

EPISODE — ASHLEY TURNER

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:18.1] LC: Welcome to today's episode. Today we have Ashley Turner joining us. Ashley is not only an M.A., MFTI yoga meditation instructor, she is a marriage and family psychotherapy intern, writer, and I know it's another, but she's also an ordained priestess. I wasn't totally sure what that entail but she explains it into these episode and she goes into how to blend eastern-western yoga techniques, meditation, philosophy and traditional western psychotherapy into building a life that is deeply authentic and meaningful.

She has someone who has been on the path of authenticity her whole life and she really goes into a lot of detail about how she keeps that truth alive in her life on a daily, hourly sometimes basis and it's not easy and she goes through a lot of great advice and ideas on the subject. She has been on list as 100 Most Influential Yoga Instructors in the US, 40 Under 40 health and wellness sector of the Wall Street MNA advisory list. Second online influencer for stress relief for Dr. Oz self-care.

She is the founder of Yoga Psych and Soul, advance yoga psychotherapy training, the co-founder of Urban Priestess and the creator of nine bestselling yoga DVD's and online courses and co-author of Aroma Yoga. I could go on and on and on and on. You can just check her out at Ashleyturner.org to find out about this and so much more. We go into the courses and the things she has to offer if you're interested in going deeper into these areas.

I know you're going to love today's show, check it out and thank you again so much for listening.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:02:07.0] LC: Welcome to this week's episode. Today we have Ashley Turner here. Hey Ashley, how are you doing?

[00:02:12.5] AT: Hi, thank you so much Laura. So good to be here.

[00:02:15.7] LC: So great to have you here and I just want to take a moment to do a little public thank you because when I was starting off just launching my book, getting into this world, I'm not sure if you know but you are one of the first people who was a definite yes.

[00:02:31.3] AT: Oh, I love hearing that.

[00:02:33.4] LC: Thank you so much, it was great chatting with you. We had such a fun conversation and I'm so excited to do it again.

[00:02:39.4] AT: Yeah, I know. Congratulations on the book and everything that you've created.

[00:02:43.1] LC: Thank you and I am excited to hear your story. We were just chatting a little bit before we hopped on live and glad we held it because I want everybody to hear it with me. You have so many components that make up your world as a yoga teacher, psychologist. You have different initiatives, the Urban Priestess Program, if you could just take us back a little bit and maybe explain to the listeners and to myself, how did this developed? Did you start off in yoga? What was this journey like for you?

[00:03:14.7] AT: I always tell people it's just a winding path. Living your authentic truth is always a winding path, kind of like a labyrinth. I went to school out here in Los Angeles. I went to USC and I majored in the national relations and then after school, I was actually acting for about five years and while I was acting here in Los Angeles, I started going to yoga. I met really my root teacher, Govind Das who owns Bhakti Yoga Shala and he introduced me to yoga. He introduced me to Bryan Kest's Power Yoga and I started going to that pretty religiously and then it really started working me from the inside out. The practice really was transforming.

It was transforming my relationship with myself. I didn't even realize it at the time but I definitely was depressed and so it helped lift that and eventually after several years, it just started to become clear that I wanted to teach yoga. So I would just think, "Well if they're doing it, I could do it," and very aspirational and so then I started teaching about five years after I have been practicing and about five years after I had been teaching yoga, I started to realize there were so many people coming up to me, asking me questions about personal stuff or essentially how can

I take yoga off the mat? And I realized that I didn't have the tools or I would intuitively feel into ways that I could help them but not really have the languaging or specifics.

And at the time, I had a couple of friends that were getting licensed as psychotherapists and we're also yoga teachers and I could see in them a whole different skill set and I wanted to understand that and I also wanted to understand how to broaden my career. When I looked at my career, it was pretty simple. I felt like this is great at 25, at 30 to be teaching yoga and busting my ass but when I'm 60 years old or 55, I don't want to be running around Los Angeles teaching 11 classes a week. So how else can I deepen this?

[00:05:24.1] LC: And one thing I just want to pause on is this whole idea of yoga off the mat because I am familiar with this and people who do yoga, but when you say yoga transformed you early on and you didn't even notice it, that happened to me as well. I was doing yoga and I thought truthfully I just wanted something to help me decompress a little and it was changing me really quickly. In fact Eric Schiffman I think said you'll either do yoga and quit or you'll change. Two options when you start doing yoga. But when you say yoga off the mat and it was shifting what does that mean for the people out there who don't know that idea?

