



Recovering from sexual assault

Guest: Vimalasara Mason-John

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[00:00:10] Alex Howard

Welcome everyone to this interview, where I'm really happy to be talking to Vimalasara Mason-John. Firstly, Vimalasara, welcome. And thank you for joining me.

Vimalasara Mason-John

Thank you for having me back, Alex. Yeah.

Alex Howard

So I really appreciate you having proposed this topic for this interview. I feel like it's really... I want to set it up by saying it's obviously an incredibly delicate and sensitive area, and I want to point out that maybe this could be quite triggering in places. So it's important for people to listen to their own body, their own experience, if they need to pause or take a break or stop, whatever... They need, support themselves. I think it's really important in honoring that. But I said to you before we started recording that having a conference on trauma and not talking about physical assault, sexual assault, we're missing what for some people, really is the heart of what's been going on for them with trauma.

So I'm very grateful to you for proposing this topic and for us to have this dialogue. Just to give people a bit of Vimalasara's background, Vimalasara Mason-John is a public speaker on the theme of mindfulness for addiction and trauma. They are the award winning author of ten books, including *Detox Your Heart: Meditations for Emotional Trauma*, *Eight Step Recovery: using the Buddhist teaching to overcome Addiction*, and *I Am Still Your Negro: a homage to James Baldwin*, poetic narratives exploring the trauma of African descent peoples in the diaspora.

Vimalasara, you are going to open with some poetry as a way of setting some of the frame and the space for this conversation.

Vimalasara Mason-John

Yeah, most definitely. Before I begin with the poem, I just want to say to our listeners that this topic of sexual trauma, physical trauma is something which is quite personal to me because it's a journey that I've had to recover from and actually part of that journey was through disordered eating. We know that there's a very high correlation, especially with sexual trauma and disordered eating. Yeah, just for myself too. I will take pauses and hopefully that will be an invitation for you to take pauses. So I'm

going to offer a poem. And actually, it's a very old poem. Actually, it was a poem that I wrote 20+ years ago.

[00:02:59]

We've been splattered in tabloids,
Paraded in shop windows,
modeled in Women's Weeklies,
flaunted across your screens.
Such oppression, such repression,
our body harbors all this tension.
Men have mass produced us on a conveyor belt,
compartmentalizing our parts.
Manifesting their perfect woman,
such dictation, such convention,
our body festers under all these inflictions.
I wear a bra to mold a man-made shape,
Spanx girdles to hold a manmade shape.
If I wear close fitting clothes,
men whistle and call me fickle.
Their lust, brands me a sex object
and labels me a slut.
Such violation, such humiliation.
Our body breeds all these infections.
We are victims of men's perceptions,
spend hours picking spots, pruning brows,
shaving legs, bleaching, perming and straightening our natural hair.
Such aggression, such destruction,
our body riddled with all these manifestations.
We are slaves to food, traitors, martyrs, secret eaters,
such depression, such corruption,
our bodies stewing, all this frustration.
We are a Barbie narcotic, a walking neurotic,
a pill popping robotic, a media schizophrenic,
such revelation, such recognition,
our body, a man-made creation.

It's interesting. There is the book, *When The Body Says No*. And sometimes I think that I want to write the book *When The Body Screams No*. And I also want to say that actually this topic of sexual trauma, physical trauma, cuts across all genders. And so as we have this conversation, I just really want you to know that this is inclusive of all genders.

Alex Howard

Yeah. Thank you for sharing that beautiful piece of poetry. But also, I think that that's right. And I think that almost the more intense the trauma, sometimes the more isolating and alienating it becomes, and the harder it becomes then for people to recognize that it's often... Even though there may be differences in the experience, a lot of the emotions and the feelings that people can have are shared. And there is a connection and a bond that sometimes can come with that. I'd love Vimalasara, to start a little bit with some of the ways that physical assault, sexual assault can affect us.

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There's obviously the obvious ways that people will be aware of, but there's many levels to those impacts, right? And I think just opening some of that is helpful to give some more understanding.

