



Shamanism Summit™

Swimming in the Mystery

Luisah Teish

HeatherAsh: Welcome, everyone. We're so glad to have you here for the *Shamanism Summit*. It's a deep honor to introduce our guest Yeye Luisah Teish. I'm going to read her bio. Yeye Teish is an elder in the traditions of the African diaspora. She renders its wisdom through storytelling, writing, divination, and ritual theater. Welcome so much, Yeye. So grateful to have you here.

Luisah: Alafia. I always begin by saying Alafia, and your response is se alafia ni. Alafia.

HeatherAsh: Se alafia ni.

Luisah: Uh-huh. What we have said to each other in the Yoruba language, it is a wish that you have good health and be at peace with your neighbor. Now, I always ask people to take a moment and see if you can and feel what your life would be like if we really had good health on every level and if peace with our neighbors was really enforced? I think that we would feel very different. I think that the hair on our bodies, the skin, our internal organs that fit everything would be different if we had those two things. Let us give that to each other as much as possible.

HeatherAsh: Yes. You are an incredible elder bringing African wisdom to America, being a bridge. I heard about you so many years ago. I studied with Vicki Noble.

Luisah: Aha! Yeah.

HeatherAsh: I just have great love for you over many, many years. As I've been reading your bio and really researching for this interview, one of the things I wanted you to start with is your upbringing a little bit in context of what we're happening now because there's just this incredible cycle of civil rights now coming back around again, and also your then connection back to your bloodline, to your knowing.

Luisah: Got you. Well, I grew up in the segregated south, at the Port of New Orleans. I lived in the French Quarters as a child, and then my family moved to the west

bank of the Mississippi River. In Jefferson Parish, there was a place called the Jim Homes, a subdivision for coloreds. Things were very, very segregated then. We were pushed up against the bayou. We were very much put out into the country, which was what my mother actually wanted because life in the city itself was so dangerous. I went from being a child in the French Quarters of New Orleans to the backwoods of Louisiana. I loved it. It was green. I was forest. It was water. We were settling in, and we had a village feeling because anywhere where there was an empty lot, people grew vegetables. We went crawfishing in the stream that ran beside my mother's house. We had, especially among the women, we had ways of behaving that I found out later were retentions from African culture. For example, whenever a woman had a baby in the neighborhood, all the women in the community got together.

They cleaned her house before she returned from the hospital. We cooked for her for the first two weeks. The women came and gave advice and shared stories all the time. I watched my mother and her friends interpret each other's dreams. I saw them do what I later learned was a remnant of African magic. I distinctly remember my mother and some of the other women going out in the backyard and making a circle of salt and crossing some matches in the four directions. They lit those matches and said something to the sky and told me, "Go inside because it's going to rain." So they were calling for rain. They had these rituals that they had maintained that had been passed down from one generation to the next. As I recall, things were very bright and fluid and abundant. We had banana trees and orange trees and wild blackberries. Everybody was everywhere. Then one day, a white man arrived with some measuring devices and some papers. He started measuring things and telling us that we had to put fences around our land because the rest of the land belonged to the company.

The company turned out to be oil, Conoco, Texaco, Exxon, those people. They murdered the forest. They cut down the trees. The trees screamed. They shut off the waterways. They covered the streets with mussel shells that had been soaked in oil. The natural connection to the environment was squashed. It was shut down. This was about 1954 that this was happening. We're beginning to see civil rights; people were asking for via civil rights. I am watching my father, who was a longshoreman. They had a situation, before they were unionized, the habit was that the foreman would throw five yellow chips on the deck. If there were seven men there, the men had to fight each other for a chip. A chip meant that you could work that day. There were seven men and only five chips. Then a fight would ensue so that that person could there was a struggle to unionize. I used to walk two miles to the highway to be picked up by a bus that would take me to a school that was two times away because the schools were segregated. I remember learning to recognize the man in the truck with the dog and the gun who made sport of shooting at black kids on the highway. You learn to see him come, and you knew where to hide until he had passed and that kind of thing.

