



## Episode 23

# The Fierce Vulnerability of Beloved Community with Kazu Haga

## Transcript *(lightly edited for readability)*

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**[00:00:00] Roxy Manning:**

Welcome to Fierce Compassion, the podcast that explores the power of compassion in creating an antiracist society. I'm Roxy Manning.

**[00:00:25] Sarah Peyton:**

And I'm Sarah Peyton. We are delighted to be joined today by Kazu Haga.

**[00:00:31] Roxy Manning:**

Kazu is the author of a book that has inspired both Sarah and me, [Healing Resistance](#).

**[00:00:37] Sarah Peyton:**

He teaches nonviolence, conflict reconciliation, restorative justice, organizing and mindfulness in prisons and jails, high schools and youth groups, and with activist communities around the country.

**[00:00:52] Roxy Manning:**

Kazu is the founding board chair of [Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice](#). He sits on the board of [Peace Workers](#) and is a member of [The Ahimsa Collective](#) and the [Evolutionary Leaders](#). Kazu has also been the recipient of several awards, including the Martin Luther King, Jr. Award, and the Gil Lopez Award for Peacemaking. We're excited that Kazu agreed to talk with us because the conversation was amazing.

**[00:01:24] Sarah Peyton:**

It was so amazing. We got to tune in to the extraordinary humility, humor, and stories that Kazu brought us.

**[00:01:36] Roxy Manning:**

We ask almost every guest to talk to us about compassion, and I loved it when he was like, you know, sometimes I just want to punch somebody in the face. And it's like real understanding that

compassion is not always easy. That it's really hard when it's with the people who are pushing every button we have was so important to hear.

**[00:01:57] Sarah Peyton:**

Those difficult moments of self-compassion, where you're up against shame, you're up against disappointment, you're up against not being able to be who you wish you were, and what's important about self-compassion in those moments.

**[00:02:12] Roxy Manning:**

We both had so much resonance with that, you know, that understanding of just how hard it was. Kazu used this phrase about the fractal, the fractal world, and this idea that trauma and reconciliation happens not just at the individual level, but it's also happening at the systemic level, and that when we see it happening locally, it can also then happen globally and universally.

**[00:02:35] Sarah Peyton:**

And when he did speak to that, I got really curious. I was like, okay, tell us how you could see this being scaled.

**[00:02:44] Roxy Manning:**

I was so glad you asked that question, Sarah, cause I love the personal examples that he gives.

**[00:02:49] Sarah Peyton:**

Yeah, and another he gave us - the story of profound reconciliation with someone who was very hurt, then someone who had participated in that hurt happening in the context of incarceration. And it was... it brought me to tears.

**[00:03:08] Roxy Manning:**

And I think that's what Kazu speaks to; this idea that it is possible, that we have the capacity and skills as human beings to have this kind of reconciliation. He's also so fiercely committed to social change, to shutting down injustice, but doing it from this place of fierce vulnerability and relationship building, that that is the essence and it's necessary to change injustice in a way that really creates reconciliation. I'm so inspired by all that he shared with us.

**[00:03:40] Sarah Peyton:**

That's beautiful.

**[00:03:42] Roxy Manning:**

So I am so excited about this interview and I can't wait for you, our dear listeners, to hear it and give us feedback when you do.

**[00:03:49] Sarah Peyton:**

We are honored to welcome Kazu Haga.

**[00:04:03] Roxy Manning:**

So Kazu, we are so delighted to have you joining us.

**[00:04:07] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah, thanks for having me.

**[00:04:09] Roxy Manning:**

It's been actually... we sent out an email asking people, who do you want us to interview? And you would not believe how many people kept saying, "Kazu Haga! Kazu Haga! Kazu Haga!"

**[00:04:20] Kazu Haga:**

That is so sweet. Thank you.

**[00:04:21] Roxy Manning:**

There are going to be a lot of people excited to hear this. But we wanted to start out with a question that we ask every guest, which is how do you define self-compassion and what's the role that you found self-compassion playing in your work in your life?

**[00:04:35] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah, thank you for that. You know, I was thinking about it and self-compassion, it's something that sounds so nice and so easeful. And I think sometimes it is. I think sometimes self-compassion is, you know, treating yourself to a nice meal after a long day or choosing to go for a walk in the woods and being with nature. But for me, oftentimes self-compassion is about coming to terms and accepting my faults, and giving space for my grief and for my pain and accepting that, almost on a daily basis, I fall short of who I want to be right and self-compassion oftentimes is a struggle. It's an ongoing struggle. It's easy to be compassionate to myself when I'm feeling great and everything is going well. But giving myself space and compassion at the times that I'm not doing well is not an easy thing.

