



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 41 with Toko-pa Turner

The Dreaming Channel and Remembering Ourselves Home

March 19, 2019

[0:00:00]

(Excerpt from today's episode by Toko-pa)

These dream stories are nature. They are biological necessity and function. And just like plants, they are inclining us to a certain medicine.

[0:00:18]

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

[0:00:23]

Amber: Hello friends, and welcome to the Medicine Stories podcast, where we are remembering what it is to be human upon the earth.

I'm your host Amber Magnolia Hill, and this is Episode 41. Today I'm interviewing Toko-pa Turner.

Toko-pa is a renowned dream teacher and has recently released a beautiful book called [Belonging: Remembering Ourselves Home](#), and we talk about both things in this interview. We talk about her childhood in exile, a lost community, and finding belonging again. This idea of belonging not as a destination but as a skill set. She talks about being grabbed by the hair and being dragged into the endless underworld, and she shares an incredible story about physical pain, a powerful dream, the grandfather who jumped from a train on the way to Auschwitz. It's just the most unbelievable story on ancestral healing and how healing is open-ended.

We talk about when a family must keep their stories silent in order to survive and how that silence affects the lineage going down, and this quote from Jung that says, "Nothing influences children more than the silent facts in the background. "

- The dreaming channel is always open

- Being in reciprocity with the world behind the world.
- We are literally made of story and dreams are the original stories.
- Why we should not be down with OPI: Other People's Information.
- Dreams are pulsing through us and incline us to our unique medicine.
- The multiplicity of our coherence -- She is such an amazing writer and puts words together so beautifully.
- Not all dreams carry equal weight, but there's no such thing as a throwaway dream either.
- Approaching a dream as if it was a wild animal in a forest.
- Heirlooms, the "story-ing" of objects and what we reclaim when we make things by hand.
- To feed the holy that sustains us, we must give it away what doesn't require anymore taking.

I would like to mention before I play the interview, Toko-pa at the very beginning mentions that she found me through a piece that I had written and published on my blog a couple of years ago and that piece is called [Ancestral Voices: Women's Weariness, and the Illusion of Linear Time](#). So you can find that at [mythicmedicine.love](#), and of course, I'll put a link in the show notes here to make it easy to find.

[0:03:11]

Amber: We talked a little about chronic pain before on this show. Or have we? I think I talked about it with Yaya. That was Episode 22.

But I haven't really talked about my own experiences with chronic pain at all on this show. I have, and have had for 20 years now since I was a senior in high school, back pain and headaches, and it's just so complex which is why I haven't talked about it.

It's so hard to talk about and always trying to figure out what causes it, and is it my fault? And what could I be doing better? I've seen SO many bodyworkers and people that I've hoped could help me over the year. It's like it gets better in some ways and worse in others.

And it was really relieving to me to hear Toko-pa's perspective on like, of course, with everything that's going on in the world and the culture with the earth, and the earth's inhabitants, of course, we're feeling it, and maybe especially, of course, women are feeling it. I actually had a splitting headache throughout this entire conversation. And the same thing happened when I interview [Daniel Foor on Episode 26](#), I was in so much pain the whole time, but I think I did alright through both of them.

And it's just an ever-evolving experiment for me in trying to get rid of it. I really don't want to have it for the rest of my life. I don't know if it's in my power to get rid of it. I don't know if that's the right way to approach it and think about it. But I see a lot of people,

women especially, posting about their experiences with chronic pain, and I'm always moved by it and touched by it. And I realize that I haven't really talked too much about it myself, so I appreciate that we get into that in this conversation today.

And I just wanted to let you know, too, that most everything, I think everything we talk about (well except for the dreams, but you can find so much on her dreamwork on her website), and actually she does write about dreams in the books so, like, everything we talk about in this interview, Toko-pa goes so much further into in her book in just such a beautiful way. So, especially this story that I've already talked about with the grandfather. There's a lot more to it and we could have just kept going and going on that story in this interview, but our time was limited. There was only so much we can talk about, so check out the book, [Belonging: Remembering Ourselves Home](#) if you want to hear the rest of that story.

I also want to let you know that if you're into what we're talking about and into the dreamwork that she has an online course coming up called Dreamwalking. It starts March 29th, and I just mention that because it's about a week after that episode comes out and I know some people are gonna be like, really wanting to get in there. And of course, it will happen again in the future.

Her website is toko-pa.com.

[0:06:24]

Amber: Umm. So let's learn a little bit about Toko-pa before we hear the interview.

Toko-pa turner is a --oh, and we do talk about the meaning of her name at the very very end. I'm so glad we did-- is an author, teacher, and dreamworker, blending the mystical tradition of Sufism in which she was raised with a Jungian approach to dreamwork. She founded the Dream School in 2001 from which hundreds of students have graduated.

Toko-pa has been interviewed by CNN News and BBC Radio and has a community of 100,000 online readers. Her writing has been published worldwide. Her first book *Belonging: Remembering Ourselves Home* explores the themes of exile and the search for belonging. *Belonging* is an Amazon best seller in the US, Canada, and the UK. It won the prestigious 2017 Nautilus Gold Award for its contribution to the field of personal growth. the 2018 Reader Gold Award for Non-Fiction and listed as a finalist in the 2018 Whistler Independent Book Awards.

