

## **Meditative Story Transcript – Kino MacGregor (Soul Curriculum)**

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**ROHAN GUNATILLAKE:** This is Soul Curriculum, the companion show to Meditative Story where we reconnect with our storytellers in a deeper conversation revealing the inner wisdom they shared. In this show together, we replay and reflect on moments of transformation, which you can apply to your own life.

How do the challenges and trauma we encounter in our lives tie to our ancestral roots? How do we hold on to these experiences in our physical body? These are questions that I began to explore for myself listening to author, entrepreneur, and yoga instructor Kino MacGregor. In her Meditative Story, Kino feels a sense of discomfort in her own body growing up in South Florida. After losing her beloved grandfather, she eventually rediscovers her body and learns to process generational trauma through her yoga practice. It got me interested in the ways our bodies store trauma, and in exploring how to release it. Let's listen.

**GUNATILLAKE:** Hi Kino. So great to have you on the show.

**KINO MACGREGOR:** Thanks so much for having me. It's a pleasure to be here.

**GUNATILLAKE:** Let's get into talking about your story. In the beginning of the story we meet you as a young girl growing up in Miami who's proudly learning about her cultural heritage. Your family is helping you to dress in traditional Japanese clothes ready for a big day at school. Only the reaction from some of the other kids is not as you expect.

**MACGREGOR:** I'm instinctively drawn to my grandfather, who seems so confident and at ease and whole. I'm six years old, and grumpy helps mom and me dress and our brightly colored kimonos. The fabric is both heavy and light. I think it's a type of silk with these beautiful patterns. I don't normally wear my kimono to school, but today is class presentation day. I have to get up in front of my whole class and tell them what being half Japanese means to me. I don't get the opportunity to express much pride in my Japanese culture, so this one day out of the year is where we get to celebrate. It's pretty cool to me. My mom does most of the talking. She explains that we are Japanese, and this is our family culture. It feels special. I stand tall in my kimono shoes, elevated wooden sandals that make walking kind of challenging, but it doesn't matter. I embrace this part of my identity today. On so many other days it feels like I'm stuck explaining myself to people who don't even want to understand.

I'm at recess one day when a classmate comes up to me and says, "Kino, you don't look like the rest of us. Your face is flat and your eyes are weird. What are you anyway?" What are you? Not: where are you from or what's your cultural ancestry? Just what are you? I don't know how to answer him.

Every careless comment makes me feel more detached from my body. Someone kicks a soccer ball near us, and the boy with the hurtful questions runs away. Unfazed. I'm too stunned to move. I don't tell my parents about the incident. I don't tell anyone.

**GUNATILLAKE:** Kino, that sounds like such a hurtful experience. So often, I think these moments from childhood that make us feel like the “other,” like we don't belong, can impact the way we feel about ourselves for a really long time. That's certainly true for me. I know you eventually learned how to process it openly, but initially it was at first something right that you kept to yourself, right?

You said that you didn't tell your parents about this particular incident, so I was interested: how was your ethnicity or heritage discussed at home?

**MACGREGOR:** There was not a discussion about how being a multiracial person in a community that I didn't fit into impacted my relationship with society, with my body, and how those interactions with members of the dominant culture impacted me. The conversation was more about assimilation and how to succeed within the paradigm of the status quo. Part of my cultural upbringing is that there is a sense of emotional self sufficiency, a sense of not talking about the hurt and instead just focusing on the next step forward.

**GUNATILLAKE:** We definitely appreciate your courage and vulnerability Kino. We really, really do. What did it feel like on a physical level to carry this kind of pain? And based on what you know now, what should people know about how trauma manifests in the body?

**MACGREGOR:** The trauma lives in our bodies on a cellular level, and it changes how our posture, sort of, expresses itself in the body because the body is this field of experience. And then when everybody tries to do a yoga pose, like downward facing dog, then somehow the body expresses itself. Our uniqueness, our humanness, our vulnerability, our intimacy And I've definitely seen individuals show up and have trauma arise in the yoga space. And ultimately we all feel our suffering, and it's the suffering that really connects us.

**GUNATILLAKE:** That's beautifully put. As you shared in your episode, the trauma that you carried was not just your own, but it also was what you had inherited. There's a moment in your story when, after your grandfather's death, you finally ask your mother about what he went through in his life. You learn more about his trauma that he'd hidden from you. Let's listen to that moment.

**MACGREGOR:** My mom puts her teacup down on the coffee table and turns a little away from me. Her lips are tightly pursed. There are a lot of things my mom won't talk about if I don't ask her about it point blank. “I'm just trying to get more information,” I say. “What happened after grampy was in the internment camp?” When I was young, this topic was too serious to bring up, but here, sharing a warm drink in the family room, I think of myself as more

mature, and I really want to try to understand what my grandfather's life was like.

My mom tells me that after the war, the U.S. government said that every Japanese person who had been in an internment camp was entitled to a certain amount of money. A lot of money actually, but my grandfather refused to take it.

“This country gave me life. I love this country. They owe me nothing.” That's what he said. I sit back and think about what this might have felt like for my grandfather, this man who always seemed so at ease. So at home, he defected to the United States before the war even started, and they put him in a camp. Still his love of country never wavered. He didn't let the grief and trauma of that experience stop him from being fully present with his family, with me. I hadn't thought of myself as someone who needed to deal with the impacts of race trauma.

I'm proud of being Japanese, but sitting here talking with my mom about her life, grampy's life, I realize that those dark moments I experienced, those spirals of negative self-talk and depression, they're at least partially tied to this inherited grief. There is a foundation at the root of all these negative thoughts. This tension, trauma, and grief lives in my body from the time I'm a child. I get curious if perhaps the solution does too.