And recently I've been thinking a lot about an experience that I had about 12 years ago. I was at a gathering called a jam, which is one of the most healing spaces I've ever been to. And there was a moment at the jam when people were sharing vulnerable truths about themselves. And so I decided to take a risk and I decided to share about a childhood trauma. This was before I started, you know, really taking my own trauma healing journey seriously, but, you know, people were sharing vulnerable things so I thought I'd share something too. And I shared a story that I'd never

shared out loud before. And in my mind at the time, I had told myself that, you know, these are experiences that were difficult to go through, but it happened 20 years ago. So I was over it and I had healed and I had moved on. And then when I started to tell the story, I just went into complete panic. And I realized in that moment how heavy that trauma was that I was holding onto, and how much of a heavy delusion that I was living with myself when I was just telling myself that I had gotten over it. And I think the compassion that I had to show myself to accept that I had actually not moved on and that I was still hurting from it, and that I was still not whole because of these experiences that I had, was really difficult.

You know, so again, I think sometimes self-compassion is easeful, but oftentimes deep self-compassion has teeth to it. You know, it's a struggle to give myself that compassion, and I think that's the kind of self-compassion that I try to give myself more and more.

**[00:07:11] Sarah Peyton:**

First of all, I love you saying this because it so maps with my own experience of, it's fine when everything's fine, but when the rubber hits the road of shame, then it's hard to find my own compassionate, inner voice that's got any kind of grace for Sarah, at all. So, I'm completely, completely grateful that you have talked about this. And also that you talked about what it's like to beat ourselves up for not having healed, which is one of the things that I hear people most often say when they're entering, doing their trauma healing work, is they'll say, "I don't know why I'm not over this!" You can hear the impatience in their voices. So, because your work has been so much about compassion, what's it like if we ask you about compassion? Is compassion pretty easy? Or is that also got some barbs to it?

**[00:08:20] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah, I mean, I think it depends. You know, again, compassion for myself comes easily some days and more difficult other days. Compassion for others is the same thing. Like, you know, it's easy to have compassion for someone who is really sharing from their heart and is deeply connected to their needs and is deeply connected to their essential self. Um, but when they're far from that, when they're far from equilibrium and they're causing harm, it can be really difficult. And I think one thing that helps me with that is to try to continue to lead with curiosity. You know, when it becomes difficult for me to have compassion for somebody for there to be at least a small part of me that wonders, that wonders what it's like for that person and wonders, um, what they're going through and how they're seeing the conflict and what made them do the things that they do and believe the things that they believe.

And I've had the privilege to work with countless incarcerated people, um, over the last 10, 15 years, who've caused a lot of harm, and I've had the privilege to hear their stories and I found that

no matter what people do and how much harm they cause, if we can pause enough and be curious to hear their story, then everything they do begins to make sense. And it doesn't condone and justify the things that they're doing, but it becomes so much easier for me to understand why they do the things that they do and why they made the choices that they made. And it becomes easier to have compassion for that.

You know, [Mariame Kaba](#), who's a transformative justice activist, says that nobody enters violence for the first time by committing it. That there's always some unprocessed pain that is still alive in our hearts that is the source of us lashing out and harming others. And so, can we be curious, even when someone is harming us, or harming those that we love, can we be curious about their story? And I think that really helps to bring the compassion in because there's always a story there that helps to make sense of things, you know.

**[00:10:32] Roxy Manning:**

I'm enjoying hearing you speak to this because one of the ways that I think about Beloved Community, which I cannot wait to ask you about later, is about thinking about it as family. And when I think about family, if my family member does something I don't like, I'm often curious. I'm willing to extend that kind of grace of curiosity to them. But when it's a stranger, it's easy to just kind of like shut them down and say they're a bad person and not hold the same curiosity. So bringing this curiosity to everyone as the foundation for compassion is so beautiful to hear.

**[00:11:06] Kazu Haga:**

Totally. And I'll say though that sometimes family is the hardest place for us to practice this stuff, too, right? Someone once told me that, um, your family members know exactly what buttons to push because they're the ones that installed them there, you know? And so, um, there's times when, yeah, when our family members cause harm that it's, you know, easy to have that compassion because they're our family and we love them no matter what and times when family members do the smallest things and it's so difficult to have patience with them. I know I experience that on a regular basis, too. So, there's never a shortage of opportunities to practice nonviolence, is what I found.

**[00:11:44] Roxy Manning:**

Absolutely. Well, talking a little bit about families, can you share a little bit about your various identities and how or whether they've been important to you or contributing to the work that you do with nonviolence?

**[00:11:59] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah, so as with anybody, I carry a lot of identities. I am a cisgendered male heterosexual. I am a Japanese immigrant, first generation. I moved here when I was seven. I'm a high school dropout with no college education. I am an author, I am a son, a partner, uh, an expectant father, uh, soon to be. I am Asian, I am 43 years old, uh, it's like, uh, pretty middle aged now.