Sometimes called a "midwife of the psyche", Toko-pa's work focuses on restoring the feminine, reconciling paradox, and facilitating grief in ritual practice.

Okay, I hope you glean as much nourishment from this interview as I did.

Here we go with Toko-pa Turner.

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

[0:07:56]

Amber: Hi Toko-pa, and welcome to Medicine Stories!

Toko-pa: Thank you so much Amber. I'm happy to be here.

Amber: Umm, your book, Belonging: Remembering Ourselves Home, it's just so beautiful! I mean, I read a lot of books. I've read a lot of books. And it's rare that a book combines the profundity of the message with just exquisite writing. I mean you are so quotable (*Amber laughs*). Every sentence could be a quote that goes viral, umm, and the art and just the layout of the whole book, the art, it's really extraordinary. Thank you so much for the gift of this book.

Toko-pa: Oh, thank you so much for that reflection. I think I first heard about you when you had written a post, umm, a recent post about some kind of combination about an exploration about time and dreamtimes, and I was like, "I need to know this young woman," (*Toko-pa laughs*), and I think that's when I reached out to you and thought we had some important things in common.

Amber: Very much so, yeah, was that the one about women's pain? And...

Toko-pa: Yes!

Amber: Yeah. Yeah, so I did want to talk about that. The story that you share in your book is so phenomenal, but I wanted to start with -- this is a wide question -- but asking you what brought you to a point where you had this book on belonging inside of you?

Toko-pa: Well, you know the book is, the book is an inquiry on the topic of belonging, and I sort of present my story as umm, the thing that qualifies me to write about a subject that I have never known anything about (*both laugh*) in the sense that at a very young age I left home.

I left home when I was 14 years old. And I did so because my home was an abusive and volatile environment, but what happened for me at that point was that I crossed a threshold into a life of being an orphan. And there was no turning back from that point. And so this feeling of being an outsider, of not belonging, was, you could say, chronic and persistent throughout my life, except that it was governing me in an unconscious way to make decisions to try and find that place of belonging.

And it was only until about five or six years ago, maybe seven, where I had an experience of heartbreak in my community where I live. And I had such a powerful reaction to what should've been just something that you shake off, maybe. Certainly, it had a heartbreak involved in it but it really -- my body had such a profound reaction to it that eventually I realized what was happening in present time was resonating with this echo from my early life story. And it was and maybe more than that my ancestral story.

And so what had been governing unconsciously to that point now rose up to the surface and confronted me with these questions of what really is belonging? Why do so few of us feel it? Why do we keep looking for it, and umm, in vain? And all of these questions were very personal for me because there was this ache that had followed me around my whole life.

So I decided to really devote myself to this inquiry and I had no idea this was going to be a book. And I think everybody had thought that my first book would be on the topic of dreams because I had been working for 20 years (*Toko-pa laughs*). But instead what I discovered as I asked these questions about belonging is that I started to receive these incredibly potent dreams which were teaching me a different way to look at belonging. They were reframing for me my understanding of the dimensionality of belonging. And I began to understand it as something that isn't outside of ourselves but is a skill or competency that we in modern times have lost or forgotten.

[0:13:09]

Toko-pa: And umm, and so before you knew it, I was, you know -- I say in the book I was "grabbed by the hair and taken down into the underworld" (*Toko-pa laughs*) because that's really what happened was I was initiated by this question of belonging. I went through many, many depths and each time I thought I understood what belonging was, there was a fathom below that and a fathom below that!

And before you knew it, I was writing a book. It took, it took five years to write this book. So it really has been and, of course, now is what I speak and teach most about. I should just add that I realize now that the work that I had been doing for twenty years around dreamwork, the greater work or the broader work that I was doing through dreamwork, was actually this work around belonging.

[0:14:10]

Amber: Mmm. Well, I hope we have time to talk about umm, the core competencies. I love this reframing of belonging as not as a destination or place we're striving to get to but a skill; a skill that we can learn by bringing back certain things into our lives. But I, we have to start with this incredible, incredible dream of the pain you were in for so long, of a dream you had of your Jewish grandfather, and this deep ancestral healing journey that you went on that ties this all so beautifully together.

Toko-pa: Mmm yes, I could see us having this conversation because I could see how much our interests and paths and your readership and listenership as well intersect there.

(Toko-pa laughs)

Amber: Yeah, I mean this story just blew my mind. It's so, so beautiful.

Toko-pa: Well, do you want to tell it?

(Both laugh)

Toko-pa: Okay, well you can fill in the parts that I miss. Okay?

Amber: I do have plenty of quotes in front of me, so... *(Amber laughs)*

Toko-pa: Okay. Well, quite deep into the book actually I begin to tell this story about umm, what I had alluded to earlier of this heartbreak I experienced in my community, and it was a time of profound isolation where the friends and community that I thought I had, I was suddenly cast out of belonging with them. And this outsider status was kind of a powerful initiation for me.

And one of the ways in which the initiation manifested was in pain in my body. And I woke up one morning and I had these TERRIBLE pains in my feet. It was really like walking on broken glass. I had never experienced anything like that before, and I couldn't walk.

Amber: That's crazy too, it's just out of NOWHERE.

