

Creating a sacred union

Guests: Allison Conte and JT Smiedendorf

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Alex Howard - [00:00:09]

Welcome everyone, to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with Allison Conte and JT.

Firstly, Alison and JT, welcome. And thank you for joining me.

JT Smiedendorf

Thank you.

Allison Conte

Thank you for having us.

Alex Howard

This is my first interview interviewing a couple. So this is going to be an interesting one.

And just to give people a little bit of context, I'm not going to read out bios, but you obviously can see those below the video.

But Allison and JT were introduced to me by a former producer at Conscious Life, Nicole Fegley, who's I think a mutual friend of ours. And I reached out to her and said, who of all the people that we've interviewed or we've worked with at Conscious Life, do you think will be great to talk on relationships? And she said, well, Allison and JT have the most beautiful relationship that I know, so you should interview them.

So that was my introduction to the two of you.

I know that sometimes you go by the names of the Pastor and the Priestess, which I think is interesting, and that's a bit of a taste perhaps of where we're going to go to in some of this interview.

But I think I'd love to start a little bit with how the two of you met.

So what was the birth of the relationship between the two of you? And particularly how that became part of your spiritual path?

JT Smiedendorf

Right.

Allison Conte - [00:01:41]

Bit of a magical story.

JT Smiedendorf

Yeah. The mundane part is one of the online dating services, but my guess is that's just kind of what spirit was using as a mechanism to get us connected.

Allison Conte

Yeah. I had been really sort of magically called to move across the country from where I had been living in Ohio to Colorado. And I landed. It's a long story so I'll cut out that part. But how I landed, I landed in this place, in this home that was situated on 200 acres of sacred land.

And I didn't know at the time when I said yes. I just knew my soul had called me to be there. And when after I arrived and said yes to living in this home, then I realized that there was a temple on the land. And the temple and the house, all of everything there. It's called the StarHouse here in Boulder, Colorado.

The temple and all of land is dedicated to the sacred union of divine masculine and divine feminine. Heaven and Earth. And I knew that my soul had called me there for that purpose, but I didn't actually have much more of a clue about it at that point.

And so enter JT. We had our first date. We met online, and we had our first date lined up. And then, intuitively, I knew I had to change the date because there was the winter solstice coming up. 2012 winter solstice was a very auspicious day.

And so I called him to move our date to the solstice. And I said, I knew he was a Christian pastor. And so I think it was part of my feminine way of testing him to see if it was going to be aligned, because I invited him for a first date to a solstice ceremony at this temple, just like an earth temple.

Alex Howard

So you went all in first date, right?

JT Smiedendorf

Right into ceremony.

Allison Conte

Right into ceremony.

Alex Howard

It wasn't a cup of tea at Starbucks. It was like, right. We're going for ceremony. I like it.

Allison Conte

Ceremony. Yeah. So then we, I started to get sick in the middle of the ceremony. And so we left early, and we walked around. I was showing him all these sacred sites on the land, there's labyrinths and big human sized crystals and just a lot of things there. And it was full moon, snow in December and we were up in the mountains. It was so beautiful. And we got back to the house. And in the house, there's a courtyard with huge crystals bigger than we are. One in the shape of a phallus and one in the shape of a yoni with water trickling through.

And that's where I paused to tell him about this sacred union and how this entire place was dedicated to this purpose, and that was why I had been called. And he stopped me and kissed me and said, where have you been? Which could sound like a little pick up line but actually it was just the most profound thing. He said, I've been looking for the divine feminine in my own Christian tradition for all these years. And now here you are.

Alex Howard - [00:05:29]

It's beautiful.

JT Smiedendorf

Yeah.

Allison Conte

So we went upstairs and he ended up staying for 10 days because I got sick. I got the flu. And then he got the flu. And we were just like, it was like spirit just pushed us together and said, do it now. Bond now, this was it.

And so, somehow we knew from that very beginning that our relationship was going to be all about this sacred union of divine masculine and divine feminine.

Alex Howard

That's beautiful.

So this idea of sacred union, maybe say a bit about what is that? And why is it important for relationships?

JT Smiedendorf

It's one image. It's a good one. We think it's a profound one. It's one image of wholeness. So there's certainly some ancient ways in which there are different stories and rituals around this sacred union of the King and the priestess, King and the Queen. There are different cultures that might have different representations of it.

