

(Intro)

Layla: I'm Layla Saad, and my life is driven by one burning question: How can I become a good ancestor? How can I create a legacy of healing and liberation for those who are here in this lifetime and those who will come after I'm gone? In my pursuit to answer this question, I'm interviewing change-makers and culture-shapers who are also exploring that question themselves in the way that they live and lead their life. It's my intention that these conversations will help you find your own answers to that question too. Welcome to Good Ancestor Podcast.

Diego Perez is the writer behind the pen name Yung Pueblo. Yung Pueblo means "young people" and it serves to remind Diego of his Ecuadorian roots, his experiences in activism, and that the collective of humanity is in the midst of important growth. Diego is a meditator, a poetry and prose writer, and a speaker who has over a million followers on Instagram. His first book, *Inward*, explores the movement from self-love to unconditional love, the power of letting go, and the wisdom that comes when we truly try to know ourselves. His newest book, *Clarity & Connection*, focuses on understanding how past wounds impact our present relationships and guides readers through the excavation and release of the past that is required for growth. In this uplifting conversation, Diego and I explore his self-healing journey through meditation, his path as a writer, and his thoughts on personal and collective liberation.

Hello, everybody, and welcome back to Good Ancestor Podcast. I'm your host, Layla Saad, and today I have a very, very special guest. I am in conversation with Diego Perez, also known as Yung Pueblo. He is the author of the book, *Inward*, which I have here, and his new book, *Clarity & Connection*, which comes out this month in April 2021, and he's just an incredible source of

light and hope and wisdom with his platform on Instagram and his books and I'm so happy to be in conversation with him today. So, welcome, Diego.

Diego: Layla, thank you so much. I feel like it's such a joy to get to have this conversation with you, and I've been following you for a long time.

Layla: Likewise.

Diego: I think it's been, I would say over two years, so I've been —

Layla: Oh, wow.

Diego: I think I've been watching your journey through and through and have just felt so much just sympathetic joy for your success and have — to be able to really dive into both areas, spirituality and the reality of this material world which includes, you know, all the beauties and all the institutional harm, the structural harm that we have to deal with and being able to just hold the two together and not divide them is just such an inspiration.

Layla: Oh, thank you. That means so much to me. That means so much to me. I have so much respect for you and people whose work is in the world of spirituality or personal healing hold a very deep space and loving space in my heart because that is the place from which I entered into the place that I'm in now, the work that I'm in now, and —

Diego: Right.

Layla: — I definitely see them as being inherently interconnected and the way that I see you talking about these

issues, both from the ethereal, the spiritual, the heart work, the soul work, and the institutional, the activism, they go together hand in hand and you weave them together so beautifully and I especially wanted to speak with you because of the times that we are in and I'm sure that you're having a lot of conversations with many people. I know many people come to your Instagram page for that respite from the chaos of the rest of the Internet and social media and media and what's happening in the world and, yeah, we're going to get into all of that in this conversation. But I want to start us off with our very first question which we ask every single guest: Who are some of the ancestors, living or transitioned, familial or societal, who have influenced you on your journey?

Diego: The ancestor that I most have in mind lately is my uncle, Antonio, who — he passed away in April like in the first wave of the coronavirus hitting South America. So, at the same time that it was really — so, I was in New York City when that first wave hit and we got to see like the brunt of how intense this pandemic would be, but, at the same time, it was hitting where I was from in Ecuador, in Guayaquil, and it just took him away very quickly and I think, for me, you know, he was always somebody who was a very compassionate person in our family and someone who was literally a hero. He was a firefighter. He was captain of the firefighters in Guayaquil and he just saved, literally saved countless lives, like there would be pictures of him in newspaper clippings like when I would go visit him in Ecuador, he would show me these clippings of him just like going into these buildings that were — just like raging fires would be coming out of them, he would go straight into them and his sort of — the way that he would carry himself, the way that he would be there for our family members in times of need, I hope to be able to, you know, step into his shoes in some way as I grow older and be there for my family members in a similar way.

Layla: Oh, that's beautiful. I'm so sorry for your loss, but I really appreciate the way that you spoke about him and the word that really comes up for me is "courage" as you're speaking about, you know, him rushing into those buildings and being willing to put himself in the literal firing line in order to save others, in order to help others. I'm wondering, you know, when you think about your journey and the work that you are doing, both internally, inside of yourself, and then what you're sharing with the rest of the world, when you think about the word "courage," what comes up for you?

Diego: Especially in the beginning, right? When I first started just like turning my awareness inward and starting, you know, to stop that constant running away, because I was stuck in this cycle of just like whenever I would have difficult emotions, whenever I would feel pain or anxiety or sadness, I would just try to run away into the arms of pleasure and just consume myself with, you know, either attention from other people or spend time doing drugs or just doing something to get away from myself and just like dull all the intensity that I was feeling inside. It took a lot of courage to start that process, to just literally just be with myself, to just sit with myself, and this was before I even started meditating. To just pay attention to what was happening inside without running away. And especially at that time, this was before that — this wave of self-love, this wave of wellness, this wave of — like I'm talking, you know, 2011, 'cause I remember self-love becoming really popular around, I'd say, 2014 to 2016, 2017. It became like a really big internet conversation where people are trying to define, you know, what is self-love? Is it real? Is it worthwhile? Should I activate this in my life? But back in 2011, this all felt very new to me, especially coming from my background, like I was born in Ecuador, I come from a very poor family and we emigrated to the United States when I was about four years old and, you

know, nobody had time to deal with their emotions. No one had like the time and space to do that. So, the only reason I did was because I felt like I had to or else I was gonna have a very early death.

Layla: When we introduced you, you know, I said your name is Diego but you are known as Yung Pueblo and unless someone has seen you in a conversation, they may not necessarily know that your name is — sorry, is actually Diego Perez and not Yung Pueblo.

Diego: That's right —

Layla: There is a — what I witnessed is very much a focus for you to kind of decenter yourself, the person, and really push forward the work, the energy, and the reflection, the wisdom for people to engage with. But there's a real person behind all of that who is not just a wordsmith who is able to put together words that just flow together and read really well and make you think but someone who's gone through their own process and you've just started telling us a little bit about what that is, what that journey has been. I'm wondering if you can fill in the gaps for us about how your journey began? What were some of the things that you were coming up against and who was it or what was it that sparked the journey inwards to get you to where you are now? Because it sounds like, and it's not surprising, it sounds like, you know, there was really a dark night of the soul there. There was something that really you were wrestling with for some time until you had to have that come to Diego moment, right?

