

**ON OUR MINDS, SEASON 4:
POET YUNG PUEBLO ON THE POWER OF MEDITATION**

Diego Perez (“Yung Pueblo”): You have to understand that your self-love is key. By self-love, I mean doing what you need to do to heal for yourself. So if you activate your self-love, that's going to help you serve other people well, these two things have to go hand-in-hand. Love yourself so that you can serve others well.

[theme song]

James: From PBS NewsHour, Student Reporting Labs.

Bree: And WETA

James: This is on Our Minds

Bree: With Bree

James: And James

Bree: A podcast made by teens for teens

James: Because everyone deserves a place to feel heard.

Bree: Hey, James!

James: What's up, Breee? How are you doing?

Bree: Hanging in there. You know, senioritis is definitely kicking in, so, I don't know, I'm feeling like I need a little bit of inspiration...

James: Yeah. No, I definitely get that. I remember when I was, like, a junior year student in high school. I always looked at the senior year students and thought that, senioritis was most definitely like a myth, something that could not possibly happen to me. But yeah, you're right, it's definitely kicking my butt. But I think today's episode will actually inspire you. Recently, students from Austin, Texas, attended SXSW EDU and interviewed Diego Perez, better known as Yung Pueblo. He's a number one New York Times best-selling writer who's widely known on Instagram¹.

¹ https://www.instagram.com/yung_pueblo/p/CjqlUTtuumw/?img_index=1

Bree: Yeah, I feel like I definitely heard the name before. Like I was scrolling through like my explore page and I definitely read one of his poems.

James: I looked through his Instagram and read a lot some of the poems that he's produced, and I totally fell in love with them. Can I actually read you one of his poems?

Bree: Of course. I'd love to hear it. Take it away. [2.2s]

James: (reading Yung Pueblo)

In a time when people devalue
kindness, let your heart remain
wide open.

Keep giving your gentleness to
the world. Act with kindness
without worrying about what
you'll get in return.

Even if people forget
what you did for them, the universe
won't.

Bree: Wow. That's super powerful.

James: Let's get into the conversation. Here's senior reporter Chloe Lewcock speaking with Yung Pueblo.

[music]

Chloe Lewcock: How have you learned how to, like, characterize your feelings and emotions into your poetry?

Yung Pueblo: What I try to do is to write about what I have experienced. I think there's something about being able to process your emotions through writing that is very, almost like it's very private, almost intimate, because it's just between you and yourself, and you're communicating with yourself with this radical honesty where you want your genuine truth to come forward. So I think in tough times, especially in times of loss, when a family member passes away or, you know, something difficult happens. Being able to bring beauty to that difficulty, it's actually quite healing.

Chloe Lewcock: Where were you when you started your mental health and mindfulness journey, and how have you grown to where you've gotten to today?

Yung Pueblo: It really started in this rock bottom moment where I was spending a lot of time running away from my emotions. There was a lot of sort of sadness and anxiety that built up as I was growing up, because we grew up, as pretty poor immigrants in Boston, and it was quite a difficult struggle with my mom. She was cleaning houses and my dad worked in a grocery store. So it was a stressful period because we would struggle. You know, they struggle to pay rent, they struggled to put food in the fridge. It just embedded a lot of sadness and anxiety inside of me. But when I, when I was 2011, about a year after I graduated from college, I had this rock bottom moment where I had been using so much drugs and alcohol to try to run away from my emotions and quiet those emotions, and I actually almost ended up losing my life.

I knew that the problem was that I was running away from my emotions, and so to get better, I had to be with them. I had to have the courage to actually feel my emotions. So what I did was I challenged myself that whenever any sadness or anxiety would arise, instead of rolling up another joint, I would sit on my bed and just feel the emotion. And at first it was really scary and hard. But then I realized that I had made that fear much bigger than it really needs to be. Because once I faced the emotion, it actually wasn't that bad. And that's something that's simple that anybody can do without any type of technique.

Chloe Lewcock: So in your day-to-day life, how do you maintain a mental health-conscious lifestyle and how do you incorporate that into your writing?

