

Spirituality and Healing Podcast Transcription -- TRUTH Podcast Library

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Transcript

Elias [00:00:00] I want you to close your eyes and just sit with your body feel points of tension and points of pain. Take a deep breath and feel muscles relax and tension slowly melts away like a heavy rain dripping from head all the way down to the soles of your feet. Imagine a beam of light emerging from the sky showering you in a brilliant glow. What color is the light? What does it feel like? Take time to notice the texture temperature (is it warm or cool?) and all other facets of light. Imagine the light shifting now emerging from your chest darting into the horizon. Follow the light. Is it a straight or winding path? Are there points of darkness and brighter points? There is an end to the light as you enter into a queer and trans liberated future. Observe what this future looks like for you. Take a moment to bask in it. [Pause] Now take a deep breath. Affirm that we are on the path to this future and when ready. Open your eyes.

James [00:01:10] Thank you for participating in our opening practice. This is the Spirituality and Healing podcast created for the GSA Day for Gender Justice 2019 from the National Trans Youth Council. To start: each member of the podcast will introduce themselves with their name, pronouns, and spiritual background.

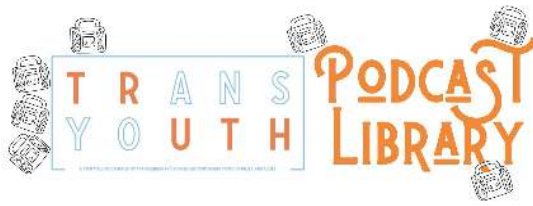
Niq [00:01:31] Hi, this is Niq, I also go by Mars. My pronouns are they or he. For me, my spiritual background is: I was raised Catholic and then after some good searching I found a spiritual practice/religion that works for me.

Elias [00:01:53] Hi, my name is Elias. I use they and xe/xer pronouns. My spiritual practice is a diasporic blend of the communities that I come from.

Bianca [00:02:04] My name is Bianca, my pronouns are they/them/theirs and I was raised Catholic, as well as went to Catholic school, and I've found spirituality in writing and art.

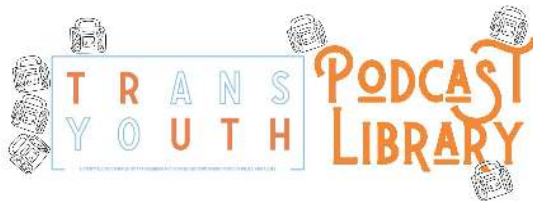
James [00:02:19] I'm James. I use kye/kyr/kyne pronouns or they/them, and I'm gonna be the facilitator/timekeeper today. Our opening question is going to be: How does who you are and the communities you are a part of effect your practice?

Niq [00:02:35] While I was raised in the church in Oakland, I lived in a very white conservative town where their Catholic practice was way different from my church's Catholic practice. But



unfortunately, because Oakland was so far from my home, I participated in their youth groups and such, where they continued to push these anti-queer and like anti-Black sentiments onto me. So to the point where I completely separate myself from the church and went in search of a new spiritual practice/religion. Somewhere I felt more safe in, and more seen. So that was a journey. I've studied a lot of different religions. Some of them being Buddhism and Rastafarianism and that was- that was the time. I found the one that most resonated with me was Ifa which is a which is the original like Yoruban Diaspora religion, some religions that fall from it are Santeria, but essentially they came over here during the- through the transatlantic slave trade and were adjusted as a guise to like keep them safe. It's effect: it's really important to me because it directly is something we as Black folks can actually like take back from before we were stolen from our lands and we can't really say that a lot that we have like, we know this history of ours. But Yoruba is like one of those things that we can, because most, if not all, African people stolen during the transatlantic slave trade were from Yorubaland or that area of Africa so many if not all of these folks had that similar practice. So I think that really resonates with me deeply in regards to just having somewhere to tie myself back to pre-colonialism as well as like it's just so open and welcoming in regards to queerness. A lot of the issues I had in regards to Catholicism regarded queerness and being a trans person and just like so these relatively rigid like gender and sexuality roles. So, it really was like beautiful to experience something that was just so fluid and open to questioning, and that's what I felt. I think that's the most beautiful thing I find about Ifa, is that like you should be questioning things. Like, it's almost based on questioning things and exploring things, whereas you just kinda lead- you are kind of just being led blindly, it felt like to me at least within Catholicism.

