

The Outerknown  
Season 1, Episode 1  
Spiritual Bypassing with Melissa Noel Renzi  
Full length episode: 56:38

Melissa Renzi 0:00

We are all human beings. And at the same time it very much dismisses the lived experiences and the systemic injustice that surrounds us and is ingrained and you know, really woven into the fabric of our society when we say that. Right, so we tend to do the things that are like call it self care when it's not actually very caring to oneself at all.

Lane Collins 0:26

Yeah, I feel like we've collectively created a lot of thought distortion around self care and the concept of self care that's unfortunately used to justify so many to your point, harmful behaviors.

Jackie Peterson 0:47

I'm Jackie Peterson.

Lane Collins 0:48

And I'm Lane Collins.

Jackie Peterson 0:50

And this is the Outerknown a podcast that shines a light on the outer edges of inner knowing.

Lane Collins 1:04

Hey, Jackie

Jackie Peterson 1:05

Hi, Lane.

Lane Collins 1:06

Happy first episode of the Outerknown!

Jackie Peterson 1:09

I know - this is so wild. I am excited and nervous and honored. And like, I'm feeling all the feelings right now.

Lane Collins 1:19

I feel lucky as hell to be doing this with you.

Jackie Peterson 1:22

Yeah, me too. Me too. I had no idea what this was gonna turn out to be and thus far, everything has - the conversations that we're having have exceeded my wildest dreams. And I feel so so fortunate that we've been able to talk to just this amazing crew of folks and listeners, you are in for a super, super big treat.

Lane Collins 1:43

And we've talked to so many incredibly special people for this season. Everyone from someone who specializes in animal communication to a psychic medium to a witch and tarot reader, to someone who is deeply specialized in lucid dreaming. So exciting. Yeah, all of these things really tie in to this concept of exploring the self. But in relation to mystery and the unknown that we are so curious about.

Jackie Peterson 2:12

Yeah, I feel like this last year has been a case study in what it's like to live through something that's really unknown. Even on a personal level, as somebody who is just a consummate planner, like I had just had to chuck everything out the window and lean into, just surrender to whatever was going to happen this year. And I think being able to do that led to some really wonderful surprises and beautiful things that flowered in my life, particularly starting this podcast.

Lane Collins 2:42

Amazing. Yeah, and I love that tie into flowering. This season is something I'm so proud of. And, you know, I can't help but think about when we first set out to do this podcast several months back, and we were looking for sort of in our witchy ways, an auspicious time to launch it. And today, April 26 - our launch day for our very first episode - is the full pink Super Moon in Scorpio. And while Scorpio full moons tend to be a little bit spicy, that seems to be the right thing for us.

Jackie Peterson 3:16

Yeah, we are very spicy.

Lane Collins 3:18

So we chose this one - and disclaimer, I am not an electional astrologer by any means -but this seemed tantalizing because number one, it's a pink moon, which is all about the spring and the blossoming of the spring, the transition of the seasons, and really coming into your own. And that really tied into some of the self-realization, self-actualization, self care kind of themes that we were talking about when we wanted to kind of set up a theme for season one.

Jackie Peterson 3:45

I love that.

Lane Collins 3:45

And at the same time, it's a Scorpio moon, which means transformation, it means challenging. And we've certainly gotten into a little bit of spicy topics around both of our feelings on self care and how that's been so kind of distorted in by our current culture.

And I'm really, really excited about the conversation that we had with Melissa, who we'll get to in just a moment around self care, but not only self care, particularly how spiritual bypassing, shows up in modern day.

Jackie Peterson 4:21

Our conversation with Melissa was so moving and so inspiring. And I'm still thinking about it many, many weeks later, in part because one, Melissa is just a wonderful person. And she does a lot of really wonderful work in the world. But what I love about our conversation is that it felt so present and so much of what we talk about is so resonant because we're starting to see it everywhere. And I love that she really goes into a lot of the spiritual underpinnings of those but also how it's showing up right now and that you don't necessarily have to be a part of a spiritual community to have witnessed some of these things happening, to have to really understand what it means. Because I think we're seeing it every day as all of us have been stuck in the house for the last 14 plus months at this point. We're constantly looking at screens. We're seeing all these messages from folks who are dismissing the pandemic, dismissing people's feelings around the pandemic dismissing people's experiences of racism and racialized trauma. And so much of what we talk about is just it's so relevant. And I really love the way that Melissa frames everything up.

Lane Collins 5:29

Absolutely, I was so inspired by this conversation, and I'm so inspired to continue all of these conversations with you and all of our amazing guests for the season to come.

Jackie Peterson 5:38

So let's get to it!

Welcome, Melissa! We are so grateful for you joining our podcast today. We wanted to start out with a little bit of an introduction. So tell us about your work - you do so many fascinating and wonderful things. So give us a little bit of a broad strokes, about yourself your work, whatever else you'd like to share with us?

Melissa Renzi 6:01

Well, first thing I say thank you so much for inviting me to your podcast for this interview. I really appreciate being here. And so a little bit about me, I am a yoga teacher - I'm a trauma informed yoga teacher with a social work background. So I am not currently practicing in like a conventional sense right now per se, but I still have my license and really, like, Social Work perspective and approach is threaded through everything that I do in the current moment, whether it is with yoga, or activism and, and even in a lot of the retreats that I lead around the world or pre pandemic I did. Hopefully, getting those back off the ground eventually. But I also lead retreat experiences for introverts and highly sensitive people to come together and experience a sense of belonging, feel seen, heard, and be able to experience the world as it is, while having their needs - having our needs - and preferences really honored and met as well. So yeah, I don't know if you want me to share a little bit more about my background, and just where what my story actually is that might be helpful.

