

Bruce Parry on Indigenous Perspective and Egalitarianism

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHvHDqlfrc0>

Introduction

Veronica Stanwell: Welcome to the Rooted Healing Podcast, where we seek to deepen our kinship with the living world and with the great mystery that runs through us. This is a space where stories heal with words that weave us closer to our wild and daring natures, bringing together the expansive minds, topics, and ideas. That help us heal, reimagine, and Co create the world we wish to thrive in.

Bruce Parry: This is where we're. At and, there's always winners and losers, and the winners one day will be the loser the next day. And if you wanna stay in this paradigm, fine. But like, it's not the best. It's like it's it's a misery. And I've experienced another way where it is much more about sharing out and and it sounds like romantic nonsense. But actually everyone's having a really good time, you know. And. We can do that. It is possible, but the only way that it's going to be even understood as if there's lived examples of this, it's like we got we actually have to have groups of people who've given up the rat race to come together and go actually we're.

Veronica: Bruce Parry is an award winning documentary and film maker, indigenous rights advocate, author and is an explorer of the inner, local and distant realms. His documentary series for the BBC including Tribe, Amazon, and Arctic have shown Bruce exploring extreme environments, living with remote indigenous peoples and highlighting many of the important issues being faced on the environmental frontline. His film to why a voice from the forest is one of the most poignant pieces I have ever seen. I'm reading this from the film's website to why is a word the nomadic hunter gatherers of Borneo used to describe the connection they feel to their forest home in this dreamy, philosophical and sociological look at life, Bruce Parry embarks on an immersive odyssey to explore the different ways that humans relate to nature. And how this influences the way we create our societies, from the forests of the Amazon and Borneo to the river Ganges and Isle of Skye, to why, as a quest for reconnection, providing a powerful voice from the heart of the forest itself.

Bruce is currently immersed in a project in the UK where he is a part of a small community whose aim is to craft a manifesto for egalitarian living, exploring new ideas around hierarchy, ownership, healing, conflict resolution and decision making, mixing their combined experiences of indigenous wisdom crafts. And skills to find ways of living respectfully, regeneratively and wildly with each other and the surrounding local environment.

I am beyond excited to share this interview with you. I used to watch Bruce documentaries when I was younger and it has been profound to immerse myself in his work

more recently. Now that I have the life experience to really digest the messages. Bruce. Betrays. This conversation will hopefully give you a lot to chew on and some really needed perspective and vision for how we can try to create a healthier culture that is based in total reciprocity.

So, I'm going to keep this short because there's so much here to dive into. Please don't forget to rate and review this podcast. OK, here it is. My conversation with Bruce Parry.

Conversation Begins

Veronica: Bruce, It is an honor to have you here on the Routed Healing podcast. I remember watching your documentaries when I was younger and it's been so captivating to immerse myself in your work more recently. You've found your film to why touched upon many vital things that need to be planted into the collective awareness and you're one of the few people who are carrying the message of what egalitarianism. Might look and feel like, which fascinates me, so I'm just so excited to connect with you and journey through a conversation together now.

Bruce: Likewise, Nice to Nice to meet you finally, yeah.

Veronica: Could you start us off by guiding us through a visceral experience of the land you are now rooting into, and how your time with many different indigenous groups has shaped the way you relate to the land?

Bruce: Having travelled the world. About the privilege I had with all of those those programs that you you mentioned, yeah, it became really clear to me that I needed to connect. To a place and and find routes and be still and find the excitement in the minutiae rather than the endless travel that was my life. And so I knew that I needed to stop, slow down and and and be somewhere. And having grown up in a very sort of nomadic. Her family. I didn't know where that place was. But I did finally come across a tract of land here in Wales where I am now, which really has has felt perfect, actually has felt just. It felt right. It's it's, it's quite masculine. It's got quite a strong energy. Of the the elements is you know you feel the weather quite intensely here. I think I get probably it's probably one of the wettest places in the UK which I'm struggling with to be honest. I'm like the first hill. That gets everything gets dumped on as it comes across the Atlantic. You know, literally. So we get it's very damp. There's a lot of horizontal mist and rain. But I'm surrounded by extraordinary rivers. I can hear the stream that's literally 55 feet from the house and that tumbles into a bigger river. I can hear the waterfall day and night I go swimming in the river, even in the winter. It's extraordinary I've got. Quite a lot of wildlife around me. Sadly, it's not as much as I was expecting. George Monbiot's kind of killed the bar buzz a little bit by writing that book. Ferrell, because you realize that, uh, what you think of as a sort of pristine environment is actually quite monoculture. So there's a lot of sheep and not as many deer or. Rabbits or pigeons, as I'd like. It's barren, I would say. I walked the first

thing I did was I walked up onto the I can walk out of my door here and walk for 10 miles, probably, and not even cross the road. So you can imagine the remoteness, which you're you've probably got this as listeners from around the world that that doesn't mean a lot to some people, but in the UK to literally be able to walk in a straight line. Anywhere for 10 miles and not cross the road is is remote for us. So relatively speaking this is a remote space. The first thing I did on the first day I was here was I walk. Up and and around the the the sort of watershed of the stream that comes past my house. And if you had come across me on that day, you would have probably thought I was insane because I was speaking out loud to all of the possible entities and. Beings and spirits and and whatever that might be there to hear me. Asking for their permission to be here asking well, pledging my support to try and maintain the the cleanliness and the that this water felt very important because it flows right past the house and I wanted to get to where every drop of rain that would end up in. This. Stream. Might land. So I literally have huge, huge, huge circles that encompass the whole thing and spoke to all these, everything that crawled and. Nestled and and wriggled and flew and just sort of speaking out to these, the introducing myself and and telling them that I was here or asking them if it was OK for me to be here. So yeah, I guess that gives you a slight indication. That was my first day I've been affected by my travels. Yeah, I'm. I'm an animist. There's no question of it. I believe in the aliveness and the animated. Spirit aspect of all that doesn't mean to say that I don't have a rational mind and and buy into the the the beautiful insights that we've gained from science and materialism and all this stuff too. But I definitely feel I try as much as possible to expand my sense of empathy into the natural world. So that I genuinely feel pained when I see a tree being felled. Hmm. And I do. And. And sadly, they are. I mean, there there are plantations nearby. They did a clear felling because of a disease that come into the UK and they had to clear fell an area and. And it's painful not only visibly, it's just like a like a battlefield. You know, when you see a clear false site. But like, everything was alive there and and speaking to the people who came to do it, who was sweet, being, you know, lovely people just getting on with their job. But, like, just how you have to close yourself off to so much. And just come in and literally destroy everything in a in a quite a large area and you're like, my God, like, this is just how we are. This is how we are. We've come so far. From the sort of deeper felt affinity to that the other. Beings species around us and them. Yeah. So I I, I carry that I for sure carry that.