The other thing I remember is the Catholic Church, St. Rosalie's, which was right across the track, was segregated. I'm watching demonstrations and things going on, and I decided that I was going to integrate that church. I didn't tell my mama what I was doing. I just went across the track and went and sat in the back of the church and pretty much got stoned. People threw rocks at me because I was trying to integrate the church. But that was the beginning of my awakening as both a spiritual person and as a political person. My mother, because she wanted me to be saved, she enrolled me in a Catholic School, which was even further away. That's when I began to question a whole lot of things. What is sacred? Why doesn't religion bring us together? You know what I'm saying? I was very, very glad to see that the civil rights movement came out of the church that all kinds of people of all kinds of different denominations came forward in there. I call myself a spiritual activist. I think I've been that since I was nine years old. It takes a minute to recognize what it is that you're doing. Of course, during the adolescent period, we try to be in with the in-crowd and part of that, but I never did fit in. I never did.

My teen years were lean and severe. Oh, my goodness! My teen years, I've looked at all of them. I left the south and came to California as a teenager was at first in the desert in Palm Springs and then in Los Angeles, where awareness really increased. I was very active in school politics and became the editor of the paper, the school paper. I've encountered photographs of me from that period of time and oh, my God, whoa! You're a pretty little baby, you're a cute kid, and then you make 13 and from 13 to 20, just ugly. You know what I'm saying? Oh, my God! I look at those photos, and I go, "Oh! I'm glad I survived, and I'm glad that people around me survived it." You know what I'm saying? I was blessed. I was blessed to have a mother who's a very strong spirit, who exposed me to a lot of things that shaped my consciousness now. A lot of people sit their children down in front of the TV, and they don't pay attention to what the child is watching. But my mother made sure that I watched Wild Kingdom and Jacques Cousteau and things that fed my mind. She was a consummate storyteller, an amazing cook, and an all-around sassy heifer as we would say then. I realized that everything that I am, everything that I do, and everything that I know is the outgrowth of seeds that she planted in me as a child. Yes, I feel blessed to have had her for my mother.

HeatherAsh: Wonderful. You got through the severe 13 to 20-year-old time, and you discovered dance.

Luisah: Yes.

HeatherAsh: Movement, that was the first bridge to bringing in the Orishas and uncovering that. So I'd love for you to share a little bit about that as well.

Luisah:

Yes, it was. Let's talk about being in the 11th grade, and one has to take PE, right? So there I am, trying to play basketball. I tried my hand at track. I was good at parallel bars. I swam like a brick. So here I am in the place of what they call the roving guard in the basketball. The basketball teacher looked at me, and she said, "You are dribbling on your toes. Get off my court and go see the dance teacher." She said, "You're not an athlete. You're a dancer. Go see the dance teacher." I want to pay homage and respect to Ms. Joan Bailey, who was my first dance teacher. Ms. Bailey, bless her heart, recognized my ability to dance. She started asking me to stay after school so that she could do some extra work with me. I'll never forget it because, on the Friday that I stayed after school, she told me, "If you stick with it, you will be an exceptional dancer." When I got back to school on Monday, I was told that Ms. Bailey had left me and had an automobile accident and was dead. I promised her that I would become the best damn dancer that I could.

Pursuing that, I was doing journalism and the French language and sitting on student body government. For a little while, I was part of the Police Community Review Board because we had some serious gang action in LA at that time, I was in Los Angeles. Another teacher, who I want to acknowledge, my journalism teacher, Ms. Joyce Combs she hooked me up with scholarships, with jobs. Our teachers are so valuable. I think people who don't understand, maybe they don't know that they have impact on you that lasts a lifetime. So Ms. Combs got me a job teaching dance in an Upward Bound program at Marymount College. So here I am fresh out of high school, and I had to actually camouflage my age because a lot of the kids that I was teaching, I was only a year older than them, but I pretended that I was much older so that I could do the disciplinarian thing. Anyway, I went from there to a college in Oregon. That is where I went from Pacific University to Reed.

