



## Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 26 with Daniel Foor

Ancestral Reverence as Devotion to the Earth

September 5, 2018

[0:00:00]

*(Excerpt from today's show by Daniel Foor)*

*The longing for reconnection that drives people to do all kinds of interesting things is an instinct to come back into relationship with the rest of life or with the others.*

*And they want that, too.*

*(Intro Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)*

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[Intro]

[0:00:19]

**Amber:** Hello friends and welcome to Episode 26 of Medicine Stories.

On this podcast we explore the mythic journeys we undertake when coming to know ourselves through interviews with herbalists, storykeepers, ancestral listeners, consciousness explorers, earth, dreamers, and other wise folk.

Story is medicine. magic is real. Healing is open-ended and endless.

I'm your host Amber Magnolia Hill, and today I am joined by Daniel Foor. He's the author of *Ancestral Medicine*. And before I get into more of what we talked about and Daniel's bio. I wanted to share a little ancestral story of my own. And I was inspired to share this by one part of the conversation that we have today in which Daniel and I talked about the interweaving of ritual, genealogical research, and healing. And I've talked a number of times on the show about my Wright ancestors, W-R-I-G-H-T. These are my father's mother's people.

And I knew my grandma, we were quite close. She died four years ago. And I knew both of her parents, too. I mean, how incredibly lucky to not only know any of one's great-grandparents, but to

know them as a couple to know them together. And they were both gone by the time I was, I think, 10. So I didn't have a whole lot of time with them, but I love that I knew them. And my dad was very close to them, especially his grandma, and I grew up always hearing stories about them. I've told a couple of those stories on this podcast.

[0:02:11]

**Amber:** But one that I have not shared is that when I was first getting interested in ancestry — this was about in 2010 — I was given the task by Atava Garcia — I think there's a second name in her name. I think she has three names. I'm sorry, Atava, that I'm not thinking about it right now! — of Ancestral Apothecary, we did some Skype sessions. I should really have Atava on here.

And she gave me the task to write out an ancestral story. I think, you know, something that we came up with together. I was telling her about the Wrights, and about the story, specifically, of my great grandparents, ones I knew, Louis and Gladys were their names, of how their firstborn died and of his burial.

He was six weeks old. This was in Arkansas. He was born in January, died in February, and my dad had always told me this story of how it was pouring rain that day. And they hitched up their mules, and I forget what it's called. A buckboard wagon, I think he called it, and had the tiny little coffin back there and made their way to the cemetery.

And it was raining so hard and was so muddy in such tough going that the mules gave out. But luckily, that happened near one of my great-grandparents' siblings, and my great grandma, Gladys, her brother, Loan and his wife, Vestal, lived near there.

There's two Vestals in my family. Isn't that interesting? Like, on different sides. Loan and Vestal, like, what a name for these for this couple.

And so they borrowed their mules, and they made it to the cemetery, and as they were, as they were digging the grave, the walls just kept collapsing in on them. And, and that's the story.

It's no dramatic thing happened, but, like, how awful. How awful, your six week old dies, and you have this horrible day just trying to get your beloved child in the ground. And, of course, for many of our ancestors, children died much more frequently than they do today.

But so he was their first. He was their firstborn, and my grandma was born, I think, a year later, and then they moved out to California and had three more kids.

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And I just love that my dad would talk about Cletus and would keep him alive.

And gosh, I wish I had talked to my great-grandparents about him and heard the story from their perspective. But the story of the day he was buried always stuck with me.

And so with Atava's guidance, I wrote it out. I fictionalized it. This is something that Lara Veleza and I talked about in Episode Seven. You know, engaging, engaging the ancestors through ritual and through art and through ritual art as this was, and we talked about this idea that I got from Sandra Easter and her book, *Jung and the Ancestors*, which certainly comes from other

traditions. She specifically names Vine Deloria as speaking about this idea that the ancestors live in the present as well. And Daniel and I talk about this today.

But so I wrote the story in the present tense, even though it's something that happened in the past, and it was very healing to write it, and, of course, I had to embellish. I had to make certain things up. What I just told you is all that I know. But, of course, I've based my embellishments on what I do now of those people, and of the time they lived in, and the place they lived in, and of human suffering. and emotions. and love.

[0:06:14]

**Amber:** And it was really it just felt so good to write it and to honor Cletus, and my great grandparents, and what I — and I think this part came from Atava, too.

So my dad came to visit around that time. And me and him, and my now 12-year old, who was four at that time, we stood outside under this giant cedar tree that was in the yard of my rental at the time, and I read the story to them, and then we rolled it up, and we buried it under the tree.

And it was kind of our way of honoring them and of saying goodbye. It kind of felt like we were kind of participating in Cletus' burials, as well, by burying this scroll that contained this story. And I've told this story before on the podcast in that Episode Seven of having a dream that there was a scroll in my bones, and then it had my great-grandfather Louis' father's name on it when I pulled the scroll out of the bone in my right wrist. William Newton Wright with his name.

So, in so many ways, I feel like that act of reverence and honoring, and telling a story from my ancestral past and sharing it with people because I did then go and put it on my blog. And you know, it actually still is on my blog, so I'll put a link to it in the show notes if anyone's interested. But I — the Wrights for me come up over and over again. And then yeah, that dream. That **dream** are the scrolls are in my bones. That dream came **after** I did that. And that dream empowered me so strongly to continue looking for my ancestors, and following this path, and speaking about ancestry, and encouraging other people to do it.

And this was before it was as popular as it is now; not way before. You know there's some like diehard genealogy nerds who've been doing this for decades. I'm pretty new to the game myself, but it was before people were really talking about it like they are now online.

And I just feel like for me, the Wrights, who also, I, like last year figured out, I went farther and farther back on ancestry.com and traced the rights to the Scottish Highlands. And I always felt like that was somewhere in my DNA. I mean, every time I see photos of the Scottish Highlands, it's just like, ah, hits me in such a deep place! And of course it's that line. Of course it's that line that takes me back there.

So I feel like the Wrights have somewhat been, like, my guides; my guides on my personal ancestral path. And it ties into the story that Daniel shares about getting some headstones for his, I believe, great-grandparents, who didn't have any, and then how that side of his ancestry immediately opened up for him, when before that there had been a lot of roadblocks and dead ends.

So, yeah, that's my story. Thank you, Cletus, for being here for six weeks, and thank you, Grandpa and Granny Wright, for loving me, for loving my dad, and for loving my grandma as good as you did. Such good simple folk they were, and I miss them.

[0:09:53]

**Amber:** When Daniel is telling his story that you will hear, briefly, coming up, he says that when they were doing like this ritual as they put the headstones in or visited the graves after the headstones were put up, that he was trying not to figure it out family too much, but they were also kind of into it.

That's exactly how I felt about my dad, and even my four-year old daughter, as we were reading this story and burying this piece of paper, that, you know, I was really worried my dad would be like, "What are we doing?" but he was so into it. And I know that a lot of people find that that family members that they think might be a little weirded out, are usually really honored and happy to be a part of this ritual for their ancestors, and for their family and people.

Daniel says "The choice to acknowledge them somehow opened up the knowledge that was previously inaccessible to me." I think many of you have found that or will find that on your own ancestral journeys.

[0:10:56]

**Amber:** So Daniel and I— man, this conversation is dense in the best way. It's dense in the way that, like, every sentence out of Daniels mouth is incredibly profound and meaningful. So I had a hard time writing out notes, and, like, what exactly do we talk about that deserves to be written in the show notes here? And that's something I always struggle with. Try not to make them too long. But I do like to give people a little preview of what we talk about.

