



# Teaching What We Need to Learn

*Leaders in Personal Growth & Spirituality  
Share Their Own Innermost Challenges*

SELECTED TRANSCRIPTS  
*Volume 1: Buddhist & Integral Teachers*

*Dialogues Conducted & Compiled  
by Raphael Cushnir*

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**Transparency Press**

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Innermost Challenges  
Volume 1: Buddhist and Integral Teachers**

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This book is dedicated to all the teachers who participated in the series. Your generosity, transparency, and vulnerability leave me honored and humbled. You have my deepest gratitude.



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**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

## **Introduction**

What happens when we teachers of personal growth and spirituality step off the stage? When the workshop is over and we return to our own daily existence?

Are we able to practice what we preach? If not, what gets in the way? Especially when it's really hard?

In the end, aren't we all the same as human beings? Beneath the roles we play? Isn't one of the greatest gifts we teachers can give a glimpse of the way our own lives are altered by the very same principles and practices we share with our students?

In the wake of all these questions, during the fall of 2011, I began to imagine a very different kind of interview series, one I'd host, in which the personal lives of teachers took center stage. In which we were willing to become vulnerable to listeners in a new and exciting way.

### **A New Vision**

But then doubt crept in. Most great teachers love to tell stories from their past. These stories help demonstrate how we all can overcome our flaws and foibles. So maybe my idea wasn't so new after all.

With more reflection I came to understand that a telling a story from the past is one thing, but relating a personal challenge as it's happening is quite another.

What I envisioned were teachers being willing to share, quite frankly, what they're working through right now. What's their edge? What's still messy and unclear for them? What may become a teaching story down the road, but right now is their own work?

Yet as soon as this vision clarified, more doubt crept in. The possibility for such a series would come down to one more crucial question: Would the teachers people most want to hear from actually agree to take part? Would they allow people a truly revealing peek behind the curtain of their lives?

There was only one way to find out. I asked them directly. I started with a small list, and an email entitled "An Invitation to Radical Transparency." Most of the people from that list said "Yes!"

### **Momentum Builds**

Next, I asked the thousands of people on my own email list who they would most like to join the series. The names poured in, and I continued with my invitations. Soon, to my surprise and delight,

there were more teachers interested than I even had room to include. To accommodate them all, I had to create an ever bigger event.

In the series that eventually premiered in the spring of 2012, and ran for 23 weeks, listeners got to know some of their favorite teachers like never before. Plus, they experienced a deep resonance with teachers they encountered for the first time.

Now, you the reader have the same opportunity. Forty four of those interviews are included in this three volume set. By sharing their own lives so candidly, these visionaries will advance our collective wisdom in powerful ways.

### **Getting Personal**

In recording the interviews, I made it my mission to put my own personal challenges front and center. This made it as safe and easy as possible for the teachers to open up right along with me.

So here's to Radical Transparency as a new teaching paradigm for the 21st century.

As a matter of fact, here's to Radical Transparency as a whole new way of being for the 21st century.

Because no matter where we are on our own path of personal growth and spiritual realization, none of us are just students. We're all teachers, too. Our everyday lives are offerings to all the people with whom we come in contact.

Taking the cue from the wise and generous guests in this series, let's all teach what we need to learn...and learn what we need to teach...starting now.

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## Buddhist Teachers

### Dr. Reginald “Reggie” Ray



Dr. Reginald "Reggie" Ray brings us four decades of study and intensive meditation practice within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as well as a special gift for applying it to the unique problems, inspirations, and spiritual imperatives of modern people. He currently resides in Boulder, CO where he is the Spiritual Director of the Dharma Ocean Foundation, a non-profit educational organization dedicated to the practice, study and preservation of the teachings of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche and the practice lineage he embodied. [WWW.DHARMAOCEAN.ORG](http://WWW.DHARMAOCEAN.ORG)

#### 1. The Nakedness of Trungpa's Lineage

**RC:** Before we begin the interview, you said to me that you thought the theme of this interview series was important and timely. I'd love to begin by hearing a little bit more about what you meant by that.

**RR:** Well, from the viewpoint of the tantric tradition, which is my training and my teaching, you can't really separate out spiritual teaching from the life of the teacher. In some sense, as a teacher, what you're doing is teaching directly out of the immediacy of the situation that you're having with your own life and with your students. I think, too often our culture's spirituality is separated out as if it's some kind of commodity—some kind of external item that teachers have in their possession and they download unto other people. And at least from the viewpoint of our tradition, that's looking at it wrong way around.

**RC:** When you said that you thought it was timely, is that because you feel like the other idea of the spiritual download has a certain preeminence these days? Or was there something else in addition you were thinking about?

**RR:** Well, I think the idea of spirituality as a commodity that can be sold to other people, is not only preeminent in our culture but it's also very tenacious. Look at the number of books and the huge sales of spiritual books; books are, you could say, second level transmission, they're a transmission of ideas. That's hugely popular but the number of people who really understand that spirituality is much closer to home is far and few between. Ideas don't change people—practice does—and sharing a space with an authentic teacher does. I think we need more of that and less of the millions of publications that come out all the time.

**RC:** I'm pausing and I'm resonating with that piece you just shared that ideas don't change people, practice changes people. That's something that we haven't heard specifically in our series so far. That's a really important point, thank you for making it. I want to continue a little bit in regard to the tradition from which you teach because you spoke about that, and your teacher, if I'm correct, was Trungpa—is that right?

**RR:** That's true. Yes.

**RC:** And the experience of Trungpa in the United States and everything that happened when he came here is well documented from a lot of angles and there's a lot of controversy involved in it. I was wondering what you were taught and what you learned about transparency from the way that Trungpa both taught and lived his life in the presence of his students.

**RR:** Well, this is a very interesting question. On April 4, just a few days ago, a few days ago from this interview, we had the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his passing, and so I've been thinking a lot about that. And I'm going to say something and I don't know how much sense it will make. The most important thing that he had to teach, which strangely enough, you won't find in any of the books, or any of the articles; but the most important thing that he had to teach was that—and he didn't teach it by talking about it as much as he did by how he was—is that it's part of the human thing that we always want to have a coherent and consistent and a well-defended point of view—a set of beliefs about reality. And we all do it, philosophers do it in one level, spiritual teachers do it, and people who are the most ordinary people in the world do it. We all have to have this sort of ego image—this image of the world; this idea about how everything is. And the thing about him was, his life, to me, more than anything was about disrupting those ideas and forcing all of us to confront reality not through the filter of our concepts about it, but nakedly and directly. And it's interesting, I was just talking with my wife about these last few days because I ran into one of his old students from my

own generation and this really came up. Trungpa Rinpoche could not stand the sort of rigid concepts and rigid beliefs and rigid preconceptions that we all have about reality. And morning, noon, and night he was doing things to disrupt what we thought. And it was very hard to be around him for that very reason—it was very anxiety producing. But that's what he did; that's what he taught. You don't have to have a fixed idea about reality in order to live. In fact, the fixed ideas are what get between us and life as it can be.

**RC:** Sometimes we use terms in the West that frame things differently from teachings in the East. I'm wondering if in your experience with Trungpa, if he spoke about anything that would be commensurate with the shadow and how he would think about the shadow and the possibility of illuminating and integrating the shadow even if one is not after a coherent world-view.

**RR:** Well, you know, he didn't use that language, but if there was anything you're afraid of, somehow he found a way to put it right in front of you. And it was usually something about yourself. I mean that's what the shadow is: it's those aspects of ourselves that we don't want to face and deal with. And he had this genius where he could—he somehow arranged things so that suddenly you were face to face with things about yourself that you loathed or you found incredibly threatening. And he just did this all the time. It was very difficult to be around the man.

**RC:** And then as a teacher, did he also show that transparently about himself? In other words, was he open and revealing about his own shadow aspects even if he didn't call them that?

**RR:** Well, you know, there are a couple of interesting points here. One is he never tried to hide anything, so that's interesting. He had sexual relationships with some of his female students. And he never made the least effort to cover it up or hide it. So that's interesting because he knew very well how the culture would respond. Also, he drank heavily and we can talk about, what the hell was going on there? Which is an interesting conversation, but he never made any effort whatsoever to hide that. And also, he was just, I don't know, there was a kind openness to his whole process that was different from the way that it is for most of us. So that that's one point. And I think the other point is he showed things about himself that most people would find very threatening. You know for example, he sometimes got very depressed. And here, we have this supposedly famous spiritual teacher who has all this press around him and his books and everything and you'd think that with his students, with anybody frankly, he would be wanting to keep some—because he knew depression in our culture, at least at that time, was very frowned upon. And it was really bad for you

to be depressed; you'd think he would have made some effort to cover that up, and he didn't. He made no effort whatsoever. And same with when he was sad or when he was however he was feeling. So that's an interesting point.

There was a story told which maybe illustrates this. One day in his house there was some very important dignitaries, I don't know who they were. They might have been the Japanese ambassadors or something to the United States—I don't know who it was. But somebody was in his house waiting for him downstairs with a couple of their people. And Rinpoche had gone out of the shower and he wanted to get something. And he just wandered into the living room—not where they were but in the next room; the door was open and he was stark naked. His attendant who was with him just said the amazing thing was it didn't bother him. He didn't even seem to think about it, being so open. So that's interesting. I want to take another step here, is that okay with you?

**RC:** I'm happy to. But I want to know is it okay, before we take the next step, just talk a little bit more about some of the pieces you just raised because I think they're important.

**RR:** Sure, yes.

**RC:** So the first thing is that you spoke about not hiding anything, and that's really important to me. In another conversation in the series, I was speaking to Mark Matousek, the spiritual memoirist. He shared that in his experience, the most authentic teachers were the ones who were really upfront; the true sign of a teacher to be weary of is one where there is any attempt to hide or to invest in a particular image of any kind. And so, I really hear the importance of what you're sharing about Trungpa just as a way for us to relate to other teachers in our own lives as well, which is that it's not necessarily about the foibles or the difficult aspects of a teachers' personality if, in fact, they're not choosing to hide and they're front and center, because then even as a student, you have the opportunity to assess things from your own point of view and you got the whole story. So for instance, you might have a legitimate conversation within yourself and with others about: do you want to have spiritual teacher who's an alcoholic? And you could say yes or you could say no, but then it's up to you.

**RR:** That's right.

**RC:** You're not being manipulated.

**RR:** That's a really good point.

## 2. The Dignity in Depression

**RC:** And so, the same thing: your spiritual teacher sleeps with practitioners. Is that okay with you? If so, why? If not, why not? And suddenly there's a real investigation and it's not about pretend or image on any side. So that sounds like it's an important piece to focus on. And then the other thing, just real quickly before you move on to your next piece, is you talked about depression. And the way that Trungpa was open about his depression even though he knew that it was seen as a problem in Western society when he was here. I'm wondering if you could speak to what you saw and mean, and what he saw and meant by depression because often—just speaking personally—depression to me is often a pushing down. As the term implies, it come from our resistance to emotional space that we don't want to experience. But from my understanding of him and his teaching, he would want to experience, he would welcome whatever emotions he was experiencing. So how would you describe depression in his case?

**RR:** Well, depression—one of the things that he said very early—this is interesting because this is really, in a way, what sealed the deal for me when I very first met him because I had been through about eight or nine years of very dark depression—it was a question for me. So, when I met him, first of all, I knew that he had been through something very deep and dark in England before he came to the United States in the late 60's. What he said was that depression was the most dignified and realistic of all the samsaric states. Depression is still samsaric means that depression still is happening within ego-framework. As he put it himself: Depression is the closest thing to actual enlightenment that we can experience, without actually crossing over. And what he meant by that was that in real depression, deep depression you see that the usual way in which you spend your time and the usual kind of pursuits that everybody engages in are fundamentally meaningless. Meaningless in the sense that they don't deliver what we're hoping they will deliver, that's not what they're about. You're left feeling that there's no point even being alive. And what makes it a samsaric state—enlightened people within the Buddhist framework see the same thing but they don't have the same response. And what makes depression depression is that there's still some feeling that it should be otherwise, and there's kind of self-regression and it's very subtle.

So that was interesting. And during his life, there were times when I saw him even in a very big social situation, things were very dark for him at that moment because what I surmised is that some of the things he was hoping for—he was seeing there was nothing in it. They were empty hopes.

**RC:** I'm really glad that I asked you to share more about that. I think it's an important teaching and really different from what most people hear. I just want to draw out and highlight that idea that there's a truth to the way that, when in depression, we see the charade and the meaninglessness of most human pursuits.

**RR:** Yes.

**RC:** And then there's also what we do with that.

**RR:** Exactly.

**RC:** It sounds like what you're saying and then maybe why he spoke so much to you out of your own personal experiences is because he was really honoring and validating what you were seeing. And then also offering the possibility that that could be true and didn't have to be argued against, and yet you didn't have to feel the way that you were feeling.

**RR:** Well, yes, I mean, in other words, another thing he said about depression is depression is an incredibly beautiful walkway, it's a passage; He was basically saying depression is a journey.

**RC:** Yes.

**RR:** And it needs to be respected, it needs to be honored. And we need to be fully with it, as fully with it as we can. That was so different from what I've heard from other people.

**RC:** Right, and in his willingness to share his depression, he was also not pretending to have reached some kind of permanent state in which he could see the emptiness of the world and just be peaceful and joyful about it.

**RR:** Oh it's so true. Yes. Studying with him for all those years, what I came to see is that the attachment to the reality of being joyful and peaceful and open is an ego state. It's not liberation. I mean for him, true liberation is the freedom to experience our lives exactly as our lives turn up, and that's the tantric view, and, again, not something that I was hearing from other people.

### **3. Day to Day, 24/7**

**RC:** And so I want to make sure that we talk a lot about you and your own journey and your own experience, but I also want to make sure we come back to that thread you said that there was some place else you wanted to take us.



**RR:** Well, the only other thing I wanted to mention is that being around someone like him—I met him in 1970, he died in 1987—so seventeen years of just really being around him a lot. You know, in the beginning, you see this quality of total openness and transparency, and also lack of apology, which is another something we might want to talk about. He was not apologetic about the life that he had and the person he was, ever—that was incredibly instructive. But also, when I started teaching, with that kind of person as my teacher, there’s a lot of pressure because you want to market yourself. You want to present yourself in a way that is going to appeal to people and their preconceptions, that’s just part of human nature. But having a teacher like that, what are you going to do? Because the minute you start trying to do that, you remember him. So the way he was has had a huge impact, I think, on the people who have studied with him and are now teaching. We have to be transparent, we have to be open, and sometimes it really gets you in hot water showing people your process and not trying to hide from them the person that you actually are day to day, 24/7.

**RC:** Can you say a little what that hot water might look like or has looked like for you?

**RR:** Well, yes, I’ll give you one example, I could give you hundreds. I’ve been in a marriage for twenty-eight years and it was a marriage in which I had and raised children. I’m very close to my wife, but there were some very fundamental problems in the relationship that just wouldn’t go away. And about six years ago, after having been teaching for a long time and having lots of students, and a large community, I left her. You try, you try, you try, you try, you try, and then you see everybody’s being hurt by your sort of cowardice because I think I hung out way too long with it for everybody’s benefit. And my students basically said, “That’s not okay” And as one of them said to me, “It’s not okay to have a teacher who’s going to leave his wife. I quit.” At that time, I lost a lot of students simply because I had a human life. My response was “My teaching is not about some idealized faith.” My teaching, in the lineage of Chogyam Trungpa, is that life as it already is and the people we already are, is sacred. And we’re not trying to override what life is based on some concept of saintliness. I am not and never will be a teacher who tries to present something that’s not human because that’s not spiritual. If it’s not human, it’s not spiritual.

**RC:** Well, I really appreciate you sharing that piece. I think it’s really important. And it brings to mind a conversation that I had in this series with Harville Hendrix and Helen Lakelly Hunt, the creators and stewards of Imago Relationship Therapy; they have some basic tenants. One tenant is that we unconsciously pick partners who have the potential to help us heal because they represent

the unhealed aspects of our relationships with our primary caregivers early in life. And then also on the other side, that when we meet those partners then we will also be unable to meet their need for the same reason; that in a healing partnership, we can stretch in growing to meet their needs and that's a gift, and vice versa. So I asked them a question: from their perspective, does that mean then if you embrace that point of view of relationship as spiritual teacher that you would never leave a relationship? Could you ever see and experience where it felt like actually the right thing to do and in the highest good of everybody to say, "Well, this work here is done." Or one or the other partner just is meant to move on? And it was interesting because they said that fundamentally, their answer is no; that anybody who really was embracing the healing work of relationship would see that the path was there and they would choose and embrace that path. And I really resonated with it in part. But also I thought about as soon as they mentioned it, the fact that that kind of relationship they're describing is one of real mutuality in which both people are consistently choosing to be as best as possible that kind of healing partner for one another. And if that's not working or if one of the two people or both isn't seeing the relationship as that kind of container, then staying together could be really hurtful. And that's what you just eluded to, you said you hung on too long and that desire to do it right or as you thought it should be done could end up also being something that one would hold on to.

#### **4. Trusting Reality the Way Reality Shows Up**

**RR:** Yeah, I think you put your finger exactly on it. Different people, I think come in to life with different missions. In the tantric tradition, the consort relationship or the spiritual relationship between two people is exactly what you said; there's an underlying commitment and a willingness to show up for the other person, to number one: not hide out, which as we know, happens in relationships. A lot of times we get into hiding out, so you show up—you have to show up for the other person and you have to be willing to acknowledge what they see about you, and you have to be willing to change. And I'm not saying everybody is called to that kind of relationship but some people are. If you're called to that mutually transformative spiritual relationship with another person, both people have to be into it. That's basically what you just said, and it's true. And if one person—let's say one person is very severely traumatized and maybe alcohol is the only way in which they can live and get through the day, and they simply cannot be in that kind of relationship; it's in my understanding at this point, it's your obligation not to just hang out with it in a kind of numb, ignorant, and maybe highly codependent way. You have to move on and for the sake of yourself and for the sake of the people around you, and do it for the sake of the other person also.

So ideally speaking everybody's spiritual, everybody ultimately wants to grow. But in practical terms that point of view can really justify an awful lot of poor behavior on our parts as partners in that kind of situation.

**RC:** Right, and it's an ideal.

**RR:** It's an ideal, yes. And again, the tantric thing is you have to trust reality in the way reality shows up and not get hung up on your noble conceptions of what it could be.

**RC:** Yes, I love that. And it brings to mind something that Isaac Shapiro said in an interview for the series. He said there's only one human drama and that's not wanting the experience you're having.

**RR:** (Laugh) Well, there's another kind of drama but it's a drama like exploding stars and thunderstorms. And that's the real human drama and it's beautiful.

**RC:** Yes, I love that. Thank you. So part of your journey and I don't know where along the line it started, but your journey as a teacher, in terms of what you present and what you live, has to do with a deepening recognition of the body and the role of embodiment in awakening. And I'm wondering if you could just share a little bit with us about how that came to be and how you ended up writing a book called *Touching Enlightenment*, which really drives this point home. So how did that evolve for you?

### **5. The Body is the Buddha Mind**

**RR:** Well you know experientially, it evolved just through my practice. And in the Tibetan tradition, there is a lot of emphasis on the body and meditation techniques that involve developing a deeper and deeper experience of the body and awareness of the body, and knowledge of what the body really is. And I've done over my life, a lot of retreat—that was something that Chogyam Trungpa really urged me to do. So at this point, it's five or six years in solitary retreat, accumulated time, and about the same time in group retreats. And what happens when you do that much practice is your concept about practice gets broken down, and your ideas and ambitions and even your inspiration about what meditation is going to do for you, they just get worn down, they just get broken down. And what you're left with, strangely enough, is a pretty open, empty awareness and the experience of life that happens when you're not thinking about things and you're not projecting a future. It's very physical, it's very embodied. You're left with literally the experience of your body and with the world. And that really changes things. And so that happened gradually. At the

same time, the tantric view is all about what they call the redemption of matter, the redemption of the body, which means that through the practices—which again, I didn't think about this, I kind of went through it and then looked back—but through the practices, you begin to realize that all of the wisdom and all of the information that you need to live is found in your body and in your heart; it's an immediate direct perception. And the activity of the left brain, which is the thinking, strategizing and planning brain—the ego center as we know from neurobiology—it's actually not helpful. The body needs to lead. So that's been my journey and, really, it's evolved over the past forty years; it's been a long process. But I'm at a point now where I really see, not only the necessity but the possibility for Western people to live in their bodies and to let the thinking mind be a handmaiden of the body rather than vice versa. And you know, I look back at the tradition and realize the tradition says that the body is the Buddha Mind. It's that simple. It's the awakened state. It's the awareness of the body—it's already in us and with us. And as long as we are willing to take our lead from the knowledge and experience of the body then our journey is very unimpeded.

**RC:** Okay, so we've got some really rich things to talk about here. One question I have is: it seems like what you're saying in terms of the left brain/right brain, body-mind split, that your perspective and the perspective of the tradition is that one needs to be the handmaiden, as you said, of the other, as opposed to a marriage of equality and equal usefulness, if appropriately applied, so to speak. So I'm wondering, did I hear that right? Do you really feel like the one needs to lead the other?

## 6. Soma

**RR:** Yes, when I talk about the body, I use the term *soma*, which is a Greek word for body. And that includes our physical body from the neck down; it includes our right brain, which is one center of intelligence for the *soma*; it includes the heart which is another very important center of intelligence, and it includes the gut. All of those three areas: the right brain, the heart, and the gut, all have a huge number of neurons and process information in different ways. And when you take the totality of the soma, it is the primary organ of knowledge of all people. And the interesting point is when you tap into your soma, you have what Buddhism calls direct perception; it's not mediated by concepts. And there are all kinds of interesting things about it: it's open, it's not ego-based, it's what Jung called 'objective intelligence.' In Buddhism, it's called the Buddha-mind: the mind of the Buddha. The left brain—interestingly the thinking mind doesn't experience things directly. And even neurologically, the connecting link in our brain between the soma and the left brain is very tenuous. What's happened in our culture is that, if you don't use it, you lose it, in neurobiology terms. And by not connecting the left brain with the *soma* with the primary experience of life,

we've actually lost the ability even to feel what the body knows anymore. So I would say, just to reiterate what you just said, that our life in Buddhist terms, in the terms of neurobiology, in terms of many religions—our lives need to be lead by the part of our intelligence and our wisdom that is not ego-driven. And then the job of the left-brain, the thinking mind, the ego center, is to be a handmaiden and very much in secondary position to mediate what the *soma* knows.

Now, one thing from neurobiology which is very interesting, is most of the things that we generate in our left brain, where we think that we're coming up with our thinking, are actually initiated by the body. And even though people don't know it in our culture, many conclusions we come to, we come to because the body has already come to that conclusion and then in our left brain, we come up with the logic that justifies it. So isn't that interesting?

**RC:** It is. As a matter of fact, there's a brilliant short book about that subject called *The Mind's Past* by Michael Gazzaniga who described in scientific detail the way that the personality housed in the left brain, in order to continue to believe the fiction that it's in control, actually pretends that it has made decisions when it can be clearly demonstrated the decision has been made prior to any conscious deliberation.

**RR:** Well, that's fabulous. That's great.

**RC:** So just a couple of other things to follow up on this: I think it's a really important theme for all of us. We're talking about the intelligences that live in the body or the *soma*, as opposed to the ego or personality structure that lives in the left brain. With that as a kind of a map, what part of us pays attention? Let me just add a little bit of that before you answer it—you were talking about direct perception, and one of the things that I share with people is that when you're going to be surfing you emotions, when you're going to be entering into the realm of the body as an explorer in a new way, and the left brain need something to do because it's a problem solving machine. It looks at everything as a problem and if you don't give it something to do, it's going to just kind of get in there and make it all something to solve again. And so it's really important to recognize that when you surf, there's the surfer on the wave and then there's the wave itself. And so in tuning into *soma*, the fact that the left-brain's job is to pay attention is really significant—at least that's how I describe it. But I'm wondering given your own wisdom about this and how you work with people, would you say that that attention is a left-brain function or would you see it as something different?

**RR:** I think it's really well said, the way you describe it. Initially we need to bring our conscious orientation to attention to attend to the body, to the *soma*. But one interesting thing that happens—I one hundred percent to agree with what you've just said—but there's a second step that is quite important which is: through practice, once you learn how to quickly and fully enter into the experience of the objective mind or the Buddha Mind of the body, what you realize is there's another kind of attention that is always there. And it's the attention of the body. And here we could use the word attention, but we could also use the word awareness. There's what we might call self-existing or uncreated awareness that the body always has. And so when you tap into that, then you don't need the attentive faculty anymore; once you've learned how to reside within the attentiveness that is already there in the body. So I see what you just described as most of meditation practice: paying attention to the body. But then there's come a moment which might only be brief, it could be a fraction of a second, when all of a sudden you're not paying attention anymore, you're just there. And the quality of your awareness is heightened and there is a sense of being fully present to your world so there's nothing outside that you need to pay attention to. So that's interesting. And I think the purpose of meditation is using the technique you just described, which is paying attention so that we can eventually *be* attention at a certain point.

**RC:** I love that and it really demonstrates that paying attention is important but it's essentially a bridge toward that effortless being attention that you're describing or being awareness.

**RR:** Exactly, yes, that's well said.

**RC:** The other thing though I wanted to touch on is, because I'm with you a hundred percent on the wisdom of the body in all of the different ways that you just described, and yet I'm aware that there is, in holistic oriented and sometimes in spiritual circles too—there's a certain kind of—what I would call easy-thinking or simplistic thinking about the body. You hear people say all the time that the body knows how to heal itself if we just get out of the way, and in many cases that's true. But in a lot of cases, the body just develops child leukemia and dies. And it's not about healing, if healing means physical well-being or even survival. We'd have to have a much broader sense of what healing means, which of course, you could heal into death, for example, if we're going to say the body knows how to heal. So I'm wondering how you, in your own teaching and in your own personal understanding factor in that kind of, I don't know if this is the right word but what's coming to me is, that natural fallibility of the body?



**RR:** Yes, you raise some really interesting points. The first thing is when people say the body knows how to heal itself if we get out of the way—I think there’s a kind of new age imprecision and sort of fluffiness – a naivete in thinking that “Oh, we can just get out of the way.” The dynamic between the ego-mind and the body is a lifelong dynamic, and you cannot, nor should you ever aspire to get rid of your ego-mind. So in other words, we never get out of the way. We’re always in the way. But being in the way and knowing we’re in the way of ourselves and working with that, that’s the transformative journey. And that’s where the new age way is really not helpful because it gives people the impression that somehow, again, here we are again, there’s some idealized state of the human person where there are no problems anymore. So I don’t think that model’s very helpful, saying, if we get out of the way, the body knows how to heal itself. But I think we need to be more realistic and say, “Well, we get in our way on a global level. We get in our way on a most personal level. We create a lot of situations out of being human that are causing a lot of problems for ourselves; and those are what we have to work on.” So I, as a practitioner, need to work on the fact that of how much I don’t listen to my body and how much my ego-mind needs to grow, and over the course of my whole life, become a vehicle for the wisdom of the body and less a vehicle for my own self aggrandizement. See what I mean? So it’s a little shift of emphasis. Again, it’s coming back and respecting the fact that we have a *soma* that is basically enlightened. And then we have an ego-mind that needs to make a journey around that—that’s our actual situation, and respecting that dynamic and not disrespecting one side of it, such as the ego.

**RC:** Yes, and I’m guessing you would say that that *soma* that is enlightened could also be “sick” or “ill.”

### **7. Illness as a Teacher**

**RR:** Well, not from the *soma*’s point of view. In other words, if somebody has leukemia, there are two ways to experience that. One way is from the viewpoint of the conventional mind, the ego-mind, the left-brain. It’s a big problem and we have to address it—this is really terrible and think of all the terrible things that we’re going to experience, and think about all the fear we have of pain. But another way to experience it is from the viewpoint of the *soma* itself. And when we view pain or illness or tension or distress or conflict from the viewpoint of the *soma*, we see it as part of how the universe works. And even if we ourselves are dying, we understand when we see it from the objective perspective in the non-ego viewpoint of the body. We just simply hold that as part of the dynamic of being a self. Stars are born and stars die; amoebas are born and amoebas die; it’s part of

the round of life. Even when the body is what we would call ill or diseased, we don't need to see that as a problem.

**RC:** Right, so just making this very specific and personal because I think that's helpful for our listeners: for almost thirty years now, I've had what is usually referred to as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome which also means something like 'we don't know what wrong with you'—that's a long discussion and I'm very open with this. The reason that I'm bringing this up here is that every day of my own personal life is engaged with symptoms that are a part of that energetic challenge in living. And so over the years of working with it as best as I could, I got to a place where I recognized that I do have a preference, a human preference, that if it were possible for me to have better and more consistent energy for living, I would love that. And I will do what I can whenever possible to see if that is something that I can move forward with. And at the same time, it's come to me to understand that it's also equally important to be with it as it is and to recognize it that if my preference doesn't come to pass, that doesn't mean that there's something wrong with me or that somehow my ability to live in fullness is compromised. But in fact, this is just the fullness that I'm meant to be living because this is what is.

**RR:** Well, yes, I mean, you're married to a very difficult partner.

**RC:** (Laughs) Yes sir, I am.

**RR:** And your partner really has your number, meaning that you cannot do what you want to. Are you married?

**RC:** Well, you first were speaking about my partner, my *soma*—my illness. But now you're asking me about am I literally married to another person?

**RR:** Yes.

**RC:** Yes.

**RR:** Well, I mean so am I. And my experience is, it's just really difficult. I mean, I love this person with my whole heart, and this person has brought me life. And one way that my wife brings me life is she doesn't go along with me; she's very tender, very present; but let's say she doesn't go along with my neurosis, she doesn't go along with my ambition, or when I disconnect from her or from our son—she doesn't go along with it—she's not mean, she just doesn't go along. I've been

through illness myself, and it's the same exact thing. For me, being ill for a long time, I had to constantly relate to this partner who was basically in bed with me all the time. And I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that. I wanted to do this and this way and I couldn't. It was like constantly being brought up short. And that's the way it was with Trungpa Rinpoche; that's the way it is with my wife, and that's the way it has been when I'm ill. And somehow I understand that this illness—my thing was I had a very serious, almost lethal Candida infestation that for seven years, I was almost immobilized. And for one year, I was actually in bed. And I realized that this was the gift of the universe to me because my personality is too, I don't know—it's too ambitious, it's too narcissistic, it's too strong. It overrides other people, or at least it would like to. And so it was like having the brake on all the time in my ego. And so—I don't know, I don't want to speak for you, but it sounds like you're married to that kind of partner. You're married—your body is not going to let you off the hook. And of course my experience with the people I work with, it's the people who have been through illness that actually understand the most, to be truthful. There was one point when I was told I was going to die of cancer. And I've met a lot of people with cancer, people who are dying, and people who were getting better. But the basic thing was this group of people understood things about life that the general population simply doesn't. That really helped me realize that those whose bodies will not let them simply override, are the lucky ones. People like you and me are lucky, even if it's painful, and many times we just hate it. It's a blessing, it truly is because it does change us and makes us be more than what we would have been otherwise.

**RC:** Yes. And just to make things on the one hand more complicated but also hopefully to enrich this discussion; in the midst of having that thirty year experience, I also had—there's no real name for it—but we can call it an 'energetic opening.' Some people refer to it as kundalini. The reason I wanted to bring it up is because a different kind of energetic channel opened up in me and began to share the space of my *soma*.

**RR:** Interesting.

**RC:** And when that first happened, I was so hopeful because I thought, "Well, this is so powerful it's completely going to burn out Chronic Fatigue Syndrome."

**RR:** (Laugh) Yes.

**RC:** And then in fact, what happened is that it just all took up residence together, and nothing canceled out the other. But they each are different teachers because sometimes or most of the time,

the fatigue and its related symptoms does exactly what you described. It's a softener. It says, "You can't do what you want to do. You can't run over people with your will and all of that." And then the other energy, which is so expansive and glorious and outrageous, offers great heights but it also doesn't care about the body, and will actually kill the body if I don't step in and say "Okay, well, that's a little bit too much." You know it will override the limitations of physiology. And so as much as I was enticed by all of those great energetic heights, I had to also recognize, okay, there are certain places where I have to come in and say, "Well, this is my body too." And I have to be caring for it because I can do that in a way that this energy can't or won't or doesn't understand. And ultimately, the process of living day-to-day with both of those things happening along with what we might call more ordinary, everyday consciousness has made me really sensitive to the experiential reality of multiplicity. Not the idea of it: "Oh we have different parts of ourselves." But the sense that what is moving through every day in the awareness that I would call me is just so much more than I ever could imagine to be in control of or understand. And we all have this unconscious process going on anyway like digestion and all of that. But in these cases with these, you know, extra additions to the situation, I'm just most of the time kind of holding on for dear life.

**RR:** Well, you know that's the definition of tantra. The term means that there's no continuity, there's no thread you can hang on to, that in each moment, your life is a particular way but there's not necessarily going to be any discernible continuity with what happened five minutes ago. And I think you're really describing that. And for a person whose life is like that, I mean, I think chronic fatigue totally opened you up. And then life becomes, as you said, so much bigger. And the only way you can deal with it is actually to relate to each moment. You can't really be importing you're tired yesterday or you're energized yesterday, it doesn't help. So the ego continuity that we're always trying to come up with, at a certain point, it just breaks down and all you can do is relate directly, intelligently, openly, and without ambition to whatever's going on. And that's what I'm hearing you describing, that process.

**RC:** Yes, I'm certainly imperfect at it, but it is my intention. One of the things that also happens along the way, this connects back to our talk earlier about attention being a bridge to awareness that isn't effortful; when somebody has a chronic illness they end up being way more vigilantly aware about where they are at any moment. People who have an abundance of energy and physical well-being are kind of profligate with their energy. They're not thinking about what's going to happen in the next hour or, "Oh this is one of those places where I'm going to pay for it if I'm not a little bit

extra cautious.” So that vigilance is not ultimately helpful because there’s a holding on to it which is sort of the opposite of the tantra that you’re describing. But it also has a consistency of attention that I think has the potential then to shift into a more spacious awareness. And I think that that’s something that I’ve been in an education about for a long time.

**RR:** You know that’s a really good point. You develop a level of mindfulness through being sick that ordinary people don’t have and it becomes incredibly refined. And that gift, I mean in the beginning it is like you’re suggesting, it does seem obsessive, it seems compulsive, it seems too paranoid, too vigilant. But actually you’re developing a tool that, again as you just said, it’s going to help you deal with life at every possible level because before you can be aware, you have to be present. And what you’re learning, and we’re all learning through this process you described is to, in a very refined and precise way, be present every single moment and every single subtlety. And those then become stepping stones into this open, non-judgmental awareness that we’re looking for, where we find the real freedom and the sort of open-ended joy of life. So you described this beautifully. And I think you completely are onto how the process works.

### **8. The Heart**

**RC:** Well, thank you for that reflection, I appreciate that. In the few minutes that we have left, I would love to focus on you now, meaning, as you just said that from the tantric perspective, there’s nothing more than being able to look without a narrative or some kind of consistent thread. So with that in mind, in these recent minutes and hours and days, what’s drawing your attention about your own self, your own process? What feels up right now or not resolved? Where are you in the glorious mess of things?

**RR:** Well this is going to sound strange after forty years of spiritual practice but I feel at this point I’ve figured something out that I knew intellectually before, but now it’s sort of becoming an experiential possibility, and I’ll just tell you really simply what it is. It’s not that different from what we’re talking about. I’m realizing that it’s possible to, let’s put it this way: in Buddhism, the mind is called *chitta*. And actually ‘mind’ is a terrible translation. The seat of our intelligence and our awareness is the human heart. We often translate that as mind, but it’s completely misleading. What we’re looking to develop is not the awareness of the head but the awareness of the heart, at least when you look at it from within Buddhism. And what I’m starting to see, and this is through practices that I’ve been doing for the couple of years, is that you can experience the world from within the intelligence of the heart without needing to go through any filter. And when you do that

—the interesting thing about the heart is that it's part of the body and so we have this objective intelligence—the heart really is the organ in our body where we perceive the interconnection of all things, and where we have the sense of passion and longing and love for the world; it really comes to heightened awareness in the heart. I'm beginning to realize through some of the practices that we, in our tradition, can begin to experience and see and feel and know the world from the heart. Often we're afraid of that knowledge, most of our hearts are really shut down, and when we attend to our hearts, we just feel numb or we feel pain. But through the meditation practice that works with the heart, we can open that organ of reception or that seat of awareness, and we begin to see the world from that point of view. And we do see tremendous suffering; we see exactly how it is with other people. And we even gain the ability to be able to feel how it is to be that person. We know that person, we can actually be that person. So that's really what's going on for me now like, "Okay that's it." This is it, and this is what I want to work on now for the next decade or two, if I live that long because that's the fundamental human capacity that we need in this world. We need to know how to feel what it's like to be a mountain or an ocean or another person or an animal, and then we need to be able to act on that and translate that love in the way we go about things. So I think for the human race, it's needed, and I think for me personally, that's what I'm working on.

**RC:** I'm hearing the possible echoes of some of the indigenous teachings that are also a part of what you share in that ability of an open and connected heart to be able to know not just know what another individual is experiencing and to be them through that awareness but also other creatures and even the earth itself—did I hear that correctly?

**RR:** You did. And I would also include in that to what it's like to be the sun or the moon or stars or even galaxies or black holes. You know the interesting thing about the heart is the electromagnetic energy—the heart goes out forever. It becomes more attenuated but it reaches to the end of our, you know, some people think the universe is some fifteen billion light years in extent, and our heart actually touches that fifteen billion light years away, now. So it's interesting, to be human is to know the state of being, not just to see from the outside but to feel and know from the inside the state of being of this incredibly vast, beautiful universe, and to act on those connections; of course, that's what we've lost in our modern world.

**RC:** Before we go, because we have to go in just a minute or two, I want to follow up on that question because I really heard and appreciated what you were saying about where it's at for you right now and as you look over the horizon towards these next years. But in terms of the kinds of



challenges that people face, just in everyday living, is there anything that, in the spirit of transparency you would recognize as hard for you now where you find yourself going into struggle or something similar?

**RR:** Well, I think one thing is I feel I'm too distracted by my life in terms of the work that I want to do now. I'm married, I have a son. I have a community I have to look after. So there are a lot of external things that I can use as excuses. I mean, I do my daily practices, I do my yearly retreats, but I feel too distracted, frankly. And I know we all face that. My students tell me that. Everybody tells me that. This culture provides so many opportunities and so many delicious and provocative and tempting invitations to all kinds of things. And I need to simplify somehow—my marriage and my family is right at the heart of my spiritual life, so that's a given. And my work is a given. But within that framework of modern life, how can I live a more simple and more focused life? And also a life that is more in-line with my deepest intentions and my deepest aspirations, how can I do that? So I'm working on that.

**RC:** That's great. That's really helpful, and I appreciate you sharing that. And I appreciate all you've shared today, and the great warmth and clarity that you brought our discussion about what it means to be not just radically transparent, but radically aware of life as it comes moment by moment without the grand story, without the cohesive narrative just one moment at a time as it is. That feels so powerful. And again, I really thank you for taking part in this series and for gifting us with your time today.

**RR:** Well, a lot of it is you. And you're in the same place, so it was great to talk.

## James Baraz



James Baraz has been teaching Insight Meditation since 1978 and is a founding teacher of Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California. He leads retreats, workshops and classes around the U.S. and abroad. He also has led a popular Awakening Joy online course ([WWW.AWAKENINGJOY.INFO](http://WWW.AWAKENINGJOY.INFO)) since 2003. He is the author of *Awakening Joy: 10 Steps That Will Put You on the Road to Real Happiness*, with Shoshana Alexander (Bantam). [WWW.JAMESBARAZ.COM](http://WWW.JAMESBARAZ.COM)

### 1. The Joy Guy

**RC:** I have to tell you I'm a little bit worried about our talk today because you are renowned for your book and course, *Awakening Joy*, and back in 2000, the first book that I published was called *Unconditional Bliss*—I'm afraid that together, the two of us may blow the wattage or something.

**JB:** (laughs) Let's hope the lines can handle this. You have fiber optics?

**RC:** Yeah, I think we're good on this end.

**JB:** Okay.

**RC:** And you know, joking aside, I do want to ask you this quick kind of side questions before we get rolling.

**JB:** Sure!

**RC:** I remember when I wrote that book (and that wasn't the original title of my book—that's a long story I've shared elsewhere), but at a certain point in time, I began to chafe a little bit at being the bliss guy. And I know that you're holding and understanding of the term joy and the kind of joy you're talking about is very rich and deep and includes everything. But I'm just wondering, do you ever sometimes chafe against that? Do you want to be something different or more sometimes than the joy guy?

**JB:** Oh, yes, the joy boy sometimes, I think of it. Yes, and the word “joy” is definitely a stretch for a lot of people. You know, when they hear *Awakening Joy* their eyes roll and they say, “Come on, give me a break,” but my definition when I’m using the word “joy”—I’m really meaning a deeper kind of fulfillment and contentment and richness than just doing cartwheels or going through a field of daisies and skipping along. At the same time, as a Buddhist meditation teacher, it’s different than the usual presentation of the teachings, but I found that I was getting very serious and needed to find out just what the Buddha had to say about joy. So that was what gave me my first motivation to do the writing and the teaching because I saw I wasn’t alone. And actually now, I’m going to be starting a project with Spirit Rock [meditation center in Northern California] looking at old age, sickness and death and exploring them in a multi-year program. So I’ll have a little gravitas along with the joy too.

**RC:** (laughs) So, from one extreme to the other, at least at the surface.

**JB:** Yes!

**RC:** With, of course, the throughline of presence I can only imagine bringing them together because really, of course, there’s no separation between any of that.

**JB:** And actually, as the Buddha said, and I share in the course, that the more you can come to terms with all the suffering and pain in life, the more you open up to deep happiness. So, they go together although it’s a different route.

**RC:** Yes and, you know, there’s a saying and I heard, I think, first from Gay Hendricks: “In order to help someone, rather than trying to make them feel better, perhaps you might want to help them feel more.” I wonder if that resonates with you in terms of your own teaching; even though it’s about *Awakening Joy*, it’s a joy that comes through the process of saying yes to everything, especially what’s the most difficult.

**JB:** Yes, absolutely! When people ask, “Well, what do you mean by joy?” or “What’s the essence of it?” the three words that have really come to the forefront, emerging over time that point to accessing what I’m really talking about are *Authenticity*: just be completely where you are; *Connectedness*: that is feeling connected to yourself, to others, to life; and out of that authenticity and connectedness, if you can hold it with an attitude of loving presence, there’s an *Aliveness* that

emerges. So, you can't bypass your reality. Actually it's the way to access what's really deep inside of you.

**RC:** I know that when it comes to the best therapists and other kinds of counselors, that the one quality that unites them is a sense that there's nowhere the client can go or needs to go that can't be held by the other. That there's a sense that you have, even if you're in your deepest pain and suffering that that other person holding the space with you is fully present and also, in that presence, there's a sense that there's equanimity. So it's like a lifeline that says, "I can be here in this darkest of places and somebody could be here with me." And they could actually feel peace, experience peace, experience both of us as whole and peaceful; that I think is probably one of the most important things in creating a healing container.

**JB:** Yes, and that's what I try to do when I'm working with people on retreat, when we teach these retreats of varying lengths at Spirit Rock or the Insight Meditation Society. Every February, I'm sharing with people their process for a month long silent retreat, sometimes longer, and what I'm doing is being with people for about 15 minutes every other day; a person checks in and my job is to basically be a loving presence for them to be able to hold their experience, whether it's bliss or suffering or whatever and create a container for them to access that capacity within themselves. So the more they can feel it from the outside and just kind of relax into that space, in that open space of retreat where all the armoring is down, amazing things can happen. The more the person can realize, if they don't know already, that they have that capacity within themselves.

## **2. Unconscious Soundtracks**

**RC:** Yes, when you mentioned the meditation retreats that you teach, there's something that I really want to share with you. You have written about something that you have experienced that I thought I was alone in and that is that your unconscious mind, at certain moments, conjures up song lyrics that reflect something that is happening within you or around you. And you've written about, in meditation retreat, that often a set of lyrics will come and be kind of thematic for the whole time. Does that still happen to you?

**JB:** Oh, yes (laughs) all the time. I sometimes think of a five CD boxed set of songs that I couldn't get out of my mind. I don't know how many people would buy it, and I probably would run the other way if I saw it in the store. But yes, that's part of what the mind does especially if you love music like I do—it's all in there. So instead of trying to get rid of it which just makes it stay more, it's just background music. Every now and then, you get lucky and there's uplifting songs like when

I moved from *Visions of Johanna*, where I was saying for a solid week, “We sit here stranded, though we’re all doing our best to deny it”—that was on a three month course—I then opened up to, “Take it easy. Don’t let the sound of your own wheels drive you crazy, lighten up while you still can.” (laughs) That was grace.

**RC:** Right, and the point is all of that stuff is not reached down for *by* you; it just bubbles up.

**JB:** Oh, yeah!

**RC:** And for me, I think that the first time that I experienced this happening was when I was having a conversation with someone walking on the beach. And I found myself humming a song and I almost stopped in shock because I realized that what the song was doing was telling me something about how I was feeling about this person and this connection that I hadn’t actually even accessed before. So more than even being a sound track, it was like a shadow illuminator.

**JB:** Yes. It happens all the time. It’s pretty amazing how we think we know what’s going on in our thin band of the spectrum of consciousness but there’s so much else going on and your mental activity is working itself out on so many different levels and then you kind of get surprised, “Oh, that’s really what was going on.” It’s like dreams, when we have dreams, how does that work where there’s something that’s working out in the psyche archetypally or personally that you couldn’t write the script if you tried, but there it is, just moving through you.

**RC:** Yes. I used to think that there should be a skit on Saturday night live called Unconscious Song Guy. And that would always be the punch line: what was coming through that he was trying to stifle just had to make its way into consciousness with a slapstick kind of result.

The way you just described it is really helpful because waking up, it seems, isn’t so much about going from a certain state to another state. It’s more of an evolution such that your radio dial becomes a receiver for more and more bands of transmission. And you keep opening up to something that just wasn’t available before and your world just expands ever more. Is that something akin to how you have experienced it?

**JB:** Oh, absolutely! Yes! In the *Awakening Joy* book, I talked about this by paraphrasing Ram Dass, who is a big influence on me and a mentor; he says in *Be Here Now* something like, “The next message you hear will be the next message you hear.” The messages are coming in all the time from around us and inside of us. It’s just how tuned in we are to be able to hear them.

### 3. Should I Tell You The People Who Love You?

**RC:** That's wonderful. I wanted to share two things about Ram Dass: One of them is in that book *Be Here Now*, which I was a teenager when I first read, there was a moment he described where there was a child and I don't know whose child it was, but the child was going through the kind of fit that a child does and there was a bunch of grownups around and everybody was really stressed and their irritation was making the child more irritated. And then, somewhere like in the middle of the supermarket or in the parking lot, everybody just stopped and sat down and got present and peaceful and allowed the child to do same. And I remember back in my teenage years, I couldn't wait to be a parent and to have some kind of, you know, a shopping experience like that where I could do the same. It was through a strange set of circumstances that I didn't become a parent until I was later in life and now, I have a stepdaughter and a daughter and I'm still like that, I'm still looking for that moment. I mean, for many people, it may seem hopelessly hippy or whatever, but I want to find those moments when I can bring that kind of presence to the girls.

**JB:** Well, I did something like that for my son Adam who's now 25, when he was very little and he'd have meltdowns. It seemed like, everyday, he'd have a meltdown. Now he sits on month long retreats and three months retreats, and he's gotten able to be quite still. But when he was very young, he'd just have a tantrum and I'd hold him and our practice was, I would simply ask him and I knew the answer each time. I'd say, "Should I tell you the people who love you?" And he would kind of nod and I'd hold him and I'd say, "Mommy loves you and daddy loves you and grandma Salma loves you." And he'd just start to melt in not that long of a time if the conditions were right and he'd let it in. It's amazing how quickly that can settle a two year old down.

**RC:** Yes! The interesting thing about raising kids for me is that they also cause you to throw any of your theories out the window when they just show up as something or someone completely different. One thing I just want to share about with you right now is my daughter who is four and a half, she is at a stage right now where when she's upset, and actually feeling powerless about some choice that she doesn't have, i.e. something that she has to do that she don't want to do; she gets really adamant and loud and she stamps her feet and she says, "No, no, no! I don't want to!" And I just was talking to my wife about this this afternoon, that for me it's such a delicate moment when that happens because it's so easy for an adult to move into some kind of shaming around an expression of energy like that. Of course, a child needs boundaries and there needs to be 'no,' but my daughter's a Scorpio, even though I'm not astrologically inclined, and she fits that profile and she is very vehement. And so, in wanting to hold space for her, as we were talking about a little bit

earlier, I do my best and I'm sure imperfectly, to be really mindful about not wanting to squash her to make her fit, while at the same time, not always, of course, letting her run the show or make life miserable for everybody else. But, I guess, the reason I wanted to share that with you is because I loved hearing the story about you and Adam and I know that when Aria is having a fit like that, if I said to her, "Would you like to know the people who love you?" (laughs) she would say, "No, go away!"

**JB:** Yes! Well, I have complete empathy. First of all, Adam is a Scorpio and second, four was the hardest year for me. Four and eleven—those were the two hardest and there were times when I'd say, "I don't know if I like this kid." And then I found out that he was just going through the programming of a four year old perfectly. In fact, he said at some point at four, he said that he thought he should make up all the rules for the house. And in fact he thought that his friends made up the rules. And we actually went to his friends' parents with him saying, "Adam thinks that Miles makes up the rules in your house. Is that so?" And Miles' parents said, "No, we make up the rules." And there was like this (laughs) rude awakening for him and for me I was able to see that that's just what four years olds are about. So my job was just to give him the space, just like you said. A piece of wisdom that Tsoknyi Rimpoche, who is a wonderful teacher, said: If you have kids who are out there in high energy and kind of bouncing off the walls, as long as they're not self-destructive or mean spirited, then your job is to give them a good container and keep them from hurting themselves and others as they bounce around but not to squash the energy because that energy is going to— you don't want to squash it. If you do, there's going to be a terrible disservice. But that energy, if it's supported, will come out into vibrancy, vitality, and brilliance if you know how to let it develop in a healthy way.

**RC:** I'm so appreciative of that story because it seems to me that when we're with our self in our own inner life that that very same instruction that you just passed on is completely apropos with the parts of our self that are the most rebellious, that don't want to go along with the program, or that we think should be different or don't belong. I mean, I know I've got an inner four year old and an inner two year old and, not reified in a certain way, like "This is my inner child" type way; but I know I have those energies flowing through me and often my unhappiness accentuates when I can't meet them in the same way that you just described.

**JB:** That's it. Well, that is the challenge to hold it all with a loving compassionate presence that's just like you would with a four year old outside. What that kid in a tantrum needs is to just be held

if he or she would let you and know that they're okay. Just be reassured that they're really okay. They're just going through an energy expression and a loving presence is what really allows— what's bottled up in that tantrum is really just life and vitality and giving it a channel to really work its way through in a healthy way.

#### **4. The Way to Freedom**

**RC:** Yes! Before we leave this topic, I want to go back to one more thing you said about Ram Das. The quote was—

**JB:** The next message you hear will be the next message you hear?

**RC:** Yes, because one of the things that happened to me many years ago when I was going through an energetic opening and lots of new kind of experiences were happening to me that I wasn't choosing or controlling and I was kind of holding on for dear life or trying to stay fluid for dear life; there was a certain kind of trickster aspect to what I experienced. One time, I was sitting in a hotel room meditating and as I was silently meditating, a voice came out of me, not like an inner voice, but my own inner voice spoke words that I wasn't choosing to speak, kind of like the songs we were talking about before. So, booming out into this silent hotel room came the voice that said, "Something wonderful is about to happen."

**JB:** Wow!

**RC:** Yeah, and that was my response, "Okay, great! I'm ready for this. This is going to be interesting. I'm cool. Bring it on." And so I just stayed as attentive as I could and hopefully not grasping for about five minutes time. And then at the end of that time, the same voice came back and said, "Something wonderful just happened." (laughs) I missed the whole thing, or maybe I didn't but it was like that, it was like that Ram Dass quote. And I'll never forget it. It certainly lightens me up to have had that experience.

**JB:** Who was that masked man?

**RC:** (laughs) Exactly! I won't know until he reveals himself. That always stayed with me over the years. But moving forward towards the theme of this series, we were just talking about how to hold those combative or painful or shameful parts of ourselves. And I know as I walk through life and relationship, things still just naturally cause me to contract from time to time and they show me the places in myself that I'm less at ease.



I know for instance for instance that when somebody is being critical or especially negative that I do contract and it's harder for me to hold, and that shows me that there are parts of me that might want to be more critical or judging or carping or whiny than I would choose to allow. And I'm seeing that reflected outside of myself. And I'm wondering, in your current experience, having gone through so much and softened over the years and opened, do you still find certain things reflected in your daily life and in the behavior of others that caused you to contract in that same way?

**JB:** (laughs) Oh, no, never!

**RC:** (laughs)

**JB:** I'm beyond contraction (laughs). Yes, as I often say when I'm sharing with people just kind of explaining meditation and how it works: You press the right button and I can be back in the third grade (laughs) with judgment and paranoia and feeling like a little kid. But what happens over time, in general, and I've certainly seen it with me, is you don't get lost quite as long and there's a place inside even while the freak out is happening, generally, that is just enough space to notice, "Oh, you're freaking out here." Which is sometimes all it takes is. As my friend Sylvia Boorstein says, "In a heavy thunderstorm, if there's just a little shaft of sunlight in the clouds or in that picture, it makes all the difference in the world." And so, generally, yes, I can certainly lose it but what the practice gives, is the gift that reminds you that you're losing it, and that's all the difference in the world.

**RC:** Yes and awareness, of course, being key in what you're describing. I'm often talking to people who, when I ask them where they are feeling something in their body, they might say, "All over." And as we explore further, they might claim that there's no part of them that is not engulfed in what they're experiencing. And I often, but as gently as possible, ask the question, "Is it true that there's some part of you that is noticing your experience because if that weren't there, how would you even be able to tell me what's happening?"

**JB:** Excellent!

**RC:** And that noticing is like that thin shaft of light that you were describing. And sometimes, it's the one thing that allows someone to climb out when they thought that there was no way out.

**JB:** Mm-hmm.

**RC:** It's a recognition that that shaft is there.

**JB:** Yes, not only that allows them to climb out, it's the way to freedom.

**RC:** Yes!

**JB:** To be able to see anything and not push it away, but in the seeing, particularly if you've gone through some mind or heart training, to see that you don't have to take ownership of it, that you don't have to take it personally in that perspective; then it's just habits playing themselves out which makes all difference in the world. That's what real freedom is. Not being blissful and unruffled but to hold it all with some wise balanced spacious presence.

**RC:** Yes, along those lines, I work with a lot of people who have significant early trauma and trauma obviously shapes the brain. So what you're calling habits are often so deeply embedded in one pattern of consciousness. I remember that one client that I had said to me that there was a worry that being a trauma survivor and having the whole constellation of pain and suffering that came from it was a life sentence. And we talked about how the life sentence could be really reframed as a life journey if the journey was meeting each arising of that pain with evermore loving spacious awareness. What better life journey could there be than deepening into that kind of wholeness and peace?

**JB:** That becomes part of your curriculum for Bodhisattva training. The traumas that we go through are actually the gifts that, as we process them and come to some understanding of, are the major gifts that we can offer others because we know what it's like to be in fear, to be in terror, to feel lonely, to feel rage, and we can meet people there if we've been willing to work through our trauma and our patterns. That's the real gift.

I was very inspired when I was younger by a book that R. D. Laing wrote. He was this brilliant social phenomenologist who wrote this book, *The Politics of Experience*.

**RC:** I read it in high school.

**JB:** Thin book but every sentence counted. It was so pithy. And I remember from that book him saying, "Those who really made the journey to the depths of the hell realms in their minds are the greatest healers." I thought, "Oh, that's comforting. There's hope for me, yet." And that's really how I see it with other people, as I said on retreats, or when I see people in counseling. When

people are going through some real pain and suffering, and they're willing to look at it and work with it as a vehicle for more consciousness, I see and sometimes I'll say this outright, I see them as really good investments that if I can help create the conditions for them to go through what they go through and wake up right in the middle of their pain, then they are going to be real Bodhisattvas and able to support other people going through it. That's how it has worked with me, you know, going through my own fears and pain and confusions is probably what I have most to offer as far as being able to be with others in those spaces.

**RC:** Yes, absolutely! And in this interview series, I spoke to Isaac Shapiro who said that, from his perspective, there was only one human drama, which is: not wanting the experience that you're having. And we could maybe expand that a little bit to say that oftentimes people are not wanting the life they were given. You know, "Okay, you know, I can accept this and I can accept that but I don't want to be defined or limited by the abuse that I've experienced," or whatever it is that seems like that's the bother that's in the way of me having the life that I could live or that maybe that I was truly meant to live. And being able to turn that around in the way that you just described to be able to say, "I choose this life. I embrace this life and that is the gift," is perhaps one of the most powerful transformative moments in anyone's journey.

**JB:** Yes, absolutely! It's very much like in Buddha's approach where one takes refuge in the dharma. And the way I think of taking refuge in the dharma, the dharma being the truth, the way things are besides formal body of Buddha's teachings; but the law, the natural unfolding of life, when you really understand or can connect with the fact that taking refuge in the dharma really means opening up to what life is giving you and seeing that it's giving you just what you need in every moment to wake up; then there's no mistakes, then every moment counts. It's either a moment of blessing to be experienced in its fullness or a moment of pain and suffering and difficulty that stretches you and deepens your compassion, deepens your understanding. So it's that allowing and not only not fighting but embracing this moment as a gift to wake up to that changes everything.

### **5. Hyperlink Reality**

**RC:** I'm wondering, following up on that, you have spoken about and written very eloquently about your path—and for anybody who has the time, I would recommend going to James' website and looking up the story about the child that you were reunited with when he was grown because the whole journey as you described that, what it meant for you and what it meant for him is just so

moving. It brought me to tears. There were so many gifts in reading that story, which for you happened years ago, and was digested, let's say into, at least to some degree, a teaching story.

And then there are those things that we experience whether it puts us into our third grade self that you described earlier or contracts us otherwise; things that we know are still cooking in us or things that these days are kind of up for us. Like in my life, for instance, I'm challenged by time and the stress that comes from seeming to have a need to do four life's worth of stuff in one life. And some of that isn't just a choice that has to do with me. It's about supporting a family, etc... And I feel like I'm on some rails that so many people are on because of the way that our culture has evolved over the last decade.

So, I'm constantly working with those themes like when you were just saying a moment ago that if it's a moment of pain or suffering, then there's an opportunity to wake up and to be more compassionate. And those are some of the ones that are the most trying to me when I feel like I can't take on one more thing in the space of my consciousness and then suddenly, something else is thrust upon me. It's the experience of there not being enough space, time and room. That would be a place where I would say my intention is to bring as much awareness as possible and it's still, you know, raw a little bit for me.

So, I'm wondering in your life these days, is there anything similar where you noticed, there's something up for me and I'm not all the way on the other side of it?

**JB:** (laughs) Yes, sure! There's a bunch. I'm sure we could spend a few hours if we had the time. I'd say, staying focused: inertia. This is the way that I hold it: that a body at rest tends to stay at rest and a body in motion tends to stay in motion. This is one area that I see the more consciousness I can bring, the better. Although people say, "Oh, you get a whole lot done," I can be very lazy—it takes me a while to get down to things, it's not even procrastination as much as distraction from the other things that seem to just catch my attention. Once I do get around to it, you know, I make my deadlines and I do everything I committed to do, although I do start out most emails with an apology.

So, (laughs) that's one that I haven't figured out but I do have a motto that kind of helps me out. My motto is, "Behind is just the state of mind." And so I've stopped putting pressure on myself as far as a day late, a dollar short, and driving myself crazy like that. But I can just, internally feel, and then say, "Come on, get on with that already and stop wasting your time doing this or that," or, you

know, checking email, going through hyperlink reality or things like that. Once I do get engaged, I really like it and I can stay. I can go through forgetting about lunch and then it's like, you know, six hours later and I realize, "Oh, I haven't eaten anything," and it's like four o'clock in the afternoon. So that's one theme that, particularly in these last few years, I've noticed—just kind of getting in gear and getting around to things.

**RC:** I want to highlight something about what you were saying. Those things that you just described around distraction and focus, they are maybe tendencies of your personality regardless of what age and history you grew up in.

But I'm also drawn everyday to the fact that reality and how it's experienced by human consciousness is so drastically different than it's ever been before. And it's almost a truism now that we have brains that are not developed for the life that those brains have created. You know, the brain evolved for us to be hunter gatherers, we have good brains for that. But we haven't been able to make an evolutionary adaptation to this current type of life. And what you were talking about as hyperlink reality, just earlier today, I was realizing how, even in doing this series; so you and I are connected by telephone. The phone call is being recorded by an entity, I think it's somewhere in Nevada. Meanwhile, I'm in my office on my headset, but if an email comes in while you and I are talking, I know about it and I have to make the choice whether to look at it or not look at it. And even in another conversation that I had with a different guest on the program, he said something—he used a term I didn't know and I silently looked it up while I was on the call—and therefore was connected through the internet to a concept and an electronic network and it's mind-boggling how much is happening. And how much my consciousness or any of our consciousness is being asked to, or compelled to, hold and navigate. It's a reality that is just confounding.

**JB:** Absolutely! Actually, I came across a fact written in a column. My favorite writer is this guy Mark Morford who writes every Wednesday a really funny, satirical, biting and spiritual column all at once. He wrote this column a few months ago on micro-tasking about how if you've got 30 seconds of your time, he was reading, the new thing is to fill it with something that won't make it go to waste. Like, you know, changing your stapler or something like that. And in the column, he shares this fact that this study was showing how these days, in a 48 hour period, in a two-day period, more information is accumulated than from the history of time up until 2007. That because of the explosion of information—I don't know how they figured it out, I did go back and looked at the article and they seem to know it, they're using some index—that the information accumulation

is just, off the charts of what it's ever been in human history. And by the year 2020, I think it was, they predicted that that's going to be in an hour, that same amount of information is accumulated.

So, we're up against some heavy duty, not only conditioning but input and stimulation that, you know, we need to somehow come to terms with. That's why it's so crucial to be able to shut everything off and just go inside and get quiet and reconnect with the fact that you're alive.

**RC:** And it seems to me that tuning in to the inner realm—and I like to share with people, there's only three realms you can pay attention to for the most part: there's what you sense externally; there's your thoughts; and there's what you experience internally in your body. And especially when it comes to our emotional life which exists in our physical body, to tune in successfully, we must slow down. Emotional time is not the same as "to-do list time" or "email time" or "twitter time" or any of those things. And I think that what's happening to most of us is we're kind of simmering in the pot of the culture that is all around us and our normative of state is so hyper-speed that if we don't actually have a personal clear and consistent intention to tune into states and experiences that are different than that, then it would just become our default. So it's not as if meditating was ever easy or didn't require consistency and some discipline at any time in human history, but now it seems that almost a Herculean act for many of us to get into the state where we could meditate in that way.

**JB:** Yes. When people come to meditation retreats at Spirit Rock, I often point out, "Okay, you're probably fairly proficient at multitasking. But here's the challenge—try uni-tasking." That's a whole other stretch and dimension. And actually, it's been shown in neuroscience; there were some studies on this that show from a brain activity perspective, you cannot really experience well-being while you're multitasking because the stimuli are moving around different areas in your brain in such a way that the areas connected with well-being and ease and peace and contentment and fulfillment and aliveness are not being activated. So there's a huge price to pay for multitasking.

**RC:** And I think that it's also been demonstrated that when you look at it at a microscopic level, it's impossible to multitask, meaning that you only can ever pay attention to one thing in one discrete moment. And so, in order to multitask, you need to be flitting so furiously fast from one thing to the other thing that that's most likely why what you just described is true that the well being centers aren't able to light up.

And, you know, it's something also that I share with people because I have filmmaking background and when we talked about connecting through emotion, I share that you can only experience one emotion at a time. So when somebody says, you know, "I'm feeling a bunch of things," I talk to them about method acting and how if you tell a method actor when reading his line, say, "I want you to be happy but also a little sad when you read that line," that it will come out flat and lifeless. But if you say, "I want you to be really excited as you start the line and right when you get to that word, I want you to feel a twinge of sadness," you'll be able to read it perfectly on the actor's expression.

And so I love the invitation about uni-tasking that you give to the people when they come to the retreat. And I know, for me, to take that invitation into my daily life is to say, "If I'm moving really quickly and somehow feel ill at ease, could I just tune in a little bit more to even notice that furious flitting that I'm doing so that I can be somehow a little bit more connected to my consciousness from which, maybe, I could make a different choice?"

**JB:** Yes, exactly! And even, besides making a different choice, settling into being present for your life which is really where the fulfillment comes. So it benefits all around.

**RC:** Yes! Absolutely, and I have to say, on the other side, there's some moments when I sit down and I have got inbox clearing energy galore and I can cruise through, you know, 30 emails in an hour and that's what the moment was inviting me to when I really paid attention to it, whereas if I tried to do that at another time, it would have been like pulling teeth and it wouldn't have quite worked. So, I can celebrate the part in me that could be like, "On it! Get it done!" It's just that oftentimes it doesn't serve me because it's misapplied.

**JB:** Mm-hmm. Yes, exactly, and it can be a little addictive, that's the thing. It is kind of insidious how it seems, there's a part of me—I've looked into this myself— where I go from one link to another. There is a kind of grasping in the mind, "Oh, that next piece of wisdom or information or curiosity," there's no end to it. You will be like a monkey jumping from one limb to another (laughs) and never get to finally rest on the ground or in a spot.

**RC:** Yes, that's the nature of desire. I mean, it tells us there's something wrong or missing at this moment. I think you're absolutely right. My jaw almost dropped over when I saw an advertisement slogan from Sprint, from a few years back, I'm not using it anymore, but again, going back to Ram Dass, they used the phrase that he became famous for and they switched it to, "Be there now!"—

that was the goal. That was what they were selling—the ability to be there now. And you know, when I saw that, I was just channeling my inner Jewish mother, “What’s wrong with *here*? I thought here was where we we’re supposed to be?”

**JB:** (laughs) Yes! Well, actually it reminds me that in Thailand, in the 70s, when America was involved in the Vietnam War and Thailand was seen as a major ally and also a place for R&R. The States had a big investment in the Thai culture emulating them and they were pressing for the Thai Buddhist monastic sangha to do away with teachings about contentment; they thought it was subversive and it didn’t help support a consumer society. And actually, this is all documented; the sangha, the monastics, the leaders were about to capitulate on that. They said, “Okay, you can teach about four noble truths and other stuff but not about contentment,” until Ajahn Buddhadasa who is this very inspiring and strong outspoken figure, social activist as well as a very high master and scholar, said, “This is not what the Buddha taught.” And the force of his personality was the major factor that kept the Thai sangha from not abandoning contentment. So, there’s a lot of forces at play that have a big investment in our being hungry for the next thing that, they say, is going to make us happy.

### **6. Awakening Joy as a Revolutionary Act**

**RC:** And so, coming back to some of the themes that are central in your work, we could almost say that cultivating and awakening joy defined in the full way that you define it, can become a kind of revolutionary act; that it takes courage to stand in the face of everything that you just described enough that was powerful enough in the 70s and now is like mega-more powerful to be able to say, “No, I’m going to choose contentment.” It can take everything you’ve got. We only have a few more minutes left but I know that you also are very involved in the Buddhist peace fellowship and that there’s an activist side to you and your work.

It seems like it’s worth bringing that in at this point because saying “no” without contracting, having an open heart and yet still being fierce about what we love and what we value is another great challenge that we face. And so, I’m wondering for you, as you live in this world and you see all of the ways that it is broken and unjust, I know that you have an ability to cultivate joy and to teach that, but also are there things right now in this world that really are calling you to stand your ground and to say, “Here’s where I must align on behalf of...” whether it’s a cause or a people, and to really bring the power and energy that you have to support and to aid those in need or perhaps



even in your case it's a planet in need? What's moving you the most? Where are you finding yourself called to bear witness and to seek change?

**JB:** Well, yes! Absolutely, it's a key component of Awakening Joy is to get in touch with your pressured heart and to feel underneath the outrage and the anger or the fear or the frustration of how crazy life is, is a heart that really cares and really loves goodness and loves life and wants to support well-being as much as possible. So that becomes not just trying to be noble but understanding where the real happiness lies: expressing your love, expressing your caring and relieving suffering when you find it. There's no lack of suffering, so one can get weighed down by all the causes and sometimes I have. Certainly climate changes is a big one on my mind in just seeing there's really going to be some pain here and the wiser we are about caring for the planet, the better; but to come from love, not from anger and to awaken that love in as many people as possible because that's a whole lot more magnetizing than fear.

What I often tell people is, "You've got to find the way that really resonates for you to express your caring." It might be a cause, it might be climate change, it might be political, it might be social justice or addressing inequalities, and it might be even just being there for the people you care about; but rather than taking it all on, the more you can find a way that manifests in you, the more magnetizing that is for others.

For me personally, I have been involved at times in politics and will probably be involved in, to some extent, the next election although I follow things avidly from the side lines, but, our system is so bent out of shape that it's more at this point picking and choosing really inspiring causes or people who can make a difference.

And I find these days often working with people and supporting people who are front line activists. I love doing that. And I love getting people in touch with their own love of the planet. And my compassion in action has taken a turn in the last few years from being activist on the front lines; I was very active on a couple of political campaigns and not so much these days.

But bringing things, say, to the Spirit Rock as much as I can, about us being leaders in consciousness, whether it's about sustainability or how to address old age, sickness and death. So it's for me, more on more personal level than going out and leading the banner on a particular big cause. I do seek climate change is going to be turning this world upside down so I'm trying to get as

knowledgeable as I can about how to make that transition to a brave new world with as minimal suffering as possible.

**RC:** I'm hearing in what you're saying something that really feels important to highlight: The recognition that there are seasons in ones life where we're going to take a different approach to what's going on around us in the world and also that to try to become active in the world out of a "should" but not out of what is uniquely who each of us is would always be confusing and not necessarily helpful. So to find that place where we're lit up, where the time is right and the energy is right for us to contribute, that seems to be an important skill to keep refining as we go because just as there's so much suffering and the list is endless, as you said earlier, also, there are many people who are calling us to their emergency and saying, "It needs to be about this and you need to do it that way." And to be able to listen to one's own heart and find out, well, "What am I called to do and how am I called to do it?"—that seems to be essential.

**JB:** That's exactly it. It's crucial. You know, you just even— even opening up your email and you get like 20 different incredibly important causes. How do you even go through the day if you're reading each one and letting it tear your heart? So you have to pick and choose just how to let your heart be tender as well as bring enough equanimity to that tender heart that says, "Okay, I can't do it all. I will do what really inspires me." And as long as you're coming from that place of inspiration, that's both healing within yourself, inspiring internally and contagious from the outside as well. And the more you're coming from that instead of fear and anger and outrage, the less you're going to burn out and the more you're going to awaken that caring in others too.

**RC:** Absolutely! And there's one other piece of that I'd love to bring in or actually come back to that you spoke about. So often, when people go on their own journey of personal healing and discovery, they find that their energy to fight the world, fight the power has been mixed up with their own issues and they retreat. There's a natural retreat. "The best way if I can serve the world right now is to learn to love myself and learn to cultivate peace."

And there's a deep truth in that. And then at the same time, in that process, we kind of cede the space unintentionally to those who want to run with it, perhaps in ways that are really destructive to other people and to the planet. And so I loved what you said a moment ago about how, when you're not at a point in your life where you're on the front lines and you recognize that, it's just the truth of where you are that you could also then selectively see who is on the front line that represents your

heart's calling and you could find ways to support them and therefore, still be involved in the process and in the evolution but just in a different way.

**JB:** Yes, exactly. Yup, I mean, I'm blessed with the fact that a lot of times, the people who come to Spirit Rock to do retreats are amazing people making a difference in the world. And those people catch my eye and if I can support them in any way, feeling more connected to their caring and their love and their passion and their clarity and wisdom so that they do as good and inspiring a job as possible, well, that's one little way that I can contribute.

### **7. The Master Recycling Plan**

**RC:** Yeah, beautiful! So before we go, we spoke about in the beginning that early in my work, I was the "bliss guy." And since then, I made a conscious kind of a course correction. And if you have a guy with quotes around you, now I'm more what I would call the "emotional connection guy." And I have seen that for all of us whether we've been on the path a long time, or we're just newcomers, that there is always one or more emotions, that are particularly difficult for us to feel, that we might unconsciously make choices around avoiding as opposed to choices that are the most expansive and in service of ourselves and the highest good. So, you could consider this as it was a game show, kind of the lightning round. I want to find out from you from you, one emotion that as you look at yourself candidly, in this very moment, you notice is one that is maybe more challenging for you than most.

**JB:** Oh, it generally comes out to anger. (laughs) I'm so much better than I used to be. My wife and I are going to be celebrating our thirtieth anniversary this year. And when we first met anger scared the hell out of me. It wasn't spiritual. This was not conscious but just unconsciously it was hard for me to let myself feel it. I'd be afraid, I think, unconsciously, of what I could do and really destroy everything around me. So I was a very nice guy. And basically, I am a nice guy, and still am a nice guy. And I'm whole lot different than when I was all those years ago. But still, anger is probably the emotion that is the most challenging for me to really experience.

I'm not just talking about getting annoyed or pissed off. When I feel rage, that kind of anger, that's a difficult one. It's so humbling; to feel it coming towards me—I'm a lot better now, I don't take it quite as personally but there's something about it that in my own history too, you know, growing up, just being around anger. So that's always been a trigger.

**RC:** So just to clarify, because I really appreciate your openness about this. It sounds like, to experience great anger within yourself is hard, is something that you might tend to shy away from or repressed. And also to experience great anger coming toward you from outside also might have the same kind of freeze effect for you. Is that right?

**JB:** Yes, it's very rare that real anger would come towards me; in the circles I run in, people don't get enraged. They can get annoyed but even that, I can have my radar out. Mean spiritedness, I think is a hard one, you know, to be around. And so if somebody, for instance is really being mean to somebody else and I see it, and they have some power over them, that kind of trips me. And if it's coming to me, if it's directed towards me, that's not easy. And sometimes I'll get on a self-righteous kick, you know, the defender of the meek. And (laughs) that's when I'll get my own frustration or dander up and then it's humbling to see that I could be just as guilty in my self-righteousness as somebody who's causing suffering to somebody else.

**RC:** Okay, this is awesome. I'm so glad we talked about this. I can really relate to it because I think I've said other places that I have this inner character that I call "Justice Man." (laughs)

**JB:** Yes, exactly!

**RC:** And he is definitely capable of the kind of self-righteousness that you described. And so, what I want to ask you is, as a quick follow up, is let's say you're in a situation you see somebody who is being mean spirited and there is also somebody who maybe is the helpless recipient of that mean spiritedness, a child for instance. And you actually do your work. So, let's say, you know, "I look forward you to the next time when I feel self-righteous so that I can hold it with greater awareness and compassion." And let's say that you come out of your contraction, so that you are more skillful and more available and you're not just going to perpetuate suffering to your own unconsciousness. So here you are in the present, and I know this is just hypothetical, but would you then step forward and be active in that moment just in a cleaner way without self-righteousness, or do you find that once you move through that self-righteousness, you're often not called to even act?

**JB:** Oh, no, no, no. I think action is, you know, compassion is a verb as Thich Nhat Hahn says. If I can do something about the situation, not necessarily, you know, the savior, but I am but doing something to bring some more consciousness to the situation. It's hard for me to keep my mouth shut actually.

I tried to do it with as much grace as possible. There's very few mean spirited people in my circle although, you know, when I see it around outside of my circles, it's hard. When I see it in a powerful figure, you know, I will pick up the newspaper that can set me off and I can be humbled by my own self-righteousness. But if somebody is doing something that's hurtful to somebody else even if they're not often they're not aware of it or they have their own agenda and don't realize it, if I can do something to bring a little bit more light on the situation, I try to be as conscious as possible and see that we're all just products of our conditioning and so bring some understanding to that. But it's, I'd say, almost impossible for me to keep my mouth shut if I can do something about it. I heard somebody say, "Hey, I thought you were a nice guy?" "Well, yeah, generally I am, but don't cross the line when it comes to fairness and justice."

**RC:** I got it. And as you were speaking, it occurred to me that there's one way of acting in the kind of situation that we're talking about where it's because the situation is making me feel it's untenable. So, I'm acting so as to discharge or not have to feel what I'm feeling, in which case, I'm always going to be reacting and less skillful versus I recognize what I'm feeling and I allow myself to have that feeling and through the fuller presence that comes to me in that process, then I can act with a much clearer lens and greater skill in addressing the actual situation— as opposed to just my turmoil about it.

**JB:** Yes, absolutely, and also being humbled. As I often say, being humbled every now and then is not a bad thing where you see your own reactivity. It makes you more compassionate with other people getting lost in their trips. And the idea that the more you can see both within yourself and whoever is out there doing something that's upsetting you, that we're all just products of our conditioning. That's where your words or your actions will be coming from a much greater understanding and compassion than self-righteousness.

**RC:** I love that because in terms of everything that we want to include, maybe one of the last things that many of the spiritual practitioners listening to this talk would not want to include would be their own reactivity. And so, you're inviting us to look forward to the next time that we're reactive so that we can therefore be humbled and then more compassionate with all those other people around us who are being so reactive all the time, for God's sake. (laughs)

**JB:** Yeah, that's it. Then nothing is wasted.

**RC:** (laughs) The ultimate conservation.

**JB:** That's it. It's all recycling, the master recycling plan. And everybody is walking around with a reality that makes sense to them, as warped as it might be, even a serial killer.

In the Buddhist teachings, the ultimate story of this guy Angulimala who was a serial killer who ended up being a fully enlightened being once he met the Buddha. So, it's never too late. But to really understand that we all have our own perspective that makes absolute sense to us.

The Dalai Lama says this line, I quoted it in *Awakening Joy*. He says, "Understand that if somebody is doing something that's upsetting to you, it's not that they're doing it to you, it's just that their internal reality is intersecting with your internal reality in a way that's not meeting your hopes and expectations." But we're all walking around with our internal realities and the more we can understand that, truly the less blame because it's just all products of causes and conditions. That's what leads to real compassion and wise action.

**RC:** What a great way to end our conversation. So James, after I hung up, I'm going to just— I'm going to resonate, I'm going to marinate in that for a while. I love that and I'm so glad that you are part of this series and that you gave us your time today. Many, many thanks!

**JB:** Ah, it's a pleasure hanging out with you, Raphael.

## Tara Brach



Tara Brach, Ph. D., is founder and senior teacher of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington, and a co-founder and guiding teacher of the Meditation Teacher Training Institute. She offers Buddhist meditation workshops and retreats at centers in the United States and Canada. Dr. Brach is also a practicing clinical psychologist and the author of *Radical Acceptance-Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha* (Bantam, 2003,) and the upcoming book *True Refuge- Three Gateways to a Fearless Heart* (Bantam, 2013.) [WWW.TARABRACH.COM](http://WWW.TARABRACH.COM)

### 1. The Shared Psyche of the World

**RC:** So one of the things I like to do in beginning this conversation is just to touch in to the present moment for myself and also my guest. So I'd like to just begin and say I'm feeling really grateful that I got this chance to talk with you. My heart is beating just a little bit faster with the nervousness of a new connection and also because I know there's a depth of connection that we'll go to; I also feel excited. So that's me. Do you want to just check in and share with us where you are in this moment?

**TB:** Well, I immediately sense you are inviting us to pause and I love having that opportunity just to stop and step out and feel my body. And like you, my heart was beating faster and yes, sense of curiosity and excitement and openness. Yes, it feels good.

**RC:** Okay. Excellent! Well, there's one thing that I want to share just before we get into anything else today. It starts with this: I think of myself sometimes as a resistance hunter—I'm speaking with individuals or groups and we're trying to find the places where we have the knots or tangles as you call them sometimes. And other times, I think of myself as an acceptance peddler—I travel humbly from town to town pedaling acceptance to anybody who will be open for their own benefit. In that regard, you are, I would consider, a sacred resource and a go-to person. And what I mean by that is that if I have shared my wares of acceptance and for whatever reason, there hasn't been a fullness

and a deepening into that set of practices and principles, I always send people to your book *Radical Acceptance* and they always come back with many gifts and a deepening in terms of what we're sharing together. So I want to give you a big thank you for writing that book and for being the person who could take people to those places.

**TB:** Oh, thank you. I mean I know it's been something I continue to have to learn about, opening my heart to just what is, over and over and over. Thank you for bringing that in.

**RC:** Sure. One thing I also want to add under the topic of being with what is, if it's okay with you, I want to share a very sweet story about how we first came into contact with each other.

**TB:** Hmm.

**RC:** And I don't even know if you remember that.

**TB:** Please, tell me (laughs).

**RC:** Okay. Well, so I first started being out there in the world writing books and doing workshops, etc., back around 2000 and in the first book that I wrote, there were two key questions that I asked people to use to help them arrive in the present moment and to recognize where they might be resisting. The first question was: "What is happening right now?" and the second question is: "Can I be with it?" And so I was out there in the world offering those two questions and one day I got an email from a kind of surprised and agitated client who said, "I couldn't believe it. I just got this tape from this teacher, Tara Brach, and she's using your questions." So I looked into it and in fact, I think it was an audiotape that you had done in which you asked those two questions.

And I thought to myself, "Well, this is interesting." I come from the movie business where often ideas are in the air and you're three quarters the way through a script about some new idea and then suddenly you find out that a movie just like it is coming out the next week and I've been there a few times. But I just sat with feelings around this and I thought, "Well, first of all anything that we're teaching about presence and related ideas and practices is coming from the shared wisdom traditions anyway. It's not anything that anyone can own and we share it in our own unique ways, of course." So I didn't feel like I had this—I didn't own anything so I wasn't worried about anything being taken from me but I also thought it would be really good to communicate with you.



So I reached out to you. I think it was by email and I explained the situation and you wrote back to me very quickly and very graciously and gracefully and just said, “Well, first of all thank you for writing to me, and second of all, I can understand why you would want to reach out to me and how you might feel in this situation.” So even before you shared anything, you were offering empathy and understanding to me. And then you said, “It’s true. I do use those two questions and I’ve been using them for a long time.” And then I think there wasn’t much more after that, but I read the email and I just remember my heart opening and I thought, “Oh, someone else is using those questions in their own way for the good of all and how great is that?” (Laughs)

**TB:** (Laughs)

**RC:** And there was no issue. There was nothing more to discuss and I really appreciated it because I realized how many places you or I in that exchange could have gone into some kind of contraction or separation.

**TB:** Hmm.

**RC:** And so the reason I wanted to share the story is because you took the opportunity really directly not to do that. And so I felt that even though we hadn’t really met and I didn’t know you, that there was this wonderful kindred spirit across the country and I was so grateful that I had decided to reach out to you in that way.

**TB:** Hmm, well thank you for reminding me. I remember the incident and I actually hadn’t remembered who it was with. I just remember the incident. So now you’re bringing it all back to me. I remember in my mind thinking, “Well, these are the two wings that the Buddha talks about and I kind of came up with an inquiry that would address them.” And then coming out of it like you did with this sense of “Isn’t this cool?” Here we are, this kind of shared psyche of the world is kind of coming forth with something and we’re not landing up in separate camps. So I’m glad you went away with that feeling, too. And thank you for bringing it in. It’s actually kind of delightful.

**RC:** Oh, good. Well, I wasn’t sure whether you remembered it and I wanted to ask you about it during this interview and not offline because I knew there might be something just in bringing it up fresh.

**TB:** The spontaneity of it. Yes, I know. It’s like I hadn’t put it together with you, Raphael, I mean, now that just rounds it out even more. My heart is kind of smiling right now; it’s pretty cool.

**RC:** Oh, good. Well, thank you.

**TB:** Yes.

## **2. Battery Powered Slippers and Gloves**

**RC:** That leads me to a question that you ask in some of your work, or I should say that you invite people to ask in the spirit of compassion when they're out there in the world and perhaps having irritation or an issue or a frustration—you in your work ask people to wonder what is it like to be this person, the other person, the one where there's a challenge and opportunity to step outside of oneself and experience as directly as possible the other.

**TB:** Yes.

**RC:** And in this series, one of the things that that I have endeavored to do is share myself that way and invite other people to do that as well. Like for instance, transparency has been the theme in the series and here we are in audio. So each day when I come into my office, in terms of being seen, I'm having to recognize, "Okay, am I doing Skype?" Which means my hair has to be nice.

**TB:** (Laughs)

**RC:** "Am I doing phone which means nobody is seeing me?" or in fact, "Do I have a client coming in?" Which means I actually have to sweep the office before I feel like it's ready and inviting.

**TB:** Yes.

**RC:** So we have the least transparent of these versions in audio. So I wanted to share, first of all, it's true my hair is really kind of a mess right now and I'm in my sweats, but also I want to share just one small thing which may be amusing for people that I haven't spoken about on any of the other calls and that is that, for some reason, I always have super cold feet and it brings my attention to my feet and away from what I want to share a lot. So as we're talking and I'm walking around my office, I'm wearing these super cool rechargeable battery-heated slippers.

**TB:** (Laughs)

**RC:** So my feet are super toasty and if sometime during the call, you hear a little velcro in the background, that's going to be me saying, "Oh, too hot now. I better open up the compartment and turn off the batteries."

**TB:** (Laughs) I love it. I have to tell you that I have very cold extremities, too. And my husband got me some rechargeable battery gloves, and so now, I go out and I actually had to wear them this morning. So you reminded me of that.

