

Nourishing Our Roots Episode 3 - Second Cut Transcription

Grace

Ashiana

Yami

Intro music (00:00:00 - 00:00:18)

[Drums, strings, and birds play in the background]

Opening Statement (00:00:18 - 00:00:57)

Ashiana: Hello and welcome to Nourishing Our Roots podcast, where we bring you practices and conversations around wellness from a decolonized perspective and help you dig into your roots and find wellness from within.

Grace: We have 4 episodes this season, released biweekly, and each episode features a new guest with themes such as spirituality, art, creativity and body practices, and sexual health. Uhm, we believe that wellness should be approached in a holistic manner that looks at all factors, including mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional wellness.

Ashiana: This podcast is supported by LGBT YouthLine's Provincial Youth Ambassador Program.

Greetings and Intro (00:00:57 - 00:02:24)

Grace: My name is Grace and I'm one of your co-hosts for this podcast. I'm recorded from Guelph located on the ancestral lands of the Attawandaron People in the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Ashiana: Hi my name is Ashiana, co-host and co-creator of this podcast. I am currently located at what is colonially known as Thunder Bay in so-called Ontario and I acknowledge that this is the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe People, mainly Ojibwe of Fort William First Nations, and I also acknowledge the various contributions made to this land across centuries by the Metis People, and I acknowledge also the Inuit People that reside in Thunder Bay.

Grace: As we engage in this discussion on decolonizing wellness, we remember that our liberation and resistance is connected in creating futures centred around well-being, joy, and community.

Ashiana: Today our guest is Yamikani Msosa. Yami is a Black, genderqueer, Malavian arrivant, currently living within traditional territories of the Wendat, Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Yami is an anti-violence educator, support worker, and a movement based facilitator. They are committed to a practice of anti-racism, anti-oppression, and harm reduction and they use popular culture, creative strategies, and a digital engagement to facilitate these. So a warm welcome to you, Yami!

Yami: Thank you, Ashiana and Grace, for having me. Really appreciate it.

Conversation (00:02:24 - 00:52:08)

Grace: Our theme question is, what does the phrase decolonized wellness mean to you? And as someone who has been working in this space and is doing amazing work in the space, what imagery does it invoke, and what's your vision around decolonized wellness?

Yami: Whoo! This is a question. This is a question. Part of, uhm, decolonizing wellness. I would say that an element of it is care and radical care. And, uhm, I'm going to go off script a bit and I hope that's okay.

Grace: Please do, yes.

Yami: How are you, though? How are y'all doing? For folks who can't see they're both just nodding their head at the same time.

[Collective laughs]

Yami: How're y'all doing? Let's start there.

Ashiana: We are doing good. I mean, I'm doing good, I'm going to speak for myself. I am doing good and I just try to listen to myself. That inner voice of my body, and I just go with that most of the time. And, you know, I always listen to what is out there, but I always, you know, take it with, you know, a pinch of salt, and try to understand does that relate to me? Does this apply to me? Oh, like, does this sound right to me? And that's how I go. I'm a very intuitive person, and so I always go with my intuition.

Yami: Mhmm. Thanks for sharing that, Ashiana. How about you, Grace? How're you doing?

Grace: Uhm, you know what? I've been having a lot of conversations around burnout with folks, like, in- in my work, in like- in like conversations with peers. Just because, I don't know what it is about this time, but it seems like during this time, like, everyone no matter whether they're in school or whether they're working, no matter what field everyone is just very burnt out right now. Uhm, and I'm definitely, at this period of time, coming out of being burnt out for the last couple of weeks and, uhm, yeah, so just, like, focusing on, like, things that bring me joy, like this conversation. I was like, "yes!". Yeah, so, at the moment I feel very good and grounded and excited. But this week has been definitely a lot and I've been needing to prioritize things. How about you? How are you doing?

Yami: Well, I mean, I think I'm on the same wavelength as you in terms of like this week. I, like, have been sleeping in most days until, like, 10:30, and it's- Pisces season is coming to an end. I thank the ancestors cause Pisces season has always helped me and my feelings. And, uhm, and I'm still kind of salty that we lost an hour of sleep, because, like, I love napping. And so for folks who are listening it's the week of- the week after daylight savings. So we gain an hour of light and move towards the light which is nice. But uhm yeah, I'm consistently in a space of, uhm, and the reason why I kind of slowed us down and ask how you folks were doing is cause part of decolonizing wellness is actually checking in on community and seeing how we're doing. And so many times I find myself in spaces where, uhm, we're there for, like, an objective or

