

## **Koffler Centre of the Arts**

### **Books & Ideas: Tawhida Tanya Evanson with Sheniz Janmohamed**

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>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: Thank you so much, Mary. My name is Sheniz Janmohamed. I am a South Asian woman with black, short hair. I have a multi-stripped yellow scarf or shawl that I'm wearing and behind me is a, I guess you could say, Turkish pillow with some geometric shapes. It is turquoise and green and cream and gold, and it is my great pleasure to be here with you today. What can I possibly say about my sister, Tawhida. I am so honored and grateful to be sharing this space, this time with you. It brings me back to the first time we shared the stage at a museum many, many years ago, and I just remember sitting backstage with you and feeling so nervous, but just your presence, just your being, grounded me, and I feel that that's exactly what you do for the reader in your book, *Book of Wings*. So, I am excited for our audience to experience this book, and I don't want to take up more space. I would just love for you to begin. Thank you.

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: Hello, everyone, and thank you so much, Sheniz, for that beautiful introduction. I will start by saying I am here in Montréal, which is a territory of the Kanienkeha people, or Mohawk people. We give thanks for the land that we are on. All lands are sacred. I will also describe myself. I am a mixed race, black woman. My hair is black and piled on top of my head. I am wearing a red dress with a black cloak. Behind me is a large yellow frame drum and a painting of black African women dancing. I thought, Sheniz and I had talked about how to open this session and of course perhaps not everyone has read this book already and this is a way perhaps to inspire some folks to go out and get a copy, so I'll say a little bit about the book. So, it's called *Book of Wings*, it's a novel and it is a Sufis love story set across three continents. The story is about Maya, who is a young woman in her late 20s, and she is traveling with her beloved, her partner, Shams. They travel down through the United States, into Mexico and across, by boat, in the Caribbean and then they end up in Paris in the springtime where he disappears. He leaves her, or perhaps she leaves him. Who knows? Only the truth knows. After that, Maya continues traveling. Being a character of African descent, Maya travels to Africa, to Morocco, and there she meets many, many people who have lessons to offer her, and that helps her grief to transform into something quite beautiful. So, that's what the novel is about, and I'm going to read a

short section now that I haven't read before and it's really exciting to read different sections online and kind of see the response. Everyone seems to have a different reaction to this book, which is a wonderful thing. It means perhaps there was some way to touch on human nature so that every human being could see themselves at some point in the book, and that's a wonderful for an author. So, I'm going to read from page 30. This section is called Via Purgativa, when Maya and Shams are crossing the Caribbean Sea from Isla Mujeres, or the Isle of Women, in Mexico over to Miami, and it's about a 10 or 12 day voyage on a small single mast schooner, and there are four people on this boat and they are in a storm. Waves crashed into the cockpit as I steered in the dark again another night. Another storm. All of it one liquid hallucination. Muscles pushed to exhaustion, upper arms screaming from steering with the wind vane against high gusts, thighs and knees on fire from holding onto anything solid as the boat sliced through international waters on a perpetual slant. Somewhere in the constant sickness, the confusion of waves, pots and pans screaming below deck, I gave up. No land in sight. No sight in dark. Empty. Staring at the compass when we had barely reached the middle of the Gulf. This is when the meek in me says, this is too much. I'm doing this but really I cannot. Oh, ancestors, where are your ceremonies, please. I need them now. Captain Charlie offered, this is when you learn that there's nothing you can do. It is what it is. It is what it is. When the waves are one-eyed giants and the boat is at angle for days and you have no rest from hanging on for dear life and heaving every hour on the hour soaking wet, purge it all, even that which you do not have. Time is of no consequence. Freedom the only goal. This is a reminder of the middle passage and our unique relationship to water and drowning. Keep your face to the wind and your eyes on the horizon. Look for dolphins to give good morning and good night. Mourn the human beings that were thrown overboard. Ancestors. If necessary, gather yourself into the sea so as to have no more fear of it. Shams relieved me from duty at six in the morning. He was distant and calm, my opposite. I tried to sleep. There was none. After 72 hours, we reached the dry Tortugas. Shams made me a processed cheese sandwich, and I devoured it. The only thing I had digested since leaving dry land three days before. We dropped anchor per instructions and stayed the night. A thin veil of salt had coated us completely. The chrome of the boat was jeweled with it. Mineral stars. Our skin itched with quartz. Oh, the beauty of the world, sighed Shams, and all the day was crystalline. That night, we bathed in the clear place where the Gulf of Mexico meets North Atlantic, took a cockpit shower together in the waxing moonlight of the deserted middle key. Shams caught my breath in the saline wind. We had come from highest squalls and without warning everything had turned calm, as if something between us had died. Thank you for allowing me to do that, and thank you, Rana, for your beautiful interpretation.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: Thank you for reading the passage I requested. I actually highlighted one of the lines here on page 31. Mourn the human beings that were thrown overboard. Ancestors. If necessary, gather yourself into the sea so as to have no more fear of it. That's something that I noticed with this book is that the character leans into fear, leans into discomfort, almost having no choice but making the choice. I wondered if you could talk about the process of writing that, how you were able to lean in as a writer but also how you were able to lean into your own discomfort as a human being and tapping into that, those moments in your own life when you were writing that passage or this book? I know that's a big question.