Diego: Yeah, yeah. There was a lot that happened and I think it all just built up over time, like for a lot of people, you know, you function relatively well as a child but then there are things that keep accumulating over time and if you don't deal with them

properly, then they just become bigger and bigger patterns and they start just taking over. For me, it was really, you know, I was born with an inclination towards like a quiet sadness that I would keep inside of myself and it doesn't really necessarily have a source, like it might even have been a chemical imbalance or something like that, where sometimes I would just feel, you know, like I would just feel this kind of lingering heavy sadness that I couldn't quite put a name to. But then, over time, with the situations of my life, that all grew. When we got to the United States, like I mentioned before, when I was four years old, my family was incredibly poor. So my mom, she worked cleaning houses, and my father worked at a supermarket so they worked incredibly hard and still we struggled so much to make ends meet. And all of that tension that was like sort of structurally placed on our household, because it was my mom, my dad, my brother, and I at the time. My little sister was born a little later, when I was about 10 years old. And seeing, you know, my parents, they loved each other incredibly well but they were forced into a situation where like there was just this constant, constant struggle, this constant lack of money, and it pushed their relationship to the edge and even though they loved each other, you know, they'd be fighting all the time because they just didn't know what to do. They didn't know how to get out of this cycle of poverty that, you know, like America just kind of like lands you in, if you're not — if you don't already come from means, it's going to be a very serious struggle. So, it wasn't until my brother and I both became older and we started working and we were able to start taking care of ourselves and we both started working really young. You know, I got my first job when I was like 13. He got his when he was, I think, also like 13. So, we were able to take some financial pressure off my parents, and it was interesting, you know, like literally their situation was — like their fights caused through structure, it wasn't because they had real relationship problems so like the more that their

financial situation was alleviated, the more harmony there was between the two of them. I mean, you could look at them now, you know? Because my brother and I and my sister are adults, we're taking care of ourselves, we're helping take care of them and they're just like phenomenally in love, you know? And they still have their ups and downs but it's just not the way it was before. So, it's interesting to watch that play out and see how much psychological harm poverty can do on a person.

Layla: Absolutely.

Diego: Yeah. I think for me as an individual, it just like — it caused such a growth of scarcity in my mind where I became, like through fear, I became quite greedy, quite attached, really self-centered in some ways and just like focused on like how can I get what I need just because like that's all I knew was scarcity.

Layla: Right, and it's a survival tactic, right? It's a way that we're trying to save ourselves.

Diego: Absolutely. And it just — it continued manifesting like over my teenage years and, on the external level, I was always very like gregarious and outgoing and I would talk to people a lot, but internally, in my mind, there was just like this constant kind of, you know, how can I survive? How can I figure this out? And when I went into college, it all kind of snowballed into being kind of oblivious to these inner workings of my subconscious and how much I had accumulated over time and how sort of, you know, unsafe, unsure, and how anxious I would feel all the time and then I just started developing these really nasty habits. You know, I started partying all the time, like I would go out all the time. I would go out probably from like Wednesday to like even Sunday, like we would just invent reasons to like drink and, you know, consume more intoxicants.

And I met some great people in college and it wasn't all a terrible experience but my habits definitely remained blind and they didn't lead me anywhere good so when I ended up finishing school, I was just incredibly, incredibly unhealthy and it pushed me to a point where I was so unhealthy that my heart felt like it was just so weak and it went to a point where I, one night, I just had consumed a bunch of drugs again that night and I was on the floor and I felt like I was having a hard time. I just felt like I was like my, you know, like my life was on the edge and I did end up talking to a doctor later who told me that I probably did have some mild form of heart attack and when I was on the floor, you know, basically praying for my life, what I kept thinking about was my parents, you know? I kept thinking about them and how much they sacrificed for me to have a better life and how they put themselves through even more struggle to come here so that they can have the opportunity for my brother and I and my sister to have something better than they had. I felt like I was wasting that opportunity and, for some reason, that was a particular — the thing that really just energized me into even starting this self-love journey.

Layla: Wow.

Diego: You know, and that's — so I took the drugs, I flushed them down the toilet and I just started by — I just doubled down on radical honesty and I started some serious positive habit building and it was all very small in the beginning. You know, like literally as small as like going for walks and being really intentional about the food that I was eating and not making any gigantic changes but small changes to the point where I was slowly feeling healthier in my mind and body.

Layla: Wow. Thank you so much for sharing that, Diego, and as you were speaking, I mean, I just resonated so much with it, because I had, minus the drugs, very similar experiences to you

throughout that period. University was really hard for me, even though it didn't look like it outwardly because I was partying so much. That was like, that was me. I was always partying. But it was because, you know, coming home at night, it just felt like I cannot be with myself. I would be in a very dark place when I was by myself. And even though, you know, I'd be surrounded by so many people when out, I just felt completely outside of myself and completely alone. You know, for me, what got me started on the journey towards changing my life was having a best friend who was on his own journey of personal development and personal growth and he introduced me to books and different mindsets and tapes, right? Like CDs and stuff at the time. I'm wondering, what was the spark for you that made you think, "I need to start with radical honesty"? Where did that come from?

Diego: That's a really good question and, for some reason, it feels rather ambiguous, right? It's like unclear. I think, in my mind, like I was never pointed in the direction of like spiritual writing or anything like that at that moment. All I knew was that a certain series of actions had led me to this point and now I need to do the opposite series of actions to get myself to a better point and what was very clear in my mind was that I had spent a number of years like seriously lying to myself and if I'm going to like — and all of this lying had brought me to this point where I would lie to myself about like, you know, those dark moments that you would talk about.

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: I would feel them and I would just either hide from them or ignore them or like downplay them. So, my thing was, if they come up, be with them, don't run away, and don't like reach for marijuana or don't like do something to try to quell whatever it is that's bubbling up inside. And I think that's where

that idea, you know, I didn't invent the term "radical honesty" but that's just the way it played out in my life because I was like, man, I was intensely lying. Now, let me be radically honest —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — and see what happens. Yeah.

Layla: That takes such a level of self-awareness, even from that place to be able to say to myself, "I have been lying to myself, I have not been honest with myself, and I'm going to start telling myself the truth." When you first started practicing that and being with what was coming up, what was that experience like for you? And how did you stay committed to it when it got really hard?

Diego: Yeah, I think the experience, you know, it started really like illuminating not just my interactions with myself but my interactions with other people and what started becoming quite clear was how I would get caught in these like performative like relationships, like with my mom, with my dad, with my brother and my sister, and I started seeing how even the relationship I had with my girlfriend, who's now my wife, all of it was just really surface level and all of it felt kind of, because we had been doing these particular actions to each other for such a long time, just like everything was kind of stale. So, I remember like one moment that really stands out to me was the moment when I realized that my father has a particular way of showing his love for the family. You know, he had an incredibly difficult childhood. You know, even much harder than mine. And he loves us so much but he shows his love and it's like sort of, you know, old-fashioned way where he will like work really hard for you, he will give you rides to the things you need to do, but he won't — he's not often telling you that he

loves you or he's not, you know, always hugging you or anything like that, but he's gonna be there for you when you need him. But I knew how much he loved me so I was like, you know what, let me switch the game up and let me give him a hug and let me like hug him and like, you know, he's like a strong like guy and I remember just like catching him off guard and just like hugging him and just like telling him I love him. And the moment that I saw that, if we're in a play together and we're always acting the same way, if I take it upon myself to put out different lines and act in a different way, then the whole play changes —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — and I started doing that within my interactions and I started just with my girlfriend, with my mom, my dad, with my brother, and just started — because the moment that I started really being radically honest with myself and started, you know, practicing these positive habits, like it's so quick that love starts bubbling up and you start feeling like, you know, more gratitude and more...I don't know, it's something to do with bringing more presence into your life but it just — I was just allowed to share that love with the people around me and try to be kinder and it made a big difference, you know, in my family. And I think to this day, now we have a better — I don't know, it's like we all grew up emotionally together.