whether it's like within the nonprofit kind of the world that I'll find myself in or even if it's in a wellness world, sometimes it's just like that dive right in, y'know? And I'm so curious about how we can, uhm, you know, because wellness is something that has been packaged as and commodified in very particular ways, especially within the Western context. And we don't, you know, I'm curious about how we can center care and practices of care and checking in and that being a point of departure of our wellness, right? That wellness is a collective experience of us, uhm, connecting with each other, right? To see how, like, you folks are doing. To see how, you know, that we're in this ecosystem. To see how other folks are doing when the ecosystems I find myself a part of, uhm, and so I think, you know, when I think about the word decolonizing. To decolonize means to dismantle. Uhm, and so, for me I'm reading the question as how do we dismantle what we understand as wellness. Uhm, and I think that individualistic, uhm, capitalistic. But capitalism as in, like, shmoney and money being the driver and, like, making people spend money to be well. Uhm, you know, for me, you know when we center and dismantle what we know around wellness it's about care and community. It's about kiki-ing, laughing. It's about sharing food, it's about practices of connection to the land and to all of its beings. And so, I don't, I mean, I guess you could say that's me answering the question around, like vision, you know around decolonizing wellness. And- and I don't really see myself as someone who occupies wellness spaces. Like I- I actively reject that phrasing. Uhm, mainly because of, you know, I think that the spaces that really- that I try to create and cultivate are really around community and care. Uhm, and wellness is a paradigm within that but that's- that's not- to be well, it's not the central point. It's- it's to be connected to one another because so much of, I think what we're experiencing right now, and the world is about this connection, right? And we find ourselves fragmented in getting, you know, one thing done to the next. You know, treating conversations in a transactional way. And so centring love as a practise is so key, right? To how we can show up and be in community with one another. Sorry if I [cobashed?] your question. Or if that was exactly what you're looking for? Okay, good.

Ashiana: That was- yes. That was perfect. Yeah, so, yeah that was wonderful how you mentioned-

Yami: Oh! Can I tell a story?

Ashiana: Yes! Go ahead.

Yami: Okay, so I want to tell a story about something. And so it was, like, two weeks ago someone reached out to me, and they were just like, you know, "I know that you hold classes for yoga for black grief," and one of the things that they reached out was, like, they were just like, you know, "Yami, I'm trying to create this, like, space for survivors of gender based and sexual based violence, and, like, I'm just curious as to, like, how, you can cue in terms of movement." And so they just described, like, different access needs that were showing up in the class and they're like, "I just want to be like the teacher that provides all the options and I know that's the type of practitioner that you are and so how do I provide all the options?" And, uhm, this person is racialized and they were talking about how they had gone through, like, teacher training for yoga. Yoga [unknown], to be very clear, and which is the movement part of yoga. And they were talking about how, in many ways, they wanted to ensure that they were able to keep perfectly. And I think about how much of like, how so much of wellness practices centre on, like, the

practitioner being able to offer space that is, like, perfect. That we are, like, the know-alls around wellness, or like that we know everyone's body and know what they need. I remember, like, sitting in this conversation and like, with this human, and feeling- I could feel myself getting, uhm, activated because I was like, well, you know, and not at this person, but just at the fact that so much of holding space for folks, there's this, within like, you know, uhm, kind of Western conceptualization of wellness, it's like the teacher is the knower. And so to this human I was like, you know, you totally know what you're doing, and your students- I said my students are always the teacher, and, like, you know, the people that come, you know, it's not even like, it's not even like they're just a student, it's like a reciprocal relationship. I'm learning from them and they're learning from me. And so, you know, I offered to this person that folks who come to your space will always know what they need. And so sometimes it's just about offering the opportunity to explore what the practice, movement, etc., whatever the space is for, to invite them to- to engage and practice consent with themselves, and that you are just offering that medium. But really they have the agency, and they know what they need, and they can tell you. You know, this doesn't work for me but maybe this works for me. Uhm, and so your question also made me think of that positionality that comes with like, folks who do- who are, like, within the traditional census of, like, wellness practitioners. Like who gets to be the knower and who gets to be the student when it's like, nah, we're all kind of, like, learning from each other! And we're in a space together to engage in care and community and to be well with one another, right? So whatever that looks like, right? There's no one image. And that, much of what has been said around wellness culture is that we need to fix ourselves rather than, you know, looking at the very systems that create the conditions as to why we are not "well", right? Or, uhm, connected. Or, uhm, yeah. The list could go on.

Ashiana: Yeah, I agree with that because, you know, nowadays people are so used to just listening to this person. You know, this mainstream wellness practices and gurus that are out there, and it's like "Oh, they know it. I don't know my own body. They know better than me." It's that mentality that gets translated. And then, you know, they come to you, who is like more- has more understanding of it and you're there to facilitate and give that space for them to discover their own wellness. But they are like, "No, you tell me how to- you tell me how to increase my wellness, or how to find my wellness." But, you know, we need to look into ourselves and find what's right for us. Yeah, I agree to that.