Lane Collins 7:15

Yes, please! Tell us your story.

Melissa Renzi 7:19

There are too many stories to tell. But what when I was thinking about this, you know, this podcast, it really forces me to look back at like... So yoga and social work in many ways have been part of my life for over 20 years, almost since I was, really since I was a teenager. Because I began with doing group work even as a student and leading retreats in high school. And then yoga entered my life when I was also in high school around, I think I was about 16, my mom began taking me to an ashram. And I was initiated into the tradition of Kriya Yoga, which is a pretty like rigorous sort of meditation and pranayama practice. And I did that for a couple of years, got really into that with my mom, you know, experienced some of just the, I don't know what you want to call it. But the wider experiences that you know, people are oftentimes looking for in meditation. And really, like I wanted to live in an ashram for a period of time, like I really wanted to be this like deeply spiritual person that just like, almost lived the life of a renunciant. And then I went off to college, and realized that it was really challenging to like live the life of a college student and be engaged in academia and still be a spiritual practitioner. And I always had this feeling like I had to choose. Like, I felt like I didn't know how to care about social issues. And so like, even though today, this all makes perfect sense to me, but I didn't really know how to care about those things and be engaged with these worldly problems, while simultaneously like trying to go into these like deeper meditative states, in which you know, we're all one and you know, we can get into some of these other teachings sometimes where there's this fall into this idea that like what we're living in is an illusion. So then, balancing with that, like, how does this really apply to living everyday life. So in some ways, a, you know, meditation and a lot of the teachings were still part of my life for a long time. But in college, I began studying more spiritual traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, even studied Sanskrit for a period of time, but really more through like an academic lens is less of a practitioner. And that was like, also I was studying social work and then went to grad school for social work, and I was working as a social worker. And so a lot of my attention was very outward oriented in the world and not as inward and it really wasn't until The passing of my mom in 2007, which really is some of the backdrop belong all of this is kind of a challenging relationship with my mom and her mental health. And some of the extreme, she took spiritual teachings and practices to in some ways, but it wasn't really until after her passing, that I began to dive deeper into yoga practices, spiritual traditions kind of went on a journey around the world, all kinds of little New Agey communities here and there, and found a lot of what was helpful, but also witnessed and experienced a lot of harm in that process. At the same time, in you know, more recent years, and especially with my teaching now, and my own personal practice, it's become a lot clearer, like how to actually live in the world in an engaged way. I'm not bypassing or turning my back on the problems that are surrounding us right now part of our lives, and still have that, you know, deeper spiritual kind of devotional practices. Well, that's a little bit in a lot of my teaching and yoga right now is probably I don't want to say informed by it, because that sounds kind of weird. But like, a lot of those negative experiences, the harm have really forced me to even take a closer look of like how, like, I don't want to perpetuate that. Right? So how can I

ensure that my yoga classes are actually approachable and accessible to the person who says that they never thought they would see themselves in a yoga class or things of that nature?

Lane Collins 11:38

Awesome. Thank you for sharing your journey. As Jackie and I were discussing originally starting up a podcast on esoteric and spiritual topics, one of the things that just became pretty immediately clear to us was that we couldn't avoid this sometimes, you know, overlap of some distorted and harmful issues with these communities. And so when we were researching this topic of spiritual bypassing, we came across your work. And one of the things that struck me was that it's just so clear and concise the way that you explain it. And I think it was very clear as well that it came from, you know, personal experience. And I guess, just to kind of break it down a little further. For listeners who may be new to this concept, how would you define spiritual bypassing.

Melissa Renzi 12:29

And so the term of course, is not new. And I referenced this in the article that I wrote too, right. So John Wellwood was a psychologist that I believe coined the term, or at least he's been credited with coining the term - I think he did - back in the 1980s. And I actually, let me just pull up his exact definition, just because I want to be like...

Lane Collins 12:50

Sure.

Melissa Renzi 12:51

And I can give you mine too. But he says, you know, that it is used to describe the tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks. So really, it's this kind of propensity to jump ahead, right, or to like rise above some of the actual realities, or the actual emotions that we ourselves are dealing with, or that other people around us are dealing with. Because we, you know, we think that we can kind of just jump over that, right, in some respect. And the you know, of course, the effect of that is that it oftentimes can cause a great deal of harm, because we're not actually looking at, you know, seeing the person in front of us or the the problem, the systemic problem in front of us and such. So, you know, John Wellwood created that term, based on what he was seeing in a Buddhist community that he was part of. And of course, I think many of your listeners, especially in the yoga world, we see this a lot in wellness communities. I think this spiritual, bypassing, you know, exists in all kinds of spiritual traditions, you know, across the board, what I'm most familiar with, of course, is more of yoga land, and in the wellness communities and such.

Lane Collins 14:15

Yeah, one of the things that struck me in your description of it, it sort of reminded me of sort of avoidant personality types or emotional or relational avoidance. I'm a novice to those types of things. I was just kind of curious if you saw any overlap there.

Melissa Renzi 14:30

Yeah, you know, I guess it's not something that I've considered deeply to, like, you know, in terms of, I don't know, if you're thinking also like personality types, attachment style, like all of that, too. But yeah, I could definitely see that that could be there.