Vimalasara Mason-John

Yeah. It's such a huge question, because when we think of physical assault, it's on a spectrum, isn't it? It could be just a clip around the ear that a parent or carer can do, which is a physical assault on a child, to pulling down somebody's pants and spanking them on the butt, to taking the belt out to... Well, we can just imagine that spectrum. And then when we think of sexual trauma, I think it's really important to look at sexual harassment and sexual assault. And I think this is really important because sexual harassment is part of sexual trauma, and it can be left out.

And the way I choose to define sexual harassment is anybody who talks about your body in an inappropriate way, anybody who looks at the body in an inappropriate way. These are forms of sexual harassment. And it happens in the office. It happens in the family home. It happens in the schools, it happens in the colleges, and that can have a really huge impact. When somebody starts going through puberty and people start talking about the body or the parents or the carer starts talking about the body.

And you can see me going like this. It's like, actually, sometimes you see people hunched over. And one of the reasons why they're hunched over is because they don't want people to look at their body or see their body. And then when we think of sexual assault, it's not just when somebody assaults you and touches you, it can be if somebody asks you to touch their body, that also is sexual assault. And that's really important as well. And also I really want to talk about physical assault and sexual assault among siblings, because sometimes when it happens among siblings or among peers, and there's maybe just a one or two year gap between the perpetrator and the actual target of that perpetration, it's not often acknowledged. And it's like, "well, it's my fault. That's what siblings do". But it has... Not but, and... It has an impact. And that also is sexual trauma and physical trauma. And a lot of that goes, I've said, undiagnosed in the family home.

Alex Howard

And I think part of what you're saying that's important is actually broadening our definitions here because I think often we can have quite a narrow understanding of what assault is. And as you're talking, I remember something that happened when I was maybe 11, 12 years old. We used to go camping. I live in the UK, we used to go camping in France. We'd go in a tent on a big campsite. And there was a family that was staying in the tent opposite, and we became a little bit friendly with them. And I remember one evening we were laughing, joking around, and I think it was the mother of the family who pulled my trousers down in front of everyone.

It was meant to be a joke. It was meant to be funny. And I remember at the time, A, feeling violated, like this is not okay. But also my Mum and Stepdad clearly felt a bit embarrassed and awkward and laughed as well. But what I needed them to do was to step up and go, "that's not okay. You cannot"... It wasn't just what happened. It was also the way that what happened was responded to. And sometimes these things that one wouldn't traditionally classify as assault.

And one would say, "oh, it's just people laughing and having fun". But these sometimes seemingly small experiences have an impact.

[00:10:47] Vimalasara Mason-John

Yeah. And that was both physical and sexual assault. And it does have an impact. And just coming back to your question of "what's the impact?" Just to take a pause. The impact is just far reaching. Let's go to the traditional impact. We often know that more so among men, if men have been sexually assaulted, they can often go on to sexually assault. Yeah. If women have been sexually assaulted, women do sexually assault. Okay. So let's get that very clear. But often with the statistics, if women are sexually assaulted, they often end up self-harming.

And that can be self-harming through disordered eating, or through cutting. Men also self-harm, we call the male anorexia, is through running, going to the gym, to control the world. And that's one of the things that I want to say, because disordered eating anorexia is a huge one. And what I would say about that is, is that it's a way of controlling the body, of controlling your world. If you cannot control your world around the sexual assault that is happening, one way you can take control is controlling the body. And also because it's controlling the body, if the body is child-like, maybe nobody will notice your body as much.

One of the ways it impacted me was having bulimia, and part of the bulimia was purging out the filth, purging out the filth. I remember very clearly getting to a point of realizing I don't need this anymore. But I just didn't know how to stop. And then, of course, we know what happens is, you have these adaptive behaviors and something that hasn't been written about much, especially with disordered eating, is that actually you can get very high.

You can get very high by starving yourself. You can get very high bingeing and going on altered states. It's like a heroin shot like you go on these binges and nothing else matters. And you're in this world, and then you purge, and then you go into another altered state, and that can be really addictive. Now, I know I've worked with men who have obesity, and one of the reasons why they have obesity is they got themselves big so that their father couldn't hit them anymore. So again, actually, these are some of the impacts that we're not even aware of.

We look and think, why is that person so big? Blah, blah, blah. And just know that often people allow themselves to be that big to protect themselves in the world. Yeah. So that people do not see them as a target anymore to physically assault or to sexually assault. One last thing I want to say, which I think is really important, and this is going to be talking more detailed around sexual trauma. So just take a pause. We know that sexual trauma is again on a spectrum, but I want to talk about that.