**RC:** Aha! (Laughs) So I was sharing all of that, first of all just because, but also because I thought it would be an invitation to ask of you, what is it like to be you in the sense that people who know you as a teacher or who maybe are hearing you for the first time—what, if anything, would you want to share with them about the life, let's say, behind the curtain? It could be something sort of silly like my slippers, or anything at all that comes to you right now that's just about your humanness and your everyday life so that we get to know you a little bit like I say behind the curtain?

### **3. The Body, the Felt Sense, Trauma, and The Trance of Unworthiness**

**TB:** Well, whenever I am sitting behind my computer and my mind just gets really dull or starts spinning, I'll often go and cuddle with my dog, hug my dog, stroke my dog (laughs), or go outside and throw kong, which is this thing on a string that you throw and they go running. And she kinds of brings me back. So that's one of my regular ways of homecoming, is I got this really sweet, older standard poodle.

**RC:** Hmm, wonderful! Thank you for sharing that. And that reminds of me something else. You have talked about going to dogs or to animals, sometimes in terms of understanding the way emotion works with humans. And I've done that, too in one way in particular because some teachers, not in the Buddhist tradition, but other traditions will say that everything begins with a thought. And I've never been beholden to one particular idea about that. I've always thought sometimes the thought generates the emotion and sometimes an emotion generates the thought.

And I've gone to animals in that way for my own sense of verification because I don't think the dog has a lot of, or any conceptual understanding when it's missing its owner or when its juts filled with joy when it hears the key in the door. So do you sense that from animals, too, that they show us something that is shared between humans and animals, that emotions often arise even before there's any concepts about what is or isn't right, or do you feel in your experience that it's more often than thought comes first?

**TB:** Hmm, I know, for me, it's a kind of a cycling or spiraling. And whether initially one comes first or the other, they're so rigged in association that I might have a stomach ache and that sets off

fear that then sets off a thought about the future, or it might have thought about the future and realize I don't feel well and I'm afraid I'm not going to show up well. So it can go either way.

I don't think it matters so much—the first cause—as much as knowing that whenever we have thoughts of any charge, they're playing out in our bodies as a felt sense emotion and whatever is going on in our bodies that's strong and doesn't disappear quickly is being fueled by thoughts. One neuroscientist described that the life of an emotion is one and a half minutes or three minutes or something like that, but that the reason we stay caught in emotions is because we just keep on charging them up with more and more thoughts. So the antidote, obviously, is if we can wake up out of the trance of thinking, then we can just be with what's going on in our body and let it unfold itself in its natural way.

**RC:** Yes. That's beautifully put. And I love the idea that even if it is the thought that's coming first that thoughts are always going to have a corresponding felt-sense. And that we can go to those for the quickest, most efficient version of being with and letting be and clearing in that way.

**TB:** Yes. Because there's really no shift in identity unless it's experienced in the body and recognized as changing sensations and that that's not what we are. It's in that mindfulness of what's in the body that we actually open up beyond our identification with the emotion.

**RC:** So we're talking about the body and the felt sense and the ability to ultimately go there with the kind of awareness that releases identification and I know that that is deep in your practice. It's something that you're going to be going into in a new and full way in your book that's coming out soon. And along those lines, I wanted to share an appreciation for you. You are one of those people who synthesizes psychotherapy and meditation in a really deep and beautiful way. And in reading some of your work and listening to it, I've noticed that you have a real sensitivity about avoiding the idea of quick fixes, whether that's what meditation can do or therapy or some kind of personal growth that you can do. And that you particularly bring that perspective to people who have experienced a lot of trauma. So I wanted to just talk with you about that a few minutes.

I don't have a specific agenda except to say that it's rare that I get to talk to somebody who has all that experience and perspective around trauma. Trauma is something that has come up in a number of ways and a number of discussions in this series because so many of the people who are spiritual seekers are carrying a lot of unresolved trauma. And often, even more than they're aware and that this is always the place that you write about so eloquently: "There is something wrong with me,

there is something bad, something not okay.” And I think you’ve even written something about this being sort of the most pervasive, almost virus, something that’s carried throughout all world cultures at this point. And I was just wondering if you could speak a little to that.

**TB:** Yes. Well, you’re bringing up two things that are really related and one is that, you know, there’s a huge amount of trauma in the whole society, not just those that are spiritually seeking but then you have people coming to the path and being given instructions to open to their experience and so on that are sometimes really contraindicated. It’s like if you open the doors and try to bravely feel your fear and you’ve been traumatized in the past, it can re-traumatize you. So it’s really a wonderful thing that’s happening right now and I’m seeing this with many, many different spiritual teachers, is a willingness to get much more real understanding of trauma and not be so quick to just apply the remedy that’s the favorite remedy (laughs), spiritually speaking.

And along with trauma, for anyone that’s traumatized, there’s a sense, and I run into this so much that, “It’s my fault and how I’m behaving, the way my trauma is expressing, is an indicator of a flawed human.” There’s so much shame and it’s so sad. There’s so much shame that gets added on to the fears and the feeling of stuckness that comes with trauma. Even for people that aren’t traumatized, when I work with students and clients and my own self, I just see so much how that sense of deficiency, that something is wrong is just so core. It comes up so quickly and that’s why I wrote *Radical Acceptance*. I call it the trance of unworthiness because if I do hand raise somewhere and ask a group, “How many of you think you’re judging yourself too much in your life?” Most people will raise their hand. I think what we don’t realize is how much that deep sense of “I’m not okay” ends up impacting huge slots of our moment.

So we might be talking, but underneath to the extent that there is some unsureness of “Are you doing a good job hosting this?” or “Am I doing a good job responding?”—there’s not a full spontaneity or open-heartedness and then in relationships in the world, when we have some unsureness about how others are relating to us, we can’t really be ourselves. So “something is wrong with me” accompanies us, at work, in parenting and it drives into addictive behaviors so we can soothe ourselves. I remember after I wrote *Radical Acceptance*, I traveled around on book tour and I went to Naropa and they had a huge poster of me to promote the workshop that I was doing on *Radical Acceptance* and the caption underneath said, “Something is Wrong with Me.” (Laughs)

**RC:** (Laughs)

**TB:** It's because I teach about it so much, but it was an interesting way to enter a new community, that was my welcome.

**RC:** Oh my goodness. Just before you go on I want to share a story about that, too. I once went to a very famous spiritual teacher's talk. It was a free talk that was a lead into a pay for weekend seminar if you chose to sign-up. And so I was just there to just be open and to learn. And I kind of knew that this person had a reputation for being off-the-cuff and kind of tough, and there was the hot seat where people would come up and ask questions.

And so there was a person who was in the hot seat, it was a woman. And she had a hard time telling her truth to people and the teacher was asking her to practice. And he was saying, "Turn to that guy over there and say 'Leave me alone'" and "Turn to that guy over there and say 'You're a jerk.'" And then he pointed to me because I was just sitting right next to hot seat and he said, "Turn to that guy and say 'Underneath it all, you're really a schmuck.' And that's great because that's how he really feels about himself."

And I was actually, at first, completely contracted and frozen and traumatized because I hadn't even volunteered to be part of this exchange. And that's a whole other story. But the reason I want to bring it up right now is because I also chose to just sit with the sting of that, and think "Is that true? Underneath it all, do I really feel like I'm a schmuck or there is something wrong with me?" And I've actually kind of stayed with that question because it was such an impactful moment over the years. And I think that my answer in this moment would be yes and no. That there's a no in a sense that really, I've opened into and through some of that core wound but also, there's a resonance of that which is never far from me. And I get that sense of that's true for people often even with years and years of practice.

**TB:** What you're saying is really right on. I mean I find that even for people that have done a whole lot of healing, those patterns can still be triggered. The difference is it's kind of like lag time, how quickly you realize, "Oh, that's going on" and you realize, it's a habit of thought and feeling but it's not who you are.

For me, the whole spiritual path is deepening familiarity with our Beingness that's really not defined by any of those storylines. But it takes many, many rounds. The reason I teach that, the trance of unworthiness, of actually recognizing that really limiting story and waking up out of it until we start sensing that who we are, that we trust that kind of space of presence, of tenderness,

more than we believe in the story. And that's the shift that's possible. And it takes a kind of deliberate practice, a willingness to go to the places that are uncomfortable.

#### **4. The Wrathful Deities of Shame, Anger, and Fear**

**RC:** Yes. And the reason that I want to just stay with this topic for a while is because I work with people both in large groups and small groups and also individually, and in working with individuals, I see the depth of this challenge so up close. I'm thinking of one particular client I have worked with who is an absolutely dedicated and skillful and vipassana meditator with probably 30 years of practice. This person also has a kind of the Dickensian background of just really harrowing abuse. And after these 30 years of practice, there is still a way in which that trance that you just described can take hold. This client who tells me, "I don't want the abuse to be a life sentence. When am I going to get over this?" And what I was sharing was that it's a life sentence if you feel that those events define who you are but if your life journey is about meeting those places in you which were wounded and traumatized with ever more full and deep loving kindness, what more important or better life journey could there be? And it seems like that really is what, at least for me personally in my practice, I'm trying to invite people to: to meet the place inside of themselves whether it comes from abuse or any other kind of trauma or pain. The place where they have said, "God includes and loves everything, except this." And to recognize that even though they're wanting another life, that the life journey that is before them is one of deepening into and through especially that.

**TB:** In fact, that is what is perfectly designed for our particular psyche, whatever that 'that' is. It's the trance of unworthiness from a many of us is the gateway to realizing the radiance and beauty of who we are. It's the actual gateway. It's the first step and one of the metaphors I love is in Asia with the art of the mandala and the temples often have these wrathful deities and that you have to go through them to get to the center to come home to really sacred space. And for many of us, the wrathful deities are shame, are anger, are fear, and it's like whatever is presenting, the sooner we, instead of thinking "It's bad that this is here." Something in us pauses and says, "Okay, this is where the suffering is. Everyone has suffering in some way. May I be kind," just that remembrance. This is where this "May I be kind—may I enter here?" If you can remember to enter here, that is where all the power is for realization and freedom. And I keep finding it for myself over and over again.

I had a recent experience meaning recent in the last handful of years where I had kind of come to feeling like, "Okay, I get the trance of unworthiness. Being gripped by great shame it's not so much

around the corner for me anymore.” And then my body started falling apart. This is about 8 years ago, where I have a genetic disorder and I was getting progressively sicker and sicker and not able to move well and not able to do the things I love doing whether it’s hiking or biking or being in the ocean. And so I hit a place of being really sickly and not only that, being a terrible patient. I was feeling very self-absorbed and irritated by everything. So not only was I miserable with all the losses and the sickness but I really turned on myself and started really not liking who I was as a sick person.

And that identity was actually stickier. I mean, it was very humbling that I could be feeling terrible and then really go into the same trance again and it wasn’t until I fully was able to name that, like, “Oh, okay. I’ve turned on myself again.” That was the kind of moment, I sometimes call it the “ouch moment,” where I really got, “Oh, that’s the suffering, I’ve turned on myself.” And I found that whenever I’m really suffering, it’s because in some way, I’ve turned on myself and so in that moment, it was possible. I do this a lot as I just put my hand on my heart again and that kind of gesture is, loving kindness, is compassionate. I can put my hand on my heart and in some way, let the touch be tender. I’m in relationship again with my inner life in a way that’s kind.

And I found over and over that that self-compassion is the turning point. Then the identity shifts. I’m no longer inside the shameful self. I’m back to the awareness that is tender. So it was very sobering. Here I am, and here I was in my early 50s, reliving yet again another round, and that I just had to again pause and come back to forgiving and compassion.

**RC:** Yes. You offer a prayer. You write about a prayer: May This Suffering Awaken Compassion.

**TB:** Yes.

**RC:** And I love that simple prayer because it doesn’t even bring up the question of who or what am I praying, too.

**TB:** Yes.

**RC:** It’s just an offering from presence which is to say, “My intention here is that I enter into this suffering. I allow it in the order to serve myself and possibly to serve others so that this isn’t just suffering that sucks and offers nothing.”



**TB:** I know when it seems meaningless, then it really gets hardened into suffering. I mean if you can even catch that possibility and it's an intuitive wisdom that this suffering has the capacity to wake us up. Sometimes I'll do an exercise in workshops where I'll have people bring to mind what's really difficult that's going on in their life right now and just note how they habitually relate to it. Like "I wish this wasn't happening," "It's bad this is happening," "It's my fault." "It's your fault." And then pause and sense, "Well, what will happen if instead on some way there was that yearning—May this, whatever the circumstances, however it unfolds, may it serve to wake up this heart, may this wake up my mind, may this serve freedom." And what happens in that shift in how we're relating to the suffering makes all the difference. It's that basic teaching that it really doesn't matter what's happening in our lives, what matters is how we're relating to it.

### **5. A Busy Life, I'm Trapped**

**RC:** Yes, I'm thinking about that and I'm taking it in a real personal way and I want to just speak to that again to just be available to listeners as a human, not just as a teacher, and to speak to the issue of busyness and overwhelm, that is something that's coming up in a lot of these talks and that is coming up all over the place, whoever I talk to and wherever I speak. And in my own personal life, I have so many things that I'm grateful for and in the midst of that, there's also a challenge which is that, first of all, I have some health issues also which make the amount of really productive time in a day more limited certainly than I would like. And also, just because of the way our family needs are being met right now, I have to go out in the world and make a certain amount of money to support the family and with limited time and with not being in a particularly wealthy profession, there's a challenge there. So I'm constantly feeling like I love everything that I do and that I'm gifted with the opportunity to do and I would prefer to do it all and also a lot less. Like if I could snap my fingers right now I would have a year long sabbatical. Then following that sabbatical, I would be doing everything I'm doing now but like about half as much. And then I would really have time to breathe into and out of the passages of my day and I wouldn't always feel pressed just to get everything in.

I was having a conversation with my wife about this the other day and she was saying, "I really get this. That this is your experience. And I also, I honestly want to say that I don't want to participate in a sense that there is no way out of it. I want to be supportive by dreaming up possible approaches, differences that might help the situation. And both of us realized very quickly that I was deepened enough in the pain of that kind of unsustainable racing and compression of activities that I wasn't really at the place where I could be the great brainstormer that I would want to be. I didn't have that

space especially because if I didn't hear something that really felt practical, like that would really make a difference for me, that I would feel kind of more burdened by a fantasy that wasn't applicable to the life circumstances that we had. So I wanted to meet myself with compassion in that moment and realize that on the one hand, it would be great just to spend time and energy engaging in how do I step out of my identification with this problem. But also I had to humbly recognize that I wasn't there.

And it was also late at night, so yet another very compressed day was weighing upon me. And so all the best that I could do in that moment was to say, "I hear what you'd like to contribute and I love that and I feel that if I try to do that with you, it could not create the right energy for positive brainstorming, so please start that process in your own space and bring anything to me that gets to the point where it feels like it would be good to discuss. And there was a sense of, maybe failure is too strong a word, but an inability, I had to be with my inability, in order to also make an offer that felt like it was positive.

**TB:** Hmm. Wow! First of all, I just want to bow to the way you described the whole circumstance because I was sitting there going, "Hmm, ditto, ditto." (Laughs) And you articulated it so beautifully and the piece that most touches me of it is that I think a lot of us have the feeling and story of "a busy life, I'm trapped" and are somewhat trapped in that. Trapped in that kind of tumbling into the future and not having the spaces where we really come home.

And I mean I know when I talk about it, I often talk about the Chinese character for 'busy' is very similar to 'heart killing,' in that I can really feel that when I'm in a rush, when I'm busy, my heart isn't as responsive to myself and my world. So that really saddens me, I get stuck in that feeling like I'm not living true to myself. If I was at the end of my life looking back, I would create more space and just as you said that there's not a lot the self sometimes feels like it can do about it. So there's also a kind of surrendering to, "Okay. So it's kind of like this right now." And what's the wisdom of accepting, it's like this, not making this wrong even if the 'this' doesn't feel good. And still having that wise aspiration to create space like how to have both there. What you called the forgiveness of "Okay, it's like this." And you can't really task the self to change it too much, but still, you can have the aspiration to make choices that will open things up. So I feel like I'm living in that one too, Raphael and a lot of people I know are. It's very much endemic to the culture.

**RC:** Yes. I really sense that and I think it's really important for us to address it because if we're not putting it front and center, then we're sometimes creating an illusion that the way it is for that person out there at the lecture or in the workshop isn't the way it is for us. I think that there's an unnecessary pain that comes in inducing that kind of comparison. And so that's why I try to get out in front of it. And also about the health issues. I really appreciate you for bringing up how that has been for you because when I go to teach retreats all around the world at many of the places that you do, we find that we're in this gorgeous environment and it's really peaceful and it seems like, "What a gig!" People will say to me like, "You get to go to Kripalu, and you get to go to Esalen and you get to teach and you go to the baths," like "Can I have your job?" And when I'm with my participants at workshops, one of the things that I will tell them is, I won't bring it up just because, but if there's a moment that it feels like it's right to share, I will let them know that most of the time when I'm not in session with them, I'm sleeping, and in one or another ways crashing because that's what's required in order to bring a degree of energy and presence to the workshop session. And there's always a little part of me that is disappointed that I have to share that because I would love to have a greater degree of physical and energetic thriving, but that just ain't the way it is until that changes, if it ever does. And so I want to make sure that there's room for all of me in that and also that I invite participants into giving room for all of anything similar in their own experience.

**TB:** I think you're right on that often what participants will pick up is what they're projecting and it does not get dismantled by honesty. In other words, it takes our honesty to say, "This humanness right here is experiencing the same drivenness or insecurity or whatever," and I have, more and more over the last years, had a deliberateness about confessing. I feel like it serves me and it serves intimacy with other people and it serves those that are listening. And a lot of times I'll talk about how at our most deep sense of "something is wrong," we adapt what I call false refuges. We create a lifestyle and a persona and so on that tries to make us feel better.

And it's based on substitutes. It doesn't really work but one of those is being really busy, is trying to accomplish a lot, and it's beyond meeting the basic needs for money or security or whatever; there's a drivenness that many of us feel to prove our okayness by just a list of accomplishments and it doesn't matter as soon as you finish one, there is like within about 45 seconds, the mind fixates on the next. So that's an example of kind of a false refuge that I'll talk about. I, sometimes, condemn myself to a speediness or busyness because at some level I still get hooked on trying to do

things to feel better, check things off the list. And I know it helps people to know that type of thing. And then other people have different—I mean there's all sorts of false refuges.

For many people, it's numbing in some way or for many people it's altering states through over-consuming or that kind of thing. And for many others, it's blaming or judging ourselves or others. It's our way to try to control things. But I think if we can recognize that in ourselves and in each other and hold that with incredible compassion, then we can start stepping out of those false refuges and choosing more space and choosing to live in a more sane way.

## **6. Humiliation**

**RC:** Part of the confessing that has been important to me is to recognize that we all have one or more key emotions that are particularly difficult for us to feel. And then if we can recognize those and then bring that greater awareness and compassion to those feeling states, we have the greatest possibility therefore of liberation. And so one of the practices I will do is to just ask people to go around the circle if it's a small enough group, and just share one emotion that they know is particularly challenging for them to feel and that they often will organize their life around not feeling.

For me, I know that one of the first ones that pops up is humiliation. Not just like making a mistake that then I could therefore make a joke about or something and get back in everyone's good graces, but to make a mistake that leaves me feeling raw and exposed and that I can't quite fix. That's an emotional response that I think I've been working on for a long time and will continue to. And I wonder for you, as you hear me sharing that, is there any particular emotion that arises where you realize, "Oh, that's been a difficult one for me."

**TB:** Well, humiliation, I would say, yes and for most people I know it's like death. I mean humiliation or that raw level of shame. We're basically kicked out of the human community. That's what shaming has to do with and: you want to disappear. So I would say the same that when I make a mistake and it's the kind of mistake that clearly is a mistake and it's in public view, that that flawed-ness being so out there is like a physical pain to have to be with, (laughs) really not wanting to feel it. And it's so interesting you're bringing that one up because I developed this game with myself over the last few years that when it comes up, I actually kind of play this thing of trying to relish it, like "Okay, this is the one." (Laughs) Kind of like, "Let's just actually let this be huge and you're not going to die of it," and really breathe with it and breathe in and really feel its fullness and breathe out and just give it the space to be there. So actually, as we started our conversation,

Raphael, about the “what’s the entry point?”—letting suffering be the entry. That one of making mistakes and feeling ashamed or humiliated has become a fascinating entry to me because if I can hang in with that one, the other side is the freedom of really “It’s not who I am.” You’re not a self that blew it, it’s just, “Yes, there’s mistakes that are made, but so what?” It’s like there’s a lot of freedom around it and doesn’t mean not being responsible for things. I can then be more responsible, more able to respond because I’m not so tied up in the reaction to having failed.

**RC:** I want to just share a little bit more about that because I had this perfect opportunity around this topic just this week. I have some groups that meet in person but then also online and by telephone throughout the course of the year, and there’s one group of people, there’s only 12 and it’s meant to be very intimate. And so people are very vulnerable to one another and I’m facilitator and we meet over a conference line and this past week, we met on Monday night and we had a beautiful call and that was especially gratifying for me because I was very exhausted and at the end of the call, I took this big sigh like, “Okay, we got through that. It was great. I did a really good job. Now I can start to wind down.” And then I made the either the great move or the mistake of looking at my email one more time and found out that in the circle of sharing that we went around, I actually, for the first time ever since doing this work, forgot someone. And so this person had written me an email and was so gracious. She just basically took it as an opportunity to use her sense of sadness and of being discounted or invisible as her entry point and wanted to bring it to my attention. And so first came the humiliation—well, first came the contraction. Then came being with the contraction to get to the humiliation. And then came the gratitude for the entry point and also for her in her approach to the situation and then I was able to call her and be present to my feeling, be present to her feeling, and let this be a healing between the two of us and for the two of us and then I also asked her if it will be okay for me to record our conversation so that I could upload it to the group site and listening to it for the rest of the group could be the completion of the call that we didn’t have because we didn’t know that I had missed someone.

And I thought the whole experience had so much space around the humiliation that it was exactly what you were describing. It took me into and through and then it was more just like “Oh, that happened,” as opposed to it happening and then creating a cascade of tensions and tightness-es and shaming and thought patterns, and really was all done in about an hour. So it’s really lovely to have that experience.

**TB:** Well what is beautiful in that your story is how by you choosing to stay with, go through and then communicate, the ripples actually were for a deeper sense of understanding and intimacy all around. And I think that is the gift of when we take whatever is most difficult inside us and stay with it; that it actually frees us to act in ways in the world that are really healing. And I've seen that in myself. We have a lot going on in terms of diversity in our sangha and we have affinity groups, LGBTQ affinity groups and people of color affinity groups and what I see so often is that liberal, white spiritual groups have a huge steep learning curve in how to truly foster diversity and being a leader of a meditation community, I've been right in the hot seat when I don't attune to something and make a mistake.

For instance, if I don't include the opinions like if I don't get the perspectives needed from the people of color in our community on something that affects them, then immediately it all bursts open. Everybody knows I made a mistake. I just for some reason went blank and then I feel incredibly embarrassed like, "What is this? Supposedly, I'm completely dedicated to this diversity process but how could I ever gotten such and such?" and then if I can stay with it and not only open with compassion but presence to myself, but then continue the dialogue and acknowledge my own feelings of shame, feelings of vulnerabilities, stay in conversation, the connections that are made with let's say, certain members, leaders of the people of color community here are exactly what's needed for us to take our next step in the broader community to have real relationships and real diversity and it's actually emerged, the mistakes I've made in the last years have led to a group of us, a very diverse group of us meeting now regularly and developing very deep connections. And so it's a similar model to what you described and I see other times I make mistakes and I want to go climb in a hole and not go talk it out (laughs).

**RC:** I love hearing what you're sharing especially because it's a very deeply held value of mine to be able to be inclusive and to promote diversity. And there's a couple of things that that come to me from what you were sharing. The first one is that we, we've been talking a lot about shame and there's a flip side of that for me, and it came up actually in a conversation I was having with Caroline Casey for this series, where I said something and she said to me, "Oh, I see that you're always wanting to be good and I'm always wanting to be bad." And she had a kind of twinkle in her eye. But the point is that somehow, I got wired up very young, it has to do probably to some degree with my Jewish genes although I haven't figured all that out, where being good was very powerful to me and in some sense, that was wonderful because it allowed me to become an activist early in

my life and to walk that path. But also, sometimes being attached to the idea of being good can limit the space and the awareness and the gifts that I can bring so that if I make a mistake like what you're just describing, and there are part of me gets really tight until I can prove to myself and the other people that, "Yes, I am good. Yes, I made that mistake but, but, but..." you know, and then fix it.

So to be able to go forward without having to fix it is I think really important for me and it deepens the work I can do anyway because the fixing, it isn't really about what just happened, that's just about my own internal knot.

**TB:** That makes total sense, yeah.

**RC:** Yes. But the other thing I wanted to say is thank you for bringing this subject up because in putting this series together, it was very easy to create diversity between men and women but really difficult to create diversity that was racial and ethnic and religious in orientation and certainly also to include the LGBT community. So for anybody who's listening now, and maybe even has been sensitive to this when you looked at the participants in this series, I would ask people to write to me with the names of any people who would be good to interview in this series from any other under-represented or unrepresented community.

### **7. The Swing Between Inferiority and Grandiosity**

**TB:** Yes. And one segue that feels natural in what we're talking about is that the other side of making mistakes and shame and so on is a sense of whether you describe your identity as good or having some sense of entitlement or privilege or specialness, and it been very, very interesting to me in this last years, because I find that we all kind of swing from feeling inferior to feeling grandiose. And sometimes it's very subtle, on some level thinking, not going around thinking "Oh, I am so intelligent" or "I know so much" or "I have things to teach people," but some subtle sense of importance, like our specialness that can be a kind of stickiness with the identity. And so I started realizing I felt more shame around specialness and grandiosity than I did around other feelings (laughs).

This has become in this last decade, a very revealing place where I first of all catch myself and then don't realize the privilege I have and the assumptions that come with it, whether it's a privilege of not being on the edge financially, not that I'm flush, but not living on the edge or the privilege of being a Caucasian person in this society, or you know, there's so many levels of it, or the privilege

of being in the teacher role and forgetting the acts of self consciousness and insecurity that can sometimes come when there is a projection—a teacher is just really knowing something, when I don't know something.

So trying to wake up to all those layers of what I carry. I remember a few years ago, I was at a retreat and I did this whole meditation on 'special person.' I was seeing if I could undo that whole identity of putting myself apart or whatever, and I noticed I would have the intention to really be awake to it and then come back from having taught somewhere and maybe because I was stressed or rushed I was locked into some identity that didn't feel really pure, whole, or here we are together, that feeling. I felt in some way, I was pulling myself off.

And so at this retreat, it became almost like a sense of despair. "Can I pop out of this bubble and really not get caught in this identity?" And I realized at one point it was almost like I was making this prayer to kind of get me out of it and then it was a really interesting thing that happened where I realized I was trying every strategy I knew to not be identified with the kind of privilege or importance or special person self. And nothing was working. And I felt this despair and then there is this voice in my head that said, "Sweetheart, just stop. Please, stop." And it was like, "I got it," that this self can't get rid of a self. (Laughs)

It's like this self was trying to get rid of grandiosity just the way this self was trying to get rid of insecurity. And so in that moment, the struggling stopped. Like that's the whole self sense dissolved and there is just this quietness and this tenderness, and it was such a teaching that we have these ideas on how we should be, that we should be the good person or we should be the mischievous person, or the smart person, or the accomplishing purpose person, and so many moments have this self-improvement project going on on some level. And that there is a difference between having this very sincere aspiration to be who we are, to really come home, and this constant striving to be other than we are which really only just feeds the ego itself.

So I'm finding myself working with that, noticing grandiosity, noticing insecurity, and noticing that the real freedom doesn't come in trying to, in some ways struggle against them, but just a real compassionate presence that really let's them both be totally, perfectly, naturally, perfectly human.

**RC:** Yes. I was listening to that, just feeling like "Oh, I can't wait to listen to that whole passage again when I have the recording because it was so rich," and in the midst of it, I had this flash of being told when I was very young based on some testing in the school, my parent sat me down and



said, “Well, what we come to know about you is that you can do anything you want as long as you put your mind to it.” And this was both a great blessing because it was an affirmation and for all the reasons that you’re already aware was a great curse as well. And both sides of that have carried forward with me through my life and there have been many super humbling moments where I had to find out how absolutely not true that was (laughs).

It comes to mind when I thought I could fix my own car when I was a young driver with the Volkswagen handbook back in the 70s and it became very clear that I was putting my mind to it and this car was not getting fixed. That’s maybe a prosaic example and there have been a lot more deep, humbling examples. But what mostly comes through for me in reflecting what we just shared is that it’s something that has come up in different ways in this series and that is we are opening as best as we can and whenever we can to an unconditioned awareness but we’re doing that with brains that we understand more and more are created such that that our early experience literally brings forward a map of reality, that in the way that our synapses and neural networks are made, that our perceptions are not hard-wired but super tightly organized based on all of that experience so that we, as you said, we can’t unravel the self with the self.

**TB:** Exactly.

**RC:** And any kind of self-improvement project in that sense that you described is folly and there’s something really humbling but also releasing in the recognition that it will always be thus, that we will be able to touch the unconditioned and then always be recognizing that we’re touching it through that fully conditioned brain that is perceiving all of this.

### **8. Oceanness and its Waves**

**TB:** I’m not sure, I mean, in my experience is that we can’t touch the unconditioned through that filter, that that filter is there and that we are the unconditioned. If we take the ocean waves metaphor, our deepest nature is that that vastness, that awake openness, that tenderness, and that the waves keep happening and there’s a tendency, a conditioning to all existing creatures to identify with a set of waves and so there is some process of relaxing back to a non-doing presence; that in that non-doing presence, we discover again our oceanness over and over again. And over time on the path, I think what happens is that we just begin to trust more and more, that what we are is that unconditioned Beingness and sense the changing waves as the conditioning that is going to keep on happening but isn’t what we are. And if you trust you’re the ocean, then you’re not afraid of the waves, you’re not reactive to the waves but they still are there. But I don’t think you perceive the

oceaness through the filter. I think that it's always going to be distorted unless there's a non-doing, a resting back. It's sometimes called the backward step in the Zen tradition.

**RC:** Well, I really appreciate that refinement which I think is really helpful, and even just for me personally. But I'm sure for others listening, and in that refinement, what I'm hearing is that as the ocean, as you said, there's a recognition that those waves will continue to arise.

And so there is that paradox of what sometimes is called the relative and the absolute that if we were the ocean and somehow—or we thought we were the ocean and somehow as the supposed ocean, we were wishing or willing the waves not to arise, then that would be the first clue that we're not actually—

**TB:** (Laughs) Exactly, exactly. Yes, that's another wave stance. (Laughs)

**RC:** Right.

**TB:** You got it.

**RC:** And so for me, one of the things that I found is that with myself and also people that I work with, that as resting into oceaness happen more and more, also what happens is a fuller expression of those waves.

**TB:** Absolutely.

**RC:** A freer expression of those waves.

**TB:** And it's a celebration of the waves. I mean it's like you love this life that appears and dissolves. In fact, the only way to fully love this life is know your oceaness.

**RC:** Yes, that's beautiful. Well, I know that our time is coming to an end and I could go on for a very much longer, so I really appreciate having this opportunity to be in presence and connection with you. And I just want to ask you before we go, if there's anything else that you'd want to share about your Now, because you've been so gracious and giving in talking about some of the things that you're working with, is there anything that feels like, these days, in this moment, that it's something that is showing itself to you and it feels like it's unmetabolized or just that it's a subject that feels rich for you around your own explorations of waves and ocean.

**TB:** It's a wonderful question, like where are my attentions going, and it's a bit of what I was alluding to. It takes a deliberate attention—the conditioning is strong so I could identify with these patterns of different kinds of a sense of the self less than what we are and it's strong conditioning to get contracted. So I feel like there's this calling for a really a continued, deliberate attention, like really intending to notice and be aware and yet, over and over again, I keep finding that freedom, the moments of freedom come when my mind is somewhat quiet and there is a real kindness. And if even in a moment, I can pause just enough to just put my hand on my heart, and remember that intention to be kind to the life that's here. That has more power to dissolve the stickiness, the identity with a small deficient self or whatever, and remind me of my oceaness, than almost anything else. Just that pause and even the idea of kindness combined with simply letting go into how it is. So that's just the place I keep getting drawn to.

**RC:** Yeah. Kindness for one's self and kindness for others and kindness for all.

**TB:** And it's really a loving of life because even though I might—there might be conception that your loving the life inside you, in the moment that I said the word kindness, I was feeling you Raphael, as a part of this heart and anyone who's listening and I'm looking outside at the trees near, it's like the heart dissolves into this vastness and then it's all a part of it.

**RC:** In the interview series, I spoke recently to Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt of Imago Relationship Therapy and they did one better than the prevalent idea in couple's counseling of zero criticism in relationship and they said that for relationship to thrive, they come to recognize that there's needs to be zero negativity. And they said that if you want to know what being negative is, it's what your partner says it is. So if they see an eye roll or a shrug as negative, then that's something to really pay attention to and I'm sharing that now because the way that you are describing kindness and the deliberate attention toward kindness is really inspirational and it makes me realize that idea of zero negativity isn't just for intimate relationship. It's for all, its relationship to everything.

**TB:** That's right.

**RC:** Yeah. So the intention for kindness is really to say that where I see negativity in myself towards anyone or anything, that's the invitation, that's as you said earlier, the entry point to bring the kindness that I can.

**TB:** It's to not push any part of yourself out of your heart, [otherwise] we're not free. If there's any part of this world that we're in some way not saying yes to; yes doesn't mean I love this, I want it to go on and on, it just means a pure profound including in our hearts of what is and the actuality of what is.

**RC:** Hmm. Well, I will say in conclusion, yes to that!

**TB:** Mmm, and yes to this whole field that you're creating, Raphael, because I think it's a beautiful thing to invite people to be in their realness. It brings it out in each of us and so a big bow. And thank you!

## **Bikkhuni Pannavati**



Bhikkhuni Pannavati, an international teacher, is a former Christian pastor, Co-Abbot of Embracing Simplicity Buddhist Hermitage and a founding director of Sisters of Compassionate Wisdom (a 21<sup>st</sup> century trans-lineage Buddhist order). She is ordained in both the Theravada and Chan schools, is a Zen Dharma Holder and Vajrayana practitioner. Pannavati's insight is rich with compassion, wit and humor. She is approachable and engaged; known for her "direct speech," ordination of Thai and Cambodian nuns, work with homeless youth in Appalachia, and ministry to India's "Untouchables."

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### **1. The Dharma is Everywhere**

**RC:** Pannavati, thank you so much for joining me and welcome to *Teaching What We Need To Learn*.

**P:** Thank you so much for having me. I'm looking forward to this dialogue.

**RC:** Oh, good. Well, in this moment as I come into presence, I'm feeling grateful that we overcame some technical challenges to make this work. I'm also smiling because the sun is shining and my daughter is outside with her babysitter and even though I'm not distracted by them, as I pace back and forth in my office, I can see them as I cross past the window so that gives me a further smile in my heart. How about you? How are you in this very moment?

**P:** Well I've learned in whatever state to be content. So my day started very early today. Before I can even do any of my usual spiritual practice, I'm down at the bakery; labeling, packaging, making deliveries in and out the county, coming back, going to the laundromat, going to a meeting, and all by that 10:00, and so, (*laughs*), my day—it's 4:00 here now and I've had a very busy day. By 10:00, I've done what most people do all day long and I'm still smiling.

**RC:** Oh, good. Well, thank you for sharing that and coming into presence with me. I'd like to begin by sharing a little bit about what you wrote to me when I invited you to the series because I think it will get us off to a wonderful start. It was so beautiful and enriching. When you got my invitation, you wrote back and you said, "This is good news for students of the Dharma. I am often criticized by other monastics for speaking about personal challenges and heaven forbid that we offend anyone with the truth and mess up the alms giving for everyone; pointing out that we need to change to really make the world a better place. I smiled so hugely when I read that and realized, "Oh, we are singing from the same hymnal," so to speak.

**P:** It's very rare that you hear a monastic talking about these mundane things, like going to the laundromat and working. But that's part of my life. I say to a person when they tell me they want to become a monastic, "I don't think you want to be one here because we work, and it's a part of life and it's a part of our experience." The Dharma is everywhere, and when we get to the place that no matter where we are and no matter what we're doing, we see the Dharma—it doesn't get any better than that.

**RC:** Now speaking of what we see and what we're finding ourselves living in the midst of, you also went on to share this. You said, "What you might not know is that the sangha where I preside is 100% Southern Caucasian, half-conservative, most formally fundamental Baptist." And then you said, "Originally from Washington, D.C. and Black, I now live in a segregated rural town in the Bible Belt where most people have never seen a Buddhist or anyone in robes until we moved here, a place where my members are concerned for our welfare, as I'm told that the KKK still meets less than a mile away." So if the Dharma is everywhere and you're blessed to be able to see it everywhere, you're kicking that to the max, I would say.

**P:** *(Laughs)* And it really wasn't by design. It's a good thing sometimes that we don't know what everything is because it would inform our choices, but not knowing certain things, I just abandon myself to the beauty of this place; it is incredibly beautiful. As things became plain to me, then I said, "Well, I find myself here. Let me find out what it is that I need to do while I am here." And that's how I've lived my life and in the midst of some people's concern, I have no concern. There was no fear there and I've seen a community change tremendously in the years that the Hermitage has been here.

**RC:** So let me ask you if you can share a little bit for our listeners, who I'm sure would be thrilled to understand how it came to be. So you're an African-American; you're from Washington, D.C., and before we even get to you moving to North Carolina on this mission, how did you even come to the Dharma?

**P:** Well, I was a Christian pastor and I went as far as I felt I could go in Christianity. I mean I was already Pentecostal and then I became Charismatic and there's no place after that. I started off Baptist, Methodist—so I went through almost every denomination and I learned something and I got something from each one but I would come up against the limitation and my faith was bigger than that. And so finally, I found myself stuck in Romans—"The good I would do, I don't do; what I don't want to do, that I do. O wretched man am I. Who can deliver me?" And that's where I was in my walk as a Christian. And so I just cried out in my heart of hearts and I was saying, "I believe with all my heart that I can come up to the fullness of the measure of the stature of Jesus, and I want to know how to do that; and it means I'm going to have to stop groveling at the altar and I'm going to have to cultivate the qualities that he had. And where can I find instruction on how to do that?"

The ideal was there in Christianity for me. Certainly the heart was there, but the instructions on how to get from A to Z, I could not find them. And so I began to look at other spiritual disciplines. If you want to know what a master was really talking about, you can't ask the disciples: "We're the students. We don't know. You have to go and ask another master." And so that's what I started doing. I started researching the teachings of other masters and I began to understand a path unfolded for me on how to renew my mind so that the good that I want to do, I can do, and what I don't want to do, I don't have to do.

**RC:** So it was through your own self-directed searching and studying of the masters and their direct teaching that you came to Buddhism.

**P:** Yes.

**RC:** And how long ago was that?

**P:** Oh, mmm...1990. I originally discovered Buddhism in 1985; it was a Tibetan book and I got so frightened (*laughs*). When I looked at the pictures, I said, "Well, I won't investigate Buddhism. I won't have anything to do with that religion," and I turned from that; I didn't touch it for many years. And so I really started with just a step away from mainstream Christianity. Well, if you're

Pentecostal or Charismatic, you're more than a step away already. But from there I went to Unity and after a while in Unity, I stepped out to UU and after a while in UU, I just kept going further and further out and then I looked around and I was out. I had an Indian guru and then I had a Daoist master, and then finally the Buddha Dharma came around to me again. And actually, it was more like ten years down the road. But this time, I was ready for it. I had overcome my fear of: is God going to strike me dead because I'm reading something that's not Christian? I had grown as a human being. I had grown as a spiritual person. I was no longer so confined and limited in my own understanding. And as I began to read the *Majjhima Nikaya*, a monk gave it to me and I thought I could literally eat the pages off the words. It was so fresh; it was so plain; it was so clear to me how I could develop a mind that was imbued with loving kindness and compassion and wisdom and still abide in a certain equanimity and that's what I was looking for.

**RC:** Now, one thing I want to ask you—it's a slight detour and then we'll come back to your path. But one of the things that you're known for is called 'direct speech' and I think we've already maybe had a little taste of that, but I'm wondering if you could describe what that means in your own words.

**P:** Well, I speak plainly. I don't mince my words and I don't have an affected language. Every area has its own jargon, so we learn how to say all the right Buddhist things, just politically correct and all of that; and I'm always stepping in it, I guess you could say, because I just speak to something as I see it. So sometimes I'm criticized that I don't have the refinement that a nun should have and I just simply laugh. The Buddha—he was very frank. So we always talk about false speech and gentleness, and there are times that that's called for, but sometimes if you see a horse racing towards...of course you holler, "Stop!" and so I'm like that. I just think that everything should be according to the situations. So sometimes I'm gentle, sometimes I'm not.

**RC:** Hmm, so it seems that in your dedication to being present fully to every situation that you're looking to see not what theory do I apply, but what does this moment call forward from me? And in that moment, you'll reach for whatever things appropriate and you communicate it in whatever way feels best for the person who's going to be listening. Is that right?

**P:** Yes, because it's not even what the moment calls forward from me, what does the moment call for? And I have to get with that. So it really doesn't have anything to do with me; it is just the moment, and I have to get with the moment. And I think sometimes we miss this because we think



something is required. We become bigger than the thing. We become bigger than the moment. We become bigger than the situation. But the truth is, if we start diminishing this notion of a self, it only becomes that and then we can know that we can be in that fully instead of trying to bring that into us. It's a difference.

## **2. The Bhumi of Social Conscience**

**RC:** And so I really hear the distinction that you're making between what does the moment call forth from me versus what does the moment call for, and there's a way in which I'm hearing, if you're really fully present and you'll step into it, you'll do that beyond, let's say, personality. And so that brings up a really interesting question around the subject of personality and biography because I'm wondering in your experience, first of all as a Black-American and then also as a Christian, do you see ways in which those, we'll call them socially constructed identities, if you will—do you see the way that those have somehow informed your teachings in Buddhism or do you feel that having really given yourself to the teachings, those aspects of your identity don't matter in the same way they did before?

**P:** Well, those aspects of my identity don't matter in the way they did before but they certainly inform my understanding of the Dharma. When we come from a place of privilege, try as we might, to understand the one who has been deprived—it's very difficult. I mean it becomes an intellectual exercise. We have to try to think about it; try to put ourselves in that person's place, and this is a mental exercise. But if you've actually been in it, then you know it all together. And so certainly my life has been informed by my experiences and I can bring them into the path to more fully understand how to walk the path, but from a place of great compassion and also great strength because it has taken strength to overcome many obstacles.

**RC:** So there's a way that you can bring into the fullness of any moment and any experience what you have previously experienced because of that identity in a way that is direct and not just a mental exercise. And yet at the same time, we have choices whether we come from privilege or not, where we're going to look at, what kind of experience and connection we're going to seek out. And the reason I'm sharing this is because I know that you have taught a course, I think at Duke University, called *Social Conscience: A Prerequisite for Buddhahood*? And I'm wondering, it's probably not a simple answer, but just briefly for the purposes for our conversation, do you see that social conscience is a prerequisite for Buddhahood?

**P:** Well, I really do and if I look at the example of the Buddha, I see it there; not just the Buddha, but all spiritual masters. He would often say, “When I was just an unenlightened Bodhisattva,” and he’d go on and he tell some story of how he became less reliant on pleasing himself and more interested in assisting someone else with their suffering. And I saw it throughout his ministry and he spoke to social issues; he acted out of his own wisdom in how he would address the same situation. And so we have the emergence of the bhikkunis at the time when you could just go to the forest and grab a woman and say, “Mine” and take her home and that’s it, and the family agreed.

So I see this man who was speaking to the social culture of his day and as he went about in his teachings, he showed in a very clear, on the ground way how we could be responsive to a spiritual truth and in walking it out, we can change a society. We can change a culture. And I think that the practice of Buddhism in this country, speaking particularly of America, is very intellectual. I mean we want to talk about it all. But I don’t see quite as much being done that says that my thoughts, my actions, and my speech are in perfect correspondence. And so I would like to be a part of that brigade that steps into the world and “I show my faith by my works”— that’s a Christian quote, but I think it is true for all of us who want to walk authentically. We show what we believe by what we do, or what we are willing to do. And I don’t think in terms of sacrifice the way I did as a Christian. It’s just natural. It’s just a natural inclination, a natural response. It is no sacrifice at all. But it aligns. It makes me feel authentic inside and it puts a faith on the teachings that goes beyond a mere intellectual conversation or stimulation.

**RC:** So I want to just draw on that and develop it little bit more because it’s so important to me personally. I hear you saying that because of your past experience, you’re able to relate to the ways that people’s actions, their behaviors, their choices really impact other human beings and often in a very hurtful or damaging way. And partially because of that, you are sensitized to not just words and concepts but deeds and impacts of those actions on those around you. And I’ve noticed that in Buddhist and other similar circles that people are very attuned to the idea of interdependence, that we’re all connected. And this attunement usually happens on a mostly spiritual level, but often the same people who are really deeply aware of that spiritual interconnection aren’t aware and sometimes choose not to be aware of the impacts of their everyday actions. So for example, maybe I, if I am willing to look, I find out that certain purchases that I make have a negative impact on other human beings and also on the planet, and then I have a choice to make: “Do I want to go through with that purchase or not? Is there an alternative purchase? Am I willing to go without or

am I willing to pay more to have my actions through the money that I exchange and then the purchases that I make and goods that I receive match my words and match my principles?" And it's very inconvenient to do that and also very confusing because sometimes you learn more about one company and you say, "Okay, I won't buy their goods." And then you learn another one and you say, "Okay, I won't buy their goods." And suddenly you realize, "Well, the only way through here is a little bit of ignorance is bliss because if I learn enough about all these companies, there might be no place that I can really support." But this consideration, the willingness to look and to see how my everyday dollars impact the world is something that I've noticed harder for people than it is as I say to recognize the spiritual interconnection. And it seems like what you're saying, and tell me if I have this right: that for the fullness of Buddhahood it's just as important to pay attention to those daily details of interconnectedness as the more spiritual ones. Is that right?

**P:** It is. That's absolutely right. I have a bakery for a bread company that's a social enterprise putting homeless youth to work and teaching them a trade while they finish their high school diploma. So it's tough work and as I was going through my list of products, we ran into that that very problem with chocolate. And when I started this enterprise, I really wasn't thinking along those lines, but as I read something about where most of our chocolate comes from and the conditions that the people work under, some who had never even tasted chocolate, and I love chocolate; I was horrified because I really did not know. And as soon as I found out, I went back and I said, "Okay, we've got to do something. We've got to see where most of our chocolate is coming from." And when I checked, it was coming right from that pool in those countries, and so I said, "Well, we're going to have to find a supplier who knows where his chocolate is coming from." And it took some effort and research on our part but we were able to do that. And it actually cost us a little bit more but it's a decision that I made when I became aware. If I'm not aware, that's one thing. Once you are aware, what will you do? What will you do with that?

And you were speaking about where we spend our money and this is around things. But it starts even closer. It starts even closer than that and what I found is that we have brought a lot of our social unconsciousness into the Dharma hall and we need to work on that. We have not been willing as a group, I think, to look at it because it's painful to look at. And it requires change and I'm speaking now specifically of diversity. I never planned that I would be a teacher talking so much about diversity but I have found that a voice was needed and not just with peoples of color but within, within the white segment of Buddhism. They needed someone who could speak to it but

with no axe to grind. I mean I don't have any animosity; I don't have any anger; And I really understand something on a very deep level. And I learned it being here.

When I was 13 and I lived in Washington, D.C., and I had a friend in North Carolina, and I was invited to spend the summer. Well, I came down, this is 1963. When I got off of the bus and I was walking down the street, a white lady walked up the street. I did not know that I was supposed to step off the sidewalk because we didn't do that in D.C. And so I did not step off the sidewalk. But that evening, the KKK came to her house for me and she asked them to allow her to discipline me and said that I just didn't know, I wasn't from here. And they did and she whipped me publicly that night in the front yard, and the next day I was on a bus back to D.C. and I never came back to the South until now.

So my family, when they found out that I was going to buy this place here in North Carolina and set up a Hermitage, they just couldn't understand it. And they said, "We will not visit you there," and none of them have. But I didn't really understand what this would mean to me, moving here because that was something that happened in my childhood. I went back home and it was over for me. But now, I'm living in a place that is back in the '50s or the '60s and I'm suddenly confronted with something. I had to say to myself to look deeper than what was coming at me, to understand on a very deep level the pain and the misinformation that was abiding in human beings to be able to love them beyond what they gave back to me. But in doing so, I have seen a community begin to change. I mean really began to change on some very deep levels. They can take the hard medicine. They can really hear what needs to be said, and they can go home and ponder it and think about it. It's like, for instance, if you may feel I don't have a racist bone in my body. Some of my best friends are black, but when we sit around the dinner table and Uncle Bob is using the 'n' word and I'm sitting their silent feeling uncomfortable when I am not willing to say, to speak up and say, "We won't disparage people in that way at my table," then I'm complicit in it. So getting them to find the boldness to put actions behind how they really wanted to be; giving them permission and encouragement that they can do this has been a great work in itself and I'm glad to have been a witness to it because it helped to uncover for me some things that I had tucked away very neatly, very correctly with my spiritual self really, really deep inside.

So first I had to look at myself and I had to sign myself and where was I on that spectrum. Was I in the middle? And in getting myself in the middle, I understood where everybody else was and how

they could be where they were, even with the best intentions. And this was the ground from which you start; it does start with one's self.

**RC:** Yeah. So it's interesting because what you were sharing a bit ago was that you didn't imagine yourself to be someone who was going to be speaking to diversity or teaching about diversity. And that's the theme that we heard. I just recently was interviewing for this series a woman who also was from Washington, D.C., her name is Milagros Phillips. I don't know if you ever came across her but she had radio show called *Spirit in Action* in D.C. She's a Black Dominican Latina, I guess, is how you would describe her background and she also, on her spiritual path thought something like, "The last thing I imagined myself doing was becoming an educator on race," and then she went through her healing and her spirituality developed—there was nothing else she could do. It pointed her right to that. So it's interesting to hear each of you in your own version of coming back to that as a way like, "I can't escape that. If I'm going to be true to myself; if I'm going to practice in the world, I must address diversity."

**P:** It's bringing so much healing. That's the thing. If somebody calls me and says, "I was looking for a Black teacher." I say, "Well, I don't know who that is. I'm a teacher." And so I really purposely moved away from invitations that were Afrocentric or whatever, and I'm always invited to them. But I'll say, "It's better for me and if you really want to get a handle on this problem, we already know what may be some of the issues, but we need to be in a forum where we can enlighten our sisters and brothers." Because sometimes, just the information from their peer group has been missing, so when we add that missing information and it has a face, it has an identity; if there is relationship, and there is no agenda, then it's so liberating for them. It's so freeing. It was like, "I've been trying to find the door, and I couldn't find it. You pointed me right to it. Thank you so much." And they can walk through that door and they can be free of the cultural bondage that may have kept them clamped out. And so this is what I'm finding and (Laughs) I've pretty much accepted it now. And so most of my students, well all of my students are Caucasian, and most of the people that I speak with are basically white groups. And I can get to the Dharma but I can make it not some esoteric philosophy out there, but I can bring it right home where we live and where we interact so that we can recondition ourselves and be part of the solution that the world needs today.

**RC:** Great. So I'm wondering, because you have a Hermitage there in North Carolina, you mentioned one way that you interact with the community is that you have a business and you employ a lot of high school students. By the way, I'm thinking because I heard a message when I

called you one time that you're very much with the times because at least part of that bakery is gluten-free. Is that right?

**P:** Yes, it is. It is gluten-free. We have a certified gluten-free facility. And we called it a business but I don't hire youth to bake bread. I bake bread to hire youth. So it's really a social enterprise. These are kids that are homeless and basically at risk. They're gangbangers. I'm talking significantly undereducated, like dropped out in the ninth grade or they may have issues—ADD, ADHD, OCD, ODD, schizophrenic, bipolar—it just goes on and on.

**RC:** Pannavati, are those students mostly of color or Caucasian?

**P:** In the three years I've been working with them, I've had 75 live with us here at the Hermitage: one African American, two Hispanic, and the rest Caucasian. It was a challenge in itself for white kids to come and live with Black folk; that was a challenge, something they had to overcome. "Do I sleep under the viaduct or will I sleep there?" So most of the kids who have come in have been conditioned and they were decidedly racist, and to have a breakthrough was so wonderful for them. It was like biting the hand that feeds you, but in time they learned something that they did not know.

**RC:** The reason that I was asking you that question and I didn't know the answer; I wanted to learn if part of what you're describing really flies in the face of a lot of stereotype in our country because as you said, many of the kids are not just homeless but also gangbangers. And when we hear gangbangers in the U.S., the stereotypical image of course is African American youth, but you're working with, as you said, Caucasian youth who are coming from that world as well.

**P:** Yeah. But generally, there are different kinds of gangs. We see what we see on television, but there are skinheads, there are all kinds of groups that organize around certain things. I mean some of my kids have been part of hate groups. These are still gangs and they commit crimes. I had one young man and when he came to me he came by his own accord. He'd gone to school and he said, "I want to do something because I've got to get out of this gang I'm in." Now a week after he moved in with me, that gang he was with, they beat a teacher almost to death. She's in critical and they killed her husband. But he escaped just by coming the week before and deciding that he wanted to change his life. That young man still comes to see me. He finished school. He went into the military and he got married and he was just here visiting me about three weeks ago. Every time he crosses a milestone in his life, he makes his way back here to see me.

I don't want to have a conversation really about race or about diversity. I want to have a conversation about human beings to human beings, exchanging self for others. And in that, we can move beyond color. But you have to be really willing to exchange. I went to a diversity meeting and people were describing what a really unfortunate situation that happened that hurt them very much, and one lady was talking about from a comment somebody made that really hurt her feelings really bad. I told my story about being 13, and they were dumbfounded because they just couldn't imagine anything like that. We all have stories and where my story really ranks on the scale depends on hearing the other stories. And as we start to hear other stories and we are touched by them, then scales really do start to fall from our eyes, our heart opens up and we can find our commonality as sentient beings.

**RC:** So it seems like where diversity leads to humanity is through being willing to come together and to listen and to listen to what may be hard to hear or to go great lengths to be in a place where you can listen because without starting there, the humanity would just be some kind of spiritual bypass. It wouldn't be real. So what I hear you saying is you don't want to go to something necessarily that's Afrocentric or maybe me not going to something that's Jewish-American; that if we're willing to take the steps to meet others and to listen, it's through recognizing our unique past that then we can embrace the commonality. Is that right?

**P:** Yes. And sometimes, it just destroys your paradigm to come into a gathering and I'm the speaker—it does more for a black person than for me to come to their Afrocentric group. It's a different dynamic. And it changes the whole view of worth, acceptability. Sometimes you have to ask, "Well, is this just in my own mind? Is this what I'm thinking that I'm not accepted, that we are not accepted?" I certainly identify; when I would go out to meditation centers, usually I'd be the only one and then I bring somebody with me and they were so happy that we were there and then I'd bring another person, now there's three of us, and when I brought the fourth, we will be met at the door with a tape saying, "You really don't have to travel across town. We made a CD for you so that you can play it at home." And so I mean I got this too, but I reached a point that no one else was going to define for me my journey in the Buddha Dharma. And once I made that decision, then I was not held back by others. Actually, I began to inform them with my liberty and they were gladdened by it because in being free—it's hard to be in the presence with somebody that's free and stay bound. You'd only stay bound because you wanted to. But when you get in the presence of

somebody free, you start feeling free yourself. You start looking at your own mental shackles and you start casting them off because you want that same freedom.

**RC:** So someone coming to the door with three or four of her friends and being met with that CD could say, “Okay, thank you, I’ll take it. I know I’m not wanted here.” Or that person, if they decided they’re not going to be defined by others and their liberties already living within them, they can say, “Uh-uh, hey, wait a minute,” and actually go forward, even if it means that in that moment there’s tension or conflict, but go forward out of that sense of freedom recognizing that it’s not just for me that I’m doing this but this expression of liberty in being is for everybody who’s here.

**P:** Well, it didn’t exactly happen in that way. I mean if somebody doesn’t want to let you come in, and you can just say, “I’m here and I’m not leaving.” But you take that and you don’t let that experience define who you are and set you up for a lesser expectation with the next group. You just start again but each time you do that remaining undefined, then you also remain un-defouled when people try to cast their crap on you. And after a while, in stepping into your freedom, there is something that’s more caught that it is taught, that when you start making the approach, then people say, “There’s something different about her. I want to hear what she has to say,” it’s kind of like that.

**RC:** Yes. Let me just jump in because I want to clarify. I didn’t think that you made your stand at that particular meditation center.

**P:** I take the inner stand though.

**RC:** I hear that. I’m interested in following up on this because there does seem to come a time often where we’re called to express what I would call our loving no. It’s not that moment, but in another moment, we have to say, “No, I’m going to make an outer stand as well because if I don’t make an outer stand and I’m going to do it with love, I’m going to do with compassion, but if I don’t make it a stand here, then the change isn’t going to happen.” And it sounds like going back to a theme of yours from earlier, it’s a lot about really knowing the moment and responding to what’s really called for there.

**P:** And fearlessly. I bought this place and of course, I didn’t know about the KKK. I found out about them when one of my Sangha members said, “Pannavati, we just can’t believe you were bold enough to do this.” And then she told me about the meeting down the way. So what I did the next—



people always come in to check you out and this was back in 2004, so what I did in the next gathering we had, I said, “I want everybody to keep your shoes on.” We take our shoes off coming in... “I want everybody to keep your shoes on” and they said, “Why?” I said, “If anybody shows up at this door in a white sheet, I’m going to look down at your feet and say ‘Johnny, is that you?’” Everybody laughed.

**RC:** *(Laughs)*

**P:** But I just put it right out there. *(Laughs)* And I was making a statement in my own way.

**RC:** Yeah.

**P:** So we learned how to engage ignorance without necessarily rearing up against the person.

### **3. The Hermitage**

**RC:** Yeah. I have just a couple more questions for you about the Hermitage experience there in North Carolina. The first one is, maybe if you could just give us the short version because I’m sure people are wondering, how did it come to be? Out of all the places that you could have decided to set up a Hermitage, you set it up there in that place that connects back to your youth but also even still in 2012 has its chapter of the KKK. You mentioned that your own family couldn’t really get it. But how did it happen?

**P:** Well, I was looking to see when our teacher gave us permission to go forward and to teach and I went out to California and it was too dry. There wasn’t enough green out there for me. I went in the summer. So then I came back through Arizona. It was too hot. I came back from Tennessee, it was beautiful. It was glowing because it rains there almost everyday, so it was too wet. I went to South Carolina and it was too hot and wet. I went to Florida. I couldn’t find a place that I felt comfortable for me. And then I said, “I’m going outside of the country.” Costa Rica, Panama, looking where we should open a Hermitage. On the way back, of course it wasn’t those places because that is the rainforest—now I know what rainforest is. Coming back on the airplane, I looked at the magazine, Kay, my companion showed it to me and she said, “Look at this.” And it said, “Asheville: Spiritual Mecca of the East, Little Paris.” I said, “Oh, Kay, I think this is it. Let’s go there and check it out.” So we went and we fell in love with Asheville, but after about two weeks, it was a little bit too bohemian. It’s a place sort of like where everybody wants to know the latest thing. They want to touch and handle everything, and I was looking for a little more depth and groundedness, so I just said to the realtor, “Take us down the road a way so we can get to Asheville quickly anytime we

want to.” And she showed us this particular place on the side of a Ridge. It was in full glory with 5,000 rhododendrons and azaleas and that’s where we settled.

I believe it was my karma to be here. I really do. And to see the community change; a little is a whole lot and so something was thrown into the mix that allowed for transformation. Sometimes, something has to come in for transformation to occur.

**RC:** So the other question I have for you Pannavati about that community is because Hermitage by its very nature is away from, it’s a refuge, apart from the work that you do with the youth that you described, how do you interact with the community around you so that they are not just thinking, “Oh, those crazy Black Buddhists up on the hill.” In what ways do you engage directly with those who are your neighbors?

**P:** Well, when we first came and we set up, we just wanted this to be a place where anyone who wanted to go into monastic life could come and of course, Buddhism is not like Catholicism here. There are no places when you go and you’re taken care of and all of that. It just doesn’t exist for monks in the West. And so that’s what we thought our contribution would be, to have a place where people could step into monastic life. But nobody came. But the people in the community were curious about who we were, and what we were about and one by one, they started coming. So I called my teacher and I said, “These people are not serious. They’re just curious.” He said, “Forget about the serious and focus on the curious.” And our Sangha was born.

How we ended up with the kids is we went to a meeting and we heard about all these homeless kids. We’re up on the Ridge. We’re just totally removed from that. But when I heard, I was touched in my heart and I went back to my Sangha and I said, “Listen, when things are good, then we should be monasteries and sit. But when things are bad, we should get up off our pillows and go and help.” And so what I asked for was permission to turn the Hermitage into sort of like a boy’s town, where I could bring in these kids and that’s what we did. Of course, half the Sangha left when I did that because that’s not what they wanted. But it was what was needed at that time to help.

And so it’s grown beyond that. Now we have a ministry in India with the Untouchables; Thailand—as a matter of fact, with bhikkhuni Dr. Lee in Thailand several years ago, we ordained the first Thai nuns with Thai monks on the platform. They will hold a fan in front of their face so they couldn’t be identified because it’s actually against the law for monks to encourage or participate with women becoming ordained in Thailand. And so we were out there. I go ordain, leave them in the woods

with her and jump on a plane and come back to America. So I go every year. Now we're in Cambodia. I went into Cambodia last year with a nun, a Cambodian nun that I ordained and I met with the head monk of the district out there at Siem Reap and we're going back next year and we're going to ordain in Cambodia. And what they said was, "We are so happy because the family is back together again," speaking of bhikkhunis as well as bhikkhus in the Buddhist family. And so people want to do right. And sometimes we have to cut down the brush just a bit and once we do that, they can run straight through and they'll just tramp the rest of that grass on down and the next thing you know, you got a road. And that's kind of what has happened. So I had defined my work, what I thought I was going to do and it's all been turned upside down. I haven't done anything I thought I was going to do, and most of all, I thought I was going to be a hermit and I'm anything but. *(Laughs)*

#### **4. The End of a Long Tunnel**

**RC:** *(Laughs)* And do you, for all of these works that you do, both at home and abroad, do all the funds come from contributions from Sangha members or how do people get the word to support you?

**P:** I get invited to teach out a lot and so a good deal of the funds come from Dhana when I just came back from Southern Dharma and then I have—I think I have about five months of teaching engagements next year, and that's how I try to raise the money. I wasn't getting any government grants even though I was taking care of the city's children, and I just decided that's why we had to have a business because if nobody will give you money to help, then you have to go and make the money. Of course, I ran into a problem then with my monastic sisters because we don't do things like that, but my social conscience dictated that I help. If I could use my wisdom for a way to feed them, what should I do? And so that's what I did. So I rely on the generosity of people who hear our story, who visit our website to find out what we're doing here and abroad. And that's how we make it.

**RC:** So I want to ask you in the time that we have remaining, kind of coming back full circle to where you wrote to me and said, "Oh yes, I often get admonitions not to talk about myself or the things that aren't pretty in life." And I think you've, really just through your being, you've shared a lot with us about how to turn towards diversity as part of our spiritual path to embrace humanity and then to experience oneness and no separation. That is really powerful as a testament not just in what you say but in how you live and just the being that emanates from you. So within that, I'm really

interested where, now, you find yourself both as a person and as a teacher challenged, triggered; where are there edges that you see in your own self whether they're about some of the things we've been talking about or differently? So another way of saying that is where are you right now in your walk?

**P:** (*Laughs*) I'll tell you right now I'm in a really good space because I'm just coming out the other end of a long tunnel, and for me it was around the issue of monasticism, speaking as a monastic who recognizes that it has become a priest craft and I had a problem with that. I went into this with a great deal of romanticism, starry eyed and other worldly and from that seed of respect and confidence where people are putting their confidence in you. Buddha said, "Be a lamp unto your own feet and a light unto your own path." And I saw something that disturbed me deeply about the distinctions we have drawn between the householder and the monastic. And I think that it is emerging in a way that was really, and I think I know, not what the Buddha intended, and in a way I think it harms beings and keeps them from their full potential.

So I began to turn some of my attention to working through some vocalizing and having discussion about the role of monastics and monasticism in the world and what is our responsibility? What is our duty? And for us to really look and see if we weren't just like a privileged class and was that really the intention? So it was a very difficult time to go through feeling this way. I get emails, "Why don't you disrobe?" But that wasn't the point. The point was for us to look and see if we lost our first love, caught up in the trappings and the colors of the robes and the adoration of the people. That was a long battle. Now I'm coming out the other end and I talk about it; I share my thoughts; I share what I learned through that process. And then I also—one thing for instance, we are never supposed to talk about any shortcoming that we have, like if I get impatient, or if I make a mistake, as if we are so perfect. But I'll get up and I'll talk about something that I did, a wrong thought that I had that I acted on. Because that's the truth; that's where the rubber meets the road and many times people can identify with that and they are glad and they are strengthened to know that they're not so bad, that they're not perfect. I'm not perfect either. I'm working towards perfection but I am not perfect. And so these are the ways that we speak and people identify with that. It's very grounded. It's very down to earth, very ordinary in that way, and I think we need more of it. I mean, it's authentic.

**RC:** Yeah. So can you speak for a moment about first of all that old tradition like why was it that someone in a teaching position wasn't meant to speak at all about their shortcomings?

**P:** Well, we can tie it into concepts of non-self and that's normally the excuse, but it is to inspire confidence in the householders, that they can take refuge in the Sangha. But I think sometimes we use concepts and thoughts as excuses to enjoy some benefits that we have found we like. It's so easy for pride to creep in. It's so easy to start thinking of yourself as above others. I mean even using the terms like within Theravada, it talks about how the monk sits poised, aloof, and just the word "aloof"—it's a poor translation. It gives the wrong idea. And so I see many sitting there truly aloof and out of touch and disconnected. And so I would talk about these things. I mean, I don't think the Buddha meant for us to be like vanilla wafers and I'm not an automaton. So I wasn't going to be able to conform in that way, but I knew the truth of my longing for truth. And I had to stand on that even when I didn't meet the outward pattern of what a monk should look like. *(Laughs)*

**RC:** And so since you really took that to a different place, right now you're in a good place, as you said. But what would you say around that subject, and I don't know if this is the right word, you used the word so I'll just say it back to you: shortcomings. In other words, where are the places that you notice that you lose touch with presence; that you get triggered; that your personality takes over, and if you're not aware, maybe the people who are closest to you, the question will be what might they say about that in you?

**P:** Oh, I know that hands down. I have great faith. I believe that anything is possible. Just because something is possible doesn't necessarily mean you should do it. But if something comes in front of me and I see it, then I usually think, "I should do something about it." And so I'm quick to initiate things and sometimes it's at great suffering to others. My Sangha is not a young Sangha. I'm 61 and I think other than maybe two or three other people, I think I'm the youngest is one. So they're in their 70s, in their 80s, and I have to call on them to assist me in carrying out work that I undertake, and some of it is physically too challenging for them. Some of it, you just need a younger mind to grasp it. And so I think that my greatest shortcoming is that sometimes I still think that I am 25, that I have the strength of a 25 year old, but I'm not 25 and I need to be more respectful of people where they are and what some of their limitations are. Instead of saying, as my grandson will say to me, "Grandma, you can do it." And so I will say this, they will rise and they try to do it. But love would dictate that I really, really consider them equally like I consider the people the people that we go out to serve. They're equally important.

**RC:** So you see something that needs attention, service that can be offered or even changed that can be advocated and your desire to jump in, roll up your sleeves, and get it done sometimes comes

at the expense of others who you might drag along; or who might think they need to come and help you in your broader perspective about what you can do and how much you can do. Is that right?

**P:** Yes.

**RC:** And what about on the everyday level? Because a lot of times when people really steep themselves in the Buddhist principles, they get softened in a positive way; meaning a lot of those rough edges or reactivity are no longer there, but with most of us, there are still some. So do you find that certain types of people or certain situations make you more irritable or less spacious or compassionate than you are most of the time?

**P:** *(Laughs)* Yes. And it's usually when I'm in the presence of people who are self-righteous or 'holy haughty', I call them. Of all the people, Jesus gave an indictment against the religious group, and I forget that I was like that at one time. And I really need to be softer towards them because many people are acting out of what is expected of them. And I know I did. I thought certain ways of thinking was the right way to think even if it didn't feel quite right to me, then I'd say, "Well, God's ways are higher than mine and his thoughts are higher than mine. So I'm supposed to possess the lamb; I'm supposed to command this." So I was acting—my faith made me respond in those ways. And I remember now that maybe my view wasn't fully matured. So I do need to be softer with people that with the sense gate eye and hearing that I feel are self-righteous.

**RC:** Yeah. There's such a temptation to judge the judges when it comes to self-righteousness, and also there's a temptation to have what sometimes might be a kind of smug superiority kind of like, "Forgive them Lord, they know not what they do," but I know what they do. And so that's obviously not clearly compassionate.

**P:** It's not smug but there are flashes of anger. We always talk about righteous anger as a Christian. There really was something that was acceptable called righteous anger. So I'll pull way back to those days and pull that up. But it's not the path I'm on, it's not the way I'm headed. And it does lie in the faith of how I feel that I should look at things in my heart of hearts. It is there and I work on it.

### **5. This Is Samara—If You Don't Like it, Best Get Enlightened**

**RC:** So before we close today, Pannavati, I want to have a kind of bonus round with you because we've been talking about a lot of things that can really touch people where they live but still when we're not specific, it can also just live mostly in the realm of concepts. And I'm recognizing that as

you and I are talking, it's in the aftermath of something that has happened in the United States that is very strange and particularly American which is the whole controversy that erupted around the fast food franchise Chick-fil-A where the owner and I think founder of Chick-fil-A made some very serious statements against gay marriage and also the organization supports a lot of groups that not only are anti-gay marriage but they also have supported what many would consider to be hate legislation and intolerant legislation and policy.

So for those listening who aren't aware of it, first there was the wave of appreciation. In other words, many people who haven't liked the way that the culture is trending towards including gay marriage had a Chick-fil-A appreciation day where they lined up by the thousands outside of this fast food establishment to make their statement with junk food, so to speak, (laughs), and that's another particularly American kind of moment. So then you had the wave of protests afterwards where some people were going in and asking for water just to kind of take the time and resources away from the organization that would be spent on making money, a kind of an active non-support. And then there was a next wave of protest where gay people were specifically going to have a kiss-in, where they would go to Chick-fil-A establishments and either inside or outside, they would show their love for each other in a harmless way but also in a very demonstrative way kind of like we were talking about before. They were making an inner stand and an outer stand. And so I'm wondering, first of all, were you aware of this whole drama unfolding over the last couple of weeks?

**P:** Absolutely. I'm one of those monks that read the news. (Laughs)

**RC:** Okay. So with you as a news-reading monk and watching this unfold, I'm wondering what thoughts, feelings, practices, perspective do you have from your unique position in terms of this issue? How was it been living in you and for you?

**P:** Well, the first thing is that every Dharma talk that we have in our Sangha is relevant. It's relevant to the world we live in, what's going on around us. So of course, we've had our conversation about the shooting. We're constantly talking, and remember, half of our congregation is conservative, and so we have some really serious comments that come forth. Where I stand personally is I can remember a time that I myself was totally against gay anything. I was brought up a certain way. I was introduced with certain scriptures and they were interpreted for me and put together with other ones that seemed to speak a certain thing, but what I noticed was when I begin

to meet people who were different than me, or had a different view of what is acceptable or what is true for them, they were people just like me. And I started to say, “Well, this is not working for me because I really just can’t hate this person because he’s a wonderful person.” And that’s when I began to realize that we have to make our own determinations about things and walking our own truth.

And so I see this happening. I am gladdened when people decide to put feet to what they believe, but I’m not in agreement with the meanness and the ways that we finding expression today increasingly. If I don’t like something, then I don’t have to go to Chick-fil-A. But I don’t have to go there and really stage a protest. Information and sharing that information can be powerful. And so I feel for some of the employees that work there. I’ve been reading their stories and how they feel being accosted by people, and they’re saying, “I don’t even feel that way.” One guy said, “I’m gay myself.” And so we have to be really circumspect in what we do and how we do it. Occupy Wall Street, now I’m part of that; I’ve sat outside myself and I’m for that; I moved my bank; I did things like that. But I think that we have to be careful about how we do what we do. We can speak and we can express but we should be civil and we’re not going to always have—I mean this is samsara, this world goes with this turf, so if you don’t like it, best to get enlightened. (Laughs) You won’t be in a world like this. Let that be a lesson to you. Let go of this world. So that’s kind of it. So we discuss, people share their views, they get to have their own view informed by others, and then ultimately as individuals we make a decision about what we’re going to do.

**RC:** Right. I hear the essence of what you’re sharing personally that whatever actions you take, whether they are just from a distance or whether they are a loving those up close, you’re looking to make sure that you’re honoring all beings and that you’re compassionate in every possible way no matter what stand you take.

**P:** Yes.

**RC:** And that’s hard and I think what we are really called for and it seems to me that it’s still possible to protest, to say no in a very strong and clear way that is galvanizing and that moves discussion but that doesn’t in the process create any us versus them. And it seems really important for—you shared honestly and openly that there was a time in your life where you would have been anti-gay anything, and so that tells us that anybody who in this moment is ‘the them’ is just some life experience away from the ‘us’, if we’re seeing it that way.



**P:** Yes.

**RC:** Yeah.

**P:** I mean it's through some of this that some of my Sangha members have changed because they saw, they've been hearing the Dharma that's been rounding the edges, softening the hard places, and now they look and they see somebody responding to something in a way that they used to respond toward themselves and they see, "I'm not like that anymore." So they realized then that they have changed and they can embrace these things that had been virtually programmed when they were young to hold as truth. It's not necessarily the truth. It's your truth. And so that's how we were. Sometimes we have to accept defeat and give the victory to others, too. We can't always win. When we have this whole collapse of the financial world and the real estate world, our Sangha suffered loss and many other were concerned, they were suicidal, whatever. I said, "Yeah, but you weren't like that when you were winning. You weren't like that when you were the one buying up the properties that were going in foreclosure the last two or three times that there was a real estate collapse. Okay, so this time, it hit me and it hit you. But we have participated in this whole process, so we have to take our comeuppance just like everybody has to," and that's how you overcome your depression. And so, but this is the way.

**RC:** Yeah. Well, I would say one way you overcome depression is listening to Pannavati because your fire and your heart are easy to discern and I feel really grateful and honored to have been able to spend a little time with you today, getting to share your experience and learning from you. So on behalf of myself and everyone listening, I want to give a very deep bow of appreciation to you.

**P:** Thank you, my friend. It was wonderful having a conversation with you. And I have to say, you'd make a great monk. You're just so polished in your speech. The way you say everything is almost as if it's been thought out and written down. And so I was marveling at the way you could interject and throw in questions. I know some people wish I was like you, but I am what I am.

**RC:** I appreciate your reflection and I like to say that if, as a monk, I could bring my family along I'd be interested, (Laughs) because right now I'm practicing household spirituality.

**P:** And the thing is, it's not like I forsook to walk this path. I had come to the end of it. That's all.

**RC:** Hmm.

**P:** So when you're finished with something, then you're finished. And a new path opened up for me and that's how it is. So I don't see one path any different than the other in terms of moving towards full awakening. It's just know whatever states you're called to. If you like a lot of women don't get married. If you like...

**RC:** *(Laughs)*

**P:** If you don't want to give up half of yourself to somebody, don't get married. If you need somebody, or if you want somebody, get married. It's just like that. Just know whatever state you're called to and walk in that freely and it will be the right path for you.

**RC:** Beautiful! Well, thank you again.

## Susan Kaiser Greenland



Susan Kaiser Greenland, JD is a former corporate attorney who developed the Inner Kids mindful awareness program for children, teens and their families. Research on the Inner Kids elementary school program was conducted at the Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA and is published in the *Journal of Applied School Psychology*. Susan is author of “The Mindful Child: How to Help Your Kid Manage Stress and Become Happier, Kinder, and More Compassionate.” She teaches children, parents and professionals around the world and consults with various organizations on teaching mindful awareness in an age-appropriate and secular manner. With her husband, Seth Greenland, she co-founded the Inner Kids Foundation. Susan lives in Los Angeles with her husband, and their two children. [WWW.SUSANKAISERGREENLAND.COM](http://WWW.SUSANKAISERGREENLAND.COM)

### **1. Raphael’s Core Wound: No Good Deed Goes Unpunished**

**RC:** Susan Kaiser Greenland, welcome to *Teaching What We Need To Learn*.

**SKG:** Thank you. I’m happy to be here today.

**RC:** I am really delighted to be speaking with you. I have a passion for kids and for education and you are a leading light in the world of introducing mindfulness both to children and into our educational system. So first of all, just a deep bow of appreciation for the work that you’re doing.

**SKG:** Oh, thank you. I appreciate it. But you know, it’s not just me. There’s many of us now bringing this work into schools, after-schools, day cares and hospitals; it’s just remarkable. When I started this 15 years ago and more formally, 13 years ago, I could never have dreamed that it would have grown and evolved and been embraced the way it has so relatively quickly.

**RC:** Yeah. It’s really wonderful. You’ve been very instrumental in creating communities in which people could find each other who are doing this work and better disseminate it. You’re also now working with some open source creation of materials for people to use around the world. So it really seems like in the world of mindfulness for children, there’s a spirit that could really inform the rest

of us, even when we're working just with adults around creating and fostering that community that you just described.

**SKG:** We're hoping. I mean we really are hoping. It's a tricky thing and we teach it to the kids with really simple games and activities. But we also talk about it quite openly in our trainings. I mean, there's all of the Inner Kids programs, which is the one that I work with, where really all of the activities relate to key concepts of mindfulness, really fundamental classical concepts, and then they relate to different strategies that we hope will help kids that are solid life skills.

One of the key concepts of mindfulness is around the concept of non-dualistic thinking; being able to hold together two seemingly different notions at the same time, but to be able to hold them at once and balance them.

On the one hand we all have to feed our children and pay the rent or pay the mortgage and put gas in our cars. So people do need earn a living and there's just a reality about that. The work has to somehow sustain itself, otherwise, people can't do it. On the other hand, the spirit behind the work is that we are all interconnected, that we are all interdependent and that we will benefit and grow together. So we really have to hold those two things at the same time and not pretend it's one or the other.

**RC:** Yes, that is really beautifully put, thank you. One thing that I like to do in the beginning of these interviews that will be good to do now, is just check in a little bit around mindfulness; take a moment to tune in to where I am, to where you are, and so I'm going to do that first and then ask you to check in in a moment. I was actually preparing to do that because the theme of the series or one of them has to with transparency and there's been a lot of really interesting dialogues about the when and the how much and the appropriateness of transparency.

And in this moment, what I want to share is that I feel just a little bit distant from myself or my usual energy and I think that will change as we explore more together but that's because I had a conflict earlier in the day. The conflict didn't trigger me in the usual sense that we use the word, where my fight, flight or freeze response was activated. But instead, what it really did is it touched what I would consider to be a core wound in me and that's a wound around something like that old phrase "No good deed goes unpunished."

When I get that core wounding kind of brought up to the surface, it's not a charge like the usual, but it's more a very fragile sense and a slightly trembly quality that then also kind of puts me, as I said, a little bit outside of my usual energy. And on the one hand, I'm hoping that's not too much information for you or for the listeners, but on the other hand, I wanted to share it, first of all, because of the interconnection that you just described and also because I think these things come through even if very subtly or just energetically; and if we speak them and allow them to be present, then they can be brought into fuller presence for everyone's benefit and not somehow just be something kind of niggling outside of what we're talking about that maybe would detract from what we're doing together.

So that's me. You're certainly not needing to share as vulnerably as that, but I would like to create a space for you just to let us know how you are finding yourself: mind, body, emotion, spirit in this moment.

**SKG:** Wow!

**RC:** (Laughs) I know, that's a lot, huh? (Laughs)

**SKG:** Yeah. But thank you for that. I really appreciate it. I agree with you that these things, if they're not voiced, can somehow be the elephant in the room and we don't even know that that is somehow informing either the questions or answers in the conversations. I'm really and deeply touched and impressed that in this conversation that's intended to be somehow disseminated to people, we don't even know whose going to be listening, that you shared that, and thank you. And I'm so sorry that you had that experience and it is something that I certainly can relate to. So thank you. How are you doing now?

**RC:** Oh, thank you for asking. I'm doing fine and actually I think of the phrase a lot: "I look forward to the next time that I will," and in this situation, it's not that I choose to have that core wound activated, but what I do choose is to recognize that when it gets activated, it's another opportunity for me to cradle it more fully and consistently and deeply. So I'm not in a sense of resistance, as in like "this shouldn't be happening" or I'm against it. I'm really with that and it's just part of what's here. So I appreciate that you're sorry I had the experience and yet at the same time, I'm not really sorry. It's just what's arising.

**SKG:** Yeah. It's interesting you bring this up because right now I'm working on manuals and I'm in the middle of over a year-long, quite intensive writing process. And one of the key concepts I'm writing right now, quite literally—I just left my computer, is on motivation. It relates to what you're saying about that really deep wound; I was reading a passage from *The Rebel Buddha* that was just beautiful about motivation and how if we keep turning back to the motivation for whatever that good deed was, the challenge for us is each time that happens where the punishment, although that's a harsh word for whatever happens, response to the good deed; the challenge is to reflect back on the motivation in the first place and just step up again.

**RC:** Yeah, absolutely. People talk about healing and wholeness and it's obviously an ongoing experience and I think that we can have a wound that is mostly healed and yet, we might touch it at a deeper level or we might come back around to an element of it that we haven't really reclaimed fully, but it's not as if I imagine or even intend for sometime in the future to not have that wound. It's more that I hope that I'm ever more skilful at noticing when it's present and then also, as I say, including it and moving through it and bringing it into the situation in a way hopefully that's for the good of myself and others as opposed to somehow having to keep myself apart and having to try to get safe by taking a lot of distance and therefore disengaging from my people and my community in the world.

So it really is a kind of a touchstone, I think for me, because that's what I might tend to do in situations where I'm a little less present or a little less skilful, I'll go away. And so I think having that wound and knowing that from time to time it's going to be scratched in that way really tells me, "Oh, here's another opportunity just to work more fully with that."

**SKG:** Yeah, and you just beautifully described that process we were talking about early on in this conversation of being able to hold two things that at first glance seemed to be somewhat conflicting in awareness and have them work together.

**RC:** Thank you. There are probably some very finely attuned listeners right now who are saying, "I wonder if Raphael is going to forget that while Susan was very compassionate with him, she actually didn't get a chance to describe how she is in this moment." So let's make sure before we go on that we get to feel into your experience, too.

**SKG:** Well, I'm very engaged right now because I'm very appreciative of how you opened up to me. I'm a little physically tired although not as badly physically tired as I have been for a while. I'm

getting my rest but I had been burning the candle at both ends with work a little bit—a little bit out of balance in the work life for a while. So now I'm getting better rested but I'm still working on that. That's where my body is and my mind is very engaged, very content, very happy and very settled. That's probably the best description I can give, that's how I'm feeling right now.

**RC:** Okay, great. Well, thank you for letting us know and to be able to kind of tune into you that way also. I want to ask you a question that's kind of a big jump off topic. As I mentioned before and you spoke to also, your arena is kids and yet, you are also very practiced and skilled and you're a teacher, I would say, of mindfulness in general. There's no reason to break it up and to categorize unnecessarily. I'm interested in your perspective about if there is anything really fundamentally different in bringing mindfulness practices to children versus adults—are there things that you would say that just apply specifically for kids and not for adults or vice versa from your experience?

## **2. Children Are Rarely Free To Choose**

**SKG:** I think the framework and the context are a little different and I think that there is a heightened sense of responsibility around this when you're working with children, because very often, they are a captive audience. Very often children don't choose to come to a mindfulness class, or don't choose to practice mindfulness with somebody. They are put there, either in a classroom setting, or in a therapy setting or some sort of after school setting by their parents. So that's quite different. I can't think of a time, even in a prison context, where adults are basically told that they must go to mindfulness class.

So that mixes it up quite a bit as far as to what extent we are imposing this on children. And so then how do we present it so that it still is an invitation and not a requirement? I think that's an important thing to remember and I think it's possible. I think it's very straightforward and we can go in and simply present our practices in a playful, fun way as an invitation. But I think it's important that whoever is going into the room does really pay attention to that.

**RC:** Well, let me pause there because I think that is so moving and valuable; the way that you just described it and let me say why it touches me so much. I think that we forget on a daily basis that children in their life are basically not free to choose much of the time what they do, and when they do it, and how they do it. It's so automatic and apparent to us that it just disappeared and yet, if you spend a lot of time with kids as I do, I have kids, and you choose to notice that—it becomes really powerful. For instance, yesterday, I was dropping my daughter off at preschool and she just said, "I don't want to go to school. I don't want to get out of the car." And while it's true that as an adult

anyone of us might say, “I don’t want to go to work today. I don’t want to get out of the car,” ultimately, we realize that there is nobody standing above us making the call. We’re going to make the call and then whatever the consequences are, we’ll have to deal with it. But there is something fundamentally not free about childhood in that way. And so to be sensitive to it in the way that you just described, not just about mindfulness teaching but about just being with them seems really important.

**SKG:** Yeah, I think so. I couldn’t agree more.

**RC:** So, really recognizing that allows you, as you said, to make it an invitation even if it’s a situation where they didn’t get to choose whether to be there or not and I love that, and I bet that that really brings them forward much faster and fuller than anything else would.