Veronica: Umm I've had similar experiences in England taking regular walks and you really get to know the different trees and plants and everything has its own personality and shape and feeling. And I was walking along. It was one of my favorite spots because it was really dense with ash trees. I really love and connect with ash trees and I was worried because I knew this virus was spreading across the UK. And I was on a walk one day with the dogs and they had all been. They had all been felled and it was fresh. It was a fresh scene with the log still crossing the path. And yeah, I felt like I had lost a part of my family of. Yeah, I felt really affected. And I was looking

into it. I mean, I don't go down too far down this route and obviously there's viruses, new ones affecting all kinds of trees in the UK. I think Western hemlock, Douglas, fir tanoka. And several pine species. But they felled all of the ash trees across the Somerset Plains, and all the wood was used a local nuclear plant which. Yeah, I don't have enough information, but I did hear some dodgy, some dodgy synchronicities there and I won't go into it, but.

Bruce: Yeah, I don't. I we could both go down that track, but just to to add, yeah, it's very similar debates with the local land agents and the and the Welsh Government. And and I was writing letters. To the newspapers and to the head of Natural Resources Wales about what was going on and and there are so many. It is complicated and and but you know, and just being monoculture, monocultures everywhere, plantations being another form of monoculture. I mean This is why I believe that the diseases are spreading in the way that they are. That we've, we've forgotten the necessity to to have biodiversity. And yeah, there's a there's a financial imperative that's driving a lot of this to. And yeah, I got deep. I went down the rabbit hole of it and realised well, actually, as with everything power. Is playing its hand in this.

Veronica: Would you ever make a documentary about it or include it in something?

Bruce: The next documentary that I wish to make which I've started is gonna touch on these things. It's not gonna like go into too much detail of about those specifics, but definitely talk about power and uh, talk about how that is at the heart of so many of the problems that I think that we're that we're the imbalance of power.

Veronica: Hmm.

Bruce: And the stuckness of power and the the ossification and all of all of that of power. And is at the heart of so many of these problems.

Veronica: I look forward to seeing what you're putting together. You. I mean, you do have such an extensive body of work. And what has stood out for me as you're sharing around egalitarianism and your fondness of your time with the Penan and Borneo, who you revisited for the making of tawai. Since the banana are one of the few remaining groups of instant return hunter gatherers, could you share what it is that makes hunting gathering egalitarian practices so different from settled groups where culture has shifted in its various ways with the shaping of agriculture and perhaps guide us through how this has shaped? Your understanding of our social prehistory. Because I'm thinking how many people have the assumption that our human nature is based on survival of the fittest and competition, which can perhaps be disproven by taking a deeper look at our collective ancestry.

Bruce: Yeah, I mean, I'd heard the term egalitarianism before I went off trekking around the world and I, you know, I just I guess like most people just thought, well, that's just a another form of of social order that's been part of our history, but didn't really think that much of it. Uh, and sure enough, in making all my especially the series tribe, which was like 15 episodes, went to 15 different places all over the world from the high Arctic to the deserts, the mountains and the seas. And you know, were everywhere places that people, the places, it's really hard to get to for all sorts of

reasons. And so that was an immense privilege to go and meet all these people and of course, learned so much. From from the mall? Uh, you know, most indigenous peoples around the world today have so much to teach us about connection to nature and healing practices and spiritual traditions and. And, you know, the the, the importance of community to raise a child and all of this sort.

Veronica: Hmm.

Bruce: Of stuff there's. There's so much that we can learn, but at the end of the day as well, I also noticed. You know having. Having sort of lost my uh romanticism very early on by seeing that actually we're all human. We're all just struggling and we're all very involved. You know, we're sort of, we're our types of societies that have sort of adapting to our environments where they are. And so I could just sort of see everyone as very much the same. As as. As each other just sort of slightly slightly different versions of depending on the environment and realising that well, we're actually we're all dealing with the same underlying problems of power and hierarchy and competition and aggression and all these sorts of things that I see in my society. And I often also saw in in some of these. Indigenous groups. But then I met the Penan and they were the last group that I visited and I... We... Became aware that there was something incredibly different going on. It was like a different operating system and the same hardware that we all carry, but they had a totally. Different. Thing going on and it really struck me and and and also I think it was the privilege of having been everywhere else before that it became so apparent to me. Yeah, I think that if I had just gone there first, it would have just seemed like a lovely group of people. But I. Wouldn't have truly noticed this other, more subtle yet so important aspect, and ultimately it was the fact that they essentially were living without hierarchy and without competition. And that's what egalitarian is a kind of means, but like reading it on the page versus meeting them in person. Was a very different thing and it was like, wow, you actually are operating in this completely different way. It was almost like everything about our society and every other society was almost playing out in the opposite direction with them. And it was like, oh, my. Was and then I learned a little bit more about them and initially I was quite afraid to even talk about it because I thought I sounded like a romantic fool and not being a trained academic anthropologist, I was like a little bit intimidated and scared of expressing myself. I thought, well, maybe, you know, maybe this is just me. And then I started meeting. The wonderful anthropologists like Jerome Lewis and Ingrid Lewis and Chris Knight Camilla Power who? Creating bodies of work all about these instant return nomadic hunter gatherers, as you call them and realising that, well, no, no, I was right in my feelings and that this is actually a completely different paradigm in a way. And it's so far away from everything that we are living in now. That it's almost impossible to sort of comprehend unless you actually go there, which is why no philosophers or religious leaders have ever come up with it as an idea. It's like it's literally the opposite of what we're doing. They are existing in a world where they they're they're the same as us, but they've created tools and narratives that main that that sort of ensure that power doesn't get out of hand. So no showing

