

## **Podcast Series, Holistic Nature of Us**

### **Episode # 17: Meet Dr. Leesa Sklover**

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Hi I'm Judith Dreyer,

Thank you for joining me for this pod cast series "The Holistic Nature of Us".

My intent is to take us, you and I, into a better understanding of the concepts behind our holistic nature and how that ties directly to the holistic nature of the world around us. How can we connect the dots in practical ways that we are nature and nature is in us?

I will be featuring authors and educators, practitioners and others whose passion for this earth helps us create bridges. We'll see what's trending, what's relevant to our world today, not just for land use, but to connect the dots between nature and ourselves. It's time for practical action and profound inner change so our natural world is valued once again.

Today I am so delighted to introduce you to Dr. Leesa Sklover, a licensed counselor, a yoga therapist, recording artist, composer, music therapist, and ocean activist. And it's Leesa's activism that drew me to contacting her for this podcast. So Leesa, welcome! It's my pleasure to have you as my guest today.

LEESA: It's my pleasure. And I'm sorry, just as we started my dog barked so I'm sorry about that, but that's what that was.

JUDITH: I'm not worried about it. It's perfectly fine.

LEESA: Okay.

JUDITH: So Leesa I want you to start with the idea of holeism. How we on the earth have the same principle. You know, if any of our parts are missing

we don't work at optimal function. The same thing happens with the earth. And we're actually made up of the same elements as the earth.

LEESA: Yes, absolutely. In my work with ocean advocacy and focusing on the ocean relates to my work as a therapist and a music therapist. A lot of the work that I do uses music as well as my therapy to bring all of the elements. And, relate the elements that are actually assigned to the body through many, many different cultures of, you know, ether, air, fire, water, and earth, each is designated with instrumentation and certain imagery within the body as well as in the ocean and in all of nature. We are also 90% water and when I use the concept of creating what we, vibrating what we want to create in the world. Our body is mostly water just like we are connected to the sea and to the ocean, and that is why we have that affinity. Some of my work has led me to ocean advocacy because I had the idea of creating chants with whales and dolphins and using them in my music. I work with a gentleman by the name of Jim Noman who basically does interspecies communication by using a hydrophone in the water and instrumentation. He introduced me to the idea of communing with cetaceans. That led me to my ocean work by using, with The Cetacean Society International and really using a lot of sounds of the beings in the ocean to allow people to really know what it sounds like. Because when I look out at the water we just see this blue but there's a whole symphony of sounds there. Those same sounds are symbolically represented in our own bodies and in our own spirit.

JUDITH: Well that's a very interesting comment. I love the fact that you say there's a symphony beneath the ocean that we're not privy to, and most of us aren't privy to it. We don't live near the ocean. We don't have an opportunity to get into the ocean. I happen to be a certified scuba diver, so I happen to love being in ocean waters and the deeps myself. But what you're talking about is actually getting us to hear those sounds in the ocean and then you put some of that to music, is that right?

LEESA: Yes. I collect the sounds when I've done research. I once worked with a lone cetacean in Canada. Some of the sounds that I used in my music are the sound of a lobster or shrimp or some easier sounds to get. But I recently did a film score about the artic. I used the sound of Beluga whales, which are represented in that part of the world, as well as the song is about saving the Artic and saving the polar bears there. I definitely try to bring all of that into the themes that I'm selling with my music. I have your regular

Country and Pop. I'm actually doing a lot of stuff that's related to the Me-Too Movement as well. My stuff is varied but my main theme is humanity and humanity's awareness of the natural world.

JUDITH: We need more music like that. You know music hits not just the elements that we are, but it hits the soul of us, the spirit of us and in my own journey, you know, I think it's important that we hit the heart sense of things, because that moves us. Don't you feel that? Have you seen a connection with perhaps your music and turning people on to being more mindful of the ocean?

