

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.*

EP57:

Soulbriety, Inner-Work & Recovery

With Dr. Elisa Hallerman

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. Let's navigate these waters together with compassion and love. There is wisdom waiting to be shared. You're not alone. We're in this together.

Hey there. Welcome to Inside the Wooniverse, a podcast brought to you from the corner of Fringe and Maine. I am your host, Colette Baron-Reid. Welcome to another episode of our fantastic limited edition series called Spirit and Recovery. And with us today is the wondrous Dr. Elisa Hallerman. Now she is the founder of Recovery Management Agency and the author of Soulbriety. I love that soul, like S-O-U-L-briety. So cool. Heal your trauma, overcome addiction, and reconnect with your soul. At the age of 43, at the height of her wildly successful career as a top Hollywood agent... And I met her way back then, she was really at the top of her game, Dr. Hellman left the entertainment world to step into her true life purpose. She headed back to school and she went and got her PhD in Somatic Depth Psychology, the study of bringing unconscious psychological material into the light of awareness. Wow. I'm so excited to have this conversation with you. Welcome to the Wooniverse, Elisa.

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Dr. Elisa:

Thank you so much, Colette. So good to see you.

Colette:

Yes. Awesome. So let's go back. Let's go on a time travel machine to your early years. What was your childhood like and when did you become aware of the concept of soul or your soul or the soulful quality of the world?

Dr. Elisa:

So, my childhood was great actually. I had a really loving family. I have a sister who I'm extremely, extremely close with. My parents were married for my entire childhood. They did not get divorced until I was 21, and we would go on vacation together, but there was this subtle isolation and lack of communication, I think with being able to really connect. And to no fault of my parents, they just weren't brought up that way. They didn't have the skillset that a lot of parents have now. And I think that what I can look back on is there was a tremendous amount of love, but sometimes it was hard to have someone else regulate when I was dysregulated, which is a big thing. And not having things explained to a child when they're going through something or not really being able to sit down and recognize that this might be something that's making them anxious or what have you.

And so, there wasn't a lot of that, but there was so much love. And then, my mom was very, very close with her mother and she was like a second mother to me and really was helping to raise me and my sister when we were younger. And she got very ill when we were teenagers and ultimately passed away. And when that happened, my mom was ill-equipped and started her own journey with addiction. And I had no idea that my mother was an addict. I had no idea that taking certain pills for this or that or a headache, taking something more strong than a Tylenol or anything like that was even an issue.

And so, it just became sort of normal like, "Oh, I have a headache. Let me take this barbiturate, or whatever it was, and those kinds of things; benzos and so on. So then, it really wasn't until I got sober many years later that... I had two years sober and realized my mom actually had an addiction problem and was able to get her sober at that time. So I would say my childhood was amazing in a lot of ways, and it kind of came to a crossroad when I was in my 20s.

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Colette:

Don't you think that we feel those subtle cues? I think that when we are with somebody, because I don't believe addiction just comes out of... And again, I could be, this is just my opinion, so I have my own recovery journey. I'm 37 years clean and sober. So I also have a... When I look back, I go, "Wow, those were the signs." The not talking about things. You have to kind of read between the lines and wonder what that is. My mom was a Holocaust survivor and then came over and raised us as Christians. Nevermind I didn't even know we were Jewish. At all. Nothing Jewish. I'm like totally Christian. So it was big surprise when we found out when we were in our 20s. Like, "Oh, by the way, we wouldn't tell you this thing about our family." So there was a lot in not talking. And that's what I'm hearing from you, is that right? It's like the not talking...

Dr. Elisa:

That's right. It feels a little secrecy or... Here's how I can describe it. My sister and I had our own rooms. At one point we had four telephone lines in the house. So this is pre-cellphone, obviously. Everyone in the house had their own line. Everyone had their own television. My mom would be in the den, my dad would be upstairs in their room. I would be in my room. And so there was a lot of subtle isolation, but in retrospect.

Colette:

Right, right. Of course, because when we grow up, it's normal to us.

Dr. Elisa:

Right, right, exactly.

Colette:

That's our normality. Exactly.

Dr. Elisa:

Exactly.

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Colette:

So you have your own addiction and recovery story, which I'm really curious about because you chose, I guess in your 20s to pursue work in the entertainment industry. Is that correct? Is that when you kind of fell into that?

