

SONGVERSATION I AM LIGHT

My Thoughts On The
Skin Bleaching Allegations

A SongVersation on how we can heal.

Part One: Why I Am Answering Today?

SongVersion: I Am Light

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PART ONE: Why I Am Answering Today
January 2014

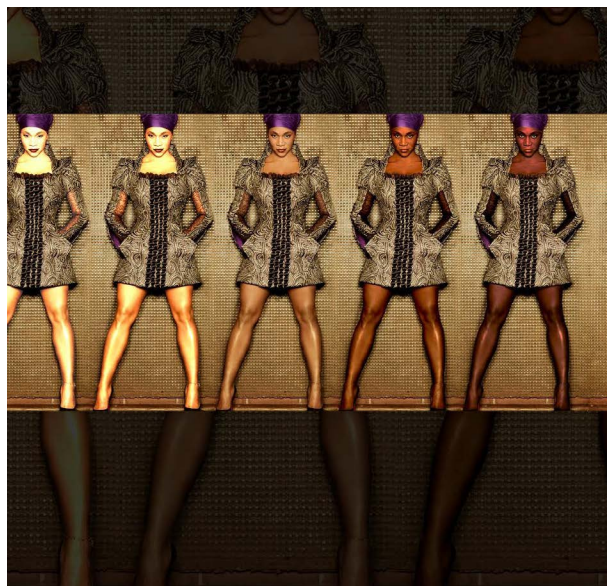
Click here to listen to *I Am Light*

SongVersions begin with a prayer:

“May these words reach who they are meant, the way they are intended to be reached. May these words bring love, healing peace and Joy, and most of all, May Gods perfect will be done.”

I am not the color of my eyes
I am not the skin on the outside
I am not my age
I am not my race
my soul inside is all Light
I AM LIGHT

- I Am Light from the album SongVersion



I've thought about this A LOT over the past several months, and this morning I woke up READY to speak.

First, let's get this out of the way...

I did NOT bleach my skin. When this story hit, I would not deign that accusation with a response. As one of my friends pointed out, I was dismissive about the entire conversation and I agree with him. I was dismissive because I was confused and offended by both the accusation AND the narrative. There is nothing in my being that wants to bleach my skin or wants to be lighter.

NOW! With that said, I promised a deeper conversation that I wasn't READY for until now.

I understand *now* why the image (on the cover for my lead single *Cocoa Butter* from my album *SongVersation*) was shocking to a lot of people. What I did not understand was the accusation that I was lying. That offended me for obvious reasons. WOULD I ACTUALLY THINK THAT I COULD BLEACH MY SKIN, AND THEN LIE ABOUT IT? People would eventually SEE me in person. How could I lie? WHY would I lie?

What bothered me MORE, was the narrative that I bleached my skin in order to be closer to society's beauty ideals; so I could gain greater access in the music industry. That had NOTHING to do with ME.

As the conversation was happening, I could not understand how so many reasonable people could skip over so many other possibilities. For example: Maybe it was lighting? Maybe it was bad retouching? *Maybe* it was allegory for cocoa butter? The more clear minded critics seemed to think it was the latter - good marketing, a way to have a "SongVersation, SkinVersation".

To be clear, the intention of that image was NONE of the things listed above. The resulting picture was a product of a lot of things other than trying to look "light". The story of this photo is complex and I will address the many, many! layers in this SongVersation.

I've addressed this in interviews a couple of times already, but I need to address the backstory so I can get to the *real* point of this SongVersation which is how we can heal.

Yes, I'll admit that after all of the work I'd done over the years to; uplift the Black community, women and humanity as whole; to be in integrity in the music industry; and do ethical business, I felt I had EARNED the benefit of the doubt, of not being seen as a liar.

I was basically unaware of the trend of celebrity skin lightening controversies. I saw it here or there, but it wasn't a part of my consciousness. So when it happened to me, I didn't SEE that I was being lumped into an on-going conversation. Once I realized it, I was dismissive because, again, I felt my reputation not deserved, but *earned*, the benefit of the doubt.

Today I see this conversation as an opportunity for HEALING.

Many argue this comes along with being a celebrity. It's hard for me to even call myself FAMOUS or CELEBRITY because it carries a connotation that I neither adhere to nor respect. I far prefer "Public Person" and that, for me, is at the core of this conversation. "Celebrityism" allows a HUMAN BEING TO BE STRIPPED OF THEIR HUMANITY, distilled down to a set of characteristics, and treated like those "things".