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: The original manuscript was written 20 years ago, and last year, so the lost year of 2020, was when somehow Vehicule Press contacted me and I ended up getting a book contract with them. So, then I was able to really review the whole manuscript and start to see it more clearly, and so maybe about 40% of it was written last year. So, the original sensations and questions and anxieties and embarrassments, all of those things were already there, so it was just about looking at that and seeing what we can learn from those experiences and those emotions and how they can be transformed, how they have become transformed, especially because the main character is based on me when I was that age. It's a mythologization of me and the adventures that I experienced at that time. So, it took 20 years and hopefully a little bit more maturity now than I had then to kind of be able to lean in and face my fears and my personal struggles as a human being as a black woman, as a poet even, as someone who lives close to the poverty line, all of those things I was able to kind of look at because I had stepped back already from them and so that allowed me to not have to relive, even though there was some moments of reliving pain as I reworked the book, but it was also a chipping away at something dark to let the light in. That's what Covid gave to me, some time and space to chip away at those stains inside myself and see that I could turn them into something beautiful like a blacksmith will, you know, pound at something hot and change it and transform it into something useful, something of benefit, and so that's what happened last year with this text.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: I love how you said that you're tapping into that part of yourself but now as an observer. It's just really fascinating to me like to not be in the trauma but observing it. Another thing that really struck me with this book was heartbreak is not linear. Heartbreak it is not linear. We want it to be. I think when I was reading this it chipped away at my own delusion of wanting heartbreak to be linear. There are moments in this book where, oh, yeah, it's not. It's not. There are moments that just break open with that heartbreak, but then that is a window or a gate, an opportunity, to investigate. I just found that also the imagery was grounding. There was this abstract and intangible or unexplainable happening but then there was also the

grounding of the images and of course that speaks to you as a poet. So, you know, being a poet, speaking to a poet, I also wonder how that process was for you as a poet to write, because this does read as poetry. It's narrative, but it's also vignette poetry, magic, many things, and so I wonder how did you strike the balance between bringing your poetic sensibility to this but also maintaining that narrative?