Now, this whole time, I am involved in civil rights. I'm involved in fighting for black studies. I'm involved in trying to help create a democratic society, but that meant being confronted by police and dogs and hoses and all of the kind of pushback that was occurring there. While I was at Reed College, I'd gotten a scholarship to Reed. There was a group of people from the experiment in higher education. They came from East St. Louis, Illinois, to study and do exchanges. We were looking for a way to change what they call the IQ test is a very biased test that doesn't really, you know. We were in about the business of making the classics and all of the things in education more relevant to black people. For example, if you had a class in Shakespeare or in the classics, we would do things like, say, well, if a fellow and his girlfriend lived on 52nd Avenue, what would happen to them? You know what I'm saying? What kind of car would Madeira drive if she lived, you know, and really make it relevant to the kids, to people's present life?

When the people came from the experiment in higher education, and they told me that they were under the direction of Madame Katherine Dunham, wow, Katherine Dunham, with no disrespect to Pearl Primus. Katherine Dunham was the first black woman to go into the villages in Africa and the Caribbean and learn those dances and develop a technique so that other people could be taught. She had what was called a living museum, which meant that people would come in and see us dance and then learn the culture. They weren't just artifacts. They were artifacts and people. I had my present dance teacher to write a recommendation for me because I wanted to go to the school. The recommendation that she wrote was so strong that Madame offered me position as a teacher trainee. I think that being at the Dunham School was the time when I was able to come into direct contact with people from all over the world.

At the time, our head drummer was Mor Thiam, who was the lead drummer for the National Ballet of Senegal. For those of you who are listening, perhaps now you know a young man named Akon, who is doing a lot in Africa. He's doing a lot with the environment. Mor Thiam is his father. So Mor Thiam was there. The Nigerian sculptor Paul Osifu was there. Christiane de Rougemont, who runs a school in France now. This was a place where all the people who converged at the Dunham School went out into the world and did magnificent things. I could name Eugene Redmond. It just goes on and on and on. Madame had a thing that our performances were always in support of something that was going on in the community. Performing art and political activism got married to each other in the same way that spirituality and political activism got married to each other. These are the things that make me the person that I am today.

So we go from East St. Louis, Illinois, and I come out to California. See, this is the way Spirit works. I want people to know that there was a time when all I had was a couple of books. I'd be looking in the book and mispronouncing the Orisha's name saying, Ogun, Oshun who are these people? What are these stories about these magnificent beings who was thunder and lightning and rivers and oceans and all of this? I came out to California and was the first black dance teacher at what was then everybody's Creative Arts Center. To this day, that is now the Malonga Arts Center. It has moved around town. I was approached by a group called Batacoto, which was led by Bill Summers, who's now a cultural diplomat in New Orleans. With Batacoto, this was my first direct introduction to Orisha. We created dances for the Orishas. We created choreography for the Orishas. Then we would go down to LA where there were priests from Cuba and Brazil and Africa, and we would show them what we had choreographed and asked them, is this authentic enough? Are we doing the right thing? The elders would advise us.

Then one day, elders approached me, and he said, "A day is coming when you will be a priestess in this tradition. You have a lot of work to do." He said, "Mama grande." Really, I'm hoping to win an Oscar. I appreciate your blessing, but I kind of want to win an Oscar. It was like with the dance. The dance is so embodied. The dance opens up avenues in your being that goes beyond the intellectual. You see what I'm saying? Embracing for me because at last my relationship to the forest and the water was integrated with my sense of myself as a spiritual being. Was integrated with my need to address political issues, and gave me a way to be supportive of all of that, the environment, the people, and my own spirituality. I was able to integrate all of that and create for myself a life that is rich with sensuality, rich with culture, and rich with an amazing variety of people. I think of myself as a rich woman. I do. I really do. I really do. It is wonderful to me to see now that the general culture has begun to put in place spiritual practice that addresses public need. When you look at the altars that accompany the demonstrations around the death of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

When I look at the fact that all over the world, in every culture, I'm told that there are monks ringing bells in Tibet. There are people performing rituals in Africa. There are people painting murals of him in Israel and Iran. There were men doing hakas in New Zealand, Aotearoa, all over the world. We now have arrived at a place where we understand that the environment, the people, and the spirit all need expression. We've arrived at that place. We've arrived at that place. We have to go forward. I am now at this point, an elder in a global tradition that has its roots in Africa. We have a very elaborate divination system that is not fortunetelling but energy pattern tracking. I need to say that. We track the way energy manifests, the patterns of energy. From those divinations, we are guided in what is coming about and how we should conduct ourselves. I'm happy to be one of the people who receives information from all over the diaspora.