We know that when the body is touched in a particular way, it's going to respond with pleasure. Okay, that's it. We know this is a very important Buddhist teaching that actually, when one or more of the senses has contact with an external stimulus or an internal stimulus, there's going to be feeling and we can't avoid feeling. This is really important. We can't avoid feeling. And so there are many adults who had that experience of sexual trauma as a young person, who experienced pleasure. And now, as an adult, they had this guilt because they experienced pleasure.

It must have been my fault. Blah blah blah. And actually, what happens is that they switch off, that people switch off. It's like pleasure becomes horrible. Pleasure becomes dirty. Pleasure becomes nasty. So whenever a pleasurable sensation arises in the body, people push it away. And so one of the things is that actually it takes away from humans to be able to experience that natural pleasure in the body because of this traumatic assault on the body. So what I want to say is that if one has been sexually assaulted, the definition is, oh, I was only sexually assaulted if I didn't like it and it felt uncomfortable and it was unpleasant.

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One is also being sexually assaulted if pleasurable vedanā arose, pleasurable hedonic tone arose. We also know that sometimes the adaptive behavior is to go along with it because that was the thing that saved their lives, again. And so again, we can tell ourselves because we went along with it, it was their fault. No, that was your adaptive behavior to protect yourself. And one last thing is that there's all these theories that actually we have a part to play in it when we're physically assaulted or sexually assaulted.

I may be deluded. And I say no, absolutely no. What happens is, what we do know is, that when we've been physically assaulted or sexually assaulted, holes in the aura, holes in the aura. And perpetrators, no perpetrators, can walk in a room and know who can be their target, not because the target asks for it, but because of the holes in their aura. Because the target knows a perpetrator, they can sense that. And it's like, how do I deal with this? And so the perpetrator has the power because they've seen the vulnerability in that person's aura in that person's energy.

Alex Howard

In a strange way that there's almost a resonance on both. There's a familiarity, right. Those roles on both sides. And until one has healed some of that trauma, the problem is that they can feel familiar in a place which is actually not safe and not appropriate.

Vimalasara Mason-John

Yeah. And we can regress to that young child who wasn't able to do anything. We get stuck in that place, and we're acting from that place. We're often not acting from the adult place. We're acting from that young place.

Alex Howard

I also just want to backtrack briefly, you mentioned self-harm, and that also feels like an important piece of this jigsaw. And I remember when I first met my wife and she was working as a child counselor, working a lot with teenagers who were self-harming. And so I learned a little bit just through dialogue with her about some of what she was working with. And one of the things that I remember hearing, which struck me, was the point that when one self-harms and is causing physical harm to their body, their body is releasing its natural painkillers as a way of responding to the harm that's being caused.

Of course there's many elements to self-harming, but one of the elements is, it's actually a way of managing one's emotional pain by triggering that response. And there's adaptive intelligence that, of course, if one is self-harming is very important they get the right help and support to work with changing that behavior. But there's a natural intelligence somehow that what can seem like dysfunctional behaviors, like you were describing in terms of disordered eating, there is reason behind.

Vimalasara Mason-John

Most definitely, Alex. Most definitely. Because I would say that the majority of people who use cutting as self-harming... There are many different forms of self-harm, but let's go to cutting, it's that most of these people had nobody to speak to, nobody noticed. What was happening in the household, that adults didn't notice something was going on? And also these young people, how could they... Many of

them could not even talk to the adults. And if they did talk to the adults, they were told they were lying. They were told they were lying.

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Stop lying. You'll damage the family. And basically, people needed to be seen, needed to be able to feel the pain. And so how can you feel and express the pain? How can you express it? Of harming it and cutting is so that actually you can also deal with the pain and soothe the pain. Yeah. Anybody who is self-harming, whether it's through cutting, whether it's through alcohol, whether it's through drugs, whether it's through the porn or whatever, it's for us to get really curious about the language, because it's a language.

It's a way of speaking. It's a way of crying. I always remember when I first went to a therapist, and I remember the therapist asking me, did I cry? "Cry? What's that, cry?" And then I realized years later, yes, of course I did cry. I cried through the food. I cried through the drugs. I cried through the self-harming. I cried. Of course I cried. It was a different way of crying.