Lane Collins 14:46

One of the amazing things about your article is that you broke down not only kind of what it is and where it may show up, but also ways that it commonly shows up and I was hoping we could walk through those with you as really clear examples, because that's one of the things I thought was so great about your article, and one of those specifically was attachment.

Melissa Renzi 15:06

Okay.

Lane Collins 15:06

And I'm curious, you know, what are your thoughts on how that shows up?

Melissa Renzi 15:11

So this one, I think, I think can be just really confusing for people again, like, it's sort of like, how do we apply this teaching to living in the world, especially when a lot of texts depending on what we're talking about what tradition a lot of the texts are, maybe for renunciates, who are actually renouncing their homes and their clothing or whatever, like all of the things that way, right? But when we consider that, you know, most of us are householders living in the world, a lot of times it gets used as a spiritual bypass to say, you know, like, I don't, I'm not attached, like, I'm not affected by whatever this thing is, because I'm because I'm not attached. I'm not, you know, like I'm not attached to, there's something to be said about not being attached to the outcome. That's actually a really important thing, right? But like that I'm not attached to this relationship, right? So I'm not, but then that can be an excuse for not getting to, or not like actually investing emotionally in a relationship and actually treating the person in front of you as more than an object, right?

Lane Collins 16:11

Yeah.

Melissa Renzi 16:12

There's this, this idea that we need to like get rid of all of the things that we own, in order to be free of attachment, where, you know, one of one of my teachers Kaia Midland, very much recommend her course on the Bhagavad Gita. But she talks or she gives the teaching of non attachment as being more about not assigning improper value to those objects into the world, right, like, so the house, the roof above your head has a purpose, it has a value to like, keep us safe and dry and warm, and all of those things. But like, to what extent you know, do we get and there's, of course, there's reason to be upset when something goes wrong in your house to right it would be like to just say that we shouldn't get upset about that, too, like to not be frustrated or stressed out or angry

or sad, can also be a spiritual bypass. But then we also could look at the teaching is like, these are the things that happen in a house, and how can we have some sense of distance? Like there is isn't just like an either/or - there could be, you know, a yes/and sort of thing here, if I'm making any sense? I'm not sure. So just like recognizing that there are objects that we oftentimes assign more value to you, right, then is needed, and then that causes suffering in some way. Right?

Lane Collins 17:31

Yeah.

Melissa Renzi 17:32

But it doesn't mean not have those objects, it doesn't mean to not have those relationships.

Jackie Peterson 17:36

Right. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Absolutely.

Lane Collins 17:39

Yeah, it sounds and one of the things I think about often when this particular concept, I'm most familiar with it from like a Buddhist philosophy perspective, but one of the things that I kind of consider is that it's almost like a balance between attachment and detachment in that it also reminds me of how Alan Watts would always say, you don't come into the world, you are of the world, you are very highly related and interconnected to not only other people, but everything within the world. You are we are we are all of the world. And so that resonates and kind of what you're saying, but also kind of like the the next point that you made, which is the we're all one slash "I don't see color" concept, which unfortunately, we're all familiar with. You know, what are your thoughts on how that shows up?

Melissa Renzi 18:23

Yeah, I mean, this is one we've, I mean, have heard so much, we've all heard so much over the years, and in a lifetime, but especially in the last year, it's become a mantra and up for lack of a better term right now, but like, in and of itself for so many people. And I mean, I think that, you know, so a lot of people saying this, of course, are not necessarily like infused with some of the other teachings that we might be talking about, but it does, I think, oftentimes, it comes from a really well intentioned place, right? Like it comes from this place where people want to treat everyone equally or think that they're treating everyone equally. And that's, you know, that's the lens that they're they think that they're viewing this as, but then you know, when we look at I think where it comes from in spiritual communities oftentimes is that we get a glimpse, you know, in Buddhism in, you know, in Vedic philosophy and a lot of like the non dual kinds of traditions as well. Like I'm thinking of non dual Tantra and vitae, Vedanta and all of those good non dualism, where there's the teaching that we are the divine in some way, right like that, we are all part of the same essence, that there is no separation between you or I, or, you know, the living beings around us and all that is in the manifestation here, right? And sometimes people actually get that glimpse right in their actual meditation

practice or with something that they're doing where they feel that deep interconnection, right. Or even like for those who have explored the world psychedelics get that experience, sometimes that deep sense of interconnectedness. And it can be really easy then to say, Oh, no, we are all one human race. And because yes, we do, we all do have the same blood and you know, more or less like all of We are all human beings. And at the same time, it very much dismisses the lived experiences and the systemic injustice that surrounds us and is ingrained and, you know, really woven into the fabric of our society when we say that. And so yeah, it's a it's it's upsetting, because I think if people still tend to keep clinging to those words, right, if I don't see color, or all lives matter, or we're one, there isn't a you know, just kind of clinging to the love and light sort of languaging.

Jackie Peterson 20:52  
Right.

Melissa Renzi 20:53  
And I know what it comes from a good place, but it's, you know, it, the impact of it is pretty harmful, because we're dismissing the very relative reality that we live in, right. So that I guess that's I didn't really finish that. But just the idea of like the in an ultimate level or an absolute reality, according to certain non dual teachings is that we are all one. But there is also a very real experience that we live in, that is not just an illusion, it is actually the thing that we are experiencing moment to moment that cannot be dismissed or bypassed.

