

Becoming the People Podcast

hosted by Prentis Hemphill in conversation with adrienne maree brown

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BECOMING
THE PEOPLE
WITH PRENTIS HEMPHILL

adrienne maree ...: So what I have here is I did a deep dive on, on the first chapter. I did a deep dive on the last chapter. And that's when I knew, I was like, okay, this isn't how you, you're not gonna be able to do this like you normally do stuff. Because I very rarely read linearly. Like I very mm-hmm <affirmative>. I mostly, like, I love books that I just pick up and take some, take some. And I was like, this is a meal. Like the each page feels like a meal. So I was just like, okay, you're not, don't overdose. Like, take your time with it. You watch pee, take their time writing it, and you need to take your time consuming it. Um, which is a great feeling to have with the book for me. 'cause I was like, this is, it's already bent up. It's already getting folds. Oh my gosh. You know, like, I'm just like, I'm, I'm in here, so

Prentis Hemphil...: I gotta bring you the new one. I just got the, um,

adrienne maree ...: With the cover.

Prentis Hemphil...: Ye ah. Oh,

adrienne maree ...: Okay. I love that. And I also love ha you know, I love the like, minor flex of having the advanced reader copies of

Prentis Hemphil...: <laugh>. I know you do. I know you do <laugh>.

adrienne maree ...: Like, I just like to put it somewhere like casually, like, oh yeah. Oh yeah. <laugh>. Yeah. Yeah. Yep. So <laugh>. Um, so p you know, the, I wanna strike a balance here between like my, my giddy joy that this book is in the world and my, my sense of gravitas about

what is in this book. Um, and I feel like it's, it's, I love you because I feel like we can always pivot between the very, very deep and the very like, buoyant. Yeah. And I feel like that is, that's the move. It feels like if you're, if you're sewing, it feels like you keep going. Stitch down, stitch back up, stitch down, stitch back up. You know? Yeah. Um, when did you know that you needed to write this down?

Prentis Hemphil...: Um, you know, I think this is all, this is like a, it's a question that leads me to an answer about community. 'cause, you know, I'd just be writing little missives and notes and scribbles and thoughts and bursts. And I think it was like, some years ago, I had a couple friends that were like, stop playing. Like, what, what are you actually doing? We need you to write a book. And I was like, how could I, how could I write a book? What do I know about anything? Um, but I had accumulated all this stuff over time and, you know, I think, um, dealing with like, movement, heartbreak and, you know, I think the, the beauty and the challenge of the movement and the last decade of being a part of BLM and the power and the beauty and the pain inside of that. Um, I, you know, I, I left heartbroken, but then when my heart started to heal, I thought, okay, well I learned a lot and how can I share some of those learnings? And so assembling my writing was kind of an, an offering back to the people that have been motivated by love and change and are trying to figure this out. I was like, how do I write a love note in a way to us, you know, that have been trying and that wanna keep trying and maybe have gotten weary,

adrienne maree ...: You know? Yeah. Beautiful. So maybe around 2018, 2019. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Okay. Good.

Prentis Hemphil...: Exactly.

adrienne maree ...: Um, and how does it feel now, having written it down, knowing it's, it's gonna be in other people's hands and minds and mouths.

Prentis Hemphil...: It's changing me. It's changing me, you know, I think one significant moment for me, I hope it's okay for me to reveal this was sitting in the hot tub with you and Sonya and Nate Taylor. Yeah, I remember that. And I read you all a chapter, and that was maybe the first time I'd read it, any piece of it to somebody other than people in my household. Um, and

adrienne maree ...: Amaya is such a good listener, <laugh>, she likes those profound, profound sentences.

Prentis Hemphil...: No, she, she says to me, she goes, "poppy, I'm busy right now." <laugh>, that's her new therapy.

adrienne maree ...: She's like, I'm pre-hearing, I'm actually good. So I, I'm busy. I'm doing the things that people do. That's

Prentis Hemphil...: Exactly, but I think sharing with you all was like the first opening. And I realized that, you know, this is a, you don't have control. This is a, for somebody like me and my shape, I think the process I understood was writing. And then the part where you share it with your friends and people you care about, and then people you don't know. I was like, oh, this is a, this is a practice of relinquishing control on every level. I had somebody give me some feedback that was like in an extended circle recently, and they referenced this one part of the book and the way they did. I thought, well, that's not exactly what it says, but that's the meaning you've taken. And there's nothing I can do about that. <laugh> just let it work. That's right. So letting it work is really working me. It's really working me right now. I'm like, okay, keep, keep letting go. Keep letting go. Keep softening, keep trusting that what the book can do, it will do.

adrienne maree ...: Yeah. I, I feel like a long time ago, someone told me to think about it, like, medicine. So like, everyone could pick up the same medicine from the store. Right. But how frequently they take it and what it does to interact with their body and like how they feel when they're taking in all the, you are like, I don't actually know what it's gonna do from here. Um, and I feel like this book feels like a medicine. You know, like it's an offering of like, here's the medicine I took and here's what it has done in my body, and I trust it. You know, there's a real sense in here that you're like, I trust the life I've lived. It has yielded some wisdom and I'm gonna read. Um, so as I read

Prentis Hemphil...: Before you do that, I'm sort of stopping you from doing that. But, but also, uh, because I also wanna say <laugh>, I'm hoping you'll.

adrienne maree ...: Yeah, same thing. And then I'm gonna read <laugh>.

