

Layla: Artist, author, activist, and transformational leader Sonya Renee Taylor is a national and international award winning writer and performer, best-selling author of two books, *The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love* and *Celebrate Your Body (and Its Changes, Too!)*. She is also the founder and radical executive officer of the Body Is Not An Apology, an international digital media and education company committed to radical self-love as the foundational tool of social justice, which content reaches over 1 million people monthly. She has shared her work and activism across the United States, New Zealand, Australia, UK, Scotland, Sweden, Germany, Canada, Brazil and the Netherlands.

Sonya has been seen, heard and read on HBO, BET, MTV, TV1, NPR, PBS, CNN, Oxygen Network, The New York Times, New York Magazine, MSNBC.com, Today.com, Huffington Post, Vogue Australia, Shape.com, Ms. Magazine and many, many more. She has shared stages with such luminaries as the late Amiri Baraka, Angela Davis, Sonia Sanchez and others. In 2016, Sonya was a guest of the Obama White House where she spoke about the body is not an apology's work at the intersection of LGBTQIAA+ issues and disability justice. Sonya currently resides in New Zealand where she is an inaugural fellow in the Edmund Hillary Fellowship for global impact change makers.

Okay, welcome back everybody to Good Ancestor podcast, my name is Layla Saad, I'm your host and I am here with Sonya Renee Taylor, the author of this beautiful book, *The Body Is Not an Apology*, welcome to Good Ancestor podcast Sonya.

Sonya: Thank you so much for having me, Layla, I'm super excited to be here.

Layla: I am super excited to have you. We are like fangirling a little bit over each other just before we begin.

Sonya: I love it. I love mutual affection. It makes me happy.

Layla: Yes. So, you're in New Zealand and-

Sonya: I am.

Layla: -you divide your time between New Zealand and the United States. Well, are you more in New Zealand?

Sonya: I'm in New Zealand, yeah. I mean I will go back to the States for work a lot but nobody is flying anywhere a lot right now.

Layla: No, they are not. And that what I was gonna say is that I was supposed to be visiting New Zealand this year and I hadn't shared with you yet, so I was like she is the other person I know in New Zealand because it wasn't yet public knowledge and then Corona happened and the event for which I was flying over was canceled.

Sonya: Boo! What was the event?

Layla: It was the, what is it called, the Christchurch...

Sonya: Oh, the Christchurch Word Festival.

Layla: Yes.

Sonya: I did that two years ago. It's an awesome festival.

Layla: I was very excited to be invited.

Sonya: Corona steals all the fun.

Layla: It is and we will talk about that in this conversation. So let's get started with our first question, who are some of the ancestors living or transitioned, familial or societal who have influenced you on your journey?

Sonya: Oh, my goodness. So many, so many, so many, I've been in deep, deep communion with my ancestors in the last three months and so I feel like I have like all of them are here so I'm gonna name as many as I can think. First and foremost, my mother Terry Lyn Johnson and my grandmother Kathryn Anne Taylor and my maternal grandmother and grandfather, my great grandmother, Josie B. Taylor, my aunt Mildred, my aunt Mannie and just a flank all around me by beautiful, brilliant, black women ancestors who have gotten me thus far. And then, you know, I wanna name and honor ancestress, Lorraine Hansberry who's birthday is today.

Layla: Yes.

Sonya: And then Audre Lorde whose work continues to unveil me to myself and mother Lucille Clifton, whose work continues to remind me to celebrate

my survival.

Layla: Yes. Yeah. Oh, beautiful. I love that you brought up Audre Lorde. I always love when Audre Lorde is brought up, but in particular when I was pulling out making sure I had your book here I also wanted to make sure that I had this book here next to me *The Cancer Journals* by Audre Lorde because so much of your work reminds me of this book.

Sonya: Wow. And I have not read that book.

Layla: It's so good and it's, you know, a woman really wrestling with some of the ideas that you're talking about in real time, you know, in real time as she is moving through breast cancer and the removal of her—having to have a mastectomy, the removal of her breast and then the inquiring around what is it to be a woman and what is my body and other people's expectations that I should have, that I should want to have a prosthetic breast or I should want to look normal like everyone else looks is that what I want. All of those kind of questions and so you know, I hear ringing in that my body is not an apology, you know, Audre's my body is not an apology, so I wanted to make sure I had both of them with me.

Sonya: Oh, what a deep thing.

Layla: Yeah, I highly recommend it.

Sonya: It's all...it gives...it's done.

Layla: It's actually, it's about the same thickness as your book.

Sonya: Oh, wow.

Layla: Yeah. Yeah.

Sonya: Okay. Wow.

Layla: So they are like handy little companions.

Sonya: I get to be a companion with Audre Lorde.

Layla: Yes.

Sonya: **[Inaudible] [07:26]**

Layla: So the subtitle of your book, subtitle is *The Body Is Not An Apology*., subtitle is *The Power of Radical Self Love*, I want to know before we even begin this conversation into your work, what are actually some of the misconceptions about what your work is about?

Sonya: Oh, yey, I love that question because there are so many, you know, I think the number one is the people will assume it's about body positivity.

Layla: Yeah.

Sonya: But that's like some umbrella that gives lump under which I don't think is the issue is that we have just made body positivity this benign flat apolitical white washed word that's about whether or not, you know, middle aged white women like their gene size and radical self-love is as far as I'm concerned first and foremost a political framework. It is a social justice framework and so I invite people when they think about this idea of radical self-love to see their relationship with themselves as a personal relationship and as a deeply political relationship. And so our transformation is a political necessity. Audre Lorde says self-care is not an active self-indulgence but an active political warfare. And so, yeah, I think that there is a way in which people wanna make it soft and you know, consumable and mass media friendly by, you know, by making it collapsing it with self-acceptance or collapsing it with self-confidence or self-esteem where body positivity and these other words that sort of [Inaudible] [09:05] the work that I'm talking about.

Layla: And I found that really fascinating when you describe that my work isn't about self-esteem. It isn't about self-confidence and it isn't about self-acceptance not because there is something wrong with those things, but because they are not— they are fleeting first of all, right? They come and go.

Sonya: Wherever we can go.

Layla: Right. And there are people who you described, you know, the current occupant of the white house as somebody who is very self-confident. He is extremely self- confident.

Sonya: You think much the whole degree.

Layla: Right. Is that what we are trying to aim for instead of something deeper that cannot only heal as individuals but also heal as societally, collectively, globally?

Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: And I think that's really, really important because these words, self-love, right? Can be—have been manufactured now this time in a different way than their roots and do feel very fluffy and do feel very, oh, just love yourself, you know, just love yourself.

Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: Right. And even the word radical is often used a lot in marketing speak and in the softer spaces is divorced from its political roots as well.

Sonya: Right. Right.