There's a couple of things, no matter if it's the priests in Africa, the ones in Brazil or Cuba, or the ones in India or anywhere else, there's a couple of things that they are all same. Item number one, people, please know that as scary as it is, this is not the end of the human race. It is, however, the end of how humans behave toward each other and toward the planet. It is not the end of the human race, but it is the end of society and culture as we know it. Mother Earth is trying to teach us something that we really, really have to pay attention to. People say, "Well, I got to get back to my work, and I got to get my hair cut, and I need to get my nails done." You can get your hair cut in your nails done at the mortuary. You really want to do that? You can get that done at the mortuary. We have to rethink what our priorities are. With the pandemic makes it clear that the boundaries between us are not marked on the land. It's in our minds, and our breath is teaching us how connected we are globally.

When we are quarantined, the air is clean. When we are quarantined, the creatures who live in the water come out and show themselves. When we are quarantined, I've been told that oh, somebody sent me pictures of lions sunning themselves on the freeways in South Africa. Mama sent us to our room so that we could see that the Earth does not need us. We need the Earth. This notion that we should dominate her and just do all kinds of things. If she lets us back in the house, we better behave, you see. I was talking to a man the other day who said, "Well, when this virus goes away, when we leak this virus, we'll have it made us." Excuse me, son. Excuse me. Hear now the truth. As long as we plunder the forest, there will be a new virus. If we don't respect that, everything has its space to live on this planet. We keep plundering self-preservation is the first law of nature for everything. If we behave like enemies, we will be attacked like enemies. We really, really have to look at that. The idea that we are somehow not related, and now I'm talking about racism, I've studied on racism for a long time and racism, there are three things.

Racism is an infection. Babies are not born racist. They do not come into the world hating each other. It is a behavior that is learned. It's a behavior that is based in fear and scarcity. So it's an infection. Racism is a mental illness. It's kind of psychotic. It's an inability to see another human being in front of you. To make them into something else, to alter reality. To live somewhere else other than in the real world where nature saw fit to create people who look different. Sometimes I have a fantasy about a goddess. Actually, I have a story, a goddess who is making different people and the joy of making all these. Everybody is beautiful. If you cannot see that, then that's kind of a mental illness, right? Racism is a spiritual affliction. It is a spiritual affliction. I have put out two things. Those of us who know how to move energy, I'm saying, let's put protection around the protesters. Let's send compassion to the mothers, especially of all these people who have been murdered. Let's work some reversibles on the violent those police. Those forces who are violent, if they must be violent, let them beat each other up.

Reverse that energy and dispel the cross condition that's going on in the White House. There's a condition called a cross condition where a person makes a wrong choice. Rather than admit they made a wrong choice, they tell a lie that complicates it. Then they have to tell another lie to keep, you know until they can't get out of. That's what's going on in the White House. I said it from the very beginning, and it's proven itself to be true. When the carrot-top emperor stole the election, I say it, his language is a signal to the little boys that the Klan can ride again. His language is a signal to racists, to supremacists, to those who walk with the ism demons. It's a signal that you can behave this way. Somebody asked me, they said, "Well, black lives matter, but there's white people out there, there's yellow people out, there's red people out there. What do you think it means?"