Prentis Hemphil...: I'm hoping you forget what you were just about to do. Um, no,

adrienne maree ...: It's like the whole thing of my interview is like bar after bar after bar. So

Prentis Hemphil...: Just about that. No. Um, and now I,

adrienne maree ...: That's how I process your medicine. <laugh>. I've

Prentis Hemphil...: Forgotten what I was gonna say. Oh, oh. Um, one, one thing I really wanted with the book was, you know, I was like, oh, it's so self, self-indulgent to be kind of like memoirist about it. But I also, I had this intention, I realized, I was like, I, I want people to not feel alone, you know, in the waters that they're in. My story is not the story. It's not the worst story, it's not the easiest story. It just is a story that I hope, um, feels like somebody sitting next to you and you're doing your work. Do you know what I mean? That's, that, that's the intention.

adrienne maree ...: Yeah. That really works. Okay. It really works. 'cause it doesn't, you know, I think that I, um, over the past few years I've had therapists, I've had many therapists who never revealed anything about themselves, ever. Uhhuh <affirmative> and how they were being touched by anything. And I was able to do some work with them. Um, and then I had a therapist who was a human with me. Let me see them. Let me feel, you know, like just touched in with me, like as a black woman to a black woman. Like, can we just talk about this moment today? And, and it feels like that, it's like, oh, you're a human. Right? And, And so what you're teaching and what you know, comes from your experience as a human, which I can access, which is super helpful because a lot of times with teachers, it's like, I'm gonna put you on this pedestal far away from me. Exactly. You have nothing to do. And it's like, oh no, you were a kid in a class feeling scared. You know? Exactly. Like I know that. Yeah. Um, so I do have, I do have these sections that I wanna uplift because they shaped the book. It's really like, I want people to hear this. So this book, this is You, I'm reading it back to you.

adrienne maree ...: "This book is written for the transitional characters of this moment, for the change makers, those feeling stirred by what's going on in the world and who want to get involved, but are overwhelmed by the idea or unsure those who are already involved in change work, brought to it by wanting to end injustices that have happened in their own lives and exhausted by facing the trauma again. Or those who see how the culture of change work itself has replicated some of the patterns around exclusivity and shaming that they wanted to address in the first place. None of this is easy." I wanted to ask you to speak to what this transitional character role is and how, how often we as transitional characters end up in social justice work. Like how that those, that that is almost a direct pathway. And then why you wrote a book for us, right? Like, why it was like, oh, like this specific group of people really needs some attention.

Prentis Hemphil...: Thanks for that question. And, uh, awkwardly inside of the Embodiment Institute, we've shifted the name to

Transformational Characters, but the book will kind of persist with this transitional characters term.

adrienne maree ...: Oh, fun. Fun. That's gonna be fun for you, <laugh>

Prentis Hemphil...: Great. Um, but the reason I wanted to talk to transformational characters, one is that I wanted to talk to a group of people which I meet all the time in conversation with friends, with, know, meet online, that are like humbly saying, I don't have it all figured out. I don't know how to do it right. But I deeply care and I'm committed. And I felt like that orientation to change, um, the orientation of like, I am trying and I'm willing to try, wasn't really getting the kind of attention and cultivation that I think we need to have in this moment for, for people that are like, yeah, I don't know, but I'm willing to be accountable. I'm willing to try, I'm willing to take a risk. I, so I wrote, because I felt like there's been this energetic, this kind of collective, I mean, it continues, obviously, it's, it's collective kind of awakening. And I felt like it was important for our movements for life for us not to lose that momentum, but to offer people that were embodying that orientation, that uptick in energy, that care to have a way of identifying themselves and a path to practice on. Um, 'cause I feel like we are, and I'll identify that way too, we are the folks that I think will be able to create something new in this moment. The people that are able to reach for each other, the people that are able to repair, the people that are able to dream, the people that are able to be a part of, and not, you know, only oriented in one way. Um, so I I I wanted to give us a place to be and a place to practice. And, you know, I think a lot of us are called really, I mean, I think there are people that are transformational characters kind of almost by birth.

Prentis Hemphil...: You know, I'm a middle child, <laugh>, you know, I think there's like different ways where you're kind of like dealing with this belonging, unbelonging dynamic that alerts you to the limitations of systems a limitation. You know, it's like in all these ways, being a black person, being a person, you're like, okay, something is off. And I'm also, there's something in me that's refusing the internalization of that offness that's, that's demanding that I stay awake and engaged. And, um, so I think some of us are kind of born into it. And I believe it's something that can be activated because ultimately I believe transformational characters are, are simply people that are willing to be oriented towards life and living change and justice and care for each other. I think it's, it's it's just about being alive at the very core.

adrienne maree ...: Yeah. I mean, I think that, and I, I loved how you said it's, it's in a family systems therapy, the term transitional characters refers to the person who's basically willing to take on the work of interrupting and changing generational patterns. Yeah. And it feels like immediately it settles my system because it's like, it's the people who are willing to say, I don't know. Right? Yeah. I just know that what we've been doing so far, ain't it? But I don't know yet. What is it? I've got seeds and clues and I've got, like, this worked for me this moment. Some, there's some, you know, like the moments that you dive into, then I'm like, oh yeah. Yes. And there's an aspect that's like, oh, I have to change it through me. Like, it's gotta come through my body. It's gotta come through my own life. And I, you know, the book is called What It Takes To Heal, how Transforming Ourselves Can Change the World.

adrienne maree ...: And I, as soon as I read that, you know, especially the subtitle, I was like, oh, okay. Grace Lee Boggs. Yeah, I feel you. Right. And I feel her. Exactly. And I remember the first time hearing her say that we must transform ourselves to transform the world. And it being such a reorientation for me from how I had thought about what justice work was, it was, you know, for me justice was like, I need to fix the broken Yeah. People who are Yeah. Who are running the broken system. Um, I have nothing to do with that. I just need to fix them. And the reorientation, you know, it's like being spun around in, in the zero gravity space or something and just being like, no, that's down Down is actually gonna be into yourself. Come on. You know? And, and bringing all the things that you're critiquing and extracting them and healing them and looking at them and shining a light on them and like being present within yourself. So I wanted to ask you, can