And, you know, there's ways in which all of those identities deeply matter, and there's ways in which they don't. Um, they matter because, you know, one of the places where I felt the deepest sense of belonging is - you know, earlier I talked about this, the space called jams, which are these, like, usually about week-long transformative retreats for change-makers. And I have the privilege to be on the organizing team of the Asian diaspora jams; every year we get together with about 30, uh, people identified with the Asian diaspora. And it's one of the places where I feel the deepest sense of belonging, because of the shared affinity with each other and the shared cultural backgrounds, a lot of shared migration stories. And it's important for me to have those spaces because the more I can deepen into a sense of belonging, sometimes in these smaller spaces, the more I remember that I belong to all of life. Right? And that's ultimately what this work is all about. And sometimes it requires me feeling like I belong in this small, almost exclusive space to remind myself that I belong to something bigger. It's easier for me to touch that deep sense of belonging around sometimes with people with shared identities.

But there's also a realm in which these identities - so many of which are not real, they're delusional - there's a realm in which it doesn't matter, right? And it's a tricky thing to talk about because I don't want to get to this, like, "All lives matter! We are all one! We're all the same!" Because we're not. There's very real differences that are important. And I found that sometimes these identities that matter so much to us, if we're not careful, they become hindrances to creating Beloved Community. And we get so comfortable amongst people who look like us, talk like us, and we forget that we actually belong just as deeply to those that don't look like us, and don't think like us, and don't act like us. And so I think it's really important that, you know, we have pride in our culture and our backgrounds and all the ways and all the identities that really matter to us, and we find our sense of self in that, and to remember that we are part of something so much bigger than ourselves as individuals and any of these so called identities that we hold.

**[00:14:54] Sarah Peyton:**

This is really exciting to me because, four years ago or five years ago, Roxy invited me or somehow together we dreamed up the idea of doing a class that would integrate Nonviolent Communication and Kingian Nonviolence. And, at that point, I didn't know who you were. And as part of getting ready to do this class with Roxy, I started to read your beautiful first book, *Healing Resistance, A Radically Different Response to Harm*, and it was right during the political upheaval of Hillary

Clinton's loss. And, and I was having a hell of a time letting an entire political, you know, party in the United States belong to me. I was just in total moral crisis and wanted not to be nonviolent.

**[00:15:56] Kazu Haga:**

It was a tough time.

**[00:15:59] Sarah Peyton:**

And I found your book and I was reading your book, and I was like... it was so important to me because - it kind of brings tears to my eyes, but - you were naming the struggle, but you were holding on to the dream. And so I really would love to know how you came to write this particular book that I love so much.

**[00:16:18] Kazu Haga:**

Thank you. I feel almost obligated to just start by saying that, you know, when people read my book and they attend workshops that I facilitate or listen to this podcast, they're only experiencing me at my best. And there are moments all the time that I want to punch someone in the face or, you know, like... and so I just want to acknowledge that we're all imperfect human beings. And especially, yeah, after that election, it was really difficult for all of us.

But, you know, my journey to finding Kingian Nonviolence was that, uh, I have been doing social change work since I was 17 years old. I've been doing nothing but social change work, both in terms of my passion and vocation, as well as my quote unquote profession. But it wasn't until 10 years into that work that I found out who Dr. Martin Luther King *actually* was and what the word "nonviolence" *actually* meant, when I had the opportunity to attend a two day workshop on this philosophy called Kingian Nonviolence Conflict Reconciliation, which was developed out of the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King. And, like I said, by that point I had been doing 10 years of social change work and movement work going all over the country, supporting organizations, supporting movements. So I thought I had some sense of what the word nonviolence meant. But in those two days, I realized that I had *no idea* what the word nonviolence meant, and that the entire legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King had been hidden from me.

And so from that moment, I've been, and continue to this day, on this endless journey of trying to understand what it means to be a better practitioner of nonviolence. And it was a couple of years, well, you know, I took that two day workshop and then that summer I went and got certified as a trainer in Kingian Nonviolence. And I continued to go back to that training every year, eventually supporting people from all over the country become certified trainers in Kingian Nonviolence. And it was actually during one of these trainings at the University of Rhode Island that I received a call from my publisher at Parallax Press who said, "Hey, we've been reading some of the stuff you've

been writing online. How would you like to write a book about it?" So it was such a privilege that, you know, a publisher reached out to me and I had this opportunity to put my thoughts down on paper.

**[00:18:33] Sarah Peyton:**

You were invited.

**[00:18:34] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah, it was a real privilege.

**[00:18:37] Roxy Manning:**

Since you started talking about just how important the work of Dr. King has been to your life, I'd love to have you share a little bit more about that work, both about the concept of Beloved Community, which I've already referenced, like, how has that influenced your work, and how you're approaching community building, community organizing, nonviolence resistance, all of the things that you're doing.

