

We Outside Podcast Transcript

Episode 2: Nature's Wisdom and Our Sacred Responsibility with guest, Elissa Sloan Perry.

[Opening Quote] [00:00:00] **Elissa Sloan Perry:** Stop focusing on the doing. Be what you believe, be the call to the sacred in everyone, and the doing will continuously show up and evolve and extend from your delicious, enduring being.

[Static Intro] [00:00:21] **Ain B.:** Welcome to the [We Outside Podcast](#), where we explore leadership through the lens of spirit restoration and transformation. I'm your host, Ain B., a restoration practitioner and founder of New Seneca Village.



In each We Outside episode, we engage in generative conversations with guests who are redefining what it means to live and work outside of the dominant imagination.

Join us as we move beyond the confines of conventional thinking and into other realms of possibility. Now let's dive into today's conversation.

[Episode Intro] Today's guest is Elissa Sloan Perry, a teacher and mind, body and spirit leader. Elissa hosts and holds work that is at the forefront of Prefiguring the Future and connecting leaders to their sacred selves. I am excited to be in conversation with Elissa as her work at Change Elementals Prefiguring Futures Lab and the work I'm stewarding at New Seneca Village are so complimentary in their commitment to practicing the future.

Now in this episode of We Outside, we explore the interconnected imperative of spirit, transformative messages from trees embracing complexity and sacred responsibility. As well as the 'how we be' practices that allow us to thrive in these trying times. You can find Elissa's full bio in the show notes and in the end credits for this episode.

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Ain B.: [00:02:50] Welcome, Elissa Thank you for being here on the We Outside Podcast. I would love for you to introduce yourself for our listeners.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Sure. Thank you. I am so happy to be here. Looking forward to this conversation. My name is Elissa Gabrielle Sloan Perry. The whole thing.

Ain B.: Yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Any pronouns are good with me, except it.

Ain B.: Oh, Jesus. Well, you gotta say it these days,

Elissa Sloan Perry: Right? Right. Location. Right now I call Los Angeles home. I've been there for 13 years, but today I am joining you from Pima Homelands outside Tucson, Arizona.

Ain B.: Thank you. And what is your internal weather like today?

Elissa Sloan Perry: My internal weather, you know, it's a bit all over the place. There have been, you know, just small interactions and witnessing in nature that have me feeling hopeful and faithful and still very aware, present to the sacred. And you know, then there's all the chaotic mess of our crumbling systems that have allowed many of us to limp along for a long time. And, a friend transitioned recently, just a couple days ago. It was expected, but you know.

Ain B.: But still, yeah.

Elissa Sloan Perry: It's still a moment. So I'm all the things.

[00:04:18] **Ain B.:** Yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: I'm still very happy to be with you.

Ain B.: Thank you. Thank you for still being with us and sending you and your friend and their family. Just a lot of love.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Thank you.

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Ain B.: Yeah. My name as always is Ain. She/they pronouns. I'm located on ancestral unceded land of the Muskogee folks, in Alabama, and my internal weather today is. So it's a gorgeous, crisp fall day, and then the leaves are on the ground and you know how there's sort of sometimes the wind that just scatters amongst the leaves on the ground?

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: And you're sort of like, where is that coming from or going? And the leaves are getting kicked up, but everything else is sort of still, that's how I feel, so,

Elissa Sloan Perry: mm-hmm.

Ain B.: No judgment, no value on it. Just, uh, that's the best sensation I can describe, so thank you.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah. Yeah. I started to say it's like when it's raining and sunny at the same time, but then, you know, there's the saying of what that means is happening.

Ain B.: Right. (laughter)

Elissa Sloan Perry: I wasn't feeling that, so.

Ain B.: Right. Let's not go back there.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Right.

Ain B.: We got enough of that happening right here, right.

Elissa Sloan Perry: I hear you. Yeah. Yeah.

Ain B.: Thank you. And we want you to be as fully self-expressed as you can be in this conversation. So thank you for the disclosure.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yes, yes.

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Ain B.: [00:05:59] So, Elissa, we start our conversations always with the question, what is spirit and how does it move through you?

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm Spirit. Spirit to me is an unending, bottomless life force that is about all beings. And I define the sacred as what's possible when we all have what we need to be our best self or return to our best self. And by all I mean all of us.

Ain B.: Yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Like all beings. And that to me is what sacred is, right? And spirit is that, it is the power of that. So we all are able to tap into spirit. We all inhabit spirit and spirit inhabits all of us. It's about whether we listen, connect, touch, hear, feel it, you know, are willing to see it in others. All of that, tend to it, you know?

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: And for some of us, you know, that's easier than others. Some of us have more challenges in the way, right. That sometimes keep us from being our sacred selves, that were not put there by us.

Ain B.: Hello! How does Spirit move through you?