off, no hoarding, no like. Like pretending to be a leader or or any of this sort of stuff and every individual within the community is acutely. Aware of this of their their need to speak to power at all times and and encourage to speak to power at all times, and that everyone is kind of like a sovereign individual who's no one's coercing anyone else. No one's telling one else what to do, but everyone's kind of loving the gig so much that they all. Do what they can to bring anyone down who gets. Sort of gets above their station and then also to bring anyone up who gets who, who's sort of depressed or down. And so everyone's trying to constantly work on this equilibrium in how they share things. They have different sense of ownership, and they have a different sense of power and the quality and. And that's what was interesting to me is like, we're always talking about. Quality in our society, but like we get equality and sameness confused. There's actually for them it was like, no, no, no, no, no. We're all totally different. And the men and the women are different, but. No one valued more than anyone else, and so they celebrate difference. But the but you're not like you don't get more from that. You just and everyone has an equal say in the running of society and anyone can say what they like. But like you don't have to listen to everyone and it's like there's complete anarchical free space. And yet the most peaceful people on the planet, it's like. A really sort of counterintuitive space to to be existing in and not only that, but like. One that exists for huge groups of people, not just tiny little communities, but like spreads out in in the Congo today, like the hundreds of thousands of people. So this is a this is this is a way of being that it's proven and is still alive and uh if and then there's many anthropologists and archaeologists who's. Who believe that this is actually how we all were for the vast majority of our time on the planet. And so there's a whole bunch of reasons why that might have come about, which is fascinating to me. I went with Jerome and Ingrid to the Benjelloun, which are a pygmy group who live in the Congo, and it was gonna be part of the film I made. But I had we ended. Up taking it. Out then cause it's so deep and intense and I was struggling to hold it all about how basically the. Women came together and said no to the alpha male, which if we came from other primates, was quite possibly how it was for us, and maybe they made that decision that they they said no to the alpha male because they needed a hand and wearing these kids as we stood up right hip, screwed narrow. Needed. We gave birth early. You know, there's a whole bunch of reasons why that might have come about, but like, there's a reenactment I lived with with this group in the Congo where they reenact that moment where they invited the other men to come and live with them as equals in society, provided that the men leave at the door. Not that they have doors. But you get the point or they're aggressive competitive ways and that was the beginning of us living in this harmonious way. And a lot of it's to do with the solidarity of the women holding the men to account for that deal that they've been struck. And these two energies of the masculine and the feminine embodied in their society through. The men and women. Which is of course different to us now. But like that's how it was playing out there and it was the play between these two energies. That was the main function for holding uh, the the the communities in balance. And

it was really interesting to observe in that particular society what women living in an egalitarian society. Alike because they didn't have to act like the men in order to be powerful. They were powerful in their own right, using their own quality of energy, their own quality of power played out in their own way. And that was so fascinating for me and and vital for me, of all the things I've seen, and all of my journeys that felt like. This is the. The key element that I have don't hear others talking about in the same way and and I really wanted to to bring back so. So there was that whole package of what? Wow. This is this is how it is and this is how it came about and these are the tools and there were a number of tools that they used to maintain it. And then the last bit of your question, how did it? How did how might it have shifted and what was different was like, you know, well, there's loads of debate about that and there's actually a few really interesting books that have just come out recently. David Graeber's new book. And there's a book from Eric, from Brett Weinstein and his wife, Heather. And then there's another book that. Came out called the civilised to death. So all of these books sort of looking at evolutionary biology and what shifted and how it came about. And they all say slightly different things. And actually I say slightly different things as well. I'm hoping that Jerome and Ingrid will put out a book because I think they're the ones who are most on it. But like mostly probably as we shifted out of the tropics and got into areas where we needed to hoard in order to get through droughts or winters that that, that accumulation may have allowed for power to coalesce and maybe through difficulties leaving a tropical belt where everyone had equal access to resources. This type of society was probably more possible and it became more difficult as we went into the temperate zones. And and it's quite possible that we made those decisions as we've turned to agriculture, where there's more need for for delineating lines and people put work into the ground. So you have senses of ownership and all this sort of stuff as part of our human journey and all the blessings that we've had as a result. I mean, of course, we're talking now through the blessings of. The technologies that have been designed because of the. Relation of food that we can sit back and have specialised in skills and all these things which were amazing but in the journey we've forgotten the the biggest insight of all, which was that we are our ancestors knew that. If if power. Gets too centralized, coalesces in one place that it just gets corrupted. And that's the bit of the story that we've forgotten. And you know, all the slavery and the warfare and all the rest of it has come about as a result of that message and and and and in particular. The women of Society having a very strong voice in the running of society is another huge element that that has shifted in this sort of patriarchal, competitive aggressive realm that we're in now and that needs to change.

Veronica: Thank you for journeying through that. You've covered three of the questions I had.

Bruce: It was a big lot. It was a bit of a long one. I got caught and I caught A roll there. I didn't quite know.

Veronica: No, it's perfect.

Bruce: OK.

Veronica: Yes, because I love that scene with the Bengali woman embodying their masana right, which is the that form of play, song and dance as a practice to keep balance. It's a really powerful scene on the toy website, which is truly a fantastic place to visit for learning about so many topics that I think are just fascinating.

Bruce: Aww that's sweet, thank you.

Veronica: In the Penan and the Bengali, this questions just come to. Is this the sense of deeper respect for the elders and elderhood, or is there more of a? Children, elders, everyone in between that, everyone's voice is.

Bruce: Everyone's voices. It's. It's interesting, isn't it? Yeah. No, that I think that they, I mean, obviously people will listen to everyone and obviously, very often the elder voice has more experience and and therefore carries more gravitas only if.

