



EUDAEMONIA **Growth, with Eboni Adams Monk**

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Kim Forrester (00:00):

From the day we are born, we're programmed to grow, learn and broaden our perspective. But once we reach adulthood, it can take a conscious effort to continue exploring, evolving, and transforming our identity. I'm Kim Forrester. You're listening to the Eudaemonia podcast and today it's time to go deep into the topic of growth.

Intro (00:27):

Welcome to Eudaemonia, the podcast that is all about flourishing. Plug in, relax and get ready for the goodness as we explore the traits and practices that can help you thrive in life, with your host Kim Forrester.

Kim Forrester (00:47):

Eboni Adams Monk is a transformational leader, author, yoga teacher, and wisdom keeper. After immersing herself in indigenous cultural and spiritual traditions with elders from Afro-Brazilian, Hindu, and Native American Choctaw communities, Eboni became a strong advocate for the preservation of indigenous culture and philosophy. I'm delighted to be connecting with Eboni today to discuss the inherent value of personal expansion and transformation, and to explore how a willingness to grow is vital if we truly want to thrive. Eboni Adams Monk, it is just a delight to have you with me here on the Eudaemonia podcast. Thank you so much for gifting your time here today.

Eboni Adams Monk (01:32):

Oh, thank you for the invitation. I'm so glad to be here with you.

Kim Forrester (01:36):

Eboni, a lot of your work is embedded in the indigenous teachings and spiritual philosophies of the world so my first question is pretty clear. What do the wisdom traditions of the world have to teach us about growth and transformation in the modern world?

Eboni Adams Monk (01:53):

Such a lovely question. You know, when I think about it, all of these wisdom traditions, their cultures, their knowledge, their wisdom is still here. That is the epitome of growth and transformation - that that wisdom could survive, could transform, could adapt to this modern world. A couple of things that I've learned, and the wisdom traditions that I've had the honor of learning from, stem from West African traditions. The cultures that I've had the honor of being a part of are elders from the West African traditions, as they've been maintained in Brazil, specifically in Bahia. I've had teachers from Native American Choctaw traditions, as well as a teacher who studied quite extensively in India. And the one very interesting takeaway for me is that all of these wisdom traditions are located in different places, geographically the world, but there was this universal thread that they all taught. And one of them is that we're here for a purpose. I used to tell my children when they were younger, this is the Earth school. Earth is the school. It's the place where we come to learn. But more importantly, it's the place where we

come to learn to let the Earth shape us. And these human experiences, they shape us. These wisdom traditions acknowledge the fact that we are human beings, we're in a body, we're here to learn. And it's a process. It's a journey, and everybody's journey looks different. And growth and transformation is a natural process. If you think about the butterfly as one of my favorite metaphors for growth and transformation, the butterfly is such a beautiful symbol. We all admire the butterfly's growth and beauty, but it's a process for that butterfly to become what it is. It starts as this caterpillar. And then it transforms over a course of time. And then it emerges. And for me, that is one of the greatest takeaways that these wisdom traditions have taught, which is that it's a process. And surrender, and you allow it to shape you and move into it with curiosity because you never know where it may take you.

Kim Forrester (04:28):

Let's go back to that beautiful imagery of the butterfly, because it is one that I think we attach to quite readily. And yet I think a lot of people use that process of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly to talk about the struggle behind growth. You know, there is a story we've bought into Eboni, that growth must come through some kind of pain or challenge and struggle. And certainly, I believe that's true in many cases, but if we look to nature, nature is also telling us that a lot of growth happens effortlessly and easily. So what do you think we can learn from nature about growth and specifically the relationship between growth and struggle?