Layla: Right.

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: It's really incredible when — this is what I found in my own journey. We're waiting for our parents to be the parents that we think that they should be, right?

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: They should act like how we think they should act but we stay the same and how things do change when we say, "Actually, I'm going to change things and see what happens." I've definitely seen that in my relationship with my parents as well and you do feel like you grew up together and you start to appreciate the fact that, "Oh, they're human, just like me. They're just trying to figure it out too and they have their own traumas and their own things, they have their own stuff that they're working through, much of which happened before I was even here," right? And having that that sense of compassion. So, in doing that work, is compassion something that has come up to the fore for you and how has it changed the way that you are in relationship with yourself and the way you are in relationship with other people?

Diego: Yeah, compassion has been huge. I think one thing that I try to practice really often is if I'm in a close relationship with someone, you know, one of my like close friends or family members and if there's a need to tell them, you know, a hard truth, like first I would examine myself, like is this coming from a good place or is it coming from like my inner tension that's seeking to project something? Am I trying to control them in some way? Or is there something that I actually need to tell them versus just like wanting to tell them out of my own craving? And when I do see that, oh, yeah, you know, I should let this person know x, y, and z, I make sure to tell the truth as compassionately as possible, you know? You don't want to like just bombard someone and throw something on someone really heavily, especially if it's someone you love, but to be able to meet them where they're at and I think that's one of the biggest aspects of compassion is, you know, trying to meet someone where they're at can be incredibly difficult but it's one of the most effective ways to hold their hand and bring

them forward and help them see a new perspective that can help both of you have a better relationship, especially on the one on one level.

Layla: I love that you talked about checking yourself first, though, before —

Diego: Totally, totally.

Layla: Right? Yeah.

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: Checking what are my intentions here? What am I actually trying to achieve here? Is this for them or is this for me? And I think there's also an aspect of "I can't meet people where they're at if I'm not with me where I'm at right now."

Diego: Totally, yep, yep.

Layla: So you've talked about the fact that you're a meditator, not a meditation teacher. I want to talk about why that's so important for you to make that distinction, and also your journey in being a meditator. In other interviews, I've heard you talk about your teacher, S. N. Goenka.

Diego: That's right.

Layla: Yeah. And sort of the Vipassana meditations that you've been doing, the fact that you meditate for two hours every single day, at the beginning of the day and the end of the day.

Diego: That's right. Yeah.

Layla: Tell us about that. I'm so fascinated.

Diego: Yeah. I think it's another story that feels — I can't quite pinpoint the actual source of like where this feeling came from, because I — honestly, like I've heard about meditation my whole life, just like everybody else, you know? It's always there in the background, someone's talking about it, but it wasn't until one of my friends, one of my really good friends, one of my best friends, he was traveling and he ended up being told about it when he was in India, this really nice family told him about it and he ended up signing up and this was someone that I had spent a lot of time with, done a lot of stupid stuff with, and he, you know, he writes me this e-mail, he's like — to me and a few other friends, and he just talks about love and compassion and goodwill over and over in the e-mail and I was so shocked by what he was saying and when he described the situation, you know, 10 days of silence, meditating, you're meditating the whole day every day when you're there, and he was describing how much he felt better and how much he had gotten and how he felt like he found his path, I knew from that moment, I was like whatever he did, you know, I don't even get what he did but I need to try it for myself because that sounds right up my alley.

Layla: And can I ask where were you in your journey at that time? Like between kind of doing the radical honesty and sort of, you know, changing your habits, between that and starting the meditation, where were you at?

Diego: I was, I would say, about eight months after I started —

Layla: Oh, wow.

Diego: — like radical honesty and positive habit building.

Layla: Look at that.

Diego: Yeah. So, it was really the perfect time where I had become kind of like mentally strong enough and had spent a lot of time building my self-awareness and just like building myself up from the ground up. And I knew that I was getting a lot from what I was doing, but I was ready to take a deeper step and it just connected so well inside of me that I signed up immediately after he told me about it and I ended up doing my first course the summer of 2012, which is basically almost exactly like a year after I had my rock bottom moment.

Layla: Wow.

Diego: And it was incredibly powerful. It was, you know, to this day, like the memories of that course are so sharp because it was just so difficult. That first course was just so incredibly difficult, like not only was it giving me a whole different worldview because, at that time, I was still in like pretty deeply in the activism world and I was an active organizer and just — I understood liberation from one context, from the context of meeting people's material needs and literally the work of like undoing oppression, undoing systemic harm, and trying to just build a better world that actually respects all of humanity.

Layla: Yes.

Diego: But then this gave me the context of internal liberation, which was like the liberation of like how much of this suffering, though there are people, obviously, in the world who are committing harm and could be harming you, but there's also a lot of harm that you're causing yourself and a lot of that harm being driven by your own cravings or your own ignorance, you know? Your lack of understanding of what's happening inside of you. So, given this like internal dynamic of liberation, it was literally like it was blowing my mind and I remember like, you

know, not only am I meditating, but then in the evening, we would have these like hour- to like hour-and-10-, 20-minute discourses of Goenka and, you know, I learned so much from him in 10 days that I remember the only way that I could conceive of it when people would ask me about it was I felt like I learned more in 10 days than four years of college —

Layla: Wow.

Diego: — like I got so much from the direct experience of just observing the truth within my body and from, you know, just understanding that like, wow, like at an ultimate level, I am causing a lot of my pain and I do need to take responsibility for my happiness and, if I do that, then, you know, I could live a life that's much more full of creativity, much more full of mental clarity, and I can be like way more effective in all of my endeavors.

Layla: Oh, wow. Yesterday, I was — I had Googled S. N. Goenka to find out more about his work and something came up with some of his quotes and I was reading them and I was like, “This sounds just like Diego, this is the same way, he really internalized this study,” right? Like, “He really went in there.” I love that you brought up the fact that, you know, you had, prior to embarking on this journey to being a meditator, you had been quite active as an activist. You know, your heart is an activist heart, but it was from that one particular lens and how this journey, which was about, you know, the self actually helped you to understand activism and liberation from a completely different lens but one that I believe is so important for sustainable change.

Diego: Exactly.

Layla: Right? Because so many people get burnt out through activism. So many people end up using the very same tools of oppression that they are trying to fight.

Diego: Yes.

Layla: Right? Not from the intent of trying to but because there is no other framework and this sounds like it opened up a whole other world for you to be able to draw very deeply from, so I'm wondering how that changed how you showed up in activism afterwards? What changed? And, as you're looking at the world that we are in today and the important activism that is taking place, what do you think is really important for activists to understand in order for them to really take care of themselves and to be able to create healing for themselves as we work together to create healing for one another?

Diego: So, I did a few courses while I was still really active. I was part of this group called Youth Against Mass Incarceration that was active in Boston and, at the time, I understood how much power people can have, like if people come together, we can change whatever we want and I've seen that happen over and over, but what I did notice even before I started meditating was the — how it wasn't sustainable, how quickly, either historically or on the like, you know, local level, I would see exactly what you mentioned, that, if you remain unaware of yourself, you will quickly reproduce the thing that you hated.

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: And it becomes like a very dangerous thing because, you know, there's so much infighting and so much unnecessary like empire building as opposed to coalition building amongst different groups.