But the idea is that there is a coming together of universal energies. In this case, it's just represented by these slightly different human bodies of male and female. But it's way beyond that. It's beyond gender. And it's even beyond the physicality part.

It is about, there are different poles of energy in the universe and when they come together it serves life. Life becomes vital and full and balanced. There's wisdom in that, knowing how to bring things together.

And, of course, in each human person there are amounts of what might be called masculine, feminine, Yin and Yang, different ways to talk about it. But the union itself is that project of finding wholeness. And that's what we're about in these ways in which, whatever it is in the culture and our families of origin, our family lineages, there are ways in which that union gets ruptured, it's wounded. And our work of humans is to be in a life that helps to heal those as much as we can in our lifetime. Within us and then between people and then even in the culture as a whole.

Allison Conte

Right. There's an ancient symbol called Hieros Gamos, which represents this sacred union of masculine and feminine. And basically, what it's pointing to is all of the duality. We live in a world of duality, of a world of polarities. And when they come together into wholeness, that's Hieros Gamos,

and we have to do that work inside of us first to marry the inner feminine and the inner masculine and come to wholeness inside of ourselves. And the more to the degree that we can do that is the degree to which we can actually have a sacred union with another person.

Alex Howard - [00:08:40]

Because people often think of spiritual practice as being a private thing that one does in their own body, in their own heart and their own soul, but not necessarily something which is a dynamic within relationship.

JT Smiedendorf

Oh, very much. It's impossible to not be in that dance within yourself when you're in the dance with an intimate partner. Especially an intimate partner, because that depth of intimacy, that closeness, that proximity and the arrangement itself creates a kind of, would I call it an investment? It's a place where we get close to those survival patterns because we're so close in relationship, and that brings up all of our stuff. So we're always in a dance with ourselves as we're dancing with the other person. So the two just can't be separated.

And we found it to be pretty helpful to see is there some way in which there's polarization? That's another way to talk about when couples get into a place that feels really hard, one could simply look for what's been polarized here? What have we built a hard wall between separated? How are each of us, for example, holding one pole to be good, but not the other pole? Seeing the other pole in shadow, it's a threat. It's not right. There are different ways we might phrase that, but it's almost always a polarization where the polarity is no longer flowing. We're no longer honoring both values that need to be present to make this work.

Allison Conte

And so he's talking about polarities. In our definition I learned this from my teacher, Barry Johnson, so I give him credit here. Polarities are pairs of values. And I'll even suggest that values actually do come in pairs. There are pairs of values that are seemingly opposed, but they're actually interdependent.

And so, as being humans we have a tendency to choose and prefer. We have preferences. Our ego likes to have preferences, and so we'll choose one over the other. And that actually is what gets us into trouble.

So when we're in a relationship, we actually seek out and find a partner. The old adage, opposites attract is so true, right? They're opposites but we're actually finding each other so that we can find wholeness within ourselves. And to the degree that we outsource the opposite pole to the other, it doesn't actually work over time. It's very attractive. It sparks a lot of energy and passion, and attraction and romance and all of that.

I'll give you an example to make it a little more tangible here. When I first met him, after that 10 day period, we had a big party at my house and I was introducing him to people. And all my friends at the Integral Community were there and asked me, what is it that you see in him? And I just looked across the room, and I was like, ah, I was so hot for him. He's so contained. His energy, you can feel it right now, right? He's very contained in his energy. And I'm like, boom, very expressive, very dynamic in my way of being.

And I was so attracted to that. But that over time, it got to be a pain in my ass. I was, like, not liking it at all. The containment. And he was attracted to me for all this dynamism and this flow and expression that I have. But the reason we do that is because we don't actually have that energy in ourselves. We've outsourced it to the other person. And then it becomes problematic in a couple, because I started to see him as the inquisitor, the judge, the one who is going to clamp down on my expression and my way of being in the world.

Alex Howard - [00:13:19]

So it almost goes from you're grounding me, and that feels good, to now you're trapping me and that feels bad. And it maybe that JT has not changed what he's doing, but how you're orienting to that.

Allison Conte

Totally right. And so I was, like fiery and passionate and expressive. And he loved it until he didn't. I mean, then he thought it was dangerous.