It's real simple. The human beings are distinguishing themselves from the demons. Some of us recognize that we are all human. Some people who are caught in that psychotic thing imagine themselves superior to others or can't see others as human. They have an illness. I would like to see our psychiatrists developing a program, a deprogramming program for supremacists, for racists and supremacists. They need to concentrate on that and leave the rest of us alone. Now, the other message that comes very, very clearly from the Africans, from the Caribbeans, from the Native Americans, from the American Indians, from Assamese, from everybody. Everybody agrees that it is now time for the voices of the women to be heard. It is now time for the voices of the women to be heard. That's what's going to save us as a species is hearing the voices of the women. I was told, especially in my personal divination, that the women must practice sharing wisdom, being courageous and compassionate. That's the formula that I was given: wisdom, courage, and compassion. Because in truth, the whole world is waiting to hear from us, is waiting to see, and nobody misses. There are two things that have happened recently that everybody's aware of.

George Floyd, when that demon had his knee on that man's neck, the man said, "Mama, Mama, I'm through." Every woman needs to hear that call to mama because we are the mothers of this culture. Every woman needs to hear that and go inside herself and pull out her best. This is no time to be shy. This is no time to hide what spirit is telling you. This is the time to step forward and put the divine feminine energy in front. We have a place for our men, support, putting strength behind it, but the vision and the direction has to come from the women. I want people to keep their eyes open. In Yoruba, we have a thing called Ajogun. Ajogun are the anti-human forces, the things that want to undo humanity. I recognize Ajogun when it is walking. A while ago, Ajogun walking had some people to attack some peaceful protesters, so that Ajogun walking could walk and stand in front of a church that he did not have permission to stand in front of and to hold a Bible upside down and backwards. I want people to pay attention to things like that because signals are being thrown.

Signals are being thrown. We need to take the best of every tradition because every tradition in the world has two components. It has the defensive component, and it has the life-preserving component. It is time for us to look deeply at the life-preserving components of everybody's tradition and bring that to the forefront. We're not raping the Earth no more. We're not doing that anymore. We cannot do that anymore, this territory anymore. We cannot do that. As long as we do that, Mother Earth and the spirits will send something to make us behave differently. She will. That's the way it is. I often say that jokingly, not jokingly so much, I often say that the Earth is a black woman. Those of us who had black mamas, we know it goes like this. You're misbehaving. She'd say, "All right now." Okay, and you keep misbehaving, and she did the look. You better read that look.

If you continue to misbehave, you are cast into your room, and that's where you really have the opportunity to save yourself because if I have to come in there and deal with you, I'm going whup your natural ass. That's where we are. Mama sent us to our room. She said, "Shut your mouth, cover it, wash your hands." Be still and quiet, and take a look at what happens when you behave. If we don't behave, she'll send us something else to make you behave. It's hard. It's really hard. But I think that, especially for this summit, the important thing to know is that a shaman's greatest ability is that of being able to commune with nature, being able to hear what the wind and the trees and the water are saying and from that hearing, to know what to do, how to conduct yourself. That is the essence of it. I'm happy to say that my tradition, as I have learned, it makes that very accessible. But start simply by quieting the mind and listening to the water. Let the wind blow on your skin. Feel what the trees are telling you.

I'm really advocating that people garden right now. I want everybody to have a garden. But me, I got a garden, but I forgot that we shipped a tree over here that had a bunch of baby birds in it. The birds have been eating my garden. I will ask them to leave a little bit of kale for me. You know what I'm saying? But the baby birds have been in some will get the greenhouse so that I can grow something without them eating it all up, but it's a joy to watch them picking through my greens. That's the other thing is, can we really just take a moment and look at the fact that she has us inside for a reason. I think inside should turn into embrace. I've been doing a lot of couples counseling and stuff lately because I'm being quarantined is an opportunity for people to share what they have kept secret by being able to go away. I would say, talk to nature. Women, speak up. Men, support that and recognize that the human race is on the line by our behavior. I'm optimistic that we'll get the less than right this time. I'm optimistic. I'm hopeful.

HeatherAsh: Good. Can you share with us, Yeye, a ceremony or a ritual for us to reconnect to put our prayers in the right place, to move through fear?

