

Finding Our Way Podcast

hosted by

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Published June 15th 2021
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agreement - when two people are speaking at once



[Music playing]

Prentis: For some of us we're coming together again after some time apart. For some we've never left, we've just been living or working in heightened risk, or threat of illness. The revelation of this time is that what many of us thought was working, wasn't. And the things we thought necessary weren't. As we put back together aspects of our world, where can we infuse choice and meaning that speaks to more of us? Our conversation today is with Priya Parker. Priya is the author of *The Art of Gathering: how we meet and why it matters*. Priya is also a long-time facilitator and someone who I've become very recent friends with this episode is honest, it's sweet, and it's a deep dive into all things human connection. We hope you enjoy the episode.

Prentis: Priya, I'm so excited you're here. Thank you for saying yes to being in this conversation on this podcast with us today.

Priya: Thank you for asking me. I'm so excited to be in conversation with you.

Prentis: So, you know, we typically start the podcast with kind of your assessment of the moment. Where are we from your work or from your

vantage point, from where you're situated? How would you describe what you see, what this moment is that we're in?

Priya: So we are in a moment of re-entry in, in conflict resolution, I've come to learn also in, in criminal justice, in, in a number of different fields, there is this concept of re-entry. And in my work re-entry in extreme conflict was, would refer to when, facilitators would successfully take a group of people like away from their contexts, away from their communities, often with people who their own communities, distrusted or hated or believed you should not meet with, had a transformative experience together, and then have to figure out like how to go home. *mmm* How to come home. And as a facilitator, we were really, we were trained very deeply that how, how to hold and how to facilitate moments of re-entry. Um, and that, in a way it was like, if, if in facilitation, one of the core rules is 'do no harm.' If you do not prepare your people for a re-entry, you could be setting them up really badly, to going back to a past when they should actually be going into a future. And it, and re-entry takes work. And I think we collectively are in a moment, even, even if different vaccination rates in different countries, but in, in this moment in the United States, collectively, we are, we are flirting with and crashing into re-entry.

Prentis: You, you took us really into some deep waters, kind of immediately, at least for me, when you, when you say reentry for me, it activates all of this. Um, it kind of activates my understanding around imprisonment in some ways, *mmmm* incarceration, all of that comes flooding forward. When you talk about reentry and how we do that. So I want to actually want to hold this piece. I want us to get there. Um, cause I feel like it's whew, it's down in those deep waters. And I want to maybe, um, gosh, that's such a powerful image. Can, can we start with, if we kind of rewind it's like we came through this, this experience together, we all had different experiences, but they kind of come together to create a kind of story about what the hell just happened over this last period. And now we're reemerging, reentering, reconnecting in new ways. Um, and we're kind of coming from a kind of collective period of perhaps isolation, perhaps disorganization, perhaps fear, and we're coming back into connection with each other. And um, I wanna just talk about what that means that reentering. And then I have another question, maybe I'll just drop in here about gatherings as a kind of a event, a kind of deep dive event, and the question of how we sustain, what happens inside of a gathering or take the kernels into the rest of our lives. Um, as a, as a way of reentering with kind of the lessons of the gathering,

Priya: I was trained that like, what does it mean to care? Like what does it mean to care for your people in this moment? Meaning in this gathering, in this transformative experience that they went through. And there's two parts of it and in a sense it's like, it's also the anatomy of an ending. Like how do you end, well, how do we end? How do we close conversations? *mm hmm* Well, what's the last 10 minutes of a wedding? Like what's the last 10 minutes of a movement? Like, and, um, and so it's a couple of things: one is it's, it's looking back and it's asking like, "what transpired here? What did I learn from here? What meaning do I want to make of this time that I had, or time together? What is a story I want to tell of this time?" Um, and then it's pausing. It's like, when I about it visually, it's like, it's like turning in. If I'm working with a group or a team, it's like, we're turning into the circle and it's both saying like "what, what happened in this place?" And to actually spend time talking about it, to make meaning of it on a zoom call, very practically if you're, you know, with a group of people or volunteers or training, instead of just saying like, by y'all the last five minutes, just literally opening the zoom chat and asking like, "what is it that you're taking from here?" And having 50 people just put their answers in, like, *mmhmm* this is practical stuff. Um, and then saying then, and then it's like, almost like if you were, you know, somatically turning people to face outside, right. It was like turning their bodies around *mhmm mhmm* 180 degrees to step back out into the world and to, and, and kind of like their backs, you know, at the wind and asking like, "and how do I want to, how *yeah* do we want to exit this place? What do I want to take with me? What do I want to leave behind? And what do I want to step into?" So like, closings are deeply important because on the other side of a closing is usually an opening and we tend to close badly, like, and, and so focus so much on like what trans *yes* like, like, okay,

Priya: "let's step back out. Let's reenter, let's reenter, let's reenter it." But like, you can't reenter if you don't know what, what has passed here. *that's right* And so it's taking time individually, collectively with our people and really asking, like, "what did I learn in this time? Who did I long for? Who did I miss? Who did I not miss? How do I want to reimagine my family structure? *mmhmm* How do we want to reimagine our team structure?" Like, and then asking, like, "what do we want to build?"

