

Olatokunboh Obasi:

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Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hello and welcome to the Herbs with Rosalee podcast, a show exploring how herbs heal as medicine, as food, and through Nature connection. I'm your host, Rosalee de la Forêt. I created this YouTube channel to share trusted herbal wisdom so that you can get the best results when relying on herbs for your health. I love offering up practical knowledge to help you dive deeper into the world of medicinal plants and seasonal living. Each episode of the Herbs with Rosalee podcast is shared on YouTube, as well as your favorite podcast app. Transcripts and recipes for each episode can be found at HerbsWithRosaleePodcast.com or through the link in the video description. Also in the video description, you'll find other helpful resources. For example, to get my best herbal tips as well as fun bonuses, be sure to sign up for my weekly herbal newsletter. Okay, grab your cup of tea and let's dive in.

I have wanted to have Olatokunboh on the show for a long time now, so it was a pleasure to finally make it happen. I've been listening to Ola's offerings for years now, and I'm always struck by her wisdom and her open-hearted spirit, as well. We recorded this episode while Olatokunboh was in Kenya visiting her family. She told me she was in a mud hut village without any wifi, but she did have some cellular service. It's pretty amazing what technology can do these days. But that being said, we did have some technical difficulties with this episode, and it was actually so bad, we ended up recording on two separate days. We spent about 90 minutes on day one, which included a lot of, "Can you hear me now?" And, "Oops, now you're frozen again." And finally, we just had to call it a day.

And then we finished the interview the following day. The audio, and if you're watching on YouTube, the visual are not stellar for this episode, but as you'll see, the quality of the content makes it well worth the effort. So, lots of gratitude for Ola and her patience and lots of gratitude for Francesca, who did all of the video and audio editing. She definitely had a lot of work cut out for her with this one. For those of you who don't already know my guest, she's the owner of Omaroti Salud y Bienestar, apothecary and wellness space located in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. Olatokunboh Obasi has been working in the wellness field for over 15 years. A yoga and dance instructor, clinical herbalist, nutritionist and birth doula committed to community, holistic health, social justice, and education, she works heavily in community service and Afro Indigenous medicine on the island and beyond.

As a member of the American Herbalist Guild, she was the 2019 award recipient for her notable work in supporting diversity and equity and justice in herbalism. Presently, she coordinates Herbalist Without Borders International on the island of Boriken, providing community service to people in need. She also trains local and online students in clinical herbalism and healing arts through her school, Well of Indigenous Wisdom. A guest presenter and teacher of many

conferences, she's originally from Africa. Her travels around the world are extensive as she integrates traditional knowledge of herbs with her Western education. She received her Masters of Science from Maryland University of Integrative Health. Olatokunboh is a mother of three young adults, and she continues to learn from her children through challenge and tribulation as she shares her journey of life with them and the human family.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Welcome so much to the Herbs with Rosalee Podcast, Ola. I'm just so thrilled to have you here.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Thank you. Thank you, Rosalee. It's nice to be here with you. I've been admiring your work for a while, too. So happy to be with you today.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, and I am kind of just like, you know, even though I know the modern world we live in, it is pretty amazing to me that I get to talk to you while you're in Kenya.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yes. Isn't that amazing?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah. What's it like in Kenya this time of year?

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Oh, it's dry. Hot.... not that hot. Not as hot as Puerto Rico. It depends on where you are. You know, I... My people are from the western province of Kenya, so that's where I am right now, visiting my ancestral home. And it's pretty cool at night, not too cool, and nice and hot in the daytime. It hasn't rained that much. So, it's not rainy season yet, but rainy season will be coming up in a couple months.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Mm-hmm.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

