

Interview of Vidya Ramachandran 4/25/2023

Tami Robinson

Hi there! I'm Tami Robinson of Wellness with Tami Inc.

Today I'd like to introduce you to my friend, Vidya Ramachandran, who I connected with in the Origin Membership with Kate Northrup.

Vidya's got a brave tale about feeling lost, frustrated, and like something's missing in her career and life.

Less than 2 years into a PhD program, she realized she was on the wrong path. She looked everywhere for the answers—different cities, jobs, people—but none of it seemed right.

She had dug herself into a hole and had no idea how to get out of it.

Until...

She got brave, got quiet, and mustered up the courage to check in with herself—her mind AND body—to figure out what SHE wanted.

Now she helps ambitious women recalibrate their lives so they can start thriving as their most unapologetically expressive, free, and creative selves.

This is her story.

We covered a lot of ground like...

- How body awareness, yoga, and meditation helped her go inside to find HER answers.
- What to do when you don't have any role models to turn to for what you're experiencing.
- How to deal with the fear of disappointing others and of what others will think.

And so much more.

So sit back, relax, and listen in as she shares the tools that helped her find her way home to herself.

So, our first question for you Vidya is, "What has your relationship been to yoga, meditation, and self-awareness practices?"

Vidya Ramachandran

Yes, this is such an interesting question because, for me, I feel like there's been three distinct phases in my life. So starting as a child, my family and I would go—like my mom, my sister and I—would go to India every other summer for the whole summer. And so I learned or absorbed just from my family and my cousins who were doing yoga, and meditation practices. I learned basic yoga practices, Surya Namaskaram, just the meditation and stillness. That just became part what I thought of like, just part of being Indian or being Hindu, like part of my religious and cultural practices, just as classical dance was for me, and you know, growing up and like, learning Indian Carnatic music or prayer just became part of my cultural identity.

And then, when I was in my early 30s, that shifted, because just some things that happened in life, I had left my job to go into a Ph. D. program, and two years in, realized it was not the right fit for me. So I was going through a lot of change of like, what is it that I am supposed to be doing? What is my next step, and I had gone back into a corporate environment, but within a few months, really knew that that's not where I was supposed to be. And so it was around the time that I first became aware of what personal development was, and started taking some, you know, signing up for some programs in that area, and started to bring back in meditation and yoga, but more as a coping mechanism. Because I just was so lost in what I was, you know, what am I supposed to be doing? Where am I supposed to be living? Like, what am I, what was the meaning? What was the, what was my purpose? And what was my mission with my life, and what was my path supposed to be? And so that was where it really shifted and came to the forefront again. I remember distinctly in like, 2012, just really starting to rely on these practices as, okay, I don't know what I'm doing. Like, I need some way to cope with this. And these are two of the practices that I used for that.

And then I would say the third phase is more of like the last four to five years of my life where as I've been deepening into my own mission, and, and the mission for my work of just supporting other women and reigniting their spark and becoming our most unapologetically expressive and vital and free creative selves. It's been a big...a big part of that has been body connection, and connecting to our body's wisdom. And

so that connecting and accessing it, what our body is telling us...and our connection to our body is just so foundational to really igniting our spark or reigniting and reclaiming our spark and stepping into who we're supposed to be unapologetically, that yoga and meditation and stillness practices have just really helped me connect much more deeply with my own body and with my emotions. And it's now kind of circled back into more spiritual practice I would say.

Tami

So there's a real story arc there almost with it being just part of who you were growing up, to it becoming a vital coping practice, to it then becoming really a vital key to what your purpose is.

Vidya

Yes, exactly.

Tami

Nice. I love it. Oh, my goodness. And so how, you know, you kind of touched upon this a little bit already, but I'm curious if you could say a little bit more about how you came to realize that the path you were on wasn't for you. Whenever you left your Ph.D. program and had this big shift in your life, what was that like? How did that happen?

Vidya

Yeah, so that, it started much earlier than that. So I would say the one thing that I was very clear when I was younger is that I did not want to be a doctor, but I didn't know what it was that I wanted to do. And so I think there were just a lot of subconscious subtle messages I had absorbed from society and from cultural, you know, familial things that I was seeing. No one actually told me, "Oh, you have to be a scientist, or you have to be this or you have to be that," but I thought, "Okay, this is the path I was supposed to take." And so I actually have an undergraduate degree in science and chemistry.

