



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 44 with Daniel Foor

[Animism: Coming into Kinship with All Life](#)

April 23, 2019

[0:00:00]

(Show starts with excerpt from today's show by Daniel Foor)

Daniel: We heal in partnership with the rest of life and with the land where we're at. If we let the good medicine of the land assist us, that's not greed or entitlement. That's also good for the land. It creates a kind of beneficial indebtedness and relatedness.

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

Amber: Hello friends! You're listening to Episode 44 of the Medicine Stories podcast.

I'm Amber Hill, and today I'm talking again to Dr. Daniel Foor. He was on Episode 26. Y'all loved it. It was very life changing for me to dive so deeply into ancestral medicine, ancestral remembrance, ways to connect to the ancestors, ways to approach the ancestors.

And when I saw that Daniel has an upcoming course on "Practical Animism" and checked out the course and the structure and the name of the modules, I **really** wanted to have him back to talk more about this. We talked about it briefly at the end of the last episode. You might remember that if you heard it.

[0:01:14]

And so I'm going to be a supporter of this online course coming up, which means there will be live calls. Daniel explains the structure of the online course at the end of this episode, but there is a series of 14 live calls that everyone can tune into that's part of the course. And then we'll break out into smaller groups after each call, and I'm going to be leading a small group.

So I'm excited to be part of it, and it was a huge yes for me, even though it's a time commitment, and time is my scarcest resource these days because I'm so excited about the material and about learning how to connect more with the spirit of the place that I'm at, with the animals and the plants, and so much more around me.

So the course, again, is called [Practical Animism Online Course: Reclaiming Kinship Through Earth-Honoring Ritual](#). And it begins May 13, but if you're listening to this after that date and you're interested, you can sign up until June 17th.

So you can learn more at [AncestralMedicine.org](#).

[0:02:23]

And, umm, this is 2019 for people who might listen far into the future. And during the interview I say, "We're not here to sell the course to you" and I'm **stoked** if I sell the course to you, if you listen to this and it calls to you! I just meant that I structured the interview so that the content of what we talk about also serves you and changes your life and sparks interest and makes you want to dive deeper into things and to cultivate more rich and present relationships with the beings around you, the more-than-human beings around you.

Umm so, yeah. And I wanted to put a little bug in your ear, too, to listen until the very end of the interview where Daniel gives his three steps to get your life together (*Amber laughs*). And umm, I just really think that - I mean, it's kinda a funny way to put it, but - the three steps are actually like, right on. And super important things to do.

[0:03:28]

So I also want to tell you before we get into it that I am currently running a giveaway and the winner will receive a 300 dollar gift certificate to the [Mythic Medicinals](#) online shop. All of our good medicine's there: the extra potent elderberry elixir, reishi triple extraction, lion's mane triple extraction, St. John's wort oils (which are currently on sale by the way) and so much more.

We have so much good medicine happening right now. I'm so proud of what we've done with the shop and we're going to be discontinuing some things this year so we can really focus on the things that are most important to us and what people seem to love the most, too.

So the way you can enter this giveaway, which ends May 1st on Beltane, is to just head to my website, [MythicMedicine.love](#), and sign up for my newsletter in some way. You can do that by either taking the quiz or at the bottom of every page in the footer is just a form where you can just put your email address in. And umm, the newsletter is super relevant to everything we talk about on the podcast, so I don't think you'll be bummed that you

became a subscriber, and you'll be automatically entered to win this 300 dollar gift certificate.

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Oh and said quiz is called "[Which magical herb is your spirit medicine?](#)" It's a really fun quiz, but the results dive really, really deep into the spiritual and physical medicine of whichever plant showed up for you. So you can take that there, and then when you input your email at the end you'll be (*using sing songy voice*) a subscriiibeeer.

[0:05:09]

Okay so Daniel Foor, PhD. is a licensed psychotherapist and doctor of psychology. He's a teacher and practitioner of Practical Animism, who specializes in ancestral and family healing and in helping folks to relate well with the rest of the natural world. Um his full bio is super interesting you can check it out at [AncestralMedicine.org](#), if you like, but I'm not going to read the whole thing here because I just want to get into this interview!

So here we go with Dr. Daniel Foor.

[0:05:42]

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

Amber: Hey Daniel! Welcome back to Medicine Stories.

Daniel: Thanks so much! It's good to be here, Amber.

Amber: (*using sing-songy voice*) I'm glaaad to have you hereeee!

So, at the end of our last conversation, which was what I titled [Ancestral Reverence as Devotion to the Earth](#), we spoke mostly about the ancestors, but at the end we delved a little bit into animism. And I'm happy to have you back today to expand on that conversation. And I thought I would begin (*Amber laughs*) by asking you to unpack something you said during that conversation which is that "Living humans aren't the only kind of person."

Daniel: Yeah, for sure. The language of animism for me is, uh, I'm drawing from the work of Graham Hardy, who is a lovely person and scholar and friend in England, and his work rests on other anthropologist's and indigenous folks' and different people articulating ways of understanding relationship with the wider field of other-than-human people.

So one of the challenges in English talk is the most neutral way about our relatedness to the rest of life. What captures at best a cultural moment? Even when English congealed as language around seven, eight, 800,1000 years ago, a lot of the sensibilities that we would think of as indigenous or animistic were already fragmented or disappearing a bit.

So English isn't set up for this task that well.