Grace: Yeah, and I was just gonna mention that way of, like, conducting spaces and creating spaces or co-creating spaces. It makes it- I feel like it just makes it so much more accessible to folks, because- because going back to this idea that, like, they are the experts on their bodies, they can- there's feedback, there's, like, movement going through the space. I think that- because I know when I've gone in yoga spaces I'm very much like, "Oh, I can't do this because I can't move in the way that this expert is telling me to". So I think that's so beautiful. So yeah, thank you.

Ashiana: So, like, for our first question we would like to know more about you. Like, I read a small bio of you but, you know, there's obviously much more to your story. So we want to know more about, you know, your journey, and, you know, we know that you immigrated from Malawi as a child so how was that transition? And how has it been in so-called Canada?

Yami: Mhmm! Yeah, vulnerability. [laughs] Leading into and sharing my story. So I, yeah, my family came as refugees to Turtle Island in, like, the '90s. And we landed in Adawe, also known as Ottawa, known and unceded and unsurrendered Algonquin territory. Uhm, and so lived there for like a good chunk of time. And I think, you know, when I think about how I've kind of arrived here in this moment that, you know, I'm in, and that we're in collectively, uhm, I think about how past of migration especially as, like, a young child has an impact on an experience of trauma that shows up with migration, right? Because I know that it wasn't- uhm, we fled and that situation wasn't safe and, uhm, you know, and- and it was several months, right? I think about the little me and the different ways in which I needed to protect myself, right, at that time and how that evolved into a coping strategy as an adult. So, being in- in Ottawa and often occupying spaces at times the only, or one of two, or one of three Black people. Whether it was in, you know, high school, or like elementary school, in all of, like, the programming that my parents would put me in. There were- there were very specific ways in which I wanted to be of service to community but I also felt like I needed to protect myself from community. Uhm, and I think in terms of today, it's so clear to me that there's always been elements of- I mean, like, I was in girl guides! Like I was a spark, I was like a brownie, uhm, and a pathfinder, and, you know, lived a very, like, service life, right? I think that, you know, even thinking about some of the work that I did in high school, super politically involved. And really believed in no system, you know, uhm, at the time. And so there's always been an element of wanting to be part of systems change work. Uhm, and the reason why I focus so much on the younger parts of me is because I think that those are the parts that really shape who I am today. Uhm, and so what I think about the work around embodiment is that I'm so deeply engaged in, and engaged and around healing- healing and honouring some of the ways in which Black folks protect themselves, navigate the world, right? Like that mode of protection as a child, through the journey of embodiment, through the journey of wellness, has been connected to, like, the ways in which as an adult, uhm, I have stayed violent around, you know, certain experiences, and not talked about my truth, around mental health and mental well-being and try to fit into this, like, world that is very much, you know, seeped in white supremacy and heteronormativity and cisnormativity and all that, you know, jazz. And so, I think for me, when I think about my journeys- I mean, I could go into some of, like, the more nuanced pieces, but I think about the ways in which and how I've been shaped, right? How stories of migration have shaped the ways in which and spaces sometimes I stayed violent and don't want to take up a lot of space. It's also shaped the ways in which I- I'm more apt to see the way that systemic violence impacts certain communities and Black communities and the ways in which, you know, healing and, uhm, call it talk therapy, call it whatever you want, in terms of telling stories of our experiences, and how that's been shaped in terms of the culture of silence.

Yami: And so, you know, fast forward into my mid-twenties, I was working- actually early twenties, I was working in a sexual assault center, and I did that work for about a decade, and in that, you know, I was always so curious about these Western modalities of, like, healing. And how I didn't see them accessible to the communities that I was a part of and, at that time- uhm, at that time I was a little less political than I am now, and so believed that counselling and therapy were the only modalities for folks to access support. And so, at that time, uhm, you know, kind of wanted to be able to also explore different ways of healing. So for me what that- what that looked like was engaging in practices of Kemeti yoga. Which is, I would say, and it's

also known as [unknown] yoga, it's like a blanket term. And so, was interested in Kemeti yoga as a way to feel, like, connected, because I was always a mover, I was always someone that found energetic release through the body and so for me, it was a question of, like, you know, like, okay, talk therapy is one modality of being able to support survivors of sexual violence, I know that movement also helped me, and so what can I do? Okay, let's think about yoga, let's think about movement. Uhm, but the spaces that I kept finding myself in around yoga were very white, and you know I was interested in looking at a decolonized approach to movement and to kinetic movement. And so through different teachers, because I'm not gonna shit on the yoga teacher training that I went on, like, I'm not interested in giving that energy and that time, but so what I will say is that along the journey there's been so many teachers within mainstream spaces and also within community-based spaces. Uhm, teachers that were "students". Teachers that were plant ancestors around being able to learn- to learn about what it means to offer space, uhm, because I think the ecosystems of nature have so much to teach about what it means to be in a relationship with one another. What it means to hold space. What it means to heal. What it means to- to think about affirming practices.