Jackie Peterson 21:26  
Yeah, exactly. It's like the idea that people like to toss around the phrase "race is a construct." Well, yes, absolutely. But racism is very real, the impacts of racism are very real. So we can't just... Yes, we can acknowledge saying "race is a construct" - it's something completely made up. However, there are very real consequences and very real realities that people face as a result of that.

Melissa Renzi 21:47  
Absolutely.

Jackie Peterson 21:48  
So I appreciate I appreciate you breaking that down.

Melissa Renzi 21:50  
Yeah.

Lane Collins 21:51  
Yeah, and I think to your earlier point, as well, Melissa, something you kind of pointed out there as it comes from a desire to see themselves as not that. And some of that, unfortunately, is just a desire at because like one of the things that I learned from Ibram X. Kendi in his explanation of racism is that we're all inherently racist, because we live in a racist society, and that we need to, you know, diffuse the concept of "racist" being some explosive term, especially in our white communities. Like we need to accept that



we are inherently racist because of the systemic racism that we live within, and come from that place of working to be anti racist, as opposed to pushing away the concept at all costs. And so while you know, as a spiritual practitioner, like, I definitely have experienced some of the we're all one sort of concept, but at the same time, to you to both of your points we live in reality as well. We live on this plane, and therefore we must participate in this plane, we can't detach from it.

Melissa Renzi 22:56

Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Lane Collins 22:58

So the third out concept that you outlined with good vibes only can you tell us a little bit about that?

Melissa Renzi 23:04

Again, like all of these, they tend, they come from a really well intentioned place. I think, I think sometimes this comes from a place, though, where people are like, working on their personal development and setting boundaries too, you know. So I just like want to give people the benefit of the doubt with that, but it ends up having this effect of toxic positivity. Because inherently like when you say "Good vibes only," or only positive, whatever, here that it just by nature, alienates those who might be feeling something other, those who might be dealing with an actual mental health issue, right, or depression and, you know, all kinds of other factors that way. But also people that might need some extra support in a given moment, and might be really struggling and feeling sad, like that doesn't feel very welcoming to say, "Good vibes only." And it's, it also tends to like, you know, it rejects right, I'm kind of getting at that anyway, but where we can get into maybe like more specific examples of this or teachings, but like, if we really want to look at the principle of like, just non rejection, this is a place to look at it right like that. We are there is a reason that we feel certain emotions. And I guess maybe that's the next one that you're going to get to in a moment, but like, they have a particular purpose. And so I don't know if I want to say much more about that right now. But the "good vibes only" tends to leave out a lot of people or a lot of experiences. So like one of the things in any group that I do is like there's always part of the group agreements is that all vibes are all parts, all feelings are welcome. And really giving people that reminder that they don't have to be positive or they don't have to share something, you know, good in their life and every single moment that it is helpful to, to have, you know, some focus and attention on those things at times, right. But we also need to be able to be real and raw and genuine with the lived human experiences that we have.

Jackie Peterson 25:07

But the follow up to that, which is that, are there particular spiritual traditions that you can point to that embody that or that you might say, would be a particular teaching of just so that people can be aware of it?

Melissa Renzi 25:21

Yeah, I mean, I would say, in many respects, Tantra encompasses that. Also some

Buddhist teachings as well. You know, there's sort of a deeper, bigger thing that I'm not even sure I feel as comfortable talking about right now. But I would say like, there are other, this isn't a spiritual tradition, so to speak. But there are other kind of models that I feel are very useful in being able to kind of meet those parts of ourselves. Where a lot of spiritual like the actual other traditions that go back, you know, centuries or 1000s of years might have more of a perspective, or may have changed over time, because there's so many different traditions within traditions. But a lot of it might be more about like witnessing and non rejection.

Jackie Peterson 26:07

Okay

Melissa Renzi 26:08

Where as there is a model of therapy that I really have come to appreciate over recent years, called internal family systems that takes things a step further, where really like, there is no part or emotion of yourself that is negative. But beyond just like witnessing or being present and compassionate, there's a process of actually getting to know what that emotion is there for what its role is, or what that part of yourself is showing up for. And understanding it's good intention in some way.

Jackie Peterson 26:40

Okay.

Melissa Renzi 26:41

Yeah.

Lane Collins 26:41

That makes a lot of sense. And kind of going back to the "good vibes only," the thing that this really actually triggered in me, even beyond spiritual communities is the entire kind of culture of Instagram right now, particularly around self care, and the concept of self care. But also in kind of, like, the whole influencers world, where our ongoing cultural events are not addressed, because capitalism. But also... you know, one of the things that really strikes me is in terms of how we think about and talk about these things, particularly self care, self care, as an example, right now. We dismiss the inherently difficult parts of this in terms of like the actual emotions kind of to your point. You know, self care more broadly, right now is treated as like spa treatments, or flying off to Mexico, in the middle of a pandemic, to, you know, have a vacation and go on a little cruise or something. As opposed to that being a concept of self work, and parenting or caring, literally, for yourself in that way of responsibility and accountability. And not only like, sure a lot of it could be getting a massage, because you need to take care of your body. But it strikes me that we're sort of in a time where there's like a cult of like a combination of capitalism, white supremacy, and honestly, misogyny as well. I think I see a big overlap in spiritual and yoga communities, sometimes on Instagram, with diet culture, and almost using self care and spirituality as an excuse to treat fasting as something that's useful for your eating disorder. You know, it's there's such a, like, a really intricate connection between all of these things right now. And I kind of see it as

almost like a, honestly a spiritual starvation. I was just curious if you had any thoughts on that?

