

EPISODE 76

“LA: I think people are terrified of that. It’s about anything, and not just weight, but it’s like anything that feels uncomfortable. We’re afraid that if we accept it that we’re going to either spiral downwards, spiral out of control or be stuck there forever. What I found is the complete opposite. That when we’re denying, or in resistance, or rejecting what’s already happening, what’s already true, it’s so much harder to shift it. It’s so much harder to transform it.

What I also notice is that people are terrified at surrendering. They’re terrified of letting go. They’re terrified of feeling out of “control”, even though in that state they do feel out of control already, but they’re afraid that if they really let go, they’ll be out of control, because whatever their shatter point was, triggers the sense of feeling out of control when the reality is we are out of control and we have so much power. It’s not really about control as much as it’s about being centered in our power. I think you have to surrender to be able to access your power.”

[INTRO]

[0:01:19.2] AS: You know battling food in your body doesn’t work. You want to love and accept yourself, and because you’re insatiable, you want results too. You bring the same intensity to your life, wanting to maximize your time, potential, and experiences you have here on our beautiful and wondrous planet Earth. Fair warning, it will be a rollercoaster. But for those insatiable, this is your primetime to thrive. Here is just saying yes to the hunger of wanting it all.

I’m your host, Ali Shapiro, who is dedicated to pioneering a saner and more empowering approach to health and weight loss.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:01:58.0] AS: Welcome everybody. Today, we are here with Lerin. Thank you so much for joining us. I’m so excited to talk with you.

[0:02:07.9] LA: Thank you for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

[0:02:11.0] AS: Great. Before we get to body empowerment and feeling great in our body and how we get there through spiritual healing, I want to figure out how you got in to spiritual healing. No one is in elementary school, or middle school and says, "I'm going to be a spiritual healer." I'd love to hear your own path of how you discovered these truths around power and spiritual healing.

[0:02:35.8] LA: Yeah. I definitely wasn't in elementary school thinking about spirituality at all, but funny enough, when I was in elementary school, I wanted to be a chemist. I think a lot of the work is about creating a reaction to create transformation. I had no idea that it was going to be internal transformation, or internal healing, but I think I've always been fascinated about A plus B equals Q, or how do you create something out of nothing, or how do you transform what's already there.

I grew up in the church. I grew up going to church every Sunday, Sunday school every Sunday. I was very active in the church, but there was no real intimacy there. There was no real spiritual intimacy, it was very much about community and relationships and people. What it gave me was an opportunity to deepen a conversation with something bigger than myself, with an opportunity to be a reverent to something.

My childhood minister, the one that stands out the most was really a terrible minister. He would sometimes say, "Oh! I'm going to preach today. The choir did a good job," or he would just talk about his wife's hats in the front row. I really didn't get much nourishment, but it sparked my curiosity, and I started to just follow that path. When I moved to Atlanta from Seattle where I was born and raised, and I went to college, I started making friends with people who already had a similar relationship with something bigger than themselves, whether they called it God, or Yahweh, or Spirit, or whatever — The Divine.

I would go to Rastafari spiritual ceremonies, or Bahá'í ceremonies, or all kinds of different ceremonies or gatherings. What I learned is that we all have a connection to something bigger than ourselves regardless of what the path is that we call it. I started really wanting to cultivate that outside of religious doctrine and structures.

I dropped out of college when I was 19, because I was very depressed and miserably unhappy, and started to just travel the world in search of a way to find my own wholeness and my own healing. The conversation had been building for a longtime, but I really only started to deepen into it when I was outside of traditional structures that told me what it was supposed to be or what it was supposed to feel like or look like.

[0:05:06.8] AS: That's so interesting, because I feel like you bring up this great point. I grew up, my mom was a fallen Catholic, I should say. My grandma who was very influential in my life believed in reincarnation, and my dad was technically Jewish, but not really. He just told me the only thing he believed in was the sun rising every day. So he was like a hippie. My parents were hippies. I wanted to go to church, because everyone around didn't. I was like this Ali Shapiro, the most Jewish name, I was like, think of CCD.

Then I, later — Catholicism didn't [inaudible 0:05:39.7], Christianly felt a little bit more liberal, a little bit looser. What found is that the church — And I think what you described so accurately, it provides us amazing community and amazing people who think like us, and there's a safety there, and yet I found that — What we're going to talk about today; power and wholeness. It's almost like a lot of the feminine is extricated, that intimacy. Do you think that was part of your depression?

[0:06:07.5] LA: My depression was because I wasn't listening to myself. My depression was I have always been different than my family and a lot of people that I grew up with in the sense that I'm fourth generation college educator. On both sides of my family have undergraduate and graduate degrees. My great-grandfather was born two years after enslavement ended and had two undergraduate and two graduate degrees. That was the way that my family knew how to get free, how to get out what could have been poverty, how to really find power and situate themselves in society.

That was never a question whether or not I was going to go to college, but I didn't really want to college from high school. I wanted to travel the world. I left the country for the first time in 8th grade, I went to France, and I you lived in Paris.

[0:07:07.2] AS: Yeah.

[0:07:08.5] LA: And I fell in love. I was so — Because I'm touched by meeting new people or cultures, and experiencing life. I've always been curious. I wanted to take a year off between high school and college and travel the world, but I didn't. I just got caught up in the moment and went to college and didn't want to be there. I'm never good at faking anything, even if sometimes it would be useful. I can't do it. I just don't know how. I'm terrible at it and it feels wrong.

I was doing my best, and after my first year, I was depressed, and I was unhappy, and I didn't want to be there. I told my mother I wanted to take my second year off and she looked at me as if I had said, "I have 17 eyeballs and three hairs —" Whatever. Like I just had dropped out of the sky in a UFO and she's like, "We don't do that in this family. I don't know what that means. We drop out of college."

I went back to school much against my will and hit rock bottom. There were days when I could not get off of the floor. Literally, I would just be laying in the floor watching TV and had a friend come — I remember a group of friends came over and visit and I couldn't get up, because I was so being disloyal to what I knew I needed to be doing.

Then, that summer, after my second year, I had three friends pass away within six months — Within three months, and then it began this cycle of a lot of death in my life, and I just told my mother, "I don't care what we do in this family, but I'm not going back to school. I have to at least start trusting and listening to and honoring myself." That's why I was so depressed, because I really just shut down what I knew to be true for me to honor what someone else was trying to give me.