Ashiana: Yeah, like thanks for sharing. And yeah, I think you have come a long way and you are actively doing so much for your own wellness and along with that helping others by creating space and giving them space. And that is, that is so great, and I can relate with, you know, maybe not all, but definitely a few of the things that you mentioned about your journey. About how, even though we don't want to, sometimes we are silent, right?

Yami: Mhmm!

Ashiana: It's like your brain is saying you need to talk of- But still, you know, the jaw doesn't unclench. I have felt that multiple times and that is real. That is real.

Yami: Yeah, I was just gonna say one of the most important pieces is, like, along this journey has been- what I've been curious about, is specifically in the communities that I'm a part of, like, what would it look like to support Black people in being able to feel? To be able to connect with our breath? To be able to connect with our bodies in ways that feel safe to do so? Because so much of the world suppresses our abilities to feel. To truly feel, right? And I know, Grace, we talked a bit about this in terms of our nervous systems are consistently activated in terms of experiencing anti-black racism. Whether it's, like, within the academic sphere, uhm, or whether it's within the nonprofit world, or just existing. We're constantly having shit thrown at us, and I think for a lot of Black folks there's this tendency to revert inwards as a means of survival. So it's almost like being in this constant state of dissociation in order to navigate the world because the world is just deeply anti-black, uhm, and so part of this political kind of space I'm in is really just wanting Black people to be able to feel. And wanting Black people to breathe, you know? But yeah, Grace, I'm curious to hear what your thoughts are.

Grace: Yeah! With that specifically, uhm, I think it's incredibly important to have these spaces because you know, as you know, I was in that black healing space with you that LGBT YouthLine was holding. And yeah, I just it's- it's sometimes like when you're by yourself or if you're in like a space that is not around people that are, like, Black and queer, like it's- it can feel very, like, intimidating to, like, feel your feelings and so, uhm, the fact that you create spaces, where we

can, like, move towards that, is so important. Also, something that came up for me as you were speaking was, like, around talk therapy and how like it's a very Western form of it- it- it- it's, it works, I'm sure there's other communities that have done it, but like speaking one on one with a professional is a very Western sort of way of moving through healing from my perspective. And I think, you know, something that I've been thinking about a lot is, how else can I tell my story in a way that feels safe, and- and in a way that heals me? And I find that, like, telling my actual community about my struggles, uhm, affirms me even more than, and this is just my own experience, but I just get so anxious in a space where I'm one on one with someone who's being paid to hear me speak. That's one way that I've been moving through it. What are other ways I can tell my story and share my truth-

Yami: I love that.

Grace: Yeah, then, of course, being in your body as well is- is a very, like, a very decolonized perspective of taking on wellness. Not like thinking it through in your brain. And there's other ways to heal yourself. And there's other ways that are more accessible to, maybe, some folks. So yeah.

Yami: Mhmm. I love that you said that, it makes me think of a quote by Prentis Hemphill who does- is one of the teachers that, uhm- one of my teachers. And they say that healing is a process rather than a destination. And so how can we get curious about that process? And for folks who are interested, they run the Black Embodiment Institute, and they have courses that are super accessible if you're interested in, like, learning more around embodiment. But, you know, I think about community [unknown] when you're talking and like, just even laughing. You know, like telling a story, and having, like, your friends responded in a way, that, like, you're just laughing. Like, that is embodiment. That is a form of, like, relief and connection that, like, doesn't fit the modes of like traditional talk therapy but it is, in its own way! Because you're being able to access and I think of all of the aunties that I had growing up that would be sipping tea, quite literally, and spilling tea, you know? And, like, just kiki-ing, you know, also being able to care collectively about community by telling stories, right? And, uhm, sharing resources, and all of the food, and all of the tea, you know? Like we have all these practices within us, and, like, that's group therapy! You know? That's its own form, so totally hear you on that, yeah.

Grace: Yeah! Another thing I think about is, like, how, like, sort of, like, societies were structured in that, like elders, were very important counsellors in a lot of Indigenous societies. And so you would go to your elder and they would know- they would have known you throughout your entire life and things like that. And that is something I want to reconnect with and that I've experienced, like, growing up being Black and in church and Black churches. You have elders and stuff like that. But that's something that I want to reconnect with.

Yami: I love that.

Grace: Uhm, so, my next question for you is, so, we did a practice around truth telling during the Black healing space. I just want to know, what is truth telling for our audience? So, what role has truth telling played in your life, throughout your life? And when did you first recognize its importance?