[00:05:56.4] AT: Yoga is a practice of transformation and people typically think about yoga as a physical practice or maybe meditation and breathing but yoga is really very deep self-inquiry. It's very psychological, it's very spiritual, it can be very spiritual and it's really a process of constantly inquiring into the true nature of who you are and of what life is about and there's many, many different dimensions of that of course and so the practice of taking yoga off the mat is really the essence of the practice which is how do I improve my relationships? How do I create more freedom in my life? How do I create more contentment?

I wouldn't even use the word happy because I think that we naturally ebon flow. Sometimes we're happy, sometimes we're sad, we experience all kinds of emotions, disappointment, frustration, heartbreak but contentment is a little different. It's about being at peace with what is even if you're in big challenges or not happy, it doesn't mean you can't be content and at peace. So yeah, I think really shifting the inner landscape and for me, really shifting my relationship with myself. It really healed a lot of insecurity and body image issues, again depression and not that those things never come up but I have a lot more skills to work with that.

[00:07:22.0] LC: So you saw that you wanted to take those things that you were experiencing from yoga and put more language around it using then therapy to help articulate it?

[00:07:32.2] AT: Yes, exactly. Language and relational skills, communication skills, this kind of thing and that's one of the reasons that I wanted to go back to school and get my master's in psychology and then get licensed as a psychotherapist so that I could really understand the mind and emotional intelligence from the western perspective as well as from the yogic eastern perspective and then my work and my passion is really weaving the two and making these larger, what can seem like more abstract spiritual concepts particularly of eastern traditions and really land them in very practical ways for people in their life.

[00:08:11.1] LC: Yeah, that's very powerful because I think using those eastern traditions and being able to translate it in a way for western people to get the value can be complicated.

[00:08:20.5] AT: Exactly.

[00:08:22.3] LC: When I first went to yoga and people were like saying these sentences, "Just focus on your breathe and think about yourself," I'm like, "What?" I'm looking around at all the different people doing yoga and I'm distracted and just focus on your mat and I'm like, "What? That person is doing some crazy move next to me. I want to check it out." So it is, it's a whole different paradigm of thinking. We're just not used to in the west.

So as you developed the yoga and you went into psychology, what were some of the things that you felt you were seeing time and time again with your clients?

[00:08:57.3] AT: Well there's a few themes. I think my clientele is generally women from 25 to maybe 45 so young woman that are highly educated and professional. Probably the biggest theme is relationships, romantic relationships. Challenges with communicating in romantic relationships, setting boundaries, really attracting a healthy, strong partnership and then everything that comes up with maintaining that partnership. So that's a big one.

Another big theme is certainly body image, that's just an epidemic in our culture particularly with women but for women and men and then there's a lot of work for most people around family origin and really understanding what patterns, emotional patterns, behavioral patterns that we have inherited from our families and it can get really intricate and murky and so sort of teasing out what are those patterns, what patterns do I want to take that are healthy and empowering and what patterns and behaviors of belief systems and stories are limiting that I want to leave behind. Or I want to find ways to transmute that.

So those are some big themes. I would also say I have actually been surprised at how many people I have worked with that women that have some sort of eating disorder and I just didn't realize what an epidemic that is also. So it's not like every client but there are a lot of people out there who suffer with that and it ties into body image for sure but it also really ties into control and feeling safe and connected. So at the root, most of these psychological issues can also be addressed deeply, spiritually. So that's sort of my approach with the psychology as spiritual psychology or yoga psychology. So really connecting to self, connecting to a higher power, connecting to a community, different ways that we can approach the self.

[00:10:52.3] LC: And so as you think about these themes and the things going on with your clients and how you're helping them, I noticed you're the creator of the bestselling yoga DVD's, online conferences, a co-author of an essential oils and yoga and life, how do you balance the decision between the eastern solutions and the western practice and building a life that you feel is meaningful to you and doing the work that you want to do?