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yes, you did ask me that part. You know, I don't know. It's a mystery, right? I mean, I also refer to Spirit as great mystery. Right. There are just some things, some ways of being, some knowing some sort of, I don't know, confidence seems like the wrong word. But some sort of something that I got that I'm clear that I just came here with, you know, ways of understanding things or hearing things or seeing things that I've had since I was a small child.

So I really don't know. And in other ways. I think spirit moves through me. I have some, I do have some gifts. I've finally come to accept that.

Ain B.: Yes. Yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: And I'm very clear that it's not, you know, some of them are things I worked hard at, but some of them are things that were given to me. And I really think that is spirit.

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I can tell you physically, I can feel when I'm in that sacred purpose, there are sensations in my body that I can recognize. I can feel when I shift out of it. Right. Like, oh, that was ego, that wasn't spirit. I feel it, I know immediately.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: You know?

Ain B.: Lovely.

Elissa Sloan Perry: [00:10:06] That's one of the ways spirit works in me and Spirit has jokes and sometimes I can be very serious. The first time I heard a tree telling jokes, I was like, okay, that's what I needed.

I dunno, spirit moves through me as a friend, as a guide, as an ego check, as a reminder of my responsibility, my sacred responsibility. And as, like yoking, if you will, that like connection, that web of fiber between self and interdependent collective.

One of my friends and mentors and collaborators, Omi Jones talks about virtuosity and ensemble, right? Like we have to do both, right? Know what our virtuosity is, stand in it, practice it. Cultivate it. Right. Embrace your virtuosity and know that you are part of an ensemble. Right. And both are necessary. And there are responsibilities in ensemble.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah. There's something about that

Ain B.: Beautiful.

Elissa Sloan Perry: That reminder.

Ain B.: [00:10:51] Yeah. Thank you. I appreciate this. Leaning into an amplification of the interdependence. And you named it in all beings, right. You know, when I think about spirit, and I say this all the time, it's something different almost every time I think about it. And, you know, it's a dear, dear friend. And it's so ephemeral because of all the ways it shows up, right? Sometimes it's the restlessness that I have where I'm. Oh, okay. This is not good enough. It's got to be better. I mean, writ large like the world.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

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Ain B.: Or, you know, sometimes it's the, just the absolute awe and wonder at like a sunset. Just that we get a sunset every day, and then a sunrise too,

Elissa Sloan Perry: Every day.

Ain B.: Every day. Just gorgeous magic, just flowing across the sky for everyone to hopefully stop and experience as wonder

Elissa Sloan Perry: and stars, yeah.

Ain B.: And then our beloved trees. So you mentioned trees telling jokes. You don't have to tell us the joke, but will you share more about your love of trees?

Elissa Sloan Perry: [00:12:16] My love of trees. Yeah. You know, I grew up in the Midwest in St. Louis, Missouri Mound City. And we had a lot of trees in our backyard actually. But there was one in particular that I could see out my bedroom window. And it was my friend, like anytime I was upset or sad or you know, if something was happening in my household, I would escape to that tree, whether physically or in my **Spirit being like, I would** see myself in the tree with my black cat, even if I was in my bedroom, if I didn't wanna be in the house. And when I was outside, I would climb that tree. It was where I would hide sometimes. 'cause you know, people never thought to look for me up.

Ain B.: Right.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Right. So I would just be hanging out there watching. That's how it started out. And you know, I mentioned having some connection to spirit and like some intuitive, I don't know, hearing abilities as a child. And honestly it scared some of the adults around me, so I learned not to talk about it or to hide it. And I just didn't deal with it much until I started listening a little more and not being afraid of it myself in my twenties. And started like tiptoeing towards it in my thirties.

And then, I was right around 40, maybe my early forties when I, I have these, this, I'm assuming she's an ancestor that comes to me in dreams. I think she's my great-grandmother and I would ask her things, you know, all the time. And I was trying to make a life decision one time where I had some options in front of me and I kept asking her like, what should I do? What should I do? Maybe the third or fourth time, you know, in sleep time, she finally, she was doing something, I don't remember if she was picking green beans this time or

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something, but she looked up and she looked at me and she was like, baby, go ask the trees. Like

Ain B.: Quit worrying me,

Elissa Sloan Perry: right? Yeah, exactly. Go ask the trees. And I was, you know, I was like, well, I like trees, I like outside, I like nature, I like hiking. You know, all of that. I think trees are beautiful. I could stare at them for a long time, but I had never thought about asking the trees.

So I started going on more journeys and I went, you know, more hikes, hikes with friends, walks, noticing the trees in my neighborhood. It was great. I was getting more exercise.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: More fresh air.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: [00:15:34] You know, more beautiful inspiration. More awe as you said, but nothing. And then, I was sitting in an airport shuttle in a parking lot. I was the only person in the shuttle. 'cause the driver had gone to get another passenger.