**[00:18:57] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah, Dr. King changed everything for me. Like I said, that two day workshop just completely flipped my world upside down. And, you know, Beloved Community is a term that was initially coined by an American theologian named [Josiah Royce](#) and popularized by Dr. Martin Luther King. And I feel like over the last 10 years or so, it's become more and more popular as a term. And I think it's a beautiful thing, and, at the same time, when something becomes more popular, it loses some of its essence. Right? And so I think when we talk about Beloved Community, people oftentimes think about, "Oh, well, my faith community is my Beloved Community. My family is my Beloved Community." And I think all of those things are true and should be celebrated, and at the same time, I know that when Dr. King was talking about Beloved Community, he wasn't talking about loving the people that are easy to love. And like, he wasn't talking about building community with the people that are already in your community. That the work of building community, or the work of building Beloved Community, is a real struggle because it's about remembering that the people that we don't like, the people that we oftentimes see as "them," "the other," our enemy, that they are also part of the Beloved Community.

You know, there's this beautiful quote from the Aboriginal Australian activist, [Lilla Watson](#), who says that if you have come here to save me, you're wasting your time, but if you have come here because your liberation is bound with mine, then we can walk together. And it's a popular quote that I oftentimes wonder how many people who repeat that quote really believe it, or if they believe that their liberation is bound only with the liberation of the people that they agree with,



and if people believe that the universe weaves separate webs of interdependence based on political affiliation, right? And to me, ultimately, the idea of Beloved Community is about this unwavering faith in interdependence: that my liberation is bound with the liberation of all life throughout the cosmos, not just our own species, but throughout the cosmos. And, if I believe that, then I have to believe that across the board. I can't pick and choose whose liberation mine is bound up with and whose liberation, like, "I have to beat those people for my liberation to happen," right?

And so, you know, by studying Dr. King's work, I've really come to understand that people are never the enemy. That it is injustice, it is violence, it is separation that is the enemy that we're trying to transform. And Beloved Community is, you know, as Dr. Martin Luther King said, and is one of the principles of Kingian Nonviolence, Beloved Community is the framework for the future. Whether we get there or not, it's always the North Star that we're walking towards. So that, understanding that Beloved Community, healing, reconciliation is always our goal, no matter how small or how large the conflict, has really reoriented how I go about my work.

**[00:21:57] Roxy Manning:**

I want to tie this back to what you had said earlier, both about sometimes you want to punch people in the face and also how difficult it is to have self-compassion. Because a lot of times when I talk to people about Beloved Community, in the way that you just did, that it's about embracing the people that we think are the other, the people that we want to reject that are not like us, about really working for all of our liberation, people are like, "Yeah... everybody, but *that* person." Right? And I think that's a place where compassion and self-compassion really comes in.

Like, I often invite people to explore, instead of beating myself up for not being the perfect person who's believing these ideals, it's to wonder, what am I trying to protect? What am I trying to take care of when I say everybody but that group. And so I love the ideas and the vision of Beloved Community, and I also get how hard it is for us, especially in this day and age, to like really want to live up to them and to really want to stretch ourselves to see the other as part of our community.

**[00:22:59] Kazu Haga:**

Totally. And I think another thing that helps for me is, you know, understanding my commitment to my own healing journey constantly reminds me of how imperfect I am. And so I think it like, it humbles me. Healing work is humbling because I realize how broken *I* am, and knowing how many faults I have makes it a little bit easier to extend compassion to others. Because, you know, I'm not assuming that I'm perfect and they're not and therefore *they* need to heal and *they* need to learn to be more just and *they* need to learn to be more compassionate, because I also need to be doing that work, you know?

**[00:23:43] Sarah Peyton:**

I wonder about this intertwining of trauma consciousness and social justice. Is this something that's always been very present for you, or is it something that's been developing?

**[00:23:57] Kazu Haga:**

I think it's a yes and no. From the moment that I discovered Kingian Nonviolence there's been a way in which healing has always been the goal, because Beloved Community is the goal, and Beloved Community is about reconciliation, and reconciliation is about the healing of relationship. But I've also found that, you know, as I've started my own trauma healing journey and as I've started to hold space and circles for supporting others in their healing journey, that Dr. King, and a lot of these kind of lineages and traditions of nonviolence that we know about, they didn't have access to the science of trauma healing and neuroscience and all these modalities of healing that we have access to now. And so to me, that is - it's not a new thing, but it's new frameworks and new ways of looking at an ancient thing. And a lot of my work that I do now is around looking at the intersection of trauma healing and nonviolent social change work, and how we really cannot do one without the other. And so it's become more and more of a focus in my work every day, especially as I go through my own trauma healing journey. I really see how important it is to have an understanding of how to heal trauma as we're working on healing society's wounds.

**[00:25:18] Sarah Peyton:**

You have a new book coming out next year, *Fierce Vulnerability*. Tell us a little about this book.