Dr. Elisa:

Yes.

Colette:

Because you became really successful as an agent.

Dr. Elisa:

So I was living in New York City and I was an attorney and living with my boyfriend, and hated my job and didn't want to get married to him. And my sister was graduating from college and moving to Los Angeles, and her roommate, who was supposed to be going with her at the last minute canceled. And she called me and said, "You're not really happy anyway. Why don't you just move to LA?" And I said, "Let's do it." So I moved to LA with no plan, and I knew I didn't want to practice anymore. And a friend of a friend introduced me to the entertainment business, which I knew nothing about. This was pre-internet. I had no idea even what a talent agency was. So I took some interviews and I walked into ICM at the time, and this is in the mid-90s. And it was young and vibrant and cool and hip and everything that you would've imagined. I was like, "Yep, this sounds great. I'll do this." And loved it right from the beginning. And then what happened was I was definitely alcoholic from day one. I started drinking at 17. I drank alcoholically in college and in law school, but everyone was drinking and it didn't seem so out of the ordinary. Only years later when I would look back and say, "Well, I started my drinking in my room maybe one or two before we even had the pre-game, before we even went out, before we even started." And so, I was already definitely an alcoholic. When I got to Los Angeles, there was a trauma that had happened. I lost a close friend of mine, and I then found drugs. And when drugs were introduced, that mixture of alcohol and cocaine for me is what eventually took me down.

Colette:

I say that's the express train. You took the express train. Me too. I did the same thing.

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Dr. Elisa:

Eight years on the express train. Yeah, exactly.

Colette:

I understand.

Dr. Elisa:

Exactly. And so, I was working, but I definitely had no quote-unquote success. I was a young baby agent and I started to get in trouble for my behavior, my use, and I was told that if I didn't clean up my act, I was going to get fired. I had no other source of income. This was it for me and I was scared. And then, eventually in 2002, I got sober. And I got sober with my therapist and going to 12 steps. I didn't know that I could go to treatment, no one was paying for me to go to treatment. It wasn't even an option. I just thought... And I was exhausted. I was 33 years old. It was two weeks before my 34th birthday. And the interesting thing was the minute I got to a 12 step program, and I was such a nerd. So they give you what we call the big book of alcoholics anonymous, and what I found out is most people don't read that.

Colette:

Yeah, I snorted it. Same like you.

Dr. Elisa:

Yeah.

Colette:

Cover to cover. Yeah. Nerding out on every word.

Dr. Elisa:

Nerding right out. And then I was like, "Oh, I have this and I don't have to be a crazy person for the rest of my life and so unstable, and I can just do what they're saying and there's answers." So I was hooked. I was like, where do I sign up? Who do I pay? Where's my membership card? What do I do? And that started my journey, and then came the outward success of working in Hollywood and having that experience.

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Colette:

So, back to the concept of soul, because I think that what I'd like to do next is to bring the idea of soul into the concept of 12 steps because I think it is a spiritual program, a spiritually based program. I know personally for me, I was so destitute in terms of I was morally bankrupt. I was a cocaine addict. When I got clean and sober, I had hit bottom. I did go to a treatment center that was available to me for women, and I don't know, I would've been dead otherwise. And coming out the other end, it is where I discovered that the soul that I always knew was there was now accessible to me. Did you have a similar experience with that? Because I think the outer experience starts to come when our soul steps in.

Dr. Elisa:

So I did not grow up with any sort of religion. I am Jewish, but we were not practicing. And the word spirituality or soul was not in my vernacular, whatsoever. Zero. So I got to AA and it was spiritual, spiritual, spiritual, higher power. I did believe in a higher power so that made it easier for me to jump in. How I was going to turn my will and my life over, that was another story. And the fact that I had to do it all the time, I thought I just had to do it one time.

Colette:

One time, yeah. Just once? Oh.

Dr. Elisa:

And I was like, "I already did it," but it was not working. So that was confusing. But I had no concept of soul until I went back to school in my 40s. For me, there was no distinction between soul and spirit. And really for me, after I got sober from drugs and alcohol, I just really became a workaholic and addicted to other things. I put down the drugs and the alcohol, but-

Colette:

You picked up the productivity.

Dr. Elisa:

I was in ego and all of that. And that's what led to five years of being sober thinking, "Oh, something's wrong. Something isn't working on the inside."