Prentis Hemphil...: I just, one thing I wanna offer to that, because I feel like, and I love that you picked up on Grace Lee Boggs, and I think there's a, a, a note in the beginning a a quote from her.

adrienne maree ...: Yeah. She's the first quote that. Oh, yeah. Like, I opened it up, up and I was like, okay, grace is, I was like, this makes me overjoyed,

Prentis Hemphil...: you know, and and Grace being there, you're, you're there. It's like, you know,

adrienne maree ...: James is here,

Prentis Hemphil...: James all, you know, it's my teachers that have been saying these things. And you know, I think sometimes with the transformational character, sometimes people are like, "oh, I'm a transformational character because I'm trying to fix everything all the time." But it is a little bit of an or a different orientation that

I'm not saying a transformational character is the fixer, like you're saying. Um, but the person that is willing to go in and through, in and out and.

adrienne maree ...: Yeah. And change something in their own way of being.

Prentis Hemphil...: Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. Exactly.

adrienne maree ...: So it's like even in a family system, it's like, I'm not gonna just spend the whole time railing against how everyone is.

Prentis Hemphil...: Exactly.

adrienne maree ...: I'm gonna be like, oh, how would I need to change what I bring or how I hold boundary, or what I say.

Prentis Hemphil...: Exactly. Exactly.

New Speaker: To shift this pattern and Oh, and I can't shift everything. Right?

Prentis Hemphil...: Yeah.

adrienne maree ...: But part of what I love is when I think you and I have talked about this before, actually, is like when an idea comes to us and it feels very like fresh and soft and um, you know, like, oh, that's a green root that just burst a green shoot that's just coming up. And then you read something by James Baldwin, you're like, and he knew that in 1964 <laugh>. So that's great. Like awesome. Um, <laugh>. So <laugh>, I felt that, you know, with Grace, that was one of the first times reading her autobiography. And I was like, okay, nothing new under the sun here, <laugh>, and like, just get to work <laugh>.

Prentis Hemphil...: Yeah, Exactly.

adrienne maree ...: Um, it was so humbling, but so it also put me, I was like, I'm in the right, I'm by the right river,

Prentis Hemphil...: right.

adrienne maree ...: Like, I'm really by the right river. And I feel like, um, you know, the question I was gonna ask you is when did you know your wisdom was connected to hers? Or, and when did you know your wisdom was connected to James Baldwin? Like, 'cause there's certain people, and I see this in you that you return to that you're like, hold on. Yeah. I really, really wanna make sure that this person is flowing through the river of my words, my life and my stories.

Prentis Hemphil...: Do you know, I don't know if you felt this way about, um, grace or, or maybe Octavia Butler is more appropriate 'cause you had a different kind of relationship with Grace, but it, there was a point in my life where it felt like a group of ancestors just kind of gathered around me and they were like, come here, we'd like to talk to you about <laugh> some things. And, um, you know,

adrienne maree ...: you appear to be available to be part of this work. <laugh>

Prentis Hemphil...: Exactly.

Prentis Hemphil...: Mm-hmm <affirmative>. And you're like, oh, so Ja James did that really early for me. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. I think probably when I was.

adrienne maree ...: mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Prentis Hemphil...: 18, James was like, hello, I'd like to talk to you. I'd like to be a reflection for you. You know, <laugh> and I, as someone who, you know, I consider myself a black feminist. I like always go to black feminist texts. And I think James is, is and is not in some ways a black feminist. He has edges and places where he's struggling. And he's a black man, and he's, and he's a, he's a soft black man, but there's also masculinity to the way he thinks and writes. And, um, for me, in that moment in time, it was deeply resonant and, and mirroring for me in a way that I needed to find my way through it all. So James came early to me and, and then Audrey Lorde was like, let me get you right all the way together. And <laugh>, I think Toni Morrison did that, <laugh>. Um, yes. Toni Morrison also came early. I think she's right there. I feel like our ancestors are talking to each other right here. We got Octavia and

adrienne maree ...: Yes. Oh, absolutely. I was, I was like, the people who can't see Prentis is pointing at. We, we both are sitting in front of bookshelves with these ancestors on our shoulders. <laugh>.

Prentis Hemphil...: Yeah.

adrienne maree ...: So there's, you've got Tony, you've got James, I've got Octavia here. Yeah. Grace is over there. Um, <laugh>. Yeah. I, it actually really does help me.

Prentis Hemphil...: Me too.

adrienne maree ...: When I'm doing events or thinking or anything, I'm just like, I'm not alone. Yeah. And yeah, I love that idea of them gathering and Yeah. And being nuanced human beings. Right?

Prentis Hemphil...: Yeah.

adrienne maree ...: I have this sense of them as, oh, and that might be, you know, each of the people we're naming as, as we say this, I think about the fact that like, we overlapped in time with all of these people. I, right,

Prentis Hemphil...: I Know!

adrienne maree ...: Which is mind blowing to me that I'm like, wait, I was eight years old and Baldwin was alive.

Prentis Hemphil...: He taught, that's wild to me. He taught, I went to college at Mount Holyoke College and I met Suzan-Lori Parks, who's an alumni of Mount Holyoke, ah, one, one time. And she was like, when I was going to school here, James Baldwin was teaching theater at Mount Holyoke or one of the five college schools. And he told me this, you know, in class. And I was like, "what are you saying?" Also, you're Suzan-Lori Parks and also James Baldwin also, what? Why are you talking to me"<laugh>? I don't get it. But, um, this, this, yeah,

adrienne maree ...: Yeah. That yeah. Yeah. Touching history, right. Touching something that I'm like, oh, I think of you as black and white, but you're in color. Yeah. Right.