And I heard this voice. I was like, what? Okay, this is saying some profound stuff. So I'm just gonna get out my pen. I literally have it written on the back of a hotel folio.

Ain B.: Yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: And I looked out the window and it was not even like a big old tree. It was a young tree in a median in the hotel parking lot.

Ain B.: Hello.

Elissa Sloan Perry: And it was answering the question. It was answering the question,

Ain B.: What did our favorite median hotel parking lot tree say to us?

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Elissa Sloan Perry: [00:16:30] So this is what that tree in the median said.

Stop focusing on the doing. Be what you believe. Be the call to the sacred in everyone, and the doing will continuously show up and evolve and extend from your delicious, enduring being.

Now I am oxygen, transpiration, and a means of communication. Yesterday I was shelter, canoe, and tools for defending and cooking. Tomorrow my doing will be another kind of medicine, another kind of joy. In all my days, sometimes upwards of 300,000 days at a time. I am my being. I commune. Eat, drink, breathe. Hear your stories and tell my own. I upend sidewalks and hold the earth together. I weep for the hangings and offer my sap.

Ain B.: Woo! Thank you.

Elissa Sloan Perry: You're welcome.

Ain B.: Beautiful. I got goosebumps

Elissa Sloan Perry: That was the answer to my purpose.

Ain B.: Yes, it was.

Elissa Sloan Perry: I was like, alright then.

Ain B.: Right. Guess I gotta get on this plane and get to doing it.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yes.

Ain B.: Yes. What a call.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: Thank you. Thank you, thank you.

Elissa Sloan Perry: [00:18:25] So that's what started it and after that moment, I've had so many conversations with trees and started learning more about different lineages of tree talking, tree whispering. Tree spirituality has like different names, different holdings.

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Ain B.: Well, what I love is, and thank you for sharing the genesis. I heard a lot there in the sense of you cultivating a practice of listening, not just to trees, but before that, in dreams of curiosity.

First of all, you know, asking this grandma figure this great grandma figure, like, hello, excuse me, I'm seeking something. Do you have the answer for me? And then listening, when this figure was like, ask, okay, ask the trees. You got to move on from this space.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah.

Ain B.: And then I just love, love, love the practice of immersing yourself in trees and what you gained from that. But that ultimately where the breakthrough came was a tree in a hotel parking lot, in a median.

You know, it's just

Elissa Sloan Perry: in Baltimore.

Ain B.: In Baltimore as you're sitting in the airport shuttle, which is, I mean, how pedestrian can we get? Right,

Elissa Sloan Perry: right.

Ain B.: And I'm just so inspired by that because so often, you know, so many of us are disconnected from nature and not feeling like we can be in relationship with nature or the land.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: And that's untrue. You know, I was raised in Harlem, New York.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yep.

Ain B.: There are trees everywhere. Now it's not the forest or, you know, the national parks, but there's always a tree. And so, I just really appreciate this too, for landing us in that we have access to a natural right to be in relationship with nature, both spiritual and relational.

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Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: Anywhere we are. And that this tiny small tree said, Hey, I'm the one with the answer is just so beautiful. So yeah. This is spot on.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah.

Ain B.: With how do we allow spirit to move to us, through us, with us, for us. And that it can happen anywhere. So, yes, please continue.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah, absolutely can happen anywhere. So that was big for me. And I actually lead tree inquiry processes. Now in some of the - for shorthand I'll use leadership development, but it's not what people usually think leadership development looks like - work.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: It's more about calling people into their sacred self.

Ain B.: Yeah.

[00:21:00] **Elissa Sloan Perry:** Tree inquiry, nature inquiry is a part of that process. It is very much listening. And so I was a part of a fellowship last year and I didn't know about this fellowship program. I was telling somebody about the work I was doing in the [Prefiguring Futures Lab](#), or wanted to be doing, hadn't even launched it yet. It was somebody who had a lot of connection with funders and with philanthropy, and he was like, have you ever heard of this fellowship?

And I said, no. He said, you should apply. Two weeks before this conversation, someone who knows I love trees gave me this book. And it came in the mail. I opened the book, the first page. Because I always do this, I just randomly open the book and just read what's on the page. I open and it said for Jeli don (sic), which are tree whisperers in Mandé lineage, like around Mali.

For Jeli don (sic), there is no human apprenticeship, you must spend time alone in the wild.

Ain B.: Mm.

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Elissa Sloan Perry: [00:22:09] Because I have been like, where are my teachers? Where are my teachers? I have these gifts, I hear these trees. Like I need, you know. I open and just said, there is no human apprenticeship.

Ain B.: Right

Elissa Sloan Perry: And, and I was like, o.

Ain B.: yeah, go to the trees,

Elissa Sloan Perry: right? And I was like, oh, hell no. Like I love trees. I will go for a hike. I will camp with friends, but I'm not spending time alone in the wild.