[0:07:22]

Daniel: But one of the ways that Graham's work and other people articulating modern animism speak to me is using the language of people: like Stone People, Tree People, Ancestor People and this is inspired partly by an earlier anthropologist's (Irving Hallowell) time, I believe, with the Ojibwa people in the Great Lakes area, Turtle Island.

And the sense of it is just that humans are one kind of person, and these others are referred to as people because there's interpersonal relationship. There's accountability. There is a sense of kinship, of ethical accountability toward one another. And it's not even necessarily spiritual, it's just that living humans are just one player, one person.

And to me, that took years of work with shamanism and paganism and things like that and involvement in indigenous traditions to a degree, and made it really simplified and made it about core values, which really clicked with my training as a therapist and doctor of psychology. I'm like, "OH! It's just about relationship and these other people, too. Got it. **That** captures it. "

And so in that way, I tend to describe what I do as animism. It feels more accurate than shamanism or paganism, things like that.

[0:08:52]

Amber: I like what you said that it's not necessarily spiritual and it's certainly not, like, "New Age wishful thinking" (*Amber laughs*). Which I think for a lot of Westerners, at first, it's that way.

Daniel: Yeah.

Amber: But it's really just fact and what our ancestors knew.

Daniel: Yeah, the idea of sacred, not sacred is a suspicious kind of distinction. The idea is just like Spirit, even talking to a spirit like a "Bear Spirit." Like, what's the difference between Bear Spirit and bear?

Okay, we can talk about spirits as not incarnate kinds of people, and I know what's meant by that. It means "ones that are not readily perceived by all humans through our sensory channels, but it doesn't mean their bodies are less real than our bodies anymore than the

bodies of microbes I can't perceived are less real or the stars that are obscured by the sun are less real.

And so the spirit not spirit is problematic, of course, the spiritual not spiritual distinction.

[0:10:02]

Daniel: And (*Daniel clears throat*) we tend in modern Western cultures (*Daniel clears throat*), even in cultures of psychology and therapy to only legitimize other living humans. And not even all of them if you're being honest about bigotry and cultural conditioning.

And so, the proposition of animism is not only that rivers and plants and animals and such are people, but that we're going to project all of our baggage and stuff and psychological issues onto these other people. That they're sources of intimacy and relationship but also sources of projection and aggression and confusion and reactivity. Both.

Amber: Just as an example for our listeners, you've written that these other kinds of people can include plants, animals, fungi, mountains, metals, fire, bodies of water, spirits of wind and weather, deities, human ancestors, star people and others we don't have words for in English. I find that helpful and kinda grounded me more into how all the possibilities inherent in this framework, which we also spoke about last time that you and I both have undergraduate degrees in Religious Studies, and I remember so clearly so many of my teachers talking about both "ancestor worship" and "animism" as these, like, throwback, you know, ridiculous ideas--

Daniel: --Ah--

Amber: -- that ancient humans had and "Aren't we glad we progressed beyond those, and we're so rational and **SO** much smarter now?" Like, how I'm curious about --I guess for you, personally -- how you came to -- cause I'm assuming this is not true, but that you received similar ideas in your undergraduate degree--

Daniel: --Oh sure, yeah.--

Amber: --Okay, yeah, how you came to turn around and be like, "OH wait a minute. No, we're the ones who have it backwards."

[0:12:04]

Daniel: I actually played that out for a little bit.

I was involved in pagan, shamanic things and then converted to Islam for awhile and lived in North Africa as a Muslim, which was instructive, and was involved in Sufism and stuff. And then I, you know, I had a spiritual teacher crash, and that fell apart because the teacher was being unethical.

And I actually went to some shamanic journey circle again and dropped back in with the spirits I had been working with prior to all that, and they really had some words for me. It was very humbling and good, but hard about my snobbery and the idea that I had kinda found the truth, which, I don't know. It's a generalization.

But it's an easier thing to fall into earlier in life, thinking that you found, you know, "The Way."

But I made that mistake. And in any case, the spirits were up in my grill about it and, appropriately, bringing me back into relationship because animism is orientation to life or one way to describe an orientation to life.

Most of whom, most of the people who are practicing that don't call it animism, or don't care about that term, of course, but it's a framework that values relationships, and trying to navigate respectfully through a lot of different kinds of relationships, and so were a lot of folks are down lineage from a tremendous amount of racism and colonialism and judgemental, arrogant, materialistic, scientism, and umm, dismissal of indigenous peoples. And it happens in the field of psychology. It happens in medicine. It happens in modern, liberal-minded spiritual circles, and then the flip of that happens of idealizing indigenous people or brown people and it's like "Oh, if you're indigenous you must be super spiritual." And it's just the inverse of the racist view that you're primitive and not educated.

[0:14:09]

Daniel: And, so, yeah. Part of why I slowed down to actually talk about and claim and unpackage an animist orientation to life is to say, not only is it very legitimate, it's very sophisticated. In a certain way, it's more evolved or more relationally smart than traditions that don't place emphasis on relationships and accountability.

So for me, seeing the rest of life as a source of intimacy, a source of community, of personhood feels more responsible than objectifying the rest of life.

It doesn't mean it's true. It doesn't matter if it's true. The results that come from seeing the world that way are better. We get better more biological diversity. We get better policy. We get better systems and better health.

[0:15:07]

Amber: Sooo I have an idea for a framework for how the rest of this interview can continue. Umm, we just scheduled it two days ago, and I didn't have as much time as I usually do to prepare, but when I was looking at your website, and the outline for your upcoming online course on animism and all the things we're talking about, I saw a neat way to help frame my questions.

