

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

***Warning. This episode includes conversations about trauma, addiction, abuse, and other subjects and situations that may be triggering for some listeners. Our intention with this series is to educate and inspire. And while mental health professionals are being interviewed, this podcast does not offer personalized medical advice. If you need help or are in crisis, please seek medical attention and advice from a professional. Thank you for listening, and we hope you enjoy this episode of Spirit and Recovery on INSIDE THE WOONIVERSE.*

EP54:

Soul Care, Mindful Movement & Recovery

With Steven Washington

Colette:

From states of euphoria and joy to grief and trauma, the human condition asks us to bear witness to it all, yet how we respond, how we react, and how we internalize these events and memories can be extraordinarily unique and profoundly impactful, especially where trauma is involved. But if we've surrendered a spirit, we gain the most amazing partner in our healing journey. Spirit and recovery go hand in hand. In this limited series, we'll explore healing modalities, philosophies, and soulful practices that are designed to support recovery on all levels. Recovery from trauma, addiction, harmful behaviors, and more. Our experiences may be individual, but our pain is collective. This is part of the human condition. Let's navigate these waters together with compassion and love. There is wisdom waiting to be shared. You are not alone. We are in this together.

Hi there and welcome to Inside the Wooniverse, a podcast brought to you from the corner of Fringe and Main. I'm your host, Colette Baron-Reid, and welcome to another episode of our limited edition series called Spirit and Recovery. With us today is the most awesome human and fabulous author. I have his book right here. His name is Steven Washington. He is a former professional dancer whose credits included performing on Broadway and Disney's the Lion King. Amazing! He is also the author of Recovering You: Soul Care and Mindful Movement for Overcoming Addiction. Now, his love of movement inspired him to become the highly acclaimed Qigong and Pilates teacher that he is today. His passion for helping others as they navigate their own recovery journeys is palpable. Steven teaches Qigong internationally. He's held countless

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

events around the world, the globe, wherever, and maybe other planets. I don't know, we'll find out. He lives, teaches, and writes from the Los Angeles area. Welcome to the Wooniverse, Steven.

Steven:

It's an honor to be here. Thank you so much. Good to see you.

Colette:

Good to see you too. I have to say, I get a lot of books about recovery because I am in recovery too. It's going to be 37 years, one day at a time. I was so moved by this book and surprised by it, actually. I think this book is for everybody. I know you called it *Recovering You*. When you think of it, it says *Soul Care and Mindful Movement for Overcoming Addiction*, but I would like to posit something before we get into the interview. But when you think of how we all live, the idea of addiction being doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result, but being really trapped in a dynamic or a relationship with something that's super unhealthy for you and you can't get out, it becomes your higher power. We can use that for social media, food, anti-aging, whatever it is we become addicted to.

This book of yours can really help shift us and give us the freedom and liberation to make choices. This isn't just about substance, I just really want all the listeners and viewers to get that through your heads. This book here, if you struggled at all with anything with distracting yourself and trying to escape yourself or whatever, this book will get you grounded in your body, grounded in your spirit, and you'll be really surprised by what happens, because I actually did the book and all the exercise. I was shocked.

Steven:

I'm glad you said that. That's great.

Colette:

Anyway, let's talk about you now. Let's talk about little Steven. We always like to get the origin story. What was your childhood like? I want to know your journey, also how you became an addict, because it doesn't happen overnight like one day, "Oh, I'm an addict." How did that all play out?

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Steven:

Thank you for asking that question. It's an important question. I grew up in Connecticut. My mom, my dad, my sister, my dad was a cop, my mom was a secretary. A lot of trauma in my family moving from the south to the north in the '60s. I feel as though I inherited some generational trauma. One of the ways that my family, immediate family and extended family, dealt with a lot of their trauma is to drink and to do drugs, to numb oneself. And so, I got that example very early on and I was a very sensitive child. And so, being in a household where there's a lot of chaos, it's very difficult for a sensitive child. I sought ways to check out and numb myself. At first, it was me, little Steven biting my nails and my father would scold me for biting my nails and wetting the bed, things like that.

Colette:

I get it. You're not alone.

