



MIND & LIFE

Mind & Life Podcast Transcript Yuria Celidwen - Indigenous Wisdom

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Opening Quote – Yuria Celidwen (00:00:04): *I know that many people find that we are at a moment of great distress in the world, but we also have never had as many possibilities of compassionate action as today. There has never been such awareness of how much we can come together to create these different perspectives of new life—and also having the humility of listening to other voices that possibly have other solutions that can contribute, and creating seriously a community that is inclusive, that is truly diverse.*

Intro – Wendy Hasenkamp (00:00:45): Welcome to Mind & Life. I'm Wendy Hasenkamp. Today I'm speaking with contemplative scholar and Indigenous activist, Yuria Celidwen. Yuria's research focuses on self-transcendence in Indigenous contemplative traditions with a particular emphasis on what she calls an ethics of belonging. She's worked across many sectors, including at the UN, to bring Indigenous ways of knowing into conversation with Western approaches.

(00:01:14) I spoke with Yuria over the summer and we had, as you'll hear, a lovely, kind of spiraling conversation. Yuria begins briefly in her native language, and then speaks about the importance of keeping these languages alive. She describes her roots in Mexico and her lineage of mystics, healers, and explorers of both mind and the lands. We talk about contemplative frameworks within her tradition, and she shares some of her experiences integrating Indigenous ideas into Western culture. Yuria also reflects on what can happen to contemplative practice when it's translated into an individualistic society (like the United States) and the possibilities for contemplative practice to open our awareness to interdependence. She describes the concepts of kin relationality and ecological belonging, and shares approaches for coming together across differences. Specifically, she speaks about bridging and the need for safety in these spaces. That takes us into an interesting discussion about the differences between Indigenous languages and English, which reflect the different underlying conceptual structures in those traditions and cultures. And we end with her reflections on the possibilities for Indigenous contemplative science, and Yuria closes with one of her beautiful and inspiring poems.

(00:02:42) Woven throughout this conversation is a call to shift to a more inclusive way of knowing, one that embodies our interconnectedness. There's a lot more from Yuria in the show notes, including a link to her fantastic essay that was just published for Mind & Life's new Insights project. I wanted to share that resource in general with you as well—this site is a collection of 18 multimedia essays that offer a deep dive into the heart of contemplative science. The authors include many guests from this podcast, so if you like this show, I think you'll really enjoy the content there. I have to say, as we were developing the project, I realized that I don't think there's really anything else like this out there, in terms of a written resource covering the breadth and depth of contemplative science, including its core concepts

and its applications and relevance for us today. You can find all of those essays, including Yuria's, at mindandlife.org/insights.

(00:03:43) Okay, I hope this conversation brings some inspiration to you today. I'm so happy to share with you, Yuria Celidwen.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:03:54): I am so pleased to welcome Yuria Celidwen today. Thanks so much, Yuria, for joining us.

Yuria Celidwen (00:04:01): Lek taleshe, bamé ayesh. Binti awilelic? Wocol awalik yu'un telabai bekón te'jkopé yu'un te taleshé.

You just heard my Indigenous Maya Tzeltal language—and I'm introducing myself, [and saying] "thank you so much, dear Wendy, for the invite. Thank you so much Mind & Life." And you may wonder why I speak my language, and I use it as a statement of awareness of the loss of cultural legacies that we are going through around the world, that goes along [with] the loss of biodiversity. As you know that we go through a massive extinction, both of biodiversity and cultures, as we lose one Indigenous language every two weeks. So speaking my language is a statement for planetary health—of how we need to revitalize these traditions, because with them is all the wisdom that can help us in the challenges that we are facing today. So thank you for allowing me to do that, and bring these beautiful sounds to our Mind & Life family.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:05:12): Yeah, thank you. Thank you for bringing that in. And I'm sure we'll get into a lot of, of course, the Indigenous perspective and what is needed now. But first, I would love to hear a little bit of your personal story and background, and how it is you ended up doing this kind of work.

Yuria Celidwen (00:05:31): Well, I love telling this story. It's almost like a mythical origin story for me. And I grew up in the family lands called El Paraíso Coelhá. So Coelhá means land of flowing waters, or wonderland of flowing waters. El Paraíso then, of course, it's the paradise. So it's like, the wonderland of flowing waters. And this was in the highlands of Chiapas. My lineage is from the Maya Tzeltal peoples. So there's wide array of Maya peoples all over the Yucatan Peninsula and then all the way down to Central America. And then I also have lineage from the Nahuas peoples from the Central Valley that goes all the way also as well to Central America.

(00:06:25) So my family is the family of mystics, healers, and explorers—both of the mind, the soul, and the lands in those areas. So I like to think of myself... I happily say that I'm equal parts mystic, healer, warrior, and witch. [laughter] Because I am also a kind of activist, but also very in tune with spiritual life and contemplative living, caring also of how we create our sense of identity. How do we belong to our communities? How do we create possibilities of transformation and healing? And then all that within a place of intention. That's what contemplative practice is, to my view, like an intention of a goal that benefits the larger community of beings.