Toko-pa: Yeah, it was excruciating pain, and both feet, too, and I was having difficulty doing even the smallest things.

So I lost my physical ability to walk, to stand up and do dishes, to really do anything that involves feet, which is everything overnight. And I kept thinking, well this is going to pass but then days went by, and then weeks went by and then months. And before you know it it was a year and a half of this inability to walk.

And so you can imagine my life completely changed. I stopped being able to participate in most of life and in community, and the direct result was that I was so confronted with all of these questions around being an outsider and being in isolation.

And one night, I think it was about 8 months into this painful journey, I had a dream. And the dream was one of those dreams that feels more like an experience than a dream, very visceral, and real, and the details were so salient and quite physical. And the dream was that I lived in the kind of refugee state, there were refugee camps and there was a curfew that was imposed on some unseen regime and umm, and I was out at night after curfew

and at some point I realized that they had taken my boots and shoes away so I was barefoot outside. And I was walking or running, and I stepped in what felt like broken glass. And it was in exactly the same place on my foot I realized when I woke up as the pain that I was experiencing in my daily world.

So this dream really struck me because those images of the refugee camps and this sense of being in a curfew state all just felt like echoes of my ancestral heritage because my grandfather was imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Nazi occupation in Poland. And he was tortured there for three years, and they actually umm, at a certain point put him on the train to Auschwitz to meet his death in the gas chambers as so many millions of Jews had. And he AMAZINGLY jumped off that train.

Amber: That's so amazing.

Toko-pa: And then just that's the only reason that I exist is because of that act. And when he jumped off that train, he broke his foot.

And, so I just felt this like power of, and even now I have full body chills thinking about the, well, what is -- just the question that emerges-- what is that ancestral echo? What's going on in my feet? What is the connection to my grandfather?

[0:19:54]

Toko-pa: And the thing about my family was not only was I estranged from my family, but many of our other family members are estranged from each other. There's one branch of my family which is. They're very enthusiastic about genealogy, and we have the British side of my family it just goes on and on and on for generations of how we're connected to each other.

But on my maternal, the Polish-Jewish side of my family, the branch of my family tree is ominously empty. And it's always been understood that we didn't know the names of those people everything was lost in the Holocaust. You know, my grandfather was the only survivor in his family. His entire family was annihilated and murdered. So it seemed like an impossible task to get to know my ancestry.

but I rolled up my sleeves and tried to do so anyway. And besides, I couldn't leave the house so I had a bunch of time on my hands you know to just kind of try to understand.

[0:21:01]

Amber: Yeah so did it feel like, like a call, like an invitation into this lineage for you?

Toko-pa: You know, I have to say that I've always felt so much grief about that part of my family and that part of my umm, my inheritance; my inheritance of the stories, and the

poetry, and the experiences of that part of my family. But yes, this dream absolutely felt like a call, like, “Hey! There’s a powerful chilling connection here...”

Amber: -- And you wrote -- Oh sorry. Go ahead.

Toko-pa: No, no. Go ahead.

Amber: You wrote, I believe, that your grandfather did not speak about what he experienced during those years.

Toko-pa: That’s right. He was one of those people that survived the holocaust that had the idea that you should work hard and move forward, and so he never spoke about it. And my grandmother towards the end of her life started to reveal some things that she had never spoken, also, while he was alive. Umm, and it -- just to give you some context on how hidden it was -- my mother didn’t even find out that she was Jewish until she was in her fifties.

Amber: Mmm. Wow!

Toko-pa: And you can understand why that would happen because during the war that it was absolutely a matter of life and death that you keep your Jewishness secret because if you could pass as Aryan nation (which my grandmother could because she could speak German and she had blonde hair) that you would do that to survive.

And so you could see how that could carry on after the war.

Amber: Right.

Toko-pa: It was very dangerous to be Jewish, so umm, so yeah, so I began to find these genealogy organizations. There are many amazing Jewish genealogy organizations who have -- the thing about the Nazis was that they were incredible record keepers! So a lot of the processing of prisoners is all recorded in different kinds of paperwork. So I’ve said about seeing if I could uncover it just based on following my ancestral name, and I discovered all kinds of things.

[0:23:39]

Amber: Umm (*Amber clears throat*) I want to harken back really quickly, I’m wondering if you know this Jung quote off the top of your head about children who grow up and like the silence?

Toko-pa: Yes.

Amber: ... Of those stories. I thought that was so powerful and could resonate for so many people.

Toko-pa: The silent facts of the background, that one?

Amber: Mhmm.

Toko-pa: Why, if you have it right in front of you, why don't you read it because I'll botch it.

Amber: I don't, but we can look it up later. But that was really powerful, and I'm wondering too before we get into the rest of the story because I'm happy to go deep into all of it. You know I love these stories of uncovering your family, and your trip to France and everything, but I'm curious if you see that silence and that lack of information also affecting your mother and her life.

Toko-pa: Oh very much so. My mother and I have been estranged for most of my life, so it wouldn't be ethical of me to try and speak for her. But I can't see how it, it wouldn't, you know?

So the gist of the quote from Jung is that nothing affects a child more than the silent facts of the background. So the things that aren't said, even though they're not spoken and they're not seen, they're incredibly, umm, powerful shapers of the young psyche because children are incredibly porous and they pick up so much.