Priya: What are we go and not necessarily going back to, but it's like, what do we, as we reemerge from this place, how has it changed us? And this place could be the pandemic. This place could be a gathering. There are weddings that are done in such a way where you leave not only

committed to the couple, but recommitted to your partnership, right. *That's right* Or with the revelation that like the partnership that you're in is not the right one. Right. That's what I mean by transformation, right? Like how this time was used and what happened in it, changed all of us. And it didn't just change us with our relationship to that couple. Yes. They went from individuals to a union, but we became a. Witnesses, but also b. In certain, in certain weddings, there's like a thesis of love. That's demonstrated that that may stir something in you, which is beautiful. Right.

Priya: And so how do I want to, as I leave this place, how do I wanna take back the thread, not only to think and to do and to wish well on that couple, but what is it that, how do I want to love differently? How do I want to take back what I've learned or experienced here and change the way that I parent or change the way that I interact with a stepparent? Um, and so it's really re-entry is about looking back and looking forward. And it's like, and it's also building intentionally. And I mean that at an individual level and at a systemic level. like the Supreme court started live streaming during the pandemic, their arguments, like, should they keep that? Harvard university, this like bastion of privilege began to allow people to defend their, their theses and dissertations with like 150 of their like friends and family and grandparents on Z,oom. Do they keep that right? So, so it's asking at the individual level and at the collective level. Like,

Priya: you know, BLM and, and like what we experienced, not just the memory of last summer, not just the memory of, of like, and the experience of all that has transpired over this past year, but it's like, I know for me individually, like I deeply understood. And in part, because of my relationship with Alicia Walters, like as a facilitator, I now center Blackness. And like, that's an individual commitment and I don't always get it right. But it's like, I know what that means. Right. It's like, I it's, like, I like have experience of living that in my body. It's like, it's changed my lens. *yeah yeah* And so, and then collectively, what does it mean to center blackness? What does that mean in our healthcare system? What does that mean in our judicial system? What does that mean in our school system? What does that mean in our power structures? So, so all of these questions is like, but it takes time. And so the re-entry literally means like having, good doing this well means taking time to process, to make meaning to mark, and then to choose the ways we want to enter and choose the ways we want to leave.

Prentis: I love that. I love that. And I will just say on a note, I don't, I don't necessarily think that re-entry is the wrong word choice. I think that it might mean, I think it actually does mean that people who have been incarcerated before probably have a lot to teach us about what this moment is. *mmmm* And I think that it actually invites me as you use that word to think about who knows a lot about coming back together, who knows a lot about rebuilding those connections about endings, new beginnings. And so, um, yeah, I, I think there's a invitation and you saying that word for me to think about who are the people in my life that I can be turning to as an expert in this moment *mmhmm* as we shift, because I think there are a lot of people I know that could teach me here.

Prentis: I guess I'm curious, I'm sure you've heard this question a million times, but I'm really curious about writing a book about gathering that hit the ground in, during a pandemic in a moment where we were kept, many of us kept from each other, at least kept from some people in our lives. Um, it feels like there's a profound, I don't know it's irony or something to create that book about the kind of longing we actually had. It actually gave us a space in time to think about it. Just what has it been like for you to be, kind of dissecting almost or excavating what it means to gather in a moment of such disconnection and isolation?

Priya: You know, it's funny to hear you say, um, it hit the ground during the pandemic and, and in a, in a deeper sense it did. Like it in the sense that when we cannot gather, we began to see it, right. We began to see the water that we had been allowed to swim in until a pandemic took over the world. Um, but the book came out in 2018. And so, so I wrote The Art of Gathering. Um, now three, I mean, it came out three years ago, which means I really wrote it, you know, I started writing it nine years ago. Um, and, and, and yet, you know, the, the opening, the opening paragraph of the book is, "is the way we gather matters. Gathering defines our days and our weeks." And, and, and that the first, um, like "inauthoritarians regimes, one of the firsts freedom that are removed is the right to assemble," right? Why? Because they understand that gathering the bringing of people together is extraordinarily powerful. And is extraordinarily dangerous. And ideas come from gathering. And new norms come from gathering and information gets shared at gatherings. And for me having this, having this pandemic, you know, hit and the way that it did and having the epicenter like the target in a sense, be, I dare even say like the collective victim be gathering, um, was, was incredibly, um, strange. Intellectually and kind of to be at the, to have

my work and the language that I use to describe my work, um, become the language used to describe like the source of danger and terror and death, um, was, uh, you know, I, there are no words.