Veronica: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Bruce: People agree only if it does make sense. It's not. There's no there. There's no delineation into any form of power whereby this group has more than the other, or this individual has more than the other. And so. I was with. I was with Jerome and Ingrid with the Bengali one time and. And he was telling me about that. And he said look where where we going now? There's gonna be some some of the the Bengali who've spent a lot time with the outside Bantu groups. And so they're sort of rubbing off some of the sort of the the. Influence from the Bantu outsiders is rubbing off on the on the banchetti and the the Bantu is saying why do you let your women talk to you like that? That so there's this sort of like thing going on and he goes. There's one guy there. You'll meet him when you get there. He's he's like likes to. Tell everyone that he's the. Leader. But he's not, because it's just something he's learned from the outside anyway. So I arrived there, and sure enough, this guy. Oh. Comes up, he goes. I'm the leader here. And then this little kid walks past and goes. No, you're not. You're ****. You know, like there you have it. It's like it's literally everyone speaks to power at all times. You know, it's like there's no the elder class, that everyone's respected, but they're not given any special treatment. No. Which I think it's great.

Veronica: Your time with the PANAN as presented in Tai captures a profound and yet for me, a heart breaking shift in the culture where I really felt like I was watching. The tipping point of our entire **** sapien shift towards quote, UN quote. Civilization in action. An NGO had built them permanent dwellings and due to the ongoing destruction and threat to their territory, they were beginning to teach themselves how to farm. Cutting back areas of the forest. And yeah, preparing for harsher times. Said. And there is this other moment when you're with them that really gives me. A lot to chew on, which is when one of the Penan elders Moyang, shares that the community have stopped practising their old rituals and beliefs, which he now refers to as superstitions because they now believe in one God and gesturing above that they will be OK as long as they trust in him. And of course, these are teachings from missionaries who surely have good intentions, and they perhaps the ones who built the dwellings. I don't know. But you posed a question that begs us to think about what this shift in faith

means to the forest and to this group's way of life. We have, of course, a brutal. History of colonization and the wiping out of Earth based cultures, religions and traditions. And the most dominant religions are ones of hierarchical gods with. Philosophy that remains very human focused with a sense of dominance and taming over the natural world. Obviously not including Buddhism and over the feminine principles too. Would you dare to venture into this and what your thoughts are on spirituality and faith when it comes to living sustainably and in reciprocity?

Bruce: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Wow. Did you notice at the end of that little chat as well that the the platform crashes?

Veronica: Can I remember that? Ohh yeah. Something happened right? As he said that I thought.

Bruce: In the in the film.

Veronica: Oh my goodness.

Bruce: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. It's like that we don't we they're like they're saying like we don't believe in omens anymore. And then literally the the, the the house they're in collapses and it's.

Veronica: Oh. Yeah, because that scene was very powerful for me. I I'm sure these mysteries have the best intentions, but it really is like bearing witness to colonialism and manipulation in motion.

Bruce: Yeah, I've seen that. I've seen that all over the world. I remember I was in New Guinea and and went to a a high in the mountains in New Guinea and went to a church service. And the men and ones everyone naked men and one side. Women on the other and passing around the the bag which was people putting vegetables in as the sort of like collection training. Don't know who it was going to cause. Everyone was pretty much looking you know. That there wasn't anyone in need in that society. Now at the end, because there's this old guy and. And he was kind of not really joining in with the songs and stuff. And I remember. Asking him at. The end. It's like, you know what? What, what does this service mean for you? You know? What does Christianity mean for you? Because it's happened in, in recent years. And he said, look, look at that village over there in the distance. It's like, I mean, high in the mountains and it's. That you could just about make out in the in a far hillside, another settlement, he goes. When I was a kid, I. I was scared and they were. They were my enemies and and and. And now I have friends in that village, you know. And so. That all of these subjects are so complex and there's clearly goodwill in a lot of what the missionaries are doing and and. And. And then what was interesting in that moment though, cause I was obviously humbled in in that expression of his. But then two minutes later, he said, So what are? You Protestant or Catholic? Welcome to the bigger fight. You know, it's like but that moment with the Penan. It was really complex for me as well because it's really hard asking questions about these things. It was very sensitive to them and and you'll you'll notice as well as the women who asked him to stop talking. It's like can you. Can you stop now? And and he did. And he he didn't say anymore. And so I never actually fully got to the bottom of what he was saying. And for for for listeners

who've not seen the film, this is this is this wonderful guy. Moyang in uh in in the the Penan and they've been Christianised for a few generations now, but obviously for the remote peoples who these were who were who were deeper in the forest, nomadic but that, that, that type of missionary influence was less and and much later. And the missionaries had removed all of their magical objects and and which they were really didn't want them to. And they burnt them all. And they were like, we're going to show you. And then came back like, however, many years later and say that, you know, see nothing changed at it. And so they were using all these sort. Slightly strange tactics which is not uncommon, I don't know. Why? The woman said. Stop. Can you stop? Stop telling him this stuff. I think. I think it was because there was a deep wound and they they still were living in two worlds and that they're they were kind of. I wouldn't say ashamed because that would be terribly me putting words in their mouth, but it felt to me that there was some sort of pain in this transition, and yet they also felt like it was an inevitability. It felt like this was then. Kind of, I guess. Romantically. Projecting into our world and as us being all powerful and this is their way of of being able to cope with being in our world. Like where? Where when I went back since making the film, you saw that my real rival in the film where I come back and whereas previously there were nomadic, now they've got. As you mentioned in your question, so there's this sort of like first first step towards stillness. And then I went back again more recently. And they've also now started sending their kids to the local school. Which to me is like even worse as far as like that is the complete severing of. So much, and even though we see schooling and education as this like primary need and and a basic human right that everyone on the planet should have, it's like, but what is education? Who gives it and what's the format and all the rest of it. And sitting in rows, being obedient is very, very different to being an egalitarian. Hunter Gatherer, who who has a society where no one tells anyone what to. Do and and then what type of subjects it is that they're learning is also going to be very different to this very informal type of education which is being in the forest and learning through following your elders through the woods and what have you. So. So for me, it's so much of what that film was about, which was about our. Connection or visceral felt connection to the environment, or empathic connection to that which is around us, I think will. Disappear through that shift into schooling. And and I think that, I mean these are subtle things that will that that will change in many different ways. I mean, I think that they're being still, you know, you saw the guy suddenly getting out the, you know, they've got these long houses and then the guy gets out there like that, the ants spray because, of course, you know, that's another thing when you're flowing with nature. You're not at odds with it. You know you can flow with it. You're there for a period of time and then on you go. Whereas when you've like, put your staff in the ground and this is my property now and like this is where I'm going to make it clean and habitable for me, then you'll you go through this process of pushing nature away so that you can have this sanitized home. And there you saw this like once nomadic hunter gatherer spray. That's because, of course, they've moved