Elias [00:06:33] So, I think for me, as a queer and trans person especially as a brown queer and trans person it was really important for me to find a practice that I felt connected to and that I felt represented me. Growing up, I grew up around a lot of Christianity and Catholicism as an Arab and Latinx person, as well as some Islam on the outskirts of my periphery and a little bit of Brujería in there as well. Personally, as I grew up I kind of strayed further and further from the Catholic Church, mostly due to feelings of isolation and alienation related to being a queer and trans person. And I think as a young adult, I really did a lot of introspective soul searching and things like that and realized that there is a type of divinity and magic and being a trans person and being a queer person and that that in a way is like a spiritual existence. And I feel like that's kind of the center of my spirituality now as I pull in practices from the cultures that I descend from. Most recently, I've been really delving into a little bit of witchcraft as always, but Sufi Islam as a means of expressing very positive Arab queerness that I think isn't really seen in any type of Western media and is a really powerful thing for me. I, growing up as an Arab person in a post 9/11 United States, had a lot of internalized feelings about Arab peoples and what it means



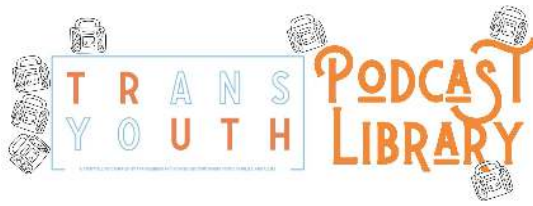
to be queer and Arab and whether or not I could be queer and Arab at the same time. So, I feel like in a way my spiritual practices kind of are reclaiming and merging my identities for me.

Bianca [00:08:39] Similar to my friends here, I grew up in a very Catholic culture and community as a Latinx person. And, as I said before I went to [Catholic] school and I think for a while I felt like it ruined my relationship with spirituality because I also felt alienated and isolated. It was very strict and I just rejected it and I thought that I wasn't a spiritual person. I thought that spirituality had to be religious and so I just thought it wasn't for me. And so, being a queer person, that's what it had to- it had to do with feeling isolated but also the need to heal from that. And I think when I started doing poetry and writing, it was a space to be able to speak our truth and I don't think I saw it as a spiritual thing. For the longest time, I saw it as a healing thing because it was a healing thing to be able to speak my truth in that way. And now, I see that it is a spirit- it is a form of being spiritual and using art in that way and in the healing way. And so, I think that's how it all kind of tied together for me and where I am today with my spirituality and my queerness and all of that together.

James [00:10:19] The main practice we wanted to share with y'all today is storytelling.

Niq [00:10:26] And when we say storytelling, we mean literally anything that involves a story. It could be passing down of a tradition, it could be telling your friends about how your day went, it could be explaining why things are. We really when we say storytelling we really mean encompassing anything you feel is a story.

Elias [00:10:56] So the reason why we selected storytelling as a spiritual practice to discuss in this podcast is that storytelling really plays a central role in almost every single spiritual and cultural background. Storytelling is vital. If you think about it some of our earliest memories as children are some sort of elder whether it's an older sibling, cousin, parent, aunt, uncle, grandparent- telling stories about either where your family has come from, things that they've gone through, about why the world is the way it is. Even in organizing - organized religion, storytelling is a huge aspect. I mean essentially organized religions revolve around big stories whether it's- it's generally their story of how the world was created or why the world is the way that it is. But it's still a big and elaborate story. I also think it's important that we chose this because many times when folks think about spirituality they think about things like crystals or books or herbs and incense and all kinds of things that you need to buy or consume to create. But storytelling is something that we all as human beings participate in almost every single day. And it's still a deeply spiritual practice that not a lot of folks consider when they think of spirituality. So I think that's really important to consider as we're talking about this practice.



James [00:12:31] Now, we'll be moving to the discussion part of this podcast talking about spirituality, healing, and self-determination.

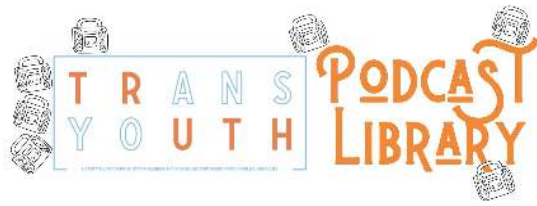
Elias [00:12:40] So, for the first question in this discussion let's talk about why self-determination is essential to healing and spirituality. For me, I feel like self-determination of all aspects of your life is very important because- especially in spirituality because spirituality is a deeply personal core belief and system of living. So, if you're not being the one in control of your own spirituality, it's not going to feel as meaningful to you, it's not going to be as impactful for you, and it won't be as healing ultimately if the things that you are following are prescriptive or they don't feel like something that applies deeply to you or is tied to your deeply held beliefs or identities. At least, that's how I feel about it.