If you will, I thought we could go through and we don't have to do it to the end I might skip around, but sort of lesson-by-lesson I pulled different words and ideas out of each of them and thought I could just read them to you, and you could just explore them a little more --

Daniel: --Yeah, sure--

Amber: --and so, thank you. I just pulled out the ones, you know, that I was interested in that I would like to hear you speak about a little more and to make clear to you this course is beginning in May, and we're not here to try and sell it to the people but it's there and we'll talk about it at the end, and I'll be a supporter for the course, too, and can be connecting one-on-one with other people who are taking it alongside me, and I'm really looking forward to it. Especially after going through all the lessons this morning, like, it just looks really beautiful and everything you do is so well done.

And since your last interview, you've become a really important teacher for me, and I'm happy to expand my, umm (*Amber laughs*), "studentship" beyond the realm of the ancestors here.

Daniel: Thanks Amber.

Amber: So, yeah, thank you, Daniel!

[0:16:37]

Amber: Um, there's two parts, and lesson one and part one is called "Kinship, Intimacy and Animist Psychology." I would like to hear more about the distinction between animism, shamanism, and indigenous ways.

Daniel: Yeah, there's so much doubt and judgyness and competitive, nasty backbiting in spiritual circles that I really don't want to add to that with my own judgyness, so that's my intro. Having said that, I favor the language of animism to describe a values based approach because describing what I'm doing as shamanism feels like it 1) exacerbates old tensions from the genocidal occupation in the Americas by European-ancestored people. And whether or not people want it to have that effect, the word shamanism has come to land as a disrespectful generalization for a lot of Native, First Nations people, and because it's important to be able to describe a way of loving and relating in the world without implying that you're in the role of a shaman or shamanic practitioner. You don't have to be an animism practitioner.

It doesn't imply any kind of vocation or any kind of approach to ritual or even that you do a lot of ritual. So that feels like a more accurate descriptor in that way. As a short version. And it's important for me to not describe what I'm doing as indigenous spirituality or sensibilities, because I'm not personally among the three-four hundred million people on

earth who are legitimately, legally indigenous people. And I find that it's also important for the 95% of humans who are not, and will not ever be indigenous persay in that designation to also love the earth urgently and effectively and passionately and have a framework for doing that doesn't exacerbate old harms between indigenous and non-indigenous people and it doesn't unnecessarily legitimize itself based on an identification with indigenous spirituality.

Having said that, if we're taking more expanded poetic license to say "indigenous wisdom" or "indigenous sensibilities", then sure, we all have that in our ancestry. Absolutely. And it's important to not collapse the current legal, political definition of indigenous into just a poetic lens or else you're at risk of exacerbating old harms and participating in unhelpful erasure of First Nations native voices.

So I call it animism because I think it's the best way around the problem. But best is to just get into the work and not worry so much about what to call it.

[0:19:29]

Amber: Thank you for that explanation and that distinction. I feel like I could spend this whole conversation talking about meaning.

Daniel: --it's kind of like of like hip (?not sure what he said there?)

Amber: --and is it? I saw you recently got attacked on Instagram (Amber laughs).

Daniel: I know! You know you're doing something good if people come after you.

Amber: Yeah! And I shared quite a bit about veganism to meat-eating. And definitely been on the receiving end of that as well.

But this lesson is called "Eating, Killing and Giving Thanks." There's so much we could talk about, but let's just talk about the first principle listed under that lesson or the first idea which is the psychological implications of thinking of plants and animals as people, or of the reality of thinking of plants and animals as people.

Daniel: Yeah, what I'm inviting people to face as much as people emotionally can, knowing that for many people it's a real sensitive trigger is how we kill to live. That humans are heterotrophs: we eat the bodies of others. We don't put a photosynthesize personally. And so, like fungus: we eat others.

We might eat plants or might eat animals or fungi or other things, but even if you don't eat the bodies of animals directly, animals still die in the food prep and all that. And for me, it's very important to not say that Plant People are less legitimate, less conscious, less sentient, less aware of being eaten than animals.

I also don't have the view that all living beings that are being eaten are non, that it's not always non- consensual, that's there's an intimacy in eating the bodies of others. There's a lot to be said here about how racism intersects rigid veganism or vegetarianism when people take that rigidly. I'm not saying most people who opt to not eat animals are rigid about it but I participate in West African tradition, Yorùbá tradition. We kill and eat animals, and we even sometimes pray with them. And it's very intimate. It's very intimate to cut the head off the sheep when praying for the animal. It's something that I'm familiar with. I'm going to leave it at that. And it is good medicine when an animal who has died, whose body you're going to eat has been prayed with in a reverential way.

If we had a policy that we only eat animals or Plant People that we have prayed with and intentionally thanked before killing, I think a lot of things would shift. So I'm not - what I'm saying is we take life and it's very intimate. And there's a gravitas with it, and it's best to find ways to face that enough to be able to say, "Wow! Thank you!"

[0:22:37]

Amber: As really, as hubris or at least, shows a really lack of understanding to think that we can rise above (*Amber laughs*), this dance of "Now I eat you. Now you eat me," which is what Susan Weed writes in one of her books. Sorry to invoke Susan Weed for all the herbalists listening who don't like her very much for good reasons, but I always remember that. You know, the first time I read that I was vegan, and she lays out this whole framework, "Now I eat you. Now you eat me," and we cannot remove ourselves from being heterotrophs, this word that I learned from you.

Daniel: Yeah.

Amber: ...And I think it's really beautiful that you're bringing that into this framework.