Luisah: Okay, so on the fear thing, in my book *Jambalaya*, I think in Chapter Nine, there's a ritual for fear and courage, and it's a 10-day ritual that you really, really want to perform especially at a time like this when seemingly there is so much to fear. There's the virus. There's the violence. There's the loneliness. There's the scarcity. There's all of that. People go to my website. You'll see that I'm holding rituals and classes and stuff to address all of this. Here's the best and easiest practice that a person can do is if you get just a clear glass of water and a candle and set it so that the light of the candle reflects in the water. You want to close your eyes and take nine slow, deep breaths. While you are doing that, you are inhaling what you need and exhaling, which you don't. So, in this case, you would inhale health and exhale contagion. You would inhale courage and exhale fear.

You continue to do that until you have named nine attributes that you want to bring into yourself and nine that you want to send out with the exhaling breath. When you open your eyes, look directly at the light of the candle reflecting in the water because with the breathing, you will have put monkey mind aside, the mind that chats all the time. Looking directly into the water, you will begin to see images. It's important not to do a harsh judgment on it and say, "Oh, well, this is just a reflection of the light." No, let your consciousness show you what it's trying to show you. If you see something, just jot it down, just make the note to that effect because spirit is always talking to us when we are quiet enough to do that. After about 15 minutes, you want to pick up the glass, and you want to speak into the water the blessings that you want. I call for blessing of health. I call for blessing of protection. You speak that into the water and then drink that water. That is one of the simplest things that we can do. You can find out more about how water rituals work from the scientific point of view. There's a book called *Messages from Water*. You know that? Dr. Emoto did his experiments that show that water is receptive and responsive. This is a simple thing that you can do anytime, the breath, breathing in, releasing what you don't need, allowing your consciousness to show you what is going on, and then to say a blessing into the water and drink it, embody it. That's the easiest thing. For the fear, definitely look in Chapter Nine of *Jambalaya* for the fear and courage ritual because fears will pop up. At this time, fears will pop up, and we need to have a right relationship to them.

HeatherAsh: Why are rituals so important right now? There are two things I'm thinking is the importance of ritual, and you also shared about doing ritual over time, to not just think, oh, I just need to do one ritual, and then the fear is gone. Is that a place doing ritual over time? Also, that mindfulness of creating sacred space to heal trauma, to heal grief. So how do we crack that for ourselves and for the people that we're around?

Luisah: Again, I have three actually four books to answer that. There's *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals*. There is another one called *Festival of the Bones: Celebrating the Ancestors*. It is a 10-volume that tells you everything you need to know about doing ancestor work. There is *Carnival of the Spirit*, which shows us how to celebrate different things. There is *On Holy Ground: Commitment and Devotion to Sacred Lands*, which I co-wrote with Leilani Birely. All of those are very, very instructional. But, in general, ritual is important because it actually changes the neural pathways in the brain. It actually changes so that you understand beyond just the intellect, you understand in the emotions and in the spirit. It changes habits, and it helps to move us through the progressions of life. One of the problems that we have is that most of our rites of passage and rituals have been truncated. So we're not clear about our own growth.

We're not clear about our relationship like on a monthly basis, our relationship to the new and the full moon, our relationship to the seasons, our relationships to the developmental stages in life, from birth to growth, to maturation, to eldering, and our relationship to spirit. All of these things that make us human got sacrificed on the assembly line of material production. We neglected these things. We're coming to understand that we must all recover our indigenous mind. We must all recover our indigenous mind so that we can create. Once you learn the basic principles of creating ritual, it is something that can be done and be very, very effective. Like, at my age, I'm old enough now to remember a time when people did not have altars in the street. We now know, if somebody dies here, if there's an accident here or whatever, that people come and they bring candles, and they bring flowers. That was not always so. That has come into our consciousness as a way to return to village, return to our indigenous mind. Of course, centuries ago, roadside shrines were commonplace. We got away from that. Now, we're coming to understand that as a community, we need to do that. We need to honor collectively what has occurred. We have come to learn that certain places hold a particular kind of energy. We need to recognize those things. It's very, very important to create ritual to manage the energy, manage the archetypes, take us through the various stages of the month, the season, and human life. I'm very glad to see that we are returning to doing that. It will be returning to our indigenous mind that corrects our relationship to nature. That's where we have to go.

