

119: The Spiritual Degree

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Welcome to *12 Degrees*, the podcast that offers real life strategies for nurturing full spectrum wellness. I'm Lindsey Whissel Fenton.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm Christina Lightner.

DESHNA NAGAR: And I'm Deshna Nagar.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Together, we explore the twelve areas of wellness that influence how we feel and function.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: We share our own personal experiences and the research-backed strategies we find helpful and give thoughts for how you can adapt them for your life.

DESHNA NAGAR: We want to empower you to make informed choices across the full spectrum of wellness. In this episode, we're going to be looking at the spiritual degree of wellness and what we can do both at the individual level and the community level to support it. Christina, what is spiritual wellness?

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Spiritual wellness is about discovering purpose, meaning, and a deeper connection to us, others, and the world around us. It may be rooted in faith traditions, personal values, or a sense of something greater than us. This domain supports inner peace, resilience, and between what we believe and how we live. So just keep in mind that as we talk about spiritual wellness, it's not all about religion. And so, if you don't practice religion, you can still nurture your spiritual wellness.

DESHNA NAGAR: A helpful place to start might be talking about what spirituality means for us. For me personally, I'm not really into organized religion, but I believe in the universe, in that there's something bigger than me that's out there that's tying us all together. A sense of the universe is looking out for me. And how I practice my spiritual wellness is going out into nature.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, Deshna. I'm very similar to you as well. Whenever I think of spiritual wellness, a lot of those environmental themes come up for me that we discussed in our environmental episode. And so, for me, a connection higher than myself is a connection with nature.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: The word connections come up a few times, and I almost think of spiritual as a synonym for connection. That could be connection to self, connection to others, connection to nature, and if you are someone who has faith in a certain belief system, connection to source. So, as we start thinking about ways to nurture spiritual wellness, maybe a place we could start is talking about how to nurture those connections. And logically, I guess we could start with connection to self and then move outward from there.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah, connection to self. And a great way of connecting to yourself is connecting to your different senses.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: In our emotional wellness episode, we talked about different grounding practices and using the senses to promote mindfulness. So, for this degree, let's go a little bit deeper into that. One interesting alternative therapy that I came across when I was doing research for this episode is on sound bathing. Sound baths are a gentle way to recharge and is also known as sound healing. It's an ancient practice that uses instruments like singing bowls, gongs, and chimes to create soothing

119: The Spiritual Degree

vibrations that help calm our mind and body. So how this works is we lie down, get cozy, and simply listen as the sounds wash over us. Like a bath but with sound.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I've actually gone to a couple sound bathing sessions, and it was awesome. It was literally, like the best way I can describe it is like a massage for your brain. Not even your brain, your nervous system. It just felt so deeply relaxing. And then the one I went to; it was like they did the sound bath first and then gently transitioned into a meditation. And it was, I highly recommend. So that's my anecdote, is that my couple experiences with sound bathing were immensely great.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm wondering if you felt different in your body and mind once you were done with the session.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I think I must have. It's been a minute, but I live a lot in my head and so any type of deep sensory engagement, like what we're talking about with sound baths, is really helpful for me to ground myself more in my body, and also just slowed down enough to be more present in my body and my surroundings.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Makes sense. How did you go about finding where to do this?

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I heard about it through word of mouth, through a climbing friend. But I think if you just Google them, you can find them. Especially like Facebook events will post things like this. I know some yoga studios will do sound baths or special events around this. So, I think they're becoming more common. I really don't think they're hard to find. I also think there's probably—I would also imagine there's probably ones you could do online, like you could download or just find on YouTube. I would say though, if you are able and it's an option to you, try attending one in person. They're pretty cool.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah. That's what I was thinking of like practicing at home, just creating a calm space for yourself and then playing like a video or an audio or something.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And Christina, just from what I don't know about you, I feel like you would love a good sound bath.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I know. When I was reading through this, I was like, oh, my gosh, I would love this. And I actually did sound therapy where they play like the music, and they put you in.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And thinking about how we can incorporate more of our senses. I know, Christina, you're a big fan of essential oils, right?

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Absolutely, yes.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I wonder if that could be integrated into your spiritual wellness practice.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: It definitely is, yeah. So, I'm worried about recommending things that aren't evidence-based. But for me, one of my spiritual practices does involve essential oils. And lavender helps me to feel calm and centered and helps to quiet my mind.