[00:11:19.2] AT: That's a great question. It's definitely not so much of a conscious effort in terms of, "Okay, I want to bring in this much east and west." It's really instinctual and I think this speaks to the authenticity piece of every step of my career, for the most part, it hasn't — I guess there has been some strategy but there's also been equal parts mystery and surrender and really allowing things to come to me and waiting until I am inspired and trusting that inspiration and moving forward on projects or deals that really peek my interest, that turn me on, that light me up.

Finally, I feel like just in the last few years, I've started to get better about saying "no" really quickly to things that just don't feel aligned. I still have a couple lingering. I just sit a little project

and I was like, “You know,” every step of the way I was resisting it and I was like, “This is not in alignment and you know this and you have already learned this lesson but I guess you are learning it again.”

[00:12:23.0] LC: It’s the lesson that repeats over and over. I know, I’ve gotten so much better but then I say yes once in a blue moon. I’m like, “God you knew it, and every bone in your body is saying no and you still did it anyways.” But you know, that just brings you back too. It’s a practice. It’s not something you can ever get done perfectly.

One thing I wanted to mention is this word surrender you just used, that you learned to let go and surrender. I remember you’re probably the fourth or fifth person that’s chosen that word. I hated that word a few years ago. I thought it meant giving up, stepping back, being weak. I just remember hearing about it in literature and I’m like, “Why would people keep talking about surrender?” It has since become one of my favorite ideas because it is not a weakness. It takes a lot of strength to step back and let go and trust. What does that mean to you, why did you pick that word specifically?

[00:13:12.5] AT: I feel like I am in a constant learning this lesson of letting go and control and surrender. It’s become a joke between me and my boyfriend. He’s like, “Oh there it is again, you’re learning how to surrender,” and I’m like, “Oh,” you know? I’m just like gritting my teeth. I was travelling in Europe and my computer got stolen and that was a big surrender and then I came back to the States and I was with my family and then I lost my rental car keys and I had to spend a whole day waiting for the tow truck and he was like, “Oh you’re still learning that lesson.” I’m like, “Oh my God.” Meanwhile with him I am surrendering.

[00:13:52.8] LC: Right, just letting things happen, right? Letting the control, the western culture is like, “Just stay on it, stay on it,” and it does help to get a lot of things done but you just have to let go sometimes.

[00:14:04.1] AT: Yeah and I think that is really important as an entrepreneur to realize that you do what you can. In fact one of my colleagues, my business partner in one of my projects, Sianna Sherman, we run our Urban Priestess Program together and it’s an online course that is a yearlong online course for women, empowering women and specifically through the priestess

tradition. We both have done different priestess trainings and weave in 13 different archetypes of the divine feminine, and go through one each moon cycle.

But she is really even more deeply connected I would say to the divine feminine and she's really taught me so much about surrender in business because I can tend to have a very business entrepreneurial more left brain approach and get caught up in all of that with launching projects and she just stays really, really fluid. Like, "Okay, well this happened," and sometimes that could be challenging for me but it's also a great teaching for me of how to let go of control and how to address that there's other forces at work.

There are so many factors that we can't control in any given scenario whether it's your relationship, your kids, your career and so it's a 50/50 I think where you do your best and you make your best laid plans and try to follow through and have systems and support around you that's going to meet deadlines and this kind of thing, that very left brain masculine but then at the same time, you really trust the mystery of what's coming.

Hindsight is 20-20. I can look back at my career now and say, "Oh that's why that happened." Or "Oh yeah, I got those. I did create those eight yoga DVD's," and a production company came to me and I did it and it was actually a great collaboration but now, I can see all the skills that I learned from that and building that that are really helping me now.

[00:15:59.8] LC: Yeah, that it's all coming together in a way that does make sense but you just can't see it in the moments in between.

[00:16:05.1] AT: A lot of times. I think a lot of times you can't see it while you're in it and it make sense later. For example, I was teaching aerobics in college back in the 90's at USC. I was teaching aerobics and I didn't really think anything of it. I loved it and I had so much fun and it was a great workout. But then when I started teaching yoga about eight years later, I realized, "Oh all those skills of teaching group classes and movement and this is where I hone those skills," and I would have never had any idea that it would become my career.

