the leadership in everyone around us because we see their power, we see their possibility, we see them as whole, and as part of who we are, we're awake to our connection too. That's a big part of it. If we're awake, if we're contemplative, we're not just having insight about our own power and possibilities for good and harm and the power and possibilities and others for good and harm, but we're aware of how we connect of the subjectivity, of the dynamism, of this relationship, of this moment. It's incredibly beautiful. You can look at the world, the natural world sometimes, and it's just amazing how the earth nourishes the trees and the grass. And we are the same in this moment. I can feel what I'm talking about, but I feel a capacity to just reach for and encourage your capacity and you doing the same for me. And it's this beautiful symphony of human life that happens in every moment or can happen in every moment. If we're awake and we're drawing that forth from one another,

Speaker 2: That's a beautiful, beautiful description of contemplative practices and the possibilities they open. I love the emphasis on agency and power and connection interconnection that you're referencing there. And it strikes me that, again, I feel like that is so what we need in this world right now. And that if you talk about this in your book, and I also find it really important, it's why I started bringing embodied practices, mindfulness or somatics into my teaching and my social justice work, is because the way I have been socialized as a white able-bodied, cisgender lesbian woman who lives in the United States, the way I've been socialized within that frame of identities means that if I just do what I've been trained to do, follow the habitual reactions that are so deeply conditioned in me, I will perpetuate the status quo, which will perpetuate injustice. And I need that contemplative pause very often to be able to make different choices.

Speaker 2: And you talk about that in your book as well, that they really help us reflect, reconnect to that. I do believe there's another way of being that is even I think its roots are in all of us, I even people long for it, even the people who are most benefiting from the system as a whole. I think it gives people a lot of tangible material power, but it cuts them off from humanity. And I guess the hopeful person in me wants to believe we all long for that deeper wholeness, but that pause needs to happen, that reconnect to that agency. And the more we do it, the more that muscle. Again, back to the discomfort resilience piece, the more we expand and then we don't have to work so hard at it because we've created new pathways as neuroscience has

Speaker 3: Taught us. Exactly. That's exactly right. So you can really think about contemplative practice as commitment to pausing that that's really what it is, to pausing, to making

sure that we are awake, that we're not on roads, what I mean that we're not just going on automatic pilot, that we're really present, that that's really what contemplative practice is. And like you said, that I talk a lot about pausing in the book because there's research that shows that it really does give us a little space between the bias thought and any bias speech or action we might take. So if we can pause for a second, people often ask me, well, what do you say when you feel like what you're going to say might be offensive, but you kind of have a question and you're not sure if it's going to be appropriate or not? And I say, pause and consider your intention first of all.

Speaker 3: For example, people, if someone wants to ask where you're from, what do you really want to know? Ask yourself, what do you really want to do? You want to know what ethnicity or do you want to know how they're racialized? And then ask yourself another question. Why do you want to know? So within the book, I talk about practices that, first of all, just practicing pausing and then practicing asking ourselves certain questions around our intentions before we engage as a very solid way to interrupt bias. Because a lot of times it's just curiosity. And if you're not really invested in having any kind of relationship with the person, but you want to kind of check off a box, oh, you're one of these passing them on the street, then you need to reexamining that intention and also reexamine privilege and rights. Do I have the right to interrupt this family or this individual and ask them these questions?

Speaker 3: What gives me the right to approach even? So I think that one of the ways that we get to think about privilege is what rights and opportunities does privilege give us that everyone should have, and what rights and opportunities does give us that no one should have. No one should have the right to go up to a stranger and touch their hair. And you know what I mean, that there are some things that no one should have a right to do, and then there are some privileges that everyone should have a right to. And that's what we get to contemplate as we work to be just towards ourselves and everyone around us.

Speaker 2: Yeah, that's a beautiful way of thinking about it. What about the weaving together of black culture and Buddhism in the

Speaker 3: Book? Well, it's all woven together at me. That's how,

Speaker 2: Yes,

Speaker 3: I said in the book, I talk about how Buddhism talks, the four noble truths and about the realities of suffering and the reality of path to end suffering. And if you look at black wisdom traditions, they're very much steeped in the sufferings that black folks have experienced and the transcendence of those sufferings, the reaching for the deeper self, the fundamentally enlightened self or the fundamentally connected and reverent self, our deepest, most untouchable unharmed aspect. I see black wisdom traditions, particularly music, but also lots of other arts kind of pointing to that and helping us express that in similar ways that Buddhism invites us to. Buddhism says, you are enlightened. You have a fundamentally enlightened aspect. Buddhism says you're free,

that your enlightenment is your freedom, that your freedom is within. It's not dictated by circumstances. Certainly there are circumstances that you can experience that will restrict you of physical freedom, but your psychological and spiritual freedom are utterly unfettered.

Speaker 3: And I see that wisdom transmitted in black music in lots of different ways. So that's where I see the connection. But it's not just black music. I talk about communicative kinesics in joyfully just how black people developed these hand signals like doing high fives and depth as ways of expressing connection and empowerment. And that's why they're copied the world over these brief gestures that black people developed to say, we matter. We're connected. I see you, that that is something that all humans want to experience. It's interdependence as articulated in Buddhism. So a high five or a fist bump is the Buddhist wisdom of interdependence, right? We're connected. We don't have to have a whole conversation either. We could do it as we pass the street. So it's just that manifestation in that way. And I also talk about black dialect in the book as a wisdom transmission and that one of the people emulate black dialect is because there's wisdom in it.