119: The Spiritual Degree

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And Christina, just to soothe your worries, I think we can give the disclaimer that spiritual wellness, probably more than any other degree, is deeply personal. So, for our listeners, just please know that we are making sure we support what we can with evidence, but some of this may just be things that are personally helpful to us. Fair?

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Perfect. Thanks, Lindsey.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Deshna, is there a way you like to engage your senses?

DESHNA NAGAR: So, what I do is at the end of the day or whenever I need like a minute to myself to just gather my thoughts, I'll do like a body scan and try to figure out what parts of me, like what body parts are hurting? Which body part needs attention? Which one is relaxed? And I try to bring my attention to the physical sensations I'm experiencing. Like right now, I'm sitting on a chair. How my butt feels on the chair or like how my feet feel. And that really helps me. And then once I've come up with, OK, this is what's hurting, I'll try to massage it.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm going to totally use this tip. I tend to carry my stress and my tension in my neck, and I'm going to pay more attention to it at the end of the day and pay attention to my whole body. So, I like that tip.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I like to engage in a lot of touch sensory. So, for me, it's petting my dog. And sometimes, I'll try to do that almost as a mindfulness practice, where I really pay attention to how soft and smoochy and warm she is or look in her eyes to really ground myself. And I know not everyone has a pet, but I think there are different things, whether it's a soft blanket or a smooth rock or something that you hold to just really focus in on that touch component. Tying this all into spiritual wellness, all of these sensory tools are ways to really ground ourselves and make space for that deeper connection to our self.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I have two cats. So totally love the pet therapy, and petting them, and that tactile stimulation. And then with cats, they purr. And so that purring and the vibration.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah. And sometimes with Ellie, I'll put her on my chest, or sometimes, I do this by spooning her. But I'll really like pay attention to her breathing. And it's like we sync up our breathing, and I just find it deeply regulating.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: For me, once I get into that space, I like to do journaling. And one prompt I like is something I heard from the author, Elizabeth Gilbert, called Letters from Love. And she would sit down and just say, love, what would you have me know today? And I have done this. You would be amazed at what comes out of when you just put pen to paper. Don't overthink it. It's been really impactful. And it's often surprising. It's not at all what I think that journaling session is going to be about. But I do think that's just a way to tune in to whether you want to call it inner knowing or your intuition or a connection to a higher power. I think that's the beauty of spirituality, is it can be deeply personal to us and our belief system, but the practices can service us across those belief systems.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. Journaling is a great one. And journaling can also be part of gratitude practice. And practicing gratitude, like we talked about in the emotional episode, does help us to reduce our feelings of anxiety and depression. And I like to do this 1-5-5 eye opener challenge. And it's from Dr.

119: The Spiritual Degree

Bern Melnick, and it's practiced in the morning. So, it's that eye-opener. First thing in the morning, you practice one minute of gratitude. And so, this involves reflecting on things that we're thankful for and acknowledging those good things in our lives. And then reading five minutes or listening for five minutes to something positive. So, it can be a book. It can be listening to a podcast. And also, it can be music. And then five minutes of a morning activity. So, things like exercising, stretching, practicing meditation, or engaging in a creative activity.

DESHNA NAGAR: I like that. Gratitude has been a huge source of resilience for me. So, at the start, I would practice gratitude by making a list of things that I'm grateful for. But over time, it's changed. Because I work with a lot of clients who don't have like food, or water, or other resources. And so, in the morning, when I'm just taking a hot shower, I'll be like, thank you so much, universe, for this privilege that I have. So that really helps me.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. And I agree. I also reframe like that. And it makes us feel good.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And we talked a little bit about gratitude in another episode and the difference between gratitude and toxic positivity. And I love the way you're framing gratitude. And I know for me, sometimes, that gratitude is just, as I'm going to bed at night. It's like today was hard, and I got through it. And like gratitude for the resilience, and the skills, and the support I received that got me through a hard day. So, it doesn't always have to be sunshine and rainbows. And I think even acknowledging gratitude for getting through something hard can also help nurture resilience or trust in ourselves and our capacity to handle this wild and crazy thing called life.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Most definitely.