And you know this if you're a sensitive person. For instance, if you're in the room with somebody who's grieving silently, or angry silently, that you can feel that energy, that that energy is going to affect you. Well imagine, take that a step further, and we can talk about the umm, silent trauma of carrying something like the experience of the Holocaust and that kind of cruelty and violence. And so, certainly growing up where that entire history is being obscured I can only fathom how that would shape somebody's ability to, umm, just live from their authentic heart and live truthfully and live with kindness, and you know?

[0:26:21]

Amber: Mhmm. Yeah, I would imagine that (*Amber clears throat*), perhaps umm, learning all this and diving deeper into this lineage just gave you more understanding of your mother and that wound.

Toko-pa: You know, as best I can. You know, I definitely, I should say, that this connection for myself was umm, really pivotal in learning to live with my disease in that it for the first time invited me to turn with compassion towards this pain. That this pain, whatever it is, you know, whether it has this, it's part of this ancestral inheritance, maybe there was

something about my life which is privileged enough, which is stable enough, which is loving enough that the pain of my family tree can now express itself in the disease that I carry. And for that reason, I can someday (*Toko-pa laughs*) turn towards it and say, "I hear you. I'm here for you. And that it -- this too belongs."

Amber: Mmm. Yeah, you write, "I felt I was given the privilege and responsibility to heal these ancestral wounds through their manifestation in my life."

Toko-pa: Mhmm... And can I just say, it's a big job! (*laughs*)

Amber: Right! (*laughs*)

Toko-pa: For any of us who are truly willing to undertake and heal ancestral lines, it's a big and awful and unruly mess.

(*Amber laughs*)

Amber: That's so true. It sounds like it's kinda dreamy, you know kinda lofty. But it's rarely simple or easy and can be painful. And there's not always, like, the perfect ending to the story.

Toko-pa: Yes.

Amber: You know? I like that. My understanding is that you were not like, "And my pain disappeared!"

Toko-pa: Yes.

Amber: It's still something you're working and integrating with.

[0:28:55]

Toko-pa: Yes, and thank you for saying that.

Ugh, I just want to get up on a soapbox about this because I think there's just so many so-called "spiritual" circles and "new age" circles that kind of equate pain or discomfort and unwellness or disease with unhealed trauma or anger or wounding or whatever it is.

And I'm not saying there isn't a correlation between these two things, but it's not an equation. And there are many complex factors at work. One of them is the ancestral piece, but then there's also the ecosystem and everything that is happening for the earth right now, and why wouldn't we as extensions of the earth be experiencing you know TREMENDOUS pain and disease? Why wouldn't we? It wouldn't make sense if we weren't.

And we see especially women, who are the prime sufferers in this rise in auto-immune disease. And so there are a lot of factors.

And another of one of them is actually epigenetic, you know? That those of us who have family lines, which is a lot of us, that have actually experienced trauma and dislocation from their place of origins, and their lands of origin and their culture of origin, that it actually carries through the genetic code, and we can see the survivors of umm, you know, the Sixties Scoop and the Holocaust and the African diaspora actually carry in their genetic makeup a propensity to high levels of stress and imbalanced cortisol reactions. And they're actually able to study this, and the children of survivors of these things have a much lower threshold of being able to ward off disease.

[0:31:18]

Amber: Right, umm, another quote that I have here in front of me, you're right, "It's a fundamental mistake to believe that unbelonging begins with the self."

Toko-pa: That's right.

Amber: Very helpful! (*Amber laughs*)

Toko-pa: Yeah, you know, I think psychology has really done us a disservice in the last 50, 200 years in this whole idea that you know, psyche is some kind of island (*Toko-pa laughs*). And that, you know, if we have a problem it's something then we need to work on our issues.

It's so indicative of the culture that we live in that we imagine that we are isolated in what we're suffering with. But you know, it doesn't make sense for us not to consider the manic culture in which we live. And that incredibly patriarchal set of values have that our culture upholds and esteems has HUGE implications on the health and well-being of our bodies and our psyches. So we have to begin to think in a more interconnected way. And it's going to take a little more practice.

Amber: Umm. can you expand on this story related to everything we're talking about the difference between remembering and not forgetting?

Toko-pa: Yeah, I think, you know, people often say to me, "I don't remember my dreams, or no, the more popular one is "I don't have dreams." And I say, "Of course you do. Everyone has dreams."

You know? And we're taught, even, that we dream just during a certain period, just during our REM cycle, but I believe that this is completely untrue, actually. If anybody's ever had a nap which is 15 minutes long and had a dream from that nap -- which is everyone (*Toko-pa laughs*) -- then you know that the dreaming channel is on all the time...

(Toko-pa pauses briefly to handle something happening in the background)

-- Forgive me, I didn't turn the sound off on those... I don't know if you were able to hear those.

Amber: I did not hear it. No problem.

Toko-pa: Okay. I've got a new tip now. --

So, anyone, we have this dream channel that is actually on all the time and when we go to sleep we're tuning into that dreaming channel, but I believe the dreaming channel is available to us in the day world as well. Some people call it non-ordinary consciousness. There is the "first attention", which is the one where we see the world day-to-day and, you know, we get around, and we make things happen.