Layla: So when you are being invited into spaces to have

conversations about your work and people are coming at it from the perspective of the misunderstanding of what it is, what is some of the pushback that you sometimes get?

Sonya: I mean it's interesting. I think about it more and more and I was like I think I intimidate people so I don't get a lot of pushback.

Layla: You are like it is what it is.

Sonya: It is what it is. I do think that people believe far more uncomfortable than they expected to be made, you know, and so they think I'm gonna come and make them feel real good and what I do is I come and say where are we complicit and how other people are able to bring about radical self with the love in their lives because of our privilege because of our unwillingness to look at our positionality and power in the world. What bodies have you forgotten and how has that harmed us?

Layla: Yeah.

Sonya: In what ways you got into the system in such a way that it is a detriment to you and a detriment to people of color, to disabled bodies, to fat bodies and so I think that people both see what I hope at the end of the day is that they see a way out of this matrix of oppression both for themselves, but they can also see a way to get out of the way of others.

Layla: Yeah. Yeah. So, you are alluding a little bit towards, you know, what your work is really about. So, what is, we've said what isn't radical self-love, right? What is it? How do you define it?

Sonya: Yeah. So, you know, I used the work radical to operationalize love, to make it specific and not this sort of fluffy thing and so the definition of radical speaks to being inherent in a thing, something that exist currently in a thing and I deeply believe that we arrived on this planet as love, our original relationship to our own bodies and to the bodies of others was love. You've never seen a toddler who is like I just really hate my thighs.

Layla: Right.

Sonya: It's not ever happened, right? We come here enamored with our beings and with the beings of others. And so therefore our inherit state. That's how we arrive here. The radical speaks to the origin of a thing and again it also is like it's the origin of our relationships to our mental, emotional and physical bodies and there is a disconnection that happens between that but it is our origin. It also speaks to needing, proposing drastic or extreme or thorough going change and I'm proposing absolutely a kind of love that is thorough

going and drastic and I believe that's what we need to counter the systems and structures that exist in the world today. Proposing drastic political, economic and social change and I think that's one of the ones that people often miss is like I'm not talking about a love that is just like bubble baths and kisses and nice facemasks. I'm talking about a love that changes systems and that love is active. It's a verb. It does things. It is not inert. And then lastly the founda—it serves as a foundation of a thing and I deeply believe that we have tried building our world on lots of things. We built it on capitalism. We built it on monarchies. We built it on a lot of different things and we see the results of that. We are living in the result of that. And I believe that a world built on love, on the foundation of love is the one that's gonna get us to justice and equity ultimately.

Layla: Wow.

Sonya: So, that's the love I'm talking about.

Layla: Right. Yes. And that is not how we

normally hear love defined. Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: And I thank you for breaking that down because I think that encompasses both like you said the individual and the collective but I love that it is also that when that love is pouring out of us, it moves us into action. It cannot.

Sonya: Exactly. It cannot. It is a vibrant living thing.

Layla: Yes.

Sonya: It has to move. It is literally an energy, I mean I think about it, parents know this like you don't just love your children and that's just like, oh, look I love this baby, I've never picked up or fed or wiped their butt, right? The love is what actually makes you do the things you don't feel like doing when you don't feel like doing.

Layla: That's right.

Sonya: You know, like that's what is the care of the action is and so if people are loving you in a way that don't have no action in it, it ain't love.

Layla: No. Maybe self-acceptance, right? The other things that we have said they may accept you but there is love.

Sonya: But there is love.

Layla: And then the other part of your work is that this foundation of love is through the body.

Sonya: Yeah. Yeah.

Layla: Talk to us about that.

Sonya: I used the body because, so, I think it's really

important and this is really important based on where I am right now in my own life that I have always since *The Body Is Not An Apology* started, seen the body as a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual entity. So I'm never just talking about our physical bodies. I think that's what—if we were talking about misconceptions that would be another one is that I'm only talking about the corporal body.

Layla: Which explains how it would be lumped into body positivity because that is just about that.

Sonya: It's just about the body, right?

Layla: Yeah.

Sonya: And just about some very specific

things about bodies, right? Layla: Yes. Yup.

Sonya: And for me if we are gonna be whole beings then we are not just our bodies and that there is actually an opportunity to, we are always experiencing our body through our emotions and through our spiritual self if we allow ourselves to be and so that relationship, that fractured relationship isn't a fractured relationship with your body, that's a fractured relationship with our emotions and our spiritual relationship to our body. So we got to be talking about that too. And so but also I think the physical body is useful to talk about because it is the great equalizer. You gotta be in one, you know-

Layla: To be here.

Sonya: -a lot of people, we can do this right. To do this right people have to do it in this flesh, right?

Layla: Uh-huh.

Sonya: So, I think there is a way in which it gives us an opportunity to reflect on the thing that everybody has to experience. There are people who are very disconnected from their emotions. There are people who are very disconnected from their spiritual selves if they even believe in such a thing, but you can't, you could try to be disconnected from your body. Your body will usually revolt. It will tell you, hey, you've been ignoring me and so I use that particular framework because it is one that allows everybody to find a way into the conversation.

Layla: Mmm I love that you say that, so it's the framework to get into the conversation but then it takes as layers and layers deeper.

Sonya: So much deeper.

Layla: But even, but even that first layer is deep, the physical body and how the media and how these industries around us, these oppressive industries have given us messages about our bodies and what we are supposed to believe about our bodies and how they are supposed to look, how they are supposed to function, how they are supposed to age. That is so many layers within that.

Sonya: Yes.

Layla: Yeah.

Sonya: Yes. Yes. You know, I tried, I really think there is like the shortcut that I think about when I think about that because there are so many layers but the sort of catch all of it all is that we live in a world that tells us that there is a hierarchy of bodies that there are some body that is better than other bodies, right? And that we see that and understand that through the lens of gender and sex and race and disability and size and age and mental health status and they are all of these things, all these markers that determine whether or not your body is a better body and as soon as we actually just acknowledge that there is no such thing as a better body like I mean it's a simple notion that is also incredibly difficult.

Layla: Right.

Sonya: Right. Right. But it really is a simple notion to try on. There is no way that my body is a bad body

Layla: Right.

Sonya: As long as I'm here in a body that's actually allowing me to feel be doing this ride and called a life then it's alright. It is a good body. And that is such a difficult I mean that's the fastest way to I think to unplug from the whole matrix is like what am I thinking about my body right now that has me plugged in to a hierarchy of bodies?

Layla: I've never heard it described that way, the hierarchy of bodies and that is so powerful because like you said we can't deny the body, we all have them. They looked different but we all have one and it is this hierarchy, you know, in my work I specifically look at whiteness and white supremacy and how white bodies are viewed as different black and brown bodies but there also all these other intersections of identities in ways that we experience the world and it really changes how we see ourselves because of what the world tells us we are supposed to see and also then how other people treat us and experience us and how we are experienced in the world. Disconnecting from the matrix is saying I reject the notion that there is a right way to be a body.