DESHNA NAGAR: We've been talking about how to nurture connection to self. It might also be helpful to talk about ways to identify when we feel disconnected to ourselves. Disconnection often shows up during times like grief, burnout, or major life changes. And some signs can include feeling aimless, anxious, or ungrounded. For me personally, I feel like I'm floating through the day without really being grounded to anything. I'm curious, how does it show up for the two of you?

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I think for me, it's similar in that sort of sense of dissociation. But also, because I am someone who tends to struggle to be present in my body anyway, I've learned to tune in to more observable things, like some of my behaviors. And for me, probably my biggest indicator that I'm disconnected from myself is actually disconnection from others. So, I have a very strong stress response of self-isolation. And it seems like, oh, well, duh, you're disconnected, but it's actually like the disconnection from self is what feeds into that disconnection from others and not the other way around. So, I will kind of hibernate, take days to respond to messages. And I've learned that like, OK, something's off, what do I need to do for myself? And that often turning inward then makes me more able to turn back outward.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. I'm very similar to the both of you. One thing I'll add is also like a fuzziness. So, like my brain feels tired. I'm not thinking clearly. And that's when I'm like, OK, time to get up. Time to move if I'm sitting down, get out of the chair, get outside. And one of the things I like to do is to take my cats for a walk. So, when I'm feeling disconnected, I'll just get outside, either by myself or with my cats, and also leave the phone behind, so that I can find that mindfulness and connection to self again.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Deshna, what do you do when you need to reconnect with yourself?

DESHNA NAGAR: So, there's something called glimmers that I recently came across. The Holistic Psychologist was talking about it, and I've been training myself to have glimmers. Yes, you can train yourself to have glimmers. So, glimmers are small moments that make us feel a sense of calm, connection, peace, and safety. And its moments where your nervous system is really regulated. So, for me, what this looks like is being aware of what the sun feels like on my skin, or if I spot a rainbow, or just looking at trees around me and admiring their beauty.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I like the idea of glimmers. I've never heard of that.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah. It's the opposite of triggers. So, triggers send you into a state of dysregulation, and glimmers send you into a state of regulation. So, it could also just be like hugging someone you love and just being really mindful of how that feels.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Oh, I love a good hug. I also have recently started doing self-hugs to regulate my nervous system if I'm alone. And a way to increase their oomph is to do it inside of a sweatshirt or a sweater because then it kind of holds your arms to you, and that can be very regulating. Other strategies to reconnect to self for me is that a lot of times, if I'm in that state of disconnection, it's usually because I haven't been attending to myself as much. And often, it's an indicator that I need rest. And sometimes, that stems from a sense of overwhelm. And when I get in that state of overwhelm, I just want to keep charging forward. And as counterintuitive as it feels to me, I've learned that one of the best things I can do is actually pause. Sometimes, it means writing out a more organized list or plan for how I'm going to do all these things, but it almost inevitably means I need to rest, whether that's actual sleep, or some breathwork, or yoga, or a walk, or some other time outside. It's usually just a call to take care of myself.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: And this also reminds me of what we talked about in our environmental episode on the Shinrin-yoku or the forest bathing. So, getting out in nature and exploring our senses in nature.

DESHNA NAGAR: I like how a lot of this simply connects to physical and emotional wellness.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Absolutely. They're all so interconnected. Another thing I wanted to touch on in the spiritual wellness realm is ritual. And when we're talking about ritual in the context of spirituality, I think we can conflate it with some sort of religious ritual, but it doesn't have to be. It can be a ritual you do for yourself, whether that is having your morning coffee in silence or doing a gratitude practice or journaling exercise or lighting a candle. And if you are someone who is raised in some sort of religion, it can be a ritual from that tradition. And I wanted to talk about this for a second. Religious trauma is a real thing. And there are people who perhaps were raised in a certain faith tradition. And there's been some harm done in that setting, and there might be a reluctance to engage in anything from that tradition. So, I would just offer to someone, if you feel any sort of struggle with that, it doesn't make you a hypocrite to do something that you find comforting, even if it's part of a system that you no longer identify with.

DESHNA NAGAR: Absolutely. I think reclaiming rituals on your own terms can be really healing.