Very clearly, I quickly realized, like, that is not something that is a fit for me. And so that started this pattern of, of, okay, this doesn't quite work, so let me try this other thing. Or this city doesn't quite fit for me, like, let me try moving somewhere else. And so, you know, it was always almost like searching for the next thing, or the place where I would find my community, or this is where I'm meant to be. And I think, especially when I had put so many eggs in this, you know, PhD program bucket or basket thinking that this I finally found what it is I'm meant to be doing with my life,

and I'm going to be inspiring and impacting all of these young minds, and very quickly realizing like within 16 months, realizing like, this was not at all a fit, and all the color had kind of leached out of my life. And I felt like I dug myself into a hole, and I didn't know how to get out of it.

And so ***what I realized is, across all of these experiences, looking back now, it's not something that I realized in the moment, it took a lot of retrospective reflection, is that I never actually sat down and checked in with myself.*** What is it that I wanted to do? I think I, the challenge was, or the reason I was just having a lot of struggle finding my path is because I was taking a lot of external stimuli. External, like, I would see somebody doing something else, or I would have a vague idea of what something was, but not really checking in with myself to say, what is it that I truly, really, you know, truly desire? What is it that I truly want to be impacting.

Tami

Yeah, I love that. Because you really hit upon one of the key principles of yoga, yoga, not just postures, but the full practice of yoga, which is that all of it is designed to take us inside instead of relying on everything outside. And so it took you some time to figure that out, but once you started doing that, that's when the answers started clicking into place for you.

Vidya

Yes, exactly.

Tami

Love it. So what were some of the challenges that you faced in trying to change directions?

Vidya

I would say it was again, I think, the sitting in silence piece. I think it's for me...No, let me rephrase. The NOT sitting in silence and not sitting with it piece. Because I think one of the things that I struggled with is one, I wasn't really like in my family cultural, you know, like in family community unit, there weren't a lot of people I knew who were doing something very different from what was, you know, what, what the norms are. And so I really didn't have the, I think the...a clear understanding of like, what the possibilities were from people that, who I knew, in a day-to-day, you know, day-to-day type of relationship. Does that even makes sense?

Tami

Yeah, absolutely. You didn't have any role models it sounds like, of doing something different than what was typically expected.

Vidya

Yes, exactly. And then, when I started connecting with people and being like, "Oh, this is a potential possibility," I think there was still a lot of the, you know, my absorbed cultural and societal norms, saying, like, "Yeah, that might have worked for them, but your situation doesn't, it's not right for your situation." And so which is funny, because I will say, I've had friends tell me, like, you know, people I went to college with, kept in touch with here and there, like, tell me that, and some family members, that I really have inspired them, because when I know something is wrong or something's not a fit, I will make a change, and try something new.

But for from my side of it, just one of the big challenges was, okay, I'm going to disappoint somebody. Or how do I, how do I turn this what might have been a failed step into something that I can talk about, or something that doesn't look like, oh, I want to just put my head under the carpet and forget I ever tried that or did that. And so, there again, it's a lot of external, you know? Like, what, what is it that someone might say, or how might I be seen, or who might I be disappointing, if I try this thing, or if I, if I say I want to do this thing. And so I think it took me a while to really recognize that, you know what? At the end of the day, I gotta be me, and I have to, you know, like, I really need to go after what I want. And also, not protect myself, perhaps, but really bring in the voices, like my friends and family members who are supportive and can kind of be that positive encouragement. And touch point for me when I need to just kind of like not hear the other voices, the critical voices in my head.

Tami

Mmm, yeah, so I heard a few things in there. So one is a lack of role models. A second was this expectation that it's not okay to disappoint others. It's not okay to, or this sort of fear around what others will think.

Vidya

Yes.

Tami

Yeah. And then the third piece was, again, like, just looking at the externals, as opposed to the internals, and going inside yourself. Yeah.

Vidya

Yeah. I was going to say it's so interesting, because it's just like such a common thread. That's why I feel like I think now that the whole body connection piece has just been so helpful for not just my own practice, but in the work itself, because it's foundational, no matter what you're trying to do.

Tami

Yes, yes. Because without it, we end up perhaps, maybe judging ourselves for things that we think others are going to judge us for. But maybe they're not. Right? And then the other piece I heard in there was also about finding a supportive community. So initially, it sounded like maybe you didn't quite feel you had that supportive community, or maybe you weren't leaning on it, but once you were able to then things started to shift for you.

Vidya

Yeah, and I think part of it is, it's so interesting, I just wrote about this to my newsletter that's going out this week. But when I was going through my entire emotional up and down and really like just steeping in misery, like, a year and a half into my Ph.D. program, it wasn't until I was talking to a friend of mine. And I just happened to like, burst out in tears in the conversation. And then it all poured out like, this is how it's going. Because I think part of it is like until then, I know, I had been talking to my friends, and I know, they would have supported me if I had probably shared the challenges I was going through.