Sonya: Yes.

Layla: Yeah.

Sonya: Exactly. Exactly. And there are ways that we do this, you know, like I mean black people do this to survive. We reject the notion that the white body is the right way to be in the body, right? Like we do that on a regular basis. There are— communities do that all the time. It's when we start looking at the smaller, more nuance, more very individually targeted messages that we actually buy those, you know, those are the ones we were like...

Layla: Give me some examples.

Sonya: Absolutely. So that's the one, you know, those are the ones that are like, you know, hairy legs is a wrong way to be in a body. And there's like then you're buying Nair or whatever else it is and never interrogating the idea that that message like why? Who says so and why? Right? And then once we start thinking about that we are like, oh, right, because people make a lot of money offering this product, convinced us that we should be buying, so-

Layla: It's so, yeah.

Sonya: -we keep pulling it down, you know, you keep stealing it down until you are like, oh, yeah, that too. That's also another way in which I'm told that there is a body that is better than mine. And all of it is part of a system to keep us disconnected from ourselves.

Layla: It's so interesting that you bring that body hair because I was having a conversation with my 10-year-old who I should have also said you are the author of another book that I had bought that was for her and I bought it a couple of years ago and it helped us to have conversations about periods because I was like I don't know to have this conversation with her and that was the way that we had that conversation so thank you for that book because you empowered me as a mother to have a conversation about her changing body and the things that are coming in a way that didn't feel frightening or like I'm gonna say the wrong thing or you know, yeah, thank you so much for that.

Sonya: Absolutely. Thank you. I'm always really—I love when mothers and daughters share that book together.

Layla: Yeah. It's so, so good. It's so good. So, we were having a conversation yesterday about body hair because myself and my husband, we are East African and Middle Eastern but because of colonization of race to Africa, some of us have more Arab in our genes and some of us have more African in our genes and that shows how our bodies work so my husband's family has more Arab in his genes which means they have more body hair and I don't. And my children have taken after him and so she was saying to me, oh, I don't like, you know, the hair on my arms like I'm gonna

shave it when I'm older. And I was like this is so weird. Where is she getting this from? This is wrong. And I was trying to have a conversation with her but without saying no it's wrong to believe that or you know, sort of shaming her for that choice or that thought, but really trying to inquire into mmm so why do you think that body hair isn't an issue, you know, but it has really brought home to me how young those messages start and they are coming from someone because it didn't come from me and they didn't come from my husband, so it's coming from somewhere and that the air that we are breathing all the time.

Sonya: Yeah. I mean it's everywhere. The messages are pervasive and you know, if you exist in a world with any kind of media, you know, all she needs to do is watch, you know, 40 hours of television over her life that never have women with body hair.

Layla: Right. Right.

Sonya: That's it.

Layla: That's it.

Sonya: All she needs to do is see all cartoons with, you know, where girls don't have hair except on her hands and then it becomes abnormal, right?

Layla: Right.

Sonya: So, you know, the messaging is also in the absence, right? That which we don't see must not be worthy of being seen. And so then we make a story about that. Oh, that must be because I'm normal.

Layla: Right. Right. Right.

Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: Oh, wow.

Sonya: So these are—we all start getting these messages, very, very, very young.

Layla: Very young, yeah. So, tell me about your journey and what are the messages that you got that you feel led you into the work that you are doing?

Sonya: Yeah. I feel like you know, my work has been a hodge podge of things. My background before I started writing *The Body Is Not An Apology* and started writing books, I was a performance poet for 10 years, so I traveled around the world doing poem.

Layla: And you're amazing. I had to say this like I didn't realize you were a performance poet until I Googled and was checking out some stuff and I was like, what? She's amazing like amazing.

Sonya: Thank you so much. So, yeah, poetry was my career and then before that I did a lot of nonprofit work around HIV prevention and sexuality and mental health and before that I was a struggling young person putting myself to college and

navigating addiction and disability and my family and so I think that my life experiences were kind of cobbling together this current iteration of my existence where it's like what's the intersection of mental health and sexuality and disability and blackness and fatness and like oh I guess that's the body is not apology.

Layla: Yeah.

Sonya: Yeah. It is also very serendipitous.

Layla: What's the inner healing work that you have had to do in order to build and sustain and share this body of work because so much of it because I haven't think about the work that I do with *Me and White Supremacy* and I know that I am able to do the work that I do in the way that I do it because of the inner work that I do because without the inner work I'm moving from a space of woundedness, anger, grief and not that those emotions are wrong but they are not sustainable for me to do this work that for me is love work. This is love work.

Sonya: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Layla: Yeah.

Sonya: I think so I mean so much of *The Body Is Not An Apology* has been about building the plane as I'm flying it, right?

Layla: Yes.

Sonya: Yeah. So it's definitely it started because it was a need for me and I said this to a friend the other day that like we were talking about writing and they were asking about what is, you know, like when I'm sitting down to write who am I writing for? And my instinct was always like that the first place, first person I'm writing for is me. But I'm writing for me with the understanding that I couldn't possibly be the only person out of 8 billion people who is having this experience.

Layla: That's right.

Sonya: So it's through my journey of my own healing that I actually have something for anyone else. And the only place that that question actually gives rise to is when we actually believe that there is an other, right? Because if there is no other then writing for me is writing for you.

Layla: That's right.

Sonya: It is essential and so when *The Body Is Not An Apology* came around, I was in a conversation with a friend who was afraid that she might be pregnant unexpectedly and I had asked, I'm nosy, so I would ask her about her safer sex practices and I asked her why she didn't use a condom with this casual partner who I knew was a casual partner. My friend had cerebral palsy and my friend said that her disability made it difficult for her to be sexual so

she didn't feel entitled
to ask this person to use a condom. And I said to
her, instinctually that you are not even instinctually,
super naturally as what I believe today, I said your
body is not an apology. It's not something you offer
to someone to say sorry for my disability and when
I said that it was immediate that I was like that's not
just for her like it was immediate that I was like
where to have you offered yourself as an apology,
Sonya? Where are you still offering yourself as an
apology? And that gave way to a poem and you
know, I believe that poems are spells so...

Layla: I do too. Yes.

Sonya: So as I'm on the stage saying the spell again and
again and again every night, the spell is asking
me, where? Where you in alignment with this and
where you not? And so you know, one of the tiny
ways I wasn't in alignment was that I had like this
selfie in my phone where I felt fabulous. I was
getting dressed for a gig and I
had this little black corset and I was giving it to the
people as I like to say and I was listening to what
we call the outside voice inside us. The voice that
tells you that you are not as beautiful as you think
you are. You are not as good as you think you are.
Do not hear this photo in your fat, black body. It is
not okay. And so it kept me hiding this picture even
though I felt incredibly beautiful to my body.