Daniel: I would love for the really very sensitive, passionate vegan or vegetarian folks who take that also as a political stance to be willing to unpack the racism that you may be unconsciously replicating by condemning things like animal sacrifice, and that you would be invited to look at my Yorùbá elders in the face and be like, "You shouldn't live like this. You shouldn't eat this goat in your yard. It's immoral." And do you really want to dig into that stance? That tells traditional Africans or people here homesteading people here of all ancestries how they need to live and eat.

Ecologically it is not always more harmful to eat the bodies of animals. That depends on your local region, and I'm also a big fan of eating in ecologically-mindful ways. But I'm saying if you're not careful, you can replicate straight-up racism by condemning the fact that sometimes people even pray with their food before they prepare it.

[0:24:36]

Amber: Oh such a useful perspective. Thank you.

So lesson three is called "Respecting the Ancestors and Tradition" and I was **very** interested in understanding the human dead as sacred ecology of place.

Daniel: Yeah, the idea that there's nature and then there's humans is another fiction that's important to break down. It's not how most of our ancestors viewed life. They, the idea, you know, nature is an impressive concept, in that sense, it pushes us further from felt-connection to life. And it is important to recognize that all of us have blood and body and bone ancestors who had - who enacted during their life - good relational values at times. That doesn't mean our older ancestral cultures were just and lovey and balanced all the time, but in terms of earth-honoring sensibilities that's in all of our ancestors.

As someone of German, English, Irish, early settler colonialist ancestry of North America, I'm about as ancestrally-removed from animist culture as any other demographic on Earth. And nonetheless, my own ancestors are present here in this conversation and they understood during their life - many of them, especially the older ones - how to take care of these relationships. So that's part of what we get into in that lesson, and how to connect with our earth-honoring ancestors. Even the ones who weren't very tapped into that during life can change and come back back into relationship.

[0:26:23]

Daniel: The dead change. And we also touch in that lesson the importance of inherited tradition and respecting the need to just practice and how traditions, ancestral traditions, are the body of the ancestors. If you have, like, as an initiate of the Yorùbá tradition initiated into the ancestral, the accumulated ancestral wisdom of a certain Yorùbá tradition, like their traditions are made up of ancestors. We'll put it that way.

Amber: And what do you talk about, too, in this lesson too when you reflect on the impacts of colonialism on your ancestors?

Daniel: Just that we, if we're like, "I don't know if it's real. I connected with this spirit, but it could just be my imagination" (Amber laughs). But part of us that would dismiss our own knowing is that part of us is grappling with cultural damage from colonialism is a generalized way to describe it, as someone of European that includes Roman, Holy roman empire colonialism toward the tribal peoples of Northern and Western Europe, but the timeline for different lineages varies, of course, depending on where you are from in the world.

And a handful of people on Earth still have intact culture that honors these relationships. For everyone else it's a reclamation effort, and recognizing that it hasn't always been how it is now can be useful in encouraging and reclaiming these and are capacitated for these relationships.

Amber: Right, so are you saying that we kind of get out of a colonizer mindset when we open up to these experiences of relating with our other-than-humankind being real?

Daniel: Correct. And we've heard people, you know the course is for everybody and we present perspectives from around the world, but, for people who are of European ancestries, it's important to not indulge cultural low self-esteem because white people have been generally speaking causing a whole bunch of problems outside of Europe for the last 500 years doesn't mean that feeling terribly about yourself ancestrally speaking is actually very useful. It's not. It's not a very interesting stance. It's not very useful for the movement.

And so, it's important to just come back in relationship where you're at and start from there. The data is a kind of gentle, relational way into a decolonizing sensibility is to look at the damage of colonialist mindsets in our own ancestries. To start to apply the antidote to those which is coming back into relationship and from that place in partnership with the earth and the waters and the trees and everybody else where you're at. You'll be more able to meet the moment in terms of political, legal change and all that.

[0:29:33]

Amber: (*exhales*) Very useful. Thank you so much. Okay lesson four: "Boundaries, Consent and Sacred Space." This is something you're really focused on with the ancestral work that is also very useful there. So in here you have that this is about "examining cultural condition that minimizes other's existence." What does that mean?

Daniel: If we can't receive no, or say no to others, we're not ready for yes, yet. And our ability to come into relationship with the rest of life isn't as balanced as it could be if we, for example, are so excited that anything in the universe was willing to connect with us, then our low self-esteem and lack of boundaries and discernment means that we're likely to get into a hazardous spot with ritual work. Or if we have an entitled view, that says "I can connect with whatever want however I want because I just came and made an offering or because I want to do it," then that's a different kind of - umm, you could say colonialist mindset or just entitled- boundary disrespecting attitude.

And so the sense here is that human relationships with the other-than-humans parallels the human-to-human relationships, and we haven't- many people haven't- been raised in a culture that really is very consent minded. And so we can learn important things about consent and boundaries and etiquette and politeness in relating with the other-than-humans as well.

[0:31:24]

So that, yeah the lesson gets into how to hear no from the spirits and really take it in. And no limitations and how to be able to, when the spirits to do something, when the ancestors tell you do something, how to say no to them. That's important.

Amber: Yeah, I've first seen that come up in um, I've participated in two ancestral lineage healing intensives by people who have trained with you, and I have to say it was surprising to me when that idea first came up, that you can say no...

Daniel: (*Laughs*)

Amber: ... to an ask from your ancestors, right? I think, we think I have to say yes, they're my people! This is a big deal if they ask something of me. (*coughs*) Excuse me, but I haven't had the experience myself I found it really useful to just be given that permission to just say no if it would just be too burdensome.