And I think that was the other piece. I don't remember sharing the challenges with the people who had gone, you know, I had friends who were professors and friends, other friends who have done other things who could have empathized and shared their experiences, and I knew some of their experiences yet, I think I was like, I need to figure this out. Or I would share it with people who weren't able to connect on it and really didn't know how to support me even if they wanted to. And so it was finding, I think that's why there's like, there's always it's nice to have a community where there's people who can serve different roles for each other in different times.

Because, you know, I was going to my parents and sharing, but they really didn't know how to support me. Like, they also had not gone through the education system in the US. They, you know, they came from India in the 70s. So, it wasn't, they really

had no, they had no idea what the process would be, how I could get out of it. They just knew like I, I needed to get a job or do something. Right?

And so that's why I feel like community, if I had perhaps even started sharing, and I have friends at school, who are also...And I think that's the other piece. Like I had friends in grad school, who were my year or ahead of me, who were going through similar things, but because they were going through similar things at the same time, they also were perhaps not the right people for me to get the support that I needed from, because they also needed support. And so in their experiences, and mine going through it almost at the same time, makes it challenging for us to have a very third party neutral view.

Tami

Absolutely. So the challenge again, being not just building a supportive community, but knowing who to go to for what?

Vidya

Yes.

Tami

Yeah, who can you share those deeper vulnerabilities with? Who's going to understand? You know, your parents, of course, are there for you. But like you said, they, they couldn't relate to the same experience that you had. So yeah, yeah. Who, knowing who to go to for what. Yeah.

So then, what were some of the tools and I know you started kind of hinting about this a little bit in terms of body connection work and things like that, but share a little bit about what some of the tools were, that helped you through this, you know, through this big change.

Vidya

So I would say, especially in the last couple of years, I mean, it's been 10 years, since I had, you know, reconnected back to meditation in some form, even though back then I was using it more as a coping mechanism. And I do really think that just no matter how one practices, meditation, just having those few moments of silence a day, at any point in the day, just connecting to that was really game changing for me.

Because it not only, I mean, even like my mom, I remember at one point, she was like, "I think this meditating is helping you," because she could see the slight change

in my behavior, like my anxiety. I was always very quick to just get angry and frustrated. And so especially because of all that uncertainty and you know, just feeling lost. So I really do find that the meditation piece was really helpful.

The, from a, you know, yoga, I started just doing that. It was just from a very, again, just really, it's so interesting, because I've pretty much danced my entire life. But I've never felt, I realize now looking back, I never was really connected to my body. And so with, you know, with yoga or with even just like body sensing practices, or just like trying to feel how different emotions feel, where they, you know, what is the sensation, where am I feeling it in my body, I'm able to just feel my body or like feel myself living in my body in such a different way than I did as a dancer where it was more of a tool to help me do certain moves, and, or even when I used to ice skate like, you know, it helped me to get me from this point in choreography to this point when it comes to dancing. But really, it's a very interesting feeling of just like, even slowly feeling that part of your body and just like holding a, you know, when I do a yoga practice, just like holding the pose, it's just a quiet way for me to just connect back.

Tami

Nice. So movement and body, body activities I'll say, to include dance and yoga postures, so that movement, it sounds like it transitioned from becoming something that, it transitioned from being something that was more performative to something that was more mindful, meaningful, and taking you inward, as opposed to just getting from point A to point B, as you mentioned.

Vidya

Yes.

Tami

Yeah. And so how did that...so connect the dots then. How did that help you through the change?

Vidya

It allowed, for me, what I realized, is it was just giving me the space.

Tami

Ok.

Vidya

It, just, you know, slowing down. And I'm bringing this a lot into my work now, too, is that, how can we just slow down and create more space, so we can a) sit with what we're feeling and what we're going through, before we try to even process and try to fix it. Because I realized that, you know, again, this week as I was writing my newsletter, I realized, like, that was the piece from 11 and a half years ago, where I don't think...I knew I was upset and miserable, but I don't think I really sat with it. I didn't, because I was automatically into, "how do I solve this problem? How do I pull myself out of that hole? How do I make this experience sound okay, when I go for a job interview?" And really, as I started connecting more with my body, I started seeing a lot more just flow in a lot of different areas of my life, whether it's work or not, where I can just, you know, take a breath, and sit with it and allow my own self and body to metabolize what I'm feeling and really help me see like, "Ok, then what is the next step?" instead of just rushing straight into like, no, action/fix mode or problem solving mode.