Layla: Say that again, the outside voice that's within.

Sonya: The outside voice inside of us.

Layla: Yes.

Sonya: The outside voice inside of us. So any of these voices that self-deprecating, you are not good enough. You're gonna fail, you know, I can't believe you look like this. You need to change this. That voice is not your voice. So, if we go back to the idea that radical self-love is inherent...

Layla: Right. It is who we are in our foundation. Right.

Sonya: And that couldn't be us talking to us. So that's not how love will talk to us. Layla: That's right.

Sonya: But we can certainly identify in the world what would talk to us that way, right? Layla: Mm-hmm.

Sonya: We can hear, we can see the commercial, we can listen to, you know, our mother who was really cruel with herself and then cruel in the way that she talked about our bodies, right?

Layla: Yeah.

Sonya: We can hear where the inheritance of that voice came from and then once we distinguish it is not our own, we actually have some efficacy on whether or not we have to listen to it.

Layla: Right.

Sonya: We have a choice. We have a choice then. So that voice, that outside voice was telling me don't you share that picture and one night I defied the voice and I defied the voice because I saw like a plus size model, she was in a curvy black corset looking fabulous minding her business and making money in her big thighs and her choice to be unapologetic gave me permission just virtually somewhere else in the world minding her business. She didn't know me from Adam, Eve, but her choice to live unapologetically in her being gave me permission to do the same and in that moment, I decided to post that picture and then I invited other people to post pictures too where they felt powerful and beautiful in their bodies and that's how I got started. But all of that was because I was being called to move out of my own way of apology and along with it, I was like I'm sure I can't be the only one so let me invite some other people on this journey.

Layla: Wow, that is so powerful. I love the kind of idea of the spell passing you each time that you are saying this poem, right? It was putting it out and it's coming right back to you saying okay.

Sonya: Live like that.

Layla: Live it then, embody it then, right?

Sonya: Yes.

Layla: So that's powerful but also that someone out in the world because we never know how the ways in which we are courageously showing up as ourselves in our lives as giving other people permission for them to do the same thing.

Sonya: We really don't know. Here's the thing that gets wild right now, if ever there were a time to be highly aware to the fact that life is contagious, you are in that body right now. We are in that moment that who we are and how we move through the world impacts one another that we are constantly spreading something and the question becomes what is it that we desire to spread.

Layla: And that ties so beautifully into how I view when I talk about being a good ancestor because I really talked about—you're gonna be an ancestor anyway.

Sonya: Regardless.

Layla: Right? Regardless. And the way that you lived your life, the choices that you've made in the world are going to also impact people regardless, so you can consciously choose to shape what that influences going to be or you can just leave it a chance and

see what happens. But either way it's gonna have an impact.

Sonya: Exactly. You can't tell that I was looking so great. You might wanna...

Layla: Exactly. Right. So when you are saying about the outside voice that we ever speak from within, you know, I'm thinking about one of the things that on my own personal journey that was a huge like one of my core wounds that I healed is around my relationship with my mother and the mother wound and the black mother wound and all of that, right? But I think with real healing came for me was when I understood that it wasn't even just about her and I, it was about the way that I had seen her when I was a child showing up was actually influenced by these other things. Was influenced by the fact that she was an immigrant, the fact that she was a woman, patriarchy, racism, you know, all these systems actually were in our relationship influencing her, influencing me and influencing our relationship with each other and it gives me permission to give her permission to be who she was and for me to be who I am and so I had a sense of radical acceptance in that regards, but I'm thinking about when you were saying about the outside voice that it's not just about, oh, that's just because of how I grew up and my mother was a particular way or my father was a particular way or the

teacher I had, all those things are influenced by these outside forces of systems, right?

Sonya: Exactly.

Layla: And you talk about body terrorism.

Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: Which is a radical term in itself. So talk to us a little about that because I just know for me having that wider understanding allowed me to relax a lot.

Sonya: Yes. Well, because it stops being, you know, some either individual failing or some failing of your father supporting on your mother's part or you know, all these things were like we are just individuals and we are to blame for whatever the outcome is.

Layla: Yes.

Sonya: And when we bring in the lens of the larger systems that are at play that live in us then we can start to see how we are being influenced, manipulated, you know, and sort of constantly under attack in the ways in which we are in relationship with our own beings and with the beings of others. So body terrorism is the way that we talk about the historical and present day systems of violence and oppression that are enacted against bodies that we consider non-normative or bodies that are not the default body.

Layla: Right.

Sonya: And when I talk about the default body, you know...

Layla: We are talking about dominant culture, we are

talking about supremacy. Right.

Sonya: Exactly like who is it in your particular society realm or culture that we assumed when we say people that we assumed not body.

Layla: That's who we refer to. Right.

Sonya: And like is that body white? Is that body able body? Is that body thin? Is that body young? Is that, you know, like that's the default body and so the systems of patriarchy, the systems of white supremacy, the systems of ableism, of homophobia and transphobia, those systems are not just conceptual. Those systems mean to do damage to bodies that do not conform or do not act to the will of the dominant paradigm like...

Layla: And that's okay, they mean to do damage. It's not a default that accidentally harms, right?

Sonya: No.

Layla: The aim of it...

Sonya: It is harm. The aim of it is control or harm so either you are under my control or you are exempted and that is I mean we see that with police violence, right? It's like the assumption that black body is a dangerous body and the assumption that the black body is a disposable body. So of course the first thing we do is kill it. Not inquire about the situation. Not give you the benefit of the doubt and the way that we give other bodies the benefit of the doubt, right? So that system in the fruits of those systems of oppression are what we call body terrorism and we call it body terrorism because it is a terroristic society. It is a terroristic society to be driving in your car and be afraid that a routine traffic stop will end in your death. It's a terroristic society to be cast out of your family and then on to the street where you will be met with epic sexual and physical violence and then murdered at a young age because you are a transwoman of color. It is a system of violence to be consistently misdiagnosed by medical professionals because of your weight. It is a terroristic way to live in a body and that terror is not accidental. It is for the purpose of political and economic gain.

Layla: Yeah.

Sonya: And so we have used the word terrorism, you know, as a way to malign and harm Muslim and Arab bodies and you feel like it's important to take back that term and direct it, direct the lighting onto the systems on our own societies that are actually enacting terrorism on our bodies every day.

Layla: And that have for generations and generations.

Sonya: Perpetually. Perpetually.

Layla: Yeah. Yeah. Wow. I'm really thinking about sort of as we are breaking down these—because I'm sort of seeing myself as this one individual and there's all these systems, right? And how do I as the individual like overcome all of these messages and these history and all these of like where do we begin? And also I think a huge part of your work that is really important is actually I'm not alone. It's not just me the individual. Yeah.

