

LOVE PERIOD.

WITH REV. DR.
JACQUI LEWIS

**Transform Your Circumstances
with ALOK**

Jacqui Lewis: Hey everybody, Jacqui Lewis here. Welcome to this second season of Love Period. This season, we're focusing our conversations on my new book, Fierce Love. A bold path to ferocious courage and rule breaking kindness that can heal the world. Each of my friends will be helping me to think about the themes in each chapter. Nine practical practices that can help us love ourselves, love our posse, and then love the world and the healing. It all starts with you. And we're going to give you practical tips to make these practices a part of your life. Welcome to this episode, inspired by Chapter 5 in my book, Fierce Love. Confront boldly, transform your circumstances with moral courage.

On today's episode, I am so delighted to welcome Alok who is an internationally acclaimed gender nonconforming writer, performer and public speaker. Alok knows what I'm talking about today, and I'm delighted to welcome them here. It was so nice of you to say yes to this.

Alok: I'm so thrilled. I'm like, this is a conversation I've been needing to have, so I'm really excited about it.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh my gosh. Well, thank you so much. I am so excited to talk with you, Alok. How are you?

Alok: I'm doing so well, excited to speak with you as well.

Jacqui Lewis: I feel like I know you kind of, because of your social media, but I would love to just have you tell me a little bit about why did you say yes to this conversation? What made you jump in this conversation with this old black lady?

Alok: I think the most interesting thing about me is my capacity to love. And I feel like so often people dwell on my physical appearance and that, for me, misses the mark. And I'm really excited about what you're doing, because I feel like compassion is the currency that makes life worth living.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh, I love that. Compassion is the currency. We've kind of missed the mark on that, haven't we Alok, in the world?

Alok: Absolutely.

Jacqui Lewis: Not enough of us thinking that love is a concrete currency with which we can change the world. How did you come to find out for yourself the power of love?

Alok: Well, the story goes like this. I was a baby sobbing and someone heated my cry. And I think the economist tell us that competition is the natural state, but the economists too were crying once. And I would offer that care is the natural orientation of the universe. And that our human nature, and maybe even our animal nature is one of compassion and interdependence. And then the thorough indoctrination of race, of class, of gender, or in other words of white supremacy of capitalism, of patriarchy, makes us pretend that we're individuals, the most perverse form of performance art. We just emerged without relation. And as part of that project of individualism, which is already always a project of loneliness, we have to pretend that it wasn't compassion that got us there, that it was our grit. That it was our stamina, our personality, but I wouldn't be here speaking you today, if it wasn't for the love that was poured into me. So for me, compassion is just about being honest about how I got here.

Jacqui Lewis: That just makes me want to take a breath. Did you and I come from the same womb and we don't know it? Thinking these and these thoughts, you sound exactly like what I've been trying to say in this book. Alok, this idea that when we stood up and walked out of the cave into the light, we knew we needed each other. We bonded together. We held hands and faced the new thing together and made fire together, planted seeds together, raised the kids together. And I had a couple of opportunities to go to South Africa in my life and to go kind of just north-

Alok: Me too.

Jacqui Lewis: ... right. Did you like it?

Alok: It's one of my favorite places in the world.

Jacqui Lewis: I know. Me too. I was really mad at South Africa because of apartheid, but it's beautiful. It's really beautiful. And you go to the cradle of civilization and you are in the museums and you're really clear about Lucy, and you're clear that all of us are African. We all come from this cradle of civilization and the South African, the Zulu concept of a Ubuntu, right? I've been trying to practice saying that [foreign language 00:05:09], a person is a person through other people. Yes, we knew we got it. I can't breathe unless you're breathing. I am inextricably connected to you. If your baby's hungry, my stomach is growling, right? If your person is unsafe, my life is in danger. I feel like we come to the world like that as babies, and then we forget.

Alok: Right.

Jacqui Lewis: Why do we forget?

Alok: Well, I don't know if forget feels like a passive word.

Jacqui Lewis: Okay.

Alok: I think it's like we're indoctrinated. We are inculcated. We're recruited.