Eboni Adams Monk (05:15):

Well, one of my teachers would say, "You learn by living" and it was such a beautiful lesson for me. I remember going to her and saying, "I want to learn this, I want to learn that, I want to learn these songs, I want to learn this philosophy. I want to learn all these things." And she just looked at me very calmly and said, "Well, you learn by living." And I think that's the real lesson, and that is that this doesn't have to be a manufactured process. It doesn't even necessarily have to be something that we are intentionally setting up for ourselves. Yes, we may have intention. We have intention to want to grow or an intention to want to understand something better than we did the day before, but the reality is when we just allow ourselves to just be and encounter all of the experiences that come to us - that end up on our path - there's a natural way that the Earth has of helping us to grow. You know, think about the river and the river flows. And I always loved the imagery of the river shaping over years and years, shaping the rough stones to the point where they become smooth. And that process is just about recognizing that we don't have to force it. We can move with ease. We can simply be.

Kim Forrester (06:51):

I love that, Eboni. It is saying of course, that a lot of growth can't necessarily be clearly defined. A lot of the growth that we go through on a day-to-day basis is so subtle and so effortless - because it's just growth through living - that we can't then go home and sort of place a tick in the to-do list and say, "Yeah, I learned that today, or I grew in that way today." But here's another interesting thing that I discovered while I was researching for this interview, children grow while they sleep and plants actually grow best at night. So is there a parallel for us there? Do you think if we expand on this idea of growth coming through living and growth, coming through situations where we're not necessarily putting in an effort, do you think we grow best when we are quiet and still and resting?

Eboni Adams Monk (07:44):

Well, I think that depends. And this is where the indigenous cultures that I've been a part of

have really played a little bit of a different role than what some of us may think. When we think about growth or transformation, many times - I have an image going through my head right now - sitting in the yoga studio, on my yoga mat and breathing and meditating and being very still and quiet. And there certainly is strength and power in reflection. There is strength and power in allowing ourselves to settle and be still so that our body can reset; so that our minds can be clear; so that our entire being can be in harmony. And on the other end of the spectrum, you know, in West Africa, we sing and we dance and we play the drums and there is a lot of growth that comes from that. I've had some magical nights that I can recall of, listening to the music and the drum beats and the harmonies and listening to the women in the community, singing and clapping their hands. And when that night is over recalling the power that came from that. So I think it depends. Sometimes we need quiet and sometimes we need to move our bodies because there's wisdom in our bodies as well.

Kim Forrester (09:16):

Is it wise to be rooted into something as we grow, as a plant is in the Earth? And if so, what is it that you are rooted into Eboni? What grounds you as you expand your experience of life?

Eboni Adams Monk (09:33):

Yes. I think it's imperative to be rooted in something otherwise we flit about, and that can be fun to be adventurous and to move about. I always say, be rooted to the Earth, right? So we know where center is. We know where home is, but let your branches, let your branches, let them go, let them be free, go and explore. For me, I'm rooted in my body. So I spend time walking. Walking the earth is a very grounding and rooting experience for me. I've had dreams where my head is just lying gently on the earth, the green of the earth. A very grounding and rooted experience. The other thing that grounds me is culture, is African culture. Being able to have a philosophy, some wisdom, some remembrances to come back to are very important as I move about the Earth, as I move about my day. When I'm at work, sitting in an office and things are going crazy and I'm multitasking, it's good to be able to breathe and remember something that one of my elders told me, right? That's home. That's rooting for me.

Kim Forrester (10:57):

Wow. Let's talk about a home in a different context. I left my homeland about 19 years ago, I left New Zealand 19 years ago, and I've been traveling around the world, living around the world, exploring new cultures, growing in huge, profound ways in the last 19 years. Probably to the point, I think, where I long for growth if there's none going on around me. Now I know a lot of other people prefer not to be that active in terms of exploration and expansion and growth. What happens though, if we resist growth, Eboni? Is there anything particularly troublesome about choosing to stay who you are, where you are, with no need nor desire to change?

Eboni Adams Monk (11:45):

Well, first of all, there's always choice. There's no judgment. If someone chooses to stay where they are, to continue to do the same things that they always do, there is no judgment in that choice. That's that person's choice. And that may be where they feel called. I would wonder if there is always change that is happening regardless of how big or how small. I have gone through quite some transformational experiences - having a child, going through a divorce, right? That's huge, huge change. Relocating to a different state, huge change. In many ways I was forced to grow, right? You can't go through that much change, you know, and not really move ahead and experience and learn something. But sometimes it's the little things that are

just as impactful as some of those bigger changes in our lives. So certainly if there is an opportunity to grow and we choose not to, well, I always say that lesson will come back again. That opportunity will certainly present itself again. They always do.

