



How Therapist and Healer Christine Gutiérrez Came Back Home to Herself, and Wrote I Am Diosa

After a difficult breakup, Christine sought out deep healing from childhood abuse wounds and toxic people. After becoming a family therapist, she also trained in spiritual and shamanic practices, and was initiated in the priestess path. In her new book, *I Am Diosa*, she draws on wisdom from her own experience to help other women heal and tap into their worth.

Alicia Menendez:

11 years ago, I was unhappy, unfulfilled, and looking for love in all the wrong places. Sound familiar? Then she decided to make a change. She started therapy and sought spiritual guidance. As she herself began to heal, she started learning how to help others heal. She earned a master's in mental health counseling. She learned tantra and shamanic practices. She recognized she was meant to help other women, especially women of color, that her work could help them heal from trauma and reclaim their worth. Now she's put her wisdom into a new book, *I Am Diosa: A Journey to Healing Deep, Loving Yourself, and Coming Back Home to Soul*. She and I get into it all.

Healing Deep, Loving Yourself, Coming Back to Soul. Those are big promises, Christine.

Christine Gutiérrez:

Yeah. So, what I tell everyone is that this is a lifetime journey. This is not just a one time thing. This process of coming back home to ourselves and healing deep is something that's like an unpeeling, right? It's a constantly unfolding process, right? The most essential thing that we can do in our life is take the time to heal. Take the time to look at the wounds of our past, how they're affecting us in the present, so that we can make conscious shifts to create what we actually want in our life.

Menendez: What is the soul call?

Gutiérrez: For me, the soul call is this ancient voice within. This voice that oftentimes whispers and sometimes yells at you to take the next right step to walk away from a dead end relationship, to take the leap into a career path that you've been wanting to take but perhaps have pushed to the side. And it's always a voice that's orienting you towards your better good.

Menendez: What did your soul call sound like the first time that you heard it?

Gutiérrez: The first time that I can remember hearing it as an adult was when I was in a really toxic relationship in college, and I remember hearing, "You need to get help. You need to get support." And it was this very authoritative and loving presence. Essentially, it was for me to sign up for therapy. That was the first big step in my journey of unpacking how my childhood abuse had affected me in my early adult life.

Menendez: That's a lot to unpack, and unpacking doesn't happen overnight.

Gutiérrez: That's the thing that I make very clear in the book and also in all the work that I do, which is that this is a grounded approach to healing. Which means that this unpacking needs to be done with patience, allowing your soul to guide the way and taking it step by step and being guided by trained therapists, trained healers, and really giving yourself the space to heal. Depending on what kind of background you've come from and if you have a history with trauma, then you need to be incredibly gentle with yourself, because it can take a while.

Menendez: When you started doing that excavating, what did you find?

Gutiérrez: Oh my gosh. I found it felt like broken bones and dirty closets, right? Like it was dark, and memories, I found memories of situations in my childhood, name calling, just like all the things that I had went through. I had both love and abuse present in my home, and so it was navigating kind of those inner emotional terrains that I was able to find and remember these specific kind of thorns in the timeline of my life that I needed to go attend to, because they were untreated emotional wounds. And so, when I remembered those memories, it allowed me to go back and journey to give love to those parts of myself.

Menendez: Where did you get help?

Gutiérrez: You know, it's an integrated process. First and foremost, I felt spiritual support. I always felt this kind of spiritual presence of love that was guiding me, protecting me. Also, within my family, though it was complex, there was an energy of love that was part of that. But then inevitably it was my first journey into therapy in college. I took off a semester of school and I went twice a week. And then I went on a journey of both spiritual healing, and also simultaneously therapeutic healing. And that also led me on my path to me becoming a licensed therapist and becoming a healer.

Menendez: Christine, what happened that made you realize, "Oh, I don't just want to heal. I want to help others heal."

Gutiérrez: From as early as I can remember, I always wanted to help people. And so, that kind of seed that was planted in me as a child, I kept on listening to that, and that morphed into being a mentor, and then going to school and studying therapy to become a licensed therapist. And then proceeding into this kind of merging of ancient wisdom with healing modalities and modern therapy.