**SKG:** Yeah. It changes the whole tone of the class and of the exercise.

**RC:** Now one thing that I wanted to mention to you, it’s a similar vein—I was doing an interview for this series with James Baraz and we were talking about the famous old story in *Be Here Now*, Ram Dass’ book, who is also in this series. It’s that passage about all the groovy hipster spiritual parents back in the—I guess it was the late 60s when this book was written—and they’re going to the grocery store and one of the kids is having a freak out and they all sort of stopped in the parking lot and surround the kid, and I think they start OM-ing or something like that, and because they all become more present, the child is also able to settle.

And it just struck me; it stayed with me for decades. I always wanted to be like in a circle where I had this chance to do that and to see how it would happen. And the reason I’m mentioning it is because your husband, Seth, wrote a guest blog recently for you and he was talking about how in your family, it’s a tradition or a practice that you developed many years ago as you were first working in this realm and learning in it too, where it was something like as you were getting ready to go to school—you can fill it in—but that you would all get together and you would just breathe?

**SKG:** Yeah.

**RC:** Can you describe that a little bit?

**SKG:** Yeah. Well, we were one of these families, we read the magazine articles about packing the lunches the night before and having the backpacks by the door and having the clothes laid out and



no matter how often we tried to do that, and even if we were successful doing that, for some reason that last push of getting to the door was always like a canon getting shot off. I imagine that there are some really wonderful families who are able to be that methodical and organized but it just really didn't work around here. So what would happen is we would just be, "Who's got the lunches?" "Who's got the briefcase?" "Who's got the this?" and then we would rush to the car and then go to the carpool and it just didn't feel good.

So I started this practice: rather than stopping when we were finally sitting in the car, just stop at the doorway and then together—because often, we would be going in two different cars; especially when there was a period of time the kids were in two different schools, which means two different facilities; they were in the same overall school but one child was in middle school, and the other one was in elementary school. So we would stop at the door and we would just take a couple of breaths. It was that simple, and it did really transform the experience. So that kind of that breathless quality of rushing to the car and all of that, was gone before we left the house.

**RC:** One of the aspects that I want to check in with you that comes back to this idea of kids being the captive audience, this obviously would have a lot to do with both of you as parents and both of your kids in terms of their specific natures or personalities: did you ever get from the kids, the "I don't want to," or the feeling like they're being corralled into doing something that mom and dad suggest?

**SKG:** Oh, yeah. Absolutely! I mean mine are 20 and 18 and I still get it. There's nothing worse than having your mother practice mindfulness, I can tell you that. When I'm out training trainers now, they talk about how difficult it is with their own kids. It's very complicated with your own kids. But you know, it's also a great opportunity for modeling and for embodying and for what I like to joke with as 'stealth mindfulness', trying not to use the word, just trying to describe what you're going to do instead like, "Okay, let's move really slowly right now and pay attention to what it feels like every time we step—what do the bottoms of our feet feel like against the floor?" Instead of, "Let's mindfully walk"—that kind of stuff.

### **3. My Business, Your Business and God's Business**

**RC:** Yeah, I'm glad that you mentioned that. There's that saying: a prophet is least recognized in his own homeland. Sometimes when people are teachers, it's the hardest for them to implement the teachings right there in their own home. And there's a self-consciousness about it and there's also just the way with kids, where as soon as they feel like they're being programmed into something,

they immediately bristle and back off. Just the other day I was having a conversation about an emotional issue with my stepdaughter and I had been talking to her about this phrase that I think is really helpful that I first heard from Byron Katie that there are three kinds of business: there is my business, your business, and God's business. And if I'm in my business, I have the greatest opportunity for peace. If I'm in your business, I'm going to suffer and probably you are, too. And likewise, if we're in God's business trying to tell the world how it should be different than it is, then again, we're going to suffer.

**SKG:** That's beautiful. I hadn't heard that before. That's just beautiful.

**RC:** Oh, good, I'm glad I shared it with you then. So, in this conversation, I had a talk to my stepdaughter about this and there was a period in the conversation where suddenly she was leaping out of her own experience and she was really in someone else's business, and I said that. I said, "Okay, well, I just want you to realize right now you just moved into so and so's business," and her response, which is so perfect was, "Can we just have a normal conversation? Why do we just have to talk about whose business this is?"

**SKG:** (Laughs) Yeah. That sounds really familiar. That's great. So what did you say?

**RC:** I don't remember exactly my response. I do remember that I was sympathetic to that. I think anytime we double down on a structure or a process in that kind of situation, we're just going to get into a power struggle. So I think I did my best to kind of just gently move on from that particular moment of conflict. But, also there's another thing about that conversation that may be interesting for listeners: when you are being present with children, and you really want to honor their thoughts and their feelings and their whole perspective about what's going on, there's a degree in which you can ask for reciprocity from them to be able to listen to and hold your experience because you're in it, too. And you don't want to disappear behind authority or just some kind of sense that that you're not alive emotionally in the situation. But it is also really true that it's not their job to hold a lot of an adult or a parent's emotional experience. And they don't really have a frame of reference to really even understand what an adult oftentimes is dealing with in a situation.

So I was really attuned to that and listening very carefully for that in the conversation because I decided that in this particular talk, it was most important that I listen and that she got to share all of her feelings and have them be heard even if it went on forever, which it did; but also, I was going to share a little bit about my own experience, but also I was going to have to be at peace with walking

away from that conversation, realizing there's just a giant portion of it that she doesn't get and she won't get and it's not her job to get. And I think that sometimes that's a heavy weight for a parent to bear because you can feel pretty alone in that.

**SKG:** Yeah. I hear that story and what I love about it is that you had the space and the stability of your own attention to just let her voice be, to let her be in what she was thinking and what she was feeling in the present moment. I mean, that's beautiful. And then not to have to label that as good or bad, right or wrong, a good feeling, a bad feeling, a skillful feeling. You're a good girl. You're a bad girl. But instead being able to let that be just what it is.

It's a feeling, it's a thought that's going to come and go and it's likely to change; it will rise and it will fall, and it will change just like our breath changes. To be able to allow the space for the rising and the falling of these things and putting them out in the air instead of locking them inside—I just think that's beautiful. And the thing that I think is so important about all of these interpersonal relationships with our children is to remember that it's a lifelong process. So when you walk away from the conversation there's a level of acceptance and equanimity that you're able to carry with you largely because you know that this is going to change and the feelings will change. And that this may be the end of this conversation right now but it is nowhere near the end of this long, hopefully lifelong conversation you're going to be having with your daughter.

And to have her feel in this area where there might be an emotional charge but it's not that big of a deal; that she can say what's on her mind and you're not going to penalize her for that or be mad at her for that, is a great way to show her that she can tell you how she's feeling and keep that conversation open. I think that's what I always have been worried about with my own children.

My primary goal in all of this is to be able to keep the conversation going while maintaining safe boundaries. It's the same thing that educators or teachers will do when they are facilitating a mindfulness class, to be able to disappear from the conversation so that the wisdom can come from the children themselves, yet be able to appear on a moment's notice. And I don't mean physically appear, I mean as far as being able to step in to maintain the safety of the circle so people's feelings aren't getting hurt and confidentiality is kept and that sort of thing. That's the beauty: when the parent has the confidence and the practice and the embodiment enough to know that by just being present and giving it time and sometimes that time can be more than one conversation; asking really

skillful questions that will turn the kids into the inquiry that will lead them to the answers themselves. That's the fun of it.

**RC:** Yeah. And speaking of fun, there was one moment that's probably worth sharing and that is that because there was an openness for the feelings to be spoken and to be felt, something kind of loosened up a little bit even though we were still to some degree at odds and there was a moment where she was unhappy with me because I had been, from her perspective, kind of tense and unhappy and had kind of stormed around a little bit. That kind of bothered her and so in this space where the feelings were allowed, she said something like, "It was just like you were a big troll."  
(Laughs)

**SKG:** (Laughs)

**RC:** And so when she said that, there was this microscopic split second where, was that going to be okay? I could see it in her eyes—did she cross the line? And immediately, right next to that was a slightly mischievous look which is what I caught (laughs) and I said, "Troll? You think I was a troll?" And she had to laugh and something shifted in that moment. We were much more aligned. And so even humor can arise in a situation like that if there's a field of acceptance in which the conversation is going forward.

**SKG:** Absolutely. If there's some spaciousness around it you can really have a more spacious stance because, I mean, some of the things I say to my children are really hilarious and I don't really hear them until they are out of my mouth. And then I cannot believe I just said; having some spaciousness so that you hear it and then can laugh together, it's just a great bonding experience.

**RC:** Yeah, and with my younger daughter, too, there's something that I wanted to share: the whole distinction between power over and power with and it comes up so often with kids. Sometimes we over venerate their emotional fluidity. We talk sometimes about kids, "Oh, they're so in touch with their feelings." Well in my experience, a lot of times kids are not in touch with their feelings in the way that they can observe them as they're having them. They are just more reacting out of discomfort or upset with less filtering when it arises. So with my 4-year old who's just filled with energy and very strong-willed, often, she's kind of goading you into a power struggle because she's digging in her heels and she's kind of waiting to see if she's got an opponent in that regard.

It sometimes seems like her position is very fixed and I've seen it many times and it's always surprising to me to some degree if I'm not trying to get her to do something; there's a little bit of an aikido happening where I'll just kind of swoop my energy in a different direction and suddenly, she's right there with me and those heels were not dug in fast and hard at all. So to be able to bring awareness, and I would definitely say I'm continuing to learn about this—I'm not a master—but to continue to bring awareness to that moment where it's just about to become oppositional. Whether it's "I don't want to go to school" or "I don't want to brush my teeth" or whatever it is, and to see if there's a possibility that we can shift the energy without it somehow being in opposition to them. And to me, whenever that's happened, it's always made everything so much easier.

**SKG:** Yeah. That makes a lot of sense to me. I mean my mom used to always be able to say, and I never understood it, "This is going to end in tears." It was always around the time that people were having the most fun and I would think, "Oh, you party-pooper, (laughs). What do you mean it's going to end in tears?" But she was always right because she could sense that moment that things were getting to that kind of fever pitch where people feel like they're having a great time but they are just about ready to lose control. They're so excited and then it just tips.

There's a great classical teaching about this and Joseph Goldstein, one of the great American meditation teachers, teaches about the *about to* moment, which is that moment when you're *about to* do or say something—you can see, if you're attuned to the people who you're with, and when they are just *about to* switch in a way. Then you can use that moment to skillfully, as you said, to shift the energy a bit.

#### 4. Trust

**RC:** Yeah. And so in this work that you do and as you continue to refine it, you're practicing everyday because you have kids. Your kids are older, but still, they're your kids. Are there particular places right now where you are called to pay close attention or places where you would feel like, "Well, this is a growing edge for me"—a new sensitivity, or awareness of a place where you'd like to be freer, more skillful? Another way of saying that is, where you might sometimes get grabbed, whereas other places, you're freer to stay in a present flow?

**SKG:** Yeah. I would say right now my edge is on this basic concept of confidence, or trust. I don't mean in the way of trusting other people. I'm very fortunate, I have wonderful friends and I have a wonderful family relationship. So I have great trust in individual people and I don't have betrayal stuff around that. But the sense of confidence or trust that if I just really stay centered in it all and I

don't allow myself to get pulled too much in one direction or the other, that the next steps will become clear for what I do—professionally, but also in this next space of my life because remember, well, you may not know, I'm in a very pivotal parenting stage in which I will be empty nesting next year.

So my youngest is leaving to go to college and my eldest will be a senior in college. So that's a moment that a lot of the stories I've told myself over the years: "Oh, I can't do that because of this obligation or that obligation," disappear because I won't have the day to day household obligations with children that I have had up until now. I mean, I have other obligations with my children that I'm delighted to have and I certainly have a very mutual partnership with my husband and I don't want to just flit off and not take his interests to heart.

So given that moment of empty nesting where both husband and wife together are looking at what's next—that's where I am. I see my own tendency—I've always worked very hard and taken on a lot to do and possibly taking on too much to do. Although I teach about attention, balance and compassion—the balance part is something I struggle with. So having the trust and the faith and the confidence in the process itself, and I don't mean this to sound airy-fairy or anything, but that in the process itself, simply to be with it and have the focus on balance and not on some sort of gain. That's my edge right now and I've been working it for a while because my son, as a senior in high school is already pretty independent, and my daughter has been gone for a couple of years, but it will really be up full force when both of them are gone next year.

**RC:** So I heard something in what you said that it might be worth talking about just so that we can unpack a little bit of it because there's so much great stuff there. You said, "I don't mean to be airy-fairy about it." And so I was wondering for you, if you were airy-fairy about it, what would that mean? Or what would that look like differently from what you were just describing? It seems like that distinction is important for you.

**SKG:** It's important because of the work I do, because right now I spend a lot of time interfacing with educational institutions, and I'm very motivated to bringing mindfulness more into awareness in an educational and a secular context. Everything from universities, to schools, to this sort of thing, they have an understandable aversion to airy-fairy. People in that realm and that arena really want evidence-based, research-based, hard and fast stuff. And understandably, there's a lot of time and effort and money that's put into this and especially into children's lives, where their time is a

scarce resource. So really needing to justify that spending time on feeling your breathing is as valuable as spending time doing math drills, is important.

So I am very careful about my language and I'm very careful about how I present it because I don't want to undermine the work. Does that make sense?

**RC:** Yeah, it totally does. I know people who teach mindfulness have this issue very large and also people who teach yoga in the classroom. Sometimes it can't be called yoga for that reason and they have to be very careful about it; everything has to be the non-spiritual part of yoga and so it really is a delicate balance.

But I think there's also something there, too, that might be interesting to explore because there are, we can say, these great themes that arise for all of us in the journey of our life; you could say they're East and West. Another way to say it is that there's Being: the intention to become more present and connected to the flow that is moving through us and between us and around us. And then there's Manifestation: the creative drive to actually specifically make some kind of contribution, to have an impact, to make a difference in the world. And oftentimes, these things are way out of balance and sometimes they're in a really artful dance.

The reason that I am speaking about that is the trust that you were talking about that was the edge for you; it feels just like a really powerful and poignant place in your life where you know how accomplished you can be, you know how much you can push the boulder up the hill if you need to, and you can make a great contribution. But there is some call that you are experiencing towards that Beingness—am I getting that right? Is that where the trust is, that it will unfold, that it doesn't have to be so orchestrated maybe, just something like that?

**SKG:** I hear you and that makes a lot of sense and I've just got to tell you, I don't know. And I'm really comfortable with that place of not knowing right now; it feels to me like part of it is very kind of practical and that I just need to be mindful and skillful around my choices in what I choose to say or do under just the theory that life is short and life is ticking by. I'm wanting to live it in awareness and spend my time wisely. That doesn't necessarily mean wisely working; it could mean wisely doing other things, too. So there's that piece that's very practical. And then there is one piece that I would say does connect with a more universal theme or value which I think goes more into what you were talking about which is just really trusting. You know that great team building exercise where you fall into your partner's arm and they catch you?

**RC:** Yeah.

**SKG:** Well, I think there is a moment for those who really do practice these techniques—I'm using the word technique quite deliberately here—that they have to let go and fall into the arms of the foundational concepts that support them. That's where the trust comes. There comes a point that if you really are teaching, the wisdom is already there. The wisdom is inside you. If you can just settle and Be, then you really do, at some point, have to fly without a parachute a little bit. Does that make sense?

**RC:** Yeah, I think so. And I think that lots of people listening will have their own reverberations around this issue of trust, and you're talking about trust in terms of falling into the foundational teachings. There's also the sense that the more we heal and the more we become whole, the more we also come to recognize that there is nothing wrong; there is nothing wrong with this moment and there's nothing wrong with me in this moment. And so if I'm not trying to fix anything from the perspective that something is broken, then there's often the opportunity to kind of relax into the fullness of who I am, of what is around me, what is between us, and to sense that things are happening that actually we're sort of pretended to be the author of or the creator of, but they're more in a way happening through us.

For me, that's where the trust piece comes up a lot. It's really powerful for me because it's so easy for me at any given time to have that refrain of the old Talking Heads song, "You may ask yourself, how did I get here? This is not my beautiful life. This is not my beautiful house." We all have these plans for how it's supposed to look and so often, it looks completely different and it keeps looking completely different and we're struggling to keep up with that in the same way: "I didn't agree with that (Laughs)." "I didn't choose that." "I didn't buy that." So to be able to trust that it's unfolding exactly as it's meant to unfold, that's a hard one especially if there's a lot of pain, if there's a lot of struggle, if there's a lot of frustration and disappointment. So that's where I know, at least for me, that trust is a big one.

### **5. The Over Developed Muscle**

**SKG:** Yeah. I think that makes a lot of sense to me and also, we only know each other over the conversations around this series, but this series alone is a great example of how if you put your mind to something, you get things done in a very significant way. So that's a muscle that must be showing up in other parts of your life, too. And that's a muscle that, just like any other muscle, that can get overdeveloped so much so that you just sort of—I will habitually be moving things forward.



And then thinking, “Oh, geez, was that something that was the natural flow of things or was that just what happens when you have an overdeveloped muscle?”—that you can actually push that rock a little further.

**RC:** Yeah, I love that phrase, the overdeveloped muscle, because it’s the way that the very thing that could save you could also destroy you if it’s mis-applied or if it’s, as you say, strengthened out of balance. As you were speaking, you touched something off in me that hasn’t really come up in any of these conversations, but maybe it’s implicit in them: that to be a teacher of personal growth or spirituality, or both, almost by its very nature means that you are a leader and that you have a degree of leadership development. So it doesn’t mean that you’re necessarily a Type A personality or that you have more masculine energy than feminine energy. There’s all kinds of different ways that people can show up, but if you’re going to stand in front of a group of people or even just work with individuals as a facilitator, you’re basically saying, “I’m a person who is taking on that mantle. I’m choosing to guide,” if not to lead forcefully. Therefore, in a broad sense, there’s a certain kind of person who comes to that, even if they’re teaching persona is more gentle or meek, as opposed to really strong and gung-ho. Still, they’re orchestrating the whole thing. So therefore, I’m now leading to my hypothesis which can’t be proven or disproven, but in this moment I want to put it out there: that perhaps the vast majority of people who are teaching in this realm do have at least slightly an overdeveloped getting it done muscle.

**SKG:** Oh, yeah. That’s brilliant! And then you add to it the other little bit of a wrinkle, which is more often than not, they’re natural introverts. I’ve been fascinated by this latest interest in introverts; you’ve got these people who are basically introverts, they at least appear to be quite extroverted and then there is an internal conflict or the tension that exists in that.

**RC:** Some people might be thinking about what you just said and relating it to their favorite teachers, thinking, “Well, that person is not an introvert. That person is out there roaring it up.” It brings to mind that many years ago, I used to be really good friends with somebody who’s a really well-known rock and roll star. He was known for the great theatricality of his performance, and it was beautiful to watch that aspect of his personality so fully realized. You would imagine that he would be gregarious and engaging and welcoming when he walked off stage, but when he walked off stage, he was more kind of like an empty shell because he just didn’t have anything more to give externally and he went to that internal place that you’re describing and it was almost as if he wasn’t even there.

**SKG:** That makes a lot of sense to me. I know you were from Los Angeles or lived here for quite a while and that's where I live now, so we have performers in our community and I've seen that too. And also in this fascination (laughs) I've had with reading about introverts, I was surprised to read that President Obama is an introvert. So how's that for a great example of how you can be an introverted person and then still, I mean, given what he has done—he's certainly doing a lot of extroverted stuff.

**RC:** Yeah. That's really interesting, that whole continuum between the two and how they feed into one another.

**SKG:** Yes.

## 6. Balance

**RC:** Well, we just have a short amount of time left. I joked in another interview recently that I have a friend who says to me, after I tell him I've interviewed another person, "So what did she need to learn?" (Laughs) And I'm always saying, "Well, it kind of doesn't work that way. The conversations are much more free flowing." But I've kind of taken up the mantle of his question and I like to pose it in a lighthearted way and you've touched on this to some degree; whether it's within you or reflected by those around you, do you have a sense as you look at yourself with clear vision and also compassion of what it is that you feel is a place that you need to learn? How would you answer that question if my friend asked it to you?

**SKG:** What do I have to learn? Oh man, I have so much to learn. The first thing I'd like to learn is a little Spanish but—

**RC:** (Laughs)

**SKG:** (Laughs) I don't think that's what you're talking about. But I'm mortified that I live in Los Angeles and I don't speak Spanish. I have so much to learn and I don't mean that in a way that is—I'm not self-deprecating when I say that because I've got a strong self-concept. I think I have stuff to learn all over the place. I need to learn to, I mean we talked a little bit about my needing to learn to trust a little bit more in the process, not trust in people, but have trust in the process a little bit more. I talk about it but as far as actually being able to stop and just have some trust as far as embodying it, we'll see, although I have made a lot of strides in that direction this year, what else do I need to learn?

I need to learn balance. I would say that's the number one thing I need to learn. I need to learn to practice what I preach as far as living a balanced life, which is engaged in something I love doing and working, but that's not all consuming to give me more time in my garden and more time just reading novels that I don't have time to get to and listening to music. So I would say that that is really what I need to learn. I need to learn to live my life more in balance.

**RC:** Just to follow-up to that because I think so many of us can really relate to it. When you think about balance right now, does it feel like you have a lot of choice there? And are you working with habits that are ingrained? Because a lot of times, people are saying right now and I know I've spoken to this too in terms of my own life, that some of the challenges with balance just happen to do with the kind of world we live in, the kind of the recession that we're in, the financial needs that we have for ourselves and for our families. Are you at a place in your life where you can say, "I get to work on balance without feeling external pressure to do that?"

**SKG:** I hear you and I would say that my pressure will be easing with the empty nesting on that. So that does give me a space that I didn't have before. I've got obligations that I have to meet but I do feel that the one of the obligations that I won't be needing to meet as much when I'm empty nesting is—I haven't had the need since my son got his driver's license—the obligations of carpooling and all of that stuff, which is for a parent just an extraordinary time commitment and also an extraordinary offering. I've got to tell you, I loved carpooling because that's when I really had an opportunity as my kids got older to hear what was going on in their life. As I go into the empty nest, I will have more space than I have had before. I tend to be able to go on all cylinders or go on no cylinders (laughs). To go at 30 miles an hour is not something I've been able to really do for an extended period of time.

**RC:** That's really interesting because another dimension that you brought into it; it's not so much balance of what I do or when I do it, but it's the kind of energy that I bring to what I'm doing.

**SKG:** Well, that's entirely what I'm talking about. It's about being able to, and I've had this since college; I would work like crazy on exams and then I would come home and pass out. I would go back to my parents for vacation and I would sleep for three days. So it's that, it's finding something in between.

**RC:** Great! And then the last follow-up question I want to ask, and you can take some time with this because I know that it's a vast question given what you've been doing with your life over the

last many years: what would you say is one thing or you can share more than one if it comes to you, that is maybe the most important that you've actually learned from children as you have been a mindfulness leader and educator?

**SKG:** Oh, hands down, I have learned from children and been reminded on a daily basis of the healing powers of laughter and play; so much work can be done in a playful, funny, laughing, joking way; it's so powerful when you can just let down your hair and get into a sandbox and play around like that.

**RC:** So when in doubt or when feeling stuck, or otherwise ground out in the adult world, figure out the soonest time that you can roll up your sleeves and play.

**SKG:** Yeah, and move, even if it's just putting on some music and dancing around in the kitchen. Really just move out of the linear kind of the thinking mind into more of a wide open creative space of sensation.

**RC:** That's beautiful. It reminds me, I had a conversation recently with Dan Siegel, and he was talking about some recent studies about daydreaming: that there are people who daydream and then there are people who daydream and are aware that they're daydreaming. The people who are aware that they are daydreaming get all the benefit that's possible out of the daydreaming; they oftentimes get inspiration and a greater sense of well-being. So rather than it being just time to space out that they've lost, there's actually a tremendous gain from it. I'm thinking about you as a mindfulness educator, and I'm thinking about to being able to play and also to be loosely joyfully aware of one's self playing, this has exponential gifts.

**SKG:** Oh yeah, and especially if from a practice standpoint. I mean the sequence we use when we practice is play, practice, share and apply. The reason we always start with play if we have time is because then you come to the practice, to the introspective activity from a wide open space of awareness as opposed to a more narrow, analytical type of thought. I've got nothing against thinking; it's gotten me and everybody I know very far in this world, but being able to balance that with the more wide open, playful and joyful space is really a gift.

**RC:** So you just said something in passing that I think it's ingrained in you and your process that I want to just end on. I want to bring it back out. You said play—and then what came next?

**SKG:** Play, so there's something fun. It can be something like listen to music or doodle or games or activities or ice breakers, or anything fun, dancing, singing; so you play. And then you move immediately and directly into some introspective practice. So it's play and then practice. Practice could be sitting, standing, lying down or moving—it's more of the introspective piece that we have in mindfulness. And then share and apply.

So then after that, if you're with your child, then you share really simply, "What was that like for you?" And then you just talk about what the experience was and then you apply it to how could this help in real life. "Okay, so if you really felt when you just turned on that music and started dancing and just really felt your body sensations and you were stressed out before and you don't feel stressed out now, how might that actually be helpful?" "Well, maybe it will be helpful if I'm stressed out with homework to just take a break, put on my earphones and turn up my iPod and just enjoy myself for a while listening to music and then take them off and go back to homework." So that would be the play, practice, share, apply.

**RC:** I just want to check with you, is that a set of steps that came out of overall mindfulness training or specifically that you developed in working with kids?

**SKG:** It's the Inner Kids program process. So we came up with it. I don't know that somebody else has ever come up with it. Remember, everything that comes out of the Inner Kids program comes out of these classical concepts. I meant the play piece was something you add on because they're kids (laughs) and you cannot go and work with kids like you work with adults. So to think of working with kids without incorporating play or songs or music or color—it doesn't make sense.

**RC:** I'm struck by that and that's why I keep coming back to it—I know that we don't own anything in a general sense but I'm still really happy to bow to you and the people who created the Inner Kids program with you because play, practice, share, apply—what a great set of invitations for adults, forget about kids. I'm even thinking about how it works even when we're not even aware of it.

So for instance, when I do workshops and we go around the circle and we introduce each other on the very first night of a workshop, I ask people to share something about themselves that we probably wouldn't guess just by looking at them. And I make it fun, and/or I invite it to be fun and then often we get so many amazing surprises: the person who can talk backwards ever since she was 3 years old; the guy who played drums in the band that played the original "Louie Louie"; or

just somebody who has a passion that they light up when they talk about. What I'm realizing is that just even that, that little bit of play in conversation is what loosens people up, allows them to feel connected and safe, and I just love how you distilled that. I would love to have that as a bumper sticker (laughs) on my mirror—play, practice, share, apply. That's so beautiful.

**SKG:** Oh, well, thank you. Thank you very much. It's fun I got to tell you. It's one of the things I love about my work is you get to get in there and do that.

**RC:** Yeah, absolutely I want to say that I have been happy playing with you today and as you know, but other people might now know, we didn't have any kind of agenda for what we're going to talk about. We just trusted, coming back to that word, that some pieces would come up that would be resonant for us and hopefully for others. I'm really confident that happened and really honored to have had you with us. So I really want to thank you.

**SKG:** Well, thank you and I was honored to be included in your series.

## Lama Surya Das



Lama Surya Das is one of the foremost Western Buddhist meditation teachers and scholars. The Dalai Lama affectionately calls him “the American Lama.” He has spent nearly 40 years studying Zen, Vipassana, Yoga, and Tibetan Buddhism with many masters of Asia, including teachers of the Dalai Lama. He is, and is the author of the international bestselling “Awakening” trilogy including: *Awakening the Buddha Within*, *Awakening to the Sacred* and *Awakening the Buddhist Heart*, as well as the recently released *Buddha Standard Time* (HarperCollins), and nine other books. Lama Surya Das established the Dzogchen Centers and Dzogchen Retreats ([WWW.DZOGCHEN.ORG](http://WWW.DZOGCHEN.ORG)) and the Western Buddhist Teachers Network together with the Dalai Lama, and teaches, lectures and conducts meditation retreats and workshops globally. [WWW.SURYA.ORG](http://WWW.SURYA.ORG)

### 1. Man Cannot Live by Spirituality Alone

**RC:** Welcome to another episode of Teaching What We Need to Learn. My guest today is Lama Surya Das. I’m really thrilled to have you. Welcome!

**LSD:** Thank you, Raphael. It’s nice to be here. Maybe we’ll learn something together. I hope so.

**RC:** I hope so too. And in the interest of full disclosure, I want to share with listeners that Surya Das and I know each other. We’re friendly. We haven’t spent that much time together but one of my most favorite New York memories was watching a World Series game at a mutual friend’s house with Surya Das.

**LSD:** Yes. Man cannot live by spirituality alone, friends. Take my word for it. I’ve tried.

**RC:** And Surya, I want you to know that I was thinking about that night just before our call and I decided that rooting against the Yankees is an essential spiritual practice.

**LSD:** Yes. I'm all for it, especially since I live in Boston.

**RC:** Okay, good.

**LSD:** We're all one but when it comes to things like that, the Yankees are out and we're in.

**RC:** Yes, absolutely. In starting today, I want to go back to something that you wrote to me when I invited you to be in this series. You said something that was really meaningful to me. You said that you are, "All for all truth telling, authenticity, transparency, and co-creation in the spiritual world." So I want to thank you for that and it's really the mission that we have today in our exploration.

**LSD:** Yes, well it sounds good. Sometimes it's hard to know what the truth is—that's where things are getting complicated as you know. But I'm all for it, especially if we're truth seekers. If we call ourselves truth seekers, if we're seeking truth, reality, sanity, whatever we call it. Then the thing is incumbent upon us to be honest and straightforward and frank and direct to each other.

**RC:** Yes, absolutely. So in that light I want to just jump right in and I want to ask you a question that I ask most of the people in this series which is: in your life right now, what is one thing that you're working on or working with, in the realm of your personal growth and spirituality? What is moving you, challenging you, engaging you?

**LSD:** Well, that's a great question. Being here in New York I have to give in to my New York side, Raphael, and say there are so many of these "one things" that I could mention that are so important. One that comes to mind is (and maybe this is related to age and stage) is that I'm kind of a slow learner. I've been in this for so many decades. I would probably have to be reborn until I get the point. It's like if you don't get the joke the first time you have to come back. You get left back until you can learn what we're here to learn.

I think it's time for me to elevate and deepen and not just keep driving forward with a very uni-directional, linear idea and alpha achievement oriented New York male ambition and orientation—thinking that the path of life is a path of going forward and uni-directional progress; recognize the holistic, bigger picture or the simultaneity of everything, to elevate and deepen. I'm not just saying go up instead of go forward, I'm saying elevate and deepen and integrate. Not just thinking in terms of forward and back as we so often think when we're in the flat lands. There are so many other dimensions to consider to be centered and whole and infinite and also in the infinitesimal at the same time—being in touch with timelessness and every moment of time.



So I'm thinking about that as elevating and deepening and integrating Heaven and Earth, not just going forward or going upward or seeking enlightenment or the uni-directional linear ways as so many people seem to pose it.

**RC:** Well in your most recent book, *Buddha Standard Time*, you talk a lot about practical Buddhism; how every opportunity gives us a possibility to be more fully present to what's here now. In terms of elevating and deepening as you were describing it, I'm wondering when you make that your intention, do you come in to contact with parts of yourself that don't always have as much room or freedom to express when you're in that more achievement oriented mode?

**LSD:** Yes, definitely. It's kind of like the dark side is also there and we have to face the shadows and it's not all peaks on the evolutionary journey. There are also the valleys, the plateaus, and everything in between. So yes, the more we deepen and broaden and go inside and enrich and question and the deeper we are, the more true to ourselves, the more Shakespearean we are, we find these limitations, these limited parts. That's why I mentioned before not just being centered and infinitely opening and widening but also being willing to be as small as small can be, because it's beyond big and small and it's all even in the tiniest fraction.

So I definitely find my own limitations or constrictions. I'm in the Jewish neighborhood in New York shopping and I see people going by in the Diamond District. So it comes to mind to quote from the Talmud, the Jewish scriptures, that say "God is not just found in the mountain tops, but also in the ashes." So I definitely find the ashes in the dark side in myself; that's part of elevating, deepening, and integrating. Breathing out and breathing in, not just getting bigger. Or not just disappearing—it's inclusive.

**RC:** Well I know in my own personal life when I look towards those ashes or darkness that you're describing, one of the things that I know that I'm capable of is really thinking I know best. You could ask my family and they will tell you that I have very strong opinions and that I can be kind of a little bit bullheaded in putting them across. I have a forceful energy in that way.

So I'm wondering, I'll go you one for one, is there something in your shadow that you work with and that you try to be gentle with that you recognize, "Oh yeah, that's there for me to include and open into and perhaps create a new awareness about."

**LSD:** Yes. I think I was hinting that before. This may not be like your bullheadedness and I may or may not be a big aficionado of astrology, but I'm a Capricorn, so that's the goat and that's the kind of a head butting or bullheaded animal. But also a mountain climber, always trying to get higher. So I think that relates to my own New York immigrant offspring ambitions and drivenness and alpha achieving and yang energy driving forward. I've been trying to relax that and accept it also and not hold myself back. Letting go of holding back is also a great letting go that some of us have to experience so that we can be more uninhibited and care free, and childlike even, not childish, but childlike.

I think that's something I'm really becoming more aware of; as you get more mature in years and also see that you won't be here forever and think about what's important and what's from the heart not just the head, with all the plans and the projects; feeling what's going on around me and what others feel and emphasize more and feel with others and maybe be more caring and compassionate.

**RC:** In thinking about empathy just now as you mentioned it, one of the things that my attention is drawn to is that you've had, in many ways, a very unique life because you have been immersed in the East and in Tibet and Buddhism as well as the Vipassana and mindfulness and you also are clearly...

**LSD:** And then Neem Karoli Baba and devotional yoga and Hinduism.

## **2. Are You Really a Buddhist or Is That Just Your Job?**

**RC:** Yes, it's been the main focus of your life and you are, as your mother famously called you, the Deli Lama, a nice Jewish boy from New York. I'm wondering have there been any special challenges, let's say, that you had to be with and open into as a result of living maybe, what, at its essence is all one, but often on the surface day to day life might feel like it's worlds colliding.

**LSD:** Yes and no. I'd say more on the no because, and people often ask me this, maybe in a less sophisticated way than you just did, like, "Do you feel split between Jeff Miller and Surya Das?"—or even last week one of my neighbors was asking me, "Are you really a Buddhist or is that just your job?" I'm so amused because it's so far from my thinking now, like 40 years later, like it's some kind of fad that I'd like to be part of. I mean, it's so not that for me, it's not 1968. It's just my life.

But on the other hand, yes, a little bit. For example, the cultural gap between East and West, between the old world and new world; living in the Himalayas in India for 20 years, coming back,

being a monk in monasteries and all that has the problem of coming back and falling into the cracks of feeling a slippage between the pace and the timing and the family like, clan like connections and values of the old world and all of a sudden being here in 1990s and now in 21<sup>st</sup> century where everything is so fast and technological and virtual with social media. I'm not even going to mention materialistic because that's so old now. It's like 100 years ago—now it's just so speedy and people are out of touch with themselves and just looking outwards for everything and so on. So that's been a bit of a challenge but that's also my work: to try to bridge that gap and be a bridge builder and help people find themselves and what they're looking for. I mean that's the work of the Bodhisattva: the enlightened leader, the social activist and altruist.

So it's more coherent than that and I'm just a guy, I'm here, America is my homeland so I know what to do, where to go, and how to do it. But it takes some time, like even now I am so used to growing up with books and old slow media like TV and movies. And now everything is digitized and the tweet era and we're reduced to 140 characters. Fortunately I studied Haiku in Japan so that comes easy to me. But I'm still putting out these 200 to 300 page books every year and I'm wondering what is the future of this? Maybe I need to be doing a blog a day or something.

How can I communicate to the young people? I used to give lectures on campuses; they're not on campuses anymore. Even if they are on campus physically, they're on the web mentally. They're texting and tweeting. So I'm trying to be more active online and that's the challenge for somebody like myself who grew up and studied foreign languages like French and Hebrew and Tibetan and lived in the old world for 20 years. I'm thinking about the books I can write. What retreats to lead and what conferences to organize? Meanwhile everybody says, "Why don't you have webinars and webitations online and podcasts? Why can't we get together and meditate with you every morning by Skype?" I'm going like, "Yeah, why not? I don't know. You make it happen, I'll be there. Tell me what time, I'll sit in front of my camera and laptop." Yes and no.

**RC:** I hear you. All you have to do, Surya, is watch my 4-year old daughter navigate an ipad and realize that—

**LSD:** I would just give up if I saw her doing it.

**RC:** Yeah, well the good news is that part of reaching people in these new ways is exactly what we're doing right now. So we're in the right place at this very moment.

**LSD:** Good, great.

**RC:** And also to be honest with you, in the retreats that I lead, what I find is that what people are hungering for in the midst of all of that technology and noise that you were just describing a moment ago is real connection, real quiet, the opportunity to connect to one's vulnerable emotions and to all the people around them. So it's great to use Skype for instance. I do individual sessions with people all around the world via Skype but at the same time it has its shadow absolutely. I think most people, even if they're addicted to all that speed and information, they actually want less, not more, at least to recharge and come back to themselves.

**LSD:** Yes, that's why people come to me too. I'm trying to become more aware of that. I mean you're good at this, I've noticed, and I'm often impressed by your work in these ways; how you bring it forward. I really appreciate that.

**RC:** Thank you.

**LSD:** Yes, people are coming because they are starved for some silence, some quiet time—they need less of the speedy and distracting, fractured and interrupted 24/7 grid lock that they're usually living. So the retreat to even just the session on Skype is very helpful. I think we can help remind people that there is a balance, there is also room for taking some time and space; and richness of silence and noble solitude are not the same as loneliness. We don't necessarily have to be communicating verbally all the time. We live in the over information age but I think there's a time for news fasts, staying away from the news however briefly even half a day or a day like a Sabbath. There's room for silence or a silent walk in nature. There's a lot of room for these things.

And I find Skype is also marvelous for being with people on their deathbed. Since I'm a Tibetan lama, authorized and empowered, people often ask me to attend them, help them die consciously or do the rites in the *Tibetan Book of Awakening* in the bardo. I just did it with one of my old friends who was in Greece in his deathbed with an oxygen mask. We could see each other, I was chanting and he couldn't talk through the oxygen mask but he was nodding his head and tears were coming out of his eyes and his wife was so happy. It was really beautiful. So I think there are many ways for us to awaken together today.

**RC:** Well, Surya I just want to say I was really touched by what you just shared. It really resonates with me the idea that we can use these technologies to foster presence and connection. That's

certainly my mission. So even if they have within them the capacity to distance ourselves from each other, they also have this other capability which you just spoke to. I'm curious about that because you describe being with somebody on his deathbed who was an old friend—have you ever also been there for someone via Skype who either was a student or someone you didn't know that well?

**LSD:** Yes, sure. That's why I'm saying, different kinds of people. Not somebody that I didn't know that well because they wouldn't be asking and inviting me. But not just as old friends. Yes, students, disciples, parents or relatives of students and disciples and people who are connected. People who have faith in my lineage or teachings and myself, people that I have something to do with but they're not all old friends certainly. I'm open to that. I don't want to make a career out of that but I think it's a crucial moment, as you know. I stopped performing weddings a long time ago because I felt like anybody could do that. But this thing, conscious dying and connecting and presencing, it's really a great opportunity to really presence with someone and presencing is what it's all about, whatever we call it. Being in the Spirit together at that moment relieves so much doubt and confusion and I really love that.

Ram Dass encouraged me about 10 or 15 years ago. He's an old good friend of mine from our ashram in India and I see him all the time. In fact I watched the Super Bowl last winter with him at his house in Maui so the World Series tradition goes on.

**RC:** Yes.

**LSD:** I asked him, "Ram Dass, what advice do you have for me now that I'm coming to the West and people are inviting me to teach Dzogchen retreats here and there and the Vipassana Teachers are inviting them to teach at their centers and teach them Dzogchen," because it's considered a secret advanced nondual practice in Tibetan Buddhism. And he said, "Be nice to old people and dying people. You're a lama." He was like, "Don't just run around talking about how school children should learn to do yoga. Anybody can do that." It was great. It was like, "Pass on what you received. It's special." He said, "I'm old now and I'm seeing now the suffering of old people. Be nice to old people. Be there for them when they're dying," he said. "You're a lama."

**RC:** Speaking of being a lama and of the person that you were and the person that you became over these years, one of the things I noticed in refreshing myself with your bio and your history is that there was a least one occasion if not more where you went into a cloistered situation, in a monastery for about 3 years, is that correct?

**LSD:** Yes, well I was lucky to be part of the traditional 3 year, 3 month, 3 day cloistered Dzogchen meditation retreat. It was the first one for Westerners. It took place in 1980 and I did that twice back in the '80s. That's something in our tradition, it's like a traditional lama training and that was a great time in my life. Not like it was all easy but it was great, it's what I wanted to do. I was preparing for it in the '70s, being in the monasteries and other retreats and then in the '80s I was ready to settle and really get into that, commit myself for 9 years.

### **3. Before, I was Different, Now I'm the Same**

**RC:** The reason that I asked you about that is because many years ago I spent some time at an orthodox Jewish Yeshiva in Jerusalem and I was very steeped in that tradition but I knew it wasn't really meant to be for me to stay there. I came back to the United States and I was experiencing what psychologists call 'cognitive dissonance' where one part of me was back there in Jerusalem and the other part of me was here and I was on the fence trying to figure out where am I going to land. So I was wondering after that kind of intense practice coming back from the Himalayas to the U.S. where you land, did you feel as if the personality that you'd had before just kind of automatically re-cohered and your sense of identity was the same or was there a way in which you felt that coming back where, in fact, you're being you was a significantly different experience?

**LSD:** Somewhere both. I think my brother summed it up. My younger brother, a doctor, a biomedical engineer and no dummy and he doesn't know the details of these Asian things although he's met some of my lamas and so on and enjoyed that very much. I guess when I came back from my first trip to India I must have spent 3 or 4 years, he said, "Jeffery, I don't know, after all those years in India you're the same. You're still yourself," then I kind of drooped but then he said, "But even more so," and then I puffed up again. Because I was young and I wanted to be different. As Werner Erhard used to say, "Before, I was different, now I'm the same."

So again I think integration is not a bad way to look at it. You grow up and you individuate, you want to become someone and you change—there's a big change and a big lifestyle change and personality change and all but in the end—nature and nurture. I have a lot of background in conditioning and I'm still Jewish on my parent's side, but Buddhist by training and inclination.

So I know what you went through Raphael coming back from Jerusalem, where your Yeshiva was. For me coming back from Asia and Tibetan monasteries, it was also not just a jump in miles but a jump in centuries because of the old ways, the old superstitions, the old mythologies and the ways of dressing and doing things; using the old lunar calendar and everything else. And all of a sudden

you're here in the post-modern world where everybody questions everything. It's very different. But I had a good formation, I was there with my teachers for over 20 years and kept going back and forth, so that helped. But I would say that it took me 5 or 10 years to really get acclimated or not be in a little bit of culture shock.

**RC:** 5 or 10 years, that's pretty significant.

**LSD:** Yes, 5 or 10 years. But I'm being very honest with you. I mean I can easily say that it wasn't that hard. But I like to remember what Thich Nhat Hanh said, it came to my attention recently. He said, "Most of what we think is wrong, at least 80%." I like that. You just can't believe whatever you think, that's what I say. I don't know if I'll ever be acclimated. Maybe we don't need to be so acclimated. Maybe it's good to have a little rawness or irritation to keep us awake and deepening. A little bit of labor pains always isn't too bad, giving birth always.

**RC:** When you were talking about the quote from Thich Nhat Hanh, I was reminded, and I'm dating myself here, of the old Firesign Theatre album called *Everything You Know is Wrong*.

**LSD:** Well I remember Firesign Theatre but I don't remember that title. That's great, thanks for reminding me.

**RC:** Yeah, and they also had another title to one of their albums called, *We're All Bozos on this Bus*."

**LSD:** Yes. That's very true.

**RC:** A lot of wisdom going on there.

**LSD:** Yes and humility. I think it's good to recognize, again, so there's no us and them. We're all just chickens here clucking in the courtyard. Let's not exaggerate and get too proud.

#### **4. Thinkolism**

**RC:** So along those lines as a skilled Buddhist meditator and teacher, you are a student of your own mind and particularly a student of what arises out of conditioning that is out of your control. The kinds of thoughts that you can notice quickly when you get more skillful but almost never can you stop them from arising. And oftentimes they surprise us and we have reactions to them and especially critical reactions. So I want to ask you about any parts of yourself that you find that you come down hard on, where you're your toughest critic or judge. I know for me for example just to

open the field of this kind of inquiry, I'm somebody who loves to talk and that can be really helpful in a lot of circumstances but I know there are other times when I might be a person who would live by the maxim why say 5 words when 5,000 will do.

**LSD:** I can identify with that, so I don't judge you as harshly as you do.

**RC:** But Surya...

**LSD:** I mean there are so many other things wrong with you that I would judge. Why focus on one?

**RC:** (Laughs) So in the interest of transparency and to really help people with their projections, is there anything that you want to share and of course you can demur if you'd like, but any parts of yourself that you notice from time to time you get a little harsh about?

**LSD:** I'd love to demur or defer but I'm not that demure. A couple of thoughts: one is, yes, I talk too much and I think that comes as our clan background and upbringing and education and the field that we're in. Neither you nor I spend to a lot of time crunching numbers, we're in communication and story and we like to read and write and other things in the arts.

Another thing is, as a meditation master I would say, or meditation masters would say, you can't stop your thoughts, but that's not the goal with meditations anymore than it is to stop your feelings or perception. The point is to be aware of them so you have more choice points, more spiritual intelligence, more mind moments in each moment between stimulus and reaction.

So when we're cued we don't necessarily have a blind reaction and retaliating kind. When our habits are cued or provoked, when the button is pushed, we can have more mind moments between stimulus and reaction and have a conscious intentional response, not a blind reaction.

So in that sense we don't have to get rid of the thoughts so much but be more aware of them and then we can choose how, when and if to respond. This is the secret of mindful emotional management; creating more mind moments when spacing clarity between stimulus and response—and then we can choose.

So myself, I think worse than talking too much is thinking too much. But then I don't judge myself as much with that anymore since I've learned it's not really what happens but what I make of it that makes all difference. So I could throw the clutch on that and just let the motor spin and if I don't



feed it, if I'm not reading a lot, if I'm not talking with people like you a lot, then I don't think so much. But when I'm with my motor mouth, motor mind, darling friends it's such a pleasure to talk and to think and to josh and to joke and goof around creatively together and also to work things out together and debate and discuss things together, then I really go down that road.

If I'm really wanting to be more serene and centered and relaxed I can learn how to do that. I've learned how to do that through awareness. Awareness is curative. Awareness is harmonizing. And if we can really be in the now, that's the best therapy, freeing us from conditioning.

But then as to my own personal defect or foibles, I think that I'm not sure, taking myself too seriously is one; believing in my thoughts and seeing myself too seriously. One of my girlfriends in the 70s, Tina, she used to call me 'Serious Das' because I was such a Dharma drone, Dharma all the time. But I'm younger now, I've gotten a little lighter. So I take myself too seriously and in a way being almost embarrassingly earnest to the point of being like pious or something.

But then inwardly it would be believing my thoughts too much or getting taken in by my own thoughts and opinions and even knowledge. Knowledge is still a long way from understanding and wisdom. We're in the over information age and we have so much information and knowledge and so little profound wisdom, like helpful wisdom. So, getting taking in by and believing my own thoughts and opinions— that's a big bother to me actually.

If we're going to have a habit or substance, thoughts are not the worst thing to be addicted to, how's that? That's what I have included as a substance to abuse.

**RC:** I hear you. So yeah, there's no TA in the anonymous...

**LSD:** There should be. I admit that I have no power over my thoughts and I need to rely on a higher, deeper power.

**RC:** There you go.

**LSD:** To free me from thought addiction.

**RC:** We just started it today.

**LSD:** Thinkolism.

**RC:** Just as a follow-up to that question. I was appreciating what you were saying about the space that opens up and that, you really could say, is one of the main intentions of meditation—to be able to see clearly and then have more freedom of choice. One of the things that I found is that it's the realm of emotions that are the most powerful in this way for most people and certainly myself and that we have to allow ourselves to actually experience our emotions so that we really get that feedback and then have a clarity in terms of how to respond, how to work with those emotions; and in my own life I know that one of the hardest things for me emotionally was to really open to the degree of hurt that I had, just emotional hurt.

I remember when I was like 19 or 20, people asked me because I was a seemingly well adjusted, peaceful oriented guy and people said, "You had a real difficult background in your family, how did you escape from that?" And then like a total fool I would tell them as if it were true and as if I knew. It was only many years later that I realized I hadn't escaped anything at all and all of that was a kind of compensation. And so one of the real key aspects of my passage into greater presence was being ever more attuned to the places in which I was vulnerable and which I was hurting and not just to notice it but to really allow myself to have the full experience of the hurt so that then I could come in to a greater place of expanded awareness in which it was even okay to experience hurt and not something that I immediately had to try to fix or solve or deny or project onto someone else.

So I'm wondering in your experience if there's one or more emotions that you're aware of that it's been a process for you to really be able to open up to us fully as you might want to.

### **5. Pain is Inevitable, Suffering is Optional**

**LSD:** Yes, that's a great and difficult area to think about and talk about. Of course, a wise guy said, "In life, pain is inevitable, suffering is optional." I like that; I think, again, it's not what happens but what we make of it that makes the difference. How much we suffer from the pain, even if it's just a headache and constrict around it and give ourselves stress and migraines, that's up to us and that's in our conditioning.

But yes, let me say, I think of course awareness and authenticity and presence, we need to have presence for all the parts of ourselves. Well, you're more of a psychologist than I am, Raphael, but yes the dark side and the shadow side emotions and what Buddhism calls it the conflicting emotions are challenging. For me, I would say desire is the most challenging one for me. I'm not that anger oriented. Of course it's well suppressed and socialized, the anger; but that desire thing, dissatisfaction more—that kind of thing. That's a tough one.

So it's interesting in the subject of our series here, I always hear the cliché we teach what we need to learn. And I hear myself always talking about contentment and being here now and this is it and the great natural perfection, everything complete as it is. That's still what I need to learn. So there it is, I'm blurting it out. I think desire or craving, dissatisfaction is my predominant klesha or conflicting emotion or inner obscuration.

I have a lot of patience with anger and with people who, I don't know, might try to get me angry or do things. But the desire thing, it's just the other side of anger really. Attraction and aversion go together. The anger and aversion thing, you're pushing things away. And the desire thing, with all of its forms: attachment, greed and craving—you're pulling things towards. They're just two sides of the same coin based on delusion of separateness or lack.

**RC:** Well first of all I really want to bow to you in appreciation because to share that I think is a great gift and it makes you a better teacher because you are in the throes of your humanness. So that is what this series is all about and I appreciate you for that. I wanted to just follow-up by saying I really know what you mean about the special challenge of desire because many of our emotions are just feedback about how we're experiencing the present that are more easy or difficult to open to and allow. But desire as an emotional energy has within it a contraction, a resistance, an idea that there is something missing from this moment that needs to be here.

**LSD:** Yes, that's right. It seems we're pulling towards something and it's also a resistance to what is. We're closing out something. We're overlooking or pushing away what is, in favor of something else. So it's complex and it's suffering-full and it's constant and it's annoying in the pit of ones stomach or wherever you feel it. It's irritating and it's something to deal with.

**RC:** Yeah and it has that clinching quality. It's very challenging to experience desire while wide open and connected. Almost by the very nature of its appearance it causes us to constrict to some significant degree.

**LSD:** Well it depends on what one means by connected. But when one is connected then one is not separate, let's give it the highest meaning, a deep meaning, and then one isn't pulling and pushing. There's a flow.

**RC:** Yes, absolutely.

**LSD:** You're not trying to unify when you're connected. You're already unified for example.

**RC:** Yes.

**LSD:** You're in touch with the wholeness. So I feel like contentment is the greatest form of wealth and I often teach that and practice that in meditation: seeing it as it is and living as it is and letting go. It doesn't mean getting rid of things, it means letting things come and go, letting be. Maybe other people see it different ways. We have the 84,000 Dharmas or teachings, or paths as we say in Buddhism, that's why we have all the different religions or ways in the world. Everybody has a piece of the puzzle. The whole is in each piece, I'm sure.

**RC:** Well I think that for many of us right now especially in the West who have done our best to incorporate some of the wisdom of the East while also staying true to our own culture or at least deriving the best we can from it, it seems like the edge is really the blending of doing and being.

To find a way to accomplish much while staying in that present moment awareness and even to let our more egotistic will soften into a flow that moves through us that is so much more powerful if we let it come and let it guide us. It seems like everywhere I look in my own work and in my own personal life as well that just comes up over and over again.

#### **6. If We're Not Here Now, We Won't Be There Then**

**LSD:** Well that's deep work in deep words. Yes, I coined the term being there while getting there every step of the way to that. So we're not just always goal oriented. But this is nothing new. I think St. Catherine of Siena said it best in history. She said, "Every step of the way to heaven is heaven." She was one of the greatest Christian mystics. And she could experience it being there while getting there. Every step of the way to heaven is heaven.

If we put that term in more of a non-theistic or Buddhist approach, every step of the way is the Great Way. There's no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, the circle is seen from above and it's gold every step of the way. So this means really being here now and that's why I've been emphasizing more the practice of presencing with my students lately, not just meditating, which seems so inner directed or silent or seated, but presencing in every situation and cultivating and developing what we call in Tibetan, Zhigi: authentic presence, brilliant presence, not just brilliant mind but authentic presence. It may be like gravitas, but I'm not sure.

But it means authenticity and presence, being fully present and accounted for here and now because if we're not here now we won't be there then, that's the world's karma. So we condition ourselves to be postponing it forever. If we're not here now we won't be there then. There will be no heaven.

There will be no peace and contentment. We will never grow up really. We'll always be trying to stand on tiptoes to be taller. And not growing.

**RC:** I really want to just pause and highlight what you just said because it's really quite beautiful and it maybe something you say a lot but I haven't heard it. You said, "If we're not here now we won't be there then."

**LSD:** Yeah, I guarantee that.

**RC:** I think that is so beautifully put. And part of that being here now, I think, is it creates one particular challenge for people I wanted to speak to for a moment around acceptance and that is what I share with people in my work: the perspective that we're going to be coming from is that there is nothing wrong with this moment and there is nothing wrong with you. And that doesn't mean there aren't things that we don't want very much to change about ourselves or about the situation we find ourselves in or in the world. Of course we can have those preferences for change but to start from the framework that it's already here, it is and therefore it can't be wrong, is something that for many people takes quite a long time to unwind into, especially people who have serious trauma in their background which is a majority of people I work with. Just to even contemplate the idea that there's nothing wrong with them is mind blowing and often something that they resist for quite some time. But of course when we get to that level of acceptance, everything is possible for us.

**LSD:** Well trauma is very difficult to speak about and heal from. Also we're attached to our traumas. It's like who will we be if we gave it up and what happens to our victim story and our resentments and all the rest that others being right and others being wrong?

So it's very difficult to deal with that. I think we need to heal and work and step beyond a lot of our notions of right and wrong, which is so much in the thinking level, like I don't know about the psychological trauma but let me just talk about physical trauma. I have some scars on my body. They are scars, but are they wrong? It's not good that I got those wounds but the scars are healed now they're just scars. They're beautiful scars. That's the healing.

So it's hard to say it's wrong that I have the scars. I mean I don't wish other people bleed and have wounds and have scars but life is difficult. The unenlightened, ordinary, dualistic life is difficult and we have to accept that. Nobody says it's easy, but it is beautiful also and we're up to the task. So I

think we have to find healing and reconciliation and peace as well as we can, Raphael. There's so many ways to do that. There's the therapeutic, psychological approaches to dealing with trauma and other things. Some people are so traumatized that until they deal with that it's very difficult to assume spiritual truth and to practice spiritual practices like acceptance and living that as it is and recognizing the natural perfection of things as they are.

Of course, in the ultimate everything is just what it is. It's hard to argue with that. Otherwise it would be otherwise; it would be different. But relatively speaking people are traumatized for many reasons and that's something we have to deal with on some more practical levels. But so much of our stuckness is about being right and the story that we tell ourselves about our backgrounds and so on, about others or about those who disagree with us. I think we need to really take a step back and reflect on this and what we're getting out of it at this point in our lives. Maybe it was needed then but it may not be appropriate at this point in our lives to be so defended and so reactive.

And it's in our higher self-interest to forgive and remember and learn the lesson, not forgive and forget, but forgive and remember, learn the lessons and move on. Way too many people come to me privately, I mean in private interviews and for meditation instruction and they tell me about how they were incested and raped and abused when they were children. And it's infuriating. I can't believe how much of that is going on. Of course I'm seeing only a select portion of the population, people that are seeking help or asking these things.

But it's unbelievable how many children go through that. So of course you're traumatized. You can't just tell them it's okay. I mean they have gone through steps of healing with that. It's very difficult. Yes, they are enraged against their parent or uncle or brother who did that. And there's nothing wrong with anger—that was the right response. It was something wrong that happened and the emotional wisdom is it's wise to be angry when something wrong is happening.

**RC:** Well I think even more so they often suffer from turning that against themselves. The shame and the self-pity is probably the hardest thing to heal through.

**LSD:** Yes, all of that is part of the trauma and the scarring and the wounding and blame and secrecy and guilt. It then separates us, the secrecy separates us of being honest with ourselves and others. It's a big knot to untangle.

**RC:** I really appreciate you sharing that infuriated response and just sharing the prevalence of your experience with that in interviews with your students because I don't get a chance often to talk to other teachers about this in their work. But I've had the same response, almost disbelief at the percentage of people who are still working through or suffering from that kind of trauma and who had it inflicted upon them. It's sometimes just staggering and it requires me to step back and take a very big deep breath to allow that to be because everything in me wants to rail against it.

**LSD:** I know, it is staggering and it's infuriating. I just don't know what to do about it except to talk about it a little more and to air it out and those who specialize in that field maybe can do something more about it, I think. We need to express solidarity with people who have those traumas and not try to hurry them to some fantasized imaginary cure like letting go and moving on before they've really worked through it in a healthy manner in their body and in their energy and memory and therapy. Otherwise then they'll do a spiritual end run as we call it, the spiritual bypass, like suppressing all that and pretending to be peaceful and have those things fester deep in the psyche.

### **7. Transparency and Tibetan Buddhism in the Modern World**

**RC:** So Surya before we go, because we just have a few minutes left, I wanted to just ask you a little bit about transparency and what you see as the kind of cutting edge of that in your world with the teachers that you know because I know that you are aware of some of those trends and it will be good for you to speak to it. The way, for instance, that the Tibetan Buddhist community might be changing, the new generation might be approaching this theme of transparency. So anything you want to share with us about that that would be great.

**LSD:** Well that's a very interesting and even hot topic. Just this week there was a new scandal about the very popular yoga teacher Joan Friend, the founder of Anusara Yoga, who has so many thousands of disciples and has trained so many dozens of teachers. But that's just the traditional old scandal about a man doing it with a lot of women and being unfaithful and other things. My heart goes to him and his community. In Tibetan Buddhism we're in new times, let's say. I mean I can't believe we're in the year 2012 already. It seems that it was like Y2K a couple of weeks ago.

I grew up in the 70s, the 60s and the 50s with the old lamas of Tibet, like the Dalai Lama's teachers and others; many of these died in the 70s and 80s and they were my teachers. And now they're coming back as Tulku's, like the great Kalu Rinpoche, who the Dalai Lama sent around the world about 6 or 7 times on teaching tours as his representative in the 70s, who died in 1989—he was my root lama. They say he was reborn and now he's 20 years old and you can see him on YouTube on

the internet where he's not a monk, he's talking in English and he's telling how he was brought up and how, when he was 13 or 15 in a Tibetan monastery, he was abused and attacked and his life was threatened.

There's a whole new modern useful energy of cathartic revelation and asking for transparency and reform of the old ways. Again, as I mentioned before it's not just that Tibetan Buddhism is coming 5,000 or 6,000 miles across the ocean, it's coming a few hundred years out of the ancient feudal theocracy that was Tibet into the modern era of democracy, so called, but democracy and communication and accountability and feminism and multiphase diversity and so on. So with freedom comes responsibility and people have accountability.

The younger lamas are asking for this and even demanding it. Tsoknyi Rimpoche's brother, Mingyur Rimpoche wrote his book about his anxiety disorder growing up and he's a great young lama, about 30, a meditation master. Tsoknyi Rimpoche has just written about his anxiety disorders in his new book as well.

So these things are coming out more as a call to transparency and for empathy and for sharing and for humanizing this over idealized image of the spiritual teacher as omnipotent Lord and Master, as it was in the old world, perfect in every way. As if the person doesn't throw a shadow or has any inner shadow either.

This is probably a good development, although, we'll see how they play that in the long run. I know a lot of people are struggling with their faith when they hear these things. Just like when Mother Theresa's journals came out after she died, a lot of Catholics were very dismayed to find out that she had doubted about God also, just like they do.

But I think in the long run this is healing because we can realize then we have to go deeper and gain our own convictions to pursuing an authentic path that's true to us and finding out for ourselves and not just over idealizing these wonderful leaders.

**RC:** Well there's something Surya that you just spoke to that I think is worth a little bit of further discussion and maybe it's a really good kind of question around which we can leave our talk today. Because you said it's a little soon to see where this is all going and so I'm wondering, do you see a potential shadow in the new call for transparency in people seeing the humanness of their teachers and taking them off of a pedestal? What would it look like to go too far in the other direction?



**LSD:** Well I think that that's one of my hesitations: to say this is a great new development. This is just a new development. It's too soon to say where it's going to land out and how it's going to shake out and balance with everything else that is going on. Some of it is kind of a pendulum swing back so like a backlash. Like before, it was almost total obscurity, like you don't know how the leaders live and what's really going on behind the scenes to now with total transparency or revelation. The pendulum swings back and then it has to come to rest more to the middle where there's an appropriate balance of private and public and discretion and so on. Just like in your own married life, Raphael, you don't have sex in front of your 4-year old even though there's nothing wrong with you and your wife having sex. And you don't give them steak to chew on when they don't have the teeth for that.

So it's the right age and stage. And the Eastern traditions are a little new in the West so we may be out of the child's stage but we're still in the adolescent stage and we need to mature and gain more adulthood before we can see, I think. Just like if we took away all the projection and transference on therapists and doctors and people knew all the relationship problems that a couple therapists had for example, they may not be able to get as good couple's therapy as they would otherwise get with a little room for the professional distance to continue, the boundaries where you don't know everything about your couple's therapist. I think that's a fair analogy, a little room for projection and transference but not over much.

**RC:** I so appreciate the calibration in what you're describing such that transparency isn't just a perfect value in and of itself. It comes within a range and with balance and as you were speaking about that I was reminded that yes, there are some things, like distance is valuable for instance those of us who eat sausage really don't want to see how it's made.

**LSD:** Yes, something like that and everybody knows that people have more faith in doctors if they wear white coats than if they come in wearing a jogging clothes and cut-off shorts.

**RC:** Good, but now I'm going to have to rethink my whole workshop wardrobe.

**LSD:** No, I think you should. Appearances are all. You learn it here from the lama.

**RC:** I want to say something about this.

**LSD:** It's all just appearances anyway (laughs).

**RC:** I think for students and practitioners it's important just to speak of this briefly because I'm not a guru. That frame of references doesn't really work for me in what I do. So I don't have some of the traditional garb and I don't come from a lineage which has its own fashion. I was at a store one time and I found a shirt that wasn't spiritual in its orientation but because of the muslin fabric and because of the special buttons it has a certain spiritual vibe. And I got the shirt and I do wear it from time to time but I'm also very sensitized because I will put it on and I will go to the workshop and then inevitably someone will say, "A guru shirt." And then I will contract and I'll have to be with whatever self judgment came for putting on the shirt.

So when we are in the green room before we're whisked onstage for our presentation, those of us in this particular position spiritually are trying to figure out what the heck to wear.

**LSD:** Just like everybody else my friend.

**RC:** Yes, just like everybody else.

**LSD:** But I will say I learned some lessons about this because I've been extremely unimaginative and unconcerned about the look for so long but now, as I'm getting older I see people are more attached and need more structure and form than I thought. For example I've been teaching Dzogchen to Vipassana meditation teachers for decades. When I shaved my beard off in about 1993, before that I was teaching some of them for a few years, one of them who was not young and not dumb, she said, "Surya, you've lost a lot of your power since you shaved off your beard." Holy crack! What? I haven't changed a bit. But to her I lost some of my power, teacher power was what she was wanting and needing from an elder. Of course she was older than me. But the beard and the guru look, not even the clothes, made her feel like I was more of an elder and more powerful.

Then I started to notice this more and more over the years and decades, so now I can hold myself just a little bit more responsibly when I'm in the role for the benefit of what I call 'the young ones' who think like that. Of course I'm just a guy and everybody knows it and that's fine too. And I don't allow bowing and scraping in my community like when I come in the room the people don't bow three times like they do in front of every other lama in my lineage. But still, I do want to inculcate a certain vein of sacredness, sacred circle, reverence, awakening together, and not just in tired, sloppy, laissez-faire ways.

So again the middle way, I think the middle way is a great touchstone that I'm always looking at. Not too much and not too little, not too tight and not too loose, not too total disclosure blurring and certainly not too secretive, not to mention a manipulating lying with too much spin.

**RC:** Well I really appreciate that ode to the middle way. I think that's a good place for us to leave it and also the theme that you just mentioned about awakening together. So Surya, I'm glad I got to awaken a little together with you today.

**LSD:** Me too, Raphael.

**RC:** I want to thank you for being a part of this and I know it takes a certain amount of courage and willingness to even accept an invitation like this. So I won't bow and scrape to you but I will definitely—

**LSD:** No, go ahead. Send money.

**RC:** —I will definitely namaste.

**LSD:** Namaste, to you. It's good to talk to you.

## Larry Yang



Larry Yang teaches meditation retreats nationally and has practiced extensively in Burma and Thailand, with a six month period of ordination as a Buddhist monk under meditation master Ajahn Tong. Larry is one of the core teachers of the East Bay Meditation Center, is on the Spirit Rock Teachers Council and is coordinating teachers of the Spirit Rock Community Dharma Leader training program. Larry has a deep interest in using contemplative practices to enhance effectiveness in social justice work and activism. Larry's article, "Directing the Mind Towards Practices in Diversity" was included in the book, "Friends on the Path: Living Spiritual Communities," by Thich Nhat Hanh. Larry is also a co-editor of "Making the Invisible Visible: Healing Racism in Our Buddhist Communities," a booklet developed for building inclusive communities within spiritual practice. His Huffington Post blog is at: [WWW.HUFFINGTONPOST.COM/LARRY-YANG](http://WWW.HUFFINGTONPOST.COM/LARRY-YANG). [WWW.LARRY YANG.ORG](http://WWW.LARRY YANG.ORG)

### Part 1

#### 1. The Universal Family and Cross Cultural Patchworks

**RC:** Larry Yang, thanks so much for being here today and welcome to *Teaching What We Need To Learn*.

**LY:** Thank you very much Raphael. Thanks for inviting me. Thank you so much.

**RC:** It's my pleasure. And as you know, we start these interviews by coming into presence. I want to let you know that I've really been looking forward to this interview for a long time so I have a certain kind of flutter of excitement and I am pacing around my office, which is always a really good sign because it means I'm stepping into the experience. Also, I feel a slight sense of pressure that I'm breathing into because I have a sense that we could talk for hours and I want to deliver the fullest benefit of your presence for our listeners; so recognizing that pressure, I think, is going to allow me to just keep exhaling and coming back to the now with you, which is why I wanted to speak it out loud. So there's a snapshot of me in this moment, how about you?

**LY:** Well, thanks for sharing that Raphael. I'm just noticing this is a different form for me; usually when I'm engaged in these conversations or engaged in sharing around the Dharma, I'm face-to-face; so this new form is really exciting. I can feel the vibration in my body and there's some anxiety, as well as excitement. I can't really parse the difference right now but it definitely is energetic. Even though I'm not pacing, I relate to that sense of energy and I really appreciate this opportunity to stretch, as well, as what we're going to be talking about in terms of teaching what we are learning and what we need to be learning. This feels like a very embodied thing in this moment to me.

**RC:** Wonderful. Well, again I'm so glad that you're with us. And this series in many ways is about transparency and I want to be transparent even a little further as we begin the dialogue, which is to say that I came to you as a possible guest in this series in two ways. One of them is that many people who I know and respect suggested that you were a wonderful voice, someone who was rich in wisdom and compassion and have a lot to share as a teacher and as a human being. And then also, that you were somebody who would be able to be a part of my own intention to bring diversity to the series because it's sometimes the same faces, the same colors, and I really wanted to make sure that diversity was a priority in this series. And the reason that I'm speaking to that is maybe best summarized in one of my favorite quotes from the writer John Berger who said, "We only see what we look at, and to look is an act of choice."

It seems to me that you have been looking a lot in your life and in your experience, as I've become familiar with you, at things that many of us either wouldn't look at or don't have to look at. So it feels to me that around the subject of transparency, that you sharing in such a way that allows yourself to be seen helps us see what otherwise we might not see if we're in some position of privilege, or if we're a part of a culture of oppression. So it seems to me that there's this delicate merging of just who you are as a person and then also where, as a result of who you are, you've had to look and grow; that we can learn so much from you, just spending time with you and getting a sense of how your culture, how your race and how your sexual orientation has impacted your own spiritual journey and even now, you're teaching as well.

**LY:** Hmm. Well, first of all, I so deeply appreciate the transparency and just bringing your intentions right to the fore because it is such a door—I mean there are multiple doors that I could walk through right now given what you just offered. And that quote that you just mentioned reminded me of another piece of wisdom which I think has been attributed to the Talmud, and/or

also Anaïs Nin, I don't know which is the most accurate source, but the quote is, "We don't see the world as it is. We see the world as we are." My extrapolation is as I've sat with that quote: the seeing is the mindfulness practice, for me. It's the awareness of, on deeper and deeper levels, not just of our own individual experience, but of our collective experience; and as I sit with that, my tendency is to see the world as I am. The invitation is: the more we are that we see, the more of the world we actually see. So the more that I can reach beyond what I just see as an individual person, as a person who sees it through a lens of a particular culture or experience, the more totality I can actually live into; the more totality of the world, of the life really, that I can experience.

Often people, when they come into the experience of diversity or in professional circles, there are a lot of diversity trainings and multicultural experiences, and when people come into that, sometimes there's a resistance or hesitancy. But for me there's a joy because the joy is really getting in touch with how much life there is out there that I don't necessarily access on a day to day basis unless I make that effort to bridge the differences or the distinctions or the amazing uniqueness that this life gives each of us. And yet even in that uniqueness, there is something that connects us deeply with all of our experiences and that dance is fascinating to me always; not always easy, but always fascinating; investigation and that sense of spiritual curiosity is one of the factors of the awakened heart and mind, and it actually allows us to keep traversing this journey and this path of we're on.

**RC:** Well, you mentioned that sometimes there's a little hesitancy or resistance when people come into diversity trainings or multicultural trainings, and often, I think that's about a sense of "Am I going to be told that somehow I can't fully be myself?" or "I have to give up certain orientations I have in order to make room for other people." It's a sense of limitation or fear of limitation and so I really appreciate what you were saying and I see the opportunity for you to share your experience with the listeners of this program as an opportunity not for limit but to follow along with what you said, for more. I was recently playing with words and I came up with a phrase that has a lot to do with the work that I share with people and the phrase is "spacing in" as opposed to the usual "spacing out". Because to "space in" for me, means to keep expanding and including more and more for the very purposes that you described.

I think that in speaking with you, there are themes that would naturally come up around race, around sexual orientation, around privilege and also around certain kind of biases of Western culture that many of the people—and I would count myself in this for sure—wouldn't ordinarily be seeing or paying attention to or creating space for. So for me it's a great honor. I feel delighted to be

able to enter into this with you and I think that one way to begin is just to ask you to talk a little bit about how you see that; how those themes, whichever ones are inspiring you to talk about right now, have impacted your own spiritual journey and now impact your teaching. In a way, since we're not at your particular, as the Ken Wilber people call, 'cosmic address' what would be some of the main things that you're aware of that it would be great for us to include and to allow new space for in our own consideration?

**LY:** Well, we begin with our own experience, so I'll just share a little bit of that. Because I grew up in a family that was already standing in multiple cultures; my parents emigrated from China and they brought their spiritual background with them, but in order to assimilate into the Western culture during the McCarthy years, they actually let go of all of that. But even though they let go of the trappings of Buddhism and Taoism and Confucianism, they couldn't let go of the values and norms that they were imbued with. So I grew up in this Western culture sort of dancing between how much I should assimilate and how much I should retain, and dealing with the racism and the discrimination at that time, and not knowing what to do with it all.

When I actually encountered the teachings of the Buddha in a different form through the Theravada lineage, what I recognized immediately were the norms and the values that my parents just sort of lived through, and I sort of absorbed through this osmosis of what we call family. So there was a cultural component to my experience in the spiritual path that was quite complex, in the sense of being offered my first experience of meditation or teachings in the Dharma from basically Western teachers who had trained in Thailand, and yet as a Chinese American, I was resonating very strongly with what was being offered to me. And with that cross-cultural patchwork, it took me a while to understand or even, not understand but just to allow that my cultural experience is interwoven with my spiritual path.

**RC:** That's really beautifully stated...

**LY:** I began exploring. Because one of the things that I feel is a little undervalued is often, maybe it's a true for all wisdom traditions, I can't generalize like that, but certainly in how the Dharma teachings have come into the West, there's a focus on the transcendent; there's a focus on those open spaces in which we are connected into the universal family, so to speak, regardless of what families of origin we come from. And that emphasis sometimes hides or veils this beauty of uniqueness that we have, both individually as human beings, but also collectively as cultures; we go

around a particular human experience, which is to gravitate towards similarity in culture; and there are these beautiful things that arise from culture, as well as difficulty; the 10,000 joys and the 10,000 sorrows of each of our lives. They are woven into this collective experience of culture that we have, and so of course, it has an impact on our spiritual development. But I don't see that very emphasized, I don't think that we are yet languaged into how these teachings can affect our different cultural experiences.

**RC:** And how the cultural experiences affect the teachings.

**LY:** Absolutely.

**RC:** There's just such a huge paradox in all of this that I hear you speaking to and I just want to touch on it from a couple different directions. Often in the Western cultures, when we are looking at things from a Buddhist perspective or similar, we talk about letting go of our story and it is very common, even if people come from a wide variety of, let's say, more Eastern traditions or even the psychological world these days, that people will say, "Oh, that's just your story," or "Let me see if I can let go of my story about that." And I was talking in the series in another interview to Sam Keen and Sam Keen is all about your story (laughs), and how you get the value of your life by really understanding what your story is and continuing to tell and refine your story. So the paradox there is that we can be trapped by our story and limited by it, but also we can be freed into something really full and rich in the human experience by really coming to a new appreciation for our story.

**LY:** I'm totally with you on this and I've actually been teaching storytelling as a path towards this teaching of *anatta* or non-self, or the non-attachment to identity. Because this is where I think Western psychology and Eastern psychology, each of them, have their different theoretical frameworks and they're mutually complementary. I don't feel that one is more valid than the other, but in the Western psychological mode the story is referencing the personal content. My experience with stories from other cultural contexts, whether it's within the indigenous environment or whether it's from other cultural story forms, is that the the story is much more a metaphor, it's much more an archetype. And so, as you tell, for example in a storytelling circle, which we began to do in these trainings for Dharma teachers that I'm involved with at Spirit Rock, it seems counterintuitive to actually go into your story. But the more stories that we hear, we actually begin to hear the story that's underneath all of those and that's the story that connects us as the universal family, that place where we have these deep connections regardless of what our differences are. And for me, even



though most of the times when we talk about *anatta* and the non-attachment identity and self, we're talking about this deep meditative concentrated state in which identity falls away. I believe and I say this through personal experience, that there are different ways of concentration and contemplative forms that actually also invite us into that experience. And this form of storytelling, which I'm so glad that you brought up, can be as consciousness altering as these deep meditative contemplative states.

**RC:** That's wonderful to even just consider and open up to. And there's another part of it too. Sometimes, we speak about the difference between the relative and the absolute, so we come to certain experiences in meditative practice or we have a spiritual awakening or philosophically we come to understand oneness and interdependence, etc., but then we're all still living in the "relative world of everyday life" in which we have a culture; we have a place that we live, we all have all the things that make up our own identity, including the stories that we carry forward from our past. And to somehow diminish that or even just believe for a moment that we could bypass all of that and just to go to the absolute without moving through the relative of our day to day experience—that seems to me impossible.

## **2. Our Highest Calling: Turning Awareness Towards Differences**

**LY:** It is impossible. And I think that's where John Welwood developed that whole area of the spiritual bypass, that there is such a tendency to avoid suffering and a tendency to avoid unpleasant experiences, which differences can often create. And actually the place of freedom, the place of that interconnection is through those differences, not around them. And he has that teaching around premature transcendence, sort of prematurely assuming the oneness of the totality without recognizing fully the relative nature of how life is lived in each of our lives; that yes, of course we're going to have differences, and not just differences because unfortunately, in the messiness, in the imperfections of our personal and collective life, we're actually going to create harm. And that harm shows up, whether it's the interpersonal dynamics or whether it's the dynamics between cultures around sexism and racism and heterosexism—all of that is going to show up and our highest calling is to turn our awareness towards it, not away.

There was a time in which I heard teachers from both Buddha Dharma as well as other traditions say, "Why do we spend our time focusing on differences? Let's focus on how we are much the same." And that really felt skewed to me because it didn't allow the awareness, it didn't allow this aspect of compassionate presence to be with how we suffer in this world; because we can't change

anything we're not aware of, and until we turn our awareness towards how our differences can create difficulty, stress, even extreme injury, we won't know how to change it; we won't know how to transform this world into uplifting our human intentions to a higher level.

**RC:** And I would add, not only can we not change something that we're not aware of; we can't change something that we haven't fully accepted.

**LY:** Yes. I would totally agree with you.

**RC:** And so therefore, part of a deep and full acceptance practice is recognizing the ways that we can cause suffering purposely and inadvertently. That's why I'm so touched and moved by some of the work that you've done in this regard. You have a piece that you wrote called *Directing the Mind Towards Practices in Diversity*. And the Trainings of the Mind in Diversity, just the first sentence, I think it will be really helpful for people to hear. The first one is "To become aware of the suffering caused by imposing one's own opinions or cultural beliefs upon another human being." There's more to the training but the reason that I wanted to say that right now is because I think for many people that would go invisible without being brought into the light—that my own opinions or my cultural belief could cause suffering to others.

**LY:** And this is where I really feel a congruence with these teachings of *sati* or mindfulness because on some level, the emphasis on the personal awareness and mindfulness that we're developing so well in the West psychologically and professionally, have such an opportunity to allow us to be collectively aware of how we can cause harm by our attachments or our unseen privileges or activities. And it really has the possibility of creating a greater freedom beyond just sort of personal awakening. It's transforming the language of these teachings into sort of these culturally congruent forms; whether it's through the precepts that you're mentioning that I've worked on or the storytelling and sort of creating different doors into these classic teachings. I really feel that we have yet to know how the Dharma is going to be fully experienced in the West, because the West is such a collection of numerous cultural experiences and communities. It reminds me historically of what I've read when the practice, when the Buddhist practice came into Central Asia and came into contact with the Silk Road, and the confluence of all those cultures and the brilliant evolution of basically all of our current Buddhist lineages come from that cultural confluence, creating this diversity of form and practice. And I just feel that we have that potential as the Dharma is coming into the West as well.

**RC:** Before we go on, I want to double back to just a couple of themes that you touched on. You mentioned that when you encountered the Buddhist teaching, later on in your life there was a certain sense of familiarity because of what you're parents had lived even if they had dropped it on the surface because of the culture they found themselves in and during McCarthyism in the U.S. But also one of the things that many Westerners, when they look to forms of Buddhism that are more popular in the East, is something that doesn't bear very much similarity to what they learn at Spirit Rock or Barre, Massachusetts or in their local sitting group; they actually see a lot of pageantry and superstition and it almost looks like it's a whole different approach to living, and so I'm wondering just for you personally, what you experienced in your household growing up that came back to you and felt familiar doesn't sound at all like that. It sounds like it was more about a value, an approach to living, compassion—can you just speak a little bit about what you came to recognize was imbued in your upbringing through your parents?

**LY:** I think it was really the norms and the values and how, for example, the first noble truth and the second noble truth, and the third, all made sense when it was formally taught to me; that the first noble truth—meaning that there is suffering in this world and the second noble truth, that there was a reason for that, which is the craving or the attachment. For example, my father would always drink a mug of hot water and I would, when I became aware of this, I'd ask him, "Why just hot water? Why don't you have coffee or tea or something else?" And he would say to me, "Well, hot water makes me appreciate coffee and tea when I actually have it."

**RC:** (Laughs)

**LY:** And so he was, even in that moment of having a hot drink when he got up in the morning, he was practicing non-attachment so that he could really appreciate it. It's not something that I would think would be part of American culture and yet when I came into the teachings that were being offered in the West, I recognized that the way that my parents were had a very strong impact on how open I was to these teachings.

**RC:** When you just said about American culture and you were talking about the confluence of culture, that what happened when Buddhism met the Silk Road, etc., I was just thinking that the pop culture version of your father's practice today would be I'll have that mug of hot water but I'll super size it.

**LY:** (Laughs) Right.

**RC:** (Laughs) I'll really practice non-attachment.

**LY:** Well, there's a—I can't remember—he's quite a brilliant comedian and his name is escaping me right now. But he has this joke about getting the 45 minutes sitting period down. He's so good at it that he can do it in 10 minutes.

### **3. Dharma in the Modern World: Creating a Door For People to Traverse**

**RC:** (Laughs) Yeah, exactly. So the other thing I just wanted to touch on and this is a personal question about how you experience something. You were talking about coming back to the traditions and you had teachers that were in Thailand but also you've been learning and practicing here in the West, it made me think of how a Native American might feel going to an Anglo-Shaman and hearing teachings that were deeply embedded in his or her culture brought back through the prism of this alien and dominant culture. So I was wondering, have you ever had that kind of experience?

**LY:** What you're touching on is this quite controversial and sensitive area of cultural appropriation, and it's a tender area for many people. This is definitely a conversation that could go on for several hours. On the one hand, how do these teachings actually transform a culture and get transformed by a culture other than this mutual dynamic of exchange? And what's the intention of taking a spiritual practice and being selective about the elements that you bring into your culture? So it's definitely a very complex experience, and for me, it really depends on what my intention is. Is it to deeply understand the culture of origin in which the Dharma is embedded in order to understand what the primal core teachings are so that I can re-language them or reoffer them in a way that creates the most open door for people to traverse?

**RC:** So what I hear you saying is: intention is key both for the person who's offering the teachings and practices, and also for the person who's receiving them and that while appropriation is delicate and can sometimes be harmful, that also exchange has to happen for anything to keep moving and evolving so if we keep meeting it with a sense of openness and if our intention is one of honoring, then we can do as much as possible to safeguard and to venerate all of the tradition.

**LY:** Yeah. And people may have different sort of views than I do. But the mindfulness and the intention are really critical because again, the intention is not to cause harm, the intention is not to exoticize, it's not to romanticize, it's not to idealize, which often happens with Asian cultures in the West; the practices or the forms or the visuals, they're idealized and stereotyped.

**RC:** Right. And I wanted just to intervene here because there's something I want to share that really rocked me to my foundations and helped me. Because you mentioned three things, you said: romanticize, exoticize and idealize. And I'm thinking about Tibet because all those things have been definitely at play in the way that Americans have approached Tibet when they come from, let's say, a progressive tradition. You see the "Free Tibet" bumper stickers, etc., that have gotten deep into our culture, and I think I touched on this slightly in one other interview but didn't go all the way with it, which is to say that there was a time when one of my teachers who is a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner filled with veneration for the wisdom there, told me in the service of clarity and transparency that in the monasteries in feudal Tibet, there was such a competition for power and influence that it devolved into such a way that many of those monasteries had torture chambers in their basements for disloyal monks. And I think just the idea of Tibetan Buddhist practices meeting torture is something that would be mind-blowing for most people who hadn't been introduced to it. So on the one hand, I was just talking before and listening to you and reflecting that it's so important to venerate the traditions that we might borrow from, and on the other hand, if we see them as Shangri-La in some place and don't recognize that all of the shadow aspects of the human psyche are going to be present there just as everywhere, then somehow we can't be as mindful.

**LY:** Right. I am not as familiar with the Vajrayana or the Tibetan tradition, but I do know that within the Theravadan tradition, the cultures of origin are somewhat idealized and that actually can be an obstacle to how the teachings can really come into this culture. And so the fact that, and maybe this is a dynamic around the convert identity of when you grew up in a particular religious tradition and then converted to a different one; but some of the most fundamental purists of an Asian tradition are Western converts who hold on to the idealization or a literalization of some of the teachings without seeing the cultural context of them, without seeing the cultural expression of them, and are just taking them and plopping them down in the culture of the cultures of the West.

**RC:** Yeah.

**LY:** And really for example, my readings around how the Dharma went into China and really sort of imbued that culture with that spiritual practice. It took 700 years. The Dharma coming into North America, we're not even at the 200 year mark yet. How this process takes is not something that we have any control over in a sense.