Steven:

And so, for me, being that sensitive child, knowing that I was different from the other kids, which I later found out or realized that I was gay. That extra added pressure, it made perfect sense that when I was 15 traveling in Europe with my dance teacher and my classmates for a summer in Germany, first time out of the country and we had our last performance and we were in a German pub and I had my first beer. That night, I got drunk for the first time. It makes perfect sense that that night, that experience made me feel like I could suddenly breathe, because I feel like I had been holding my breath before then. I felt like I suddenly could feel like that part of me that was dying to come out, but I was too shy, too introverted to let out.

I felt smart, I felt funny, I felt attractive, which is important to a 15, 16-year-old boy. So many things, I felt like I could connect with people and I felt like, oh, now I'm like everybody else, because before I felt like I was very different. I basically tried to repeat that same experience and feeling for the rest of my years of drinking. I drank all through high school and to college, moved to New York, studied dance at NYU. I finally felt like I met my tribe when I moved to New York City. All the artists, all the freaks, everybody loved the club scene. I was all over it.

But those years were very challenging for me as well, because I excelled in dance, but everything else about the college experience was very difficult for me. I had a really hard time

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

going to my academic classes because I would walk into the main building and have panic attacks, because I felt like the energy of so many people and being in an environment where I didn't know people and it was very hard for me to ask for help at that time in my life. Asking for help is a lesson that's repeated itself over and over again in my life.

I essentially flunked out of school, but it didn't stop me from having an incredible dance career in New York City. Danced for many small modern dance companies, eventually ended up on the stages of the metropolitan opera in New York City Opera, and ultimately, Disney's The Lion King, which was incredible. But all the while, I was drinking, I was drugging, I was smoking, I was doing all the things to check out and self-soothe and self-regulate, although I didn't realize that's what I was doing all along.

For a long time I did it without great consequence. Now, there were certain times when I would feel the consequences of my actions, like the night I was drinking and drugging and suddenly I couldn't see. I lost my sight for a few minutes and a normal person would think, "Oh, maybe I shouldn't do that anymore," but the next weekend, I was at it again. For me, that time with The Lion King was the most incredible period of my career. At the same time, I felt a tremendous amount of pressure.

I didn't know how to handle the pressure. I was also in a relationship at the time that I didn't really want to be in it, but I didn't have a voice to say, "This isn't right for me." I was so concerned about his feelings that I wasn't paying attention to my own. I drank and I drugged this stuff all that down too. I'm very good at that. But during that period when I just reached the end of my rope with my using, I would look at myself in the mirror and not recognize myself. I would wake up in the morning and part of me would be disappointed that I actually woke up.

Colette:

I know that so well.

Steven:

Then, I just got sick and tired of being sick and tired. Then, one day after a therapy session with my therapist, I realized I couldn't run from it anymore. Then, I reached out to a friend of mine who was in recovery and who had been a shining example of recovery. I mean, he wore it so

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

well. He still does. He made sobriety look so good that I became willing to try something new. He took me to my 12-step recovery meeting and the rest was history.

Colette:
Was that in New York?

Steven:
That was in New York.

Colette:
Best ones are in New York.

Steven:
Yeah, Midtown.

Colette:
At least, that's what I'd say.

Steven:
The Rainbow Room.

Colette:
Midtown. Yeah, the Fireside.

Steven:
The LGBTQ. Fireside.

Colette:
Yeah, Fireside.

Steven:
Love it.

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Colette:

I went there when I was in New York. I loved the meetings in New York. I loved them. You connected then with a tribe of people. Recovery is all about having also that safe space and you recognize yourself in others and you've all paid the same prices in those chairs. But not everybody takes that recovery and that life and channels it into the direction that you did. I'd love to kind of segue, you talk a lot about soul in your book, and I believe that the soul is a source of inspiration. It's that still small voice that, the whisper, the calling. When did you feel called from recovery to actually do something about recovery for others besides the typical thing that we do in a 12-step program where we are actually, we're not allowed to keep it if we don't give it away kind of thing, which is sponsorship and volunteering, et cetera, but this is something very different. Let's go through those steps.

Steven:

Well I would say what comes to mind is when that point in my life and point in my recovery, when the practices that I teach came into my life.

Colette:

Okay, great.

Steven:

About 10 years sober, I moved from New York to California to go to a traditional Chinese medicine school to become an acupuncturist. That's what I thought I wanted to do. I was convinced that that was what I was supposed to do. I told everyone that's what I was going to do. I busted my butt to get into that program, had to clean up a lot of the wreckage of my past. You have to be able to do that. Once I got there, I realized that's not what I wanted to do.

Colette:

Oops. But at least you were supposed to go there.