Jacqui Lewis: That's better.

Alok: We're groomed into.

Jacqui Lewis: Yep. That's better.

Alok: My fundamental hypothesis is that everyone at their core knows what you're saying to be true. But that truth requires vulnerability and people fear needing one another. But what if we were to actually do the reframe that the communities that people call oppressed, people with disabilities, trans people, racialized people, we actually in our oppression rediscovered the need for need. And what that means for me, I guess, is I was able to hack at the shell of that forgetting because I couldn't do it alone. I couldn't be me alone. At a physical level, my safety was in jeopardy and in one narration of the story, that's a tragedy, but in the other, it's an invitation because I could ask for help and how beautiful that is.

Jacqui Lewis: The need for need. The realization that our surviving and our thriving depend on each other

is a very woman is to notion. I think about Shug and Celie in *The Color Purple* and the conversation they're having about. Sorry, I am so allergic, Alok. Wow!

Alok: Allergic to Western individualism?

Jacqui Lewis: Honey, for show and this room, I think. But yeah. Yeah, this kind of wisdom that we find in black women's literature, I'm just going to say as a black woman who loves the black women, the Octavia Butler, the *Woman at Rescued Place*, the *Argen Lord*, they were writing the truth that we know. And we know it from the womb. We know it from the ground. We know it from the air. We know it that we just cannot make it by ourselves. And that is strong to know that, right? That it's important and strong to know that your Indian, is there commonality, Alok, in the let's say indigenous wisdoms around the globe. Do you find them to have common? Can you talk a little bit about that?

Alok: Yeah. I think in many indigenous cosmologist, the basic unit is not one it's two. And the idea of nature nurture as a binary is impressive. The idea of society and nature as if nature is something that you go and experience in a park and we're not part of it. The idea of human, animal, all of those categories, those came into being with the European disenlightenment, because they weren't getting enlightened. And-

Jacqui Lewis: I love that disenlightenment. Yeah.

Alok: ... they restricted the possibilities of imagination of millions of people across the world. And I think what I'm trying to do in my life is first at the level of imagination, because I think also the reason people fear love is because the way that they've been taught love is impoverished. They've been taught love equals use, love equals lying, love equals assimilation, love equals pacifying. Not a revolutionary love, not an interdependent love. And so, what I'm asking when I say love is for people to suspend their imagination for a second of what they've been taught and imagine that there are ways of living, loving, looking, being relating that they may not know yet, or may not even remember yet.

Jacqui Lewis: I love that a local may not remember... this kind of feeling of a, I don't know. I've got a little psychologist in me. I have a PhD in psych and religion and it feels like a yangyin, what you said, that there maybe is a bedrock of wisdom, a local bedrock of knowing. A natural theology, a cultural something embedded in us, hardwired in us. My friend, Jim Loter used to say, "Every human being is looking for the face that will never leave them.

Alok: Yes.

Jacqui Lewis: Right? Everybody wants to just be seen, known and held. Everybody wants to be recognized and not feared. And that same professor defined love as of a non-possessive delight in the unique particularity of the other. Isn't that yummy?

Alok: That's so good.

Jacqui Lewis: The non-possessive delight in the unique particularity of the other. What if we could

imagine love like that? Not trying to smash each other into position, not trying to push each other into a whole, not trying to change each other really, but just to receive each other like a book that we're reading, like a wonderful waft of fragrance that we're experiencing, or the feeling of water on our bodies, just like, this is what it is. This is who it is. This is who's in front of me. This is the text before me. And there's nothing for me to do, but delighting it.

Alok: I really feel a lot of grief because even in so-called resistance movements, what you're saying is people are allergic to that.

Jacqui Lewis: Yes they are.

Alok: And it strikes me as really concerning that and retaliating against all these forces. We in some ways are just inscribing disposability and we don't need each other. And we can reduce one another to one dimensional tropes that we can use as a way to figure out who we are. And I feel often lost in so many movements and spaces because I'm saying what happened to love. That's the only thing that's sustainable. That keeps me coming back. I feel when I first started imagining and insisting on another way of living, my currency was not compassion. It was my anger. It was my rage. It was my resentment. It was my sense of frustration. It was my trauma. And that served me well at that time. But then I was exhausted, depleted.