[Laughs]

Yami: Oh lord! It's a great question. So for folks that are listening, in the space that Grace was referencing, we did an exercise around truth telling. And what are the truths that we may be holding onto that we want to release? And so that practice is actually born out of teachings from ancestor bell hooks, who talks about truth telling as a way of liberation for Black folks. I remember the first time I came across it was when I first got sober... Oh god, that was in 2015. And so my supervisor at the time, who- Agla Martinez, who's amazing and I love her dearly. To see that I was struggling with substance use and she gave me the book to read and gave me- specifically said, I want you to read the chapter on truth telling. And in the chapter, hooks, and not to get all academic but just, like, real talk, you know. But, like, hooks talks about how, as Black folks, lying has been a form of protection for ourselves. Whether it was, you know, in the [unknown] closed South, where folks were- or, you know, within the context of slavery where folks were lying to protect themselves from violence. Uhm, and so she gives this, like, historical trajectory around lying in the ways of which lying has been a tool for Black folks to protect ourselves, whether it be in the workplace, etc. Or the form of protection from some of the violence that we experience so, you know, if the truth telling element of, like, how many times have you heard someone say "oh, it's okay, I'm fine, I'm good, I'll be okay", you know, when really we're not fine and we're not okay. If we were to engage in practices of truth telling as a form of liberation it actually speaks truth to the deeply anti-black, homophobic, transphobic world that we live in, right?

Yami: So that exercise of truth telling, which is basically just asking folks, like, what's the truth you want to share? Uhm, and what feels alive for you? Invite that shaping of realness, you know? And- and I remember in that group, I remember Grace, you know, I mean you were there, sharing like I want to tell the truth about the ways in which sometimes I codeswitch in order to protect myself at work, and how it fucking sucks and it makes me angry and how I don't want to do it and how, like, I catch myself in it and it hurts and I know where it's coming from and it's like, why do I have to do this, you know? And, like, something as simple as that may not be simple for some folks, but for me, right, it's like speaking truth to power, you know? I think about the practice of truth telling for myself around sobriety and being like, "No, I actually have a drinking problem", you know? Like and like I need to get real about that because of my own conception, the truths that I told myself around what it means to be someone who, uhm, engages in substance and- and- and reconciling those truths and getting under why the truth telling as a practice it- it's so important within Black healing spaces because so much of it is about taking away the armour that we need to exist in this world. And doing it in a way that's not for consumption of white gaze or non-Black gaze but doing it so that we can honour our realities and truths because so much of existing in the world is about silencing those truths.

Ashiana: Yeah, so... [sighs] That was- that was kind of heavy. I'm sorry.

Yami: No, no! Let's take a moment. Let's actually take a moment just to take a couple of deep breaths, because I know- you know, or just like, do what we need to do and move or close our eyes, or you know, just reconnect because I think sometimes when we speak truth- telling the truth is not this easy practice because it also means that we have to reckon with what comes after that, you know?

Ashiana: Yeah, mhm. Then, you know, once you voice it, it is the truth, and now you've got to deal with it. And that is- that is the fear that keeps us from saying the truth in the first place, right? The being with it part.

Yami: I think about being a little homo. [laughs] And in truth telling, what that looks like in terms of being like “mommy, daddy, I think I like boys and girls”. And I was like, I don't know, 18 at the time, you know? And knowing that with that truth there were consequences. But that not living out that truth, there were other consequences that I wasn't willing to deal with. And so I always invite folks to use truth telling as a tool, as a writing tool, as a meditative tool to support our well being because if we store it in here, you know and you folks can't necessarily see what I'm doing because it's a podcast, but I'm holding my heart. If we store it in here and in our bodies, it needs to release to somewhere, right? So how can we get that truth out there even if it's still only with ourselves? Uhm, yeah.

Ashiana: I think that's the hardest part for me. [laughs] It's about truth telling to myself. Like sometimes I have to say it out loud to myself, because I'm in constant denial with my brain, like you know, going back and forth, and sometimes I have to just say it out loud. This is my truth, you know? Deal with it, and that's just to myself, you know? That's not concerning anybody around, or it's just to myself I have to admit it first. Yeah, mhm.

Yami: Mhm, that's not easy.

Grace: Yeah, and I was just gonna say that I think, you know, what you described within truth telling it's such like a radical act, especially with what we're taught, you know? I think- I think about, like, from media. From capitalism. From colonization. All these things are like “don't speak”. You know, silencing us. And then I think of even the cultures that we grow up with. I know- in my family, like, they just being immigrants from Haiti, like, it's very much like you can't- you have to be quiet, you can't show too many- too many emotions. You can't get angry. You can't be sad or else you're too emotional. And then also this idea of, like, constant gratefulness. That they sort of put on you, that nothing, nothing is- is bad. Nothing is allowed to be bad. Nothing you're allowed to be upset about. No situation because you're in so-called Canada. You're in Canada. You're- you're experiencing this, this is what people back home are experiencing, this is what I grew up with. And so sometimes around harder truths, it's- I find it's very hard to tell myself them. I don't even believe them in the first place. Uhm, and so definitely. I feel like it's a beautiful and radical act and definitely important in healing.