**[00:25:27] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah. So, *Fierce Vulnerability* is something that I've been working on for a long time. I'm finally almost done with it. And I think there's two main things about it. One is this focus on trauma and healing as the kind of core of the work that we're doing in the world, and looking at the ways in which trauma and our efforts at healing from trauma work in fractals. And so what are the things that we as society have learned about how to heal from trauma as individuals? And how can we extrapolate those lessons to scale and bring them into social movements? And how do we look at social injustice and systemic violence as manifestations of collective trauma? And therefore, even nonviolent direct action as a modality of collective trauma healing. And if we can view injustice as a manifestation of collective trauma, then to acknowledge that - you know, a lot of activist movements that I've been a part of, we move with the spirit and this energy of we're here to shut things down. Right? And that's important energy in this day of genocide and war and injustice and power and all these things, we need to shut down injustice. There's times when we're going to need to occupy government buildings and whatever it is. But also acknowledging that we actually can't shut down injustice any more than we can shut down trauma. Like, we can't go to a

traumatized person and point our fingers and say, "Stop doing that!" and I'm afraid in a lot of organizing circles, that's how we view our role, is to go to places where there's trauma happening and point our fingers and say, "Stop doing that. Stop being unjust." And that's not how healing works, right?

One of my friends and incarcerated nonviolence trainers, who's currently incarcerated at Soledad Prison, Bill G, once told me that resolving a conflict is about fixing issues and reconciling a conflict is about repairing relationships, and that ultimately nonviolence is about both. Like, we need to fix issues *and* we need to repair relationships. And I think if you're only worried about fixing issues and passing legislations and changing policies, then you can harness power by shutting things down, but, if you're trying to heal trauma and you're trying to repair relationships, you need more than just this, like, we're-here-to-shut-things-down energy. We're actually here to open things up and open up vulnerable conversations that may not have been accessible to us earlier. And so, that's the first part of fierce vulnerability is understanding the connection between trauma and social change work.

And the second thing is just an acknowledgement of this particular moment in human history and in earth's history, where there are changes happening at scales that are unimaginable to us, right, ecologically and otherwise. I feel like, you know, the compounding crises of our times brings us to this moment where some of the old rules of organizing no longer apply. Like, the ways that I've always been taught as an organizer, I feel like a lot of those rules are no longer applicable. And there's a way in which you know, there's so many ecological changes happening that we are no longer driving. Like, we may have sparked it with industrial revolution and all these things, but we are no longer in control, right? And so how can we kind of transition ourselves from seeing ourselves as change makers to just being in relationship to the changes that are happening that are both inevitable and are happening at a scale that is so much larger than anything we can control. And to accept that we cannot make the changes that our species needs right now, but we can be in relationship and in right relationship to the changes that are happening, and to see Earth as our ally in doing that work. And so, how do we have the humility to accept the things that we can't change, and how do we learn to be in relationship with the things that we can. Um, so those are the two things that I'm thinking about and experimenting with and asking questions about in *Fierce Vulnerability*.

**[00:29:58] Roxy Manning:**

I want to talk about both areas. But the first part, the idea of really working on relationships being almost as important as shutting things down and shutting down injustice; I wonder if you have an example of, like, a success story of where that approach and working on relationships actually led

to the kind of reconciliation and then the cessation of the injustice that people might be experiencing.

[00:30:25] Kazu Haga:

The story that comes to mind right away is not one that I was actually there for, but it feels fitting because the words "fierce vulnerability" came out of a conversation that my friend [Chris Moore-Backman](#) and I were having for years about the word "nonviolence," and how nonviolence is sometimes a tricky word because there's so many misunderstandings about it, and it actually becomes a hindrance sometimes to working with a lot of the communities that we want to be in deep relationship with.

So for years, we were like, we just need to find a different word, let's call it something else. Um, and right around that time, my friend Chris was at this action, um, in North Carolina, where he was part of supporting a campaign that was trying to stop the construction of a pipeline that was going through a lot of impoverished neighborhoods. And he did this action and it was in that, the planning for that action, that the words "fierce vulnerability" entered his lexicon. And then he told me about it, and he was like, Hey, what about fierce vulnerability as a replacement for nonviolence? And ultimately we decided to continue to use the word nonviolence, and fierce vulnerability kind of took on a life of its own.

But, you know, that action was very different because he said that the night before they held the action, they had a conversation about what are the qualities that we long to witness and experience in nonviolent action spaces. And they talked about relationship and vulnerability and connection and healing. And so when they went to the action, they didn't hold any signs. They didn't do any chants. And instead, they occupied the government, the governor's mansion, and sat in a circle and asked that the governor come down. And unfortunately, the governor wasn't there, so some of his staff people went down, and they invited the staff people to sit in circle with them. And they shared a talking piece and each person went around the talking circle, sharing why they were there, sometimes expressing incredible vulnerability about the fear that they had for their children and the future of this planet. And they shared that there were moments when it brought the governor's staff people to tears.