Alex Howard

You spoke about how sometimes the family can respond to these things in a certain way. And it makes me think about the element of shame. And I think there's many faces of shame, often. There's the shame in those around us. There's the shame we have in us. There's the cultural layers of shame. But often when there's physical assault or there's sexual assault, there's a great deal of shame that can arise within that which can often be a barrier to then getting the help, because somehow we think it's our fault or we deserved it, or we asked for it and also that it's not okay to talk about it, because if we talk about it we'll be rejected or we'll be judged.

So perhaps we could say a bit about shame, and perhaps a bit more about how it can show up, but also how we can start to find some freedom from it.

Vimalasara Mason-John

Yeah. A great question. As we know, we often hear Dr. Gabor Maté say that it isn't so much what happens to you, it's what happens inside you. And I would take that one bit further because, of course, if something happens to you that is traumatic, and if you're able to speak to somebody, able to be listened to and heard, then that shame most probably won't arise or manifest in the same way. So if we take it inside, and we know this is a posture of shame, we can take it inside. Because shame is about hiding, isn't it?

It's about hiding. So there's this shame because something inside us happens. And then there's the third part. To soothe the shame we move into adaptive and addictive behaviors. It's that second art of suffering that we talk about in Buddhism. Yeah. It's that second art of suffering. And it's really how do we pull that second art out of us so that we can open back up to the world. And shame can take many forms and guises. Some people hide in their clothes with shame. Some people will communicate and will be like this with shame.

Some people will turn to addictive behaviors with shame. But it's all about hiding. It's about hiding. It's about hiding this awful secret, this awful burden. Actually, it's a burden. That's why that shame is a burden that can weigh us down. Often. We might want to shame other people because we have that shame. There's that shaming way of shaming other people. So shame has many guises, many, many faces. How do we work with shame? It's one of those emotions that really we need help.

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It's one of those emotions, which I think is incredibly difficult to work with on your own. And this is half the problem, because the reality is, why did we get the shame? Why did shame manifest? Shame manifested because there was nobody to speak to. There was nobody to speak to. Okay. And so now, as an adult, we're still carrying this shame, and we're saying, well, we want you to speak to... Well, if there was nobody to speak to as a young person, who are you going to trust and speak to now, who is going to believe you?

Because part of the healing of shame is retiring the story. How can we begin to let go of the story? How can we begin to retire from that story? And the only way we can begin to retire that story and let go of the story is to begin to tell the story. That's half of it because it's not just telling the story, but even just to be heard and witnessed, and to actually be told "that was really awful. What happened to you that should never have happened to you.

I'm really sorry that happened to you". So if there's anybody out there who's listening right now who had that experience of sexual trauma and physical trauma, I want to say to you right now, I'm really sorry that that happened to you. Really, deeply sorry that happened to you. It should never have happened to you. And I want you to know that I witness, witness your story and witness your pain. And really, it's an invitation to trust. Keep on speaking until somebody is prepared to listen. And what I want to say to you is try not to set yourself up to fail, because often what happens is we hear we should speak, and then we want to speak to family members, and they can be the worst people to speak to often, because often they're in denial.

Alex Howard

They have their own shame, right?

Vimalasara Mason-John

That's it. They're in denial. Don't Even Notice I Am Lying. The acronym "DENIAL". Don't Even Notice I Am Lying.

Alex Howard

That's good. I haven't heard of it before. That's good.

Vimalasara Mason-John

That family... So of course, there's a family shame. And let's talk about the family shame because that's the intergenerational trauma or the epigenetic trauma, because often we know if there was sexual trauma and physical trauma, played out in that household, there's almost a good chance that actually those carers who are looking after you had the experience of sexual trauma. And I use the words carers to include parents. And also knowing that there are many people who didn't actually grow up with their parents. They grew up with their aunts or grandparents or grew up in orphanages or in institutions.

So I use the word carers. And again, actually using the term institutions, we know that institutions are rife with sexual assault. It's almost as if that's just what happens in institutions. We thank God the Catholic Church has been busted now. I live in Canada, with the residential schools and working in

that community, my life will never be the same working in that community and hearing the stories of sexual trauma that happened in these institutions.