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Colette:

And doesn't it now bring up to you, I don't know if you ever heard this saying, but that they used to tell me in the program used to bug me because I thought, "Oh no, I'm in for a month. This should be good." That you have your feet firmly planted in mid-air in your first five years of sobriety.

Dr. Elisa:

Oh, no one said that, but that makes sense.

Colette:

Right? They told me that.

Dr. Elisa:

That does makes sense. Someone should have told me.

Colette:

Yeah.

Dr. Elisa:

Yes.

Colette:

Like, don't get too big for your britches. You're going to start seeing all kinds of other addictions come up. And I went, "No, I won't."

Dr. Elisa:

But they did say something, which did strike me when I started to feel that unhappiness of just because you get sober doesn't mean that you're going to get everything that you ever wanted or that you're going to be happy. You still have to do the inner work. And for me, that was always my Achilles heel. What's the inner work? How do you get in to do the inner work? Where do you connect into that? That for me was a disconnect.

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Colette:

There's something missing. And plus you were in an environment that didn't support that kind of thinking and behavior, being an agent, et cetera. It's a difficult, difficult environment. So let's segue into this then when you decided, you know what? I don't want to do this anymore. There's something more. You're obviously five years sober at this point, right?

Dr. Elisa:

Yes.

Colette:

And you're like, "I don't want to do this anymore. I want to heal more. I want to understand the soul. I want to know about this inner work."

Dr. Elisa:

So what happened was, I had gone on this... I knew I needed a minute to think about everything. I went on a vacation with my dad, and I brought a whole bunch of books with me, self-help, spiritual, whatever I could get my hands on. And I read everything. One of the things I read said, "Make a list of all the things that you ever wanted to do or that you love or that you're passionate about." So I made this extremely long list, and three of the things that were on there were, I want to learn more about addiction. I wanted to be of service to women, and I wanted to be an ER doctor.

Colette:

Wow.

Dr. Elisa:

Yes.

Colette:

And you kind of are. You kind of are now.

Dr. Elisa:

Exactly.

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Colette:

You know what I mean? Okay, but we'll get there.

Dr. Elisa:

Exactly. And so, I came home and I thought, "Okay, what are some tiny little actions that I could take towards each one of these things?" So right away I'm like, all right. I started working at a sober living for women and volunteering. And then, I went online to see what prerequisites I had to take in order to take my MCATs, because it's just an exercise. Let me just figure it out. And realized that I was never good at science or math, which is why I became a lawyer. But when I was researching at UCLA, I found this drug and alcohol counseling class certificate program. And so, I thought, "Okay, this is everything I want to know. It's a year and a half program, two days a week from seven to 10 at night, I can do this while I'm still agenting."

Colette:

Yep.

Dr. Elisa:

So that's what I did. Now I'm studying my note cards in staff meetings, but it's lighting me up, learning and all of this new information. And that's when I first started to understand neuroscience behind addiction. And I first started to hear the word trauma in a real way of exactly what it was. And I was able to connect the dots that I did suffer from PTSD and that this is what was sort of driving these constant addictions and anxieties and this OCD like behavior that I had had, regardless of putting down the drugs and alcohol.

Colette:

Right. Same. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Elisa:

So I really started to pull those threads. It was fascinating to me. I started to meet with different professors. I would read a book and call the author and go meet them for lunch because that's what agents do. And I started to build this Rolodex... Which is just a bunch of contacts for those people that don't know what a Rolodex is.

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Colette:

Yeah, right, because we don't even have-

Dr. Elisa:

That's from the 1800s.

Colette:

I remember that.

Dr. Elisa:

Yeah. So that's where that started, and cut to, I ended up retiring from the entertainment business and starting this recovery management agency, which at the time was a small little consulting company. Because when I left Holly, what it was newsworthy for a minute, and people started calling me with, "Where do we go for this? Who do we call? Who's the best doctor for this?" And I realized that that was what was missing.

Colette:

Sure.

Dr. Elisa:

That instead of just Googling it or asking your neighbor where their kid went to treatment, or your dentist for a good therapist, that there should be a place like when I was an attorney, people would come to me for legal advice. And when I was an agent, they would come for career advice. And you're having a mental health crisis, and there's no place to go with an expert to say, "Hey, let me educate you on everything that's going on, figure out what's wrong, and also where your strengths are." And so, that's what led me to go back to school and get my master's and doctorate, because I obviously wanted to really understand the world I was entering.