So, in this interview, we talk about:

- The story of Daniel's first ancestral connection, and the healing that followed
- Your body is your ancestor altar
- The ancestors are the collective wisdom of our species in all its beauty and trauma
- How time collapses when in communion with the ancestors, which is why I wrote that story in the present tense.
- Not all of the dead are equally well
- I talk about the deeply embedded alcoholism in my fatherline. And Daniel gives me this, like, framework as addiction as the hunger of the dead, moving through the bodies of the living, and the act of taking the substance as a form of ancestral communion, which just, man, resonates so strong with my dad's alcoholism.
- We talk about how there are very few personal problems. And this gets into a look at unmetabolized ancestral pain and systemic injustice
- The dead can change
- Ancestral forgetting as a function of the damage wrought by colonialism
- We don't arrive at healing by exiling those who commit harm: an approach for white folks wishing to address their oppressive/colonizing/slave owning ancestral legacy (rather than ignoring it or living in perpetual guilt)
- The role of the ancestors in social and earth justice
- Synchronicity

- They are shaking us awake in the burning house- the growing sense of urgency coming to us from the ancestors at this pivotal point in human history
- The Earth as the repository of ancestral wisdom
- The dead are in the earth, and the ancestors are animating the earth that is our bodies, and it's ongoing, recycling of spirit and matter.
- Approaching activism in a more ritual oriented way
- When a child is a returning of an ancestral lineage. Mothering is my main form of ancestral reverence, and remembering that our children are the future ancestors of our further descendants
- Are souls that die suddenly lost in limbo?
- I ask Daniel a vulnerable question about my mom, who died in a car accident in November 2015. Daniel says — and I couldn't agree more — “The most important way that we prepare for death is to be ethical and kind.”
- And then we talk about animism. Living humans are just one kind of person/coming into relationship with the wider web of being

**[0:14:07]**

**Amber:** So Daniel's, one of his students, Darla Antoine, she was on, I think was Episode 19 of the show. And she's gonna be she's coming back she's gonna be the first ever, return guest on the next episode in which we are going to talk about anti-racist genealogical research.

I am really excited for that. I did her online course about it, and I just, as someone who is almost 100% of European ancestry, Ancestry.com and other genealogical resources really are set up to work for me and for other white folks. And I have felt poorly resourced to guide people of color and people of non-European descent into their own genealogical research, but Darla is there, and she's got it dialed in, and we're going to be talking about it. So please, please listen to that one. It's for white folks as well as people of color. It's for everyone.

**[0:15:07]**

**Amber:** So Daniel is a teacher and practitioner of practical animism, who specializes in ancestral and family healing, and in helping folks learn to relate well with the rest of the natural world.

His focus on the ancestors sources from his training as a Doctor of Psychology and licensed Marriage and Family Therapist from the guidance of his teachers in earth-honoring traditions, and from two decades of implementing the teachings of ancestor reverence in his own life.

Since 2005, he's guided hundreds of ancestor trainings, rituals, and talks throughout the United States, and helped many others to reconnect with their family ancestors through personal sessions. He is the author of *Ancestral Medicine: Rituals for Personal and Family Healing*.

And on Patreon, we're going to be giving away a copy of that book. So that's at [Patreon.com/MedicineStories](https://www.patreon.com/MedicineStories), as always, at the \$2 a month level. Check it out there, if you are interested in winning a copy of this really, really beautiful and meaningful book. I absolutely loved reading it. And I hope that you absolutely love this interview with Daniel Foor.

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*(Transitional Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)*

## [Interview Begins]

[0:16:27]

**Amber:** Hi Daniel, welcome to Medicine Stories.

**Daniel:** Thanks so much. It's good to be here.

**Amber:** I'm really, really glad to have you here. I had many, many listeners requests your presence. So I'm happy to deliver you!

**Daniel:** That's good. Cheers! *(both laugh)*

**Amber:** And of course, we had Darla Antoine on the podcast before, who studied with you and just got a huge response to that episode.

**Daniel:** She's great.

**Amber:** Yeah, and as I'm sure you know, people are really hungry. They're hungry for their ancestors. That's, you know, just, I don't know, an exciting time to be talking about this.

**Daniel:** It's true. There's a kind of an intense job security in what I do. *(both laugh)*

Yeah, I don't know where to start, but yeah, maybe I'll just say a little bit about, you know how I got into all this.

**Amber:** Sure, please.

**Daniel:** So I wasn't raised with any of it. I sought out as a teenager, shamanism, and psychoactive things and started crashing around with pagan ritual stuff, and books, and it was great. And then I — chaotic but useful.

And at age 17, I connected with teachers, which was super helpful to get a framework early on for relating with the animal and plant spirits and ancestors, even. And that was over 20 years ago. I'm 40, now, and I did a PhD in Psychology, became a therapist in there, and spent the last 20 years working with different teachers, different systems, with ritual ceremony, all that. So it's been a passion for me.

And I've had the good fortune to train some different indigenous people and a practitioner of West Africa in the Orifa traditions. So I go back and forth to Nigeria to work with elders there.

But the ancestor work isn't sourcing from just one of those systems per se. And it's not like I ripped it off from some system and then changed the labels and then said, "Look, I made this up." It really is just connecting some dots about cross-cultural patterns, and ancestor reverence and ritual, and also a little bit the way that Spirit showed me to put it together. And what I learned from my own experience, as a settler colonialist American of German-English-Irish ancestry, trying to find a sense of belonging without being too terribly offensive to native people or other people, and

working with my own ancestors of blood, and engaging with their support from an awareness of my own cultural position, has been really good. It's been really grounding.

And I see how many other people that are crashing around with that same problem, like a real soul-level longing to the earth and the spirits, and wanting to get reconnected, wanting to do the right thing, but there's no map for it, because there's been so much loss and trouble, especially in the last thousand years or so.

So, that's a little bit. I don't want to monologue it too much. But I will say, last thing, that in the last decade, especially, my overall approach to ritual, which is animist or Earth-honoring, has come to include a specialization in work with blood-lineage ancestors.

So I certainly don't see them as the entirety of the path. But I have come to see work, at least a bit, with one's ancestors of blood and of body as being a really foundational and grounding, orienting, fortifying type of focus for a period of time.

[0:20:25]

**Amber:** If you're willing, I would love to hear more about this story, that you briefly touch on in your book *Ancestral Medicine*, about when you were a teenager, and as you said, first sort of feeling called, dabbling in shamanism and trance work, you had this encounter with an ancestor in your paternal grandfather's line, which led to some healing of your paternal grandfather.

**Daniel:** Sure, yeah.

I was in my early 20s. It was the first time I had been introduced, ritually, to work with the ancestors. And my teachers at the time, Bekki and Crow at The Church of Earth Healing, asked me to connect with a much older ancestral guide. And I did that earlier in the day.

I remember going to the spirits and saying, "Okay, I'm going to connect with my ancestors." And they were like, "Which ones?" I'm like, "I don't know. I hadn't gotten that far."

And so I connect with my father's father's lineage. And eventually, that led to asking those much older ancestral guides and teachers, "Is there anyone in the family that needs any help in any way?" And there was. I hadn't thought about my grandfather for years. He had died when I was seven. My dad's dad, and I didn't learn until I was a teenager that it was from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

And the ancestors brought me to him, and they wanted to assist him. They did assist him and helped to piece them back together. You think of it as a kind of post-mortem soul retrieval, or repair of his energy body. He shot himself in the abdomen, and I helped him to get oriented to the fact that he was dead. Because he was in a state of confusion, still, even though it had been some years since he passed. And I helped him to transition to join the other well ancestors.

It happened relatively quickly, but it was very impactful for me like, "What was that?" Because that just connected dots in a major way, in terms of my experience of family, healing, trauma, identity, all that. Like, what just happened? And it set me on a path of really valuing the connections between family, culture, spirit work, ancestry, all that, and seeing — starting to have a sensibility

for intergenerational trauma and all that. Some of that would come later with the psychology training.