Layla: Yes.

Diego: But what it did for me was it gave me a context to work inside of, like, at the time, I was — I remember reading, I read *Revolutionary Suicide* by Huey P. Newton and then right after I read the autobiography of Assata Shakur, and this was like this like — it felt so similar to my transition and how I understood the world and I understood myself and I felt like I was landing like in the lap of Assata. You know, like she understood, especially like those last few chapters of her book where she puts out her global view and, you know, is really one of the first people that I know of to call for movement through love and, to me, that was really something that's missing and love is not only an active medium that you can use to change the world but it's something that is regenerative so that if you're loving yourself through this process, you're going to just be able to make way better decisions and the problems that we face, they're going to require a lot of creativity —

Layla: Yes.

Diego: — but to be able to access that creativity, you're going to have to go through a deconditioning process so that you're not acting from a place of survival, so that you're not acting from a place of human habit, but you're acting from a place of actual human nature so that that creativity can just flow abundantly and your mental clarity can just be so sharp.

Layla: I love this conversation so much because I think, you know, these last couple of years that we've been in, the collective challenges that we're facing are really ramping up and really asking us to really be discerning and intentional.

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: Right? About how we show up. And, for me, what that has looked like, especially this year, is I don't want to do all the things. I want to do what's really essential and what's really important. Yeah, I've been taking things off my plate.

Diego: That was literally my promise to myself too, was like do less things and do those less things really well.

Layla: That's exactly what I told my team at the beginning of the year. I said we're gonna do less things but the things that we do, we're going to do them really, really well because I want to be intentional about how I spend my time, what we create, and what we put out into the world. There is a feeling, and it's — it's not just a feeling, it's a requirement that change is needed and change is needed now. There's an urgency that is required. But at the same time, I think, when we move from that sense of urgency that's not grounded, that's when we begin to replicate some of those harms that we're not meaning to but we're doing it because we're not taking the time to do the work inward. So, yeah, I just want to say thank you to you for really like modeling that and affirming because when I see other people doing, I'm like, "Yes, okay, good. It's important."

Diego: No, thank you too. It thrills me that we have come to such similar conclusions. I think it's so important, yeah.

Layla: Absolutely. And so, I want to talk about your books now. So *Inward*, which you originally self-published, and then later has been published by Andrews McMeel Publishing and so is your second book as well. And I know that this is part of a trilogy series —

Diego: Yeah, that's right.

Layla: — which is very exciting. So, can you give us the overview of *Inward*, how it started, and then the trilogy and what you're wanting to accomplish with it?

Diego: Definitely. So, I, you know, even to just keep going from the conversation that we were having, like when I started really delving deeper into meditation, I would go to a few of those 10-day courses a year and I kept, you know, I just kept getting such a big — you get a big return for the effort that you put in.

Layla: And does it get easier? Or is easier not the right word?

Diego: Yeah, I'd, you know, it's not — there's a lot in there. You'd be surprised how much we've accumulated as individuals. So it always remains challenging but you do figure out how to practice better and you do figure out how to like ride the waves and the ups and downs within the retreats better, you know? So your level of reaction, it decreases, it doesn't become as intense so that if you have a hard moment, you can just accept, "I'm having a hard moment right now," as opposed to like not only are you having a hard moment but then you're going to throw a bunch of fire on top of it —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — and make it a worst moment.

Layla: Right.

Diego: Yeah. But when I really started digging deep into meditation, it just — it hit me so hard and, you know, and this is where like the name Yung Pueblo got its meaning and it hit me hard that humanity as a whole is in a transitional period where we're maturing and I always like to give that example of, you know, what teachers tried to teach us as children, like

when we were first entering school, you know, just the simple basic fundamentals of you should share, you should treat each other kindly, you should tell the truth, you should not hate each other and generally just being, you know, good to one another. These are fundamentals that humanity as a whole has not mastered at all, right? We may be able to do these things as individuals —

Layla: Yes, right.

Diego: — but these like essential core things of like how to be a proper human being, we need to master them. So, when that became clear that humanity was maturing, like the name Yung Pueblo literally means “young people” and, to me, humanity as a whole is very young, and especially in this 100-year period where we have these massive challenges, you know? Like structural racism, patriarchy, we have climate change, we can just go on and on. We have these massive challenges —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — but through challenges, there is the opportunity for maturity, that we can grow up. And not only that, people are taking it upon themselves to do that in our work in a way that’s, I think, historical, like that’s just unprecedented. There has been so many negative effects to globalization but I think this might be one of the few positive effects of globalization where, because the world has become so deeply interconnected, the healing modalities that have really been effective for different peoples, they are now just more widely accessible. We can go much further in regards to accessibility —

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: — but there are, you know, from like Western therapy to like Eastern forms of meditation and you can just, you know, indigenous practices, you can go on and on, and if you go into each one, obviously, there are problems with each one and the way they're treated in the Western world but, generally, people are trying to find their means to go inward in a way that's just more effective than it used to be. So, to me, when I started writing, I wanted people to just know that healing was possible, you know? I didn't want to tell them how the healing would work for them but I just wanted to give them reflective material so that they can start understanding themselves better as they're moving through their own process. And that's really what kind of gave *Inward* life because, to me, if you can love yourself a little more, if you can understand yourself a little more, then you're going to be less likely to harm other people —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — so this is like a fundamental thing, as human beings, like you should get to know yourself and not only will that make you happier but that will make you a kinder human being and we need more kind people.

Layla: Yeah. And tell us about the trilogy of books.

Diego: Yeah. I just — so I was just, you know, letting people know about that when I started releasing *Clarity & Connection* but I do want to — I want to put forward, so *Clarity & Connection* is the next step from *Inward* where we continue — I continue talking about personal transformation but then I want to really give a strong focus on relationships like — and that being like friendships and intimate relationships, because I do feel that if we're able to treat each other in our most local environments, if we're able to treat each other well, then like

it's those interconnections that build the building blocks of society. So, as you know, like so much harm happens in the home and if we're able to remedy that, if we're able to improve our ability to communicate, improve our ability to actively support each other's happiness, if we're able to do that from a wise place where like I understand that I can't make you happy but I do understand that I can support you in your happiness and I can actually help you through your own healing process and just be there for you and, likewise, you could do the same for me. So, if we're able to build a much more compassionate web where we can treat each other better and catch each other if we fall, then I think that will be sort of like that next step, because personal transformation is the beginning but then after that, it's how are your connections?

Layla: Right.

Diego: You know, how are you dealing with them?

Layla: And what will the third one be about?

Diego: The third one is going to be about community.

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: And I want to just keep sort of stemming outward and I want to still maintain that vibe of building self-awareness and personal transformation because, at the end of the day, that's the key fundamental building block —

Layla: Exactly.

Diego: — but then just start talking more about how can we interact with each other in just more fulfilling ways and keep sort of like going outward from there.

Layla: I really appreciate that model of it starting from the personal first and that always being the foundation because that's definitely what I found in my own journey and I think I've always felt from a very young age that I wanted to do work that was about changing the world in some way, right? And it's this, "I'm going to help the world, I'm going to save the world," right? But where things really started becoming real for me was when I realized just you working on you is a whole world within itself.

Diego: It's massive, yeah. It's massive.