Prentis Hemphil...: Yeah. You were right here. You were just here a moment ago. You were

adrienne maree ...: Just here, you were just here a moment ago. Like, I, we shared the breath of this earth, right? Yeah. Um, yeah. So you have this line in here. It's hard to heal when you're still being hurt. And this feels like an essential part of moving through this period of history. It feels like an essential piece of the wisdom of this book, um, because we, in this moment where there's no pause in the level, crisis level occurrences. And I do wanna ask you that. 'cause I, even as someone who's like constantly working on healing, there are definitely moments where I'm like, it's just never gonna stop. Like, I am tired and why bother to heal if the hurt isn't gonna stop? Um, so I wouldn't ask you like, why heal? Why heal? And maybe a little bit of how pri why prioritize healing when the hurt is continuous?

Prentis Hemphil...: I'm gonna start there because I, I feel like it, it's a, what I'm trying to offer in this book is a, is a redefinition to some degree of what healing even is and could be. And in part it's probably very obvious. I'm trying to poke holes in the idea that healing can be, well, one complete individualistic, um, decontextualized, uh, bought. Um, and to say that what I'm talking about is healing is a really an orientation to life. It's an orientation to our own lives, our own interiors, our own selves. That's one aspect of it. It's a orientation to relationship, but it's also an orientation to the world that we build. Because right now I believe that the orientation to the worlds that we live in, reside in, they're based on exploitation, theft, um, dehumanization to the point of massive destruction and violence and to people to land.

Prentis Hemphil...: I think the extraction at the core of our culture, and we do all sorts of things around it that mimic, um, life, but are really mimicry of what living really is. I, I think that is central and we've kind of, I don't, I, I'm not gonna say like we've accepted it, you know, like I, one day I was like, I accept that is, you know, but it's like a, a gradual acceptance. And I think there's actually, um, if we oriented to healing or what we might just say is the process of being alive and having the room and the ritual to process what it means to be alive, to experience what it means to be alive, um, then we, then everything would change. It's like the question that abolition poses. It's like, if we weren't gonna have prisons, what would life be like? Well, it would be totally different. We would do different things. <laugh>, we would feel different things, <laugh>. So, um, I'm saying healing has to be political in that way, but it has, it's like we have to reimagine everything, how we do everything, um, in order, if we're really serious about this question of healing.

adrienne maree ...: I like that. Especially because I, you know, this, this has been such an interesting moment for me to notice, you know, where I'm like, oh, I feel fairly grounded, centered on purpose. You know, I'm doing my healing work con, you know, now I know it's continuous and I come to a new precipice each year. I come to a new place each year, and it's like, okay, are you willing to, to explore that edge? Are you willing to go over it? Do you wanna repel or do you wanna jump? How are we doing it? You know? And, and then rinse, wash, repeat, like keep growing. Um, and it's changing what's possible, like when things are happening in the world. Um, part of why I don't feel despair that often is because I have this practice that I'm like, oh, right. Like as in, in the same way that I had these places in me that continuously need my attention because it's intergenerational work that's moving through me, that also is happening at the collective level.

adrienne maree ...: And, and everything that comes to the surface, everything we attend to right. Shifts us and changes us. And, um, so you have this, I wanna get into the BLM a little bit. Um, I, I really appreciate, first of all, I just wanna say I really appreciate that you spent some time here to pull the medicine from the experience you had working with BLM, being a part of that movement and it's tender medicine, you know, it still feels very raw. It still feels like, you know, I, on a regular basis feel like, wow, people really don't know what happened. No, not at all. <laugh>. So, you know, people really don't know what happened. And every time I see movements and young people now getting involved, getting up, getting fired up about things, I'm just sort of like, be good to each other. Yeah. Really be gentle with each other.

Prentis Hemphil...: Yeah.

adrienne maree ...: Really listen to each other. Really, like, really check the part of you that wants to punish each other. Like, it's gonna really require shifting how you be with each other. And there's a line that you have here about what happened where BLM pushed, and then you say, "everyone came to the precipice held hands, but failed to jump. The change required was more than people were willing to give." And I, what I felt in that, I was like, that's exactly what it felt like, right. That it was like, yes. Like we all came and, and by we all, meaning not just people in movement, but like body.

Prentis Hemphil...: Yeah. Everybody.

adrienne maree ...: As a nation, you know, like, it was like, there's a moment where we're all gonna turn and face this. And then the, the shape of racialized capitalism is so insidious and so sneaky and so divisive, right? Like, having the comfort that you can get inside of racialized capitalism, um, is debilitating for people who are also then saying, I think there's something better on the other side. I think freedom might actually feel better than this. Yeah. But this pool is nice. Or <laugh>, I have a kid, or this healthcare is necessary for my team. Or Right. There's a million. Like I can, you know, every time I talk to people who are like, here's why I'm not changing <laugh>. Yeah. You know, in so many words, it's always like, here's the thing that I love that I don't want to be in a precarious state. Um, or here's the comfort that I have, you know, accumulated. Let someone else do that now because I'm over here in comfort land. So I wanted to just get into that a little bit with you of like, um, what do you think it would've cost people to go all the way?

Prentis Hemphil...: Hmm. Um, I'm kind of, uh, I don't know. It's kind of amusing to me in a way. 'cause it's like, it, the book really is subtly, like, it's a

subtle, it's like a nudge trying to, you know, it, it's kinda like, what's, I can't sing, you know? But you know, that song say you wanna a revolution. Well, <laugh> I'm like,

adrienne maree ...: Revolution. Mm-hmm. Yes. It's like, but do you mean it because <laugh> ?

Prentis Hemphil...: Right, but but not from like a Yes. But do you mean it, it's, it's like, it's hard. It's hard. It's hard.

adrienne maree ...: It actually takes work.

Prentis Hemphil...: I have to go do, I mean it, like you said, I have a, I have a, I have a kid. It's like, you know, and the whole system is built on incentives. It's like, here's a little, here's a little crumb, here's a little crumb, here's a little crumb. Stay in your lane, stay in your lane, stay in your lane.

adrienne maree ...: You're special.