**[0:22:55]**

**Daniel:** But one of the things that I like to highlight from that story about my grandfather and — He's well now he said to me. I felt bad at times, speaking of him as like, you know, the “poster child” for, like, ancestral healing because his he's not defined by the way he died. He was very identified, as many men are, with work and productivity, and he had emphysema. So he felt, you know, not valuable as a person. And he shot himself 70 years later to the day that his grandfather died.

And his father, my great-great-great grandfather, died in a rebel prison camp. He was captured in the Civil War, Martin Foor, and probably dysentery. And the much older ancestral guides showed me that images of, like, tribal Germanic peoples being run through in the abdomen with a sword from Roman armies. And so there's this theme of men taking a kind of blow or hit to the belly. And they showed me that this is the same moment in time that Germany, Germania, is being overrun by Rome, that my great attempts through grandfather's being captured and killed, essentially in a rebel prison camp.

My grandpa, his son's dying of acute indigestion and his birth certificate, or his death certificate, sorry. And like who dies of that? But he had a stomach condition. And my grandfather, shooting himself in the abdomen: same moment in time. That we're made of story. And until we can get to the root of the story, which often begins before remembered names, before this most recent cycle of colonialism, and cultural disruption, and immigration, voluntary and otherwise, unless we can get at the root of the story, we're at risk of playing them out.

**[0:25:04]**

**Amber:** And the story that we're made of is often, literally, physical, in the physical body.

**Daniel:** Oh, sure. Yeah, I mean, the — a lot of people don't have an ancestor altar, then that's fine.

But this body is the shrine. This is where they live. These bones are their bones. We're not separate from them.

Humans are funny, man. We're a piece of work because humans need a lot of work to not turn out bad. And one of the kinds of things it's really important to culturally teach and reinforce, is our embeddedness, our interdependence, our inseparability from others. If not, then people can, ethically, they'll think they can get away with all kinds of stuff, and when you can't really. It catches up with you.

And the ancestors and work with them, teach us about our inseparability from lineage in our accountability to our elders. Even if our living family's a mess, which, you know, it's like that sometimes, but we crave accountability, whether or not we own that, there's a kind of intimacy and being met and being seen, that comes from being accountable. And we can't have love and healthy relationships and all that without accountability. And our ancestors, because they embody this collective accountability or morality, part of the longing to come back into connection with them is to have some kind of reference point for how to be, or where to navigate, and they bring that.

The ancestors are like the human totem. They're the collective wisdom of our species in all of its beauty and unresolved pain and trauma. And so they bring wisdom on how to embody our humanity in a healthy way.

**[0:27:10]**

**Amber:** That story also makes me think of this idea that comes up in a lot of ancestral writings. And that just comes up when you start doing the work, which is that time kind of collapses when you're in communion with your ancestors.

**Daniel:** Yeah, it's like that. And it's important to be able to put on your name and remember your phone number and remember to eat stuff, but usually people don't have trouble with that.

And, yeah, time is weird. It's bendy. And we are asked by our ancestors to embody and restore to the lineage different blessings that at times have been dormant for 1000, 2000 years. More sometimes.

A lot of the gifts that people express in their life are unconscious, positive inheritances from their ancestors. And it's fine. I mean, it's good etiquette to actually recognize where those gifts come from and say thank you. But most importantly people live them, and that's what matters.

And you know, we, if we're living in a very constricted, narrow, linear sense of time, then it'll get shaken up when we die at least, if not before. So if you don't do much inner work, you'll have a chance to do it when you die. And, or you just stay stuck, which is super painful, confusing

And let's see. Those who — there's something about engaging in ancestor reverence and ritual that during life, when you're alive, as ancestors along every one of our lineages have done at some point, something about that, that changes our sense of time. And that conditions us to be available for our descendants or extended kin after our death. We're affirming that time is made out of relationships. And this connectivity is other kind of connective tissue. And that that's actually a deeper structure. So our ancient ancestors live in the present, not in the past.

**[0:29:39]**

**Amber:** So something that you have really, I think, brought into this conversation, more so than other teachers and authors that I have experienced, is that not all of the dead are equally well.

**Daniel:** True. So many of them. Yeah. Like it's so basic, and I feel like such a grouchy, broken record, like, annoying, spiritual teacher guy to harp on that all the time. But I ended up feeling passionate about it because it's a question of ritual safety.

And in the same way that as a therapist, I think it's really bad to sleep with your clients and people shouldn't do that. So therapists who do that, I'm like, thumbs down. Don't do that. With people who are like, "Go ancestors! Invoke all your ancestors. Go for it." I'm like, "Why would you do that? Don't do that. That's not safe."

So then, if I said, "Hey, Amber, like, not all living humans are equally safe." Like, "Wow that's deep." Like, you know, we really needed to unpack that one. People get that, and yet, there's a kind of an unconscious assumption that often people haven't reflected on which is fine. I don't mean to be judgey about it, that dying just automatically makes you wise and kind and loving. And it doesn't it

just means you're not incarnate anymore. The body, it doesn't work to free your consciousness to inhabit that body, it's not functioning.

So then what? You can change. You can become well, but that doesn't happen automatically. And we tend to be terrible about it, culturally.

People think the funerals are for the living. Well, they're also for living, but perhaps most importantly, they're to make sure the dead get a good send off, and that they are on track to be a well-seated ancestor. The death of the body is a rite of passage that doesn't really complete until one is a well-seated ancestor and has embraced, or at least been accepted into training, in their new status.

And so this to me, because I've been living with it, and for cultures that have been living with it, these kinds of things seem really basic. But because a lot of the frameworks have been lost in modern Western culture, then it's like, Oh, geez. Like, sometimes people hear that and they're like, this makes sense. Could it be that the disturbing forces I remember from my childhood in the house growing up, were unwell ancestors or ghosts that hadn't left? Oh, yeah, totally.

The ghosts, the ones who don't leave, they can be a source of real disruption, illness, disturbance, bad feelings, bad actions, premature death, things like that. It sounds a little dramatic, but it's just it's more of an ecological lens.

It's not saying they're evil; they're just eating as well. And if you have 20 raccoons that live in your house, it's going to create a different vibe. So they're not evil. They're just like, "Secure the food." So, yeah, there's a whole thing. We're pickled in ghosty-ness in the West, especially. They have a blind spot around it. But just ignoring it doesn't make it go away.

**[0:33:14]**

**Amber:** I think of this in my family in terms of addiction, and how incredibly, strongly addicted to alcohol my dad is and has been for three decades.

And the last time I saw him — and I know his dad was an alcoholic, and I know **his** dad was an alcoholic, — but the last time I saw him, and we were talking about it, he said, "You know, I just found out that my **great**-grandfather was an alcoholic, too."

And I could see, and I believe, I could see how he's hooked into that story. And he feels fated. But I also see that it's very real. It's very real, how deeply entrenched this hard alcoholism is, not only in their genes, but, like, there's these ghosts. These ghosts haunt him. They haunt him. I see it in him all the time.

He moved back to his ancestral home, and he will not leave, even though it's so uncomfortable for him. And even though I'm like, "Dad, I'm here with your granddaughters, and I'm inviting you to come be with us and live with your descendants." And at some point I realized, no, he feels like he... he can't break free of his ancestors. And so he needs to be there in that home with them doing what they did.

**Daniel:** Yeah, for sure. That's sad. That's tough. And it's possible, I mean, you could, if you chose to, because they're in your shared ancestors, make sure that his father and his father and his father

and all the men before him, are deeply well in spirit. Healed, no longer alcoholic, like, in a really good way. No longer drinking through him.

And it's like taking away the firewood for someone's, you know, dysfunctional bonfire. And it doesn't mean they can't still do their thing and make the choices they're making, but there's less intergenerational momentum around it.

**[0:35:02]**

**Daniel:** And I do think addiction, in general, is one way in which the hunger of the dead move through the bodies of the living in a way that is really compelling for the living.