Layla: It's massive. Just you and your relationship with yourself, that is a whole world, and in really nurturing that relationship with self, that's where they will become a natural expansion to your relationships, your close and intimate relationships, and then to the world, but I feel like when you're trying to do it the other way around, perhaps you're — and I'll speak for my own self, I think that there was an aspect of me trying to find a sense of worthiness and a sense of like selfness and who I am through trying to change the world —

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: — and when I put the world down and said, "Let me just be in my relationship with myself and figure that out first," that I have felt a lot more grounded and I think that the way that I show up makes more sense for me. And I hope does more good than causes harm. But it's that discipline, right? Of returning to self, because we want to go outside of ourselves so often and not stay with ourselves. What I found for myself is that it was hard being with those parts of myself that I judged as not good, as not right. Speak to us about why that is important for us first

in our relationship with ourselves but also when we're talking about collective liberation.

Diego: You know, honestly, it's so funny because a lot of life feels like a paradox and it's similar for personal transformation. If — it's one thing to be aware of judging yourself, but you really have to come to terms with the reality that human life is sort of built on imperfection, right? So like even you can get it right nine times but there's going to be that one time you're just going to get it wrong.

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: And that's just a very common aspect but, at the same time, you don't want to then build a defeatist attitude like —

Layla: Yes.

Diego: — you know, because I'm so imperfect, like I'm not going to do anything and I'm not going to try to change myself at all and I'm just going to be stagnant. But, personally, like one of the biggest things that I've been working on in 2021 is like I heard this story from a teacher that I looked up to, he was telling me about one of his friends. He teaches meditation in the same tradition that I practice in. He was saying that a friend of his went to an older teacher who he, you know, he asked him, like, "How can I make progress?" And the teacher told him just accept, like just accept, like whatever comes up, just accept it, you know? When you're in there and you're meditating, like so many things can come up but when we come into trouble or end up like developing blocks is when something comes up and we just kind of deal with it with tension as opposed to just letting it be what it is and then keep moving through your practice as you're supposed to but the moment that we're fighting ourselves, we're losing —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — you know, we're still at war with ourselves.

Layla: We're still at war. I'm wondering, you know, your journey has been with meditation, you are a deep meditator, it's a daily practice for you. Is that the tool that you think everybody should use? I'm asking because I was thinking about our conversation, yesterday I was in the shower, you know, that's when you have all these thoughts, right? So —

Diego: Yeah, yeah.

Layla: — I was thinking about the conversation that we were going to have today and why I personally have a sort of on again, off again relationship with meditation, but the place where I feel like I'm authentically able to show up in that self-reflective process is in journaling.

Diego: Wonderful.

Layla: And so I'm wondering —

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: Yeah, like does it have to be meditation or is it just about finding the tool that works for you?

Diego: I mean, that's it right there. Like I let people know that I'm a meditator, but really my — like the tasks that I've given myself and the way that I try to serve in the world is just by creating reflective material because anyone can benefit from reflection, right? To just like try to get them to know themselves a little better, even at the intellectual level.

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: But I do let people know that I'm a meditator because like the same way my friend let me know that he meditated, that really benefited me. So who knows that'll, you know, if that'll connect the spark within somebody else —

Layla: Right, yeah.

Diego: — but at the same time, like people are in such different places.

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: Right? We all have such different emotional histories, like — you and I, we're talking right now but we have gone through such immensely different journeys to get here —

Layla: Yes.

Diego: — and what you've accumulated in your mind is different from what I've accumulated in my mind. So, the way that we react, the intensities of our reactions, you know, the past that tries to repeat itself in our present, it just shows up really differently. And then there are a lot of people who have suffered incredibly intense traumas. And if their trauma is so severe then, obviously, they're going to need a very gentle method to develop introspection because if they, you know, do something that's just too much, then too much will come up and they're just not going to want to continue with the process.

Layla: That's right.

Diego: So, for each individual, they're going to need to find something. What I try to tell people is you're going to want to find something that will be challenging but is not overwhelming. You want to find that sweet spot, that sweet spot where like, yes, this is harder and I can put effort into this but it's not bringing so much up that I feel like I can't and not only that, finding something where it's challenging but not overwhelming, but you want to find something that just clicks with your intuition, that something that you want to give your time to and will, you know, and something that will give you results where you're seeing like, "Oh, yeah, I'm making better decisions. This is great for me."

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: To me, like what matters most is that you put your effort into taking at least a few steps forward in this life, because those few steps forward, that will help us build a better world —

Layla: That's right.

Diego: — if everybody takes a few steps forward.

Layla: Oh, I love that so much. I love that. I want to read a couple of your poems.

Diego: Sure.

Layla: I feel like everyone knows who you are but if they don't, they should. For those who don't. So I'm going to read like a couple of the short ones but then I had also folded the page on some of the longer ones that just spoke to me. And I will say, Diego, as I was reading through your books, the words are very sparse on the page but they make you think and so I would

read and it's like a four-sentence poem but I would read it and I'll be like, "Huh," and then I would read it and reread it and reread it and I'm like, "Oh, this has layers." So I love — I love that. I love that you've done that. And I also love that there are these longer pages as well for deeper self-reflection. Okay. This one's called "Rebirth." This is *Inward* first. "Rebirth. The moment people wake up to their power and start moving toward their freedom." I love that. So "Rebirth," the definition of "Rebirth" is the moment people wake up to their power and start moving toward their freedom. What does it mean to you to wake up to your power? What does that mean?

Diego: It's interesting. I think a lot of times in life, we end up — and I think you hit at this a little bit earlier too, like we try to just externalize everything. And there are these moments, especially if a great transformation is on the horizon, it will involve you being like, "Okay, enough is enough. I have to put my foot down and I'm going to move in this direction no matter what and nobody's gonna stop me." And those are those moments, like profound moments of rebirth, where you're like just taking your power back and though we all have very different situations and there are difficulties at different levels, there are those moments where we're just like, "Okay, I'm going to make a change within myself or outside of myself and I'm going to do it no matter what."

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: I think it looks different for different people, the moments of rebirth, the moments of reclaiming our power, but it's that moment where you're like, "Nope, no more of this," or you give yourself a profound yes but it's those moments where you kind of break from the — just like the regular movement of life.

Layla: Yeah. And there's such power as well in seeing yourself commit to something and actually do it.

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: Yeah. Okay, another one. "I started speaking my truth when being free became more important than guarding the fear of my ego." What is the ego and what are some of the misconceptions about it and what do you think it means to have a healthy relationship with the ego?

Diego: That's a great question. I think our ego is like the entirety of your sense of self. It's especially on the conventional level of like you and I conversing this moment. So like not only is it like all of your memories and all of your conditioning, all of your — the way that you react, just all this energy that you're carrying, and not only that but like everything that you've learned in life. It all sort of composes and becomes this like not only definitive way that you protect yourself but the way that you like perceive and interact with the world, but a lot of times, the ego is like cemented on this foundation of survival, you know? Like the ego emerged evolutionarily, like literally we forget that, you know, we're sort of trying our best to like procreate and live and eat and do these like fundamental human things, you know, that in a lot of ways are motivated by fear. So, I think having a healthy relationship with your ego is understanding that you don't want all of your actions to be emerging from fear because a lot of times, then you're just going to get like these kind of like mundane results, you know? You're not going to be able to connect with people deeply. You're not going to be able to like really reach your highest goals. But at the same time, you don't want to completely ignore fear because you don't want to become reckless —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — right? You want to understand that, right, sometimes you should be cautious so having that healthy balance between fearlessness and recklessness, you want to be able to balance that and just, you know, act in a way that you can preserve yourself but also be courageous at different times.