[0:08:58.3] AS: Yeah. I would even say, it was cutting you off from your wholeness.

[0:09:03.2] LA: Absolutely.

[0:09:04.6] AS: Yeah. Wow! My God! That's so — I think you bring up this interesting point, especially about depression. It is not, but I've been depressed twice in my life. I'm not trying to

romanticize it, yet I think when we medicate it, we miss the redirection it's trying to get us to pay attention to.

[0:09:20.6] LA: Yes. I agree. It's part of what ties so beautifully into the medicine of your work, because especially as women, we learn to stop listening to our body very young. We learn to internalize what shameful, that we're either too tall or too short, too wide or too thin, too light or too dark, and we're bleeding, and it's shameful. All kinds of things about our physical form we internalize.

It is this sense of not listening to ourselves, not listening to our bodies, because we're told that they're wrong, that they're flawed. By the time we're adults and we're starting to have this very disordered relationship with however that shows up, it's so normalized in our minds that we don't even realize that it's outside of our wholeness, that there's another way to be in relationship with ourselves.

[0:10:13.2] AS: Yeah. It's like the power structures in our society that are keeping the scaffolding. You really are in this fishbowl. Even, I think — I often say — Again, I see this in the body positivity movement, or in the weight loss movement, a lot of times people recreating the patriarchy, but with lipstick on. People don't see that it's still the same telling women what to do, telling them how to feel, but it looks more empowered, right? It's tricky, and I'm not judging those people. I'm just saying, "It is hard a maze and matrix to get out of." I think we're getting more and more breathing room, but it's like all these shit has to happen first.

[0:10:50.9] LA: Yeah. Absolutely. I think, ultimately, it boils down to permission. If we can give ourselves, even on an individual basis, permission to accept ourselves, to love ourselves exactly as we are, because we were talking about this before we started recording, that tension between body positivity and ultra-restrictive diets, like, "I'll eat anything, or I won't anything." It's like how do we accept that maybe your body — It looks like how it's supposed to look. Maybe the size that you're supposed to be, and there's a way to be in relationship and harmony with that, that can always increase, but that's not because you're flawed, or wrong, or bad, but because it's just you're loving yourself more, you're nurturing yourself more, but not from a place of deficit.

[0:11:41.5] AS: I love it. What you said so powerfully was how can you basically feel powerful exactly where you are.

[0:11:48.7] LA: Yes, that's it.

[0:11:50.9] AS: I feel like that is a lifetime goal so that you can get to the place where you like, "It is what it is. Nothing is bad or good. It's exactly how I am," because I know a lot of my clients feel like, eventually, there're these finish lines. Weight loss is a really strong — I'll feel — Are we able to happy? I know things aren't going to magically change, but they'll change when this, or I'll feel more relief when, versus what you're saying is the power is almost the serenity of being exactly where you are. How do you — I know it's a process. It's not like, "Oh! You could tell me what to do." I love to hear your ideas of how to start to get to be okay where you are now, because I know a lot of people are afraid that, "If I am this way, it's just going to spiral downward."

[0:12:44.5] LA: I think people are terrified of that. It's about anything, and not just weight, but it's like anything that feels uncomfortable. We're afraid that if we accept it that we're going to either spiral downwards, spiral out of control or be stuck there forever. What I found is the complete opposite. That when we're denying or in resistance, or rejecting what's already happening, what's already true, it's so much harder to shift it. It's so much harder to transform it, because we're still pushing against it. Resistance requires pushing against it. If we surrender, and not surrender by saying that it's right, or good, or perfect, but if we accept that it's true, if we accept that it's happening, because it's happening. Not because it might happen, but because it's actually happening. Then, in that moment of acceptance, our relationship to it changes.

What I've noticed is I say this and I've taught this before in different ways, and people immediately intellectualize it. I say it and they aren't accepting it, but they're going to — They start troubleshooting why acceptance is wrong instead of actually just accepting it. We can talk about the body. If someone is uncomfortable in their body and they are going to the gym, or restricting their diet, or however they are approaching it, it's still — There's something wrong. If it's coming from a place of, "I'm just going to accept that right here right now, I feel uncomfortable. I feel heavy. I feel bigger than I want to feel. My clothes are too tight. It doesn't feel good." I'm just going to accept it and take a pause and take a breath there, not resisting it.

Just really honestly accepting that that's how you feel and that your feelings are valid. Then, the next question is; what can I do — What would be the most loving thing I can do to for myself right now?

[0:14:41.9] AS: I love that you ask that after you take a breath, because what I really work on with my clients is this story that, often, when they're uncomfortable, it means something. It means I'm failing. It means things are going to fall apart. By taking that breath and actually syncing into it, you're giving yourself some distance to say, "I'm still here. It's not falling apart. I'm still with this."

Then, what is loving is not the eat whatever you want response. It's how do I take care of myself in this vulnerable position?

[0:15:16.7] LA: That's exactly it. That's exactly — That makes me teary to hear you say that, because that's — It's this sense of worthiness and value that you are even in this my clothes are too tight state, you are worthy of receiving what would be most loving for yourself right now, and that it's not that there's something wrong, or something to fix. Like you said, it's not — It can help move from this, "I just need to feel this space with food or not food," to like, "Oh! What would be the most loving and most nourishing thing would be go get some fresh air, unplug my computer, take a walk, meditate, write, or whatever." Whatever it is, but it's coming from a very different place than, "I don't want to feel what I'm feeling, so I just got to do something else." Part of it I think is we don't know how to be uncomfortable in our culture.

[0:16:13.6] AS: Oh my God! We immediately think it says something deficient about ourselves.

[0:16:17.3] LA: Exactly. It really only says that you're a human. That's it! That's all they wrote," because you are, and it doesn't have to be perfect, it doesn't always have to feel good, and that you're more than being uncomfortable. You can be uncomfortable and accept the discomfort. When you accept the discomfort, then you can shift it, but you will never sustainably shift anything by resisting it.

[0:16:48.0] AS: I know. One of my favorite sayings is what you resist persists, and what you embrace dissolves. One of the things too that's really ironic is — I just kicked off Truce With

Food this spring and we kicked off the first session with what story is basically causing all these discomfort. People start to realize the discomfort that they're trying to run away with, they're already living with. It's like this —

[0:17:10.9] LA: Exactly.