It has taken this long for me to speak out because this is where it gets challenging, the NUANCES of being in my *particular shoes* are difficult to explain to a mass of people with such varied experiences. What it means to be a Black WOMAN, in the public eye, in AMERICA, in this social media age, these shoes make me *especially* qualified for THIS conversation.

It becomes more complex, and nuanced because I am a public person who is; Black and female while making "Black Music" with a spiritual message, in an industry that is INHERENTLY racist, sexist and profane. On top of this, I miss the check marks for beauty ideals in this society. I have nappy hair, I have African ethnic features, I'm both muscular AND curvaceous, I'm both cerebral and sensual, I have a slight androgyny with my deep voice and a masculine-feminine balance at the very core of my presence. I've been ridiculed for this all of my life.

When I came into the public eye, of course this was all magnified and intensified. It's CRAZY to hear people say what they REALLY think of you. The flip side of this challenge has been being able to bring my experience to my songs, singing to Black America and telling some of Black America's stories to the world. Through music I've also been blessed to fellowship with people all around the world who GET what and who I am and enjoy my music because in it, they see some aspect of themselves.

I've met many men who love the type of woman I am. I've been able to commune with, MY TRIBE the world over. It is a very healing and beautiful thing; one of the great pleasures of my life. My very consciousness has been elevated by what I once saw as painful. I wonder now if this is *how* one's consciousness is elevated.

My life's journey thus far, has grown me into a woman who LOVES EVERYTHING about myself. Even the things that cause me pain. From public scrutiny to menstrual cramps, failed relationships, and serious family dissent. I still, on my hardest days, and there have been some DOOZIES, LOVE ME and would not want to be ANY. ONE. BUT. ME!

I am not the things my family did
I am not the voices in my head
I am not the pieces of the broken-ness inside
I AM LIGHT

- I Am Light from the Album SongVersation

I'm saying this, not to reiterate that I did not bleach my skin, but more so to begin to explain the NUANCED conversation at hand as it pertains to ME personally as a Black Woman in this society.

Sometime in May 2013 I released the cover photo for *Cocoa Butter*. In a span of 30 minutes I went from being addressed as QUEEN (especially in the black community) to being called a whore, a LIAR, dirty, donkey ass, self loathing, bitch, HO (these words were LITERALLY written out to me)... in fact MOST of the comments were misogynistic. I didn't RT (ReTweet) them, and I considered printing some of them here, but decided against it.

People used their internet anonymity as a cover to actually SAY THESE THINGS TO ANOTHER HUMAN BEING. I was stunned, hurt, MAD! and then just disappointed; in that order. This not only lacks compassion, but courage, AND it's narrow minded. It says more about the accuser than it says about the accused, this type of interactions ONLY exists in this twitter age.

Let me just get this off of my chest now...

The people you see on TV and hear on the radio ARE HUMAN BEINGS. Yes, it sounds crazy to have to say, but somehow, it NEEDS to be said. On the most basic level anyone saying such awful things might look at themselves and question if this is the kind of person THEY want to be. Someone does something you disagree with and calling them profane names is the best you can come up with? Out of ALL the actions in the world at your disposal? Or because a child has CELEBRITY parents, it's cool to say unkind things about a child, IN PUBLIC? Pull it together.

I fought the urge to clap back because it's not the kind of person I want to be. To whom much is given much is required (my mother says this to me often). I have worked hard and sacrificed a lot (whole 'nuther SongVensation), to be responsible with my platform and *this* situation was no different.

Which of course begs the question: if I am responsible then why did I allow the release of that photo? THIS, question was the ONLY one in the ENTIRE conversation about the *Cocoa Butter* photo that I felt was *worth* answering.

Again. This is complex, so before I answer the question, let me address why we are having this SongVensation TODAY.

Nuance: I'd spent four years on hiatus from public life (MUCH LONGER CONVERSATION), but as the daughter of an ex-professional athlete I understand what athletes know...they will NEVER play without pain, and you can't let the pain keep you out of the game. I went through an intense emotional journey, difficult health issues AND along with all of THAT, I spent three of those four years (and much of my savings) on a music project that fell apart at the 11th hour.

I'm not the mistakes that i have made
or any of the things that cause me pain
i am not the pieces of the dream I left behind
I AM LIGHT

- I Am Light from the album SongVensation

Even with that, *I was ready to get back into the game*. So, I scraped myself off the floor and set myself on the mission of creating a new album in six months and I surprised myself when I did it in seven. My other albums took 2 years, 2 years, 3 years, and 3 years, respectively to record. This one, took 7 months, AND a large part of it was recorded in Istanbul Turkey. I was in rare form, inspired by an inner fire I'd worked for YEARS to reignite.