Steven:

I was supposed to go there, but it caused a great deal of anxiety and a great deal of worry and a great deal of panic in me, and I didn't know how to handle it. During that period of time, that semester that I was in school, I literally thought I was going to pick up. I thought I was going to

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

start using again because I didn't know how to handle the emotions that were coming up, until I started taking Qigong. Qigong is part of the curriculum, and Qigong had the magical effect of giving me space in my body, space in my mind and in my heart. I was able to really work with the energies of that experience and come to the truth of why I was really there. What I discovered was I'm there to have this experience that was really groundbreaking for me, life-changing, and that this is something that I need to share with other people.

Colette:

I want to add to this because that was an effect that I had from doing a couple of the exercises in your book. I love Qigong, but you do it very, very differently the way you bridge the two and the concepts and the suggestions in your book. But that sense that you just described, I felt like as I was feeling particularly anxious that day and I thought, oh, I think I'm going to do something from Steven's book. I just followed along and did. Just what you said, oh there's space now, but it's not the whole space that we're afraid to look into like the dark space of that empty well or that fearful swirling cauldron of feelings. That's a different thing. It's like that's the thing we're trying to distract ourselves from. But this emptiness was very calm and it's the kind of empty that you feel enveloped. We get empty, but something holds us. I cannot sing the praises of this book more, because I got that experience just from doing one of your chapters.

Steven:

It's very powerful. It's very, very powerful. From the outside, it could seem as though, oh, this is just too simple to be true, to be real for it to work. That's what I love. That's what love with everything. That's what I love about this medicine, that even without a great knowledge of its history and all the specifics of how it's working in the body and your energy systems, it does the work. It does the work. It allows you to calm down, to be quiet enough, still enough for your internal energy to become very known to you and to open up your mind so that insight and intuition can come in and inform you and tell you what you need to know. That was my experience. I knew that it would be a powerful tool to share with others because I always thought that... I love 12-step recovery. It changed my life.

Colette:

Yep, me too. There's more.

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Steven:

And there's more.

Colette:

And then more. There has to be more.

Steven:

There has to be more and more for me was therapy, more for me was other things that I learned from sponsors and other friends in recovery and just my own hunger and searching. What I felt with Qigong was, oh, this is going to work on my body, because the body is the foundation for the emotions and for the thoughts and the consciousness. Many of us know, and if you don't know, you're going to understand this better after this conversation, is that stress and trauma settles in the body. It lives in our tissues. It settles in our tissues and it creates tension, pain and energy is meant to flow through the body freely. One of the things that helps that happen is movement, movement and breath. That's the thing that's missing from other practices that I've done that have helped me maintain my sobriety. And so, I wanted to bring what worked for me so incredibly to other people.

Colette:

The idea of, we talk about the mind, we talk about spirit, because really, when you look at 12-step programs, it's about plugging back into spirit and then having an ethical and moral template for living. There's a template for living, but it doesn't address the body. It was very easy for me to remain within that and stay disassociated from my body. After a number of traumatic incidents in my early 20s, I found it very easy to just completely disassociate. My husband will tell you, I bump into walls, I break my foot. It's just like, "Well, why didn't you see that?" No. I've actually spent a long time avoiding that because so much was stored there. If I paid attention to the body, it would be like Pandora's box. It'd be all the grief and everything that's stored. Of course, what happens is inflammation. In my case, it's weight gain. I'll fluctuate a lot... It's very interesting.

Landing on your book, which was very, again, you said it's simple, it's not simple. I mean, it is and it isn't right. But it deals with very complicated things, but in a very simple, loving, gentle way, which does open it up, but it is safe. I did notice as well too, because we talk a lot about

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

trauma. Trauma has become a very popular conversation. You brought that up, ancestral trauma, you have that. For so many reasons we didn't go into, but you have that. I have it for different reasons, and that gets stored. If you don't move it, it creates illness.

Steven:

In this book, I wanted to create many doorways or passageways into a deeper connection with your body. I wanted to do it through the breath. Breath is so important. It's something that we do countless times a day, but very few of us do it very well.

Colette:

I am guilty.

Steven:

As am I.

Colette:

I used to sing professionally years ago and I still, my breathing, I took a coach just for a little while when I was living in New Hampshire and he said, "I don't know how you sing so well. Your breathing is terrible. You breathe from here, you're not breathing from your diaphragm, you're holding your stomach in." He goes, "How do you even get those notes out?" It's just because I was too scared to breathe. It was interesting. Anyway, and I'm sure a lot of people don't even know that they're scared to breathe.