So the containing energy, these are actually universal energies we're talking about. Dynamic feminine is what I'm talking about. The spark of life. And the static masculine, the part of the masculine that's contained and structured and stable and grounded.

And so, we were playing out these archetypal energies between us and I saw him as the inquisitor or he saw me as this dangerous fire starter that needed to be contained.

So when we did shadow work, we did a really deep dive into shadow work together as a couple. And then what we realized, and this is what I want to offer to the listeners here, is that I think this happens a lot and we've done with this with a lot of polarities over the years, where we've gotten tangled with each other, and the way out, that we found, is wholeness within the self.

So I started to actually, I stopped outsourcing containment, and I started finding it inside of myself. And as soon as I found my own containment, he felt safer. And then he was able to express more and flow more, and I'd be more dynamic.

JT Smiedendorf

Yeah. So it begins with a golden shadow projection that's a big feeder to romance, and initial attraction. Eventually, there's some point where it clicks over and it turns upside down and becomes the negative projection we end up hitting. Well, this is why we didn't have it in the first place, because there are blocks inside of ourselves that we picked up over the years where that was not okay. It wasn't safe. I couldn't be that. And so then the work of the relationship and that next stage begins.

Alex Howard

My wife and I were spending some time with a really good friend of mine recently. His relationship of 30 years had ended. It was obviously very painful and very difficult. And exactly what was being articulated was the thing that had attracted the partner at the start had become the thing which had become the source of the break. What was so attractive became too much.

And I think what happens is the more we find the danger can be if we're not on a journey together and we don't have the words and the framework to understand it, that someone perhaps is deficient, for example, in their own spark and our aliveness and spontaneity, they then start to find that, is there any danger that they now don't need that from the other person? Or somehow there's a change in that dynamic that has to be navigated?

Allison Conte

Yes, for sure.

JT Smiedendorf

And it's possible that sometimes it's too great a ridge, for whatever reasons. People don't have the inner resources to get that far to do that shadow work. Maybe they don't have some of the other compatibilities. It's nice to share other things that are the same values, a general orientation.

So there are other factors that can make it too big a load to carry. And it could be some of these growth pieces of certain, someone hits a stage. And I think you're right, Alex. It's helpful if both people get it together and have that shared framework and then do that shared work.

I get it that we're doing this together. And now this is what's happening. And so what's my part in creating this shared reality and can I do that? So for her, as she mentioned, it was in that particular polarity working on containment. For me, it was finding enough safety to express, to be more expressive and realize it's not really her job. I can't rely on her for expression. That's my job. It's a wonderful ride we get with the romantic falling in love as we do so much in Western cultures, and even more around the world now. It's fun. It's a great ride.

Alex Howard - [00:17:39]

It's chemically addictive, right?

JT Smiedendorf

Exactly. But eventually that bubble will burst. And hopefully for people, it's not such a terrible let down, but it can be difficult to realize wow, all the air's gone out of the balloon here and here we are.

Allison Conte

And I'm only seeing the negative, that's what happens, I was only seeing the negative side of the containment.

JT Smiedendorf

Right.

Allison Conte

So that's what we do.

I want to bring in here just a minute, for just for a minute, if I can, the spiritual aspect of this. Because what we're talking about here, you could just work this only at the level of psychodynamics and interpersonal stuff, but because we both are spiritual leaders and have a very deep spiritual life, the work that we did in shadow work was actually held in a spiritual container, a shamanic spiritual container. And so that means guided by spirit.

Just like in ceremony, where you just turn over your intention to spirit and life brings you the opportunities to sort through things and the little miracles and the messages and the allies and all of those things that come with a very intentional spiritual quest.

And so I just wanted to add that part because that was a really important component for us. And it's also how we work.

Alex Howard

And I think, I know it's more than just what I'm about to say, but I think part of it is also, as you've both been speaking to, that if all that attracts in a relationship is the polarity, that when that chemistry changes if you haven't got shared purpose and shared values and shared interest, then you're really lacking that glue that holds things together through those challenging times.

And it sounds like a really important shared intention for the two of you is this commitment to spiritual path. And that this idea of it being a sacred union. It's more than just, she said this, he did that, there's a commitment to something greater. I wonder how that also holds and supports, in a sense becomes the container for the relationship?