It's very intimate. It's intimate to have ghosts up in your body and in your space. It's a kind of unhelpful possession state. And possession states can be ecstatic and awesome and helpful, or other than that. A lot of the really creepy-style harm that plays out from humans toward other humans, involves an element of less well energy, ghosts, or other things inhabiting humans and, yeah. So it's compelling.

There's an intimacy when — and not to speak for him and presume to know — but generally speaking from what you're describing, there's a kind of communion with the ancestors that I imagine he may feel when drinking with them and for them. And that intimacy can be found in other ways. But it needs to be, you know, addressed in layers. Some of that stuff you could do, though. Yeah.

**Amber:** Thank you. I think that's absolutely true of him. I think all of my interest in ancestry came from him. I think he's an ancestral storykeeper. And that he passed that on to me in a way, and you're absolutely right. It's a form of communion for him.

**Daniel:** Yeah, and a lot of people struggle with addiction are super sensitive and empathic.

**Amber:** He is.

**Daniel:** And just, like, don't know what to do with their bad selves. So this is like, "I got no shell. I got to self medicate."

**Amber:** Right. Right. Yeah. And especially men, in this culture, who are very empathic and sensitive who have been taught to stuff it.

**Daniel:** Oh, totally. Yeah. Yeah. Also that.

**[0:36:59]**

**Amber:** Yeah, so this reminds me of something else that you say that speaks to smaller, individual stories like this, but also to bigger cultural stories, which is that "Our sufferings are not our own personal shortcomings."

**Daniel:** Yeah, sure. I see very little at this point as a personal problem.

I trained as a therapist, and now it depends who you're talking to, but a good number of therapists will tend to frame one's struggles as personal. And you know, the advantage of that is that like,

“Oh, it's my personal trouble. I can have leverage over it.” Okay, sounds good. You know, I am a fan of being self-responsible.

And yet, if we ignore how profound the impact of racism, white supremacy, in a way that also hurts white people, like differently. It's bad for white people's souls to be racist. And classism, income inequality, exploitative capitalism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, colonialism, religious intolerance, go down the litany of troubles that were culturally dealing with, these kinds of toxicities are hard on the soul, and they're hard on the body. They're sometimes fatal for bodies and families.

And to suggest that those aren't profound is to overlook the condition that we're living in.

And I tend to see a lot of those systemic troubles through the lens of ancestry; that they're unmetabolized, ancestral pain, and intergenerational toxicity that also have become expressed through systems. Because if we're going to talk about racism, sexism, et cetera, we need to make sure that we don't frame it as just an “interpersonal thing”. The bulk of it really is systemic in a lot of ways, like institutions and such. But even those are ancestral houses and creations. So to exclude the ancestors from the attempt to clean up and resolve those troubles is a mistake.

For one, the very body of the troubled dead, the ghosts, are part of what sustained the trouble. And on the other hand, the dead who are more well, are a profound resource for transforming the trouble. And this is important, so it's not just the dead who behaved well during life. It's not just “Let me look to my, you know, abolitionist, anti-racist, progressive, white ancestors.” Awesome. For sure, honor them. But as you know, ritually-speaking it's possible somebody has good politics, but their soul is a hot mess. And they're not actually very safe around The kids after death.

And it's also possible that someone who had terrible politics during life dies and is like, “Wow, I was a loser. I want to do better. How do I do better?” And the grandmas and grandpas are like, “Well, you need to start helping out these people, these causes whatever.” And then they get it, they do better.

So the dead change. And this requires the living to have a framework for forgiveness, and ongoing relationship to allow for these changes to happen.

But yeah, there's a lot to be said about that.

**[0:40:42]**

Amber: Yeah, well, something that I picked up in one of your talks related to this, too, is you said something about how this cultural damage from colonialization, patriarchy etc, causes us to, to brush off our ancestors, and anything that's not an embodied human right now as not real.

So not only do we have all these problems, you know, arising from everything that you just talked about, but one of these deeper ones that's so invisible is that we don't like “believe” in the ancestors anymore.

**Daniel:** Sure, that is a function of damage from colonialism as I see it. And as someone of Northern Western European lineages, just speaking from my own position in that regard, it's been over 1000 years, I'm pretty sure, and more or less all of my lineages since any of my ancestors had a

framework during their time on Earth, for ancestor reverence and ritual. 1000 years to have the lines be down. So at least, let's say 40 generations at least.

And we see, like, as a, you know, European ancestry - white American, when I see that happening for Native North American Tribal Nations or other more intact indigenous cultures, the influence of colonialism and disruption, exploitation, etc, violence, racism. It hits me, because I care about people, and I'm empathic. And it also hits me because it reminds me of what the damage that's happened in my own lineages as a European ancestry person.

And that can be repaired. It's important to not settle into a victimized, defeated energy. It can be repaired partly through just relearning and reclaiming a framework for ancestral engagement. And then being like, "Hey, ancestors," and they're like, "Yeah, what's up? I've been sitting here patiently for 1000 years. How you doing?"

And so talking about them is not the same as relating. Some people in activist circles, you know, bless them, I don't mean to generalize, and it's not most people. But there can at times be an element that centers whiteness in a kind of performative guilt way, and brings in the topic of ancestry, which is good, but doesn't actually engage the ancestors; talks only about them, and is only about processing one's feelings about one's ancestors, or looking at the inherited debts incurred because of one's ancestry, which is useful, it's sacred. But what it misses is the relationship.

Like if you invite elders into your house and into the room, and you sit and talk about them in front of them, that's weird. It's rude.

So, yeah, I'm a big fan of actually coming into relationship with the ancestors and seeing what they have to say. They actually have quite a lot to say. They were there when shit went down, like they know how it got broke because they participated in breaking it usually. So that can be a motivation for them to assist in fixing it.

[0:44:26]

Amber: Yes, you say:

*Each of our bloodlines includes thousands of years of human history with plenty of time spent as oppressor, oppressed, and every other configuration.*

**Daniel:** Yeah, it's true. People love hearing that from a cisgendered white guy, middle upper class, like PhD, I could... It's like, I feel like I'm an apex predator in terms of my social position. So it makes it particularly like, fraught, and, you know, potentially annoying at best for me to be the one saying, "Hey, no matter what your position right now, if you want to zoom out and look at the big ancestral picture, yeah, we all have lineages that have include bad behavior."

That's not to minimize the real structural inequality, oppression, violence, etc, happening in the present. You know, I'm not minimizing that. I'm just saying, like, to be a really whole and empowered person and to see your ancestors in their full humanity, you see that they have expressed all kinds of things. Beauty, trouble, arrogance, patience, tenderness, violence, all of it.

To suggest otherwise is to say that “I'm not a whole person, because I'm only full of violent things or only kind things” or whatever. But that's not rooted in spiritual truth. We're all those things.

And I see it. It's interesting, I guess. It's an edgy topic, I suppose. But I see it in trips to Nigeria. And sometimes I've gone with people of African ancestry, African Americans here, or I've hosted, my Yorùbá elders here in the United States. And Africans and African Americans, generally speaking, tend to have a somewhat different cultural outlook on matters of race and identity and all that. And sometimes it comes up in awkward or charged ways, where Africans can be insensitive to the real, like, inherited pain of African Americans. Or African Americans can seem to Africans like stuck or fixated on race as an aspect of identity. And so I... yeah, what to say?

**[0:47:03]**

**Amber:** Yeah, it's a big topic and can be hard to talk about. And it's so important to talk about.

And I think of a class I was teaching on ancestor reverence, especially in relation to herbalism at the Good Medicine Confluence earlier this year and a student who just got really agitated, like how, but how can I honor or review or even communicate with my ancestors when I know some of them were slaveholders?

Daniel: Uh huh. Sure. That's a great question.

And, you know, not to be intense toward that person or whatever, but to unpackage it because something I get asked a lot. We don't — ah, there's so much to say — we don't arrive at healing by exiling those who commit harms for one.

