



Iyanla Vanzant



Unfortunately, the standards of modern lifestyles have taught us that to be alone, to be quiet, is bad, frightening, and most of all not normal. We believe that to be “by yourself” is to not be good enough, to not be right in the world. As, such we fear and resist being alone by accepting into our lives things and people which occupy our minds and give the illusion that all is well. To reap the benefits of the Valley of Light experiences, a woman must be willing to translate being “by yourself” to being “with yourself”. When you are with yourself, you receive the blessing of enlightenment. You can view the experience or the period of life in which you find yourself from a posture of introspection. Being with yourself is a time of sacred aloneness in which you can understand your lessons.

— The Value in the Valley: A Black Woman’s Guide Through Life’s Dilemmas



Quick Facts

- * Born in 1953
- * African-American motivational speaker, spiritual counselor, and ordained minister

Biography

Iyanla (pronounced EE-Yan-LA) Vanzant was born Rhonda Vanzant in 1953 in Brooklyn, N.Y in the back seat of a taxicab with the given name of Rhonda Fleming. At the age of two, she was sent to live with her grandmother, after the death of her mother. After a severe beating at the hands of her grandmother, she went to live with her father and stepmother. Vanzant was later shuffled off to an aunt whose husband repeatedly raped her. She tried many times to tell of her abuse but each time her voice was never heard.

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Biography continued

Vanzant's teen years were filled with pregnancy, abuse and loneliness. She had her first child at the age of 16 and married for a short period at the age of 19. After two marriages, three children and a nervous breakdown, Vanzant decided that there had to be more to life. In the middle of the night, she left her abusive husband taking only the things she could carry, three children and a bag filled with clothes.

After months on welfare and living in poverty, Vanzant saw a sign that changed her life. It was an ad for Medger Evers College. She enrolled at Medger Evers in New York, where she received her Bachelor of Science in 1983 and graduated summa cum laude. She later attended Queens College and received her law degree in 1988. Vanzant then moved to Philadelphia and practiced law for four years.

While working with a group of women on public assistance and creating lectures about changing their lives, Vanzant wrote *Tapping the Power Within: A Path to Empowerment for Black Women* in 1992. This book, containing basic spiritual principles, self-affirmations, and personal rituals, was used to uplift and motivate women on welfare. For Vanzant, this was the beginning of a new career. She started seeking spiritual growth, leaving her job as a public defender without giving a notice in search of growth and happiness.

Vanzant has empowered women of all classes, races and socio-economic backgrounds. There are no boundaries in her self-help books. A regular on the Oprah Winfrey Show, Vanzant is a motivational speaker, spiritual counselor, ordained minister, and Yoruba priestess. She changed her name from Rhonda to "Iyanla," meaning "great mother," after she became a Yoruba priestess. One major role of the priestess is to give advice to her followers or congregation. This is probably an influence on her motivations for writing the large volume of works that she has.

Vanzant has written 18 books to date. *In the Meantime: Finding Yourself and the Love That You Want* is a book that addresses single people who are looking for love. Vanzant discusses how to make oneself whole in order to be able to find what you are looking for. Her advice is good and well-put, with practical applications and examples. She likens the journey to completion within oneself to a house, where one must start at the basement, and work up to the attic. She feels that the only way one can have a fulfilling relationship with another person is to feel totally comfortable with oneself.



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Vanzant's role as a spiritual advisor shows through her words and examples. She makes it clear that spirituality is important in understanding life. Her advice centers around issues that pertain more centrally to people of color, appealing to a specific audience. This book has received good reviews and is a good guide for those looking for help on self-improvement.

Yesterday, I Cried is a book that is autobiographical in nature. It tells Vanzant's own life story and how she made it through the struggles in her life. She was raised in an abusive household, being sexually abused by her uncle after losing her mother at the age of three. She entered an abusive marriage at 19 and found herself caught in the system of welfare. She was a single mother of three children and earned several degrees. This book provides a source of hope to women who are caught in situations in which they feel trapped, and offers valuable advice on how to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. She counsels people on how to find happiness and reach their peak of spiritual growth.

One Day My Soul Just Opened Up guides people on a 40-day spiritual journey to find themselves. This book echoes many ideas seen in other books, but can not be confused with any of her others. Her choice of words are rich and beautiful, and again she steers her writing predominantly to people of color. She provides good advice on how to release angry and poisonous emotions, a skill she feels is lacking in many people. Her advice is practical and easy to follow with reasonable expectations.

Vanzant has been on Oprah several times detailing her crusade to help African American women become stronger and more empowered. Both Oprah and Vanzant have noted that the shows have been very beneficial not only to the viewers, but also to themselves. Oprah even invited Vanzant back to have "Iyanla Tuesdays." She dedicated one show a month to remember "single women looking for love" by bringing on the most inspirational guest the Oprah show has seen. On one show, Vanzant talked specifically to men, stating that "one of man's greatest desires is to make women happy." Oprah and Vanzant talked to men from the audience about fear and finding the right woman. Overall, it appears as though Vanzant will be joining Oprah many more times to help people gain strength in their personal and spiritual lives.



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Biography continued

On November 22, 1998, *Dateline* (NBC) aired a show featuring the life of Iyanla Vanzant. This piece showed the author reaching out to women through her conferences and books. Vanzant tells the story of her harsh childhood being beaten and raped. The news magazine shows Vanzant with a small group of women, spending time sharing with each other to empower themselves. Through her story it seems that women can connect and find healing. Of her work, Vanzant says, “My books aren’t self-help, they’re God-help.”

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