[00:30:39] Alex Howard

Well, I think, particularly not that it's a compare and contrast because all assault is assault. But I think, particularly when we're talking in environments where they're religious environments, where it's supposed to be the safe place to go, it's supposed to be the pathway to spiritual support. And when that's the place that abuse happens, I think it's even more challenging in its own way.

Vimalasara Mason-John

Yeah, I would say it's a different kind of challenge. Assault is assault. And it's interesting. I grew up in institutions, Christians... And sexual trauma was rife, and I can always remember kids banding together and saying something. So what did they do? They just promoted the person. What does that say? It says this is okay, and this is where we learn, where people learn, it's okay to sexually and physically abuse people, because if you spoke up and institutions have promoted people or parents have just said, "oh, well, they can't help it".

Well, what's the message you're being given? This is okay. This is okay. And nobody is telling you anything different.

Alex Howard

Yeah. Also, protecting the institution is more important than your needs, and that's a deep impact on one's soul, in a sense, to say that your experience is less important, unimportant than the experience of the person that's causing the suffering.

Vimalasara Mason-John

Sure. And let's kind of open that up to the institution of the family, protecting the institution of the family because that's often why it continues.

Alex Howard

I'd like to turn our attention a little bit to asking for support and help, because as we've been speaking about, because of the shame and often because, as you said, the shame is often the result of not having places to turn to have support. That one can learn that either there is no support or it's not okay to ask for support, or if you ask for support, you're likely to be wounded more deeply. So when you start to work with someone who's perhaps early in their journey of reaching out and is in a very delicate place around that, how do you help encourage and support that process?

Vimalasara Mason-John

Yeah. Thank you for that question. It's interesting. I think about a year ago, I had several clients who were dealing with predominantly sexual trauma, and I realized that actually I needed to go off and do some more work myself. So I want to say those practitioners out there, those of you who are working in the field of sexual trauma that actually it's really important for you to do the work. And so I went and bought a package of 15 "IFS" internal family system therapeutic sessions to work on it myself because I was aware that I was being activated, I was being triggered.

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And also, I think it might have been a time when I had the contract of working with residential school survivors. Especially as well, because I grew up in an institution, all that activation, et cetera. So I think the first thing is that any of us, even if you don't specifically work with sexual trauma, because I don't say I specifically work sexual trauma, it's open. But people are going to be coming to you about sexual trauma. So that's the first thing that those of us as practitioners, as counselors, as therapists or public speakers in that field, one needs to do the work themselves. Because in a way, we have to model something back to the clients.

That's really important. We have to model something back to the clients. For me, the way I work. As part of my training, I should say my core training is most probably psychology because I studied psychology at University. But since leaving University, my core training is mindfulness and Buddhism. And I want to say that I believe that mindfulness and Buddhism is the oldest therapeutic program that we know to date. And what's really key is coming home to the body. So before we are expecting people to reach out and speak to somebody, how do we learn to come back to the body?

So this is the place I want to begin with first, because some of you think, "well, I can't reach out". One of the things is learning to come back to the body. And so one of the things I want to say to listeners is become aware of your early warning signs in the body that something isn't right. We know, Alex. We know that somebody is waiting for a bus. They're waiting for a bus. Somebody comes along, sits next to them... Actually, let me use a different example.

Somebody walking home, somebody walking home, and they want to do the shortcut. They're going to go the shortcut and somebody starts walking behind them. And there is this gut... the gut is... something's not right here. Something's not right here. And we don't listen to that because we want to take the shortcut home. And if we can begin to listen to the gut, it's actually "maybe I should actually go and take the long way home where there's more people. Okay. Maybe that's what I need to do". Because we know many people who've been sexually assaulted will tell you that actually, they didn't listen.

They knew something was up. Something wasn't right, but they needed to get home. They needed this, and they didn't listen. Why didn't they listen? Because the sexual assault and physical assault has taken away that power of us, of trusting our gut. And so we have to learn to trust our gut. So what I want to say to people is early warning signs. Could be sweaty palms. Early warning signs could be itchy groin. Early warning sign could be your teeth chattering. Early warning signs could be your shoulders going up.