Menendez: I want to talk about that latter piece. You have a master's in mental health counseling and you're still a big advocate of working with trained mental health professionals, but you also saw the limits in the clinical world.

Gutiérrez: Originally, I worked as a family therapist, specifically working with families in prevention and teaching them healthier coping skills, so they can parent better. Mostly with cases of abuse and neglect and predominantly in the Latino, Black, Indigenous, POC communities. And so, a lot of the clinical practices that I was taught was devoid of cultural context, spirituality, and first of all, you need to work with the client's perspective, and a lot of times that wasn't given to them. And a lot of these clients were deeply spiritual, deeply religious, so I saw that they were missing that warmth. And they needed a little bit more sharing on my end than what the traditional clinical kind of therapy gave.

So, one thing that I noticed was that especially in these cases of abuse, that a little bit more personal sharing, which is usually not as common in clinical, kind of old school therapy practices, was needed. And whenever I did that, and whenever I incorporated some more of these spiritual principles, prayer, meditation, breath work, it actually

expedited the process of their healing. In addition to that, mainstream therapy was focused mostly on the kind of the verbal expression of your issues. One of the things that I brought in was more of a somatic body base. Exercises, breath work, meditation. Which actually allows you to heal deeper on a physiological level, because now you're allowing your nervous system to relax, so while talking helps, I think that it's limited. Especially when you're working with trauma and abuse. You really want to access more of that spiritual and body somatic piece.

Menendez: You say you were initiated into the Priestess path. Did you have any spiritual practices before that?

Gutiérrez: I grew up Catholic, but my family was pretty open minded in the sense that they were mostly spiritual and very accepting of all people's faiths. And so, that was like a kind of... definitely a protective factor in terms of me being who I was in the world, because my family gave me the space to do that. I remember getting really annoyed in religion class and saying, "You know, what if you grow up in a different country and you don't know about this. My God would love you anyway." And I would get in big trouble in this Catholic school, constantly in trouble for speaking out about that. I remember going on strike kind of in my bedroom. I was like middle school, and I said, "I'm not gonna pray Our Father anymore, because there's too much male attention. I'm only gonna do Hail Mary."

So, I was like 10, 11, doing Hail Marys only, like on this very little personal revolution against the patriarchy, I guess, in my own kind of child way. There was an inner knowing that I wanted to be in touch with the feminine aspects of spirituality, but... So, that was the first spiritual practice, was this kind of intuitive practice that I also developed on my own, and kind of combining what I learned with Catholicism, I took my little confirmation book and my Bible, and I would open it up and ask it questions as a kid, like an oracle card deck almost, and I was obsessed with Psalms in the Bible, because it was the most poetic to me. And so, those kind of little rituals and things that I felt drawn to do, or blessing my house with holy water, morphed into me then going on this kind of journey to finding what spirituality really fit me.

I was craving this feminine kind of spirituality, and the Priestess path was part of that for me. So, I think spirituality was always deep in my bones, and it's morphed.

Menendez: What did being initiated actually look like?

Gutiérrez: Oh, it was so beautiful. It was actually led by this Latina therapist, she was a licensed therapist, but she was also a [Spanish 0:09:36.8](#) and a Priestess facilitator. And essentially it was a group of women. We got together and we gathered, kind of like this very underground thing. She had no website. This was something she did on the weekends, very private. She guided us into teaching us about the different feminine faces of the divine in different cultures. Yemaya, Oshun, all different types of goddesses. Not only from the Yoruba Priestess kind of tribe, but also from Hinduism, from Buddhism, and really honoring and respecting each culture and each lineage, and just teaching us that there does exist this other world of spirituality which includes more feminine faces of goddess. [Spanish 0:10:26.3](#)

We would do different exercises. One of them was like a rebirthing, where we would come back and kind of simulate this birthing process, and play music, and do rituals. It was a... I would say like a mystical healing path, and for the first time, all of the things that came kind of natural to me as a kid, I was being taught that they were these actual practices for

centuries that were done. It was one of the most powerful moments, because I knew it, but then to see it, that it actually existed, was... This is my path. This is my calling.