Melissa Renzi 28:37

Yeah, I have. I do have a lot of thoughts on that. I'll try to keep that keep track of some things here in my head that you'd because there's so much I want to respond to with what you mentioned. I mean, the one thing I feel - I notice - and maybe it's sometimes this has to do with like, depending on, you know, we're kind of following and when, but I do feel like a lot of what you're talking about is there and at some, in some ways, it's shifting. In some ways it has especially like in the last year or two. That, what you're talking about with self care is something I struggled with, you know, maybe five, six years ago with my business where I was like, trying to clarify what I was doing, and everybody was like, "Oh, like you're teaching people self care," and I was like, "No, no, it's deeper," but I can't come up with like the language or how I want to express this. Because it is more like toward what you're talking about, of doing this deeper, you know, and not just like going off to a retreat to do deep inner work on yourself, but doing the deeper work so that you can actually come to your life and to the people around you and your communities in a way that is actually beneficial for everyone. right, rather than just you know, something that's temporary or like it's instant gratification or really heartily to the point of diet culture, creating it I mean, in some ways it can end up creating like another disorder with you know, unnecessarily right and causing more Um, and I mean, that's the interesting thing is there's so much overlap, though, between spiritual communities. And then there's like very extreme wellness groups as well. And I don't know if either of you have listened to the Conspirituality podcast, but that's one I'd very much recommend if you're interested in how the wellness world and conspiracy theories have converged. Matthew Remski, Julian Walker, and Derek Beres are the three doing that podcast, and it's, it's excellent. But I think you're also you're touching on, you mentioned a lot of other like isms and white supremacy and everything else. But you're also touching on individualism and that being a big part of it really, you know, it's so ingrained in our American society, right. And I think that that's just so prevalent in the wellness communities, because there's this idea that, like, if you just do all these things that you can maybe create your own reality that'll bring us to the very next ones in a moment. Yeah, that I think it's the rogue individualism at hand, and then the misunderstanding of like, what self care really is, and like what lasting self care could be. Right? So we tend to do the things that are like call it self care, when it's not actually very caring to oneself at all.

Lane Collins 31:16

Yeah, I feel like we've collectively created a lot of thought distortion around self care and the concept of self care that's unfortunately used to justify so many, to your point, harmful behaviors. Yeah, thanks for exploring that with us. I also wanted to touch on your point around anger and fear or bad emotions and how that plays into this.

Melissa Renzi 31:37

Yeah, I guess, I started speaking a little bit to that before with the "good vibes only" and

making space for all emotions. But I mean, we see this quite a lot going back to the love and light concept, right of like, and even beyond, like love and light, there's this, there's this very widespread sort of idea that like, we can have different opinions, and just like we should all respect each other. And like, I agree that we should, that there are effective ways and human ways to communicate about different issues. But it tends to, like, in a lot of these things that I'm seeing a lot of it's on social media, but it happens in one on one conversations too where there's this idea that we can like talk about all this and but we shouldn't get angry. Or that if you get angry about it, that there's something wrong with you. Where I worry so much when we get to this place where we can't, where anger is seen, and especially anger, but by certain people, right is seen as problematic. When anger, first of all, is a secondary emotion, right. And oftentimes, there's something else going on beneath that. But it also like is there as a protective mechanism. It can also be anger is there to motivate. It is the you know, can be the thing that allows aliveness to be felt to move us to action. Obviously, I'm not saying like, let's go around and be angry all the time and every moment of life. But at some point, that transforms. But yeah, I would say that the dismissal of anger and especially righteous anger, is really a problem in a lot of spiritual communities. And similarly, with fear, you know, I found it like really ironic, especially early on in the pandemic, so many people were saying, like, not to cave to fear, like the only thing to fear is fear itself, like not to be afraid of the virus. But at the same time, those people oftentimes and I hate to say like "those people," oftentimes these people aren't recognizing that they themselves have their own fears, right like that their fears are just showing up in a different way. And fear too, you know, is some is, is there for a reason. And sometimes it's actually telling us something that we should be fearful of. Sometimes it's something to simply explore and understand where it's coming from, what it might be protecting. I don't know if that helps at all, if you have other thoughts.

Jackie Peterson 34:08

Absolutely. I think part of it is too that some of these emotions, particularly anger and fear, are just inherent to us as human beings. And that, as you said, there, it's information. It's telling us something and that dismissing them doesn't really help. And then, you know, unless we sit with unless, we explore it, unless we sort of noodle on it, it's we're not going to move anywhere that we need to be.

Melissa Renzi 34:35

Yeah, I agree.

Jackie Peterson 34:36

And I think, you know, obviously, we don't want to sit in it. We don't want to stew in it. We didn't want to stay there forever. But I do think it's it's important not to dismiss those feelings when they do come up, particularly, you know, the idea of righteous anger, right. That's, that's a phrase that really deeply resonates with me because as a Black woman, you know, living in the 21st century, there's a lot I've been very righteously angry about, and I think I have also just an inherent sense of justice and injustice. And that's what that anger is connected to. And I think, you know, thinking about the ways in which certain communities are dismissed for being angry, it's like, well, anger is not going to do anything. Yes, it is. It's, you know, we're sounding the alarm bells folks, like

wake up. That to me is useful. And that, to me is a primary purpose of anger. It's like, Hey, listen, we tried to say things in all these other ways, we tried to speak softly, you know, we tried to wave the red flag, but no one was listening. And so here we are, and I'm really angry about it. I need you to listen, I need you to pay attention.