Layla: It is such a balancing act, right? Because I think, for a long time, a lot of the conversation was about the ego being this thing that we need to get rid of, to minimize, you know? It's bad, we don't want to have ego. If we don't have ego, we don't have a self. We're not here, we don't exist, right? In the sort of the way that we perceive each other as two physical beings here, but it can kind of swing too far the other way, I think, as well, right? Which is what I think you're trying to say —

Diego: Definitely, and —

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: — then it becomes quite interesting too because if — it depends on your personal goals, like some people have a goal to have a healthy ego, which is a fine goal. They want to be able to balance things out and not be so self-centered, which is a very dangerous game to play.

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: You know, just allowing self-centeredness to run amok, but then there are other people who, you know, people who are really serious about meditation and like the liberational path like where you understand what you have to balance out the conventional truth that, "Yeah, I'm here and I'm living my life and have responsibilities," but then you balance that out

with the ultimate truth that like, “No, I don’t really exist.” Like —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — this thing right here is not really real. Like it’s just —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — mental and physical phenomenon moving really rapidly in different combinations.

Layla: And that becomes really real when you start learning about quantum physics, right? And —

Diego: Totally, totally.

Layla: How we’re more nothing than we are a thing, right? It’s just —

Diego: Oh, yeah.

Layla: — as your mind.

Diego: We’re full of nothingness. And that’s a very liberating understanding to like, actually, you know, to be able to experience that within your body.

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: But you have to balance those things out because even if you understand that like ultimate truth really deeply, you still have to like feed your dog —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — you know? And take out your trash. So —

Layla: Right, right.

Diego: — balance is key.

Layla: Balance is key, okay. I'm gonna read one of the longer ones. Bear with me. I felt it was so beautiful that I wanted to share it. "We live in a unique time when fear-driven and hateful emotions are coming to the surface so that they can be completely released, so that we can create a new world where institutionalized forms of harm are no longer factors in our lives. As it works for the individual, it also works for the collective of humanity. We can't heal what is ignored nor can we live happily and freely if we continue running away from our own darkness. Personally, my faith is in people. Our courage to turn inward in the hope of uncovering and releasing all that stands in our way of becoming beings of unconditional love is what will bring harmony and peace to our world. Unity with those around us is most possible when we become internally whole and loving. Wisdom more easily flows through us when our minds and hearts are no longer reacting to the suffering of everyday life. This does not mean that we will become cold or distant. It means that we will learn to respond calmly to the inevitable changes of life without causing ourselves misery. We will learn to respond to life as opposed to blindly reacting to it. Humans affect one another deeply in ways that the world at large is just beginning to understand. When we begin healing ourselves, it sets off waves that connect us to those who have healed in the past and those who will heal in the future. When we heal ourselves, it gives strength to those who need more support to take on their own personal healing journey. What we do reverberates through time and space. Like a rock thrown into a lake, the circles it creates move in all directions." I loved

that. I loved that because it spoke so deeply to my own personal philosophies around being a good ancestor and knowing deeply that, yes, we may be an individual self and ego, an individual being, but we are all connected not just in this lifetime but in the generations that have passed and the generations that will come and knowing that the work that we're doing now will deeply affect both throughout time, I believe, forwards and backwards, right? Because time is also a construct, right? So it's all at the same time.

Diego: Right, right.

Layla: Yeah. Can you speak on that one a bit and what that means to you? Because I read it and I reread it and reread and I was like, "This is beautiful. This is it."

Diego: Thanks so much for reading that one. I haven't read that one in a while. I also haven't posted that one in a long time either.

Layla: You got to go post that one.

Diego: Yeah. It's nice to hear that one again because that's, I mean, it has a lot in there. There's a lot to like —

Layla: Yes.

Diego: — kind of take apart.

Layla: Yes. I love that you said "my faith is in people."

Diego: Oh, yeah, all day. All day. I've seen people just do amazing things when they come together. I mean, I've been at enough rallies, part of enough like campaigns, different organizing campaigns and I've been a part of a lot of groups

that have won, you know, that have won campaigns, that have like literally changed their material realities in their cities and like I know what people can accomplish.

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: But people historically have accomplished so much and what's interesting is that when you get a group of people together, like there are chances that they win but will the win be lasting? Will they actually be able to create transformative change that's better for all people? And one thing that I've seen historically is that if we don't deal with ourselves internally in a way that's very healing and regenerative and helps us just become the better version of ourselves that we really want to be, then it's just gonna be so, so easy to like replicate, reproduce the harm that we were trying to fight in the beginning.

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: So, to me, it's like you do want to do enough work to start activating at least some degree of unconditional love because unconditional love comes in layers, like it can be, you know, as powerful as like the great saints of the past, like people like Jesus or the Buddha or like, you know, Muhammad or like the people that we all look up to. But that's some high level stuff. But if you're able to like take a few steps in that direction —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — that will help tremendously to even start building a mindset of unconditional love where you, yes, I have not met this person before but now, today, I'm interacting with them and you know what, still, I'm going to treat them with kindness

and I will do my utmost to not harm them, you know? To be able to like move through life with that type of mentality is going to save us from so much harm.

Layla: Right.

Diego: But I think it's powerful that when you do do that healing work, and I don't know if you've had this experience but I've had it a number of times where I meditate by myself, like so this morning, I meditated by myself because my wife is at a meditation retreat. Normally, I don't meditate with myself, I meditate with her and, lately, we've had two other friends, another couple who've been staying with us and the four of us have been meditating together. When the four of us meditate together, it's mad strong, it's super strong. When her and I meditate together, it's also strong. When I meditate by myself, it's strong but it's not as strong as when I do with a group of people or when I go to a meditation retreat and I meditate with like 140 people. It is so powerful, so powerful, you know? Like you get so much more work done when you're in a group.

Layla: Yeah. And a group that is coming from the same place of intent.

Diego: Totally.

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: Totally. Same technique. We're all here for the same mission. We're all here trying to purify our minds, become a better version of ourselves. And you know what? It's interesting because it does feel like the energy of the past is supporting you because people have done this before. Like —

Layla: Yes.

Diego: — even in the tradition that I'm a part of, like people have been doing this for hundreds and hundreds, thousands of years. And when we practice *metta*, this one practice when you share your merits, you're like, "May all beings be happy." And sometimes I'll even like have the intention like, "May anyone who comes after me, may they also benefit from my merits and may they also share in my peace, my harmony. Whatever good I may have acquired in this lifetime, may they benefit from that as well." And —

Layla: That's beautiful.

Diego: — I'm not the only one who said that, you know? I'm sure people came before me who said that too.

Layla: Oh, I love that so much. Thank you, Diego. So, there's — there's so many things I want to ask you. One is about you've mentioned a couple of times your wife and the fact that you've been in this relationship for a very long time so a huge part of your personal journey, she's been right there alongside with you —

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: — and a lot of your poems are about intimate relationships and having that partner who can be there by your side, that you're going to be in a real relationship with and what does that look like and what does that mean and what it means like when you grow together but you're growing at different paces or —

Diego: Yeah, yeah.