Daniel: Yeah. Hmm. Good! All this stuff we're trying to sort out around consent culture, of course how it relates to intimate connections but not only that, because colonialism is can just a massive systemic consent violation in terms of one's space and territory. And so all the depth of the issues around consent can be practiced and brought into our relationship with the other-than-humans as well.

Ecological destruction on earth is a big grinding consent violation of taking without permission. So if we learn, if we really take to heart this idea around consent, it has lots of implications.

Amber: Wow, umm, yes! I hope this framework is moving for you and working for you. I just, I really like focusing on a bunch of different things because--

Daniel: --Oh great! --

Amber: ...There's so much that I think people can hook into. But I just want to say I could just keep going with every (*Amber laughs*) everything that you say there's just so much we can dive into and you also have a ton of free talks available on your website AncestralMedicine.org, that I highly recommend people listen to if this is resonant at all for you. Daniel, many many hours of talks there that you can just dive deep into on everything that we're talking about here.

[0:33:46]

Amber: Umm. So lesson five: "Celebrating Diverse Bodies and Wisdoms. You're going to talk about in this course "Expanding vocabulary for the sacred by reflecting on our animal kin."

Daniel: Yeah, I try not to be too depressing with the course with genocide and colonialism but no wait! It's actually kind of sweet (*Amber laughs*) once you get through the layers and one of the joyful aspects of coming back into relationship is seeing how the other-than-human world or our kin have tremendous diversity of form. Generally speaking, this is a big generalization: I think animist-oriented cultures (you could generalize and say indigenous- oriented cultures) tend to do a better job at recognizing human cultural diversity because they look to the rest of the natural world as a reflection of the sacred. And when you look to so-called nature you see a great diversity of forms. And if you see humans as inseparable from the rest of life, you expect to see a great diversity of forms among humans as well.

And so, animals are like that, and they are teachers about flexibility of consciousness. And to know that the medicine of butterfly, and of hyena, and of E.coli and of (I know it's not technically an animal, but you get the idea) and of giraffe, that one is not above the other. But they are really quite different modes of consciousness. And each one is an elder complex teacher deity if you will.

And so that engagement with these different elder powers and trying on those different forms and those different flavors of consciousness is good for us. It gets us out of a stuckness and encourages us to cultivate archetypal diversity or like, uh you know we tend in this culture to get 6-12 crayons, so to speak. And if you come into relationship, even if you're just a natural, or amateur naturalist, then you get the 64 crayon set. And then you really get into studying nature and then it's like, "Oh! It's 128 now." And so how much diversity of form can you cultivate? And the more you live with that - the more we live that - the more we can find actual neutrality.

Amber: (*exhales*) Okay, lesson six: "Extinction, Grieving, and Opening the Heart: You'll be contextualizing your devotions amidst the current extinction crisis." What is contextualizing your devotions mean?

Daniel: It means not giving into self-absorbed, narcissistic spiritual bubble of self-improvement when we're in a massive hemorrhaging of biological diversity on the Earth (not to mention the massive amount of human suffering that is on track to increase in our life times). And how do we make our heart the shape of the world and feel the agony of what's happening, but not drown in it. Because it's actually indulgent to drown in it as well. Because if we really cared as deeply as we might claim to, the response is more ideally "What's my role? How can I be useful?" and not "I'm drowning," and then we post it on Facebook as an indicator of how committed I am.

I know it sounds snarky there, but I'm saying the challenge is not to isolate, to stay in relationship. But once we stay in relationship the amount of suffering is really off the charts.

And how do we live sustainably year after year in those conditions and joyfully even? And so we'll talk about that a bit and how to get good at grieving. We'll have it all resolved in a 30 minute clip.

(Amber laughs)

Daniel: It will be really tight.

Amber: But you, you are offering that piece of it, too, you know, getting good at grieving and exploring ritual skills for grief and loss and heartache. That's useful too.

Daniel: Yeah.

[0:38:44]

Amber: Umm. So then lesson seven: "Finding your Place in the Natural Disorder." You have written here, "Consider how power dynamics and differentials inform ritual etiquette."

Daniel: Yeah, we're going to talk a little bit about, in that last sentence, about the importance of recognizing that everyone's got their own distinct and different unique medicine and their own unique soul-level calling. So it's actually impressive to act, to try and get other people to be like you or try to imitate other people.

But we're also going to talk about the tendency, I think Americans are especially bad at it, the tendency to flatten all power differentials as if that's liberatory. To say that anyone who is, like, hierarchy itself is oppressive. I don't see it that way. It's not what observations of other-than-human communities reveal. It's not what my experiences, personally, in intact indigenous systems show. And yet, people struggle because, for understandable reasons about how power gets abused, and feelings that any power differential is inherently oppressive. And if we don't look at that and we re-examine that, it can lead to stuckness.

You know, you're a parent, and if you were like "Oh me and my kids, we're on the same level. I process with them, and I expect them to take care of my feelings, and you know, I feed them sometimes, but you know, we're equals." It would not lead to good outcomes. Now you can recommend or you can respect the sacredness of them, but there's a power differential. We're their elders.

And so that, how we do human relationships and how much we can allow for those power differentials is going to affect how we approach the other-than-human relationships. If you come at a Mountain Spirit with like a "Hey what's up, bro? Good to see you!" *(Amber laughs)* You're not on that level. You're just not. Most mountains barely talk or have a lot

to say to you when you come with that form. So human relationships mirror relationship with the others.