And then there's the "second attention" which is the world behind this world, which is very alive and very open. And this is something animistic cultures around the world practice on a daily basis to be in reciprocity with that other world. But in our world, of course, we don't -- we denigrate that idea and dismiss it as being silly nonsense.

So as a result of that dismissal, we have this huge emphasis which is placed on, you know, the rational world, the materialistic world, the one we can touch and can gather evidence for (*Toko-pa laughs*).

And so we forget; we forget our dreams.

[0:35:19]

Toko-pa: But I believe forgetting is a choice. It's a passive choice, but it's a choice nonetheless. This is a really important piece.

When people say they don't remember their dreams, it's not because they're not gifted or they don't have the ability or that they, you know, they're just stuck in that not remembering. It's a practice! Not only is it a practice, but it is a very simple, very easy practice, actually. And dreams want nothing more than to be remembered and so, there are just a few things that you can put into motion if anyone's interested in learning more about that, I actually have free resources on my website. You can search for "tips for dream recall, Toko-pa."

(Both laugh)

And it will take you right there, and I have a long video and I have step-by-step instructions.

Getting and remembering is a practice, it is similar to belonging. The word “membering” is in “remembering” so it’s kind of I actually invented a new word: “remembership.” (*Amber laughs*). I love this word because there is an idea that there is a membership, we are entitled to a membership with that other world, with that something greater, with the holy in nature.

We have innate membership, but we have to remember how to belong with that world and it’s a practice. It’s a skill.

[0:37:01]

Amber: And umm, (*clears throat*) and you, this quote struck me so deeply, “We are literally made of story. Every night something in our biology compulsively spins out dream stories in order to keep us healthy.”

It’s, it’s funny for me as someone who thinks a lot about dreams and a lot about story, that I had somehow never bridged the two that that’s all dreams are; they’re just constant story spinning.

Toko-pa: Yes. Yes! And don’t you think that a lot of the cultural products we have now such as television shows, fairy tales, movies, all of these things I think are crafted on the inspiration of dreams. I think that it, really, dreams are the source of stories.

Amber: Yeah, That makes so much sense to me. Even going, you know, way, way, way back into human pre-history that we know story is fundamental to our species and it makes sense to me that that grew out of dreaming.

Toko-pa: Yeah! Yeah, even, let’s say, creation stories, why wouldn’t it make sense that those come out of our dreaming.

[0:38:21]

Amber: Mmm... I really like this idea, too (*laughs*). There’s this phrase of “other people’s information” (*Toko-pa laughs*), and how in this culture we tend to get really hung up on other people’s information and taking in, you know, so-called “wisdom” or whatever knowledge from others and taking it as our own, and maybe not questioning the truth of it for our own lives, and dreams as one source of our own information.

Toko-pa: Absolutely. (*clears throat*) I love umm, I love playing with the word originality because the word originality in its root has this word “origin” and umm, I think true originality comes out of an encounter with those origins. And we share those origins because we are all connected, but the particular way in which our origins are pulsing through us is unique for each individual.

And so when we turn towards our dreams, the way that I understand dreams, is that they are nature, naturing through us in the form of these stories.

So in the same way that a tree produces branches, and then pinecones, and sometimes flowers and fruit, that dreams, these dream stories, are naturing through us. They are a biological necessity and function just like plants. They are inclining us to a certain medicine.

As you very well know, Amber, that every plant has a particular medicine, and so I think do we. And that medicine comes in so many different forms, but it is inclining us into our true, you could say, purpose. And what I mean by purpose is not necessarily like a single purpose, because I think we have many different purposes, but let's say "wholeness"; the wholeness of who we are meant to be; the life that's meant for us.

[0:40:52]

Amber: Mhmm. Yeah, forgive me as I quote you once again, but when we go inward at night, we are resting ourselves, or restoring ourselves to the multiplicity of our coherence.

Toko-pa: (*Laughs*) That's fun!

Amber: It's beautiful!

Toko-pa: Tell me what you think about those words.

Amber: I guess that there's... Umm, in living life in daily life I feel like maybe I need to be split in a lot of different ways. You know, I have my interviewing someone mode, and then soon after this I'm going to go into mothering a two-year-old mode, and that's going to be hard, and then I'm going to be thinking about what's for dinner, and then I'm going to have to pay my taxes, and then I'm going to have to pick up my twelve year old. It's just these tiny, little, there's -- I don't know if that's even correct (*laughs*).

It's like, something I think about all the time, that we are one person; we are one being; we are one consciousness, but there's all these little splinters coming off it throughout our days.

Toko-pa: Yes.

Amber: And as we age as well, I think we splinter more in our consciousness in the way we like, conceive of ourselves as we go through our lives. And maybe that comes back into more coherence later in life if we're lucky to get into old age in a wisdom-keeping capacity. But umm, when we go inward at night we are restoring ourselves to the multiplicity of our coherence.

It's interesting because multiplicity and coherence are not exactly opposites (*Toko-pa laughs*), but they're holding two different ideas there, but again, weave into one.

I don't think I made a lot of sense, but there's just something about...

Toko-pa: -- Oh you did!

Amber: ... Okay (*laughs*).