Kim Forrester (13:06):

Do you feel that there are signs in our lives? Because we can get very comfortable, even those of us who are adventurous can become comfortable, to the point where we are literally ignoring those signs where life is stepping in, the Earth is stepping in, the universe is stepping in and saying, "Hey, you're being invited into a new way of being, you're being invited to grow in this particular way." I think of the butterfly inside the cocoon and it's being called now to break out and become a flying butterfly. Are there signs that tell us, "Hey, life is actually asking you to grow here" and you are choosing - perhaps unconsciously, but you are choosing - to ignore the compulsion to grow in that way.

Eboni Adams Monk (13:52):

I believe so. I believe so from a very practical standpoint, in my own life, what I've noticed is people will come to me and ask me for something. Let's just say advice. And let's say, I've decided I'm not going to give people advice about a particular topic. I don't want to participate in that. And someone may come to me and ask me that very thing that I'm running from, and I don't engage. The next thing I know, somebody else comes and then someone else comes and then someone else comes. So the reason, actually, why I've written articles and some of the books that I have is because the messages would not go away. So when you see that the same thoughts, the same desires, the same people show up time and time again, I always like to say, this is maybe for a reason. Perhaps I should investigate this? Perhaps, right? Even nature has a way of showing up. I like to walk outside. There are a lot of trees, a lot of nature trails where I live and it is not the rare occasion for me to see a hawk that may symbolize my need to open up, perhaps, and be more open. And to see a Hawk three days in a row, right? And so there are things like that that I've learned to pay attention to. These wisdom traditions teach us to pay attention, observe what's happening around us.

Kim Forrester (15:34):

I love that whole idea of nature speaking to us and I cast my mind back to the last 18 months through the COVID-19 pandemic. And it seems to me that the Earth has provided us, as a species, the opportunity to grow in some really important and profound ways. And I'm often saying to people that if you choose to come out the other end of this pandemic the same person you went in, then that is absolutely fine. But I do feel that if you have not grown in any way over the last 18 months, then you have missed an opportunity. Because I believe that, truly, the Earth and nature and this virus asked us to be still, to go onto the yoga mat, if you will, and reflect and grow in wonderful ways. But let's talk about relentless growth. So this is more like me. This is the point where I'm at, where growth is such an inherent part of my day-to-day existence that I tend to search for it everywhere. I tend to yearn for it. My experience is one of constantly reflecting, and refining my choices and my behaviors, and seeking to learn and grow. I am actively engaged every day in becoming a greater version of myself. And it can actually be really exhausting sometimes. There are many going through life with such a huge spotlight on personal growth. Do you think there's such a thing as too much growth or, I'm going to say, 'growth fatigue'?

Eboni Adams Monk (17:12):

I believe there is growth fatigue. I do believe that as possible. I believe that it is possible to take in so much in a short period of time that it simply overwhelms our system. Our minds need time to rest. That's why we meditate. That's why people do yoga. So we do need time to integrate, right? Integrate is really important. We need time to not take anything else in, but to actually step back for just a moment and allow the cells in our body to catch up. I think about transformation and it's like, okay, we're going to go to this retreat, and then I'm going over here and I'm going to read this book and get this certification. And the body is being impacted. It truly is. The mind and the body, our spirits are being impacted by that. And it needs time to all integrate. I recall when I've gone away to some transformational experiences with some of my teachers and we might work all day, just all this work, relentless, right? Relentless work, relentless going inside. And when that's over, we dance. When it's over, we eat a grounding meal because you know, we can't just live only in those upper chakras. We have to also make sure that we're balanced and we're nurturing those lower chakras that out us as well.

Kim Forrester (18:50):

Eboni, do you think that, like a seed, we're destined to grow into a particular version of ourselves? Or, in your view, do we have the freedom around the ways that we choose to evolve and a freedom to choose who we transform into?