**RC:** I want to just tell two brief personal anecdotes that might inform this and make it really alive for people because these themes are so rich, and as you say, we could go on with them for quite some time. The first thing I want to say is that as a Jewish American, and I was schooled pretty significantly both in conservative Judaism and then I went to Israel and studied more traditional forms of Orthodox Judaism, I was always aware of these dynamics we're talking about now around the subject of Kabbalah, as some people would know it. Because where I studied, I wanted to know all about that when I went to Israel. And my teachers there said, "Oh you know what, that's not how it works. You study traditional forms of Jewish ritual and you study the Torah, and maybe 30 or 40 years after you've mastered all of that, then you get introduced to the mystical teachings. And here in the West, whether it's through Madonna or otherwise, people often hear about the Kabbalah and they don't want any of that other stuff; that would be very inconvenient. They have to eat differently; they have to pray all the time; they just want to go right to the mystical teachings. And so I've noticed that and I know I've been triggered by that sometimes and also been triggered a little bit around that appropriation issue because again, just speaking personally, one thing is that my own wife is really interested in and influenced by Kabbalah's teachings, and shows things to me. Sometimes I learn but also my first reaction because I'm human is, "Hey, wait a minute (laughs), that's completely out of context. And how are you, my shiksa"—that's the Yiddish word for non-Jewish woman, "How is my shiksa wife bringing the Kabbalah to me? There's something wrong with this picture." (Laughs)

**LY:** (Laughs)

**RC:** And just to go one step further in that regard, my best friend growing up in childhood for about 15 years of my life is a woman and she also happens to be a celebrity. And when I was growing up, she loved the Judaism in my house or really as it came through me. I was her conduit to Jewish tradition, such that she even was an honored guest at my Bar Mitzvah. As a matter of fact, there's a suburban American tradition that different people of honor in your family light a candle at the ceremony, the celebration for your Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and I said, "I wanted this girl to light the candle," because she is my absolute best friend. My parents said, "No, there's no way that we will allow a non-Jewish person to light that candle at your Bar Mitzvah." And so I put my foot down. This was in 1970s California, and we had a huge battle of wills until finally, we agreed that she could light a candle, but also if I chose a boy and he had to be Jewish.

**LY:** (Laughs)

**RC:** So you see both of them in the pictures back then in my 13<sup>th</sup> year. The reason I brought that up is that this best friend of mine, we're still loving to each other from a distance but we are not very much in contact. So a few years back, people started sending me newspaper articles about her conversion to Judaism. And now she's actually a prominent Jewish voice in certain circles and it's just mind-blowing to me (laughs). And also, even though I don't come from Brooklyn, some of my family members do, and I wanted to say when I heard all about this, "Hey, what am I, chopped liver?"

**LY:** (Laughs)

**RC:** Like in the origin story of her Judaism that is now available for public consumption, there is no me. There is no next door neighbor across the street. There is no Bar Mitzvah. There was none of that, I'd been erased.

**LY:** (Laughs) But what is beautiful about that story is how you were a door into her spiritual practice and the piece of the story—I hear the erasing which I would find painful, but I also hear how skillful you were in not discriminating against a non-Jewish person who had this interest in practice, even at that young age. That's the challenge of all of our spiritual communities. How can we keep our doors widely open? Because it's not just about inviting people into the door, it's about can you create the conditions in which people can walk through that door, light that candle, and be interested and engaged to stay in the room creating even a different community by their presence. So I think that's where our challenge with culture lies. One of the things that Dr. King said in one of his greatest statements was, "Sunday mornings is still the most segregated time of the week when people go out into their respective spiritual communities." And creating that opportunity for the mingling of our cultural experience and the sharing of that in a space that's safe, in a space that honors the differences—what more is there to a definition of community?

**RC:** Yes, definitely. So I want to use my Bar Mitzvah as a segue (laughs).

**LY:** Sure.

**RC:** Because there was another part of it as well and that is that when you're the boy/man of honor, you have the head table and all of your friends sit with you at the head table, at least this is the way that it used to be. And I submitted the list of people to sit at the head table with me and they were all girls.

**LY:** (Laughs)

**RC:** And once again, my parents refused and they forced me to invite and to have sitting at the head table a number of boys who I wasn't really that close with at all, just to create some sort of balance. And part of the balance I think was a little bit around feeling worried. Was I effeminate? Was I gay? It's just not right. There needed to be those boys there. So we've been talking in terms of inclusion and bridge crossing and diversity. We've been speaking mostly about your Asian tradition, but you're also gay and write about that really eloquently, and I'm wondering if for you, that everything that we've been saying just crosses over to that dimension of your experience, or if there are particular things that arise out of sexual orientation in terms of this discussion we've been having today around opening and including and seeing that we haven't touched on?

**LY:** Well, being a gay man has been a continuing unfolding process for me and maybe for other gay people too; there are these places that because of how we are perceived and how we are treated by the external world and the external conditions, it is a spiritual practice to gain some freedom from that, from the boxes that we are placed in. One of the realizations that I had early on in Buddhist practice was when I started really exploring these identities that I had as a Chinese American, as a man, as a gay man, I did this exercise of just listing all of these identity categories that I identified with and associated with and I realized that none of these words or even explications of these words could really fully describe who I am as a person, who I am as this living being. And it began to put my sexual orientation, my cultural identity in this larger field that on the relative level, yes it is really important. It is really important that I be able to create a spiritual life and a spiritual family with the people that I love. And that community, the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender community—because I have the privilege and the opportunity to practice with them in the beginnings of my practice, I had the sense of safety that I could just relax. I wasn't defended, trying to figure out, “Do I belong in this retreat? Do I not belong? Do I belong in this community? What do I have to do? What kind of baggage do I have to leave at the door in order to be a part, so that I can feel a part of this group?”

Relaxing into an LGBT community, that practice, was such a gift because it allowed me to get familiar on a visceral level the spiritual principles that I could take out into my world that was a little bit more messy; that had the cultural conflicts and the discrimination and the racism and the heterosexism out there; and still remember that that suffering doesn't define who I am. This space, the ability to have that space of knowing, it reminds me of one of the parables about the Buddha



sitting before his awakening, and Mara, the god who is the tempter and the destructor assailing him with all these weapons and all of these rocks and tornadoes, and that's what the external world can do to any oppressed community. They can tell you, "You don't belong; you're not worthy; you're not human; you don't deserve marriage. You don't deserve all the stuff." And Mara in that story of the Buddha—the beautiful imagery is that all of these rocks and weapons fell at the Buddha's feet as celestial flowers and all the tornadoes and the wind storms didn't ruffle his robes in the least.

And when Mara challenged the Buddha and said, "I have these thousands of armies in back of me proclaiming that that is my seat that you're sitting in. Get off of it. Who is your witness?" And that's the famous image that is portrayed in so many Buddhist statues of him just very gently with his middle finger of his right hand touching the Earth and having the Earth witness his being, and that was enough. That was enough, that he belonged in this life regardless. He belonged in his seed of freedom regardless of what any external voice says or demands. That's a measure of freedom and that has been part of my teaching practice: to create that sense of safety and belonging so that people can access that image, that metaphor, that archetype that the Buddha has offered us for these thousands of years, that is still relevant because he was a human being and so are we; that there is freedom regardless of what the external conditions of suffering are. And from that place of freedom, you can actually greatly transform, not only your life but the world around us.

**RC:** So in what you were sharing, I heard echoes of some of our themes from earlier because on the one hand it was practicing with those who were your tribe, so to speak, that allowed you to relax.

**LY:** Yes.

**RC:** And then therefore recognized that as Walt Whitman said, "I am large, I contain multitudes"; that your tribe is not the definition of who you are ultimately and certainly not spiritually. But probably you couldn't have gone the other way. You couldn't have just embraced your universality and really lived it without coming through that sense of safety and relaxation that could only come from not having to ask, "What do I have to leave at the door to belong to this?"

**LY:** You pose a very interesting question because my personal path was the way that I described. I don't know, I would imagine that it's possible to go the other way, but that wasn't my experience and there is also the attachment of the path that I took; that also is important to articulate and to share in that these, what I call culturally specific practice forms, whether it's retreats for LGBT

folks, or whether it's retreats for communities of color, or for women, or for young people, they are doors into touching our hearts and minds with freedom. They are doors into the practice and it is easy when we're not as aware as we could be to attach to the door; to attach to the form; to attach to this specific retreat; that "I can only find freedom here." And that's not the invitation of the door. The door is the invitation into a much broader landscape so that you can take your spiritual faculties and strengths and the things that you learned walking through that door so that you can practice with anyone, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstance, even if Mara is throwing his 10,000 armies at you. That's where the spiritual rubber hits the road.

**RC:** Yeah.

**LY:** And that's I think the beauty of this path through your identity. It doesn't go around identity and it doesn't attach to identity. It goes through identity and holds it along with that sense of universality.

**RC:** Yeah. I'm just bowing to that and cheering at the same time. I absolutely love how you stated that. I was also thinking as you were talking about this really powerful question, I want to restate it again: "What do I have to leave at the door to belong here?" Safety in the work that I do with groups is paramount and we set out what safety means in terms of how we accept everyone as they are moment by moment and there are certain things that are implicit in that safety that we don't actually speak. And what is implicit, I think, is something along the lines of those mind practices towards diversity that I spoke of that you wrote earlier and that people can see at your website which is [LarryYang.org](http://LarryYang.org).

#### **4. What is Safe Enough?**

**RC:** So you can come and join this group and maybe the only thing that you have to leave at the door is your need or choice to exclude or invalidate or reject what you see here in others. And it's a paradox because if somebody comes in with racism that they want to attach to or sexism or if they come into the room and the sacred space with the idea that things that are objectionable to them about other people aren't okay, then the safety is very superficial.

That's why I was so appreciative of a man who came to a workshop some years ago. I think there were two men and ten women, and he was feeling very uncomfortable and he had done a lot of work in his practice, and he came the second morning after we'd all convened once and he said, "I feel that there's something that I need to say or I'm going to not be fully present and authentic

here.” And then he began to speak about his own experience with pornography in his life. And he was taking a giant risk because out of those ten women there, it was going to be likely that some of them would be deeply triggered by what he had to share. But he needed to know for himself that he was present and not hiding. He also needed to know that even if those people were triggered, that somehow something about himself that he was disclosing didn’t disqualify him from being safe in the circle. So that’s one example, and of course, we could get scores of those examples, but I’m just drawn to see from our discussion today how safety means you don’t have to leave anything at the door, except your belief that anybody else in the group has to leave something at the door.

**LY:** And also the container of safety is relative to the intentions of the purpose of the group gathering. I have actually been in a similar, not exactly, the same conversation that you’re describing. I view that for those of us who create the container, that’s why those precepts are so important to create the safety in how to be together in the moment because even if we seem to look alike or seem to act alike, we are all different and we can’t assume anything on each other’s behaviors or backgrounds or conditioning. And each of our needs, and this is where this could go on to a whole another area of community building and what is this practice of sangha and what is this container of community that we create even for a short time in a retreat because each of us comes with different needs. The more that our needs gets seen, the more safe we feel. Well, in life, in the reality, the practical realities of life, not all our needs are going to be met and there is no 100% safe container in this life plane. What is safe enough? And what needs are enough met to allow the collective experience of safety to be beneficial? Because the reality is in the situation, in the gender situation that you’re describing, what I hear is that the needs of a one person actually, not only contradicted and intersected with the needs of, say, the other women in the room, it actually harmed their needs. And this is a complex area for us to hold as teachers or facilitators; that we create a space that’s safe enough; that even in the intentions for absolute, nothing is absolute. Absolute safety is not possible in this relative reality.

**RC:** So to create a container that is safe enough in a retreat, in a family, in a city, in a country; I mean, that’s a beautiful consideration recognizing that there isn’t going to be absolute safety, but what is safe enough? And coming back to the example that I gave and informing it with your wisdom, this person had a need to be accepted as he was, but also as you’re describing, the women in the group, and now we’re just making it up, but let’s just go with it—they had a need not to be objectified; to be seen as whole people, and so there’s the intersection. I think that’s probably

something that we could see happening everyday in every realm. So it's interesting, because we just have a few minutes left and there are a couple of things that I wanted to talk to you about and one of them was your particular interest in seeing how contemplative practice can influence and support the movement towards social justice. It seems to me that what we're talking about right now is one huge example of that, because the more that we can learn to recognize and value each other's needs and also the more that we can recognize that we can't have all of those needs met; but there's a threshold that we can aspire to—that inclusion, that awareness is going, by its very nature, to promote social justice. But I'm wondering, following on that, if there's anything that you would want to add that you're particularly excited or passionate about around this theme of how your own contemplative practice relates to the quest for social justice?

**LY:** My sense of all the people that inspire me, by their work in changing and transforming the world, all of them had deeply root of spiritual practices, and it not just informed but it sustained their energy. Because, I'll speak from my own experience as a social activist, that there were times especially when I was younger and I was much more attached to a certain social outcome, and I was driven towards that kind of social change; that I would forget to take care of my inner life. I would forget to take care of the energies of both my mind and heart that I needed to engage in such challenging work. And I would burn out I have seen this with other folks too so that's why I feel that I can broaden, just from my own experience, to others that we need some place of spiritual sustenance in order to walk this path that is really upstream. And that's what the teachings of the Buddha say that awakening is, it's going up the cultural stream of unconsciousness. And social injustice is primarily driven by this unconsciousness that these harmful activities are actually going to lead to happiness, and they're not.

**RC:** So going up upstream, I want you to repeat that because I think it's so powerful that the practice is going upstream. Can you say it again?

### **5. Going Up The Stream of Unconsciousness**

**LY:** The practice, whether it's a practice of social awareness, injustice, or personal awareness and transformation, is going up the stream of unconsciousness. Because the unconscious mind is so powerful, our awareness and our mindfulness is so important. And I give this very short example because I was a social worker at one time and I know this as a dynamic that you would rush to help someone who is in front of you, a client, and the problems are enormous or the issues are enormous, and you rush to solve their problem and you actually make it worse. What mindfulness invites is

just that space of taking in with space the other person's life; taking in the situation so that you can move from this place of wisdom and insight and compassion and that our hearts are called to transform suffering. But if we do it unconsciously, we'll actually create more suffering.

**RC:** Yeah. And on that note I just want to share another brief personal story. I was very active in the 70s in California in the movement towards farmworker rights, and there was a famous proposition on the ballot, Proposition 13, that Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers were advocating for, and this became my mission. I would ditch school to put bumper stickers on people's cars to try to get Proposition 13 passed and it had lots of momentum. It was all about human rights; it was pretty basic. And then because of the way the laws were and still are in California, towards the end of a political campaign, you can put any commercial on the air that you want and if you have enough money, you can lie as much as you want. So this pretty straightforward fairness proposition in the end was defeated and to me it was devastating. I was, I remember, 16 years old at the time. And I went to, after that defeat, what the farmworkers put on and called 'a victory party'. I was enraged. I thought, "How could you all be dancing and singing and joyful when the forces of destruction had just rained down upon you and are you all in denial? Are you crazy?" And of course, I was acting all of this out within myself, but the reason that I'm bringing it up is to say that, in order not to burn out and along the lines of what you mentioned, I had to learn that in attachment to any particular outcome with any particular timing was only going to create suffering for me and for others. And I mean, that's a practice that I think I'm still forever practicing.

**LY:** And the invitation of social justice and activist work is the invitation to expand this practice from the personal to the collective, which has so much more impact on the world. So that what I hear that celebration and the farmers engaging in is a practice that Thich Nhat Hanh is well-known for offering and that is when there's a problem, when there's pain, where is the non-problem? Where is the non-pain? Because the joys and sorrows are all in our life. Our lives are never about the sorrows only. It's never just about that piece of our life and when we can open to the fact that regardless of the defeats, or the imperfections, or even the failures that we experience, that there is still is the joy and the support and the achievements that we've accomplished; that helps balance out this place of equanimity that we actually live in as opposed to practice or try the gain. This aspect of equanimity is what can sustain the movement of transformation, especially collectively and socially.

**RC:** Yeah. And there's one other piece of that that I just want to highlight for me personally, and that is that if I have great opportunity and I have great freedom in my life through no earning of my own, just the accident of my place of birth and the timing of my birth; if I don't then celebrate that and live it fully and dance it fully and love it fully, in some ways it's an insult to the creation that has brought it about. So there's a way sometimes I think that activists want to wear a kind of hairshirt to be small and to diminish and not live fully and celebrate because it seems like it would be an affront to those who don't have and who aren't as free. It took me a long time to come to recognize that that helps no one and also limits what's possible in me. So to be humble and aware and to work for the opportunity and freedom for others is something that is still a deeply embedded principle in me, but to feel bad on their behalf and then to contract my life as a result no longer feels like it's spiritual, it feels like a kind of denial.

**LY:** Well, and I think that what you're describing is the near opposite of compassion. Compassion is turning the awareness, the loving presence, towards difficulty in order to transform it and the near opposite which masquerades or looks like compassion is a form of pity or a form of a feeling this detachment from it. Again the awareness and just being with is so important in all aspects, whether it's our personal transformation or our collective one.

**RC:** Yeah, absolutely. So I want to end with a final area. I wanted to speak to whatever you feel is appropriate to share around these themes where you find yourself currently either still triggered, or growing towards, in terms of this way of being that you have so beautifully articulated for us today is—what part of it do you still find your self coming up against your own edges?

**LY:** All of them. (Laughs)

**RC:** (Laughs)

**LY:** Really, it's a lifelong practice and I don't pretend to have gotten anywhere in it. Although I have felt the energy and the joy of the practice, there's a huge laundry list of things and situations that still trigger me including how long this work takes; and just to be more specific, this work of multi-cultural awareness and awareness that includes the cultural experience of going upstream from the way that these teachings are currently really being offered. I get resistance all the time; I get resistance from practitioners; I get resistance from other teachers; some of it is active resistance and some of it is sort of passive, either indifference or not even knowing what they don't know. And I find myself questioning myself, "How long can I do this?" Or, "Why am I doing this?" Or,

“Where do I get fed? Where do I get sustained?” And it’s this ebb and flow; it’s this organicity that sometimes I’m incredibly available and feeling energized by the work, and sometimes I feel burned-out and weary. Just remembering and coming back to the teachings that there is this ebb and flow and that it’s not a single trajectory or it’s not linear in its development, and that there is a larger picture that I actually don’t need to fully grok. I mean, I am just walking one step at a time and that’s enough for me because the attachment to knowing, to understanding can create suffering, too.

**RC:** So on the ground, I hear certain things that I really resonate with, and I want to kind of check them with you. So I know myself that even though I believe that the arc towards justice is long—I think I just butchered that phrase but you know what I’m talking about.

**LY:** Right. The arc of the universe bends towards justice.

**RC:** Thank you. But we know that that arc is a long one and we make great strides and then we fall backwards or even now in the U.S. where both of us are talking, we see forces that want to take us backwards that are often a huge part of the public conversation. So for me on the ground sometimes, I can attest to that desire to celebrate who I am and what I believe and what I stand for that I mentioned a few moments earlier, but also I can become depleted, I can become depressed, I can become cynical, and I see all of these as places where I shut down. And again, on the level of the day to day, that might look like, “Oh, there’s a demonstration that feels important to me to attend, but really I just can’t summon up the will and I just have to watch some bad TV instead.” And so I’m wondering just in your life on that very kind of on the ground and granular level, beyond the fact that we’re all in process always, what would we see that we could relate to person to person in you that you would want to share as somebody who embodies so much wisdom and has so many gifts to give in helping us see oppression and see racism and all of that. If we were behind-the-scenes, looking at how it is with you...

### **6. The Role of Trash T.V. in Not Burning Out**

**LY:** (Laughs) You would be looking at BBC’s Murder Mysteries, for one.

**RC:** Ah! (Laughs)

**LY:** (Laughs) You know, I...

**RC:** You have a weakness for whodunnits?

**LY:** Oh, I totally do, Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot and all of those great escape venues. But this whole thing of taking care of self is really important and I get so much sustenance from my husband and my family and we need those allies supporting our backs. This practice, whether you were talking about meditation or whether we're talking about social justice, we're not meant to do this alone and I think that's the conditioning of our Western culture; this individualistic sort of pull yourself up by your own bootstraps type of cultural conditioning, the process of moving through this difficult issue, we are not meant to do it alone. So when I do watch trashy TV, I watch it with someone so that there's just more enjoyment. I'm in Palm Springs right now and Palm Springs, as campy as it is, has a Marilyn Monroe Film Festival and it was great. They have it outdoors on a Friday night. People bring their picnics, and there's a sense of a neighborhood community forming over this campy 1947 film. And it gives me a lot of joy. It gives me a lot of space to know that that there's enjoyment in the midst of the important work that we do.

**RC:** I love hearing that and it also causes me to out myself a little bit to say that sometimes when I'm watching either trashy TV or some kind of independent cinema that I love, for my own replenishing of the well, I'm kind of the opposite of you. Sometimes I just want to be there with my snack.

**LY:** (Laughs)

**RC:** And my cordless headphones and I don't want to talk to anybody for a really long time, and if somebody wanted to join me in that experience, I have to say, "Well, maybe, but totally on my own terms."

**LY:** (Laughs) So there are different paths to freedom.

**RC:** Yes, yes.

**LY:** Different paths to destruction.

**RC:** Yeah. Well I just want to say that I am so delighted to get a chance to know you a little bit and to delve into these realms and as we both said, there could be much more. I know there is so much that I could learn from you and I want to invite everybody who's been listening today to not only take very personally everything they've heard from you, but also if they're inspired, to learn more about you and learn how to be able to work with you. I'm just glad that you are who you are doing what you're doing and it's inspiring for me just to kind of breathe into it with you for a while.



**LY:** Well, thank you so much Raphael. I really appreciated learning from your personal stories as well. I've just totally enjoyed this conversation and I really appreciate your invitation to engage with it.

## **Part 2**

### **1. Encore: The Deeper Dimensions of Safety**

**RC:** Larry Yang, welcome back to Teaching What We Need to Learn for part two of our discussion. Thanks so much for joining me.

**LY:** Thanks, Raphael, for inviting me back to explore this issue that I think is important to maybe provide a little bit more detail and clarity on.

**RC:** You're welcome. We have been in discussion since our first talk because there was a passage that we discussed having to do with safety in groups, where as you've told me since then, you kind of got caught a little off-guard and on further reflection realized some things that have to do with power and privilege and groups and race and gender and all of those issues that we were talking about in our larger conversation; and you were, to be really clear and honest about it, uncomfortable with what I had brought up and how I shared it and I was really interested about that. I wanted to learn more. We had some email exchanges and we talked on the phone prior to this interview, all because you and I share an intention to be as sensitive and skillful with these issues as possible, both as teachers and practitioners. So I'm really thrilled that you're willing to do this and I think it adds something really deeper to the series and its dimensions, so thank you again.

**LY:** I appreciate that. It's always a dilemma or a judgment call as to how much to explore these issues because of safety itself. And also my own limitations of awareness or collective limitations of awareness and the passage that you were referring to, or that I was referring to, was when you were talking about the group of ten women and two men, in which one of the men, in order to feel that he belonged to the space, needed to disclose his involvement with pornography.

And what is so, I think, complex, at least in that moment, was that story caught me off-guard. I knew that I wasn't feeling comfortable with it. But in the moment, especially because we were being recorded in real time, I couldn't identify it. And you know, I think the passage went on to discuss the lack of safety in the world and how sometimes the needs of one group, not only in just sex, but sometimes harm other groups. But what I wasn't able to articulate in the moment was the

example that you offered actually also had the overlay of power and privilege around different life experiences.

And one of the things, in hindsight—which is often sometimes clearer than in the moment, one of the things that I wish I would've said that was different about the man articulating what would make him feel safe is that his safety was dependent on expressing an objectification of other people, which is a way of causing harm. And that even though he was feeling less empowered and needing to define himself, he was empowered enough to say something in that group that was not the majority of his experience.

So if we were to flip the situation, and this is what I came to after our conversation, that instead of being 2 men and 10 women, if it was 10 men and 2 women and the men were going on in their kind of heterosexual male conversations about stereotypes and sexuality, would the women feel as empowered to verbalize the space that they needed to create their own safety? That indicates to me that there's a differential in how we experience our power and privilege; not everybody has the same power and privilege based on one's acculturation, education and conditioning. And so in other words, the playing field is not level. And part of our collective awareness practice is being aware not just of our own experience, but being aware of other people's.

This is what the Buddha called Internal and External Awareness. And when we are aware of experiences outside of our own, that is actually how we experience this thing of interconnection of the life that is beyond our own experience. There's so many things I can that condition to stay inward in terms of this experience of self, including this unseen effect of privilege and power that the guys think, "Oh well, I can say whatever I want," without really realizing the impact it has on the group that they're in. And may be that particular man needed to process that, but that may not have been the appropriate group to process it with. And so right timing and consideration, which are all part of spiritual teachings, is part of the experience itself. And the last thing that I want to add—and I know that I'm talking a lot—

**RC:** (laughs) No, that's good! That's why we're here.

**LY:** The last thing that I want to talk about is to reflect on our own process between you and I, that I think one of the reasons I didn't touch it as soon as I would like to, meaning in the conversation itself, is because we were two guys. And we have our male identified conditioning and I think that if there was a female in the conversation, the impact would have been even in the conversation

itself. So this was my learning edge of learning how to feel into someone else's experience beyond my own. And then for me, this is part of awareness practice. It's not just a sensation of the body, the heart and mind, but it's also the sensations of the body, heart and minds of the people around me.

**RC:** And I think you just spoke to what the question was for me and that was if we wanted to share with listeners what is the essential piece that we wanted to bring attention to that takes the example in our first interview to a new dimension and look at it through different eyes. It seems like it's just what you described, that the fullness of an awareness practice does include also the awareness of others, their situations, their responses, their feelings to things that are happening not just to them, but between us and them.

**LY:** Yes. And you know, one of the current Buddhist scholars, Analia, has written a very popular commentary on the subject of the Satipatthana Sutta, which is the Four Foundations of Mindfulness from his teachings. He looks at this teaching of both internal and external awareness and I'm going to paraphrase him, but he says sometimes we can think like 'what is being asked of me, is something like extra-sensory perception'. And he says, 'No, that's not the point. The point is all you need is some common sense and awareness.' The sense that if I feel unseen and marginalized in this way, like in all probability, someone else is going to feel marginalized or unseen in a similar way. So for example, that flip of the gender balance in the group is just an exercise in internal and external awareness, how would it be if the roles were reversed? How would it be if I were living and feeling from the other person's shoes? How would I feel? Most likely, I can extrapolate that.

**RC:** Yeah. Now, you did say, though, in our discussion something else in this regard, which is one cannot see one's own privilege unless there is a specific mindfulness that is cultivated. So that awareness practice from the other that you're describing is a cultivation, but it seems to me that the first part of what you shared is really super important as well; that none of us, no matter how wise we are, no matter how far we've traveled, can see our own privilege often unless it's pointed out to us.

**LY:** Yes, that's true because sometimes privilege is languaged as a fish swimming in water—the fish isn't really aware of the water until there's an absence of water. And so being aware of what you're not aware of is a starting point; that at least you're sensitive to those areas of "Oh, something's not feeling right, which is what was going on in our head during our first conversation.

I can't pinpoint it yet, but can I look further as to what's going on?" And that's where our awareness can support a deepening of this exploration around our experience and identity.

**RC:** So there's a couple of follow ups I want to ask you about in this regard. One of them is that you were very caring and gentle as we were having our conversations since the first interview, and one of the things that you shared with me as skillfully as you could and not wanting to be critical, was that you didn't think that the example that I gave around safety and this man and this issue around pornography was such a helpful example. And ultimately that's what's led to our further conversation and hopefully it will get turned around and be helpful. Is it what you've been speaking to already that made it seem to you less than ideal because it didn't in and of itself as a teaching example surface these issues of privilege, or is there more to it than that that might be helpful for me to know and learn and also for listeners?

**LY:** I appreciate your question and your openness to talk about it. You know, it's true. I mean, you know, outside of our first conversation, I don't know you that well. And so I was very careful about also wanting to know if it was okay to question the story that you brought in because I didn't want to undermine your facilitation of this beautiful series, which I've been listening to. And so there was a question in my own mind: so how much should I say?

And really not only to be compassionate and kind, but also to be skillful: what is of benefit for both you and the audience? So your openness and willingness to explore this area around yes, it would be beneficial to be as transparent as possible, helps me relax into saying that the one of the whole processes of spiritual development is learning. And we actually don't learn from things we already know. We learn from our mistakes, so I hope there was no sense of judgment or blame around the choice, but my intention is really what can we learn from this? And I also just want to appreciate this conversation; it certainly stretches me and, as you have mentioned, stretches you and that's what I think I would like to offer the audience; that the stretch itself might feel a little awkward or uncomfortable, but there's so much growth, there's so much opportunity to gain from being in that place of not quite knowing where the conversation's going, but it feels authentic and transparent and we're doing the best that we can.

**RC:** Great! Well, I appreciate that. And the other follow-up question that I had is one of those, 'if we could wave a magic wand kind of questions'. So you spoke earlier about in the moment, everything that you would have wished for didn't come to you right then when we were talking it

and only later did you realize there was something missing that would be good to address. So I'm curious if we kind of come full circle and we imagine you in that situation with the sensitivities that we're learning about today and there's that same group and we've set up a basic tenets for safety and it's the same ratio, you know, two men and ten women, and the same thing happened: the person shared out of a place of privilege, his issue that he was vulnerable about that had the potential impact to sort of destabilize the safety and the connection of the group of the women present; do you have a sense if you waved a magic wand and you were the facilitator and had everything right there at the tip of your mind and heart to share, how you would handle that moment?

**LY:** (laughs) I think that I would have both tried to acknowledge his need and also acknowledge, at least in the space itself, that it may be triggering or difficult for the other members of the group to hear; to try to hold that tension and to also do some teaching around the appropriateness of disclosure; that in order to create a safe enough space, we actually don't have to disclose everything that's going on in our minds. Our minds are basically kind of wild things and the more mindful we are of both self and other folks, we realize that we can create safety that is not dependent on just our experience, but that safety includes other people.

And so I would have used it as a teaching moment and maybe to say something like, something that I like to say, "That sexism is not just the problem of women or racism is just not only the problem of people of color. These are issues that are issues for all people because if we're really going to create the safety and the healing through these experiences, everyone needs to be involved."

**RC:** Good! So I want to stay with that if I could for a moment because sometimes in couples work that I do, one member of the couple will say something out of his or her own experience and I have an immediate sense that it's really inflammatory for the other person and that the person who is speaking is not clued into that. And it's a moment with just two in my facilitation where my intention is to as artfully and sensitively as I can to bring to light that inflammatory aspect to check with the other person, "Is that right?" and to still honor the first person's expression, but maybe bring attention to the way that they're feeling or issue is expressed.

And it's one of the most difficult kinds of moments that comes up, even in just doing couple's work, because the first person is wanting to be authentic and honest and that's why we're there, and if that person who maybe even took a chance to share something hard to share, ends up leaving that

encounter feeling criticized or somehow made wrong, then the opposite of what we most want to happen is going to happen. They might get more distant, they might feel more shame. So it seems to me that if you take that example that I'm giving and you extrapolate it to a larger group, like the one we're talking about, that it's a minefield, first of all, and also completely unpredictable because we don't know about any of the responses of the other people who aren't in the place of privilege. So it seems like I guess you were talking about wild mind before and I'm thinking that bring a group of people together like that and its wild group mind almost automatically.

## **2. Healing Through, Not Around**

**LY:** Right. And your analogy in the couple's work and expanding them does speak to the complexity and how it's difficult to actually provide the larger container when the trigger is inflamed in the moment. It's much easier to either look at hindsight or to process it when it's not quite so heated. And the ability to go through the fire over and over again actually begins to lessen it because actually my sense is that people begin to have a sense of toleration and even acceptance that this is the nature of the 10,000 joys and 10,000 sorrows of our relationships. Whether it's the relationship that's intimate; you know the first fight you have with your partner, you think you're going to break up. But after you learn that landscape, that, "Oh, it's possible to survive. It's possible to more than survive these disagreements." Then the disagreements become part of the landscape, but not the landscape itself.

This is bringing into my mind that we just finished the two-year training of Dharma Teachers and Dharma Leaders at Spirit Rock and there were 95 people of which 33 were from communities of color and 29 were from LGBT, Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender populations. And this, it's a culturally shifting program because no program has ever trained more people of color or more communities from the LGBT group in one program ever. And over two years, the first 2 or 3 retreats, you could feel the dynamic of fragmentation. You know, people just want to split into like corners of groups of people of color, groups of white folks, groups of queer folk, and yet there was something connecting them that we kept reminding them over and over, that there's a larger purpose of you being here as Dharma teachers, as Dharma leaders in both secular and spiritual contexts.

So at the last retreat, which was only just last week, which is why it's so fresh in my mind, we had a story circle in which 95 people were sitting in the room and people were telling some stories. And after a while, after the 8<sup>th</sup> person, someone noticed that after all this time of being together, none of

the stories was coming from the people of color. Again, that sense of agency, that sense of empowerment, 8 people who came in to telling a story were all white folks. And then, you know, in one of the stories, there was a joke that was made that took advantage of another identity group.

So even in this program that was trying to develop leadership in the spiritual values and teachings, people were making mistakes. And people were not just making mistakes, they were making mistakes unconsciously that were harming others. And what was different about where we had arrived by this 5<sup>th</sup> retreat is that people didn't fragment into their places of safety; they didn't caucus into— what they did is they held it together and processed. And that it wasn't as inflammatory an experience because they realized this is the landscape of our own purification. It was actually incredibly beautiful that none of the facilitators, none of us as the program teachers, needed to do anything about it because it was the community that held the space that allows for difference and it also allowed for our very human unconsciousness to still be imperfect and to learn from, "Okay, so how do we do this better?" So all that to say I have great hope because I see the possibilities and how our spiritual practice can create better experiences through these complexities.

**RC:** I love hearing all that and I really appreciate you sharing this last piece about the group that just completed and the mistakes that are made even amongst those who are, we can say, at the vanguard of working with some of these issues. And it helped me realize that going back to that original, let's say, in-artfully chosen example, that if we were to meet it with all the heart and mind and skill that we could, it seems like, well, one thing I'm taking away from what you're saying is that it's very important to recognize when something is potentially hot.

In other words, somebody shares something and maybe important for that person, it may also have reverberated and impacted and perhaps even wounded other people in the circle; this is what happens when people come together. It's not about blame; it's about growing in consciousness. And so being able to know, let's say, as a facilitator, speaking of myself, to know when things are reverberating inside of me that might be difficult or to know when I'm sensing when there's a heat in the room that's not just about one person; that these are opportunities, maybe even the most powerful moments of opportunity to address the in-between around safety that we don't always get to, and to surface some of the greatest barriers to safety that arise in situations of privilege, whether it's about power, gender, sexual identification, etc. So that if there is a holding that values everyone and that doesn't turn from the heat when people don't feel safe, then that's the greatest possibility to

develop a deeper understanding of what safety requires, and therefore the challenge of that moment ends up becoming possibly a greater opportunity that wouldn't have been there otherwise.

**LY:** Beautifully said. I'm not sure that I would have anything to add! (laughs)

**RC:** Well that's because I was listening very closely to you and learning as you were talking. And one thing I want to say because it'll be a wide swath of people that are listening to this: I mentioned to you offline that I come from a long activist background and I've sat in a lot of meetings that bogged down into very pained and painful places when it was all about group process and consensus and people would go screaming and pulling out their hair because nothing was getting done. And I think a lot of people have a sense that to pay really close attention to these details often does just put a monkey wrench into the gears and makes it impossible just to be and to be free and to just live, really. And I know that's one of the most common resistances to looking at what we've been talking about today with a greater degree of sensitivity.

So I'm interested, I want to come back to the group that just ended because you have such a really interesting example to share with us. As the people did that difficult work over time and were coming back over and over again to the community that they had created, did it feel tight? Did it feel freer? Was there a liveliness? Did it feel oppressive or maybe all of the above? What evolved out of those two years that might be instructive for those of us who on the one hand want to take such a journey, but also might be tentative because we feel like, "This could be too much, this could be overwhelming?"

**LY:** Right, yeah. And that's so understandable because when you touch these places in our collective psyche and experience, they can feel very fiery and overwhelming. And to the extent that we can, as you say, to turn towards as opposed to away; that freedom really is about going *through*, not around. And so that's what this group did. One of the things that they were encouraged to do and they took the challenge to really build relationships in many different ways. So here is a program for Buddhist teachers, primarily Theravada—although there was some Vajrayana and Mahayana practitioners there—and build relationships across difference.

So on the mundane level, you know, whether it's through the meals or story circles that we created, and I know that in meditation circles, story is diminished—you're encouraged in your meditation to drop beneath the story to what's beyond the story. And yet, you know, in both indigenous traditions and lots of cross-cultural examples, story is the vehicle of wisdom and story, once you hear



individual stories over and over again, you actually hear the universal story. And that universal story is the place that is the teaching of *anatta*, of non-self, right? It's beyond who we are.

So it's a different doorway into the same teachings and we hear each other's story; we get connected in familial and professional and other ways so that when the fire arises, we're held by something more than just the experience at hand. We're held by all these other connections that have been developed. And one of the things that this group—oh, it was just so beautiful—developed, is a chorale. So they began singing together, regardless of the difficulty. And some of the Kuan Yin chants and the *anicha sankara* chants morphed into this beautiful cross-cultural expression of art and music. And you could hear the overtones of gospel and indigenous drumming. So every night they practiced their singing practice together. And so in the last story circle, when the edges of our awareness came into light and the edges of our conditioning began to rub against each other, it was held in so much of a larger field. Not to diminish the harm that was caused, but it could be held and learned from without being traumatizing.

**RC:** Many years ago I took part in—I don't know what to call it exactly, but it's a certain kind of choir that was inspired by Ysaye Barnwell, one of the founding singers in Sweet Honey in the Rock. It was a gospel choir, I guess you could say, but open to people of all different walks of life. And so I was really reverberating with what you were saying because I realized if you sing with a big, open heart with other people, there's something that will happen that will create much more possibility for connection, as you were describing. And that's just about singing and you were also talking about a story. It suddenly struck me that you were saying how you heal anything by turning toward it and going through it and you can't do that by going around it. And Amen to that!

The piece that dawned for me as you were describing that was when it comes to social wounds, and by that I mean anything in society that we've experienced; that we can't heal those wounds separately; that we would have to heal them together; we would have to come together in the way that this group did because the wounds were made collectively.

**LY:** Right.

**RC:** And that seems really important to recognize because as a person of privilege, I need people who have been wounded, let's say, by racism or power or discrimination of any kind, I need them to help me heal and grow and they need me. So we really are in it together in a way that's much deeper than just that cliché.

**LY:** And to bring in, you know, our previous theme of safety, things have to be safe enough for that gathering to occur, you know? So the preliminary work, both internal and external, sometimes occurs in the safety of smaller groups of particular identifications, whether it's people of color groups or women's groups or a youth groups. But none of those specific groups are the end of the path because there is something beyond of course our cultural identification. And that piece, as you say, we can only begin to experience in the wholeness of our joys and our sorrows, our achievements and our wounds together. So on some level, I view this as not just a path of spiritual awakening, but human civilization that we're moving through; that we're uplifting our capacity to be fully human.

**RC:** That's beautiful! And you know the other day I had a book title pop into my mind; that happens to me sometimes, whether or not I ever write the book. But the book title is *Whatever's In The Way Is The Way*. And I'm not the first person to say that, it just popped into my mind as a title. But the reason that I wanted to bring that up in the context of where what sharing now is that the impatience that sometimes comes around "Can't we just move on?"—whether it's about any kind of wounding or past privilege, etc.; a kind of a wish and a naïve wish in a way. That's why I was always struck when I would learn about countries that went through really painful and often violent revolutions that then would have a truth and reconciliation commissions.

And there was a recognition that there was no way to start anew without really deeply honoring and accepting what had happened and facing it squarely. And it seems to me that the same theme that we're talking about, where it's inconvenient maybe to have to slow down and really hear all the voices and get a much deeper understanding of what had been unconscious to us previously; that's the work of human civilization that you were just describing. That's it! It's not a means to get somewhere else.

**LY:** Right.

**RC:** And so I look even today—and this is just for a moment maybe taking us a little bit a field from our original discussion—but I look at situations in our culture and see this truth playing out. So for instance, the United States became a nation of torturers just a short while ago. And after that happened, there was a change in the power structure in the administration. And there was a decision made to say, "We won't look back. It's in the best interest of our country to look forward and go forward and go forward together." And it seemed to me that along the lines that we've been

discussing today, there was a great wound and a great wrong that had been done and it will come back again and again to harm us as a country and as a community of people if we allow that kind of thing to happen and we don't take any kind of ownership or responsibility for it. So this again is not about the thing that we were talking about today in the specific, but it's the same kind of thing playing out, that wish that we could just say it's done already, let's move forward.

**LY:** Right. And that's why our practice, even if it's among just our families or communities, it really does radiate in all directions and so it's through the unconsciousness too, and that's how it has radiated to have such large karmic effects; that our awareness practice is so important at this point in our world and civilization—it is so greatly needed. Specifically because of examples that you just gave, that there is so much suffering in this world to heal through and not around.

**RC:** Yeah. And I just want to give one more example if I could, because you describing a really lovely Buddhist training. And it was just last week that somebody forwarded me an article about the Buddhist nun Pema Chodron wanting to meet Barack Obama. I think this was in an online article in the Shambhala Sun. The reason I wanted to bring it up is because in the comment section—and most people in the comment section at least have an affinity for Buddhism, regardless of whatever their practices might be—some people were really moved by the embrace of these two great leaders who play such an important role in our current cultural moment.

And then there was somebody else who came in and said beware of this image and this desire to feel good because the President who she's embracing is somebody who routinely sends unmanned drones to kill innocent people all around the world. And it seemed to me in that moment, as I first read it that if I had the widest, most spacious understanding, if I didn't turn away from anything, I might be able to see the greatness of both of those individuals and the camaraderie that they shared, and also see some really problematic choices that needed to be addressed and brought more into the public discussion around drones and what they do. But the reason I brought up this subject is because that person who brought up the subject of drones was immediately attacked in the discussion thread because people didn't want to include that. It felt to them like somehow that would give quarter to the critics and the haters and you know, can't you for a moment step away from your smaller concerns and see the goodness.

And I tried to just pause and breathe into the whole thing. It felt to me like it was a little bit of an example of what we were talking about today; that even in the places where people are the most

well-meaning and want to bring the most consciousness; that there's always stuff that's really hard to look at, not just personally, but especially inter-personally and culturally. This whole discussion that you and I have been having has sensitized me in that way too because I would say prior to our conversation, I would think I'm pretty good to go when it comes to diversity and a wider, broader point of view than most people; I'm very loving and inclusive and I've been out on the streets in protest with people, etc. But there's a way that I needed to continue to learn, as you described, and to make a mistake so that I could learn and then to also—and I guess this is the big piece—to come to recognize that I will keep doing that and I need to keep doing that if I want to grow, as opposed to that kind of sensibility of “I've been there, I've done that work, I'm pretty good to go with that.”

**LY:** May it be so for all of us because what you've just described is the intention to practice over and over again. It's why we come back to the breath over and over again even though we get distracted from it. We come back to the consciousness that we are more than just our own experiences; that there are so many different experiences in the world to value and honor and respect. And so, you know, coming back to: is the intention to learn? The theme of your whole series and so I'm just so appreciative of how much time you've devoted for this particular topic, but especially giving us the space to tease out the nuances, which at the beginning I wasn't even sure that we could get to, but I feel quite good about the place that we've come to.

**RC:** Oh, that's wonderful! And I was going to say, not to burden you and take over your life or anything, but since we don't always come to everything right away, I want you to know you're welcome to a part three! (laughs)

**LY:** (laughs) Thank you!

**RC:** Anytime you want to, write to me, I look forward to hearing about it. I look forward to making another mistake on my behalf and on the behalf of all of the listeners. And I'm saying that, you know, laughingly, but it's really true because we're not done with this. We're never done with this. And that's really, I think, one of the big teachings that you've offered people and I knew that I had to really take that extra step to reach out to you because otherwise, this offering couldn't have happened. So I'm really grateful to you, Larry, and I'm really grateful for the reminder about practice. I mean the series is called Teaching What We Need to Learn, which is another way of saying “We're all practicing.”

**LY:** Right. Well, thank you. Deep bows to you, Raphael, for creating this space and so appreciative of it.

**RC:** Likewise to you. Thanks, Larry!

## Integral Teachers

### Terry Patten



Integral Spiritual Practice founder Terry Patten is a leading voice in the fields of integral evolutionary practice, leadership, and spirituality. He speaks and consults internationally, connecting leaders and institutions worldwide. A community-builder, entrepreneur, and author of four books, Terry has worked for over three decades as a philosopher, activist, coach, and teacher, helping leaders embody higher consciousness in practical actions that transform complex systems. He is the author, with Ken Wilber, of “Integral Life Practice: A 21-Century Blueprint for Physical Health, Emotional Balance, Mental Clarity, and Spiritual Awakening,” and the host of the teleseminar series, “Beyond Awakening: The Future of Spiritual Practice.”

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#### 1. Teaching What We Need To Learn *Right Now*

**RC:** We talk all the time about the theme of this series: transparency along with vulnerability and authenticity. If it’s okay with you Terry, I want to tell a little story to get us started today.

**TP:** Sure.

**RC:** Well, most the time, people aren’t thinking about what’s happening to either the host of this program or the guest in the moments before we began taping our call. So I wanted to share with the listeners today that for me, the issue of transparency was very alive in my morning because I decided recently that one of the workshop participants from my last workshop at Breitenbush Hot Springs would be my new primary care physician. And already that had within it a kind of a wobble because there I was in my usual role, my leadership role, my convening role, and now I was going to be vulnerable in terms of my overall health and well-being. I was going to be showing-up in patient mode.

So I started this relationship, and it's been great. And this morning I had to go in to get some blood work done, and I thought I knew exactly where I was going. And perhaps because I hadn't been caffeinated yet because of the test I had to take, I got a little bit turned around. And so, on top of the unusual nature of the flipped relationship, I was late, and I didn't even know if I was going to get there on time or if the test was even going to be able to go forward. And I was feeling a lot of the stress that happens when you know people are waiting for you and you're letting them down, and I actually forgot to bring my cell phone with me so I couldn't call. And to top that all off, I went to that ancient device called a payphone and I tried to call information, and the payphone twice took all my money and disconnected the call. So eventually I got to the office, but by the time I was there, my stress was not only internal, something just I could feel, but I could tell it was kind of emanating from me. And I was self-conscious about it because, of course, I teach people to be with what's going on in the moment. And so as I described to the front office person and to my new doctor all about my crazy morning—getting lost and not being able to call them, etc.—I could hear a kind of windup in my voice. I could hear nervousness and, you know, a heart rate that wasn't flowing. And I was smiling about it as it was happening because I realized that no matter how evolved we become, no matter how well we learn what we teach, there's still going to be these moments in life where we have our physiological response and we're not going to be able to override it just with the power of presence, acceptance, etc..

The only good thing about it was I realized that I was going to talk about it with you, Terry, and share it with the listeners this morning. So that's what leads me to this moment. One other thing was that I couldn't caffeinate until I got home, so maybe listeners will hear that I'm talking a little faster with a little more excitement than usual as a result of just having my coffee right now.

**TP:** (Laughs) What a great way to start.

**RC:** Yes.

**TP:** (Laughs)

**RC:** So thank you for indulging me in all of that. And then also in terms of transparency, I want to add in addition to what I said earlier, you being one of my very closest friends, we've known each other for almost twenty years and we've been through many life chapters; many ups and downs. And it is actually one of the foundations of our friendship to abide in deep presence and

vulnerability with one another. So we're doing, live to the public so-to-speak, in this call what we do within for ourselves whenever we get a chance to get together.

**TP:** Yes, that's absolutely right. So the theme here: *Teaching What We Need to Learn*—at first, as I contemplated your invitation, you know because I love you and because I wanted to support anything you were doing, I want to say yes to whatever invitation you would give me. I said yes to this without much thought, of course, I would do this. But also, I was aware that this theme turns it on the head a bit, the usual rhetorical stance that a teacher is supposed to stand in, like when I am speaking to anyone about what I do understand—the lessons that I learned last year or whenever that are complete, that are fully digested, that are still not open and incomplete. Then using my own story as an example is entirely congruent. But when we say, “Teaching what we need to learn”—that's present tense. So it's not about teaching what I needed to learn last year or to teach me what I needed to learn ten years ago.

We're talking about teaching what we need to learn *right now*, and that means showing up in the place where I'm incomplete and where, if we were to think of things in a kind of conventional linear way, I wouldn't be in a position to teach. It's almost like outing yourself as an incomplete or broken or human person with flaws. And many of the people who I've co-taught with or who I've met as colleagues in the world of psychological and spiritual teaching, even people who teach in more conventional ways, feel most comfortable in the position of presenting themselves as complete. And it's almost like the rhetoric—a lot of the ways I've been taught to teach, all depend on standing in the place of your sanity and your serenity and your acceptance and your wisdom and your fullness and your trust and your radiance and your awakening and your clarity, and offering your teaching from that place; not from the place where you've been thrown off, where you're confused, where you're wounded, where you're broken, where you're hardened, where you're human in all those ways.

**RC:** Well...

**TP:** And...

**RC:** Let me jump in here.

**TP:** Yes. Go ahead.

## **2. From Cruelty Toward Love**



**RC:** I think it's a really important observation and I want to speak to it briefly because the title of the series is something I haven't spoken about in other calls yet. There is the adage that we all teach what we need to learn; and that's where the title comes from. It's sort the idea of the wounded healer—is there any other kind? And without the wounding, would someone be able to heal? So in terms of how I'm thinking about that—this is why I appreciate what you were just putting forward—it wouldn't make sense for somebody to be in the teaching role, and teaching about what was raw for them, exactly. But as they share when and if appropriate about what is off or unfinished or unresolved in them, there's something that happens between themselves and their students or listeners that's just really different. And it seems to come back to what you just said so perfectly: they “out themselves as human beings.” And this was behind my inspiration for the series—it seems whenever that happens and however that happens, somehow we all benefit.

**TP:** Yes, I'm totally with you. Because we talked about this and because I knew we we're going to have this conversation today, I have been feeling into this theme really deeply. It's been catalytic actually. I'm grateful for the invitation because I've already benefited from it even before doing the interview. I've realized that there's a sense in which the very heart of what I teach; the thing that I've devoted myself to maturing in the most, the thing that I'm known most for offering by those who've really delved deeply into my work is exactly the thing that in some sense my whole life is about—my learning. Not everybody listening to this interview knows my work probably. For a long time, my website—in fact it's still mirrors to my website—was Integral Heart. And the core of what I've done—the Integral movement—I've written a book with Ken Wilbur, *Integral Life Practice*—I teach practice—and the angle on it that I have always emphasized is the heart. It's the intelligence of Ken's brilliant integral synthesis manifested in a completely heartfelt way; in a way that gets into the embodied feeling ground of experience with all those brilliant distinctions elaborating it. And yet, what shows up in every moment is understanding that all through life you're doing a practice. You're always practicing something and you're reinforcing—you know, they say that neurons that fire together, wire together. Whatever it is you're doing, whatever it is you did all day today; that's what you practiced today. You reinforced those particular circuits by making choices, and intending is the core of practice.

But where do you make those choices from and how do you participate and what is it you reinforce? Well there, the heart is central only to the degree that I'm here with love, only to the degree that I'm able to feel, only to the degree that I'm fully present. Am I able to make those choices and embody

that practice in the way that I want? So a lot of what I teach is I help people get back in touch with feeling and positive feeling—the truly miraculous joy, the attractive power, the good news of the heart of life. And I help people to get beyond the place where the heart is closed. I help people to go to the place in themselves that already knows the goodness of life, and already loves, and already wants to be present as a gift from the heart—this fullness of appreciation, fullness of gratitude, fullness of care.

But the truth of it is—and I've been thinking about this recently because of some exchanges I've had with my younger brother. My personal psychological pattern was really formed in the process of being a mean older brother. My brother was born when I was only three and it was just the configuration of things; I went from being the super center of attention, utterly narcissistic—adored and praised and loved and at the center of everything. And then when my brother was born when I was just about three, he was hurt, he was injured; he needed a lot of care. And essentially my parents hired a loving—thank God—she was a wonderful black lady who kind of reminds you of the recent film, *The Help*—you know, we raise their kids. I had that kind of wonderful, loving black nurse in my life, Sadie. But I went from being my mother's apple of her eye and her constant companion to being shunted to the side. And by the time my brother was old enough so that I was interacting with him, I resented him and I was mean to him. He had had some injuries. He was dropped on his head. He was colicky. He had allergies. He had troubles. I hurt him in ways that I was horrified by when I got to the age of a kind of self-awareness where I began to have a moral sense; therefore, at the point where I began to really constellate what I wanted to do with my life: “Well what is it that I want to do with my life? What do I want to stand for?”

I knew that there was a part of my heart that could be real asshole; I was a prick to my younger brother. I was mean to him, and there was a horror over that. And that knowing of my own heart—to know that I have that that capacity for cruelty—in my own little way I started the path a little bit like Milarepa. He'd been a sorcerer. He'd brought down hail storms that killed his enemies. And then he had to do lots and lots of sadhana to make up for it. I really got that I had to do something different than living from this aspect I'm made of that has within it a prickiness or a capacity for prickiness; a meanness, a hard-heartedness, cruelty. And so in some sense, I have been someone who you might say is cruel; so I'm bringing all the capacity for focus and all the rest into the project of creating as much of a truly loving, truly wise, truly giving human being out of this closedness. The place that could have been cruel and chose to be cruel whatever way I did at those young ages

has been reshaping itself to become something else, and that's really kind of a core pivot of my life. So wouldn't it be natural that what I'd eventually find myself teaching is love?

### **3. Just One of the Infinite Aspects of Human Nature**

**RC:** Well I was listening very intently as you were describing the situation and I bowed in gratitude at the place where you described that aspect of your nature that, as you say, was the first part of the pivot from that capacity for cruelty toward love. And I'm wondering though, do you see that as something that was unique to you? Or do you see that capacity as just one of the infinite aspects of human nature that we all share?

**TP:** Well, I know enough that it is the latter. That it is something that we all share. But in doing this interview, it was an opportunity for me to make the confession very particularly and uniquely and to tell something of my own story, not just universalizing it, but making it about me and my own special particular history because there's much more vulnerability and in a sense, more courage, more authenticity, more self-disclosure, and more of a real gift to whoever takes this to heart; because everybody's got a different pattern. Not everybody was mean to their younger brother. Not everybody's particular psychology hinges on this particular theme in quite the way that mine does.

**RC:** Yes, I think that's absolutely true, and I think that as we go forward and explore this together that everything that you say is going to come to bear. But it was worth pausing to bring that piece in around the issue that some of the teachers I've been talking to have brought up, which is what truly is appropriate to share and how—perhaps we don't want to just trade positive projection for negative projection. So from my perspective, my preference would be not that somebody said “Oh I listened to Terry Patten and he revealed this thing about himself. And somehow it makes me think or feel differently about Terry.” The gift is in the more vulnerable personal expression as you described, but it can only be received rightly and fully if a person is understanding that you're speaking to your individual version of the human story. And that's what I wanted to make sure of before we went further; we got it out there even though we'll stay with the personal that I would love for our listeners to reflect and to resonate back. You know, how their own story may show that kind of capacity for cruelty; front and center or maybe repressed, or maybe even may just at this point have a don't know mind about it, they're not sure, and that they're wondering. So with all of that—and thank you for indulging me; I want to come back to you and to your...

**TP:** Hmm. No, I really appreciate you're doing that because I think that's important in terms of framing this up in a way that's truly focusing around what's going to be most useful to folks.

#### **4. Remorse and Humility**

**RC:** Yes. And so coming back to what you're sharing, as you said, it was the big pivot. It was a choice point for you to try to be love and to teach love coming from that background. But I'm wondering now, here it is many years later, and of course you'll share what you choose to share about these recent conversations you had with your brother, but how is this theme that you're gifting us with—how is it living in you right now?

**TP:** Well, I think first of all, it took me a long time to get to a place where I really fully admitted this. And to some degree, we become conscious of our psychological themes in a series of ways across our life. Our self-awareness is certainly not a binary on-and-off switch you know? You grow in it. I could have described these events and my feelings about my having been mean and all the rest back when I was probably twenty. But over in the decades, I've found myself reflecting on this and taking it to heart in deeper and deeper levels, and understanding it in deeper and deeper ways. So at this point, I could make a much more powerful, I would say, disidentified—you know, but only through more deeply identifying—and therefore I disidentified with that—the one who needs to defend himself against the identity of being an asshole enough so that I can really really see how much of an asshole I am. And only someone who sees themselves as a total asshole can totally practice because you're not invested enough in transcending the asshole because you're denying some of it—you know what I mean?

**RC:** Yes.

**TP:** And the humility and deep remorse over having hurt my brother because my brother was scarred guy; there are certain ways in which, in his life he is basically very successful, in some ways even an awakened man, but also he is still very scarred by his early childhood, and I played a real role in some of that. So the sense of remorse and the sense of humility and the sense of how important this is that this asshole do the practice of being loved and even more thorough awakening—I'm not sure that I would recommend this to every single person. This isn't some universal practice.

But at a certain point in the trajectory of your life, you might find yourself able to do something like what I've been doing just recently in which I have come to kind of feeling that there was a egoic,

strategic, me-against-the-other, frightened, ashamed, narcissistic kind of core that was operative, that to some degree is the M.O. that evolved and evolved and evolved and evolved—and is still the tool I have to use. So in some sense, I am in my own way; in my way of getting off it. I'm realizing that I'm just using all that assholiness to reach and finally resolve the invitation to be the most truly loving being I can possibly create.

Framing it that way, instead of saying "I am a loving man" like I have for significant parts, even of my teaching career. But instead saying "No, I'm an asshole who is just trying his utmost to be—doing the very best imitation of an absolutely loving man I can possibly do." The extra degree of humility that that creates and the extra degree of seriousness about me having to interrupt my automatic patterns—that really has been a rich and recent clarification. I haven't had the chance to teach about it before so I'm using this interview as an opportunity to express it.

### **5. Self Identity**

**RC:** It's interesting because what it calls to mind as you shared it just now, using that language, was the twelve-step program, where a person, no matter how healed he or she becomes, no matter how their life is no longer ruled by their addiction in terms of their day-to-day experience, they always start out by saying "I'm an addict," or "I'm an alcoholic." And amongst people in the psycho-spiritual community, there has been a lot questioning about that because it raises the question: does it create a certain identity box that is perhaps shame-based or stuck in a religious type of humility that isn't necessarily helpful? But I hear you— although you didn't make that connection that I just did, and you may even have your own response to it—I hear you kind of coming back to something in yourself as you're describing it, and letting it be; and that's humility taking you to a deeper place. So as I'm hearing it and as I'm drawing a parallel, I'm also wondering about that.

I'm hearing something in what you're saying, on first hearing or first response that I'm guessing listeners might too. Can speak to this idea that somehow there's a way in which by saying, "I'm coming from this place," that you're defining yourself or confining yourself.

**TP:** Well, we have a self-identity, which is such a big thing. And so much of what we do has to do with finding ourselves, and often denying a kind of, we want to prove that we are not that which we, in some dark part of ourselves, believe we are. I am feeling like I don't want to be an asshole so I'm trying to prove I am a good man. Other people might be trying to prove that they're intelligent or confident or loveable or whatever it is; we're all trying to prove stuff. And the identities that we're

embracing and affirming and willing to take on can be so powerfully limiting. I mean this is why the New Thought movement and the Law of Attraction, the movie *The Secret*; these subtle beliefs is what the whole Avatar program is based on: discrediting beliefs, these limiting beliefs that we have about who we are and how we are so profoundly causative and shaping of so much; our way of showing up as human beings. So under the surface of everybody's virtue is usually a submerged and utterly disowned Gollum who is the opposite of whatever that virtue is. As soon as I embraced goodness, I was in some sense, at first sweeping the asshole under the carpet and trying to deny that I was that one. As soon as you become inspired by almost anything, there's some opposite of that. And very many of us are actually more deeply wounded by our idealism than any other idea because we've created a threshold: we try to be X, we deny Y; some part of us is Y. We don't want to be Y. We walk away from that. We pretend that's not okay. We experience a split in the psyche, the psyche is splitting; this creates a situation where we actually don't even dare to feel everything that's here in the field that is here to feel. And so many human beings are walking down the street, almost everybody is walking down the street. Honestly, just take a look at a parade of folks just going by you at any point in time and—my God, these beautiful, interesting, competent, very capable, apparently adult successful people are actually afraid to fully feel part of what they're actually feeling; that's our human condition, the splitting.

**RC:** Let me jump in here because I'm really hearing you and I think that this piece really stands for a lot of explication and so I want to bring in what I know for myself, the truth of what you're describing. And here are a couple of examples: I used to think when I was in my teens that I was virtuous to some saintly degree, and when I went through a crisis and ultimately a healing of certain aspects of that in my twenties, I went through a period of shoplifting. And shoplifting is something, of course, that people, if they're going to experiment with it, it's usually when they're much younger, not when they're at an age that they can get incarcerated for it. And I didn't do much of it, and I didn't do it for very long, but I could see that I could be immoral, I could be a thief, I could be these things that I never thought I could be. And there was shock in that, but there was also liberation in that, because I was no longer in the stricture of the ideal as you were just talking about it. And even on a more personal and vulnerable level, I remember around that same time, I broke-up with my girlfriend and I pursued her best friend. And I knew a lot of people who were aware of that who thought I was sleazy for doing that, like "You never do that. That's just a horrible thing to do." And I was coming from a place of lack—I didn't get all the love that I needed and deserved, and why should I ever turn away from an opportunity to get mine? So I saw that I could be coming from

a very lacking place, the same kind of place that anybody robs or steals from or hurts another person in order to get what they want or need. And all of that, for me, as it eventually processed through and I got to a more peaceful place around it, got me to be able to say “I’m neither this nor that. I’m neither light nor dark. Ultimately, I’m just a guy.” And I’m wondering if “I’m just a guy” is different for you than “I’m an asshole who’s learning to love.”

From that place, I can drop all the beliefs that might keep me stuck, and really be alive to myself moment by moment, and my life, and my relationships; that’s one way to hold it. And I’m wondering if there’s something different...

**TP:** Well I think there’s some gold on both sides of this. The gold on the normalizing side is that we’re not so self-involved, we’re not so focused on ourselves, and characterizing ourselves one way or another. We’re recognizing that there’s no original furniture; everybody’s got their stuff, everybody’s a mix. Our particular darkness and brokenness is not deserving of endless reexamination and self-involvement. There’s a kind of freeing up from self-attention in that normalizing, which I think is really healthy and important. But in the really getting your assholiness in a deep way, not normalizing it; what that has in gold is that it’s got the seeds for real remorse, which is the seed for real repentance. And the best sense of that word, *metanoia*, in Greek, what is in every single language, in Hebrew, the Islamic word, *tabah*—they all mean basically a 180—a radical turnaround. A *metanoia*, a revolution in your knowing, in your very way of knowing, that is what repentance is.

We can call it insight, it doesn’t have to have a lot of tail between the legs, self-abdication. But what it requires is “Oh my God, I am making a different choice than the choice I would tend to.” And I do think that we all need that. Actually, I’d like to offer a couple of vivid images that for me are illustrative of this. One of them is a scene in the Roman Polanski movie *The Pianist* about the fellow in the Warsaw ghetto who survived the atrocities of World War II. In one scene in the Warsaw ghetto, an old man approaches an old woman, food is so scarce people are starving to death, and this woman has got some warm soup and she’s got it in her hands and she’s trying to eat. And this man is coming and he’s trying to take it away from her; he’s desperately feeling he is starving. He manages, in trying to grab the soup from her, to cause her to spill it on the cobblestone street, and she’s just utterly distraught over losing this little bit of food. But he ignores her and he gets down on his hands and knees, and he laps the soup off the cobblestone. He is so debased that

not only is he stealing food from a starving woman, but then he's so debased that he's getting down and licking it off the ground.

And then of course there's another vivid image which is the image that we get from Victor Frankl from the concentration camp itself, in which he describes people going around the crowded bunks of people who've been watching their fellows die—some people in these beds have died the night before, during the night and during the day before. Everyone's in terror, and there were people who would go from bunk to bunk with their last crusts of bread, giving them to people and offering words of comfort. Even though they couldn't expect to live, even though they were probably terrified—they chose to show up in that way. What Frankl drew from that is that we have no choice about the outcomes of our behavior, but we have a choice about how we behave. So if we know that we have it within us to be lapping the food we would steal from another off the cobblestone street, if we get that, you create the right circumstances—you seem to be made desperate enough to really not embody what you want to embody, and therefore you have that capacity for something that you really would not want to do. Therefore, you get that “Oh my God, I could be something I don't want to be. It matters that I choose something else.” And that awareness seems to me so important it can't be over emphasized, it needs to be re-encountered at different moments in our life so that we're more deeply awake to the fact that we're facing these kinds of choices in little tiny ways in so many moments of the day.

**RC:** Okay, let me pause then to try to synthesize what's coming through those two images and what you're sharing about them; which is that it can be helpful to get to the “I'm just a guy” place as you described because we're freed up to not work so hard necessarily to prove who we are or to act out the parts of ourselves that we haven't owned. And so there's a value there, but there's a different and maybe sometimes deeper value of recognizing that at our core, we are capable of that which we would wish that we weren't. And that we have choices; big ones and often small daily ones in which, with that awareness as keen as possible, we're more able to make the choice, ultimately, that we would want: the choice for love. And that if we don't really embrace the soup lapping part of ourselves and hold that in as full as possible awareness, we're going to miss opportunities and we're going to miss parts of ourselves that need another look and that need to be brought more fully into light. How's that for synthesis?

**TP:** Yes, that was nice.



**RC:** I wanted to make that synthesis or kind of go over it one more time because I can imagine listeners really wanting to understand why both of those things might be helpful, and specifically why it might be helpful as opposed to somehow being ashamed to recognize and embrace those parts of ourselves. So the more you lose sedation about that, the better.

## **6. Shame**

**TP:** Yes, okay. Well let me say a little more about this matter of shame because...

**RC:** Before you do that, there's one more thing, which is that there are a number of people listening who would say, "That's where I'm actually more identified. You know, my job is to learn not to be so shame-based, not to see the parts of myself that I think that are worthless or not good enough as who I am." So maybe as you speak to it the next time, that could be incorporated as well.

**TP:** Yes, that's very important. And thank you for pointing to that; it's really true. Well, first of all, there are a lot of different meanings of this word "shame." Mostly, we think of shame as something unhealthy that we want to outgrow or purify. Another way of defining shame, though, is the very deep belief that some part of you is unacceptable; that if people only knew what a mean older brother I was—they know something about you, they would reject you. The core is that if people can see what they're ashamed of because they fear exclusion from the group, from love—they feel, "If you knew this about me, you wouldn't love me." Therefore, it's so horrible that it has to be suppressed. I think that shame, understood that way, is a way of talking about the repression barrier itself. Sometimes people say fear is the repression barrier, that we repress what we're too afraid to feel, but I think, although there can be a lot of fear loaded in, it's the place where we think that the result of the thing that we fear would cause us to be rejected. Therefore shame, I think, defines the repression barrier most essentially. So I think that it's important to look at the research and to find some of the wonderful research has been done by many people. I particularly like Brene Brown, many of you may have encountered her YouTube videos.

On this idea of shame, the bottom line is that it's universal. Everybody's got it. And the big difference between some people and others is that some people recognize that it's a human thing by being, in a way, friendly to themselves and the fact that they sometime have a shame attack, and having a kind of humor about it. A fundamental self-acceptance where they get that they're still deserving of connection and that this universal matter of feeling ashamed at times just arises for everybody. That lets you have a looser, more relaxed relationship to shame, instead of absolutely, desperately having to stuff this thing that's so shameful into the closet. You begin to be able to

relate to it and you realize that a friendly relationship to your broken parts actually turns that thing that you're ashamed of, the very fact of the shame, not into a reason to be afraid of separation but a source of connection. Because everybody's afraid, everybody's ashamed. I mean everybody's ashamed in this deep way. And in this human condition in which shame is arising for all of us, me being somewhat friendly to myself and my shame—I'm a link for you to be more friendly to yourself, your shame, your whole humanity. And by doing that, I am more likely to connect. I'm actually giving to you in that friendliness to my whole self—I'm friendly to your whole self, and I'm creating an environment of connection and therefore normalizing and resolving this relationship to it; this is key.

Therefore this whole thing about seeing just how much of an asshole I am— let's just continue to use me as the example—is not about me having a self-concept of being an asshole and being full of shame; it's about me having a sense of humor and an actual freedom from this fundamental self-concept that I've been so busy with, trying to prove I'm a good man my whole life that I've lacked a certain kind of freedom. I'm a lot more human, a lot more approachable if you know that I, at some deep level, feel like a bad man. And in that, there's a connection to you and the parts that you have disowned.

**RC:** Yes. I really hear that, and I don't know why my mind keeps going back to aspects of my romantic history but in relation to what you were just describing, I remember that there was some times when I was with a woman I was dating— again, this was in my twenties—and she was really insecure and was trying to find the secret thoughts that I was having, that if she knew, would prove to her that I wasn't really who she wanted me to be, that I didn't feel about her the way that she wanted me to feel about her. And she was kind of pushing and pushing and pushing, and finally I just said, “You know what? It's true. Let's just start with the idea that it's true; that the worst possible thing that you could think that I might be thinking—I am. And let's take it from there.” And for me, in the moment, there was a catharsis in poetically outing myself. It feels to me like it's similar to what you were just describing: that I gave myself the opportunity to meet it with some gentle awareness and friendliness as you described it. And then my need to repress it or her need to find it out was no longer running the show; there was just something that could pass between us that wasn't about all of that.

**TP:** Yes, beautiful.

## 7. Unconditioned Relationship to Wretchedness

**RC:** So Terry, we could talk forever and we only have a limited amount of time. I want to shift to something that I know is also really important to you, which is the embodiment of this work and the embodiment that you teach, and therefore to talk about bodies and to talk about the frailty of bodies and the challenges of bodies. And in your life and in mine, we both deal with symptoms and illness, and I guess the first thing I want to ask you in a general way, and please take it wherever you want, is how do your own physical symptoms and limitations, if they do, enter into your teaching and learning?

**TP:** Hmm... That's a novel question, I haven't thought about it in quite that way.

**RC:** Well let me tell you something about this I shared with one of the other guests in the program, and I'll get your take on it, maybe it will send you up and running. We all speak of how important it is to be here now, to live in the present moment, and how presence is the ground of everything. And one thing that I came to see, having been someone who has dealt with Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome or otherwise known as we-don't-know-what's-wrong-with-you for almost thirty years—is that what doesn't get spoken about but which seems to be very important is that we can only be present to the degree that we have energy for it. Or another way of saying that is that when our energy is diminished, we can still be present but there's a different quality to our presence. At least that's what I've found. I'm wondering if you have found that and if maybe that opens the door for you to talk about this issue of the body and its involvement in work.

**TP:** Well, that's a beautiful example. Drawing from my own experience, I suffer from a condition called Meniere's disease where, as you know, I will periodically get these really horrible attacks. And when I have one of these attacks—depending—there are varying severities, but they can strike without notice, without any warning although they do have a gradual onset. At their very worst, I'm like a severely severely seasick person, utterly wretched, vomiting, the world's spinning around me, I'm completely disoriented, and it's damaging my sense of hearing permanently. And you know, it's just a one way trip to hell—it's a two way trip, but it feels like a one way trip when you're in the worst of it. It is a kind of deep wretchedness. The people on the Meniere's website who had some of these other really painful conditions like Bell's Palsy rate it as the worst symptom they've experienced except for Bell's Palsy theoretically. I don't believe this is true, but people even rate it as being more painful, more dysphoric than the pains of childbirth, which seems extreme but whatever. Anyway, it's intense. And so being with intense intense physical suffering has really been

a great teacher to me. At first, I would just kind of hang on for dear life; bite my fingernails, and just try to endure these times. But because I am a lifelong meditator and because there is this whole deep dimension of meditative experience, what I teach and certainly what I practice has to do with locating a place that is deeper and not subject to the changes of conditional experience. Because I had a lot of these attacks, I began to learn to be with them and be with myself from the perspective of that more radical consciousness and discovering that there is a place where I can be with all this; and not just being with it in the sense of going out of the body into an alternate state and kind of escaping the circumstance.

Sometimes I've had these attacks in a hotel room where I have to catch a train the next morning or be kind of lost in a country where I don't speak the language where I'm expected to speak that night and things like that. I've had to kind of gauge whether I can pack my clothes without vomiting. Like when I'm feeling really terrible having to function. So it's about your state of consciousness when you're in the midst of wretchedness where you're not able to just easily go to an unconditional state of mind, and discovering a place within one's self and within one's relationship to that wretchedness that has a different kind of space, where you're resting in a place that's not conditional; where you actually, in a weird way, have a kind of sense of humor; you're aligned to something that's more important than how you feel, just deeper and truer and more real than how you feel. And that's been a wonderful gift, so I think that that has informed my teaching quite a lot.

**RC:** So that is so beautifully put, Terry, and I want to follow-up on it in a specific way. So, when you are in the midst of as you called it this "wretchedness", your practice is to find that place which is truer and deeper than just how you feel. And yet at the same time, if I'm hearing you right, it requires a certain kind of presence, a certain kind of awareness, and a really profound acceptance that this is what you have to be with right now. Because there's so many kinds of energies and presences that you wouldn't be able to perform or to experience when you're in the midst of that, correct?

**TP:** Yes, true.

**RC:** Yes, and I so appreciate you talking about the travel and the teaching because I've had certain intense, chronic muscle spasms that will sometimes happen right before the next workshop session is supposed to begin. And I'm wondering, "Am I going to have to curl up in a semi-fetal ball and tell people to wait for me for forty-five minutes until it passes or is it going to pass with grace in

such a way that I can keep with the schedule?” And these are behind-the-scenes glimpses of people who are showing up to teach something about presence, about acceptance, about the spiritual path. I think that our work and the whole conversation about this work would be incomplete if we didn’t speak to these issues.

**TP:** Yes. Well I wasn’t going to go there but you called me out. That’s your agenda; not mine, man. (Laugh)

**RC:** Well, you could’ve said that I don’t want to talk about it so I know there was a part of you that came with me. That same pain with me. But I’ll tell you there’s another part that is worth speaking to briefly. I have sometimes spoken about having my symptoms in a public talk, and then immediately afterwards I’ve had people come up to me and say things like “Would you like to be free of those symptoms?” And I kind of know what’s coming so I internally roll my eyes, but I say, “Sure I would.” And then they hand me a business card about the latest supplement or the latest new technique for releasing one’s self of this or that. And I’m actually very open to those things. I’ve spent, you know, thousands of hours and hundreds of thousands of dollars in the exploration, both in conventional and complimentary medicine. But what I notice is that we’re engaged in a moment where I’m wondering if that person has difficulty being with what I’m practicing being with, or if there is a belief that’s present in that exchange that somehow there’s something incomplete in me or something that is even incomplete or erroneous in my teaching because—and this comes back to some of the things you were talking about earlier like New Thought and *The Secret*, etc.—because if in fact I were more realized, I wouldn’t have this condition. So I’m wondering, from your perspective, how do you hold not so much that idea, but how do you hold yourself around how your symptoms do or don’t relate to the depth of your offering.

**TP:** Yes, that’s interesting. Well there’s a number of things—there’s actually something I’d like to say about when you said people asked, “Would you like to be free from those symptoms?” I have sometimes been confronted by people who feel so absolutely certain that they have even a kind of glow about them; they’re kind of lit up with the excitement of the thing they’re connected with that they feel certain—really, they’re not just having this as a feeling—they’re standing in the existential reality of their whole, every cell in their body is kind of connected to the fact that they have these answers and that they are standing as that set of answers. And they are there to bless, and they are just wanting to know how bound are you by your limiting beliefs. And it’s an interesting thing to confront that. I’m thinking of an occasion that took place a couple of years ago: I was in Germany

where I had that kind of confrontation. And these people were offering to cure me permanently of my Meniere's disease, and I was having quite a few attacks during that trip. So I took them up on it, and I went into the next room and let them do their healing on me right then and there.

I didn't really have much of a—you know, it didn't heal me. (Laughs) It didn't work. But I had the chance to go deep into that; and it's very interesting how powerful conviction is. And when you arrive at a certain kind of certainty, the force of your confidence can reorganize people round you. I found it possibly believable that the intense radiant certainty that these people carried was founded in something that might be more powerful than the whole symptom pattern in my whole being. And in that moment, I kind of surrendered my own perceptual framing of things which said that energetic healing, you know, it was unlikely to make a difference. I surrendered that and said, "Okay, I'll try a new reality for this, let's go for it." Now it's very interesting how we encounter these different kinds of beliefs, how certainty and doubt affect us. And when we're in a place of confidence and trust, something very healthy happens to us and to our whole being. But when we rest on beliefs that are brittle and narrow and that don't account for all reality, of course, they're disproven in time, and we crash.

So a lot of us are so bruised that we can't find our way to a place of confidence and certainty at all. And it's like our whole capacity to rise to a place of confidence and certainty has become learned helplessness in that place. And yet I think that there is basis for a different kind of confidence and a different kind of certainty that is not a true believer's rigid conviction that is a possibility in a mature human being. And I wanted to just point to that—it's kind of a nuanced point that it seems worth making since this is coming up. And then to go to your actual question... (Laughs)

**RC:** Don't go to my question yet. Stay with it because it's crucial. I love it. I'm on the edge of my seat, wanting to know, just a taste, because I know you can't give it all to me here, but how you perceive being able to come to that confidence and conviction in a way that isn't standing upon brittle beliefs that would get disproven over time. That's sounds to me like a growing edge for myself; so what could you tell me about that?

**TP:** Well I think it requires growing in our embodied intelligence and in our ability to take perspectives that are really complex and nuanced in which there's room for paradox and ambiguity and complexity and process in which we're thinking dialectically of the most rich and nuanced fashion. Not just thinking in the mind, but in which our feeling relationship to things is tracking that

more nuanced disposition. And in that, we can come to a re-encounter with the most profound spiritual truths and even some of the relative truths that come from traditions of spiritual practice as a lot of practical, on-the-ground know how, and savvy clarities about life such that we are—well, for example, probably the most ultimate expression of this has to do with: “What would I be like if I were completely free? What would I be like if I were completely awakened or realized? How does it feel to be most fully awake?” And I think most of us have a picture of somebody like the Dalai Lama who’s kind of bubbly and spontaneous and laughing all the time, and it seems like nothing bothers him at all, and we think we’re supposed to be like that. And I think that that is a beautiful image, and I have utter respect for His Holiness, and I know he probably has a lot he could still teach me. But I think that the model of the wound of love in which we are an unarmored, undefended, full, broken-hearted context with all the suffering of the world, and we’re letting that penetrate us and we’re in some sense weeping with tears streaming down our faces and sympathetic resonance with all of the pain and confusion and injustice and cruelty and anguish that is this embodied condition for humans and all the creatures; for factory farmed animals—everything. It’s like we’re unarmored, we feel it all and at the same time, we’re in touch with the miracle of existence; the mystery itself, the radiant transcendental okayness, the perfection of every moment, the gift of life, the miracle of existence. If we can be, in a sense, utterly joyful and utterly kind of crucified at the same time, I think that’s a better model for what awakening really is. And I don’t doubt that his holiness by the way, probably is an example of this whose outer aspect is very bubbly and joyful.

But his outer aspect doesn’t have to be bubbly. His outer aspect could look like somebody feeling very intensely into that pain. It doesn’t have to, you know, there’s no one way we have to look or be. If we have that orientation emotionally, then if we’re aspiring to grow and to develop and to do a practice in which we’re growing in a fullness whose ultimate expression is more like that; then the more nuanced way that we’re making room for the complex realities around us allows us to come into certain kinds of conditional clarities that can give us a basis for confidence and trust. And then we can relax a little because everything that can be lost will be lost. And, do we have to be trembling in fear in the meantime forever?—I don’t think so. You know the dawn is radiant, the sunrise is full of color, the birds are singing, and there will be another morning. And even if the whole world were coming to an end, that last dawn will still be beautiful. Every moment, every fragment of this miracle is incredibly wonderful, and to be present to that, we can be confident in

that. We can therefore trust, and out that, we can have a kind of courage, we can become formidable, and we can become an embodied stand for that truth.

**RC:** That's really beautiful. And I'm guessing right now that listeners have a clear understanding of why, many times when you and I would get together for our dinners in Marin County, that we would close down the restaurant and that I don't want to leave even if my eyes were closing with fatigue because Terry, you are always able to channel something that is so beautiful and rich and powerful, and I could feel that happening in these last few moments, and I'm still resonating with it. And I want to kind of complete the circle of this last round of discovery by coming back to that moment where I might choose to try a new healing technique or put on someone's belief that it's possible that the way I'm holding my illness or my symptoms—if shifting could lead me to a greater state of wellness. And if I take what you were just sharing into that healing session, it sounds to me like I would be saying that, "This is how it is. I can sink into what you call the crucifixion of that. I'm not pushing it away. I'm not needing it to be different in order to embrace the miracle. And at the same time, if there's something here for me that could bring healing, that could bring uplift; my intention is to be wide open to that and not let anything that is unnecessarily in the way within me prevent that from happening. So I have a deep acceptance and gratitude for what is, and equal preference that something shift."

**TP:** Well, and even I would go further because I have a rich prayer life in a sense. I mean, I don't have a conception of a metaphysical other who is the God to whom I pray, but I do recognize that no less real than this self is the great Beloved. And so I actually enter into those moments with a kind of opening surrender that says "Let Thy will be done." You know, "Help me be a vehicle for your grace. Please—it does hurt this yelping pile of protoplasm that wants not to hurt so much." And I gratefully invite and in a sense, invoke and pray for grace and for healing and for completion. I think that I can do that with a kind of not knowingness that isn't—I mean, I was talking about certainty in a broader sense; this isn't the only frame for that kind of discussion of certainty but I do want to point out as we complete this that I am answering the question you're asking right now, and I'm not making a summary comment about every form of certainty; that's all.

**RC:** Sure. I think it's important to know that, and also I think it's really beautiful that you spoke to that particular moment that I was asking you about because so many listeners will have their own version of that. It may be about a physical symptom. It may be about an emotional wound. But they will be hearing you guiding them exquisitely toward a confidence and conviction in which they can



truly thrive and live as fully as possible as they're challenged, perhaps very fundamentally, or in this case we've been speaking about physiologically in some way that causes confusion. And when I was saying that I heard you speaking to an edge for me, I think that's probably true for many if not most people because I spoke in another conversation with a guest about the way that acceptance and shame come together where so often people are thinking that everything is a part of God except this one part of me. And that the healing path in those circumstances is along the lines of what you described earlier: people being able to make friends even with that part of themselves. And in this situation that we're talking about right now, it seems like there's an important parallel where we're often saying "We could really embrace that kind of confidence and conviction and truly thrive if we didn't have X." Whatever X is.

**TP:** Right.

**RC:** Even though we can't speak now to the whole of what you have to share about certainty, in a very powerful way you're inviting listeners and I to hold a kind of confidence to practice a kind of consciousness that would allow us to thrive as fully as we could even if we continue to live with X—whatever that X is.

**TP:** Yes, that's right. I don't think that we're as fully open to healing; I don't think we're even fully open to healing except to the degree that we let our heart break, and we are willing to endure a really difficult and painful and even short life. In some sense, we ceased only to be braced in non-acceptance. And then with that basic acceptance, I think that we can turn to the healing potential of our next moment with a kind of openness and a kind of anticipatory willing gratitude that invites more healing into our lives much more effectively.

**RC:** Well, I think this is the place where we need to leave it today, although I'm inspired and feel like somewhere down the road there's a part two or three or four; whether it's recorded or not recorded. So Terry, I want to thank you so much for really being a trailblazer. I know that as you contemplated the theme of our series, you rolled up your sleeves and you looked at your moment, and you said, "How can I serve this series?" And I'm very very grateful to you for that, and also I'm excited because I know now that a lot of people will get a chance to see not only what those dinners are like but why you're such a great friend.

**TP:** (Laugh) Well thank you brother. It's always deeply nourishing to my soul to spend time with you.

## Diane Musho Hamilton



Diane Musho Hamilton is an exceptionally gifted mediator, group facilitator, and one of the most authentic contemporary spiritual teachers of our time. Diane **has served as Director of the Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution for the Utah Judiciary** and has practiced meditation for nearly 30 years. She began her studies at Naropa University in 1983 with Choygam Trungpa Rinpoche. Later she became a Zen student of Genpo Roshi's and received ordination as a Zen monk with her husband Michael Zimmerman in 2003. She then received dharma transmission from Roshi in 2006. Diane facilitates Big Mind Big Heart to help elicit the insights of Zen in Western audiences and currently works with Ken Wilber and the Integral Institute. [WWW.DIANEMUSHOHAMILTON.COM](http://WWW.DIANEMUSHOHAMILTON.COM)

### 1. The Polarity of Transparency and Polarity

**RC:** I like to begin these conversations by coming more fully into the present and sharing a little bit about my own sense of this moment. I feel just a little bit of kind of a nervousness in my upper chest, I was a little bit more rushed than I thought I would be getting ready for the call and now I'm kind of coming back a little bit more into full presence and I'm noticing that I'm pacing slowly around my home office, which is a good sign. It means I'm kind of getting into the groove of conversation. So that's me and I just want to check if you would share a little bit about where you are in this very moment.

**DMH:** Yeah, well I'm actually – it's a bit of a high-contrast situation in the sense that I'm actually in my mother's home, which is about 45 miles from where I live. Usually on a workday like Monday if I'm not in retreat I'm in my office taking care of administrative business or telephone calls. But it just so happens that I'm with my mother today. I lost my father this last year and she's now a widow and so she and I are spending some time together and so I feel a little bit the tenderness of being with someone who's in a– you might say a more fragile state – and kind of abject grief. She was with my dad for 56 years and so it's a big change in her life.

And then I'm just noticing the impact on me on being with her state of mind. But I'm also at the same time really excited just to be on the call and getting to know you and talking about just a great subject which you're setting up for everybody. So thank you for doing that.

**RC:** You're welcome. I wanted to ask you just to kind of get the ball rolling, in the invitation to the series that you received and everyone else received, I talked a lot about transparency and the role of transparency in personal growth and spiritual teaching. And this is something I know that it's been a big consideration of yours over many years. And I'm just wondering if you could speak in general to how you approach that topic of transparency in your teaching and just in general.