It's beautiful. It's beautiful weather.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah. And you mentioned you spent the day in the forest, so you got to spend time with plants.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yes, I spent time with the plant people. I went to... So, I'm from the western province of – my mother is from the western province of Kenya. It is also where I spent a lot of my childhood. This is where I became an herbalist. So I went with my cousins today to a pretty popular forest for us here. It's a national forest called Kakamega National Forest. And we just walked around, you know, visited some trees and plants and there there's a beautiful view to see the entire forest that covers all our, our ethnic, our ethnic group. Yeah. And I met lots and lots of plants. Fortunately, I didn't get to meet too many animals except for a terrapin, a colobus monkey, couple of colobus monkeys. But I didn't get to meet any leopards or pythons or any, anybody else who's out there, or wild pigs. I also met plant people, of course. I should mention that. I met Ficus which is also a kind of... very popularly found in Puerto Rico, most tropical areas, the Ficus tree, like a fig tree and the fig family. And I met an 800 year old teak tree. I met... I met nettle and gotu kola, *Centella asiatica*. And then I met coffee, wild coffee.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Well, I'm looking out my office window and we got a foot of snow overnight, so it's... It's a little different here. So it's nice to hear about what's going on in [crosstalk] for the world. So you mentioned where you're at, where you became an herbalist. I'd love to hear more about your, you know, plant journey and where that's taken you.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Well, I learned herbalism here, right here, where I am right now. I was about seven years old when it all unlocked for me. Whenever I come home, the elders tell me about myself, my little self, who loved to run around in nature, climb trees, just couldn't stay still. I look around and there's so many eucalyptus trees, you know, different kinds. And eucalyptus was my first plant that I learned. So it's nice to be back and to, to feel your... After so many years, that you're still alive, number one. And number two, that these are the plants that you've... you grew up with. And this place is what formed, formed me as an herbalist and many other things that I am through plant medicine. So that's what it feels like to be here. Hmm. And that's how herbalism has been formed... formed me from this place. And I'm very grateful. But it's also grown in so many ways around the world and had many teachers, many lessons that have created who I am today, including being in Puerto Rico, Boriken, and my teachers there and the land there that has supported my path.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And would you like to speak to any of those different paths that, um, that you found yourself on through the years?

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Sure. Well, you know, Africa's my foundation. My father's Nigerian. And so, you know, Kenya, Nigeria, two populous countries. I feel that both... Kenya supported me as a youth. You know, I grew up here. Nigeria supported me as a young woman entering her spiritual initiation and rite of passage. So I learned plant medicine there in that manner, working with my spirituality and spirituality for others. Puerto Rico. And, you know, I mean, I... I don't wanna miss out my western education with Tai Sophia Institute, which became Maryland University of Integrative Health. And that's an important piece, as well, 'cause that gave me vocabulary and sort of direction and compass to work with the medicine. So I'm very grateful for that education. And then working in Puerto Rico with my godmother in the Taino tradition has been an amazing work of self-realization and also community work.

It's my work in Puerto Rico's taught me a lot about community service and community work. Clients have taught me a lot too, of course, with their feedback. You know, clinical work, clinical herbalism is so satisfying, but also can be very frustrating if you don't get the results you want or people don't get the results that they want. But I often have no frustrations with clinical herbalism. The only one would be just people having good compliance, people taking what they need to take, knowing that herbal medicine is another way of healthcare, whether working side by side with conventional or an option. So it... that's all formed... formed ideas. It's created meat, you know, my school, me becoming a teacher. Yeah. And just growing spiritually as well.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'm so excited that you chose coffee to talk about today, especially 'cause you're basically in the birthplace of coffee right now. You've visited wild coffee today. I also have it, too, because sometimes people don't think of coffee as an herb. You know, that's just... for whatever reason, that's just not... people don't make that connection. And I personally love coffee for people who say herbs don't work. And then, you know, they're often coffee drinkers, so it's like, well...

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Mm-hmm... Hello.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'd love to hear more from you about coffee.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Well, here we call coffee 'kahawa' and coffee moved from East Africa. We're talking about Abyssinia, Ethiopia, which included Kenya. And then we have Somalia. But mostly you would find it in Kenya and Ethiopia. So coffee moved around with Arab... the Arab trade, which included slave trade. That's how it ended up into the western world. Arabs were very big traders between Africa and Europe. And of course, eventually the Americas. The Americas have come to



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be the big coffee makers and drinkers because of this. Right? But it all... it all comes originally from here, from East Africa, particularly here, Kenya or Abyssinia, Ethiopia, Kenya. And we traditionally honor coffee. You know, like anything that becomes really popular.... Let's talk about sage. Let's talk about... even ayahuasca at this moment. Right? Let's talk even tea, tea leaves, which is also here, you know, very prominent cash crop, traditional crop for here for Kenya.