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Menendez: So many of us could benefit from the type of introspection and self-analysis that you facilitate. Where do we start?

Gutiérrez: I think the first step is giving yourself permission to honor your experiences. And what I mean by that is really giving yourself the space to look at your life, and to see it as this kind of like timeline, where you have these major points in your life that have happened, and the ones that pop up most, some of them you might have kind of squished to the side, because difficult experiences will have us repress emotions. But giving yourself the space to, either alone or with a trained therapist, or trained healer, to say to yourself, "I'm gonna look at the moments in my life that have most affected me. Especially the moments that I've kind like brushing off to the side. And I'm gonna look at them, and I'm gonna say I give myself permission to see this. My experiences are valid. Whatever has happened to me was not my fault. I didn't deserve it." And really being that healthy parent to yourself and validating your own experiences, and saying, "This is important that I see this. I didn't deserve this. This isn't something that ever should have happened to me. But it happened."

And so, step one is honoring that, and then saying to yourself, "I'm gonna get help." And help can be picking up a book can be the first step. Help can be signing up for therapy. Help can be going on a spiritual journey. But I do believe in having support through any process. But giving yourself the space to be self-reflective and to give yourself the comfort to know that when you do this, I promise you that even if it's hard, that there will be a healing that's provided to you, because when we ignore those things, they end up manifesting in our lives anyway, because they come up in our behaviors, and our coping skills, absolutely.

Menendez: One of my favorite things about I Am Diosa is these prompts that you give the reader throughout for journaling. And so, can you give us just a taste of what those questions are? Where you begin that inquiry when you start to do that dive into yourself.

Gutiérrez: Yeah. I usually ask people when I'm speaking to them, and in the book I do the same. What are the main experiences that have impacted you? And then the second thing is on the other side of that, what are the three intentions that you have for yourself on this journey? An example that people will give me is, "I want to love myself again. I want to walk away from this toxic relationship." And on the other side of that is, "I want to have a

remembering of my deep self worth and my self-esteem.” And the reason why both of these are important is because when you also claim, “This is my intention. This is what I want.” You can look at all the ways that you’re not that. So, usually when someone tells me something like, “I want to be in a healthy relationship.” I say, “Okay, so what are the deep, dirty things that you’re doing that are not aligned with being in that healthy relationship?”

Acknowledging and giving yourself the permission to write it out and to say, “Here is where I am.” It allows you to access a map. A map so that you can see where are you now and where you’re headed. And these kind of soul intentions of what lives on the other side of that block that you’re experiencing shows you where you want to eventually be.

Menendez: What is a root wound?

Gutiérrez: A root wound would be anything that has happened in your childhood, and usually these are the things that have most impacted you in your development. So, it doesn’t necessarily have to be your parents. It can be any caregivers that were most prevalent in your life. It can even be a teacher that you had a negative experience with or something that happened between the ages of zero to let’s say even 10. But whatever most pops up in your memory, don’t try to analyze it too much. Whatever is the first thing that comes up when you think, “What is the negative thing that pops up in terms of my childhood that I feel has most impacted me and has impacted my self-esteem and my way of loving myself?”

I know for me, that was name calling. Name calling was a big thing and so, while there was a lot of love, there was also a lot of toxic ways of loving, and abuse was very common in this kind of dynamic where it was like the parent didn’t know how to control the emotions, so then they expressed the anger instead of expressing what they’re actually feeling. And so, for me that was the case. And that was the main one that stood out. So, I did a lot of work with going back to that root issue, and that root wound, and really giving love to the little girl that was experiencing that. And really speaking to her, and nurturing her, and telling her, “Now we are gonna make sure to be a better advocate for you.” Becoming kind of like this parent to yourself.

Menendez: And what you do such a good job of articulating for us is how those root wounds can then show up in our adult lives. So, with you, it shows up in the form of Mr. M. Who was he and how did Mr. M take you back to your root wound?