**DMH:** Well I'll take it from two different angles: from an Integral angle, where we're working with developmental models, with ego development, looking at Spiral Dynamics, we think a lot in terms of polarity. So when we talk about transparency I think that maybe the opposite pole of that polarity is privacy. So the question becomes what's the relationship of transparency to privacy in our lives both as learners...and teachers. What is the role of transparency and when is privacy something that we actually need to take into account and to cultivate as well? Because transparency has a quality of expansiveness to it and an openness to it and privacy has a quality of containment. And those two poles are sort of necessary generally to our practice to understand expansiveness and to also feel what containment is like when we hold back, when we are not necessarily – I wouldn't say withholding – but rather maybe waiting for the right moment to disclose or the appropriate method of disclosure.

In terms of those two, my personality is I'm much more to err on the side of disclosure, of transparency, of honesty about my own life; of trying to be straight about what's actually happening for me because I found that it's the old adage that of course the honest policy is the best policy. And at the same time I think as I've developed and learned how to kind of identify a little bit more with the privacy side of this polarity because there are times in which, for instance, I've been open with other people's information in ways I shouldn't be; or I haven't kind of waited for the right moment to disclose. In my development I've actually had to learn how not to say everything or to reveal everything. So I would say that in my own development I'm holding that polarity.

On the other hand, I remember a quote from Trungpa, which I think has a kind of a radical truth in it. I remember him saying that, "True bodhisattvas have no privacy." And so in a funny way there's something about that that's also true. So as we progress I'm sure we'll have – I'll give more specific

examples. But I think of it in terms of a polarity and also just in terms of certain points in our development where there just simply aren't as many boundaries.

**RC:** Well I really appreciate that kind of jumping off and giving us that perspective of the polarities. It's reflected in a deep way some of the things that other people in this series have spoken about. Absolute transparency would be rigid just like absolute containment, so of course there's no "should" involved. It's more about developing skillful means in the moment to see, "If I really tune into myself and the field around me and between myself and other people, what's really asking to come forward; what's in the highest good as I sense it as fully as possible?"

**DMH:** Yeah, precisely.

**RC:** Yeah. But there's something about that I want to follow-up on. You mentioned Trungpa, who I understand was a significant teacher for you. And it's interesting because there was no particular intention in this regard on my part, but a number of people in this interview series: Tami Simon, Reggie Ray, yourself and Bruce Tift all come from that experience in some way or another of having a connection with Trungpa. And so he's come up in some discussions in a significant way. And in one discussion that I had with Reggie Ray we were talking about Trungpa's shadow, Trungpa's more controversial aspects in both his teaching and his personality and one of the things that Reggie Ray said was that Trungpa never hid anything; that there were a lot of things that you could object to about him as a person or a teacher, but at least you had the ability to decide for yourself because what you saw was what you got.

**DMH:** I've heard that before.

**RC:** Yeah and I'm wondering if there's something in that for you and your own consideration because there is transparency on one side of the polarity and containment on the other. But when we think of it like that, it suggests a kind of intentional and wise and discerning containment, as opposed to a containment that's designed to deceive or hide.

**DMH:** Yeah and I think that's a really, really important distinction that you're making, and maybe I can just back up before we launch into this conversation about Trungpa because what came up for me as you were [speaking, is about] sensing what the highest good is. If we look into the Soto Zen tradition and to the history of ethical discussion, Dogen Zenji talks about the still yard metaphor for ethical conduct which is basically to have as wide open our senses as possible. Integral way of saying it would be to have as many perspectives available as possible and then to create a hierarchy

of perspectives based on what we perceive to be the highest good in that moment. And so I think that the intentionality behind what Reggie Ray is talking about in terms of Chogyam Trungpa that this idea that he was completely available to his students and he was completely open about what it was he was doing, now I think it's important to understand that I actually didn't spend time with Trungpa personally. I went to the Naropa Institute when he was still alive and his teachings, they went into me like a shock and my whole life changed based on the two or three years that I spent there. But I wasn't actually ever in the company of him when he was engaged in some of the ways that now people have lots of concerns about. I had certain views about that but I didn't have firsthand experience so there are much better sources in terms of trying to assess the impact of his conduct than myself.

**RC:** There's something also connected to this that I want to bring up and it has to do with the kind of spiritual authority that one takes on or is given. So for instance someone I know who you know well, Sally Kempton was in this interview series and of course she came through a guru path, not so much a spiritual teacher or a spiritual friend path, with Swami Muktananda as her teacher. And she spoke very much at length about the difference in those roles and how there are certain things that arise in a guru-disciple relationship that are hard sometimes for Westerners to understand. And in her own life experience she made a conscious decision not to set herself up in that way but to be more of a spiritual friend or a teacher with a lowercase "t" so to speak. So it seems like the more of a mantle of authority that one has, the more that such a transparency kind of shifts.

For instance in some of the Zen traditions, and I know that's where you're very steeped and I'm not a Zen scholar or a Zen practitioner, but I know that in recent years there's been a lot that has come out. The book for instance, *Zen at War*, has actually talked about a lot of things that were really hidden in Zen tradition. Part of it came from that idea of there being a sort of hierarchy of authority, that there were choices being made that were not available to everyday practitioners that perhaps they would have wanted to be able to know about.

So I'm just wondering about how you see that because you teach in different modes, in different environments, in different traditions and I'm just wondering about how authority does or doesn't – in your experience – enter into this discussion about transparency and what is wise and skillful versus what isn't.

## **2. The Lens of Integral Theory**

**DMH:** Well again the conversation shifts based on whether we're looking through the lens of a tradition, like a guru-disciple tradition, or a master-disciple tradition, or whether we're looking through the lens of ego development. But I think one of the things that Ken Wilber talked about that I have found useful in my life—and I think it might be helpful to others as well—is that if we create an evolutionary context and we really do look at ourselves as innovations of the Cosmos, literally you might even say like, at least certainly on planet earth, the kind of cutting edge of biology, in a funny way. And that we're basically in some way advancing the cause of complexity in the universe and that we move through really specific phases and that spiritual, let's say genuine spiritual opening, whether it's an experience of absolute love, whether it's an experience of non-duality or however the spiritual recognition is framed, where you experience yourself somehow as completely at home and part of something that's fundamentally good, so to speak, with a capital 'G'. Let's just look at it that way. But that experience is still interpreted not only through the type of worldview that we happen to be coming from, but it's also manifested through culture so that it takes on qualities.

That which is unknowable, ungraspable, unqualifiable, takes on qualities based on an individual worldview, collective worldview, collective culture. Let's take an example: there's the kind of notorious example of Andrew Harvey's group. He had a kind of a terrible falling out with this woman that had been a tremendous source of Divine love for him. And I think what Integral theory would say about that is that her genuine connection to the Cosmos is mediated through what we might think of in Spiral Dynamics as a blue meme level of development so that homophobia actually is still intact at a blue meme level of development because at that level of development we're still dividing the world into black and white. So even though her connection to great consciousness is there, she's also making cultural interpretations which explains homophobia, which explains the caste system in India, which tends to explain a lot about the unwieldiness of both spiritual attainment and also human development; that there's a kind of wobbly and you might even say cumbersome kind of quality to how we evolve and awaken and what the relationship between evolving and awakening actually is.

So another notorious example is that of Zen masters who actually supported imperial Japan during the war. And again, it kind of helps to explain that kind of phenomenon. Or if you take an individual teacher or people like in my case, Chogyam Trungpa, that he could be completely brilliant in terms of dharma at the same time he's also participating in the 60s and 70s culture in America, which was pretty wild. People often fail to acknowledge the kind of sexual freedom that

was happening; the sort of atmosphere of exploration, of overindulgence; there was a whole cultural phenomenon happening then. And that doesn't necessarily mean something about his level of awakening. On the other hand you have someone who just simply shows up as a saint, like maybe Thich Nhat Hanh who might fall into that category, and an activist. So he's an activist and a saint where Trumpa's sensibilities were much more Dionysian you might say. And that even though the relative manifestation has qualities, something about their recognition is the same.

**RC:** I really appreciate the fullness of that explanation. You said a moment ago something to the effect of the way that it comes through, let's say Trumpa, because of certain aspects of the culture at the time and perhaps his personality; it shifts the way that it comes through but doesn't necessarily mean anything in terms of the awakening. And so what I'm thinking is that the other piece that goes along with this that I know is also part of the Integral approach is the personal developmental life.

**DMH:** Exactly. Precisely, and the range of personal development because we can be very developed in certain places and extremely undeveloped in others. Like we can actually have pretty deep spiritual understanding and be kind of emotionally not so good at it.

**RC:** Yeah and I've certainly seen this and I speak about this a lot because my realm tends to be more emotional than others. Even though I'm kind of a cerebral guy, I kind of found my niche, my calling, in working with the emotional realm. And I've often worked with people who had 25 years of intense meditation practice and great education in one tradition or another but they're emotionally stunted and their emotional life is unavailable to them. But I wonder as we talk about this and as we're informed to some degree by those Integral models, if it points to a kind of more transparent teaching. In other words, do you think it would be in service if a person who is a teacher and also is being wise about that polarity between containment and transparency, were to really share what he or she understood to date about his or her own developmental life, you know? Just to be candid right there in the teaching?

**DMH:** Again, I think it depends just a little bit on the teaching and on the context. So, for instance, I just did a retreat with a Zen student who practices with me occasionally, but he also is a formal student of Shinzen Young who teaches Vipassana and also Zen and Susuki Roshi, who is 105 years old. And one of the reasons this student comes and talks with me is that he likes the Integral model and he wants to actually look at how emotional development relates to meditative practice. So in the Integral model we're saying that you need a certain kind of physical dimension to your practice because the body actually is the carrier of your consciousness in the sense that the when the body is

strong, realization is strong. But on the other hand you have the Ramana Maharshi who is one of the great-realized beings of contemporary era, who as I understand it, would sit in the cave and let the insects eat away at his arm. So you have a model of someone where the physical actually just simply isn't relevant. And the emotional is not relevant to Suzuki Roshi. Let's think of U Pandita in Burma for instance – when you come and sit with these great Zen masters or great Buddhist teachers, what they're interested in is you seeing your true nature beyond any relative condition—beyond your emotional eyes, beyond your physicality, beyond what you've inherited in terms of your injuries or your personality structure. Suzuki Roshi is 100% organized around giving you a deep experience of Buddha nature, unqualified awareness, and your life as absolutely validated, completely as it is, without condition.

So in that context, in that cultural setting and with that intention, having the Integral conversation just doesn't play. The Integral conversation plays in our conversation, in yours and mine, because we are informed by it and it matters to us. But there may be contexts where it doesn't, is all I'm saying.

**RC:** Yeah and it seems that if we can't escape our own frameworks, somehow we've just kind of Balcanized ourselves in an unhealthy way. So I really see that and I see what you're pointing to, the great benefit in being able to take someone as he or she is and really understand as best as possible where that person is coming from.

**DMH:** Yeah, I have a number of students who've actually studied with those masters and feel just incredibly informed and grateful for the meditative realization that they've accomplished with U Pandita and Suzuki Roshi, but they actually are looking for more integration. They want to have a conversation about hierarchy and authority; they want to have a conversation about sexuality; they want to have a conversation about power; they want to actually explicate a lot of their experience in the context of spiritual practice; they want to talk about their communication skills and how to manage money and they don't want that necessarily to be left out. And because they have been informed perhaps by Ken Wilber's work; or they've been informed generally by being an American with incredible access to information; incredible cognitive development; a lot of freedom and curiosities follow their interests. And because of that, then it actually allows them to place a great master in a context and to kind of know more specifically what it is they're there for and not to be looking for what isn't offered in that particular spiritual context.



And I think you could extend that in lots of different directions. So for instance another example might be that in my part of the world, of course, people do a lot of training with Native American people in sweat lodge or in pipe ceremony, things like that. And lots of times one of the insights that Integral theory brings to that is that you can be involved deeply in shamanic practice but the shamanic practice is actually a pre-rational practice as opposed to a post-rational practice. What shamanism looks like, at an ethno-centric level itself, is that we're not only providing for the tribe healing, finding resources such as water and food, developing relationships to the plants but also protecting ourselves against the tribe in the next valley. So there's a fundamental ethno-centricism to how shamanism is working. What would it be like to have or be involved in a world-centric shamanism and how does the rational then become included in terms of a developmental step, so that it's not pre-rational, and the kind of superstition and propitiation that human beings are so engaged in can actually develop into a rational phase of development?

How does that get brought back online but in a way that we're actually working with nature but not subject to nature in the same way? Because we pass through what you might call a differentiation from nature.

So understanding this kind of larger map and being able to kind of ask questions like, "Is my shaman fundamentally ethnocentric?," meaning as I'm in the ceremony, at a certain point am I going to start experiencing a lot of racism or actually have my shaman developed out of that image and is genuinely world-centric and have somehow found the way to metabolize the wounds of the last 150 years and be able to recruit people of European descent?

These are really sophisticated questions that people are able to ask precisely because of our place in time, because of the privileges, as Ken says, of having all the traditions, all their texts, all their rituals, all of their wisdom available to everybody around the globe. This is an amazing innovation of consciousness. So I know I'm expanding the conversation beyond just the question of transparency and privacy, but we're able to ask these questions from a different level of development and from different points of view. We can ask them from a first-person's point of view: "What's the impact of my teacher's ethical conduct on me?" From a second-person perspective: "What's my contribution to the ethical conduct of my teacher – how am I participating as a community member, where do I have power, where do I not?" We can actually think in terms of exchanges of power. And then we can also ask it from a third-person perspective: "What's the impact of this over time, on culture at large?"

So we have this amazing capacity to really look at these questions from many different angles and to know, as Ken frames it, our "cosmic address," which leads me back to your original question, which has to do with, as a teacher: am I able to disclose and reflect on my own cosmic address, both my places where I'm extremely developed and places where I'm not so developed so that my students actually can make informed decisions about what they're there to learn from me?

So an example of that at this moment might be in terms of meditative realization there are some large oaks; I think of them as great trees in the world. Like the two masters I'm just referring to, and there are some very profound American masters as well. My teacher, I think, is one of them. She's a very gentle Roshi, and she's very extremely developed in terms of what we call samadhi. So I would say that I'm not as developed; I just simply haven't spent the amount of time sitting that they've spent sitting. On the other hand I have a kind of uncanny facility for being able to work with a group in terms of group energy, shadow, and what's not able to come forward. In other words I'm a quite gifted facilitator of energy and space and that's just a gift that I was somehow given. And in terms of working with energy I might be more gifted in that particular way than certain meditation masters might be.

Now in terms of my own blind spots, I'm very interested in power and how power is navigated and I think I also have a blind spot that maybe I could acknowledge in our call, right now, that I could be transparent about: growing up, as a child I was the oldest sister, I had a lot of mental capacity, I was athletic and I was also pretty. And the privilege that comes with being a pretty woman is something that you take for granted. So lots of times I'm given power because of those certain gifts that I sometimes don't necessarily have to work for. So that I might be handed power because of those things and then not notice the privilege that has entitled me to that. So that might be one way that I can be transparent, about how power works in my own life where I might have a blind spot for instance, so that's an example of one.

**RC:** Yeah, so many wonderful threads in what you were sharing and one thing I just want to come back to just briefly before we go on is that when you were talking about the difference between ethnocentric versus world-centric it brought me and my activist and political cells right up front and center because when 9/11 happened in this country, (in the United States where we're talking), it was almost as if there was a collective, immediate and almost impenetrable nation-centric trance. And we saw people who up until that moment might have considered themselves to be world-centric and certainly others might have considered them to be that, suddenly out of the primitive

brain going into high alert, suddenly becoming “us” versus “them” in just extraordinary ways such that the conversation wasn’t really possible to have for a period of time.

And for me although that was a very painful time and in large part because of what I’m describing, it was also a real gift because I don’t think I’d ever had a chance to see that with the same kind of intensity that it would show up in lots of cultures and lots of historical periods. So just that difference between ethno- or nation-centric and world-centric when the chips are down, not like when we’re just sitting in church or synagogue or just on our own meditation cushion but when someone is out to get you.

**DMH:** Oh yeah. If you attack the boundary of the identity, that identity gets reaffirmed. So if you attack America, the American identity actually gets activated in a certain way. So even though people’s center of gravity—in the many times I’ve listened to Don Beck teach, he’ll say that under stress or duress that our center of gravity will lower. And then within that if we were attacked personally we’d become very egocentric in terms of just protecting ourselves or protecting just our small family against the larger family.

The extent to which we actually understand that is the extent to which we can actually learn how to navigate that center. As more and more people move from an ethno-centric center of gravity to a world-centric center of gravity we can actually become more skilful at working with ethnic strife and tribal warfare and clans and nation-to-nation encounters because we understand something about how the body and the identity reacts when it’s attacked.

**RC:** Yeah. And one of the things that was a part of that, that was so extreme at that time as I saw it, was that there was almost no space available to pay attention to or to care about civilian casualties in the actual war that we were fighting.

**DMH:** Yeah. My experience was that in small groups, in liberal publications, in places that maintained a world-centric level of consciousness they could – it’s what we would call a healthy transcend and include of ethnocentrism; to really feel for the American dilemma and feel protective of ourselves and what happened on 9/11 and at the same time be able to extend our circle of care to include the people in Afghanistan; Thich Nhat Hanh would invite us all to include the terrorists, that’s precisely the point. We watched one by one as our leaders were not able to do that precisely because of the incredible public pressure on them to take a stand for America and against the rest, whether it was the terrorists in Pakistan or Afghanistan or Iraq. We saw that happen and we saw it happen right before our eyes. There was also a tremendous amount of world pressure on the Bush

administration not to invade Iraq. If you remember, those demonstrations were massive and those demonstrations had absolutely no impact at all because that ethnocentrism was so strong. George Bush is an exact example of what I was talking about earlier, as someone who seems to have had some kind of genuine spiritual opening: he quit his cocaine habit, he quit drinking, he actually pulled his life together after his big opening and his talk with Billy Graham and at the same time he interprets his experience through an ethnocentric lens. So he's a genuine religious person who has a worldview that probably just isn't the same worldview that I share or that I think you do.

**RC:** Yeah. So if we bring that back to our own world and particularly our own teachings, you said a few moments ago that you noticed that you have on the one hand the facility to work with energy and groups and the whole state as opposed to some of your own teachers who might have a tremendous amount to pass on in terms of just hardcore meditation. So with that recognition somebody might come to you and want to drink especially deep of how you work with a field, how you perceive a field of energy and a shadow. That's one thing, just in terms of discerning students or practitioners to say, "Where do I go for what, especially because as you said right now, we have that cosmic address and we're in the cosmic supermarket. We do get to pick and choose for better or for worse but in terms of this discussion I would say better. Someone once said to me that, even though I wouldn't have necessarily chosen this to be the reflection I got at the time, she said, "Well there's one teacher I go to named Pamela and Pamela comes from the non-dual tradition. I go to her and she's where I resonate in kindness. I'm just incredibly gifted by her kindness. I come to you, Raphael, for clarity."

When I heard that, I first said, "Well I want to be the kind guy too!" But I also did recognize the reflection and see that of course there was a particular value to clarity and that might be something like what you were describing in your case. It might be particularly relevant in terms of what I have to offer.

**DMH:** Right, I think in the traditional spiritual practice context we would ask, "And who does she go to, who does she trust enough to bump up against her egoic boundaries in a sustained way?" Because a lot of times the student-teacher relationship is really predicated on entrusting someone to take you beyond the limits of what you now know to be yourself, right? Even if someone's kind and even if someone's clear I can still stay in my identity as Diane and in my limits without having an experience with my identity beyond that. And that's one of the really, really important questions:

“Who is in my life that I’m going to entrust to bump up against where I think I end and you begin?”  
And that’s the hardest thing I think, very challenging.

**RC:** I love that question and I think it’s a really powerful question, particularly around the subject that we began talking about in terms of shadow work, transparency, etc. Because I would say that over the course of the years I’ve been doing my teaching, which is about 12 years now—I am ever more just laid low by the degree of trauma that I experience in the people that I work with; the degree that trauma has really shaken the foundations of someone’s core sense of self and well-being in the world. And so when a person is offering him or herself to a teacher for that really unique work that you’ve just described then it becomes a real sacred relationship. And the question that you asked has an element to it, which is who do I sense has worked with his or her own trauma and can hold me in a way that is actually going to be deeply loving even if challenging at times? But also really deeply relevant to me where I am in this moment, not some teaching that they know and understand beyond what I can hold, but can they meet me right there at the edge where they’re going to take my hand and support me to the next place? Not keeping me stuck or try to help me bypass what I need to go through or develop. It seems to me that the more integrated the teacher, the more trust-able is that relationship.

**DMH:** Well you’re raising a whole other issue I think, which is also an important one: the relationship with healing and spiritual practice and particularly trauma and again I think it’s something that the map, the Integral map helps us with a lot. Because someone in the course of what we might call, I don’t know because I’m not a trained healer, but I do know that within the field of trauma and recovery right now there’s just a lot of innovations that are being made around how trauma is stored in the body and how what kinds of reprogramming and what sorts of proven techniques actually work to help us re-orient the body so the energetic patterns aren’t quite held in the same way. And I think that’s a really important consideration as well because if you’re dealing with someone who’s sort of in the range of basic healthy ego development, that’s very different than dealing with someone who’s had a history of abuse. And yet interestingly enough, people who’ve been traumatized in different settings sometimes have actually accessed the absolute more clearly than people who fall into the range of normal ego development because sometimes trauma actually throws our consciousness outside of those ordinary boundaries that I was just talking about a few minutes ago.

So they'll sometimes have very easy access through meditation to more absolute states of being but they may have trouble integrating in the personal domain and within the personality precisely because of the same injury.

**RC:** Yeah and I'm tracking with that 100%. Many people come to me and they're not asking for or needing to be able to touch what you just called the absolute and what previously we might have referred to in the conversation as true nature. It's something that because they are so fractured, they don't have anything to hold on to, to prevent them to that kind of access. And in their case often what they're trying to do is cohere.

**DMH:** Precisely, it's a different developmental test. Absolutely. And that's why – so here's another way we could talk about what we're talking about just for the people listening: what is the relationship of absolute recognition to healthy ego development, to healing, to being a functional human being, to having decent social skills, to being able to make a living? In other words, if you're not in the monastic setting, how can we both deepen our recognition of Love with a capital 'L' and at the same time function as a healthy human being? Because we know from – if we've done any kind of spiritual practice, we know that true love is unconditioned. That it's occurring in all kinds of circumstances, under all kinds of scenarios. And all you have to do is read a poet like Rabia, she's a great I think 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet who is basically a sex slave, and her poems to God are some of the most evocative and beautiful of all the mystical poetry. So we know that the experience of God or the experience of love or of enlightenment is available under all kinds of conditions and at the same time as a human being we have an imperative to care for others, to give other people opportunities to grow and to have healthy and happy lives. So it's an interesting conversation because the absolute and relative dimensions are never separable and at the same time we make distinctions, distinctions are extremely important.

**RC:** Yeah so just taking us in a slightly different direction but again central to our theme today, there is somebody I know in the larger world of the Integral movement and, by the way, I consider myself a passionately interested observer. I'm not like a full-fledged participant in the Integral realm, that's where I sort of sit, as I say this. I think that's important again for transparency.

**DMH:** Yeah, fair enough.

**RC:** But there's a voice that I have heard that says in regard to teaching that one must talk about the issues in one's life that have really been digested, synthesized and to use the Ken Wilber term that you spoke about before, transcended and included. That you can speak about it from the

perspective of having gone through it and are more whole as a result. And with that came the maxim – I don't know if that's the right word – not to talk about something, not to teach about something that one is in the midst of that one feels isn't fully cooked. And I'm wondering if you have a thought or a reflection about that, given what we've been talking about so far?

**DMH:** Yeah well I think for me it's probably the best just to come from my own experience as a student and as a teacher. So in the Zen tradition, the Buddha said something really important, he said, "I teach one thing and one thing only and that's the relief from suffering." And then there's a certain way that Zen teaches one thing and one thing only, and that is recognition of true nature. And yet any Zen teacher knows or any teacher of meditation, that meditation is not – meditation is – our meditation experience in our practice is completely always informed by what's happening in our lives at large. So what's happening in our sex lives, what's happening in our career lives, what's happening with the larger political momentum and how we navigate those kinds of things?

So I find I don't generally instruct people in areas of my life where I just don't have a lot of experience. People come to me a lot with issues related to relationships and relationship, as we know it, is one of the things that really kind of gets to people because you get – you access such goodness on the cushion and then you go home and start interacting with your spouse and everything goes to shit and you just don't know what happened. And so there's a certain way that what I like about relationship is that I think in some way it's the most unresolved of anything; we're always developing in a certain way our confidence in relationship.

So I would say that in short answer to your question, yeah, I would be hesitant to kind of offer advice from a relative point of view to a situation that I simply don't have access to. But one of the things I love about the period of time that we're in, the conversation you and I are having – and I think most people who are doing practice of any kind are Integralists by the way, whether they've studied Ken Wilber's work or not, because that's the calling of our time, which is really what you're saying – to function in this more integrated way, where we have more capacity to access dimensions of ourselves that are more flexible and freely functioning in the world and we can actually act in the world with some genuine relationship to wisdom and compassion because we've practiced in the business world or we've worked in sustainability and we actually understand technology to some degree and participate in that domain.

And so I think that the fact of this moment in time and all these relationships that we have, one of the things I feel is that when something arises in the context of my teaching that I don't have expertise with, I actually have a colleague who does. So it's really easy for me to make a recommendation. So an example that comes out of the Integral world is an example of recovery and addiction. I happen to have a nephew who became a heroin addict a number of years ago. He was 18 years old and I happened to be able to hook him up with some people I knew in the Integral world and he went to South Africa to an addictions program hosted by some Integralists down there and basically went through recovery and kicked his heroin. I wish he wasn't drinking; he's still drinking but he's not using heroin.

So from that perspective being networked in the way we are right now is one of the great gifts of our community. So I may not have the emotional depth that you have and I might have a student who really for whatever reason is a little bit dead in the emotional domain and sitting isn't really supporting them coming to life in that domain, to really being able to feel and express fully. So I might say, "I don't really have that expertise but I'm going to turn you on to the work of Raphael, because I know that's something that he does well. He's part of this larger network of creative teaching that we're all doing together." So there's a big net of teachers, and as long as you have that one teacher who you let bump up against you then you can get some guidance in other domains. That's a very long-winded answer and I apologize.

**RC:** No, it's really helpful. And then there's one clarification which I want to make, which is, I don't think the question was so much only about trying to offer advice or counsel or teach from a place where you don't feel strong in your own expertise, but rather around a place that's in process. So for instance to be able to say, "Right now I'm deep in grief and there may be a time when I felt peace about this but right now I'm wrestling with it and it's got me." And, "There are moments where I feel lost and I want to be present with you in this retreat or workshop or training or whatever it is, and I also want..."

**DMH:** "And I'm crying my eyes out."

**RC:** Yeah, and so I think part of the question was, is it skillful some people might say to us. "Well no, if you're in the process of something and you haven't completed that, don't share that vulnerability with people because it compromises your role or the quality of your teaching." And when I hear that I have a real 'hmmm' about that and that's why I wanted to just come back to that a little bit more specifically with you.



**DMH:** Well certainly in the training that I received at the Naropa Institute and the training that I received with Genpo Roshi, everything was brought onto the path. Whether you were a teacher or a student, it was all brought into the path. So I remember a period of time when I was really studying with Genpo Roshi and his dog had been hit by a car. And I remember him crying for six weeks while he was teaching and I even had moments where I was thinking: wow, okay, maybe....

**RC:** Get over the dog?

**DMH:** You're still grieving your dog, yeah. But that's what was really true for him and so I actually appreciated that. And we've gone through some really hard times here in Salt Lake City recently with what Roshi's been experiencing around sexuality and what he went through in terms of the relationship that he had so that's been a deep question we've all been experiencing together. And I think I've learned a lot, not only from Ken's maps but from my own mistakes in that domain and watching what Roshi's gone through. And one of the distinctions I've started to make is that I always ask a question of my students: how many of you feel like you have your erotic lives worked out? Because we lay so much on people around sexuality and the question around sexuality and for the student I think it is a really fair question because of that dual relationship and because of the intention and the vulnerability that the student brings to a teacher. Now does that mean in my mind that there could never be a sexual relationship between a student/teacher? Probably not, but the social moorings right now are around the fact that you really need to make that distinction.

I can also imagine teachers who are very realized who basically say to their students, save a relationship with a student, "My sex life is off-limits to you." And that's basically what I've told my own students. My husband and I maintain the prerogative to navigate our intimacy privately. So that's a moment where I hold privacy, except for being involved with someone in my community. I feel like that's between us and whether we choose to stay exclusively monogamous or whether we choose to step out of that, that I want the prerogative to actually navigate that myself. Now some people might really protest that I should be transparent about that completely, but I'm just not willing to be. I just am not willing to be, at this point. Now that could change.

And what I said, at this point I am monogamous because I've learned a lot about the relationship of conventional sexuality and post-conventional sexuality and I think where we get in trouble is some of us want post-conventional privileges but we want conventional esteem. So I think if you give up conventional esteem you can probably have post-conventional relationships. But if you want the recognition, if you want to be held with conventional stability — because the majority of people fall

into the conventional place on a bell curve. So if you want the privilege of convention then you have to hold to the mores of convention. And if you're willing to be in the post-conventional or in the unorthodox or non-traditional domain, then don't expect the perks that come with being conventional. Does that make sense?

**RC:** I think so. Let me say it back to you just to see, because I think there's a lot in what you just described. If one comes to recognize that what's true for him or her is some kind of unconventional sexuality, sexual arrangement, agreement etc., and if that's an expression of authentic being then go for it but then don't turn around and somehow hold in contempt those who are more conventional, who aren't giving you approval for your choice.

**DMH:** Precisely. That's precisely what I'm saying. And for me I sometimes like to look at sexuality; so let's think about the people who are non-monogamous, or the people who are let's say polyamorous, to use the word. Because those people are in a certain way, in culture, in the same position that homosexuals were 20 years ago. Which is, they're required by conventional culture to remain closeted because conventional culture won't tolerate that, right? Now again, if you want to be a spiritual teacher and you want to maintain a community and you don't want your community to collapse over some sort of sexual issue, you may have to make the decision to stay within a conventional mold. And you may have to make a decision to stay transparent about that. And if you choose to look beyond that then you just give up the convention and you understand that where most conventional consciousness is, isn't going to include some post-conventional way of being.

And again we have to again examine what's post-conventional and what's pre-conventional. So when is a 65 year old or I don't even have to be that high, a 45 year old spiritual teacher sleeping with women in their early 20s; when is that pre-conventional, and is there a moment that can actually be post-conventional? Or is a young woman who is only 20 years of age always going to be vulnerable to someone in power who is let's say, close to 50? Is there any way for that to be post-conventional or is it always pre-conventional? Does that make sense; have I answered that particular question?

**RC:** It does. I love how it's informing everything we've been talking about before and it brings up a really key issue that I hadn't quite thought of until now in this way. I could imagine a person in the role of teacher or therapist, etc., asking: "Is there something about me and how I choose to live my life that if my client or workshop participant, etc., knew, that they wouldn't want to be working with me? And does that matter?" And I think there's no easy answer to all of those questions but

again it comes back to the hiding. Like why would I not be disclosing? Is it because I want the prerogative of privacy, as you just described, which is completely understandable and valid, or is it somehow because I feel like I might be outed as fraudulent if this other part of me, if its other aspect or self is showing up?

And then I think there's also the question – and this goes to the pre and post-conventional that you were just talking about, is it that I would be outed because I feel that the people who I'm working with aren't at a place in their own understanding to really be able to hold how I'm holding it, or is that an excuse for a shadow to not be looked at?

**DMH:** Great questions, certainly good questions.

**RC:** Yeah and one thing I know, particularly about this because we're using sexuality as a kind of a way to talk about something that is really inclusive of much more than sexuality.

**DMH:** Yeah, I used that as an example.

**RC:** And it makes sense though because it's almost always something sexual that brings down communities or that is where the shadow shows up. Whether it is what happened at the Kripalu center or what happened with Genpo Roshi or what happened with Mark Gafni...

**DMH:** To John Friend...

**RC:** Yes exactly, right now that's the most current example. But what I wanted to bring attention to is that even in a slightly post-conventional mode there are people who would celebrate sexual diversity and even what they might call "kink" from a standpoint of 'what excites me is what I should celebrate; and enough of this disapproval and making me bad or wrong, and having my sexuality based in shame.' But a kink is actually what it sounds like; it's a twist in energy. And so one could choose to celebrate the way that energy moves through that kink or one could say, "I would like to untwist that." Not with the idea that somehow if I untwist it, my sexual response is going to be somehow vastly different; maybe it will, maybe it won't. But then I'm after a kind of liberation that is beyond just starting where I am and not exploring further. And the reason I'm saying all of that and in that way is because I wouldn't think it was my place and my role to tell someone about how they choose to navigate that kink.

I could see for some people that the absolute right thing for them at that time might be to really open fully to that experience for the freedom that it entails and another person in that same situation

because of where he or she is at, I might say, “It’s not serving you and are you willing to accept an invitation into a deeper kind of inquiry about it?”

**DMH:** Yeah, I know. And then so you’re raising another question which is, so I’m asking myself about your question, “Are there things in my history that if I disclose, people wouldn’t want to work with me?” I don’t think there’s anything in my history that if I disclose people wouldn’t want to work with me if they could have been in my experience. (Laughs) On the other hand from the outside there are definitely things that just in terms of hearsay or how I’ve conducted myself, or errors I’ve made, that people – hearing them on face value, that they probably would say well I can’t possibly work with her. That’s the interesting point. Now I’m going to ask myself now is that really true even from my internal position, is that truth?

So this whole question around ethical conduct, perfecting ourselves as human beings, trying to integrate shadows and then of course the whole subject of tantra and what tantra itself is in terms of the transmutation of energy into enlightened where poison is literally brought onto the path. Or that aspect at least, I don’t claim to be a master in that domain, but it always enters into the conversation. So the question would be, can a genuine spiritual teacher who’s teaching let’s say meditative discipline and ethical conduct, can that teacher have a kinky sex life or is that just simply not possible?

I would say they could.

**RC:** I would say it would depend whether they’re approaching it with the fullest possible awareness or whether they’re using it to go to sleep.

**DMH:** Well, right. And then we end up in the enlightenment and illusion problem.

**RC:** Right. But I think that this whole conversation for me reminds me of that wonderful and very famous Rumi line that comes up in many of the retreats and programs that I do, which is: “Out beyond the worlds of right-doing and wrong-doing there is a field, I’ll meet there.” So I would say, and this kind of goes along maybe with what you were saying about your own life, I would be confident that if people would meet me in that field and would be truly swaying with the grass in that field, that I could share anything about my life and that they would be able to say, “I get it. I honor you. It doesn’t fundamentally change how I see you and I know more now and let’s keep going.”

**DMH:** And here's the thing I would add to that just to contextualize it a little bit. I think I would share anything about my life as well. The problem I've encountered is that I've shared things about my life that includes other people and they've been negatively impacted. So if I were in just a container by myself, I feel like I can share anything. That I totally feel. But I have people around me for all kinds of reasons that would feel injured by certain disclosures. And that's where it gets complex.

**RC:** But also just to go back to the point I was making and round it out — that if people were to go into that field with me and then for whatever reason triggers of their own came up that 'I'm out of this field', they might see what we're talking about and sharing really differently. And so here's a perfect example of that. I was at a workshop recently and there was a woman who very courageously shared about some sexual abuse that she experienced as a young girl and it was really hard for her to do. It was very new for her to approach it in this fullness and the group met her in an exquisite way and she was very close and connected to everyone in the group. And then when it came to be the turn for a woman in the group who was one of those absolutely exquisite receivers of the first woman, what the second woman had to say was, "I was that mother. I was the one who let that kind of abuse happen in my own life with my own children." And suddenly the first woman, for obvious reasons, contracted. She didn't feel so safe, didn't feel so expansively connected and really was struggling very earnestly and beautifully with the question of, "What do I do now, what do I do with this?"

And one of the things we talked about was that everybody is here telling their story and none of us can know what's true, what's not true. Even sometimes the people who are telling the story can't know how much memory has been edited through consciousness over the years or we also don't know what other people are leaving out...

**DMH:** Or how mores, cultural mores have shifted in terms of what's okay and what isn't...

**RC:** Right, but I guess the main point is, is that we have this beautiful love that we're sharing. We've co-created the safest room on the planet and everybody is grooving in that, but the truth is that it's possible that every single person that you're looking at in that room, if you had more information you might not want to include.

**DMH:** Absolutely. Which takes us then into a place — which I think is really important because we start to feel the complexity of it — that place of the development of not only destroying that and really making good discriminations, but also expanding our compassion. How do we have

compassion for the woman's contraction? We can have compassion for the victim of the abuse, we can have compassion for the tacit mother and then can we also have compassion for that moment of it not feeling so great to everybody?

The beautiful thing about reality in life is that it keeps us on our toes. If these things were easy these questions would have been answered a long time ago and they kind of have in very broad strokes. But then there's always the particular; there's always the particular and there's always the exception and that's what keeps these questions still alive.

**RC:** Yeah. And something about you that we didn't talk about throughout this whole conversation is that one of your great talents and ways that you have moved in the world is as a mediator. So this is something that you bring to your Integral teaching and to all the rest of your practice that is very impactful and probably differentiating for you. You've seen people be able to find common ground, and not be able to find common ground. You've been in the middle of the wars, both without and then in terms of the Big Mind process, within.

**DMH:** The inner wars and the outer wars.

**RC:** Yeah, and in my experience I haven't gone through the Big Mind process but I did Voice Dialogue many years ago, which is kind of like a cousin, I would say. And what I found is that the inner wars aren't very much different than the outer wars. And becoming a kind of enlightened referee of all of these different streams of energy and consciousness is really what being able to be the most radiant human is about. And when you asked that question of your students, which you shared with us, "How many of you have your sexuality worked out?" I think it's such a brilliant question because it's in sexuality that most people have awareness of access of wilder, untamed energies that in the rest of their lives they don't feel that they're at the mercy of, let's say.

But there are wild and untamed energies in all aspects of life but it's just that that's the realm – sexuality – where we're used to encountering them. So my sense is that as we become more aware and more integrated, we keep getting bigger and bigger and able to hold and move with greater ease, grace, and care along with these energies that are way bigger than the operating system egos that we've been developing over the years.

**DMH:** It's really quite extraordinary and just as you were talking, I'm just noticing right now the incredible amount of appreciation and also tenderness I feel for our predicament. And for the aspiration we have to be fully realized and expressive beings; to express ourselves fully in that kind

of wild, energetic aliveness that you're talking about and finding ways to continue staying open to letting energy flow. And not getting so — it's going back to the beginning again in terms of the polarity, between expression and withholding; realizing that those are two parts of our lives. It's like striking the note and then there's the silence, and those two things always have to go together.

So anyway I feel very appreciative, Raphael, for you and for this series.

**RC:** Thank you and absolutely back at you. I can feel your really deep heart and wise consideration with all of these questions and it's just wonderful to meet you in this way and I know the people listening will feel the same. And I'm also respectful of your time and I know that because there's been so much to share we're kind of over. So I want to close in a few minutes. But if you do have a couple of more minutes, there's one more thing I want to check in with you about.

**DMH:** Totally, 100%.

**RC:** So here we are talking about opening to more energy and flow and creating ease and this is something that in many realms of my life I would say I'm really good at. And then there are those where I'm not...

**DMH:** There must be other ones, yeah.

**RC:** Yeah, and one of the ones that has been coming up a lot for me these days is just the crush of time and financial considerations. If I were to ask the question: "What would I be doing if I could be doing anything I wanted?" I think the simplest answer is I would be doing everything I'm doing now but just much less of it, because I have a family that I want to be able to spend more and more time with and I want that time to be as relaxed as possible. And I find myself — and I think there are millions of people in this predicament — who are just living in the world as we find it right now, who have to be compressed in order to make it work. There are just so many competing impulses.

So that's the place where I lose my flow often, where I can start to feel a little bit victimized or constrained or no-way-outish. So I'm wondering if there's anything in your realm these days that feels like it's the right thing to share given the polarity between containment and expansion that we began with, where you just notice it's not about disclosure as much as it's just like, 'yeah, this one gives me pause, or this one I bump up against a lot?'

**DMH:** Yeah, I'll share one — I have a fistful of those — but the one that comes to mind because I've been working with it is just what it means to have been an attractive woman by conventional

standards and to be aging; to be hitting my mid-50s and really literally just watching the way that I look just change really dramatically. And the culture on the whole, for me at least, doesn't do a good job of holding me in that. I'm given two options, and I wish I weren't given one. One option is to try and keep it up and maybe have some cosmetic surgery or maybe do this or maybe do that and to look as good as you can. Like Madonna and I are the same age and Madonna did a half-time show. And it was like I had two feelings about it: on the one hand I just totally admired her because she's doing her thing and talk about expression, the woman is just the true pop icon and she's amazing. And there was something just, well, she's 53!

And so I'm watching her and Piers Morgan, you know the English media figure; he said it was a little bit for him like watching his mad aunt get drunk at Christmas. Oh my god, you know? It was just this sort of horrible dilemma around how, as a female, I'm supposed to age or not age. So I just had this breakthrough the other morning where I was coming to look in the mirror and I looked in the mirror and I said to myself, "Well, this is my way of saying goodbye." I kind of just of — when I looked at myself I realized oh, this is the gesture that I'm saying goodbye. So the way that I've been working with it is just to see that it's actually heightening my sense of the preciousness of my life, that I'm—because until you get to 50, there's just some — how old are you, can I ask you?

**RC:** 51.

**DMH:** 51. So at least for me, prior to 50 I had this idea that there are two ages, there's young and old and it's like you're young and then you're not. And when you start crossing over and you see that you're losing life force, that my memory isn't quite what it was. I'm only 53, I'm not 90, I'm not 85, and yet I can feel certain kinds of vitality going out of me. And I think my death is just a lot more apparent to me now than even five years ago. So that's just the one that I'd like to share because it's a dilemma and as I said I don't feel like it's helped very well in culture.

**RC:** Yeah, I really appreciate you sharing that and I want to go back to something just to further understand it. You said that as you experienced it you were kind of given two options: one of them is the fix-yourself-up option, get the plastic surgery, etc...

**DMH:** Oh, or the other is to withdraw, just to kind of withdraw from being seen. I could always use that option.

**RC:** You mean like you used to be front and center and now go behind the scenes to take your place?



**DMH:** Yeah, for instance, here is a good example: my sister is basically a media celebrity up in Portland, Oregon. She used to be an investigative news reporter, right? And she made a decision that rather than have to deal with what you have to deal with when you're in the media all the time, she moved into radio, so that she wouldn't be seen. Because you're not really allowed — if you're going to be in front of cameras or you're going to be on video and you're going to be teaching in front of large groups or those kinds of things, there's a lot of pressure on you to look good. So your other option is not to be in the front of the room or not to be on video, does that make sense?

If you think about it, just think about who you see on TV everyday, you're just not allowed to be on TV these days if you do not participate in looking as good as you can for your age. Does that make sense?

**RC:** Yeah.

**DMH:** So I feel that dilemma, you know?

**RC:** So it's something that you're living with that's very palpable for you as you go through your days.

**DMH:** Yeah. And again it's disclosing a kind of privilege that doesn't get talked about so much in spiritual circles, but just the privilege of appearance. The privilege that I've had because I was gifted for absolutely no merit of my own of having conventionally good looks as a female and what that meant as a woman and then I think another thing that never really gets talked about very much is just our kind of implicit need for attention. Human beings need attention the way a plant needs sunlight. And we sometimes, I would say we've started to talk about sex and we've started to talk about power and we look at our security needs and money but we don't really talk about just the fundamental need to be noticed, to have other people recognize you.

We talk about expression from the interior, first-person perspective but what about being seen from the outside or seeing each other from the outside? That's something that sometimes in my retreat I'll work with really directly: talking about just the need for attention and how do we get it and what would it be like to make that more conscious?

**RC:** Yeah, I love that and it's interesting because the pop culture takes us places that are surprising. And one of the things that Oprah Winfrey has talked about is this very thing. That people, from her perspective, have a fundamental need to be seen and to matter, to know that they matter. And something about attention is that you matter in the space. It matters that you're there.

But you said something that I just really want to take a moment to add to, because I think it's really an important topic.

So you were pretty and you said that was through no hard work on your own. When I was young I was held up because I was smart and that was also through no hard work of my own. But here's the thing that I come to recognize especially through all the years of spiritual work and understanding, is that there is nothing that is of my own.

**DMH:** Even being able to work hard is not your own, yeah.

**RC:** Exactly, right. Right. Because I write these books and then people say, "Oh, I love how you write." And they want to make it mine and of course there's a part of me that wants to get on that horse and make it mine. But ultimately all I did was show up.

**DMH:** Everything is a gift, yeah. Absolutely. And there is this deep, kind of phenomenological question about where is there choice and what do we have choice about, two big questions. You can do your next series on that.

**RC:** Yeah, it's true. But I just want to say the reason that I wanted to expand it that way is because it's easy to fall into certain things you work hard for and those have more value because you worked hard for them. But if we're really just showing up moment by moment and life is living itself through us, then hard work is the path of one and *laissez-faire* is the path of another and there's no better or worse in that regard. And that's the field that Rumi talked about. So I want to make sure — I'm raising children now — and I want to make sure that on the one hand I pass on certain values because I'm a human and I have the values but I don't want to hold them so tightly that somehow there is this sense that some things are earned and other things aren't, and the things earned are where you derive your value.

**DMH:** Fair enough, that makes total sense.

**RC:** I know so many people are going to gain so much from our time together.

**DMH:** Thank you, Raphael I really appreciated this, I really do.

## Thomas Hübl



Thomas Hübl was born in Vienna in 1971. As a 26-year-old medical student, Thomas became interested in bodywork and took a radical step to abandon his studies and spend the next four years in retreat in the Czech Republic where he meditated and explored the spaces of inner consciousness. After returning to Vienna, he began to offer one-to-one sessions and lead larger workshops. Since 2004, Thomas has been active worldwide, lecturing, holding workshops and trainings. He has participated in events including Celebrate Life Festival and Healing Events, which have brought together thousands of Germans with many Israelis to acknowledge, face, and heal the cultural shadow left by the Holocaust. When he is not travelling, he lives in Berlin and Tel Aviv together with his partner, the Israeli artist Yehudit Sasportas. [WWW.THOMASHUEBL.COM](http://WWW.THOMASHUEBL.COM)

### 1. Healthy and Unhealthy Versions of Transparency

**RC:** Thomas, as we were getting ready to begin the recording, you asked me a question which was about the motivation of our series and you wanted to clarify, first of all, what it was really about and whether it was something that you were aligned with. Would you be willing to just start us out by, once again, sharing your concern about that because I think it's really valuable.

**TB:** Yes. I wouldn't phrase it a concern. I think my interest is just in the motivation for this kind of program because there are two different things according to transparency that I think are important. The first one, the healthy version of transparency is a true interest, like a heartfelt interest in the human connection. And the other one comes from an interest in a kind of a [gossipy way] about people. For me, it was important that the program will be about the first part because the program, as I understand it, is very helpful in bringing more transparency into the backstage that people often don't see; I think this is very helpful and it can clear things. For me, the motivation makes the difference here. It can go either way and I think if the motivation is clean, then it's a wonderful thing.

**RC:** Well, thank you for bringing that up and clarifying that. As we just discussed briefly earlier, it is that heartfelt transparency that is the motivation I had in creating this series and I mentioned to some other guests of the series that when I do workshops, I begin by inviting people to co-create with me what we can call “the safest room on the planet” in which all of our thoughts and feelings are held in a compassionate acceptance; there’s no way that we can do it wrong, or there is nothing that we can experience that somehow would cause us to be outside of that safe container. It’s my intention to create that very same kind of container with the guests in this series which I think you and I have begun even by addressing the difference between what you called the cheap version versus the deep version of transparency. So I’m excited that we’re already bringing that to the field and I wanted to reiterate for you that that kind of honoring and safety is really what I’m all about.

**TB:** Right. Yes, because we know, as I said before, that there are two different versions of spiritual teachings—there are many but I think there are two categories. The one that emphasizes what I call a non-dual awakening in the being state and then a non-dual awakening that equally honors the being and the becoming. The becoming always includes the whole humanity, the whole ego and personality structures, and I think working with these needs a lot of expertise and involves a lot of projections. Therefore, I think, also for this program and the many people that are listening, it’s good to see what the motivation of the program is but also the motivation of people listening to this program.

**RC:** Right. Because they may tune in because it seems somehow entertaining or titillating to get a glimpse of something, maybe a foible or a flaw in a teacher just for the sake of that kind of gossip. But on the other hand, even if that is a partial motivation as they come to listen to our talk or the other talks, to open into acceptance about that to allow it and not fear it or fight it, but then also to have the opportunity to deepen into a connection with us as we have our exploration, then we are all going to gain from that.

**TB:** Right. This is very beautiful, yes.

**RC:** So one of the things I wanted to tell you, Thomas, as we get started today that I don’t know that you would know is that there are a number of people in the world of my work who also are in the world of your work. And as a matter of fact, a couple of weeks ago, or maybe a little longer, you did an interview with my good friend Terry Patten on his *Beyond Awakening* series. And shortly after that, some of my clients and people in my community were telling me all about that interview

and said, “You got to listen to it, Raphael. It’s really wonderful and it adds dimension to the work that we’re doing.” So even though this is our first time communicating, we’ve been in the field of one another for quite sometime.

**TB:** Oh, beautiful. I’m very happy.

**RC:** And I wanted to just share one thing about that too, which is I’ve been working with people on a process that I call ‘communing.’ It’s not the best word but there isn’t a real word for it in English that I know that captures the flavor of what it’s about. I’ve shared on my website and on my blog some examples of what it’s like when people come together not in a teacher-student or client-professional relationship, but person to person, heart to heart sharing, first of all, where they are in that moment of presence and they say what they would like to support one another in, in terms of their becoming.

And people are finding this really helpful because the deep acceptance they have for one another, the curiosity that they have, and the structure that they have to look at things that have eluded them or where they’ve had a lot of resistance, whether it’s about something like a creative block or procrastination. They find by staying in contact with each other or checking in frequently, even sometimes 10 minutes or 20 minutes apart from each time they talk. They experience shifts and they get a lot done and they also feel much more whole in the process. I’m wondering if anything like that is happening also in the world of your students and your community, people coming together and really tapping into the potential of the ‘we’ and the field of collective consciousness that you are so passionate about.

**TB:** Yes, definitely. Let me say it like this: One ability that is very important, which I think is an ability that the spiritual intelligence gives us—it’s an ability that many people have inside to a certain degree of expertise. But, as grown up human beings, we didn’t really have opportunities to develop it because our schooling system and university system is not really designed to support people in this kind of dimension. And what I talk about is a level of transparency and transparency for me means that life becomes transparent to us; that a human being is a field of information as well, and if I refer now to the Kabbalah tradition, the Kabbalah tradition says very clearly that there are four different levels to reality and most of the people experience reality in a certain level of story; things that happen to us, the programs that we have, the good things and the flowing things in our life.

And there are at least two or three other levels that are much more based on information and the deep nature of reality that we can live in at the same time. And then we experience the story but we have a much more profound resting in reality which gives us access to much more information. And I simply think that the level of how often communication is running is just tapping into a small percentage of the information that we have. So given this small background of theory, to your question, we have a lot of exercises where we look at how people can tune in with each other when they communicate and make communication a kind of an empathic, but also tuned in version of communication so that there is a kind of a transpersonal aspect arising to two people that meet. Like one person, the inter-subjective space, and another person, or within a group. So we have many exercises that sound similar to what you are saying where we learn to hold a space. So communication is space and the expertise to be very precisely attuned to the level of information, to the level of development, to the level of collective information that we are talking from.

So in a few words, we could say if I'm able in my communication to contain whatever happens within me, to contain what happens within the space between us, what happens in you while you listen, and with which level of consciousness you are listening. If all of these are in my radius of awareness, then I think there is a high art to communication. Many of the exercises lead to the emergence of a new 'we' are based upon this principle.

## **2. Being and Becoming**

**RC:** Beautiful. Thank you. It seems to me that it is that space, that either two individuals or groups can co-create and deepen into which really allows for the most powerful becoming and that that becoming can be experiential and it can also, as I was describing, be applied to a particular area of someone's life in a very practical and direct way. So the field has multiple benefits but it especially can really enter into the actual life of the personality and even can build skills and achievement for people even though it seems at first like it's more about being than it is about doing.

**TB:** Yes. It can—it seems like it's about being. But on the other hand, it's a very precise profession even. We can really become professionals in it. So there are many people that walk through reality and life is simply happening to them but then there are some people that really rest deeper and deeper and deeper in the core of reality, which, I think gives us much more access to a much wider stage of life. And if you see this, then the presence will actually give us access to the information of what we call the past and to the information of what we call the future in this eternal moment. So being is the eternal moment but the past and the future are not outside of being. They are part of it.

And I think that, therefore, I am very much for a spiritual practice that will enable all of us to be present in that which always is anyway, and also be skilled in becoming because I think there is a skill, which I call spiritual competency, in navigating reality and understanding how creation works, how life comes into form. There is a beautiful sentence in the Tao Te Ching that says “Bring things in order before they exist.” And I think that this is a beautiful sentence that describes the being and the becoming, the expertise of both. And so I think that there is literally a kind of an expertise that we can learn and practice everyday. And I think we all need to make our life this practice.

**RC:** Yes, that’s great. When I speak to groups, often in the very beginning of the experience, I ask them to raise their hand if when they were growing up, they got a great education in how to recognize, honor and experience their emotions. And almost no one ever raises their hand and everybody laughs because it’s not even really a legitimate question for most people. It’s so far removed from what they experienced and that’s the place from which we begin. I was smiling when you were talking about our educational system and our university system and how people don’t have any training most of the time in the kind of skill of listening and opening to the field of presence within and then also between people; what a wonderful thing if that was part of the curriculum because it’s certainly part of the curriculum of being a human in the fullest sense.

**TB:** Right. And if we go to the emotional and also to the spiritual; I meet many people that come to the groups and say, “All my life, I had a feeling I’m a bit beside the track. All my life, I have the feeling I have never been really seen.” Where is the culture that we can build that has these abilities in order to see the core intelligence that’s unfolding through human beings, so we can learn to create potential-based societies? I think if we do this, then we will have holistic trainings and educational systems. Like there are attempts now in Germany, quite serious attempts, to turn many schools from knowledge-based education into a potential-based education, which, I think, is a fantastic thing. And this will need to include all the lines of development: The emotional line, the spiritual line, intuitive line, besides the ones that we already know a lot about, like the intellectual or social, or whatever.

So I think what you’re saying is totally on. I ask a similar question in the groups and there are many people that know there was not a training and therefore abilities that we have as human beings are not being expressed. And we need these abilities in companies and institutions in the intimate relationships and then in all kinds of fields.

**RC:** I would even go one step further to say that most people I come in contact with didn't get no education, they got a really harmful education in how to relate to other people and they spend a good deal of their adult life trying to undo that. And one of the things that I find with my beginner's understanding of neuroscience is that our brains are really shaped and our neural networks are formed by those early experiences and that when we choose to enter into this new kind of deep presence for ourselves and with others, we're literally changing the structure and the perceiving ability of our brains. So it's happening on every level and giving us a chance to really be recreated anew.

**TB:** There is a brain scientist in Germany, quite a famous brain scientist, Gerald Huether. He said that in the brain, when we are a one year old, around this age, there is the highest potentiality of neuronal networks. So we have the highest potential for where we will go, the highest openness in our brain, and then he made a research and he shows in his diagrams that it goes down and down and down. When we are 14, it's already much lower and then when we are grown-up, it's even lower. So, it's forming a personality but it's also reducing, in a way, the potential intelligence that is there. So is this a necessary step? Or is the way our education and our schooling system works also part of this decline?

And so I think that they are very interesting questions and when we turn it around and we open ourselves again, many abilities start to reappear that we think we have lost or that we—some people even remember when they were children that this kind of abilities were there and then when we are grown-ups, we just have memories of this. So this is an amazing science to progress with that many ways we lead in a way to a more suitable education system. I am totally aligned with your words here, yes.

**RC:** Just a quick question as an aside because we're talking about education, are you somebody who is a supporter and finds resonance with Waldorf education?

**TB:** Definitely. Rudolf Steiner, I think was exceptional and had many very good insights and I think in his time, he was definitely much ahead of his time and a pioneer. I think that they are very lovely principles. I am not expert on Waldorf education. Therefore, I cannot give a really profound statement now. But as far as what I've heard and what I have seen and how I've been introduced to it, I think there are many lovely principles and I think there are already again updates that we can build in, in order to go even further.



I had a lovely discussion with Peter Russell. And I had dinner with him in the last five-day retreat in IONS and he said, “There is a very interesting thing that people always imagine the desirable future would be a more stable future.” And I totally agree with this, that our mind always wants a future that has more stability which means actually, if you really look at this, it would be a future that would develop less. But, what would it be if change, development and movement actually are the resting point? To become competent in changing—this is a desirable future, I think. We will learn that life is constantly updating itself and the genius people I think of all times, were on this updating wave.

And I think that often, when there were teachers or genius people that brought new insights, that we have the tendency to stay fixed on them. How can we learn that life is constantly updating itself and honor great achievements in humanity, and not lose the updating mechanism of it? I think that this is a very interesting question.

### **3. A Global Village and its Shadow**

**RC:** Yes, thank you for that. And the other thing that I was going to say, just again, with a smile on my face, is that there are communities that are forming, and I know that you come into contact with them around the world and you also lead some of them, that are really opening into this deep potential and the collective consciousness. When I was little and we were in school, we had ‘pen pals,’ they called it, where we would communicate with people from far away; as children, we would get a sense of what’s out there in the world and how they were similar to us and also different.

I had the idea that at some point, it would be lovely to create gatherings in which the different communities could come together and in honoring what draws them and also their uniqueness. So for instance, I have a year-long program for just a small group of people that I have been doing for I think 8 years now, and I imagine it will be so wonderful to have a field trip sometime where whoever was available could come to Germany or Austria or wherever one of your communities is and we could actually co-create together, knowing that there’s many things about us that are similar but also we have our differences and our uniquenesses—a new kind of presencing diplomacy, let’s say.

**TB:** I think it’s very good. You are most welcome to join us in Germany. We have this three-year training program running, we call it the Timeless Wisdom Trainings, and now that we will start at the third turn of it and I’m always interested. In the summer, we have the big Celebrate Life

Festival. We invite different teachers internationally to come and join a kind of consciousness event for 10 days. So there are many anchor points, I think, and to have an exchange of knowledge—I'm very much into this—we will create a kind of global net where every competency of every field and also a critical creative dialogue can happen where we will find out what we can learn from each other and what we can give each other and to strengthen actually the global movement that's happening.

I believe that the synchronicity that different movements and leaders all around the planet can form has a lot of power, and it needs to be there in our time. The separation of movements doesn't make sense anymore in the time of a virtual village because I think that the world became a virtual village and our older great traditions and older movements around the planet are actually challenged to communicate with each other which is actually very good because we will see that every tradition has a different level of expertise in different areas and I think that this is an amazing time.

**RC:** Yeah. And you're also speaking to an interesting challenge and almost an irony in the global village that has been created because in the time of my growing up, there was something that we could call a counter culture or an alternative culture that while it had many streams, it also had a sense of cohesion. People could find where they fit and see where they wanted to plant their roots and grow. And with the advent of the Internet and many of the things that have come with it, our world has splintered ever more into subgroups even as the potential for unity has grown through the technology. So I think one of the biggest challenges that we have is finding each other and re-establishing those kinds of connections so that there aren't millions of things happening simultaneously that never find each other and never get linked up.

**TB:** Yes. And also to see that we are living in a time of an information overload, the global village gives us also an informational overload which, in my perspective, already starts to prevent on one level, people who are going deep. I often see people that jump from one thing to another; there is a high level of consuming things but then sometimes it lacks certain depth. And how can we have a globally informed system, but at the same time know where we practice locally and deeply? I think this will be the challenge of this kind of informational age; when you open the Internet, you have so much information that you can be overloaded by it, and then stay on the surface of things. And so the depths and the range of information are both important. And to have a global dialogue amongst different movements that we can discuss these topics and can also discuss the pathologies or shadows of our age—which is not only that we have access to everything but that we might also

stay on the surface. I see people who consume every weekend another workshop but then some of them feel really confused inside because of so much different information and so much different energies that they connect to, which is hard to digest. And then you need to see if this really supports the spiritual growth or if it supports also sometimes many people to escape the things that we really need to look at.

**RC:** I'm really fascinated by what you are talking about in terms of information overload and I'm thinking of electricity where there is that idea of the signal to noise ratio. And so much of the information, using that way of looking at it, that we have access to, is really the noise. It's not the signal, the gold that we want to be able to mine in using the ability for connection that we have. And it's a good place I think in our discussion to ask you a question about that on a slightly more personal vein, which is when you open your computer and I open my computer, we have all of that available to us. And also, it has the potential to give rise to lots of different compulsions and distractions and shadow aspects.

So if you'd be willing, could you tell us how you manage in your own life this very issue we're talking about, how you work with too much information, how you choose to use your time in pursuing and digesting information? If we were there with you when you're in your hotel room or you have your free time and you're opening your Chrome or your Firefox, or your Internet Explorer, do you have rituals or practices that help you to not get lost in the ways that we're talking about?

**TB:** One thing is to say that the good thing for me is that I'm very busy. So on one hand, I don't have so much time because I travel a lot and I'm a lot on the road, and when I'm not on the road, I need to run a very complex system of the field that I created in a way—I'm sitting, in the times when I am not giving groups, a lot on the computer, but I don't have so much time to look for things or go into the Internet. There is one thing—because I came out ten years ago from a deep retreat. I was, for four years on a deep retreat and then this time I had nearly no access to technology; I didn't have even a functional computer for a long time and Internet didn't exist for me; also the mobile phone, in this time I didn't use it a lot.

When I came out, I was not connected to news, I wasn't connected to many things that were going on and I find myself in the last few years being more and more interested again in the information of the basic things that are going on in the planet. And I need to see that this doesn't get too much,

and how I see this; when I feel it now, it's like my body is a very good sensor for when my energy gets a bit too much involved in the computer work, then I can feel it in the energy of my body and in a certain stage, I know that I need to stop and either do some sports or either sit for a few minutes and meditate and ground my energy again. So I find myself often doing some basic exercises of grounding my energy which means I connect with a ground and I expand myself into the field and immediately, because I work a lot with this, and because I do it very often, it's quite quick for me how I can reconnect my energy to the field. Then the process reverses and this kind of energy accumulation in my body disperses again.

#### **4. The Importance of the Body**

**RC:** Thank you for that. It's a beautiful transition to something else I wanted to ask you about which is the body. In many spiritual communities, even those that I really draw a lot of energy and wisdom from, there isn't in my experience a fullness of celebration and connection to the physical body. For me, in my own life and in the work that I do, I usually begin there and end there. So I'll ask people when we're coming together to notice what they're experiencing in their body. We talk about how there are three basic realms in which you can pay attention; there's the external realm that your senses bring to you; there's the realm of thought and then there's the realm inside your physical body, which includes inner sensing and also emotions because emotions are physical as well. And certainly, to me, it seems that it's the inner realm where most people are the least comfortable spending time and paying attention. And actually going back to something that you mentioned earlier about change, as soon as you pay attention to that inner realm for any period of time, you see that nothing ever remains the same and that everything is always in flux. And any kind of nostalgic urge that you have to live in a more fixed or stable way goes out the window because you just realize that's not how a being functions. It's impossible. So is there a strong place also in your tradition and in your work for the body and that inner sensing?

**TB:** Oh, definitely. It's like a whole science. Where do I start? First of all, I think that the body is like a vessel for me. And I totally agree that some spiritual traditions actually are meant to take us, in a way, out of the body; but I believe that the competency of silence and the competency of movement, if a non-dual realization is composed by those two, then the competency of silence is eternal spaciousness and the eternal being, and the competency of movement is actually the becoming process. And the becoming process for me needs to anchor every realization in the physical body because I believe that when we have a higher realization, it's 50% of the way, but

this higher realization needs to ground itself through the body energetically in the world. And once it's grounded, then it becomes a reality.

So I see spiritual mastery is a higher and higher capacity of, in a way, grounding higher realizations of the becoming realm because...eternity doesn't matter. But if eternity becomes life and life manifests itself and potential and intelligence are working, and the universe is appearing, then it matters. And then I believe that there are some fundamental sentences that I think need to be challenged. One is that life or the world "is an illusion." I think it's not true that the world is an illusion. I think that the separate experience of the world is an illusion. And the other thing that we sometimes see is "life is suffering" and those two sentences need to be challenged: The [suffering is actually resistance to life.] And so if we take these, then for me, it becomes more and more important—in my work, I use a lot of body as an informational field that we need to have a very high competency in. And so people that attend our trainings are often people like therapists, coaches, psychologists, and so on.

What we learn is how can we use the informational transmission of a body to really become very competent to relate to every developmental level that this body went through, individually and collectively, and learn to be very precise in addressing topics, patterns, shadows, whatever, including the body experience. We go so far that we say okay, that we can learn to see what somebody feels and to perceive what somebody feels and be very precise if people, when they say, "Oh, I feel anger," or "Oh, I feel this," or "I feel this," to really see if people imagine that they feel it or if they really feel it. So that we refine our perception of this field that we call the body and really work with it on a very precise way.

And given what I said now, I relate to what you say very much that I think it's very important and it's also very important when we go into higher consciousness states and that we can bring them down. Every new realization might bring up another load of shadow material in our body minds because a higher electricity runs through us which needs to clear up—also, if there is some stuff stuck in the body, it will surface which I think is a very important process when we want to understand evolution. And so I definitely agree that the emotional content and the body are very important parts of the process of evolution.

**RC:** Yes. And just following up on what you shared about asking students and practitioners about what they're feeling to find out if it's an imagined feeling or if it's actual, when I'm working with

people emotionally, I'm asking them to step away from the label or the static noun that they are using to describe a feeling. So sadness, for instance, well there's no such thing really as sadness because every time you would turn your attention to your body and notice the subtle sensations, each time they'll be different. And so we use the word sadness in my experience, or any other emotional label, as a convenience to describe an overall sense. But if we're really willing and able to explore deeper than that label, we get all kinds of different and more refined information and get a chance also to separate from the story that we bring to the emotion or the interpretation and just have the raw data available for us to synthesize much more fully and easily in the process. Would you concur with that?

**TB:** Partly. So on one hand I agree, but I think it needs already a certain level of expertise in feeling our interior world to go to what you said right now. I find it sometimes helpful that when people come and they are quite new to the work, to invite them through even labels that we know to connect to the energy and then once people are more skilled with this, then I agree. Then we can go to more refined and refined levels of vibration that we label with certain things and then the label is in the way, yes.

I also find it very important about what you said, how it's not about the story. The story, in my mind, is the past, but the actual energy that is un-integrated, which I would say causes a kind of a circular energy; an energy that doesn't fulfill its purpose because it's actually circling in a certain age and level of development. It cannot progress because it's held in a contraction. So when we relate to the energy itself, to the vibration itself, then this has nothing to do with the past. And I think some people mix the past of the story and they call sometimes, the energy also of the past.

So some people in the spiritual traditions would say, "Oh, it's not really necessary to work with this stuff because we don't want to connect to the past." But un-integrated energy is not the past, I believe. Un-integrated energy affects us now. This is what I call the movies on top of the main movie. And then we need to discern why certain feelings and fears and anger and stuff appear in life and situations where they are not really fitting and to take down the extra movies from the main movie to clear my screen. So I would challenge some of the spiritual teachings that say, "Oh, we don't want to connect to the past and we don't want to work with shadow because it's not necessary," and I don't think so. I think it's not the past. It's an un-integrated energy that holds an evolutionary spark, an intelligence that cannot manifest, and therefore, it doesn't contribute to our

society and to our lives. So to get this on board I think is very important. So evolution is not just a future potential, this is also evolution.

**RC:** Absolutely. So I want to take the opportunity based on what we're talking about to get personal and what I really mean is with myself, I'd like to reveal something and offer it up to your wisdom and your perspective because I think that will help listeners deepen into what we're talking about. I have heard you say elsewhere that if two people come together and have an exchange, a conversation, and if one of them leaves the conversation feeling depleted, that there's an issue of competency there that somehow they missed, if I'm saying this right, they missed some information. They missed the ability to perceive the fullness of what was there because if they had perceived it all and were able to engage with it all, they would leave the encounter being energized. Before I go on, did I say that sufficiently?

**TB:** Right, right.

**RC:** Okay. So the reason I wanted to ask you about this is because in my own life, my own experience, up until this moment, I've had a personal realization that presence requires energy and that we can be present to the degree that we have energy for it and I came to this personal understanding because I've had chronic illness for almost 30 years. And when I am bringing together a group or having a client session and I am creating this field and co-creating it with the people who I'm with, I find often that it really uplifts my energy. And it does bring me into a higher and richer vibration. And that I leave the encounters often with that increased energy. But then also, perhaps it's because of my chronic illness, or maybe something else, I also find then that I do get exhausted and I do crash, and I do need to recharge before I'm in a place where I can be with people in the same way. So often my experience of workshops and I'm very transparent about this with my participants is that in between our sessions, a lot of the times I'm sleeping, purposely giving myself the space and time to go down so then I can come back up. And I'm wondering just in a very open and vulnerable sense, not needing to hold on to or defend anything, do you sense that from your own experience and perception that there is some missing piece of competence or something similar such that I wouldn't necessarily have to recharge or maybe is that another element of the overall piece that I didn't yet hear you address?

**TB:** Yes. I think there are two things. One thing is that I really like what I hear—that you know what you need. And I think if there is—and we talked today for the first time so I would need to

tune in a bit deeper now—but if there is any kind of chronic symptom going on in your body, it's a high responsibility, if you work with people that you know how you can take care of your own energy. And if this means that you will go to sleep in between the sessions or whatever you do, the first feeling that I get is that it's right. It's good that you know how to take care of your energy. I think everybody who works with people, we need to have the ability to hold a certain space and we need to know what we need for this. And so I will definitely encourage this part in you that found this way to deal with it and it's very good. So this is the first point.

And the second point is that of course, that I what I said before we started the program is that I feel, what I appreciate about this program is that people who work with people, it doesn't matter in which level they are, I believe, it's always good to have people around that they can go for an exchange which is not in the field of the clients or the students, another field of people that we talk to and we get some clarity if we feel it's necessary. There is, of course, always the possibility to look deeper into what you say are chronic symptoms and to see if there is something that supports you more, and of course, there's always the possibility that in some situations, we simply don't fully see the dynamic of the situation. And we all need to be open for this, that even if we are already very experienced, I often say to nearly every group that in every group, I learn something. Every group that I give, I feel they are another a puzzle piece of how amazing and how reality works—I learn. And my work constantly refines and refines and refines itself.

I think intuitively you know if it's because your body needs rest and/or if there were some situations where you felt that something in the situation was a bit stark and didn't reveal itself what it is. And if this is so, I always go and I would look, even after the situation, “Okay, what happened there? And is there something that I need to see? Is there something more?” And then I would go and sit with it or go and share it with someone. And by sharing, sometimes, it gets clearer to me what, what's going on there, in this situation.

### **5. The Groundedness of Fatherhood**

**RC:** I got it. Thank you. And I want to ask you, because of what you just shared, for you what do you find that you need for your own self, for your own personality and your own body in order to be able to be present the way that you would like for your groups?

**TB:** I think there are two things. One is that when I give groups or like now, I was in the States for two and a half weeks, and when I do this, giving teaching tours, I always feel very energized from the work and also the energy that runs through me. But I always know that there are one, two, three



people in my life, that whenever there is something unclear for me, that I can go to them because I, from my perception, give them a very high level of competency, or clarity, of spiritual development, and I know that whenever there is something that seems unclear to me, that I know where to reflect myself. So where is the mirror that I can reflect myself in the places that are not clear to me?

And this is something for me that I need, that I feel that it's even my responsibility to take care of; that if some of these people leave my life, that I will look for new people and they always appear because I feel that this is something that I want to have in my life. And I think that is one of the things that is for me very important. And this is also what I teach when there are a lot of therapists or people in my group that are working with people, that we all know that in the work with people, we have two things that come up with it at the same time: One is that life gives us a speeding up of our own evolution because when we work with people, naturally more energy runs through us. So this will speed up our own development, but on the other hand, it gives us also the responsibility to take care of our vessel, which consists of our physical body, our emotional, mental, spiritual, social, whatever, that we need to take care that this will be as clear and as open and as transparent as possible. And I think therefore, we need to look for a support system. And I feel that this is very important for me. Because when I work with people, I feel that it's in the groups where there is such a high intensity that runs through my system that I feel very energized by this. And so this feels very nourishing on the one hand so I go out from the groups and mostly I'm very charged, like after holiday. For me, sometimes the time in between the groups with the practical things and the company and the business stuff and all this is a different time. But the actual work that I do, for me is more like holiday time.

**RC:** Yes. And you have, like many spiritual teachers, a little bit of a rock and roll life. What I mean is that you travel so much and you're away from home and I do as well, less than before and part of the reason that I travel less now is because I have a family and I have a stepdaughter and a young daughter who's not yet 5. And so for me there is a dynamic tension between traveling to be with people and sharing this work and then also being away from home and those connections that are so vital to me. Is there anything when you are home that causes a tug or a pull within you in the same way? Or are you just fully able to be freely where you are and not having that kind of pull.

**TB:** I mean there are two things. That one is that I have a daughter since 10 months. She's now a 10-month old. And it was not an easy process for me to come to this point because I felt so full with

my work, and now I see more and more the gift and the presence that it is in my life. And I also agree, for me, it appear sometimes there's a bit of tension, all the drive, and all the commitment to many, many people that I'm working with and to the whole structure that I'm working with and to the family life. But I'm also very lucky because my partner, Judith, has her own very strong path—she is an artist, an international artist—so there is a kind of a good movement; sometimes we have our times where it feels a bit more like a friction between the work and the time that we spend together. But I think I'm very lucky also with the relationship, Judith is a strong support for my work. And this feels good. But nevertheless, sometimes we also have frictions if I'm two and a half weeks or nearly three weeks away and I'm touring in the States, it's a long time. It's also a long time then to come back and to see my daughter again and to come back to the closeness. And so this is true. I think one of my biggest challenges in the last years was to agree to become a father because on one hand, that the theory was known to me but somehow, not the practical application of it—and now that I go through the practical application, which means not to sleep so much, I see the benefit in participating in this process. It's a very interesting process for me because it was a long decision up to this point and now I see also the expansion that happens in me.

**RC:** Do you find also that there are certain pieces of your development or material that need to be integrated that can only come up within the kind of intimate relationship that you have with your partner and that you have within your family or do you see the same kind of materials for you showing up everywhere?

**TB:** There's definitely something that comes up in the intimate relationship, in the parenting that I think wouldn't come up without it. I think that this triggers very deep parts in us and for me, it was also a deeper grounding process that happened through it. I could literally feel how one part of me dropped somehow deeper into the body and into a deeper responsibility for life. Because I think without an intimate relationship and even also the parenting, there is one part that doesn't get triggered, that only gets triggered when we are in it. And I see now that I couldn't think of it before the way I can now. This is a strong learning process for me because I am, in my teaching I often relate also to—I go with people very deeply into structures as well and for my work, it's very beneficial. Although it's also a process for myself, like I felt it as a process, also to agree to become a father was a process. It was not so easy. But now I see actually another side of it that is very different of what I could see before. And I think that this is a part in me that couldn't be touched in another way.

**RC:** Yes. I know in my own relationship, what I find is that it's very different than the kind of connection and love that I have with my clients and students and community members because there is, for the most part, a respectful distance between us. There's a personal space that everyone is allowed to have and that I'm allowed to have so that the needs and preferences of all of those people don't scratch against my needs and preferences. And being in a close intimate relationship, I see what happens within me and how deeply it comes from my conditioning around those kinds of moments where what I want and what my partner wants is very different or when there's a conflict that arises because our directions aren't unified. And that kind of experience is something that I would never have in any other kind of relationship because nobody would ever be as entangled with me as my partner as.

**TB:** Right, yes. I see it very similarly and I think that even in the conflicted situations, this is a very good place of practice. So it's a very good challenge to the practice, I find, and also because Judith, my partner is a very fiery, very energetic and alive woman, and when we met, I came from a much more quiet space and I see some things that I learned through this, like about my own fire and about my own aliveness that I think I wouldn't have learned without her. And so I think it's totally true what you're saying that intimate relationship triggers parts that couldn't be triggered with people that come to the groups or people I work with.

**RC:** Now, we only have just a few minutes left and there's one other piece that I'm really interested in asking you about and I'll start it off by sharing. It has to do with the way that my role as a teacher also gives me an opportunity to look at some of my own shadow material, things that aren't so integrated. I've known over the years that I'm able to create a space with people that is very rich in acceptance and also includes a range and a depths of experience so that people know that when they're with me, there's nowhere they can go that I won't be able to go with them or that I won't be able to hold in awareness and compassion. And that's a positive. But sometimes, I see that there is an edge for me because from a very early age, again, most likely from conditioning and it might even be through my ancestors, I have that desire to help and sometimes that desire to help is a contraction and it can keep me from the fullness and the openness of the space that actually would be the most positive for the person with whom I'm sharing and witnessing.

I see that as something that is important for me to continue to be mindful of and to integrate as it comes up especially around and experience in which somebody may not feel like they've been helped by me or had an intention for what they wanted to experience or how they wanted to change

and they're feeling upset or disappointed, either in themselves or in me—that's one kind of moment where I see that as a teacher, I have an opportunity to continue to do that work. And I'm wondering, you're obviously your own unique person, as you hold the role of teacher and leader, do you have aspects of your own personality and perhaps shadow pieces that arise for you to work with?

**TB:** Hmm, that's a good question. I think the shadow material in my life was most profoundly challenged by, as I say, the commitment to an intimate relationship and to become a father. I think the process triggered something about embodiment and grounding that was a very important process for me and it's still going on. But I think to make this decision was a very important process that was not so easy and I think this also opened something in my work with people so that there is another level of, I don't know, humanness to it, or like another level of human generosity to it that was added by this process.

And I think that the most development in my shadow areas have been actually through these two parts in my life because when I look into my work, I feel that in the moment I'm working, it's like as if a very strong intelligence and what I call light runs through my system and there's a very refined clarity on line that, of course, got developed through the years. I think my own journey of shadow integration has been mostly through the two parts that I mentioned before. I think this gave the most growth to this part in me; to the grounding aspect and to come down after what I experienced in this four years of meditation to literally ground it in life, this was my most challenging process, I would say.

**RC:** And is there anything in the now for you, and by the way, I love the way that you speak about: if I'm with you and I'm having a conversation or a connection with Thomas, the person, then I'm in the past, and I'm not getting a chance to be with you as a creative flow, an emergence. I found that really inspiring because you even said that in closer relationships, it's the most common that we already have an introject or an internal sense of who we're going to be experiencing and that keeps us from being alive to what's available and what might be transforming in the moment. So with that as a background, encountering you in this moment as a creative and transforming energy and force, are you noticing that there's anything that is particularly alive for you? It might be a challenge, it might not be a challenge, but is there something about you right now and these days that is feeling fresh and new for you and undigested in your life, in your teaching, in any aspect of your experience?

**TB:** I think, what I said before with fatherhood, I feel still that there is an expansion in me happening which opens my system and me to deeper and deeper levels of grounding and groundedness in life. And I think this enables me to more and more resonate with more grounded aspects of life. And this is still a challenge and I can feel the expansion that's happening through it. As if you open tubes or channels everyday a bit more and a bit more and a bit more and sometimes it's not always comfortable and I can feel the process of opening sometimes as a tension also in my body. And I see also how it's contributing to my life, how some things start flowing that didn't flow before, and suddenly, they get more open. And then comes another phase of the same process, like a deeper level of it, and it's opening like "Ugh!" and then even more energy flows. And so I think that this is one challenge at the moment that I still feel. It was such a long time I felt in me, "No, I don't want this and this is not part of my life." And, but now I see this part of my life and I also go through this opening pain sometimes inside.

**RC:** I love hearing that and I appreciate your sharing it. And I think it's worth one more moment here. I was really surprised with my own daughter as she was growing up, how early her life force and her uniqueness were clear. And you mentioned earlier in our conversation about the scientist who says that the potential is the greatest at about 1 year old. And I found with my daughter that before she could talk, she had a sense of humor.

**TB:** Right.

**RC:** And she had ways of creating closeness with me by making jokes that were not just jokes but they were also private jokes between she and I that fostered intimacy because nobody else did them the way that we did them. And it was very specific. It had to do with like me wiping up her high chair and I would ask her if I missed a spot, and with this big grin, she would take her finger and she put it right at somewhere on the high chair, and I'd say, "Oh, I missed the spot," and then I would clean it up and I would say, "Did I get it?" And then with this big devilish grin, she would point to another spot. And she just loved that game and she loved tricking me with the idea that I had missed the spot. And so I'm wondering, as you're getting to know your own 10-month old daughter, is there anything about her nature that is coming clear to you that allows you to deepen in relationship with her?

**TB:** Yes, many things. I'm amazed by the clarity. I'm amazed by like the maturity that I meet, there is something where I look into her eyes and it feels like she gets everything that I say. There is

a small child but there is somehow a much bigger being behind this that has an understanding that is—I mean I am amazed by what kind of things she remembers or she does. And also as you said, the sense of humor that comes with a very early age that you can already see, the sparkling humor and the fun, the juicy part that is really striking. But I think one of the main parts is this clarity that look through her eyes where I know, “Ah, there is a way through this process of being a child but there is something else that understands me in a level that is really amazing,” like a deeper level of understanding that I’m really amazed.

**RC:** And do you ever at trainings or events, are you the proud papa that will show a picture of your daughter or do you keep that part of your life more private?

**TB:** I mean I’m not showing up with it, but if people ask me, “We heard that you have a daughter,” so in my trainings, I show the pictures on the video beamer for the group, because these are people that know me already longer. And if people ask me, I have some photos with me and I show it to them. If it’s appropriate and people are really interested, then yes.

**RC:** So the last question I have for you, again, I’ll introduce it through my own experience. The person closest to me is my wife and she allows me to see parts of myself that I wouldn’t see and that wouldn’t necessarily show up in my persona as a teacher, so for example, in my teaching, I am very open as I described before and accepting and I’m not very directional, like I don’t have a strong will and I don’t assert power or attempt to do that in a way that is harsh or demanding. I tend to focus on the idea that we can only go as fast and as far as the slowest and most tentative parts of us can go, so I’m very gentle.

But in my home life and in my intimate relationship, my wife introduces me to a side of myself that she would say is very bossy and wants things a certain way and is very particular and asserts that particularity upon her and the people around her. So I’m wondering if in your most close relationships, if the people around you express things that show you any parts, any one that you’d want to share that might be different from what we would see if you were at a workshop or teaching otherwise?

**TB:** I mean what definitely happened which sounds a bit a similar to what you described now is that when I got to know Judith, then I was in a very, like what I would call my energy, was going much more up. So not so much interrelated with life. I was much more in a meditation process, I was much more up, as I call it. And I think it’s a very similar quality that you described in yourself

that came and still comes alive in me which is like a sense of radicality and urgency to the process of evolution. And this also comes up in our encounters because as I said, I was much more the quiet one, more receptive, and Judith much more the outgoing, expressive, also demanding.

And I think I'm learning more and more of these qualities. I learn even to appreciate them, there was a time when I didn't feel this part is of my repertoire so much. Sometimes in the teaching it came through but it was not so much part of the way I was in life. And now, through the conflicts that we sometimes have or through how we engage in the intimacy of our lives, I feel this kind of urge and drive comes out that is much more clear, focused, and also much more taking leadership in life. So before, I was more into the place, "Okay. Things, if they happen, they happen. If they don't happen, they don't happen." And in the meanwhile, I'm coming more and more to the place that sometimes it needs a very profound, grounded and straight leadership that things happen. And I started enjoying this process, which I didn't before. Now, through the closeness of our lives, we live closely together and we share this family space, this comes up stronger and stronger. And I literally see that it was missing before, that there was a part that was not fully participating. And I feel that this was and it is still a process that I participate in more and more and more which I started to enjoy. And this is very lovely. So I see this as a present.

**RC:** Wonderful! Before we go, I just want to check in with you: In the beginning of our conversation, you were discussing the motivation of the series and what you would hope it would be versus what it could be in a negative sense, so what is your reflection? How do you feel about our conversation today? Do you feel it served the greater good in terms of transparency? Or do you have any other feedback about it?

**TB:** Yeah, definitely I enjoyed the conversation with you. I enjoyed the space that you held for the conversation, and I think I feel inspired and enriched, so this is a good sign. I felt that the energy is high, so I liked it.

**RC:** Good, and thank you for that reflection. I wanted to offer a reflection as well because as somebody yourself who is very refined in tuning in to the field, I know you're very sensitive that way and I—in my own way, I think I am too and I'm really grateful for, I would say, a combination of energetic qualities that I experienced in getting to know you. I can really experience your powerful clarity and the strength of conviction that comes from that clarity. And at the same time, I experience your generosity and your loving kindness. It feels that those things together really create

a lot of safety and a willingness to explore and to be more vulnerable. And this series, of course, is about transparency but also vulnerability. So I really want to thank you for touching that in me and also just for gifting the world with that.