Priya: And what began to happen, um, was that this thing that we basically the, I think most people take for granted, I mean, not, I don't think facilitators take it for granted or movement builders. I don't take it for granted, but, but, um, this element that we were all, many of us were on autopilot about all of a sudden, overnight was taken away from us. And it became this extraordinary, you know, 12 to 14 month meditation around, you know, dreaming about, longing for, also, I think also like quietly relieved by not having to do it in a lot of contexts. Um, but this kind of this ability to reflect on like, very simply how we spend our time. How we spend our time together. How we spend our collective time. And, um, and it became kind of like a social x-ray of the invisible elements that we took for granted all of a sudden giving most people an opportunity to think about how do I gather my people? How do you create meaning when you come together on zoom and you don't have, you know, all the, you don't have passageways and doorways and, *mmhmm* um, and drinks on tables? And, uh, and you know, and arms around you hugging you to welcome you. Like, how do we actually create, like, what is the technology of meaning-making when we don't have our regular tools?

Prentis: This is the question that I feel like I'm in a lot of the times, like, how do we re-infuse or reveal maybe the meaning in the things that we do every day? Or we do maybe at this point kind of automatically or habitually? And I think that's, what's so beautiful about your work is it, you know, your book, you, you it's, you what's the word you just said, you said an 'x-ray.' I wrote down a dissection, dissected, every kind of element of what it means to gather and from different perspectives. And it felt like it had the intention then of inviting meaning back into the practice. *absolutely* And that's what I appreciated so much about it.

Priya: You know, I come from the world of peace-building conflict transformation, dialogue, deliberation, I feel on a, in a conversation with you, I can kind of start using all of these terms. [both laughing] *yeah* In my modality, like the, the, the deepest training that I have is, uh, my way into this work was a very specific process called 'sustained dialogue.' And, and the, the core grounding of my work is, is making meaning through dialogue. Like through language, it's not through art, it's not through film, it's not through soccer. Those are other ways, ways

to create transformative experiences. But my deepest training is through the word, right? So like the sacred texts of, of this specific field are like Martin Buber and David Boehme and just really dialogic. And what I think this moment revealed to me and I already knew this is within The Art of Gathering if you kind of read the pages mostly, but there's thousands of there's millions of ways to make meaning with, and through other people, I particularly have resonance and training in doing it through language. Um, I mean, I'm being really literal here, *yeah* but, but, and, and because we had so few tools to be together except digitally, our need to be able to get better at making meaning together through our conversations increased.

Priya: So much of when I, when people, you know, people often think, well, I don't know what they think, but, um, in terms of, in terms of like helping people understand, like, how do you make meaning with your community in 90 seconds, right? Like people often think like, "oh, meaning-making is this like really complicated existential thing?" I, uh, and, and I, you know, I'll give an example of what I mean by meaning-making. So, um, this was years ago, I attended a Passover Seder Jewish. I was invited to a Passover Seder with probably 30 people in this couple's living room. And I walked in and I didn't know most people. And, um, some people were sitting on the floor. Some people were on couches, some people were talking. And, um, at some moment in the night, like pretty soon in, maybe 20 or 30 minutes after milling around the, the host, Um, the woman kind of dinged her glove and she raised her glass. And she said, and you can almost time, like how long this takes me -it's like 30 to 60 seconds.

Priya: She says, "Bill and I are so deeply grateful and happy. You are here with us tonight in our home for some of you, this is your 30th Seder with us. And we are so happy you're here. For others of you, this is not only your first Seder with us. This is your first leader ever. And we are so joyful that you said yes to this invitation. And for me personally, this is the first year that I'm doing a Passover Seder without my mother, *mm* without my mother on this earth. And so as a particularly raw and vulnerable moment for me, and I couldn't imagine getting to have this evening without you here with us welcome", *mm mm* right. In 45 seconds, she has like oriented the group, She's settled our collective systems. She's helped us understand who's here. And that, even though we are different from each other, and that there are deep roots and, and there's a community here, um, there's also new sprouts. And that, even though we're not the same, all are welcomed. She temporarily equalized us.

That we each have something to offer that we're not all Jewish and that that's not only not okay, that's part of the point. And then she, and then she located us in her, meaning "this is the first Seder in my grown-adult life without my mother. "And she created this like 60 or sweep by what she said. And so much of, for me, so much of meaningful gathering is about how we like who we bring together, why we bringing them together, but then telling them like, no, no, no. Literally tell them, it's like we hide inadvertently. Or because we think it may be awkward. I was like too, on the nose. Or like, it's like feeling like you don't impose. And actually it was this like deeply generous orientation. And meaning-making for the entire group to say, "woof, I belong here tonight."