Ashiana: Okay, so [deep breath] a few more minutes, maybe. This is something we already touched on, we've already talked about this throughout the podcast, but how do you imagine the radically liberated future for 2S, queer, trans, BIPOC, disabled, neurodivergent, fat folks? For everyone, you know? What is, again, your vision once more? How do you see that?

Yami: Mhm... That's a really good question. [sighs]. Yeah. As a practice, sometimes I will just close my eyes. Uhm, and envision that. Envision that type of freedom. Envision realities where care, joy, community, love, uhm, where we are able to exist, uhm, and leaning into that- that element to futurist that calls us to dream. To me, it's- it's not- it's attainable here and now, right? In this conversation that we're having, right? Where we can not know each other super well but still care deeply for one another and see ourselves as kind of community. Like, to me, that is a

radically liberated future. Uhm, and it's in the here and in the now, right? I know that there are possibilities around dismantling systems and, you know, really leaning into abolitionist futures, where police aren't out here killing Black people and Indigenous people and racialized people. And that our, you know, that our medical systems are responding in ways that actually provide support that folks need. And that folks have to eat and- and- and- and that we're taking care of the land, and that the waterways are restored, and that, you know, folks have access to housing, and that, you know, all of those I mentioned and so until we- we're able to get there, uhm, the dreams are in the now. The dreams are hearing from you, Ashiana, what brings you joy and how you're doing because the future it's just a moment away, right? So, and Grace. So yeah. Yeah.

Grace: Thank you so much for that. That was so beautiful. The future is but a moment away. That's going to be a quote on my wall. [collective laughs]. And I have one final question before we sign off.

Yami: Grace, why you acting like that? I'm like uh-oh what's the question?

[Collective laughs]

Grace: Uhm, it's, okay. So you spoke a bit in our pre-interview about like ancestors and stuff like that, and, uhm, resistance. So I'm just wondering how movement and dance and things like that are a part of your resistance? And how does it connect you to your ancestors?

Yami: Hmm. I think in practices of movement and/or meditation and/or stillness it invites me to tune in, I think, in ways that I can't always because there's so much noise, right? And the noise is coming from whether it's from, like, technology or from the world. So a practice that I have is, uhm, go by the water. And today is a full moon and Virgo! But is to, like, go by the water and to just notice, like, the air on my face and to feel, like, my body connected and to just, like, sway, because I often find that, like, just thinking about how like our ancestors' knowledge is like within our blood. It's within us. We are, you know, they are us, we are them. Which is a part of an Indigenous philosophy, called musu [?], which is a teaching from the Dante [?] people, which I found in my maternal and paternal side of the family, and so to connect to them is to know that we are all one, and so movement and stillness is like a conversation. And when I can get clear on that I can hear them. And I think about the time that, and this is not for everyone, like, because I also know that to access our ancestors with them in knowledge, and- and- and even to know who they are, is a privilege. But, like, I had to do some deep searching with my parents to be like "can you tell me where exactly we came from. Can you tell me who my people are?" Like, I had to do that because colonial legacies and migration and patterns had forced them to be like "no, we don't want to talk about those elements anymore", right? Like, that traumatic piece. And so, I think about the ways in which movement and really breathing, actually, have supported me in asking the questions to get closer to the answer to get closer to them in terms of, like, that knowledge base but then also that physical base. And so I remember before talking to my parents about- this was a couple weeks ago, it was like two months, in January. Actually, it was right before- a week before my niece had passed and so I'm like, I know, I know that it was her, you know? Uhm, being like remember and don't forget. And I remember just asking my parents like, "okay, so, mommy, daddy, like, can you tell me exactly, in Malawi, like- yes, I know where the Bantu people, like, give me more specifics about who our people are". And you could

see this exercise of them getting, like, super uncomfortable. So I was like, “mommy, daddy, just breathe and walk with me, like, I just need to know because I feel this calling in my blood”. Anyway, so they told me and I think about how embodiment and, like, movement and breath have supported those connections. The connections to the conversations. The connections to water, which is like such, like, my people are people of the water. The people of the lake, like, were also warriors, and- and- and so just thinking about how all of that lives in me, you know. And so sometimes, you know, and we all do this sometimes, where we’ll be like- if you grew up really Catholic, you’ll be like, “lord help me”, right? And I find that sometimes, even in, like, moments of navigation, I’ll be like “ancestors”, or like, I’ll call on specific folks names, like, “help me”. Uhm, so just knowing that they’re always with us and they’re always here and they’re always present.