[0:17:11.0] AS: — Insane series. It's like, "I might as well just be with it and transform it rather than constantly run away from it, because I'm still with it. I'm still living with it. If I'm afraid of being alone, but then I'm isolating myself, because I can't even have intimacy, emotional intimacy. I'm still alone. Just because I'm around other people, it doesn't mean I'm belonging, or I have connection. Yeah, I'm just totally agreeing with what you're saying.

[0:17:39.9] LA: That's it, because it's like I think that's part of where the sense of fragmentation comes in, because we're not being fully present. I was trying to think of a different way to say I, because I think that can be overused to the point that people don't really accept presence. It's like if you're not being fully present, you're not feeling your wholeness. Part of that is resisting, like, "Oh, no. I don't want to feel this way, so I'm not feeling this way, so I'm going to deny myself, or resist myself, or judge myself, or criticize —" All that is contributing to not feeling whole even though you already are whole.

[0:18:16.4] AS: Right. That's the real, "Hey, you're already whole." I think the wholeness is knowing that we can have the capacity for that uncomfortability.

[0:18:25.3] LA: Exactly.

[0:18:28.2] AS: I think, too, what's so great about taking a breath and pausing, and that breath could be five minutes. It could be one minute, but what you're describing is a lot of people are worried that their feelings are going to annihilate them. They feel so big, because they've been resisting and down so long, that when they come up — By asking yourself and getting curious, "What would be something loving?" and giving yourself that space, the feeling starts to become smaller. There's a boundary around it, rather than it just being the truth.

[0:18:59.3] LA: That's it. That's it. That's it. That's it. It's exactly it, because your present, and it won't annihilate you. It won't destroy you. Part of my work I call shadow-diving, and I called myself the tour guide through the shadowy places, because it can be scary to go alone. It can be scary into the discomfort and the unknown alone, and so I feel very honored and privileged to be able to hold my client's hand to guide them through, but I don't do the hard work for them. I can't do it for them, but I want them to know that they're not alone. The essential part of that is being willing to be uncomfortable and being willing to go, because you will know how strong you are by going into the shadows. Not by standing outside and like observing them.

[0:19:53.9] AS: I know. I think when we all think about the most proudest moments we have, it's when we did the hard things. It's like, "Yeah! That's how you become powerful."

We got to go back. You said you're a shadow diver. I love that. That is the coolest career ever. Some of my clients have studied psychology, they know Carl Jung, but I'd love for you — Most people have never heard of this. Talk about what the shadow is, and then let's talk about how we can use that around our body. This is like — I love this topic.

[0:20:32.0] LA: I'm not a Jungian, and I don't have a degree in psychology, so I don't want to position myself that way, but my work complements psychotherapy, or counseling very well, because it's a beautiful complement to that kind of depth work. I use a lot of other modalities other than western psychology to help people really go into either their conscious or unconscious or subconscious places that they don't want to go, places that are uncomfortable; trauma, memory, pain, loss, grief, sadness.

My clients are generally women who have — Clarissa Pinkola Estés is an author and she is a Jungian therapist, and she coined a term called, "Who have survived a great something." My clients have survived great some things, and their some things can be miscarriages, bankruptcy, assault, just complete depression. It doesn't really — It crosses the board, but their something is something that shattered them, that shattered their perception of themselves and their lives, that they woke up one day and they said, "I did all the right things. I went to the right schools. I got the right the grade, got the right degrees, got the good job, married my happily ever after, and this isn't it. There is something missing," and that could be walking in and finding their happily

ever after with somebody else. It could be a number of things, but it shattered that sense of what they thought was happening, versus what's actually happening.

Then, they start doing internal work and they realize that most of the stuff out there that's either about spirituality, or healing, or manifesting, or whatever, is just playing on the surface. It's not really getting to the depth of the transformation and the healing that they are seeking. They need something to go deeper, and so that's what shadow-diving is, that we go deeper into all of whatever is there. It can look different for everybody, but we go through it using ritual practice, writing, movement, art, yoga, all kinds of different stuff to go not just to it, but through it so they can get to the center of their soul and really live from their wholeness, which means they then have the capacity to embrace all of it. That they're not scared of it, they're not running, they're not hiding, but they're embracing because they know they're bigger and more powerful than it.

[0:23:11.2] AS: I love that. I love that it's the shattering. That's such a great way of describing it. I know a lot of my clients experience that shattering the first time with their bodies, and so they associated this food and this weight loss. They're really trying to get themselves back together again, like Humpty-Dumpty. That's what I think about. All of us are, not just the — But that shattering happened around their body in some way. It wasn't always about dieting. Like you said, it could have been assault, it could have been a home-life, not being what it was supposed to be, or all these things.

Let's take that. With the shattering, what did they find that they've cast off? Shadow is the parts of ourselves that we're trying to deny. They're the imperfect parts. Although they also create this tension of what we think is good and bad. When people are diving, what kinds of shards of glass are they finding?

[0:24:07.7] LA: That's such a good question. Thank you for asking that. They find really — Often, my clients find that they've always known who they were, and at some point, they swallowed it. At some point, they silenced it, because they were told it was too big, or too loud, or too smart, or too different. They started to quiet it. They started to numb it. They started to dismiss it. They started to ignore it.

The shards are these pieces of themselves that they've disowned, and it could be as young as childhood. Their parent saying, "Oh, be quiet," or, "Go take care of your — Whatever," or, "You're too much," or, "Be seen and not heard," or, "We don't do that," whatever the messaging was that they get. Our work is about reclaiming and embracing and making safe these parts of themselves that they've disowned without, in turn, flipping to the other side and just living in the past, living in the story, but embracing them all lovingly, with sovereignty, with grace, with truth, so that they can live from that wholeness. When they get into that power, that sense of power from their soul, from their self, from their truth, nothing external could actually harm them, no one else's judgment, no one else's critique, no one else's opinions, or finger pointing, or expectations will impact them, because they're whole.

The cracks, the shattering is where all that judgment, externalize judgment, which is actually how they're already judging themselves, gets in, because they have given more power to the external interpretation in their own internal experience.

[0:25:56.7] AS: Ooh! That is good. They've given more power to the external expectation than their internal experience. Everyone listening, that is really gold. We need to take a breath.