Sonya: It's not, it's not and so we are first of all the notion of individualism is a lie. It's an illusion. Again, if ever we live in a time that was here to shine a spotlight on the fact that there is no such thing as individualism, it is the time of the Corona virus. It's the time where it's like everything we do could have an impact on someone else's life and their life can have an impact on ours. So, the great mythology of individualism is expired right now. And so what that means is that you were not alone in trying to figure this out. And the thing that I feel like is even this is the peace that I find fascinating about this work is that it is both about the collective but that our individual existence is so necessary, so essential for the existence of the collective that what it is we do for ourselves will transform the world.

Layla: That's right.

Sonya: And that is what matters and so we don't have to be like how do I beat all of patriarchy? How I will beat all of...

Layla: Well, it's the same. Same with *Me and White Supremacy* when I tell people that start here first. This is where we need to start.

Sonya: Here. How about you just beat it in you.

Layla: Yes. Yes.

Sonya: If you just start to beat it in you then again because we talked about this idea that love is an activator. Love is kinetic. And so once you begin to look for and undo with those systems live in you, more of what is inherent starts to come through. Your inherent sense of love. Your inherent sense of connection. And then that puts you in action with other people toward a more just and compassionate world. That's how that happens.

Layla: That's incredible and the thing that I just got when you said that is the understanding that love is limitless.

Sonya: Limitless.

Layla: It's limitless so there is no limit on once you are in that practice, right? Because it is not a destination. It is not a place that you reach, right? That you okay got it, I am radical self-love now, right? I'm just an image of a care bear just beaming out, you know.

Sonya: I love it. I love it.

Layla: To that daily practice of it is this daily refilling and when we refill, we overflow and overflow is limitless.

Sonya: That overflow is limit—and I tell people all the time, you know, I have been having this conversation a lot like I tell people all the time I don't give for my cup unless it is overflowing.

Layla: Right.

Sonya: You can't have what's in my cup. You can have them overflow. And so I turned to myself in such a way I tend to my radical self-love practice in such a way because I desired to be in overflow because I recognized that that's where connection happens. That that's where activation happens. That that's where interrupting and joining my power with other people's power to interrupt systems happens. But it requires that my cup be full.

Layla: That's right.

Sonya: And that's my work.

Layla: How do you fill your cup?

Sonya: Uhm, you know...

Layla: Because it's different for everybody. I think that's important for people to know.
Yeah.

Sonya: I think that the first thing for me is absolutely and I feel like I'm gonna say that this one is true for everybody. You got to tend to your wounds. You got to tend because other—you got to tend to the holes in your cut because that is what that is.

Layla: Yeah. Yes. Yes.

Sonya: That's what that is, right? And so I'm not...

Layla: You are refilling and it's just leaking out of those holes.

Sonya: Leaking through, my mama wound is leaking through and my banded wound is leaking and then I'm never a filled cup, right? And so therapy has been a transformative model for me. I'm a deep believer in all the tools like the more tools I have in my tool belt the better off I'm gonna be. So I've done 12 of therapy and all the things, but I have found that, you know, I just started a somatic healing practice and so I'm really looking at like where is trauma still living in my body? I have talked it all out but you know, but if these fails it is still danger around certain things and how I remove that through. I also have what I like to call a

decadence practice. I am deeply moved by beauty and what feels succulent and rich and vibrant and so I tried to make sure that that exist in my world whether that's brilliant bright colors and sometimes that's an extra just ridiculous delicious meals it's like I want lobster tails with sriracha butter and garlic. And so there are times when that's the practice looking for places to be reminded of my right sizeness in the world so I spend a lot of time at the ocean and lately I've been spending a lot of time at the ocean at sunrise where I get to be reminded that I'm invited into a new day, that I'm invited into another chance and that it keeps me, yeah, it keeps me right sized in the world that I am both one in eight billion and I am one in eight billion and both of those things are necessary and important.

Layla: At the same time important, yes. I love that you said it reminds me of my right size because one of the things that I have, you know, I love clothes, right? I love...

Sonya: You're always fabulous.

Layla: I love dressing up but one of the things that I first of all, you know, like many people especially women I've had messages around dieting and what size you are

supposed to be if you surpass a certain weight that means you are overweight and so you're trying to get to that weight in order to prove you're at the right size and a couple of years ago I just released that so I don't weigh myself. I don't know my weight. I don't know I'm just this is my body. This is the body you're gonna get, right? So, part of it also that this is my—the way my body is it looks like the way my mother's aunts, grandmothers, you know, maternal ancestors like we are African, this is how are body looks. So for me to say it supposed to look like is for me to say I'm not supposed to be African. So, that is like that's a form of radical self-love for me, but where I was going with this is that I came to a realization when you are in the changing rooms in shops and you tried something on and it doesn't fit and the conversation for me used to be, oh, my body is wrong that's why it doesn't fit into these clothes and now the conversation is these clothes are wrong because they don't fit.

Sonya: You are making clothes for bodies but they don't fit my body.

Layla: It don't fit my body, right. So it's not I have to shift to fit into you. I am wondering why you don't fit all bodies, right?

Sonya: Exactly.

Layla: And so when you said about you go to the ocean and remains you of your right sizeness, it's the like the ocean isn't like, oh, I'm supposed to be smaller than I am, right?

Sonya: I can't believe all these galloons on me. Exactly.

Layla: Right. And that shift is, oh, it's just huge.

Sonya: And nature has so many places for that. Remember like we can't believe that tree is so big. There's nothing wrong in the natural world that we shame for growing bigger just like human body.

Layla: Right. Right. Right. And you know, I can't—I don't wanna go down the root of the ways in which there is a false sort of equivalency of a fat body and then healthy body because we just—there's just a enough evidence that people don't go research that, right, a thin body doesn't equal a healthy body. A fat body doesn't equal to an unhealthy body, but I think we still—that still somewhere in the back of the mind and fat phobia and the reasons that we give for why this isn't the right size breaking out of that and just saying this is my body is radical. It's huge.

Sonya: Absolutely. Absolutely. And raising to attention in ways in which what I think is important for folks to remember is that none of these systems are separate that they are all interconnected. I invite people to read *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* by Sabrina Strings, which details the history of the relationship between white supremacy, chattel slavery, and the protestant church. And that the body norms that we adopt in modern westernized civilization are rooted in a white supremacist, a white supremacist protestant, bourgeoisie

ethic. That was about white supremacy and racism and so you know, when I find myself in a conversation about somehow being in my wrong body, I'm like, oh, that's also just a way in which I'm internalizing white supremacy.

Layla: That's right.

Sonya: I get to dismantle that in myself in all of ways in which you chose at, you know.

Layla: Yeah. And what's interesting is what dominant culture systems of oppression says is a right body shifts over time, right? So we are seeing now we are in a time— right now we are in a time where certain features that are usually found in black women, you know, are seen as attractive when they are on white women and nonblack women. And so it's like, oh, but I you know, I remember growing up and sort of being a young woman nonetheless than young woman and I didn't wanna wear ever bright lipstick because...