Allison Conte - [00:20:01]

Sure.

JT Smiedendorf

I think so. Very true. In the sense that we're participating in something that's even bigger than us. So we're participating in these energies also, I think, there's a help in the greater endurance, especially getting through those difficult moments, because it's not like we don't go back there. We just get to the next layer of the onion and it's a sustaining understanding that this is me, and it's bigger than me. We're doing something that humans do. We're participating in this great stream of life, even itself. And so how are we going to surf that?

I think that's pretty helpful. And also going into ceremony together itself was one of those glue pieces, you might say for us. Asking for help beyond us, beyond our conscious self, we need to dip into something greater, because that is a sensation and a sense that people get when we hit a dead end here. We're stuck. The polarizing. And that helps to say, well, you're going to have to draw something bigger and greater than what you know right now, consciously. That's one of them.

Allison Conte

Yeah and then even growing beyond that. But so for several years, we had just our separate spiritual lives and practices. He's deep into the Christian path in a very evolved way, I would say the an integral Christian path. And I've been on the shamanic path for a long time.

And after I met him, I started remembering a whole lineage that I had held in past lives around the sacred feminine. So we had these different lines that we were following. And then one day, spirit came to us in the form, really in the form of a visitation from Mary Magdalene and Yeshua, who also were teaching sacred union. And they invited us to bring our spiritual lives together and our work lives together and to really step into a whole new level of generativity with our relationship.

So you can have the level of evolving together psychologically. You can have the level of evolving together spiritually with a shared commitment to spiritual growth and doing your own things, spiritual practice. You can also bring your spiritual practice together, which is what we've done. And then I think at the more advanced levels, you can actually dedicate your union to how to be generative, have the union itself be an offering and a prayer for the collective. And that's what we're about.

Alex Howard

I want to just take a side step question, which I think is a really interesting point here, because I opened by saying that Nicole introduced us because she felt that, Nicole's well connected and knows a lot of people, and she felt you had one of the most beautiful relationships that she knows. And people could have thought, oh, well, lucky them. Oh, yeah, God. It's alright for them, they've got this, but what I'm actually hearing the two of you say is your relationship is a lot of effort.

And I'm not saying it's only effort, of course, there's a container of a spiritual practice. There's a natural chemistry and attraction that's there, but there's also a commitment and a willingness to show up to do the work of the relationship.

And I feel that it's a really important piece. I think particularly because we're having a conversation with the two of you, as opposed to someone on their own, saying, oh, you must work hard at relationship. I think it's a really interesting point of the effort that it takes to really invest in that sacred union.

JT Smiedendorf - [00:24:04]

It's a long, you might compare the analogy of a long journey out in primal nature. Could be a mountain climb sometimes. Sometimes it's walking along a path. And so there's beauty along the way and this incredible one. I'm so glad we're here. This is wonderful, isn't it? And then these moments are like, wow, this is really long, and it takes effort to keep going.

Allison Conte

My feet hurt.

Alex Howard

The tent blows away and there's a storm.

JT Smiedendorf

There are things to be managed for sure that are going to take effort where the greater goal has to be kept in mind. But in that moment, it's going to be uncomfortable.

I think it's one of those basic principles. It's not really possible to keep growing and evolving the relationship without discomfort, because the comfort is so close to the status quo. It's, of course, necessary and needed to have comfort in the pacing of nourishment on the journey. And there'll just be moments where the stretch is like, I'm really I'm going to have to effort here to stay with this. Be in an uncomfortable space for a while, while this new piece comes in, because I'm not used to it, and that's why I didn't have it in the first place. But the relationship will call it forward, and I need to have it.

Alex Howard

And of course, it's what you do in those moments of struggle and difficulty that defines the relationship, isn't it?

JT Smiedendorf

Yeah.

Allison Conte

I think the most important thing is to hold hands and face the problem together, like we're getting on the same side of the thing. The thing is not in between, it's not sitting here in between us, separating us that we're actually over here together as partners, looking at the thing that's challenging us. It's not you are the problem.

JT Smiedendorf

Super tempting.

Allison Conte

It's very tempting.

Alex Howard

But never happens, right?