Toko-pa: No, I love the insights you have especially this idea that as we get older that we might splinter more in that, our identity becomes more umm, what? Becomes a little more rigid?

But it could go the other way, as well, like you said. If we're consciously in this conversation about restoring ourselves to the multiplicity of who we are, it brings us into coherence.

So what I mostly mean by that is there is a splintering process. It happens in our ancestral lines as we talked about, splintering off from our culture, our land of origin, our ways, and practices of our people's people, and the splintering off can happen in our childhood when we are told to be a certain way and to not be another way. And we learn to push those parts of ourselves into hiding. Because they are not welcome in belonging. And this splintering process, or what I call the "split off self", becomes eventually foreign to us. They become, I call them the "refugee aspects of the self" pushed to the fringes of acceptability, left on the margins and abandoned outside of belonging.

[0:44:24]

Toko-pa: And so, we have this happening in our psyche where we have this splintering process that takes place, but when we go to sleep at night, those many aspects of the self try to re-belong themselves to us, and what this looks like sometimes is nightmares or difficult dreams. For some people, that's a real suffering.

But really I believe these dreams are just trying to turn up the volume to get our attention about something. And that's kind of how that works is like you ignore something long enough, it gets louder and more upset with you and more thwarted and more VIOLENT. Uh, because we have, we have dismissed it and devalued it and ignored it. Right?

So dreamwork for me is this process of meeting the otherness within and learning how to re-belong with it, and to find out what it needs, what it wants, what it has to offer. And it's not always parts of ourselves that we've pushed away, sometimes it's parts of ourselves we haven't met yet, new possibilities!

Have you ever had one of those dreams where you go into a house, and you discover these new rooms and new spaces? And those are dreams that are finding parts of the psyche that just haven't been inhabited yet.

Amber: OH, that's funny, Toko-pa because I had a dream like that this morning.

Toko-pa: Oh?

Amber: And it was like this blue velvet carpeting in this big house that I was exploring, new and ever-expanding staircases. And I was thinking today that I have dreams like that ALL the time

Toko-pa: Ohhh!

Amber: And I wonder what that's about?

Toko-pa: Well, you see, I'm so excited for you because those dreams don't happen all throughout your lifetime. They just come at a certain point when you're just moving into a whole new having-ness around your personhood. It's this massive growth, and you can't really say what it is, but maybe there's a clue in those blue carpets or the staircases. Like, you have to look at the qualities of the dream, the details, to get a sense of what is that character you're moving into? And see if you can find the bridge back into waking life where I can relate to that feeling of entering a whole new territory of who you are.

Amber: Mhmm. Yeah. Yeah especially right now actually.

[0:47:15]

Amber: Um, do you, okay I'm going to ask you now all of the dream questions that always come up for me that I (*laughs*) feel silly asking people or haven't found the answers for.

Like, do you, does every dream have equal weight? Does every dream deserve consideration and picking apart and trying to understand, or when you wake up in the morning are sometimes like, "Yeah, I'm just gonna let that one go."

Toko-pa: Okay, so you had ten questions in that one question, believe it or not (*Amber laughs*). So, I'll do my best.

Do I believe they have equal weight?

No. Some dreams are big dreams. Some dreams are what I would call "numinous dreams" where they are communications from the divine, from your origins. Other dreams are -- it's a little bit like spelunking, you know? -- Other dreams come closer to your surface. However, there's no such thing as a throwaway dream. I have never met a dream that

didn't yield some significance and meaning for the dreamers. That being said, there are absolutely some dreams I will let go because if I didn't I would just have a full-time job being in conversation with my dreams because the well is deep and rich (laughs) and there is a LOT that emerges from there.

But it's a little bit like a garden. You don't keep all of the plants, and you need to make room for the ones you really want to thrive. So, I think I answered all your questions. Let me know if I missed any in there.

[0:49:05]

Amber: Yeah, thank you. That's helpful.

Um, I guess I'll just share that about a week ago I woke and had this one image resonating strongly from a dream, and it was of a rat skeleton, and I was just like, "What the hell does that mean?" (*laughs*)

And so I kinda let it go. I haven't worked with it. I haven't looked into it, but also I have not forgotten it. And so that's telling me that there's something to look at.

Toko-pa: I agree. I think, you know, even sometimes dreams from your very early childhood will continue to hover at your shoulder from time to time. And those dreams, just like you, I feel still have a potency, still have an energy that is meaningful for us.

In fact, some of those earliest dreams speak to the core pieces that we are meant to work with in a lifetime.

The one thing I wanted to say is that I don't use language to pick them apart or analyze or dissect or anything like that, because the part of restoring us to coherence is, for me, the approach that I take to dreams, I use the word courtship because I think we really, when we're working with a dream, we want to approach it respectfully and with curiosity, as if it were a living thing. And that if we can learn to approach the mystery in as wholehearted and present a way, the mystery might decide to reveal something to us.

And so the emphasis in the work that I do with reams is really in curiosity; the art of asking questions. And that those questions bring up a kind of amplification of the symbols that are appearing in our dream. And it's through that mysterious question-asking something constellates, and you really do have to trust the unknown, for, I would say, an uncomfortable amount of time before something constellates. But it always does.