Yami: And, uhm, one last story is that I recently- so my ribs consistently dislocate and they kind of, like, shift away. And part of it is because, uhm, from one of my elders she was- who’s also a massage therapist. Uh, was telling me that, like, I am always trying to protect my heart and so because I’m protecting my heart my back is vulnerable, and this is, like, there’s a physiological and an emotional and a spiritual element, so she’s like your C3, C4, C5, which are my ribs, are consistently, like, dislodging out of place. And I’m, like, it’s so fucking painful. And- and so I remember her being like Yami, what does it look like to armour yourself knowing that Janella’s in front of you, right? And that Niobe is behind you, right? So in terms of balancing, in terms of posture, right, she’s like I want you to do heart openers. I want you to do heart openers in terms of, like, yoga and movement. It is a real- it can be really vulnerable. Do heart openers and I want you to call in Janella, who is my grandma, who guided- who transitioned at 110, and I want you to have Niobe watch your back, who is my niece that passed, uhm, y’know, in January. And I want you to call on them to hold you and it’s been a practice when I meditate to support the physiological elements of the body, having them there with me, so that I know my heart is protected as well as my back, right? I think that it’s- it’s an important practice to connect with them, because they’re always here with us, even if you don’t know their name, you know? They’re always here with us.

Grace: I’m literally crying. [laughs] That was so beautiful and thank you for sharing, uhm, that beautiful story-

Yami: Take a moment

Grace: Yeah

Yami: Take a moment there.

[Deep breaths]

Yami: So I want to invite you to call in who you need to have space with you. The names of the unknown. The names of- you know, our ancestors can actually be plant ancestors, you know? Water ancestors. You can call all of it in to hold us and build that container, right? And know that truly we are not alone.

Grace: That, that brings me to think of when- which was another thing that we met in,

Adornment Stories, they held this space for Black women, femmes, and nonbinary folks of these sort of healing type of spaces. And one of the folks who came in to do, like, a movement practice cause, like, it was movement based healing. One of the things they were doing, as we meditated, was talking about the support that exists around us. Like, support that exists beneath our feet, and, like, the trees and, like, the air, and the ancestors that there's support everywhere. And I even started thinking about, like, the human body, and how like all these little cells, or like "hey! You've done it! We're working!" And all this support is just everywhere and it's so beautiful.

Yami: And we're repatterning, right? Cause it lives within ourselves, right? Uhm, our experiences of trauma are intergenerational, like, when we think about the study of epigenetics, uhm, which is like- I have an article although I wrote about it so maybe I'll just, like, share it with y'all.

[Unknown]: Yeah!

Yami: But, like, it's basically the ways in which our genes- part of it is like the way our genes carry not only DNA that's like you are going to have like curly hair, but also like experiences of trauma and- and other dimensions of- of generational experiences. So yeah, like, even thinking about how that, like- when we do this work, we're sealing future generations themselves and how powerful that is, so, uhm, yeah. I appreciate y'all so much! So much.

Grace: We appreciate you!

Ashiana: Yeah, we appreciate you coming here and having this talk and being vulnerable and making- giving us the space to be vulnerable as well. And, you know. Yeah, that's- [giggles] like you said I'm holding my heart right now, like I'm feeling a lot of feelings here, and I'm like- it's okay, it's okay.

Grace: Okay, one thing I think I'm going to be- I'm going to be thinking about is intergenerational pleasure, you know-

Yami: [cheers] Yes!

Grace: And how that's like, all the things I like are also connected to my ancestors. As well as trauma and we heal and we pass on the healing and we pass on the pleasures of life, and things like that.

Ashiana: Yeah that- that- that was really like- I've heard about the epigenetics- am I saying it right? Yeah? The part that we have that our ancestors gave us and with that comes a lot of things, including trauma and, you know, the defensive mechanisms that our ancestors had built up to, you know, face that and that's why that's built in. I also like the part where you said, you know, the healing we are doing now in the same way that's gonna help our descendants and that's just beautiful, you know, just that thought and that gives us, you know, motivation to heal ourselves for our future generations as well.

Conversation Closing (00:52:08 - 00:52:41)

Ashiana: Thank you so much for this wonderful conversation. It's been- it's been eye-opening and truth telling, you know. It's gonna help all of us to ground ourselves and understand

ourselves better. And thank you so much, Yami, for coming here and co-creating this space with us. Thank you so much.

Yami: Sure, thanks for having me. Really appreciate the conversation.

Interlude Music (00:52:41 - 00:53:11)

[Strings, vocals, and birds play in the background]

Practice Segment (00:53:11 - 01:08:00)

Grace: And we're back with Yami Msosa for the practice segment of the podcast today. We thank you deeply for being here and co-creating this space with us and holding our stories as sacred offerings. Yami recorded this practice to share with you all so you can follow along from wherever you are.

Ashiana: Thank you again to Yami for offering this practice to our Nourishing Our Roots community and for all the work you are doing out there to enable and empower the people of our community.

Yami: Thank you for joining me for this short practice in connecting with the breath, the body, the spirit, and the heart. My name is Yami and if it's your first time practising with me I want to invite you to get into a comfortable shape and that shape can be seated, can be lying down, whatever form your body wants to take in this moment. I invite you to take a moment to get connected and honour how your body wants to move or how your body wants to be in this moment.