Even in a traditional culture that practices execution, typically, those who are executed are also ancestralized. There are people who make sure that the community members who have earned themselves an early departure make their way to the realm of the ancestors, because to fail to account for that is to birth the ghost into the community.

And there's also a reversal of the order for a junior to judge someone who's senior to them. So in a situation like that, I would say you want to get revenge on your slave-owning ancestors, get to know the even older ancestors who lived before the empire, and colonialism, and Christianity of Rome. And ask those older tribal grandmas and grandpas to step in and hold your slave owning ancestors to account if they have not already gotten right with the spirits Then you ask the older ancestors to step in, and they can handle it. Because they're the ones in a position to do it.

To just judge our ancestors is not a particularly transformative stance. It's not one that I've ever heard my different indigenous teachers or elders encourage. So it's not one that's rooted in indigenous wisdom. Generally speaking, in my experience, not presuming to speak for all of that, but holding the dead and just the state of judgment permanently is, yeah, it's not that interesting.

And, you know, you know, it's good to just take on the blame instead of running from it, and identify with those ancestors be like, “Yeah, we did. We, me and my people, we did all those things. You name it, whatever it is, we did it, not running from it. Then you can start to have a conversation.”

**[0:49:55]**

**Amber:** Yeah, like acknowledging it, acknowledging it, looking at it, looking hard at it. Talking about it, but also, what good does it do to it? She just the guilt was dripping from her.

[0:50:07]

**Daniel:** Sure. I know. It's, it's encouraged at times, which is unfortunate.

**Amber:** Right.

**Daniel:** As if holding one's people in a state of judgement actually supports the cause. If it were useful, perhaps, but it doesn't actually support transformation or healing.

And I've watched young, white people argue with indigenous or African people, that they should hold their ancestors in judgement. And I'm like, do you understand how rude you sound right now? You are telling someone who's at least twice your age, who is from an intact indigenous culture, that they also need to hold your same stance of judgement, or else they don't get it.

I've had people offer to explain to my Yorùbá teachers why they shouldn't share their culture with non-Yorùbá people like me. I'm like, are you serious? Wow.

The part of it that's problematic about it is it internalizes a racially essentialized view of humanity that was generated. There are earlier routes to it. It especially got concretized in the late 1600s in the Americas to justify the, you know, upper class, white people's exploitation of Africans, Native people, and poor white people for that matter. And that notion of different races is really worth deconstructing.

And one of the ways we break it down is we get more specific about our lineages, and where we're from. Like, I'm, sure, I'm a white person, it's fine. And I'm of early German, English, Irish colonizer ancestry to North America from Pennsylvania and Ohio, which is more specific. And this idea of just different, like, four different races, why would we want to continue to replicate a, you know, European colonizer framework for humanity?

It's not kind. It's not beautiful, really. It's very harsh. It doesn't mean that we minimize the impact of race. Of course not. I'm not suggesting that. But I'm saying we need to bring nuance to it. And when people are grappling, to be righteous, and to be redeemed from a feeling of crushing shame and guilt, nuance is a tough sell in that moment,

[0:52:33]

**Amber:** Right, I could tell she felt like she wasn't a true social justice advocate if she didn't hate her ancestors and herself for that.

And I just want to put in that you have this talk called *The Role of the Ancestors in Social and Earth Justice* available at your website, [AncestralMedicine.org/talks](https://AncestralMedicine.org/talks), where you go very deeply into what we're talking about here. So for people who want to dive, dive deeper there, your grasp on the complexity of these issues, I think, is really profound.

**Daniel:** Thanks. Yeah. Just for context, it took me almost a decade of doing or supporting others in blood lineage, ancestral healing work before I started to really understand what I was looking at better. So I did a lot of work before. I'm like, "Oh. Oh, this **is** the cultural healing work. Weird."

**Amber:** Yeah. (*Amber laughs*)

**Daniel:** Okay. And then I think I'm trying to go throw up for a minute because I'm gonna need to say this out loud. Okay, here we go. (*Daniel laughs*)

And then, you know, I was just nervous about all that because it's contentious.

**Amber:** Yes. Oh, yeah.

**Daniel:** A lot of there's a lot of hurt people hurting other people. And it's understandable, but also it can be a little rough in moments. And whatever. I don't mean I don't have a victim-y feeling about it. Like, so many people suffer, you know, in really real ways. And there's a lot of lateral hostility and just like mean girl culture in social justice activism.

**Amber:** Yeah, yeah.

[0:54:15]

**Amber:** Okay, I would like to go back to another of your personal ancestral stories. I love, I loved this story. And in your book you write about how closely ritual genealogical research and family healing can interweave, and this is specifically related to the story of your maternal grandmother's parents' unmarked grave, and what you did for them.

**Daniel:** Yes, good. People don't ask me about that one a lot. It was really sweet.

I learned that my Grandma Hal, she helped raise me. She is very, we're close. Our daughter is like a returning from that lineage. And I learned that her parents, they were very working class like Irish, Welsh people near Pittsburgh. And they, somebody in the family, a distant cousin, remembered where they were buried. So she had the spot, and then there was a grave that wasn't marked. So I knew that I needed to get a gravestone. So I did. And I got the names and dates and also engraved on there the totemic energies, different animal spirit energies that occurred to me along the lineage of my mother's mother's mother's mother's mother's father's people.

And at the same time, when I went back to Pennsylvania to place the grave marker with my parents and some extended family and a prayer — I tried not to weird out family too much, but they're also kind of into it. — at that same time, the block on the research on that side of the family opened up, and it was really clear to me that the choice to acknowledge them somehow opened up the knowledge that was previously inaccessible to me.

And it's great. I got to understand some of the lineages that trace back to Northern, what's now Northern Ireland, and other places in Europe and different stories, and to see that many of them were buried in a nearby cemetery. But the... it was instructive for me.

And I've seen it again and again and again and again, over the last 15 years of supporting a few thousand people through this work, how synchronicity really can light up once you're relating with the ancestors. There are so many stories of people just reaching out to them, and then someone calls or then something happens or somebody discovers some family heirloom or some, you know, sign comes, whatever it is. And it's one of the skills, it seems, in ancestor bootcamp is to learn how to generate synchronicities for the living, and how to come to them in dreams and how to make

things happen. So it was a sweet example for me of making effort and being met by them in that Yeah.

**[0:57:15]**

**Amber:** Yeah, I remember realizing early on in my ancestral wanderings about eight years ago now that like out there, they're looking for me, too. You know? It feels like as soon as I start reaching out, they start reaching their hands forward through time to be like, "Yes, we're here!"

**Daniel:** Oh, yeah. So much. Like, look, we're in such danger on the planet right now. There's such such crisis. And so many of the troubles have been building, and they're not even fully manifest yet.

So the best possible outcome is it's just really hard, and we turn the corner. And so they are, like, shaking us awake in the burning house. They're like, "You need to do wake up now. Things need to change, like, urgently. You've crossed certain lines, and you're continuing to cross further ones." And so there is a sense of urgency from them. There's also joy and play, and you know, all the like, awesome, fun, magical things. And there's a real sense of like, "You are in danger. We are in danger together. Please wake up." To like a child waking, you know, trying to wake up a parent that's fallen asleep at the wheel.

**Amber:** Yeah, yeah. There's there's a sense of urgency coming, I think, to us who are embodied right now from the ancestors.

**Daniel:** Yeah, and the ancestors, remember, are very aligned with the wisdom of the earth.

In Yorùbá culture, and I'm also an initiate in Ogboni society. And it's a society that gives reverence to Ogboni, the Earth Mother, and in that society one of the qualities is one of like accountability, or moral authority, or community, looking out for the health of community.

And when we give reverence to the earth, we're also saying the earth is the calabash, or the container, for the souls of the dead. The earth is the repository of ancestral wisdom, and the earth is witness to our interactions. The earth is the third person on the call between us right now. And the, you know, one also present when listeners access the recording. And the earth in that way is the many eyes and hearts of the ancestors whose bodies are in the earth or their ash are still in a sense in the earth.