Amber: That's true. I was gonna say I've done a lot of work with dreams and there's something magical about the process of just choosing to engage and be curious and go deeper that something is always revealed.

[0:51:59]

Amber: And I wanted to go back, too, to what you just said about the childhood dream, that's amazing I have a few childhood dreams I definitely gonna need to revisit in light of that idea. But you write about in your book about this dream that harkens back to your grandfather and that lineage that that dream continues to teach you down through its many layers.

And I think that's something that really helped to reframe something in my own dreaming life that it's not like, you know, you wake up the next day, journal about your dream figure out the meaning and that's it, the meaning is fixed in time forever for you. Especially in those big dreams, the meanings, the teachings and the wisdom tend to unfold and even change over time.

Toko-pa: Yes, and that is a sign that you're doing it right.

It's if you take the image of, of you would approach a dream as if it were a wild animal in the forest. So let's say you're walking in the forest and suddenly a fox appears there, and you lock eyes, and the fox sees you as much as you see it, and you don't say, "A fox means your uncle's going to inherit money," you know? (*Amber laughs*)

That's not what happens, so please throw out your dream dictionaries (*both laugh*).

Instead, make this encounter with the fox and the fox makes an encounter with you. And then something happens that you can't necessarily name, but if you're curious about it, maybe the fox will decide to approach you; maybe you can get closer; maybe you can have a relationship with each other eventually.

I've seen this kind of thing happen in my own dreams. So then, it's the relationship becomes a living force in and of itself, and so if you're doing dreamwork right, it's more alive when you leave it, than when you started with it.

So if you have this -- this is why dream dictionaries are such rubbish, because they are deadening. They say, "Your symbol means this." It's an objectifying process. And then you say, "Okay good. That's done," until the next dream which tries to belong with you also more successfully.

So yeah, some dreams have many, many layers.

[0:54:35]

Amber: Ah, I love this idea of belonging and dreaming. It's just it's a sweet two concepts to hold as one (*laughs*).

Toko-pa: Yeah, this connection has really become my life's work. Because I was doing dream work for more than twenty years, and it never occurred to me that the work I was actually doing was developing these skills around belonging (*laughs*)

And so it wasn't until I wrote this book that it showed me that that was what was happening; that the underlying question that is beneath, it's like the silent conversation below the other conversations we have in the opening is this longing to belonging. And when we're doing dreamwork we're restoring ourselves to all of the split-off parts of ourselves that we talked about earlier, or, as in your dream last night, discovering new parts of ourselves.

And that in that process we are coming back into coherence with our origins, with our originality, and the result of that is a natural generosity, like fruiting that comes through our lives where we want to give away that which we have been given, and so this is the part of the process where, you know, you have to roll up your sleeves, and put some elbow grease into it (*laughs*), and make something of what has come creatively out of that encounter for you.

Amber: Umm, before we close, let's just touch a little bit on what you get into towards the end of the book which is these core competencies of belonging.

So this idea of belonging as a skill is very beautiful, and especially becomes useful, and, like, doable or pragmatic when you give these ideas for things you can do to find --not to find -- to come back into that state of belonging.

So I just want you to speak about a few of them or one that you really love. I really loved the handmaking chapter.

Toko-pa: Yeah, and handmaking is kind of an unlikely candidate, but actually, it's an incredibly powerful skill in belonging because when you look at most traditional cultures, indigenous cultures and first nations cultures, handmaking is an essential skill, making things with your hands, and there are multiple reasons for why this is important.

The first is that -- oh, there's this wonderful -- did you ever read that book by Alice Walker called *Temper of My Familiar*?

Amber: No.

Toko-pa: OH! You have to read it! It's a classic.

Amber: Such an amazing title.

Toko-pa: Ugh, I mean, Alice Walker is one of my favorite writers of all time. But she -- it's this wonderful story that crosses boundaries of ancestry and time and dreamspace -- and she -- there's a gospel in that book called *The Gospel According to Shug*. And one of the, I guess the, what do you call it? Commandments of the gospel is that through the art of creating (I don't remember it exactly), but through the act of creating you're reliving the thrill of your own conception. You're reliving the thrill of your own conception.

And so when we're making something with our hands, we are in conversation with the lifeforce itself, the creative lifeforce itself. But also everything that happens during the handmaking process. Let's say we sit in a circle with other women while we're weaving, we're building relationship; we're telling our stories; we are sharing our intimacies with one another; we are singing the songs of our ancestors; and when we do that it goes into each one of the threads as we weave this beautiful thing.

And the more we weave this fabric, the heavier with quality and stories and history it becomes. And so um, but it's also a way of being in relationship with the materials of the place where you live. So suddenly it expands into all kinds of relationship. Let's see, if you're doing basketry, for instance, you're perhaps learning how to harvest the reeds in the lake that grow in the lake you need to create your basket. Or perhaps you're learning from the indigenous elders how to consciously and safely harvest bark from the cedar tree in order to dry it and make your cedar basket. And so there becomes so many different kinds of relationships that you make with the other-than-human world in the process of gathering the materials in order to make this thing with your hand.

So there's something very powerful in the process of handmaking which teaches us to be in relationship with our own creativity and the god-force, or vitality, the holy. It puts us into relationship with each other when we handmake things together. It puts us into relationship with the other-than-human world, with the natural world all around us.