Steven:

Yeah. Well, like I said before, a lot of us walk around holding our breath and holding it in the chest and not allowing the diaphragm to move to get a full breath in and a full breath out. That's really important. That's a simple self-care practice that you can bring into your life and just take some time each day to just notice how you're breathing, because you can tell a lot about how you're feeling by how you breathe. Then also, self-massage. Massage school, I went to massage school after I left Chinese medicine school and it changed my life.

Colette:

Tell me about that.

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Steven:

Imagine receiving a massage every day for a year and a half.

Colette:

I would love that. That's like, "Tell me about the massage." I am a spa girl. The minute I go to a hotel, "Does it have a spa?"

Steven:

That's great. I love that.

Colette:

"Does it have a massage?"

Steven:

Me too. But you'd be surprised how many people aren't comfortable with their bodies enough to allow another person to touch their body in that way. In the book, I teach people simple practices of self-massage because self-massage is a way of creating movement in the body to move energy, to help release tension so that the energy flows freely in the body and it's very relaxing. It's a wonderful way to connect to yourself in a deeper level.

And so, there are all these different stages of connecting to the body. For some of us, that thing that we live in, but we try to have as little to do with as possible. I think in recovery, and also for all of us, it's important that we have a better relationship with the body. It's not so much about going to the gym and exercising and pumping iron. That's part of it for some, and that's great and that's what I do, but I also include all these other practices like Qigong and Pilates and self-massage, which is a part of my routine every day to help bring myself into balance and help me to be in the world and live life on life's terms without having to act out just to get through the stress of life. Let's face it, life is stressful.

Colette:

We have to take a little break now. More with Steven Washington when we return. We'll be right back.

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Welcome back. We're here with Steven Washington. Steven, my next question is, let's talk about the spiritual piece for you. Let's relate that both to Qigong, breath, you are deeply spiritual and I'd love to hear how you weave spirituality throughout all these practices.

Steven:

Well, one of the things that I found really incredible about Qigong is that it connects the different parts of ourselves. We have our body, we have our emotions, we have our thoughts and our consciousness, and all the connective points in between. Qigong helps to keep that flow moving in an effortless yet powerful way. For me, it helps me to tap into my own insight and intuition. I feel like my insight and intuition is that little small voice that you talked about, which connects me to my higher power, God, whatever it is for you, that's what it is for me. It helps me to find a place and find a space of peace within myself, that no matter what's happening around me, can I get to that place, and it's not a place that I live in 24 hours a day.

Colette:

It's impossible.

Steven:

It's impossible to do that. I think oftentimes, when I talk or when I watch other people who are teachers like us, there's an expectation that you figure something out where you're able to just be in that space 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Colette:

We'll be dispelling that quick. Yeah, no, that's not true.

Steven:

No, not at all, but I'm able to get to that place sooner rather than later. I'm able to not sit in that stuff, which that stuff is also important because it teaches us a lot, it teaches me a lot, but I need to be able to rise out of that. And so, these practices that I do help me to do that. On top of all those things that we just talked about, just being in nature helps me connect to spirit. Playing with my cats-

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Colette:

Me and my dogs.

Steven:

... helps me to connect to spirit. Dogs, too, that just animals are just these wonderful healing medicine doctors.

Colette:

Yeah, little medicine beings. One of my favorite parts of your work is talking about fear and how fear and addiction go hand to hand, and how when we're feeling afraid, it's not uncommon for all of us to want to numb out and distract ourselves. I believe that fear has become an addiction for everyone. I do think that because we've had such an exposure to sustained uncertainty for so long during the pandemic and then you live in America, so you'll have all the elections and the Europeans had... well, we are all connected to everything. You have the war going on, you have inflation, you have everything that's happening.

Steven: Climate change, you name it.

Colette:

Yeah. I mean, you just open the news and it tells you, "Here's five reasons for you to be afraid today."

Steven:

"And that's just the beginning."

Colette:

And that's just the beginning. Wait, it's only the beginning of the day. Give us some of your favorite exercises or mindfulness practices or Qigong practices about moving fear because fear gets stuck in the body. How do we move it?