LEESA: Well you know when I first started; I've been a counselor, psychotherapist for 25 years and a music therapist around the same time. When I first was teaching meditation and using all of this, people were not as accepting. In my doctoral work I researched the brain and sound and rehabilitated people who had trouble speaking or had a stroke or neurological issues. But it was very much related to the music because more of our brain is musical. We get a dopamine response from listening to music and so it makes us, you know if you listen to certain symphonies, it makes you connect to nature. It makes you connect to the celebrating of self and listening to the sounds of nature through the music, as well as intervals that are found in the music that I create purposely is meant for a specific purpose. The themes and the use of being able to hear something that you never would have the chance to hear. On the Orcas Chantress CD, it's basically a whole animal orchestra. You know the polar ice caps are the drumbeats melting and there's just my voice with animals and nature.

JUDITH: That's the one Ode to the Artic Angels?

LEESA: No, that's Orcas Chantress. It's a whole CD. And then Ode to the Arctic Angels is just part of a film score but it's a titled song for a film.

JUDITH: They're beautiful. What can you tell us about some of the harmful effects going on in the ocean and what you've seen as an activist?

LEESA: Well um, I've done some research and I support organizations like Oceana and Cetacean Society International and many people are trying to stop. There was an order that allowed for seismic air blasting, air gun blasting in the water so for a long time we've had trouble with sonar and now if seismic air blasting is also allowed it will definitely affect zoo plankton and all the fish that we eat on the

East Coast. It's supposed to go all the way from Delaware down through Florida and if it's also planned, it could probably happen on the West Coast as well. And it's happening all over the world, but I was in shock that it was actually happening here, but maybe not any more. It does destroy hearing. You see a lot of beached whales and dolphins with bleeding ears. A lot of the people who study animals that have beached themselves show damage to the ears, and it's definitely related to these kinds of things. We're hoping that we can stop that from happening. That's really the essence. I think if people have a greater relationship with the ocean and they're listening, and they know that there is a symphony down there and that actually the brains of whales have spindle cells which allow them to be emotional and intuitive, just like what we pride ourselves on. They have four times the amount or had them for 20 million years, you know, longer than us. We have to celebrate what is, what has been around before, longer than us, perhaps.

JUDITH: That's a good point. We forget that, as far as we know, all these life forms were here before the human species really developed and took off. And yet we seem to have great disregard for them, at least in our society, at this time in our development. I don't think some of the ancient cultures had disregard for them. I have Native American ancestry. I studied Taoism through traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurvedic Medicine. I was so impressed with the fact that these systems are based on the elements and their deep observation of nature. They don't take us out of nature in their equation or in their healing practices.

LEESA: Right, because that's exactly like the Orcas Chantress CD. It's chants from all those different cultures that do use the elements and celebrate. And chant is basically in many ways how the elements have been incorporated into a lot of celebration and healing of the body. There's a cover on the Orcas Chantress. It's a Shaman, a female shaman giving birth to a Beluga whale and there's an image of her tongue, like as if she was chanting. So that's a petroglyph from thousands of years ago. It does pre-date anything that we we're doing. From my research with music, sound and music therapy, you know sound and music was really, we had a musical speech before we had a verbal type of speech. That is how language evolved and so it is really important that we honor using sound and music and that we kind of mirror what is happening in the ocean. Because when we listen to Humpback whales they are chanting. That was my original concept. And

they're chants are. Their song changes every year and it has the same structure as a classical piece of music. There are phrases that repeat themselves just like in a song where there's the hook or the chorus and it's pretty fascinating.

JUDITH: I think it is fascinating. I didn't realize that whales and dolphins are doing that, you know? I was on a trip years ago to the Caribbean off the coast of Cost Rica and we were looking for dolphins. We ended up not finding them and couldn't figure out why. There was a whole pod of pseudo Orcas that were actually following us and hovering around us, around the boat. We must have seen 20 of them. Everybody was happy. People just started to be happy in their presence.