in, you know, so all of these things are just incremental shifts. The other big thing in the film which which I think was probably the main point of the film, although very subtle, was that being a nomadic hunter gather. You you are exercising the mind in a very different way. You know, like in order to go hunting, you've got to be present. You've gotta be in your body, in your senses to catch the monkey. If you're drifting off to other times and places, you'll step on a twig. You just won't be present. The monkey can guarantee it's fully in his senses. He's going to be alert to everything. So. You will get away if you're not as alert as present as him, and likewise with foraging. You know you you have to be. Very present to what nature might offer you in various places as you're walking through and you have to be looking, and it's very different to me walking my dog, whistling and looking at the horizon, that's very different to farming, where I can just, I don't have to be present. Like. I mean, I can be as a present. Horticulturalist, but I don't have to be. I can actually wear headphones and be listening to an audio, but while I'm sticking things on the ground and not really paying deep attention at all, and This is why I thought the work of being the Gilchrist answered that very beautifully about these different ways that we can experience and view the world. And that Once Upon a time when we were nomadic hunter gatherers, we had a very different relationship with each other and with the environment and a lot of that was how we perceived and how we literally were were interacting and looking and feeling and and perceiving the world around us and. And also I think that this sort of meditative. Way of being to to exercise the mind on a regular basis in this meditative way. Does sort of equalise our inner workings, you know anyone who's been on a for passing or a treat or any for type of like long meditation retreat, we're all very often come out saying similar things, which is they feel more connected. You know that's just one of the things you close this constant chattering voice in their head and allow for the other. And the more subtle sensations to arise, you're more in your body and and that's how you gain this empathy for that which is around you. And I think that that's what they heard. It's like you feel more empathic. And when you're feeling empathic, you have a different relationship with that which is around you people and place. So that as well as a hundred other things, you know, they all build into this package of what perhaps we were all once like, you know, the other group that we visit in the film, the the perhaps you know that they are so present. Because they don't even have a Future Past tense to their language, they're so present that they're in their here and now they couldn't even drift off to abstract thoughts if they wanted to, because they just don't have the capacity. They're just all about the here and now. And even the conversations you have with them, it's like if if they can't relate it to some lived experience that's kind of present that they're not interested. That's why no one, no missionary has ever managed to convert any of them because it's like, well, who's this Jesus doing or like, do you know him? Does your dad know him or do you do, you know, you know? But it's like went to the OR they just they can't actually relate to it in any way. So they're so present. And and this was a group of people. Have a running dialogue with the voices of the forest. You know, whatever they may be external or

internal. I don't even know. I mean, I have my views obviously, but like they they have this, this dialogue with this, let's call it spirit entity. Which guides them, you know, and you hear the voice. It's like, like, don't take too much. Own the the Cobra Gate tells you not to take down the big trees to only take what you need and all this sort of stuff. And this is. Their running dialogue. And then in more recent years, I think again through the action of missionaries, they've moved now to agriculture. And you. And so they've started taking down the trees, you know, and you and you hear this dialogue of of them telling you that Kluber gay is saying the spirit and say is saying please and the trees talking to them. Please don't chop us down. Please don't burn us. We're like you, we're like humans. Do we feel the pain? And yet they're still doing it because they've taken this shift, this this turn in our evolutionary. History that has brought us to where we are now, and I think it wouldn't surprise me that we've had to suppress that kind of pain. It's deep there. We know deep down what we're doing, we know it and yet we're we're we're. Unwilling to go there because it's too painful and and and that I think is is potentially at the heart of so much of our trauma.

Veronica: I am so on board with everything you're sharing. Thank you, Bruce. Yeah, I remember poignant moment with the piranha people when they said that that now in conflict with the forest, you know, they'd been they'd had no choice but to stop listening to the voices of the forest. Even though they could still hear them. Oh, the first episode I did on this podcast was with Nikki Harrison and we briefly address, you know, how can we open ourselves up to the full array of grief for our world so that we can begin to change and reimagine a way of being that places us back into reciprocity. And. Actually feel. Yeah, that level of empathy that is needed for these changes to happen. To why is one of the most powerful things I've seen. It's very artful and sometimes quite subtle with the messages it's portraying, but I really felt that I got them and it was deep and I encourage anyone listening to go and watch it. My next question was going to be about being the Gilchrist work because you threaded philosophy on the right and left brain hemispheres into Twi, which I felt was a way of inviting the viewer to consider the disconnection from our capacity to exist with more presence and sensation of interconnectivity with all that. Is. And I know that your time with indigenous groups and engaging with ancient traditions that sometimes involve plant medicines that you have been on a journey of reconnection yourself and perceiving the world around us, animate. And this is essentially what I'm trying to do with rooted healing, is to explore creative ways, to reconnect us back with our original. Deep kinship with the living world and with the mystical world as as yeah, my personal healing journey has been along the path of ancestral and indigenous. Remembrance reciprocity, relationship with nature and spirit. So could you share about your personal? Transformation, for lack of a better word, and how a deeper connection with the more than human world might just be the key to waking people up. To change this paradigm of perpetual growth and destruction and feel free to include any insight around what spirit has to play in this and what spirit or spirits. Even entail when it comes to our relationship with life, if that isn't too abstract.

Bruce: No, thank you. Yeah, well.