Ain B.: Mm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Right. Where would I, I wouldn't know what to do. I wouldn't know how to do that. Like, what do I need? So anyway, two weeks later, I'm like, you know, having this call trying to make some connections in philanthropy and he's like, do you know about this fellowship? No, you should apply.

I apply. I read the description once I got an interview and I was like, oh well, I might actually get in this. Let me read more about this, right? And it was like, it's very nature-based, land-based. We go to the wilderness, blah, blah, blah.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: I'm like, oh great. You know, I'll learn more. Maybe eventually I'll be ready to do some alone time in the wilderness. I do the interview and they're like, okay, you know, you're fantastic, blah, blah, blah.

But let me tell you about the second retreat. 'cause a lot of times this turns people off. I'm like, okay, what's the second retreat? Well, we spend some days getting you ready to be alone in the wilderness and then you're alone in the wilderness.

Ain B.: Badum bum

Elissa Sloan Perry: Right. So last thing I'll say is, I was describing this to a friend who's initiated into ancient, like thousands of years old spiritual traditions. And I was telling them this story. They're like, oh, you're about to be initiated by the trees.

Ain B.: Mm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: [00:24:08 Like this is your tree initiation. Like the way this is all moving, like you are being called to this particular.] So, um, yeah, there's something here.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Elissa Sloan Perry: And I'm just to go way out there and I'm happy to come back to practical applications and what this looks like in social justice and liberation movements, but I am very clear that I was sent here by some tree spirit energy.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: You know, with that question of how to survive the disconnected humans. Yeah.

Ain B.: Beautiful. Yeah. So what, how do we survive this? I mean, to say that we're in a time of disconnection is really an understatement.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: You know, I too am a lover of trees. I will say the ocean is my first love and spiritual mom. And, in my move from California, I really asked to be connected to my next ocean. And I've learned that that next ocean is, are the trees.

And you know, we know, or we're learning more about how interconnected they are, how in community and conversation and reciprocity and mutuality they are.

These are not words that we can say about our larger society at this time. You know, it feels like, not just America, but definitely America, but not just America, that we're in a time of rupture and destruction and chaos and I don't

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think that's all bad, but it's definitely fatal and harmful and torturous for many of us. So I just would love to hear what that tree energy that sent you here has to say about how we not only survive these times, but thrive in them. Thrive as in our birthright to thrive.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah. So it was after Mike Brown was murdered in Ferguson that I had to redefine. Well, well, I say that's where I landed. 'cause you know, in this work, everything starts with a check-in.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: You know, and all the, how are you doing? How are you doing, how are you holding up, blah blah, blah. And I didn't wanna lie. And I didn't wanna go into all the things, right. So I was like, what does well actually mean to me? And I was like, well means able to be with all the things in a relatively resourced way, right. The joy and the pain. The excruciating devastation and disappointment and belly laughs, and the possibility for joy and little pleasures like skipping rope and sitting on front porches and trees and you know.

Ain B.: Yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: And it can be a practice, right? Like having to remind ourselves of those things. A friend who lost, or had three significant people in her life transition within a year started a gratitude practice for herself where she, I don't remember the number, but let's say it was 10 things that throughout her day she had to notice. 10 things that she was really grateful for. And spend time with that, not as a way of ignoring the grief or the disappointment, but as a way of remembering the joy and the beauty. And I think we have to do that. Right?

Ain B.: Yeah.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Right now I find so many folks that I work with in movement spaces are both exhausted and like hanging onto the slimmest threads of possibility, you know?

Yet find it even more difficult to pause or do something nice for themselves, or, you know, go to a movie or do something silly because of what's happening in the world and the amount of guilt they feel for what they have, and shame for

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doing something nice. And I try to encourage folks, right, that we actually need both

Ain B.: A hundred percent

Elissa Sloan Perry: And we probably need even more.

Ain B.: Yep.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Now, right?

Ain B.: Yeah.

Elissa Sloan Perry: A friend asked me the other day how I was doing, I was like, well, you know how I define, well, I'm well enough and I'm keenly aware of how much more it is taking for me to maintain that wellness.

Ain B.: Yes. Yeah. The realities of continuing to feel well.

You know, Elissa, I, a hundred percent agree. You know, I feel like there's so much weight to this moment in time that can really drag us into the harder side of human emotion.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: [00:29:45] You know, the grief, the sort of never ending grief, the consistent betrayals, which this society has never been without, but which are increasing in urgency and impact in this moment. And part of what this program that's being enacted now, distinct from the American program that's sort of always happening, is for us to feel weighed down and feel entrapped in guilt and shame for all that we have. And, you know, I think it is a strong countermeasure to actually start to revel in our moments of cultivating joy, of cultivating softness, of connecting to luxury.