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: Good question, and how do we move between genres as a writer. It's a very unique obstacle, and it's really useful to work with an editor and I had that chance, and, in fact, the editor at Vehicule Press, Dimitri Nasrallah, I met with him, and we had such a strong connection and, in fact, he was just on his way to Morocco, this is January 2020, so this is right before COVID, and because all of these things seemed to just flow very naturally. He has the name Allah in his name, so I thought, okay, there is some kismet here, there's some fate or some destiny where this feels right and it feels like this is the time to explore this manuscript that had been sitting in the pile for so long. So, it really helped to work with a guide who had more experience than I did. It was originally written still as a narrative but just as separate vignettes that didn't have any kind of overreaching flow. They didn't have an arc tying them all together. I had to work also to describe characters and setting more clearly and that's where an editor was, you know, just open up this section up more so you can really place the reader in this moment with you. So, it was just about, it was like kind of a skeleton, and it needed to just have some meat put on it. I just had to really work at it, and I don't think I could have done it as I did without help and without Dimitri Nasrallah's help, so that was really useful because he asked the right questions so that made me also question, okay, yes, well, that's very poetic but then where are you and who is this person you're with, you know. If you use just he, she, they, we don't really know who the people are and that's also when all the characters started to come to life and starting to see that when you travel in Muslim countries you're meeting folks with such beautiful names. You meet Mohammed over and over and you meet (name) over and over and Hassan and Hussein and Fatima and (name) and (name) and so you're meeting all of these characters that are central to Islam and that was kind of the journey that the character took and that also that I took without realizing fully at the time that that's what was happening, and the manuscript didn't explore that even though this life has exploded since that time, so it was about kind of seeing that story clearly and bringing it to life with some help.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: You took my next question. My next question was about names and naming, but even the main character's name, Maya, you know. Illusion, right? Like, that's an interesting choice, and I feel like there's intentionality in the naming, but also what struck me about these characters, too, was that they were all companions on the path, like they were all touchstones, not just simply for the sake of

being touchstones, right? They have more purpose and complexity than that, but I found that really fascinating, and I also noticed, speaking of names, just even in the chapter titles the intentionality of the chapter titles, you know, like Seclusion, Disappearance of Disappearance, The Gatekeeper. These seem to be also a lot of themes in it the Sufis path, you knew I was going to go there, and so I wanted to talk to you, or I wanted to just listen to you, actually, speak to that. Waking and dreaming, prayer positions, the brilliance, awe, like it's stages on the path. So, did that come after? How did the naming happen?

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: It's 50 percent where half of it had been written and then the other half had to come in afterwards to clarify some of the chapters and what was going on in them, especially meeting a character and meeting them 20 years ago but then revisiting that meeting now and saying, oh, that's who that was. So, for example, meeting (name) in the Sahara Desert and meeting someone named (name) who brings the character of Maya deeper into the desert. Of course, that chapter had to be called The Gatekeeper because that's also the role, so everything is also taking the mythology and the symbols within Tasawwuf, within Sufism, which now has been something that has been a practice for 20 years or so since when this book was written right afterwards. The book is everything that all of the adventures that led this one to walk the path of Tasawwuf, to walk the path of Sufism. Even that is not something that is usually even said out loud because who am I to say that out loud. If it's said, then I should disappear immediately. It was a really interesting process, really beautiful process. Yeah, I'm going to leave it at that.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: I love that you said who am I because there doesn't seem to this, again, like the poetic sensibility comes through in what's unsaid, as well. The choices between breadth, the choices between lines, between the spaces of what we don't know, yet I was just thinking about, you know, these intersections of who you are, or who Maya is, right, a black woman traveling in this Muslim country. A lover, you know, with many intersections of identity but then also intersections of no identity and how those two kind of meet and, you know, separate and come together again, and I guess similarly I was kind of hoping for a second book because I'm like, now you meet your teacher at the end, what happens, right, but, I mean, I'm assuming that that again is part of the choice of what 's unsaid and it's the journey that leads us to that place and then the journey actually begins at the end. So, selfishly I'm asking if there's going to be another book but I also feel like maybe that's the whole point is that there isn't one or there isn't going to be one.