Bruce: You know my own personal, you know, I started out life in a very orthodox. British family, very Christian dabbers in the army travelled sort of like military bases, went to English boarding school, you know, BBC was the gospel pop music was the Devil's music. You know, I was very, very institutionalised in a. Pretty old fashioned Victorian type family and and and you know, although I rebelled against a lot of it, I also absorbed a lot of it. You. Know I drugs was. Were bad, my mum telling me if I ever did a drug. I. Would be. She'd disown me, and now I joined the Marines myself, which also reinforced a lot of my. Pretty toxic masculine behaviour and then through a number of different events over my life, you know, it's been there's been definitely been stepping stones, momentary stepping stones. But there's also been lots of sort of much more gradual insight and. Mostly held by wonderful girlfriends to be honest, over the years inviting me to question why it is that I'm saluting the national anthem and then I think one of the biggest things was like uh, as a psych. My first I was. So as I said, my mum had had instilled in me that that all drugs were bad. Drugs being illegal substances as opposed to all the other myriad drugs that are in our lives, which just goes to show the the madness of the the, the, the sort of the, the, the language. But yeah, I did a mushroom trip and that totally knocked me sideways and made me. He realized that my I had to reevaluate my Christian beliefs as so as far as spirit was concerned, that was a shock. It's like, well, what I thought was the case is very different to what this experience that I've just heard, and I'd already been questioning a lot of it. There's a lot that's clearly. Questionable within it, but you know you you can just take it on board. It's like, well, that's the story and that's the culture. Let's go with it. But then it was like, OK, this is just the the the straw that broke the camel's back. It's like it's just that doesn't make sense at all. No. And then the first ever tribe show that I made, I mean, we're jumping a lot of other things, but I went to do a boga, which was a very powerful psychoactive plant and used in a in a ritual setting in this group of people in the Congo. Uh called the bongo and and it was like.

Veronica: MHM.

Bruce: Right of passage for them. And I mean, that's just a whole podcast in its own right. Just that one experience. It was like a three day extravaganza with just me doing it. And like first six hours of me just eating this root, which was probably one of the hardest things we've ever done, followed by another six hours of having all these visual experiences and healings and and insights into into my life and the decisions that I've made and all this sort of stuff. And then coming out. For another two days of being carried by the community, well, my feet literally didn't touch the ground for two days and and had all sorts of wonderful experiences and and super profound. And that was the beginning of my tribe series and in it. There was definitely a deep spiritual element to it whereby the whole point of it is to go and meet the wheaty, which is like their deity, and they ask. Depending on the various visions you have and the signs and the these type of geometric shapes that you can identify along the way is like how far you go down the pathway to meet the burrito and it seems that I was successful in

doing that. So I was initiated and then of course set me up. That set me off on my trip to go and meet. All these other people and and have all these other experiences and and quite a lot of it was plant substances. As well as other experiences of my life where I went from a very fast moving, high octane lifestyle when I was making these TV shows and then went off to to to Greenland to do a show where I was basically suddenly catapulted from this fast moving, high octane highly. Sort of stimulating lifestyle where teams of people were organising my everyday to be different and then suddenly in a white ice field with no trees or foliage or mountains or anything like literally being in detention with nothing to stimulate the mind at all for like months. And going completely insane and and my brain and my my the voice in my head telling me all the time that this is terrible and basically not being in control of my own voice and going kind of mad. And then since then, discovering meditation and realizing, Oh my God, there there's ways that you can actually get a grip on this and not let it be the thing that's running the show. And so that was another huge. So that sort of diving into eastern mysticism and philosophies and those sorts of things. And a lot of the healing modalities and then meeting the cocky people and being. Invited to give up sex, drugs, alcohol, you name it, for which I ended up doing for years three years, which was another huge journey into my own inner workings and the sort of my sexual energies and where they were coming from and how I was relating to people and what what my driving forces were and. Becoming aware of this as a result of removing elements of my life so that I was able to experience them and being on this supremely high level. Journey whereby I was trying to purify. I mean as as a bit of a crass term perhaps, but like trying to clear up and harmonise every thought and word and deed, so that even my thoughts, I was trying to have in a way that was. Yeah, harmonious and and and beneficial and and selfless and. So that was a huge, huge, huge other journey for me. And then coming here and trying to put into practice in the Unitarian society, which I which, which is still very much in its embryonic stage, but like trying to work out what that is all about and the spiritual element of that. So, yeah, I mean, I guess my whole life's been that. Been a bit of a trip in that sense and I've I've I've had a number of extraordinary privileged experiences that have woken me to so much. And and and nearly every turn sadly made me realise that my existing lifestyle and culture is. Is problematic to to the to the, to the core, you know, but as you said, I think in the chat that we had before we before we went on air. You know that this is the this this is. This is a deep realization that we have, but we didn't like. We didn't create this space we're in now. We might be the ones waking up to it. But we're, you know it, it's easy to feel guilty, but we shouldn't beat ourselves up. You know that's not the attitude we've got to like be aware of where we're at but like but not be so. Over powered by the sense of, like guilt and shame or whatever it is, the energy that that we become completely unable to to do anything. You know, we've got to, we've got to. UM. We've got to be soft on ourselves and yet at the same time be strong in order to to, to, to, to maintain this, this, this direction that we've that, that that feels right, but not to to be so harsh that we that we lose the joy of existence and that that's its own

struggle, which I include in this little waffle. So yeah, I mean spirits. A big part of it it is. And empathy is a big part of that for me and. As we touched on earlier, you know there there's nearly every mainstream religion has a mystery school, and each one of those mystery schools has its own methodology for us to reconnect with something, you know. And so whether it's the Sufis or or the nastics or the Kabbalah. Or whoever it is they've all got. These these tools for reconnecting and and so they also have very, very well designed tools out in the East, you know, meditation being at the heart of it. But like alongside that is also a narrative that contains these tools. You know, so I can spin with the Sufis and and. Convert to Islam, but then before you know. Do I swallow, then the whole pill of this whole package, that is Islam. Likewise with Christianity, I can chant and do all the gnostic stuff. But like, what's the package that holds it? And what I've realised is that there's direct connection that we can have. You know, I can be present and be a sniper. I can be present and be a box or I can be present or sit on the map. Because like it, it's like it. It's it's. One thing is to have the feeling the other thing is like how do we interpret it, you know, cause we're we're we're very adept, our minds. Are adept at having these experiences of of like non dual sort of unity consciousness and it feels amazing. But then how do we bring that into the world and what what are we receiving there? What how much of that is my own inner workings and how much of it is actually a true experience of something and. It's really hard to it's really hard to figure that out. And so I've always been a a believer in in sort of mixing these the these tools that give us this feeling with also a narrative that holds it. And that's why I've always kind of come back again and again to the indigenous wisdom because I think that their narratives. Have been, you know, if I want to coldly analyse all the narratives out there, some are about leaving this earthly realm. Some are about love and but it's a very human centered perspective. Others are, you know, they all have a slightly different flavour. But what the indigenous people have that I like. It's not about past lives. It's about ancestral lineage to bring you here, and it's about the future generations. And it's also about the environment and being on equal terms with the environment not being above it. And of all of these different narratives, no matter how beautiful their healing modalities. Are. And they and and many of them have extraordinary extraordinary healing modalities that we will the grateful recipients of. I also have have been grateful for the insight. Of like placing it within a container that also makes sense in this in car that well that we're in and I like the indigenous visions, I mean like obviously every indigenous group has a different vision. But roughly speaking, there's a nature connection, not above we're not, we're not special unique. We're not above it. We're in it. And and the more that we can abide in the mystery of it alongside our fellow species, the more chance we have of getting through, I think. And to me that's what it's about.