(00:07:34) So I learned a lot of that from my lineage, and from my lands. I always start my talks with honoring the lands, because without our Mother Earth, there is no life. There is no community. And then, of course, without the community, there is no me. So I honor those lands. And then also my ancestors, because my ancestors are the ones that transmitted all this wisdom, all this being a caring,

loving member of this larger community. And so I think my coming together to the contemplative living, or contemplative life, was through the lands and through my ancestors from a very, very early age. Of course, we didn't call it "contemplative living." That was something that I learned later, but it was very much like that. It was, to observe what experience is, how I am being part of it, how I intentionally create the responses or the impact, being accountable of that as well, and being very careful of what I'm bringing to the world. I think part of it is [to] realize what is our part, what is also our purpose and our responsibility. Being part of a larger group that is responsive to you makes you very, very responsible, makes you become really accountable of what you're bringing, and also very caring, very mindful of your every action. And then that, of course, comes from an intentional experience. What is the feeling that is coming, and how can I then express it in a way that's more conducive to caring and careful interactions with the community?

[\(00:09:44\)](#) So that's a little gist. I would say also that my beautiful grandma and my grandpa were very caring members of the world. They would love to tend the land. I remember it almost being a practice—to walk barefoot on the skin of Mother Earth. So, to be very mindful of how you are being in touch with that great cradle... And that creates a sense of being part of this community, and also of being enveloped by a larger environment that's being loving and caring to you, too. So it's like, how are you responding? And so my grandma was a medicine woman, and my great-grandma was also a medicine woman, and my great- great-grandpa and all the way down to the roots of the earth.

[\(00:10:50\)](#) And so that brings such responsibility of how you're eliciting flourishing for others, or care for others, well-being for others. In the Indigenous perspective, the sense of healing responds to a sense of healing of the environment. So there's no such thing as individual health. It has to be a planetary health. So whenever I hear in the West that the medicine system focuses on healing the symptoms of disease, but not the environmental causes or the origins, it's very confusing. Because if the environment continues being harsh and hostile, and creates that imbalance or that over- hyper-arousing of the senses, then it will just continue creating imbalance. And there's no possibility of being a healthy member that's bringing fruit to others, becoming life for others.

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:12:13\)](#): There's so much in there that I would like to follow up on. The way you describe your childhood, or just the culture in which you were raised—you talked about bringing intention, and being really aware of your actions and the impacts of the actions. And you shared the way of walking on the earth very carefully, or with some awareness. So that's an example, you said it was almost a practice. Were there other kinds of practices? Or maybe that's too formal of a word, it feels like... This is just the way that things were. Or so was it more like that, where it's just, this is the culture, everyone's kind of imbuing these mindsets? Or are there more systematic practices that are also observed?

Yuria Celidwen [\(00:12:57\)](#): And I will also say before I respond, dear Wendy, that we Indigenous peoples have a way of being that's very spiral. It's very non-linear. So we tend to be very broad in our conversations, and keep returning to the different topics that appear. So nothing is an island, or an atomic being. It's all related. So conversations are very rich sometimes, and not also direct. But that's a beautiful way of exploring not only how our mind works, how the world works, but also different ways of reaching maybe knowledge or wisdom, or the way that we understand the world. And so in terms of contemplative practice or contemplative living, because that's the thing with an Indigenous perspective. It's not only... I mean, the practice is the everyday life. How do we relate, in everything we do, with that intention?

(00:14:07) And so I'll give you just something, just a little gist of it, and that is also something that I bring in my talks. One of the greatest ways of relating with that contemplation manifests in the calendric systems for the Maya tradition. So there are two calendars. There's a solar calendar, very similar to the Gregorian that we follow. And then there's a lunar calendar. That is the one that dictates ceremonial times or rituals or agricultural... And it's also very related to how cycles of nature work. So I'm not going to go very into detail because they are very complex calendars, as you imagine, but they change every year. There's never the same.

(00:15:00) So today, and just to talk about what the day is today, and it is the day [foreign language], which is 11 Obsidian. So if you think, I don't know if... maybe your audience do not know what obsidian is. It's a kind of volcanic glass that's very, very sharp. And it used to be used for creating arrows or flints. And so it's this double edge, very sharp, that I would say it's a kind of very discriminate awareness. So like consciousness, mindfulness, clarity of how we relate to the world.

(00:15:44) And so in a day like this, the day 11 speaks of that non-dual part, of we may see all the ways that human mind tends to label or make sense of the world by creating dualities. But much of the practice is understanding how these apparent confrontations actually are part of one same system. And much of the Indigenous perspective is about returning to that sense of balance. So this flint is about cutting edge from all the projections that the mind makes—all the maybe social conditionings or the cultural ways that we play some things, or in our phenomena—and realizing that it is all a part of an experience that is being created.

