

5 Questions for Jalaja Bonheim

1. What happens in a circle gathering, like the one you facilitated between Palestinian and Jewish women?

In my circles, we cocreate an extremely potent field of love that changes how we perceive ourselves and others—I call it “Seeing with sacred eyes.” We’re still Jews or Palestinians, Christians or Muslims, but more fundamentally, we’re women on a sacred path. Women have always gathered in hard times to heal, support, and comfort each other. So it feels very natural for us to connect in this way that honors each woman’s unique beauty.

2. You describe heart-shame as a “huge obstacle to our collective healing.” What do you mean by this?

Heart-shame is like a straightjacket around the heart that makes us suppress our tenderness and vulnerability in favor of a tough façade. It’s keeping us from enjoying the intimate, authentic relationships we long for, and worse still, it’s got us stuck in a suicidal cycle of violence and warfare.

3. One of your stories is about how a black lawyer created a connection with his racist client. How did he find success?

Much like the space we cocreate in my circles, the space Justin held for his client was completely accepting and nonjudgmental. Some might call him egoless; I would disagree. Over years of spiritual practice he had cultivated a healthy, confident ego. And so, when racism stepped into his counseling office, he didn’t feel threatened in the least.

4. You point to the popularity of *Fifty Shades of Grey* as indicative of society’s desire for control. How can our “control addiction” hurt us?

Twenty-five hundred years ago, the Chinese sage Lao Tzu wrote: “The universe is sacred. You cannot improve it. If you try to change it, you will ruin it.” What prophetic words! For a while, we actually believed we could control nature. Now, we’re realizing that we may have ruined our planet. At the same time, control addiction is making us exhausted and unhappy because it won’t allow us to stop, rest, and simply be.



Circle work facilitator and teacher Jalaja Bonheim offers a fresh perspective on our egos in her new book, *Sacred Ego: Making Peace with Ourselves and Our World*.

© ELAINE DERBY

5. How can we start looking at our ego as a spiritual teacher?

For centuries, spiritual seekers viewed the ego as a terrible burden that they had to somehow get rid of. Today, this view no longer serves us. As long as we reject our ego, we will remain inwardly fractured. By approaching it with curiosity, respect, and reverence, we can move toward a deeper sense of authenticity, integrity, and wholeness. To know our wholeness, we must know every part of us as sacred, including the ego. And whatever is sacred, whether it’s our heart, a person, an animal, or our ego, can also serve as a spiritual teacher.

—ALMA TASSI