They all once were very sacred, held sacred. Coffee certainly is a sacred, sacred, sacred drink. We hold the beans in sanctity, you know, it's a sacred plant. It's sacred because coffee is, as we all know, is a stimulant, but it gives you so much energy and vitality and vital force and... We honor that, right? But of course, all plants are sacred. So coffee in itself is a strong plant. We've used it to help us with headaches. We've used it traditionally to help us with any stomach aches, as you know, it's a laxative. We wear it, we use it as a detoxifier, wash in it, bathe in it, make enemas with it. It's... you know, make a coffee tea – or, if you wish to say, a coffee infusion to rinse the body and to rid it and strip it of any detox, skin issues, but also, energy, spiritually.

Right? So this is the coffee bean, mainly, that's used, not the leaf. When we drink it, we don't drink a lot. We drink very little. We don't use milk. There's no frappuccino, cappuccino, all that. It's just a cup of dark coffee that has been carefully roasted, collected, roasted... you know, dried first before it's roasted, of course, and then in a specific way, then ground. And then decocted. And then we have coffee ceremonies where we all drink together and join in conversations. Something like you would see with the kava kava ceremonies in the Polynesian areas. The Papua New Guinea culture where people work hard and then they come together and they sit and they have coffee to collect, connect, to reason, to recap their day, to give them inspiration. It's a drink of enlightenment. We always traditionally have our coffee with peanuts and we also have our tea with peanuts. My uncle I went to visit the other day served tea and peanuts; it's tradition. Sesame seeds and peanuts. So, our coffee salt.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Well, thank you for sharing all of that. And I... One thing that sticks out for me is that you're talking about all these different ways of working with the coffee plant, not just as a drink, but also working with it externally, which makes me think of your recipe, the coffee scrub. And I'm wondering if you would just kind of walk us through that recipe and share a bit about that with us.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yeah, so it's a pretty common recipe. I think a lot of people do it now here. You know, we wear coffee a lot and we mix it with... Actually, a part that I didn't put in the recipe is cloves as an option. So clove oil. I just didn't think about it because it's not a common thing to get a hold of in the western world, but it's pretty common here. So I did add almonds, but... So the recipe is... includes freshly ground coffee, so the coffee beans freshly ground. And of course another very special plant that connects me to the Americas is cacao. So the cacao beans also freshly

ground. And then just mix it up together and blend with coconut oil, which is very common here and has become a common oil around the world.

It grows in the tropics. Yeah, that's grown in Puerto Rico as well. And then vanilla, which is really common here and almonds, as well, which are both... almonds are very common in Puerto Rico. So I like this scrub to wake me up in the morning. I like it to invigorate, 'cause as I said, coffee's an inspirational plant... has that essence of inspiration and focus. So I've also made flower essences with coffee flowers. That's really powerful. It helps you focus, it helps you move through difficult tasks and thoughts. So I very much appreciate that with coffee. And I feel that when I do the coffee scrub in the morning, it's like... If I have a lot of clients and then it'll be a challenging day, I'll just prepare myself with that coffee essence.

It takes away bad odor, as well. So that's not anything I'm really experiencing, but just thought about that as far as people who might be having... are energetically more... what in Ayurveda is called pitta-like constitutions... Coffee's really, really good for people like that.