So the ancestors in that way are always present, and they're also associated with the quality of witnessing and accountability that comes with the earth as an intelligent deity.

**[1:00:31]**

**Amber:** Right. I think that's something that we overlook so easily. I've talked about it a few times on this podcast, and I was just struck dumb when I realized it — I don't know, a year ago or something — that the ancestors are literally in the earth.

**Daniel:** Mm hmm. They are.

My first trip to Yorùbá land the elder of our lineage, Àràbà Adésànyà Awoyadé, he had just passed two weeks earlier at age 99. Very kind senior Jedi. And he was buried in the house as is traditional.

So I slept across the hall from him. I was just, you know, in a room in a house, but there's also a busted up area of concrete where his body was buried in the house. And so, something lovely and intimate about having the dead buried, like, under, in the house where you live.

And another way of framing that is these bodies are also the earth. And so the dead, who are not dead, who are the ancestors, who are also us, because we're one human community are wearing these handfuls of earth that are these bodies. And so the earth also moves around and talks to itself and so yeah, so like the dead are in the earth. And the ancestors are animating the earth that is these bodies. So both

**Amber:** Wow, right. And then when we step outside of time and take the long view, it's just like people are just Earth, taking human form over and over.

**Daniel:** Totally. And it would behoove us to behave like that more, instead of framing ourselves as separate.

You know, I follow the news closely. I don't know if it's good for my nervous system. But I've always been I've traveled a lot, and I'm a student of language and culture, and I care about politics and vote. I care about those things. And I think others should, too.

And I don't think that there are any environmental problems. They're just human behavior problems. And the human behavior problems and the legacy of them arise from a false and distorted understanding of who we are, as if we understood our embeddedness, like, really got it. We wouldn't behave in the ways that people too often behave, positions of power.

And so I, you know, I almost went into environmental law as a career. I'm so glad I didn't. I would have been so unhappy. But I was just mad about what's happening. And I decided to try to leverage it in a different way. So I'm trying to help humans to do better. And to remember our context and our position.

But in some ways, I'm doing it out of loyalty to the earth. Like I'm on assignment in the human neighborhood, because that's where my real teacher, who is the spirit of this planet, has sent me.

**[1:03:53]**

**Amber:** Yeah, you know, you've pointed out, too, how well Indigenous American communities have brought ritual and ancestor reverence into their, like, Earth justice activism.

**Daniel:** Oh, yeah, totally. I think the Native peoples throughout the Americas, whether it's things like Standing Rock, and I don't know more like Native, First Nations people in North America or different movements in Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, other places are exemplary in understanding that ritual and the sacred and political change and communal healing are inseparable.

So I don't say it to idealize Indigenous Peoples, but the world, generally speaking, for those who still haven't generalized like indigenous worldview of some sort, things are less compartmentalized. And this can be seen in other places. Like, Maori people in New Zealand, some, you know, spiritually tapped in folks in India, let's say, doing advocacy for rivers and Wangari Maathai in the greenbelt movement in Kenya, and other kinds of activism in continental Africa.

So there are examples all over the world. I'm not saying it's unique to native peoples in the Americas, but I think social justice- type folks who are not indigenous in the Americas could learn a thing from people who are approaching activism in a more ritual oriented way. And there are folks, like, I think, Starhawk in reclaiming movement, has that sensibility. I don't know her well, but I'm not saying there aren't people already doing that. There are, and it's encouraging. And I'm a therapist also. Some activists really could benefit from some therapy, bless them. (*Amber laughs*) And some therapists could really benefit from some activism too, for that matter.

[1:06:11]

**Amber:** I want to go back to something you said a few minutes ago, speaking about your maternal grandmother's people. That you said, "Our daughter is a returning of that lineage."

**Daniel:** Yeah, I did say that.

**Amber:** Yeah, tell me about that.

**Daniel:** She's awesome. She... we kind of sensed that early on, that we knew she was going to be a girl. And then we had a sex reveal party with the cake and everything where they, they bake a cake, and if it's blueberries inside, then it's a boy. And if it's strawberries, it's a girl. It's kind of dorky but everyone took bets and we're like, "Oh, it's a girl."

So we had a big Scorpion on the cake and icing just to be dramatic 'cause she's a Scorpio, but we just knew through the dreams and intuition that she seemed connected to my mother's mother's side and the Irish grandmas. And we just felt that, my wife and I both. And our teacher in West Africa did a reading through it's called [*inaudible 1:07:16*]. It's a divination done around the birth of a child. And we asked, as is customary, which lineage she's reincarnated from. And he's like [*inaudible 1:07:29*] about his father's mother, Ifa says it's your father's mother's lineage. I'm like, yeah, that's what we thought.

So it's confirmed their divination as well. And doesn't have to lock her into that or it's saying she has to be any certain way. But it's good for parents to recognize that each of their children is an ancestor returning, and that the children aren't... the souls of children aren't small souls. They're they're fully they're full grown souls so to speak. And I mean, generally, all kinds of things can happen, but children are just big souls with small bodies who, you know, poop their pants. And so sure, we need to help them to get reacquainted.

But the point is that they each have their own unique gifts and medicine. And it's something, generally speaking, indigenous or animus cultures do really well is recognize sacred difference, and not everybody is the same. To the point where not everyone needs the same spiritual practice that not everybody needs the same whatever. You know, I had an idea, like, I speak Spanish pretty well and I'm like, "Oh God, we should teach her Spanish. We should, like, do this bilingual thing." And I wanted to do it. We just decided this this week. But I stopped and divined on it, first. I'm like, is that what she wants? I'm excited about it. Is that actually what's gonna be good for her? See, I came back. Yeah. So I'm like, okay, we'll do it then.

But it's good to not assume that what's right for us is right for other people. People have different needs, different taboos, different trajectories, including our children.

**Amber:** Is it exciting, though, to think about how she may reveal more of that lineage to you as time goes on or bring you closer to them? Or are you just looking forward to seeing what happens?

**Daniel:** Yeah, she's awesome. It's totally vulnerable to be a parent. There's so much you can't control and it's just like a having... You're another heart that's outside your body.

And yeah, I love it. I mean, it's terrible for sleep, but I am also excited about how she's already deepening my understanding of the ancestors just by being herself. So, I'm like, Oh, this is... My teacher when he was here brought his eldest daughter and wife last year. And somebody asked him in a talk, and we're in Athens, Georgia, how do we honor the ancestors? And his daughter is 11, jumped in [*inaudible 1:10:27*], and she said something to the effect of "When we take care of the children, we honor the ancestors, because the children are the ancestors returning. If you want to know the ancestors, take care of the children."

Boom, like, yeah. What she said.

[1:10:44]

**Amber:** Yeah, I feel like my main form of ancestor reverence is my mothering. Because there's not a day that goes by that I'm not thinking about my ancestors, as I am loving my children and loving them as good as I can, as an act of honoring for my ancestors, and knowing, as well, that my children are the future ancestors of my descendants.

**Daniel:** Yep. Awesome. Thanks for doing that.

**Amber:** Yeah. Yeah, my little one, Nixie. She'll be two next month. And I've always felt this really deep connection with my paternal grandmother's people, the Wrights. I've talked about them many times on this podcast. I think I'm going to tell a story when I record the intro to this about how I really feel like they initiated me onto this ancestral path.

And one ancestor on that side that I just really enjoy looking at his photos and learning about him, his name is Hezekiah Wright. He lived in Arkansas in the 1800s. And he's got this big full beard, and there's these photos of him with, like, 60 plus family members, and it says "Hezekiah Clan", and he just looks kind.

And I posted a photo of him in Instagram stories a few months ago and got so many people responding, saying, "That's Nixie. Do you see Nixie in his eyes? Do you see Nixie in his face?" I was like, "Yes, actually I do." And that so many strangers saw it too, felt really sweet and just like nourishing on this deep level.