[0:41:07]

Amber: Yeah, I mean, hierarchies are just embedded everywhere in the natural world. It is a really silly, liberal, left-leaning ideology to think that hierarchies are inherently bad.

Daniel: Right.

Amber: And so then we move into part two of the course: "Deeply rooting into one very specific place." So, you know I'm just gonna say this, it looks like in this animism work and what I'm familiar with in your ancestral work, there's certainly theory, there's beautiful ideas, there's paradigm shifting concepts, and there's a lot of practicality too. I really appreciated seeing that as I was looking through the framework of this work. So in this first lesson of part two we're going to start to reclaim dynamic relationships with previously overlooked earth kin. What is the previously overlooked Earth kin?

Daniel: Yeah, to speak to the earlier point, even though I'm a bit of an intellectual and there are a lot of intellectual resources to the course, it is experiential. It's not heady ultimately. I like to articulate stuff well when I can, partly to bring sort of subversive earth-honoring ways into the mainstream. And to not have people feel like it's intellectually less, less in any way. Like we talked about earlier.

But the lesson is focused on seeing where you're at as the Holy Land. Even if you're in suburban Baltimore or you're just in some place that just doesn't feel quite on the level of Machu Picchu or wherever you envision a place in the natural world with a lot of vitality. Maybe you're in a place that's been really desecrated in a lot of ways over time. And we'll be, participants will be invited to find a sit spot, even if that needs to be for mobility issues, accessibility issues, in one's own apartment.

And we'll be sitting still when we sit, when we sit still the world spins around us. When we're moving it's like, umm, yeah uh-huh. There's something about sitting still that we suddenly see how much it's spinning. And we can mmm allow certain layers to settle enough to hear older songs from the other-than-humans, and to value what's right beneath us. It's the same sensibility that has us focusing on food, food plants in the course early on. Because if we're not looking at the plants and animals that we're consuming, we're skipping steps to dive in with the ancient redwoods and mountain lions and hummingbirds.

[0:44:15]

Amber: I'm looking forward to talking more about the plants right now. Lesson two: "Friendship and Healing with our Green Kin." Umm, I really liked that the first point under this lesson is releasing hang-ups about not being a plant person. Whatever that means.

Daniel: Yeah, I know! The snobiness, certainly not everybody, there can be an assumption which I love herbalists and herbal medicine and all that, there sometimes can be an assumption that to relate with the plants, one must be an herbalist, and that's a very specific calling. And that's a very specific calling, and that's a very specific demographic with the plants.

Someone might be profoundly connected to plant consciousness and just work with companion plants: plants in one's home, or so-called ornamental plants that get brought in to beautify one's external surroundings in their home, or plants that are brought in to you know, remediate certain kinds of troubles or cleaning up human mess or for food or for whatever.

So the focus on the lesson is on friendship. And almost, you could say, it's almost a little pretentious word, but "mysticism" with the plants. And I don't mean psychoactive necessarily (no disrespect to that).

I'm talking about the holiness and the depth of consciousness that's present. If you know how to really drop in with the ficus or the air plant or the aloe in your home and how their voices get overlooked because of our snobbery sometimes.

[0:45:58]

Amber: Yeah, I was excited to see this one because, umm, as an herbalist I also see how not meaningless, but that phrase, that word, that concept is not clearly defined, especially in the states where there is no certification for being an herbalist. It's something that anyone can claim to be and um, I really have spent my career encouraging people to just, talk to the plants, to just start a relationship in some way. It doesn't have to look any way. There's no wrong way to do it. There's not right way to do it, at least when it comes to the kind of herbalism that I like to teach and talk about.

Daniel: Mhmm.

Amber: And so for people that might feel intimidated or you know, might be listening and be like, "Oh but Amber, she's a **real** herbalist." and I'm over here like, "Oh yeah, oh no **he's** a **real** herbalist." I'm just over here playing around pretending. So I'm just thankful that you are giving people permission. It really is our ancestral human right to work with plants! It is a 1000% in all of our blood and bones and DNA to have a relationship with the plant world.

Daniel: Yeah for sure, I see it that way too. Thanks Amber.

Amber: Yeah (**Amber laughs**). Nothing special. You don't have to be chosen.

[0:47:24]

Amber: Umm Part three: "Praising and Feeding the Earth as Deity." And so yeah, it's just a really interesting phrase to me and then this idea underneath it. I was very curious about what do you mean by "Focusing on withdrawing projection of personal pain and gender norms on the earth."

Daniel: Yeah. I'll probably make some people mad (*Amber laughs*), but that wouldn't be the first time I would've done that.

At a certain point in the discussion of the course, there is a tension between I'm real conscientious of not wanting to teach a certain tradition, even though I'm steeped enough in Yorùbá traditions that I could teach fundamentals up to medium-depth. But that's not what we're doing in the course. And so, having said that, so I'm looking for what are recurrent patterns, and one of them really is to give reverence to who we call (*lists names of Yorùbá deity*) or Pachamama ... or Gaia or the earth as deity.

And it doesn't mean that there aren't traditions that see the earth as feminine, let's say. But we so quickly, and there are many who see the earth as Masculine, and even more that see that earth as not gendered along those binaries. And not only for the people who are gender non-conforming, non-binary, queer, trans, etc (but perhaps especially for such folks) the replication unconsciously and unnecessarily of a gender binary onto the Earth, at the very least, is annoying. It's annoying at least to me. And it often means that we project stereotypes about gender onto this very complex ancient multifaceted deity who's also us.