(00:16:47) So a day like this, it's very auspicious for healing. I spoke about my family of healers and medicine people—curanderos. And because... It is a time for well-being. So when we start realizing that opposites are actually coming together and that there's a conciliation of apparent conflict, it opens a possibility of communication, of really dealing with whatever is happening in experience—or in perception, so in the labeling. And it helps for then re-educating the mind, dissolving all these perceptions that may be not conducive to flourishing, or to conversing, or to collaboration, or cooperation, that keeps us isolated. And then start cutting through all of that, so that we can come back together to a sense of clarity and flourishing, and the unity.

(00:17:57) So that number 11, it's like the neutrality, the non-duality. Like there's no good or bad. Because that's the label, right? But rather, we can find a sense of balance, a sacred balance, that brings together a kind of ancestral time. The teachings from the past—from the lineages, from the lands—are informing our action to this day. But the action that we are doing now is then going to be fruit for life of others in the future. So actually all of these times come to this day, to this moment. So all the more important that what we are creating, may it be intentional and for the benefit of the community.

(00:18:56) And one of the things that I love about the Indigenous perspective is that we are not a community of humans only. As you know, for a few years there has been so much talk about human flourishing, the science of human flourishing. But then again, going back to the systems of health, there's no such human flourishing if there's not planetary flourishing, if there's not environmental flourishing. So fortunately now the Indigenous movement is pushing for this conservation, for this environmental movement at a global level, for caring for the earth, for caring for "other than human" community. Getting out of this narrow way of seeing, "Oh, it's only me," or, "It's only us," in-groups of either country or ethnicities or whatever. And breaking with that obsidian flint, cutting with discriminate awareness all these labels and returning to a sense of, "Oh, we are beings in a larger community that is responsive to us, and to whom we owe responsible action and intention."

[\(00:20:17\)](#) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:20:48\)](#): You just spoke so beautifully about the perspective of dualism and separation that, certainly in Western culture, is the dominant viewpoint. I mean, it's so dominant as to be assumed. It's not questioned often. And then bringing these more non-dual... and seeing the interdependence and the connections between all beings, and the whole planet. To the extent that those views are at odds, how have you gone about—and what's been your experience in—trying to offer that perspective, the Indigenous perspective, into a context and a philosophy and a culture that may not be primed to accept it? How does it land? And I'm just curious of your experience.

Yuria Celidwen [\(00:21:41\)](#): Yeah. Well, it's a long story, which started also very early. So I was born and raised within an Indigenous ontology, a way of being, and also epistemology, a way of learning or knowing. But I was educated in a colonialist Western system. So when I moved to study (I got a scholarship at a very early age), I was very soon shown that I was different. So I was othered and discriminated, very hostilely... It was the first time that I started realizing that my identity, the way I look, was perceived as negative in those contexts of Western education and systems. But back at home, I was embraced. So I had these very different experiences of being in a group.

[\(00:22:53\)](#) So I started questioning from very early, from my very early experiences of, where is this coming from? What creates these kinds of ideas? So I think at that moment I started realizing how much Indigenous people's identities are othered. And even from the very definition of who "Indigenous" are, speaks about otherness. It is another long story about how Indigenous peoples came to be named, but in the definition is belonging to a land, or have a historical continuity to a land, previous to a colonization or invasive process. So there's already an othering right there, in the mere definition.

[\(00:23:50\)](#) And unfortunately, with time there was also an internalization of that otherness. So for a long time, Indigenous peoples wouldn't even admit their Indigeneity, because that would put them in a position of probably being othered, or not having access to health or education. And then that opens an even larger conversation about the lack of access and well-being for Indigenous peoples at the global level—starting to be a little spiral now, but we will return to that—to the point that in some countries in the world, Indigenous peoples have as much as 20 years less of life expectancy than non-Indigenous. And at the global level, Indigenous peoples have the least access to education, to safety, to dignified living, et cetera.

[\(00:24:53\)](#) So that kind of discrimination, I started feeling really, really early, and then also started realizing that this is created by a culture and by a mind, by a social system. And I started committing as well to keeping those traditions—revitalizing, reclaiming those traditions—and bringing those systems to an equal standing with other systems.

[\(00:25:28\)](#) As you know, our contemplative world was based on Western translations of mainly Buddhist, Tibetan Buddhist practice... other Theravada Buddhist traditions as well, but mainly Buddhist practice texts. But when translated to Western systems, they were also secularized. And that has been important for the West, the secularization of practice. But that also had some consequences, that the collective origins of the practices were lost, because they started taking the personality of the West, which is profoundly individualist. And so some of our [inaudible] practices started focusing on the well-being of the individual—on concentration, or lowering blood pressure, better sleep, lowering stress. All

of which are surely very beneficial. But we are missing the very core, because we are still, in a way, perpetuating the same system.

(00:26:47) It is very hard for one that is immersed in a system of discrimination, or of othering, to realize that these practices are happening—especially for the dominant section of the system, because they all continue what they are used to. For the one that has been othered—so in this case, Indigenous peoples or my own experience—we feel that. The internalization is a kind of perpetuation. So yes, we may not be aware of that, but the contemplative practice precisely tries to focus on that. It's like that flint that we talked about, that obsidian again. Why am I responding to this phenomenon, to this experience, in this way? And where is this story coming from? Where is the origin of this? Where are all these labels starting?