[00:16:38.5] LC: Yeah, it's that sense of letting go, of knowing and thinking you're the one always in control of every moment. I was an entrepreneur and I thought, "Okay I am done with

entrepreneurship,” and I have moved on as I said to you right before we hopped on this call but I am writing a book and I am an author now.

Writing a book nowadays, you are an entrepreneur again and all those skills are serving me so well and it’s like, “Oh I didn’t waste those years learning these skills.” But yeah, I think that belief in a moment that we know what’s best and it should be that way and just letting go of those things. What do you do to help you move through those moments in a more graceful way so it doesn’t just ruin your day?

[00:17:24.1] AT: When you’re really challenged or?

[00:17:25.5] LC: Yeah and you are trying to surrender and you’re trying to let go and the battle starts up.

[00:17:31.1] AT: You know I think it’s really, really important to have a strong system of support and mentors. I call my mentors. You know, Seane Corn is an incredible yoga teacher and one of my best friends and has been a mentor for me all the way along and I always call her in moments of despair or frustration and some other very good friends, my girl Terry Cole who would be great actually for this podcast as well and she’s a psychotherapist out of New York City and Sianna, my colleague.

Just having those people around that I can really count on that I know are going to give me really honest support and advice and reflection and help me see things more clearly and keep me grounded and I am lucky my sisters are like that too. So I am just constantly calling people and I do therapy. I do therapy every week. I was at my therapist yesterday. I process a lot and I think it is important to know what skills are really going to help you. Knowing your weak spots, knowing whether you tend towards it. Is it fear, is it anxiety, is it depression? What are your weak spots and then when those kick in, knowing what tools you have as an anecdote for that.

[00:18:48.3] LC: Yeah, how to fortify yourself a little more in those moments and so talk to me about these Urban Priestess program. I’m so interested you’ve created an online course, can you explain it a little bit what this is?

[00:19:01.7] AT: Yeah, it's amazing. So as I've said, I have actually been building a brand, Urban Priestess, for about 10 years and I had done a priestess training in 2005-2006. Interestingly in my typical fashion, I started my priestess training at the same week. I started my masters in psychology and I thought, "Oh this is no big deal. I'm going to do both of this and work full time in yoga," and about two months into it, I was like, "What did I do? I am so underwater." My priestess training was amazing and so I always wanted to...

[00:19:35.2] LC: Could you bend up for like a half a second even to explain to some of us what a priestess training means because I think that is probably...

[00:19:42.6] AT: Yeah. So the word priestess is a great word. It is actually an archetype of the feminine. Archetype meaning certain aspects sort of a constellation of personality traits and ways of behavior and the priestess archetype is the same as the priest archetype, which if you think of it in the over simplified Judeo Christian version of even the Catholic version, priest is the one who translates down the message of God and so the essence of the priestess is that she is connected to the spiritual realms and able to translate that.

Like tapping into intuition, really being in a place of sovereignty, being in a place of empowerment, knowing how to wield power in different situations and that doesn't mean necessarily external power or power over anyone. It's really about being empowered within yourself. In other words, knowing how to take action that's aligned with your truth being confident in your decisions, being confident in your skills. Also it has a deep quality of a feminine such as being very receptive.

One of the symbols is the symbol of water or the chalice or the cauldron. These are often associated with the priestess and so when you think about water and being very fluid but being very clear and transparent like a looking glass. So if someone is in your presence, your field is so clear that you can offer them a clear reflection of who they are. So in other words, you're not running out all of your stuff on them. You are able to really connect with them from a place of authenticity and help them see that within themselves as well.

[00:21:30.0] LC: Yeah, that's beautiful. I love that idea and so you've created a program around this concept?

[00:21:36.4] AT: Yes. So our program is a yearlong mastermind program for women and it's basically each moon cycle, every 28 days or approximately every month, we go through a different archetype of the divine feminine. So we start with archetype of the priestess, that's sort of the hub of the wheel and then we do use the astrological calendar. So each moon cycle is associated with that house of astrology.

So for example, Cancer is associated with the mother archetype. Typically Cancer is actually the mother in the wheel of the zodiac. Scorpio is associated with the queen of death, transformation, rebirth. Aquarius is associated with the midwife and that which really brings forward and activates community and Leo, so that's the primal goddess, the wild woman, accessing that more sort of wild raw power.