HeatherAsh: Would you say that indigenous mind is that all of us have access to service to ancestors, to nature?

Luisah: Absolutely.

HeatherAsh: I think sometimes those of us that have such Westernized minds. I've watched people get into this place of like, well, I have to get rid of the Western mind in order to find the indigenous mind. I'm always reminding people, they can coexist. You have to bring back the indigenous mind and that wisdom and use the Western as a tool.

Luisah: Yeah, yeah. See, that's why we have it as backwards. We've been taught to deny the indigenous mind and only go with the left brain way of doing things. That's what's caused the wars. I tell my students, your intuition is your mammalian survival system. Now let's talk about this. Human beings, if we look at the animal kingdom, we have the least fur. We have the dullest teeth. Our eyesight ain't that good. We don't smell all that well. You know what I'm saying? We don't have the best hearing in the world. So among the other critters, the gift that we have is the sixth sense, the clair sense, the intuition. If you develop your intuition, you'll be able to tell when somebody is lying. You don't have to carry a lie detector machine around in order to find out if somebody's lying. What we

want to do is pay attention to our intuition because that is the mammalian survival mechanism and put our intellect in service of our intuition. It's not throwing one away for the other. It is balancing. Right now, because our Western education has separated us from from intuition, the job is reclaiming that indigenous mind and working with it. I think that every major discovery that serves human beings, the person who discovered it or invented it will admit that they meditated on it or they dreamed about it. They heard it when they were sitting out in the trees or whatever. That's when intuition and intellect came together and really created something useful.

I think it's important for me to say here, my goodness, I've been teaching what I call practical ancestor reverence, which is a class I do in the fall, for about 35 years now. The big problem that I run into, I run into people of Euro-American descent who say, "Oh, I'm just a Heinz 57 variety mutt," or "All my ancestors were bad people who did terrible things, and I don't want to have nothing to do with them." I run upon people of color and black people who say, "Oh, my ancestors allowed us to fall into slavery, and they didn't give us inheritable wealth." To both groups, I say, bullshit. Yeah, I'm sorry. Everybody comes with assets and liabilities. Until you learn to celebrate your assets and take responsibility for your liabilities, you cannot be whole. I am very much into helping people get to wholeness. That's the real work that we have to do. I go back to alafia.

Again, imagine, imagine a world where everybody is healthy. Sometimes I fantasize, I say, what if old age and natural sickness was the only way that we died? What if we didn't kill each other anymore? Wouldn't that be interesting? What if we just didn't kill each other anymore? There would still be death, but it would be natural, not this wanton murder that is going on. I hate to say it, but sometimes it feels like there are human sacrifice rituals going on, and we have to stop that. We really have to stop that. When people tell me, well, I don't know, there's ancestral cleansing, there is healing, there is the transformation of energy. It does start with, my students, whatever transgenerational curses you have come with, you have to make the decision that it stops with me. I'm the one who's going to transform this energy and get ready for the work. It's a lot of work. It's a lot of work. I remember when I was first initiated, I went to see a priestess down in LA. I was complaining because I had so much work to do. I was like, oh, what have I gotten myself into? She looked at me she said, "I have no sympathy for you." I said, "What?" She said, "No, baby, because all this work that you're talking about, you agreed to do that before you even came to earth. Quit whining and get to it." That's what we have to quit whining right now and do the work of becoming better humans. That's it. That's it.

HeatherAsh: Yes. What I see in you is that you have so much joy. You do the work. You've done the work. You're teaching the work. Yet you also bring in the sensuality and the beauty and the joy.