And then if we gift that thing away, then all of the richness that I just described goes into the possession of someone that we love, which weaves them in to belonging with us, and with their own origins through us.

[1:01:25]

Amber: Yeah, I think that's what you talk about with the "story-ing of objects." I like that as a verb.

And I really really loved you breaking down the word "heirloom."

Toko-pa: Yes!

Amber: Can you do that?

Toko-pa: Absolutely, the origin of the word heirloom is heritage, right? And looming, like looming the weaving on the loom. Do you have that right in front of you?

Amber: I don't.

Toko-pa: I don't remember exactly what I said about that.

Amber: Well, just knowing that etymology,. That's just a really lovely word, you know? The meaning is special, but knowing that it comes from, from those two ideas, specifically I think is just very meaningful.

Toko-pa: Yes. Yes indeed.

Amber: I had a previous guest, Yaya, I think, and she quoted a friend ours, Bethany, who does broom making, and teaches broom making workshops all over. And she said that (Bethany during that class) that we want to do things that our ancestors would recognize.

So they recognize basketry. They don't recognize what we're doing when we're on our cellphones. They recognize singing a lullaby to a child. They don't recognize driving in a vehicle at 60 miles an hour (*laughs*).

So I think of handmaking in those terms, as well, yeah, remembers us to the actual divine spark of creation, and to the natural world around us and to our communities and also to our ancestors.

Toko-pa: Yes, absolutely. I think the rule of thumb with that, if you want to be in conversation with the holy, it's said, that the holy, the ancestors, feed us. And they feed us in many ways in this world. In the ways that we are gifted and taken care of. And the way to feed them is to do things that don't require anymore taking. So, anything that involves taking energy from the world, like even battery power, or fuel in your car, or something has to be chopped down, that there's a debt that's incurred when we do that.

So if we really want to make an offering back to the holy, we have to use our own lifeforce to make something that doesn't take from the earth.

Amber: That is BEAUTIFUL! Thank you for sharing that.

And thank you so much for everything, for this just incredible book. A friend was over yesterday, and the book was on top of my pile of books, and she was like, "WOW! This book is beautiful!" (*laughs*).

I was like, "Yeah! And it's that beautiful inside as well."

So tell people where they find your book, where they can find you, anything coming up or anything that you'd like to share.

Toko-pa: Oh, thank you for that invitation! You can just go to belongingbook.com, and that will take you to my website and it has all the links for all the different places you can find belonging. It's on Amazon, it's on all of those online retailers. You can also buy directly from me if you're in North America, otherwise you're best going to Amazon, or one of your favorite retailers.

If you have any international listeners, the best place to get belonging is probably through the Book Depository. They actually have free shipping if you're in someplace like South Africa and you don't have access to the mainstream channels.

And what else? I'm teaching a course on dreamwork it's called Dream Walking. It's a 4 week course and it takes place in April. And this will be the last time I will be teaching for potentially many months, because I'm about to sort of step out of the public eye a little bit and take some time to rest.

As you said, when we first started the conversation there's no quick solution to chronic illness, so I'm still living with rheumatoid disease and really needing to listen to my own rhythms and go quiet for awhile.

So I hope your listeners and readers enjoy the book, and you're welcome to join us for the last dream walking for a while. And I think those are probably the main ways.

OH and you can find my website at toko-pa.com. I'm one of those lucky ones who gets to have a dash in her name. (*Amber laughs*)

[1:06:54]

Amber: And your name is from your Sufi childhood, is that correct?

Toko-pa: Well, actually, I was raised Sufi, but there is no connection to that.

Toko-pa, it is my given name, but my parents chose it from a book of poetry from different cultures around the world. And in that book of poems was the name "Toko-pa" which is actually a Maori name from New Zealand.

And the Maori people have a creation myth, and in that creation myth Toko-pa is the "parent of the mist." Which is very funny, because it took me -- you can imagine growing up with a name like that all of the kids used to tease me. It's a super weird name -- and it definitely took some growing into. But now, I think it's just the perfect name because I always think of that mist as that veil between the world, so being a parent of that realm seems like an aspiration.

Amber: Oh, I'm so glad I asked.

(Both laugh)

Oh okay, thank you. Thank you so much, Toko-pa.

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

Toko-pa: Oh you're so welcome. Thank you for your beautiful questions. What lovely conversation this has been.

[1:08:15]

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, and past podcast episodes, and a lot more at MythicMedicine.love.

While you're there, I invite you to click the purple banner to take my quiz "[Which magical herb is your spirit plant?](#)" 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. There's some cool rewards there: like exclusive content, access to online courses, free access to my herbal e-book, and online course, and the ability to chat with me.

I'm a crazy busy and overwhelmed mom and adding this project into my life has been a questionable move for sure, but I'm also so excited about it love doing it, and just praying that Patreon allows me the financial wiggle room to keep on doing it while giving back to everyone who is listening.

Another way that you can support if that's not an option is to head over to iTunes and review the podcast. That would be super helpful.

And thank you to Mariee Sioux for providing the music that I use. This is from her song "Wild Eyes," one of my favorites. Check out Mariee Sioux. Beautiful music. Thank you and I look forward to next time. Bye!