Steven:

That's a great question. One of the things that helps me to release energy and what you're talking about is energy from, well, all around us. It's very easy for us to absorb that. We have to be very mindful of how we take in all that information and find a way to control the intake of that,

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

but I love to do this exercise that I teach in the book called shaking, where you shake out your hands, your wrists, your arms, your shoulders, and you shake your whole body and it helps to activate the internal energy within you. It's very simple. Anyone can do it.

Colette:
It works.

Steven:
It works and it helps release.

Colette:
Well, you have to remember, but when you remember to do it, I was like, "Oh, this is great."

Steven:
And you can do it anywhere.

Colette:
Then, you're like, "Where where's my fear? I can't find it now." It's really cool.

Steven:
It's a way to help release energy and also to feel the activation of energy in your body. That's one thing that I do very often. Then also, I think it's important, and I talk about this in the book, it's important to look at your fears in a very honest way. I talk about how it was helpful for me, especially in early sobriety, to take a fear that I had and really just think about it and play it through. If this thing that I'm so afraid of happens, what's going to happen?

Colette:
What's the worst at the end of it?

Steven:
What's the worst?

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Colette:

And then what?

Steven:

Underneath it all, for me at least, it's a fear that if this thing happens, I'm not going to be okay, that I'm not going to be safe. If I look at my life and the evidence that my life gives me and shows me, anything and everything that's come up in my life, I've been able to manage, I've been able to navigate. There have been some things that have been very difficult. But once they happen, and oftentimes they don't even happen. Most of the things that we fear most never really even come to fruition, but we spend a lot of energy waiting, just waiting for that thing to come around from the corner for that shoe to drop. A lot of us can live in that space, in that place.

That gets me to the point of presence, trying to be present in the moment and connecting to your breath. Even doing that shaking exercise brings you to the present moment. The present moment is where we hold our power. We don't hold power in the past, because the past has already happened. We don't hold power in the future because the future hasn't happened yet, but this moment right here, if we can just get back to the present moment, and it's always the present moment. It's always now.

Colette:

Many present moments and we will always be both yesterday and both tomorrow. It's like when we get to the present moment, we were yesterday's tomorrow and we are tomorrow's yesterday. It's like, now is literally the only place we have to build our lives upon is now.

Steven:

Which makes me think of that simple slogan in 12-step is one day at a time, living one day at a time, or just keep it simple. That helps me to just stay in the present moment and just think about, okay, what's the next right thing for me to do if I'm in fear about this, that or the other? Just bring it back to this very moment, because then it kind of simplifies things.

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Colette:

Don't you find radical acceptance, also that sense of being able to completely be with whatever. What I love about your book too, it doesn't say, oh you're just going to do this and then you won't be dealing with your fear anymore, you won't be dealing with any of these uncomfortable things. Instead, it's more, here's how you can process it so you don't get caught or trapped in them. But a life without the myriad spectrum of feelings isn't a life. It's not just all happy, joyous and free. It used to bug me when they say that like, "Oh, the road to happy, joyous and free." I'm not always happy, joy and free. I don't like happy music. I like to write music and it's always sad. You know what I mean? I like a little melancholy once in a while. I notice that you talk about that very clearly, which I really love because there's a tendency in self-help and in recovery to want to be happy and to be joyful and to find that space, where I think when you talk about, for example, your gratitude break, why don't we dive into that, your concept of that gratitude break, because that really helps shift things.

Steven:

It does. What you just reminded me of is the fact that there are so many emotions that we are capable of having. Within each emotion, there are different colors and there are different shades of it, different degrees of it. I like exploring all that in my recovery because that's really where life really is. It's not happy, it's not sad, there's so much in between. There's so much in between. Gratitude. I think gratitude is a really important practice and it's done so much for my life. I talk about in the book how I was first introduced to it from the Oprah Winfrey show. I remember thinking, "Oh, that's cool, that's great. I'll try it. I don't know if it'll work for me," but it ended up being a really powerful practice. What I found tricky though was when I was trying to do it, I was also in the midst of using, I was in the midst of chaos. And so, I thought of my gratitude efforts as taking vitamins, but at the same time, I'm washing the vitamins down with-

Colette:

Whiskey.

Steven:

... vodka.

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Colette:

I'll have some B12 with some Crown Royal. Thank you.

Steven:

It doesn't work. It can't work.

Colette:

No, it does not work. No, no, no. It's a good idea, but no, it does not work.