Jacqui Lewis: Sure.

Alok: Yeah, it didn't regenerate me. But what I found about compassion is that it regenerates me, which is why it's so funny because people often see compassion as kindness to the other. But I also think of it as kindness to the self first.

Jacqui Lewis: Yep. Yeah.

Alok: Because if I become a repository for resentment, I'm unhappy.

Jacqui Lewis: Right. Right. Yeah and you can't, I mean, in that Ubuntu place where I am, who I am, because you are who you are. What in that Ubuntu place where I am, who I am and you are who you are and we're inextricably connected. I think underneath, or maybe built on top of that is this love your neighbor as yourself in all the world's religions, right? Love your neighbor as yourself, do unto others as you'd have them do unto you. Don't withhold from someone that which you need, I think is what the Koran says, one of the things. And then some tradition just says, don't break anybody's heart.

I have grief also about how we think we can love the other when we can't stand ourselves. We think we can love the other when we hate ourselves. We think we can love each other, love the other, when we have absolutely zero compassion, patience, kindness toward ourselves. No grace for ourselves. So, we got a lot of people running around in the world who can't stand themselves moving in the world. As activists, artists, writers, teachers, right? Standing in the grocery lines. I have a lot of grief, Alok, that we haven't dreamed, imagined self love enough in our cultures. Who learns how to love themselves? Where is that taught?

Alok: Yes. I've always said my diagnosis is that there's no such thing as transgender issues. There are issues that non-trans people have on themselves that they're taking out on us. I move the location away from my body towards their psyche. And what they see in me is a reflection of what they refuse to see in themselves. Because what I believe is no amount of political education, no amount of historical pedagogy, no amount of cultural sensitivity will make you accept me because what you need is to love yourself first.

Jacqui Lewis: Yes, that's right.

Alok: And that's why also I'm concerned with the move towards, yes, education, but what about education at the heart?

Jacqui Lewis: Right.

Alok: I was having that conversation that it's like, actually it's not just about yes. We have to learn subjugated histories, repressed theories totally. But alongside, the kind of spiritual failure.

Jacqui Lewis: Yep.

Alok: We're spiritually depleted first. And unless we address that crisis, none of the education will land. And so what I've reframed in my life and maybe it's just one of the reframes we have to do to make life worth living. But I realized I had been told that the reason I was being persecuted was because I lacked. I lacked the decorum required to gender binary. I lacked the ability to pass. I lacked assimilation, but now I've reframed it. And I said, it's because I love myself. That's why I'm hunted.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh, wow!

Alok: It's because I love the places that other people have abandoned. I have a new poem where I say your wound is my garden. I found life here in the places that you've left for dead. And then I began to realize that's the only thing that matters at the end of the day. Because when we die, I had the luxury of assisting my grandfather as he died a few years ago. And I kept asking the universe, why are you doing this to me now? And my grandfather had so much trauma. He was a refugee PTSD. He couldn't let go at the end. And he kept on telling me, "People are going to forget me. People are going to forget me. I didn't do enough. I didn't do enough." And no amount of me saying, "You did enough. You're amazing. We'll, remember you", mattered because he didn't believe it himself.

Jacqui Lewis: He didn't believe it. Yeah.

Alok: And so, I sat there at his deathbed and I swore to myself, I need to live a life where I believe this for myself. Where, when I die, I'm just like, "Okay, cool." I did me in the fullest extent of my screen and the fullest extent of my laughter. And I don't want to have this turmoil of the, what if. And I think, everyone is living in what if. And that's not a home.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh my goodness. Is that a poem that I can read? Everyone's living in a what if, and that's not a home. That is so right. I'm older than you are. And I feel like this book came out of me after nine years. A look of wrestling with like, "What is it that I'm struggling with as a kind of, I'm going to say a professional faith person, right?" I mean the boxes that we can

be in because we're supposed to preach this, teach that, walk this way. Or what is supposed to be Orthodox that I just do not believe at all anymore. So, many of the things, the tropes of Christianity, the things I do believe are the mandate to love. The mandate to love, to love God, to love neighbor, to love self. So simple, so straightforward. Everything else is commentary. Everything else is midrash. Everything else is somebody opining on what that looks like and often getting it wrong.