And this action was just an experiment. And it actually wasn't tied to a longer campaign, it was just like a one time action to support a longer campaign. But, I think that's when we really started to ask questions about what would it look like if we were doing essentially the same things with our bodies, like occupying the governor's mansion, but instead of leading with our anger, to lead with our vulnerability, and to lead with our heartbreak. And instead of saying, "We are here because you are screwing this up," to say "We are here because the things that are happening on this

planet is breaking our hearts, and we need you to hear that." And to lead with that vulnerability might give us just enough connection and relationship necessary for something new to open things up. So like to shut down the governor's mansion while opening up the possibility of relationships. And I think part of fierce vulnerability is a real humbling acceptance that we don't know what's going to make that possible. So it's just a lot of questions and experiments. So, you know, I don't know what is ultimately going to create the relationships necessary to create the transformations that we need on this planet right now, but it's really leading with the question of, yeah, like, how do we shut down a highway while opening up the possibility of relationships?

**[00:34:03] Roxy Manning:**

Yeah. And it takes so much to be that fiercely vulnerable to speak my truth, my heartbreak, to somebody when I don't even know if they're willing to receive it. It takes a lot of courage and it requires a lot of our self-compassion, a lot of our connection to why we're doing this.

**[00:34:22] Kazu Haga:**

I also think it's not just self-compassion, but it's training. You know, nonviolence training has a long, long lineage. And historically, when I would go and even facilitate nonviolence training, it was about how do we form blockades, and how do we work with the media, and how do we make sure our bodies don't get hurt. And I think in *Fierce Vulnerability*, one of the things that we're inviting people into thinking about is part of the training that we need to do is, in the short term, learning to practice emotional regulation tools, and, in the long term, committing to our own trauma healing journey as part of our *training* to engage in nonviolent civil resistance work.

There's a beautiful quote that comes from the [Reverend Nadia Bolz-Weber](#), who says, "Preach from your scars, not from your wounds." And I think when we talk about the possibility of engaging in nonviolent direct action and leading with our heartbreak, I want to be clear that, like, we want to lead with those scars, not from wide open wounds. Which means that in our organizing spaces, in the nonviolence trainings that are preparing us to go into the front lines, we need to be creating the safe spaces where we can process a little bit more of our unhealed open wound heartbreak. So that by the time we go into places of front lines actions, we've built a shield, a scar over that wound that still allows us access to that vulnerability, but in a way that's a little bit more protected, right? And so it's still a risky thing, but nonviolence is always risky, right? Um, and so I think we need, if we're talking about nonviolent action in this way, we need a new generation of trainings that talks about how to prepare not just our bodies, but how to prepare our spirit for that kind of action.

**[00:36:11] Roxy Manning:**

I'm feeling so much resonance in what you're saying, because in some ways this is why Sarah and I wrote our joint book together. We found people who were saying, "Yes, I want to be antiracist! I want to do antiracist work!" But they hadn't done their own healing. They hadn't done the kind of training, the ongoing practice and reflection and commitment to exploring their wounds and healing them that they needed to be able to do in order to show up, to be vulnerable, and to receive another person's pain in a way that could truly be transformative. So I'm so, so resonating with this vision for what nonviolent action could look like.

**[00:36:50] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah, it's easier to say we want to undo racism and end systems of white supremacy, but you know, that is some of the deepest work we can do as a species, right? And as a society. And if we feel like that work is just work that needs to happen out there, and it's just these non-human systems that need to change, we are fooling ourselves, right? Cause this work is so deeply in our hearts and in our own stories and yeah, it's deep work.

**[00:37:24] Sarah Peyton:**

This is very, very compelling to me, and I have so much gratitude hearing both of you talk about it. But I'm also very interested in when you spoke about the scaling of personal trauma healing work to a more systemic level. I'm sure that you have many thoughts about this. Would you be willing to share just even one thought about how to scale?

**[00:37:50] Kazu Haga:**

One of the things that I think a lot about is how so many of the ways that our trauma manifests today has to do with, like, a deep core wound that so many of us experienced in childhood. And until we're able to heal the deepest, earliest traumas, there's ways in which dealing with just, like, today's surface level manifestations of our trauma is like playing an endless game of whack-a-mole. And I feel like that's a lot of what we're trying to do in this country when we talk about things like racial healing, right? Like, we're trying to have conversations about this country's collective childhood trauma. This nation, as a collective body, early in its infancy and childhood experienced incredibly traumatic events that we have never talked about. And so of course that trauma still lives in our collective bodies, and so healing from that requires us to have that conversation that many of us are like, "Oh, that happened 400 years ago. I'm over it. We've healed." Right? But the reality is that we've just been sitting with this trauma in our bodies and we've never talked about it.

And so, I think that's what I mean when I say that trauma works in fractal ways; like, the same ways that my childhood trauma, because I never talked about it, lived in my body for 20 years, and

I live with this intellectual delusion that I've healed from it, this country experiences the same, right? And so, some of the things that have been supportive to me in healing through my own journey is learning to tell my story in safe spaces and to talk about it in front of people that I trust. And so how can we create larger and larger containers where people can start to talk about our collective traumas in spaces that feel safe. Um, how can we learn to grieve the things that we're bottling up?