**TB:** Oh, thank you. Thank you very much. And it was a pleasure for me to get to know you today.

**RC:** Oh, likewise. And I hope sometime we get to see each other and have a big hug in person.

**TB:** Yes, definitely.



## Sally Kempton



Sally Kempton has been teaching spiritual wisdom for nearly 40 years. She is known for her capacity to kindle meditative states in others, and to help students work with meditative experience as a framework for practical life-change. She teaches teleclasses, retreats, and workshops, appearing at conference centers such as Esalen and Kripalu. Sally is the author of *Meditation for the Love of It*, which *Spirituality and Health* magazine called “the meditation book your heart wants you to read.” She writes a regular column, “Wisdom” for *Yoga Journal*, as well as a column called “Meditation for Life” on the Internet religious site, Patheos.com. A former swami in a Vedic tradition, Sally’s teachings combine deep knowledge of the texts of yoga and the Hindu tantric and advaita traditions, with practical wisdom from contemporary psychology and integral thought.

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### 1. The Cellular Decision to Marry God, and its Shadows

**RC:** Sally, thank you so much for joining me today.

**SK:** A total pleasure, Raphael.

**RC:** Well I knew that I would have a lovely interview with you because you wrote to me in response to my initial invitation by saying that “Sharing openly about one’s shadow, one’s difficulty is something,” that you “appreciate and have longed to do more as a spiritual teacher,” and have found it “difficult to encounter the environments and the communities in which that could really done safely and well and is welcomed.” So I just want to first start off by saying I love what you shared about that and it set the stage to meet you in a really deep way. So thank you.

**SK:** I’m looking forward to it.

**RC:** One of the things that I like to do in these interviews just to bring in a deeper presence, is to start with my own felt sense in the moment and to invite you to do the same. I want to say that for me over here I know that I’m grateful; I feel calm; I also know that I’m tired because I haven’t had a day off for a very long time. And I have a little scratchy thing in my eye and all of these things are

probably going to just be very subliminally in the background of my listening and my speaking. So I wanted to name them and then also just say none of that keeps me from really being fully and passionately here.

**SK:** And it probably helps having named them and felt your way into them.

**RC:** Yes, how about you?

**SK:** At this moment I'm feeling very open, kind of soft in the center of my body; slightly hot because the sun is pouring into my house, there is an undercurrent of anxiety that comes from having a deadline that I'm working on and not having absolutely cracked the thing that I have to turn in, in a day or so, which is kind of, as you may know, a typical writer's anxiety.

I'm feeling ready to be surprised. I've actually been enjoying thinking about the topic of what we're going to talk about today, with a mixture of interested excitement and slight trepidation, so all those pieces are in the mix as well.

**RC:** Okay, good well thank you for sharing all of that. Again as I'm often saying in this series to the people I'm speaking with and also to the general listening audience, safety is, for me, tantamount to any really deep practice or deep engagement; and at the same time, and I think this is something you alluded to in your note to me, safety has to be a relative term when you're talking about yourself in an environment where you know that anybody on the entire planet could listen at any time in the future.

**SK:** Yeah, certainly.

**RC:** So I say that as a way of recognizing that transparency is not an absolute value and neither is vulnerability. We're all constantly assessing the environment in which we are sharing and I'm happy for you to keep doing that, as well; I want you to know one thing, which is there won't be any kind of push or prod or challenge from me for you to investigate or share anything that doesn't feel exactly right for you.

**SK:** Thank you.

**RC:** Sure, you're more than welcome. So just in terms of the subject of shadow material, which you have written about very eloquently yourself, I was refreshing myself on your background and I know that back in the 70's you went through a very powerful transformative spiritual experience

that set you on your path and that you have moved in many different circles and had many very different roles since then. But I wanted to know from where you sit in this moment when you look back on that really powerful transformative experience, do you see that there were certain pieces of as yet still un-processed emotional material that kind of survived the opening and were still there for you to work with very seriously once you were kind of reintegrating into life?

**SK:** For sure. I would say my deepest experience of the inner journey, the spiritual path, which is of course the life path, is that everything is a spiral. So you're constantly revisiting your major life issues at deeper and deeper levels as you hopefully spiral inward and then enact to your inner shifts, externally.

So I would say at the time of my initial awakening, a couple of things were up for me, which I've come to see were kind of part of that very poignant and pregnant developmental edge of the late 20's. In astrology we talk about it as the time of your Saturn return, when your adolescent self has expressed itself enough so that you're being pushed or pulled to move into some kind of adult stage.

So for me, there were two major life issues. One was my career, which I really had not gotten together, partly because I hadn't fully embraced my own unique gifts and was kind of living out the things I'd inherited from my parents, which is not unusual, and partly out of a kind of insecurity. And the other thing that was up, both of these are of course major development issues, was personal intimacy and love. What happened in that awakening—a lot of it was the recognition that the love I was looking for was actually divine love, soul love, and that I wasn't going to get it from another person. I sometimes tell a story of one of my big awakenings. It happened when I was with a new boyfriend and like many of these awakenings, it happened under the influence of a psychedelic drug.

So we were sitting there and I'm having one of those unbelievable heart-openings and it was a first time I'd ever experienced that. It was utterly revolutionary and included the recognition that everything was everything and I was everything and love was everything. And I turned to him and I said something like, "There's so much love" or, love is all there is. He gave me this ironic look and said, "Haven't you ever taken acid before?"

And I first of all, I did the next thing, which was to completely project the love onto him and play out that particular karmic relationship for the next year. But in the course of it I realized, "Okay, this is not going to do it for me." So when I threw myself into spiritual practice, which I did about a

year later, it was really like getting married. In other words, I decided that at some subliminal level that I was going to marry God. I would've never put it like that; it was a much more cellular decision than that.

It kind of enhanced itself when I met my teacher. When I met my teacher there was a very deliberate recognition that by letting myself fall in love with him— because it was a classical guru path where you kind of project your god-self unto the human teacher and then the way I understood at that time the path works, is that the teacher then gives it back to you in small manageable doses and eventually you recognize your own divinity through that relationship.

So I very consciously entered into a devotional relationship with my teacher who was highly enlightened and also extremely patriarchal and lived in that paradigm for a number of years. During which time I was able to fulfill my career issues and not at all deal with the issues of human relationship, whether romantic or in any other way.

So when I kind of came face to face with—it's a long way of getting round to your question... The shadows that I discovered about 16 years into my subsequent journey were the two pieces that I had literally stepped away from in deciding that I was going to do relationship by relationship to God and then I was going to find self-worth by falling in love with the inner self.

So what I saw at that time was that the hole, the wound, the self-esteem wound had actually been untouched by the experience of the god-self. So somehow the human wounded personal self was still kind of crouched there and simply had to be brought into, really caressed by, awakened by, loved by the god-self in all the ways that are necessary in order to kind of grow up the wounded child.

So that was kind of the shadow work that I began to engage at that moment, which was big of course; it's not untypical for people of my generation. And from that everything else arises, including integration and the recognition of all the other things that come up. But ultimately, a sense that I was actually given the opportunity to step into a container where I got to live in relationship to divine essence and somehow life managed to smack me in the face with the un-worked on parts in time.

**RC:** It does that, doesn't it?

**SK:** It does.

**RC:** Well there's so much that is really rich in what you were just sharing and one of the things I have to do if you'll just indulge me is to share with you around the love affair with God versus the love affair with a person is reference a classic old Motown song that at one point I kind of appropriated because the song goes, "You are everything and everything is you," which of course is a beautiful non-dual sentiment but when the song was written it was really all about projection.

**SK:** Totally.

**RC:** In the human and the romantic realm. And one of the things that I came to recognize in my own personal journey is that when you have a relationship with a loving God or even a relationship with a song such as that, it's in a certain sense a one way relationship because it kind of filters back into you without a lot of interference.

**SK:** Right.

**RC:** And I know that when you're in an actual intimate relationship with another person and all of your scratchiness is coming up against that person's scratchiness and all of those unhealed places, then suddenly it's as much a tug-of-war as it is a kind of yummy oceanic wash over me kind of relationship. I know in my own life, I've had to recognize that in using the term from the Integral world, which you're a part of, of developmental lines. I think I'm really good at a certain kind of relationship at a distance.

Like for instance as a spiritual teacher I can practice authenticity, I can practice vulnerability, I can create a really safe space for the people who I work with, and they really do know a genuine me, but they really don't know a genuine me who would show up if they were actually wanting to watch one channel while I want to watch another or if I thought the room was messier than it needed to be and they didn't. Or just any of the millions of little everyday things that come up between people. So I really had to recognize in my own life that if we could call one developmental line actual emotional intimacy with another person in a day to day intimate way, that was something where the old wound was so deep and needed so much attention that as you said earlier that was going to be a lifetime job.

## **2. The Ice Cave**

**SK:** Yeah, I agree. For some people that's the ice cave, it certainly is for me, if you think of life as a long hike.

**RC:** So you said ice cave, right?

**SK:** Yeah, I was thinking of and this is perhaps sort of rough analogy, but I was thinking of the spiritual journey as a climb, which is only partly true. But in a sense that it's a climb, there are places where you're walking uphill and there are places where you're in beautiful sunny meadows. And then there's the ice cave in the dark scrambling over rocks, you have no idea of what's on the other side.

In relationships I think for many people and really for me are the ice cave because other people are so mysterious. They're so different and they misunderstand our best intentions and we misunderstand theirs. It's a very powerful and difficult journey for me so that's somewhat similar I think to you.

**RC:** Yeah and there's an interesting twist to it for me. I was doing an interview for the series with Reggie Ray, the Buddhist author and teacher and he was talking about how sometimes it's very easy to 'hide out', that was his term, in relationships. That was really profound for me just to hear it stated like that because we know that people can hide out in their spirituality, whether it's through that love of God that you were describing or just the kind of 'spiritual bypass' as it's often termed. We know that intimate relationship is more challenging in all the ways that we've described and more and yet it's also true in intimate relationship to do it in such way, I mean I would venture to say that most people do it in such a way where there is at least some degree of hiding out and not necessarily confronting one's own shadow work as it's coming in relation to one's self as an individual and also in terms of what's transpiring in the partnership.

So it seems like there has to be a real recognition and intention of that in a relationship or else even though here we are in it, this thing that we are using our life to learn how to do, we still might not learn how to do it.

**SK:** Yeah, and I would say that the hiding out can happen even when we're processing like crazy because then your whole life becomes about processing in the relationship and you really feel like you're making a lot of progress and lots of shifts are going on and actually what's happening is that you've turned into a kind of mutual in-turned dyad, where both of you can get completely lost. I think that's part of what the romantic ideal of the West sort of holds up to us—that you can't make the relationship cocooned in any way.

So I think that we are constantly sometimes tiringly being called to balance self and other, self and God, self and world, self and self. We think we've got it together in one area and then suddenly another one leaps up and we realize "Oh, that there's so much more to learn here."

### **3.The Spiritual Value of Privacy and Confidentiality**

**RC:** The thing about hiding out that is striking me right now as we're talking about it is that the shadow is always about what's either consciously or unconsciously hidden or denied and in some of the other discussions in the series we've talked about the role of transparency in spiritual teaching and how the teachers who have the least to hide, have the opportunity to offer us the most. I was wondering what you came upon, what you learned about in relationship with your teacher because your teacher was Muktananda correct?

**SK:** Right.

**RC:** And Muktananda like so many of the great spiritual teachers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century came with a lot of controversy and most of our listeners know lots about that and it's probably not necessary to go into a lot of details. But many people in that world were really shocked and deeply traumatized when it turned out that there were some, we can call them transgressions, things happening hidden behind the scenes in that community starting all the way at the top with the guru. And for someone like yourself who had made such an intentional choice to be in that relationship, I'm imagining that you went through a big passage in terms of how you dealt with that and how ultimately it informed your own way of being a spiritual teacher.

**SK:** Well that's a big question. And as I think you know every spiritual community has its own history. So I would say that the experience that you have when you're with a teacher and a community that's based in a tradition that's innately hierarchical, in the sense that the guru is the perfect image and the disciple is sort of an open-mouthed fish or the baby bird receiving grace through the mother. The nature of the relationship, I would say intrinsically, and I've seen this among my friends who were involved with traditional Eastern teachers, that there's an inherent, let's say, authoritarian vertical relationship between the teacher and the student that's a part of that tradition that the Westerners of my generation—and I don't know how people are doing it nowadays but I sense that it's the same issue—that individualistic, basically rebellious, in Integral terms green-level Westerners come in contact with teachers who are highly trained and mystically enlightened and not particularly developed in the psychological line I would say, not even the interpersonal line. The whole Western tradition of looking at motives, looking at the complexity in

your relationships and I know my teacher was so disinterested in any form of psychological awareness, in the sense that we understand it.

So in order to be in a relationship with him you had to work on your stuff yourself. So whatever came up in terms of transparency or lack of transparency, I and the people I know who kind of went through that system in sort of the way I did; it really became a mirror in which we use to look at our own projections and our own issues.

So my experience of being in the community in which some things were kept private or confidential, being a person who's not particularly—I'm not a particularly confidential type person; I don't really keep secrets myself and keeping secrets is not that easy for me; so in a certain sense living in a culture in which privacy and secrets and confidentiality were given very high value actually made me look at, more than anything else, the spiritual value of privacy and confidentiality. That's how I, to this day, really have tried to understand that.

**RC:** Well you just said something that I think it sounds like it will be really helpful and important, but needs to be unpacked, when you say the spiritual value of privacy and confidentiality.

**SK:** Yeah, so as I think you may have noticed I'm going to leave aside the sort of specific question about my community as such, but what I'd like to talk about is one of the deeper questions that I don't think is really understood in the West. We tend in our time to believe that transparency is, I wouldn't say an absolute value, but we consider it crucial and I've been looking at a situation in a community that I'm close to where the teachers had a private life that wasn't shared; and one of the big issues in that community was it wasn't shared, it wasn't transparent. When the whole thing started to come out he then did say, "Okay, I'm now going to be absolutely transparent." In talking to people in that community, many of whom were also a part of my previous community and talking about that issue, what I saw is that many of them were caught up in this belief that we have in our society that absolutely everything about you should be on the table and should be fair game for conversation with everybody else you know. In the Eastern tradition that I was trained in, there were certain exchanges between the guru and the student that you never shared. And the reason you didn't share them was because the privacy allowed a spiritual container, which let things grow and ripen.

For example this sounds really silly but this is the degree to which sometimes it was taken: my teacher would give gifts to his students and he would often give us saris; someone would come and



give us a bunch of saris and he would give them out; as many saris as there were he would give out and there were never enough for everybody, so he will tell you, “Don’t tell anyone I gave you this sari.” And you’ll be walking around in a sari and everybody would know where you got it because there’s no other way to get one of that particular piece of clothing. They would ask you, “Did the teacher give it you?” And you would have to say, “No, no, absolutely not.” In other words, you would lie about it because it was part of the contract that you made with the teacher.

What I discovered in the course of these sometimes bizarre and transparently deceitful moments was that the training in telling someone I didn’t get the sari from my teacher actually affected the way I was able to hold my spiritual experience. In other words, I would learn something. I would be taught something. I would be told something and I would be asked to keep it to myself. And in keeping it to myself what I would find is that it got processed in a kind of cauldron or container of my inner being rather than being leaked by sharing it. I’m not necessarily comparing this to the kind of secrecy that feels like hypocrisy that is the complaint that many people have about the teachers of Eastern traditions. But there’s a very important link between privacy and inner growth that we don’t understand very well in the contemporary West; that in insisting that everything be shared, we actually lose our capacity to hold something that is mysterious to us that we don’t understand, that we may not even value until it reveals its mystery to us. So I hope that unpacks a little bit of what I’m saying.

**RC:** Yes, definitely. And we’ve spoken in a number of dialogues in this series about transparency not as an absolute and with recognition that there are certain things that are important to share and other things that might not be helpful to share and that there’s a practice of discernment on the part of the teacher and then there’s also a practice of what Tami Simon calls “conscious discipleship.” And I’ve forgotten, she might have gotten that from somebody else, but that’s the term that she used in our conversation; where there’s recognition that there’s a responsibility of the student as well in a deep practice to be mindful and to be discerning and to listen to one’s own knowing about these kinds of issues. Otherwise it all just becomes a kind of welter of either positive or negative projection onto the teacher. That’s why some of the other people in this series had said that transparency can have its own shadow, let’s say, just continue to promote comparison—

**SK:** Jealousy and—

**RC:** Or the opposite, arrogance. But either way if we're comparing then somehow we're losing what is most precious and I think you've informed that discussion in a really helpful way. I also want to add in terms of the privacy of one's spiritual path, that this is a not often spoken about consideration, so I really appreciate that. I know that there are many people that have come to see and work with me who are surrounded by people who would only not get what they were going through, but would pathologize them. And they might lose their livelihood; they might lose their children; they might be institutionalized, when in fact what they're going through is just some kind of very deep psychic healing work that requires dissolution and profound not knowing and sometimes just an absolute unwillingness to go along with the psychosis that runs our world.

**SK:** Yeah and it often requires a willingness to sit in absolute confusion, really not to understand what's going and not be able to present a persona. I think that that's one of the gifts that a spiritual community can offer somebody, if the community has strong enough borders and a strong enough recognition of privacy, actually. In the community I trained in and in, I would say, spiritual communities in which there's not a lot of sharing among the members; the downside, of course, is that a lot of things that would be helpful to talk about don't get talked about. But the upside is that someone can be going through the deepest form of dissolution and go about their life and nobody has to know about it. The process of grace that exists in the atmosphere of the community can actually heal very deep things, very deep cellular shadow issues just by the process of going through your life in such a community.

Again, the downside is that there can be too much reliance on the unseen hand of grace and not enough actual practical shadow work. But on the other hand, that capacity to sort of open up to the transforming power of grace, which has been part of monastic traditions, for example, for so many centuries, is not valued so much in our society. To me, the ideal would be to somehow be able to hold the two together and I don't think it's something that we've actually figured out how to do.

**RC:** Yeah, the consideration that you're describing, I think, is really important for all of us. Because in this series I often choose to speak personally, rather than just conceptually because I think that it really lands differently for people, I want to say that what I was just mentioning a moment ago about clients and people who I work with is also ever more true for me. What I mean by that is that I talk judiciously about some of the more 'out there' parts of my own spiritual experience; things that have come to me, not that I have pursued and that then I've had to figure out how to work with or work alongside of.

In truth if I were to sit down right now and the job were to write in a completely unedited fashion, a spiritual autobiography, I think for some people they would just say, “Aha, yeah that happened and then that happened and that happened.” And then lots of other people would say, “This guy is nuts and I thought that I should be listening to him, but now I don’t want to listen to a dang thing he ever says again.”

**SK:** Right exactly. There are some things that shouldn’t be shared.

#### **4. The Guru Disciple Relationship**

**RC:** But I do want to ask you, coming back to one other thing and just speak to this in whatever way it feels most helpful to you. One of the things that is an issue around what we were talking about, in terms of the teacher-student relationship is that often if that relationship is in any way un-pure, if that’s the right word; if there’s any undeveloped psychological material that the teacher is bringing to that relationship, which, of course, is likely when the teacher isn’t even interested in the psychological realm; then it’s really possible, it seems to me, and I’ve certainly heard it from lots of people that the relationship ends up recreating a past trauma and so much of early abuse in life, especially sexual abuse, is all about secrecy and all about specialness. So it feels to me that, again speaking personally, if I were asking myself the question, “Do I trust the teacher? Do I feel like I want to work with the teacher?” whether it’s using their experience as a reflection for me or whether I really want to engage in more of an inter-subjective transformative experience, I would ask myself about this issue, “Do I sense in that teacher that there’s a way that my trauma is going to be at best healed, but at least really honored with tenderness, or is it possible that for whatever reason this kind of arena, this kind of teacher, this kind of teaching might actually be wounding for me in a really serious way.”

**SK:** Well I think that’s a really major question and as a teacher I’m much more in your camp. In other words, it’s tremendously important to me as a teacher for the people who study with me to be as safe as they can be. I mean, of course nobody else can make you safe. But certainly I place a really high value on not triggering people’s wounds and also not encouraging them to get into situations within the relationship that are potentially going to do that. Now that said, I mean one of the things that I recognized in my own transition from one community into what we loosely call the world, is precisely that: that the path of working intensively with the teacher when you actually do your best to follow the path to the letter, does inevitably recreate early trauma because I think part of the reason that you’re drawn to a particular teacher, just the way you’re drawn to a particular

partner, is because in some way that part of you that's wounded is hooked by that part of them which is going to both heal and trigger the wound.

So I actually have come to believe that in a true guru-disciple relationship—in my tradition we make a distinction between a guru and the Sanskrit word *acharya*; that is somebody who's a teacher and a guide but not necessarily the psychopomp connecting point between the human and the divine that the traditional *satguru* is. But when you get involved with somebody who you're actually surrendering to in a big way, you can bet they're going to beat the shit out of you.

In the Tibetan traditions, of course especially Trungpa's tradition, they're quite conscious about it and also in the tradition that I was trained in. I think having the particular discernment that somebody who's been given the mandate to be that kind of guru has, I would say, that is, somebody who's been, let's say, picked by the force to serve as the person who can guide their students through the worlds because that's what the *satguru* is supposed to be able to do: guide you in this world, in the dream world and in the after-death world, etc. until you are completely fully enlightened, lifetime after lifetime. So if you enter into a relationship with somebody like that, the chances are pretty good that it's going to be their soul speaking through your soul. They're not going to be paying too much attention through your personality and your historical issues as a personality in this lifetime. So it's often going to feel like boots are trampling on your sensitive self. And my experience with that kind of thing is that a student is responsible for healing the wounds that come with a radical opening and with that relationship, I actually think it goes with the territory.

It's one of the reasons why I'm not interested in or willing to be a guru. Because I think being a guru is very dangerous to the people who come in contact with you. A guru is meant for people who want to go all the way. The rest of us are better off with a teacher who's more of a peer and perhaps more psychologically sophisticated or makes it very clear that the relationship is confined to a particular modality. Does that make sense? I mean that's really my deepest conviction about the guru-disciple relationship. It ain't for wimps. It ain't a normal relationship. And if we think it is or if we try to project that particular image onto somebody who's your asana teacher, or your therapist, or your Zen teacher who's completely great at helping you trigger *kensho*, but is not trustworthy to lead you through the worlds; it's just going to end up in some kind of bloodbath.

**RC:** Yeah, well in a moment I want to shift off the topic because I want to make sure that we have enough time to talk about some things that are more Sally centered. But I want to touch on one part of what you're saying because it's a really deep reflection that you're offering about the path and why it's not so simple. I want to use as an example that is not your community because I think it will be easier to talk about.

I teach once a year at the Kripalu Center in Massachusetts and I know a lot of the people there well. But I came to that Center after they went from being a guru centered community to one that basically kicked the guru out and then began to find a way to remain together and to provide offerings to themselves and the world that were transformational in a different way, more of what you were describing as the peer or the acharya kind of relationship.

So there's this fundamental question in the middle of everything that you were sharing, which is that if you want to go all the way with that guru then you also have to really believe that everything that the guru is doing, even if that guru is not developed along all the psychological lines that might be available, that ultimately it is about this lifetime and all the lifetimes and that when you get the crap beat out of you it's always intentional and you're being guided in a sacred way because you've given your sacred trust. It seems like it's also possible in that circumstance to, at some point, in a very sharp and painful way you'll have to revisit that trust that you've given and reassess whether you're still in it based on what you found out because of what was hidden, what was lied about.

**SK:** Right, I totally agree. So here's what I'd say: I think that the guru-disciple relationship is a particular kind of contract and it's certainly not a parent-child contract, it's not a therapist-client contract and it's not necessarily a contract that's about anything that happens in the physical world.

I always go back to something that Pema Chodron said about her teacher, who as you know, was incredibly controversial and certainly had qualities that as an outsider, I would call human flaws. Not being an insider I always try to not draw conclusions about people I didn't actually know. But she always said about him is that, "He showed me the Self." Which is interesting to me that she used that term since she's a Buddhist, it's more of a Hindu term. "And that's why I went to him and that's what matters."

What I came to see—I mean I was with two very strong and traditional gurus for a long time—is that if you understand why you're there in a particular way then even the things that feel really screwed up can be part of the process of grace. If you're not sort of aligned with what I would call

‘the guru principle’ coming through that person, then it can really feel like looking at the underside of the car really wondering why it’s wired that way. But one of the things my guru used to say, my teacher used to say was—people are always coming to him and saying, “But what about this teacher and that teacher who had been proved to be taking money or sleeping with his students,” or any of the things that gurus seemed to be caught doing; they would say, “So what about the disciples of X, Y, and Z?” and he used to say, “If your discipleship is focused on the highest then any guru, even a completely incompetent guru can connect you that way because it really isn’t about the person,” and obviously you know this, “It’s about principle that comes through that person,” which in fact, comes through many of us when we’re standing in the light that way.

But in the end I think when you’ve committed yourself to that path, what you commit yourself to is that beam. So I would say if what you’re committed to is that beam, then it really doesn’t matter. In the human world, in the world of psychology and ethics and community building and all those things, it’s a whole other question. This is why I say that the guru-disciple relationship is for a particular purpose. When you forget that purpose all these other things becomes hugely important.

**RC:** Yeah and also in listening to what you’re saying now in my mind and I’m looking back in what you said earlier, which is that you decided that path wasn’t for you, not the disciple path, but the guru path wasn’t for you and you chose to work within communities that have a different structure and a different intention that don’t have that particular fire at the center of them.

**SK:** Right. And in my relationships with students I really deliberately practice much more as a spiritual friend than as a guru. I mean there are teachers who take too much authority and there are teachers who take too little authority and I am really trying to live in a place where I’m taking the appropriate amount of authority. As a teacher I’m sure you have this experience as well. It’s a very delicate place to walk.

### **5. The Moment to Moment Tight Wire of Appropriate Authority**

**RC:** Yes, it is. And I love that phrase, we haven’t heard that in the series before, “The appropriate amount of authority,” because that doesn’t make authority all good or all bad. It’s not in the land of judgment that you’re speaking of it. It’s with a recognition that if there’s no authority then that’s just as egregious in terms of what can happen in a relationship or missed opportunity as if there’s too much. So it seems like that assessment is like literally a moment by moment process.

**SK:** Yeah exactly.

**RC:** You're sitting there across a student or a client or you're in a workshop and something is happening all of a sudden that is out of control. One person is freaking out and it could mean that the whole weekend could focus on them if things aren't careful. So there's social dynamics along with individual dynamics and just to be able to say, "Okay, I want to create a place of openness and safety and shared humanity and yet I'm the convener, I'm the teacher, and what amount of my authority here is going to serve the highest good to the best of my awareness in this very moment."

**SK:** Yeah.

**RC:** And that to me is sort of like the tight wire. There's no way to prepare for that even.

**SK:** Exactly. It's completely in the moment and relationship by relationship.

**RC:** I'm remembering, I was in at a workshop one time and one of the most kind of shocking to my nervous system things that happened was there a person who I came to understand for myself later what I might call an 'intensity junky'. Somebody who really had come to believe that deep transformation only comes from being thrust upon hot coals. And so she was saying, "All this stuff that we're doing here this is bullshit." And kind of pointing fingers at this person's experience and this person's process and saying to me, "Couldn't you see that. What kind of teacher are you? Why didn't you call them on that?" And suddenly I was rocked not just in my role but also on a very personal level like, "Am I incompetent? Is this person right? What did I miss? Have I been mamby-pamby and it's all love here?" It really was right in real time, my job to try to process that through for that particular person but also for everybody else who was now also on edge and very nervous and scared because, "What's going to happen? And is this going to be good for me or am I in trouble here?"

**SK:** What did you do?

**RC:** In that situation I spoke long and from the heart with that person and I basically said that I was making a careful assessment to the best of my ability with each person as to what was the edge that they could walk without it being somehow violent because they were pushed too far; that I'm fallible and I could have not gone far enough, but I'd rather not go far enough than go too far. But also at the same time I was pretty confident and was aware also that there are many different kinds of transformation and they're not all dramatic and they're not all intense. And so we had a heart-to-heart about that and eventually what happened was she left.

**SK:** She felt like it wasn't the right situation for her.

**RC:** Yeah.

**SK:** Which is good because actually I think it's really important that the people who are there with you are there with you because they know that they're meant to be with you right now.

**RC:** Right and there was one other thing about it which might be interesting for listeners to know about is that at one point when she kind of freaked out, she described a way in which she felt that the safety that we had co-created at the beginning of the workshop had been violated and I don't even remember the exact details right now. But I do remember that in this one specific I felt that she was absolutely correct and that I spoke to the group and I said, "The safety is my responsibility as a convener. If we agree to it and then I'm not aware of when it gets transgressed or I don't deal with it successfully, then we can't go forward. And so now what we need to do is stop the work we were doing and find out from each one of you here in this group what will it take for you to feel like we have restored that safety and let's not go forward until we do that."

**SK:** Good, great.

**RC:** So she left but there was a gift she'd given us anyway because we went way deeper as a result of the stirrings that she created in all of us. And that is going back to what we're talking about—totally fly by the seat of your pants, moment by moment kind of thing. There's just no net in doing that kind of work.

**SK:** Yeah and that's actually what makes it fun.

**RC:** Fun and sometimes incredibly exhausting.

**SK:** Yeah exhausting, scary, and also asks you to get into the infinite spaciousness, which is I think to me a great gift of teaching is that you have to be so present.

### **6. Surrender: A Mystery of Effort and Grace**

**RC:** Yeah. It doesn't ever cease to amaze me the new challenge that will arise just when you think you've seen it all in that kind of intensive environment. But let me ask you before we need to go. The title of the series is Teaching What We Need to Learn and it says that leaders in personal growth and spirituality share their own inner most challenges. And often we have so many things to get to that are of real value. We don't always get to that last part and I think it would be great just in



the few minutes that we have for you to share with us whatever feels right about what kind of, let's say, undigested for you right now? Where are the places in your life where you're feeling that you're not as at ease or something is up for you; it's confusing or you just feel like you're in a process with it but you haven't reached the end of that process?

**SK:** Well the thing that is up for me right now is actually the gap between the relationship with what we could call the divine or with presence itself and my relationships with humans. And it is sort of the ongoing issue of this part of my life, but part of what makes it interesting to me right now is that I've been writing a book on the divine feminine, on the goddess, the Hindu goddesses actually. My preference in teaching is to really offer people very practical tools, especially tools for applying meditative wisdom to real life situations and writing a book on the goddess was something that seemed like fun but I sort of couldn't see why I was doing it. There have been so many of them; it didn't seem practical enough etc., etc., and at a certain point it became clear to me that I wasn't so much writing the book for others, so to speak, although hopefully they'll get something out of it, hopefully a lot.

But that I was actually writing it because it required that I go into a place of total not knowing and allow something to write through me. It's something I've never really experienced consciously before. I'm fairly intellectually driven as a teacher. It was a process in which over a period of several months this document came out, which I actually feel I had not that much to do with and a few days ago I was actually contemplating these questions that you've just asked me that is to say what is it now that I really need to unfold in the time I have left on this earth? And what arose for me was the recognition that it really does have to do with being willing to be fully present in my one-on-one intimate relationships in a way that's naked, that's vulnerable, that's functional, and it's different than the way I experience my meditative relationship with the self or my kind of devotional relationship with the divine.

So as I was contemplating this, this presence began to arise in the atmosphere and I began to experience this energy really almost making love to me through the air. It felt as though it was some subtle form of the goddesses of the world or the goddesses of the atmosphere. Very abstract, I mean not like something I could see. What I recognized in that is that perhaps in this lifetime I'm not going to do the intimate one-on-one relationship thing in the way that perhaps I planned, if we could be said to plan our life. That there wasn't going to be time for it and that I was going to have to

accept what I'm being given by the universe, by the divine if you will, and unfold that because we only have a certain amount of time.

The experience of just a kind of deep surrender to letting what is, be as it is. To the real, let's say, recognition of the fact that try as we will, we can only accomplish so much; we can only do so much. One of the things I've been seeing since that experience: I've been getting phone call after phone call from people, some friends, some students, some people I've never met who are working with exactly this issue in varying states of confusion and realizing that what I have to offer them, because of course we try to offer people what we can, is not practical wisdom about relationships but kind of trust that the energy of the universe is present in even the most tangled confused situations and that the journey of life cannot be a failure. It cannot be because we haven't done everything that we wanted to do or grown in all the ways we want to grow that there's something wrong with our life.

So that's where I'm sitting at the moment, in a kind of awe of really the way we are what we are. It's very different than the way I was feeling two weeks ago when I was all about gliding with the evolutionary spirit, breaking through what needs to be broken through.

**RC:** Well I really appreciate the delicacy with which you were painting the way that both of those experiences happen for you and it brought to mind for me that number one sometimes only through the deepest and fullest surrender can whatever is meant to come through really have the freedom and the space to come through. And then on the flipside of that, that there's no fake surrender or there's no bargaining surrender like, "Wait, if I just surrender, then I'll get what I wanted anyway." I've never seen that work.

**SK:** Never works.

**RC:** But I have seen it work the other way, which is a person and sometimes that person is me, just says, "Okay, I will no longer fight. I will no longer align myself with that egoic impulse that says 'I know what is supposed to happen'." Something about a true deepening and anchoring of that surrender—and this is just me speaking from my own experience, I'm not talking about truth with a capital T—but something amazing and precious always comes through that level of surrender, whether it has something or nothing to do with whatever was the original issue.

**SK:** Totally. And there's one more piece of it, which is that what I see over and over again is that we can't surrender. I mean it's an exquisite spiritual concept the idea of surrender that's unbelievably useful to contemplate and to try to do but actually I've never actually been able to do it myself. It's sort of like at a certain point *that* just takes over and sort of pushes you out of the way and that it's not like you surrendered, it's that you are surrendered. In other words *that* surrenders your limitation, your smallness, your mind, it just wipes it out for the moment, or the week or I guess in some cases for a lifetime.

**RC:** Right so what I'm hearing you say is that and it's funny as I even just try to paraphrase this but that you can't try to surrender.

**SK:** Well you can try to surrender but you won't.

**RC:** But you won't.

**SK:** You can certainly try. I think trying is actually a really good thing.

**RC:** In the conversation that I had with Reggie Ray, who I mentioned earlier in the conversation, we were discussing the fact that paying attention in a volitional way can sometimes be a bridge toward an awareness that is just who we are, it's not something that we intend. So maybe in the same way trying to surrender opens up a space if there's not too much reaching and grabbing, in which surrender can happen maybe just a little more easily.

**SK:** Yeah, although I have to say in my experience when surrender happens it's usually six months or six years after you've tried it.

**RC:** Oh yeah, there's that time thing.

**SK:** There's that time thing, right. It's funny because I'm in the middle of writing a piece for a journal on dealing with anxiety. Of course one of the ways you deal with anxiety is to practice breathing out and letting go of whatever the story is that you're telling yourself that's contributing to your feelings of anxiety. And I love that practice, it's fantastic; it's an incredibly useful practice for daily life. And yet I've often heard people complaining that it actually doesn't fully work; you're breathing out and letting go of grief, anger, etc., etc., and maybe a little piece of it is letting go but actually it's not. And then what happens is that at some point it just goes. It's just a mystery of effort and grace I guess.

**RC:** Yeah and as humans we want it now. As a matter of fact I wrote a children's book, I have a 4 ½ year old daughter and based on her experience I wrote a book for children called, "I Want it Now!" The first stanza says, "I want this. I want that. I want, I want, I want, it stat!" We want that, especially when we have anxiety or any unfortunate state we would like the technique to work immediately, right now, thank you.

**SK:** Yeah right now and get rid of it all.

**RC:** Yeah, well speaking of right now, I'm so grateful for this conversation and I want to leave just a little bit of space for you to share with us what's happening in your world and what people might want to know about. So this would be the time for that.

**SK:** Okay, thank you so much. So I'm mostly teaching these days by teleconference. I teach meditation classes by teleconference but I also teach practices for embodying presence through practice in life situations. My book on the goddess, which is at the moment is called *Awaking Shakti*, is just going to press with Sounds True. It actually is quite a powerful transmission of divine feminine energy for which I claim no credit whatsoever. But it will come out in the winter of 2013. And I also would invite you to read my book, *Meditation for the Love of It*. It's both a symposium of meditation practices and techniques and also an experiential attempt to inspire people to really deeply enjoy their meditation and feel the energy of mediation guiding them. That's also available where books are available. And my website is [WWW.SALLYKEMPTON.COM](http://WWW.SALLYKEMPTON.COM). It has many resources on it.

**RC:** Wonderful. Well speaking of all of that and as a way of moving towards closing, I want to say that we've been speaking about a lot of different issues today where there's lots of ideas and perspective that we've shared. But also I was aware during our conversation of a real deep presence that you have that comes through you and also how loving it is and how it really does invite one who's listening to come to that space. And so I imagine that anything that anybody takes advantage of that's available to them in your world is going to resonate in the same way, which means it's going to be wonderful and valuable. I want to thank you for the opportunity of being in and with that presence today.

**SK:** Well, I would say thank you very much to you Raphael. It's beautiful, you're just an exquisite person to dance with, and I can feel just the resonance of your own deep—how deeply cooked in

practice and understanding you are and the way that you kind of hold the masculine and the feminine in your way of being. So it's been really a pleasure.

**RC:** Thank you so much. It's a mutual admiration society.

## Saniel Bonder



Saniel Bonder received an honorary scholarship upon entering Harvard in 1968 – but promptly had it revoked for helping occupy a building in a Viet Nam War protest. Soon afterward, he began two decades of spiritual quest, mostly with Ramana Maharshi and Adi Da. After leaving Adi Da’s work (and graduating) in 1992, Saniel has been helping people awaken, clarify and express their distinctive gifts in service. Saniel is the author of “Waking Down,” “Healing the Spirit/Matter Split,” and the acclaimed new novel, “Ultimaya 1.0.” He founded The international Waking Down in Mutuality movement, is a founding member of the Integral Institute member and is also co-founder of the Human Sun Institute together with his wife Linda. They are co-authoring a forthcoming book, “Wholeness, and Unique Purpose.” [WWW.HEARTGAZING.COM](http://WWW.HEARTGAZING.COM) and [WWW.SANIELANDLINDA.COM](http://WWW.SANIELANDLINDA.COM)

### 1. A Curiously Glorious Way to Live

**RC:** One of the things that is really great for me in doing this series is it gives me a chance to reacquaint myself with the work of people who I really admire. As I was reviewing some of your work, I was struck by how prolific and clear and really inspirational your writing is. It made me think that apart from giving people an opportunity to dive into all of that, that we have an opportunity to do something different: to kind of peek behind the curtain a little bit and give folks another sense of what it is to be you and what your own personal evolution looks like. That’s how I’m coming to our talk today.

**SB:** Sounds great. I’m really thrilled. I know when you first approached us about this idea I just thought it was terrific. I remember once, several years back I did a number of similarly oriented interviews with people. I think I called them, “*What is 21<sup>st</sup> Century Spirituality for You?*” Something like glimpses into the engine room of the leading edge. The whole idea was I just feel that it’s probably for many people helpful to find out how teachers, thought leaders, etc. that they

respect—what it's actually like on the inside of their lives? I think one of the things that's great about it is we get to share that sure enough we're everyday human beings who forget our keys and make mistakes and have to apologize and all the rest of just ordinary living. I think it's very important to share that so I'm happy to open up about whatever is really worth talking about here.

**RC:** Good, but just to make it clear. I've never forgotten my keys, Saniel.

**SB:** Well I understand. You're a very rare character.

**RC:** Of course I completely resonate with what you were just sharing. I was thinking as I was preparing for our call today of a quote that I first heard from Robert Bly. He was talking about this Chinese proverb that said, "The bigger the front, the bigger the back." It was in relation to leaders and teachers of all stripes. It stuck with me over the years and I started thinking, "Well, it's obviously about shadow and the great divide between how someone presents him or herself and the reality as it's lived."

I imagined to myself, "How would one get out of that divide? How could one choose to approach self and life so that it wouldn't have to be front and back in that way?" Of course as you think about it a little bit it becomes the image of a circle, if one makes one's life a circle and everything is complete within that circle then there doesn't have to be the front and a back.

I'm mentioning that because in terms of your work "Waking Down in Mutuality" and some of the other names that you give it, it seems that that is a kind of overriding intention that both within oneself and within the community that you speak to, with the word "mutuality" there's room for everything: light, dark, front, back, etc. and it seems that you and Linda and your community are really wayshowers in terms of that circle.

**SB:** Well thank you. We certainly try to live that kind of life with the greatest possible authenticity and integrity. And we feel very strongly that it's about all you can do to be living the Way and hopefully it's a good demonstration model for others because there's just so much continually being revealed in each of our lives about what is this moment's practice of integrity, and what's the accountability here? Is there a failure to come into the most appropriate transparency? It's not about constantly ripping your guts wide open in front of all and everyone. But there's such a refinement of practice that what we understand about it is anybody who's really living it is continually learning and we need one another's help in a big way. It's a curiously glorious way to live. I say glorious

because sometimes it feels anything but and yet, in the authentic participation there is something very noble and enriching about it.

**RC:** Yes, absolutely. I'm reminded of that great book title of Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*.

**SB:** Yes, exactly.

**RC:** So one of the things I try to do when speaking to people in this series is listen really carefully to what they're sharing and quickly deviate from any presupposed questions that I have in favor of what's arising. You spoke something a moment ago that I think is so important, which is that for all of us on our path there's a question of what is this moment asking of us? How do we best meet it outside of any kind of formula or concept or should? It occurs to me to ask you a question and you can defer if nothing comes to you.

But just a quick preamble before the question, I've noticed there have been times in my life where I thought I wanted to show up in the ways of compassion. I wanted to be open-hearted, let's say. And something comes my way and when I'm really listening and taking it in, something else is asked of me. I'm called to step beyond the usual and see that there is an aliveness here that I can meet even if it scares me or if it takes me out of my usual approach into something that on the surface wouldn't even seem like it was connected to who I am or how I choose to live.

So with that preamble I'm wondering, does something come to mind, a time recent or distant even, where how you met a moment ended up being very different from how you might have thought and that something important was happening in you being willing to be different than your usual?

**SB:** Well yeah. For me life seems to be—such moments come frequently, let's put it that way. I guess one way I could qualify that a bit is that I've learned that formulas of how I'd like to be—I think I trust that I'm going to be called at different moments to show up in ways that I wouldn't have planned on or that might not be so comfortable for me. And I'm happy that I do have one that just came to mind a moment ago. I was just talking with a friend about it today. It concerned a meeting of a number of people who are both friends and associates with another, engaged in work together and also good friends. A couple of the people involved had a falling out. And the meeting was scheduled to take place and I had it in my calendar and I was, as best I could tell from what I



gathered, not having gone all around the room to talk to all the parties, I had a pretty strong sense that my presence and voice there might help really bridge some very important gaps.

And as I said I had this in my calendar, I was looking forward to it. I knew there was something important for me to bring forward. I sensed that I had a leadership role to play there. Instead, this is the excuse part, but it's no excuse really. I've been really busy trying to process way more information than I'm well built to do. And literally the day of the meeting I was looking at my calendar and all I saw were two appointments that I had earlier in the day. Even though in red on the calendar at the end of the day was this meeting, I didn't even see it. In fact I hadn't seen it for several days beforehand. I completely missed the meeting. My presence or I want to say my absence there sure enough was at the very least inauspicious. It was shocking. I mean stuff falls through the cracks, I'll space out an appointment, blah-blah. That kind of thing does happen and I make amends and I try to be pretty rigorous about more than making amends.

But in this case the moment was passed. There's only so much I could do. The way I live, we're not into beating ourselves up about stuff like that. But it was a really serious lapse. So what it prompted for me and this is often how I look at the stuff that comes down the pike that's got a little or a lot of bite to it; it really prompted for me a sober kind of structural looking into, "Well, wait a minute. This is so off the charts unacceptable that we're going to have to take it into account by not just resolving to do better and reaching out and trying to make amends as best I can with the parties concerned. In addition to that, it prompted a discussion between me and members of Linda's and my team, talking about finding me an assistant, someone who can help me with scheduling appointments and so on and so forth. This has got to become top priority."

So instead of being this occasion where I presumably was going to be able to play an important leadership role, it became an occasion where I really had to look deeply into what was going on with me and how could I possibly have allowed that to slip by. So it was very sobering.

**RC:** Well it seems like in that situation, if I'm hearing it correctly, there was a recognition that on the external side of things there were some systems and people to put into place that could help with that kind of thing but at the same time you recognize that you looked right at the red calendar listing and didn't see it. So there was also perhaps something going on internally where there was an opportunity for you to look at what about that particular experience might have caused you to unconsciously avoid it. Is that true?

**SB:** Yeah. I did look at that and interestingly enough Raphael, in this particular situation when I evaluated it—and there had been times when I’ve seen stuff hiding under that rock—in this particular case my feeling was that wasn’t so relevant here. I really had so looked forward to being part of that situation and there wasn’t anything in it that I was fundamentally shying away from. And that’s actually I think a good point because often we assume automatically there must be something there at those other kinds of levels. In this case I didn’t feel that was so relevant. I felt it was mostly a wake-up call that had to do with, “Your endangering the greater work, capital W, that we’re all involved in together by in effect not taking into account your practical liabilities as someone who can handle the information you’re trying to process.”

**RC:** Right and so rather than beating yourself up there was a deep acceptance of what that experience brought to light and then a willingness out of that acceptance to create new opportunities to better serve that whole. I hear that in that kind of experience one might kind of collapse into self blame or defensiveness or reactivity. But it was your ability to see it for what it was that allowed you to be successfully proactive about it.

**SB:** Yeah, thank you. That’s how it appears to me and I think it’s also relevant. A similar kind of situation can happen with people where something comes up between two people, they have an argument or a conflict whatever. One of the tendencies that people have today is to assume, “If something like this happens both of us must have more or less equal parts of shadow to take responsibility for.” Sometimes there’s quite a differential. Linda and I, sometimes, we’ll see this together. We don’t have a lot of conflict going on between us but sometimes some would come up and both of us will see, “Yeah, here’s my part and okay, yeah this is what I get and do you see this particular piece for yourself?” Other times it’s like I wind up saying to her, “You know something Babe? That was just all mine. I don’t see anything there for you.” I’m accepting 100% responsibility.

So I guess what all this is saying is it’s like you said there aren’t any hard and fast formulas. We’ve just got to be present to the specific event that’s showing up now and in my view anybody who’s seriously engaged in the work today is really frequently coming up against their own next growth edges and it’s often not a very flattering picture.

**RC:** I started to get all jazzed up and excited at the last piece that you were talking about having to do with two people in conversation about an issue or a challenge because it really takes what we’re

talking about to a broader realm and often when we're first getting started in some of this work we use the kind of tropes of the work to put it out there. So for instance there's that saying, "Well that's just your projection." And in that circumstance there are often a lot of, what will be the right way to put it? I don't know just sort of sacred ideas or the sense that everything is always the same way. And you were describing that situation where you realized, "Oops, that's just mine." And it doesn't necessarily mean that because two of us are together in conflict that we each have our work to do, we each have to own something here. It can look really different moment by moment. I think that's so important for people to be liberated from and to recognize that if we really look we'll find something but it may not be what we thought we were going to find in the first place.

**SB:** That's right.

## **2. The Unscripted Moment**

**RC:** You shared that also in terms of the meeting that you didn't go to. I think that a lot of people in the realm of personal growth and spirituality will actually tilt naturally towards the idea there is something important for me to look at, something I need to grow through and it can be a liberating moment in a certain situation to say, "Nope, it wasn't that. I just forgot," or as Gertrude Stein wrote: "A rose is a rose is a rose."

I'll speak to a personal episode for me. I'm always going to start with the premise that cooler heads can prevail and open hearts can find common ground and we can therefore in any situation show up as the ones who are going to support the fullness of people and the opportunity for everybody to find common ground. I know there was a situation in my life where, I won't get into the details for obvious reason, but there was a threat to my family and I approached that threat along the lines that I just described. I kept trying and I kept trying and finally, I realized that this was a situation and in fact a person who wasn't interested or available for any kind of coming together in the way I just described and that therefore if I continued to offer vulnerability in the purpose of the highest good as I saw it, I was actually going to put those I love in real danger. It reminded me of Arjuna on the battlefield in the *Bhagavad Gita*, he's told, and you're going to remember this better than me, that he has to kill some people that he loves, is it is family?

**SB:** Krishna is the charioteer and Arjuna is the warrior and he tells him, "You're going to have to kill your family."

**RC:** Right, and on the surface of it looks just as insane as the story in the Bible of the binding of Isaac.

**SB:** That's right.

**RC:** And in that situation that I found myself in, I realized that if I was going to really show up in the moment in my truth, how I was being asked to show up by what was moving through me and around me—I was going to take a very hard-line stance that would seem on the surface like I was acting in ways that wouldn't be aligned with my conscience, that wouldn't be the way 99 times out of 100 I would act. And yet suddenly I was standing there like Arjuna on the battlefield ready to do battle in that way. It was a sobering moment for me and humbling I guess would be the way to describe it. It made me get off some of the high horse of my own like, "Can't we all get along and this is always how it has to be," because right there in the thick of it I was feeling like the right response was the opposite of what I would have imagined.

**SB:** Thank you. I totally agree and I see that again and again. In our "Waking Down in Mutuality" work these kinds of recognitions are really crucial for people to be able, as you're saying, to go beyond a kind of formulaic assumption, the trope, a beautiful word. If I'm being spiritual enough this can be worked out with XYZ person. We like to tell people, Linda often mentions this, "Yes, the work here involves mutuality, it involves being authentic and true to yourself in all the ways you're knowing and learning and growing as yourself and cooperating with others who you hope are doing likewise. But sometimes they're not going to be able to do it in anything like the way that works for you and you've got to be able to recognize and identify and choose those with whom you can truly go most deeply into those capacities to harmonize, even when there's been a falling out. That's not going to be with everybody. Sure enough love and vulnerability are risky and you can get hurt. I love that particular story you told there. If you try too hard to be too open with some people, not only can you be putting in yourself jeopardy but you can be bringing very unnecessary risk to those near and dear to you. The world is a bit toothier than we would like to think it is in our spiritual vision and its good learning to get that kind of lesson.

**RC:** Yes, it's interesting that you used the word 'toothier' because it calls to mind another conversation I had with James O'Dea in the series and he used the phrase that has stuck with me. "God," to use his terminology, "is periodontal." It's true. It's just like wherever we've got that little

pocket of decay or abscess, somehow it's going to show up, somehow we're going to need to face it. And often in it's surprising ways like you and I are talking about.

**SB:** True, true, true.

### **3. Being Intensely Alive**

**RC:** So what I'd like to do is switch gears a little bit with you because you have shared that the path that is a part of your community that you call, "White Heart Yoga of the Heart," leads one, through time and practice and presence that you've been talking about, to an experience of being "intensely alive." That's a phrase that you have used. I was wondering if you could just speak to that. What does it mean to you to be intensely alive?

**SB:** Thank you, I'd love to. I think I'll process it by saying that I came into teaching, helping others, having spent, this is in the early 90's; I had already spent two decades seeking spiritual awakening and transformation and kind of full picture personal and soul growth and so on. I had many profound experiences and had gone through a lot of enlivening encounters with great spiritual beings and the deeper development of certain aspects of myself. But a point came where, thus the use of the phrase "waking down," I felt that as I was coming into a much greater clarity of consciousness of my own spiritual awareness essence I was also landing in and coming down into being this embodied person in the world. And the feeling of enriched aliveness was quite remarkable and became the foundation or the given of my life ever since.

And my sense Raphael, is that, to use a little bit of James' terminology there, my sense is that God is waking down not into and not through, but in some very mysterious ways *as* humanity and that there is an enlivening identification with our earthy nature that is now becoming more and more inclusive and seamlessly available along with the awakening and clarification of our consciousness, the expansion of our Spirit, the sense of union with, and deep communion with the divine.

The intensity of aliveness is also for me such an intense spirituality that the distinction between Spirit and matter has become extremely blurred to put it mildly. The unity of it all has become that much more obvious. And that appears to be very appealing to a lot of other people as well and thus we do our work.

**RC:** Yeah and I'm reminded of a phrase from somewhere in Ken Wilber's writings when he talks about the particular and the absolute: there's recognition of our spiritual understanding of the oneness of everything and Spirit manifesting in and through and down as you're describing. And

then I am left with my own personal life as well and the question of how do I live my life? How do I respond to each of the moments like we were talking about before? What I'm hearing you suggesting I think, tell me if I got this right, is that as we open more and more to our experience, feel it all and know it all as directly as we can, we find out that those two things are indivisible, the whole and the individual part. And that's in moments in which we are intensely alive to use your description: it's indivisible—the Spirit/matter split as you call it is reconciled such that it's all present, all together.

**SB:** Yeah, for those of us who perhaps at some point in our lives having been generally trained in a relatively materialistic orientation, if we went to church or synagogue or whatever, a Buddhist temple; wherever we might have gotten a religious training, if we did, for many of us there was a time in our lives when we have turned towards Spirit and realized in that turning or being drawn that, “Oh my gosh, Spirit isn't just a concept and it's not unreal. It's really real and in many ways, it's the ultimately reality.”

What appears to be happening as a kind of a next phase is a resumption of the recognition that the matter side of the equation of reality, so to speak, is equally as real and divine and important as Spirit. The two coming into parity in our experience and our participation, and then yes, thank you for quoting that, it tends to heal that Spirit/matter split in us. And really it starts to impart a different world view. We begin to see life in different ways and in many cases for people there's often something of a crisis of realizing that their previous spiritual training was actually to some degree perpetuating that split.

It's like outgrowing and becoming a sufficiently autonomous adult that you can truly love your parents while realizing that sure enough they're not you and you're not them. You can respect them and be grateful for them and treasure what they've given you and who they are in your life without that determining how you are going forward in some absolute kind of way.

#### **4. Neuroscience and Free Will**

**RC:** So as you were talking I was thinking about something. I know that you're a person who spends a lot of time in deep reflection about Spirit and the way forward. I'm wondering if you've been thinking about something of late. There's a lot of talk in the field of neuroscience and particularly the way that neuroscience and research in that realm is connecting with the spiritual path or reflecting it in different ways. In the world of neuroscience there's a dawning consensus that our idea of free will is deeply flawed. That we do things thinking that we're making conscious

choices when in fact it can even be demonstrated that the choice has been made before we decided it for example, or that we have what one writer called the ‘user illusion,’—the idea that the ego as we ordinarily described it is like an operating system that is how we relate to our internal and external environment but how it sees what’s happening is not an accurate reflection of what is actually happening.

So I’m wondering if you’ve thought about how that stream of science and exploration is connecting or not connecting for you with what we were just talking about. In other words when Spirit and matter come together, when self and all come together, and when we have these moments of intense aliveness. Is that somehow connected to where neuroscience is taking us or do you see those as two just very different things?

**SB:** Well, I’m very intrigued by what you were just quoting. When we’re done with the call if you could send me a couple of references that would be great. I’ve got Rick Hanson’s *Buddha’s Brain, The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom* sitting right here on my desk. This is becoming a major area of learning and reflection for me.

So I’m interested to hear what you say and my sense, not having encountered quite that evidential feedback yet, but not being exactly surprised to hear it; my sense is that, first of all, I love the work that’s being done to link neuroscience in general, our total psychobiology with our more spiritual concerns if you want to put it that way and concerns about will and determinism and all of that. I think it’s inevitably part of what’s going to inform us as we go forward.

And my own feeling about that particular point is it’s a little bit like knowing that every atom is a zillion parts empty space compared to little tiny specks of anything. And therefore from a deep micro point of view, subatomic level, there’s hardly anything here even though it looks and feel so solid. And that our perception of it is actually turned upside down in our brains and so on.

All that is of interest to me in terms of helping us ground ourselves in a fuller picture of reality, but then we’re still here living our lives. The cultivation of the degrees of freedom, of will, or the degrees to which we can become self aware of ways we are conditioned and find those aspects of our conditioning that sure enough by learning about ourselves that much more fully and learning how to presence ourselves and participate differently, we can indeed take responsibility for ourselves, our actions, our patterns, our tendencies and show up in different ways.

So I don't know if I'm exactly on the point you were driving at there but I think to me, to try to summarize, the science and the evidence that's showing up is definitely of interest to me but it doesn't disprove the opportunity for us to take as much conscious responsibility as is possible. I guess part of what comes through for me on it is, "Well sure, I know there's no such thing as completely free or unconditioned will and it's good to know that there's also a confirmation of that." But that doesn't mean that therefore we should abandon the cultivation of our capacity to take responsibility.

**RC:** Right, I'm with you completely on that and it just seems to me that as the Spirit /matter split, as you call it, heals and the individual self/wholeness split heals and comes together fully that the way we live includes a recognition that how we see and what we think we know needs to be held much more loosely. I mean we know for instance that as a bee operates in our environment, it sees the flower as a landing strip. We don't, but we see lots of things in ways that are unique to us, which hopefully allows us to relax and hold it all much more loosely. I think that that was one of the streams that was coming through what you're saying, which I really do resonate with.

And also, I'm just thinking about a person who wrote to me recently in an email. He was doing two things. He thanked me for my work around emotional connection and then he also said, "And by the way, it's not particularly mind blowing." He gave-eth and take-eth away at the same time. What I wrote to him was that I understood what he was saying, there isn't anything new under the sun and, so to speak, it just comes through us all differently. And also I wanted him to be in touch with me whenever he did experience anything that was mind blowing.

Because I want to know. But I have had experiences along those lines that were mind blowing and that did alter how I live and what came through me but wasn't owned or created by me was able to emerge and to flourish. For example many years ago I was having an energetic opening and my limbs would often shake and move in their own ways and I would be noticing this and I would be wondering, well, after I got passed first wondering, "Am I crazy?" I would just realize that my awareness was intact but my limbs were moving of their own accord. I wasn't choosing to move them in their shaking manner.

One time I was driving in my car and I had no idea what was in the backseat. My left hand was not on the steering wheel and it started shaking in that way. It juttet back behind the seat and reach to a specific place in space and grabbed what I think at that time was a Cliff bar and shot it back into the



front seat. I realized that I had absolutely no conscious awareness that that Cliff bar was there or what it was that my hand was reaching for. In that moment I could have had many different responses but one of them was just to be profoundly awed that something was happening that had its own awareness and knowing that was outside of how I usually live or what I thought of as myself.

To me that came under the category of mind blowing because it also invited me to just keep opening to what more was there in what it meant to be a person and to be alive and to be open to all the energies that can and do move through us.

### **5. Divinely Human Animal Realization**

**SB:** Thank you. I love what you're saying. One of the ways that we talk about this healing of the Spirit/matter split is as a progressive, you could say, wedding or marriage or union of instinct and intelligence. And so in that sense we sometimes use the phrase 'divinely human.' In fact one of the Senior Waking Down teachers, CC Leigh, has written a beautiful book, a great introduction to our work called *Becoming Divinely Human*.

I sometimes refer to the process as not just divinely human realization but divinely human animal realization and there's a learning how to harmonize with our instinctual nature and therefore to trust more and more deeply. Every person goes through this. It's more and more of a trust in self, a trust in other in appropriate ways, and your story of realizing you couldn't trust someone who was potentially endangering you is good cautionary note there. It's not some sort of absolute "I trust everyone everywhere." A trust in being, a trust in the mystery of our existence even at these biological levels, these instinctual levels of who we are as mammals, primates, creatures. That, to me, is part of the beauty and the joy of this healing of what divides Spirit/matter, God/flesh, divine self/ego self, black/white, light/dark, positive/negative. There's such an entry into a world of very vital paradox full of gray zones and giving ourselves more and more permission not just simply to indulge whatever comes up but to trust that there is, sure enough—each and every one of us really is here with a much greater purpose than our fears might suggest to us and are attenuated to the degree we sense that we're compromised, we're struggling with issues of self esteem and, "What am I here for and am I ever going to realize and express my gifts?" I just want to encourage people keep on keeping on because you are a unique event in nature and you're very body is not just a symbol of that uniqueness, it's a big part of it.

**RC:** I'm inspired by what you were saying and something clicked for me because if we're looking at that neuroscience understanding of there being no free will in the way that we think about it and we're only looking at it from a personality perspective, it seems like there's a great loss there like, "Wait a minute, it seems like all this power and control that I thought I was asserting in my life to manifest my highest good isn't really even happening the way I think it's happening?" And of course there's a threat there to the ego.

But if we bring in the spiritual component that you were just speaking to, what we see is that we then give up the idea of being the seemingly heroic individual creators of our life pushing it forward for something really different, which is an opening to Spirit living through us and in that process animating the uniqueness of who we are in a way that only it can.

So, for me that's where the union of the spiritual perspective and the scientific perspective really exist. I find myself more and more experiencing the fullness of who I am coming from that surrender to what wants to move through me that isn't willful. And that is on a certain level paradoxical, that as the energy of the One comes through me I become more of my distinct self and offer the fullness of who I am. But to me that is really the paradox of the spiritual practice as I live it, and as I share it with people. It just keeps showing up as we were saying before, each moment in more and more surprising ways.

**SB:** Exactly. And then everybody is so unique, that's why in our Waking Down in Mutuality work, quoting Linda, she has these beautiful pithy statements, very simply, "This is not a cookie cutter process." Becoming your fullest and most authentic self is not something for which there is a preexisting manual. Not only isn't there a manual in general but also, and this is where I love some of the science I'm studying ranging from Rupert Sheldrake's whole idea of morphic resonance to a writer of complexity theory named Stuart Kauffman who wrote a great book called *Reinventing the Sacred*. One of the things that these two very profound thinkers and students of life both say, each in his own way, is that what evolutionary theory today is making more and more clear is that the entire universe from the greatness of all the galaxies down to every single subatomic particle, wave or whatever it is, everything is continuously evolving—everything is.

Therefore, as a mentor said to me when I was in my awakening time, trying to figure out how I could be going through the changes I was going through having apparently failed as a seeker and the work I'd been involved in for two decades, he said, "Well, as best we can tell spirituality is not

just evolutionary, it is itself evolving.” What that means, and I love Sheldrake and Kauffman’s making this point, that there’s really no such thing as laws of nature the way we thought about them, that we are having to conform to that are already preexisting.

Sheldrake makes the point that essentially what it’s really all about is the sustainable habits coming into play because as they sustain over time, they have the quality of laws. The other one Kauffman, he has a beautiful phrase, he speaks of the ‘partially lawless creativity of every moment.’ So what each and every one of us is gravitating toward is more and more of a life in which we use all of the best information we have available to us but we are really taking a radically autonomous and mutually accountable, optimally, quality of responsibility for how we’re showing up.

And what we’re discovering are the truly sustainable habits or patterns that we can live by that align us most profoundly to our truth, to our sense of who we are and our optimal purpose such that, in effect they become something like laws for us, although, as we started from the very beginning of this call talking about, sometimes moments arise where we realize, “Whoa, I’ve got to shift to a gear I didn’t even know was there.”

**RC:** Yeah and it seems to me, Saniel, that in my earlier life, and I see this also in a lot of clients and workshop participants, when we’re in the mode of clearing away a lot of the conditioning and healing the wounding that has been in us, that in the earlier times of that, if we just allow what wants to happen to happen often we’ll default to certain neurotic responses or addictive or compulsive responses.

But as we do this work and as our hearts feel more healed and more open and as we feel more connected to our intuition, which is, of course very subjective, but I think it’s something that we can really know for ourselves. Then we get to a place where we can ask this question that maybe draws from what you were just describing where, “What can happen here if I let it, if I open up to this moment, the situation, to this greater possibility, and I come from that place of openness and a willingness, almost a prayerful sense of: “Let what is meant to come through me in the fullest sense arise in this moment and let it be alive as me,” then it is always new, it is always surprising and it’s always much better than we ever could have imagined even when it’s painful.

## **6. This is a Good Thing**

**SB:** That’s right, that really says it very well. We are blessed to live our lives as a continual adventure of discovery. And more and more the drumbeat, the horns that are playing are affirming

at a very deep level and in a very pervasive way that this is a good thing, this life we're leading and we are here with great purpose and each and every one of us—there isn't any wasted matter on the planet. Everybody has got something unique in them that is growing toward its fullness and to participate with that, and find the ways that help us get to that the best, the sooner we can live the life of love. One of the phrases we use is "the fundamental wellness of being" and beginning to also help our human brothers and sisters, many of whom aren't developmentally ready to take the same kinds of conscious responsibility; we can still help one another keep growing and attend to the challenges that face us all as a species and throughout our biosphere. I mean if there was ever a time for a healing of a Spirit /matter split so that as many people could cheerfully and with a whole heart attend to righting what's askew in the biosphere and in human relations, I would say we've got about as good a time as it's ever shown up.

**RC:** Great. So I want to ask you one last question before we get to how people can be in touch with you in your community and your work. It's a completely giant detour but I think given the nature of what we've been talking about today, it would be helpful for people to get a glimpse of you behind the curtain so to speak that is much more earthy than perhaps some of the ways that you and I can talk when we get riffing.

So here's what I want to ask you: if somebody was living with you day by day or if they had a documentary camera, what might they see that would be let's say a perfect example of your ordinary humanness? In other words some people who live their lives devoted to the work that we've been just describing also love watching bad TV. Others of them have a secret fixation on Snickers bars. So what comes to your mind to share right now that is just personal, human, real, doesn't seem at all spiritual with a small or a capital "S" that's just a part of the way that you live that it would be endearing, let's say, for people to know about and to feel close to you with?

**SB:** Well I can give you a few probably in rapid-fire here. And what I'll start with, I think, is probably really important for somebody to say and I don't know if anybody else has said it yet or will, but I have pieces of my humanity like everybody else I don't really want to share. It is like, "Wait the minute, I'm not actually obliged to tell on that part of just how human and ordinary I am," but I'm happy to share a bunch of things.

My office always gravitates to chaos. I told the story of a little bit of what I call 'calendar dyslexia.' I can look at the words on the page there and not read them at all or read them backwards. Linda

and I both love all kinds of TV and movies and our idea of what we do after a profound spiritual workshop is veg out in front of the tube. I'm a kind of a golf fanatic for better or for worse, only with mediocre talent. So I do a lot of watching of the game. I don't have enough time to play it. One guy read a book, a kind of personal journal of my adult golfing writings a couple of years ago and he said, "Man, that seemed awfully narcissistic and delusional to me." I said, "Yeah, that's where golfers go."

I don't feel like I've got the capacity actually, Raphael, to strap on a discipline unless my heart is really in it. For instance, I, for many years here had a pretty serious chocolate sweet tooth which finally my body said, "That's all," and I haven't been able to take even any sugar in for quite a while but not because I decided heroically to give up sugar. The organism just instantly reacts and I bummed about it, but it's the way it is.

**RC:** I hear you. Well I want to say first of all on behalf of a large portion the world and the listening audience that thinks that watching golf on television is actually worse than watching paint dry that we still love and accept you and include you in the human family.

**SB:** Right, thank you. I appreciate that.

**RC:** And I also want to say Sanial that it's so great that you prefaced that there are things that even when we're in this transparent mode that you don't have to share or that you wouldn't share. Because I think that's another level of what this is all about: recognizing that even when we do disclose, it's with a certain discrimination.

**SB:** That's right.

**RC:** And there's in any one of us the other things that we wouldn't choose to. For example, nobody on this series is likely going to talk about how they pick their nose all the time.

**SB:** Yeah, thank you.

**RC:** Or how they have a problem with farting all night long. And that's okay, there's no special value and I think you alluded to this earlier in just spilling everything inappropriately all the time. But there is a special value I think in people recognizing that somebody who they might think of as awake in the way they would want to be or realized in the way they want to be, still might be farting

all night long and that there's just some fundamental aspects of being human that don't change when you reach some particular stage in your evolution.

**SB:** I think it's one of the most important recognitions we can all come to because it liberates those who are truly responsibly living some kind of awakened presence and helping others do the same. It liberates them from the illusion maybe in themselves and in others that they're "free of karmas," that they're somehow perfect. It allows us to share our humanity together in such a way that we can grow into its ultimate divine fullness and that's where I feel we're all growing. It doesn't mean by the way that some of those qualities mark our human ordinariness that we won't be looking to improve our act. I mean, hope springs eternal for my office here.

But it's something about giving ourselves and one another permission to be these ordinary animals with all these particular bodily quirks and private rituals and all the things that it takes just being a human being from day to day in our own skin in a way that's not even our closest intimate partner comes close to sharing.

**RC:** Yes and so people often have an air of perception, so to speak, in which they will look at a master, a teacher in some way and think that that person has something I don't have. But I think what we're talking about is a kind of parallel or almost opposite understanding, which is that even somebody who has evolved in some way that is really powerful and important and beautiful, that they still will have the kinds of things that you, the listener, wherever you are, might think I could never have and evolve to that level.

**SB:** That's right. Precisely!

**RC:** Yeah.

**SB:** So suddenly people get liberated and they realize, "Now, wait a minute. That guy has that going on and yet he's deeply respected and gratefully so by a whole bunch of people who he has helped clarify their own consciousness or moved into some higher spiritual awareness whatever, if he can be that way, why not me?" Then to us that's a great big moment of empowerment and liberation right there.

**RC:** Yes and it brings me back to the image that I spoke about earlier, the front and the back versus the circle and it seems that part of how spirituality perhaps is evolving now is from that presentational mode to the circle in which all is included for students and teachers and everyone.

That's what inspires me. That's what inspired me to do the series so I'm really glad we're touching on that now.

**SB:** Yeah, thank you. We talk about a lot in our work a fundamental existential equality in our being, heart to heart as fellow humans, as fellow creatures. And there are functional distinctions that we have where one or another of us has superior knowledge, expertise, whatever and we can make use of one another in that kind of way. But I think the 21<sup>st</sup> Century spirituality if you want to use that phrase is moving toward a time where it's almost as if the old form of a supposedly existential superiority is just not—it doesn't have any purchase on our evolving presence and our capacity to meet the challenges that are in front of us both individually and collectively.

**RC:** I love that. So in a particular moment Spirit might be using me as a teacher. At another moment it might be using me as a student and there's no reason to get caught up in any of those functions as our identity as long as we just keep showing up moment by moment as we've been talking about today. So amen to that and Saniel thanks so much for all your sharing today. Please do take a moment to share everything you can that will help people find their way to you and your community and allow them to drink from it as fully as possible.

### **7. Where Something New is Always Cooking**

**SB:** Sure, my pleasure Raphael. Happily, recently Linda and I have posted a Web page that a lot of people in the Waking Down community are finding very helpful. By the way our community is very democratic, including to the degree that even though I founded the work I'm not in any sense its controller or CEO or anything like Lord and Master. I'm much appreciated as the founder and one of the primary leaders but the work is really shared.

What Linda and I have posted is a page called [whywdmworks.com](http://whywdmworks.com) that is Waking Down in Mutuality. There you'll find a brief summary, it's kind of a declaration of who we are, how we do it, what it's all about: it's called: "10 Reasons why Waking Down in Mutuality Works So Well." For people who want to awaken whole in the body and to live an authentic life of conscious contribution, especially for people who have been seeking a deeply embodied spiritual awakening that sticks, that doesn't require constantly, vigilantly holding on to but that becomes a given condition of your new life and accelerates and plugs you into the power of the universe right at your own heart core which is the same place as the source of the heartbeat, plugs you into your own growth power and stream of transformation in optimal ways.

We explain these 10 reasons, it's kind of fun. A couple of our friends contributed, so along with talking about healing the Spirit/matter split, there are also statements like there are no dietary restrictions and the teachers don't try to bash your ego and humiliate you, which are very important things to say.

Also on the site, and this is something that Linda and I are so excited about and so happy to do: people can sign up there to download whenever you want or listen to live. We're doing now free weekly teleseminars that are called under the general title, "Why Waking Down in Mutuality Can Work For You." In them we have hour long discussions. We keep it pretty strictly to an hour. Linda and I are doing this week, it's just the two of us, and we're talking about what we call transmission or the radiation of the conscious energy that helps the awakening process which is very central to our work.

But most of the sessions we have each week we invite other Waking Down teachers, regional coordinators, others who have gone through a great transformation and can speak about it and reflect with us on aspects of this process of healing your Spirit/matter split and what that can mean in our work. In each of these calls we present various information, Websites people can link to. So it's a good way to get in touch further with us and our work and at the same time it is a whole really wonderful worldwide community that I feel very blessed and privileged and in a kind of founderly fatherly way proud to have been able to make possible and to help bring into the world.

**RC:** Wonderful.

**SB:** So whywdmworks.com and we look forward to making contact with people.

**RC:** Great, well I'm proud to have gotten to spend this time with you today, Saniel. And I want to, by way of a preview, share with people that Reason number 8 on that site Waking Down in Mutuality, is: "A welcoming melting pot from the global living lineage of spirituality where something new is always cooking," and I wanted to share that because I never thought I would actually take part in or host a cooking show. But in fact I believe that's what we've been doing today. So thanks for spending an hour or so with me in the kitchen, Saniel.

**SB:** My pleasure. Yes, cooking is definitely always going on. Thank you.



## Linda Groves Bonder



Linda is Saniel Bonder's full partner in The White-Hot Yoga of the Heart transmission and teachings, and a Founding and Senior Teacher of the Waking Down in Mutuality work. In the Waking Down community she is honored for her immense compassion for all creatures and all Life. Among so much else, Linda and Saniel share an extraordinary connection to special places on Earth—among them Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County, California, which graces the formal name of their company, Mt. Tam Empowerments. Linda's first career was as a professional jazz-cabaret singer and songwriter. During the last two years she returned to the stage for a time as a singer, dancer, and percussionist with an international touring band. She recently resigned to focus on developing her book and, with Saniel, on new expansions of their work. Linda is a founding member of the Integral Institute and a charter member of the Integral Spiritual Center.

[WWW.WAKINGDOWN.ORG](http://WWW.WAKINGDOWN.ORG)

### 1. Transitioning From The Core Wound of Existence

**RC:** My guest is today, Linda Groves-Bonder. Welcome, Linda!

**LGB:** Thank you so much Raphael! What a great pleasure to be here with you today. I'm looking forward to this.

**RC:** Likewise. And I know that you're unfortunately not feeling a 100% today and so I wanted to just give you a special nod of gratitude for showing up anyway and in the transparency that we seek to achieve here in this series, I thought it would be good just to say that so that you're free to be as you are and not to push against in any way.

**LGB:** Right, I absolutely love that. Thank you so much and I appreciate the authenticity of that communication for the listeners because sometimes these things happen and they're out of our control. So I'm leaning in with you as best I can and looking forward to our dialogue.

**RC:** Yes. You just reminded me, there have been times when I've been just about ready to go out and teach at a place like the Kripalu Yoga Center and there'll be 30 or 40 people waiting in a circle and suddenly, I'll just have the most terrible stomach cramp or pounding headache. And I'll think, "How am I going to be able to do this?" and it's always quite an adventure. Sometimes I do choose to share with people a little bit about what's going on and sometimes it just resolves itself in the background. But again, under the umbrella of transparency, teachers get sick too; teachers often are teaching in adverse circumstances and as long as nobody, especially us, thinks that we're supposed to somehow soldier on and never let them see us sweat (laughs), as long as we're not sticking to that old paradigm, everything seems to work out.

**LGB:** Yes, indeed.

**RC:** I wanted to ask you, right off, and that is from your perspective, what does it mean to awaken?

**LGB:** Oh, I love that, thank you. Well, I'll back up into a little bit of history.

**RC:** That's great, sure, please do.

**LGB:** Initially for me, when I first encountered Sanial's teaching, this was back in 1994, it wasn't really about awakening. I had read things and I had been involved in a quite eclectic form of seeking at the time, but for me it was just trying to find peace and joy in my life; trying to find my purpose; trying to be happier; trying to be as true, authentic, real in communications with others—and then from that place, hopefully find what it is that I feel driven to do and I really didn't know what that was. I was intuiting something.

**RC:** And by the way, we should say that Sanial Bonder is the founder of Waking Down in Mutuality and also your life partner.

**LGB:** He had been a teacher for about a little over a year and a half at that time when I started working with him. And his teaching just started singing to my heart. I realized that it was actually about evolving as a spiritual being and at the time, I wouldn't have necessarily called it awakening, but then it started happening. And so as I dove into my process as Sanial encouraged me to go deep into my shadow material, deep into all sides of who Linda was back then, I noticed that doorways were opening up.

I used to call them my “aha moments” or my light bulb going off moments, and it was very powerful. Very much in a sense of being powerful in the body and the mind was actually trying to catch up to the concept of what was actually happening. So I tended to be a little confused at the time, but as I continued to evolve, as I continued to have these aha moments, I realized that this deeper part of my nature was screaming to be revealed and pieces started bubbling up; things that hadn’t worked or come up for me in the past with other traditions or things that I had been involved in.

**RC:** I love what you’re sharing and I want the listeners to really get as much as I they can from what you’re sharing. I’m wondering if you could share an example or two. You’re talking about things that are coming screaming up from deeper recesses of your consciousness. So what did that look like for you, in maybe one or two examples?

**LGB:** Oh, thank you. One of the things that arose for me when I was sitting with Saniel was I was always aware, and that was even prior to meeting him, always aware of an emptiness in my diaphragm, in my solar plexus—a void, a feeling sense of something missing. And everywhere I went, I was trying to fill that place, that void, or learn more about myself so that it would go away. And as I sat with Saniel, I realized after a hearing a teaching that he was communicating, which was called the Core Wound of Existence, that that’s what I was experiencing.

So I have an actual visceral feeling sometimes of a tension, a core tension in my body that for me, it was very confusing at the time, and all these other teachings kind of addressed around it but didn’t go to the core. Saniel’s teaching on the core wound of separateness and confusion in life, in your existence, was the thing that really penetrated that place in my body and my conscious nature. And I actually felt the transitions happening physically and emotionally and intellectually as I sat with these teachings, but that teaching primarily in the beginning really sang to me.

**RC:** That’s a great example and I think it’s worth just even staying with a little bit more because you described as you were absorbing the teaching on the multiple levels, that that core wound that you had experienced—this confusion and emptiness began the transition. Could you describe what it transitioned to or how it transitioned?

## **2. The Awakening Process**

**LGB:** That is a wonderful question which leads to the awakening process. So just to give the listeners a little bit of a description of what we mean by what the core wound or what Saniel even

meant back then; he was teaching this as an existential angst in your being. This primal place in your existence that feels separate, your confused about your identity here, you're confused about who you are; and yet simultaneously, you are intuiting that there is something more to life than just walking around in your personal self, living your life, having your relationships.

That addressed so much of what was going on for me and once I started feeling this communication literally penetrating me, and it wasn't like he was doing something at me or to me. It was just a natural organic opening of the realization of the core wound of existence that I went, "Oh my gosh! That is me! It's not about issues in my life. This angst, this emptiness, this void isn't about not having good friends or not having a good job." I had so many wonderful things in place at that time of my life. It was just that primal place in my being that felt separate and I knew intuitively that there was something more, that's what the void was.

So as I continued to be taught by Sanial and others and lived in mutuality, which is a huge part of Waking Down work, I realized that this place started to heal. This awareness started to open up. My awareness of my conscious nature started to open up. But it wasn't merely about a transcendental form of conscious awakening where it's more, perhaps, feeling like a witness quality of background or dissociated sense of consciousness. This was coming really in all parts of me. It was visceral; it was in my body. So that's what the Waking Down in Mutuality work is. It's a conscious realization of embodiment—Spirit and matter of being joined, being realized simultaneously.

**RC:** So as you were having that realization it was also creating a healing that was embodied. You could feel that your experience of being you was changing and that was, in a broad sense, the awakening process. Is that right?

**LGB:** Yes. I first started sitting with Sanial in October of '94 and I actually had my awakening in August of '96 and through that whole process, it was an ongoing deepening of this recognition of who I am, here, as a conscious being. And also, even after awakening, obviously, there is still the ongoing integration of who I am as an awakened being here doing the service that I do as best I can for as many people as I can possibly reach.

**RC:** That is great and really helpful. What I would like to do to follow up on that is read something that you wrote that is really beautiful and poetic and then ask you to speak to it in the kind of the everyday life that you lead now. You wrote:

*The transition from knowing myself as consciousness alive to owning my divine nature as a Goddess woman came through a tremendous plunge into and then a burning through the depths of my psyche and pre-existing life patterns and conditioning.*

That's a big wonderful juicy sentence and I wanted to ask you if you could share, again, just one or two examples of a pre-existing life patterns or conditioning that began to resolve itself or ease as a result of this awakening process?

**LGB:** In the work that we do here, we talk about broken zones or broken off zones which usually are linking up to wounds in relationship or previous patterns and conditioning that we've had as a kid or conditioning through certain teachings or religious belief systems; even spiritual paths, you can have conditioning from. And so what I started noticing as these things started burning away or here's another term that we use in the work and that is "rotting away," things started falling way; belief systems started falling away. My background prior to Sanial was, as I mentioned, every eclectic and a lot of New Age belief systems were very much rooted in me at the time: positive thinking and affirmations and all kinds of wonderful paths that helped me on a certain level but never really reached that core wound place, as I had mentioned.

So what happened in the process of this burning away or transition is that some of these belief systems started falling away and I realized that in the rotting away, in the falling away, it was a very natural process that other things started coming in. I started noticing and bringing awareness and recognition to the places where I had attachment to the belief systems themselves. And they actually controlled me on some levels. So here is another term we use: we talk about "governing sentimentalities," governing in the sense that the sentiment is something that you're clinging to and that has a bit of control on some level over this other place that wants to open up that isn't capable of opening up until you are. So parts of my being started to open up to realize that there were other ways and means of being in my body, of being with these broken zones and these patterns and conditioning that were actually being transformed as I deepened into my conscious embodiment.

**RC:** Would it be accurate to say, Linda, that as your attachment to some of those older beliefs began to release or to fall away or to rot as you described it, that then therefore, you were able to embrace some of these broken zones or come to hold them in a more complete, whole or loving way?

**LGB:** Yes, absolutely. When you talk about the holding or the embrace of it—another term in our work is called "green lighting" where an individual can actually fall deeply into a broken zone or a pattern and really kind of love through it, so to speak; embrace it, green light it so fully and continue to glean the teaching from it that you need to but you don't have to get swept up in it or controlled by it or lost in it. Sometimes I use the image with students as like a chokehold. I'll literally put my hand over my throat and say this is what broken zones feel like sometimes until, through the recognition process, the chokehold starts to release gradually, little increments along the way. One of the most important teachings that I do with people is to have them notice the little, small incremental changes all along the way because this is just human nature. We tend to negate that. We tend to minimize these subtle shifts of awareness or subtle aha moments because we're looking for something bigger and better, right?

**RC:** I'm just reminded of a session I had just the other day with a client. She was wanting certain things from her grown daughter that she wasn't getting. I asked her a question: would she rather that her daughter spend more time with her out of obligation or that she do what was more natural and in her heart. And she was honest and said, "Well you know, I think there's a part of me, an old part of me that really actually would rather, damn it, have her do it out of obligation." And we both chuckled at that, and then at the same time, we had accessed a part of her and we didn't want to make it wrong or have it run the show, so I suggested to her that she spend some time, just kind of stomping around and letting that energy flow through her. I think this is maybe what you mean by green lighting—while at the same time, remaining in awareness of it, so it's not making her choices and it's not something that she's collapsing into as the truth; yet she's giving it all the room that it needs to breathe and to be and ultimately to heal for her.

**LGB:** Yes, absolutely. That's a beautiful piece of work that you did. The transitions of those chokehold issues and patterns shift and change through that recognition process of allowance and embrace and green lighting and literally becoming it. This is part of the Six-Step Recognition Yoga process that was revealed to me quite spontaneously one time in kind of like an almost in between sleep and awake reverie that I had years ago. Part of that recognition process is the gleaning of it, the embrace, the becoming that issue; once you drop deeply into it as that and keep awareness open in the midst of it, then there is a transformation of the effect of it. That's the beautiful thing. That's the miracle, that the effect of the pattern no longer has that chokehold feeling sense.

### **3. States and Stages**

**RC:** This takes us to a couple of pieces that I think are going to be really important. One of them is that you are deeply involved in the Integral movement and as a matter of fact, the Ken Wilber who is, we could say, the “Father of the Integral Movement” actually spoke of you as a brilliant teacher, which is a wonderful accolade coming from a shining light. And in the Integral philosophy, there is the distinction made between a state that we experience, something that comes and goes, versus a stage, which is a place that we reach that is a stepping stone in evolution but it’s one that we’ve come to and that is steady for us and consistent. Going back to the awakening that you experienced, do you consider that a state or a stage?

**LGB:** Absolutely a stage. In fact, I had two transitions that were stable stage realizations. The one prior to what we call ‘second birth,’ which is the conscious embodiment—the non-dual realization of consciousness in form—that’s ‘second birth.’ The realization I had prior to that, nine months prior to that, was a witness form of awakening. That was also very stable and we in the work, sometimes talk about the witness being more of an embodied feeling witness awakening, merely because it is a process of bringing that consciousness, even the witness quality into form, intuiting and feeling it in the body and the emotional being and that was true for me on occasion.

Now the one thing that did oscillate in and out of me while I was living that embodied feeling witness stage, is that sometimes I could feel it and access it in my body but then it would oscillate out and it would feel as if consciousness, and I kind of used a joke about this, consciousness was hovering over my left shoulder, behind my head, just above my shoulder. And for nine months, I lived this consistently, feeling this witness quality of consciousness, located there. Even though I knew intellectually, you can’t locate consciousness, right? But that was the intuitive sensing and feeling of that piece. So I knew that there was something more to come. I was excited about the process but after a few months of living that, I started to get a little discouraged because I’m thinking, “I know I’m not complete here. I’ll never really fully be complete because awakening is ongoing realization and integration. But this piece is not transforming into what Saniel was calling ‘second birth’ at the time.”

My ‘second birth’ awakening did happen in ’96 in August and what that was for me was the seemingly—well, not so seemingly—in the moment, it was an actual experience. This consciousness streaking around (laughs), like in a split second, I literally, in a meditation felt it, just knock me backwards. And that’s when I realized that that particular shift had to have been the ‘second birth’ because after that experience which I thought at the time, maybe this is just an

experience that will leave me, but it did not. It was very stably established. I could no longer access the feeling sense of a witness behind my left shoulder because it had integrated. I had realized consciousness in form in me, as me and simultaneously that same conscious principle was recognizing itself. And I know that might sound really confusing, but that was the occurrence of 'second birth.'