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: That would be the first album that I did because, you know, I'm a lover of music. I think many people are lovers of music, but I always

tried to get as close to music as I could but always feeling that, well, I'm not a musician or I can't play music. I'm not allowed to do that. I used to hang out with musicians a lot when I was growing up. That still didn't really help, but it was sitting with dervishes who inspired music and so right after this first manuscript was kind of written in about 2002, my first album came out in 2004, and so actually the sequel to the book is the album Invisible World, which is from 2004, and then the following albums, and so all of my, it seems like all my work it kind of goes in the wrong direction of time or in the opposite direction of time where my most recent work is my oldest. The next book also that is being worked on, the original manuscript is even older than this one. So, I don't know, we all have different rituals when it comes to writing. I seem to write things and then put them aside and then come back to it later and see what the meaning is and what the benefit could be for others and also for myself to contemplate what has transpired between the time it was written and the living that you have done. So, yeah, and also, how could you write another book because then you'd have to tell everyone what happens in Tasawwuf, and we cannot do that.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: Yeah, the secret has to remain a secret. Basically, what you're saying is buy my records. Well, this is what I'm saying to the audience. If you want to know what happens, you just need to be everything Tanya, or Tawhida, has ever done. Speaking of naming. Yeah, that's really fascinating and I guess it goes back to that observer, right, being able to give something enough distance to be able to look at it clearly, and I guess my question is, how do you know? How do you know when it is right? When which project is the right project to pursue for that moment?

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: It's often the most urgent, the one that you would like to share with the world or you feel that itself it should be shared with the world before you die. This book was that project. Actually, I put in my will before I had gotten the book deal with Vehicule Press. I had put it in my will to ask my husband to please try and get this manuscript published in the event of my passing.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: Yeah, like, no pressure, no pressure, just publish this. This is my last wish.

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: At the time, it was only kind of half a complete, so COVID has brought us a lot of suffering to a lot of people. It has caused a lot of people to pass the spirit before their time and also at the same time it has given some space to some people to perhaps do something that they always wanted to do but never had time to do, and so I see a lot of people who have taken on some personal challenges, for example, connected to health of the body, I see some people doing exercise and sharing their exercise routines. Okay, I started this, this is my health year, or this is my

reading here, or I'm unable to read but perhaps I could write this year. COVID has brought with it some extremes in different people's lives, and I'm very thankful. I have a lot of gratitude for the fact that I got a book deal because all of my live performances were cancelled last year, but I also got a grant at the same time, so I didn't really have any money and then all of a sudden there was money. In the arts, I seem to observe that that happens a lot. You don't have to work for money, you just have to work and then money will come. If you go that way, it often does work out and it has worked for me for the last nine years or so in that way. So, I don't worry about, you know, there's that saying, there's no poetry in money and no money in poetry, and that's the good way to walk forward on the path of the artist, I think. We're not here to do work that has the ambition that capitalism has. We're here to resist that, to combat it, to be a light in the darkness, and to show human beings what we are, what we have become, and what do all these systems that we constructed mean and what is it to be a human being in this. How much of our humanity can we remember, and I think that that's what artists do, as well as entertain us, of course, when we need to just head bang or just have a dance party. It helps us to see ourselves.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: You've reminded me of this Zen, I guess it's a Zen phrase that's used a lot and it's, you know, time is passing quickly. I'm totally paraphrasing here. Time is passing quickly, death and life are of utmost importance, do not squander your life. It's almost like impermanence has always been this reality for us but suddenly it's become in focus. There's no escape from it. There's no distraction from it. I see that parallel in your work, as well, that that impermanence that we continuously engage with as artists where there is that, you know, shaky footing, that shaky ground, but we find groundedness in that and then also the character herself is doing the same, finding footing, finding faith, finding choice, trust in this impermanence and this unknowing. I don't know if I have anything to say other than that.

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: It happens as it's supposed to and you also observe that it happens as it's supposed to. I've just seen a little note about the microphone. Can you hear me okay?

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: I think it's just at the beginning of when you start speaking. In the meantime, maybe I'll just read something as you're fixing that. I came across something in this book called, Sufism and Surrealism. There's a section here on love. It says, love does not exist in a state of permanence where it can be analyzed or defined, but it is constantly moving and changing to such an extent that it appears nonexistent or absent. I feel that in your book. I feel that love is ever present but it's also like the minute you try to touch it or hold it, and maybe you could also speak to Sham and why you chose the name Sham and the importance of that name in Sufism.