JT Smiedendorf - [00:26:10]

It never happens. It just always seems so easily within arms reach to say, well, if my partner would just do this, if they would be different, as opposed to shifting that orientation to say, well, here's what we're experiencing right now. How can we engage this? What are the possibilities here? Because where we are is not where we want to continue to be.

Allison Conte

And there's a way in which you really just have to give up your claim to being right, and that's hard for me. And actually, what's easier for me. So it's hard for me to not be right, and it's hard for him to be vulnerable. So I can be vulnerable, but I can be vulnerable and be right. But you have to do both. You have to loosen up the righteousness and also open up the heart, open the heart to be vulnerable. Those are the things that really get through the hard times.

Alex Howard

So I'm really interested, if you don't mind me asking, if I ask questions that are too prying you can just be a politician and answer a different question. But when you guys have a difficult situation, let's say one of you is perhaps overtired, they're cranky and they use unskillful words, and they're emotionally unavailable in that moment. And the other one of you can feel that they're not acting in the way that's really in the spirit of the commitment that you have together. How do you navigate that?

And I'm sure not always perfectly, but what do you find helps in those situations? To invite the other back in a way that's not attacking, is not blaming, but is naming perhaps what's happening?

JT Smiedendorf

Well, there's several things. If you're both not resourced and that comes up, your chances are limited for sure in that moment to have a good outcome. What it takes is, I guess I'll just call it witness consciousness. What it takes is for one of the partners to step out of that spiral and stay out of it and to begin something else. It's sort of like not taking the bait, not letting it too far in to get hurt and then go into your own reactivity. It takes one of the partners maybe to just give attention to the other. It could be just to shift into curiosity. You seem really upset right now. What do you need?

It could be that simple, but the other partner has put a helpful filter or shield to not let it get in and then go to those great phrases like, oh, yeah, well, this, and come back at them that begins that cycle of spit balling each other rather than saying, well, we want to just get out of the cycle.

It could be its timing. My partner needs a little time here to just come to themselves, and so there's a little bit of separation but if it's a together moment, one of the partners has to find a resource to begin another kind of exchange. That's what I would begin with. What do you think?

Allison Conte

Another thing that I really challenge myself to do, Alex, is to look inward. So, the way you even framed this question is your partner is off center and acting in a way that's not right. The hardest thing to do is to turn inward and say, how is this me? How is this me? Can I find some of that in my own system? Is there a way that I'm wrestling with something similar? Or I might have framed my question in such a way that created some friction here.

When I do that, I usually have to take myself out to do that. I usually have to take myself out. Like, sometimes I'll go for a walk or I'll go to my altar or something, and I'll do that work in here first, so that when I feel clear and I can own, oh, I am that or I generated that or something. I contributed to that in some way. I have that kind of demon inside of me also. Or if I can do that work and then go back to him with it, it totally opens the whole field.

Alex Howard - [00:31:01]

Yeah. I think what you're both saying is really helpful that one of you has to, in that moment, find a way to change the dynamic, to change the direction. And knowing what you need, as you say, it might be going for a walk, it might be coming back to your practices, it might be going having a soak in the bath, whatever it may be, but it's like until that piece shifts, it's just in danger of escalating more and more.

JT Smiedendorf

Yes. If you both take the bait, you're kind of off to the races.

It's a tough one to get out of. It takes one person to just wake up in a way, in the moment and say, well, this is not what I want for us, not what I want for me. And then you find whatever that is, the deep breath. I'm going to go sit on the earth outside, whatever it is, I'm just going to take a 10 minute break. Whatever it is. You have to come back to a different energy that can be that kind of shift that Allison pointed out earlier. Wait a minute, this is us against this thing. It's not us at each other. How are we going to work through this thing that we're both in?

Allison Conte

And another thing. And then I would love to shift to what are the positive practices, but I'm just, did I lose my train of thought?

Oh, no. Another thing in that dynamic, I always think that a great question to ask is, what am I learning here, or what is life asking me to learn?

JT Smiedendorf

Yeah.

Alex Howard

Yeah. I like the second question, because sometimes we're not learning it. But the invitations to learn is there.

Allison Conte

And the invitation to learn, it's like life brings us these things, these conflicts, these issues, these challenges because it wants us to get something. It wants us to learn something, it wants us to expand out of some kind of smallness that we've been in.