Because again at base is a kind of empty nest, a chasm, a existential emptiness that from which you're writing that theology from which you're teaching that sermon or creating those Politis or the whole fabric of the Western world, kind of pretending to be reporting, to be built on God whom we trust. But instead, a soulless bunch, a loveless bunch, a bunch that didn't love themselves created a God that matched their sorrow. Or when I'm in a good mood, I say they're sorrow or their pathology or their junk just here is this projection of God. That is actually about my own fear and emptiness and soullessness and insecurity. You are beautiful because you love you. I am a badass.

Finally, what I mean by that is my truest self, because I stopped. I just, over time got, what did you call it? To my fullest scream, to my fullest weep, to my fullest laughter. And I'm thinking about what kind of journey it is. I don't know, but I'm going to say this better. How can more people find the corage, the heart to love themselves so we can fix it together. The broken spaces.

Alok: This is the question I ask myself every day. I think it's what propels me to keep going is once you experience this kind of self love, there's no going back. You want to recruit everyone to it.

And that's both my biggest strength and my biggest weakness. My strength and then it makes me want to keep going. My weakness and that sometimes I believe in people more than they believe in themselves. And I mistake people for their potential because I see a halo above them, what they could be if. But once again, if it's a dangerous place to be, I'd rather stay in is. So, what I try to do is to create reverberations to everything and everywhere I go.

If I'm kind today, maybe someone will see that kindness and it will create a chain reaction. If I bring compassion everywhere that I go, especially in the places where it's unfamiliar and not cool, maybe then there'll be a kernel of possibility, like a seed planted in the middle of oblivion. And maybe it may take years to grow, but everyone will know there's a seed there in the darkness with no dirt. And I guess the closest that comes for me is as a performer, when I'm curating a show, I'm tearing at the fabric of the earth and I'm in the crevices, in the cracks, creating an underground world with where I'm trying to show people for at least an hour and a half, what it's like to be free.

And maybe they'll have to return to whatever the bullshit, the repression, the loneliness, the pain, but my responsibility as an artist is in that hour and a half, I show them me.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah.

Alok: Me, me. And that through seeing me, me, I hope that they can see there, there. And I think that's how I got free as I met free people.

Jacqui Lewis: Ooh, that's right.

Alok: And they were my lighthouses and it was less about giving me a blueprint and more about giving me permission. Because, I think, a lot of people don't have permission. This work is betrayal work. It's betrayal to what the system wants you to be, what the system wants you to say, what the system wants you to feel. It's isolating work and people know it. This is what I think is so fundamentally fascinating about the American condition is that every time we speak truth, people can recognize it because they've been repressing it for so long. So, I break out of this idea that what I have to say is revelatory babes. You know it. You just refuse to say it, so I say we're bilingual. The things that we say and the things we won't. And everyone is fluent in the things they won't say.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah, exactly.

You model by being your truest me, your me, me. That you do it and you live to talk about it. No kidding, right? You're not, you're here. Salient color purple, maybe black. I may be ugly, but I'm here. You're here, which is a lighthouse to help others feel brave enough to confront the if, to confront the no, to confront the restrictions, to try to be unimpinged by everyone's expectations and just practice, just practice being themselves. It is hard work. It is really hard work. I want to make sure that our listeners know that we know it's hard work, but it's the only work or you going to die. I mean, I think it's like that. I tell a story in this book about my dad, who won't be listening to this podcast because he doesn't do that, but he will read this book and be probably annoyed with me.

But I tell this story about growing up in this family, Alok, where my dad loves me so much. He loves us so much. He loves us so much, but the love is like, this is what you do and this is how you be. And when you're outside of this, the way you get back in line, the way you get back in the frame, back in the binary, back in the girl role, back in the don't know most, the don't do that messes, is he's angry as hell. Just angry as hell. And you woke, you grow up terrified, walking on eggshells, just like, how am I going to keep my head down enough to not pissed at off.