Colette:

I love that you did all of that. It's an interesting thing. I think when we get clean and sober, we really want to be of service. That's a similar thing. You stop being so self-centered and realize

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like, "Oh my God, I've been set free. Who can I help? Can I help this person?" And we find our way in our own way, and I think you've definitely found your way. So let's talk about how you developed the concept of soulbriety, because I think that's really what... I know, you and I both share the idea that we're both grounded in the 12 steps and respect and love them, but there really is a different way that you approach this.

You add all these different components to recovery that I do think are missing. I had to get outside help for a lot of different things. The 12 steps could give me a really good basis of my recovery, but I needed outside help. It didn't give me any information about how to deal with my traumas or issues around rape and the litany of things that I came in with, needed outside help. And you kind of now have one-stop shopping. So let's talk about that.

Dr. Elisa:

So when I was looking to go to grad school, I couldn't find exactly what I wanted. I didn't want to be a therapist. I knew that, but I wanted a broad education in some capacity that was going to give me a lot of information. I found my way to Pacifica Graduate Institute, which is in Santa Barbara.

Colette:

I so wanted to go there.

Dr. Elisa:

It's an incredible, incredible institution. I found my way there and I remember I went to the... I drove up there to hear what's the school about? And they started talking about soul and imagery and Joseph Campbell and the Hero's Journey and all this creative stuff that fit into the things that I loved about working in Hollywood, but also were seriously resonating with me. I didn't even understand what depth psychology was maybe until I was there for two years. I just was like, this is just mind blowing, but basically it spoke to me on a soul level. I jumped in and I decided to do the depth psychology program and the somatic track so that I could really focus on trauma and neuroscience, but be rooted in depth psychology. So three years later, we're ready to write our dissertations and my dissertation was around could doing soul-centered work lead to long-term recovery? And after interviewing all my participants and working on this, the answer was yes.

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Colette:
Resounding.

Dr. Elisa:
A resounding yes with a caveat of, but they didn't know they were doing it because they didn't have the language of soul. And that became very clear. The other piece was that, of course, soul was showing up in different ways, but they didn't know how to dive into soul work when it wasn't just appearing organically, when the unconscious wasn't just bringing itself up. But how can we proactively make what's unknown known?

Colette:
And it's Jung. That's-

Dr. Elisa:
Exactly, yeah.

Colette:
It's rooted in Jung. Yeah, it's-

Dr. Elisa:
Rooted in Jung-

Colette:
It's fascinating.

Dr. Elisa:
And also James Hillman, who's the founder of archetypal psychology, which really spoke to me, and Zoe, our mutual bestie gave me a book prior to me going to Pacifica by James Hillman called The Soul's Code. So that was another one little wink.

Colette:
One of my favorites. Mm-hmm.

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Dr. Elisa:

Yes.

Colette:

The Godwinks, yes, along the way.

Dr. Elisa:

Exactly. So that was a Godwink along the way. And so, I thought, "Okay, there's something here," but I had just graduated. I had just got my doctorate. I was building a company. I was exhausted. So the title of the dissertation was soulbriety, essentially. And I started doing the work on myself and on my clients, and it was very, very powerful. And then, the pandemic hit.

Colette:

Oh. So now we've come all the way up in time to three years ago.

Dr. Elisa:

Yes. And when the pandemic hit, obviously we were all forced to be home.

Colette:

With ourselves.

Dr. Elisa:

With ourselves. And there was such a spike in addiction and substance abuse and anxiety and depression, and in suicidal ideation. It was devastating. It was every day call after call after call, and I really couldn't manage the amount of people that needed help, and I really wanted other people to have this information. That's when I felt very called, because as you know, it's not a very easy thing to sit down and write a book. It's extremely time consuming and very hard. But I just felt really called that this idea and this concept of sobriety and some of the language and what it is and the storytelling behind it needed to get out there. And so, that's what led to it.

Colette:

What a great point. But we're going to have to take a little pause. More with Dr. Elisa Hallerman when we return. We'll be right back.