119: The Spiritual Degree

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. And we can also incorporate rituals from other traditions. In our cultural wellness episode, we talked about the difference between appropriation and appreciation. And in the context of spiritual wellness, there are ways we can respectfully integrate rituals from other cultures. I'm thinking of mandalas. A mandala means sacred circle in Sanskrit. In various spiritual traditions, mandalas are used to facilitate meditation and are used in sacred rites as a transformative tool to assist with healing. And so, one of the ways I integrate mandalas is through adult coloring books or printing out mandalas from online and then just coloring. And I mean, you can use any media that you like. I like colored pencils probably the most. But find what works well for you. And I encourage integrating mandala coloring or mandalas in another way into your wellness practice. And I'm curious if either of you have experience with mandalas?

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah. I was reading about this recently. You can combine mandalas to sacred geometry. I don't know if you've heard of that, but it explores different patterns and shapes that are found in nature. And they're designed to reflect balance, unity, and the interconnectedness of all things. So that's pretty neat how you can combine those two. And it's supposed to promote focus and deeper connection to your inner self.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. Anecdotally, whenever I'm coloring these, it definitely brings on more focus.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: You had mentioned the practice of forest bathing, which comes from Japan. Another wellness practice that comes from Japan is Reiki. I tried this for the first time, and I was a little skeptical, but it definitely did something. I don't know if I understand fully how it works, and when I tried to find research around it, what I found was basically, if you want to find research supporting that, it doesn't work, you can. If you want to find research supporting that it does work, you can. But that there is sort of an accepted understanding that there is some benefit, even if we don't understand what it is, to the point that even, I think, like Johns Hopkins integrates it into some of their practices. It's basically a form of energy healing. And in my experience, I just laid there. She covered my eyes, and it was like she did some light touch. But I think often, it can be done without touch. But it's about moving energy through different portions of your body. And one unexpected side effect of it for me was that I did find I was much more able to connect with emotion afterwards. So again, I'm someone who can live in my head. And my joke is I either feel all my feelings or none of my feelings, and I was very much in a blocked, shut down state. And I made a comment to my therapist afterward that I noticed I was crying more easily. Not in a like hyper-emotional way but in an appropriate way of reacting to things. And she said that was not uncommon from what she had heard of people who had done Reiki. So, I do think there is something to, again, that nurturing, that connection to self and thinking about the connection to self in terms of our spiritual wellness. And I'm curious if either of you have had any experience with Reiki.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: The experience that I have with it is more like on the medical side and learning about it as a nursing student, and it's something that we learn as an alternative practice. I've never done it myself, but after hearing about your experience, I'm kind of curious to give it a try. How about you, Deshna?

DESHNA NAGAR: I've had a very informal Reiki session with a friend. I was just really anxious, and my friend was like, OK, you know what? Come here. And she's been trained in Reiki. And so, she just—I don't know. She did a bunch of stuff. And I really felt lighter after that. So, I don't know if it was placebo or if it really worked, but that was my experience.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Interesting.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Interesting. So that was another example of something that can be integrated from perhaps other cultural traditions. Another form of connection that is relevant in this space is connection to ancestors or even more immediate significant people in our life who have died. One practice I feel like anecdotally is becoming more common is the practice of ancestral altars, where we display pictures or belongings or things that are relevant to people who have come before us, or to our loved ones, or just significant people in our life who are no longer here. I've seen it with pets. I've done it with pets. And maybe it's lighting a candle or just something where you can go to engage in that type of spiritual connection.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I love that you bring this up, Lindsey. I was in a fellowship through the Ohio State University. And Dr. Taura Barr guided us through meditation that was focused on our ancestors. She had all of these different guided prompts. And my grandmother, who passed away when I was two, actually came into my meditation. And it was so powerful. And in a positive way, it brought me so much joy, and I just couldn't stop crying. The tears just poured. And it was like a group setting. So, it was a little bit embarrassing because my whole face was wet.

DESHNA NAGAR: These things happen.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah.

DESHNA NAGAR: Another huge component to spiritual wellness is purpose or meaning in life. When we think about purpose and meaning in life, it often boils down to feeling like we understand our experiences and how they connect to the bigger picture. But I was reading research on what exactly do we mean by meaning in life? And it came down to three concepts. One is when we feel like we are able to make sense of the past, the present, and the imagined future. So being able to make meaning of the good things and the bad things that happen in our life. And also, when we believe that we know how people, ideas, or objects are connected to each other. The second one is the belief that our existence will continue to influence others across time and space. So essentially, the idea that my life matters. And the third one is having an overarching long-term goal for your life. What do you hope to accomplish, or what kind of impact do you want to make?