**GUNATILLAKE:** Kino, when you heard these stories for the first time, how did it shift your thinking about body-based generational trauma? How did you process it?

**MACGREGOR:** I think when I first started talking to my mom about these things, it was more just like, “Wow.” And then I think it took years for me to process the emotional impact to wake up to how that has probably impacted me in terms of my subconscious development, and I think I'm still in process to be honest. We're constantly letting go of things from the past, which perhaps no longer serve us, and then claiming new aspects of ourselves, which are constantly in flux and in evolution.

**GUNATILLAKE:** The idea you talk about there, Kino, is so fascinating, the way that none of us are fixed entities, and instead, we're all in a constant state of change, endlessly adapting to the events of life as it flows through our bodies.

As we've seen from your story and the life of your grandfather too, we don't always have a say on what happens to us. But with a mindful approach we might be able to better choose how we respond, what we might leave behind, and how we can move forward. Which brings us to the final moment of your story, where you discover a practice that helps you evolve for the better.

**MACGREGOR:** I stand at the back of the class unsure where to lay my mat down. I don't wanna be in anyone's way, but I also need to make sure I can see the instructor because I have no idea what I'm doing.

I'm 19 years old, and this is my very first yoga class. The class is in a gym, and there are big glass windows and mirrors. I've been struggling again recently.

My depression is really bad, and I haven't wanted to do much of anything. I don't want to eat. I don't wanna move. My mind feels bored and numb.

I know I need to change something to pull myself out of this. So when I hear about an Ashtanga yoga class at the local yoga center, I figure, sure, why not? When the powerful flow of this practice takes over, it feels like nothing else. Breath, body, mind as one. This inner sense of quiet, calm, a feeling of expansion, of connection. After a few repetitions, those feelings of numbness and sadness start to fade. The precision of these movements force me to become aware of my body in a way that I haven't felt since I was a kid. Since the days I spent mimicking grampy's posture, the way he would hold his hands, the way he would stand and sit, that untethered feeling that consumed my body and mind so many times over the years is replaced by a sense of stability, of feeling rooted, of feeling whole. I stick with a class. I wanna see what else I can get from this.

**GUNATILLAKE:** I love that moment when you make the connection between your own yoga practice and the poise you remembered in your grandfather. I'm curious, given the awareness you now have of your own body and the experience you've had in your life from healing practices of different kinds, what would the wise yoga teacher you are now say to that younger Kino taking her first class?

**MACGREGOR:** I mean, "keep practicing" is probably the most important thing. And I did, and that's what I would say to any student who is stepping on the mat. You get the benefits each time you practice and that each practice leads you a little bit more into that journey of healing. Stepping into the yoga space was deeply healing. And I just knew I wanted to do two things: that I wanted to keep practicing, and I wanted to spend more time with my teacher. From that foundation of practice, then so many other avenues have opened in terms of the mind-body connection, spiritual exploration, personal wellness, so to think that all of that was contained within the sort of seed in that first yoga class is just so, so powerful. I think the only thing that I would say to myself again is just keep practicing. Keep practicing.

**GUNATILLAKE:** Great advice of course. And Kino, you're one of the generation of yoga teachers who are now so experienced in connecting with your students digitally, through social media and taking classes online. How do you feel about that?

**MACGREGOR:** Even if it's live, and you're interacting with someone online, it's amazing to think that there were thousands of generations before us who tended the sacred knowledge and that we are here, and we can access it on the internet, on our phones is just incredible. But it's not ever going to take the place of spending time in person with a teacher. I meet so many students whose first yoga in-person class is with me because they found a video of mine and they always say: "And then this is something else." So there's an energy transmission, an atmosphere that gets created

when you're in person. It's like a massage. You know? You can't really get a massage online.

**GUNATILLAKE:** Very true. And for you, however people choose to practice, it can only help to connect mind and body, right?

**MACGREGOR:** No matter how dire it seems, no matter how much division it seems there that there is in the world, threads of commonality underneath our skin, that we're all spiritual beings on our own paths, those things which tie together the human experience on a spiritual level tie us together far more than we can possibly know when we're lost in the boundaries and the chains of our own individual suffering. So, yoga really represents, more than anything else, hope. Hope for a better life for ourselves, hope for a better planet, hope for a future that bends gently towards more kindness, more peace, and more love in the world.

**GUNATILLAKE:** A beautiful thought. Thanks Kino, thank you so much for sharing your story with us today.

**MACGREGOR:** Thanks. My pleasure.

**GUNATILLAKE:** Kino's story was fascinating, Particularly, because it made me reflect on the idea that past experiences, even the trauma of those closest to us, might live on inside our body, carried around with us, every day. Our relationship to our body then, our connection with it, could be the key to unlock thoughts and feelings holding us back, allowing us to evolve in new, more positive ways.

Kino finds her connection to her body through her yoga practice which is beautiful and right for her. What's the practice that you want to cultivate to connect you to your body? Maybe, before we meet again, you can take a moment to feel the movement of your breath, the rise and fall of your chest, the weight of your arms, the solidity of your feet upon the ground. Perhaps that's enough.

Over the course of this week, I invite you to check in with how your body feels whenever you remember and, if possible, to relax against its tension. Who knows what you might unlock!

That's all for today's episode. I hope you've enjoyed what you've heard, and if you have, we'd love to hear your thoughts. You can find us on all your social media platforms via our handle @meditativestory, or you can email us at hello@meditativestory.com. Take care now.