Lane Collins 35:41

Absolutely. Yeah, one of I would say the best things I've kind of learned and explored in training as a coach is really coming to the realization that all emotions are human into fear or deny our own emotions, or label them as bad as to fear or deny or label our own humanity as bad. And that these things are part of our actual biology and not just something that comes from society. Right. So I really I love all of that.

Melissa Renzi 36:11

Yeah.

Lane Collins 36:12

So the last one that you mentioned in your article was the law of attraction. And I'm very excited to talk about this one.

Jackie Peterson 36:18

I love this one.

Lane Collins 36:19

Tell me more.

Melissa Renzi 36:22

You know, this is one of those things like when we get off of this, I'm going to be like, "Oh, I forgot that example. I wanted to say this thing." Because this is just something that has gotten under my skin for way, way, way too long. You know, I want to just mention for a moment, I don't know if either of you are familiar with Christopher Wallace, or Christopher Harish Wallace, he is a Tantra teacher. He did a series I think like last summer, maybe YouTube videos called "Near enemies of the truth," which if it's still up there, your listeners might want to go and check that out. Because he talks, he goes through quite a few different kinds of like, you create your reality law of attraction kinds of things, and unpacks, the actual teaching and how that gets distorted, misconstrued. That said, this is just one of those that I was thinking about with respect to law of attraction, or any of this idea that you could like manifest manifest whatever it is that you believe or think, you know, there is some and I think it was in one of his, one of Christopher Wallace's, webinars or whatever you want to call it, where he's explained to, you know, you might create your experience of your reality, you might have some agency over that of creating some experience of your of the actual reality, but like that we don't actually create our reality. It dismisses privilege, it dismisses a lot of outer circumstances, it again goes very much into this kind of rugged individualism of you know, if you just try hard enough, if you just work hard enough, if you just believe enough, and it's hugely victim blaming as well.

Lane Collins 38:05

Yeah, I just I'm, So I, I'm a witch. And so this one in particular, is one that I've had a lot of struggles with, and a lot of just like internal wrestling with primarily because my spiritual practice is one that explores this concept, but from a very different lens than, "Oh, well, if you just think positively, it'll all be okay." Which kind of taps into the "good vibes only" concept as well. But it's something that, you know, I I definitely even recognize my privilege as openly identifying as a witch. There are places in the world still today where people are persecuted for such but it's something that I want to continue to keep in mind as a practitioner, and I'm curious, how are you seeing this kind of play out in, in live examples today?

Melissa Renzi 39:00

Hmm... Well, I'm really curious to hear more about what it means in the context of being a witch, but I'll answer your question. One of the things that I you know, I see this a lot with respect to even like the pandemic right like that, going back to if you like, if you live in fear that then you might be more susceptible to and there may be like, if we are stressed out sure our bodies are might be more susceptible to disease, right? Like we like that can be true but it dismisses a whole lot of other factors by saying that that you know, if you you know, if you just if you believe I've seen quite a bit of that but I guess surrounding the pandemic and the virus if like if people just you know, believe things a certain way then they'll be okay, blah, blah, blah. I see it also in the world, the icky world of business coaches.

Jackie Peterson 39:51

Mmmmmmm.

Melissa Renzi 39:51

Ummm right? Of just like the - what do you call them - I don't know, like the boss babe kind of...

Jackie Peterson 39:57

Yes!

Melissa Renzi 40:01

Or goddess this and that. Um, and, you know, I will say, like, I know somebody firsthand who like does, talks all about, has been for years talking about all the law of attraction stuff and you know how she grew her business. But she grew her business by lying - really. She grew her business by saying that she was making six figures a year when she was not making six figures a year, right. And so like people are then like you know taken by a lot of these people out there that are just, are charlatans and and I don't even think always see it themselves. Like it's still just like you know if you believe this and you know if you put your you know whatever it is, that that you too can you know attract you know your life partner, you know the love of your life. You, too, you know can have a six or seven figure business, and you know you too can, you know like the list goes on. And so I see that in a lot ways where it's, where people are being manipulated, people are

capitalizing on, I think people wanting to... And I hesitate to use this word, and I hope, Lane, that you like can understand where I'm coming from with this. Because like there's a sense of like magical thinking where I think that there's a whole lot of magic in the world already. And like there are ways to interact with the world around us that are, that can be, that - how do I say this - that like, that can have a sense of magic. Right, or like I think of Joanna Macy, who's been an activist, environmentalist, Buddhist teacher, she's like 90-something years old, is just. I don't remember her exact words but she had said something to this exact effect of like "Look around you. Take in the world around you. There is magic all over the place." But like we need to sometimes re-create it into something that it's not. And there's so much nuance to that so I'm not making a blanket statement that like you know there isn't something somewhere in there. But I think that oftentimes we're giving people this idea that if they're good enough, if they just do the right thing, you know, that they'll get these rewards. And then also just dismissing: What about life as it is? Right? And what about your inherent worth as you are because you exist?

Lane Collins 42:21  
Absolutely, yes.

Melissa Renzi 42:23  
So, yeah.

Jackie Peterson 42:24  
Yeah, I love the way you said that, because it hits on something that I've always felt really icky about the sort of landscape of coaching and people who present in that way. And I also have folks who have coaching businesses who say "Look at this money I'm making! Look at all these clients that I'm getting!" And you know they've tried to pitch me and I'm just like mmmmmmmmm – like something feels really icky about it. And you just hit the nail on the head, and kind of articulated why I feel that way and I just wanted to say that I really appreciate that. Because that's something I've been struggling to figure out and that's exactly it.