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Thank you for joining us today and welcome back. With us today is Dr. Elisa Hallerman, author of *Soulbriety: Heal Your Trauma, Overcome Addiction and Reconnect with Your Soul*. So let's talk about the importance of language and how linguistics are... They also affect us on a neuroscientific level as well too, so when we hear language and we use language, how does language play into Soulbriety and how talk about it in ourselves, in our recovery?

Dr. Elisa:

Yeah, I'm really glad you asked this because I want to go back to what we were talking about before and the distinction between soul and spirit. So the 12 step program saved my life, period.

Colette:

Same.

Dr. Elisa:

I really grasped the concept for me of spirituality, which is also individual. And there was no separation. That was my spiritual program. When I started to learn about soul, I realized that soul and psyche and spirit had all been a bit commingled over time, and people will use them interchangeably. It made it hard now to distinguish between which was which, but all the teachers in depth psychology are very clear on the separation between spirit and soul, but the intrinsic need for them to work together at the same time.

Colette:

Can you explain that?

Dr. Elisa:

Yes. So for me, spirit became wanting more, wanting to connect to something outside of myself, i.e., higher power, to think about things in the future, want to transcend and manifest and forward thinking and future oriented.

Colette:

You're saying that that's attributed in your perception or perspective of that word to that? So some type of consciousness that included the future that sounded like, if you could be a little more clear, that it's personal desire based. Is that how you're connecting it?

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Dr. Elisa:

Yeah. So spirit is something outside of yourself that you connect to.

Colette:

So the concept of an outer higher power is-

Dr. Elisa:

An outer higher power.

Colette:

Okay, because that's interesting. I don't see it like that, but I'm fascinated to hear this. Okay.

Dr. Elisa:

Yes. And that soul is a much more internal, deep, embodied, unique essence of who you are, and it is essentially our meaning making machine.

Colette:

Okay. So let me just clarify. So spirit is transcendent and the soul is inherent, it's imminent, right? So there's transcendence and imminence, both have to work together. So, what you're doing is bringing that concept of the... Is it true that you're looking at this as an immortal part of us that takes us on and helps us grow and become conscious, et cetera? Where does that concept come into play?

Dr. Elisa:

Yes. Soul is, for me, the part of me that is absolute and genuine and certain. It's the part of me that has a felt sense of home and peace, and it requires of me to be constantly curious. To seek out the imaginal and to endure and be able to sit in the darkness, and really be able to alchemize during that time my pain into purpose, and teaching me how to do that. So I'm not afraid of the dark. That will inevitably happen. My spirituality has gotten bigger through my soul work, but that's the differentiation for me.

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Colette:

No, I love it. It's so great because I think a lot of people struggle with this idea that a higher power is something outside of you that's going to give you gifts like Santa Claus, or take them away, et cetera, where you don't have a real connection, you just have a kind of, "Can you please help me?" As opposed to this eminent sense that isn't dictated by outer conditions nor personality, if I'm hearing you correctly. That it's-

Dr. Elisa:

Exactly.

Colette:

Right. There's a purity about the way you describe soul, which I love. Actually, all my work as an Oracle creator is based on your concept of soul, to bring it into that sense of owned sovereignty. It's a sovereignty that is not dictated by the psyche or the constructs of the personality. I think if we could call it that, the conditioned self. Does that make sense?

Dr. Elisa:

100%. Yes.

Colette:

Okay.

Dr. Elisa:

You can feel when you're connected to soul. We talk about soulmates, we talk about soul food, we talk about heartbreak on a soul level when you feel broken or disconnected or soul sick. When I look at trauma, I look at soul loss.

Colette:

Yes. Let's talk more about that, soul loss, because I think it's so popular now, it's become such a popular topic. I think a lot of people, when you talk about soul loss, this is a beautiful way to describe what happens to us. It's like the trauma that is the loss of something, loss of innocence, loss of something, loss of that home. Would you say that's true?

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Dr. Elisa:

Yes. So when something traumatic happens, to the outside world, it might look like dissociation, or there's any number of things. We have a biological effect, we have a cognitive effects of it, and so on. But to the outside world, it's a disconnect. It's something that reoccurs from the past in our present, and it's not about what happened to us, but it's about how we're experiencing the world today because of it. Essentially what happens also is we experience soul loss, and what that means is there's a disconnect not only with others, but with ourselves. And we're almost fragmented, if you will; and I talk a lot about when something traumatic had happened to me, it felt like I was broken up into a million pieces, looking at myself on the floor thinking, "It's too much. How am I going to put it back together? And how am I going to put it back together by myself?"