So, yep, that's the basics. Basics of the scrub is to exfoliate the skin... anything that's dark or hyper pigmentation, eczemas, psoriasis, that type of situation, fungi, all sorts of skin care and just detox. I use coffee for that inside and out, yes? And of course, there's abuse of coffee; you know, too much coffee, just like too much chocolate, is not so good. All the caffeine can be a little too stimulating for hormonal women. Bleeding, during menses that would just be... I'd avoid and take caution with that. It's that... something people haven't done. Or coffee [inaudible] internally. Sorry for those pieces.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'd love if you could share some tips about sourcing coffee 'cause there's a lot of problematic coffee sources. So yeah. What would you like to share about that?

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Well, that's good, a good question. Thinking about the coffee that I use, I get local coffee in Puerto Rico and... or here, I actually, my great aunt, my grandmother's sister, owns a coffee farm, tea farm. She's pretty sick right now, so she hasn't been managing that. So I am basically very big on local access. So I ask people to look into that. I mean, that's my practice. So, when I make coffee scrubs to sell or for my personal use, I just always source local. And in Puerto Rico, I go as local as the region that I stay in. So there's several regions. For instance, I stay in a region called Hormigueros; there's other regions like Lares, you know, other places. And there're lots of coffee farms in those areas. But I tend to only actually purchase coffee from Hormigueros, which is where I stay in Maya... a little city outside of Mayagüez. I would try not to do anything large industry, you know, definitely not Nescafe or anything big like that. Right? Just choose as local as you can and if you can make it yourself, which is a lot of work, do it, try it, especially as an herbalist, it's good to try these things from scratch, curing the coffee beans, et cetera.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And since you see a lot of coffee farms, do you see a difference in like the health of the land between say, organically grown or shade grown? It's often commonly put on labels too.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Absolutely.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Absolutely. I mean, the land is... Anyone who produces mindfully and their interest is obviously to produce to... for economical benefits, which is fine. But when you have equal interest in the health of the land and health of the plant and health of people as in economical benefits of, of the plant, you know, that the plant can bring to you, then I think that makes a very good marriage. Yeah. Of good medicine. And so, for instance, one of my neighbors who was a, he was a Nationalista, which is a type of revolutionary in Puerto Rico, who... I actually like revolutionaries. My grandfather was a revolutionary here in Kenya actually, in the Mau Mau. So I have volunteered on his land and, you know, visited his house, which is where he was assassinated actually. Anyway, there's coffee there.

So it's got an energy, yeah, it's got an energy of revolution. It's got an energy of, you know, somebody who stood up for the land and for the people, wanted independence for Puerto Rico until death, right there where he wanted independence. So for me, it says a lot about the plant medicine that comes from that land, that type of tending and the spirit that is on the land still.

So I think people should choose sources that connect with their own story or their belief because that makes the medicine different. You wear it differently, you... you're really wearing the whole story of the land and those who were associated with it. Walking in the forest here today, seeing all the wild coffee was like... tears came to my eyes because, number one, this is not just... I'm not just in Kenya, I'm in where my tribe is from and that... We cannot trace, but maybe thousands of years ago migrated in this space.

So how many of my ancestors have walked in that forest? You know, how many have associated themselves with those plants? That just gives such a fuzzy feeling; connection that's so, so, so, so profound, so, so, so deep. And so to see that coffee there and knowing that its origins are from here just brings such a smile on my face. So that coffee, that coffee medicine is, is different, you know, speaking of plant medicine and land, right? And how, how I give back... The coffee medicine is... is different. It has ancestral reasons. So when I wear it and feel it, drink it, I'm really like connecting with the old ones.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hmmm. I'm so glad that you brought that up because some of my favorite teachings from you are about that connection to the land and the connection to the plants around you and just what a powerful approach to herbalism that can be. There's kind of... There's studying plants on paper, but then there's being with the plants and working with the plants that... your land. So, and that's like, for me, that's where the juiciness is of herbalism and really the, I don't know, its essence in a way, that really brings it all to life.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yes, yes, yes, yes. I mean, you just can't take the land away from herbalism. While I love bottles and jars and I'm certainly a collector of all of those, you know, just... I don't know any herbalist who doesn't have heaps of jars and containers – you know, “I might use for another day. Somebody might need this.” That material, of course, is just a container for... for what we want to put together. And then of course, what we want to put together comes from somewhere, right? So the land is the... We just don't have it without the land. That end product container is nothing compared to where it begins, which is on that earth, the bones and the minerals of the earth. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Thank you for saying that. So herbalism is just beautiful with this knowledge of land connection.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Mmm. Yeah. Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to share about coffee?