Layla: Yeah, so can you speak to us about that? Because that, I mean, relationships within themselves, that's a school that you go to, right?

Diego: Right, right.

Layla: Because that person holds up that mirror for you and shows you all the things that you don't, you know, necessarily want to see about yourself. But I find it fascinating that you have been together for that long and have been on that journey together.

Diego: Yeah, it's been a while. So, I'm 33 now and my wife and I, we met when she was 18 and I was 19 —

Layla: Wow.

Diego: — so that's like 12, 13 years.

Layla: Yeah, that's your life, right? That's your adult life, yeah.

Diego: Yeah, yeah. We grew up together, you know? In like, in a very real way, we spent a third of our lives together. So, it was interesting. When we first got together, we felt a very strong connection to each other and it really felt otherworldly and it felt like we belonged together, like we should be together even though it was so hard at times. And I would say for the first like six years of our relationship, it was really hard, because, you know, I didn't know myself, she didn't know herself, and it almost at times felt like we were like in this little hurricane together and it wasn't until we started really intentionally trying to grow and then we started meditating when more harmony entered our relationship. And as we kept learning, we started realizing what we were lacking. And we, you know, we didn't have good communication, we didn't take proper turns

speaking, like, you know, we started learning how to listen to each other's truth selflessly. And to be able to like really take in her perspective or her to be able to take in my perspective without projecting anything onto it. And we also didn't understand how often we were projecting or how much we needed to be aware of ourselves to be able to maintain the harmony in our relationship. One of my favorite things to mention is like once we really started doing this work, my wife was really the one who started doing this but she would come home and she would let me know exactly how she felt. And just so that I would know that if she felt rough, it had nothing to do with me, you know? She just didn't feel that good. And before, it would become like a tension point, where it was like, "Oh, did I do something bad?" Or, "What's going on? Why don't you feel good?" And just like dropping this idea of like, you know, you should always feel great, like no, of course not, you know? Like that's so like — if I love you and I'm committing to be with you, then I should accept you in all the ways that you come, whether that's low energy, high energy, mid energy, whatever it is, like we're moving through life together. And we really — it took a lot of time to build all these systems to just like let each other know where we're at. And my wife, she's so funny, she like — so we started meditating at the same — sort of the same time. She started — she did her first course like a few months after I did mine. So she has a really powerful degree of self-awareness and she was letting me know and it cracked me up, she, one day, you know, and this happens sometimes when you're a pretty serious meditator and you're meditating like two hours a day, you are in a constant deconditioning process where you're like constantly trying to just like unfurl all the layers and unbind everything that's knotted up so that you can just keep working towards that inner liberation that we're talking about. But sometimes that comes with like a storm or two, or you'll feel like, "Oh, this was this old pain that I've been carrying." So, one day, she's feeling a bit stormy and then she is

like really quiet and then a few hours later, she's like — she's like, "You know, I just spent the last few hours trying to figure out how this thing that I'm feeling is your fault," and she was laughing to herself at like how crazy her mind was being, because like in that — like, and totally, sometimes things are totally my fault, you know? It's fine, but in that situation, it was not. It was just her and her mind trying to work magic and figure out like, "How can I blame this on him?"

Layla: Right. "How is this not on me, it's on him?"

Diego: Yeah, yeah. And it was — it's just wonderful like I feel really fortunate to be with someone who has a high degree of self-awareness. You know, we still — like we both, we make mistakes, we miscommunicate, but it's — what's really helped our relationship a lot is that meditating does decrease that level of the intensity of the reaction, you know? So like when you feel tough and you want to feel angry or you want to feel, you know, you do, you feel, you honor the fact of whatever it is that you're feeling but you also have a bit more space in your mind to be like, "I'm feeling this but, you know what, I'm going to make sure to be kind to myself and to also tread gently so that I don't cause any unnecessary arguments or unnecessary tension around me."

Layla: Right. Thank you so much for sharing that. I really appreciate it. Not everyone has a relationship where they are engaging in a healing process and their partner is also engaging in a healing process and I know that can be very painful for people because you feel like, you know, I'm working on myself, I'm doing this work, and I'm trying to change myself and they are not. For me, personally, I don't think that necessarily means that the relationship is not good or it's doomed or whatever, but I'm wondering, do people ever approach you with that question and how do you respond to that?

Diego: When one partner is not — is unable to do the work?

Layla: Uh-huh. And isn't interested in doing the work and sort of they're feeling like, "What do I do?"

Diego: You know, I kind of fall back into my own experience so like when I decided to start meditating two hours a day, my wife was really busy at the time and she, you know, she's a scientist so she has a lot of work to do and I decided, you know, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do this no matter what because I know that this is just like all around the best investment that I could make with myself and I want to be able to, you know, show up better in my life.

Layla: Yeah, nothing bad can come from deciding to meditate every day, right?

Diego: Yeah, exactly. So, like she didn't try to stop me or anything but she didn't join me in it. Even though she had done a few courses, she, you know, was moving at her own pace and I think that was something that I had to learn how to honor, was like, you know, just because I'm doing it or I'm moving at this pace doesn't mean that everybody else needs to be doing that. Not at all, you know? Like you move at the level that is good for you to achieve your personal aspirations because even your aspirations may not necessarily be my own —

Layla: That's right.

Diego: — so it took a, you know, a bit of strong determination on my part to just like keep doing it alone for a number of months and then, eventually, she joined and she decided, you know, on her own and she was like, "You know what, I'm gonna become part of this," and then there was another interesting

point where she was ready to stop drinking alcohol before I was and she was like, “You know what, I’m done with this,” and then for me I was like, “Oh, I’m almost done with it,” but I was a little slower with that but even though it was hard, I was able to like, you know, honor where she was at and then I, you know, went through my own process and then I was able to eventually join her but I think, you know, realizing that if your partner really is just not open to introspection, then you have to have the strong determination to keep going because, at some point or another, that will give them some sort of inspiration to possibly take it upon themselves, and if that never happens, then at least you will benefit from your own growth and that growth will support some harmony in your relationship for sure.

Layla: Yeah. I mean, I love what you shared about yourself and your wife’s different journeys because it’s really about doing it for yourself, right? As opposed to trying to manipulate the person that you’re in a relationship with, right? To be —

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: — in it with you in order for you to feel like, you know, “I’m going to continue on it.” It’s for me and my journey is for me and your journey is for you and it is beautiful when you’re synced up in that way and you’re sort of walking it together but that’s not the reality for everyone but it really is about this is a gift that I’m giving to myself. This is work that I’m doing for myself, and that I’m doing it, that I will show up better in the world, right? To other people.

Diego: You know, I gotta tell you, I love when you share pictures of you and your husband.

Layla: Really?

Diego: Yeah. Every time I see them, I'm like, "Oh, they're so great together," like —

Layla: We are very different people, you would —

Diego: Yeah?

Layla: — and we laugh about it constantly because we only have two things in common, really, which is that we love each other deeply and we have very similar values, but, other than that, it's — we are night and day. We are completely different. And I know for myself, you know, I had to release this idea of "He should do this" or "He should be doing that because I'm doing it."