And something I talk about briefly in the lesson, is the, the language of raping the earth., I'm like, "C'mon! Can we use that very charged and very specific kind of language to describe what it ideally is used to describe for clarity?" Because it really has.

The desecration of an area of land for mining, let's say, it's not necessarily sexualized violence. It's not the same as human-to-human harm. And it leads into other ways of speaking about the earth like, "We need to take care for the earth, because women need taking care of. And the earth is our mother. We need to take care of our mother. "

And you know, there's benefit in that. That language might resonate with some people, and I'm saying caution also in how much we project our hurts, our gender norms, our binary thinking onto this ancient, complex, multivalent deity that is draining us up.

[0:50:45]

Amber: Hmm... that is very interesting. I have never thought beyond the framework of Mother Earth, but of course, it's so much bigger than that gender binary. I look forward to exploring that more. Thank you.

Daniel: Mhmm.

Amber: Lesson four: "Blood, Sex, Tears, and the Water Spirits" and this will include exploring water ritual themes such as grief, the erotic, ancestors, food and healing. (*Amber laughs*) That's just so much. That's just a lot of diverse ideas and things right there. How does this all tie into water?

Daniel: In this lesson I was looking at what are some recurrent ways that different cultures associate or approach the waters with, and the invitation is for participants to come humbly with a spirit of listening to the waters local to where they live, and see if those specific waters which include the water typically that you're ingesting everyday, and ask them for assistance or just listen with them. When we talk about how much to bring our issues versus showing up and receiving, so there's a bit of both that are important, and notice how these different prayers that we're working on in our life: grieving, relational healing, healing around intimacy, around dreaming, whatever it might be can be amplified and increased - (*Daniel coughs*) Excuse me - and enhanced by the waters.

We heal in partnership with the rest of life and with the land where we're at. If we let the good medicine of the land where we're at assist us, That's not greed or entitlement, that's also good for the land. It creates a kind of beneficial indebtedness and relatedness.

[0:52:51]

Daniel: And um, there's a teaching, I forget her name, unfortunately Julia Parker, maybe? From I think the Sierra Miwok, a basket maker. A Native Californian Elder. But she's talking about her work with the plants and it applies here and is basically saying, "If we don't continue to work with the plants they lose their medicine." And she's saying that the relationships need maintaining over time. And so we're talking about how do we bring our troubles, and our learning, and our growth edges to the waters close to where we're at?

Amber: Hmm, our growth edges. Lesson five: "Honoring Place: Specific Blessings and Challenges. Ask nicely to understand deeper layers of magic at your specific place." (*Amber laughs*)

Daniel: Yeah, this draws a little bit on Keith Basso's work with the Apache people, his brilliant book, Wisdom Sits in Places, and he's highlighting in his many comment to many in the world. Places have their own stories, their own qualities, medicines, properties, magics, and like, imagine if you're a doctor and the only thing you can prescribe are places? And what - so we start to ask, well, what are the properties? What are the qualities of the place where we live, of the places within 20 miles of us? And starting to bring that sensibility to this specific place, the sit spot, where we are then and folks are of course invited to share with others in the course how their experience is in the place that they're at. And to listen through that lens: "What's the magic of this specific place?"

It's not that different from how we respect each different human's gifts and medicine that we meet.

Amber: Ah! I can't wait. Lesson Six: Ancient ones who are Animals, Plants, and Ancient Places. So here you've written that we'll learn inclusive ways to think about deities, archetypes, and weird old gods, (*Amber laughs*) and also that we'll distinguish between deities of ancestry, of place, and chosen tradition. So this seems to me that perhaps this lesson is, uh, a lot about distinguishing these beings. I'll just let you speak.

Daniel: Yeah It was a most tricky lesson to record because not necessarily all traditions have a construct of what we would think of deities. There's a distinction between animism and totemism. And you know, some cultures that on the surface are comparably indigenous, so to speak, might have stylistically quite different conclusions about how they approach relationship with the other-than-humans.

One simple example would be Thor as a deity, from my own ancestral heritage as a part-Germanic person, and that deity is associated with oaks. If I have to ask a question to a prominent oak, would I ask Thor? Would I ask the oak? Would I ask Thor to facilitate a question with the oak? Or are Thor and Oak the same bigger deity that responds to that name?

And how do we - a lot of traditional cultures think along these pathways. That there are complex elders whose bodies include certain plants and animals, like it's the same. Like mugwort and the moon, and the mongoose might be all the same "person" so to speak. And so that conceptual framework really stretches Western-minded folks, who tend to speak in very discreet relationships. So we'll get into that a bit. Get a little weird with it.

Amber: That sounds **VERY** interesting and fun

[0:57:20]

Amber: Lesson 7: "Animism as Lifestyle, Culture, and Public Policy. Learn ways to harmonize ritual skills with cultural and political advocacy."

Daniel: Yeah, I want to see the core of about how you see humans are just one kind of person, and that we're morally and ethically accountable to the other kinds of people, I want to see that be really mainstream and really normal. And not only be associated with indigenous people, because it's not, well, good values, like, indigenous folks don't have a monopoly on good values, nor do they all embody good values.

But I want to see, for example, the personhood of rivers, which has gotten some traction, in say New Zealand, among the Maori people. It would be nice to see the San Joaquin, or the French Broad River, or the Mississippi, or the Thames have personhood: legally,

politically, culturally. The other-than-humans have legal and political standing as people, and that our laws, and institutions, and elections, and policies take that into account. It's quite normal.