Veronica: I am right right there with you. I could literally listen to you and stay in conversation all day.

Bruce: Yeah, likewise. It's so nice to talk to you.

Veronica: You've said that egalitarianism is not about everyone being the same. How equality doesn't mean sameness, and you've expressed in previous talks that you're not trying to go back in time and that you're. Yeah, you're looking forward and considering ways to integrate your learnings into quote UN quote modern life. I know you are in the delicate phase of incubation for a UK based project, which you and your friends are exploring new ideas around hierarchy, ownership, healing, conflict resolution and decision making. So I don't want to probe. Into something that is still very much brewing and taking shape. But could you give us a taste of this new adventure? And in terms of action and engagement and overcoming this collective feeling of disempowerment. Yeah. And any of those small step ideas that might edge us closer to this revolution.

Bruce: Thank you. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, for me, of all of the groups, as you've as you've heard me just say, you know, it was the Penan and the Bengali, these egalitarian groups that really struck me the most. It's like, wow, here's another way that we can live and exist together and actually quite possibly be. Happier. I think so. Many of the ills that we're existing and abiding in today, which which are really, you know, evident if you want to drill down. Uh, I was a result of our separation and our anxiety with inequality and all this sort of stuff. And it's like which I think Richard Wilkinson on the website. Makes very clear in in the in the case of inequality, and I think a lot of the mental health issues that we have and all the rest of it, that all resulting from this type of society that we're in, you know, I just don't see those same things in, in many of the indigenous groups that I visited. I don't see addiction in the same way. Let's see. The depression in the same. Way, I mean if they're. Intact, the ones that have you know that are are going through these very dramatic shifts. You see it very evidently that there's a lot of addiction. There's a. Lot. Of problems, but in the very few that I've experienced time with who are still living closer to the really traditional ways than then it's much less.

Bruce: So I thought that was interesting and also I came to this kind of understanding that. This particular paradigm of aggression and competition and and consumption and all the rest of it is. I didn't see a way out of this being catastrophic, you know, with the amount of people that we have on the planet there. And I don't think that population is the problem and it is part of the problem, but it's not the problem. It's like the way we're living. It's the problem, especially in the rich nations and. Of course, for everything. That we're doing here, there's a 5 billion people who want to have the same lifestyle as me and all I wanna have is a better lifestyle and they're just. Clearly isn't enough resources for that, and like and when we're all in this space of inequality, we're. We're all judging ourselves next to each other and all wanting to have just that slightly better life and and again you don't see that with an egalitarian society. They've all got the same and that and actually the other things that life become more important, it's the friendships, the family, it's the song and the dance and the simpler things. And we don't all need to go well. He's got a Lamborghini, so I need to have this. It's like it's just not going on because everyone's pretty much the same and and

yet that feels so at odds with where we're at that to try and persuade anyone that this would be a good way to go feels. Really. Difficult so and even with my film, and even the talk sometimes the talks I give about egalitarianism, I often see people slightly glaze over. It's like you're speaking a dream, but it's like it's just like romantic nonsense. And there's me going. No, you don't get it. Cause it's like 95% of our time on the planet. This is how we existed and everything. Everything that we're playing in now is just destined to cause warfare and and and aggression. And it's like this is part of the package we're in. Sure. That's fine. When you're on top, but. Like and we are on top. You know we are the ones, the 1% destroyed you know and like stealing from the rest of the world. As the rich nations, it's all a corrupt system and we we might not see it, but it is it's a corrupt system and we are the benefactors of that and we're waking up to privilege and all sorts of ways of white privilege male privilege. You know all these privileges. But like, we're also rich, nation privilege has not talked about us like we are. A colonial might. Still stealing from everyone else. And so it's like this is. This is where we're. At and, there's always winners and losers, and the winners one day will be the losers the next day. And if you wanna stay in this paradigm, fine. But like, it's not the best. It's like it's it's a misery. And I've experienced another way where it is much more about sharing out and. And it sounds like romantic nonsense. But actually everyone's having a really good time, you know. And. We can do that. It is possible, but the only way that it's gonna be even understood is if there's lived examples of this. It's like we got we actually have to have groups of people who've given up the rat race to come together and go. Actually, we're better off. I'm not having. To work in a factory or get up, get up and get on the tube every morning. It's like, OK. Yeah. So I have to do the elements a little bit more. I have to like, you know, there's some. There's some things that seem at first, like, it's a slight discomfort, but actually in the long run, there's some real blessings that can come about. And so that was the plan or the idea, but. It's it's actually really, really hard for all of us to give our paths of individuality to come into a collective space. It's like we're all so set on our dreams and our personal ambitions and our and all of these things that to let go of that, to come to a place where we're like literally sharing. Everything to really work at this power getting out of hand and like whether that's through money or that through possessions and ownership or showing off. It's like that's a real journey and so I'm in negotiation with this amazing group of people at the moment who are young and and already and engaged in all sorts of nature activities and they're activists and they're they're all involved in all sorts of social movements and they're that. I mean, I just feel so privileged to be in their company. They're such. A wonderful group of people. But we're still negotiating what this vision is, you know, and I have this place here, which I'm happy to let go of into a space that I could even be kicked out. You know, it's like we're gonna be fully equal here. But. But what's the container that holds us? We're not. We weren't born into the Penan. You know where there's this legacy that's come before. It's like we've gotta recreate this. And so I've obviously got my own understanding of what that is. But that's Bruce's thing, you know? And so this is where