Gutiérrez: Yeah, so I call him Mr. M, and he was a perfect example of all early childhood trauma. He was abusive. He was controlling. Had a lot of love in him, too. But was deeply broken. And I like to say, especially when I’m doing interviews, that obviously some things go beyond words, right? Things are much more complex than just a book, or a moment, but it was exactly like my blueprint of love growing up. And that blueprint that I downloaded ended up being what I saw in this relationship, which was someone that called names, someone that was so insecure, that was projecting his feelings of insecurity, but he was a perfect match for me to see how my childhood was playing out again. I was able through that relationship, and it took many years, and many ups and downs, to... That was the first initiator into me getting therapy.

And I want to normalize for people that the way our brain works is that we do something called repetition compulsion, which is that we have an original injury or emotional wound that we go through in our childhood. And then in an attempt to kind of close up that original wound, we replicate it. And we replicate it until we can fix it, and so if you have no new tools, or no new ways of being, inevitably you won’t be able to repair it, and that’s

what's called repetition compulsion. So, the goal here is to say, "This is normal. You're not crazy. You're not wrong. You're not bad. It's not that you're just attracting something. It's that that's the way the brain works."

And so, once we can know that we can start learning new tools, so that we can come into these situations and say, "How can I show up differently?" And so, there was an awareness of his illness, his sickness, his... But he wasn't able to make it. And that happens in life, and understanding that you can love someone and feel bad for someone, but it doesn't mean that you need to accept them in your life. And that was a hard lesson for me as a healer and as an empath. You can't save everyone.

Menendez: No, and even with people who are clients, you can't save everybody. Like there... It is the work of two people. It can't be the work of one person.

Gutiérrez: Absolutely.

Menendez: And sometimes people aren't ready.

Gutiérrez: And you're not saving anyone, really. You're giving people the tools so that they can heal themselves. There's less attachment there, actually. I think it was more in my personal life that it was learning to apply those principles of trusting that this person needed help that went beyond what he could do in this lifetime. It was important for me to see that, and to also know that I deserved to have the love that I didn't have.

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Menendez: There is so much wisdom in I Am Diosa, but one of the pieces that I really wish I had had in my 20s was this idea of soul traps. Because I think that they are the reason so many of us take two steps forward on our path to growth, and then one step back.

Gutiérrez: Yes.

Menendez: So, first let's define, what is a soul trap?

Gutiérrez: Yeah, so this was actually a piece that came to me kind of later in the book-writing journey, because I remember these points in my life where I felt like this is a test. This is a test and I'm gonna get trapped if I don't listen to the test. So, for example, it's anything that keeps you away from your true self, keeps you away from your highest self, keeps you away from your soul self. For example, the trap of comfort, right? Where you have this seemingly comfortable life, and on the surface everything seems great.

Menendez: Well, no. Let's... I really want to get into comfort, because I have multiple friends who are going through divorces right now. And the comfort I think across the board was the number one thing that held them back, or even that once they became certain that it was what they wanted, and they were able to say, "This is what I want." If there is hesitation, question on their part, it is that soul trap. It is comfort.

Gutiérrez: Yeah. And I think it's really common, because the illusion of the perfect home, or the perfect amount of financial stability, or even if you don't have that and it's just the comfort of having another body there to be there and to not have you be alone, and face this whole new uncharted territory, where you don't know what that's gonna look like. And so, what oftentimes happens is that the mind seeks what it knows. And so, when it knows something, it says, "Well, I'm miserable. My soul is dying. My colors are fading. I don't feel connected. I'm not lit up. I want out. And I know this."

And so, we're so scared of the healthy feeling of... There's a healthy death energy that's required for living in alignment with our highest self. And that healthy death energy is the closing of chapters that no longer serve us. And so, that's being in rhythm with nature. When you feel that the expiration date has come, and you prolong it, your soul gets sick. There's a soul sickness that arrives. And it's painful, and it's scary, and you're gonna go through an uncomfortable period of time. The trick is knowing that this is gonna be a temporary discomfort. Your life might be in upheaval. You might have to leave the school district. You might have to put our kids in somewhere else. You might need to start-

Menendez: Yes!