Prentis Hemphil...: And it is appealing. And it is, It's like our little piece, the little drip of stability that we're able to get. And, um, so I don't really fault anyone. I'm ask, I'm actually asking big questions about what will it take. But I think what I know from all of that experience, or what I'm, at least the iteration of question I'm in, is, um, I think we're not going to jump all the way until, well, two things, one, conditions, uh, minimize our choices to such a degree that, um, that feels like a, a viable choice for people to jump. Or we build a, a trampoline <laugh> of us underneath us to jump. And I think without the trampoline, which to me is strong movements, strong relationships, um, people that are, like I said, trying people that are attempting to embody the things they believe. That to me is the trampoline that people can jump into. Um, without that, we're gonna end up waiting until the conditions force forces.

adrienne maree ...: Yeah. I think I, I really resonate with that. You know, I, I always tell people, I'm like, I'm super excited about revolution. I don't think that that has to mean, oh, violent chaos. I think that there's so many ways that we can do this Yeah. That are connective. It's like, that's right. You know, in the, in the body, it's very rare. It is not, uh, it's not outside the realm of possibility that occasionally you have to break something to heal it. Absolutely. That does occasionally happen. But most of the time, the thing you have to do to heal something is actually let it be still. The thing you have to do to heal something is find the right motion for it. The thing you have to try to heal something is to make room for it to complete its cycle. Uh, you know? That's right. Right. We know

this as holding healing bodies on a table. It's just like, okay, what your body needs is to fully express what's happening and not to be pummeled while that happens. Not to have the table pulled out from under you. So I think about that as I'm like the collective body. If we're, if the healers are all holding the collective body, then, um, you know, it's like, how does this body get free? And you have this part, you tell this beautiful story, um, that every time I hear it, I really, it's so visceral to me to see little baby P in this classroom <laugh>. And you're dressed, it basically, it's like everyone is dressing up as historical figures coming into the classroom. And you talk about how you discovered Harriet Tubman tucked into the corner of this textbook and what it did. You know, that there was, you say, first you said that, well, first you said that you were like, okay, I'm learning to look down and keep my eyes down and keep my, you know, sort of pull my energy in. And then you're like, and then I read about Harriet and it made me sit up straight and it made me really feel my dignity. And you say, "the only place I had I had that was my own was my body. And if Harriet had found a way to make her body free, I knew that I could too."

Prentis Hemphil...: Yeah. Yeah.

adrienne maree ...: Woo. I was like, Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, <laugh>. Oh. So a lot of questions came out of that, right? Because it feels like such a definitive, shaping moment for you. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Yes. And so there's two pathways of questions. I'm just gonna say the both and then give you kind of a choose your own adventure. One is, I think that so many of us who are holding movement space right now are, are particularly being tapped by Harriet. I think she's, she's like, you, you, you, you, you, and I'm gonna pour bits into each of you. I have been pouring them into you your whole lives and now get to work. And I, I can think of like a lot of people, right? Yeah. Who are like Harriet's kids. And it's not like she's the only teacher, but she's really talking to us and being like, sometimes it feels like you're by yourself, walking north by yourself, yelling at people shotgun in your back. Right. But you gotta go. And I, she always makes me feel hope, right? Mm-hmm <affirmative>. I'm always like, I can do this. Like, right. My conditions are are,

Prentis Hemphil...: Yeah. That's the thing.

adrienne maree ...: Remarkably abundant.

Prentis Hemphil...: That's the thing. I can do this. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

adrienne maree ...: So there's one path, and I would love, you could go down that path and just talk a little bit about how you see the Harriet, uh, the Harriet touch inside of movements now. But the other direction is, do you feel free in your body now, like now today? And do you feel free in a Harriet way? Like, I have, I have freed myself from something? Or do you feel like I feel free in a practicing way. Like every day I practice some freedom. Um, so smorgasbord love.

Prentis Hemphil...: I love that. Okay. Um, You know, the, yeah, Harriet, I feel like she is just around and I'm so glad. 'cause I think in that time that I'm writing it, my relationship to her felt very private. I didn't, I didn't know that other people were also cracking open their textbooks and go, wait a minute. Wait, what? <laugh>? You know? Um, yeah. And you talk about her conditions. It's, it's, it's unimaginable to me, like the stories that I've read of her, um, on her journeys through Canada, the ways that she was able to evade, capture the way that she moved people with such navigational skills, but also such relational skills, such situational awareness and such courage. Like, but her courage, and this is the part that I've really been kind of like rolling around for the last couple years, is that her courage was not the way that I think about courage. It was like born of a faith, but a faith that's not just a flat kind of like, it's a flat religious faith. I just faith and I'm disengaged. But it was like, she was like, oh, there's one story where I think she thought that she was about to get caught. She had just come, I think, um, into a dock and was hiding in a boat, and I hope I'm remembering this correctly. And, um, the person was kind of checking every boat. And she said, she said a prayer. And she was like that. She would often say, she was like, God, you brought me through seven journeys. I know you're not gonna leave me at eight. And then somehow the person that was checking the boats, their attention got carried away somewhere else. And I was like, what dimension was she connected to? Because she was, I believe, connected to a whole other dimension and a way of understanding who she was. And that's the part that I'm like, what's, what, what's that <laugh>, what's that technology? What's that? What's that kind of courage? What's that kind of vision? How do you see in that way? Um, so it's like, is

adrienne maree ...: It the sacred access of disability?

Prentis Hemphil...: Yes, exactly. Yes. <laugh>, it's like something opened up in her and she was like, "whoop, I have a, a direct line. Like, somebody just patched me in."

adrienne maree ...: God, I know you're not gonna do that.