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Hmm. Other than that, like most sacred plants, it would be nice to see more honor of the plant. And even this knowledge I feel like I'm sharing is not known. And unfortunately, it's an example of many herbs and plant medicines that... We should use them and I know things go around and are carried in water and carried by people and that's fine, but it's good to... It's good to be aware of that. Like anyone who's in the western world or in Europe or Asia, drinking coffee, as they put that drink to their lips, it should be, “Oh, thank you, Africa, for this drink.” Right? It's almost like these transfers of blessings. It's the same thing I do with cacao. You know, it's like, “Oh, thank you Americans; thank you, native people of Americas for this, for these beans. So how... how do we bless each other in, in... with these plants? That's what that's about. Yeah. So I just ask people to get out of the kind of Starbucks mode of coffee and think about it when you put it to your lips, you know, how blessings, send some blessings to this land here for bringing this up in this part of the world.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hmm. I love that, Ola. Every time I drink coffee, I'm going to do that now. It's...

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Good. Good. It's like blowing a kiss across the world.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

What I love about it is that when we have blessings for the things that we're drinking or eating, it's just this whole reciprocal action, right? That by, it's like... by me having gratitude, I also get blessings from that because it's just this like continual loop of good.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Absolutely. Absolutely. You get it, you get it. It's no loss. Nobody loses.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

So true. Well, I'm really excited to hear what's going on in your herbal world right now, because you have a lot going on and a really awesome school. So I just, I wanna hear all about it. Everything you have to share.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yeah. Well, oh, in my, herbal world. Oh my goodness. Okay. So what's coming up is I have the Caribbean Herbal Symposium. This is the first one. And we are holding it in February. February 9th to February 12th. We have rent... We're renting out a space called the Hacienda Juanita and people can stay over and their meals, they will be served... and awesome teachers from all over the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, Boriken. So I had a vision in 2020 to put, simplify the people together in Puerto Rico, in Boriken. That's where it started. And then I thought, oh, you know, we need to unite Boriken with other Caribbean people. 'Cause it felt, feels like very isolated from the Caribbean, I think because it's a US territory, colony. So, it's... people tend to just focus on the US and there's just that interrelationship.

And of course, because of political reasons, it's harder to connect with other Caribbean countries where... very close neighbors. So I figured, you know, let's do this. Let's put this, let's put healers together. They're awesome healers, awesome. People live in the mountains all over who know so much plant medicine. They don't get... they're not on Instagram, Facebook, social media, written books, but they're there and they're our teachers, you know, those of us who are on social media, written books and, you know, teaching. So they need to be heard and they need their work to be shown and represented. And another thing is we need to all unite and sometimes in the healing community we're just so separated, you know? So I wanted us to come together and to share with each other because I'm very committed to the Taino tradition there. I, as an African – so the Afro indigenous aspect of myself, indigenous to here, and then the indigenous adoption to there – I felt that I wanted to represent these people who are hardly represented in herbalism. There comes a Caribbean Herbal Symposium so people can come to learn about Afro indigenous people and medicines and healing and herbalism also know that

we have a narrative that has been there forever and we are willing to share, you know, to share it. So that's one of my projects,

Rosalee de la Forêt:

This symposium, I can just tell. It just feels so important and is quite the vision. And like you said, pulling in people who, you know, live in the mountains or aren't on social media and learning from these people is just so important. And I'm wondering how people can be involved with the symposium.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yes. Well, in several ways. We are accepting sponsorship. We need sponsorship to... If anyone has run a symposium or gathering, it takes... It's a lot more than you think it is. And I'm definitely learning that, as we've been planning it, myself and the team. That information will be available at the CaribbeanHerbalSymposium.com. We also have the Caribbean Herb Symposium Instagram link. And people can come and attend when registration opens. You know, people are welcome to come to the classes and learn with respect. We have community agreements, you know, that ask for us to be respectful and open-minded and not appropriate all these agreements and to share the word like what you're doing, Rosalee. You know, this is creating a forum, this space for people to know about the Caribbean Herbal Symposium. This is just the first year. We expect that it will grow throughout the years and the years to come. We ask that people share. Come if you can. It's February 9th to 12th.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