[1:12:19]

**Daniel:** We have a tradition in Yorùbá religious practice, called Egungun. It means, egungun means bones in Yorùbá, but Egungun is the ancestor medium society. And I'm an initiate in that society. And one of the things that happens is there's a colourful cloth, consecrated suit, that when a person steps into it covers your body from head to toe. And so there is no way for others to know who is in the suit. And if you do know, it's taboo to reveal who that is.

And part of what is conveyed is that when one is embodying the ancestors, there's an erasure or an eclipsing or setting down temporarily of individuality; that your face, which is the face of the

masquerade, is the face of the hive. That the bee is suddenly, like, "Let me tell you. Let me speak as the hive." And the voice changes when people are in mediumship mode. And the ancestors speak in community. They'll come up and say stuff to people, sometimes call them out or whatever it is, offer a blessing, pray for people and to have that communally enacted is really lovely.

And their children sometimes that are initiated to that society so they're short little children masquerades. It's really lovely. And I think of it in your share, because there's a commentary on time. Like it's Nixie and Hezekiah.

Are they expressing the same energy, in the same moment? Right.

And so there's a way that we, as humans, can become a channel or even possessed in a friendly way. Well, it can go both ways. But let's say in a friendly way, by the collective intelligence of two species, or a bigger current and bigger lineage within the species. I think a lot of really talented people are doing that half consciously anyways. So.

**[1:14:42]**

**Amber:** I want to, I want to ask you something that's really personal to me, something that came up over and over in reading your book and speaking about well ancestors and elevated ancestors, and in this thing that you talked about earlier today with your paternal Grandfather and how sudden deaths and suicides can sometimes leave the departed spirit in a limbo state, in a surprised state.

So... okay, this feels really vulnerable right now, and I probably gonna cry. But my mom, who was my best friend with whom I was very close, died in a car accident a little less than three years ago, November of 2015. And she was just, truly, the most wonderful, loving, kind person. Like, you know that people use the word "Angel" for her all the time, even before she died.

And my sister and I, and a few weeks after her death, we're like, "Whoa, like mom was like an ascended being." You know, we just thought, "We have the best mom!" But like really looking at the way she lived her life, and the way she treated people, and just this baseline, like, happiness and trust and loving-kindness that she lived her life from. Damn, she was really there. Even though she wasn't like spiritual, you know, in any way, really. She was... the way she lived her life was, you know, you know what I'm saying?

So this internet stranger writes me an email a couple days after she died and is like, "Oh my god, you're, you know, your mom's soul is in limbo, you have to do this Native American ritual, that Chinese prayer..."

**Daniel:** Really?

**Amber:** And I was just like, "Whoa, chick, like, don't throw that at someone you don't even know."

And I talked to my sister and my mom's mom, who's still living now, you know, in her 90s when she lost her baby girl. And I was like, "Do you guys, you know, there's this idea that when souls die suddenly they're lost. And do you guys feel like that?" And both of them said, "Not at all." And I felt the same way. Like I just feel like the moment of impact she was at peace.

**Daniel:** Yeah.

**Amber:** And I... but I don't get that reflected back to me in anything that I see or read. And so I guess I want... I want you to affirm me, Daniel.

**Daniel:** Yeah. No, I'm not just being whatever, hospitable by agreeing with you. It's actually how I see it. And, of course, kindness on your mom's passing in that way so suddenly.

And, look, the most important way that we prepare for death is to be ethical. And to be kind.

**Amber:** Exactly.

**Daniel:** You could take someone who's kind and ethical and has, like, a real, soul-level backbone of good character, and cause them to die very slowly and painfully, and they would probably still transition okay.

And you could take someone who's, you know, very conflicted, and if they haven't addressed that, then it might slow their journey after death. So it's if people die in violence or surprising ways it can... it's just one factor.

And yeah, there's no rule about that. Some people would make a rule about suicides. I'm like, I think that when people take their own life, usually it's surprising to them. Because usually they have a view that it's going to end things. And it doesn't actually end them. It just changes them.

**Amber:** Right.

**Daniel:** And so, once that initial surprise has passed, some people work it out. Some are kind of working it out, but slowly, some contract quite strongly and don't work it out at all. So it really, it depends. It's so hard to generalize.

And, but yeah, especially if people are loved. If people live an ethical life, and they're loved, they're almost certainly going to be fine.

**Amber:** Right? Like nobody felt like they had any unfinished business with her. Nobody.

And I, I mean, I was almost like floating on air those few first few weeks after her death, because I felt so blessed to have someone like that be my immediate ancestor, to have that person be my mother.

**[1:19:10]**

**Daniel:** It's possible on some half conscious or soul level that she was just ready to work from a different position. And I mean, who knows? It's not I don't like to... It's not my place to make any specific story about it. But I guess what I — I don't hear you doing this — but I hear culturally sometimes people say that, "Oh, so and so died young" or "They died too soon." As like did they die too soon? If a child dies at age two, is that too soon? Or is that the duration of their life?

I don't... I think it's best to not add a story of how it should be on top of very soul-level movements, but to have humility and kind openness and be like, "Okay, this is super sad. And it's what's happening. And how do we work with it?" Yeah.

**Amber:** Yeah, I think we were really able to do that as a family after she passed, too. And, really, as you sort of hinted at, like, the number of blessings that have come into my life since she passed, as a direct result of her passing, is almost overwhelming. Like my life wouldn't be what it is at all right now, if she hadn't died when she did, like she did, which is so hard to wrap my mind around, sometimes, how much good could have come from losing the person I love the most, like I did.

And I feel also very lucky to be in this place where, you know, with your work and a lot of other ancestral work, it's like, "Oh, you might reach far back ancestor who gives you these blessings," but I just I hadn't heard of anyone else having this experience that I've had with your parent after they passed.

**Daniel:** The experience of which part? Just like them being in such excellent condition?

**Amber:** Yes, exactly having that, like, ascended ancestor be your immediate parent.

**Daniel:** Oh, sure. Look, if it's already like that, fantastic. The work, like not saying you're asking for this, but if you were to approach this kind of work, and you're like, "Okay, what does it look like to work with my mother's mother's lineage? My mother's still alive. She seems quite — sorry — my mother's passed. She seems quite well. My grandmother's still alive." It would look like making sure your great grandmother, and all the women on back before her to pre-Christian grandmas, and I'm guessing somewhere in Europe are deeply well in spirit, and that they're in harmony; you know, they're connected with one another. And also they're connected with your mother in spirit; that your mother not only is deeply well, but also is in great relationship with her grandmother, and all of the ancient witchy grandmas well before her.

**Amber:** (*Amber laughs*) Yeah, there's some work we could do with her grandmother for sure.

**[1:22:10]**

**Daniel:** Yeah. So there's the approach that I take is lineage-based. And the indicator of a healthy lineage, your bloodline, is that any individual along that lineage can wear the face of the lineage. Like, any bee can speak for the hive. Any one individual can function like the mask of the group energy.

And, you know, often it's a mix often in some more well than others. So that's where the work is. That's where the ritual repair and healing work happens. We call in the old grandmas and grandpas and be like, "Look, we've got a problem down here. Things got off track. It's a mess. It's painful. Please help." They're like, "Oh, we thought you'd never ask." They're polite people. Why didn't they help before? Did you ask? No? Okay. Ask. See what happens.

**Amber:** So my mom can be that face for that lineage for me.

**Daniel:** For sure. And I mean, she already is. Yeah, this is kind of dorky but I use a one to 10 scale. And so what you're describing as someone who's like a seven or an eight, like, the 1-3 range are the really funky ghosts. The 4-6 are, like, not fractured or fragmented, but not awesome; like nice

people who, you know, if pressed would probably do the wrong thing. And the 7-10 range are they're really safe, well, ones. Like they'd be safe around the kids, that they're, they're good.