Steven:

But there's so much science around how being grateful and just finding things to be grateful for, and I find in my life, even in the most darkest periods, there's always something that I can be grateful for. I can be grateful that I'm breathing. I can be grateful that I have water here on the table with me and I can drink it and it will nourish me. I can be grateful that I have eyes and I could see your beautiful face, things like that, just reminding myself of that. If I just sit in this moment and observe how I feel, just in saying those things that I'm grateful for, it changes how I feel and I just invite people to infuse gratitude into their lives any way that they possibly can throughout the day. I even make it even more fun than writing it down in the journal. Take your camera and take pictures of things that you are grateful for in the moment because they're things that happen and just whiz by in our lives. It's nice to have something to remember that moment.

Colette:

I get my best gratitude moments looking out my window. We have a lot of wildlife where I live, because we live on a big property and there's a family of wild turkeys that come, there's like 30 of them and I've watched them grow, so who knows who's coming next year. But they came like little ones in the beginning and then they grew really fast and they all stick together, and they all come and they wander around and I put food out on the ground, like bird food on the ground, but I can sit for hours and watch these big birds, and then seeing a rabbit join them and then all these different birds. I literally go, "Wow!"

Who would've thought years ago when I was the club kid too, that I would ever sit on a podcast and say that that's what gets me high today, the gratitude for nature and for being with it, part of it, not thinking of the exploitation of it, just being with it and participating in it. It really is

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

something. I want to talk about my most favorite thing in your book. It's called breath prayers. Just love this concept. Please, I want us to talk all about breath prayers.

Steven:

Breath prayer is a simple practice of combining the physiological act of breathing and intention, and this practice of thinking about something that you would like more of in your life, something that you want to experience. Oftentimes, in my breath prayers, I'll think of, oh I want more peace. I will think about when I inhale, I'll draw in more peace. Then, as I exhale, I'll release whatever could possibly stand in the way of me feeling that sense of peace that I want.

Sometimes, that's fear. I'll inhale peace and I'll exhale fear. You just say that to yourself over and over as you take slow deep breaths. Usually, I feel a change within myself in 10 breaths, that I'm able to shift my body, I'm able to shift anything that's in my heart that feels sticky, that I'm having trouble moving through, and it clears my mind. It's a practice that is just so simple, so effective, and it's a way to also create more optimism in one's life.

Colette:

It works too.

Steven:

I feel like when we are more optimistic, we're open to step into those connections we have with things that are outside of ourselves, like nature and the universe and with a higher power.

Colette:

Reading the book, I did it and I asked for more God.

Steven:

Oh, I love that.

Colette:

I asked for more God and less fear. I really wanted trust, but I noticed that with the exhaling, I didn't think so much about fear, but what happened was it was like this incredible softening. The fear of not being safe has permeated, I inherited it from my mom, my grandfather was killed in a concentration camp. It's like when she came to Canada, that she was the most afraid person

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

ever. It was always, don't do this because that might happen, but whatever. I know that that's been in my body for a long time. But I felt this really safe, it's like more God equaled more safety for me. I thought that was so interesting.

Then I had more time, that's the other thing. I also ended up with more time and I don't know how the more time came, but also when I felt safe, I had more time. It was like this really trippy, expansive thing just by doing the breath prayers. I encourage everyone to learn how to do this and get this book, because oh my god, it is so good.

What are some lessons, let's talk about your lessons that recovery has taught you about how to enhance your life, so that a lay person who may not be in recovery, but I mean obviously people in recovery will be listening to this, I have a lot of people in recovery that listen, but like anybody, what have you learned as a result of obviously living a more soul-centered life? What are some of the things that you know enhances your life? Actually, we've kind of talked about all those things. Everything we've talked about enhances your life, but what else? Did we miss anything?

Steven:

I don't know, we've covered so much, but one thing that my life and my experience of being an addict and finding recovery is that there's purpose to my pain, and that every experience I have had in the past and I'm having now in the present and what I'll have in the future, I learned so much. It serves a purpose. Had I not experienced all that I've experienced, we wouldn't be having this conversation right now-

Colette:

Totally.

Steven:

... which I think is a really beautiful experience to have. This book that we're talking about wouldn't have been born. I really look at all of it being valuable and I'm grateful for that understanding because before then, before this beautiful blessing came into my life, I didn't view life in that way. I would cherry pick, "Oh, I'm glad this happened. Oh, I wish that didn't happen, or that's terrible, or nothing's to be gained from that difficult situation I experienced". It's all fertile

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

ground for growth and information and knowledge. When I'm able to share it like we're sharing right now, it enriches my life tenfold.