(00:27:50) And then we start seeing that the ones that create, let's say science, or let's say the way the world is, are the dominant sectors of society. So how do we start changing those systems of oppression? Well, by practice, by using that discriminative awareness and cutting into those stories, realizing that those are constructs—constructs by a system of oppression that was set up to benefit a specific group. But in order to dismantle those stories, compost those stories, then we need to go back to the very raw materials, which is the stories, the stories that created this. That's the moment that we start realizing, okay, there is an othering. But there's also, then, if we know that these stories are a construct, that means that we can dismantle them, compost them. And then use them to recreate new stories of intention, of compassion, of kindness, of awe, of reverence, and of community.

(00:29:22) And I feel that's precisely the power of contemplative practice. It's not only about, "Oh, I increased my concentration and lowered my stress level." All of that is important, yes, but only because it creates the possibility for then setting up a place of safety in which all of us are able to share stories, to contribute to pieces of wisdom, to find solutions together for the challenges that we are facing. We are at a moment in which the challenges that the world goes through are not anymore of just some groups; we are all in this together. The whole of Mother Earth is calling loudly for our awareness, and for shifts in the way we behave and the way we relate. And part of changing that, part of going back to a sense of balance or equilibrium at a global, planetary level is by dismantling all these obstacle stories that keep perpetrating systems of othering. Othering of humans, othering of other than human beings (as we relate with our sibling animals and plants and fungi and fish), and in the end is by othering our own Mother Earth. We ourselves are making us orphans, when our whole home is calling us to come back, to belong.

(00:31:08) So there is this term nowadays, *solastalgia*—it was created by an Australian scholar—that speaks of... You know nostalgia, like missing home, homesickness. But solastalgia is being worried or distressed or anguished by being home, so by the state of your home. So right now, as we face the climate urgency, there is a distress that's happening, because our whole home, as it's been said, is in trouble. So we are even more called to awareness. And I feel that the possibilities of contemplative movements—to bring awareness of how we can come together, contribute, collaborate, return to places of kindness, return to places of reverence for the whole of the community, for the environmental community or planetary community—is great.

(00:32:17) But we have to then also transform our own contemplative field. Because as they also take the personalities of the cultures that are adopting them, those personalities also need to change as healing happens, when we realize what's creating the problem and then finding balance to it. And it's

always a process of becoming. We never totally reach that place. It's always a constant practice, a constant day-to-day living towards that aspiration of well-being.

[\(00:32:57\)](#) I know that many people find that we are at a moment of great distress in the world, but we also have great possibilities. We have never had as many possibilities of compassionate action as today. There has never been such awareness of how important it is—human impact—in the whole world. And how much we can come together to create these different perspectives of new life. And by that, it's also having the humility of listening to other voices that possibly have other solutions that can contribute, and creating seriously a community that is inclusive, that is truly diverse. The problems that we are facing are truly diverse. So we can't face them with only one "good for all" formula. It's not like that. Nature doesn't work like that. Our Mother Earth is multifaceted, multidimensional, amidst very complex systems of relationality.

[\(00:34:14\)](#) But then again, dear Wendy, we go cosmic!

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:34:20\)](#): That's great!

Yuria Celidwen [\(00:34:21\)](#): When we go Indigenous, we go cosmic, because how do we integrate all of it? And the marvel of it is that once we sit with all of this material, it makes all the sense! It somehow makes all the sense. So yeah, we are such spiritual beings. So, beings of very subtle essences. We learn from these very ways of being in the body, being in the heart, being in the mind, but then towards... I love explaining "spirit" in the Indigenous perspective as honoring the animating principle of life. What brings, what creates life towards flourishing, like a true possibility of planetary flourishing. And how we bring that by that alignment—of action, intention, thought, affect—that puts us into being together with an environmental community.

[\(00:35:28\)](#) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:36:00\)](#): Part of what you were saying about narratives and stories, and thinking about where do these mindsets come from, particularly this mindset that you experienced when you were exposed to Western thought, of being othered and separateness and all this dualistic thinking... And we see, I think, so much today these different narratives are so prevalent, and so insular. They are developing within themselves without any cross-talk. So there's becoming these different realities almost, is what it feels like, at least in the United States context. So I'm just wondering your thoughts on the reality of different narratives and different perspectives. Is it important that we all come to agreement, come to having the same, or at least some of the same elements of a narrative? Or how do you think about holding that kind of plurality, but then having agreement?