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: We are set very differently. I'm, as you had described yourself at the beginning, you know, carrying this sort of — what did you say? A quiet sadness, that you'd carried that a lot. I carried that a lot as well. My husband doesn't. It's not a part of his makeup at all. You know what I mean?

Diego: Yeah, yeah.

Layla: We're very, very different. Okay, so as we wrap up, the one thing that I wanted to talk about is, you know, you have a huge platform on Instagram of more than 2 million people but you want your work to be separate from you, Diego.

Diego: Uh-huh.

Layla: Right? Like Yung Pueblo is Yung Pueblo, Diego is Diego, and I love that you've done that. I think that's so healthy that

you've done that, especially in the social media frenzy that we have, you know? What is the balancing act for you in showing up in the work, having it reach so many people's eyes and so many people's hearts and still protecting your own peace and your own...like I think I heard you say in one interview and I think it's from one of your poems, you talked about this idea of a palace of peace?

Diego: Yeah, yeah.

Layla: Yeah? So how do you protect that palace of peace when more than 2 million people are following you on Instagram?

Diego: It's really an ongoing situation, I think. I tried to build like some systems or like habits to try to, you know, just deal with it all in a healthy manner. I think as soon as it really started becoming bigger, I realized, I was like, oh, I was like this — if I read everything —

Layla: This is gonna be a problem.

Diego: Yeah, if I read everything, and I wouldn't even say like, yeah, occasionally, you get like trolls or mean comments and stuff but even reading all the positive things —

Layla: Yes.

Diego: — right? Like it's not healthy.

Layla: No, it is not.

Diego: You don't have a situation where it's like a ratio of one to a million and then like 95 percent of them are saying, you know, really positive things of how you're inspiring them and all this stuff, so I realized, I was like, oh, actually, I need to like

pump the brakes and not read all this stuff because that's not good for my mind, or, you know, being on the internet all the time so like I don't respond to — I generally don't respond to DMs —

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: — I don't really try to read the comments too much because it just — it's just too much. It's not good for the mind —

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: — and I did create Yung Pueblo at first because I, you know, I had that idea and I was like, oh, this name fits the idea, right? It's within — everything that I write hopefully be in service of the maturation of humanity, but then, luckily, Yung Pueblo is like becoming its own thing and I'm able to just quietly be in the background and share the material that I'm writing. So, you know, I have a lot of followers but nobody's recognized me in the supermarket yet —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — so —

Layla: That's also one of the great things about being a writer is that you're famous but you're not, right?

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: You're known on the internet, not on the streets, right?

Diego: Exactly, and, you know what, I really like that because —

Layla: I like it too.

Diego: Yeah. I rather keep it that way because when I'm just moving through the aisles of the supermarket, it's better if it's just me and my wife.

Layla: That's right. That's right.

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: But I love what you said about that it's not just about reading the negative comments, it's also reading the positive ones and not internalizing any of them.

Diego: Totally, and if you have — like you have a huge platform too, so because you have a huge platform, obviously, most of those comments are going to be super positive because you're doing something amazing in this world but like think about that. Like how many compliments are you getting every day? Like —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — it's crazy.

Layla: Yeah, it's not healthy and —

Diego: Yeah.

Layla: — each time, you know, there have been waves of sort of having an influx of people come in and actually what I do is go in — is go inward. When that happens, I kind of like, oh, need to hop offline, you know, and sort of recalibrate that I am not shifting myself in some way to perform who I think I now have to be for this increased number of people, but I thought

about that for you because I was on my Instagram Explore page and one of your poems came up but it was a celebrity who had shared it. And, you know, I was like — I mean, of course, because he has so many followers and his work is reaching so many people and I wonder how he navigates not getting hooked into, you know, this happened or that happened. Like we can appreciate that those things are happening but not start to define ourselves by them.

Diego: Oh, yeah, totally. I think, and I got to be honest, sometimes I'm still like a little star struck. Like I remember like Jennifer Lopez shared something that I put up one time and I was like, "Oh, wow," like that's —

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: — you know, really big and SZA also shared something of mine and I was like, "Wow, that's really big," but then, at the same time, it's like I don't try to like seek these things out, like if —

Layla: That's right.

Diego: — if I end up finding out and like one of my friends sees it and then they text it, it's like amazing, you know? Like, to me, like I am really glad that what I'm writing is serving people —

Layla: Yes.

Diego: — you know? Like if you're finding it useful, like that's literally the whole point. That's why I keep going and I don't stop because I'm trying to just like serve people well and I love the Instagram platform because it just lets me give tons of stuff away for free. Like I'm just like literally, you know, I'll write

something, I get to own it and I get to just give it away for free and then possibly I'll put it in a book in the future —

Layla: Right.

Diego: — interspersed with like a bunch of new stuff that hasn't been released. But it's just like — it's a whole new world, like having all this like internet real estate. It's been really interesting. I don't even know what to call it, you know, just having these massive audiences —

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: — but I'm also glad that, you know, there are so many people who are like — who think just like the two of us, who are like trying to do their best to transform themselves and then show up in big ways for the world because —

Layla: Yeah.

Diego: — I mean, we collectively need to transform.

Layla: That's right. Oh, my gosh, Diego, I've loved this conversation so much and before I ask you my final question, I just wanted to say thank you again for the work that you do, for the way that you show up in the world. You're such a huge inspiration to me and to our team and I know to so many of our listeners. I want to really encourage people to get both books. These are books that I feel like you can pick up at any time and flip to any page in them and be able to really sit with the words. And I also just want to honor you for doing the work within yourself continuously so that you can show up for the rest of us in this way. Again, it's such a model for all of us about the importance of being committed to that change that comes from the inside out, right? That long-term transformative

change that comes from the inside out and in a world where things are moving so fast and so much is about our performance, I'm so inspired by you because you are the opposite of that to me. And so thank you so much.

Diego: Thank you so much too and I honestly could just say all the same exact things about you. It's just been such a joy seeing your journey, seeing your success, seeing you at the top of the best sellers list, and I've just been so inspired by what you're doing and I feel like —

Layla: Thank you.

Diego: — you're literally serving so many people well and people will tell me that they're reading your book and I'm like, "Yeah, I've been on that before you were on that. I've been following her for a long time."

Layla: I love that. Thanks, Diego.

Diego: Yeah, yeah.

Layla: Thank you so much. All right, our final question: What does it mean to you to be a good ancestor?

Diego: That's such a deep question. You know, I hope that I'm able to live a life that really inspires my family members and the ones who come in the future to be able to walk both lines, to not only be able to develop like a really strong mental health but, at the same time, take on the deep healing initiative, to deeply go inward and heal themselves, because even if you haven't experienced a lot of trauma, like there's going to be, you know, you can be happier, like you can have less anxiety, you can have like less intense reactions so you could definitely make a big change in yourself no matter what, like no matter

where you are in life. But I really hope to inspire the people who come after me and the people who are with me now to just do the work on both levels, you know? To go inward and then when the world calls for it, show up, like go to that protest, not just on the internet, don't just post, like go outside, you know? Go outside and like — when people are moving together, history changes so go out there and move with the people.

Layla: Thank you. Thank you so much, Diego.

Diego: Thank you too.

(Outro)

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