**RC:** In taking that in and thinking about how it could be of the greatest benefit to people who aren't familiar yet with Waking Down in Mutuality and your teaching. I'm drawn to something that you also wrote elsewhere, which is that the process of awakening happens uniquely for each person. That would be uniquely in terms of the "what" and the "how" and the "when" and I really get that and I think it's a powerful thing for people to keep in mind.

It seems to be that there is a balance in the work that you're describing and in what you experienced, because on the one hand, you're going through something uniquely, and on the other hand, in that Waking Down work, you have certain kind of trail markers that are common between the people and the community. So for instance, what you are calling a 'second birth.' It's something that two different people might experience and with the help of the teachers in your community, it might be recognized and affirmed and clarified even as it might happen differently for each person. Does that make sense?

**LGB:** Yes, that's absolutely right. In fact, the differences sometimes can feel so starkly different that sometimes people will question "Well, this wasn't like so and so's awakening and yet I am so here. I am so embodied. I know that I've had this transformation happen, this stage realization."

The beautiful thing that I always loved about Saniel's teaching and the Waking Down work from Day 1 is that it's not cookie cutter process, that it is so uniquely individuated and that's where the skill of the teachers come in. The teachers can guide people into this self-discovery and self-realization and it's different for each person because we all have different broken zones; we all have different histories and belief systems that sometimes we have to burn through or rot out of and then it opens the door for more. It opens the door for this deeper intuition and then realization of that conscious embodiment.

**RC:** When we go through that, obviously teachers and communities are so important, and one of the reasons that I know personally that that's the case is that in my own life, when I started having openings of energy and consciousness within me that were very wild and unpredictable, I went



looking around because I wasn't in a particular community at the time, almost like the animal in the children's book, "Are you my mother? Are you my mother?" I would go around to different traditions and gurus and say, "Are you my teacher? Are you my teacher?" And the whole idea was if you could see, understand, explain to me, and guide me through what was happening, then I would say "I'm home." And unfortunately for me, at the time, this was about 17, 18 years ago, that just didn't happen. I met with some of the most lauded gurus in the world and explored many different traditions and ultimately found that in my case as the teacher Mukhtunanda once said a long time ago, that "Kundalini," which is how I came to describe at least part of my experience, often, "becomes the teacher."

I entered into a very deep relationship with what was opening up in me but wasn't able to do it in a community. And I can see that the great benefit of what you're describing, being able to share, reflect, be honored in what one's going through, and not feel somehow that it's going to be measured against something that is static or doesn't feel exactly right for the individual.

**LGB:** That's one of the things we encourage students to do all along the way; to communicate what really is singing to their hearts and what isn't. What feels like it's really working and what feels like it's something that is being put on their being, or a process or a discipline that they're not resonating with. This is what we call a deep discrimination. Each person who enters into this work comes in with a level of discernment and discrimination and what happens as they continue to fall more deeply into their process is that discrimination gets heightened; that awareness and attention gets to jump from one thing to another to another to another, just very naturally and then you make choices from those places of deep discernment.

Also, it's not just what the mind is saying to think about or to discover, but again, bringing it back to what the body is communicating. Because that discrimination is yes, a conceptual mindful act, but it is also about the body's wisdom; dropping deep into the energetics of the body, the emotional component; how there is a tension or contraction feeling sense in the body, or in enlightenment an energy that feels joyful and exhilarating. Part of what I do with people when I work with them is I help draw their attention through deep listening on my part and asking a lot of questions and making suggestions all along the way for them to take their attention to what is already occurring in them.

**RC:** In my experience along those lines, I was fortunate because I met with a teacher briefly who I talked to about how a lot of what was moving through me in a troubling way such that I couldn't really identify, "Was this actually in my highest good? Was this actually helpful to me or could it even harm me?" Those concerns were coming directly from my body as you were describing, not just my mind and what this teacher said to me was that the best diviner or helpful decider she had for what to open to and what not to open to was to just ask myself, "Does it open my heart?" If it opens my heart to go with it, and if in any way I'm not certain and clear that it is opening my heart, then to turn away and create a boundary so that I could come back to feeling more grounded and safe and just generally okay. Using that heart discrimination was really powerful for me and I am speaking to it now, in talking to you for a particular reason, which is that when people do awaken and open to some of the energies that we've been talking about and some of the aspects of consciousness, it is often in my experience, a wild ride and confusing and often people are as worried as they are elated and really want to know, "Am I okay?" Especially when it's dark and when it's scary, "Is this a passage that I need to go through for my unfolding, or in fact, is this something that I need to be careful and to avoid?" So for me, being asked to listen to my heart's call and you used the phrase earlier "Does it sing to my heart?" which I think is really similar.

**LGB:** Yes.

**RC:** That question was really profound and helpful for me.

**LGB:** That really talks to the organic nature of it also and you used the word "boundary." Sometimes, people feel, "Well, if I set boundaries or if I say no to this, then I'm not really practicing, right?" But we all have to find a natural rhythm and pacing in what we're exploring in our deep psyche and in our spiritual and emotional being, which is all one and the same. Pacing is crucial to developing and building trust, primarily starting with self. You have to start to feel openings and dropping deep into a trust of your own being and your own intuitions and your own rhythms and then you can relax a little bit, take a breath and then find the next step and the next step is revealed.

**RC:** It took a while in my own process to really understand the difference between a standard kind of defensive boundary, which causes one to contract and be brittle, versus what I call a loving boundary in which I can feel that it's the love that is emanating from me that is creating that boundary so I can feel awake, alive and heart-full even as I can say no to something, temporarily or

even permanently; being able to practice a loving boundary so that I don't suffer as a result of having to claim that space and keep it clean for myself, I think that was a really big transition.

**LGB:** Yes, beautiful.

#### **4. Energy Levels and Presence**

**RC:** I think is a good place for us to shift a little bit because I think we've spoken very well to the stable stage awakening that you experienced; it's important for people to know a little bit more about how that looks in terms of the kinds of things that they are working through and struggling with in their life. So for example, here you are in the present moment, in these days and months that you're living in, are you noticing any particular triggers or places of struggle where you're called to a greater opening or a greater healing, places where you're feeling like things aren't working as smoothly or you're feeling more irritable than usual? What's showing up for you within this stable stage that's still totally recognizable as human for everybody, whatever stage they are in?

**LGB:** Yes, thank you. Well, one of the things that I feel I struggle with sometimes is an energy level. I think it could be my age and the place in life that I am, but trying to keep my energy level up for the travels that Saniel and I do and just the work that I do with people can be a challenge sometimes. I've realized that as I try various things to keep my energy level up, some of the means that I used to use in the past don't quite work. They are not working in the same way so I have to find new means; I have to really take care of my body and try to get enough sleep as possible and that sort of thing; eat good food, do nurturing things whenever I can, pamper myself, those kinds of things. So the energy level is one thing.

**RC:** Let's stay with that one for a second because I think it's really important. I was having a conversation just recently with the author and relationship expert Daphne Rose Kingma and she actually spoke very specifically to the same thing. The struggles of being in a body and especially a changing body and one that's aging and learning how to take care of it; one of things that I'm struck by in listening to you and to Daphne is something that is rarely spoken to in the realms of spirituality and personal growth, at least in my experience, and that is that this presence that we're always talking about, how important it is to be present in the moment to ourselves and to others and to the world; that this presence requires energy and that in fact, one can only be present to the degree that one has the energy for it. So that there are different qualities of presence dependent on one's energy, and therefore, it's not as if there's this one thing we call presence that we're always

supposed to be aspiring to and achieving; that it actually is in an ongoing dynamic relationship with the kind and amount of energy we have. What do you think about that?

**LGB:** Well, I would agree with the level of energy and the attention or the awareness of presence according to the level of energy. But in a conscious embodied awakening, here's the thing that I think I would like to say that might be a little bit different.

There's truth to what you said and what she's saying or perhaps others, but in this embodied awakening, I think there might be an expectation by some practitioners that if you have even a conscious embodied awakening, you're just going to be blazing with consciousness all the time and the energy level is going to be high and so forth, but we are in a limited body/mind. We have limitations in a body/mind that is actually aging and even though this is a cellular realization, there's a flow or an intensification sometimes of a blaze of consciousness; or not so much a blaze of consciousness. I'll use myself very personally as an example today.

You had mentioned right off the bat in the call that I wasn't feeling well, and that is true. In my body right now there's just a bit of a digestive thing going on; I am very aware of that and simultaneously, I haven't lost my conscious awareness, but there's not a huge blaze of blinding consciousness in my body right now because I'm dealing with a discomfort, it came up early in the morning and I've been sitting with it and being with it all day. So there are intensifications or blazes of consciousness that if you're in the field of others who are transmitting consciousness and we all transmit—we transmit our being according to where we are in our own evolutionary process. If you're in the field of people who are doing their work or if you're in the field of awakened practitioners and teachers, that sense of consciousness is going to be heightened. You'll be able to access that more fully and feel the transmission of being.

**RC:** Let me see if I understand. What I'm hearing you say is that while we are in bodies and bodies have limitations, that consciousness also at times has the opportunity to blaze through and uplift us beyond what our ordinary limitations might be. So in a field of consciousness, in a community of conscious beings; perhaps in sitting with individuals or teachers who have a heightened degree of consciousness, there might be more play and more possibility to what can move through us as presence and energy rather than just only what we would be used to when we would think of our ordinary life and the ordinary limitations of our body.

**LGB:** That's a good way to put it. However, I would just add something and that is that even if I were in a roomful of people right now, teaching or having a mutuality circle, I would still be uncomfortable in my body. Here's the simultaneity and yet, I would also be feeling everyone's transmission and I would be participating consciously in that connectedness with others, in mutuality. So in a sense, I would feel better. I mean even being on a phone with you, Raphael, makes me feel so much better because over the telephone, we are transmitting to each other and that's a very healing force.

**RC:** So as a teacher who travels and probably has some grueling schedules as I think you were alluding to, do you also then have the kind of 'ramp up' and 'ramp down' from those kinds of engagements with consciousness that you were describing? Because for myself, I know that I might have a very intense and big energy and big spaciousness experience with a client or with a workshop, and then when it's over, I can feel the hum and then I can slowly come back to my more ordinary consciousness and realize that my physical being stretched temporarily to hold all of that. And now it needs to kind of come back and hunker down and I've got to get quiet, I've got to get still. I can't expect that that rush of consciousness is just going to continue to uplift me, and in fact, if I don't get quiet and still, then I'll get sick or otherwise unwell. So I'm wondering if you have, as I was calling it, a 'ramp up' and a 'ramp down' kind of thing that is necessary for you?

**LGB:** Yes, very much so, thank you. I'll tell you a little story. It's kind of a cute story. Ken Wilber is a friend of ours and we were visiting him years ago at his beautiful home in Boulder and he was asking me one time because he knows how sensitive I am and how open I am, "Well, what do you do when you're teaching for say, two days? Do you take time off? Do you find ways to integrate it?" and I said, "Absolutely." It's exactly what you're saying, Raphael. I have to find ways to integrate it because back in the day, it was a lot more than than it is now, there was a sense of a saturation and I could feel it literally in my crown chakra. I would have pressure in the crown of my head that felt like trapped energy and Saniel would help me quite often, just by putting his hands on the top of my head.

I used to say that he is my incinerator. Not that the energies that I pick up are bad, not in the least, it's part of being a teacher and doing the work that I do with people is to take that on and to transmute it. But Ken was cute when we were talking about it. I told him some things that I do to help equalize the pressure and he says, "Yeah, you know what it is. It's the "suckage factor." When

you've got two days of suckage you've got to have at least 2 to 4 days of down time so that you can integrate the suckage.

**RC:** (Laughs) So that's one of his very highfaluting philosophical terms now. (Laughs)

**LGB:** (Laughs) I love that, though because it really spoke to how it feels at times. But again, I don't want to give the impression that that is wrong and bad, not at all. In fact, I actually feel it as quite an honor to feel individuals and to be as open as I can because that's what I signed-up for as a teacher, to help integrate and move things with people, not to take it on and to make it disappear from the person. It's not about that. It's being with them in true mutuality and as a teacher to help them transmute it and then whatever I do take on, I can release it in various forms.

### **5. Continued Evolution**

**RC:** Good. That's really helpful to hear. Now, it's not that often that two people who are life partners teach together and live together. So I'm wondering, along the lines of getting a sense of how it is to be you in your state as a teacher and as a human, do you find yourself having periods, experiences of irritability, bad moods? Do you find yourself sometimes snapping at Saniel, maybe more than you would in a more expanded state? What could you share with us about that and how you be with that?

**LGB:** That's great. Yes, of course, I have mood swings; yes, of course, I am not perfect—no one is; and yes, sometimes, I might do something or say something that will also irritate Saniel a little bit. We've been together for so many years that we have gone through unbelievable ups and downs in the early years and yet, through the years we have found such a beautiful flow and equanimity in our relationship that I feel like I'm the luckiest woman on the planet. (Laughs)

But back to the mood swings, the reactions—that is human. Fundamentally, it's not wrong and bad. Now if you're hurting someone, yes, go to them and see if you can heal it in relationship obviously. But if Saniel and I snap at each other or get a little edgy, we talk about it and we try to process it there in the moment. Through the years, we have developed a skill to where we really nip it in the bud. If there's something up, we talk about it, we process it, and then it's really fully released. And quite often, there's not a repeat of it. There might be something similar that enters in an edge, but again, we try to address it as quickly as we can so that we're not holding anything.

Now, we do live together, of course, and we do our work together and we travel together, and that for me, and I know he'll say the same thing because we're very happy in our marriage. It's

incredible how we think alike and how we have the same passion to reach, what I like to say, as many hungry, hurting hearts in the world as we possibly can to make change, to help individuals have their awakening so that they can find their unique purpose and gifts and take that out into the world to make change. This is what gets us up every morning, Raphael. We are like-minded in that way and we are working very diligently together and with other teachers and practitioners and people who are just dipping their toe into the work even; working very diligently with every single body to help evolve the work, to help find unique ways to make our communication heard and to be seen so that we can make change. And also, make change in ourselves, because as I had mentioned before the second birth awakening is a very stable stage realization of conscious embodiment, but you continue to evolve. Everyone does, we're here; we're on a planet; we're in a body; we're in relationship. We will always grow and learn and benefit from others wisdom and presence.

**RC:** Let me ask you one more question about that because I really value that principle of evolution and the recognition that if we're alive and if we're in a body, then we are always moving and shifting and hopefully, evolving. And many of the old belief systems and conditioning fall away, and yet often we find new ones or old ones show up in a different form. I know for instance, in my own life, when it comes to my work, I'm pretty open in terms of my energy and attention, meaning I follow where intuition leads me in terms of creating opportunities and partnerships and that feels good most of the time, but every once in a while, I'll have an experience where maybe something won't go "right" or people won't respond to me in a way that feels as kind and as caring as possible. I'll experience something along the lines of let's say a slight and I will notice that there is a complex in me, and if it was spoken in words, it would be something like "Everything is so hard for me, like other people have things that happen more easily for them and for me it's so hard."

This is a story, of course, and I'm not attached to that story and I'm wanting to be transparent in describing a moment at whatever stage I'm at in my evolution where even with all of the opening and transformation and healing that I've experienced, I can still notice the feeling tone of that complex and I can still notice a tendency, if I'm not especially mindful, at least for a while, to sink down into a contracted state.

I'm wondering if there's a state—if there's something like that that you'd be willing to share; a place that maybe is newly coming up or is an old thing coming up in a new guise where you have the tools to recognize it and to work with it and yet it still comes up and it still calls you to evolve in that way.

**LGB:** Yes. Thank you. As you were speaking, I immediately went to something that's a little more current for me right now and I won't mention any names, but in two separate occasions, I have noticed that an old pattern of co-dependent behavior arose in me with these two individuals. It was such an interesting encounter because I really feel like I have done so much healing work and therapy and the Twelve Step Program, Al-Anon back in the day, around my co-dependent tendencies and it arose on two separate occasions.

So I really witnessed and dropped into it and asked the question, "Wow, I thought that this piece had been healed but then, here it comes back. So what's the difference between my encounter with it now as compared to before?" One of the differences I discovered as I really sat in it and again, green lighted the fact that, "Hey, this co-dependent tendency arose again." Simultaneously with that encounter and the pattern reaction that I had to these two individuals, I realized that even in the midst of that, if I put my attention on it, I still could access that place in me that wasn't affected by that tendency or didn't judge that tendency or didn't make myself wrong.

Whereas before, I would judge myself and I would scramble to try to do the next process to heal it or to change it, manipulate it, whatever. I think I burned through a lot of the patterns of trying to perfect myself or trying to not go there, trying to not encounter something that—it's just there for me to learn from again. So it was interesting to see that that arose and that I didn't have as much judgment about it, although I was going "Whoa, where did that come from? Okay, I need to go deep in here with my recognition process." And then with that, it also took me into mutuality. I didn't do that on my own. I did it in relationship to others who could help me through reflection and guidance to go deeper in it so that maybe in the future, if it arises again, it will come and go even more quickly.

**RC:** I really appreciate how you shared that. It seems to me that you highlighted something really beautifully about the awakening process. If I heard it well, it was this: that issues of personality and conditioning are going to arise, and when they arise, perhaps the old way is to either turn away, "That can't be so. I can't be like that." Or to collapse into the experience as if that's the truth, that's the way to be or the place to react from. But in this case, if I heard you right, you allowed it, you embraced it, you explored it, you made room for it, and it all happened within a bigger space of awareness in which you were free to work with it and to let it heal; let it evolve and not feel like somehow you were in a tight relationship that somehow this is all there was; this is all that you are as you're in it.



**LGB:** Yes, well put. I wasn't completely consumed or identified with it because of that other side of me that was holding it in presence, in consciousness. Now that's not to say that I didn't have reactions, and that I didn't feel pain around these circumstances. That's what we do. We are human. We're divinely human, however. And so the best we can do is try to bring, in difficult moments, bring attention and awareness to the part of you that might not be so consumed by it or identified with it. That's the direct investigation of consciousness. What part of your being actually is just holding and registering the event and not affected by it? And accessing that piece can feel like it's ever so, so, so subtle. Maybe ten miles behind you but if you can access even the most subtle awareness of that, then you're accessing your conscious nature, that presence piece that isn't affected by the issue.

**RC:** Yes, and when something arises, you have the opportunity as soon as you are out of your first reaction to say, "Oh, there's that." I think something that you share with me is a recognition that if we're going to talk about uplifting our overall self, our vibration, the way that we be and move in the world for our own success and well-being and that of all others; it's going to happen through the recognition, the curiosity, and the embrace of that which arises, along the lines that you were describing and not by trying, in any way, to make it different.

**LGB:** Yes, that's right. That would be what we call a hyper-masculine tendency or moving your being to manipulate or change something. This intense feeling sense that, "Uh-oh, am I actually going to allow myself to go there or do I want to try to get out of it or avoid it or deflect from it?" Now, see fundamentally, nobody does anything wrong even in that place because protection, defense, all of that is human nature as well. Those protective mechanisms are in place for very good reasons as long as they don't need to be in place anymore; the recognition process of when you can go to "Wow! You know what, I have even rotted out of that protection piece," then organically, something arises to be seen and done if anything needs to be done around an issue.

**RC:** Yes, this is, of course, not about a wrong or bad in any different approach.

**LGB:** Right.

**RC:** The reason that I mentioned it as different from other approaches is that I could tell from reading some of your work that we come across a lot of people who do come from one or another New Age paradigms who often are very fearful of states that they experience as painful or reactive or that feel bad and they're afraid that if they embrace those states, that somehow bad things will

happen to them, that they will be attracting negativity. And so I've seen a strong, as you say, hyper-masculine attempt to soldier through or up away from some of these kinds of things that we're both talking about that arise and cause a lot of suffering.

**LGB:** Yes.

**RC:** So it's not about right or wrong, it's about noticing what causes suffering.

**LGB:** That's right. Thank you for phrasing it that way. That's beautiful.

**RC:** So for me, I know that I often say to people, if you could just get around that because you wanted to and if I knew how to; that if there was a way to do that, that would be quick and fast—I'd show you how to do that.

**LGB:** (Laughs)

**RC:** We'd save a lot of time probably. It'd be a lot easier but I've never seen that work. I've seen this other process of embodiment and evolution of consciousness. I've seen it not just work but I've seen it help people blossom into a fullness of loving kindness and a beautiful life. So it's through watching that over and over that I become so dedicated and inspired to supporting people in that, very much the way that you were describing, that you came to it.

**LGB:** Thank you. Yes, oh boy, am I so glad you're here. (Laughs)

**RC:** Well, speaking of that, I do want to say as we're going to be coming to close here in a moment that I have no idea what it would have been like to have you without a digestive ailment, but I'll take you with a digestive ailment any day.

**LGB:** (Laughs)

**RC:** It's just been such a blessing to be able to commune with you and to get to know you a little bit and feel the fullness of who you are in this way where we're choosing to show up and to be transparent and not in any way separate ourselves with a role or with expertise or anything similar.

**LGB:** Oh, thank you so much! I just so appreciated our time today, too, Raphael. I loved all your comments and questions and the flow. This felt very good for me and I have to say I feel better.

**RC:** Well, I feel enlivened myself and, and one of the things I want to make sure to do is to ask you to share with people if they have been inspired today, and they want to learn more about Waking Down in Mutuality, the work that you do—tell them, where should they go to dive in and to reach you?

**LGB:** Oh, thank you. Well, before I give the website address, I want to just encourage everyone who is listening to just continue to move in the ways that you feel so moved and if you are attracted to this dialogue or to the Waking Down in Mutuality work, there are several things— several offerings online. There's several communications books that have been written, several things that Saniel has written; there are audio CDs; there's a DVD set that's called *Awake and Radiant* that is also available for purchase on our website, in our web store. I have a toning CD because I'm a singer where I do wordless toning for healing and that's called *Joy of Being*. All these things you can explore on this particular site and this site links to several other sites, Saniel's and my sites as well, and this particular site that I would recommend for anyone to explore it more fully is [whyWDMworks.com](http://whyWDMworks.com).

**RC:** And that WDM stands for Waking Down in Mutuality.

**LGB:** Yes, indeed.

**RC:** Yes. Excellent!

**LGB:** That site is a new site that actually, the people who access that will see that there are a number of questions that people have initially when they come into the work. It's for new people, it's for exploring, "What is this, and what isn't this work?" and some of the questions and some of the answers were actually brought in by practitioners. Newer practitioners as well as some of our teachers; it's brilliant and it's very easily accessible.

**RC:** Wonderful! So now everybody knows where to dive in. I'm so glad they have that opportunity and again, I'm so glad that I got to spend this time with you and I'm hopeful that you will 'ramp down' after we're done and take care of your body and put into practice what it is we were talking about that we both need to do when we travel through the world, doing this work and sharing in this way.

**LGB:** Yes, indeed. Thank you, Raphael, so much. What a pleasure to be with you today, and again, I want to just close with a blessing to all the listeners, to everyone out there, blessings on your

journey no matter where it leads you and listen to your heart and keep moving and making change in the world because each and every body matters.

**RC:** And so it is!

## **Acknowledgments**

Teaching What We Need To Learn was never a solo creation. In developing, launching and maintaining the online interview series, I relied heavily on our producer, Julia Zaslow, along with our technical director, Kenny Bushman. Our theme music, as always, came from Steven Walters.

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Last but not least: During the creation of Teaching What We Need To Learn, my wife, Ayin, stepdaughter Hazel, and daughter Aria Belle were all often woefully short on "Raphi" time. I'm very grateful they put up with that, and I'm devoted to rejuvenating our joyful togetherness.

A deep bow and tip of the hat to you all!

## About Raphael Cushnir



Raphael Cushnir is a leading voice in the world of emotional intelligence and present moment awareness. He is the author of six books, lectures worldwide, and is a faculty member of the Esalen Institute, the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, and the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies. He has shared his unique approach to personal and professional development with millions of readers in *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*, *Beliefnet*, *Spirituality and Health*, *Psychology Today*, and *The Huffington Post*. In addition, he coaches individuals and teams at Fortune 100 companies, governments, religious organizations, and leading non-profits. Raphael's own heart was opened by an experience of profound grief.

Raphael's offerings includes an innovative yearlong program for groups of just twelve people called *P4 - Presence, Purpose, Passion and Power*. He also facilitates an online learning experience called *The Vulnerability Project*.

Raphael works with individuals and couples anywhere in the world via phone and Skype.

The interviews in this book are available as a complete audio set, and also as selected singles and albums on I-Tunes, Amazon.com and other outlets.

To learn more: [www.cushnir.com](http://www.cushnir.com)

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# Teaching What We Need to Learn

*Leaders in Personal Growth & Spirituality  
Share Their Own Innermost Challenges*

SELECTED TRANSCRIPTS  
Volume 2: Non-Dual & Relationship Teachers

*Dialogues Conducted & Compiled  
by Raphael Cushnir*

**Teaching What We Need to Learn**

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**Transparency Press**



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Volume 2: Non Dual and Relationship Teachers**

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For information contact Transparency Press via Raphael Cushnir - [RC@CUSHNIR.COM](mailto:RC@CUSHNIR.COM).

This book is dedicated to all the teachers who participated in the series.  
Your generosity, transparency, and vulnerability leave me honored and humbled.  
You have my deepest gratitude.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## **Introduction**

What happens when we teachers of personal growth and spirituality step off the stage? When the workshop is over and we return to our own daily existence?

Are we able to practice what we preach? If not, what gets in the way? Especially when it's really hard?

In the end, aren't we all the same as human beings? Beneath the roles we play? Isn't one of the greatest gifts we teachers can give a glimpse of the way our own lives are altered by the very same principles and practices we share with our students?

In the wake of all these questions, during the fall of 2011, I began to imagine a very different kind of interview series, one I'd host, in which the personal lives of teachers took center stage. In which we were willing to become vulnerable to listeners in a new and exciting way.

### **A New Vision**

But then doubt crept in. Most great teachers love to tell stories from their past. These stories help demonstrate how we all can overcome our flaws and foibles. So maybe my idea wasn't so new after all.

With more reflection I came to understand that a telling a story from the past is one thing, but relating a personal challenge as it's happening is quite another.

What I envisioned were teachers being willing to share, quite frankly, what they're working through right now. What's their edge? What's still messy and unclear for them? What may become a teaching story down the road, but right now is their own work?

Yet as soon as this vision clarified, more doubt crept in. The possibility for such a series would come down to one more crucial question: Would the teachers people most want to hear from actually agree to take part? Would they allow people a truly revealing peek behind the curtain of their lives?

There was only one way to find out. I asked them directly. I started with a small list, and an email entitled "An Invitation to Radical Transparency." Most of the people from that list said "Yes!"

### **Momentum Builds**

Next, I asked the thousands of people on my own email list who they would most like to join the series. The names poured in, and I continued with my invitations. Soon, to my surprise and delight, there were more teachers interested than I even had room to include. To accommodate them all, I had to create an ever bigger event.

In the series that eventually premiered in the spring of 2012, and ran for 23 weeks, listeners got to know some of their favorite teachers like never before. Plus, they experienced a deep resonance with teachers they encountered for the first time.

Now, you the reader have the same opportunity. Forty four of those interviews are included in this three volume set. By sharing their own lives so candidly, these visionaries will advance our collective wisdom in powerful ways.

### **Getting Personal**

In recording the interviews, I made it my mission to put my own personal challenges front and center. This made it as safe and easy as possible for the teachers to open up right along with me.

So here's to Radical Transparency as a new teaching paradigm for the 21st century.

As a matter of fact, here's to Radical Transparency as a whole new way of being for the 21st century.

Because no matter where we are on our own path of personal growth and spiritual realization, none of us are just students. We're all teachers, too. Our everyday lives are offerings to all the people with whom we come in contact.

Taking the cue from the wise and generous guests in this series, let's all teach what we need to learn...and learn what we need to teach...starting now.

Raphael Cushnir  
Portland, Oregon  
December, 2012

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## The Non-Dual and Related Teachers

### Ram Dass



Ram Dass first travelled to India in 1967 as Dr. Richard Alpert, an eminent Harvard psychologist. There he met his guru, Neem Karoli Baba (affectionately known as Maharaj-ji), who gave Ram Dass his name, which means “servant of God.” Upon his return from India, Ram Dass became a pivotal cultural influence and has served as a guiding light for over forty years, carrying millions along on the journey. He is the author of the landmark book, “Be Here Now,” and co-founder of the Seva Foundation and lives in Maui, Hawaii. Ram Dass is pleased to announce the release of his latest book (with Rameshwar Das), “Be Love Now: the Path of the Heart.” [WWW.RAMDASS.ORG](http://WWW.RAMDASS.ORG)

### 1. Colonoscopy Brothers

**RC:** Ram Dass, what a great pleasure to welcome you to *Teaching What We Need to Learn*.

**RD:** This is quite a thing, teaching what we have to learn.

**RC:** I guess that’s what we’re all doing, yes?

**RD:** Yeah.

**RC:** Well, I start out each one of these encounters by coming into presence with the person I am exploring with and so I would like to say that I feel really grateful for this opportunity to be with you and also I am unintentionally fasting for our conversation today because tomorrow I have a colonoscopy.



**RD:** (Laughs)

**RC:** So, no food for me. I will be nourished by our conversation only.

**RD:** I'm also on a cleanse and I'm getting my colonoscopy next week.

**RC:** (Laughs) Brothers!

**RD:** Yeah (laughs).

**RC:** So Ram Dass, I wrote down a few things that I needed to ask you before we get started because I feel like you have been a presence in my life for so long. The first thing is, I'm always quoting one line that is attributed to you and now that I'm with the source, I want to find out if you actually said it. In my workshops, I tell people, "Ram Dass always said, 'If you think you're enlightened, go spend a week with your family.'"

**RD:** Yeah.

**RC:** So you really said it.

**RD:** Oh, yes.

**RC:** Okay. So I want you to know, I have spent weeks with my family and I'm not enlightened.

**RD:** (Laughs)

**RC:** I'm always really taking that to heart! Another thing that I'm so excited to get to ask you about just for fun, is in one of your books, I think it's either *The Only Dance There Is* or *Grist for the Mill*, you tell a story about meditating and having a mosquito land on your nose and deciding to be so fully invested in loving awareness, that you allowed the mosquito to do his thing, to put his stinger inside of you and extract the blood, and let him do that uninterrupted until he had his fill and then flew away. So my first question is, did that actually happen in the way I just described it.

**RD:** That's just the way it happened, yes.

**RC:** Okay. And then my second question is did you ever do that again or was once enough?

**RD:** No. Once was enough (laughs).

**RC:** (Laughs) Okay, excellent! I also want to tell you, again, just from my heart, personally, that even though all of your books have been meaningful to me, your book with Paul Gorman, *How Can I Help?* was so profound and really just hit me upside the head because I was a nice Jewish boy and I was a world saver. And for many years as a very passionate activist, I was out there trying to fix everything that was wrong not really knowing that I was actually trying to fix my own pain.

**RD:** Yeah.

**RC:** And it was such a koan, so confusing and rich and powerful for me to see the path of activism through yours and Paul's eyes and perspective. You really changed everything I did from that point forward. So I really want to give a special honoring and thank you to you for that.

**RD:** That's good. We worked hard on that book, and Paul was such a perfect activist. We did our thing in New York City with street people and distributing food and stuff like that and we had them all come into the St. John's Church.

## **2. Ram Dass Said It First**

**RC:** I also wanted to mention something else: If anybody who is a teacher of one sort or another in our contemporary moment reads Ram Dass with care, we have to acknowledge that most of the things we say, Ram Dass said that already and probably said it better (laughs). When I go back to 30 years ago and read some of the things that you wrote, they are so fresh and it seems like there's no reason to kind of reinvent the wheel. And I feel that way because I travel to places where you have taught, for instance, at Breitenbush Hot Springs where I do workshops, they even built a special cabin for you after your stroke. And so you're always there and I'm always doing a kind of a bow, "Okay, I get it. I learned it from you and I'll pass it on in my own original way but I remember where it came from." So thank you again for that.

**RD:** Well, things change; the culture changes, and therefore, the way you can say it changes. Because you are talking to the consciousness of your audience.

**RC:** And here you are with a strong presence on the Internet, talking to this contemporary audience in the place that you are right now. So the dialogue continues.

**RD:** It continues.

**RC:** Yeah. So the last thing I want to ask you just for fun on my list of “I have to ask Mr. Ram Dass” is a few years ago, the telephone company Sprint had an advertising slogan in which they said “Be there now. ”

**RD:** Yeah.

**RC:** So the first thing is were you aware of that when that slogan came out?

**RD:** No.

**RC:** (Laughs) Okay. So again, the nice Jewish boy came out from me when I heard that slogan, “Be there now.” I mean, what’s so bad about being *here* now? What's here -- chopped liver? Why would we want to be there?

**RD:** (Laughs)

**RC:** But I saw that your influence was carrying so deeply into popular culture. They thought they had to improve on the now.

**RD:**(Laughs) That’s funny, that’s very funny.

**RC:** So Ram Dass, I often save this question for the end but there’s no reason to waste precious time that I have with you. This question that’s posed by the title of this series, *Teaching What We Need to Learn*, it’s really about transparency and it’s about sharing what’s cooking for us, what’s not all the way done, where we find our consciousness called for greater exploration in this present moment. And I’m wondering, how that is for you? I mean there are so much that you have come to peace with and there is so much love that moves though you, but you’re a person. You’re evolving and I’m wondering where do you see that evolution right now?

**RD:** Well, certainly the stroke that happened to my body proves a lesson for me because the words don’t come out as well as they should and I have to wheelchair, which means I can’t get as much exercise as I want to. Then I think that my age is an interesting factor to work with, 81. I don’t mind that my memory is shot, things like that, because I dwell in the present. The past and the future are not on my screen at all.

That means I can’t say, “Oh, damn it! I used to play golf” or “I used to drive my sports car,” or something like that but because of my stroke. I used to play the cello and all that stuff; no, I don’t

do any of that. That's past. That's somebody else. And this is me now. The challenge I've been dealing with is working with and talking to teenagers to 30ish people and they have a different language than I have. So when I get a spark from them, I feel very honored. Because they come in to see this old man in a wheelchair and I don't know what they expect (laughs). Most of them have never heard of my history.

**RC:** So I want to go back to the very first thing that you mentioned about your 'now' which is the physical limitations that you have following the stroke. And I'm imagining that there are many moments, even a majority, where you're not in resistance to your experience. It just creates stuff to navigate in life.

**RD:** Yup, just right.

**RC:** I have a chronic illness and so I work on that in the same way myself.

**RD:** Yup.

**RC:** But I wonder, do you find that there are particular times where you're less at peace with those physical challenges, not being able to exercise, the speech, etc.? Or do you find yourself pretty much in a constant state of acceptance with all of it?

**RD:** Pretty accepting now. Because I go into my pool where there isn't gravity and I walk, then I'm really walking. "Look ma, I'm walking."

**RC:** Beautiful! So you have said that anytime you pushed something away, it's still there.

**RD:** Yeah.

**RC:** And you said that your down times are really especially interesting because they show you where you aren't, and over time on the spiritual path, you become actually more interested in those days and times because you long to be whole and to accept everything. So do you have, at 81 and having burnished the gem of yourself for this long, do you still find that you have those down place or places where you come to see that you aren't?

**RD:** What I do is I witness those thoughts. I witness from my spiritual heart into the thoughts and I'm surprised now that that they're still around. And I love them most of the time because that's the only way that you can get rid them (laughs).

**RC:** (Laughs) Right. But they're very sophisticated so that if they sense that you're loving them in order to get rid of them, then they may stick around even more.

**RD:** (Laughs) That's just exactly what they're like (laughs).

**RC:** I was speaking in this interview series to a non-dual teacher named Isaac Shapiro. And he was talking about having a pretty clear awareness in which lots of things still arise, that he doesn't attach to, but he knows they don't go away. So for instance, he feels irritation sometimes about a person or a situation. He likes one person more than he naturally likes another person and he doesn't attach to it or create a drama about it. But all that kind of 'going toward, then pulling away from' still seems to happen in the psyche even though it's not happening to an "I" as he experiences it.

So in your experience, do you still find those kinds of attractions and irritations arising even if you don't give them a lot of energy or resistance?

**RD:** Yes.

**RC:** I'm so delighted to be able to ask you that question and also hear your truest answer because I see so often that people do harm to themselves by creating an idealized state that they think they should be in in which those things wouldn't arise.

### **3. Substituting My Soul for My Role**

**RD:** Yup. I'm human too. We are spiritual beings taking a human experience but the human's experience is these judgments and all this stuff, because they're part of the warp and woof of being in the culture. I mean I've lived down in my heart and I know the judges in my mind. But it's very much like the Hindu image, there's a coach and I'm sitting in the coach but upon the driver's seat is the ego and that's got all those things. And I can't drive the coach from sitting in the back. I have to help the coach driver by knocking my cane against the window to then go left or go right, but I've got to trust him to the potholes in the road.

**RC:** So the driver has its place, and as long as it has its role, it's also going to do its shtick.

**RD:** Yes, that's right. I have roles in society. I mean like being a wise old man, you know. I have roles in the society but I don't have to take them seriously. And I think that I can substitute 'my soul' for 'my role.'

**RC:** Hmm, beautiful. I noticed too, I think, that over time, at least as I've known of you, that a lot of those natural kinds of egoic judgments turn into discernment that can be heartfelt and valuable. I heard a story about you, you can tell me if this is accurate, that in the early days of your recovery from a stroke, many people wanted to come and offer you this kind of elixir or that kind of healing, a promise of some kind of full recovery, and that there was one time where a certain healer came forward to offer you something and you just had a natural discernment... 'phony,'—it just didn't feel true to you. And you didn't shy away from that. You let that intuition or discernment just be what it was and you followed it.

So do you experience it that way, that you can have heartfelt discernment that isn't so much just the ego doing its thing?

**RD:** It's colored by the soul and by the ego. It's colored by them. When somebody comes along that's a real phony, my soul really pulls back. My guru said, "Ram Dass, speak truth. Speak truth." And I expect that of other people. In relationships, truth is gold. I remember sitting in my mother's hospital room when she was dying and all these people, all the relatives and nurses and doctors all came in and they were all speaking phony stuff. The doctor said, "You're going to be all right. Wonderful, you're going home soon." And they went out of the room into the corridor they said, "She won't live a week." For a person that's going through a ceremony of dying and then being surrounded by lying, boy it hurts me.

**RC:** Yeah, I really get that. In this interview series, I spent some time recently with Dan Siegel, the psychiatrist and mindfulness teacher, and his father had just died. And it was a very poignant interview because he spoke about that and he didn't cancel the interview even though it was a very raw, the passing.

**RD:** Yeah.

**RC:** And when he spoke to his father when his father was very scared, he said to him, "Dad, I don't know if this will be meaningful to you but the place that you're going to is very much like the place where you were, or is the place where you were before you were born. And nobody is afraid of the place they were before they were born." And his father took that to heart even though he was a scientific man. He said, "Thank you. That helps me feel better."

**RD:** (Laughs) That's great.

**RC:** So that's something really—it's soothing but it's different from you're going to be home in a week.

#### **4. The Hereafter and Parents**

**RD:** Yup. Most of the people are speaking to a dying person from this side; there are pictures of the children, and medicines and so on and there's very little said about the about the hereafter. I think, since the soul is not in time and space...it's going to be infinite. It's going to be a blank slate. And most people project on that blank slate their image of what they expect of the hereafter. And it may be a sylvan scene or a school or a big mansion or a St. Peter or a hell, or the Bardos, or Buddhists wanting to... nothing.

**RC:** Yeah. I really relate to the idea of the projection onto the hereafter because ever since I've been very young, being a very intellectual oriented person, I've had this idea that when you die, all unanswered questions are answered. You get to have complete knowing. Which for some people would be torture but for that part of my brain and my ego would be bliss. So I have this fantasy that when I die, I'm going to find out about that girl who rejected me back in my 20's who wouldn't tell my why, I'm actually going to get to find out what was going on.

**RD:** (Laughs) It's better than that because you'll not only know, you will be wise. And that will be, you'll be that girl and you'll see why she was incarnated and four incarnations before, and not only will you see all this, you will be all this.

**RC:** Wow! Wow, that's a lot to look forward. That's a great ride.

**RD:** That's great, yeah.

**RC:** Yeah. Well, I want to ask you a question on a different subject because we were talking about Dan and his father, and I was thinking about a moment in your recent interview with Oprah and this was the point where she was talking about you and your relationship with your father.

And so we're talking about that moment in *Fierce Grace* when Oprah saw the footage and saw your father and his expansive acceptance and respect for the scene that you had created out on the lawn of the family house. And Oprah said, "Ah, he seems really kind of enlightened and aware" and you said, "Well see, that was for the camera."

**RD:** (Laughs) Yes. My image of my father is very complex in my mind because in his lifetime he was an achiever and then in his death, I found him to be an angel, just a sweet, soft angel. And then

in my earlier days, he was very against my going into Psychology and he fought me tooth and nail about that. And then here he is going, “Oh, we’re all resolved and I let my kids be anything they want.” That’s phony, that’s phony (laughs).

**RC:** (Laughs) Yeah. You see, there it goes again. Your guru told you to speak the truth and there’s something in you that says, “Sometimes I’ve got to tell the truth”.

**RD:** Yeah.

**RC:** And I know in my family growing up, there was a lot of emphasis placed on how we looked to the outside world. And as a matter of fact, some of the kids who were my contemporaries grew up resenting our family because their parents would say to them, “Look at those Cushnir kids, why can’t you be like them?” And it was total crap. And the image was so hurtful.

**RD:** Yeah.

**RC:** I understand that it was an intolerance my parents had to be with pain and discord. So my father would come back from a day at work or whatever and the first thing he would say with a big kind of plastic grin was, “So is everything copasetic?” And it almost never was but it wasn’t a serious question, it was more a need that he had for us to be so. One of the things that I found though, at the different stages of my own evolution as an adult but still the child of my parents is that as parents soften—you mentioned that your father became an angel near the time of his death—as my parents softened, in this now moment it often brings up a certain kind of turmoil in the child because it seems like, “Well, you just got off scot-free.” There was no accountability, like how is it that you could say, “Well, yeah. I just want to be here now,” when you weren’t there then?

**RD:** Yeah (laughs).

**RC:** And the truth is, there is nothing to do about it. If someone doesn’t want to go back there, if they don’t want to revisit, if they don’t want to heal, if their memory doesn’t even persist anymore, in terms what that was all about. As a child, too bad for you, you’re on your own.

**RD:** Yeah. My parents, you know they were good Jewish middle class parents but then as I got to know them as souls, I realized that they were very, very high beings and my guru said to me, “Your mother is a very high being.” And I had been up until then only known her as her incarnation. And



once I started to see her as the high being, it was just wonderful that we had the melodrama of being middle class Jewish beings.

**RC:** So I think hearing that, what so many listeners and watchers will want to know is how were you able to shift into the realm that you could get to know your mother and your father as souls?

**RD:** Well, for my mother, it was my guru saying that to me: “Your mother is a very high soul.” For my father it was at the time in his 90s, and he was into being this very warm, loving person. There was a story about him. We had a farm and on the farm he had three golf links. And so we were sitting out one night looking at the scenery and there was a beautiful sunset, absolutely beautiful sunset, and I said, “Dad, isn’t that beautiful?” He said, “Yeah. Do you know how it’s cut so beautifully?” He was looking at the green and, but later on he was in his 90s, I was holding his hand, he was in bed, and I was on a chair next to him, and he said, “Rich, look at that beautiful sunset.”

**RC:** That’s great. Thank you so much for sharing that story. It’s interesting how we can come to see our parents differently. In my own life, I had an experience once where I was so triggered by both my mom and my dad. And at that time, I was involved in the film business and I noticed that I could empathize with almost any character in a movie, even the bad guy.

**RD:** Yeah.

**RC:** I could find compassion for where he was coming from. So I said to the woman who was my wife at the time who was also from the movie business, I said, “I’m totally stuck here. I’m lost. I can’t relate to my parents in any kind of compassionate way so could you please describe them to me as if they were characters in a movie?”

**RD:** Yeah (laughs). That’s great.

**RC:** And she did, she did a great job and it totally worked.

### **5. Loving George Bush**

**RD:** Yeah (laughs). I’ll tell you another trick I have. The puja table, the table in which I have the saints, Jesus and Maharajji and Anandamayi Ma, all those; I put George Bush in there because I knew I couldn’t handle him. Maharajji said, “Ram Dass, you’ve got to love everybody.” George Bush is everybody.

**RC:** Yeah (laughs).

**RD:** And I realized as I looked, Anandamayi, Maharajji, George, I realized it had to be in me, because I only saw his incarnation. I never realized a soul in George Bush. And when I did, I was so compassionate that that soul had to take a lousy incarnation (laughs). And I loved him more after that.

**RC:** Ah, so I take that you could follow that practice and you could love him and you still might be out on the street in protest against the war.

**RD:** Same thing.

**RC:** But with love.

**RD:** With love, yeah.

**RC:** Yeah, and that reminds me because we just have a few minutes left, one question I wanted to ask you is are you tuned in to that kind of overall world situation these days or do you choose to have refuge from it?

**RD:** (Sneeze) That's my answer (laughs).

**RC:** (Laughs) You're allergic to it.

**RD:**(Laughs) Well, I know the Wall Street saga. My friends are protesting. I read the papers and the magazines regularly. I live in Maui as a way to keep myself from the hubbub of the world. I certainly feel compassion and the suffering of the world. But I never do any social action now. I'm 81. There were things like the Seva Foundation, which I was very active in. We must have helped maybe thousands of blind people and taken their blindness away.

But I now saw that I was being a certain role, a compassionate role and I now see that what I do, what I *be* in life, what I *be* is helpful to the world.

**RC:** So your service is being.

**RD:** Yeah.

**RC:** And if you didn't have the challenges and you weren't at a point in your life where this is right, or maybe another way to say it is are you there in spirit with what's called the Occupied Movement?

**RD:** Yes.

### **6. A Regular Day**

**RC:** Yeah, okay. So the last question I have for you is just because there are so many people who really do care so much about you and feel so connected to you, I wonder if you could just share really simply, out there on Maui, when you're not involved in a special retreat or workshop kind of situation, what makes up an ordinary day for you? What does that look like?

**RD:** I nap (laughs).

**RC:** (Laughs) Me, too.

**RD:** I nap and go swimming in the ocean or in the pool. And then my relationships are with doctors. I've got about 5 doctors and I visit them. And then a lot of people visit me from the mainland or from here. That's what I do. Visit people.

**RC:** Well, I'm so honored that I got a chance to visit with you today across the continent, across the ocean and what a wonderful blessing and a special treat for me. I first got to know you through *Be Here Now* when I was in high school. And it was the same time that I first learned about Gestalt Therapy and Fritz Pearls. And I teach at Esalen now and one time I got to stay in the house that was built for Fritz Pearls and I watched videos of him doing Gestalt Therapy in the same house that I was staying in and that was a great pleasure.

**RD:** Yeah.

**RC:** And this is a pleasure of another order of magnitude for me, just getting a chance to look you in the eye through the computer and commune with you. So you've made my day and my week and who cares about my colonoscopy after this.

**RD:** (Grand boisterous belly laughs)

**Peter Fenner**



Peter Fenner is a leader in the adaption and transmission of Asian nondual wisdom and in the training of nondual facilitators. He is known for his incisive from of dialogue that leads to deep unconditioned stillness. He is the Founder of Timeless Wisdom. He created the nine-month Radiant Mind Course® ([WWW.RADIANTMIND.NET](http://WWW.RADIANTMIND.NET)) and the 10-month Natural Awakening: Advanced Nondual Training ([WWW.NONDUALTRAINING.COM](http://WWW.NONDUALTRAINING.COM)) which he offers internationally. He has a Ph.D. in the philosophical psychology of Mahayana Buddhism. His books include “Radiant Mind and The Edge of Certainty.” He is a coach to therapists, facilitators and spiritual teachers. [WWW.RADIANTMIND.NET](http://WWW.RADIANTMIND.NET)

### **1. What Is This?**

**RC:** So Peter, you are a wonderful teacher from the non-dual tradition, that’s a part of where you came from. You have lots of other perspective to offer, but today we’re going to be exploring the theme of teaching what we need to learn and the idea of transparency, particularly in relation to non-dual awareness and the conditioned mind. So just for some of the listeners out there who either have none or very little experience in that realm, can you just spend a first few moments describing what it is that you point to and how that happens.

**PF:** Yes, a pleasure to do that. For me, one of the most immediate ways to reveal non-duality, non-dual awareness, is through question like, “What is this?” And for me, that question opens up two possibilities: one, it points to what’s happening at a conditioned level. So when I say, “What is this?”—you, for example, can describe what’s arising for you within your mind stream, and I can describe what’s arising for me in terms of thoughts and sensations and perceptions and so on, but also, the this, what is this, can also point to that which can’t be described, that which has no content. This can point to the contents of awareness, it can also point to awareness itself, which is

undifferentiated, which is indivisible. And so for me, non-duality is the co-arising of both. It's like, when the word "this" simultaneously reveals "this" at the conditioned and unconditioned level.

**RC:** So as you are going through your experience open to non-dual awareness, you're having a thought or a feeling as anyone would who is aware of a thought or a feeling, and at the same time, you're aware of let's say the field in which that is arising in which there is no separation or distinction between people or any phenomenon, is that correct?

**PF:** Yes—"this" at the unconditioned dimension, because it's not a thing, it can't be distinguished from anything else. So it's indistinguishable from whatever's arising within the field as a paradox in that. That's how it is.

**RC:** Yes. And so just to check on something, because language, of course, is very tricky, especially in this domain, there are some people—I'm thinking now of Ken Wilber, the philosopher, who will talk about what he describes as the relative and the absolute, meaning the idea that as I'm going through life, there's still Raphael and he records this interview with Peter and he pays his taxes, etc., and then at the same time there's this absolute level where there is no separation between Raphael and anything else and there is no way even to find a specific and separate entity called Raphael who is doing all of those things. Would you use those words relative and absolute along with conditioned and unconditioned in the same way or is there some important distinction there?

**PF:** Certainly I use them. For me, they're effectively the same thing. To talk about the relative and the absolute, the relative and the ultimate, is effectively the same as talking about the conditioned and the unconditioned. But for me, the point here is to appreciate is the distinction that's being made by the relative mind, relative distinction. The ultimate or the unconditioned doesn't have anything to say about anything.

**RC:** Yes, and in that regard, I think that what most likely will happen as we continue today is that we will have a conversation that is more in the relative mode, but informed by, hopefully—if that's a way to describe it—the absolute or the unconditioned. Because when we talk about teaching what we need to learn or transparency, these are ideas and even practices that are relative in nature. There's nothing hidden or nothing to be transparent about or anything that could not be seen in that unconditioned realm, yes?

**PF:** I'm not sure. See, when you're asking me a question like that, that invites a yes or a no answer, It's a relative question. It's inviting that type of response. I'm not sure exactly what the question is.

**RC:** Well, I was watching recently another interview that you did with somebody and she said something along the lines of, "Why do anything?" And you answered by saying something like, "I don't really understand the question," and you shared about the way that the conditioned mind and the unconditioned mind co-exist in a way that you described for us a few moments ago. But that question, I think, is important for us to stay with a little bit and maybe as you share about it, certain things will come into clarity or important notes might be touched for people who are listening. Because there are times when people have a powerful non-dual recognition, and this usually happens—at least in my experience—when they first sense the power of this approach for themselves—that there's a way in which they can temporarily sink into a kind of passivity: "There is no doer ultimately. I've glimpsed that or I even have something that's anchoring in me along those lines."

And so therefore, it doesn't matter what you do. So I'd lose a certain sense of will or generative capacity. I become less of an active participant in the conditioned realm. Someone once called this—using the term *advaita*, which means not two, and stands in for this non-dual approach sometimes—they refer to this as the *advaita* shuffle. Is what I'm describing is something that makes sense to you that you've seen also?

**PF:** I hear people talk about it, but I don't see it. Actually, I don't see it in myself and I don't see it in the people that I work with, primarily because what I see is that when we hear, like resting in this way, connecting with the non-dual, that it's impossible to avoid anything. In fact, it's the opposite of this notion of avoidance or spiritual bypassing. When we hear, in a way we're compelled to be with the presence of whatever's arising, but we don't have a capacity to push anything away, we don't have the capacity to avoid or bypass anything. And also, for me, I would say it's a little bit superficial to use the language of there being no-doe because, I mean here, right now, we have this very rich and subtle and wonderful conversation that's arising between us and also the conversations that are happening with our listeners—a very dynamic process happening. It's not as though we have, in any way, been pushed into some mode of passivity. That's not what I see.

**RC:** So just to stay with this for a moment and build on it, I had a session with a client today and we were talking about the way that when we are in conditioned awareness, we often think, "Oh

there are so much to do and I must push the boulder up the mountain.” And often, when we relax into a deeper presence, we find that it wasn’t the efforting that we thought was making it all happen, but rather, as much happens and sometimes even more dimension comes to what happens when we stop pushing in the way that is our habit.

**PF:** Yes, I think so.

**RC:** So if I make it my intention and my practice to open and to let arise into presence everything that will and does arise, if I’m hearing you correctly, then there’s more room for relative Raphael and the relative Peter, so to speak, to also be present in awareness. So there’s more of us, rather than less of us, in a way.

**PF:** Yes, exactly! I feel that as we presence the non-dual, as we become more familiar with resting in the unconditioned, overall there’s an expansion that happens, an expansion in terms of the connection that we have, the appreciation that we have, of our souls at the relative level.

**RC:** Yes. And so then I’m brought back to this phrase that I’ve used to title the series, *Teaching What We Need to Learn*, and I’m wondering how, as you present both relative Peter Fenner and also the unconditioned awareness as you opened in the fullness of that presence, is that even a phrase that resonates for you? What does that mean to you, if it does, and where do you take that? What do you need to “learn”?

**PF:** In a way I would say that’s just presented to me day by day. It’s not like I know in advance what that’s going to be. But it’s life coming to me, delivering to me what it does, in terms of challenges and opportunities that are there to be integrated to the non-dual. I think about this as a deepening of the non-dual; a deepening of our capacity, of my capacity, to be present to this in different circumstances, and in particular, really working with preferences. I mean, for me, that’s in a way the limitation that comes to me through at the conditioned level: the fact that I have preferences that set me up for suffering. When things are in accordance with my preferences, when things are evolving, working how I’d like them to be working, then it’s like I’m on track, I’m thinking, “Oh, this is fine, I’m happy, I’m joyful, things are pleasurable.” If things fall outside of those parameters, if things are no longer how I would like them to be, then there’s resistance, there’s suffering. So for me, that’s becomes the path. The path is directly related to slowly loosening the grip of being controlled, in terms of pleasure and pain, by what I like and what I don’t like.

**RC:** I think the way you're describing that is really important and bears some extra exploration because many of the listeners will have had some significant experience in the Buddhist realm and Buddhist meditation, and I know that you are also deeply steeped in that realm. Often, the way it's described there is that we recognize that the cause of suffering is attachment. We see the role of aversion in exactly what you described, but most often it comes down to a recognition as I've heard it and have learned it, that no matter what, because we are personalities on the relative plane, that we will have preferences and if we recognize those preferences but hold them loosely, then we could be skillful with our preferences. It sounds like what you're saying is that in your perspective, you're working even with those preferences and that the more that you open, the less preferences you'll have, and the less suffering therefore. Did I hear that right?

**PF:** I don't say that it's directly a process of working with preferences, because I'm not sure how to do that. In fact, if we'd look at that idea of me working with a preference, it will dissolve, it will deconstruct; I won't be able to find a me that's in a relationship with preferences, I won't be able to find preferences. In fact, that's one way of entering unconditioned awareness. But for me, it's more a process of becoming more and more familiar with this. And seeing when there are opportunities to be here, to rest in this space, and the work that we're talking about isn't work as such, but the work's getting done of loosening that grip of preferences just by being here, so that over time, like 1 year, 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, gradually we can see that through resting here, that we're not as picky, we're not as particular, we're not as choosy.

Normally, at least initially, resting in awareness, resting in the unconditioned is, in fact, a highly conditioned state. We can think that we're resting in the unconditioned, but it's highly conditioned in the sense that things have to be just right, like the ambient conditions, conditions of our body, have to be just right in order to have that opportunity. So over time, things can broaden. There can really be what we would call disturbances or motivations within the field, like sensations in our body, or our mind behaving in different ways that no longer displace the possibility of resting here at the place where there's nowhere further to go.

**RC:** I understand what you mean, I believe, when you say the word 'work.' We're using that differently than the kind of effortful approach that people might ordinarily apply to that term. But using it in that way, we could say that the work is about noticing when we go into our personal contractions anywhere where we might say that there is a problem. Something that would keep us



from being able to open and present to everything that is arriving or that would be in the way, seemingly, of us being able to access that unconditioned awareness. Would you say that's accurate?

**PF:** Yes, I feel so. But if I can go back a little bit, just picking up on what you were saying earlier. Part of engaging in the non-dual path is acknowledging the way that resting in awareness is a very conditioned state for us most of the time, it's very brittle, it's easy to flip out of it. And to acknowledge that for as long as we have preferences, and for me that means as far as I can project into my life through to my death, I can't imagine being totally free of preferences so it also means just openly, fully acknowledging, embracing the inevitability of suffering, the inevitability of that. Because I have preferences, likes and dislikes, attraction and aversion, it's inevitable that I will suffer. So part of the path, for me, consists of not living in the illusion or not living in a discourse that this state is ever present, the non-dual—that this is continuous. This is beyond coming and going. So it's beyond notions of doer-ship or no doer-ship. It's beyond notions of presence and absence, it's beyond notions of existence and non-existence.

## **2. The Inseparability of Teacher and Student Roles**

**RC:** So you've mentioned a couple of times now that for all of us, that as we first have some access to that state, that it is highly conditioned. And following on that, I want to ask you a question. Do you believe that it's possible? Have you seen it, that a person, a teacher for instance, in the non-dual tradition, could have access to that consciousness that is, let's say, maybe the best way to describe it would be at a high or less conditioned level and also have psychological issues or challenges that might make him or her relate to students, for instance, in a way that people might consider to be unhelpful or unethical. Or does a true and deep access to that awareness make it such that love and care and the highest possible regard and compassion for students and for all people, would just naturally arise from that access.

**PF:** Well, I mean, that's such a tricky question you asked. I don't know. You're asking way too much of me to ask me how that plays out.

**RC:** Well, there's a special reason why I asked that question, and let me maybe address that and then it will help maybe untangle the discussion so that it makes more sense. You mentioned earlier that you hadn't seen amongst non-dual practitioners, if we can call them that, the passivity that is sometimes reported. And I really appreciated you just sharing honestly that that hasn't been your experience.

There are many people who have seen teachers of non-duality and who certainly have claims of access to (levels of consciousness) that we've been talking about work with students and other people in ways that considered to be very harmful and which seen to emanate from what we might call shadow material, places in themselves where they aren't yet transparent or clear. And this causes a lot of people to have a kind of a wobble or questioning in: how could this happen? And so it seems like it speaks to this overall theme of the series just to hear whatever you might share about that and in particular, how doing personal psychological work on the relative or the personality plane, does it inform one's non-dual practice?

**PF:** See here, for me, you seem to be talking about people for which there's an assumption, a claim, or a projection that they are resting permanently in this ultimate state beyond need, beyond attachment and aversion and etc.. So that's way beyond my comprehension to know what that is, what that would be like for someone to be resting continually in that state. What I feel is, I can't really talk about that because I can't conceive of it. I think it is possible and there may be a few teachers that I've known who perhaps were in this state continually. But I think that in terms of people that you're talking about, I don't know what they're resting in.

What I feel like I can say is that when we touch into this state, when we're resting here, we can see that in this moment, there's nothing that we need, that we don't have any needs. Like there's not that energy of looking for something, trying to bring something into the picture, nor is there any energy of trying to hold onto something, like to reify an experience. So it does feel to me that when we're authentically resting in this space, that there's no manipulation possible because there's nothing that we're looking for; we really are in a state of being complete, totally complete, asking nothing, requiring nothing from no one, being totally undemanding, because nothing more is required.

So for me, I prefer to look at this, I guess, at a more micro-level rather than making global judgments about what it would be like if someone was permanently here, or certainly I feel like a completely unqualified to make global judgments, really judgments of any sort about other teachers. Going back also to that question of shadow work, for sure, I mean for me, if the path is one of doing whatever needs to be done in order to gain increasing access to this space, it means for discovering whatever it is that lets us be here in a natural, in a gentle, in a way that's respectful of our souls and deeply respectful of others.

**RC:** So that last piece that you shared, it really touches me because it's that goal—if we can use the relative term here—to gain greater access to that state that would compel someone to do anything, as you said, that would help. And certainly, as you said, shadow work, therapy work, could be included in that and is included in that. And I'm mindful of the conversation that you and I had a while back, not in this recording, where we were talking about when thinking about teachers and their path, how the idea of transparency by itself isn't some kind of special value. In other words, we don't want to encourage a positive projection or negative projection upon anyone and we also would want to draw attention to what happens even when we just compare. Those were some things that you said that I thought were really helpful for me, and within that framework, I'm wondering if there's anything that you could share about your own process, perhaps pieces that you've integrated, whether you call it shadow material or just even psychological healings, that in your own personal journey have helped you open more, gain more access to this state that we've been talking about.

**PF:** Well, going back to the thing that you were just mentioning about positive and negative projections, that for me is a continual thing that we work with. I mean, that's applicable to everyone, to teachers as well. The challenge is not to collude with positive projections, to sense how that collusion happens, and to sense the danger in that, just to feel someone's elevating us, making more of us, thinking that we're more realized, more evolved than we are. So really feeling how we're being elevated, it's a physical feeling when you receive it, when someone's offering that positive projection. So then it's like doing whatever needs to be done from our side, from my side. Not to reject the projection, not to buy into it, not to receive it, not to believe that there's a reality in it.

So it's to neither accept nor reject those types of projections. The same of negative projections, which happen when people think less of us, when people think that we're inauthentic or fraudulent or whatever. We can then be demoralized and reduce our capacity to authentically share the ultimate state with others, if we buy into that negative projection. So similarly, just allowing those projections to move through us so that we are like clean and clear inside and able to continue to be a clean, clear channel for sharing our content-lessness.

**RC:** In terms of the second part, the negative projection, it may be possible that as a teacher, somebody is projecting negatively onto me and I could help clear that space of any projection as you described. But it also might be that they are pointing out something to me, a contraction in my

own experience or nature, a moment where I kind of collapsed into a judgment or a need of some sort and then as a teacher, it would be a gift to myself to pay attention and to own that, so to speak. And also in so doing I would help support others in recognizing that whatever role we happen to be playing in the scenario, teacher, student, otherwise, that it's always going to be possible and helpful to open in that way to what was hard to open to or what might have even been impossible for us to see without having something been brought to our attention.

**PF:** Yes, absolutely! I mean, that's the beauty of teaching, that's the beauty of having students, that they do reveal our vulnerabilities, they reveal our ambition, they reveal our fears, they reveal our frustrations. It's wonderful.

**RC:** And so that truly, for me, encapsulates the idea of teaching what we need to learn. That by being a teacher in this way, if we're really fully assuming that mantle, we're also signing up simultaneously to be students.

**PF:** Right. But in a way, they're inseparable, aren't they? They are so fused together that we are learning continually. I mean, I see myself as a beginner, really. A real beginner on this path when I look at what I feel is possible in terms of the capacity that people have to expand into non-dual awareness, the capacity that's possible in terms of presencing awareness in excruciating conditions, like conditions that for me would be absolutely unbearable. So that, for me, just opens up this enormous horizon in which I feel, wow, I feel so fortunate to be a beginner; to know what this state is. And then I also realize, wow, it's maybe never ending, the capacity, given the incredible levels and range of pain and suffering and bliss and so on that's possible within a conditioned human existence.

**RC:** So in that light, especially around what gets illuminated by being in this role that is simultaneously teacher and student, could you speak to some experiences that might come under the category of what you just described as excruciating times that were difficult for you or aspects of yourself that have taken special attention and time in order to integrate and to allow into all that is. If we were just looking at your journey to now, so to speak, what, in the interest of all of us being in it together, might it be helpful for us to know about those kinds of challenges for you?

**PF:** Well, I imagine that they're really no different from anyone else's, I'm figuring, because I'm not fundamentally different from anyone else. I'm like the guy next door. So the challenges are around things like security and physical pain. I've had a knee operation recently, so there's a

journey in that and relationships—just discovering what it is within a relationship that makes it rewarding, how to contribute to others, how to let go of personal needs and preferences. So you know, the things that I'm working with are not different from what everyone out there I feel is working with.

### **3. Optimal Possibility in This Moment**

**RC:** So I'm interested in something that comes from that idea of mutuality: that we're all working with these same things. There is a way, when I listen to you and I feel into the presence that you're sharing with us that has a lot of space and quiet. And there is a place that I know for me I can drop into, or I can notice sometimes, when that space is less available inside of me; I might be in my mode of fast-talking Jewish guy, for instance, or I might be agitated about something and you could see and feel and hear that in the way that I'm coming across. So I'm wondering if we had a documentary camera and we were in your personal life and you're maybe sitting and watching TV with a friend or someone who's dear to you or just figuring out what to make for dinner, would we hear you speaking with this fullness of presence and the deep deliberateness in which you're sharing with me or is there a conversational mode that you might be in sometimes that's different from this?

**PF:** That's great! That's a lovely question! Yes, I think both. I think there's a type of deliberateness within me, but I think some of it is just like a personality characteristic. In a way, it's wanting to like take maximum advantage of the moment, seeing what's the optimal possibility in this moment. So I feel that with you, right now, and yeah, that's with me, I think, a lot of the times; sometimes in the foreground, sometimes in the background. But for me, it's incredibly precious just being in relationship with another person. Any opportunity we have to be in relationship, knowing that we do have that recognition of awareness within us; the possibility may or may not happen, we have no idea, but it's an ever present possibility that that gift of transmission could happen. So that's there and I feel that deeply. Of course there are the casual conversations about getting things done and what does the shopping list look like, will we get out and go for a walk, how will we plan our activities for the next year, what does your diary look like and so on. So yes, all of that's happening.

**RC:** And also would you add to that, like, "Today I noticed that I'm especially irritable or I'm in a low mood."

**PF:** Yes, for sure! Sometimes, yes, you're there and for no reason it just feels so buoyant and it's a grace and a gift and you're thankful to the universe for whatever is bringing that buoyancy and then

see that on other days, yes, feeling flat and low and, oh wow, so much to do, it just feels like there's a lot of drag. So for me then, one thing that I do is I try to stand back and ask the universe in a way, "So what day are you bringing me today and how are you inviting me to live this day?" I just do it one day at a time.

So if it's that I'm feeling a bit flattened, tired, and just down, then I'll just put that question out and then maybe the universe comes back and says, "This is just like a day-off, Peter. This is just like a 50% effort day, you don't have to do a lot." That's beautiful to hear that. I don't know where the conversation comes from and it doesn't concern me; does that message come from inside, from outside, it's not important, but it's beautiful to be open to that, to receive it and then to say, "Okay, good, that's how I will hold the day." And then take it easy and be in a way that respects our conditionality in the moment.

#### **4. Leaning Into the Mystery**

**RC:** Beautiful! Thank you so much for sharing that. I want to ask in relation to what you were just sharing about what sometimes is referred to as 'karma' or sometimes referred to as 'dependent arising.' It could be within the course of a personal lifetime, and then for some people, of course, it spans in their perception or their belief, multiple lifetimes or incarnations. The reason I wanted to ask about that is because in many traditions, both spiritual and psychological, there is a sense that what will arise comes from un-synthesized or integrated experience, un-healed places.

So for instance I was talking as a part of this series yesterday with Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt, who are the people behind Imago Therapy. And they have a conception that we pick our partners unconsciously because they inevitably bring up the material for us that is there for our healing, if we'll take the invitation. So they're meant to drive us crazy is a way it might be put, and we can either rail against that and run from partner to partner, or we can stop and say "What is here? What is there for me to open to?"—and to recognize that the more it drives me crazy, the more power it has for my presence and my healing. And I was thinking about that as you were describing your question to the universe, "What are you bringing me today?" Because so often it seems, for myself and for many people, that what the universe is bringing is that material. So I'm wondering if you relate to that idea or if you have a different way to look at it?

**PF:** No, I think I see it essentially in a same way. Maybe not as specifically, not seeing that it just has to be relationships that are bringing us the really big challenges that lets us work through karma and heal ourselves. I mean, there are many sources: for some people that's the big thing—the big

chunk is relationships, and for others it can be money and finance, or physical health. Some people have more than one thing or many people have a lot going on. For me, just life is challenging. It's how it is. The process is not pulling back. Just being open, as open as we can, and then if we have that gift of having some recognition of awareness, then we can allow more to flow through us, like with less grippage, and more just being in the flow.

**RC:** So life will continue to be challenging but we may be more peaceful and more open and flowing in the presence of those challenges.

**PF:** Yes, but then also like with that idea of karma, I mean for me, it's a very rich word; a very rich concept because, for me, it's really is saying that even at the conditioned level, we really don't know and can't know what's happening or what will be happening. And so it's also embracing that fundamental unknowability of who we are and how our life will evolve moment by moment, year by year. So again, by just opening in the vastness and rather than thinking, "This is who I am and I know what I'm doing and this is my objective and these are the outcomes I'm looking for, this is what I want to do with my life," but really saying, "Wow, I don't know what I'm here for. What I'm here for, fundamentally, the most powerful thing seems to be just that I'm connecting with the purity of awareness and then gently finding ways of sharing that with others, like sharing it causally, sharing it more formally. But any opportunity we have to awaken another mind stream to its ultimate nature, that, for me, is the meaning of life. If we do it just once, for one person, just once in our lives, that's enough. That's made our lives incredibly meaningful to support someone in realizing their ultimate nature.

**RC:** So along these lines, there's something that's coming up too that I want to ask you about. In some of the teachings that are non-dual centered and related in that general arena, let's say, we often talk about dropping the story, we talk about who would you be without your story or can you open to something fuller by recognizing and perhaps releasing your attachment to a story.

And then there are other traditions that speak about the power of a story and often that power comes from helping us see the commonality between us being moved by stories that are powerful for others but then touch us also in deep ways. And so I've noticed and I've been thinking about recently how story can cut both ways in that regard. And I'm wondering if there's anything that you would want to reflect on or share about that, meaning that you were just describing how it could be worth a lifetime, just for one time, for one individual, to help open and welcome them to the truth of

their ultimate being. And so if story has the power to do that, would you use story? Do you see a possible benefit there or are you more focused on helping people let go of all stories because they only function on the basis of identification?

**PF:** That's a great question! I'm not sure how to answer it because it would be a story. I mean, that the idea of dropping stories, that's a story in itself. So yes, I think that some leverage is possible with that idea, that story of just letting go of identifications and in fact showing people how there's no source to the stories that are being told, that there's no speaker. Right now we can do it. I always love bringing things into the here and now when they're alive and real and apparent, but now, for example, we can see through the idea of it being a speaker and a listener. So for me, yeah, if we call that a story, like doing that, pointing to the nature of mind, and for me, well that's a really powerful story. But I think also, people can get tied up in a story about needing to let go of the stories, because when we're here, we can see that there's nothing we need to let go of. We don't have to let go of any story. The ego, the I does not get in the way of being here.

**RC:** So stemming from that, let me share a personal experience. I once went to go see a movie and in the movie, there was an orphanage, and there was a man who ran the orphanage. And at the end of every night in the movie, he would say to these homeless, parentless orphans who were staying under his care, he would say, "Goodnight, you princes and princesses, you kings and queens of New England." And what was present in that moment, as I felt it in the story, was just this profound, loving care that he had for these children who had been bereft of the usual paternal attachments. And when I saw that, when I was experiencing it in the movie, I just wept. And even now, as I'm sharing it with you, I can feel emotion arising within me. And when I had that experience the first time, it was instantly clear to me why that moment was so powerful, and it was because they were getting something in a dire circumstance that I didn't get in a much more traditional or comfortable supposed circumstance.

And I was moved, I felt grief, I felt loss, and I also felt great joy to even just be an audience member to that experience, that transmission that was happening on the screen. And I experienced what I would describe as healing in that moment. Something opened up in me that had been locked or knotted. And I felt much more able to be open and love just poured out of me without a particular subject or object. And that was clearly a story, it was literally projection on a white screen, not psychologically, literally, and it had that power of transformation for me. And so I just wanted to



share that. It felt like it was the right thing to do and I'm wondering if that brings up anything for you?

**PF:** Ah, it's just beautiful! It's a lovely, wonderful to hear that. And just to appreciate all of the different things that need to be taken care of at the conditioned level, like as pre-requisites, things that are necessary to begin to explore our real nature and not devaluing anything at all, but just appreciating that all of the conditions, the material world that's needed, the emotional health and well-being that's required, in most cases, before we can do the work of self-reflectively looking at who is experiencing this, where is the witness, what is the source of all of this? And knowing that all of that work—I mean, even though ultimately none of that needs to happen because this is unconditioned, in reality, so much has to be done in terms of just supporting people's well-being so they can receive the gift of awareness.

**RC:** So when you meet with someone in an individual context, whether it's one on one in a session if you do that, or when you have a private moment with someone in a retreat or training that you do, are you intending to be as present in that moment to the place that that person is, in relation to that is all that is needed, as you just described it? In other words, are you meeting them where relatively they are, to the best of your understanding, just to walk with them or welcome them to one more degree of openness or is there a way where you stand back from that because of the unconditioned?

**PF:** Again, I love your question. It's both. Yes, I'm meeting people where they are, but also it's a little bit like I'm a specialist in my role. I know what I'm there for and it's out there, people know why they're coming to me and it's becoming or has become more and more clear over the years that it really is for the presencing of the non-dual, so it's both. I'm open, I hope totally, to people exactly where they are so I can reach out to them into their reality, but also they are coming to me, they're making steps, they're walking towards me. So it's both.

**RC:** Yeah, I totally love what you're saying and I see that in myself. People sometimes say to me, "You take checks, you don't ask for a lot of ID, does that ever come back to bite you, just on the financial plane?" And I say in all the years that I've done this work, I've probably gotten less than 5 bad checks because it takes a while to find me and a decision to work with me. And if you come that far, it's very unlikely that you're going to bounce a check.

**PF:** Right, exactly!

**RC:** And then conversely, I have the experience sometimes where I'm sitting with someone who seems to be needing something in the moment that is either, let's say, more in someone else's wheelhouse or something that's more generically available. And I find myself thinking, "What are we meant to do here? How did you get here?" And then that presents a different opportunity. But I am keenly aware that most of the time, as you described, it makes total sense why I'm here and why you're here and why we're together, and other times when it doesn't make sense, then I'm there to lean in to that discrepancy.

**PF:** Right, exactly! Yes, you'll lean into the mystery of "I don't know what it is, I don't know what's going on here, I don't know how this came together." But just being with that and journeying that together.

**RC:** Yeah. Well, I think this is a good place to rest. Leaning in to the mystery, as you just described it. I want to thank you so much, Peter Fenner, for letting us have you as a guest on this series and for gifting us today with deep, deep breaths of the unconditioned. So many thanks and many blessings to you.

**PF:** Great pleasure! Thank you, Raphael. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

**Isaac Shapiro**



Isaac Shapiro is an internationally known facilitator fascinated with life lived in alignment with the world's wisdom traditions. At 19, he had a recognition of unconditional love and peace and became passionately into looking at many of the aspects of life and began exploring communal living, growing food organically, mind clearing using biofeedback, Feldenkrais bodywork, group energy dynamics, and awareness and attention work. In 1991, he met the Master of Advaita, HWL Poonja (Papaji). Since being asked by Papaji to be available for those that have this interest in Truth/love, he has been holding meetings worldwide. He now includes a somatic approach, so that this love affair becomes available to all. [WWW.ISAACSHAPIRO.ORG](http://WWW.ISAACSHAPIRO.ORG)

**1. The Only Human Drama is Not Wanting the Experience We're Having**

**RC:** The fact that we can do this interview this way across the world using Skype is a testament to evolution and it's exciting to be able to take advantage of it. So thank you for that opportunity.

**IS:** Yeah, we do live in an amazing time.

**RC:** Yes, we do. And that's something that I wanted to ask you about to begin with, let's say that it is a little bit different from the overall topic of this series. Because I was reading some of what you've written and a description of some of the ways that you work within the non-dual tradition but perhaps in a way that is also unique to you. You mentioned that you draw on a broad spectrum of understanding from neurophysiology to Quantum physics, etc. and that made me think that you would be a really good person to ask this question to or to have a kind of a mystical musing with because on the one hand when we are tuned in and connected to a non-dual awareness, we come to that recognition of You Are That and the knowing and the experiencing of what we sometimes call 'no separation.'

And then alongside that, there's the history of human evolution and science and a recognition that we are a very small part in this incredibly expansive and complex universe that we find ourselves in. And it seems like the more we come to know from a scientific perspective, the more we see that rather than the universe being made for us, that in fact, we are a wisp of dust, so to speak, in terms of the grandeur of it all. And so I know this is a long introduction to a question, I promise the question is coming, what I've been wondering about is just the process of evolution such that we humans, as a species, have the unique opportunity, it seems, to perceive non-duality directly; that something in our evolutionarily developed functioning creates that opportunity; whereas for a bee or a dog, they don't have that. I don't know that that's true but I think that's generally what we sense.

And so what I'm getting at is it seems like all of our knowledge and evolving awareness tells us that on the one hand, the universe wasn't made for us and it's grander than we could ever imagine, and on the other hand, we've developed a function whereby we can see unity of consciousness and experience it as if that is all there is. I'm wondering if you've pondered that paradox or if you have a way to discuss it that might be helpful for us?

**IS:** Well, that's an amazing paradox actually, what you're speaking to there; which is, I think, anybody that's in this game, has to at some point look at that, and see that it's kind of like these two perspectives. There's a perspective of being a human being and then there's a perspective of that awareness in which you know the whole human perspective is a blink of an eye, it's nothing. And then even that which is there, like in deep sleep, that which is in the substratum of everything—humanity appears in that. Our humanness is an interesting opportunity to recognize that and yet that is ever present. It's always the substratum of everything.

So it's always interesting, in a way, trying to marry these two realities, or these two perspectives in a way and how can you bridge that in a way, because the one is so beyond everything and includes the whole of human experience and the other is such a small perspective of everything. So I don't know if I've managed to say anything more about it other than what you already said (laughs).

**RC:** Well, I'm glad to kick it around with you because we have had a few other people in this series who, in one way or another, drink from the well of non-duality. And I think many of us have come to use this phrase, 'the relative and the absolute,' maybe a little too casually. I think I first learned of that phrase from Ken Wilber, and it was very serviceable for me because it made it clear

that while I could directly perceive oneness, I still had lots to do and to pay attention to in the relative realm of myself as a personality and involved in relationships and living in the world, and that neither of the two cancelled each other out. And yet at the same time, just being able to kind of casually say, “Oh yeah, the relative and the absolute” seems to be cavalier in light of what we know about the vast expanse of the universe. And even though, as you said, humanity is at the substratum of all of our experience whether we’re awake, asleep and dreaming, or in dreamless sleep, we know now that there are certain things, signals that can come back from across the galaxy or the universe that are being recorded and can be read, whether any particular individual is in any of those three states. So we kind of know now that if a tree falls in the forest and we can’t hear it—that it’s still making a sound of some kind to source that famous Zen koan and I don’t know that there is a particularly wise answer or additional way of looking at it. But I just wanted to address it because I know that you’re a profound bringer of this presence and the presence if it’s going to include everything, has to include everything. It seems like within the human evolution that everything is expanding so rapidly we can barely even keep up with it.

**IS:** Yeah. I mean it’s like it’s unknowable—that’s the whole thing. It’s interesting also the way the words that we use because we can say we can perceive that oneness but in a sense it’s beyond perception, it’s like unknowing. Because there’s this interesting paradox of how oftentimes awareness gets entangled with perception. Where in truth, awareness is something that we can we can talk about, and conceptualize about. But it’s beyond all of that, in a way. It’s just at the very best, it can just be pointed to you through words.

**RC:** Yes.

**IS:** But in a way, they’re all lies. They’re all—none of them can begin to talk about it.

**RC:** Yes. And just to drive that point home, just a few minutes ago, I was reading an article in the *Scientific American* about some studies that have been showing that while for many years, scientists have been hard-pressed to separate attention from consciousness and in fact, in conflating them, that newer research has been able to demonstrate that they are very different from one another. That consciousness exists apart from attention.

**IS:** Yeah. Attention, the way that it seems to me is that, attention is a focus of awareness, yeah?

**RC:** Yes. And yet there is a field in which that focus is taking place more broadly, more inclusively.

**IS:** Exactly!

**RC:** And also separate from, in some degree, that choice of focus.

**IS:** Yeah. And what's so amazing is here we come to that same story of how, at the human level, attention is so paramount. It's like it's all that we have to give each other. And it's so important, the quality of attention that a child gets growing up or that happens within the family system, and all of that determines everything about the life of the expression of that life force/form. And yet, you know, attention—it's a focus of awareness. And if you look at the way Ramama's invitation is, it is to bring the attention back to awareness.

Ultimately, that whole question of "Who am I?" was just a movement of attention to bring the attention back to its source. And yet when I look at attention and see what is, it's like—it seems to serve keeping a life form functioning, that's its function. Because like here, I'm in Australia, when I'm walking around, there's snakes and all that stuff, so when I hear a rustle on the grass, my attention goes there. If you're in the city and you're walking across the road, your attention notices sounds of traffic or things that could be dangerous to the life form. So it seems like its function is a function of life, keeping the life form viable for as long as it can.

**RC:** Yes. And actually, I'm so grateful to you for the way that you've taken this theme and expanded upon it because now I think it can be very juicy even in a personal way for people who are listening and who are wondering, are we going to get to that personal stuff? Because, well first of all, I've always loved this quotation and I can't source the author of it right now but somebody said very simply, "We only see what we look at." So that, of course, points to the fact that attention is, in some circumstances, volitional and that when we choose to see more or see deeper, then it's an important act and important part of being a human. And you mentioned it in relation to other people like children or our family members or romantic partners; we thrive on being seen as well as seeing.

**IS:** Yeah, well and not only being seen but the quality of how we're seen. I mean it's very clear now that certain qualities of attention actually cause difficulty for life forms. So like a person, like a child growing up in a very critical environment will develop very differently than a child that grows

up in an environment where this acknowledgment or you could say a sense of connectiveness is present.

**RC:** Yes. So, so the attention can be nurturing and attention, depending on the type of it, the quality of it could be harmful.

**IS:** Absolutely.

**RC:** And so attention is at the core of everything and in the work that I do with people that focuses on emotional healing, over the years, I think what's evolved in me is a sharing of ways that people can pay attention more fluidly and flexibly, if that's a word, and what I mean by that is that in mindfulness, people are taught to pay attention and there is a softness and a spaciousness to that kind of teaching. So there is an emphasis on the how of attention. But, I've, over the years, in my own work and in my own life as well, become more, let's say granular than that in looking at attention.

So for instance, I will sometimes talk to clients who are having a physical and emotional contraction in their body and they haven't been able to get it to move and shift and release. And I might ask them to imagine if they could shrink down to the size of an atom and drop through that solid ball in their belly, for example, and begin to notice it from the inside where, because they're now looking microscopically, what seemed dense and impermeable a moment ago, now seems to have space and flow and energy within it.

So that's bringing someone to the smallest point of noticing with a certain imaginal aspect to it. But then also, when people are experiencing a lot of trauma or the effects of trauma and they want to stay connected, but they don't want to dissociate but they also feel like they're being overcome, sometimes I will suggest that they could work with their attention as a zoom lens. So just as you can zoom in the way I just described, you can also zoom out and you can imagine experiencing yourself even from miles away but with just enough sensory connections still to know that you're attending to yourself as you are, where you are.

So it seems like working with attention in these ways and perhaps many others that you or other teachers are using that I'm not aware of, that we're really advancing in a way what it means to know ourselves by directly working with attention.

**IS:** So one thing that might be useful, just to bring up, is that in exploring the whole, the life story, one simple way of speaking is to say the only human drama is not wanting the experience we're having.

**RC:** Yes.

**IS:** And so I bet it shows up in many different forms. And one of the forms that it does show up is as emotion. And when I look into an emotion, what I see is that emotions, actually the word means 'with motion' or 'a movement away'; what happens when we take those two statements, the only drama is not wanting the experience we're having. And then we try to be with what we call an emotion.

What's happening is our intelligence or the intelligence of life is trying to get away from a certain sensation. And then through trying to be present with the emotion, it's almost like trying to do two things at the same time.

And what I found is that by recognizing whenever there's an emotion, actually there's a sensation underneath that emotion that the system is trying to get away from. And when we can make a differentiation between the emotion and the sensation and start to very gently be present to the sensation, I mean being very aware of when it's too much and titrating, going backwards and forwards until the attention can rest in that sensation. Then you get tremendous transformation and integration happening because the emotion is actually a signal. It's showing that the system actually is doing its best to get away from a certain sensation. But then because we misunderstand, we then try and be present to the emotion, and when it doesn't want to move we don't understand it because we're doing our best to be present.

## **2. What Is Emotion?**

**RC:** So let me ask a hopefully clarifying question because we may use words somewhat differently or concepts differently; I want to make sure that I understand you and also that the listeners get a chance to have the fullness of your expression. When I'm talking about emotions with people, I'm saying that emotions are physical and that the only place that we can feel they're arising and shifting and departing is in the physical body. I'm actually not making a distinction between that sensation that we're trying to get away from and the emotion. So I'm interested in learning from your perspective and your experience, if you're seeing the emotions as different from the sensation, what actually is the emotion?