Yuria Celidwen [\(00:37:00\)](#): Yeah. I think it also helps very much bringing back the story of the Indigenous people's movement at the global level, because Indigenous peoples are widely diverse. There are around 5,000 Indigenous groups all over the world, living in around 90 countries. Even only the US has 564 or 574 federally recognized tribes. So it's diverse. Each of these have a very distinct relationship with their lands, from which their ontologies and epistemologists derive. So we cannot speak of oh, one single way of being. And yet there are certain agreements, of reverence or honoring their lands and also the relationships around and the ancestry, that creates a possibility of a container. So that's why the Indigenous groups, as the plurality of Indigenous peoples, focus on a specific goal—to find, to reclaim, revitalize our wisdoms, start being participants in decisions that impact our lives and our territories. It was about coming together—not in uniformity, because it's not about, "Oh, well, now everybody has to

think the same." No, but rather we come together because we share a problem, and we need to find solutions that are helping all of this diversity.

[\(00:38:44\)](#) So how do we do that? It's not going to be the same solutions that we're going to need for our Arctic relatives, or for relatives in the equator, or in the high mountains, high altitude. So all of these different landscapes need different solutions, but we need community action. We need international community action. So a collaboration and global policy from all of these states. So it is, yes, not about thinking all the same, but what is important is to listen to each of these individual needs, and then find solutions that are geared to that kind of situation or problem.

[\(00:39:32\)](#) And so I think one of the greatest problems right now with the divisiveness that we face in the United States is that everybody wants to push their thinking towards the other. There's no place of safety for dialogue, for either group. Unfortunately, there is a tendency of shaming, a tendency of guilt. There's no real grounds for feeling safe enough to share stories and then to start finding the humanity, the shared human grounds on the other, and then to start finding solutions. There's none of that. The conflict is right away. So there's something missing, really, in how we are coming together.

[\(00:40:26\)](#) So for that, I feel the great solution would be to bridge, to bridge different groups and systems. And bridging means that both are willing to listen. And to listen in a space of safety, which is the most tricky part, because how can one trust when the other has been constantly abusing power, or being oppressive, or all of these systems that we talked [about] earlier. Well, before that coming together, there has to be in both groups a practice of, "Okay, what's the origin of all of these emotions, and all of these ideas, and all of these stories?" The realization that those have been stories—so constructs, social, cultural constructs. And to let go of my benefit or my in-group benefit and start gearing towards the aspiration of a common well-being, of an environmental benefit.

[\(00:41:45\)](#) So that's why the coming together to tackle the climate urgency could be a great possibility of bringing together humanity, right? Because it's not anymore about these different groups. It's about, "Well, we need to come together because we have this great challenge that demands our collaborative solutions." So that place needs to be established—and again, with safety, with accountability, with responsibility of action—and then the commitment or the willingness of coming together.

[\(00:42:25\)](#) It's not going to be easy, of course. As we know, as contemplative practitioners, practice is also not easy. And that's another thing that we need to bring back. One of the greatest traps of contemplative practice is spiritual bypassing. Thinking that, by only sitting on the couch and sending metta, for example, is enough for things to change. And there hasn't been enough engagement with the community, or these sections that do not engage with the other. And we need to get out of that. Just as much as we start observing, what is our own part in this situation—for the oppressive and then for the oppressed as well? How do we empower voices to start coming to express their own story? That most parts, for people that are suffering intergenerational trauma, most times these are so hidden (as we know, to the very genes). Most times we aren't aware of what is causing our overwhelming experience.

[\(00:43:39\)](#) But I love to bring as well that yes, there is intergenerational trauma, but there is intergenerational bliss. And I came to this from my own experience. My family and my peoples and my own personal story have been imbued with extreme instances of violence—land dispossession, kidnaps, murder, et cetera, all horror stories that we can imagine. But that kind of vulnerability wakes us to the fragility of life, how fragile we all are. And so, how much we also need to then care, because every action that we do may have the impact on others. So then how do then we create the possibility of

compassion? And it has been also shown that people that have suffered more acute experiences become more able to deal with challenges later on, and also are more willing to be collaborative and compassionate to the suffering of others. Which is really striking. One would think that having more resources makes people more generous, and it's the opposite. The less you have, the more you're willing to share. Or the more you have been exposed to suffering, the more you are tending to the well-being of others.

[\(00:45:20\)](#) So that's when trauma turns to bliss. So it's not that disempowering overwhelming facing of life challenges. Yes, we acknowledge them. It's not about bypassing. We see the seriousness of the trauma, we stay with it, we work with it. But then the possibility of using that raw material—compost it, so that then it creates new nourishment for a new life, a new possibility. And that's when the bliss comes, by that opening of compassion, opening of community and collaboration, opening of awe and reverence, and ultimately that profound love for life.

[\(00:46:11\)](#) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:46:48\)](#): I love the metaphor of composting these difficulties, or these old ideas, because it speaks to integration as opposed to just, "Let's get rid of that and never look at it again," or never use a piece of it. And it raises the idea that there's value in it somewhere that can be reused, and reborn into something even better.