And over years, a few different times when I'm a teenager, we have it out. We have a big moment, but I don't get to be a grown up with my dad until I'm 45, graduating from my doctoral program. And he just acts really crazy at a party. And I just take him on all the gloves off. And I, inside myself, my little self is going, love doesn't do that, love doesn't talk to your dad that way or love doesn't confront. But it does. It has to. It has to, right? It has to be unleashed sometimes in ways that feel harsh. But the corage, the heartness of it calls us to those hard places. And I know there's a story in your world about coming out to your mom at six. Do you feel comfortable talking about that?

Alok: Yeah, sure. And I didn't remember this, but she kept it in her diary and she just casually mentioned it to me once and it made so many things click for me. When I was younger, I always used to be a child with many questions. I would ask what would life be if I was born an ant? Like a serious ambition.

And I just literally, I was so dysmorphic about being a human. I was like, "Like what?" What is reality? What is existence? And now I look back and it was my childhood way of articulating what you see in me is not me. And there were so many moments where I was trying to not just leave bread crumbs, but entire freaking Banh Mi sandwiches. So, my mom was taking me in. I said, "Mom, I'm Koyer and I had learned the word because my dad is Malaysian. As we grew up reading, British colonial children's school literature. So, Koyer for me didn't mean gender, sexuality. It meant different, strange, peculiar. And my mom didn't ask, what does that mean to you? She just didn't ask. And I was like, "Why didn't you ask me?" And she was like, "You were just always used to say strange things." And I was like...

Jacqui Lewis: Okay.

Alok: This is a thing. When we're saying the return, here's what I fundamentally believe. Children are free. And so the return that I'm speaking to is that wonder, that sense of possibility, imagination, porousness, interconnectivity play, that's what I'm trying to get back to. How did we normalize abbreviating our creativity and calling that maturity,

That's not maturity. I think maturity is being able to daydream. Maturity is what they call naivety or idealism. Maturity is actually the practice of wonder.

Jacqui Lewis: Yes.

Alok: And that's what I was doing back then when I said I'm Koyer. It was so much more expansive and celestial than just gender and sexuality. It was, I'm an alien, and I wanted her to say, I see you in your difference and thank you. And I didn't get that. And I think that's why what I've learned is that our mothers, they're the mothers that give birth to us. And then there are mothers and those are not the same. And my mothers were people who were dead, who I read their books and they gave birth to me in that reading. When I read James Baldwin and I'm literally like that chill child story of the abandoned goof saying, "Are you my mother?" That's me reading. Saying like, "Oh my God, you're teaching me how to feel." And that's what parenting should have been. Teaching me how to feel, be expansive, be compassionate, be wonderful. Yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: James Baldwin is my mother too. I love the way you're saying that. I was talking to some parents the other day about the book and this place where I'm saying children are watching us. Children are paying attention to us. There are free sponges, right? Free sponges, ready to be what it is that they would have permission to be. And in so many ways, rather than being an elastic, playful Donald Winnicott, because he's great psychologist, like play space where children get to experiment and try on new things and dresses and choose and get outside of the lines. And the magical way that that makes a true alive, vibrant, vital self or parenting is impinging. "No. Johnny don't cover outside of the line. No, this is what it looks like to be a human." All the no gets safe, gets straight as a black person. All the ways my parents parented us to keep us from getting our behinds kicked.

You're dead a little bit inside. Or you develop a false self, which is what I did. Alok, a mask and a cape and I'm shiny and I'm good and I'm not bad. And I'm doing all the right things. And I mean, repressing my sexuality, repressing my passion, repressing my sassiness, repressing my, I don't think so-ness to just stay safe. And how many children, Alok? How many of us just grow up with whole pieces of ourselves not realized because of the giant no, in our container.