All right. So here we are, day two of recording this podcast. Thanks again so much for your patience, Ola. I'm just so, so grateful that you're here and really enjoying the conversation despite the technical difficulties. And where we left off is you were sharing about the Caribbean Symposium, which I am so excited about. The second that I heard about this from you, I knew, I just saw it was gonna be a very impactful event, a very important event. And I don't know if you know this, but I lived in the Dominican Republic, so the Caribbean has a special place in my heart.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yeah. I didn't know.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah. So I'm just, I'm really excited about it. And so I wanted to just recap that people can be involved by... If they own an herbal business, they could be a sponsor.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yes.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

But you're also accepting small donations from everybody because it takes so much to get a conference going.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yes.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Like you said, people don't really know that... know everything that goes into it, 'cause they just show up, you know, for the events. But it takes months of planning and you have to rent. I mean, you have to put out a lot of money to rent the space and get the teachers taken care of and on and on and on. So, people... You're looking for business sponsors, but even small donations and I know small donations can add up. They're really important.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yes.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

So I will put links on how to donate in the show notes.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Thank you.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

So people can easily find that and be a part of this really important event. And yeah, thank you for having this vision, for sticking with it for a couple years even. And yeah... and I'm excited to see how it comes into fruition.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yeah. Thank you so much.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, thank you. So that's the Herbal Symposium. And I also really wanna hear about your school because you have a lot of wonderful things going on there. And even just this conversation, I'm just like a little bit jealous of your students to be able to spend so much time with you and just be a part of your wisdom circle and all that you have to share. So I'd love to hear more about your school.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yes. Well, I have... I run the Well of Indigenous Wisdom School. Um, been since 2012 and started in Pittsburgh and then moved on to Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. I have small groups. I used to... I'm just changing. For 2023, I'm gonna have one class a year. But I had been having a group of 6 or 7, 5, 6, 7 students, three times a year. And it just has become overwhelming. So now I'm doing it differently. One of... Indigenous Wisdom School focuses on indigenous wisdom. So it's the best I can do because that's what my lifestyle is anyway... So-called modern, indigenous person or woman, where I am right now in this very, very rural area. You know, people still are living in mud huts here. You know, I mentioned this is a first place I learned about healing arts and medicine. This is my tribe here.

I'm with my tribe right now here. And so that background is just the foundation of – is, is, not “just” – is the foundation of my whole essence. The wisdom that I learned, not just from words, but from action, from learning to be an observer, from learning how to speak manifestation, how to be simple yet powerful in all our actions. And how to really be intentional when we're making medicine. Because I learned from my first teacher here that we make medicine not just from the plants, but we make medicine to add our own essence... we, the medicine person who's making the medicine. So that's indigenous wisdom. You know, we are not working with machines and factories and processing industry, which are good and fine. However, that's a different, an industrialized kind of lifestyle.

Indigenous wisdoms really speaks about the wisdom of the ancestors, the wisdom of the earth, wisdom of nature, and putting that and injecting it into each lifestyle and each intentional thing that you do, which... everything we do should be intentional and with purpose. The Wisdom School is a 14 month program of – well, I'm adding a third part, so it's got three levels. So it's, the first level is about indigenous wisdom, about learning how to heal. I believe that students and people who work with people in healing – ‘cause this is a clinical herbalism track – should really know what they need to heal in themselves. People should learn how to understand their own needs and their own healing before they work with other people. Just, there's been so many healers who hurt their clients. So the first level is that, you know, learning how to heal oneself, tools that are needed to work with healing, discovering the magic and spirituality of plant medicine.