Nuance: This is significant because the way I approach music is akin to hand made art. I conceive, write, produce and perform everything "by hand." With this in mind here is yet another layer; putting out a new album gets more and more intense with each passing day. After the deep emotional work of CREATING THE SONGS there are several necessary levels to delivering a final product worthy of YOU.

In addition, I was fighting my label for support all along the way. I did NOT have the SPACE or WORDS or ENERGY or TOOLS to respond to the skin lightening accusations.

I'll expound on all of this.

I went from closing out the unreleased album to completing SongVensation to going straight on the road. This includes radio, television and then three months on the SongVensation Tour.

Nuance: The road. is. hard! Very hard. Especially for a woman. It's *hard*, it just IS. I can tell you some stories.

So, when this controversy surfaced, I did what I generally do in a crisis; I went into prayer and meditation. I consider prayer talking and meditation listening, what I heard was, "don't DEFEND myself because then I'm in a fight." My prayer became, "May my presence be the truth." And with that, I jumped with both feet, back into the world that had caused me so much pain.

Child its time to break the shell
Life's gonna hurt but its meant to be felt
you cannot touch the sky
from inside yourself
you cannot fly
until you break the shell

- Break the Shell from the album SongVensation

I hadn't been seen in so long, four years is forever in the music industry. When I was seen again, I was treated with nothing but love and respect. Of course I was asked about this photo in *every* interview and I answered the best I could. In a public way, it all died down. I felt honored that my prayer was answered and my reputation did the talking. However, the topic *still* comes up in conversations; not directly with, but ABOUT me. Just yesterday a friend told me there was still speculation and THAT is why I'm writing this SongVensation; to educate those who don't understand and clarify for those reasonable people who still question. Most of all I'm writing to speak my truth.

Fast forward to June 25, 2013, the SongVensation Album is released! This massive undertaking begins to churn forward with me at the helm. I was still in a fragile state, fresh from my cocoon, wings still wet. In the spaces between the activity, this question would haunt me. **WHY DID I ALLOW THE RELEASE OF THAT PHOTO?** I'd sit down to gather my thoughts, but over the months not only did I not have the *time*, it also never felt like the RIGHT time.

Until Today.

The SongVensation Tour went from Seattle to Boston, from September until the end of November. I thought December would offer rest, but it ended up being a very active personal life month (I set EVERYTHING aside for the tour).

Then the glorious day, January 2, 2014, I touched down, slept for 12 hours, and spent the week nurturing myself; recuperating really.

Then ... TODAY I woke up, READY.
Ready to talk about how THIS picture came to be.



It's a much different story than you think.

I'm going really dig in and explain in ALL

Before I get ALL the way into this, I want to say thank you ...

Thank you because, I am HONORED by the ownership the Black community feels of me and for all the love they have shown me, even when it is hard, thus THIS SongVensation. I've been asked many times if I ever feel hindered by people's expectations. In general NO, sometimes it's a heavy weight, but I wouldn't call it a hinderance, more of a responsibility. Because of that responsibility, I write this SongVensation. My work all of these years has been for the HEALING of our community, and the healing of HUMANITY as a whole. These skin bleaching accusations are significant because they are absolutely COUNTER to who I AM but on the flipside, significant for being an invitation to not be "perfect" but to be "real".

I reject the notion that I owe an apology. This is not an apology. This is an examination (of myself, for myself), an explanation for anyone who REALLY wants to know, and an education for those (outside of the black community) who wonder.

What I do owe, is to be honest and clear, out of RESPECT for myself and for those who trust me and felt betrayed. You can't hurt a person unless they love you. Returning that love, is what this SongVensation is all about.

I pray (literally I prayed before i sat down to write this) for this to be a healing for myself and for all who read these words, for the world at large. My prayer and intention is that this will raise the collective consciousness, and bring healing to this cultural pain of colorism.

On a personal level I write this SongVensation because I choose to be self defined; because I am worthy of my voice; because I am committed to not just speaking but BEING my truth. And MOST OF ALL, I'm writing this because I've learned the hard way, that NOT being my truth carries a price that I can't afford to pay.

Why did I allow the Cocoa Butter photo to be released that way?

Meet me back here in 2 weeks for PT 2: NUANCE: THE BACK STORY

Keep following, There is a lot more to say....

I am divinity defined

I am the God on the inside

I am a star

A piece of it all

I AM LIGHT

- I Am Light from the album SongVensation