Whether that luxury is my hot water heater that always has hot water, so whenever I want tea, I can have tea and I don't have to wait for it or plan for it or whatever. You know, like we're talking broadly luxury, yeah. And that it's our almost sacred responsibility, duty, to be cultivating all of these many ways that

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we get to be connected to our humanity because that is what is going to keep us, from falling into the monsters that are trying to be shaped out of this time.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: But also to honor our divinity that knows that this is a moment in time of many moments. And that is not to diminish anyone's suffering or grief or truly present impacts.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: But just to say that, you know, in the grand scheme of time as we think we know it

Elissa Sloan Perry: mm-hmm.

Ain B.: You know, this is a moment in it. And so that we have to come out intact so that we can build from the place of what is possibility and not from a place of despair. And for the contrarian in me, the place where they want us to be building from - no hope.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Exactly. Mm-hmm. And we have to live the future we want as much as, in the moment we're in.

Ain B.: Right? Yep.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Which means being in liberating practice, right? Yeah. Like, as Monica Dennis outlined for us, you know, being in our bodies and in touch with source and with all the forms of wisdom and story and, you know, feeling all the feels, right.

[00:32:24] **Ain B.:** Feeling all the feels.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yes. And I was, when you said the grand scheme, I was remembering, I was teaching a course. I've been an adjunct in a master's in leadership program at a Catholic college for a long time. And we do a nature inquiry as part of it. And we went out to, there's a Redwood Grove on the campus and it was literally like the week after the LA fires. And the message I

got when I was out there that I heard was, yes, like grief or what is lost. Feel, feel it, be with it. But remember in the long arc, fire is how the earth goes on.

Ain B.: [00:33:22] Remember that. You know, it's so funny 'cause you mentioned before about, oh, I was sent here by the tree spirits and I'm like, I mean, I spent a long time not knowing how I got here and being like, was this the right idea?

But to what you're saying of, you know, I didn't ask to be here during this time, but I have always been asking for freedom and transformation always and possibility, always.

And back to what you were saying earlier, you know, spirit has jokes, spirit has got jokes. Yes. And you know, I think one of them, for me in particular right now is like, well, you said you wanted X, Y, and Z. We're heading there, but to get there, we're gonna have to go through the fire. Right. And here, literally we are in, a multitude of fires and what does it look like to continue to be, and to be becoming the person that is then, um, equipped and ready for the freedom and the liberation and the infinite possibility that we all know is real, as real as anything else.

Elissa Sloan Perry: [00:34:45] Yes. And have some humility and recognize that some of what we've been doing, and I mean we, in the global we.

Like we as humans, whether we're in movement space or we are, you know, some of the actors that we think are the cause of all our problems. Right. But all of us, recognizing our own hubris.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Elissa Sloan Perry: You know, and being willing to, yeah. Just very recently as I've been thinking about, with the fomented chaos, you know, that, we are in and recognizing. Oh, I actually need to change how I've been talking about the change work that we've been doing. So I've been talking about it as advancing complex systems change.

I was like, oh, what a place of privilege I've been coming from because so many people have been experiencing their lives as chaos and we haven't tended to that, right. So it's recognizing that and realizing that it's not about advancing complex systems change, it's actually about understanding the moment and the

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context we are in and showing up accordingly with the long view, the vision in mind.

Ain B.: Yeah. Yeah.

Elissa Sloan Perry: And so, and not getting stuck in that place of shame and guilt, but really recognizing what that means. Right. And making the shift like, oh, no more. Okay. Right. I even said to a colleague recently who's like - well, you know, I'm stepping back because it's not my lived experience. And I'm like, yes, but you know something now and you know a lot more than other people and your humility is actually hubris in this moment.

Ain B.: Mm. Hello.

Elissa Sloan Perry: You know, like there's, I'm going off on a tangent now. But the trees are what is keeping me connected to sacred purpose. And what I've come to call tree spine, like that's one of the ways spirit moves through me. I can feel one of the things when I'm in tree spine, you know that place of, that dignity line.

Ain B.: Yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: And connection and presence. All at the same time. You know, I so appreciate lifting in the practices for thriving.

Ain B.: You know, I think that part of the issue now is that we are not used to or encouraged to recognize and hold complexity. So, you know, America has a way of wanting to flatten everything into good or bad or right or wrong, and not having any broader context beyond a snap judgment based on skin color or way of speaking or, you know, all the ridiculous things.

I often think of like, if aliens came down and they were like, oh, how do you organize your society? They would just get right back on the ship and go, because it makes no sense. It's ridiculous. Okay. And it's not grounded in any reality.

Elissa Sloan Perry: It's not. None.

Ain B.: So here's where we are.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah. The race stuff, the class stuff, it's not. Any reality.