Eboni Adams Monk (19:10):

Well, I believe there is choice. I believe there is freedom and I almost feel like it's a chicken and the egg question. When we talk about destiny, you know, some of my teachers would say - would look at my life and where I am now and they would say - "Yes, we knew that. We were told that this is where you would be." At the same time, they were my choices. I own all of them that got me to this point. So perhaps, I don't know, maybe it's not an either-or, and maybe there's space for both of those ideas to exist in parallel.

Kim Forrester (19:55):

So our seed, rather than carrying a blueprint of who we can become, sort of carries tools or clues to, you know, our greatest version of self and we can choose how to use that potential.

Eboni Adams Monk (20:08):

That's right. Absolutely. I believe we come to the planet with tools. We come to the planet with potential, as you say, and how we use that is our choice. But in many ways, our greatest gifts, the things that are truly ours, they can't help but express themselves. They can't help but attract these different experiences to us that help us to land exactly where we need to be.

Kim Forrester (20:38):

I have experienced that. Let's talk about growth and how it relates to our relationship with others. And let's talk about relationships in particular. Do you think that there is such a thing as growing apart from partners and friends? And if so, what's your advice to anyone out there listening now, who's feeling this expanding distance in one of their close relationships?

Eboni Adams Monk (21:05):

I think there's some truth to it. You know, whether it is ... You know, maybe it's instead of growing apart, maybe it's easier for our human sensibilities to think of it more as we walk a path - there are many paths in life - and we walk a path with some people for a specified amount of

time, for a variety of experiences. And there will be points along the way where other paths will present themselves to us and we have the choice to go down one path or another. I mean, that's a very poetic way of saying it. The reality is that it can be a very painful process that opens our hearts, maybe cracks them a little bit. And my advice would be to honor every feeling that comes up for you, because there is wisdom there. Acknowledge the love, because love always exists, even when that person is walking a different path than the one we may choose for ourselves. Give yourself grace and recognize that we are human. And yes, there may be some feelings that are uncomfortable and it's okay. And then finally give yourself permission to let go.

Kim Forrester (22:33):

You also write of the importance of community and obviously in your learning and in your work, connecting with the indigenous communities around the world has been a huge part of what you do. I actually think that many people approach the concept of growth, particularly personal growth, as an individual pursuit. It can feel quite isolating or lonely at times. How has connection and community helped you grow in your life and your career, Eboni? And do you feel that community is a powerful force for individual transformation?

Eboni Adams Monk (23:12):

I can't speak enough about the power of community. Indigenous cultures didn't live in a bubble, people didn't live in a bubble. They lived together and everyone in the community had a role that they played. There are people in the community who teach. There are people in the community who model, and there are people in the community who learn, and people in the community who contribute. One of the earlier lessons that I learned is that we actually grow and we learn the really powerful lessons with other people. Because that's where we're tested. Think about your relationships. Someone doesn't say something that you want them to say, and we get into ... we have all this drama and trauma around it. That wouldn't happen if you were alone with your thoughts someplace. So community is such an enriching experience. It helps us to grow, but community is also support. My, I call them my older brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and fathers, and aunts, and uncles, and my spiritual communities -and even in my family - they are the ones who give me the advice. They are the ones to pick me up when I fall, they're the ones to let me know that it's okay. And they're also the ones to challenge me and help me to see my blind spots. And that's exactly what's happened in my life and I carry that over into my work. Work is a community. It's a work community. It is a community. There is a vision, there is a purpose. People are working together - most of the time - toward a specific goal. There are people who have been working in their offices at their jobs for 30 years and some have been there for two. So it is a mirror. It is a mirror to those indigenous communities that have raised me and taught me so much. And we have the same opportunity to do that at work.

Kim Forrester (25:27):

I hear you talking about, you know, receiving advice and being challenged by people that you love and trust in your community. And it strikes me that we can all grow in really profound ways if we are willing to hear other's perspectives. But that takes an awful lot of humility, Eboni, and you do write that humility is very important for growth. And surrender as well, you say, is vital if we want to transform. So what are we surrendering to when it comes to our growth and why is humility so important?