So how do we get from here to there? We talk about that and how do we make sure this stuff isn't spiritual? Isn't compartmentalized into a private, personal, spirituality that we keep separate from life.

[0:58:53]

Amber: Mmm... Okay, and this little piece I thought I might skip altogether, but I think you can cover it quite quickly, and I just think it will be a really useful framework for our listeners.

You've laid out this three step progression to get your life together (*Amber laughs*), more or less. And it sounds like this all gets covered in this course and in all your free talks on your website, your book, other podcast interviews, and stuff like that, but could you just give us these 3 steps briefly, before we close?

Daniel: I think it goes something like, get well with your own ancestors and your own culture of origin. And you know just that track, and knowing, you know it's iterative, this stuff is ongoing.

And you know, step two, as you get more online with your humanity, and your ancestry and you're able to responsibly inhabit whatever your social position is, get well with the land where you're at with the earth, generally in the earth where you're at and the larger community of other-than-human people who are sustaining your life.

And from that sense of being well with your ancestors and being well with the land, ask again with even more clarity what is your specific unique medicine, your gifts, your soul-level purpose, your destiny? Call it what you will. What are you specifically doing here? And with the backing of your ancestors and the land, get busy doing that until you die.

(*Amber laughs*)

Daniel: It's different from what you think it all to be. Even if you think you don't feel like doing it. Even if other people are gonna judge you for doing it, or it's not as flashy as you want it to be or whatever.

Get busy doing you, because that's also what's going to bring the most good into the world as well.

[1:00:55]

Amber: Hell yeah! Thank you, Daniel. So let's tell people about the course: when it starts, how it's structured, and umm, all that.

Daniel: Sure, the course starts I think May 13. We'll keep it open until start of June--

Amber: -- May I interject? It's called [Practical Animism Online Course: Reclaiming Kinship Through Earth-Honoring Ritual](#).

Daniel: ... It's true, just like that. And, you know, the details are on my site [AncestralMedicine.org](#).

And one thing we're excited about: It will be you and probably 25 other really great skillful, interesting humans who are supporting the course. Which means, they'll be present in a lot of the 14 live conferences and calls, which are really just driven by people's questions, and they are also going to facilitate small group breakouts on those calls. So it means that you'll get a chance to work with some other awesome supporter folks.

People can send any questions to me. There's an interactive space through Facebook. There's 14 pre-recorded lessons in addition to the 14 live conferences. And all those are transcribed and close-captioned for the recorded lessons, for the deaf, hard-of-hearing folks.

And I approach it in a culturally mindful way, in an anti-oppression sort of way, to the best of my ability, knowing that we're all still learning.

[1:02:40]

Daniel: And there's a lot of flexibility around cost to keep it accessible to folks, and there's a ton of extra resources and information.

Like, I, as a teacher I err on the side of overwhelming people (*Amber laughs*) with a generous amount of educational information and trust that people will wade through it in the year that they continue to have access to that after the course. So it's a lot of value for the money, compared to what's happening out there.

And me and the other 25 people holding the course down are really committed to it really meeting people well. We care about this. We're doing it because we care about it, and because we want to see people well-met by things.

Amber: Yeah, it really looks like it's just going to go above and beyond expectations. And I'm really excited about the 14 live calls! And then the opportunity, as you spoke of, to break into smaller groups after the call in zoom and have like, small group conversations. I

love that aspect of in-person classes and online classes. Cause that's really when you form relationships that can be so deep and nourishing and last a lifetime.

Daniel: It's true! We have a good time with it, I'll say. Look, I can come across as a little intellectual or serious or Vulcan or something (*Amber laughs*) in interviews or pre-recorded stuff, but when we're giving the live conferences, we're having a good time. We're talking about the lizard people and life on Mars. And it just gets into really fringe and funny conversations in the live calls, as well as touching, you know, heartfelt kinds of things. So there's space for that, but we're also going to have a good time with it in a non-uptight way.

Amber: Yeah, good. I think I come across the same way, like, pretty serious, and kinda just like chill and maybe a little dreamy, but I have fun too and I'm really looking forward to letting loose in these smaller group sessions.

[1:04:45]

Amber: So, thank you so much, Daniel! People can find you and find out more about this on AncestralMedicine.org. Do you have anywhere to send people or anything else coming up that you want to talk about?

Daniel: Mmm, no, I could say a lot about the stuff I'm doing, but I will say real briefly that I'm teaching in Australia, and Hawaii, and Portugal, and Germany, and Finland, and Austria, and England this year. So if folks are not in the states and just are really looking for a good excuse to go to Finland or something, (*laughs*) I'm excited about that, and it's more of an ancestral healing focus. And yeah. Just that. There's a lot on the site so folks who are drawn can check out what's happening there and work from the other awesome teachers doing the work.

Amber: Yeah, and there are many more ancestral healing intensives the rest of this year as well.

Daniel: It's true. Yeah, it's true.

Amber: And I've probably already said six or seven times on this show (*Amber laughs*) that I really recommend purchasing if you're able. Okay, thanks so much, Daniel.

[1:05:50]

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

Daniel: Thanks amber for your service and your work with the podcast and all of it.

(Music continues)

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 link in the show notes. You can find my blog, handmade herbal medicines, and past podcast episodes at MythicMedicine.love.

While you're there, I invite you to click the purple banner 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.

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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 gift to people on Patreon. 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 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 the show is by Mariee Sioux (*Amber spells out Mariee Sioux*). It's from her song "Wild Eyes" which is one of my favorite songs of all time.

Thank you so much and I look forward to next time!