Colette:

I also think, too, sobriety. In our case, we had to almost die and hit bottom. I identify with your story too. When you look at the type of sobriety that happens, it's got nothing to do with substances. It has everything to do with how connected and plugged in we are to that higher consciousness, because then we get emotional sobriety over time as we continue to do this as a habit and a practice. Then when you've added Qigong, then the body that... because if you don't move your body and you don't address it, no matter how much 12-step work that you do, that's still going to be there.

You're going to be stuck. You're going to be stuck. You have to find some way to release this stuff that's been stored in our bodies for a very long time. No matter what it is, I went and did EMDR, I did all kinds of different therapies and stuff because I had to, but I avoided doing anything because it's like, "No, you can't touch that." That's closed for repairs and it's not opening anytime soon. Then, finally it's like, right, I get it. I have to take the key and open that. Doing the gentle thing like Qigong, which is very gentle. I've worked with Robert Peng, I don't know if you know him.

Steven:

Yes.

Colette:

He's so awesome, but I was fascinated with Qigong because it was quiet, slow, gentle, and incredibly profound. I barely moved and I was sweating and something happened that was just like, "Whoa." I haven't kept it up, so actually, you coming on here today made me just like going, this is what I should be doing, because again, I've been like a bit of a tourist.

Steven:

That's beautiful. What you just said reminds me that what we resist persists.

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Colette:
Oh, God.

Steven:
Right?

Colette:
You betcha.

Steven:
Also, that all of this work is about getting closer to who you are, who you really are. I mean, really, and recovering that part of yourself, because when we're dealing with addiction and when we're dealing with unhealthy dependencies that we talked about, which runs the gamut, there's a trade off. We're trading off a part of ourselves in order to do that thing and to do it repeatedly because we think we're getting something back from it, and on some level we are, but it's not sustainable, but we give up a part of ourselves.

Colette:
Or a lot of ourselves. I mean, look at social media. Listen, I understand social media is useful as a method of us being connected and certainly in our work or whatever, gets us out there, but being on it all the time and living there constantly and it's a false place and you get so hooked in it and you have the kind of messages that are given, especially to kids and young people and oh my gosh, look at how much is lost. I was in Starbucks today. There was a lineup of people, not one person was looking at each other, everybody was looking at their phone.

Steven:
Their phone. Oh, yeah.

Colette:
It's like where is connection? Of course, I'm Chatty Cathy. I talk to everybody, so I'm chatting up the girls at the counter and they gave me an extra thing and whatever. It's just we lose our connections to each other through the thing that's supposed to give us connections. I had the same experience with alcohol like you did. It made me feel smart and I wasn't scared and

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

different and I was the same and not even the same, but I could do anything. I was only 12 when I had my first drink, but it was like it changed my life. I'll never forget exactly, it was called slivovitz, it was plum brandy.

Steven:

Oh, delicious.

Colette:

Oh yeah, baby. My dad right away recognized it and hid the bottle. "This kid cannot have anymore." My parents did, they put masking tape to see if we took anything out of the bottle, seriously. I was like, oh yeah, they knew that they had a budding problem in their hands when I was 12, because it does. It's medicine. That's just like social media in the beginning, medicine. "Wow, I can be connected. This is so great." Anything that's too much, it's too much, and then what do we lose? We lose our humanity, I think.

Steven:

I think so as well. I think culturally, I think we're about to face a reckoning around social media and how it impacts all of our lives. I think that what we've all gone through over the last few years with this pandemic, I think we're facing a reckoning around that too, and just in terms of how much or how little we actually deal with the mental health issues that have come about as a result of that, or we're waiting for something to just open the floodgates and isolation will do that.

Colette:

I feel that too. We're just on the edge like, "Oh, something's going to happen," but it's for the better. I really believe that too just going back to what you said about there's purpose in pain, there's purpose in these big transition periods in culture and in our society, et cetera. They rise up, changed, something happens again, we go with the transition and I think we're in the most fascinating experimental time of history and we get to be part of it, which is so great. I want us to pull a card together to see if there's anything else the Wooniverse wants us to talk about. Is that okay? Can we pull a card?

Steven:

That's fun.