I love that, because what you're describing ultimately is we get to choose — I love that word, sovereignty, by the way. That is I think such a great — I love to hear you define that in your terms, in your own terms for our listeners, because I think at the end of the day, that is where we ultimately have agency and how we're choosing to make meaning of what happened to us. I think that's — We can't control it. We may have a little bit more control than we like.

We have some control in life, but in the larger part, we don't. We do have that sovereignty over what we make the experiences mean, versus what other people are telling us. Please define sovereignty for everyone, because it's not a well-known word.

[0:27:03.9] LA: Yeah. I think you just did it perfectly. It's defining yourself for yourself, and owning your power. Sovereignty is often used in terms of loyalty, kings and queens, their sovereign kingdom, or nations. I think somewhere in the bible, it says that God is sovereign.

Humans, we are also sovereign, and it's about owning our power, owning our truth, owning your kingdom, or your queendom, which is body, absolutely. It's also your thoughts, your opinions, your place, and your place in the world. So that you know — It's not about rigidity. It's not about this kind of — Which is, again, going back to the sense of resistance or pushing against, but it's about being centered in yourself and your soul and being comfortable making whatever guidelines, or rules, or boundaries that you need to make from there.

I think sovereignty is different than — I love boundaries. Boundaries have saved my life and my sanity in so many ways for years once I realized that I could have them. I don't think sovereignty is exclusively about boundaries, because you can be rigid in your boundaries and still not be sovereign, because you're just pushing — You're anti-something, and sovereignty is really about surrendering to what is and having clear boundaries and truth inside of that.

[0:28:27.5] AS: I love that you keep bringing this back to and not being about rigidity either, because that's not very nuance-center, because if you're always defining yourself in relation to what you're against, to your point, it's still controlling you. If you're like, "Okay, I don't want to be too much," but then if you let that control you, you end up being too little and then you're not happy either.

Can you give some examples, because I often hear from my clients — They don't want their weight to be holding them back, but this external culture, and it is pelted at you. It's not really easy to get out from under, but you can do it, but it's constantly telling them that a certain size is going to give them sovereignty and allow them to have the careers they want, get the relationships that they want, that they're going to have this choice, even though it's dependent. It's not really sovereign, but it's dependent on a certain weight. How do you start that process of having people not hold themselves back?

Because I think, also, what you were describing earlier is when you get shattered like that, it's often a subtle process. It's not always one thing. It's like getting hit again and again and again, and it's often more — I would say, it's just as challenging when it subtle as its getting hit over the head with it probably, because it's harder to see sometimes.

What is some of that process of, “Okay. I want to be in this median space of not holding myself back, yet I still know that I want to be healthy, lose weight. I still want to be — I don’t want to put up boundaries, so no one can get in.” How do you start to navigate that really nuanced place that you get your clients to?

[0:30:19.9]: LA: One of my core values in my life and in business is the whole truth. Part of what’s required before acceptance is acknowledgement. You have to acknowledge the whole truth. You have to acknowledge the shame and the judgment and the desire to be popular and wanting to be liked; and if there is judgment that comes with that, acknowledge the judgment. You can’t accept what you don’t acknowledge.

That’s where we begin; telling the whole truth. What’s really happening without blaming or finger pointing or giving anyone else the responsibility, but taking full responsibility for what’s actually happening right now. All the work that I do with my clients one-on-one is in person. I don’t do one-on-one work over the phone or over the Internet, because I created a sacred space and a sanctuary that really helps people feel safe going into these places and to tell the whole truth. Telling the whole truth, it sounds simple and it sounds cute and it sounds fun to some people maybe, but it’s not always easy. It’s not always easy when you’ve been in a story that allows you to blame someone else for how you’re feeling right now.

I create a sanctuary that is a process to really help people feel safe being present and telling the whole truth. To me, that’s the first part of the process, is to acknowledge what’s actually happening. From there, we can go into accepting; and from acceptance, we can go actually into shifting it more intentionally. It is hard when the only tools that you have are the tools that the over culture or the external culture gave you.

[0:32:06.1] AS: I just felt so much power. As you were describing creating that space for your clients to feel safe, because that acknowledgement step, I think everyone skips over that. They think they know what’s happening. Until you have the space to feel, someone is also going to expect the best of you. They’re not going to pity you. They’re not going to try to — I just posted this on Instagram. One of my favorite, Parker Palmer, was a really influential teacher in my graduate degree. He talks about the human soul doesn’t want to be fixed or given advice to. It wants to be witnessed. It wants to be reminded of its own resourcefulness, of its own strength.

That's what you're doing with people. Do you find that people often come in thinking it's one thing, and then they have this whole other tentacles to their story and to their truth?

[0:32:57.1] LA: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Part of that fracturing and that fragmenting is living from such a limited place in our consciousness living from such a limited place in our awareness, living from such a limited place in our accountability, our responsibility, and being very starved, in a sense, for the wholeness of who we actually are. I completely agree with that.

I don't fix anybody. There is no magic wand. There is no even solution, because I don't think there's a problem. I don't think that they're wrong. I don't think that anyone's broken. It's just about bringing back in the pieces that they've forgotten or dismissed or hidden.

Witnessing is probably the most important thing for me to do in my work. I do it skillfully. I've studied a lot of things. I've been doing this work for almost 20 years. I bring a lot to the table. I have a lot in my back pocket and in my front pocket, all the pockets. Ultimately, it's about meeting my clients where they are so that they can surrender.

You said something earlier, and I don't remember exactly the word that you used. What I also noticed is that people are terrified at surrendering. They're terrified of letting go. They're terrified of feeling "out of control", even though in that state, they do feel out of control already. They're afraid that if they really let go, they'll be out of control, because whatever their shatter point was, triggers the sense of feeling out of control. When the reality is we are out of control and we have so much power. It's not really about control as much as about being centered in our power. I think you have to surrender to be able to access your power.

[0:34:45.2] AS: I agree. Again, because it's not conditional on you being in control. That's why I often — People say eating is all about control, and I don't believe that. I think it's about power. It's about not having to have everything go my way. On the surface, it's about I forget my lunch or I'm out to eat. How do I actually rise to the occasion and make a sovereign choice or a choice that aligns with me when things don't go my way.