And even if I did put it back together, I'm never going to look the same. And it's about really taking the time to connect with that and work with those pieces. Sometimes those pieces become parts that we need to reintroduce into our lives, but really it's about making what's unconscious for us, whether going back to personal unconscious or the collective unconscious, making our own personal mythologies, our own personal images, making those things more known to us.

Colette:

Mm-hmm. And they're safer. So when they become these mythologies, I think that we fragment... Again, when I look back on, something happened to me, I could see how I had a psychotic break in a way. Somehow the dissociation enabled me to survive the experience, but there was a soul loss. When I read that you talked about this, no one else had ever spoke about it like that exactly, and I look back on that 19-year-old girl that I was, and I saw... I can still see that loss in all the years that it took to retrieve and make peace with and love that fragment that you spoke very eloquently about, that we become fragmented and disconnected, and yet those pieces are never lost. They're still there. They're dormant, or they're active in ways in which continue to remind us of the original trauma because it's in our body. Would you say that the somatic piece of your work addresses that, the body?

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Dr. Elisa:

Definitely. Definitely. When a client will say to me, "I think I should go to treatment. I think I'm ready to go home from treatment. I think I should break up with my boyfriend. I think this," I'm like, "Well, the answer's no then," because if you are up here and you're thinking, you don't know from here. You don't know from your soul. And so I'm asking always, "What do you feel?" You know when you walk into a room, you walk into an elevator and there's a shady person, or you get a bad vibe and you're like, "Oh, I feel a little..." And you straighten up and you look around and you have a sense of what's going on, who's around. And you have a sense when you meet someone, an instant connection.

And so, this is soul speaking to us. We have to start to listen to the whispers that are coming from inside. And I talk about the soul journey and knowing where you are on the soul journey, which will happen over and over again within your lifetime. But the 12 sort of stops on the soul journey.

Colette:

Oh, I love that.

Dr. Elisa:

And knowing where you are really helps with the fear of not getting to the next phase and having the faith that you're going to continue to move through. And the first step is usually we hear this whisper. Sometimes it's asking really big questions. For me it was, "Do you want to quit your job?"

Colette:

Big.

Dr. Elisa:

Right? "Do you want to move to New York? Do you want to be in this relationship?" And you're just like, "Shh, that is way-"

Colette:

That's too much for me.

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Dr. Elisa:

... way too big, what are you thinking? Go away. But soul will continue to whisper and yell until a brick house falls on your head and you're stuck with, "Okay, now I actually must answer these questions."

Colette:

And isn't it true too through synchronicities? It's like I believe the soul speaks to the body so that those whispers, they aren't mental. They're expressions of a sense. There are different kind of sense that we have that have atrophied because our culture has never supported it. But the feeling state of the body will tell you, and it just is, it's a plunk. But then you're like, "Ah, excuse me. No, thank you. No, no, no, no, no." And then it'll come to us, "Okay, well, you're not listening to the plunk in your gut and your chest and your throat, so how about I line up a set of circumstances external to you." And I believe that... And again, because you have a background in neuroscience, so you'll understand this, that when we have this sensation, it's not just the conditioned self that we start to see evidence in the outer world of what we're looking for. That's the reticular activating system of the brain. Our eyeballs are going to go for what we want evidence, show me the evidence, without being cognitive of it.

But then all of a sudden, this soul self is going to go, "Okay, we're going to take your eyes now and we're going to show you some things. Since you're not listening to me, we're going to show you a set of circumstances." So when you're called-

Dr. Elisa:

Yeah, I love that. The other thing is we do take in information through our eyes, but the way we take in information in totality is from all of our five senses.

Colette:

Six.

Dr. Elisa:

And so... Six.

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Colette:

Yeah.

Dr. Elisa:

We will have a visceral response to something. I talk about in the book, as I was getting ready to write my dissertation, I was full speed ahead. Here's the concept paper, this is what it is. I just got to get this done. I got to move on. I got to get this PhD and move on. And I'm jumping in and I'm writing this, and it's good. It's all right. The question's okay as it is and it's all going to get figured out. And boom, I fall off a ledge and shatter my elbow and my right arm.