Eboni Adams Monk (26:04):

I believe we're surrendering to ourselves. We're surrendering to ourselves because ultimately what we all really want is to be ourselves, our true selves; to have that emerge and express itself in the world. And humility is so important in that process because it's very difficult, as you alluded to, to hear if we're not being humble. It's very difficult to learn something new. If we think we already know the answer.

Kim Forrester (26:39):

My final question, Eboni, is one that I ask every guest on the Eudaemonia podcast. Can you offer a morning reminder - so this may be a practice, a mantra, perhaps a favorite affirmation - something that can help my listeners grow as they go about their day?

Eboni Adams Monk (26:56):

I absolutely can. Yes, I would love to. I have two, one is really quick. The other one is a little bit longer. So on your busy days where you barely have time to get yourself together, one of the things I would offer is to breathe. Just breathe, right? Quite profound. So with the in breath, breathe in "I", and with the out breath "am". "I am". A very simple mantra, but to me, it also speaks to the power of the micro growth that happens with every breath and every moment. It's acknowledging the fact that right now, I am.

Kim Forrester (27:40):

Wow. And do you have a second practice?

Eboni Adams Monk (27:44):

The second practice is a visualization meditation. And when I think of growth ethic, one of the most popular metaphors is the flower. And so similarly in the morning, find time for stillness, close your eyes, put your feet on the floor. If you're lying down, lie comfortable position and just begin to breathe. You don't have to force it, don't have to do anything special. Just acknowledge a breath in and out. And then begin to notice yourself sitting or standing or lying in a field of beautiful flowers. Flowers for as far as you can see, lots of colors, beautiful, bright petals, opening to the sun, blooming. And then imagine your arms just outstretched, just taking all of that in, and then just bring it into yourself, hugging yourself, and then continue to breathe. And you can do that for as long as you'd like, just continuing to stay with the breath and envisioning that. Because the flowers are just such a beautiful reminder of growing from the earth and blossoming into a beautiful soul.

Kim Forrester (29:16):

There's so much beauty in those two practices there Eboni. Firstly, because they are so simple. There's exquisite beauty in the simplicity of them both. Secondly, as you were sharing them, I realized you were bringing us back to the simplicity of just being alive of just focusing on our breath. And it reminded me that growth doesn't have to be something that we try, and it doesn't have to be something that we pursue, and it doesn't have to be something that is particularly active. As you were saying, we grow through living. So thank you so much for reminding me in that moment that it is simply about coming back to the fact that we breathe in and out, and that we are being, we're living here on the planet. Eboni Adams Monk, your work is just so divine. It is so imbued with the beauty and the wisdom of the indigenous cultures around the world. If people want to learn more about the work that you do, you have the most delicious little book called *Leading Wise*, where can people find you?

Eboni Adams Monk (30:22):

Leading Wise, you can read that and buy it on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or also on indiebound. And if you want to learn more about my work, you can always go to my website, www.eboniadamsmonk.com. That's Eboni with an "I", and I'm on all social media channels at Eboni Adams Monk.

Kim Forrester (30:43):

Well it's just been an absolute pleasure. And I mean that from my soul. I'm feeling so inspired and relaxed in this moment, Eboni, for having this beautiful chat with you. So thank you for bringing your grace and your wisdom here today. And thank you for bringing the wisdom of the wisdom traditions. I truly appreciate you being part of the Eudaemonia podcast.

Eboni Adams Monk (31:03):

Absolutely. Thank you. Thank you, and to your listeners.

Kim Forrester (31:09):

As Mel Robbins, once said, "Life is about growth and exploration, not achieving a fixed state of balance. You have a very limited time on earth to experience all that you can. Figuring out how to squeeze the most out of your family, work and spirituality is your life's purpose. Go do it." You've been listening to the Eudaemonia podcast. If you'd like to learn more about how to live a truly flourishing life, please subscribe, check out www.eudaemoniapod.com for more inspiring episodes or come join me on Instagram @iamkimforrester. I'm Kim Forrester, until next time be well, be kind to yourself and allow yourself to grow.