That's really, I think, where the challenge is, not when you're in control, and it's not about being in control. It's about being creative in that space. I love that you said that you use yoga and art. Do you find that creativity helps bring that soul and wholeness back to life?

[0:35:31.0] LA: Oh, absolutely. All of the things bringing the soul back to life; movement, music, stillness. I have a six-month offering, and that's called Learning to Breathe Underwater. We meet once a month for a full day in person. Part of the offering includes a 10-day silent meditation retreat. That's a big commitment for a lot of people, but what it gives, too, is a new way to be present, a new way to witness yourself, a new way to witness your breath, a new way to connect with what's actually happening in the moment.

There's this sense that — I could go into a longer description of the power of meditation, but part of it is this is it also disrupts this screen gazing or this do, do, do, do, go, go, go, go, go. There's something out there that's going to fix in here when there is really nothing out there. You're never going to buy enough mala beads or fancy yoga mats or designer smoothies to feel whole. It's just never going to happen. Not to say. I love all those things.

[0:36:48.0] AS: No, I agree with you.

[0:36:50.0] LA: They're never going to bring you wholeness. It's just filling another void as much as anything else.

[0:36:57.0] AS: So true. It looks like every — We're trying all these different things, but it's still an attempt of something else to feel whole. When you talk about that you create a safe space, I'm wondering if you can give the listeners — A lot of times, my clients feel so uncomfortable in their body or they retreat to their heads like you even talked about. I immediately went to intellectualize. It's like a defense mechanism.

A lot of my clients don't say that like, "Oh, they go —" They eat at night in their happy place, which is alone and by themselves. I'm like, "It's not your happy place. It's your safe space." It's only safe, because they're alone. It's not really safe because, they are eating rather than being with themselves.

Do you have a couple of steps that people could start to create a safe space in their own life for them to — Is it a journal? If being with your body and being alone makes you just want to eat, is there something that they can at least practice, whether try to start to feel safer, not black and white, you're safe or you're not, but only a little bit safe key. Do you have any tips for that?

[0:38:04.6] LA: I think I do have a tip for it, but it's not really a tip.

[0:38:10.1] AS: Oh, good! I get tips are hard, but just things to think about, mindset shifts — I don't know.

[0:38:15.6] LA: I think part of this what we've named is witnessing yourself without judgment; not criticizing, not finger pointing, but noticing, becoming a detective of yourself essentially. When you're in your safe place, when you're in your happy place, and you're eating by yourself, and you're alone; what are you thinking? What are the thoughts that are going through your head? Just notice that and maybe write it down.

What are you feeling in your body? Where physically are you feeling relief? Are you anxious? Are you hoping no one comes in to interrupt you? How does that show up? Where does that show up? How long does it last? When do you notice? Just really starting to map your own patterns, your own habits so that you can see, "Oh, I get up every morning at three o'clock to go eat and all I want are graham crackers and Nutella, but right before that, I went to bed thinking about how I hate my job and I wish I could get out of this relationship but I don't know how."

Just start to map out what's happening, because it's all connected. You don't wake up, eat by yourself, because you feel super excited about and on fire and joyful. Just noticing what's playing out. I think when you bring similarly to acknowledging, that's a pre-step. In order to acknowledge something, you have to notice it.

Noticing, "Oh, okay. I eat when — " Not my mother, but as an example, "if my mother passed away 10 years ago, and I notice I get super anxious, and my chest gets very, very tight three days or three weeks before her birthday. I only want to eat food that feels heavy and makes me feel not as alert and awake." Just notice, and then things will start to shift. I would begin with noticing before anything else.

[0:40:11.1] AS: I love that because that's the first week in Truce with Food is just people observing their story. As they start to see it more, there is even just relief and the distance of, "This is what I'm doing. Oh, my God!" versus, "This is who I am," right?

[0:40:25.6] LA: Yes.

[0:40:27.0] AS: I always use the example of if you have a five-year-old who's at the top of the Empire State Building, she looks down and she's like, "All the people are so tiny there." You as an adult were like, "No, just how you're seeing things, because you don't have subject-object distance yet." It's like, "No, the people are the same as us. It's just we're how many feet in the air."

We want to start to be able to see that and then noticing of like, "What am I doing? Oh my God! Here is what I'm doing. This isn't how things are. This is how I'm thinking about them. This is how I'm feeling about them." There is tremendous relief in that. I think it starts to build that safety container, so thank you for that.

I'm curious, some of your clients, they've been through a lot of stuff. It's stuff that is unfair. How do they come to these things? What do they produce? What kind of power do they produce from going through the process of working with you and integrating these parts of themselves that they thought were too much, that they thought were not enough?

I remember, we did an episode with my — I did visual imagery therapy in 2012. It's an episode with my therapist at the time called That is not a Feeling, but I had to go back. I had cancer when I was 13. Part of my depression that year was finally really emotionally being living it, but from a more powerful place. I was shocked at how — I went back and a lot of the things that I saw were guilt around taking attention away from my sister. It wasn't even the cancer itself. It was how emotionally needy I felt and in the resources that I took up for our family.

I talked to my sister about it. She's like, "It did not bother me, whatever." I realized that when we go back in our stories, we're often most angry at how we responded or sad or frustrated at ourselves. It's not the experience that happened, but it's what we did in that moment.

Another example; I was just working with a client. Her dad was an alcoholic, and her daughter just got married. It triggered all these stuff. She's like, "I have been to therapy, and my therapist tells me I just have to let it go. I want to let it go. I'm not mad at my dad." It came out that during her wedding, her dad never came, because he was in the throes of his alcoholism.

Ultimately though, what she realizes is she was mad at herself because she told him it was okay not to come when she wanted him to come. That's what triggered this whole other stuff with her daughter's wedding and everything. I share that. Do you find that too? It's not really what has happened to us, but how we responded and then how we start to learn to respond differently in life today and what power does that generate.

[0:43:08.3] LA: Oh, yeah. I think it's always about the story that we're telling ourselves about what's happened. Ultimately, it's always about the conversation that we're having with ourselves. There are as many different possible interpretations of any experiences are humans. We would all think about or interpret something differently. I think part of it is about changing the story, but it's not just the story. It's about the template in which the story is written.

If we're told — If we believe that we're wrong, we're damaged, we're not enough; we have to prove ourselves. We have to earn our right to whatever. Then, whatever happens is going to reflect that. Whatever it is, it's going to verify or validate or justify that what we already fundamentally believe about ourselves.