we're at now. It's like I spent all last winter riding out this, this manifesto. But and and I didn't. Even have the guts to share it with the group until. A year later, because it's like everyone, like, I don't wanna see your. What about our vision? It's like it's like and. And in a in a sense, they're right. So we're going through this really beautiful journey of, like, listening to each other and sharing a vision. And while I've obviously got something to carry from this sort of pre his pre prehistoric. Was about to say. That sounds weird. I mean, it is prehistoric, but it's like. Not with any negative connotation that's insight from what I think are like the most exemplary groups of people that I've ever come across to bring in, but also taking my own self out of that is the journey I'm on and and. And so we're close. It's it. It's an amazing group and it may or may not have. And we're still in this world. You know, we're we're still not. We still need money to do the barns up and we can't just go out and take the trees in order to build log cabins. We still have to go through planning issues. And so you know that we we've got 1000 potential problems that we don't know how we're going to resolve and. And everyone still that entwined with their own lives, understandably. And I'm not trying to savour that, but I'm trying to be a part of a group that invite. A a movement towards being much more local, much more in tune with our environment and tune with our consumptive needs, and also not feeding into a wider society that that is, you know, especially at the at the national level, causing international problems. You know, how do we do that? Without also alienating ourselves from the. The people that we love and and respect and don't want to be seen as different and would love for them to come and join us. But like we don't wanna join in that madness anymore. So how's that gonna unfold, you know, and especially me being English coming and try and do that in Wales, it's like that's also problematic. It's like, who's this colonial do coming in telling us to? Change our ways. It's. I'm not telling anyone to do anything. I'm just inviting us all through the prism of this thing that I've seen. And and and it's layered with complications and and. So that's kind of why it's slow and and it may be that it's it, maybe it's not possible it's. May I? I don't know. I I'm. I'm still with this wonderful group of people trying to work it out and we're we're trying to work it out and. And we all have subtly different takes on it. But I I I'm a believer in the galateria anism and I know that lots of, like political thinkers. Today and throughout history have all said that's nonsense. But I've I've lived with people who really have managed to let go of. Competition and aggression from their societies in a in a really profound way and and and seem to be OK and I'm not trying to romanticise poverty. And I'm not also a technophobe. I think that we, you know, we've created some amazing stuff, but we are also facing. It's bleak stuff, you know? It's like the the the, the, the extinction that we're in and the and the and the potential demise of, well, pretty much everything is like is is real in my view I've I've seen first hand the destruction. Making that series Amazon, making that series art. It was all about globalisation was all about climate change. I've seen it. I came back to a nation in denial and it's still in debate. But for me it was super clear. But maybe, maybe. I don't know. We'll see. We'll see what comes. We'll see what comes. It's it's proving to be the hardest trick yet. Let's say.

Veronica: These. Conversations around the need for community are all around me and I feel a personal urgency to find a way to make it work. And of course it's complex and dependent on what is accessible to everyone. And then there's the whole dance of choosing where home is when there is. So much displacement, I have deep, deep, deep respect for what you are doing and I don't overlook at all the complexity of what you are immersing yourself in.

Bruce: Ohh, that's so sweet well, I think the last thing to say on that and I know that I know that we're winding up, but it's like it's not to. Forget that it's. Also a privilege. You know, it's a privilege to even have this notion, this possibility, to have the possible space in order to even consider it is in our day and age of privilege, and that shouldn't be forgotten either. And that doesn't mean to say that.

Veronica: Absolutely.

Bruce: We we can't act. It shouldn't stifle us. But as long as we're working for the benefit of all, rather than just our own few, and this privileged space, then then I think that that's an OK start.

Veronica: Yeah, and trying to rethink systemic models that do invite more equality, maybe looking at financial inequality first, for example, and how much decreasing the wealth gap has positively affected the well-being of of all you know, I'm thinking of in Scandinavian countries, for example, without going towards centralized approaches. To equality enforcement, like communism, but yes, it's it's complex and paradoxical, and I'm just so grateful. There are people out there daring to dip their toes in to the deep inquiry and practice of alternative ways to live and grow. So Bruce, thank you so much. It is so wonderful connecting with you and I can't wait to see what stories you will continue to share and create and projects that will unfold. Thank you so much. For being here.

Bruce: Like cries, it's so nice to talk to you.

Veronica: I recommend to stay in tune with Bruce Power. He stay updated with this human being. Please for the sake of a better tomorrow visit to White dot Earth which is TAWAITY to watch his film and there is so much additional content to learn from there. To learn more about Bruce and his work, you can visit bruceparry.com and follow him on social media. He's Bruce Parry tribe on Instagram. I am going to be uploading a transcript of this episode for our Patreon listeners. You can support this show by helping us with the running costs by joining our patron community from as little as 1 LB a month, and that space is just getting fuller and juicier with carefully created offerings. With every episode we release. Visit rootedhealing.org to find out more about our work, and I'd also love to mention our summer solstice Rebirth gathering this June in Dorset, England. That's 2022 from Vickers. If you've enjoyed this conversation, then this intimate gathering that celebrates the rebirthing in creative. Ignition the summer solstice brings us we'll definitely speak to your soul. More information is at rootedhealing.org/summer-solstice. I'm your host, Veronica Stanwell. Thank you for being here.

Links

<https://www.bruceparry.com>

<https://www.tawai.earth>

Recommended Reading:

Feral - George Monbiot

The Dawn of Everything - David Graeber and David Wengrow

A Hunter-Gatherer's Guide to the 21st Century - Bret Weinstein and Heather Heying

Civilized to Death: The Price of Progress - Christopher Ryan

This episode contains the song of the Mbendjele women during Massana - watch the full scene here:

<https://www.tawai.earth/tawai-iii-mbendjele>

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Find out more about our Summer Solstice Rebirth gathering at <https://rootedhealing.org/summer-solstice-rebirth-gathering>

Or head straight to rootedhealing.org to learn more about our work.

The Rooted Healing podcast is hosted by Veronica Stanwell.

With thanks to Mike Howe for the ongoing music contributions.

The Ted K Archive

Bruce Parry on Indigenous Perspective and Egalitarianism
Jan 25, 2022

Rooted Healing Podcast. <youtube.com/watch?v=vHvHDqlfrc0>

www.thetedkarchive.com