LEESA: I think that there is something, I mean because I've been around them so much, but there's something nonvocal. I mean once I was on a nightline experiment on nonlocality, which is being able to sent energy or prayer at a distance and I really, really believed that there's something in their ability that when you're around them, that there is some kind of healing energy that you receive, and that they receive from you. I mean it's very powerful.

JUDITH: So, in terms of, we've got Earth Day coming up. I know there's Ocean Day you said which is in June. What are things that these societies are trying to get out into our awareness through these specific events?

LEESA: Well I don't know all of the events. I know the UN does something on June 8<sup>th</sup> every year and I mean I have a number of events that, you know, I will be doing. One on June 10<sup>th</sup> at Raven's Wing Yoga, something to do with, it will be related to Ocean Day, and on June 23<sup>rd</sup> an Eco-Concert with John Marshall, who is an amazing percussionist. But you know, if we look at Natural Awakenings or any local magazines you'll see so many articles. If you read the Huffington Post, you'll see endless things. People don't know about International Whale Day. I have a poster from the man that created, the first person that created Save The Whales was head of the Cetacean Society International. I have a poster that names a date in May. So, it's my intention to someday maybe create some events around that but um, all of my work, whether it be a concert, or a workshop is related to this. And one of the things that I also do is called "See Me as I Am" which was basically aimed to teach compassion and respect for fellow humans, especially men and women but also the animal world and the natural world.

That everything really has a soul and we have to respect everything. So that's the name of my podcast – See Me as I Am and another woman's group that I do. My aim is to teach young children all about the environment and about themselves and about respect for each other through that program.

JUDITH: Leesa do you, have you had any experience actually sitting with whales and dolphins yourself. I'm thinking more that might be either injured in some way or is it out in the open.

LEESA: Yes definitely. There's a song that's called Deep, Deep, Down and there's a little video, but it's not about that whale but it's about a whale called Mr. Q. It was a Beluga whale. It was lost in Canada. He was way far away from where his home most likely was, the St. Lawrence River, and he was connected to this bell buoy. I'm working on a novel about that experience and taking it a little bit further. But this whale was attached to the sound because that felt like home. Beluga's are considered the canaries of the sea and so I felt like, it felt like it (the buoy) was his mom. Of course, I humanized the situation but every day we would go out there and the Beluga would follow us and then you know once the boat was out of sight and he couldn't follow us any more, he would just go back to the bell buoy. It just made me so sad. I've dedicated a lot of my work to the idea of lone cetaceans that are out there. There's one, Hertz 52. For years Woods Hole would track this one whale that kept coming back to the same place. There are lone cetaceans all over the world. They become lost because of sonar and air gun blasting and all these things that we're talking about. They lose their pod. There was one, a baby, found in, where was it, in Alaska recently. He had to go to an aquarium because once humans are with them, they become attached to humans and are not able to be in the wild.

JUDITH: I didn't know that either. Aren't there more restrictions right now in terms of which whales or dolphins we can keep in captivity? Do you know?

LEESA: I don't know the details and definitely the Cetacean Society Internationals aim is that all animals remain wild. But I did do some work at the Clearwater Aquarium when I was in Florida. There are animals, like what the movie Winter's Tail is based on, that can't because they don't have a tail and so they are rehabilitated, and certain aquariums have just rehabilitated animals, which I think is great. You know you can't be a

purest in this situation because you know, you have to have a place for them. Whenever there was a stranding, they have to have somewhere to go. So no it's not right to take an Orcas away from its mother like Telecom and traumatize it but at the same time I don't think there's anything wrong with rehabilitating animals that can't be in the wild. We have to have sanctuaries. I mentioned Dave Gallo in the article, a great oceanographer, who shows us the bottom of the ocean. Sylvia Earl who has Mission Blue creates sanctuaries so that we can't destroy it. If you look at the coral situation or you look at the plastic in the ocean, it's just scary, and so if we could see it. In my article I was talking about how we could see it because we now have submarines, but we don't really listen to it. If we could listen to it as well as see it, I think we would have a greater audience of people fighting for saving it.