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: Of course poets talk about love. That's our job. We'll write volumes and volumes about it, but in the end it's really something that must be experienced, like even if we elude like in this talk today to a spiritual path it means nothing. One must walk one's own path, and hopefully you have a guide because it's very useful to have someone who has some experience on that path. That's a really useful thing to have a teacher right there with you, especially on the path of love or the path of (word), which is perhaps what the book kind of explores a little bit. (Word), depending on which country you're from is an Arabic or a Persian word or a Turkish word and it's a little bit different than just love. It's more dangerous, the more dangerous version of the word love. It's the one that encompasses unconditional love and ecstatic love and the one that causes crimes of passion, so that's a little bit what the book explores. There's a quote similar to the one that you mentioned by I think it's Jami, and says, if you have trodden the path of love, go away and fall in love and then come back and see us. In the end, that's what the character of Maya has to go through. In fact, falling in love and then the object of the love disappears and then what you do with the feeling of being in love when there's no one object, and that's where the spiritual path opens up and the spiritual path is there to help us work on our weaknesses, to guide us as we work on our weaknesses. That's my understanding of the spiritual path, anyway, any spiritual path. In this case, if you fall in love, it's like you're in an ocean and when the object of your love disappears perhaps it's you trying to get out of that ocean and you're grabbing onto the branches by the side but the waves are taking you back in but you don't want to go back in and that's depression right there. If you let go and actually swim deeper into the ocean then you realize, wow, there's enough love here for me to give away. In the end, that's the lesson that Maya learns and also that I learned is that true love does not require an object. It's just a way of walking in the world, a way of working in the world and of being of service to human beings. So, that's the love part. And then you asked about Shams (word). One thing that is interesting about the name Shams is that it has very specific connotations for some people, and other people will say shams, that sounds like the word sham. Is this a trick? Is this character a trickster? So, that's a really interesting aspect of why the character is named Shams. It can be looked at in different ways. One is that you perhaps don't quite trust that person and also you never really meet them or know anything about them because at the beginning of the book they disappear so all you have is the fragrance that's left over. If you look at Shams from a historical perspective, then you cannot separate the name Shams from the name (name). So, Shams (name) was his teacher and that's in the end what the character is for Maya. It's someone who has to inspire such a deep (word) in you and then disappear for you to actually manifest or have, kind of fully activate what it is to walk as a lover, which is also another name for people on the Sufi path. We are lovers with a capital L and that is our job in the world,

that everything that we do is from that. It cannot happen without the struggle of Shams and the disappearance of the disappearance.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: Even in that cry to hold on, that's an opportunity. Yeah, I was also, oh, sorry, go ahead.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: Being a conduit for all that is, for the power of all that exists around us. The easiest way to describe it is the force in Star Wars. That description is a beautiful description for God, for Allah, for (word), for truth. That's what the whirling dervish is allowing, is making visible. When the whirling dervish will turn with one hand open to receive, to symbolically receive all the power that is, and one hand downwards to give it to the hearts of all the people, and it flows through symbolically through this hand, through the heart, and then out of the other hand, and so it's a real magical act to be a planet turning like that which we all are. It's just that we don't remember.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: That's beautiful. I love how you talk about how love is action. Something that also strikes me about your book is that it felt like medicine. Necessary medicine for me and I'm sure many people. Like you said just about the name, it can mean different things for different people. That's the beauty of it is that you're able to see yourself in these words and you can take what you need. I've been finding particularly with the lockdowns and the pandemic that I really need medicine, and so I wanted to ask you, where are you finding your medicine? In poetry, in music, in text? Where are you finding your medicine these days?