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: This is so important, definitely for our spiritual wellness but also for our emotional wellness. I'm thinking of stats I've come across recently around rises in people who are dying by suicide, especially young men. And the two most frequent words that come up are useless and worthless. So, finding that connection to purpose can literally be lifesaving. I think it can also be life-sustaining and can just change how we go through our day to day. So, if we think for a second about strategies around that, there are different meditations or journal prompts or things that can help as we want to gain clarity on that. You can do it whenever. Sometimes, people do this around the New Year. Like I'm not a resolution person, but I usually do an intentional goal setting for the year, and I get very specific around what I want those goals to be. You can do things like vision boarding or anything that helps you really connect with what that purpose is and what you would like your legacy in life to look like. Because often, life feels so busy that it can be easy to just go day to day without ever thinking about these bigger picture questions around what you would like to be doing with your time here.

119: The Spiritual Degree

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: This reminds me of legacy thinking. That intentional reflection on how our actions and contributions will impact others, both currently and then in the future. So, asking ourselves, what do we want to be remembered for? Thinking about how our presence will affect future generations and then that making mindful decisions. So, will this matter in 10 years, or will it matter in 50 years?

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Something that came up for me in preparation for this recording was simply that spiritual wellness is about increasing our capacity for stillness. Because I just think when we're constantly in motion and focused on being productive, we're not still. And that those moments of connection, of insight, of revelation, of purpose happen in moments of stillness.

DESHNA NAGAR: When you say that, do you mean still mentally or physically? How do you practice that?

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I think more internal stillness. Because for some people, it's really hard to physically sit still, me being one of them. And so, it could be out for a walk in nature, or just sitting outside, or engaged in some activity that you do purely for pleasure, just something where you're not consciously engaged in the next thing, the next thing, the groceries, the email you have to send, whatever the daily tasks are. And just carving out some space where those insights can reach you or come to you.

DESHNA NAGAR: So almost like trying to clear up your head space, like trying to make your mind go blank.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, I feel like all of the practices we've talked about offer different ways of doing that, whether through grounding through your senses, or body scans, or meditation, nature, forest bathing, time in nature. It's all just a way, I feel like, to quiet the noise.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. And in our digital age, we tend to fill all of our time with something. Like, oh, I'm on the bus. I'm going to get my phone out. And that can be a time where instead of getting our phones out, we practice stillness.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah. I do think stillness is a practice. And Deshna, that's a wonderful question. I don't think it has to mean—can mean physical stillness but not always. It's more mental stillness.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Christina, when you were talking about legacy, I thought of something I think of as morbid spirituality, which I would argue is actually not all that morbid, which is to simply really reflecting on the fact that the one thing we are guaranteed the minute we are born is that we will die and that our time is limited. I shared a story with Deshna before we recorded this about a time when I was younger. I had read like an introduction to Buddhism book. And there was a thought on it that I wrote on a Post-it and taped to my door. And the Post-it just said, remember that you might die today. And my brother came to visit me and was like, what is wrong with you? Why would you put that up there? And I thought that reaction was so interesting because to me, it felt like such a liberating, like—maybe not liberating. But yeah, liberating, positive thought in terms of the mindset we carry through life of just nothing is guaranteed. That would be an interesting practice or challenge, I guess, is like what is

119: The Spiritual Degree

your gut reaction to that statement? Because it's just reality. And I think we make thinking about the end of life something bad when it's literally the most natural thing that happens.

DESHNA NAGAR: If I came across a sticky note that said you might die today, I think my gut reaction would just be, OK. Someone's threatening me, and I'm about to die.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: But once you got past the fact that you wrote it yourself, as was my case, what would your thought be around that?