Lane Collins 43:03  
Yeah, and Melissa I think your point about nuance is right on the money. Like, it hits the nail on the head because I think there is so much, for example, some of these business coaches are taking it of, the point of view of like "Oh just change your thinking," like it's no big deal. And for example in my coaching practice, it's more about mindset. But I think as someone who has suffered from depression and anxiety my whole life, I understand this difficult bias that some people have around like, "Oh, depressed people! They should just think more positively!" And it goes back to the toxic positivity a little bit. And I do think it's very similar on a lot of these practices around like business coaching, the law of attraction and not actually truly understanding the deeper spiritual philosophies and context from history but just thinking like "Oh, it's fine." And it's very much bypassing in that way. It's just kind of uneducated or not very thoughtful. And I think that's where a lot of the issues lie.

Melissa Renzi 44:05

Yeah.

Jackie Peterson 44:06

Yeah, particularly as sort of the idea that, the idea of manifesting has become like a buzzword. I think especially, I've been very conscious of it in the last you know about year and half, two years, where everybody is talking about it. And one of the funniest and sort of on-the-nose things I've seen is that meme that's like "Maybe she manifested it. Maybe it's white privilege." And it's like, yeah, exactly! Like there's so many things, so many other obstacles or circumstances that you can't just wipe away and say, "Ok, if I just put it out in the universe, it's gonna happen." But it's like people don't have access to internet, people don't have access to capital, people don't have access to, you know, hardware, people don't have access to buy books or invest in coursework or all these other things that maybe got you to where you are. But me just saying "I want to make a six-figure income" and then - poof! - it's just happening is not an equivalent. It's not the same at all.

Melissa Renzi 45:05

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I mean you can have the thoughts, the beliefs, even the actions and then - but if the conditions are not such for that to happen... And I'm not saying there aren't like hurdles that we can't you know overcome to some degree - but like there are still a lot of different variables in terms of the societal conditions or immediate conditions around us that either enable that or don't, you know, in a given moment in time too, right. Yeah, you know one thing just as we were talking that came up that I also just wanna mention in case the ever happens with any of your listeners. I haven't seen this recently but I was involved in one of those gifting circles - I don't know if you've heard of these. Some years ago - going back maybe, probably like 9 or 10 years ago or so - umm and that is a perfect example of the law of attraction stuff. Or how so many - ohh goodness - how so many different spiritual teachings or like personal development stuff were used to manipulate people. So for those who don't know about this, like there's a, you know, you receive an invitation from another woman to join this gifting circle where you give the woman like - they have all kinds of like lotus, flower metaphors and all these things that sound really lovely and sisterly - and um where you give a financial gift to the person in the center of that circle. And then there's these people, there's like, if you imagine a flower at the center, and then you have 2 petals and then 4 petals, and then 8 petals going out. And like the gist of this if people aren't fully following is that once person receives the gifts from those on the outer edge of that circle, then that person exits and then the people like toward the center move towards the center. And yeah, if you don't fully get it, that's okay - the most important thing to do is to not do it!

Jackie Peterson 46:57

Yes!

Melissa Renzi 46:58

But um in that, you know, when I was into it at a time when I was very financially



strapped, um very vulnerable in a lot of other ways. Uh the woman who invited me - I don't think was trying to harm me or swindle me - but in that, it was like all this, you know, like are you, you know, like getting over the fear of asking for things, right. Getting over the fear of asking for money or recognizing that you're deserving of money and like all of these sorts of really really like harmful kinds of patterns of just like trusting your intuition when it was actually like, mmmmm, probably like denying the intuition all along. But thinking that I was trusting my intuition or thinking that I just wasn't... like you know, too critical, too cynical, too like, all of the other things and wasn't trusting enough. And then, you know, the impact of these things is like, these are your friends that invite you and then you're inviting your other friends. And uh, yeah, I put a lot of money into that. I thankfully um didn't invite anyone to that like larger circle - there was a smaller one I was part of. Um I'm really thankful I was not the one that invited somebody to give somebody else thousands of dollars. But yeah.

Lane Collins 48:16  
That's unfortunate.

Melissa Renzi 48:17  
Yeah, that's another example.

Lane Collins 48:18  
Yeah, almost sounds like a spiritual Ponzi or pyramid scheme.

Jackie Peterson 48:21  
Mmmm hmmm.

Melissa Renzi 48:22  
That's exactly what it is, yeah.

Lane Collins 48:23  
And I think to that point, you know, the term "abundance" is another one that is inherently abused. Um, and you know, sure - scarcity is a perspective that you can come from that is, you know, a blocker. But abundance is just so misused as a concept and very much by both spiritual communities such as that, and also going back the law of attraction issue.

Melissa Renzi 48:47  
Mmmm hmmm.

Jackie Peterson 48:48  
So, we touched on it a little bit, but just to articulate it a little bit further, what do you think are some of the more harmful or damaging aspects of bypassing in your experience?