JUDITH: Because you are connecting the dots then with your work, that because our brain is more water and connected to sound, that the sound, whether we can remember it or not, hearing the sound from the ocean would probably stimulate something in our brain which would help us connect the dots or create the bridge about how valuable we are together.

LEESA: Yeah, I mean I think you're on the right track. All of our body has water but the rhythm, you know I used to talk, I'm kind of like a Jungian oriented therapist and I do a lot of sand play work and have spoken about the archetypes of sound and symbol, and so the rhythm of obviously the ocean, the waves coming in and going out, mirrors our heartbeat. The words for lamer and for the ocean in many languages is symbolic to the mother. And we all heard that rhythm in the womb and that mirrors the heartbeat. But there are many things like that. Also we are, we are also, rhythm is a bilateral function so we automatically tune into that. When we're listening to music without words or we're listening to certain things that we're improvising, it's more of a right hemisphere experience when your body is being trained, rather than when your singing a song or analyzing a song. So different experiences are different. But the rhythm, tempo of rhythm, 60-80 beats per minute of the ocean kind of thing that's kind of like the healing metaphor.

JUDITH: Well that's very interesting. I'd love to hear more about the sound and the music therapy that you do, especially with archetypes. I'm fascinated by archetypes myself but more importantly because you're working on this level with your counseling practice, with your music experience, and then with connecting the bridge or the dots with the

archetypes. Could you give us another one? The tide is the heartbeat. La mere is the mother, which is referred to as the sea. Could you give us another one?

LEESA: Well I mean there are endless archetypes. I mean in terms of just sound?

JUDITH: Yes.

LEESA: Well an archetype of sound would be the earth elements. For example, in your body the lower charkas are earth so that's percussion and rhythm, and that's a music therapy concept. If someone needed to be more grounded, you would focus on percussion and rhythm. Then the water element is perhaps the brass instrumentation. The fire element is string. There's all these concepts of your heartstrings, and sympathetic resonance. I have an ear infection and I've never had anything wrong with my ears and my songwriting partner in L.A. has an ear infection. And so, I was like this is sympathetic resonance. Like you're receiving that energy across the country. You know I think that the vibration of a cello vibrates into our heartstrings. There are certain archetypes both positive and negative images, for each element. There's the fire element of compassion and peace but there is also intense music, and intense staccato, Japanese heartbeat drummers or something that would show that fire element. Then the air element is the throat and the head and everything above that, and so that would be woodwinds and the voice. I use those symbols when I'm trying to give people metaphors, or pick music for them, or have them improvise music, as well as this is like really rich in the yoga therapy world and in the Kundalini yoga world, the use of the archetypes of the elements that are also within the body.

JUDITH: I think that's fascinating, just really fascinating. I have had experience working, not personally but they were in my classes, music therapists. And they were always very, very careful, you know, what they chose to play for the class because they didn't want to unwillingly or unwittingly create an emotional response for somebody that could be perceived as negative. They were very, very careful with the music that they chose, for those sessions.

LEESA: Most with music therapy the theme is you mirror the person where they're at. And what's kind of weird is I kind of do the same thing whether

I'm working with a child with Autism or somebody, you know a patient that wants to write a song. I take as much as I can from them and then the same thing you do with the whales. Like if they send, you know your listening to a vocalization and you don't put your instrument and just play jazz on top of it, necessarily, or whatever you might do. You might... I would vocalize exactly what they're presenting, to mirror them, to show that I hear what they're bringing me. I'm not going to put my stuff onto them. I'm not going to play some song that obviously they haven't heard.

JUDITH: Aha, interesting. And it's interesting to me that you do this with whales as well as people. You have a song on your website that was also with other animals, like the wolf. I saw that one there too.

LEESA: On "You May Be Beautiful", that's on that work Orcas Chantress CD.