Colette:

Ouch.

Dr. Elisa:

And it's a year before I can even fully extend my arm again. So, no dissertation writing.

Colette:

Just thinking and feeling.

Dr. Elisa:

Just thinking and feeling.

Colette:

And considering.

Dr. Elisa:

Which is of course, exactly what I needed.

Colette:

That's enforced percolation. You have to percolate on this before you-

Dr. Elisa:

I love that. I love that, enforced percolation.

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Colette:

So, you've talked about that in the book, about how your circumstances lined up so you weren't listening. So something happens, and it's not about blaming. I want to just underline that because I know a lot of people who listen think, "Oh, well, are you blaming yourself to fault?" It's not the point. It's not about blame. We are always participating in the universe. Always. So it's just interesting in hindsight, retrospect like, "Oh, how interesting is that. I wasn't really listening, so I end up having to break my arm." It's not about blaming or you manifesting anything. It's just about observing and being curious. I wonder what that means?

Dr. Elisa:

Exactly.

Colette:

I wonder what that means?

Dr. Elisa:

It's always that means about, from a depth psychological perspective, we're always asking questions. Why is this happening? Why is this person showing up? What is this image or dream trying to tell me? We're always asking why.

Colette:

Sure.

Dr. Elisa:

We're always in the conversation.

Colette:

Always.

Dr. Elisa:

So the minute that happened, I was, "Okay, why, why, why, why?"

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Colette:

This is a really interesting thought and I wonder what you think about it. Do you have to be addicted to something to practice soulbriety, or can you still benefit from it if you're experiencing something like the dark night of the soul or something else? From the way you're describing it, it appears that you really don't. But you might think that the way... Again, I don't know 100% the way you teach this, but to me it sounds like, well, everybody could use sobriety.

Dr. Elisa:

Yes.

Colette:

Right? Everybody can.

Dr. Elisa:

Soulbriety is literally for everyone and anyone who ever struggles with connection to themselves or others, period.

Colette:

I love that.

Dr. Elisa:

It really gives you a sense of your own soul journey and how to walk through it. The book is told in story because that is how soul speaks to us. It's not something we can give you a specific definition or wrap your arms around and say, "This is soul and this is your soul, and this is what it is." It's so personal, and there is no language specifically. It's explained in story, in mythology, in poetry, in imagery. And so, that is how the book is set up so that you can have that experience of reading it and say, "Yeah, yeah, me too. Me too here, me too there. I feel that I resonate with that." And then start to understand for you what your own soul journey might be looking like and where you are on it.

Colette:

I think it's so important to now that we return to metaphor and the language of the imaginal, et cetera, because I think that we've been conditioned to see things so black and white and so

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narrow that there's no room for nuance. And now we need this. We need the nuance. We need to be able to identify rather than compare or sense that this story is, I can reflect on this, and I understand it. It may not be exact, but I understand the gist or the spirit of... I believe even stories have soul. So for me, those-

Dr. Elisa:
Same.

Colette:
... there's home in the story. And so you actually are connecting to something that's very much alive and can communicate with you. So I love that that's the way that you've approached this. And yeah, because when I looked it over, I went, this really does sound like it's for everyone. Although I've always felt that way about the 12 steps too, but nobody would go there and do that unless you've hit bottom. I also realize that... I tried a couple of times. I'm like, "I don't like this. Ew." And then it took me five more years of torture to come back going, "Okay, I'm ready to listen to you people." You get to a place where you realize, "I need something. I need to come home and I don't have a map."

Dr. Elisa:
Exactly. During the pandemic, I started a soulbriety group with a bunch of women, and now I have another one, and everyone in it is not by any means in recovery from drugs and alcohol. It became a place where people that were ready to have this conversation, we could come and talk about it. And so, I start off with a reading that is some sort of soul-centered reading and then explain it a little bit further and then share on topic. And it's been amazing.

Colette:
That's so great.

Dr. Elisa:
These women, my Monday night ladies, we are as thick as thieves. We can talk about anything. It's such a deeper intimate relationship than I've ever had in any other group.

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Colette:

So do you find that the... And it sounds to me, I mean, I could be wrong, but that community is the next step for soulbriety, community of people who are coming to it from the same perspective, that they share the language. Because I think that really brings people together when there's an agreement to explore a language and to be curious about this new language.