Yami: Once you're in a shape or form that your body feels connected to if you'd like to join me and if it feels safe to do so, I want to invite you to become aware of your breath. The inhale and the exhale. And if that doesn't feel accessible in this moment, maybe you are connecting to the sounds or the scents in your space. Maybe you're drawn to the connection between your body and the surface it's under, the textures. Maybe you're feeling a carpet or a blanket. Maybe your body's feeling like it wants to connect with what I can visually see in here. Wherever your body and your mind lands today is perfect, it's exactly as it should be in this moment.

Yami: Taking a couple more moments to bring awareness to our current state, recognizing that it may not always feel safe to do so. You may be navigating so much right now. So if at any point in time you feel like you need to pause or do something differently, please know this is your time. Your practice. You get to decide. You get to choose. If you'd like to continue along with me on this journey, going to invite you to take a couple of deep breaths. At your own pace, at your own time. Inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. Know that it doesn't have to be a soft inhale, your exhale and inhale can be loud, can take up space. Honouring whatever shows up in this moment.

[Deep breathing]

Yami: You may, naturally, want to take a sip of water or swallow. Completely normal.

Yami: Next I'm going to invite you to bring your hands to your chest if that feels accessible to

you. Now the next inhale, raising the arms up towards the sky, reaching up nice and tall. Yes, reaching up just a little further. And on the exhale, drawing your arms down to your sides, making a shape of a half moon or a half circle. As your hands and your arms come to frame the side of your body, maybe you'll want to bring your hands again into prayer position, inhaling the arms up all the way to the sky. Stretching like you're waking up first thing in the morning. Exhale, drawing your arms down to your sides. You can repeat this movement or any other movement that your body calls for the next couple of breath cycles.

Yami: I'm inviting you to move slowly, with intention, with connection, taking up space in a way that feels in alignment with your body. Know that you can pause at any time. Know that you can keep going. You're doing wonderful.

Yami: Whenever you feel ready if you'd like to join me in coming into a comfortable shape. Maybe your legs are crossed, maybe you're seated in a chair, lying down, on the bed or on a mat. I'm here inviting you to connect back with the breath through the inhale and the exhale. [Deep breathing]. As you land in connection with your breath, I'm going to invite you to draw in an ancestor, a family member, a friend, a guide, and it doesn't necessarily have to be a person. It could be an element, such as water. Or plants. It could be a specific place where your ancestors have walked, lived, loved, laughed. So as you inhale and exhale, drawing your guide, your ancestor, into the space with you. As they enter the space with you, you may feel different sensations arise in the body. You may start to feel emotional. All are welcome in the space.

Yami: For me today, I'm calling in the guide of water. As you inhale and exhale, allowing the body to feel held, that feeling of connection, recognizing that it may not always be easy to feel connected to people, places, or things and if that shows up for you today, honouring that. And as that guide, ancestor, person, place, is with you. Again it could exist in memory form or present form. I'm going to invite you to ask for what you need from that support system. Maybe it's connection. Maybe it's just to be held. Taking a moment for that need, that desire, to show up. To be brave enough to ask for it. I mentioned my guide is the water. So inviting the water, and asking the water to remind me and teach me the lessons of what it means to be in flow, what it means to be in relationship with others. Sitting with that just for a moment. Using your breath as an anchor.

Yami: And again, know that you can stop the practice at any time. If your eyes are closed, I'm going to invite you to open them gently and slowly. Becoming aware of the space as you call in your guides, the wisdom of your lineage. If you'd like to join me in taking a moment to thank that guide for hearing and being present with you, and that you may call on them again in the future. That you may ask for their support and assistance. They let you know that they're always there, able to access them at any time. Gently closing your eyes, if it feels accessible to you. Allowing the guide to journey out of the space and for you to come back to awareness.

Yami: If it feels accessible to you, moving your body in any way that feels good in this moment. Know that freedom is something that you can access at any point, at any time. Our liberation, that feeling of existing in our own bodies in peace, is our birthright. You can come back to this practice whenever you need. Maybe you'll want to take a bit of time to journal, listen to a song that you like, maybe take a nap. Ancestral work and healing from systems of oppression takes a

lot out of us. Be gentle with yourself until we connect again.

Outro Music (01:08:00 - 01:09:14)

[Strings, vocals, and birds play in the background]

Grace: This podcast was created by Ashiana Ismil and Grace Guillaume with the support of Destiny, Kumari, and the PYAP Team. This episode was edited by Umang, with music created by Grace. The art for the podcast logo was created by Kamina Jasse. You can find this podcast wherever you listen to podcasts and all the episodes, along with their transcripts, are available at youthline.ca.

Ashiana: See you next time, and until then keep hydrating and nourishing your roots.