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: Because I'm a full-time professional artist I always worked from home, so I have a home office. This is my home office studio space. So, before COVID I was working here and since COVID I'm working here. The work at home, the writing that happens at home and the composition of new projects, was always just punctuated by touring, by performances of spoken word and also of (word) or the dance of the whirling dervishes because that's also something that I do with a couple of groups. My routine didn't change much. It just was more stable and time and space opened up. So, the discipline was already there. At 9:00 am, I'm at the table, or this body is at the table, and if it's had some coffee then the work can begin. So, I just held that discipline throughout the year last year and working on the book was a touchstone to keep me grounded but so is music. So, the book is written, it's meant to be read while listening to three albums, and so there are three sections in the book. The opening section is there is an album called, the Yakaza Ensemble. They're a Turkish like experimental Sufi group, and they made an album called Amaki Hayal. That album is the opening of the book. In the middle of the book, it's Alice Coltrane and

Journey Through Creation and Space. The end of the book is Charlie Parker because it's very much about poets with poets talking about poetry, so it's very much in the tradition of like the beat poets and the black arts movement of the 60s and it's kind of in that mode. So, when I would sit down to work, if I didn't really feel like getting into it because sometimes it was painful to revisit my own inadequacies, I would turn on the album and then right away I was in the book, and so that was very useful. Music has been the biggest medicine, I think, for a lot of folks, as well as movies. I don't have a television, but I have a projector and so I just project onto the wall and so it relaxes your eyes where you don't have to use the screen all the time, and right now I'm watching Star Wars. It's so wonderful. I feel like it's 1979 and I'm sitting on my dad's lap watching the Empire Strikes Back and crying because Han Solo was frozen, and it's really a blessing to have this safe home where I can do that and kind of indulge in these pleasures, but at the same time, exercise has been really useful. Yoga and now hopefully some biking in the countryside will come about. I also would go for three hour walks once or twice a week and I did that all last year and I continue to do that this year. I just walk to the river. It takes an hour to get there, so by the end I can't feel my legs too much because I am a bit of an aggressive walker but that's been medicine. So, walking while listening to music, but then when I arrive in nature then there's the music of birds, so that's the best music ever, or the sound of the water rushing. Also, I paint. I'm a very bad painter, but it's also very therapeutic to play with shapes and colors when you're used to working with letters. So, all of those things have been medicine and of course food and also sometimes not eating too much food.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: I think you covered a range of things. I love that you mentioned other art forms for the sake of creating as opposed to production, right? There's something different about that, about tapping into your creativity in another way. I feel like we could continue to talk, but I know there's a question. If you do have questions, do put them in the chat. Our first question is from Deanna. I hope I'm saying your name correctly. I am very moved by your reflections on capitalism and ambition and our work as artists. Would you kindly elaborate on this?

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: I used to be a full-time ESL teacher, so I used to teach English as a second language in Vancouver, and at the same time I would do some spoken word performances and I would produce inter-arts events with ensembles of artists. Sometimes I wasn't able to do both. I found it difficult to teach for five hours all day speaking and then do a spoken word performance in the evening, so I started to take some mental health days. My boss started noticing that, because my boss was also a supporter of my artwork, my boss started to notice a correlation between the mental health days and the performances and sat me down and kind of inspired me to make a choice, which was either you, you know, commit to being a full-time teacher or

commit to your arts practice and so that was in 2012 and so that's when I left that. So, I left a salaried position to kind of live fully as an artist. That meant worrying about money differently because it wasn't always coming in on schedule as it had in the past. For the first two years it was a little bit difficult and there was one moment, and I was working every day, working on different projects, applying for grants, collaborations, doing performances and by this time I had moved to Montréal and also I started working at the Banff Center that year, also, so it gave me another touchstone but that was just every two years that I would go to the Banff Center to direct this spoken word program, and so at one point around the year and a half mark I couldn't pay my rent and I thought, oh, what am I going to do? At that exact moment I received a letter in the mail. My Aunt Veronica, who was also a poet in Antigua, in the Caribbean, and she used to write in dialect, which was really frowned upon. She had passed a spirit a few months before and I got a check in the mail, and it saved me. Right when I needed money, it came. I wasn't working for money, though hoping it would come eventually, and right when I needed it, it came, and that has always been the case. So, I don't worry about money, and I don't do things for money. I just work and money comes. I just work a lot. I don't take vacations because there's no such thing as a vacation from art. Also, I still get to touch, which I love teaching, but I don't have to do it full-time so I can do it contractually, and I just work as much as possible, collaborate as much as possible and try to be of service as much as possible with the skills that I have, that I've nurtured, that I've had the opportunity to nurture, so it's just about nonstop working but in a way that is sustainable, a pace that is sustainable, and then you don't need the vacation. I don't take weekends, either. Perhaps, when it's beautiful outside, Mother Nature says, you need to come and take your bicycle out and come and play in my trees for six hours. So, that's also part of the work. Taking care of your body is part of being alive and part of the work. So, growing food is part of the work so I also grow a lot of food. It's a different way of living. It's a slower life, and I really appreciate it. There's money there, but that's just because the work never ends, and it won't end until the end and what even is that?