Ultimately, it's about shifting our belief about ourselves, which will then ripple out and reflect on how we experience life. What I notice in my clients, to go back to your original question about how do they live differently, how does the power show up differently, is that sometimes their life changes completely 180 degrees. I've had clients gets a divorce, move across country, leave the country, quit the job, start a business, go back to — I've had all kinds of experiences.

Then, I've had clients who reconciled their marriage, whose lives stayed the exact same from the outside, but their experience of it was different. It's really about their relationship to their life that changes. Sometimes, that looks different externally, and sometimes, nothing at all changes externally. It depends on what they decide they want and how they decide they want to live.

[0:44:55.7] AS: I love that you talked about that because sometimes, I think people think it's all about the dramatic change, or they're so off course. When really it's, to your point, how they're relating to their lives. Sometimes, these micro movements, if there can be more intimacy or more wholeness, it changes everything. Things you thought could never change change, because you've changed. I always like, "We're the common denominator."

[0:45:18.8] LA: Exactly. For someone, for example, who may have stayed in this marriage, where they are estranged from their husband, now has a way deeper level of intimacy and connection and visibility and honesty that they never had before but they know how to ask for what they need because they're sovereign. They know that if their partner still doesn't give it to them, they have it internalized and made it about it about them because they've changed their beliefs about themselves.

They know that that person's own sovereign decision. It's releasing that sense of, again, control and attachment. If it's like, "I ask for what I need and he's still going to give it to me. I'm not saying I'm a horrible wife. What did I do wrong? Oh, my goodness! I shouldn't have asked for that." It's like, "Oh, okay. How do I meet my own needs right now? He's sovereign, he gets it, and I don't make it like we have a terrible relationship. How can I still nurture the intimacy? How can I get what I want?" It's asking different questions in a different framework.

[0:46:20.4] AS: I love that you set example, because our shadow will often make us close up. Rather than asking the new questions or exploring further, we just go, "Mmm! Nope!" I call it closing the story loop. It's like, "Nope. See? I was right."

[0:46:33.2] LA: Yes. Yes.

[0:46:36.2] AS: Versus integrating your shadow, it enables you to continue to open up. It sounds like, even if it feels like you failed or that you've done the wrong thing or said the wrong thing. It enables you to still be, "I like what you visible in a healthy way, not as a target."

[0:46:50.4] LA: Ultimately, if we're going to use the metaphor of sovereignty and royalty, they don't have the keys to the kingdom. You do. You do. You can say, "Okay, I can see you're not —

The tone you're using doesn't feel good to me right now. I'm going to take a walk," or again, "I'm acknowledging; this doesn't feel good. I'm accepting; this doesn't feel good. Not that it should, not that I'm wrong, not that you're wrong. I'm just accepting it doesn't feel good. What's the most loving thing I can do for myself right now? Take a bubble bath, take a walk, give this pause, and come back when I feel better," when you feel better to have revisit the conversation.

[0:47:31.5] AS: I love that because everyone has their own shadows. It's amazing that people can communicate at all in my mind. We all have these gaping glass-like wounds. We're all shattered and then we're trying to find the person who isn't shattered, were weren't shattered. You know what I mean with this?

[0:47:48.9] LA: Right.

[0:47:49.7] AS: It's like a hot mess, you know?

[0:47:52.3] LA: Totally. It's not the end of the world. None of it is the end of the world. None of it. None of it is the end of the world. That's the biggest piece of resilience, I think. None of it's the end of the world. We have to know that there's Clarissa Pinkola Estés who I've mentioned earlier.

[0:48:08.3] AS: I love her. *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. It's her epic blog for people listening.

[0:48:13.6] LA: I've studied with her and I've —

[0:48:16.0] AS: Oh my God!

[0:48:17.4] LA: I love her. She's brilliant human. She has a story in her audio book, *Dangerous Old Woman*, which is so good. It's about her interpretation of the Snow White story, but this is a side that she mentions. It's the tree who withstood winter. What she teaches in the story is that every single tree on the face of the planet has, what we know, the heart of the tree, the center of the tree.

Part of it is, in winter, it builds up protective new trees, build up a protection around their heart to fortify them, to strengthen them, to keep that sweet softness sweet and soft. If it did not protect itself in this way, it will die. It wouldn't be fortified enough to survive winter because it wouldn't have protected itself in the ways that it needs protection.

It doesn't make it, like we were talking about earlier, rigid or resistant or pushing against, but it creates a barrier around its most tender and precious heart so that it could continue growing and expanding and strengthening and fortifying. I think about that. How do humans survive winter? How do we survive our shatter points? How do we survive?

It's not by shrinking in, it's not by getting smaller, it's not by numbing out or cutting off or dismissing or disowning. It's about building a fortification so that we can keep those tender parts of ourselves tender and still grow into. That requires opening intimacy, vulnerability, and courage of our own responsibility, not giving that to someone else.

[0:50:04.6] AS: I love that. Ultimately, you are in control if you're taking responsibility because you're not — Which feels safe. You're not depending on outside forces.

What are some of the big shadow themes that you see coming up right now for people that they want to integrate?

[0:50:24.6] LA: For my clients at least, the theme is very consistent with, "I did all the right things, but now, what? I did what they told me was going to make me happy, and it didn't work. Now, what? They have the job, they have the degree, they have the resume or the CV, they look good on paper, everyone's impressed, their parents can brag about them, not a hair out of place, no one would know.

That's part of what it makes it hard to be vulnerable, because they don't want to shatter the illusion that they're not happy because people would say, "Oh, look at all that you've got. Why are you complaining? Just be grateful. Just da-da-da-da-da." They still know something is missing and that it's not being "fixed" in the ways that they were told it would be fixed. They've been sold a bill of goods and now, they want a real deal and they don't know how to get there.

[0:51:24.8] AS: You find that they're acting out in "bad" ways. It feels bad but that shadow part of their sounds that they've casted off, which they categorize as bad is now with there are also attracted to in extreme.

[0:51:38.4] LA: I find that when they're acting out, they're more acting in. They're more drinking themselves more than they should be or not exercising in the ways they should be or just like overworking. I don't see them acting out on tables.