Yung Pueblo: I have these two pillars that I work with within everyday. You know, this morning when I woke up, the first thing I did was I meditated for an hour. That's the way I primarily take care of myself. I make sure that my mind feels good, feels sound, that my mind is balanced. I've developed equanimity, equanimity is balance of mind. And the other aspect of it was, is making sure that I'm eating nutritious food that fits my body well and, running. So I try to be really mindful of that. And the other thing is just not, not spending too much time on my phone because the phone is like, in one way, it's beautiful that this technology even exists, but in another way, like it can really just be damaging.

Chloe Lewcock: How did you come into like this place of mindfulness and meditating daily? Like where did where did that all start?

Yung Pueblo: Well, it was a long journey because I started with my, one of my best friends, Sam. He was the one who meditated first in this, did this silent 10 day course. And then when he he wrote me an email, and he wrote it to me and to a few other friends, the email was all about love, compassion and goodwill. And I was surprised, like, I've never heard of him talk about love, about compassion, or about goodwill. So I knew that I needed that. I knew that whatever he got, I needed some of that, too. So, when I went and started meditating, I found that it was just deeply, deeply helpful. And, and it's profoundly changed my life.

Chloe Lewcock: What do you hope that your poetry gives to people?

Yung Pueblo: I hope it helps people understand that they can heal themselves. I think that's one thing. As I was growing up, there was no mental health movement. There was no wellness movement. This is all quite new. So when I started writing, the point of it is to help people, hopefully inspire people to also get in their own journey and work on healing themselves.

Chloe Lewcock: How did you learn how to become such a prevalent writer? Like, I feel like writing about your feelings is such a vulnerable thing and finding the confidence to share that with people. Like such a large number of people especially, it's it takes a lot of confidence. How did you how did you learn that?

Yung Pueblo: It was hard, it was hard in the beginning but I had to understand that I can't control the way people perceive what I write. So I can do my best to be as clear as possible. But even then, some people may misunderstand what you're writing. You have to be okay with that. And the other aspect of that is that you have to understand that success is a product of consistency in no matter whether it's your mental health, whether it's work, whether it's school in any facet, if you're consistent, like you don't have to be that creative not to be that intelligent, you know, you know, it's not necessarily about talent, but it's about consistency.

Yung Pueblo: It's hard to, to keep it going, to keep that consistency going. But I keep going because, like, the mission is not complete yet, right? We still have this huge mental health epidemic, and I'm not. I can't fix it alone. I'm one of the very, very many people that you're all helping. Like, you're all doing your part to also try to decrease this devastation of mental health that's happening in the United States and around the world. So I feel like collectively, we all have to do our best to help our minds.

[music]

Bree: Wow, I really love that conversation. So now I'm curious. James, have you ever meditated or journaled or anything of that sort?

James: Yeah, no, I definitely did try meditation for a while. I actually have this like yoga mat sitting in my closet right now where I would, like, sprawl out in my bedroom and like, just try meditating, whether it was like kind of spiritual or just emotional. You know, I think it really like decompressed a lot of stress for me. And it was something good for me to, you know, start my mornings with. In terms of like writing or journaling, I'm not a big writer, actually, so I haven't actually tried that, but I have friends who journal a lot and they, you know, tell me, like whenever they journal about me that the night of. And I think that it's just such a, such a cool way to like let out those kind of emotions. And I think it's always such a good feeling knowing that like, people are like journaling about you. So sharing that with others. I think that's, really nice too. But now I'm curious about you, Bree. Have you ever tried, like, meditation or writing or journaling by any chance?

Bree: Okay, first of all, I find it so nice that people journal about you! No one I know journals about me or journals in general, so I'm kind of jealous. But whatever. [laughs]

James: You never know. You never know, like seriously.

Bree: Yeah, someone might just not be telling me. But moving on. I had a huge meditation phase in 2020. I would do it every single night. I would just put like, my AirPods in and I'd be in my a whole different world. But the thing is, I would I would always listen to guided meditations because somehow I just can't do it by myself and I'd need someone to help me. So yeah, even now I still listen to guided meditations here and there to help me, like just feel less stressed. And when it comes to journaling and writing, I feel like I have like a lot of books that help me like have prompts because just like guided meditations, I need like some sort of like help to kind of get all those thoughts and processes out of me. So it's really great to hear someone like Young Pueblo also utilize the same methods as me.

[theme music]

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JAMES: Theme music by Joseph Broad. Additional music from Blue Dot Sessions.

BREE: If you or someone you know needs help. We have a list of resources at studentreportinglabs.org/mentalhealthresources

[end of theme song]