DESHNA NAGAR: So, as you say that, I feel some anxiety in my chest. I don't know. It just makes me think of—It just makes me more grateful for everything that I do have. Because part of what made me anxious is that oh, my gosh, I have so much to lose and so much love. So, I think that's really beautiful.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm with you, Deshna. Anxiety and then also gratefulness. And it reminds me of something that one of my dear friends said. She was facing end of life, and she was given so many days to live. And one of the things that she said was, this isn't the end. I don't want anybody to be sad for me. I get to find out what's beyond.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: That's beautiful. I don't feel as much fear for myself. I feel a lot of anxiety around thinking about losing other people I love. And having gone through that, it sucks. It's not fun. And it's something we know is going to happen. And so, I love that you came back to gratitude with this, Deshna. I once read a quote that was the best way to increase your appreciation for something is to put a question mark after it. So, whether that's your job or relationship, just time, whatever it may be, just appreciating that nothing is guaranteed and trying to stay mindful and express gratitude when I feel like I'm spending time on things that, in the grand scheme of life, probably aren't going to make or break my experience on this Earth. That's where I think that morbid spirituality can actually be something beautiful and comforting and doesn't have to be something that we shy away from. This also offers an opportunity to get into community wellness because another way to engage your morbid spirituality is something called death cafes, where people just get together and talk about life, death, existential matters. Anybody can go. A lot of communities have them. You can Google it, find one near you. And it's also a great way to nurture your social wellness.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm interested. I'm googling it now.

DESHNA NAGAR: I think we have one in State College.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: You do. I'm pretty sure you do.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: What else is coming up for you two in terms of spiritual wellness at a community level?

DESHNA NAGAR: Part of nurturing our spiritual wellness at the community level is also just understanding that religious beliefs are diverse and that no one approach is right for everyone. So just as you might find meaning in your own faith, others have found meaning in theirs, even if those beliefs differ from yours.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Very important, Deshna.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: That's a great point and also, I think a strategy we could use. Because when you are able to engage in conversation, especially thoughtful, respectful conversation in spaces where you feel safe with people that allow you to feel safe, that can be a beautiful way to explore your own spiritual wellness of even if you don't share the same beliefs as someone, sometimes communicating what it is you do believe can help deepen your own introspection or understanding and also gain that appreciation for someone else's perspective and nurture our social wellness, cultural wellness. So, I think that's a wonderful suggestion.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm thinking about something that communities can do. We talked a lot about the role of nature in nurturing spiritual wellness. So, anything a community can do to support green spaces like parks or community gardens is a good strategy. And if a community wanted to do something more, specifically related to spiritual wellness, they could create a community labyrinth. A labyrinth is a prayer or meditation tool. It can be used for walking meditation. And it can help folks to find peace, clarity, manage stress, assist with decision-making, and then also offer a space for self-exploration and reflection. So, at Penn State, the Center for Spiritual and Ethical Development has a portable labyrinth that can be set up in any large, flat space. And their goal is to provide participants with exposure and chances to experience a non-denominational, meditative practice. And so, they're hoping that this will provide spiritual and physical benefits. And so, while there's no set ritual for walking the labyrinth, there is some basic advice, such as entering slowly, calming and clearing your mind. And this can be done with words, prayer, or chants. And then open your senses and focus on the process of slowly walking and taking deliberate steps. So, we can bring questions or ideas to contemplate during our walk to the center. And when we reach the center, we can use that time to pause and reflect. And when we exit, we can absorb the experience with continued reflection, prayer, and journaling.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: That's a great idea. I also think a lot of communities do offer classes or workshops that we might not necessarily associate with nurturing our spiritual wellness but that do. So again, there's a lot of that overlap between emotional wellness and physical wellness. So, if your community offers things like meditation workshops or classes, yoga, even hikes or nature walks, those can all be opportunities to engage in spiritual wellness practices.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah. Find out what works best for you, whether it's labyrinths, sound healing, vibrational healing through Australian Bush Flower Essences, or sacred geometry. The key is to explore different methods and stay open to what aligns with your beliefs and needs. Science or placebo. If it's working for you, keep doing it.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Absolutely. That's it for this episode of *12 Degrees*. To learn more, you can visit wellness.psu.edu. Also be sure to and follow this podcast, so you don't miss any of the upcoming conversations that will help you adopt healthy habits. I'm Lindsey Whissel Fenton.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm Christina Lightner.

DESHNA NAGAR: And I'm Deshna Nagar.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Until next time, we wish you good progress on your wellness journey. *12 Degrees* is produced by WPSU in collaboration with the Penn State Ross and Carol Nese College of Nursing. This podcast is intended for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute

119: The Spiritual Degree

for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical or mental health condition. Please consult your physician or other qualified health care provider immediately if you are experiencing any suicidal thoughts. If you're in crisis, help is available for free 24/7 in the US by calling or texting the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. More information is available at 988lifeline.org.

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