Dr. Elisa:

Yes.

Colette:

Similar to 12 steps, but different.

Dr. Elisa:

That would be my prayer for the book, is that more people would learn the language of soul, that they would find their way to a group of soulbriety, and that we could create this community for everyone, where we're not looking at everything from a point of view of pathologizing our symptoms, but rather strength affirming, getting curious, understanding, and not being afraid of the dark.

Colette:

Oh, I love that you said about not focusing on the pathology of our symptoms, because I think I've noticed a lot of self-indulgence. As soon as the word trauma became popular, a lot of people started self-diagnosing and saying, "Oh, this is my trauma, da, da, da." And to me, that kind of conversation sounded very indulgent and very much focused on the pathology. So I had this, therefore I can't do that. Or you've done this to me, so I can't handle it, so walk on eggshells. And that's really unhealthy for culture, for people in general because there's no connection there. It's like there's another reason for me to tell you to stay away. So what I am hearing you say is a way to get so much more deeper intimacy in these groups where people have come and this is the common language. I think this is just such a beautiful... I hope we can help that happen by you being on this show happen, because everybody needs to start a soulbriety group. I want to join your Monday night group. It sounds cool.

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Dr. Elisa:

I mean, one of the things I always say is everyone grows up, but not everyone makes the decision to grow down. And that's the essence of soulbriety, is growing down.

Colette:

Which is being rooted, Right?

Dr. Elisa:

Being rooted, and creating depth.

Colette:

Ooh, I love that. I know I don't have a lot of tolerance for superficial things, and I get into a lot of trouble because my husband's like, "You're always going too deep." I'm like, "Oh, but that's me." Okay, so how about us pulling a card and seeing what the Wooniverse or the soul, what our mutual soul or the combined soul between the two of us wants us to talk about, if anything? So, ooh, Call of the Muse is the card that came out. So let me give you a little background on this particular card. It's from my seven energies deck. It is about communication and creativity. And so, from what I feel from our conversation is that the more growing down we can do and exploring the concept of soulbriety, that would open up a huge amount of creativity for each of us and capacity to tune into new ideas and inspiration, which really does come from the soul. Would you agree?

Dr. Elisa:

Yes. And creativity is essentially the way we talked about how do you get in, the way in to caring for your soul and doing soul work, whether that's in your writing or some sort of art or something that you're reading or dreaming. These are all ways to tap into that creativity that we all have inside, and lead us into this world of the imaginal, which is a term that Henry Corbin coined because imagination felt more like a fairytale and not real. The contents of our psyche are not, not real. They're real. They're very real for us.

Colette:

They're very real.

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Dr. Elisa:

And so, they live in a place of the imaginal and being able to get there and figure out what your gateway is into soul is where the creativity comes from.

Colette:

Wow. What a fantastic conversation. To learn more about Dr. Elisa and all of her offerings, you can visit her at drhallerman.com to find a transcript of this episode, quotes and links to what we've been speaking about here today, learn about her book and all the things she's doing. Head on over to our show notes page at itwpodcast.com, or click the link in this episode's description. Dr. Elisa, thank you so much for joining us today. This was an awesome conversation.

Dr. Elisa:

Thank you so much. It was awesome to see you and great to be on, and I loved it, and I'll come back anytime.

Colette:

Thank you so much.

Dr. Elisa:

Thank you.

Colette:

What an inspiring conversation with Dr. Elisa Hallerman today. So I always love to ask this question at the end of every interview. What did we learn today? And I learned so much, but I think when I think about soul, one of the things that Elisa had said was, it's when we're at home. We're at home in our own skin, and we all know what that feels like. And so, her content, her book, her work, there is a way for all of us to find home and we don't have to have suffered terrible traumas or addiction to actually understand and explore the concept of soulbriety. We just need to be human and want to find our way home. Thank you for listening. I'm Colette Baron-Reid. Until next time, be well.

The top portion of the page features a vibrant background of an aurora borealis, with streaks of green and blue light against a dark, starry night sky. The title 'SPIRIT & RECOVERY' is centered in the upper half of this image. 'SPIRIT &' is in a smaller, white, sans-serif font, with a horizontal line extending to the right from the ampersand. 'RECOVERY' is in a larger, gold-colored, serif font with a slight glow effect.

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