Ain B.: [00:38:44] You know, I always think of this as bizarro world, you know, like what is up actually is down. And so I'm hoping that this time is part of an invitation for us to reorganize our priorities and get real with what is actually real. So I, yeah, I would just love to talk a bit about how we be in complexity and what we bring to it and what we can take from it.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah. How we be in complexity. There's so much there. 'cause right now we've had a challenging time, many of us being in complexity. It does require some inner work to be able to see and hold multiple simultaneous stories that sometimes even contradict each other, right. I think many of us, and especially Black women, right. Folks, socialized as women, we've had to hold complexity and it wasn't a conscious choice. Right?

Ain B.: Right.

Elissa Sloan Perry: It was a matter of survival to actually be able to see all the things, feel all the things, and cultivating our ability to listen, to embrace multiple forms of wisdom, to understand that relationships are the infrastructure.

You know, as all the systems break down, the communities that are going to survive are the ones where there is relationship. With each other, with nature. Right. With the land, with all the things. Yeah. So how we be is, I mean, and to use some simple jargony terms, embracing multiple ways of knowing.

But that means, you know, being in touch with ancestral wisdom, with creative practice, with natural intelligence, with academic intelligence too. But all, all our cultural wisdom, all our ways of knowing. And to keep practicing, keep intact, whatever our connection to source is.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: [00:41:11] Right Source or great spirit or great mystery, whatever that is for you. Whether that's an organized, you know, faith-based community, an organized religion, a creative practice, relationship with trees, you know, whatever it is. Whatever is that place that I can plug in, you can plug in, whoever can plug in to get some energy, some restoration, some sense of that larger world, that larger context, right? That is source, right. So cultivate doing the inner work, right? Cultivating that relationship to source that allows us to be with all the things,

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Ain B.: right.

Elissa Sloan Perry: To pause and see another perspective, to be curious. And I have kind of a push pull relationship with that word curious, 'cause everybody's always like, remain curious. And it's like who gets to remain curious and who's being extracted from,

Ain B.: Well,

Elissa Sloan Perry: you know, who keeps being asked all the questions and to prove themselves and why they should exist. Well people are curious.

Ain B.: Right.

Elissa Sloan Perry: But anyway,

Ain B.: I love that you're bringing that in 'cause I love curious but not that curious. I love the curious that lets me be in conversation with Spirit and Source to say, oh, what lights me up?

Elissa Sloan Perry: Me too.

Ain B.: What don't I like? You know, what is a no? What is resonant and what do I want to eagerly explore, you know? But yes. A No to what you're saying in terms of curiosity.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah, exactly. I mean, me too. I love learning. I'm a creative person. I'm a creative writer, poetry fiction, creative nonfiction.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: I was a hoofer, a tap dancer. I loved science and doing biology experiments and exploring and all of that. I love curiosity and.

Ain B.: And.

Elissa Sloan Perry: you know what I mean?

Ain B.: Yes, I do. Thank you. Yes, I do.

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Elissa Sloan Perry: [00:43:13] So, yeah, so really being in all of those practices, and they don't have to look like you know, some. Not that this image is a perfect one, but it did make me laugh. Adrienne Maree Brown on Instagram posted these two photos and the first one was spirituality 101, and there were like crystals and a bundle of sage and you know, a tarot deck or something and, you know, all these things. And then the second picture was like advanced spirituality, and it was a cup of coffee and a cigarette.

Ain B.: Okay. Right.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Like, it's not.

Ain B.: How to be not so precious.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Exactly. Exactly. So it doesn't have to be precious. It doesn't have to be, you know, all these things.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Elissa Sloan Perry: And knowing what it is for you, right. Like being able to recognize the tree in the parking lot.

There's a person who participated in one of the labs recently who makes hoops and I don't know how to describe it without using what I learned was actually an offensive term.

Ain B.: Mm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: So I'm gonna use it just. Maybe I'll be teaching other people, what we grew up calling hula hooping.

Ain B.: Okay.

Elissa Sloan Perry: But because hula is actually a sacred dance.

Ain B.: Right.

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Elissa Sloan Perry: Right. The request is that we don't use that term.

Ain B.: Uhuhuh helpful. Thank you.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah. So, she hoops and she makes her own hoops and teaches other people how to hoop and that is how she's able to stay in her body.

Right. And usually there's enough room in our apartment or whatever place we live. Then we could do some hooping. Right. Do a little hoop.

Ain B.: hooping.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah. It doesn't have to mean going to, you know, power yoga or you know, whatever.

Ain B.: Well, it's funny you say that 'cause I have started a new practice where...I'm not a dancer. And we're all dancers. So I've started a new practice where I have just decided that I'm the best twerker in the world, and so I just twerk around the house and really, it's just so helpful because it's opening up my hips, it's releasing what, a group of us call the whale tail, right?

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: How do I get into a different relationship with my spine?

Elissa Sloan Perry: I need to start that practice.