Gutiérrez: ... dating. You know, you might need to do all these things that you thought you were never gonna have to do, and you're pissed, and you're angry, you're upset, you're mourning the life that you had. But if it doesn't work, it's allowing yourself to go through that mourning so that you can have new life. So, in those moments, you need to remind yourself this is a temporary comfort. I may be temporarily comforted, but my soul is dying. And then you need to really look at what do you actually want? What is it that you actually want?

Because the thing is is that if you stay in that marriage, or that situation that doesn't work, you will be soul dead. It's a dead end. It literally is a dead end. But you can go through a period of uncomfortability which is temporary so that you have sustainable happiness.

Menendez: There is a popular meme now which I love that says something like, "Maybe you manifested it. Maybe it's white privilege." I think there are a lot of ways to interpret that. I wonder what it means to you.

Gutiérrez: We need to be very real about life. For me, being spiritual doesn't mean spiritually bypassing reality. I'm also a teacher that likes to deal with life on life's terms and face the reality of what's going on in the world, and the realities of the suffering that exists. That to me is being a real spiritual student, is why do this work if you're not gonna show up for the injustices of the world and speak up for things that are not right? Otherwise, it's not spiritual. It's delusional.

I think a lot of new age spirituality and pop psychology books are really dangerous, actually. I think that they perpetuate this notion of being glamorizing happiness. They're not human. It's not real. It's like a robot. It's not someone that's alive and breathing with a variety of colors, and emotions, and mental health illness, and realities of racism, or domestic violence, or all these things that happen. I feel like you need to look at the

conditions that are internally happening and externally happening. And ask yourself, “What’s going on in my life?” I’m not gonna tell someone that is in a situation, that they’re in a domestic violence situation, that they manifested it. And this is the kind of belief system that doesn’t... When you don’t have psychological meat on these principles, and people are coming and looking for help, and looking for support, and they read something like The Law of Attraction, which... Is there some truth to attracting things? Yeah, but to use that against someone that has a history with trauma, or is experiencing racism is so dangerous, selfish, abusive, and wrong.

And I believe that we need to do a better job at really understanding that there is so much depth to every situation. And every person that comes in has a very unique experience. And so, we need to honor and validate that person’s real life, and real experiences, and not make them feel bad for what they’re going through. We have systemic injustice. We have different factors that we need to face. Grounded spirituality is what we need now more than ever. Deeply rooted, psychologically savvy, kind of integrated approaches that honor people’s experiences, cultures, internally and externally.

Menendez: You dedicate I Am Diosa to a few people, but first and foremost to little Christine. Why?

Gutiérrez: Oh. I have a picture of me with these big Mickey Mouse glasses. I wore huge little Lisa Loeb bifocals. She had so much love in her heart and she was so emotional, and everything was so hard, because not only did I feel the pain of the world, but I felt the pain of my parents that didn’t know how to deal with their own emotions. And so, to know that we’ve come this far, and to know that we’ve risen from so much suffering, and that have really put in the work to create a life that is in alignment with my soul is like the biggest gift that I could give to her.

And I always say that like that energy of little me, I know that she’s so proud, and that I get to tell her like, “We did it. We made it.” Of course, I will continue to unfold, and grow, and learn, but I’m really proud of where I’ve come. I’m just happy that I get to kind of dedicate this book to little me, who went through it and still decided to rise through it all.

Menendez: Christine, thank you so much.

Gutiérrez: Thank you for having me.

Menendez: You’re so special. This book is so good. It’s really... You should be so proud.

Gutiérrez: Thank you, my love. No, just for anyone that’s listening, no matter where you are on this journey, know that you are worthy. You are worthy. You are worthy. You are worthy.

Menendez: Thank you for joining us. *Latina to Latina* is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Virginia Lora is our managing producer. Cedric Wilson is our producer. Kojin Tashiro mixed this episode. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor. We love hearing from you. We really do. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com, and remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, wherever you are listening, and please, please leave a review. It is one of the fastest, easiest ways to help us grow as a community.

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