Prentis: [Prentis exhales] This what you just shared. I feel like it, um, it lives in this space that was really just activating for me in your book. Because I, I think, I dunno, I saw your book somewhere and folks have been talking about it and I have a, does it, how would I describe this? I don't think I'm a good host. I'll say that. I don't think I'm a good host and I actually have like a resistance around it. *mmmm* And I know that you kind of talk about that in your book too, but partly it comes from this piece that you talked about belonging. You know, I grew up in a, in a town where my grandmothers lived, one, lived two blocks away on one lived four blocks away. And so I would ride my bike. I didn't, I never announced when I was coming, I'd walk in, I'd eat some food. I'd sit on the couch and watch a show. I go home. That was what my childhood felt like. There were, no, it was like, your house is a continuation of my house over here. But when I would go visit friends, it felt like I was entering into, And I think it's because of, you know, the, the fact that I was bused into a different neighborhood, so there were just different rules. *mmm* Um, and I remember it being such a source of anxiety for me to go to someone's house. Cause I was like, "I have no idea what these rules are, where I come from - The rules are you walk in the door, you get some greens out the pot, you go see what your cousins are doing, you know, that kind of thing. Um, so I think I've like, I was like, Ugh, the intentionality creates exclusion. And I know you talk about this so well in the book, but that's why I was so resistant at first. I kind of came to it because I cracked it open and you were a conflict facilitator. And I was like, "oh, okay, well, I can vibe with that." [Priya laughing] But I was afraid that the rules would exclude me.

Prentis: *Mmhmm* And what you're talking about here is you're like, there's an intentionality. Sounds like that actually cultivates connection. That

there's a, there's a distinction there, between, I think you talk about etiquette and what is it? What's the term for kind of those?

Priya: Pop up roles.

Prentis: Yeah. I wonder if you can talk about just that space in between, *totally* like how you find that, that space.

Priya: I mean, this is like, this is such a beautiful question. Um, I, so The Art of Gathering, as a body of work is a it's like, it is, it is deeply modern -- And I mean, that sociologically. Like it is for modern societies where we are not praying in the same way or perhaps at all, or to the same God, in which we all come from different ways of being, ways of doing ways of dressing, *mmhmm* different languages, different codes. And you know, I often joked, I'm half Indian, you know, this about me. I'm half Indian, half white American. And my like my book at some level makes no sense to my Indian grandmother. [both laughing]

Priya: *yeah* Right? She's like, "why do you need a book to explain this?" *yeah yeah* [both laughing] *What is going on?* What is going on? And like, and in part, if I go, so if I put that hat on, I, um, I grew up every summer in part because I am my mother's only child. And, um, and, uh, she was and she married a white man and we lived in a lot of different countries and then eventually in the U.S. And she wanted to make sure, frankly, that I didn't have an identity crisis and she didn't know how to raise a mixed person. She, I remember her telling me years later, "I didn't know, like whether to ask you anything about your race or ethnicity or identity. If you felt brown, if you felt white in part, because I didn't want to put ideas into your head that you didn't have" like our conversation even around parenting and mixed race marriages and parenting children of color when you are white or when you are an immigrant has, has just evolved so much, anyway. So her parenting philosophy is I'm going to drop Priya off in New Delhi with my family for three months, every summer. *Well, yeah.) [Priya laughing] Right. Um, when you described like your growing up for three months, my life was going, running between like uncles and aunts houses and like spending hours and hours, like going between, laying on my stomach on with like elbows on the cement floor playing Carrom like dusty Carrom, which is like this Indian colonial British game where you like flick these Carrom. Um, I don't even know what the word is- Carrom discs, um, into holes.

Prentis: I love that you called it dusty, It was actually dusty?

Priya: It was actually dusty, like Dehli *ok* summers hot. It's like, literally it's like, duh, like covered in everything is just, it there's monsoon, there's winds. There's courtyards. So it's like, there's just, you're just in the elements. Um, this was in the eighties. So it was just, it was and gathering, like gathering. It was just almost like, "what are you talking about? Like, this is just life," [Priya laughing] right? You, "we moved from meal to meal, like things are just fluid." And, um, and they're what, what you described with your grandmothers and, and that, and when I described like my very specific deli, like homes, it's a monoculture *yeah yeah*, right? Where like, there is a way that you, no one is conscious that there's a way, but there's enough sort of like codes where you're not conscious of how you, you are. And part of what you experienced through busing, um, was a crashing into other codes and ways of being, but also in that context with very different levels of power, right?