Alok: Yeah. I mean, I can sense it. That trauma means that the living die many deaths. And oftentimes navigating this world, this civilization, I feel like it is the walking dead. I meet zombies every day. I meet shells of people. I meet living ghosts and I'm haunted by it, because it feels so hollow. It's like, I don't want power if it's that, I don't want visibility if it's that, I don't want money or fame if it's that. What I want is peace.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah.

Alok: Co-presence, alignment of my spirit and my foot. I want to be able to relish in every second on earth and make it aesthetically striking and worthwhile. And it took me, like you, the shedding of many skins to recognize that everything that had been marketed to me that was happiness or success, those were prisons. That actually the happiness and the success was already always in me. Nothing external.

Jacqui Lewis: Right.

Alok: And so, the most powerful romance novel is the memoir and the autobiography, which means that the most powerful love plot is your own.

Jacqui Lewis: The one you have with you.

Alok: Yes. And now that I'm doing this work, there's really no going back. And I don't want to offer myself as someone who's done it because I think it's life work, right? But I feel so much more zest, so much more curiosity and order and possibility. And I don't know if I'm okay with just finding people like you and saying, "We're doing this work." I know some of my friends were like, "You just got to find your people and then stop." But I'm like, "No." And I see that in you too, the reason you're writing is like, how do I bring in people?

Jacqui Lewis: Yes. I want more, I want more people. Yeah. More people.

Alok: And I think that's what my purpose on earth is, but it's devastating and heartbreaking because it's not, it's a disappointment at a soul level. I hope one day I get to perform for you. But when I perform, I stretch every particle of me and I give everything. I'm sobbing. I'm laughing. I'm rolling on the floor. I'm human. And then afterwards, when someone comes up to me and does the very thing that I'm protesting and my performance reduces me to a body, turns into a shell. I'm a commodity. The photo is taken and I'm sitting there gutted like a dead fish.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh my gosh.

Alok: How do you return? And I think that's where I'm now at in and my journey is, what does it mean to return to unreciprocated love because if I'm committed to love, I'm going to get unreciprocated love all the time.

Jacqui Lewis: That's right. Yeah.

Alok: What does it mean to reach and to have people recoil? How do you hold that?

Jacqui Lewis: Oh my gosh. That's so painful. I can really feel that. And I do think that you, in your performance art, and me and my writing and teaching and stuff, we're just kind of, I don't know, there's the reality of how hard it is. There's the tragedy of how unreciprocated the love can be. But also isn't it true? A kind of effort, but that's what I got to do anyway. I think it's a path we're on. I think it's a path we're on to be revolutionary in our love, fierce in our love. And maybe part of that fierceness is to confront. It just might be lonely and it just might be heartbreaking. And it just might be that you're bleeding inside yourself while you're trying to love people into healing. And the source, the universe, the world, your cosmology, my worldview will rejuvenate us also along the way. There's loss and there's gain and there's right hurt and there's my grandchildren, Alok. They give me juiciness enough. My husband, to get back in the game again, but there's no way this is easy. This is not.

And I was writing this book, thinking about this confronting our circumstances with moral courage. But what this conversation is helping me to hear better is actually the object of my confrontation is often just me. The object of my love is me, right? But the object of my love is me. But the object of my confrontation is me. "Jacqui." "What?" "No, what?" "What are you wanting to do?" What are you going to be? What's the parts of you that are still

listening to some old tape. What's the part of you that is going to buy into commodification by accident or on purpose. What's the part of you that you need to do so you can be a better lover in the world. I'm in the mirror, Alok, both trying to love myself, but also to confront or care for it. The junk in me that keeps me from being the me that I want to be. The me, me, as you said earlier. Is that your experience too? That you both love you and confront you?

Alok: Oh yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: Right?

Alok: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Alok: I notice... what are the things that I find particularly difficult or thorny to sit with another people? What really irritates me? What really pisses me off? And you have to peel an onion, that discomfort. And at the core, it's a story of you. I recently had someone in my life who I felt like was betraying their creative purpose on earth. Settling and compromising. And I would say, I just don't have respect for people who don't try. I don't have respect for people who give up on themselves. And then I went deeper, and I went deeper, and I went deeper, and I was like, "Oh my gosh. I am recruiting this person into a chess game that they didn't opt into." I am making them a character into my own novel.