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Colette:

Awesome. We're going to pull from my Oracle of the 7 Energies. Let's see if spirit wants us to talk about something that we might not have yet. Okey-dokey, here we go. This has been such a great conversation.

Steven:

I've loved every minute of it.

Colette:

It's been good. Spirit talk to us. Beautiful Uncaging. This is about relieving ourselves of guilt. I'm going to let you jump in there and talk about that, how important that is for our wellbeing.

Steven:

Oh, it is.

Colette:

Guilt and shame.

Steven:

Guilt and shame. I talk about that in the book too, just how shame is something that we will carry with us. Sometimes, it's not even your own shame, it's shame that you inherit from others, but it's this idea that you're not worthy, that you're damaged goods and you're beyond repair. None of that is true. None of that is true. I really want people to get from this book this idea and this truth that shame will grow if we don't talk about it, if we keep it a secret, if we stay silent about it, it will grow and it'll fester. If we judge ourselves, it will grow and fester. I try to teach people to be sensitive to the shame that they feel.

Colette:

And to love that part of themselves.

Steven:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Colette:

This is what I think levels the playing field for everybody in a way, is that sense of we need more self-love and understanding that none of us have done it perfectly, we're not going to do it perfectly, but if we could stay conscious, conscious to our accountability and responsibility for our own boundaries, for our own respect, self-respect, respecting others, I mean, we have some work to do, but that's the one thing I think that will prevent us from getting where we want to go, is that burden. We need to put the burden down.

Steven:

Absolutely. I love how when you feel shame about something and you can share it with someone that you trust, someone that has your wellbeing at heart.

Colette:

Not just everybody. Don't go on Instagram-

Steven:

No, not everybody.

Colette:

... and tell people how much shame you have.

Steven:

No, not everybody can hear your shame. But when we are able to share our shame and have someone listen and not judge us-

Colette:

Witness.

Steven:

... witness, then it is an invitation to do the same for ourselves and also to do the same for someone else who'll bring their shame to you as well, because that's how we all heal together.

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Colette:

I think that's the beauty of having paid the price we both did to end up in a 12-step program, because that was the first experience I ever had with what you described was being there raw with my shame and having my sponsor who was like Aunt Clara from Bewitched. She was like-

Steven:

I love Aunt Clara.

Colette:

She was. She was just like that. Because I was so stubborn and so afraid not to get it right, she would repeat herself over and over again until I thought it was my idea. Then, she would just go, "Oh yes, dear, that's a wonderful idea." When I would parrot back all the things she said to me thinking that, "Whoa, I just came up with this great idea."

Steven:

She had your number.

Colette:

She had my number. It was just like, okay. Just being there and having that witnessing, now, I think obviously, we had a place to go with that, but I think this in culture, in society, more of this, more of that community-based holding space, safe space to do that in I think is extraordinarily healing because then you realize you're not the only one, you're not the worst one, and that you can change and you can be better and you don't have to hide. You don't have to hide.

This was fabulous. To see all of Steven's offerings, including his courses, his writing, his events, and so much more, visit him online at stevenwashingtonexperience.com and Steven is spelled S-T-E-V-E-N. You all know how to spell Washington and experience, well, you know that too. To find a transcript of this episode, quotes, and links to what we've been speaking about here today, head on over to our show notes page at itwpodcast.com or click the link in this episode's description. Thank you so much for joining us today, Steven. This was such a great conversation.

SPIRIT & ——— RECOVERY

Steven:

Thanks for having me. So good to be with you. Yay!

Colette:

Awesome. Yay. High five!

Colette:

What did we learn today? Gosh, I learned so many things, but if I go back to his story and when he talked about going to acupuncture school, but that wasn't for him, but he discovered Qigong as part of the program, that really brings me to the idea that man plans and God laughs, but also that we never know when we're driven towards something, what's really going to be on the other end. It's a reminder to let go the form of what we think is what's best for us.

Also, I've learned that Qigong and focusing on the body and different techniques can really help with stress, relief from fear, and all of these things that tend to get ignored when we go into, say, therapy, a talk therapy, and in my case, recovery therapy was where we don't discuss anything about the body, it was the mind and the spirit, et cetera. We actually don't deal with the fact that trauma and our old stories live in our bodies. Gosh, I could just keep going on and on, but guess what everybody, you're just going to have to listen to the podcast again. There's so much in it, so thank you for listening. Until next time, I'm Colette Baron-Reid. Be well.

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