[0:51:58.8] AS: I think we're talking about the same thing, just describing it differently. I meant, you're doing things — A lot of my clients are, "Why am I doing this if its feels so bad," right?

[0:52:07.4] LA: Yeah. Absolutely.

[0:52:09.8] AS: For everyone listening, you can often start to identify — This is a very amateur shadow 101 tip. When you start to feel really annoyed by other people or triggered by them, that's usually a sign. Not always, because look, some people are just outright dictators and horrible. I don't believe it's always projection, but if you're doing things that are "bad," you're like, "Why am I doing this if it feels bad? Why can that person get away with it?" I often think like ease is a big thing for me. I assume it's easier for everyone else.

What I'm really craving is to give myself a break and to give myself space. Again, I'm getting better at that, but I realized a couple of years ago, I was so annoyed at certain people who I thought had it easier. There's different ways that people could have it easier. I have it easier than most people. This is the irony, but I was still working myself in a way that wasn't healthy. Anyone who felt ease, I was finding ways to judge them.

I just want to offer that for everyone listening if you're like, "Where's my shadow? Why am I shattered?" Some of you will feel like they're completely broken, that's not true either. It's just maybe your shadow part is up for deep healing. Were you really ticked off and irritated about other people that what you want for yourself is often — It doesn't mean you need all of the ease that they have or all the privilege that they have. It means that's a clue that this is a part of myself that I need to address.

[0:53:40.8] LA: That's it. That's really ultimately what it boils down to, is that whatever we see outside of ourselves that we're repulsed by or annoyed by, is something in ourselves that we are repulsed by and annoyed by or rejecting. I think that goes back to changing that baseline, that template with our relationship with ourselves, our beliefs about ourselves. Anything that's internal gets externalized. That's just the dynamics. Whatever we're pointing our attention, our fingers at to is something that were already pointing our attention and our fingers to internally. It's just the way it works.

When we can accept what's happening internally with love and compassion and joy even if it's ugly, even if it's not cute, even if we're not proud of it, but we can accept it. It would be so much easier for us to accept it externally.

[0:54:40.3] AS: Yeah. It starts with, like you said, acknowledging, right? That you want ease. You want, I don't know, intimacy. You want a fulfilling career. First, acknowledging that want, like you said, and then it's the breathing and what's the loving thing to do here. I love that.

As we wrap up here, I'm curious how you define — You're a spiritual healer. I feel like it's an endless process, but how do you define spiritual healing?

[0:55:14.0] LA: I don't, really.

[0:55:18.8] AS: I love that answer.

[0:55:23.6] LA: I think everyone has their own relationship, their own practice, their own journey. I really don't define it for anyone else, but for me, my own personal practice and philosophy is that I love God; the sacred, the divine, the numinous, the beyond, the source beyond source, the creator. I am totally interested in knowing it intimately in my life, in my lived experience, because I think everything is an expression, everything. The shadow and the light, the hard and the soft, the challenge and ease, is all a way to know the sacred more intimately in ourselves and in each other.

That's the foundation beyond the foundation, for me, is that which makes all what I do possible which makes it easy for me to just anything because I don't think there's actually anything to

judge. It's just, "How do I love this more deeply, how do I accept this, and how do I transform it if it's not something I think is serving the greater good?"

To me, that's spirituality, is connecting with the source of life that moves through all things and all people, even politicians that I don't agree with, even people I don't like. I'm not saying you have to like everyone that it's Kumbaya, that we have to hold hands and sing We Are The World at all; but how do I love them if I don't like them, even if I don't agree with them. How do I find the deeper truth that may name, for example — There are people who I love who I don't talk to on purpose, who I don't spend time with intentionally, because I don't find that they're safe or healthy or loving. How do I connect with that deeper? It's connecting into a deeper wholeness that doesn't have anything to do with my ego or my interpretation of things, but that can trust the bigger picture.

[0:57:26.1] AS: I love that you just described about love. Sometimes, you love people and you don't talk to them. I find the more that you integrate and can be whole, you have these much more creative definitions of what something is. It's not the rigid love has to meet, I have to call every Thursday and look after them and pay their bills. It's also not, "Oh, I'll just do whatever you want." It's something that is beneficial for both people, and you get that balance much more accurately if you're coming from a whole place rather than trying to fill your own wounds, to be needed, or to rescue them, whatever it is.

[0:58:01.9] LA: That's it. That's exactly it. That's exactly it. It's all connected. That goal is back to sovereignty that goes back to power that goes back to truth. It's all connected. If I don't need you to show up any differently than you're showing up, however you're showing up doesn't impact my sense of myself. That gives you permission to be who you are, too, then we can all be free.

[0:58:29.6] AS: One of clients, I think he describe it really well. We're working on what's his and what's not his. He's like, "What's mine and what's yours?" That's a delicate question. It's a big question. I think for people listening, start to think what's mine here and what's the other person's?

[0:58:46.7] LA: Totally. I started therapy when I was 21 years old. It was probably the most game-changing thing I'd ever done in my life, game-changing, because it gave me a language, it gave me boundaries, it gave me a consciousness, it gave me an awareness of that exact thing. I learned to be like, "Oh, that's not my shit." Can I say that on your show?

[0:59:10.2] AS: Yeah.

[0:59:15.0] LA: That's a tool that I still use for my own personal life to this day. That's not mine. I don't have to take that on. Just because you're giving it to me, I don't have to take it. Just because you want me to do all kinds of things that don't feel good or sovereign to me, I don't have to take it, and it doesn't mean I'm a bad person. I'm not a bad daughter or sister or friend or whatever. That has been a game-changer.

I had another therapist later, who we would do workshops. Part of the practice was this isn't me touching myself and this is you. To incorporate the physicality of it was like — It snaps my synopsis in a different way to know, "Okay, this is my body, this is my desire, this is my nose." That's you to really create a boundary or even just an acknowledgment that it's not an enmeshment. Game-changer.

[1:00:09.0] AS: I think what you just brought up too is so important, because a lot of my clients are empaths or really sensitive, and the energy of someone else they get wrapped, even when they go to order. It's like that's the tip of the iceberg of, "The group is doing this, and I didn't want to have my own foot right." It's like we work on them tuning in to the limits of their body and checking in with their own intuition. Remembering to do that, like you said, first acknowledging, "This is what's happening. No one is forcing me this. My energy is just like totally enmeshed with the other person, and it's just because I'm sensitive. It's not a bad thing. Whoa! I got to rein it back in, and I love that. That's another great tip that you just offer. I know it's a tip, but it's like a way of, "Let me come in to my own boundaries of my body and get back into my own space. What do I want here, and maybe I need some more time, a couple of more breaths to figure it out." I love that too. Thank you for sharing that.