Jacqui Lewis: Wow.

Alok: Why do I do that? It's because it's easier to externalize than it is to internalize. It is so easy, and that's my diagnosis for what's happening right now in this country. It's we've been non-consensually recruited into someone else's storyline. We're just the figment of someone else's imagination. And they've made us, I mean, I think this is what James Baldwin said so lucidly decades ago, white people invented the racial other as a repository for all the things they didn't want to confront in themselves, right?

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah.

Alok: So, that's why imagination is a material and concrete structure where we kind of began with. Gloria and Zultuis says that we have to see the images in our mind before we can manifest them in the world. There has always been that feminists of color reckoning. That this dream work is physical work. That everything is energy before it becomes concrete form. And what I feel when I see this country is I'm like, "You have made me into a villain in some story that has everything to do with you and nothing to do with me."

Jacqui Lewis: Right. Your work is so important, and I can't wait to see you perform. And just the idea of dropping the seeds into the world, what you just said so concisely that is about owning our capacity to both create the stories that we want, but also to be co-opted into the stories, right? And where do we want to be? Do we want to be generative of an alternate story? Are we comfortable being co-opted in these stories? How do we resist these stories? How do we confront these stories? And how do we change them together as a series of thoughts that come to mind when we're talking right now?

Alok: I think the first step, the first start is trying. One of the things that I've noticed in myself is I am so comfortable in speculation. It makes me tricks my brain into thinking that it's the kind of doing. I'm just sitting there contemplating.

And I believe in contemplation, of course, but I also believe that we just got to try. And the reason I don't try often is because I'm afraid of a failure, but then what my higher self is, all those failures will get you where you need to go anyways. So, short term, you'll be like, "Oh, well that sucks." But then long term, you're going to be like, "Oh, that guided me where I needed to be." So what I'm trying to push myself right now, so not just write about loving myself, but do it. Not just speak about the work, but do it.

Jacqui Lewis: But do it. Yep.

Alok: And the doing of it is so quiet. It's not the Instagram post. It's not the spectacle. It's the, you're hungry as F---. You're on the train and someone's being crude and cruel and saying even now I'm going to choose compassion. And that work is a lifetime of cultivation. And I think that's who I want to be known as. I don't want biographers or people who knew me in life. I want barista's and I want passengers. And I want people in the line at the grocery store you mentioned before. To be able to be like that person was, a delay.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah.

Alok: Those are the post-it notes I want left on my grave.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh my God, that's good. That's super. What do you know for sure about love?

Alok: What I know for sure is that I'll never know for sure. That love requires a suspension of comprehension and a surrender that there are things that are far more expansive totalizing and ambitious than thought.

Jacqui Lewis: And when I say fierce love, what does that evoke on you? Or what comes up for you?

Alok: It's love with a curve like a hook that carries you in. It's like, love is going in one direction and the fierce comes in and just gives it a little limp wrist and [laughs].

Jacqui Lewis: I like that. I hope I can kind of find a way to make that a meme or something. That's right. That's really good. Alok, I want to know you. I'm delighted to have this conversation with you. And I hope that we can find ways to connect with each other on this journey.

Alok: Yeah, I'm so grateful that you're doing this work and I can't wait to read the book.

Jacqui Lewis: Thank you, Alok. God bless. Be well.

Thank you so much for listening to this beautiful conversation with Alok. I hope that these are your takeaways because they're mine. No matter who you are, no matter where you stand in the world, it is an act of moral courage to be your true self. And you might need to confront the people in your life to claim that space. I want to encourage you to be brave, to take a risk and try to be authentic and claim you. Claim space enough for you. Be bold, my friend, and do that. And then almost all of our cultures teaches to honor our parents. Does

that mean squashing what we really think? Or does it mean partnering with your parents to create an honest relationship between the two of you? It might not work, but it certainly won't work if you don't try. So, think of yourself as co-parenting a relationship together and see if that guides you.