Speaker 3: Think of the difference between saying, I understand how you feel and I feel you as an expression of embodied empathy. It's an expression of embodied awareness of our interdependence and our interconnection. Again, Buddhist insights expressed in African-American dialect. And it's a wonderful thing when we really pay attention to it and honor it as the wisdom transmission that it is because there's so much there. But a lot of times it gets appropriated and people use black dialect to try to, I'll say, forge papers of allyship that they haven't earned. Right? As I speak this way, that must mean I have meaningful relationships with black people, but often it's not the case. And rather than reflecting kind of insight of the contributions of black people to the very words that are coming out of our mouths, sometimes people will just kind of exploit it and dismiss it as being cool, as opposed to saying, wow, one of the insights from black dialect and then saying the phrase, I encourage that not all the time, you're not going to remember to do it all the time, but it's interesting to me, and I think it's important to notice that when people copy black dialect and you see it all of the late night comedians do it, it's everywhere.

Speaker 3: You'll have people of non-black ethnicities, copying black dialect and never saying, as African-American people say that. It's just, it's my cool talk. And what's problematic about it is that you don't understand it as a wisdom transmission that connects you to African heritage people and you miss some of the value of it if you're just trying to kind of be cool.

Speaker 2: Yeah, it can perpetuate the harm of oppression and the kind of co-opting and commodifying artistic production and labor from a community that has experienced historical oppression. So it's a continuation of that if we don't give credit or reflect on, and I really appreciated this in your book, reflecting on what is your particular identity relationship to this practice or to this wisdom tradition. Doesn't mean you can't really learn from some of the beautiful insights, but again, there's that opportunity to pause

with the what's your particular relationship, whoever though you is in reading the book, and then what's the responsibility that comes with that particular relationship?

Speaker 3: Yeah, because then you're more awake. You're doing it from an awake present place as opposed to kind of some flippant place, and it doesn't have this. You actually give it more meaning in your own life and then out of your own mouth when you do it from that deeper place and more awake and aware place.

Speaker 2: I just learned so much from even just the first couple chapters, and it's always a joy to talk with you. I'm curious, I ask a lot of my guests what gives them hope, and part of me wants to ask you that question and also throw joy into the mix because it's the title of your book. What does give you hope these days? Well,

Speaker 3: I love that question, and it's always a joy to talk to you as well, really is we have to have to talk more. We have to do more things together.

Speaker 2: Yes, I agree.

Speaker 3: So in the book I talk about how hope is not necessarily a gift. I don't think about what gives me hope. I think about how often I make the decision to be hopeful. I feel like hope is an intention and a decision more than it is something that's kind of bequeath to on us by any particular set of circumstances. Now, that's not to say there aren't a lot of things that inspire me, this inspires me. The work of allies and leaders like yourself inspires me. Nature, the natural world inspires me. I live here in California. There's the sea inspires me, my ancestors voices in my ears, my grandfather, my mother, my Aunt Esy literature, the breadth of human experience that's articulated in literature. James Baldwin said, you think your pain and your suffering are unique and the worst experienced in the history of the world. And then you read.

Speaker 3: So something about the ever-growing inclusive realm of literature as well as what's been produced, and that I've continue to metabolize by really seminal artists. So there is much that gives me inspiration and I practice and offer in the book the encouragement that we all set an intention to be hopeful every day and decide to be hopeful every day. And then from that place, we pull everything that happens into our resolve and our intention and ask ourselves, okay, how am I going to make this suffering or this problem that emerged? How can I turn this into something of value that when we set that intention, I shall be hopeful. When we make that decision, then we create hope. We're hope generated. Yeah, I feel like hope is the thing that it's endless because we create it, we can generate it endlessly.

Speaker 2: I love that we can generate it endlessly. And also, you mentioned this in the book when you talk about joy, that it isn't a Pollyanna superficial kind of joy. And I think it's the same with hope. It's a joy and a hope that recognizes the suffering in the world or the suffering in this moment, but also reminds us we have some agency in terms of what we do with this particular experience whenever it might be. And even if external circumstances are out of our control to shape that particular harm, it's also really

disempowering to feel like we can't make any choices around it. And our internal experience is one dimension of that choice.

Speaker 3: Yeah, it's really, really true. And that's the way that hope leads to joy because it creates possibilities. It reminds us, no, I'm not powerless. This may be happening in another part of the world, so let me reflect on what I can do because I'm part of this web of humanity and what I do when I tug the web in my small little way has some impact. I hope it has some impact. So I'm intentionally doing that and that we allow joy to arise from that possibility. It just emerges from the possibility. So I'm excited about all the hope and joy that those of us who are committed to justice and those of us who are growing and exploring a commitment to justice can really experience

Speaker 2: Together well. Of course. I love, I just want to say that at the beginning of your book, you talk a little bit about the solemn with which people sometimes approach justice work and mindfulness work, that to be a proper meditator, I have to be super solemn. And I just have to say, having been in your presence, you exude joy and this really warmheartedness and you're super fiercely committed to justice in the world and in your work, and that there's just a reminder that we can in fact, do this joyfully that it is a part of our human birthright.

Speaker 3: Yeah. Yeah. We hope each other get free internally and relationally and in our world.

Speaker 2: Thank you so much for talking with me today. Oh,

Speaker 3: It's been such a pleasure. Really has been a delight. Thank you so much for having me.

Speaker 2: Oh, my pleasure. And we will link to the book in the show notes, so please pick it up. And we'll also link to your social media. You've been doing beautiful posts for African-American history, and of course it'll be a different month when this comes out. But follow all your listeners, follow Dr. Rae's work because it's really empowering and beautiful. Oh, yes. Thank you so much. So

Speaker 3: Exciting. It was in a couple months, so please stay connected and you can go to mila majeed.com, sign up for the newsletter and find out a little bit more, because I'll be making some wonderful offerings in March and April and May as the book emerged. So I can't wait to tell you all about that. We'll be doing that on social media.

Speaker 2: Fantastic. We'll put all that in the show notes. Thank you.