So we go through each realm of life, each house of life. So relationships, career, creativity in play, communication, sexuality, body and health and vitality, home and family, finance and each moon, we focus on a different aspect of life and the different archetype associated with it. Then we have all kinds of different skills from more as esoteric building rituals around it to really practical psychological tools and yeah, it's really fun.

[00:23:09.2] LC: Wow and how many people join? Is it something that you join and then you go through the whole year together as a group?

[00:23:14.4] AT: Yeah, you go through the whole year together. We have a couple hundred people signed up for this year that we're completing. We have just a couple of months left and then we'll start and we're actually in the middle of launching our next program for next year. So I will send you the link and you can get that to everyone.

[00:23:29.7] LC: That's amazing. If somebody is interested in checking it out, they can find it on your site, right?

[00:23:33.8] AT: Yeah, Ashleyturner.org, exactly. Or you can go to urban-priestess.com.

[00:23:41.9] LC: That sounds really, really, really interesting and so everybody who comes on the show, I ask them a couple of questions and so I just want to, if it's okay, run you through this.?

[00:23:51.4] AT: Yeah.

[00:23:52.5] LC: I'm dying to know because you think about this all the time but what does an authentic life really mean to you?

[00:23:57.9] AT: I think it is really important to give ourselves space that authenticity is constantly changing and I think it means tuning into your truth and living from that place and again, that's a day to day dialogue with self and also having the courage and the confidence to pursue that truth. Also actually, it takes a lot of discipline sometimes like I am digging for me, it really comes down to values and it comes down to priorities.

So I just had an incredible month long vacation in Europe, which was so amazing and then I came back and I'm like, "Okay, it's time to really get back on the workout schedule, get back to my health and do a little detox and this kind of thing." And that takes discipline to change those habits and switch those patterns. But I think living authentically is looking inside for the answers to really truly looking inside for the answers and not being afraid to go against the grain and not be afraid to try new things and change and reincarnate.

[00:25:07.7] LC: Did you have a turning point moment when you started living more authentically or it sounds like something you've been building and building throughout your whole career?

[00:25:15.1] AT: Yeah, I guess I feel like I'm really, really lucky in the sense that I was born into an incredible family and the message that I always got from my parents was, "You can do anything you want." You can do anything you want, you can go to any school you want to go to and so I really did, from the beginning, I really did follow my dreams and I didn't know what was that going to look like and my parents were very gracious and that they always supported my dreams even when they seemed like pipe dreams.

Acting for example, is not something that a lot of parents would be supportive of and my parents were just like, “All right, let’s go for it. How can we help you? What can you do?” And then that led me into yoga and then I kind of have always had a really strong entrepreneurial spirit so that has been good. That’s really — yeah.

[00:26:09.4] LC: Yeah and for somebody who’s been following your dreams for a long, long time one of the messages that I hear you saying is that it wasn’t just like, “I found my dream and then I was happy, happy, happy.” Which is, if people listen to my show they have heard me say this a lot of times, but I feel like blog posts and stuff simplify it in 500 words. Find your passion and then you’ll be there and you’ll be all set, but it’s really even for somebody who was given the privilege to do these things from a very young age, you’re constantly like you said every day tuning into yourself. To ask yourself what your truth is.

[00:26:41.4] AT: Yeah every day and I think the other part of it is, there’s a grind. To be an entrepreneur is challenging. It takes a lot of grunt work, there’s a lot of blood, sweat and tears involved and I’m a really hard worker and I think it’s easy. There’s sort of the tendency now with the internet and social media, everybody is looking at each other’s highlight reels and just to think, “Oh I can just become a coach and make a couple hundred thousand dollars,” and you totally can. And it’s going to take a lot of work and like anything, you get out of it what you put into it. So I think it’s important to not just look with rose colored glasses.

[00:27:25.2] LC: Yeah and so the last question I love to ask people is what are your habits or daily practices to keep an authentic life going? And for somebody like you, it sounds like you’d have a lot. What are your detoxes and yoga practice, what are some of the things you do that you feel are critical to keeping your truth and authentic choices?

[00:27:43.4] AT: First of all meditation, number one. Number one, two and three.

[00:27:48.9] LC: Do you do meditate every day.