Priya: So you weren't cross switching with just different norms. You are across switching in a racist, racialized *yep* context in which there was also Blackness and whiteness going on. Like there, there was a lot going on there and you were, you're co you, you had to code switch. And so anyway, to kind of this full thing around, which is The Art of Gathering is a book for people where the old ways and rituals of doing things are no longer serving its community. In part, because the community has changed in part because the community is chosen, right. We choose our friends more often. We choose the companies, the organizations that we go to, we choose the movements we want to join and leave. And so with all of this mixing, not just racially, like, you know, 50 years ago, the majority of people's friends were like their high school friends, because there was less movement. There was less motion. They were their cousins. Right. And that has that just, just socially, like statistically has changed. And so The Art of Gathering is really a modern book to help people create meaning across difference *that's right* so that you're not excluded or you don't assume there's a certain way. We actually, and it's it's work, but we have to create the ways so that we aren't only comfortable with our grandmothers.

Prentis: Yes. I so much is resonating for me too, because some years ago I taught, um, uh, somatics course in, well, it doesn't actually matter. I taught it outside of my kind of context, but it was a room full of just people from so many different places. And it occurred to me in that moment of teaching. I was like, "oh, somatics is only a thing, now. [Priya laughing] It only makes sense as a thing now, because we're all in this room." And my, my ancestors come from Africa and someone else's

ancestors come from Okinawa, Korea, or wherever into the room. And we are trying to figure out how are we going to build with one another. How are we going to practice with one another? How are we going to deepen our relationship? It makes sense in a world that has experienced colonization. It makes sense in a world where people are coming from so many different places, but it doesn't make sense. It wouldn't make sense to my grandmother to describe what somatics is. I'm like, you, you feel it, you do practices where you feel your body and it has some meaning. I think it's just like, that's culture, that's dance, that's music. *mm hm* That's how we move, you know, but now,

Priya: So, so, so if you were literally to explain that workshop to your grandmother, [Prentis laughing] okay, okay, let's do this. So if you were to explain that workshop to not your grandmother, like if you were to explain that workshop for who's it for what's the sentence you would use to describe it. And if you were to explain that workshop to your grandmother, what's the sentence you would use to describe it?

Prentis: For the folks that are coming to the space; I would say that the workshop space is, uh, I'm like, there is something that I said about, I mean, we talk about it as a space to kind of center the body and the healing of trauma and oppression. But I think underneath that, it's like we are generating practices that help us to connect with each other, help us to connect with our purpose, help us to develop awareness of what it is that we do kind of automatically. And those are the, that's what we're doing. We're practicing, engaging in different ways to activate us and reveal us to each other. That's if you were going to come I'd say something like that. To my grandmother, I would say, [laughing] it's so funny because she would not have any of this. Like, what would I say to her to have her even listen to me? *totally,* I think it's like, look, "we're all, we're all sitting in this room. People coming from different places, people have a different set of beliefs. People have, um, uh, just different ways of being in the world. And when we come up next to each other, we're colliding. We're like, we are, our worldviews are, are," I wouldn't say this at all to my grandmother. I don't know what I would say to my grandmother. I would say "we're trying to make it all mean something again."

Priya: If she was like, "no, just literally like, tell me what happens. Like, what are you doing in that room?"

Prentis: Oh gosh, that's the worst question. [both laughing] Um, so worst question. "we are consensually touching one another. We are, um,

feeling ourselves." None of it makes sense. Why are you asking me this question Priya?

Prentis: What's so interesting about both of us, each of us grappling *mmhmm* with like, I think in different ways, our, like we are each, and I don't know if you would agree with this, but we are each like pursuing similar threads in different ways in our work. *Yeah. Yeah. Yeah* And I think part of, part of the grappling of this is like one is there used to be ways of doing things, whether it's just very practical and literal, like the, like where women mostly used to, I'm going to say in India, like wash clothes, right. *mmhmm* It becomes a gathering place. You go it's, but it's functional. You go, you wash clothes, you put the water in the, you put your clothes in the, well, or you put your clothes in the river, you dry it, you chat, you talk, you gossip, you talk about, you perhaps put a little kitty together, which is like the word that they use to like rotate money to so each person each week could decide with like all of the stuff would happen in part, because they were coming together to literally wash laundry. And, and, and we could reverse engineer. Because like, 'we're coming together with our bodies, we're touching cloth. We're making meaning together.' *exactly exactly exactly* Like we're talking about purpose. We're figuring out who we belong to. Right. And, and I think part of what I think both each of our work is committed to is a lot of that communing was happening in incredibly unequal systems, right? *hmm hmm hmm* It's like, The reason all the women are at the, well, there's a reason they all have to borrow money from one another. They're in like deeply patriarchal contexts. And so part of, I think the work of modern equity builders is like, how do we keep, like, you don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water of the powerful practices that actually build belonging and meaning, but how do we do that while within more equal systems?