Early warning signs could be your heart beating. Early warning signs could be tension in the body. And listen to that. So what I'm saying to you is that you have these early warning signs, and rather than go into the story or something's going to happen to me, because we don't know. All we know is that we do not feel comfortable right now, and we just need to get out. We may just need to leave the room. That person, whoever it was who gave you the bit of the heebie jeebies, might not be doing anything.

Actually, they might just remind you of somebody. It might be the way they look, that they remind you of your abuser. But we don't need to know that. All we need to know is that we do not feel right, and we just need to get out and take care of ourselves. So that's the first thing of coming into a relationship with the early warning signs. As practitioners, our job is helping the clients to come home

to the body because anybody who has been sexually assaulted or physically assaulted, they've left the body.

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Nobody is home. All sense doors have been closed. Okay, every sense door has been closed. They're not at home. They've left. And so how do we bring that person back? And the reason why all sense doors are closed and nobody's home because that's what is protecting them. And, of course, that's the adaptive behavior, part of the adaptive behavior. We know drugs and alcohol... we want to get out of our head. We want to get high, we want to split from this experience. Left the body.

Alex Howard

And so part of that journey of learning to ask for help is almost retuning and reconnecting to what the body has to say, right? That in of itself is actually a powerful step towards reconnecting.

Vimalasara Mason-John

Yeah. Becoming attuned to one's body, beginning to learn the body and let the body know that actually, whatever you did, it was protecting you and taking care of you, whatever you did during that time. Because often the reason why we don't want to attune to the body, come home to the body, is because we blame the body. We punish the body and actually just to let you know that the body, whatever it did was protecting you. Trying to take care of you.

Alex Howard

Or because the physical and emotional pain is in our body, and it feels like a difficult place to go because we don't want to have to connect to that, right?

Vimalasara Mason-John

Of course. That's why I say this is a really important job of the practitioner. When I'm working with a client, it's so difficult to be in the body. So we meander, and then we come back, and we meander and then we come back. Because clients are very skillful at taking you away. And our job is to come back. And how can we again be in the body, because the client is observing. The client will tell you something and see how you will metabolize it. The client is very aware of the ecosystem in that client room and is really watching.

And actually, if it's hard to metabolize, you just say, this is really painful to listen, I need to take a break. In fact, that can be really powerful to actually model "this is a lot, I need to pause", because that can model back to the client that this is a lot. Because clients will think, "oh, this isn't a lot", but this is a lot, and that can be really empowering and enabling for the client to hear. Actually, what you've experienced is actually really painful. And this is a lot to have that reflected back to the client.

Alex Howard

Yes. Also, I want to amplify something that I'm hearing you say, which is that the wisdom and the guidance of how we respond at the time is, as much as we might not like the behaviors and sometimes those adaptive behaviors, can perpetuate our suffering, there is a wisdom in those responses. And furthermore, the more we return to our body, if we can open to that wisdom again,

the wisdom that we need to help us heal is often there, right? It's not about discovering some ground-breaking, miraculous therapeutic technique, although it may well have its place.

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There's something more powerful in the simplicity somehow of listening to that wisdom that's there.

Vimalasara Mason-John

Most definitely. In fact, I have a practice that I've developed called "RUST" to really work with that so that we can actually connect with the wisdom in the body. And R stands for recognize. And basically, one is just recognizing that you're activated. You're recognizing you're activated. Whatever is happening, you're activated. You're triggered. You're activated. U stands for understand. Understand that you're caught in a story, because whenever we're activated, somebody walks in the room like this, we're activated, and a story begins to spiral. So U stands for understanding, just understanding your core story.

And often it's an old story. It's an old story. And knowing that you can step out of that story and actually just knowing that it's a story, that it's full of judgments and perceptions. S stands for sensations because we know that actually, if you're caught in the story and you're activated, sensations are happening in the body. So in a way, if you look at the tip of the iceberg, what the person is often in contact with is actually the story, the story, the activation, but they're not in contact with the sensations in the body.

And so I kind of encourage people to search the body for sensations, become aware of those sensations. I don't tell people to sit with the sensations. It's like stand with the sensations, stretch with the sensations, scream with the sensations, sing with the sensation, so that there is this somatic experience, because often when people have been physically and sexually assaulted, I know with some of my physical assault, I had to be a tabula rasa and not flinch at all with anything that was happening, that was being inflicted upon my body.