Alex Howard

So you pre-empted my question, so coming to some of the, and I'm mindful of time and I want to have some time to come on to the psychedelic piece, but what are some of the practices, and maybe it's part of the same answer, but what are some of the practices that help us get to that place? That help us get to the place where we're better able to manage our own, reactivity our own state, to really support the evolution of the polarity rather than the disintegration somehow?

JT Smiedendorf

Yeah. Well, first, there's anything that a person does for themselves. Each partner has to manage themselves, take care of themselves, whatever that is. Meditation, prayer, reflective reading, exercise. It's just a sort of how do I stay in balance? How do I become my best self? And you would practice that whether you're with a partner or not, it's just your own art of self, like your own self mastery, if you

will. Like, how do I stay in touch with myself and catch myself getting off center and then resource myself to come back to center? So that's always present.

Allison Conte - [00:34:09]

Yeah. And, well, polarity working with polarities, I think, is one of the most important things we could be doing. Not just to serve our own partnerships, but our own spiritual growth and developmental path, and also for the world. When we can harmonize and integrate polarities within ourselves and we can come to wholeness within ourselves, that has a ripple effect out in the world.

And then I would just add my favorite, in most of the spiritual traditions, gratitude is a fundamental practice, and shamanism is a fundamental practice. We resource ourselves. We literally resource our energetic body through the practice of gratitude. And it fills our system up in such a way that we can give to our partner from the overflow. And it also helps us to see in new ways.

When we're practicing gratitude, we start to see more things that are good. So if we do that with our partner, for example, what am I grateful for about him? What do I appreciate about him? That actually starts to grow and be amplified in my experience and then I actually have a better time being with him.

JT Smiedendorf

It's one of the ways you can build a container before a difficult conversation is to start with all the good. Before even getting, you know, you're going to have a conversation about something difficult, but you can build a container for it by just starting with let's share appreciation. Let's build ourselves up together first.

Alex Howard

I think that's a really important piece. One of the things that I noticed in my relationship is when one of us feels physically or emotionally depleted and drained, we're very quick to look for what we're not getting. Like, what's wrong? What's missing? Because you're coming from a place of deficiency. It's almost like the more that you can fill up and come from a place of gratitude, as you say, automatically, you're looking and relating differently.

Allison Conte

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I'm so glad you mentioned that, Alex. That's what I meant by when I said, when we feel we can give from overflow, because if we're giving to our partner from a place of depletion, where we're gonna, not just see the things that are going wrong, but we're gonna feel resentful.

Alex Howard

Yeah.

So I'm mindful of the time, and we've got something we want to explore at the end, which is, in some ways a bit of 180, but I think in some ways it's not because it's an evolution of your own relationship together.

But this piece of psychedelics in relationship, and I know we got talking about this when we were prepping the interview a few weeks ago and we sort of ran out of time. There's a lot to say about it, but perhaps maybe just as an introductory piece to start with, when we talk about psychedelics, what do we mean? And what's the potential that they can have to support sacred union?

JT Smiedendorf - [00:37:17]

Well, we made those plant medicines that can alter consciousness, that help us get to an altered state of consciousness. What we would call a liminal space. There are different ways to get to liminal space, altered consciousness, but it's the liminal space itself that allows us to encounter new things. Sometimes they're difficult things. Sometimes they're super uplifting things, beatific things, even kind of ecstasy.

Allison Conte

Union with God.

JT Smiedendorf

Yes, that's all possible.

Allison Conte

All the way there.

JT Smiedendorf

It's something to be done thoughtfully and in ritual container to really know what you're doing. Finding a guide is often an important piece if it's new for a person and it's not to be done lightly or even frequently. It's something that's done periodically and choosing the right medicine for, you know, what's the intention, matching that up. But it can provide a powerful way to stretch that evolution.

It's a little bit like, I'll use a light analogy here, people go to hot yoga because there's this temperature that helps them loosen up and stretch further. So they're going into an altered condition to get something done. This is like that in that it's an altered condition and will help people get places they couldn't otherwise. Have that state experience, and then from that state, those impressions, those experiences, they become something to draw on as you come back to do the most important part, which is integrate the experience in the everyday life.