But you get into like, eight, nine, that's like, "Oh, these are potent. I feel a little dizzy to think about them. Like magical, ancient grandmas." Or, you know, something that's very, like, there's substance there.

And, and so you when you speak of your experience of your mother, I, in that way of kind of organizing the information, I think of her as like someone who's quite well in spirit, but she may not necessarily be super tapped into this group consciousness and the ancient, Earth-connected, essentially, indigenous grandma's. She might be. I don't presume to know. But so sometimes things can go from quite good to amazing. Yeah.

**Amber:** Thank you. My heart needed that today. Today would have been she and her husband's 10th wedding anniversary, and their wedding was just one of the most joyful days of all of our lives. So it's really heavy on me, and I appreciate you walking me through that.

**[1:24:46]**

**Amber:** I wanted to touch on one last thing before we wrap up, and so I was a Religious Studies major.

**Daniel:** Me too.

**Amber:** And yeah, and a lot of anthropology,

**Daniel:** So practical. *(Daniel laughs)*.

**Amber:** I know, but look at us now! You know, it very much ties in.

**Daniel:** I know! That's what I say to my parents. *(Daniel laughs)*

**Amber:** I know. I know. That's what I say to myself. And I'm like, "That was wasted years of my life."

So I just remember so clearly, you know, learning about animism and ancestor reverence as like these bygone, primitive belief systems. And now of course, this is mostly where like my work is and the people that I'm talking to on this podcast and surrounding myself with.

So I'd like you to speak about sort of the overlap or the intertwining between animism and ancestral reverence. And it's probably to explain to a lot of people what animism is.

**Daniel:** Yeah, sure, like, the three minute version.

I, yeah, I'm an animist, which is a way of saying my worldview is that being humans are just one kind of person. There are many other kinds of people. Some are human-shaped, like the ancestors not incarnate right now. Some are other-than-human, like the animals, plants, fungi, mountains, rivers, some are deities, some are physically perceivable by us, some not so much. But there are many, many other kinds of people with diversally-shaped bodies and consciousness. And we are embedded in these relationships. And it's incumbent upon us if we want to be a grown up,

essentially, or a quality person, to try to be respectful with these other relationships that we depend on to live, that are a source of, you know, guidance, healing, joy, community, all kinds of things.

And that seems very basic to me. But that's not the frame that modern Western culture is predicated upon. Modern Western culture basically says, "only living humans." and not even all of them. It's, like, mostly living, white, male, cisgender, middle-upper class, Christian humans or whatever the oppressive garbage storyline is, "are fully real." And then it kind of goes down from there.

So that's how generalizing many, not all, but many people who are indigenous people is about 350 million depending on how you think of that legally and politically. It's how many indigenous people traditionally see the world as a very relational view that respects the other than humans. And it's how a lot of people that are into shamanism, which is a complicated kind of topic and word, tend to see the world, as respect for what we think of as nature. Nature is a kind of a silly concept but the, you know, the spirits or the people whose bodies are nature are the focus in a lot of shamanism.

**[1:28:05]**

**Daniel:** And so animism is a way of talking about just coming back into reconnection that doesn't — it's not off putting to indigenous people, and it respects the sovereignty and the history of colonialism and all that. And it just says, anybody, who cares to, can behave in a more relational way. And that's not only kind of interesting and spiritual or whatever. It's very adaptive at this point in history, and very pragmatic and sensible, and scientific, even, and gets better results.

And it means that, you know, Western-educated, white people are probably the most culturally disconnected humans on Earth in terms of historical distance from animist worldviews. For people of that background like myself to come back into animist frame for life is encouraging. I'd like to see others pick it up more.

But the longing that people have for this kind of generalized, indigenous something — the thing that moves people to drive to Standing Rock or to, you know, find a sweat lodge or to do whatever it is to lick psychedelic toads or whatever, like the longing for reconnection, that drives people to do all kinds of interesting things — is an instinct to come back into relationship with the rest of life or with the others. And they want that, too, of course.

They're shaking us. The one shaking us to wake up are not just the ancestors. They're also the, you know, orangutans and the rare orchids and the deep sea, you know octopus, that's like, "We're dying because of the bad dream you're having. If you would be so kind as to wake up, we would love to enjoy your company in some other kind of configuration than what's happening now."

So, animism comes with a set of understandings and even rituals and tools for re-enlivening those relationships with the other than humans that we are already embedded in. We're just playing them out less consciously right now.

**Amber:** Well, I would add here that folks who want to go deeper into everything we talked about today will find so much in your book, *Ancestral Medicine*. I mean, you know, we didn't talk

specifically about rituals, too, to facilitate these connections, but you go very deeply into that in your book on your website.

And so please tell people more about where they can find you and what you've got coming up.

**Daniel:** Yeah, sure, the main places, [AncestralMedicine.org](http://AncestralMedicine.org), and there are ... I'm guiding, well, it'll happen by the time the interview's out, but I am guiding trainings next year in Australia, and I believe in Bali and Europe, an online course in *Ancestral Lineage Healing* starting this December. It's a full length course. It's a great way to dive in with the practice if you're not local to one of the trainings.

And there's a directory now of practitioners. There's 30 so far, 32 people who have my blessing to guide this work with others. They're all under my supervision. They have my support. And, and so I don't do session work with folks anymore, but I train people on how to guide this work. And that's been very satisfying.

And that also means that if people want to work with someone whose trans or speaks Spanish or you know, has African ancestry, whatever it is, that there's probably someone in the organization who would be more of a cultural match if folks need that for, you know, just safety and feeling met.

And yeah, but check out [AncestralMedicine.org](http://AncestralMedicine.org). You're welcome to connect on Facebook and all the social media things, and check out some of the online learning. There's hours of free interviews on my site. Yeah. And the book. So.

**Amber:** Yeah, you've got a lot out there. And thank you so much for your work and for talking to me today, Daniel.

**Daniel:** Thanks so much. It's been good. I appreciate it.

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*(Exit Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)*

## [Closing]

[1:32:46]

Amber: Thank you for taking these Medicine Stories in. I hope they inspire you to keep walking the mythic path of your own unfolding self. I love sharing information and will always put any relevant links in the show notes. You can find my blog, handmade herbal medicines, past podcast episodes, and a lot more at [MythicMedicine.love](http://MythicMedicine.love).

While you're there, I invite you to click the purple banner at the top of the page to take my quiz "[Which Healing Herb is your Plant Familiar?](#)" It's a fun and lighthearted quiz, but the results are really in depth and designed to bring you into closer alignment with the medicine you are in need of.

If you love this show, please consider supporting my work at [Patreon.com/MedicineStories](https://Patreon.com/MedicineStories). There's some killer rewards there: exclusive content, access to online courses, free beautiful downloadable e-books, coupon codes, giveaways, and just amazing gifts provided by past guests of the podcasts. All of that stuff is at the two dollar a month level.

For a little more, you can access my herbal e-book or my small online course, and that's all there as a thank you, a HUGE thank you from me and from my guests for listening, for supporting this work. I love figuring out what I can give to people on Patreon. It's so fun. And I love that Patreon makes it so that you can contribute for such a small amount each month.

I'm a crazy busy and overwhelmed mom and adding this project into my life has been a questionable move for sure, but I love doing it, and I love the feedback I get from you all. And I just pray that Patreon allows me the financial wiggle room to keep on doing it while giving back to everyone who is listening.

If you're unable to do that, or if you'd like to support further, I would love it if you would subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. And if you would review the podcasts on iTunes, too, it really helps getting it into other ears. It means so much to me when I read those reviews. It's, like, the highlight of my week when I check them and see new ones.

People are amazing. You guys are wonderful. Thank you so much.

The music that opens and closes the show is Mariee Sioux. It's from her song "Wild Eyes." It's one of my favorite songs of all time.

Thank you and I look forward to next time!

**[1:35:36]**