And the second level is more clinical, materia medica, physiology. But I take it a little in an interesting way because I like... Really, I love a lot to discuss the physiology in a way of the cosmos, which is indigenous wisdom, you know, in a metaphysical way. So, we as the body are part of the cosmos and the stars and interconnected with the insect world, the ants and the termites and the worms and all the microbes that also exist. And so I use this wisdom and integrate it into the physiology, how we have become who we are and also how we stay healthy and how we stay connected. We stay connected as we are an image of that which is outside of us in the whole universe. So we are cosmic beings, right? Cause we live in a cosmic world. Yeah. So then materia medica comes in with that.

And then the third level is a mentorship program. It was not mandatory. Now it is. So I found that it's helping students to be more successful, to give them more guidance and to have them experience clinic with me. Before, you know, just finish the theory and then say, okay, go out there and do clinical work and, you know, just have a couple of days of clinical observation and supervision. But now I'm opening that up and with the mentorship it will be about a three week program. It has always been, but now it's mandatory. So it will be three weeks together with me and I'll have three clinics. So I'll set up clients in the community. At the moment, I've been doing it only in Puerto Rico. But now I'm going to open it up to here, to Africa, to here, my village and have locals be our... come for free clinics. And so we can serve them with herbal medicine here.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hmm. That's wonderful.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yeah. Yes.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love in the sharing about your school, I feel like we just get a deeper look into what all it is that you have to offer. So thank you for that.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Yes, yes. You're welcome. Thank you. I like... I really, really love staying connected with my students. I just see them as colleagues and I like to see what they do. I really love to see people successful and that's what I... the school wants, is people to be successful, be useful, be... fulfill their purpose out there in the planet. So that's part of it. You know, indigenous wisdom is endless and timeless and it can be applied anywhere and anyhow. It's not a linear, you know... has an expiration date. It's always able to be built. I tell my students that, you hear what I'm saying, but build on it. And make it twisted into your own lifestyle and your own experiences. 'Cause that is wisdom. Wisdom is the experience we have that we can never really buy or learn and read in a book. We just have to live life. That's how we get wise. The school promotes that, promotes an everlasting connection with each other and also with myself as a teacher and founder of the school.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's beautiful. Is there anything else you'd like to share about the projects that you have going on in your life?

Olatokunboh Obasi:

No, I mean, you know, I already discussed about the Caribbean Herbal Symposium, something that I'm really excited about. I just can't wait to see how this comes together, this January, this

connect... collection of people we've selected to teach. Just, it's just amazing to have the first Caribbean symposium ever, Herbal Symposium. It's amazing. And I hope that there'll be a lot of people who will attend and putting it out there that I would like to have a whole bunch of people attend and register when we open registration. Please come out and support. You're not... you know, this is supporting the teachers. This is supporting people who are out there that haven't been known, who are powerful, who are beautiful, who are knowledgeable, who are wise, who are spiritual, doing really good work in the community. Grassroots people, leaders.

We have a cacique from Jamaica who will be coming. He's an awesome leader. He's a medicine man. He's going to be sharing ritual with us and showing us Taino ritual.

So please do come out and support. Send this information around to other people who you know would like to support the Caribbean Herbal Symposium. Support doesn't come in only one way. It could be the monetary support, there's the sharing support, word of mouth, or just saying, "Hey, I like what you're doing." And just send a love heart like on Instagram and keep following. There's always just a prayer and intention out there to support our cause and to build us up.

I also work with Herbalists Without Borders. To be honest, I haven't been very strong in that direction. This last hurricane took a lot out of me. It's partly why I'm also here with my family – excuse, my uncle is in the background – because I needed to really rest. I was very, very tired. And you know, if you work in the healing and herbal circle, you know that rest is so important and support from your beloved. So my family said, "Come home and let's take care of you."

But Herbalists Without Borders, please continue to support them.