[00:27:51.9] AT: Yeah, I definitely try to. There are days that I don’t sit down at my altar and meditate and I can feel a difference especially if it’s more than a few days. So I definitely, even if it’s five minutes, 10 minutes before a phone call or something, I definitely try to do that because

it just quiets the mind and connects me to spirit. It's an opportunity to pray and set an intention and just to sit with my own priorities and say, "Okay, this is what I'm creating. This is what I'm doing."

So meditation is huge. Exercise is important to me. I think that I like to do a lot of different things. I don't just do yoga, I do a lot of yoga but I also run and do Pilates and hiking and I think all of that is really key and crucial as well. So just finding what works for your constitution and your body type and your psyche really.

[00:28:46.6] LC: Because not everybody is like a big athlete. Somebody like you has been teaching yoga and aerobics, I mean you must have been athletic most of your life.

[00:28:55.9] AT: Yeah, for sure.

[00:28:56.6] LC: Yeah, so I think it's great that you say that everybody has got a different constitution. There's no magic answer, it's just finding what works with your life and your body.

[00:29:06.5] AT: Yeah, for sure. Absolutely. So I would say there's four primary things, meditation number one, exercise number two, number three is getting out in nature. I think being in nature is really, really important and it just tunes us into the world in a very different way, which is so important to remember sort of the grandness of who we are what's going on and what's really going.

And then connecting with your community. Again, really building super strong friendships and mentorships and colleague relationships that you can go to as a psychotherapist one of the things that we're taught to do is to do peer supervision, which is to turn to your peers if you have a question about a client or a case. Go to your peers, have three or four people in your back pocket that you can call and say, "Hey I am struggling with this, with my client, what are your suggestions?" And so it's important to have that in our lives whether it's personally or professionally. So I think a good community support is really important.

[00:30:14.2] LC: And for people out there that don't have a big network and are looking to get started, you have this tremendous network of people that you have created what would you

suggest for somebody? Because I believe in having a network and a community and the mentors that you could call especially as an entrepreneur. How did you get that started? How did you tap into?

[00:30:35.0] AT: That's a great question Laura. I think that honestly just look around at who are your biggest competitors, if you will, and then befriend them. Find a couple that you really think are — because I don't really believe in competition. I think there's enough to go around for everybody. So all of my best friends are yoga teachers or therapists. So on one sense, yeah we could be vying for the same client for sure and on another sense, there's more than enough to go around and we're all facing quite similar challenges so let's help each other out.

[00:31:16.0] LC: Yeah, that's such a great one. I love that, "call your competitor".

[00:31:19.9] AT: Yeah.

[00:31:20.9] LC: Awesome, I love it. Thank you so much Ashley for coming on and sharing such great information with the audience and again, if they're looking to find out more about you, where can they find you?

[00:31:31.7] AT: Yes, thank you so much. You can just go to my website. It's Ashleyturner.org or Ashleyturner.co, I have both and then everywhere. I'm on Facebook and Instagram but yeah, ashleyturner.org. If you want to know more about my training for the Urban Priestess, it's Urbanpriestess.com and then I have an awesome yoga psychology training, which is six modules of really weaving together the eastern and western approaches and that's yoga-psychology.co. But that's all in my website.

[00:32:08.8] LC: Is that for people who are doing — do you have to be a yoga teacher or a psychologist to do that?

[00:32:13.5] AT: No, you definitely don't. You definitely don't. It's also for lay people. We have an online course that you can take that's just really giving you a lot more information on the new ounces of the practice of sort of the deeper practices of yoga. Not so much just the physical Asana but mantra, working with mantra, meditation, neuroscience, definitely working with the

chakra system as a developmental psychology. Working with, there's a business and leadership training that's yoga based, conscious relationships and sacred sexuality. So it's all encompassing to very different modules.

[00:32:50.3] LC: Oh my god, you're like a curriculum machine. I love it.

[00:32:55.2] AT: Yeah, I have been pumping a lot of content. It's a little bit crazy.

[00:32:56.7] LC: As someone who's done some of this, I can just say, she's offering a lot here. Thank you so much Ashley and again, I appreciate you coming on the show.

[00:33:06.5] AT: Thank you so much Laura. Take care.

[END]