So this like one fantasy direct action that I've been, um, fantasizing about for the last couple years is, you know, what if a group of activists who are used to shutting down highways can occupy a major intersection in a downtown busy city, and then a group of dancers or artists or ceremony leaders can hold a grief ritual in the middle of that intersection. And then facilitators and trauma healers can be there to engage with people who are passing by and witnessing this and bring them into it and say, "What are you seeing here? What does this bring up for you?" And doing things like that is a form of nonviolent direct action, right? Because we're doing this in a public space. I feel like some of the things that have helped me the most is creating safe spaces for my grief, and a lot of activist spaces are doing more and more grief rituals, but there's so many people who are never going to come to an activist like grief ritual. So let's take the grief ritual into public spaces and invite people into them in a way that is safe for everybody. So, you know, things like that, like, how can we bring something like creating safe containers for grief into larger and larger scales.

**[00:41:06] Sarah Peyton:**

We've talked about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 's meaning to you, is there anybody else that you would like to name who has been a strong guiding light for you?

**[00:41:19] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah, um, the Buddha, for one. I think, you know, that question of, like, if you could have dinner with one historical figure, um, it might be the Buddha. Um, the Buddhist Dharma has been so supportive to me throughout my entire life. But I also, I think, want to give a shout out to two people who aren't as famous as Dr. King or the Buddha; my friends [Sonya Shah](#) and [Shilpa Jain](#). Sonya, who is the founder of [The Ahimsa Collective](#), which is a restorative justice organization that I belong to, and Shilpa, who was the longtime executive director of [YES!](#), which is the organization that organizes jams. And I want to shout out those two people, because I think those two people more than anyone has supported me in my own trauma healing journey. And I think Shilpa is the person that opened me up to my own journey more than anybody and has just created, and continues to create, space for me to just be with whatever is alive for me. And Sonya, through largely her work that she does in the prisons that she's invited me into, has shown me the

possibilities and the depth of healing that we are capable of as a species, that we are capable of bouncing back from so much violence and so much harm and trauma. And so I think without those two people, I would not be doing the work that I'm doing today.

**[00:42:48] Roxy Manning:**

Thank you and we will try to put links to both of their organizations so that some of our listeners can actually find them and hopefully either support their work or benefit from their wisdom. Thank you for naming them. I'm also wondering what are some other sources of inspiration or moments that have inspired you? Part of the reason I'm asking this is I know when I'm doing this work, I can sometimes feel weighed down at the enormity of what it is we're trying to address. And then something will happen, it'll either be just a sense of touching someone, building that relationship in a way, or seeing some change that really inspires me and fuels me. And I'm wondering about some of those moments of inspiration that you've experienced.

**[00:43:33] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah, this is a story I've been sharing, um, a lot these days, too, and it's a story that I have the two people's permission to share. It's about Cynthia and Richard. Cynthia is somebody that I met five, six years ago, maybe. She's a mother who lives up in Northern California, and 20 years prior to when she reached out to me, and reached out to us through The Ahimsa Collective, she had lost her son to a homicide. And she reached out to The Ahimsa Collective because she was ready to have a dialogue with the people responsible for her son's murder.

And so, uh, my co-facilitator and friend, teacher, mentor, elder, Bonnie, and I went to meet with Cynthia, and soon after we went to old Folsom State Prison to meet with Richard, who was one of the people responsible for our son's murder. And we spent about six months talking to both sides one-on-one before we brought them together, and I'll never forget, I will never forget the day that the dialogue actually happened. We brought Cynthia to the prison and we sat her down in the room that the dialogue was going to happen. And we settled her in and I went around the corner of the holding cell where Richard was, and he was already shaking, you know, and I sat down next to him and talked to him for a couple minutes. And we eventually stood up and he walked around the corner and he saw Cynthia sitting there down the hall. And the moment he saw Cynthia, he just completely broke down and went into panic and was crying. And Cynthia, at some point, noticed him, and she stood up, and she just opened her arms, and he just collapsed in her arms, and they just fell into this embrace that felt like it lasted for hours.

And then Bonnie and I just got to sit there and witness them talk for six straight hours, non-stop. And there was a moment when Cynthia was holding Richard's hand, and she told him that, "I had a dream that I needed to hold your hands because these are the hands that took my son's life



away. And I needed to have a different relationship with them." And there was just, like, so many magical moments that happened throughout these six hours, and I will forever feel so privileged. I, you know, I was just sitting there like, what did I do to earn the honor of being in this chair, witnessing this magic?