Tami

Right, yeah. So when we're avoiding the uncomfortable feelings, and we just start acting, it's like throwing spaghetti against the wall to see what will stick and most of the time, it just slides off, right? It's like not a solution. And so slowing down, becoming more mindful, going inside more, helped you created the space to really sit with what you were feeling, gain the wisdom it was there to give you, and then figure out what to do, from a wiser internally sourced place.

Vidya

Yes, exactly. And I will also say, like, if you'd asked me six years ago, I would have told you, I don't have an intuition. I'm not intuitive. And now, over the last several years, I'm realizing like, No. I mean, actually, a friend of mine just said recently. She said, "Everybody has an intuition. It's just if we access it or not." Really like, actually use it, right? And so I think that was it. Like, really connecting to my body and ***slowing down helped me realize that I had an intuition or I am intuitive. I just needed that space to, to hear it.*** Or feel it, because for me, it's a lot more feeling based.

Tami

Yea, and when you feel it, then you're able to, you're able to receive the message.

Vidya

Yes. Exactly.

Tami

Nice. Awesome! So what would you suggest for someone else who feels like maybe the path that they're on isn't working for them? Or maybe they're also feeling like something's not quite right, and they can't put their finger on what it is. What would you recommend for them? What would be a good first step?

Vidya

Yes. So my first recommendation is always, because that's my, what I love doing now, is, like, talking about how do we recalibrate. Because it's not that we have to completely jump from one thing to another, right? Where, we have a true alignment with self, at some point, somewhere. It's just we're maybe a few steps away from it. And so we're recalibrating in a more gentle way. And the first step is body connection, which I'm sure your community is very well aware of. But I think when we're feeling that we are stuck, and we don't know where to go, what action to take, we lose sight of the tools that we already even have or might know of.

So, you know, there's a few different things that I really like to work with my framework, with clients, and also for myself, whenever I feel like I'm off track, and I need to recalibrate. And it's either, it's both experiential based. And it's just either just connecting to how something feels for you. So it might be, you know, if you're seeking freedom, how does that feel for you? If you're seeking peace, like, how does that feel for you? And it can be just a tiny exercise, but I feel like if we tune into what it is that we want, and how does it feel for us in our bodies, then we can access that more.

And then when we, you know, that's when some of those ideas will come intuitively, or serendipitously where it's just like, okay, then maybe this one step. I can try this one step and then see where that goes. Also why it's nice to have that space so that you can kind of take a step, sit with it, get the wisdom, like you're saying, and then that opens up, what's the next step. But typically, everything now, in the last at least, like six months, was since I shifted what I'm focusing on in my work, everything we do starts with body connection, some type of body connection exercise.

Tami

Absolutely, yeah. Yeah. So it's really about creating the space to listen. And even if that means sitting with some discomfort, and then and creating that space, not just mentally, but being in the body, and trying to understand where that's coming up for you in the body, and then trying on a different way of being. Like, once you've heard the message. Ok, it's this, and it sits in my belly, or it sits in my heart or on my shoulders. Like, okay, so then what, you know, what do you want instead? Or what

would be, you know, kind of and feeling that in the body and seeing what that opens up? Is that kind of summarizing?

Vidya

Yeah, yeah, exactly. And that's why I also like, you know, I've been doing this body, you know, starting these body connection workshops, because I think the more we can understand whatever we're feeling in our body, we can develop the language for it, then when we are making decisions, we can use that feedback that we're getting from our bodies, right? Like the whole, just like, you know, you hear you get some piece of news and your body might clench or it might feel really expansive. Like that is your body telling you something and so, the more we're in tune, the more we can access that that level of wisdom.

Tami

Absolutely. Awesome. I love it. And so how can how can people find you and what are the kinds of things that you offer? You said you work one-on-one with clients so...

Vidya

Yes, so I, I am on Instagram. So you can catch me there. My username is @Vidya.r.warrier, w-a-r-r-i-e-r. And also my website is where a lot of my information is, on the things that I offer. I have a lot of free resources there as well to just dip start dipping your toes into recalibrating and connecting to your inner spark. And that is Vidyawarrier.com. And I do I love working with clients one-on-one I love just connecting with other women and other you know other people in general. So, you know, I would love to just even have a conversation if any of this sounds really intriguing. You want to continue the conversation, happy to chat with anyone. But I do work with clients one-on-one. I also have workshops, like I said, my intro level body connection workshop, which will be on my website in a couple of weeks. But those are some of the ways that you know, and then on my website lists some of the other ways that, some of the other services that I offer.

Tami

Awesome, great, thanks so much, Vidya!

Vidya

Thank you, Tami.