Luisah: Yes, that was my instruction. When Coronavirus first hit, I came to my altar, and I did divination with my goddess. I said, how shall I conduct myself? She said, bring joy and plenty and keep your eye on what the government does. So I do storytellings and rituals online and classes. Me and another woman are taking food to the homeless. I'm keeping my eye on what's going on with the government. I think there was a man in New York, some demonstrators were being chased by the police, and he opened his door and let 70 people into his house. We have to have more people like that. That's what we have to do. I want to send sympathy out also to the older white man who the police knocked down and busted his skull. Here's what is really scary. When I was fighting for black studies in the '60s up at Reed College, we took over the administration building to fight for blacks studies. At the time, we had an organization of young white people who agreed to make a circle around us and put themselves between us and the police. That work, that was very, very effective because, at that time, those young white people were regarded as flower children and harmless hippies. The police did not want to beat up their own children. But now, we have a psychotic in charge who is saying, "Kill them all. Kill them all." When I heard the blowback about an old man, 75 years old, being damaged like that, I had to say as a black woman, if you don't care nothing about an old white man, he really don't care nothing about a young black man. Everybody is in jeopardy now, and everybody really, really need to know. I think that's part of what's going on is that it is so blatant and so Hitlarian that people's eyes are really being opened. Are we going to make it? We're going to make it.

HeatherAsh: We're going to make it. I want to ask one last question of you of that place of as we really open to what's happening now. How do we stay sustainable spiritually? So last question, I would love.

Luisah: Yes. Here's the thing that I have to say. Right now, we are being called upon to embrace the mystery. We don't know exactly what's coming or what we are to become, but we know that it can't be what it's been. It cannot be what it's been. So the real spiritual job right now is to be open, be listening for what spirit is telling us to do and be ready to do that. Now, I got all kinds of divination tools. I must say I have 35 different tarot decks. I read shells and coconut pieces and stones and nuts and gemstones, all kinds of things. I remember going to my goddess Oshun, who's the Joy Queen, and I said, "Mama, it's me. It's your girl Teish. You know I'm one of the good ones. I do whatever you tell me to do. I would like for you to please send me a vision maybe of the next two years so that I can plan what I'm going to do." When I shut up talking and got quiet, the answer that came back was, she said, "Do what I tell you to do today, and then

get up and do what I tell you to do tomorrow." It's not a Sunday go to a meeting thing. It's an every day, you get up every day, and you ask spirit, what is the best that I can manifest today? What is the kindest thing that I can do? What's the most powerful thing that I can do? Where's the beauty? What have you for me today? What do I give? What do I receive today? I really do tell people, I tell my students before your feet hit the floor when you first open your eyes in the bed, list 11 things that you're grateful for. Give you a gratitude. When you get in the bed at night, don't get in exhausted. Lie down and call forth that which you need and want and watch it show up in your dreams. You really, really have to make it a daily practice. You can do it from your bed. You can do it from your kitchen table. It would be wonderful if we could all go sit on a mountaintop, but we don't have that luxury. But we do need our spirits intact every day.

HeatherAsh: Thank you.

Luisah: You're welcome.

HeatherAsh: That is beautiful wisdom that we all need to take in daily gratitude, daily practice, daily listening.

Luisah: That's right. That's all there is, really. Everything else is elaborations on that. That's the basic thing. Once we understand that we are always being spoken to, our main thing is to get into flow. This is why the moon cycles are so important, to get in the flow of the energy. You get to the place where you know what's happening. You see the external manifestation. A few weeks ago, I asked a friend to bring me some oranges because I wanted some oranges. She brought me five oranges. I juiced them, and then I boiled the rind of the oranges. I put them in a nice vase, and I put them in front of the vessel for my goddess. Since then, people I don't even know have dropped bags of oranges on my steps. I've been giving out boxes of oranges. I gave her oranges; she's giving me oranges. I got a sack of clementines over there that I'm going to open up. What happens is the more you do this, the more you see start to see how that energy is moving and what you're giving and what you're receiving. It's beautiful.

HeatherAsh: Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and your history and your love of the Divine in all the manifestations.

Luisah: Ashe.

HeatherAsh: Everyone, if we can really hold this place of daily ritual, of opening to the mystery, of listening each day, that is our work at this time.

© 2020 The Shift Network. All rights reserved.