Niq [00:13:35] In regards to- spirituality is your own individualized practice. Individualized, I'm going to emphasize because we are talking about self-determination. And like Elias literally just said if someone else is choosing your spirituality for you it's not spirituality that's religion that's literally religion. So, you won't get the benefits that folks who practice their own individualized spiritual or spiritual practices get. The healing is not attuned directly to you, it's someone else because nobody knows you better than you at the bottom line. Nobody knows you better than you. No one can tell you what you need better than you can, especially in regards to spirituality.

Elias [00:14:33] I would like also add that's not to say that you can't seek advice from other people or other people can't help you figure out like what your spirituality is or what spiritual practices speak best to you, but ultimately the person who's making the decision to engage in them should be you. Someone else shouldn't be making that decision for you. You shouldn't feel like you're doing it only for someone else. And a lot of folks' like religion and spirituality can be super deeply tied but I think especially for like us growing up in religions that we didn't necessarily get to pick we feel probably kind of strongly about it.

Bianca [00:15:11] I think the other thing with it being such a personal thing that you have with yourself, it also helps you and it helps you gain that self-determination in other aspects of your life because spirituality is part of your everyday life. And so, I think it's really important because it will extend out into outside of just your life and into your community as well.

Elias [00:15:39] I think ultimately this is kind of along the lines of what Niq said earlier. But you know there is no like one size fits all buy-this-crystal-that'll-fix-your-life spirituality. Like it really does take a lot of introspectiveness and trial and error and learning and it can be a lot of



work but ultimately, in the end, has a very large net positive effect on your life at least in my experience.

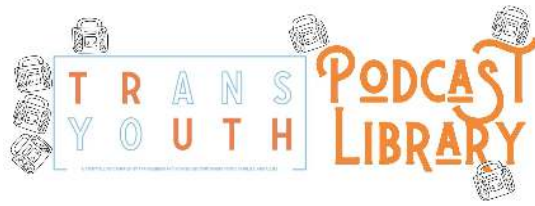
Niq [00:16:08] I kind of want to go touchback on Bianca's point about self-determination within your spirituality, helps promote self-determination within every aspect of your life. Because for me that's like- speaks very truly, my spiritual practices bleed into literally everything I do, the work I do, the people I spend my time with. When I go outside literally my spiritual practices come with me because that's just how it worked my spiritual practice is- my spirituality specifically. But it's really helped me to continue to beat to my own drum, and that sounds so corny, but like that's really how it be, because you know not everyone is doing the work that I'm doing in regards to spirituality. And we all have the capacity to, it just depends on what we have to do what we can, or do we have the capacity for it.

Elias [00:17:18] I also think that I totally agree with what you just said Niq, and also Bianca's point earlier, and I think that spirituality really heavily shapes your worldview. So, it's something that you can't like unmarry from the way that you view the world because it affects everything; from the way you would perceive a simple interaction with another person- like a stranger or what you think about the afterlife, like it's from the smallest little things that happen in your life to like the largest. And it can really affect all kinds of things like the way that you respond to stuff because if you view the world a certain way it can then inform your actions. So it really it's inseparable from your entire life. And so it does affect every other aspect of your existence including like any type of self-determination, including your idea of gender or sexuality or relationships like everything is affected by your spiritual worldview.

James [00:18:23] Moving on to our next question: what does healing look like in a gender justice context?

To me this has a lot to do with a shifting of- from a framework, especially for trans/non-binary people, as that really focus on dysphoria, self-hatred; negative stories really kind of propped up by cis folks and moving towards gender euphoria, embracing who we are, and celebrating. Kind of saying like we get to be trans, all the rest of y'all have to be cis, sucks to suck. So, for me healing means embracing the goodness that comes with being trans.

Elias [00:19:17] That was really good. I also like completely agree and I think that healing in a gender justice context could also be like the dismantlement of the notions that we have in regards to gender, especially the gender binary and these strict roles and boxes that people are placed, even within trans communities. The notion that trans men have to be hyper-masculine in order to be valid, and trans women have to be hyper-feminine in order to be valid, and that all non-binary



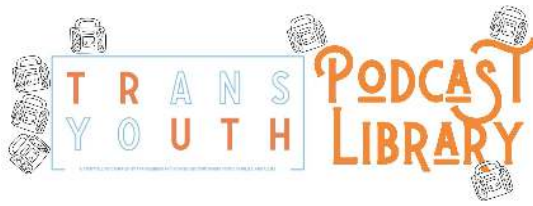
people are like skinny, white, androgynous, afab folks. It's just not I feel like that there's a lot of preconceived notions and prescriptive ways to even be trans, that I feel need to be dismantled and changed and addressed, especially like super Western notions of what gender is and only understanding gender within a Western context. I feel like there's a lot of ways that healing relates directly towards the self-determination of each and every single like trans person and then like individualized definitions of gender.