Ain B.: Yeah. I'm like, and I can just do this while I'm waiting for this water to boil or sitting here doing, feeding my dogs or whatever, like I get to create the practices and I get to adapt them for my own pleasure and joy.

I mean, I'm around here laughing at myself. It's ridiculous and hilarious and my body feels better when it's done, you know? Right. Like what a gift to be sovereign in our lives and being able to customize exactly what we need for our thriving in this space and time.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

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Ain B.: I just wanna say, I'm always so grateful for how far away I am from the mythical norm of the straight, christian, white male who's, you know, rich. Because it allows me so many vantage points to see through the illusion, you know?

And I think in the seeing through that illusion and at a very young age, having to be like, wait a minute, I'm not showing up at all in this story when actually I'm the main character of the story. I mean, how could it be any other way I'm trapped in here, right? I gotta be the main character.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: You know, that is what opened the door for me to be in conversation with my spirit, who was like, hello, no. You know, you are divine, you are human, you are all those things, and you have your own path to walk.

And from that, all of the perspectives and approaches and practices and listening and lessons that I get to absorb because I am not the accepted ideal or whatever. These are air quotes y'all for whoever's listening on and not seeing us.

But I would love for you to share anything that we haven't talked about or asked.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah. Hmm. Anything else I would wanna share? Just thinking about how, yeah. Just thinking about how none of us have lived in the world we want.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: You know? So we're doing this all based on faith.

Ain B.: Yep.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Therefore, this is all faith-based work.

Ain B.: Yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: [00:48:30] And faith and sacred possibility, and that means all of us stepping into our sacred responsibility. That is what's really clear to me.

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And as I keep going deeper and deeper into my own practices and into practice, in relationship with others and in community, the easier it is for me. And it's not like something that was hard before, but just something has happened where it's really easy for me to see through form and see through masks.

And that is something about spirit. So I don't know exactly yet, what the call is to do with that. And it is so clarifying in terms of discernment and yes's and no's and coming back to that faith in what is possible and creating spaces where people can actually start to feel like their experience in the village, New Seneca Village, their experience in Prefiguring Futures lab. Get a little taste, a little amuse bouche, if that's how you say that of what, what a future we want might actually feel like.

Ain B.: Yes. And may it be so.

Elissa Sloan Perry: May it be so.

Ain B.: Yes. Thank you.

Elissa Sloan Perry: And so it is.

Ain B.: And so it is. Thank you Elissa, for this conversation. So lovely.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Thank you Ain for inviting me.

Ain B.: [00:50:32] Yes. It's so great to be in curiosity in the embodied way, about what is ours to do. I often think about what is my contribution to this gorgeous, stunning, diverse, life-giving planet that we have the opportunity to exist on like, what a treat.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: What a gift, and how do I repay that gift by being the best and highest version of myself in whatever I'm doing, or being called or told or assigned by spirit to do.

So grateful for your listening as you continue to listen into and as you're holding and shaping and offering the Prefiguring Futures lab because we need to know

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and experience a liberated future now so that it's easy for us to walk towards it and call it in. So thank you.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm. You're welcome.

Ain B.: I would like to invite you to share your sacred shout out. What is bringing you inspiration or joy or gratitude or wonder these days?

Elissa Sloan Perry: So many, many, many different things. Well, I just have to say audio books in general. I'm a very slow reader and there's something about listening that I'm just so grateful I get to take in wisdom in that way.

I also frequently go back to things. So right now I'm in a book that is new to me and a book that I've had for several years, maybe a few years. I don't remember when it came out, that I've just come back to. So that one is Undrowned.

Ain B.: Oh yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Come back to Alexis Pauline Gumbs. I just came back to that one.

Ain B.: Beautiful.

Elissa Sloan Perry: And this one is new to me. I think it just came out this year. The Healing Tree, Stephanie Rose Bird.

Ain B.: Oh, beautiful. Botanicals, remedies and rituals from African folk traditions. We love to see it. And it's a gorgeous cover.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yes. So she had a book several years ago called, The Healing Ground. And that's where I first read about Jeli don (sic). That's the book that I opened. And you know, read the page like for Jeli don (sic), there are no human apprenticeships. You must spend time alone in the wild.

Ain B.: Yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: So this was the follow up to that.

Ain B.: Beautiful. Thank you.

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Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah. And then I just also have to say babies, infants, whenever I get to be around babies.

Ain B.: Doesn't it just transform you? It's just like, first of all, gimme the baby. I gotta hold this baby. And we have to talk. When my nephew was born, I'm like, okay, listen sir.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Exactly. Can we talk?

Ain B.: Okay. I'm like, now I know you know the things. Okay.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Can we talk?

Ain B.: So when you can talk, talk.

Elissa Sloan Perry: don't forget them.

Ain B.: Don't forget them because we gotta talk about it.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yep,

Ain B.: Exactly. Shout out to the babies. Thank you.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Shout out to the babies.