And I appreciate both of them giving me permission to share their story, because it's one of those stories that, you know, I was just sharing, it reminds me of what we're capable of as a species. Like, we are capable of bouncing back from *that*, and we are capable of healing *that* wound. And having their relationship between Cynthia and Richard be stronger than it's ever been, you know? And I think it's important that we remember that. And because I do believe that the universe is built on fractals, if that's possible between two individuals, I know that's possible at every scale that we belong to. Whether that's in our families or as a species, you know, or the conflict between the species and the earth and all of those different levels of the fractal, we are capable of healing from that. And so, yeah, it's one of the reasons why I say it's always such a privilege to have worked with so many, particularly, incarcerated people who have been through so much harm and violence and have become some of the most dedicated peacemakers I've ever met in my entire life.

**[00:47:00] Roxy Manning:**

Wow, Kazu, hearing that story, it kind of weaves together everything you've been talking about; about the power of curiosity and the commitment to Beloved Community, to really showing up with the fierce vulnerability. You know, all of it coming together and creating this really powerful healing moment. Thank you. There are a lot of people listening to this podcast and I know so many of our listeners say, "I want to be committed to this life of social justice. I want to have some impact," and not maybe even from that place of controlling that you talked about, but "I just want to have a role in witnessing and being with what's unfolding." What advice would you have for people who have this commitment or this desire?

**[00:47:47] Kazu Haga:**

I'm so grateful to every individual that has that commitment, and ultimately, each one of us has to find our own way and our own vocation within that ecosystem of movements. But I will say that, you know, a lot of us start our commitment to social change by engaging in social justice movements, and obviously that's important, but the danger of that kind of external-facing social movement work is that we tend to think the problem is out there, and only out there. And other people start this journey by focusing on oneself, right, and trying to become a more compassionate person and a better neighbor and a partner and a parent. And that's obviously critical too, but it can become easy to think that, "Oh, if I just become a better person and I help my, my family become better people, then the systems will ultimately transform." And I don't think

that's how systemic change happens either; that there are systems that are causing harm at a rate that is so much faster than individuals can heal.

And so there is such a strong, important connection between personal change and systemic change, and it doesn't mean that every person has to do both, because we can't all do everything, but to always understand that as a collective, if we're not doing both, then we're not going to be able to create the transformations that we need. And so if your vocation is personal transformation, then to really think about how can that vocation support the people who are on the front lines. Right? And if your vocation is on the front lines, to ask yourself, "What are the ways in which I also need to work on myself and to ask support from the people who do the more personal transformation work?" Because it's one and the same work, just happening at different scales, and if we miss that then we're only working on one half of a really important puzzle. So to find your part of the ecosystem, and to know that the ecosystem is this lush, diverse ecosystem and to figure out how your part in the ecosystem can help to influence all the parts of the ecosystem.

**[00:50:11] Roxy Manning:**

I love this because this is why we have this podcast, because we really wanted to tell people there's so many different ways that we can do social change and so many different avenues, and we need to support the person who's the activist on the front line and the artist who's creating art and sculptures and the person who's working on healing, that they're all necessary. And so I'm really loving this advice, that people just need to find both their own path, but also be open, curious, and supportive of others who are walking a different path than their own. Thank you for that.

**[00:50:45] Sarah Peyton:**

Well, we're coming towards the end, sad though I feel about that, and so we want to make sure that people can find you, that they can get notified of your book when it comes out. Do you have a place that you'd like people to go to sign up? What's that ecosystem like?

**[00:51:05] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah, it's a relatively small ecosystem. I'm terrible at marketing and I just kind of move through the world with faith that the people that I need to connect to we'll find each other. And I am currently in the process of building a very simple, basic website, and people can at least sign up for updates on that, and it's just [kazu Haga.com](http://kazu Haga.com).

**[00:51:25] Sarah Peyton:**

Excellent. That's wonderful. The date of the book's release?

**[00:51:30] Kazu Haga:**

We're hoping for early 2025.

**[00:51:34] Roxy Manning:**

In fact, as people are waiting for early 2025 and the release of *Fierce Vulnerability*, we'll also have links so that people who have not yet read *Healing Resistance* can read it. And I have to say, Kazu, that reading that book is part of what made me think it was possible for me to write my book. You gave me so much hope and inspiration. So, thank you!

**[00:51:55] Kazu Haga:**

Oh, I'm so glad to hear that. Thank you for that.

**[00:52:01] Roxy Manning:**

Such a beautiful conversation.

**[00:52:03] Kazu Haga:**

Yeah, this was fun. I always love talking about this kind of stuff. So, I always appreciate the opportunity and love the work that both of you are doing in the world. You've been such a huge influence on me, too. So, you know, I always believe that teaching and inspiration is a two-way street. And it's definitely the case with the three of us. So, I appreciate all the work that you two are doing.

**[00:52:22] Roxy Manning:**

Thank you. And then for our listeners, I'd love to invite you to support this work in the world by going to our website, [antiracistconversations.com](https://antiracistconversations.com), where you can learn more about our books, how to have antiracist conversations, and *The Antiracist Heart*. And you'll also learn about our upcoming and past podcast guests and new classes that we're offering. Thank you for listening and for supporting our work.