What else would you say?

Allison Conte

I would say from shamanic perspective, these plants are conscious beings, intelligences. They have their own intelligence that's really far greater than ours. And they act like guides and teachers. And so if we get stuck somewhere or we know we have an expansion that's coming, like we need to up level something. We'll go to the plant teachers and ask for help.

It's like going to your own little internal shaman. It's been an incredible resource and help in our relationship and also in our work with others. Ceremony, it's a big part of what we do.

Alex Howard

It's something that I haven't personally experienced, but I have a number of friends who have shared positive experiences. And what I hear people say is that either working with psychedelics with themselves or in a relationship context is that, a bit like what you just said, it allows them when they're stuck in a perspective or a framework, rather than trying to think their way out of it. It blows out that container and somehow within dynamics in a relationship when we can get very caught in us and them or that egoic way of relating that somehow we can think we're going to resolve the relationship by talking our way out of it. But somehow that state shift seems to then give a new perspective. That sounds like some of what you're saying.

JT Smiedendorf - [00:40:57]

Yeah. That's what the liminal space is for. It gets us beyond the things that are preventing getting there. I love that because there are things that are important to talk through. But there can be those moments where the talking, you're still stuck in these patterns. And the strategy is not going to work. All the strategizing of the careful wording. It needs something at a different, energetic level.

Allison Conte

And these plants they speak to us in different kind of language. I mean, not to say that sometimes you might get a message in English, but often it's through symbols and images and just felt, like a felt energetic sense. That just something shifts. And all of a sudden it's different.

Like, I remember we were in a journey once together, and he was about to be mad at me for something.

JT Smiedendorf

Yeah. We were going to have an argument inside of a journey.

Allison Conte

He was about to be mad, I could feel it, he was about to be mad at me. I didn't cover the fireplace or something like that. And then the medicine actually told him to sit down and be quiet. It gave him a lesson all inside himself and then he came out of and he was not mad at me.

JT Smiedendorf

Yeah. There were no words. Just a transmission of energy that was transforming something in me without words. And that's something that's difficult to, not impossible, but difficult to accomplish without that help.

Alex Howard

So what you're saying is if you can't find a therapist to tell your spouse or partner to be quiet, the plant medicine might do it for you.

JT Smiedendorf

Right.

Allison Conte

On the more really spiritual, deeply spiritual ethereal side, there is a way in which they open us, our awareness to oneness, to our interconnectedness. And that is a really good medicine for an intimate partnership. That's the thing that will have us sit on the same side and look at what's going on together.

So, we've gone all the way in our experiences, all the way to realizing that our souls actually wanted to continue this relationship beyond this lifetime. So we've actually had several lifetimes together. And so we were asked to make a commitment at that level, at the level of our eternal souls and to come back together as necessary in service to humanity. So there's a lot that can happen in that mystical, magical psychedelic plant medicine space.

Alex Howard

That's beautiful.

I'm mindful of time, but the people that wanted to find out more about the work that the two of you are doing together, what's the best way for them to do that?

JT Smiedendorf - [00:44:06]

Well, there's the website the sanctuaryforsacredunion.org

It's just sanctuaryforsacredunion.org

And so opportunities are there, events that we're having. They can email us through that site and connect with what we're doing.

Allison Conte

We work with couples two to two. And we hold ceremonial experiences. We have some classes coming up. We have a free class coming up called "Divine Wholeness to Sacred Union". That's a free offer.

We have a free class on psychedelics and spirituality coming up, like an orientation that's coming up this fall. And then later next year, we have a really deep dive for couples that's like a journey. It's a longer, cohort style deep dive into Sacred Union that's coming up next year. So if anybody who's interested in that, they could just email us.

And we have a podcast that's fun. It's called *The Pastor and Priestess*, so you can find us on any other platforms, on any other podcast platforms.

Alex Howard

And it sounds like your website is the place to find those various pieces.

Allison Conte

Yeah.

Alex Howard

Well, thank you both so much. It's been really fun. I've really enjoyed this interview and to talk to both of you, so thank you.

JT Smiedendorf

Yeah. Likewise. Appreciate the invitation and the conversation.

Allison Conte

Thank you so much, Alex. It's great to be with you.