Ain B.: [00:54:35] I think my sacred shout out today is to nature in general. You know, I feel like nature is my first community and I did not always feel that way. But before I felt that way, I was like, why am I here on this planet?

So the answer to that was gorgeous, gorgeous nature in particular the Pacific Ocean, in California and the gorgeous highway one that travels through it. And just really the opportunity to be in relationship with something so majestic and so unknown and so eternal. You know, I felt like gazing into the horizon, across the ocean, that I really was looking at the entirety of the universe.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

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Ain B.: And really encouraged me in a time of deep grief and loneliness to be in the deep grief and loneliness to allow it to have its time and its space and nothing is wrong. The waves are still coming in and they're still going out.

And as the grief moved through me, the waves were still going in and still going out and ultimately led to me being able to respond to a spiritual assignment that I'd been given, I don't know, six years earlier, that I had turned down multiple times and finally recognized that it was mine to pick up and do, because I had allowed myself the space to just be exactly how I was being.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: But also to be in conversation with the ocean about what, what is next? What is for me to do? How do I contribute? And so New Seneca Village is a portion of that call to contribute.

And I'm always going back to the proverbial well. Now surrounded by trees as I am on every side of my home to say, what is it for me to do? And so my sacred shout out is just to the gorgeous, loving, consistent, ever present power of nature.

And I just have so much deep gratitude for the transformation it's brought in my life and my heart. Because I did not start out this way, you know?

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah. Me either.

Ain B.: That could be a whole other podcast where I talk about how I started out

Elissa Sloan Perry: Whole other podcast. I published a short story when I was like 24, and one of the bio questions was, what is your emotional rescue?

Ain B.: Mm.

Elissa Sloan Perry: I said, Big Sur.

Ain B.: Yeah. Well.

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Elissa Sloan Perry: Yep. And any place where the redwoods meet the ocean. I mean,

Ain B.: That's it! That's it. I wish I could transport everybody there and just. You just sit here for,

Elissa Sloan Perry: Just sit here for a minute.

Ain B.: Just sit here. Just sit. Yes, yes. Thank you.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yes.

[00:57:54] **Ain B.:** I love to know that about you.

So, Elissa, do you have something for our listeners, either a question you're holding now or a practice or action that you'd like to invite them into until we meet again?

Elissa Sloan Perry: Yeah, I won't go and take folks through the whole practice, but any practice I wanna invite folks into, actually listening to and being curious about - there is that word again - what information our emotions are bringing us.

They can be so much our friends right now, you know when we're angry or irritated or what have you, like what actually is the basic need in the world or in my life that's not being met.

What is the value that is being violated, right? My core value, like really getting curious as opposed to like, I have to release this anger.

You know, we go so quickly to releasing without actually pausing to understand Right. Which, for me and I think for us, gives us an opportunity to respond from the future we want as opposed to just trying to release the anger and keep going with whatever was on the plan.

Ain B.: Yes, yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: So that's actually a part of being in complexity, what you asked me about earlier. Right. Even when we're disappointed or sad or grieving, you know, what is it that is actually lost or that we feel disconnected from,

right? Yeah. And like bringing that curiosity and not forgetting the joy, even when we're not feeling joy, because joy can be and come in different forms.

Like it can be release, it can be relief, it can be feeling seen or heard. It doesn't have to be, you know, belly laughs on the front porch with your people. Right. Joy doesn't always look like that.

Ain B.: Yes.

Elissa Sloan Perry: So asking like, what is the possibility for joy here? What is the possibility of joy today, you know, of feeling seen or feeling heard or finding a little bit of relief. A little bit of relief, whether it's, you know, twerking while I make my tea that, you know, relieving some tension.

Ain B.: Yes. Thank you. Well, as a wise teacher shared very recently, I love this question and what I'm hearing is that we get to stop and say, why is this energy in motion?

You know, we think emotion. Why is this energy, emotion, no judgment.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: Just really compassionate curiosity about what's up.

Elissa Sloan Perry: Exactly.

Ain B.: Yeah. So thank you. I will be practicing that. Thank you for the invitation.

Elissa Sloan Perry: You're very welcome. Yes.

[Guest shares their bio] **Elissa Sloan Perry:** [01:01:28]

I am Equal Parts Nina Simone, and Led Zeppelin. I am black and queer and of African Choctaw and Cherokee descent. I am a call to the sacred in everyone, and I define the sacred as what's possible when we all have what we need to be our best selves and contribute to the wellbeing of people and planet.

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One form that takes right now is I am the director of Prefiguring Futures at Change Elemental. You can also find me tap dancing, writing, exploring other art forms, and of course, spending time with trees.

[Static Outro]**Ain B.:** The We Outside Podcast is produced and hosted by Ain B., and produced and edited by Aisha Jordan. For access to resources mentioned in the episode, check out the show notes.

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