Prentis Hemphil...: I know you're not, because you already brought me here and you did that on purpose. So I know you're gonna bring me through. What would, what would I do if I could move that way? Do you know what I'm saying?

adrienne maree ...: [singing] "Oh, I can't believe you brought me this far." Yes, I do. Exactly. I do. Yes, I do. I, I think about this all the time that I'm just Yeah, I mean, you're actually, the spiritual text of it all is part of, you know, part of it. When I look at Harriet, when I look at Audrey, when I look at James, when I look at black people surviving in any way, right? I'm like, it's a spiritual act to survive in the face of those who want to kill you. It's a spiritual act. And you speak about this early BLM meeting, um, where someone talked about wanting churches with no walls. Yeah. Yeah. And you know, to me, when I think about Harriet moving through the world, right? Yeah. And I'm like, freedom makes the world a church with no walls.

Prentis Hemphil...: That's right.

adrienne maree ...: Right. Freedom is the thing that does that.

Prentis Hemphil...: It's like, I don't need walls.

adrienne maree ...: When I, like, I feel free. I'm like, I, I feel of the world. I don't feel scared of it. Today, a beaver went running by my porch, <laugh>. I was sitting back there reading your book, and this beaver went by. And I was like, wow, you're a really big mammal. Like,

Prentis Hemphil...: yeah. You know, they are.

adrienne maree ...: And I was like, you're big. And he clearly didn't expect me to be sitting on the porch. Like he was like halfway across the, he was like, and then all of a sudden I moved and he, we paused. And it was like a contending, but I'm like, I'm free. You're free. You know what I mean? <laugh> just like, we're good in this moment, in this moment. And so far I only feel freedom as a temporary thing. But, you know, I was like, Harriet knew that -- she tasted it enough to be like, this is something that I can dose others with. And I, I think you're doing that.

Prentis Hemphil...: I don't know that I'm doing that, but it's something I'm..

adrienne maree ...: I said, I think you're doing that.

Prentis Hemphil...: Okay. So you think, I think we're doing that, but it's, it's also a way that she saw around, I think I write this too. Like she was looking around the reality.

adrienne maree ...: Yes.

Prentis Hemphil...: So it's not even just, okay, the people are pressing me and I'm kind of reactive to that. She was like, oh, the what's actually happening, you can't see the person that is in opposition to me doesn't really understand what's happening.

adrienne maree ...: They don't.

Prentis Hemphil...: what, what I see of reality and of the world and of existence is a much bigger picture. And because I have that, it's like, you can move through the portals. 'cause you're like, oh, you're just, okay, get outta here. 'cause you're confused and I'm gonna go around this way and I'm going around this way. And I'm like that. Positioning that orientation, the place at which she moved from.

adrienne maree ...: Yes.

Prentis Hemphil...: The way that she perceived who she was, gave her a view on reality, on the structures that people thought were immovable. And she saw all around and underground and over them. And, um, that's what I, I like pray for, you know? When I, when I talk to her, it's like, how do I see that way?

adrienne maree ...: Yeah.

adrienne maree ...: How do I See, how do I see the world in myself that way? Um, and do I feel free in my body? Um, uh, I feel like I'm a process and some parts are freer than they've ever been. I'm, I'm really reconsidering what freedom is a lot. I think I've said this on other places, but, and maybe on, um, in another conversation with somebody, but, you know, being a parent, I'm like, what is the freedom in responsibility? <laugh>. It's like freeing me from a certain kind of individual self, um, that I conceive myself. I feel like I'm a little bit, I mean, you in one way you could be like, you're tired, but I'm also dissipated <laugh> in a way. I am more than one. And, um, that's a different kind of freedom that I'm exploring right now.

adrienne maree ...: I like that. Um, I, a couple of thoughts popped off while you were talking. One is that Harriet was a time warrior, and like, part of what we're all doing, you know, it's like, oh, I'm from the, I often will say like, I'm from the future. I'm speaking to you from the

future. Or like, let me tell you something about the future. The future. Like, I can, what I mean there is, I'm like, I have a vision of things that are very different from this. And, and I'm trying to translate from that place all the time to where we are now and be relevant. And then when you talk to someone who's like, I'm from the past, right? Like right now we have people who are like senators, but they're like actually civil rights. No. They're like, you know, KKK members from 1938.

Prentis Hemphil...: Right, right.

adrienne maree ...: Actually, but they're, they're, you know, gallivanting about in a, in a Gucci suit or whatever. So we're like, oh, you're from now? And it's like, no. So, but I think when you run into some of them, I'm like, oh, you live, you're already dusted. Right? Like, you're actually very fragile. Like an old thing. Like you're very fragile. You're very dusty and you can't actually handle,

Prentis Hemphil...: not dusty,

adrienne maree ...: the pressure of the future. You're very dusty, darling.

Prentis Hemphil...: He's so dusty.

adrienne maree ...: There's a smell, there's a dustiness,

Prentis Hemphil...: yeah it's moth balls.

adrienne maree ...: There's, there's an entity. Yeah. Yes. And I'm just like, oh, this is your, your, it's not old. It's ancient. Right. Like, it's like you, you, your time has come. And then being from the future, it's like, I don't wanna cause harm to all that exists, but there is something else. And I feel like Harriet was one of those. There is something else. And the, the outline of the past is not gonna contain all of us.

Prentis Hemphil...: Exactly.

adrienne maree ...: Any of us, you know?

Prentis Hemphil...: Exactly.

adrienne maree ...: Um, and that feels like a spiritual practice to me to see that way. And in this book, you speak of healing as something that begins in the realm of dreams and imagination. And which also feels like the spiritual practice, right? Is to be like, I'm gonna take very seriously what I dream. I'm gonna take very seriously what we

can imagine together. Um, so I wanted to bring the question to you. Does this feel like a spiritual text to you? Does this, you know, like there's this intersection of justice and healing and change and our potential, um, that I think of you as a spiritual leader, I think of you as a spiritual teacher, but you're so pragmatic sometimes that I feel like you <laugh>, you know, I'm just like, I don't know, mean, maybe. I'm pragmatic just breathing.