Sonya: Exactly. I was told the same.

Layla: Right. You draw attention to your lips. The lips are ugly. And now I'm like hold on I spent my whole life not doing this and now people are plumping their lips and is going with their lips.

Sonya: Exactly.

Layla: And so it shifts overtime and so it's like you can't, we can't buy into the fact that what they are telling us is correct because they shift it. They shift it based on, you know, all kinds of things, yeah.

Sonya: Wherever the wind blows. Whatever the market is

looking like today. Whatever the, you know, whoever selling the most albums. Who has the most eyes, you know, who can push more products, you know, capitalism is interested in making money. And it is happy to make money off of our self-loading. It is great. Be happy too. And so when I'm in a space of self-loving, I just continue to remind myself who profits. Who profits off of this self-hatred that I'm experiencing right now.

Layla: Yeah.

Sonya: You can't have my coins.

Layla: That's right. That's right. And the other thing is, you know, and I think you spoke a little bit about this earlier but I really wanna drive this point home which is that when we are in that relationship of radical self-love with our own bodies, we then, well, that will extend out when we accept, not accept, we love all bodies.

Sonya: Yes. Yes.

Layla: All bodies that are not just bodies that look like mine and that function like mine but those that don't as well because how can I not if I'm radically loving all of who I am.

Sonya: Damn, right. And what I start—I feel like the radical self-love gives us the opportunity to see because as we dismantle the story about how our body is not enough then we start—then we recognize that the story has holes across the board.

Layla: That's right.

Sonya: If it wasn't true about my body then it can't really be true about any bodies body.
So, where are the rules that I'm still abiding to about other people's bodies? I think that part of our own radical self-love work does is it helps us get acquainted with the boundaries of our own radical self-love walls because wherever the wall is that means that there are people on the other side of that wall who are experiencing oppression. And so, wow, I'm lovable at this size because if I'm not lovable at this size then there is a whole bunch of people on the other side of that size who I'm saying are not lovable. If I'm lovable in this body with this particular disability because if I'm not then that means there's a whole host of people on the other side of that wall I'm also saying are not lovable and so that's how we get to expand our own individual experience into the collective.

Layla: This is huge because I know that I would rather judge myself than judge another. Sonya: Mm-hmm.

Layla: Right? So, I'm so much more used to judging myself than I would to judge another. That

voice...

Sonya: Right.

Layla: Right? You know, I remember, by shopping I remember being in a changing room and I was trying on this jumpsuit and I was like that outside voice was like you can't wear this, look at the way it clings and look at the way it does that and then I remember somebody who I know who is in a fat body and I'm like I've never want like she was wearing this and all I thought was she look fabulous. She looked amazing. I was like I want that what she's wearing. And not in a kind of like, oh, she's my fat inspiration or anything like that. It was just it wasn't the judgement of it doesn't look right on her because of the way it clings to her body.

Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: So, if I'm saying there's a limit for me, there's a boundary, right? Then I'm saying that anybody who also looks like this or more than this...

Sonya: There's a boundary for them too. Exactly.

Layla: That's me saying, well, none of you are acceptable either. None of you get to be here either. Right.

Sonya: Exactly. Like again if I'm in the hierarchy, if I'm in the hierarchy of bodies then I am affirming the hierarchy of bodies. If I have decided that I am in the hierarchy of bodies then I am affirming that that is true and as soon as I affirm that's true all the other systems that live within that but there are, you know, situated against that hierarchy are validated.

Layla: Wow. Yes. Yes. So there's being in the hierarchy and trying to get to the top of the hierarchy.

Sonya: That's right.

Layla: Let me be thinner, whiter, you know, all of those things and then there's I'm walking away from this whole thing.

Sonya: Exactly. This is all an illusion that reaffirms oppression.

Layla: Right. And I want people who are listening to know I mean you have cultivated I mean you've got this books, right? You've got the book *The Body Is Not An Apology* but you also have a website and a community.

Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: Where people will have these conversations and so you know, when we were saying about if you are feeling like I'm alone and I wanna break out of the hierarchy and I wanna, you know, go down this other path like there's a whole community of people who are having these conversations that

Sonya and her team have been cultivating.

Sonya: Yeah. I invite people to spend some time at *The Body is Not An Apology*. There is content that is, you know, 8 years' worth of content of people writing on the intersection of identity and bodies and social justice and healing and how we transform the way that we understand and live in our bodies and how we can transform the world through that and so you know, it's a great resource and opportunity of place to go and then, yeah, all of the community always having conversations on social media, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, people are you know, like joining a book club around the book. There are all kinds of ways to be in community.

Layla: Yes. Amazing. Okay, so we have to talk about something that happened recently.
She knows I'm going with this.

Sonya: I do.

Layla: You are one of the many reasons that I really resonate with you and just really like fangirl over you is like me you love words and you're able to channel words in a

way that just really speak to what people need to hear in this moment and your words move I mean I think part of it comes from being a poet but it's— like it's not something that you manufactured. It is something that you just are and so you had this meme that was of your words, snippet of your words that you wrote about our Corona times that we are in and I wanna pull it up on my phone that these words went super, super viral. The words were “We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-Corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment, one that fits all of humanity and nature.” So you shared this words, these beautiful words and they went viral and then something really weird happened where suddenly they were no longer attributed to you. Now, we know this happens on the internet, right?

We know with meme culture, people will see memes wanna repost it, just cut off the original poster's names, right? And then becomes like theirs like urban legend of you wrote it. We don't know.

Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: But the weird thing that happened with your words is that they were now attributed to somebody else, somebody who sits in a different kind of body.

Sonya: Yes.

Layla: Somebody who is we are all familiar with in fact, I

have a couple of her books here. We are talking about Renee Brown. Suddenly, the words were going more viral and being attributed to Renee Brown.

Sonya: Yeah. Yeah.

Layla: I actually thought they were Renee Brown's words because that's where I saw them until yesterday—was it yesterday we are on I was on your timeline.

Sonya: Yes.

Layla: Doing my research and I see these were actually my words and I see Renee Brown has posted about these are not my words. These are Sonya Renee Taylor. And I'm just like, how did this happen? There is an image of her with the words overlaid on top and I'm thinking it is one thing to remove the poster's name. It's an entirely different thing to attribute it to a different person and a person whose body is so different and body fits closer to dominant culture.

Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: Because for me I was just like, wow.

Sonya: Wow.

Layla: Whiteness is the most talk here.

Sonya: My friend says whiteness call white. I was like whiteness is whiting today. It was, you know, it was interesting. So when it first happened, I started getting mostly white people in my inbox tattling, but it felt like it's a very tattling thing like it was like "I just saw your quote and it had Renee Brown's name on it. And I just thought you should know." And I was like, did you correct them? Am I supposed to now chase down the random person you saw on Facebook like...