So I learned not to be there and to be completely tabula rasa, and so that gets stuck in the body and we have to move and we have to stretch it. We have to have that somatic experience to begin to release it. And T stands for trust. This too shall pass, or tell the story to relax. Tell it to just relax for a moment, so you can have a moment of freedom, a moment of peace. What I say to people is, you can just call on RUST.

I use it myself. So I use RUST. It's like, okay. All right. I'm back here. Okay. I'm this adult now. I'm not this young person anymore, and it doesn't have to be linear. You can just call on you. Oh, I'm just caught in a story. Okay. All right. I'm this adult, back in this adult... Because often what happens is we lose the wisdom because we become this young, vulnerable child, this young, vulnerable adolescent. I don't want to just say child because adolescents as well.

We are vulnerable when we're adolescents and parents are abusing us, and we become vulnerable and we become overwhelmed. And so this practice of RUST really kind of can jolt us back. Oh, yeah, I'm this adult. I'm just... Yeah. Okay. Sensation. Oh, I'm activated. Trust this too shall pass. Because when we're at home as this child, it's never ending. When is it going to end? We don't know. When is that person going to come back again and assault us again? It's never going to end. We just think it's just never, ever going to end.

[00:47:45] Alex Howard

I'm mindful of time and there's many directions we could go with this. I feel like this is one of those interviews where I realize we need so much more space and time to unpack this. But for people that are wondering where they start, that are perhaps... I imagine there are people watching this, that are recognizing experiences they had in the past that they haven't recognized assault, are perhaps now seeing them with a new understanding and others that perhaps have recognized things assault but have not really given the internal space to start to open up, and are starting to wonder, what do I do with this? Where do I go with this? What are some of the simple starting points for people?

Vimalasara Mason-John

Well, the place to start is if you've been activated and you've become aware, "Oh, my God, that was abuse. Oh, my God. I was groomed" find somebody to speak to. And actually, now. Not to wait until next week, perhaps ring up a close friend and say, "I've just listened to this talk and I'm just really experiencing a lot of activation. I just need somebody to listen." So that would be the place to begin, because if you've only discovered it now and become aware of it now, it means that you didn't talk to anybody. Or if you did talk to somebody, they didn't believe you and you suppressed it.

And so you need to speak. You need to talk. You need to ask for help. As a Buddhist practitioner, I want to remind you when the Prince was full of doubt before he got his wisdom, what did he do? He asked for help. He touched the ground of being and said, "Let the Earth be my witness". He asked for help. The Buddha asks for help. So for that wisdom, we need to ask for help. That's the first. I'm not going to say anything else because I've given lots of nuggets.

The first thing if you have been activated, something has come up. Please ask for help. And of course, I have lots of meditations on RoundGlass. I think actually the practice of RUST is on RoundGlass, which is an app or web based app.

Alex Howard

I was going to ask, people that want to find out more about you and your work, what's the best way to do that? And also what's some of what they can find?

Vimalasara Mason-John

The best way to find me is through my website, which is valeriemason-john.com or you can Google my name. I am on [Twitter](#). I am on [Instagram](#). It's just so much. I think the best place is that people want to get hold of me, definitely through my website. And then again, my books. *Detox your Heart: Meditation for Emotional Trauma* is a great book to work through. There's also a course on RoundGlass, on Detox your Heart, which is completely free so you could do that course on RoundGlass.

Also, *The Eight Step Recovery: Using the Buddhist Teachings to Overcome Addiction*. There are eight step meetings around the globe and that's completely free. And then just to speak to my book, let me take a pause. *I'm still your Negro: Homage to James Baldwin*. There's a whole section on "me too", which is really looking at sexual trauma through the poetic lens. So that's a book that you could look at as well, if you're curious. Thank you.

[00:51:58] Alex Howard

Wonderful. Vimalasara, I really appreciate you bringing this topic forth and having this conversation with me today. I know it would have been helpful to many people and I really appreciate the sensitivity with which you approached it as well. So thank you.

Vimalasara Mason-John

Thank you. And just to let the listeners know that myself, after this conversation, I'm going to most probably go out into the elements, take a breath of fresh air and stretch, to just acknowledge that actually that this is a conversation which can be activating, to take care of myself.

Alex Howard

Wonderful. Thank you so much.