Prentis Hemphil...: I'm so pragmatic. <laugh>.

adrienne maree ...: Oh yeah. You're very tangible. Right? Yeah. Do you see this as a spiritual text? Do you want people to hold this as a spiritual text?

Prentis Hemphil...: I mean, very lightly in that way? Um, do I see it as a spiritual text? Uh, I think it reveals my spiritual journey in a way. Um, I would not have considered myself a very spiritual person, say 15 years ago, but I think the more that I dwell in me, the more I have access to the felt sense of the infinite of possibility of life. And so, you know, I think any invitation into our interior, this is one of the places where I sometimes quote the Bible. And, you know, I was raised, you know, going to church is that, you know, I didn't understand it when I was a kid. When I talk about the body as a temple, I thought, I think the way that we're trained is like, that means you have to take care of it. That means it has to be cute on the outside to somebody. That's how I took and interpreted that scripture. But as I've gotten older, I interpret that scripture as, oh, this is the place where I dwell in order to be connected to the infinite. This is, I can dwell in this place and inside of me is an altar. Inside of me is a temple. Inside of me is a door that connects to the all. And, um, it's spiritual in that way. I'm not, I'm not trying to be heavy handed, but I'm saying, I, you know what, once you feel, once you sit inside of yourself, a world of mystery and wonder opens up. And there's a lot in this world that is trying to take you away from that experience because there is tremendous power in that experience. There's tremendous connection in that experience. Um, and I'm, I'm trying to like hint at people, Hey, I think there's, we've been sold a very narrow way of living, but we are infinite and we are connected, and we are powerful. And that is gonna come through our felt sense.

adrienne maree ...: Whew. I feel that. And I mean, it's, it's also like I keep feeling like something that's starting to bubble up for me is a real distinction between like what a religion is versus what a spirituality is for me. Yeah. That I'm like a religion is like, here's the rules, Sir. It came down from on high. It's written in stone. It's never ending. It's never changing. And then spirituality for me is like, you can only access this from within. I can't even tell you about it. I can talk to you once you start to feel it, we can start to talk about

Prentis Hemphil...: Never, to me don't trust people who know, who feel that they can know God

adrienne maree ...: that's what I was gonna say at the top of this conversation, I was like, I don't trust anybody who tells me they know God or they know something.

Prentis Hemphil...: Yeah. There's no way.

adrienne maree ...: I'm just like, mm-hmm. I was, you know, I always, I always come back to the tao te ching, which is like, the way that could be named is not the way, like the spiritual is like, "oh, this is the thing you can only feel from within."

Prentis Hemphil...: That's, and then that's right.

adrienne maree ...: You can recognize when someone else, I'm like, you felt from within what I felt from within. And that's the closest I can get to talking about it. Um, but I think another word for all of that is love. And so I wanna come to your final chapter. Yeah. Because you, you end the book with this chapter on love that is profound and intimate and beautiful. Like it is so beautiful. We get to hear about the incredible Kasha Ho and the love that you all have. Um, of which you said, "I wish a love like this for everybody. Imagine what it could do." Um, and you talk about this line that came to you, I think in high school or college getting high.

Prentis Hemphil...: I was, I was high in college. Yeah.

adrienne maree ...: High in college. In your dorm room you said "to love is to will something into existence," which you later realized was an echo of St. Thomas Aquinas, which I love when we get wisdom throughout the body that's like, "oh, okay." There's something about it that feels like you are holding a blackness that is in touch with the world, uh, that is in touch with like, all these lineages of the world. Which for me is like that, you know, I, I've been like, oh, my blackness is this expansive blackness. Like there's nothing in the world that doesn't flow into the river of my blackness. That's right. And I feel like that's part of what loving ourselves allows for. Um, I wanna read this last little bit and then ask you a final question and then.

Prentis Hemphil...: Sure.

adrienne maree ...: Uh, I mean, I'm gonna talk to you about this book for the rest of our lives. <laugh>. So, Um, <laugh>, okay. "Love can do things no other force can. It is only through love that we are ever really

changed. There's a love to be practiced that can tear down the walls of anything in its way. I believe in this destruction, but only for the sake of love. So that love can be set free in our relationships, in our institutions, in our cultures. And that it becomes the shaper of our futures." It gives me chills to read it. I'm just like, I want that so much <laugh>. I want, I want the love like you and Kasha have for everyone. <laugh>.

Prentis Hemphil...: I do too.

adrienne maree ...: Um, you know the, I want the love that you and I have for everyone.

Prentis Hemphil...: Yeah, I do too.

adrienne maree ...: It makes you generous to feel such a love. And yeah. So I wanted to ask you how you knew that you needed to end this book on love.

Prentis Hemphil...: You just almost made me cry right there. I got hit with the tears. Um,

adrienne maree ...: I was like, it's so you, it, I mean, you should, you're such a love teacher, <laugh>, and I think it's such a intentional choice. I know you, I know that you spent a lot of time thinking about where you're gonna end us, land us. Yeah.

Prentis Hemphil...: And I actually was just thinking about my love for you.

adrienne maree ...: I love you so much.

Prentis Hemphil...: I love you too, <laugh>. And I love, like loving getting out of the way of your love for someone, you know, getting out of the way with your stories, getting out of the way with your unmet needs, getting out of the way so you can really love and witness a person as they are, um, is like, to me the best way to spend time <laugh> on earth. <laugh> to be like, I love you. I really love when, and I'm gonna answer your question, but I just really love when my friends shine. I feel, I always say like, I feel like I'm looking at the sun. I feel like I'm looking in the face of a flower. I'm like, shine. Like shine. Look at shine,

adrienne maree ...: Look at life in my friend.