Yuria Celidwen [\(00:47:10\)](#): Yes, absolutely. And I love bringing back all these natural metaphors, like bringing Mother Earth into our everyday living, into our... As we know, the performative quality of language. We know how much language creates our experience. So if we bring Mother Nature in the way we speak, in the way we act, then we also realize that yes, there is birth, there is flourishing, but then there's also wilting, and there is the transitioning. But that transition also gives life to the next iteration. So then there's again the spiral, right? Then it's a new regenerative power of bringing again—but by intention, by focusing on that aspiration, of that collaborative community of environmental, planetary aspiration of honoring the animating principle of life, honoring spirit.

[\(00:48:13\)](#) So by returning to how much we are nature. We are nature. We are all offsprings of Mother Earth. So if we treat each other like that... It's like, how can I water your experience, Wendy? How can you and I come together right now? How can we water our Mind & Life family audience, by our coming together and sharing these ideas, so that we can move to together as a community towards that inspiration of planetary flourishing? That's about it. And is there one formula? No, we have to talk about it, feel each other, continually come back to what is working, what is not. Where do we need more action? Where do we need more time of repose and reflection? And then again, return to engagement.

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:49:14\)](#): I love your sensitivity to language, and the way that language shapes our mind, is constructing our mind and then...

Yuria Celidwen [\(00:49:26\)](#): And how it comes to fruit, right? With action.

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:49:29\)](#): Right.

Yuria Celidwen [\(00:49:30\)](#): Because it's like, first it's the experience, all this embodiment. But then it's, "Oh, we are having a more constructed thought about it." But then it's going to come in action. But then how is this action going to benefit? And that it is not my benefit, but rather how can I be food for

others? And at the same time, of course, keeping myself nourished so that I can be of better service. If I am a food that is not well cared [for], it's not going to be as beneficial for the other, as nourishing for the other. So it's about it all.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:50:10): Yeah. And I remember, so you recently took part in our Summer Research Institute, which was on othering and belonging and becoming, which was so fantastic.

Yuria Celidwen (00:50:20): So much fun.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:50:21): And you brought so much. Thank you for joining us. It was really powerful. And I remember you were pushing back in a panel discussion on the use of the word mechanism—you know, psychological mechanisms—which is so much a part of the language of science, and reductionist thought, and just viewing ourselves and the systems that we're embedded in as these separable, dissociable components that exist. And I really appreciate that, as we've just been saying, the importance of language and thinking of different ways to represent the reality of that interconnectedness. I'm wondering also now—coming back on the spiral to the beginning when you were sharing your Indigenous language and the importance of keeping those languages alive—and wondering differences that you've seen, maybe even in the structure of language between an Indigenous language that you speak and English. What's been your thoughts there?

Yuria Celidwen (00:51:24): Well, one of the beautiful aspects of Indigenous languages... and then that's another thing that also brings the similarities of Indigenous language all over. (And then, of course, there are around 7,000 languages spoken in the world, 70% of which are Indigenous, like 4,000 of those are Indigenous. But as I was telling you, sadly, almost half of those languages are at risk of extinction.) So I don't know all of those languages, as you could imagine. But for many of the Indigenous languages that I know, and from my own, there is a quality of performative... So languages are about action. Not so much about the nouns, but it's about how we are emerging and how we are acting. And you were talking about the mechanisms, and I really resist that kind of language, because one, we are organic. We are beings that are responsive to every experience and phenomena that is having our environment. And at the same time, we are influencing and impacting our environment. So it always changes. It will never be exactly the same as a mechanism.

(00:52:49) And Western science, I think that's also one of its flaws—of expecting that, because of certain observations and testings, then every time it's going to be the same. Of course, now we know, Western science knows, of the influence that the observer has on phenomena. So it's not really only the phenomena itself that can objectively be seen, but it's also that subjective influence. So that's what brings the contemplative part. Western science is about this third-person. It's like the observer, and then the observed. But the contemplative brings also the subjective part. It's like, "Oh, I am being observed of my own experience, so I am the subject and the object." But then the Indigenous brings the dialectic, the second-person of, "Oh, we are actually in a dialogue. We are actually constantly influencing." And I know that fortunately this is something that we are starting to bring into the field, but it was also another of the flaws, another of the traps, thinking that, "Oh, we will be finding the same results over and over."

(00:54:09) And in Indigenous science—which is a science, even though Western systems are yet to fully embrace our Indigenous methodologies. That's part of the work that I do, to keep pushing for the inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing into academia. But part of it is seeing the particularities of phenomena, not only what repeats, but also what is missed. Because that also creates a larger

experience, and it's a systems experience. It's our observation of systems and relationships, not only of atomic events or phenomena.

[\(00:54:52\)](#) So I think that those two aspects make us more aware of the organic different experiences that we are facing that happen to us, and that brings the possibility of being more aware of the interdependence of all these systems. So we go back to the plurality of experience. So it's not only one viewpoint even, not anymore either. There's a plurality of that, and then there's a diversity of also points of view, or perceptions of what we are seeing, I guess.

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:55:30\)](#): Yeah. One of the things I wanted to ask you about is your work on Indigenous science, and bringing that into academia. Can you say more about what that looks like?