Prentis: Okay. So I kind of have a question here for you, which is when I think about some of the gatherings you describe in your book, or that you've talked about, there's like a, Hmm. I may not describe this well, but it's almost like a gathering suspend certain pressures externally. Like we can arrive at a gathering if the container is built well to deepen into certain spaces, because other aspects of who we are, what we have to do is kind of suspended. We're gathering with this intention in this space and it can be a more kind of democratizing or experience. And, um, the, the question that I'm in, you know, as an embodiment practitioner too, I'm like, we can, we, we can't really keep history at bay so much. How do we hold the way it shows up in the space, in our

embodiment, knowing that, okay, we gather with an intention, we relieve certain kinds of pressures, but power is still very alive in all the spaces that we create. *mmhmm* And the, and what I mean by power is alive. I guess what I want to say, it's a, it's alive in our stories and our histories, but it's also alive in the expectations our bodies have of each other *mmmm* and have of how we're going to be in the space with one another. And it's not really something you can, it's not really like, here's one answer to that question, but it's a, it's a inquiry that I have, around kind of the gift of intentional gathering space and the limitations too of our own embodied scripts that we play out with one another too. It's not a real question. Just curiosity.

Priya: Yeah. I, I, um, I think when I, when I, when I speak with, when I'm working with organizations or movements to help them figure out how they want to gather to embody the principles that they're fighting for, or frankly, when I'm talking with friends and helping them think through their weddings in ways that don't perpetuate the norms that they saw within the ancestors that they came from. *mmhmm* One of the most, like one of the most dangerous things that I, I hear and I immediately try to counter-correct, is like, "I don't want any power dynamics," *mmhmm* right. Or it's like, we just like, "let's just like take power out of this." And I'm like, "there's no such thing as taking power out of this no way." Right. "Power exists anytime two or more people come together," *come on.* And the role of the host is to temporarily equalize them. But if you pretend that that is then systemically equalizing them, *mmhmm* that is incredibly problematic. I think part of the opportunity that we have in any of these gatherings is to not say like, "oh, I just don't want this silly power stuff. Let's leave it outside." It's actually saying, "how do I temporarily equalize people? And how do I, how do I do this so that they feel safe being vulnerable?" Um, you know, the last thing I'll just say is, have you read Adam Kahane's Power and Love?

Prentis: Yeah. Cause you told me to.

Priya: [Priya laughing] So, um, I'm glad we are reading each other's [both laughing] deepest influences. So I found this it's, uh, it's for those, you know, for, for those who want to geek out, along with us, it's this like sleeve of a book. It's a, it's a geeky facilitator's book. Like it's literally called, uh, you know, I think it's called Power and Love. And, um, it really influences my work and it influences it because, so he takes this idea that was, that comes from a Christian theologian named Paul Tillich

and Paul Tillich, I think his book, he was a, uh, he wrote mostly in the 1950s. His book was.

Prentis: So hard to read.

Priya: It's so hard to read. It's, uh, *but great* Power, Love and Justice. And, um, and until it says this quote that then Dr. King also use, which is, he says, basically he defines, he says, "in every group, there are these two competing and dancing forces, which has power and love and power is the desire for the self to actualize," right? "Come hell or high water. Like this is what I want. This can be evil. This can be grand, but it's a neutral thing. And love is the desire for the separated to be whole, to be in union. And that in gatherings and groups, power without love is abusive, but love without power is anemic," right? *mmhmm* "It's without life it's without life force." And so, so much of gathering in terms of equalizing, it's creating enough safe structure, whatever means. And again, practically, does that mean you ask everybody a question at the beginning of an evening so that they all get to speak? Does that like, like if you're having a conference, who are you asking to speak? Why? How much time are you giving them? How much time are you letting the audience decide what the questions are like? What's a Q&A? A Q&A is a release of power into the room to decide that someone else may actually determine the conversation. Right? These are, this is all power.

Prentis: Okay, wait Priya! [laughing] Hold on, hold on for a second. First of all, that Q&A definition - Wow, I'm going to be with that for a minute. But there's something I want to just say about you for a second. Maybe there's something here too, about what it means to facilitate in these spaces or maybe host gatherings. But a couple times that I've talked to you, there's a way that you're just very clear about where power lives and there's, I guess it's a question of like, you don't feel when I interact with you afraid of your power. And I don't know if that is as a facilitator or what, but I'm like, can you peel that back a little bit? Cause you're like, it's just power and it's a choice. And so, and I think that that's actually, what is terrifying for a lot of people is uncovering those places where we do have those choices, or we do have those pockets of power that are hidden away. And there's, I think there's, there's a way that you talk about it, even in the book where you're like, "these are choices, these are the choices that we make" and you reveal them, but I'm like, there's something that comes just before. How do you do that?

Priya: Well, so I would say there's two, I hear two different parts of your question. The first is like, "how do I as an individual? How am, how am I

in relationship to power, my own?" And then there's a second element, which is "as a facilitator, how am I not either afraid of, or how do I read or how do I see and understand systemic power, power in a group? Like, what is my relationship to that?" And, and, and they're connected. Like, so first of all, as an individual, and I'll just be like super practical, um, it's a, it's a journey. *yeah yeah* And like, there's, there's like different, there's different sources of power. And I try, and this is over like decades. I try to consciously build those forms of power. And when I feel a block, I explore it.