Prentis Hemphil...: Exactly. So pretty, I feel that way. <laugh>. I feel. Um, alright, good. I didn't know that I was gonna end with love until, and that chapter, I wrote it very quickly and I think I had to do it that way. I

had to just like, lemme just get this outta here. 'cause I had all these stories about "you're not a serious person if you're talking about love." You know, somebody who's really serious is gonna end on some something pragmatic. But if, even if I'm a pragmatic person, if I really look, pull back and go, what has changed me <laugh>, what has actually been effective at changing me? It is my experiences of being loved and loved fully and loved, gently loved, well loved, and response to what I've asked for. What I've said. It's like being loved and loving. That is ex those are exactly the places where my life has changed.

Prentis Hemphil...: And I think, you know, bell hooks obviously you can't really, well, you don't, I don't really wanna talk about love without talking about the hooks <laugh>, you know? Yeah. But lovelessness, I mean her bringing that distinction to us, like what Lovelessness does to us and how it warps our sense of relationship and how it interacts with power in the world and what, you know, the, the other side of that is like what Love Unleashed can do. And I think we are thirsty and we have hardened in ways, many of us to say, I don't need, I don't need love. I don't really love people like that. You know, I'm just whatever, whatever stories we tell about how we move. But they're just stories because I think each of us in some way wants to melt into the other, wants to be known, wants to be accepted, wants to be, I love it when someone, a friend or my partner or even my child kind of looks, can see around me and is loving enough to allow me to be multidimensional and to see something that is just outside of my view, but not separate themselves from me to say, I see this edge and I'm still sitting here with you. That is what changes me. Yes. Thank you for letting me see that. Then, uh, it's like, I can let it, I can let it go. I'm like, oh, well here. Well, dang, I I'll give that away because it, it was waiting for you to love me. And so, um, I think love is, it is the, it's the great unlocking. And I don't mean to be whatever, to pollyannaish about it, but if we're talking about the things that we might practice in our lives that are going to have significant impact on isolation, on a sense of powerlessness, on, um, disconnection, uh, uh, on the healing that I think we're gonna have to undertake as a global society, given where we are and what we face. If we don't do love, we will do destruction for the sake of destruction. And I'm down for destruction, like I said, but for the sake of love. And that's what I wish for us in this period.

adrienne maree ...: Yeah. And I think that's, that's wisdom, right? That to me feels like that ultimate wisdom. Like I feel like there's been a real clarity that it's like, oh, hate is easy. Yeah. It's so easy to hate. And so I can make list and list and lists of all the people I hate and why I need to hate them. Exactly. Blah, blah, who hates me and everything.

Love is so much harder. <laugh> love is so much harder. And to let it in, to really let it out, to truly be like, no, it's unconditional. I'm really here for the whole shebang. And I, yeah, I felt that in the way that book is structured and these words <laugh>, I really was like, oh, I'm supposed to let love in. Like, that's all the healing is so that I can touch into this aspect of life that is most holy. Oh, okay. Got it. So when does this book come out? Thank you.

Prentis Hemphil...: Um, well, you could pre-order it right now, but I think actually when this airs it will be out. 'cause I think this is gonna air June 5th and the book will have come out June 4th. So if you haven't pre-ordered it, you can just go to the bookstore right now and go buy.

adrienne maree ...: And Are you doing a book tour?

Prentis Hemphil...: I am doing a book tour. And my first stop on the book tour is actually June 5th with you in New York.

adrienne maree ...: Me <laugh>. We gonna be in New York City. It's gonna be so cute. We are.

Prentis Hemphil...: It's gonna be gonna real cute.

adrienne maree ...: I can't wait talk about what we're gonna wear. Oh my God. Okay. Um, but then after that, where can people find out about the book tour?

Prentis Hemphil...: Um, you can, the dates for the book tour will be up on my website, um, very soon actually. And on my Instagram. And I'm gonna be all over this country except really for the middle part. Sorry about that. But, um, all over the country for the next month. <laugh>, <laugh>.

adrienne maree ...: The middle part. You're like, not Oklahoma, but everywhere else.

Prentis Hemphil...: Sorry.

adrienne maree ...: Yeah. Maybe, maybe in the future,

adrienne maree ...: You know, maybe Texas.

adrienne maree ...: Look, this is Texas,

Prentis Hemphil...: period.

adrienne maree ...: Um, I'm so proud to be a Texan with you. I'm so proud, proud to be a writer with you. I'm really, really grateful that you wrote this book. P like, I'm really grateful that you sat down. Um, and just for, for folks who are listening to know, like Prentis really went off into the cave to do this work, <laugh>. And, um, I don't think we honor that enough. You know, we have such a plugged in world. It's like everyone has to be plugged in and reacting to everything immediately. And it was so, um, respect inducing for me to watch you go off into the cave and make this and, and come back with something that's like, "oh, that's why, that's why we go spelunking". You actually found that's some gems. You found something new.

Prentis Hemphil...: Thank you friend. And thank you for this. Thank you for taking the time and thank you for your love and sweetness and encouragement along the way. It, it really meant a lot to me to feel your care. So, thank you.

adrienne maree ...: I know Amaya's first, but I'm definitely like way up there in the fan club, so I'm like,

Prentis Hemphil...: she's not a fan. <laugh>

adrienne maree ...: <laugh>, Amaya is obsessed with you. What are you talking about? You're not as great as Kasha, but you're, you're up there <laugh>.

Prentis Hemphil...: I am up there. I am up there for sure. <laugh>, I'm up there.

adrienne maree ...: Oh yeah. So I love you. I'll see you. Love you too soon.

Prentis Hemphil...: Thank friend.

adrienne maree ...: Thank you for this text.

Prentis Hemphil...: Thank you.

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