Yuria Celidwen [\(00:55:42\)](#): Yes. So as you know, Western science, continuing and going back in this spiral of the conversation that we had a little while ago of who chooses or who decides what is "the truth," or the systems of understanding the world. And the Western scientific method was following systems of oppression, and systems of colonial understanding of the world. As you very well know, these systems in its origins were also seeing that difference even within human beings. And to this day, which to me is so very hard to understand, that to this day, research has also shown that some people in the health system still think that there is a difference in perception of pain depending on ethnicity, which are remnants or echoes of those times of thinking that, "Oh, are they even considered human? Or the others?" So that creates the "who" has authority about understanding the world. And right now, it has been the West, the scientific method.

[\(00:57:13\)](#) The Indigenous way of seeing things—which is, as we were talking about a moment ago, of observation of relationships, of systems, networks, of plurality, of mutual influence—they have not yet been quite accepted as a science. So Indigenous methodologies—ritual, storytelling, ceremonial work—those are ways of also observing experience or phenomena, then making sense of it in a more symbolic, maybe metaphoric way, and then also using it to adapt to new experiences. But that's the difference. There's an adaptation. There's an assumption that things are going to be constantly changing, never the same, but you can learn from what experience has brought.

[\(00:58:11\)](#) So there is a movement within Indigenous scholars to bring Indigenous methodologies into academia. And for me, part of it is to broaden our understanding of science to include other systems that are equally valid for understanding experience, and making sense of how the world is. And also now with the environmental challenges, that we can find solutions to the world—from millenarian wisdoms of resilience, of adapting to different environmental, either weather, or changes in, of course, fire management, water management—that can be maybe even life-saving for most species in our planet today.

[\(00:59:01\)](#) So I think part of the importance of bringing Indigenous epistemologies is the push for participatory action in the world, inclusive ways of knowing. As you know, there's so much talk about diversity and equity, but most times it continues being within these structures that follow certain privileges. And I was saying, the Indigenous scholars, but in this country at least, Indigenous youth have the largest dropout out of high school. And in terms of advanced degrees, at least the latest report says that 73% or so of advanced degrees in the country go to white people. Then the next is for Asian Americans at 12%, I think, 12 or 16%, and then 8% to people of African descent, and 8% to Latinx. And only 0.3% to Indigenous scholars. Just to show, why is it that certain systems continue to have the privilege and the decision in academia.

[\(01:00:24\)](#) So part of it is, we need to demand for more representation. As this country starts changing and being much more diverse and inclusive, we need our students of the global majority to see themselves represented as systems of authority, as voices of change, as agents of transformation. Because that's when we start really finding the possibility of all these voices to contribute to solutions. Not over and over the same voices that we know that have not been enough for what we are facing right now. And I think there's a thirst for different knowledges. There's a willingness as well of going back to that possibility of a global planetary community. Because we are feeling, the whole world, this epidemic of loneliness, of despair, of lack of community. And there's so much that we can learn from those communities that have adapted for millennia, and that also have cared for their environments and their lands in a way that nourishes these different relationships.

[\(01:01:41\)](#) – musical interlude –

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(01:01:42\)](#): I just wanted to touch on... You spoke a lot about contemplative practice and the importance of those approaches for awareness. And I know that you've done a lot of work teaching mindfulness and compassion in different contexts, of bringing Indigenous perspective in. And I was just wondering if you could share what that looks like, particularly in Western contexts, the way that mindfulness and compassion has been adapted here. So yeah, how does that look?

Yuria Celidwen [\(01:02:26\)](#): Yeah. Well, when I started getting deeper and deeper into the contemplative world... Because, as I said, contemplation has been my way of living since I remember and probably of my family, probably of my peoples. But as I came to the West and started speaking within this language, I realized that, well, I didn't see myself represented. I didn't see anybody that looked like me, or that would speak of the systems or traditions that I knew. And so, because that's my part of warriorress *[laughter]*, I started protesting. I started saying, "We are missing something here." And at that time, this was a few years ago, there was absolutely no talk, no word about Indigenous then. So I started bringing it up.

[\(01:03:28\)](#) And so my work is in the intersection of Indigenous studies, contemplative studies, and cultural psychology. And there's a lot of religious studies there. So right now I co-chair the Indigenous religious relations at the American Academy of Religion. But at that time I was still a student, and I was, well, I need to bring... that's my commitment. I want to honor my lands and my lineages, and bring this into the conversation, because I also knew—I've felt, I have learned in my own experience—that they have been so helpful for the agency that I have right now, the sense of also safety and serenity that I have. (Not that it's there all the time.) And also that can help others, that can guide or orient, or create that place of home for others.