[1:01:09.1] LA: Absolutely. I come in to a lot of these so honestly, because not even the deeper shadow-diving work, but the boundary work, because I grew up in a house that was very

enmeshed where expectations were very enmeshed and I didn't even know I had a right to have boundaries, and I'm an empath, and I'm entirely intuitive, and I'm highly sensitive energetically, not emotionally. It shows that for me energetically.

I had to learn manually how to unhook and unhinge myself from other people's stuff, because there was no expectation that I would know how to do that. I was never taught that growing up at all.

[1:01:51.6] AS: Yeah, for everyone listening, enmeshment, maybe you can define it better, Lerin, than me. It's basically when you take on other people's emotional turmoil and feel like you have to do something with it. That's how I understand it, but maybe you can explain it better.

[1:02:08.8] LA: Yeah, it can show up so many different ways. It can show up emotionally. It can show up energetically where you feel sick, or tired, or grumpy, or not necessarily emotional about it, but you feel what they're physically feeling, or it can be that you take on — Which tends to be how mine shows up. I feel it more in my body than my emotions. It also can be that you take on responsibilities. It's about fixing. It's about healing. It's about taking care of. It's about you if you see a need filling it. It's about speaking up for everybody, but not yourself. It can be not giving anybody responsibility, because you feel like you're the only person who can do it. It can show up a lot of different ways. Ultimately, it's about not being in your own power and outsourcing it to someone else.

[1:02:55.5] AS: I love that. I love that. You also said another big thing when you were defining — I love your definition of spirituality and why I really like your point of view and work is that spirituality is not all love and light, and getting on a yoga mat. I think we mean — Or having a reckoning.

It was really interesting. I just moved back to Pittsburgh after 18 years away, and I live in a city, and there are so many good people here and really down to earth. Sometimes I think their shadow is they're too grounded, not open to new things, but that's changing as we get new people moving out here. I thought about how many people I know here who volunteer and are working on things to make the world a more just and fair place.

Then, I think about how — I'm not criticizing yoga, or whatever, but I think a lot of us think — I love yoga, but I think for a while, it was like, "Oh, I'm spiritual, because I'm going to yoga." Granted I was in grad school starting a business. I had no bandwidth. My whole life was about me. Spirituality isn't just about love and light and yoga and becoming unattached.

I actually think the soul is about attachment. It's about ritual. It's about routine, the soul is often what we're healing with the shadow, the spirit as well. I just like that you pointed out that it's not just because you say love and light and candles. I see this whole sanitized version of spirituality coming out right now, and it's like they say if you see the Buddha, kill him. Anyone who claims to be the Buddha, is not the Buddha.

I'm not saying that in terms of — Again, I love yoga. I don't want people to be like, "Aah! I don't think I'm better because I do yoga." That's not what I'm saying. I'm just saying that a lot of spirituality is being with the discomfort like we've talked about for this episode. What you said is it can be challenging. I just love that you included that, and I want people — Because I think people end up feeling bad about themselves when — They're like, "I'm not being spiritual, because I'm not love and light and feeling like everyone were all one." It's like, "No." It's not always the only path or outlet with spirituality is. I just appreciate your definition, because it includes the wholeness of it.

[1:05:12.6] LA: Because, ultimately, the wholeness, the we are oneness, is still true, but you can't have that by only focusing on the light. If you are only focusing on the light and saying, "We are one," but you're ignoring the hungry person or you're pretending — Blaming the person who just was assaulted, or because you only want to focus on love and light. That is a direct contradiction to the whole, because the whole includes all of the gunky stuff too. It's like how do you honor that with the same reverence and nonattachment that you honor the love and light?

When you said consistently see daily practice. I think of that as devotion. How do you love all of it with devotion? That, to me, is spiritual. I love yoga, but I think people — It can be a little fluffy if you're not willing to go into the grit too.

[1:06:09.5] AS: Yes. I love that you use the word devotion. I used that on a podcast I was being interviewed on about the difference between being inspired. I'm like, "I think you want to aim

more for devotion.” Which means not just when you’re feeling good and want to do something, but saying, “This is bigger than me, and it’s going to connect me to the deepest part of my self. I’m going to show up even when it’s hard.”

[1:06:30.3] LA: That’s it! Which doesn’t require perfection.

[1:06:36.8] AS: No! That reminds me of one of my clients, she was like, “Oh! I hear that Truce With Food originally was going to be about being perfect. Now, I’m realizing it’s all about being imperfect.”

[1:06:47.4] LA: Yes.

[1:06:49.3] AS: Yeah. Totally. Oh my God! Lerin, this has been amazing. Where can people find you?

[1:06:55.5] LA: My virtual temple home is sisterfire.com, and I’m in the middle of a rebrand, but that will always redirect you back to me. Sisterfire.com.

[1:07:07.0] AS: Great. Are you on social media? Is that too energetically draining?

[1:07:11.4] LA: No. I do love Instagram, so you can find me at Lerin Alta on Instagram. I’m trying to swim very close to the surface of Facebook, because it’s a little distracting right now. There’s a lot going on over there, but I like to play on Instagram.

[1:07:32.3] AS: Wonderful. Yeah, I gave up Facebook for a couple of months. I’ve started to peek back in, but it has done amazing things for me to not be on Facebook. I totally get it. For everyone listening, make sure you get the L, it’s L-E-R-I-N Alta on Instagram. I just wanted everyone to see that.

Thank you so much, Lerin. I really appreciate you having coming on Insatiable.

[1:07:56.8] LA: This was a fantastic conversation. I have so enjoyed talking to you. Thank you for having me, Ali. I really am glad to be here.

[1:08:03.4] AS: My pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[1:08:06.5] AS: Have questions or reactions about the episode? Reach out to me on Instagram and Twitter @alimshapiro, or Facebook at facebook.com/alimarieshapiro. If you love this show, please leave an iTunes review and tell one friend this week about how to get the Insatiable Podcast on their phone.

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