So, to wrap up the discussion portion we have one more question which is how does spirituality shape and empower the fight for gender justice and self-determination?

And I feel like a really good example of this could be using spiritual and healing practices to heal our folks and engage in healing justice so that we can fight burnout and address like intra-community issues while we're working towards collective liberation because this is hard ass work y'all it's difficult. So healing and staying well-rested and taking care of each other is really important.

Bianca [00:21:04] To go along with that, not just to cure burnout culture to keep the movement going, but also to create a community in it and to strengthen communities for that fight for gender justice and also self-determination. So, I feel like it's like a cycle of having self-determination, spirituality, using it to fight for gender justice and then through that also getting more self-determination in the process in this beautiful cycle.

Niq [00:21:35] I wanted to touch back on what Elias said about healing needing to be in social movements especially because like yeah, the work that we do is not easy. It's hard as hell. And it's not just like burnout but we also carry traumas into our work. I can personally speak to- I can only speak for myself. But oftentimes or sometimes, the reason why we get into this work is because some traumatic shit happened to us and we're like nah this needs to change. So, we do that as a form of healing, so it really own it goes hand in hand already. Because the reason why I do this work is so that I can heal from this work. I'm like OK I'm making a difference in like what happened to me so that in the future this does not happen again. And that makes me feel- you know work some shit out OK. So, it already goes hand-in-hand. So, we need to reinforce that I feel like within our movements so that we are also like because- just doing the movement work is not going to like heal trauma. So we need to be there for our community so that like yes we can like fuck shit up like in regards to like movement work and creating a liberated society but also like so that when we get out of that, once we get to that point, we're not all like burnt out and broken and we can actually enjoy this liberated queer society. Like I want to be able to like



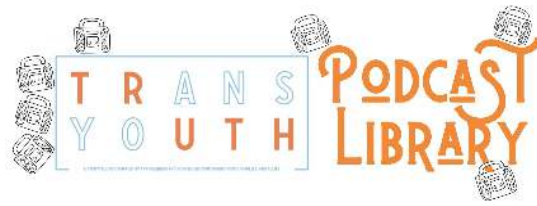
party it up afterwards and not be like. Nah I'm gonna take a nap, I'm good. So I think that's just it's like super important.

James [00:23:29] I think this question really encompasses what all y'all have been saying. And it also speaks to that we can't just be building movements, but that we really need to be building our community. And that part of building that community is you know, finding our spiritual practices on an individual level and mutually through community. And I think adrienne maree brown has really talked a lot about this in her book *Emergent Strategy*. And it's definitely changed how I interact in movement spaces and how I try to build community through spirituality on my own front.

Elias [00:24:16] No, I definitely think that both of those points are super real and important. And I also think that, going along with Niq's point, like of course like we're doing this work to pave the way for our futures but as well as like future generations so that folks after us don't so have to go through things that we went through, that the people before us went through. But also in these spaces a lot of folks are bringing in generational trauma. It's not just things that have happened to us but it's the things that have happened to our ancestors, to our parents, to our grandparents, that have been passed on into our DNA, into our way we were raised, into our thought patterns, and every aspect of ourselves. And so even coming into this work we are often bringing like so much trauma. The work itself can be traumatizing as well as healing. So, it's important to have a good balance of taking care of yourself and taking care of your community, your comrades and your friends, because oftentimes when folks are burnt out, when folks aren't taking care of each other is when we in movement spaces and then community spaces start to replicate systems of oppression. And we start replicating systems of capitalism and valuing people based on their output rather than their worth as a person or replicating systems of white supremacy or transphobia. These are all things that happen when folks in movement spaces are tired and burnt out and irritated. So, in a way like taking care of yourself is also part of checking internalized feelings and privileges and checking feelings and things like that within our communities so that we can keep our community safe, ourselves safe, and feel good while doing it.

Bianca [00:26:06] We appreciate the time and space we were given to speak on spirituality and queer liberation and self-determination. So to close out this episode, we're going to give some daily affirmations for everyone.

James [00:26:23] You are indisposable.



Niq [00:26:26] You are surrounded by light.

Bianca [00:28:29] You are surrounded by love.

Elias [00:26:33] We are on the path to a queer and trans liberated future.

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