[\(01:04:28\)](#) So I brought the very first paper on Indigenous contemplation back in the day, and then I created the very first panel on Indigenous wisdom. Also, I brought it for the first time to Mind & Life a few years ago, in the conference. And at that time, I remember, all of these many voices of great wisdoms of our siblings of Tibet. And I felt like, "Wow, how is my voice going to be heard?" But I also trust that it made sense. And because of that wisdom, it would be received by... If it held, it was going to be received. And fortunately that has been the case. That there's something that my voice is bringing that contributes to the field, that helps advance the field, and we can create richer conversations. So that's where we are at the moment. And I am excited to continue my work in Indigenous contemplation. I'm in the process of writing my first book-

Wendy Hasenkamp ([01:05:42](#)): Oh, great!

Yuria Celidwen ([01:05:45](#)): -on emphasizing Indigenous contemplation. And work more on this... Because my professional career is on the concentration of the defense of the rights of Indigenous peoples and the rights of Mother Earth. I also want to bring voices of Indigenous contemplation at the global level. So I've been networking and engaging with relatives of Indigenous wisdom groups from very different areas of the world, so that I can bring that nuance.

([01:06:15](#)) Because I came up with these two core systems of Indigenous contemplation—which is, kin relationality, seeing all relationships and all phenomena, all living beings, as kin. And the other ecological belonging, which is, being part of these larger systems, responsive systems of Mother Earth, and then responsibility and accountability. And, of course, there's much more nuanced definitions of these two core concepts, which I'd love to go deeper into at some other time, and that you will also find in the book.

([01:06:51](#)) But I had a conversation recently with a scholar who was saying like, "Well, but if you already found the idea of kin relationality, why do you need to go to all these different places in the world?" And I was like, "Well, it's like thinking that because compassion appears in all these different traditions, then we would need to be looking into the different nuances or the different expressions of compassion in all of these stories, rather than just staying with one single system." And then he was like, "Oh, of course! Makes sense."

([01:07:31](#)) So it's about looking into how does this show up or manifest in different locations of Indigenous peoples in the world, with completely different landscapes, like in the Arctic or in the high altitude or in the desert or in the rainforest? And what can they say about our difference of contemplation? And how can they say also about our differences of adaptation or possibilities, opportunity of adaptation, especially with these challenges?

([01:08:04](#)) So it's about weaving, weaving stories for a much more colorful, rainbow tapestry that allows the animating principle of life to keep flowing.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([01:08:21](#)): Wonderful. Well, that feels like a really good place to leave it, and the time has been flying, but is there anything you want to say, take home messages?

Yuria Celidwen ([01:08:31](#)): Well, I would love to finish with a poem.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([01:08:34](#)): Please. Yeah, that'd be great.

Yuria Celidwen ([01:08:36](#)): And I'll say it in the Maya Tzeltal language, the Indigenous Maya Tzeltal language, and then I'll give you the translation into English, if that's okay.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([01:08:49](#)): Wonderful.

Yuria Celidwen ([01:08:50](#)): Okay. So it says,

K'uxtaya!
K'uxtaya, k'uxtaya, k'uxtaya
te sjocholil kuxinele—yu'un te lajele—te cha'tojkele,
ya sk'uxtabe sjocholil te sak'inale
sok te ijk'al lumilale!
Ya sk'uxtabe sp'ijil te Ch'ulme'tike
sok ya sk'uxtabe ak'ol k'inale yu'un te Ch'ultatike!

k'alal k'anuk ta nakomalil te kuxinele
bit'il tulan talelil te nojem nax ta ijk'al xab
peta nax aba te ta ch'ultesbil kuxinele
te xlemlun nax stilel ta sjamlejal te awo'tane!

[\(01:09:59\)](#) Love, love, love
the emptiness of being, of death, of birth,
Love the emptiness of clarity
and of the thickest mud.
Love the lunar wisdom
love the solar joy!

And when the inklings of life
appear hard and harsh and full of rifts
rejoice in the ecstatic bliss
burning in the openness of your very core!

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(01:10:58\)](#): Beautiful.

Yuria Celidwen [\(01:11:01\)](#): Tlazohcamati! Hocol Awal! Gracias, and thank you so much, dear Wendy.

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(01:11:05\)](#): Thank you so much, Yuria. This has been fantastic, and thank you for bringing all of this wisdom into the world.

Yuria Celidwen [\(01:11:12\)](#): Thank you for being also part of bringing this, also weaving this, and creating platforms for our voices.

Outro – Wendy Hasenkamp [\(01:11:26\)](#): *This episode was edited and produced by me and Phil Walker, and music on the show is from Blue Dot Sessions and Universal. Show notes and resources for this and other episodes can be found at podcast.mindandlife.org. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review us on Apple Podcasts and share it with a friend. And if something in this conversation sparked insight for you, let us know. You can send an email or voice memo to podcast@mindandlife.org.*

[\(01:11:56\)](#) *Mind & Life is a production of the Mind & Life Institute. Visit us at mindandlife.org where you can learn more about how we bridge science and contemplative wisdom to foster insight and inspire action towards flourishing. If you value these conversations, please consider supporting the show. You can make a donation at mindandlife.org, under Support. Any amount is so appreciated, and it really helps us create this show. Thank you for listening.*