Layla: The reason why I'm laughing, so in *Me and White Supremacy* one of the things that we talk about is you and white silence and one of the things that people with white privilege often do is even when they see something and they are like, oh, this doesn't look right, they won't speak it.

Sonya: They won't speak of.

Layla: They will go and ask us to speak it. That's why I'm laughing.

Sonya: Yeah, totally. It's totally like, yeah, it's like it's still an opportunity to let people of color do the heavy lifting, right?

Layla: That's right.

Sonya: So it was like there's injustice and your first instinct was to come and tell me to fix it.

Layla: That's right.

Sonya: And so I noticed, you know, and so those few people who, you know, where that was happening I

was like if you see it, please correct it. But the thing that was also happening for me at the same time was it was this interesting challenge to my own ego in this way that was about, you know, like does racial dynamics aside and like there were so many things at play. There was like the Sonya that knows that you know, Zora Neale Hurston was buried in an unmarked grave that Alice Walker had to go back and find her and mark her grave, you know. We were fine with erasing her from history and forget talents. There is the me that knows that part of my assignment is to contribute to the collective pot of liberation that it is that we are all working toward, right? And that I can't be like but I brought the eggs.

That the recipe is supposed to be the recipe and I bring what it is that I bring to it and then what we make is what we make and that is not about my individual contribution. And then there's a part of me, the ego, who is like but-

Layla: Hold on a minute.

Sonya: -wait. And so I had to spend some time parsing through that and I think what I got to in the end was my job is to do my work. That's my job. And that I get to check in with myself and see if I trust my gut enough to correct that which is incorrect in the world. That's actually not my part. My part is to do my work. If I'm in integrity

with my work that I am going to lend myself to the trust that the rest of it will be made right. And so that moment actually turned out to be a tremendous blessing is like somebody decided that Renee Brown must have said this I mean they literally just...

Layla: It has to be black woman.

Sonya: This must have been, this sounded like Renee Brown. But when Renee Brown corrected it then it went viral again. So it centered back out into the world and then all of a sudden, you know, then all of a sudden representative Rashida Tlaib is you know talking about it and economist Robert Wright is talking about Viola Davis is reposting it then all of a sudden the words have a new level of platform and now what I think is fascinating is there are still not very many memes with my face on it. People still didn't take my face to put my words on my face.

Layla: Right. Right. That's right.

Sonya: But you know, but that was just for me is for me. It can't be taken. And that my assignment is to do my work and trust my God and when I live by that then the rest of it will work out one way or another.

Layla: I love that. I love that because it's a huge element of it that's like in what ways could this become a distraction from me doing my work.

Sonya: Exactly. Exactly. And it could have been. Even me chasing down thousands of memes. It could have been that which would have been exhausting, you know, and was not what I was supposed to be doing at all.

Layla: Right. And at the same time I do love that you talked about Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker because the erasure of black women's contributions to the world, you know, we've always seen it throughout time, right?

Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: And we have to go—we actually have to go looking for those voices, so like just with the example as you said it's interesting that Renee's image was used in this meme but you have—I haven't seen your image used at all on this meme.

Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: We actually have to go and search it out. If somebody didn't know what Sonya Renee Taylor looks like, they just assume the meme with the name, they're not necessarily assuming it's a black woman.

Sonya: Exactly.

Layla: And so I think I just think that part is really important for the—not for you but for the person who was and people who had decided I'm gonna do this instead.

Sonya: Exactly.

Layla: It is what I'm gonna do with words, right?

Sonya: Exactly. And yes I think...

Layla: This erasure.

Sonya: Exactly. And here's the thing I think is important. It's not my assignment and my work to go chase down everybody who misattributes my meme but it is my assignment to chase down everybody who misattribute yours.

Layla: Right.

Sonya: It is my assignment, you know, so that which we do for each other make sure that it doesn't happen and it is the assignment of all the white people who knew that that was quote and saw Renee Brown's face on it. It was definitely their assignment to go and correct that and so we can correct the record for each other which then lives the other to do their work. We removed the burden of them having to chase down because we did it for each other.

Layla: That's powerful Sonya. That is so powerful. Because we just get to then just focus on what we are here to do.

Sonya: Exactly.

Layla: The last thing that I wanna talk about because I think it's a huge part of your journey is your relationship and your spirituality and your relationship with God. Tell us a little bit about that and how that sort of deepen your relationship with

yourself and how do you show up in your work?

Sonya: Oh, yeah, it is then, you know, I've been talking lately to folks about the fact that I am in a pretty spectacularly intense what I've been calling a spiritual initiation. I've always been, you know, I've always had a relationship to God, universe, whatever way it is that we talk about that which made things possible. And that which created the earth and sets the sun to rise that, you know, that I don't—that can't be an accident because it's so divinely orchestrated, whatever that divine orchestration is I've always had a relationship with that and I used to have a very sort of Christian relationship with that but always sort of, you know, I've been pressing the boundaries of things for a long time. So, even in that space I was a little like, huh, what do think was that? And then there was a long time where I still felt that connection to what I understand as God but I was like we've dressed it in things that are horrible. We've created a structures around that are the antithesis of what I believe God is because I believe God is love and so some of the stuff we are talking about can't be in alignment. So then that sort of sent me to a whole other—for a while it just left me like mad, you know, and then I found a really amazing church when I moved to California, this radically inclusive led by a

black lesbian with, you know, all the whole beacon team was trans, black women and it was affirming but I knew that it was my right church home when I went for the first time and they said we wel—they were in the welcoming and they said we welcome everyone whose teachings harmonize with the teachings of Christ and I was like, call on for the choir of love, yes, right? You know, that it is about you know, that there is a space for all of it and so you know, and so that started what led me back into the sort of a spiritual relationship. But you know, I'll tell you what, nothing will get your spiritual self together than crisis and calamity and so...

Layla: Yes.

Sonya: Yes. And so as we were hitting into this global pandemic, my life kinda imploded. I was in a relationship living with my partner and my dog and we are getting ready to launch this healing retreats in my home and 3 days before the global lockdown where they closed everything and everybody had to stay home and all the businesses were shut, my dog who I had for 12 years who was like my fury life companion got diagnosed with liver cancer and then a day and a half after that, my relationship ended with my partner, extremely abruptly and then a week and a half after that my dog died and so suddenly I was in this giant home that was meant to host retreats alone with no dog and no partner and all the things that I thought where how I understood who I am were gone. And it was this moment of deep reckoning with all the wounds, all the holes and the cut that I had been sort of catching over but I didn't repair, all of those things and also the if everything else is gone, if everything else is gone, who do you rely on then? And what have you elevated above your relationship with

your ancestors and your relationship with God? And what happens when those things aren't there anymore? And all of a sudden I started being re-acquainted with what really was allowed to live my life, you know, with all the graces that I had been given over the years that I was attributing to my own awesomeness, you know, to all the places where my ego had decided that that's why this thing had to be away and all of a sudden it was just me and my God and my ancestors for two months in a big old house alone and they were leading me and guiding me and giving me really specific instructions, get up and go to the ocean so that, you know, your right size in the middle of the night, 4 o'clock in the morning. But also reminding me that I am deeply, deeply profoundly cared for and that if we are listening for how we understand love, then what we are really listening for is that experience of God talking through us because that voice of love of how we connect is the divine in us and if we can learn to listen to that then we can learn to build from that.