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: I love how you also talked about, you know, not working for money but working for work's sake and then the money comes, which is really interesting. It's a conversation I've had with other artists, especially in this past year, where, you know, like you, I lost all my live gigs, all my performances, and suddenly this part of me came out that was like, oh, I've got to make money, how am I going to make money, and then it's like, wait, wait, what are you doing, right? I had to take a moment to actually ask myself am I doing this for money, which of course is important. You need to eat and, you know, live, etc., but also the question was, what is the intention? What is the intention, and just using that as a compass, so thank you for that reminder. I know we have another question from Leona. When you mythologize personal

experience of the past to write poetry and prose, how do you keep yourself grounded in the present? How do you handle the anxiety of losing track of what really happened and what you might have enhanced or mythologized? Thank you for your words. Thank you, Leona.

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: The mythologization happens because you're looking for the thread of human nature. What is the aspect of human nature that was learned from that experience, and how could that be not exaggerated but enhanced in a way so that it's clear for the one who is receiving the information? So, I'll give an example. In 2014, I believe, my father had to come up because he had hurt his knee. So, having to care for a parent is something that most folks don't talk about, but it's something that many of us may have the privilege of doing, of caring for our parents, especially when they cared for us. We didn't have to ask them to care for us, they just did it. If we were lucky, that's what happened for many of us. I had to cancel a lot of my work and when you work on contract, and at the time my career was just starting, but I had to cancel many things in order to care for him full-time for a couple of months. It was very difficult to do that. I was writing about it at the time, but I was writing angry. Like, why do I have to do this, you know, I'm canceling all of my events. So, at the time, there was anger in the experience and then afterwards when the experience was finished, when it had come to pass and I could see the beauty and the gift of being able to spend time with my dad, and my dad lives in the Caribbean so I don't get to see him often, and to be in spiritual discourse with him, to make food for him, all of the things that he had done for me, I got to do that, but I didn't see it fully right in the moment when it was happening. So, a little time and then looking at it as an experience that it wasn't I that experienced it, it was the human being that experienced it, and then you can start looking at it from different angles and seeing which is a beautiful angle to look at it. In the end, my dad had also some heart troubles. Even though he came for knee surgery, some heart troubles developed. This notion of the heart and how parents are our hearts and what about this planet, where are the hearts on this planet? Is it Machu Picchu, is at the temples of Giza, is it Stonehenge? So, all of these hearts on the planet and this is where the mythologization of the event took place, which was taking one aspect of an event that happened and looking at it from different perspectives and from the perspective of beauty, what is learned, even from ugliness. What can we get from it so that we can move forward as human beings because in the end I might not have a boss now because I don't have a salary but I work for humanity, I work for god, I work for the universe. The universe is like a really tough boss. You can't get a boss, you're a boss, because they're always on you. You can't get away. So, I'm very happy to have a boss that is always with me and always making sure that I'm holding some discipline for the work that I do and making sure that it's a benefit to human beings because that's the main reason we're all here is to be of service to each other.

>>SHENIZ JANMOHAMED: Medicine. Thank you. Thank you for being with us. Mary, I think we can come back. I know that some have been asking where they can find you, Tawhida, online, where they can find the book, so maybe that's something that you can share at this time before we close.

>>TAWHIDA TANYA EVANSON: Thank you for this conversation. It's been a real blessing.