Melissa Renzi 48:58  
Hmmm... I mean, just, I guess in some ways it's been what we've been talking about all along. Like on an individual level, people and their, you know, actions, their very

important emotions and experiences get dismissed, disregarded. So that results in people really feeling like they don't belong or that there's something wrong with them because they're not doing this that way or they're not getting it - other people seem to be doing it but they're not or something, right. So like, and then, when we look at it like at a more collective level - and I think this is something I'm going to have a hard time actually verbalizing. But when we look at just like the impact of that on our friend circles, our families, our communities and then at a wider societal level, we're like kind of building in this conditioning where it's like ok to uh, to bypass, to dismiss, uh to not look at the real problem or the real experience in front of us, right? So and eventually then those things are going to come back up to the surface, right. So like we can look at this all over the place, at every layer of systems, whether it's our individual systems or like, our societal systems, right. Eventually those things, they're going to surface in some form and need to be dealt with. So it's kinda like, "Do we deal with it now?" or "Do we deal with those things down the road?" It's, you know, you can say, er, you can talk yourself out of anger maybe, maybe not [laughter], depending - it's like a biological response too. But like in a certain moment, you know, there could be this like, there are a lot of even like behavioral therapies that will just be like, "Do I have to be angry? No I don't, so I'm not gonna be angry." Or whatever [laughter], like challenging the belief of that or that experience. And, for some people - let's say it's not anger, let's say it's something else - like whatever it is, for a moment it might seem like it's working. But inevitably, it's not actually the root of why it's there to begin with isn't being dealt with, so yeah. I feel like there's a lot more to say that I'm not saying to answer your question there but what are your thoughts?

Jackie Peterson 51:05

No, I think that's really helpful and I think that speaks to a lot of where we are as a society right now, particularly, as you said, thinking in terms of systems and parts of our systems that we've ignored. I mean, the most glaring example is healthcare. You know, we keep circling around this idea that I think a lot of folks, we're all on the same about everyone deserving healthcare, and yet we consistently do nothing about it. We consistently vote down policies that would allow more people access to healthcare rather than less. And so I think that's a really valuable perspective and a valuable way of framing it, because, you know, the more we keep sort of saying "Ehhh we can't think about this right now," "Ehhh I'm not gonna lean in to the way this feels right now," we're gonna have to deal with it eventually and maybe there's gonna be more harm done in the interim when we don't address things sooner rather than later.

Melissa Renzi 51:57

Yeah, well said.

Jackie Peterson 51:59

So we've talked a lot about recognizing different ways that bypassing shows up. What are ways that you would recommend trying to combat that? Like when we see bypassing kind of happen in the moment, how do you recommend addressing it, how do you recommend having this conversation with other folks and helping people recognize some of the bypassing behaviors that they have either individually or collectively. How

do we do the work to start to dismantle that?

Melissa Renzi 52:26

I mean I think that you, well you just spoke to the first point is like just even recognizing that within ourselves and where we have done that and being honest when we've done it - being honest about that with ourselves or with others if needed. Um, just even having that awareness of - and just that process of kind of questioning like "Is what I'm sharing right now with other people or saying to this person like helpful, or is it potentially causing harm?" You know, I mean I think about - there's, there's - I'm gonna go off on a brief tangent, but I think about so many things that might be useful for ourselves and our personal practice but aren't necessarily like useful to tell someone else. Like I just was at a funeral today, earlier today actually, and you know, it was a Catholic funeral and the priest said something about it being part of God's plan, and I was like I guess he knows who the audience is for the most part, that they're in a mass, right. But I don't think that like telling somebody that their, you know, that loss is part of God's plan or that it's in their karma or whatever else is a very useful thing. Similarly like there's like a teaching of just like of like karmically like choosing your parents. Like for some people those things - like take a look at these. They might be useful for you in a moment, to actually see things through that lens of like, that, of um the difficult person in your life being your guru [laughter], right. It's not so helpful to tell other people that. So I think it's just like having that awareness, being able to differentiate. I think that when we're seeing it happen with others, you know - so actually, just going back for a moment, like when we see it in ourselves, it can be really easy to have an experience of feeling shameful, right. Like, of feeling guilty that we did this in the past, or like feeling embarrassed in some respect. And I think just having some compassion and understand towards those parts of ourselves that have enacted harm unknowingly or that have bypassed in some way gives us a little bit more capacity to then also kind of have that space for others so that when we... Because again, I know in antiracism work we talk a lot about like impact over intention, which is really important. And at the same time, like it is helpful to consider people's intentions and to be able to like effectively call someone in I think, rather than like call them out on social media. If we want to just like look at like the more like nonviolent, and truly more effective way. I've had so much more success with reaching out to someone in a private message or having a conversation to discuss, and like you know, giving them the benefit of the doubt that they may not know this and like I see what they're trying to do here, and at the same time, I want to just bring this to your attention that this might land for other people in a way that really hurts. Um so I think being able to like recognize those parts of ourselves that have done that without shaming them, and like having some space allows us then to come to others with the same sort of approach. Those are the things that come to mind right now.

Jackie Peterson 55:35

Thank you for that.

Lane Collins 55:36

So helpful. Yeah, thank you.

Lane Collins 55:46

That's it for our show today, listeners! As always, thanks for tuning in! If you enjoyed what you heard today, please subscribe to The Outerknown wherever you get your podcasts. And if you use Apple podcasts, we'd love it if you left us a review! Keep the conservation going by joining us on social media - we are @outerknownpod on instagram & twitter. Our home for all things Outerknown is our website, [outerknownpod.com](https://outerknownpod.com). Today's episode was edited by Jackie Peterson and produced by Lane Collins & Jackie Peterson. Our theme music is by the ever-talented Smoke Bonito, and our cover artwork is by Eric Centeno. Until next time, blessed be.

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