JUDITH: And have you sat with wolves too?

LEESA: No, but that's my totem. I mean wolves – I'm a Pisces and the wolf wherever it is, the wolf shows up in my Hebrew, my kabala chart and my rabbi did a chart for me and that's my totem there. And then it's also like imagery in childhood and it's my Native American totem too, so it's pretty, pretty much there.

JUDITH: So that is your totem when it shows up in all those different places you can't quite deny that.

LEESA: I think you have a few.

JUDITH: Yeah, I think you do too. All right well let's talk about some of the programs and all that you're doing. I always like to end the show with what's coming up for you, how can people reach you? If you could give us that information that would be wonderful.

LEESA: All right, so it's Leesa Sklover and the email is [drsklover@gmail.com](mailto:drsklover@gmail.com) and my website is [lovelifeproductions.net](http://lovelifeproductions.net). I am going to start a podcast that's going to be released in June called See Me As I Am and there will be music on there as well as interviews with environmentalist, so I want to definitely interview you and environmentalist artists, creative artists and healers. And people that we really should know, that are kind of quasi-famous but maybe a lot of people don't know. I think

it's important to interview them. And then I have what are like mini little short pods which are sprite pods, so they're going to be really just little short insights that come from me and maybe also have meditation and music involved in them. So that's that. And then See Me As I Am Collaboratory for women. I'm going to be holding it one Sunday a month, the end of the month from 4-6 in the East and 7-9 in the West and people will be there live but they're also able to call in and say that's about just really having a question and answer kind of experience. People sharing their stories and talking about respect and compassion and the environment and each other, and what we can do to heal our world. Getting a bunch of women together and actually speaking to them maybe in different parts of the world at the same time would be wonderful. And then a concert, an eco-concert June 23 in Branford. You can call me about that information with John Marshall, a great percussionist and other artists as well. We're going to be doing like a songwriting series, but they are definitely going to be environmentally oriented so that people sing about the earth. And then a drum circle, a nature drum circle July 1<sup>st</sup>. And June 10<sup>th</sup> there will be something at Raven's Wing in Branford that I'll be doing that will be combining the environmental work but definitely music meditation and yoga therapy. That's all I can think of. Go to my websites [www.lifelifeproductions.net](http://www.lifelifeproductions.net). I have yoga classes that I do where I combine all the elements and play my music live and that's right on the beach in Branford at the Shore Beach Union Church on Pentecost and that is on Thursdays and Saturdays at 9:30 and Mondays at 6:30 starting in June.

JUDITH: That's wonderful. You've got a full schedule but it's exciting the work that you're doing. I wish you the best of luck with launching your podcast series and I look forward to being a part of that and all your classes. And that's Branford, CT, correct?

LEESA: Yes. I do my counseling in Branford and Glastonbury, as well as all these integrative therapies.

JUDITH: Wonderful. Well I want to thank you for joining all of us at Holistic Nature of Us. I hope my listeners feel as inspired as I do by your talk and your practical advice. And I can't thank you enough for sharing your vast knowledge of music therapy and how it affects us, how it's affecting our ocean friends and what we can do perhaps to be more mindful, sympathetic and active in protecting our ocean environments.

LEESA: Can I say one more thing?

JUDITH: Sure.

LEESA: If you want to listen to the music, Spodify and Apple and CD Baby but if you like any of the music please do that on, make a Spodify play list if you have one and just put one of my songs on there, that's really helpful.

JUDITH: Wonderful. Yes, we have to remind all of our listeners to make comments and click "like" and you know acknowledge these different sites, because that's the name of the game out there.

Well I have a surprise too for my listeners. Leesa has graciously allowed me to share her song that I was just so touched by when I went to her website, It's called "Ode to the Artic Angels". I'm going to say goodbye. Enjoy your day as you listen to this beautiful music.

Thank you again Leesa.

LEESA: Thank you so much.