And locally I work with Boricua Barefoot Doctors. And it's a small grassroots group that we also helped during...and I did work with them after the hurricane. So we work on the floor. So if you wanna follow Boricua Barefoot Doctors on Facebook and support them, please do so. At least just follow so you can see how you can support moving forward.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wonderful. Thank you for sharing that. I also had wanted to say for people to attend the symposium, to share about the symposium. So I'm so glad you said that so beautifully and eloquently. And to finish...

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Thank you.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah. To finish, I ask everyone the same question. And admittedly, it feels a little silly to ask you this question 'cause I feel like you've just been oozing this the entire time we've been chatting together. But to follow the formula, I'm gonna ask it to you anyway. And the season six last

question is this: The plants give us so much, how do you like to give back to the plants in reciprocity?

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Mm, indeed. The plants give us so much. Yeah, I mean, the forest walk yesterday that we were talking about with the coffee and nettles and all the other beautiful plants that they give us those sorts of... Cedar and, you know, Thuja, right? And just a family, a grand family of Thuja, of cedar. I recognize and reciprocate plants because I recognize that they are so giving, their empathy and their love is so available and open anytime, anyhow, anyway, right? And so it's my purpose to give back to the plant world by always educating. I was with young people yesterday, young cousins, and I was – all young men – and I was saying to them, “You know, we shouldn't be littering. When we cut down trees, we should replant them.”

We need to be aware of how our ecosystem functions. Let's keep recycling. Let's not overburden the earth, right? Let's allow certain plants to grow. Let's allow mushrooms to grow, fungi to survive. Let's not think that certain things are dirty or... Let's also learn to coexist with the animals. We know that butterflies and bees and worms and earthworms and all these little creatures that are so, so important in running and managing our life on this planet need to survive. And so, in my educational practices, even on my Instagram, I'm always posting about animals if that occurs – or speaking to the community, to children, to young people, to my students, anywhere that I can, about conserving and paying attention to how the ecosystem runs so that everything can... plants can survive as well as us and as well as the animals that are around us.

The park I went to yesterday was wonderful because there are leopards there. There're leopards, there's wild pig. There's the Colobus monkey, which is the white and black monkey. There are terrapins. What else? Many other creatures there. And I asked a guide who was guiding us through the hike, how does he feel about these animals? Because most people are afraid of these animals. Oh, there's pythons. Yes, that's that one, too. So he says, “I don't kill them, you know, if they're bothering right, that's when you do kill them.” But most people are afraid of animals, afraid of certain plants. So they want to kill them or get rid of them. They think that they're a nuisance, like weeds – which we all know that many weeds are medicine. And so, we have to become more knowledgeable. Let's get more educated and understand that animals and plants and the whole ecosystem works together. And if we kill them, then we are also cutting off a food chain. We're cutting off an aspect of our own lives. Lastly, I reciprocate because... And how I reciprocate is in just my entire lifestyle, knowing that I am a reflection of what is outside of me. So to keep what else, what is outside of me beautiful and healthy means that I'm also caring for myself, right? And my children and my grandchildren in seven generations. So this is how I reciprocate and I... Sorry, I hope I... that wasn't so large of an explanation.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, that was beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing that. And thank you again for being here and for sharing your wisdom about coffee and for all the gifts that you spread throughout the world, through your school, through this new symposium and in sharings like this.

Olatokunboh Obasi:

Thank you. Thank you so much, Rosalee, for this. I appreciate it.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thanks for watching. Don't forget to click the link in the video description to get free access to Olatokunboh's recipe for a coffee scrub. This would make a wonderful gift for the holidays. Also available are the complete show notes, including the transcript. And there's also links for those of you who would like to support the Caribbean Herbal Symposium, whether it's through donating, sharing about the event or attending. You can also find Olatokunboh on Instagram and through her website, WellOfIndigenousWisdom.com. If you enjoyed this interview, then before you go, be sure to click the subscribe button, so you'll be the first to get my new videos, including interviews like this. I'd also love to hear your comments about this interview and your herbal thoughts about coffee. I deeply believe that this world needs more herbalists and plant centered folks. I'm so glad to have you here as part of this herbal community. Have a beautiful day.