Priya: And so like very practically when I was in college, one of the most incredible women I'd ever met, who was like two years older than me, basically a peer I'd never met anyone like her. She just, she just like, she just owned every room that she was in. She, um, she actually is a Black woman. She white father, Black mother. Um, and she, like, I'd never met such a brilliant mind before. Like I would like go to New York city to visit and like, like, wonder if I can go to the big H&M [Prentis laughing] and she'd be like, calculating, like, like sanitation, like patterns and like looking at systemic ways that like public vehicles navigate the city. And I'm like, "where did you, where do you come from? Like, like what, how, how?" And I asked her one day, I said, where do you get your power from? And she looked at me and she said, "I work out." [both laughing]

Priya: I literally, I was like, dumbfounded. I didn't know what to say. And I was like, "no, no, no, no, I'm not talking about that. I'm not talking about that. Like, like, that's fine, that's fine. That's fine. Where do you?" And she's like, "no, literally, like, I work out my core power originates in my body." I try to keep coming back to like, what is my source work? Like, meaning for me, what is it that I'm pursuing? And, and so I was like, I am pursuing mastery in my craft as a facilitator that I don't think I can achieve in a lifetime. And so there's an integrity to it's like, I want to use that power and, that craft in order to really shift systems, in order to help democratize people, to be able to make meaning with each other. Like, it's not self-serving, but it is, um, sustaining.

Prentis: I want to talk about just for a second about how we met, cause I think it's a funny story. And so I just want to say it, [Priya laughing] and I think there's something in there for me around just who I perceive you to be. So, um, do you remember how we met *mmhmm* it wasn't that long ago? Can you start the story and then I will pick it up? *yes* Do you remember what happened first?

Priya: I do. So I, um, I was, I was facilitating, um, some movement work and we were in a really complicated moment as facilitators and holders of that work and really trying to figure out, like, what was the next step with that group? And, um, a fellow facilitator of mine texted me, uh, an episode of your podcast. It was with adrienne maree brown, and she texted the, basically like the facilitators and the leaders of that small group. She texted us the episode and she said, "here are our answers." [both laughing] And, um, and, and, and basically it was like, everyone just knew, like we needed to listen to that before our next call. And I, I put my earpods in and I was, well, I, I was walking home from dropping my kids off and I walked like seven steps, and then I stopped and I take out my notes file. And I started like trying to, and I like hit, hit, like go back 30 seconds and like, write down, you know, manically what you were saying. And then I, then I went down the, um, Finding Our Way rabbit hole, and I listened to the whole, the whole series season. So season one, and then I, I think I DM'd you,

Prentis: You DM'd me, you DM'd partway through, and you said, um, "I'm listening to your podcast." And you just, you gave a very thoughtful and precise review, of the podcast up until that point, what it was like stirring in you. And you said, "I would like to have tea when I'm done listening to the, to the podcast." And I was like one, you know, we had never met, but I read it. And I was like, "wow, there's a, there's a precision." I don't know if anybody's ever called you precise. I'm sure they have, but there was a precision inside of your message that I felt like you had actually really listened and understood. It's, it's the thing that I think you do again, in this book where you see around the thing, you see the intention of the thing in a *mm* way that I think not everybody can, and I felt like, oh, this person sees the intention of what I'm trying to do and how I'm trying to do it. And it really touched me.

Priya: Do you remember what I said?

Prentis: You said that, yeah, I remember the gist of it, which was like, "it's centered around your relationships. It feels very much like relationships are at the center. And you're like bringing messages through connection" basically is how I understood it.

Priya: And that it was a generative. It was a generous offer that you are letting us the rest of the world, *yeah that is what you said* listen in, on these conversations that are epic and that you are choosing to share them.

Prentis: That is what you said. That's exactly what you said. And I was so touched because, you know, I think we're all wanting to be, when we come

together with each other, it's like, I want to be witnessed. I want to be seen as I am. And you offer that. And I was like, "wow. Wow." And you were like, "and I want to have tea." And I was like, "wow. Okay. Priya Parker was invited me to tea, not now, but when she is done with the podcast,"

Priya: I, I think, I think I, to be fair, I think I may have said something like, "and if you would, and I would love to have tea with you, and if you don't have some time, I totally get it." [laughing]