Layla: What an initiation. What I know from my own experience is that often there is no other way that it has to be that way because rock bottom is one of the greatest teachers because there is no fulling rock bottom. There is no—you can't put on a mask, you can't pretend it's not happening, your old tricks don't work, you can't manipulate your way out of it, you can't, you know. There's a saying that my mom says it's in Swahili, in Swahili it says Wakati Ukuta and she says do you know what that means? And I said, no, when she first said it to me. She says when you hit a wall, the wall will hit you back like you can't hurt the wall.

Sonya: Yes. Yes.

Layla: So you can try and you can rage and you can say this isn't fair and you can do all that but eventually you're just gonna have to sit on your butt-

Sonya: And surrender.

Layla: -and surrender. Yeah.

Sonya: Yeah. It's been the—it's been, yeah, probably the most transformative time of my life and I have had some pretty transformative times but this has been it and I'm clearer every day why, right? I'm clearer why now and why this and yeah...

Layla: I think it's I mean, yeah, go ahead.

Sonya: Yeah. I was just gonna say that like I'm being told that I can't actually give the fullness of what it is that is my assignment with all those other things, all those other conversations.

Layla: I was about to say that. I was about to say I think it's very clear to me why that is happening to you, why it's happening for so many of us because collectively, globally like you said we are experiencing it differently depending on you know, our positionality and all of those things but nobody is outside of this. We are all in it. And in that meme and those words that you were saying we are not going back to normal and we are also being called forth to decide what intentionally we are gonna be co-creating as we move forward and that I think requires that what you were saying about is not about the individual ego, we are all working together collectively but we are all working all from our unique gifts and our unique experiences and

our unique theme that we are here to do in the world and I think when we have those rock bottom moments, this is what I have seen in my life like I hate going through them, but I know when I'm going through them they are happening for a reason like I don't—I really don't wanna be here in this moment but I also really trust that you wouldn't put me here if not for a purpose like the purpose is not self-torture.

Sonya: Right. And not just being mean to me.

Layla: Right. This is gonna soften me, break me open and have me confront rooms that like you said you are patching over but not really healing and that doing that means I'm gonna show up different for myself and I'm gonna show up differently in the world for other people and you know, as we were talking earlier, I was thinking, wow, radical self-love is actually one of the greatest gifts of service to the world because the more we are in it, the more we extend outwards and so it doesn't ever like we were saying about it being limitless but it's also like it's never not going to be of service to other people, the more I'm like I really am engaged in a practice and relationship of self-love with myself the more everyone benefits.

Sonya: It is inexhaustible light. That's inexhaustible light.

Layla: Yeah. So, I see you on your—where you are.

Sonya: Thank you.

Layla: Yes. And thank you for sharing it because I know we often don't wanna share that part, right? The messy part, the part that's like I'm just figuring it out and I know one of the things that you talked about is like one of pieces that we have to make is the piece of I don't know. I don't know what's happening right now in my life. I don't understand and we don't always have to understand. We don't have to have it figured out.

Sonya: And for me, for you know, for me in such a fantastic control freak the power is in the fact that I don't have it figured out like actually whatever it is that is supposed to come into being it is only going to be able to come and being because I have finally given up the idea that I have to have it figured out.

Layla: Right. Right. Yeah. And that's just goes back to kind of like it circling back to the systems and the control and the ways in which we try and you know, categorize people and put boxes around people and that is happening in systems but it is happening within ourselves because so many people I know myself included have issues around control and perfectionism and wanting to know everything and feeling like I can only be at peace when I have it all figured out.

Sonya: Yup. Which means that I can never be at peace.

Layla: Thank you. Right. So, the power when you see the power is in knowing that I don't have it figured out.

That's a different kind of power as well that we are not used to.

Sonya: And it's a reminds me of the like when you said like when I got that like, oh, there's a whole bunch of things in the mixed between me and my mother, oh, I don't have to hold all of that by myself like all right then relax. We don't have to know it all, have it all figured out. There is a relaxation and invitation to ease.

Layla: One of the things, one of the messages I got this morning actually when I was getting ready for this because, you know, like many people, you know, as we are moving through this time right now, there's so much uncertainty and it's external uncertainty but then it's also having us individually question like who am I actually and what does this mean for me and the things that I felt were stable are not so am I stable within and where was I placing my power right. Questions of that sort. And one of the things that sort of downloaded for me today was the energy of I don't know if you use the Tarot or if you are familiar with Tarot cards.

Sonya: I do. Yeah.

Layla: Okay. So the energy of the full, the first card.

Sonya: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Layla: And I thought that's the energy of right now like that is where I need to be right now is the energy of the full who is on this journey who doesn't know and is fine with the not knowing.

Sonya: Joyfully, joyfully not knowing. With great joy and abandon.

Layla: Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Sonya, thank you so much for this incredible conversation. I am taking so much from this actually and I can feel I'm gonna go back and like re-read this book because it has been a while since I read it but it's I think because I got it like I said a couple of years ago when I got it and so I was in a different time of my life then.

Sonya: Yeah.

Layla: I'm in a different time now and we are in a different time collectively.

Sonya: And we are in a different time now. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I definitely think for a lot of folks who got the book, it's like it's definitely pick it up in a different point of your life and you're gonna get a different thing out of it.

Layla: Different thing. Yeah. So I'm looking forward to revisiting it. So, I wanna close with our final question. What does it mean to you to be a good ancestor?

Sonya: It means—being a good ancestor it mean doing rightly and justly by myself, by my family, by my community and by my world in this plane so that I get to be inextinguishable light in the next time.

Layla: I love that. It's beautiful. Thank you so much, Sonya.

Sonya: Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me. This is gonna true the light. I'm a fan.

Layla: We end with the fangirling.

This is Layla Saad and you've been listening to Good Ancestor podcast. I hope this episode has helped you find deeper answers on what being a good ancestor means to you. We'd love to have join the Good Ancestor podcast family over on Patreon where subscribers get early access to new episodes Patreon only content and discussions and special bonuses. Join us now at <https://www.patreon.com/goodancestorpodcast>. Thank you for listening and thank you for being a good ancestor.