Prentis: Okay. First of all, the fact that you remember verbatim is amazing. I think reinforces the precision assessment that I have of you. Yes. You did say that. And you know, I, I went to my partner and I was like, "Priya Parker has invited me to tea because she enjoys the podcast." Great. So I said, yes. And we scheduled, uh, a tea date for some point in the future. And let me tell y'all the day leading up to this. I'm like, "alright, I'm having tea with Priya Parker. Like what kind of tea am I drinking?" You know what I mean? *oh my goodness* Like I got down the tea set that my, that my partner's aunt had made in her ceramics class. And I like cleaned it out. And I figured I was like, I want this kind of loose leaf tea. This is serious business because Priya Parker wrote the Art of Gathering and we get on the zoom for tea. Can I say this? [laughing] *Sure!* And you are just coming out of your, your, your workout class, you're in your like workout clothes. And it's like, you kind of jumped into the frame. You're like, "Hey!" [laughing] And I was like, oh wow. I'm sitting here with a full on T set in my, like, Sunday's best. [both laughing] Talking to Priya Parker and I'm like trying to move the tea set *I had a cup of tea!!* You did. I was like, do you have tea? And you were like, "oh yeah, I've got tea." But it was so amazing. Um, that meeting, I was just like, "okay and Priya's a person and not a gathering, you know, master all the time."

Priya: Priya as a sweaty, like working out, hopping between zoom and zoom, like ran to put on the kettle. And I, and I, and I think I, I love this so much. And when you told me this, I was like cracking up because I remember you were like, the light was beautiful *oh yeah, oh Priya* where you were sitting. And I was like, "wow. Wow."

Prentis: I you found the light Priya.

Priya: You found the light. And, but, and, and I think like the deeper, lik I mean, if, you know, my friends, my husband would be like laughing so hard cause it's so me, which is like, when I say tea first, it's like tea is like a social contract, like in a sense, like literally bring tea because we can't be together. And so I wanted to like, have a kind of conversation that

would happen over tea and like, in a way, and this isn't a good thing about me, but it's like, I almost don't see the stuff of gatherings cause like the language and the dialogue is so loud. I can almost, I it's almost like I can't see other things like if any. *mmhmm* And so, and to me, the converse, like I wanted to emotionally have tea with you. [laughing] *yeah i know, i know, I learned*

Priya: I want, you know, I want it to like dialogue tea with you. And, and it was like, and to me, our first meeting, it felt like my memory of it was like, literally like sitting in the sunlight and like having the kind of conversation that friends would have on a porch over tea. *Exactly.* And, and I think that's when the art of gathering, like this is deeply accessible. It's deeply democratic, like even pop-up rules. It's like, it's so it's for the people like you and me who didn't grow up with the codes of the fancy places *yeah* like it's so that we can actually it's. So it's so that we can actually crack open democratic spaces and like, understand that you can bring a mug of something and I can bring a mug of something and we're calling it tea so that we're not confused of like, what kind of drink to have, but if you bring green tea and I bring black tea and like, it's, it's all good, but there's a focus *yeah that's right* and it's a it's enough structure so that we could find it.

Prentis: That's right. Mmm. Priya, thank you so much. I feel like you, um, we talked about it earlier, but I think we're really in this moment, you know, when there's so much up in the air so much that is being, uh, taken apart, rightfully. Things that are being built rightfully. And you are one of these people that I see that is also attentive to, "okay, what are we going to infuse this new, whatever it is that we build, what are we going to infuse it with? What will it mean? And let's take the time now to consider that with the kind of intention that it requires." And I, I feel kindred to you in that and just grateful for the questions you ask, how you ask them, how you see. I mean, it's, it's, I hope people got to feel some of that. It's one of the things I maybe haven't said to you, but I just really appreciate the clarity and depth of, of how you see and what I think it offers for our increased intentionality and how we come together. So thank you for your time today. Thank you for being one of my newest friends. I'm grateful for you.

Priya: We made friends in the pandemic. *we did* They say it's not possible. *We did that*. [laughing] *I know* Well, thank you. Thank you for having me. Thank you for saying yes to that tea. And, and what I said in that podcast is like, it's really powerful. Like, you know, I, like so much in our culture is about like scale and rushing and just like the next big thing.

And it's like, no, no, no, no. Like pause, like, what are we building here? And what I feel in your podcast. And you're continually doing that is like this it's, you used the word precise before, like this is a precise piece of work. *thank you* This has a way, this has a point of view. This is like deeply thought. It's, it's, it's like a deeply, it's a, it's a sacred thing to you to, to choose to use your relationships, trusted relationships and friendships who happen to be at this epicenter of the conversations about how to rebuild this world and get them off script, and let them choose to get off script and then let anyone listen into it. And like, I felt that because it's, it's throughout the current of all of your conversations. And so you're also modeling for us, like this is good work and it's deeply good work, and it's deeply good work because to me it's so deeply intentional and careful. And then within that context, you can be bold and make judgements and do things that are scaring yourself a little. So you're growing. *yeah yeah* And like it gives all of us to do, to like, it gives us permission to then do our version of that in our way. So thank you.

Prentis: Mm Hmm. Thank you.

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