**IS:** Okay, great. Well, it's a beautiful point. To me it seems like what happens is that, emotion often gets entangled with the sensation underneath it. But the emotion is actually a resistance to the sensation. And that distinction has been amazing to be able to play with people with. Because with any emotional feeling, you know, a strong feeling—there's a physical component, absolutely. But the difficulty is that when there's an automatic response to the sensation that shows up as an emotion, it so often gets entangled or lumped together. And so as long as it's lumped together, it's very tricky to work with, because what I see in all of us is these automatic unconscious movements that happen.

And if I look at it from the perspective of the development of a fetus from conception onwards, this fetus is growing up in the matrix of the mom. And the way that her system is receiving the information of now, so all the different sensations, and information that's going on, it really starts to condition all the cells of the growing fetus. So different smells, or different energies, or the way she relates to the father, or what's going on in the world, already start conditioning at a cellular level.

This way before there's any photo, any discrimination, or anything like that going on. And so by the time discrimination kicks in, there are all these automatic movements that are going on, micro-movements that are happening and that show up later as emotion. And as an interest arises to bring that to peace, we start looking at in—I mean you could say there's an interest in bringing to peace but a lot of times that's also collapsed with wanting to get rid of, or change or fix.

**RC:** Yes.

**IS:** And so it's like unpeeling the onion or un-layering it. It's like whenever there's a movement to get rid of something, or change it or fix it, it makes it more solid because at the level of experience, it is actually changing all the time. That's the nature of experience, it's changing. Even if it doesn't appear to be, if you slow it down you can see it is actually always changing. And so the model that you want to change something—it's already changing. The only way that can happen is it has to become something that it isn't. And so then there's this measuring to see whether it's changing when it is already changing. So it's funny the way consciousness functions.

**RC:** So let me ask you a follow-up question to this.

**IS:** Yeah.

**RC:** Because I heard you expressing the idea that the emotion or what we call the emotion is really the resistance to the sensation underneath and that when you can actually experience more directly and fully the sensation underneath, that you get integration and you get a movement towards peace. So in a situation where the emotion is—well, the felt experience is one that the person is wanting so it's not aversion, it's attraction; what some people might call a 'positive emotion' even though I wouldn't use that term. So there's no resistance to that unless the person is clinging, as in, "I want this, but I don't want this to go away," which then again would be resistant, but in a purer experience of an emotion like joy or gratitude in which in that moment, there's just a full-bodied yes.

**IS:** Yeah.

**RC:** In that case, is there a difference then as you're describing it between the emotion and the sensation?

**IS:** No, because to me—I think language has gotten us a bit confused, because those are just overflows, they're not, in what you spoke about wanting, if we go into what's underneath the sensation, underneath the wanting, there's some sense of lack. Or I mean, to have this conversation, we really have to slow it down a little bit, because it's like wanting water, or food, or touch, or some other things that our system requires just to survive. It's like that phenomena of when people drop into non-dual consciousness and there's nothing missing, there's nothing lacking, there's nothing needed. And yet at the same time whenever there's some sense of not okayness, experientially, what seems to happen is our thinking has this capacity to solve problems.

So what happens is our thinking kind of takes whatever that sensation is and it looks for some kind of solution. So it'll come up with what looks like is going to solve this subtle discomfort that's going on in the system or feeling of not being at ease. And it'll project it as like an 'I need this,' or 'I need that,' or 'I want this,' or 'I want that.' And when we look, it's like where our attention is focused for much of our waking state is towards getting what our mind projects is going to solve the problem. But what that projection does is it gives us, in the moment, a sense of lack and a sense of needing to get someplace else, which is like the old analogy of a donkey with the carrot tied to a stick in front of its head.

**RC:** Yes. I totally follow you and I think about this topic that desire, wanting, is something that has a contraction within it because it does exactly as you just shared: it starts from the premise that there is something missing or something wrong with the current experience.

**IS:** Yes, and I'd tell you that's a felt sense. To the extent that there's something going on unconsciously in our system, our system isn't completely at peace.

**RC:** So just before we leave this topic, just help me out with one part of it. So if what I'm experiencing is contentment—

**IS:** Yeah. Then there's no movement.

**RC:** Is there such a thing as an emotion?

**IS:** No, I wouldn't see that as emotion. I would just say that's an overflow. The moment it moves towards gratitude, or appreciation, or any of those things, what's going on in the nervous system is, we move from the sympathetic to the parasympathetic. And there's this, I love to call it drinking and kissing, it's like this receiving the moment as the beloved or something like that, to speak a little poetically. And the other organization that happens is what I like to talk about as 'waiting for a better experience.' And it seems like most of humanity lives their lives waiting for a better experience. And that's going on without realizing it. It's like the default setting, you could say. And so, in that organization even when it feels reasonably okay or you could say reasonably within tolerance level, when the attention gets finer and there's a deeper noticing, there's the recognition of where there is still subtle waiting or this movement to—'waiting for a better experience' really captures it.

### **3. Unconscious Patterns**

**RC:** Yes, you have described some of coming into recognition of this in a way I want to read. So this is your writing. You said:

*"We all have unconscious habits of attention, that are uncomfortable to ourselves, and the one's closest to us, and indeed, to all with whom we are associated. And all reality is experienced through these unconscious habits, which function as cognitive filters, and make it almost impossible for us to recognize them."*

And you went on to say that, *"It can be of enormous value, to have someone who is perceptive at this level, to assist us."* And from knowing the work that you do and from seeing you do the work

with people, I am really grateful for that offering. In terms of the series topic of teaching what we need to learn and transparency, I think this will be a good place to pivot from our conversation so far and to speak just a little bit about you and your own life and perhaps how you have come to your own awareness of some of your own unconscious habits of attention and how that has served your own evolution. So whatever you would like to share, I would love to hear about how this process has really created transformation in you.

**IS:** Okay, fantastic. Part of the thing is in looking at these unconscious patterns—when I've looked at them to see: where do they begin? Or what or who's responsible for them? In that inquiry, what happens is a seeing that these patterns come from generations back. They don't belong to anyone in particular. They show up in a way that feels very personal and actually I would say they show up as the sense of 'I.' But in fact, they're not personal at all and they don't belong to anyone. And yet they play, and they play in a way that does affect the people around us. And what I see is, with good intention, in my own experience with my partner and the kids, there has been ways in which those patterns have caused difficulty.

**RC:** So for listeners, tell us, when you mentioned the kids, how old are these kids?

**IS:** Well, I have five kids and from three different moms, and they range in age from 32 down to 13. So I've been through quite a few different lifetimes in a sense (laughs), and exploring with participants that come to the meetings and noticing subtleties of ways of relating that are painful. To give a specific example, as this seeing has gone deeper, there was the recognition that these patterns are playing in all of us. So what would happen for me would be resting in myself with whoever was sitting with me and letting my eyes rest in their eyes and just noticing the sensations happening in this system and being space for them. And with some people, what would happen is there would be a lot of discomfort going on in me. And my idea was that by being present to that discomfort, I was assisting in some way. And in fact, quite often that was the case. But what I later realized was that just looking at someone in the eyes was enough to re-traumatize some people. So the discomfort I was feeling was actually coming from just making eye contact and I wasn't reading their signals correctly. I wasn't seeing that actually, what their system needed was for me to stay connected but they actually needed me to take my eyes away. And so I'm so grateful that that finally showed up.

**RC:** Yes. I just want to interject that there was a time I had a client who I was working with who really wanted to be in presence and to open through some knots to greater flow but this client

actually knew that it wasn't going to happen if we did have a gaze with one another. And so the request of me was that I close my eyes and that was a great wisdom I thought, on behalf of that client, because eventually and pretty quickly, that changed. But as you say, it would have been too much, too soon, and too traumatic to have that depth of connection. So I really understand what you're talking about.

**IS:** Yeah. And then just seeing how the subtleties of attention and being with my kids and noticing, especially as the kids came into being teenagers, their needs are to have their own autonomy and all that stuff. And yet at the same time there's still this, I would say, need for boundaries—clear boundaries that are honoring. And just seeing how easy it is to overstep and actually not really, I could say, be present to what their system is telling. In my everyday life, I would say it like that; feeling kind of frustrated at times when requests don't get met; just having a frustration color and seeing the painfulness of that, which is not really where my heart longs to resonate.

**RC:** Yes. So this is really beautiful and very helpful, I think, because it comes back to something we were talking about earlier. If I'm hearing you right, what you're saying is that the quality of attention that you may bring to your teenager, for example, could have a frustration within it because you're not wanting the experience that you're having that is being expressed through the behavior of your teenager and therefore, what is being transmitted from you is the idea not only that this isn't okay and that there's something wrong, but also even if just very subtly, that there's something wrong with that kid.

**IS:** Yeah, exactly.

**RC:** I know that as a parent, I can have that happen just as easily as any other parent and in terms of walking my own talk, I want to be ever more attentive to that when somehow my demeanor and quality of attention is expressing that kind of frustration. It feels to me, and this may be dramatic as a term, but it feels to me that that's a kind of violence.

**IS:** Exactly it is! It is and the difficulty is that most often it's patterns that are repeating themselves. In a certain sense, even though they might be much more refined than the patterns that were conditioned into our system, they are still the continuance of that unconscious functioning.

**RC:** Yes.

**IS:** And so it's beautiful that it gets refined generation by generation with luck, but as long it's still playing at any level, it's still a violence and maybe the more subtle it gets, it's like it's even more potent, in a way.

**RC:** Yeah. Because it's less overt and kind of insidious.

**IS:** Yeah. Exactly

**RC:** So let me just follow-up on this. My kids, as well as I think all kids, are exquisitely attuned to what they see as hypocrisy. They love to magnify it to alarming degrees. And so I'm wondering, as you have been reflected over the years and perhaps, especially in recent times by your own family members, are there places where they tell you that you're not walking your talk, that they would like to see you more congruent with what you teach?

**IS:** For me, I would say, and again it's just words but I don't see that I teach anything. For me, it's more an invitation to what people already know. And I like to make that distinction because for me there is a very big difference between—the word 'educate' comes from the word 'induce' which means to draw out. But it's been taken to mean, to put on top of. And there's such a big distinction in those two modalities. So for me I like to see what happens in the meetings as an invitation to what people have always known; so it's not strictly a teaching. But to answer your question with the kids, yes of course; I keep getting reflections of where I would tell you there's different subtleties of not being, not meeting in the way that my heart completely resonates with. And I feel very lucky in the discomfort of (laughs) having those become conscious.

**RC:** So something I know in my own experience, I want to share and see if it touches anything in yours—when I am holding workshops and meeting individuals and couples in deep presence, I find that the experience is invigorating and also requires energy, not trying but just the energy of presence. And sometimes when I'm finished, the workshop or day of session is over, I feel that there's a spent quality to my energy and I need to recharge and maybe to some degree, to use the technical term, space out a little bit. So where I find sometimes that there is a tension in my own life with my family is that I think they sometimes feel that other people get the best of me and they get me when I'm kind of done sometimes.

**IS:** (Laughs) Yeah. I understand.

**RC:** I'm wondering if you've ever experienced anything like that?

**IS:** For sure. I mean, it's interesting because like some meetings, you can come back actually with more energy than you started and some you come back feeling spent. And the system needs to recharge, it needs time to just chill out.

**RC:** Yes. So in your own experience and with the conditioning that moves through you, do you also ever have a challenge in—I'm guessing it would be more with your family or your most intimate connections in life where you know what you need and somebody is asking something of you and maybe even sometimes pressuring or demanding you and you know that the answer is no for you or not like that, not the way that you're being asked to show up. Is it challenging for you sometimes just to stay in the truth of your own needs if you know that you're also creating a lot of disappointment in someone close to you or is that something that has become easier for you over time?

**IS:** That has become easier over time. I think there will be differences depending on our early experience with setting boundaries. So, for some people that's very difficult. And for me, that's never been that tricky. But it's definitely gotten easier over the years to be able to not take a person's request when I know from my side that it's clearly a pressure. There so many nuances, I mean it's a beautiful discussion that we can actually be looking at the nuances that play out, and become more aware of it—seeing when our system needs to resource itself and honor that. And at the same time, let people know, “Look, I just need a little time and I will get back to you.” So they know that it's just a time thing, that it's not forever (laughs).

#### **4. An Interest to Notice When It's Less Than Beautiful**

**RC:** Yes. So when you look at yourself right now in your life as you're living it day by day, do you find any particular aspects of your life or your experience of your life where you would say, “This is where I'm challenged” or “This is where I'm growing” or “This is my edge. I see myself evolving here and I notice there are tension points about that”?

**IS:** You see, again it's just the way it references here, it doesn't seem to relate to a ‘me.’ I understand what you're asking. I see where this expression of life has all of that going on. And yet somehow it doesn't seem like it has anything to do with ‘me.’ I don't know if that's clear.

**RC:** Well, I think I do very much understand what you mean. It's all happening and it's not happening the way it is for you to a personality but then—

**IS:** Because I found that previously there was this seeing it from that perspective, and I found that seeing it from that perspective actually got in the way of being able to meet it clearly.

**RC:** So if we take that out and we look at it—

**IS:** Yeah, that there's still those unconscious patterns playing, absolutely. I've never met anyone where there's no unconscious patterns playing.

**RC:** So are you aware of some let's say recently conscious patterns; like as unconscious patterns are playing, how have you come to see that through your behaviors, through your experience, or as it's been reflected to you by others?

**IS:** Because there's an interest to notice whenever it's less than beautiful or less than exquisite, those nuances or functioning show up more obviously on the screen. I'd say it's such a privilege that at this point, that there's the willingness to see things in a way, like our systems have been organized to try and avoid it at all cost. And even though the seeing of it usually is uncomfortable because there's a seeing of ways of functioning that have actually caused difficulties for yourself and everybody.

**RC:** Could you reference just one example of something that was uncomfortable to see for you as it was reflected?

**IS:** Yeah, certain personality types or certain expressions of life have caused an automatic aversion happening in this system. And just noticing subtleties of that going on and I would say almost (laughs) all the time in a certain way, you know movements, aversions, and attractions going on; just becoming more sensitive to those subtle movements that play.

**RC:** So I want to pause there because I think this so important to hear. There's a liberation, I believe, in what you're describing because what you're saying is, if I hear it right, what's happening, what I'm experiencing without owning it or thinking of it as happening to me or to a self is that if someone else walks into the room and I notice the experience of aversion, or not liking, or this person—their arrival on the scene has created a sense of irritation.

**IS:** Or disinterest.

**RC:** Okay, that too. That, too.



**IS:** It can be just be not being interested.

**RC:** But the reason that I'm emphasizing this and really excited about it is that it happens all the time to every consciousness and especially in the spiritual realm, there's an almost immediate contraction and judgment around it. Because it seems that if I really had opened to see myself as all that is and if I really am heartfelt in my way of experiencing life, then I would love everyone and everything. And suddenly when I realized that this person pisses me off, or that person is boring to me, that it can seem very quickly like that's not okay. And I hear what you're suggesting is a freedom that you have or has evolved to where it might be uncomfortable to recognize that that person doesn't draw your interest.

**IS:** And I would say it's not even that person, I would just say it's the patterns playing in that person.

**RC:** Yes, okay. And so, but it sounds like there's a way that you have or that you are moving towards of letting that be without getting tangled in it.

**IS:** Yeah, I mean just that capacity to notice little subtle movements going on in the system, because, I mean that's where all these movements go on but we've tuned them out in a certain sense, this information that's going on. But most of all, it plays unconsciously and then you just see the grosser aspects of the movements.

**RC:** But what's so liberating about that when you think about it as just socially between people, in relationships, and in families is that we spoke earlier about people wanting and needing to be seen and even to be positively reflected and cherished. And those things are very important in relationships, but at the same time, if we could allow one another the space to just say, "Irritation is happening." And even to be on the receiving end of that, like a person is saying to another one, "I just noticed that patterns of energy or consciousness are playing between us and I'm feeling repelled," and somehow that not having to be then immediately blended with interpretation, "Well, you just don't accept me the way I am. And I need to be with somebody who's not critical of me."

**IS:** Or I need to work on myself and really change that or any of that stuff, because my sense is that when those patterns become aware, and the costs are seen, nothing more is needed. In the seeing of them, it's already changed, and transformation happens. But seeing it without taking it personally,

without wanting to change or fix or without projecting it out onto the other person or onto yourself, because all of those are movements that keep it stuck.

**RC:** And do you have anybody in your life who in some way offers to you what you offer in the meetings with people? Somebody who has the ability to help you bring into consciousness what you couldn't yourself?

**IS:** My partner, who I live with, is beautiful in bringing attention to where movements are happening in me. And then whenever I meet anyone that I feel has a sensitivity that could bring light into some of the subtle movements, I love to get sessions and explore. Because what I find is, even when I don't have an issue—there are no issues playing or anything like that, just that taking time for that exploration, gems unfold sometimes, things that you didn't even know were going on. And it has nothing to do with getting anywhere or anything like that. It's more just like the privilege of having a lifetime where this exploration can take place and benefits actually all beings, because as it comes to consciousness of being seen, it actually affects the whole field. So it just feels like it's just a privilege that life has opened up like this; and that this exploration can just continue and deepen.

## 5. Stress

**RC:** Yes. And so the last question I have for you stems from that term, exploration, that you were just using. I'm wondering what you're noticing in patterns of consciousness in your experience, what is drawing attention for exploration? You spoke just now about noticing with ever more refinement internal experiences and those kinds of gems that can come from paying attention internally. But in terms of focusing outwards in the world, what's interesting you these days? What's intriguing you? Where do you find your curiosity going and spending more time and energy in exploring?

**IS:** To me it seems like this is the noticing of the subtle movements that go on somatically in the body, because as awareness there's nothing actually. There's nothing going on, there's no—you can't even say it. There's no word that you can use to speak of that. But then at the human level, so to speak, there's these trillions of cells that we call our bodies that are doing this dance.

**RC:** Yes.

**IS:** And in the way that they have been conditioned and functioned, they produce all these senses of reality that seem so personal and so real and all the rest of it and when there's attention—when

that's included in the attention field, there's another thing of how that all plays and how that all functions. Something that just is beautiful to me starts to become, I could say, an ongoing love affair with life and being available as life, as love.

Because in this journey, there was the recognition of awareness and yet, one day, walking along the beach in Byron Bay with perfect weather, beautiful circumstances, nothing troubling and yet noticing that this system was stressed. And I'm going, "Wow, that's such an interesting paradox that, that there's nothing extraordinary that this has to do with. It's just the way the system has been programmed," and then I was noticing how that affected everything. Because the moment that there's stress is in the system, there's a feeling of pressure. And from that sense of pressure there's a way of relating to life that we don't listen to our own bodies anymore. We're so driven from that perspective of stress because it feels like if we don't keep running we're going to die.

So that was a doorway into noticing something that is like, "Wow, I didn't realize how this system had been conditioned to stress." And the interesting thing about when there's stress is that the system moves into the sympathetic nervous system and we have very little access to the outer part of our brain. Everything goes through the older part of our brain and it's all survival oriented. So our capacity to notice is almost nonexistent.

**RC:** Yes.

**IS:** And stress has become so endemic—you get 6 billion people or 7 billion people on the planet functioning from some level of stress and then we wonder why we're in such difficulty as a species. Because when we're stressed—like how do you relate to your own body? You don't. How do you relate to other people, the other drivers on the road, other colleagues at work, your loved ones, your kids, nature? We just don't relate at all. Everything's just from this perspective of their stress, trying to keep it together.

**RC:** I really appreciate what you're sharing and I heard a real nugget for myself, which is that, "Stress diminishes our ability to pay attention."

**IS:** Absolutely.

**RC:** And we all are endemically stressed as you described, more and more and that's the field in which we're living. This has come up in a number of conversations with people and I know it's a

part of my life too, which is that just in order to get by in the world that we've all constructed together, there is a degree of stress that feels like it's like the new baseline.

**IS:** Yeah. And it's basically an upset with time, "I don't have enough time." And what's amazing is when you look at that like if I had to try and sell people, "Look, I'd like you to live your life from now on with a sense of not having enough time. Anyone want to sign up for that particular reality?" I mean it seems ridiculous and yet most of us find ourselves living in that trap.

**RC:** Absolutely! I wanted to just follow-up quickly on that subject, and ask you in terms of time and what you do with time yourself—do you, for instance, keep abreast of world events?

**IS:** No, not much because at this point, I don't trust the media. It feels like to me everything has become a spin. And so if you talk about events, there's an awareness of things that are going on but I just spin around it, I'm not that interested.

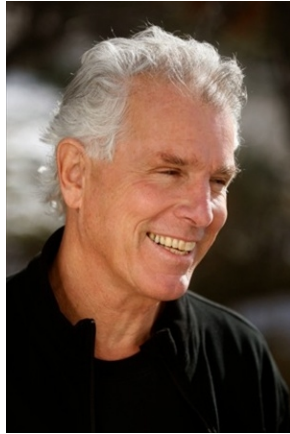
**RC:** And so I take it then that you also choose not to engage directly in adding your own voice to influence a particular issue or how it's addressed in the society?

**IS:** Well, it seems to me that—it's this funny paradox again of putting my voice to petitions and things like that, but at the same time knowing that the deepest contribution in a way is to be at peace, to be absolutely at peace as an expression.

**RC:** Alright, good. Well, Isaac, I really appreciate the wide-ranging nature of our conversation today. We started with talking about some very abstract themes that are interesting but are not necessarily embodied as much as some of the things that we continued to talk about later in the conversation. So, for your range and willingness to travel far afield with me, I'm very grateful.

**IS:** I enjoyed it very much, too, Raphael. It's been a lot of fun for me, thank you.

**Elias Amidon**



Elias Amidon is the spiritual director (*Pir*) of the Sufi Way International, a non-sectarian mystical order in the lineage of Inayat Khan ([WWW.SUFIWAY.ORG](http://WWW.SUFIWAY.ORG)) Through his nine-month Open Path trainings and retreats ([WWW.OPEN-PATH.ORG](http://WWW.OPEN-PATH.ORG)) in Europe and the U.S., he offers students a guided approach to recognizing nondual awareness, and learning to express that realization in the diverse conditions of daily life. Pir Elias has lived a multifaceted, engaged life, working as a schoolteacher, builder, architect, writer, environmental educator, peace activist, and wilderness rites-of-passage guide. He is author of the forthcoming book “The Open Path – Recognizing Nondual Awareness,” and co-editor of the books “Earth Prayers, Life Prayers,” and “Prayers for a Thousand Years.” He lives in Boulder and Crestone, Colorado. [WWW.PATHOFTHEFRIEND.ORG](http://WWW.PATHOFTHEFRIEND.ORG)

### **1. Intimacy and Solitude**

**RC:** Elias Amidon, thanks so much for joining me today.

**EA:** It’s a pleasure being with you Raphael.

**RC:** So we spoke a little bit before the recording began about how we’re doing in this moment. But just to presence ourselves a little bit more for our listeners, I just like to share that I’m feeling summery; there’s a lightness to my energy and I’m excited to be talking to you. I’m feeling peaceful this morning. How about you?

**EA:** I like those words; summery, peaceful, and lightness of being—I’d go along with that. That describes my mood at the moment.

**RC:** Okay, excellent. Well, as I mentioned, I'm excited to talk to you about a number of things today. One of the things that I want to ask you by way of kind of bringing the listeners into a journey that's been ongoing: yesterday, as you know, I spoke to your wife, Rabia, and she described her experience of how listening to the interviews in this series played a part for her and her relationship with you. And because both of you have come to the series that way and it had an impact on you as you knew you were getting ready to be interviewed; I'm wondering if you could share a few words about how that was for you because I'm sure that even if there was some similarity to that between you and your wife, your own experience was unique.

**EA:** Yeah, listening to some of these interviews brought up to me this—well I suppose it's a concept, but it's more than that. It's transparency, which is one of the words around which you've organized these interviews; transparency and privacy; and what is that line? I mean you can also call it opacity and holding back and that kind of thing. They're not necessarily one negative and one positive—transparency being positive always; there's probably a shadow side of transparency too. What would that be? Something like holding your heart under your sleeve all the time or being a kind of narcissistic display of whatever's going on for you. But in its best, transparency is openness, presence and availability—allowing for intimacy. Whereas privacy also has its shadow side. It could be conceived, or experienced, as closed or sort of contracted. But there's something also about privacy and listening to these interviews, I noticed that there's a play here between transparency and/or privacy.

I remember once when I was younger reading the Castaneda books and Don Juan saying to Carlos something like "Don't always tell people your personal history, you don't have to do that. You actually lose power." That came up to me too, "Okay. Don Juan was on to something there." So you can see, I'm holding both of these married qualities of transparency and maybe privacy isn't the right word. My wife and I, one of the scenes that we write and talk about, especially in relationships, is the interplay of intimacy and distance. And in a way, maybe that's a better word: distance. In a relationship, isn't it how it is? We seek intimacy and yet there comes a time when one, not retracts, but one comes back to one's sovereignty? Autonomy?

**RC:** Rilke talked about how in a transcendent relationship between two people; lovers or friends, they become the guardians of one another's solitude.

**EA:** Oh, beautiful! That's beautiful, isn't it? That to me, is very respectful that we don't always kind of glue to each other's eyes in a gaze. We have these beautiful moments of intimacy and gaze and connection. And yet there's something just as natural about one's solitude, to put Rilke's word on it. So that's what I'm trying to respond to your question and not get too tangential here, but the whole idea of transparency and vulnerability and openness, I think it's brilliant, this series that you're doing and we're a part of right now.

**RC:** Elias, let me jump in and say that in the conversation yesterday with Rabia, one of the things that she said is that as a result of the two of you listening to some of the interviews together, somehow that translated into the two of you deciding that it was time once again to do some couples' therapy.

**EA:** Yeah, I wouldn't put it quite as causative as that, but it certainly was an element in it, because the beautiful nature of many of the teachers that you've interviewed in terms of their availability, their presence, non-specialness. That certainly did inspire us. And for us, couples' therapy, I mean we've been together for thirty years, and I think over that time, oh, quite a number of times; four, five, six times, we've had some periods with a third, either a professional therapist or a good friend who could function that way. My goodness, it's so healing and so magical. Well you know, you're a therapist. But it's quite magical that in the presence of the third, the two somehow are released to speak in ways which are—it makes a safety that allows things to be said in new ways and listened to, and perhaps that's even more crucial—listened to more acutely and more openly.

**RC:** Yeah, absolutely. So one of the things that Rabia also mentioned was that behind the scenes, as she was getting ready for the call yesterday, you asked her an open-ended question, "So when he asks you something like, 'What is your edge?'—what are you going to tell him?" And we laughed about that question, it was a great question. We came to that maybe towards the end of our interview, and I thought one of the things that would be good to do towards the beginning of our interview is come back around to that, which is to say, you must be considering that question yourself. So, in terms of that interplay between transparency and privacy that you were just addressing, what's the sweet spot for you in terms of what you would like to share about the now, the very moment of your life that you're in? There is so much change and transformation that you've already gone through, many aspects of your being are super well-seasoned, and yet here you are at this moment, always fresh. So what are you noticing as a place that you're growing into or feeling a challenge about? What would you say?

**EA:** That's a beautifully expressed question. It does have something to do with intimacy and distance and exploring that—I guess we could call that an edge. Curious that we use this word edge because there's no definable edginess to it, it's more of, our edge is come and there's no longer an edge—you're right in it. And for me, one of the aspects is, well, it's Rilke's word: solitude. I find myself drawn to increasing solitude as I get older. I'm sixty-eight so, you know, getting up to this last chapter. I love my work, actually, it's my life and it's full up to the brim like many of us; it's spilling over and sometimes that can be overwhelming but I love it—all that I do and engage in. And there's an increasing call to solitude, to quiet, to going on retreat or solitary retreat. I would identify it as a kind of a mystic aspect of my being which seeks to rest, to be with that which is prior to all the human hubbub—and I love the human hubbub—I'm immersed in it. And yet, just to let that recede to some extent and come into the presence of this, that is—what is it? I want to use the words 'not-so-demanding', although it's utterly demanding—it's the presence of presence. But there's an edge there in that I'm drawn back, and it's not like one is the enemy of the other. So finding the appropriate balance, and not only in big hunks—you know, "Okay, and I'm going on retreat for two weeks." That's great; those are precious, delicious times. But also the edge of, in my daily life, when I'm in the hubbub of the human world—the essence of solitude, isn't it present now?

Even for us; we are in communication and relationship now—there is some way in which, at least I can recognize that there is a solitude here. Maybe that links to what I was trying to say earlier about privacy or whatever it is.

**RC:** Well, I've been listening to what you're saying and I'm really resonating and I'm fascinated and I want to dive in a little bit into this with you. A quick preface: which is to say that as these talks have gone on, I realized that in some ways, they are dialogues more than interviews, and every once in a while, someone writes me an email or a Facebook comment saying "That was a good interview whenever that person could get a word in edge wise."(Laughs)

So I'll try to be succinct, but it is inspiring what you're bringing up because to me, just like we talk about the being from which doing can arise, there's this corollary that you're speaking to, which is the solitude that is present even amidst the hubbub. That really speaks powerfully to me because in that solitude there is a certain kind of rest and completeness and especially not a sense of a need to do or to please or to fix.



I was reading about one of your offerings where a small group of people come together at a hermitage—and mostly they're in silence in solitude. And I saw that as so distinct from the workshop mode, which I'm often in, where people are looking for what they are going to get. I'm thinking about how I can serve them, how I can create an offering that's going to take them through stuff.

And I'm aware at the same time that all that stuff isn't essential, and they might not come if it wasn't oriented around growth or healing or transformation. But ultimately, the greatest gifts for me and for them are the ones that come when that solitude and that stillness in it takes the space; something different happens.

**EA:** Yeah. It definitely does. And I appreciate what you say because I offer both kinds of things, more workshops or trainings, this type of thing where you often do feel as if you're, to put it pejoratively, almost an entertainer or you have to keep seducing people back into the content and so on. And yet, what I find with those types of retreat that I hold where solitude is already there, then that work is done; (Laugh) no seduction necessary, no kind of entertaining necessary because people in these retreats each have their own little hermitage. So, when the door closes there, when they go into their hermitage; it's very comfortable, it's no aesthetic thing but it's alone and they're in a high desert and everything's there and yet no distractions.

Rabia and I, for twenty years, have been taking people out into the desert on Vision Quests or we call them Wilderness Quests. And again, to sit, and that's with much less comforts than at the retreats that I do now: No food, you're out there for three or four days and the sun rises and the stars rise and you're quiet and the solitude there opens up a cosmic dimension in people's souls automatically.

When there's contact—because in the retreats that I've been holding for the last number of years, we do gather for about an hour and a half in the morning— people don't have to come—and we sort of tune in. People might bring up things but then they go back to their hermitages so there is a little bit of an interplay but it's not—in the workshop setting, it's almost like an instant community; that little group will form a community and have that unique conversation together. But it's also a microcosm of society and then we have all of social interactions on display, shyness, dominance, seeking approval and all of those things. Whereas when you have a background of solitude, a lot of that is just lifted off of everyone's shoulders and they can become real: alone with the alone.

## 2. The Dilemma of Writing the Blurb

**RC:** Yeah, that's so great. I want to touch on two things within what you're saying; one of them going back to, you used the word seduce around getting people into the setting for the training, the workshop, etc., and I wanted to just let the listeners know that for all of us teachers, whether we're a lineage holder and creating trainings in that way or whether we're at the Esalen Institute or Omega or places where lots of teachers come, there's this really interesting dance around the marketing material. First of all, many spiritual teachers and personal growth experts cringe at even the idea of marketing. Some of them are natural marketers. But there's this consideration if you've got one paragraph or sometimes even less than that. What are you going to write that's going to bring the people who are meant to be there? And you know, there's this hype that sometimes people can feel that pushes them away. But other times there's a promise that is especially seductive and it might hook someone in a way that is less than just a genuine communication through that marketing material. So it's a really delicate and interesting process. I know when I do it, I'm thinking "Who is this retreat really most for and what will they respond to that will let them know 'this is my place'," as opposed to trying to win the biggest group, so to speak. But even in that, there's this dance around modesty and hyperbole. The most intensive workshops that I do lasts for about a week and it's called Total Immersion for Total Transformation, which of, course is a lie. (Laughs) How could you totally transform in a week's time? It doesn't work that way. Or certainly if you did, you couldn't integrate it in a week's time. But in some ways, that marketing copy is not just invitation, it's also exclusionary because if you're not feeling like you're at a place in your life where you really want to take a deep dive and support others in doing so, this is going to be too much for you.

**EA:** That's right. (Laughs)

**RC:** So there's this interplay between inviting and excluding, and I just wanted to speak to that briefly because you touched on it and most people wouldn't necessarily think about the wrestling that goes on within and also between organizations and teachers around how to present what it is that they're offering.

**EA:** That's so well put: the dilemma of writing the blurb. Here we are, blurb writers. (Laughs)

**RC:** (Laughs) Exactly.

**EA:** I have almost spent most of my life writing blurbs for all sorts of things. I've been a teacher living all my life in all sorts of venues and having people come to indigenous tribes in Asia with us;

or to Syria; or spiritual retreats and gatherings and trainings; or to the wilderness. And each one of these, I agree with you, in a way, you want to put out the offering and you want to be as clear as you can be about the possibilities this opportunity offers people. And like you say, you want it to be a filter as well. You don't really want people in your workshops or journeys who are, I don't know, self-preoccupied to the extent in which they're going to bring down the group; that they wouldn't collaborate and help with the learning and be together with everyone. In fact recently, I have been doing more applications so people will have to give a little bit first before they're accepted. I always accept everybody anyway. (Laughs) I mean unless—no, I think I've never needed to because those who go to the trouble of writing an application are ready for it. They really are seeking it. Sometimes, especially when I was younger I became very poetic with them. I thought that poetry or mystical poetry that was there would filter out folks who were, for some other reason, willing to come to these things. I wanted to find the mystics; the ones who were slightly misfits.

And my teacher was like that too. Back in the '70s there was all sorts of wild names we would give Sufi gatherings that, well, yeah, that was the '70s wasn't it? (Laughs) Whereas now, I try to be a little bit more upfront and say "Okay, this is what's on offer here. If this is already stirring in your soul, perhaps this is the right place for you to be."

**RC:** Yeah. The interesting thing is we can give it everything we've got and try to be spot on in terms of how we do that blurb writing. And then so much of what transpires is mysterious anyway. I've had people who come to the Total Immersion for Total Transformation Retreat, and then they tell me after the first day "You know I'm in a really good place right now in my life and there's nothing I think that I really need to address." And I'm thinking "Okay, so was there another part of you that responded to this invitation?" Or sometimes someone would say, "You know I've only got a week of vacation this whole year and it feels like this is really heavy." And so I'll ask once again "You chose this somehow." So it becomes a discussion and sometimes the discussion is really amazing. There was one person who came to a retreat of the same name, who actually swore that it seemed to him like it was a business networking event. Somehow, whatever you write is perceived however it's perceived and there's some recognition of the lack of control. So whether you wrote the most beautiful, wild, mystical invitation or I wrote the most intense transformative invitation, somehow it's just going to get out there how it does.

**EA:** (Laugh) It does. I mean it's like Rumi said, "This is free medicine."

**RC:** (Laughs)

**EA:** You know, it's free medicine. I know we have to charge for things just to put bread and butter on the table, but it is free medicine. It's been given to us and we give it on; we've been graced with it.

### **3. Wholeness**

**RC:** I want to come back to the other piece though around solitude because there's something that I think I was learning and was really brought to fullness as you were describing it, so I want to kind of put an explanation point on it. And that is that when people know that place of solitude within themselves and the completeness that comes with that and also when they know how to rest in it, then I know for myself the conversation can really begin, and I'm so drawn to the connection that comes when neither of us is trying to win anything from the other or control anything about the other. And then spirit dances within and between and really magic happens in the connection. I guess another way of saying it is that anything that is in the way of my solitude within me is somehow going to disturb the field of possibility between us.

**EA:** Amazing isn't it? That's an enigma. Maybe this solitude is a stand in word for true being, resting in your natural being, in your natural state.

**RC:** Yeah because it's not so much about being alone. It's about being one. It's about being whole.

**EA:** Exactly. It's being whole and not closed off so you're totally porous. You're totally open in one's solitude. You're totally welcoming to whatever appears. What helps about physical solitude especially—its solitude from human interaction for a while, which I think is very healthy, then you're, I'll repeat, alone with the alone or the All One, but you're completely porous, completely transparent. And in that transparency, then when you're with people, when I'm with people that can be, as you say, there is the opportunity for true intimacy or love can ignite there. If you're not grabbing on to old stories and sense of self-identity and trying to repair and present your "selfiness" in one way and I'm not trying to do the same, but instead we're both open and present in our wholeness—I like that word 'wholeness', the wholeness of solitude. Then wow! As the poet said, "Forth the particulars of rapture shall come."

**RC:** (Laugh) Yes, that's really beautifully put. Now, I want to ask you a question about this that is personal and it's about your life experience. Also it touches a little bit on, you could say, the science of wholeness in a way because so many of us in my arena have been talking very much about how

things get set up in us at an early age and the way that the brain or the mind; I should say which doesn't just include the brain; how the mind is patterned based on early experience, and so often, healing and transformation comes from being able to update or rewire that conditioning through a deepening of presence and a growing into the kind of wholeness that you and I have just been talking about. When I do public gatherings, I ask people usually towards the beginning, to raise their hand if when they were growing up, they got a great education from their family in terms of how to recognize, honor and experience their emotions. And instead of hands going up everybody laughs because that's farthest from what they experienced. But from the little bit that I know from your background, you actually might be somebody who would raise his hand—there was a wholeness in your upbringing that was rare. First of all, is that accurate?

**EA:** Yeah, I want to have a qualified yes here. I think all of us drag along—anyway, I do—some sense of disappointment in my parents or my school system or people around me in that regard. But, yes, the yes is much bigger than the qualified part. I would say that, but I don't know if I would necessarily say emotional education, although I would say certainly honesty—that I was steeped in honesty and curiosity—emotional in the sense that I grew up in, on the one hand, a very artistic family and circle: my father was an artist and I'd say philosopher as well. My mother was a social activist; they both were concerned with a much larger dimension than just the nuclear family. So yes, in that way, as art and let's say concern for others, concern for the whole, were present in my life.

**RC:** Would you say that you knew you were always loved and accepted as you were?

**EA:** Oh yeah. I was, being the second child, which I was—that helps. My older brother probably had to take the brunt, especially trying to relate in a certain way to my father, I would imagine, and trying to both be him and not be him. You know the second child doesn't have to make the wake; he or she is protected from that. There's something about my upbringing and maybe my disposition, genetic or whatever, just by sheer luck—I used the word porous before. I think I always had this certain quality of porosity in my being or at least that's how it has appeared to me since I was little child. I would be like all little kids and then would have an experience, and I think often people have a transcendent nature, which was way beyond any—I had no preparation for it. It wasn't like I was trained in that way. But, there would be a crack in the worlds, as Don Juan put it or there would be an opening. And this has continued actually throughout my life, so much so, of course, that by the time in my early twenties I was just “Okay, there's a mystery of all mysteries behind this world

or within it, which is already a mystery.” So it brought me into being a seeker and eventually following the Sufi path with many other of paths within that kind of framework.

**RC:** So this topic, and thank you for filling that in a little bit, is really fascinating to me because often people will say something like “Well, you know a wounded healer—that’s the only kind of healer there is.” And there’s some understanding that it’s through our pain that most of us are broken open so that we can have the deep presence and empathy with others that can serve them in their own healing. But I’m hearing two other things. One of them is, and tell me if I don’t get this right, one of them is also through a beautiful nurturing, through a sense of one’s wholeness, that it doesn’t necessarily lead to some kind of shallowness but actually the depths can be cultivated in a more joyful or peaceful way. Because there’s no question that you have that capability of upholding everyone and everything and you’ve spent so much of your life even going to places where there’s tremendous pain and suffering, and it’s been a calling for you. So in your case, it’s seems like just in terms of the personal emotional story of your development, that it came primarily through wholeness. Which is unique, I would say, and a testament to the fact that that kind of early safety and love can also lead to some of these very profound places.

**EA:** Oh absolutely. I somehow feel like we all were held in infinite love, always, and certainly before we were born, or before we were what we are now or—we come out of this, it’s our home. So we all have it; we know it. Although we are sort of paying attention to other stuff here. So in a way, prior to our birth, we were nurtured in pure safety. And here it feels much more unsafe of course and—I don’t want to give you paint the picture that I characterize my life and my being as happy. It’s not that I escaped pain; that comes with the territory doesn’t it? And growing up, adolescence, my God, what a confusing time or twenties or all of them.

**RC:** Or now. (Laughs)

**EA:** Or now, exactly. (Laughs) Aging, whatever. So this world is a place where there’s that which we’re attracted to and that which we’re averse to. So we’re trying to thread our way through and get more of the goodies and avoid the bad stuff. And you can never win that battle—I mean, pain and pleasure and joy and sadness—these are all mingled here. I don’t think anyone can escape that.

**RC:** I love how we can never win that battle; that battle for finding the good stuff and just letting it always be that. There’s something that you shared that is really important to me and the work that I do because often I’m working with people who have come from unimaginable pain: neglect,

abandonment, abuse, violence and it seems to me that if I'm going to be honest, or if any of us are going to be honest; that when we sit in presence, full connection, and acceptance with another person, especially if they feel anything but safe in the world, anything but joyful and at peace; that it isn't very much the process that we do. It doesn't matter whether we call it emotional connection or somebody else does EMDR, or somebody else does mindfulness meditation. There's this whole other piece that you're speaking to, which is that something about coming together in the wholeness that we were talking about earlier, allows someone to remember that place you're describing that we came from, that is always here, that is the mystery behind the mysteries. And even though it sounds maybe sometimes poetic or even perhaps glib, there is a part of whoever has been so almost destroyed by life, there is a part that has always been untouched by that; where there is always just love and connection and safety and wholeness. And I really think that, even though I can get caught up in, "Okay, this is how you might want to do it or here's the next thing that you're facing." And there's an unfolding and that's real too in time and space, but something deeper and more profound that you're speaking to is really at the heart of what we do when we come together.

#### **4. Emptiness with Attributes**

**EA:** Yeah. I may err on this too much in this direction. But I find myself often repeating again and again at the heart of my teaching, it is to say, "You're safe. We're safe. No matter what, you are safe and always will be. And everything is alright forever and forever and ever."

**RC:** Right, even if this cancer takes you or...

**EA:** Exactly.

**RC:** Or even if you're attacked in the streets; it's not about that.

**EA:** No. Deeper than that, we can't fall out of this presence that we are; this luminous aliveness that is—we don't even die. I guess that's the big scary thing for all of us here, is that death is waiting somehow. There's no death. It's maybe more like total transformation, in your words, transformation is what's showing up. But what doesn't transform—it couldn't—is the alive presence of the inherent essence of this moment and that's what we are. It doesn't go anywhere. So in a way, I find myself sometimes wanting to forget all the other types of teachings and practices and the work that I do. And just want to go out on the street and or stand on the rooftops and say "It's all right. It's good news. Don't worry." You know, like Meher Baba said, "Don't worry, be happy. It's okay." It's simplistic but...

**RC:** There's another guest in the series that you probably know of or maybe know personally, and that's Brother David. And he said in his interview, "Time is in the Now; Now is not in time." And the Now I understand he's referring to is that endless presence that we are, that you're describing as well; that we're participating in it in part through the operating system of our humanity, which brings us into the Now differently than how a bee is brought into the Now, or a tiger. But what doesn't change, what doesn't die, as you're describing it, is the Now.

**EA:** Yeah. And this brings up, maybe we don't want to drift into mystical topics here, but there's a kind of controversy between those folks who consider emptiness to have no attributes; that it is the Now; it's called emptiness—the Now, this spaciousness, this "no-thingness" of being or beyond being; and those who consider emptiness to have attributes. It's a little awkward way to say it but that emptiness is presence, bliss, supernal joy; a happiness that our word 'happiness' is just a mere little piece of a shadow of what the happiness that is the very nature of no-thingness. So as you can tell, in that controversy, I fall on the side of emptiness with attributes. (Laughs)

**RC:** Yes, well, my teachers have told me that in the Buddhist realm that when you really look carefully, the Buddha never talked about emptiness without fullness or fullness without emptiness. That they were paradoxically forever linked and one and the same. So I'm with you and that brings something that I want to mention and that is that it's my sense, although every path is unique, that the call to that mystic path that you described you felt in yourself; while it can be encouraged by particular life events, there's something innate in most of us who are called to that. So regardless of whether we had a super happy or super painful childhood, etc., there's something that is in some and not in others that wakes up at a relatively early age; maybe it's adolescence, maybe even before, and is forevermore part of that individual and that journey, and really apart, though, from biography, if you know what I'm saying.

**EA:** Exactly.

**RC:** Because I was in the mountains when I was fifteen or sixteen and just incredible radiant joy was coursing through me and I knew a oneness that was full of attributes but also empty; I didn't know how to talk about it or how to name it. But it was just absolutely riveting and transforming, and I knew that it was somehow at the essence of who I was. And I also knew that it was almost impossible to talk to most people about that.



**EA:** Exactly. We're struck dumb by it. In a way, this is beautiful because it kinds of links back to what began with our discussion of solitude; in a way this that is unspeakable, in a way, holds us, we can't share it. And yet we can. (Laugh) And yet it is, but it can't be spoken of in that way. It can be shared, how is it? Maybe that's what the heart of love is; perhaps it is that intimacy of just resting together in it without needing to affirm it or make sure to reassure each other. Although God knows a lot of folks like us, we love to orbit around these topics because it—what is it? It reminds us again—oh yes, oh yes. (Laugh)

### **5. We're the Guests the Mystics Talk About**

**RC:** We do. We come back to that. It's like we know it can't be pointed out but we keep trying to point it out. We keep looking for people who can join us and who have that sort of twinkle in their eye that sort of 'we know each other.' But it's also interesting, and this is a little bit along the line of the marketing discussed earlier; sometimes I have talked to the leaders at some of the big retreat centers and said "You know one thing I would love to do is a weekend of celebration. You know we worked very hard to transform and heal our wounds. We're mostly in a good place but we'd love to commune with others and we'd love to do that with painting, with singing, with poetry, with dance, with food for one another. Let's come together and actually celebrate and *be* this oneness." And what I've heard over and over again is "Oh that doesn't sell. Nobody's going to come to that." If you tell them there's a problem that you're going to fix then they're going to come. But if you say just celebrate all the goodness then they think "Well, I'll use my disposable income elsewhere. I don't need that."

But I think that underneath that is what you're speaking to, and that is everybody to some degree has a longing to remember who they are and if they only knew that it was okay and they could come together and that they could dance in that fullness with one another, they would. So it's something maybe marketing can't touch but maybe we have to find some other transmission to invite people to come.

**Ea:** Not to gainsay that but we, who do these kinds of teachings and put out advertisements and offerings so people can come together in these temporary gatherings, temporary communities; maybe all we're doing, if there's issues, we're just freeing up folks who then in their lives in the normal course of whatever shows up for them in their lives, celebration comes. We don't necessarily have to be the hosts for that, although we could be. In a way, we're just midwives, let's

say. And then the rapture comes, then each person has opportunities where it shows up in their lives where they can play; instant by instant this comes.

**RC:** I love how you're saying that because it comes right back to my own vulnerability because on the one hand I'm thinking like "Oh my God, this is so great! I don't have to be the host of this party." And then on the other hand, I think "Really, I don't have to be the host of this party? Who am I then?"

**EA:** (Laugh) We're the guests; we're all the guests, you know? That's what Rumi says, "We're the guests the mystics talk about."

**RC:** Well, I just want to share one thing with you because it came to me last night about this and there's something about the invitation that perhaps we offer just because we are willing to rest in that. And it's an always present invitation and anybody who wants to RSVP, they can, but it's not organized per say.

Somebody wrote me an email last night and they were talking about their process and their relationship to me and whether they could trust somebody who is a stranger like me and whether I would even read their email. And so in the email it says "He might not even read these emails, that little crazy man with a big happy smile." (Laugh) I've never been described in any way close to that before, but I'm thinking like if you wanted to put something on my tombstone: Crazy Man with the Big Happy Smile.

**Ea:** Beautiful! Why not? You mentioned a little phrase before: 'twinkle in the eye'— you know, it has the same quality. Finally, this unspeakableness that we're playing with here is—what is it? It has a quality of relief and joy, which is humorous somehow—is that the right word? Humorous? Where that twinkle is. It's not just, look, I'm not talking about frivolity or gaiety even, but a kind of both gratitude and a kind of vibrancy—let's call that vibrancy.

**RC:** Yeah. So two things Elias, before we have to close and I want to make sure we touch on this. The first one is clearly that the mystic that you are and even the tradition that you come from is ecumenical, all are welcomed; it's really limitless and yet, at the same time, you are a lineage holder. I'm wondering if there's anything about being a lineage holder in the way you practice that is present, involved and somehow shifts the flavor of how you show up? And not because I think I know the answer to that or that there is, but it's just that part of how you have lived in to all of this,

is that there's a mantle that you've taken up that's different from, let's say me, or other kinds of people in the same realm. So I'm wondering if and how you see that impacting in how you move through the world and your offering?

**EA:** That's a good question. You know in one way—I want to answer two ways—yes, of course it affects how and what I offer; I've always been a teacher, and then this came up, was given to me—this cloak was put on my shoulders. I didn't ask for it. In some sense, it makes it easier because there's a little title and in some realms, that allows people to say “Oh, okay, this is a person who somehow is gotten some imprimatur to speak. Okay so we'll be quiet and let's listen.” But this only goes so far; there's nobody under the cloak; there's no cloak—that's the odd thing. That's what so beautiful about this. There's nothing solid here that says, “Okay, now you are a peer of this mystical lineage and you have a kind of stately dignified thing that surrounds you.” No. In fact, it's just the opposite. I suppose could take it like that and go around with great airs of one's importance. But what I find at the heart of it, is that the cloak is invisible. I mean, in a way it vanishes. Its real challenge is to completely obliterate self-importance. Every time that's there and every time I think “I must be somebody because they're looking at me that way or I have a title.” That shows up very clearly in the clarity or the invisibility—the transparency of the cloak. And so I want to conclude to that, and that's the other way I want to speak of it, which is, say in your situation, I mean you don't have that type of title, although God knows you have other titles.

**RC:** Well, yeah, Oprah gave me that imprimatur; the high priestess of American popular culture by being in her magazine two times, since I didn't have a PhD or some kind of clinical license, the only way I could get the cloak is Oprah gave it to me.

**EA:** You know this whole question of lineage, which is inherent in the subject and having that approbation and Oprah is a little humorous and so on. And you have other names though I'm sure would show up in you bio in workshops and so on. You know, when we think of the lineage, actually that is inherent in your being able to do this series or give workshops like you do, and have coaching and counseling the way you do. The lineage, even though you may not name it in one specific way or another—it's awesome. It's as sacred as any Sufi or Buddhist lineage—my goodness!

**RC:** Let me ask you a question about that because this is not what I'm going to describe isn't really the way that you would approach your concern. But I want to share with listeners that the Sufi

tradition is, we could say, the mystical center of the Muslim tradition. And yet this dialogue that I'm having with a Sufi teacher, that is you Elias, is as close to Islam in any more traditional sense of what we'll get in the series because I put out many invitations and just did not receive any other responses. So with that as a framework, I just wanted to ask you, is it somehow meaningful to you personally that the lineage that you teach in a very open way is though directly from Sufism and therefore is also directly from, historically anyway, Islam?

**EA:** It's definitely meaningful and has great power in that. And in our particular lineage, we also recognize Sufism as predating Islam. It's the perennial wisdom tradition and it passed through Islam and got a lot of its qualities and practices and so on. But it's not exclusively Islamic; that's how my teacher put it. And so the heart of our lineage embraces all of it. I mean, we're not trying to make one big umbrella, no, we just recognize that the wisdom traditions...—you know, the traditions are many, the wisdom is—there's one wisdom. So in that regard, everyone's a Sufi. Or everyone's a simple human being—that's another word for Sufi.

**RC:** But on the other hand, if you travel in more conventional Muslim realm... Are you able to be conversant, and are you welcomed and recognized as a brother from that tradition, given the lineage that you hold?

**EA:** Oh absolutely! That's one of the really sweet things about Sufism and to some extent Islam. But all Muslims don't have that kind of sensitivity. But in every Sufi circle that I've joined: in Syria, Morocco, Turkey, India and all of these places; there is an immediate welcome. People accept all the differences; it doesn't matter. We all have different expression. But that welcome, it's so sweet. And even you see it in Islam; you can today walk into any mosque in the world just about; walk in there, put your shoes down, and go and join the line if it's time for prayer. It doesn't matter who you are—you're accepted; shoulder to shoulder, you do the prayers together. And that sense of openness; brotherhood, sisterhood; the sisterhood is a different issue as we know it's not so easy because they divide: the women are in the back and men in front, so they have some work to do in that regard. But yes, that acceptance I felt everywhere, and it's real joy actually. But to say you know, I often feel that in Christian monasteries I go to or Buddhist temples, and I've been to a lot of them. There's a welcome there too; it's not specific to Sufi's.

**RC:** So okay, we just have couple more minutes and I want to touch something on two sides really, and just briefly. It's easy in being with you to really drink deep of the peace and wholeness that

we've been talking about. And part of looking behind the curtain a little bit but not beyond the right kind of privacy for each individual as we spoke about earlier, there's still how we show up in a day-to-day. Even though there's a person who wrote to me about the 'crazy little man with the big happy smile,' there are people closest to me who know that there's a flipside to that. Sometimes I can be grumpy or I can be arrogant. I'm just wondering, if you were to go to the top three list, or something like that, of qualities that might show up as your personality moves through this life that wouldn't be in your presentation and we wouldn't know about unless you told us, but that we would appreciate because then we would feel like "Oh yeah, he's even more like us." What would you say, briefly about that?

**EA:** Oh I'm as human as anybody; I'm subject to irritability, grumpiness...

**RC:** What would your wife or your daughter or those closest to you say might be some of the places that are hardest to navigate around you or about in you?

**EA:** I think the moodiness. You know, it's probably impacts more than anything certainly Rabia, standoffish, or I think one quality for me that would be in that little list would be hypersensitivity to blame—I can easily feel blamed. And it could be then if I'm not careful, that I blame first. Or I judge that blame which is another form of blame and then I get into that whole mess.

**RC:** I think that's great thing to have shared. We don't even have to go beyond that because I think in listening to teachers and having these dialogues, I don't think we've touched on that. I don't think anybody has shared a sensitivity to blame or a propensity to blame. And that's a hard one, and I honor you for binging that up. Nobody wants to think that they are either of those two things at times because that's kind of messy.

**EA:** Oh it is.

**RC:** And it doesn't sound very spiritual.

**EA:** Not at all. (Laugh) We've already tossed the spirituality out the window here. Right? If you're the crazy man with a twinkle in his eye or a happy smile on his face; we know that part of that smile and that twinkle is knowing that we're subject to these things. And I would to the list maybe it's not getting what you want—the frustration of things not going my way, that I thought were my way that were going to be nice and clean and go that way, but then suddenly this interruption and that interruption. We talked about edge early on—that's a real edge for me: noticing, "Oh, there's

irritability because... there's frustration." I'm getting that way and it sticks and it becomes brittle and visible. And then allowing that to be, you know the drill: Don't fuss with it; see it; don't add to it and review it and castigate myself for having my feelings hurt by somebody, by a perceived blame; okay, see it, urgh, it feels yucky; Okay, sit in the yucky, and you don't necessarily have to do anything to it but just stick with it and be with it, and let it be and these things self liberate—it's Buddhist—these things, they vanish. If we allow them to come right on center stage, if I can allow that irritability or whatever it is, that blameness thing to come fully in awareness, because if it's not, then I'm just going to act weird and be insufferable. (Laugh) But if I get it and then let that yucky thing or however its appearing be there—it really does dissipate. It's so merciful this thing.

**RC:** Well, there's that kind of addendum I would add. Out of my own experience and this may speak personally to me but I noticed that with irritability and not getting what I want and things being in my way, that there's a certain relative quality to it; meaning that there are some people that I let off the hook much more easily than others. Like for instance, there are lots of times where if somebody else was behaving that way, and in the same way that my daughter does, I would've very little patience for that person. But when it's her, I find that I am much more spacious than I am with just about anybody else. And I think it goes from there. There's this sort of, not just each situation but each person who's in my way, somehow depending on all kinds of mysterious elements, I find myself more or less okay with it.

**EA:** Yeah, I find sometimes that the person who gets the brunt of stuff is my wife actually. I'll be much more tolerant with somebody else's craziness but with hers, in the most intimate relationship then it's like, at some level anyway, I can risk somehow getting fuming. (Laugh)

**RC:** Yeah. And the flipside of that also I know for me is that if I spend my day being in presence, in openness and in connection with others; that takes a lot of energy. And I don't have much energy left and then my wife, I would say, gets the short end of the stick in that.

**EA:** Yeah. That's a confession, and I would join in that. Sometimes it's like you just want to after a day of being totally open and available—maybe it's the retreat into solitude or aloneness that we need to get regenerated, maybe it's that, to look kindly at it. But it does mean that our most intimate partners can get the short end of the stick.

**RC:** Yeah absolutely. So I just want to ask you one last thing and it may take us all the way back to the beginning where we spoke about edge and you talked about that play between solitude and

connection, or maybe it will take you in a different direction. But I wanted to ask you, where right now would you say the juice is for you? Where do you find yourself getting the most engaged and enlivened and when do you feel yourself at your fullness of being? What's calling to you in that way?

**EA:** Sweet question. Well, right now, I'm very much involved in rebuilding a house down in Crestone, Colorado—the high desert—in the mountains and it's a Sufi center connected to a hermitage that I often give retreats at. That's all happening. And I'm about to leave for there again; I'm overseeing the remodel. I tell you Raphael, when I get out of the car, and I'm there in that light and spaciousness and quiet, it's enormously quiet. And watch the light go through it, the light of the sky on the mountains and the big valley that's there. To talk about juice, that's where my heart went. It's aahh. The whole effort of creating this space there is actually, I haven't thought of this before, to invite others there so that they can, a few even, just so that they too can be touched by the majesty and beauty.

Just to conclude, this reminds me of a beautiful Sufi teaching, an ancient one: When humans recognize God's majesty, the response is awe. And when humans recognize God's beauty, the response is intimacy. And these two, intimacy and awe, that's the juice for me, in that great theater of being that's expressed there. So that's where my juice is, both being there in solitude and welcoming others to taste it.

**RC:** That's so beautiful and a great place to conclude. Elias, thank you so much for this journey together. I feel deeply enriched by and grateful for it.

**EA:** Thank you too Raphael. It's been a real pleasure.

## **Rabia Roberts**



Elizabeth Rabia Roberts is an independent citizen activist and spiritual teacher in the Buddhist and Sufi nondual traditions. She began her work for social and environmental justice, non-violence, and women's rights in 1965 where she worked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for two years. Rabia has travelled and taught all over the world. She focuses primarily on training grassroots leaders, peace workers, and religious leaders from all traditions. Her home base is now in Boulder, Colorado. She received her MA from Marquette University and her doctorate from Harvard University. Together with Elias, she co-founded, the Institute for Deep Ecology, and helped develop the Spirit in Education Movement in Thailand with Right Livelihood Award winner, Achaan Sulak Sivaraksa. In 1994, she co-founded, with Elias, the Boulder Institute for Nature and the Human Spirit, and currently directs a variety of projects. She is co-editor of the anthologies, "Earth Prayers, Life Prayers, and Prayers for a Thousand Years," and has a forthcoming book, "Love and Dust, Bearing Witness from Selma to Kabul." [WWW.PATHOFTHEFRIEND.ORG](http://WWW.PATHOFTHEFRIEND.ORG)

### **1. Names**

**RC:** Rabia Roberts, thanks so much for being with me today.

**RR:** Oh, I'm absolutely delighted, Raphael!

**RC:** So I know you've heard some of these interviews by now and you know that in most of them, if I remember, I start with the present moment. So I would just like to share that this is the second interview I've done following some kind of strange and mysterious back injury. I'm still walking around rather than sitting, in order to facilitate flow, and the good news is I was able to have a nice, good soak and therapeutic hot tub treatment prior to getting on the line with you. So I feel as peaceful as one can be with some spinal impingements.



**RR:** We are in exactly the same moment in time. I have constant and sometimes really severe spinal problems from polio and I, too, am walking around.

**RC:** Okay!

**RR:** We'll meet around the inevitable pains of life.

**RC:** Yes! And you know it's really funny symbolically because in my office I have a place where I do my desk work; I have a place where I see clients one on one; And then I have a massage table where more often than not it's energy work that happens on the table. But you know, most of the time when I'm walking around, I'm actually walking around the massage table, so hopefully that's getting some kind of vicarious healing as well.

**RR:** Well, I'm sure it's here! What we want is here.

**RC:** Okay, Good! Well, I'm delighted to have you with us in this series and there are a few things that I want to explore with you as we get going. The first one is you and I have gone back and forth on how we would call you, what your name would be for this series. And I know that there's some interesting back story to that. So if you would share, I would love to hear it.

**RR:** Well, my formal name is Elizabeth Rabia Roberts and most of my friends know me as Rabia. And for a variety of unimportant reasons, I was trying to change that back to Elizabeth, but that's a no-go at my age. You're firmly known. Rabia was a spiritual name given to me by Elias' Sufi teacher at a time when I was struggling with the beginning of chronic fatigue syndrome and I was really down, as depressive as it can be with that illness, which is hard to predict and also debilitating.

And during that time, I told him I felt like I was just in a dry desert. A few weeks later, he said I'd like to call you Rabia, which means the desert in bloom. So Rab is an Arab word that means a long, flat arid plane. And Rabia is a little mound in that desert where if any water comes at all, that's where flowers or green will sprout. So it was a name that I embraced deeply and continue to love, actually, that's why it's the name I just assume and go by with all my work and my writing. And it's been really a help with our work throughout the Middle East and now in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. Rabia is a name they all know; it's a well-known Sufi saint, but it's also a name many of their sisters and mothers use. So they always do a double take when I say it and it opens the conversation.

**RC:** That's lovely! Thank you for sharing that. One of the things that I found in doing this series, because the interviews have been recorded over a number of months and there's over 40 of them now, is that I'm sometimes in danger of repeating myself. In the back of my mind, I'm thinking that I've told some stories about my name change in my life and how that was, so I'm not going to go into the details now. If any of the listeners really want to know, they can email me and I'll send the story and that way I know I won't be repeating myself to people who don't want to hear it. But I do want to say that I've always loved the Native American tradition, which is: you get a name and then when you grow into another name at another point in your life, than you kind of fluidly shift.

There's something so beautiful about just saying our name isn't something that we're stuck with, it's a part of the vibration of who we are and why not keep revisiting what name is going to bring the greatest degree of expansion and presence and connection and life force to us. So I really appreciate you and also your husband for that process that you went through as a gift to yourself.

**RR:** Well, it is and was a lovely process. My husband had changed his name when he was younger, both his first and his last name. My daughter did after I changed mine. She thought, well, I can do this too. And then so did Elias' son. So our family kind of has a line of it. But when it first happened to me, I had mixed feelings. I was not part of the New Age. I was active in citizen activism issues and had a different trajectory. And I had some disdain for all those nice young people named Tom and Bob and Janet and Mary who went off to India and came back with Shekhinah and Dahan and Mahira. I thought, "What are you doing?" And then it happened for me. So we always have a chance to learn.

**RC:** Yes. And I love that, too, because you bring up the way that people do have a resistance to that. I think that at least in this Western American culture that you and I live in, at least that we're here for most of the time when we're not traveling or living elsewhere. Often people in our circles think that there's some kind of selfishness or I don't know exactly what the right term is, but they resent the idea. It's like, "Who are you to change your name?" as if it isn't something that belongs to us.

So I love that there's a whole family that you belong to with a history of working with the idea of names. In my family, it's really interesting because when I changed my name as the first name I would use to Raphael, which was one of my given Hebrew names, I found that lots of people couldn't pronounce it or they would pronounce it wrong. So it was this strange setback where it

took me so long to claim the name and then I didn't want to be standing there in a neurotic way, telling everybody how to say it, so I had to go through that process. And then it kind of got re-blessed because my now step daughter, who I met when I had been going by that name for, oh, maybe 5 or 6 years, she just decided that she was going to call me Raphi which was wonderful because I don't like the name Raffy as a short version or a nickname for Raphael.

But Raphi, especially coming from her, sounded very unique and sweet, and so now I have that name in my family as well, and also not only my stepdaughter, but my own daughter as well, who is almost 5; they both know the history of my name. So they know that I grew up with the name Howard and often, at the most hysterical times, they will call me that name or they will bring it up. And I like the little poke there, you know? Don't get too proud about the name you chose, even though we all go along with you, but it's done in a loving way as opposed to that, you know, you don't have the right to do it way that I also experienced at the beginning of the change.

**RR:** I think the only resistance I've encountered, people pronounce my name in all kinds of ways. As long as they're kind, it doesn't matter to me how it's pronounced. But in the last year or so, as I'm starting to work more in the U.S. than in the Middle East, I have friends who wanted me to go back to Elizabeth because they didn't want the people I teach or invite to my teachings to think I was Muslim. So that was actually something I gave a couple of months to think about. And then, as you know, I decided to stay with Rabia.

**RC:** Yeah! That's really fascinating. A whole other socio-political component to how people might respond to that name or even be afraid of that name I hadn't really thought about before.

**RR:** Well, it gives an opportunity for teaching.

**RC:** Yeah. Well, I think one of the reasons I love that we're having this brief conversation about names is because many of the people in this series and many spiritual teachers that you come across, that we all come across, have changed their name. And sometimes there's a sanctimoniousness that goes along with it. Sometimes people who have those "regular names" that you were talking about before, you know, Tom and Dave and Susan, they might even feel a bit of a distance, a separation from someone who has taken a name that has some kind of exalted sound to it.

So it's just nice to refresh everybody and remind them that this process is very tender and delicate and personal for anybody who goes through it. The reverberations of whatever name they were brought into the world with are always still there as well. So in my own case, for instance, I chose to, when I changed my name officially and legally, to take the name I grew up with as my first name and put it as my middle name on the new certificate so that it wasn't the idea of running from or somehow turning away from the Howard who I was when I grew up. I wanted it to be all-inclusive.

**RR:** I think that's wonderful. I think it's important, though, to add to what you've said is the name itself doesn't make you holier. And people who think it does, they're doing themselves and the name and the lineage, a disservice. It's not enough to have a new name (laughs).

**RC:** I love that you share that and at first I didn't want to interrupt you, but I wanted to say, "What? Really? It doesn't make you holier? Darn!"

**RR:** (laughs) There's a lot of Sufis in the Sufi Way lineage who I think when they first were given a name and they were younger, thought they have achieved something. There can be misunderstanding then about the name as a reminder, and like you said, it carries where you've grown to, but it's not the path itself, of course.

## **2. Why Aren't You Getting How Wonderful I Am**

**RC:** Yeah, good. Well, we have many things to discuss, so I want to move on from this subject of names. I wanted to talk about something that's really unique and beautiful to me that has happened for you. The process of you coming on this series took somewhere between 2 and 3 months to arrange. And from the time that we first spoke to each other and you wrote to me about where you were in your life and then to this moment where you are now, it ended up actually having something to do a little bit with the interview series because you had a chance to listen, and your husband as well, who's going to be a guest on this series too, to listen to some of the interviews in preparation for doing your own.

So I was wondering if you could share a little bit about how that was for you. I'm just delighted to know that the series served you even before you became a guest. So please go ahead and share.

**RR:** Well, I wasn't expecting it. And like you said, I went on to listen to the interviews more because I was preparing for being interviewed. I was listening to them with my husband, Elias, together at one point. And Elias and I had been having, well, it's been a 30-year marriage, and so

we are exploring new structures. We're living in two different places for the first time in 30 years, and visiting, kind of bi-location. And it's been bumpy. It's been bumpy to be the wife of a lineage holder. I'm sure I'm not the only one who experiences that.

And we were going through a rough time and we were listening to these interviews, and I don't want to mention a name, but two of the men who were interviewed, spoke directly to difficulties arising in their relationship. And Elias and I got a chance to hear that some of our, what we thought were personal difficulties, might in fact be structural. It might, in fact, be very hard to be married to a lineage-holder and spiritual teacher. And as a result of these teachers we were listening to, who both of us had enormous respect for, we went to therapy. And we're managing this process much more successfully. So I want to give credit where it's due. It was these particular interviews and those two men particularly willing to be vulnerable and talk about their relationships that gave us a step up.

**RC:** Great! Thank you so much for sharing that, and also for being willing to share that as both really venerated spiritual teachers in your own right, and activists as well, that at this seasoned stage of your life you both saw the benefit of going to counseling and that walking in humbly with your challenges, was able to bring something really positive for you. There's no way that you were somehow above or done with that kind of process.

**RR:** No, I definitely didn't feel that. But I think it was a higher step for my husband to take. Maybe it's the difference between women and men, but I value therapy. I've used it a couple of times in the 30 years of our marriage, for my own growth. But for Elias and the non-dual teachings he does, I think there was a step to be taken to say, "My goodness, the psychological really needs to be worked with as much as the spiritual, as much as the non-dual, that there is a door that only counseling or that counseling can also help," not only, but also.

**RC:** I want to share something personal along those lines as well. It has to do with my own lovely wife. It's interesting because some people, especially women, might think on first glance about the lovely ways it would be to be married to somebody who is devoted to presence and emotional connection and to vulnerability. And besides the fact that I have my own blind spots and foibles and triggers like everybody else—

**RR:** No doubt! (laughs)

**RC:** No doubt! There's one interesting thing, which is to be married to me—and I'm not a lineage holder—means that you're married to somebody who travels around the world, who does very intense and intimate one on one client sessions and deep group intensive work with people who are wonderful and yummy in every way, and often exquisitely beautiful as well. So part of our work together as a couple, has been just to recognize that that can be a challenge to any relationship because I'm away a lot, number one, and then the people I'm away with, number two, are super attractive inside and out. And my wife is back home, living the more seeming, sometimes prosaic life, and it's a good growing place for both of us, but it's something that maybe at first I would have thought like, "Well, there's nothing to worry about. I mean, of course there's trust here and who cares about all of that?" But there's something a little bit more tender and vulnerable that needed to be both expressed and held because that's how it is between us.

**RR:** Oh, there's so many more problems to be the wife of a lineage holder that I didn't foresee. For us, as both of us are spiritual teachers, we both have our own students. But we had taught together for 22 years, side by side, around the world, doing both peace work as well as spiritual teachings together. And we knew for a number of years before his teacher died, that he was going to be a successor. So we really incorporated a lot of study and retreats with different teachers, into our life, still jointly. Then came the turning moment of his being named, and suddenly there's all this projection on him and on me that made co-teaching feel, at least to him, impossible to continue; that he should be the teacher, and I felt my buddy of over 20 years sort of abandoned me because his relationship became much closer with his spiritual path, with his senior teachers, as opposed to working with me who was his peer teacher.

And the projections of others in this lineage, which had a fairly patriarchal history, was resoundingly, "We're not interested in your wife. We're interested in you." And because these are often beautiful people, as you say, very often in this spiritual path there are more females than males, and they love you because of what you, the lineage holder or a teacher in your case, is offering them. And they don't tend to be as critical as a wife might be. So my husband would come home from a trip and not understand that we had an issue, a normal married issue to discuss. Why wasn't I getting how wonderful he was? Everybody who sat in front of him thought so. So we had to do a little grounding and it was probably easier between he and I at the beginning than it was between all of the students that became part of his lineage because they weren't coming for the couple. They were coming for the man and the history; and the history, as I've said, has a strong

patriarchal element in it, as do most lineages. Not just Sufi, but Buddhist or Catholic or whatever. It's got a patriarchal bottom history.

So a wife has to figure out how to be seen. I could just disappear, but it isn't my style. So it took me a few years to actually not resent the whole process and wish that it would go away, that we could just go back to the decades we have loved teaching together and working together all over the world. Eventually, while he travels a lot, I was left traveling to war zones and conflict areas by myself. And I missed him. I missed having him do that. He needed to make a choice where his time priority was and it was, of course, to his students.

And I understand it now, the resentment finally wore its way off, but still we're in therapy at this moment because now, having developed my own path, my own students, my own work, now how do we stay connected? With both of us having strong calls, independent, where does the marriage find its dues? We don't play golf together; we don't do kind of hobbies together. Our hobbies are our life's work. And so we're finding, we're practicing being advisers to each other, to stay in touch with both works, but my concern has been not to drift away and become so taken with what I'm doing that I have no time to be Elias' wife and a senior teacher in the Sufi way as well.

**RC:** I love just the idea of looking for where is the juice any time in a relationship because it's easy to drift away from that and it's easy to even believe that it's lost. But just to say in a curious way, "Where is it? Where might we be able to find it and kind of swim in it more?"—that's really great. Marshall Rosenberg, the creator of Non-Violent Communication, says that there's a question that is really wonderful to ask of one's partner or anybody with whom there's a loving connection: "How can I make your life more wonderful today?"

It's interesting because sometimes we really want to ask that question of our partners and other times we're not really interested in that answer because we're overwhelmed with whatever we need to be doing. But as you were talking, I thought of an interesting kind of corollary to Marshall's question because you said that when Elias came home, there was this moment where there was a different question, which is, "Why aren't you getting how wonderful I am?" And I thought that even though, as you described it, there was a little bit of maybe bubble piercing that needed to happen, also that's a question that most people are probably asking of their partner much of the time. And they want to be perceived as more wonderful than perhaps they're feeling. I just love that question, not that I think that there's a particular answer that would come in any moment or

situation, but, “Why aren’t you getting how wonderful I am?” I think, is a door opener to a lot of exploration.

**RR:** It’s better than, “Why are you giving me a hard time?” I think both of those are door openers and the first one you said is actually very close to what our counselor suggested to us; why don’t we ask each other how we can be of service to their dreams at this moment, or on this day, with what they’re doing. And we’re actually doing that now every morning, some kind of check in around that. What can I do for you? And I think the other one is we just don’t want to admit that we feel as wonderful as we do, and anyone who’s working in the world and having the world tell them they’re wonderful, which I don’t think most people get in the world. I think people working in corporations are often treated like they’re not doing enough all the time. But being blessed to be a spiritual teacher, or to work with people who are coming specifically to get your juice shared with them, you know, to awaken with it. You can begin to forget that you put your pants on one leg at a time, just like everybody else.

### **3. Severe Pain: Lessons From a Veteran**

**RC:** Yeah. I get that, too. Well, I want to shift subjects again because I want to make sure that we have the fullness of time to talk about one particular element in your life experience I think people will be really galvanized by. The quick background, which we may have time also to get into more, is that you have had a life with a tremendous amount of physical pain and challenge; your body has been really a difficult place to inhabit since you were very young, and you’ve worked with that in many ways over many decades. But as you shared with me previously, a short while ago, the pain got to a place, an intensity, an un-remittingness, where you felt like you couldn’t be alive any more. And you began a process, which I would love for you to share with people, an essentially year-long process of readying for death.

**RR:** That’s right. I think the back story: polio as an infant, chronic fatigue and then making the choice for the last 26 years to live in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma; a lot of stress and sicknesses. So two years ago, I came home from Afghanistan and could barely walk. The spine was beyond what I knew. And I had already been on medication for it, surgery would have ended up in a wheelchair; all my doctors agreed there wasn’t much more they felt they could do at that time. And as my teacher said, “Your nervous system can’t cope with the pain anymore.” I simply was unable. So I told Elias and my daughter. I didn’t ask them. I said, “This is not your decision, this is mine, and I’ve made the decision, that within a year I would like to end my life if I hadn’t died by then.”



**RC:** Let me jump in because there's so many pieces here that I want to make sure that we can flesh some of them out. Because I know that this story that you're telling will touch people and in some ways trigger people too, which I hope is in a good way. So I want you, if you could, just give us a few paragraphs about what that really meant for you. Because we all have pain, pain comes in gradations. And in order to get to the place that you did, the pain must have been really excruciating. And so just in the service of openness and sharing and just the fact that that pain, on a physical level, is such a part of our human existence, can you just describe a little bit more about as it got to the breaking point, what your daily experience or moment to moment experience was of being with and working with this pain.

**RR:** Oh, by the time it got to this point, I couldn't—you know, if you went to a doctor and he says, "How's your back, you know, out of one to ten," and you can say four or six or seven—I was at a ten all the time for over 9 months. And I was on a morphine and I was taking a lot of meds for the pain, but I couldn't function on the meds. The medications made me drowsy, I was sleeping most of my day or crying the rest of it. So think 9 months of sleeping, crying, or trying to live with pain, that must have been as if you were shot in the war. There were so many places—this had come gradually over many years. I'd had surgery in so many places and my spine was compromised. I'd worn braces, I'd been to healers, I had hit my limit on—I couldn't be a human being, I couldn't have a life.

**RC:** So there are people who would naturally understand and say, well, if it was ever that way for me, I wouldn't or couldn't remain here either. And there are other people, because of their belief systems, their early upbringing, who have a really hard time even contemplating the idea that one could or has the right to make that decision. So I'm wondering for you, was there any struggle in claiming that? You said that when you got to the point where you talked to your husband and your daughter, you didn't even ask them, you told them. Was the pain such that it blew away any reservations you might have about making that decision or was there a wrestling?

**RR:** The wrestling went on before I told them. I was raised Catholic. I certainly know—basically anyone whose belief system is centered around a God—and this is not a criticism of my Catholic upbringing, it's essential to who I am spiritually—it's not allowed. It's simply not permitted. No matter what condition you're in, whether that's fatal cancer or a brain tumor or unbearable pain, it's not okay. And I had to wrestle with those demons. I know people who have chosen to live in a

wheelchair and live their life, who've chosen to be crippled in a wheelchair. I coach a young woman who could do that.

And so it was a lot of—it's actually hard to talk about! It was a lot! I didn't want to deny that part of myself that I believe in, the part where you should just go on, as you can imagine, with decades of pain. That's very built up in me. You should go on. Not only should I go on, I should go on where people are suffering more. Maybe it's a neurosis, but it was a part of my life stream as a peace and justice worker. And I make myself—many of my connections in countries like Afghanistan were my own vulnerability, were my own physical suffering. It was easy to connect with women over there and for them to connect with me. I needed to lay down, I needed to take naps, I couldn't ride in some cars, and it's a stressful environment over there. The same was true in Iraq and Palestine and really in Burma for a while, and they loved me for it. I was well-loved on the road because of my physical suffering. It was an asset.

**RC:** Because we know that as Americans especially, when we travel abroad, even if it's to do service of some kind, that we carry a heavy burden in terms of the old stereotype of the ugly American, or the sense that we know best for other people. It seems like the vulnerability and transparency that came to you through your pain, it wasn't what you would have chosen, but it was a way to break through some of the more traditional tensions that might arise otherwise in those relationships.

**RR:** That's absolutely true. For example, it was much easier for people to come up to me, strangers that come up to me or allow me to come to them, than it was for Elias, who's a healthy, good looking, strong alpha male. I was the ice breaker, I was the one with the big smile and the cane or the brace I was wearing or whatever, and you're right, I would not have chosen it. If I could do it over again, I would do it without pain and cope with whatever difficulties that has. But within a few years—it took a couple of years—I was on the road for 26 years. I realized this was not a bad thing that I got malaria. Elias never got a cold in 26 years. I got malaria.

And suddenly, out of nowhere, I'm in a little hut on the floor. There are women coming who can't speak to me but bringing me lemon tea or herbal tea. Elias is out running a training and I'm laying there and I open my eyes and there's a group of women looking and patting my hands and giving me tea, as I said, for my fever. The world suffers and I think we make a mistake thinking that it is our happiness and our strength by which we help other people. It's often our own suffering and our

vulnerability that also can give. We don't have to wait to know a lot. For me, it was just show up, be with who you are, learn to be with these people, and listen. And I spent almost 26 years in that mode.

**RC:** I think that is so interesting and we could talk about that forever, too, but I want to come back because I asked the question that took us on this digression. Now, I want to bring us back. So you came to your husband and your daughter and you said, "I've made this decision." And so if you could take it up there, that would be great.

**RR:** For my husband and my daughter both, after an initial shock, they understood. They had lived with me, they had seen what my life was like. I didn't begin to get any negative—my 3 doctors, 3, all, I have to say, supported me. They wouldn't do anything. It wasn't their job to help me to die. I never asked anyone. I arranged a process that didn't require the help of any doctor or anyone else but myself. It's not illegal in Colorado to take your own life, so I wasn't breaking a law. It's illegal for someone to help you.

So I didn't want them to break a law either. But I began to get other feedback from my daughter's husband, who is more traditional and I love him like a son. And he said, "Well, I'm going to tell you, I don't approve of this. And I don't want my children to know about this. And it might even be morally wrong, I don't know." And I began to get what it would do to him, but I was still totally committed. I never had a doubt, Raphael. Once I made the decision, nothing shook me on it. It was a huge relief.

**RC:** I want to ask you a question about this, too. Because you were a person of great spiritual depth and practice, you'd been a spiritual teacher and an activist in the ways that we were just talking about, and people often, in these realms, will talk about pain as a teacher in a kind of clichéd way. They'll talk about the way that the rest of their life is informed by the relationship with the pain and even their relationship with God or spirit, however they describe it. And so I think it would also be helpful, even if it's just for a small bit, you share how your practice and how your perspective was involved at this time, as you made—and even perhaps in what led to it. In other words, do you see that without your practice and without your spiritual perspective, that the journey through this time would have been significantly different?

**RR:** I can't know that because the practice—where I live and what people call spiritually, has so informed my life these last years that I don't know what it would have been not to have love and

faith and trust in what we can see in this world, this universe, this part of my spirit, and also that which we don't see and don't know through our minds, or even our bodies, but which we know with this other capacity. I was so in that place that I felt I was making that decision in that context. It wasn't like something gave me permission. I have an intimate relationship with the One, the All, the Allah, God, the Source, whatever. I know that intimately and I know it both as radiant and as empty. I mean, I'm going to be 70 soon. I've practiced since I was a girl in a Catholic convent. I was making a living decision that I believed.

**RC:** But it sounds like—here's the key thing I'm wondering about. Even though you would have done anything not to be in pain or most anything I imagine and certainly wouldn't prefer to be in pain. I'm sensing, from what you're describing about yourself and your practice, that you also weren't resisting it in a fundamental way, that you weren't saying the pain should not be or there's something wrong with this moment that I'm having where I'm in terrible pain. Tell me if I'm wrong, but I'm sensing that it was your complete acceptance of the moment as it was with this incredible, unendurable pain that led you through your process, is that right?

**RR:** Well, my pain first showed up when I was 13. By the time I made this decision, I had had almost 50 years or more to reach that point and to—I mean, you can't go to the places I went or do the work I do without acceptance of the moment. No, I was past resisting the pain. I didn't mean I was past crying or past saying, "I want this to go away," and asking my husband to hold me or to take it away or saying that to doctors or wanting to increase this last year, my morphine. I mean, I wanted out of the pain. But that it was, I wasn't angry at it. I wasn't angry at the world for it.

**RC:** Well, thank you for that clarification. That's really helpful. So you were at the point where you were saying that you started to reconsider some of this because of how it might impact your son-in-law.

**RR:** Well, I went back—the period of reconsideration actually didn't, you know, I didn't want to hurt him. I told 4 other friends who I had asked for support. I'd watched the reactions on their part and they were all complex, more complicated than I expected. I thought everybody would be glad for me and that was very naïve. It complicated their thinking and their life and their understanding how to be in relationship with me. And I went away; I took time away with my complete bag of medicine and spent some time and was still clear. I wish I could—they didn't change my mind.

What did change my mind was one doctor who said, “Look, do you mind if I keep experimenting with medications on you?” Especially working with my brain, medications that are not—I don’t want to get him in trouble, but they’re not out for general use now. “Can I just keep experimenting with you?” And I said sure, you know, I’ll keep trying. And about 4 or 5 months before the date I had chosen—I don’t think it serves anybody for me to tell you what means I had chosen or anything, but it wasn’t violent and I was only asking Elias to be present with me. I wasn’t burdening anybody else with that. Something he was doing began to relieve the pain. It began to lessen and there was no denial that the pain went down a significant notch.

It got to that place where it wasn’t—I couldn’t say it’s unbearable. I couldn’t say that to the world, to Spirit, to myself anymore. It was just bad. And I struggled there because I had told everyone and I was embarrassed, I didn’t know how long this mediation would last. One doctor called it a remission. “Of what?” I said, you know. But what happened is life force comes in when pain isn’t standing at the door preventing it. It came in to me, just...I didn’t want to die. It wasn’t unbearable, I didn’t want to die.

And then I had to tell people that. And the shock, the reaction, from my husband and my daughter who simply didn’t know what to do. They had made their adjustment. And they weren’t able to say, “Oh mom! That’s great!” My daughter said, “I don’t want to go through this again. You know meds go up and down, you know you can’t trust this.” From her birth, she’s dealt with this and she didn’t want to go through it again if I should change my mind again. And Elias had been also carrying this for almost 28 years. And I think he, too, thought, “Is this a temporary help, am I going to go through this again. How do I manage my life?” He took off a year from his teaching to be with me this last year. And I was shocked.

Of course their responses changed. I mean, it didn’t take long for them to see this looked like it might be making a major difference. Something is going on. And it’s still in that process. I have begun to have an energy I haven’t had for decades. I have no chronic fatigue symptoms at all, the pain is bad, it gets a little higher and a little lower. I do have to rest more but I am lit by an energy that isn’t personal. I know this sounds woo-woo, but what followed my saying to them “People, I’m not in unbearable pain anymore. I don’t know if it’s the change in medication, I don’t know if it’s a remission or my spine moved. I don’t know what happened, but I am being born on an energy,” and I evidenced that in my life now. I’m working like I did when I was 40 in terms of the amount and I’m not working off of my agenda. I am doing only what comes to me. And something happened

that called into question what I understand about spirit. I mean, I don't know how to explain this shift in my body.

And with it, the shift in my willingness and readiness to die. I didn't continue to want to die at all once the pain wasn't that severe. And maybe people can understand then that a pain that drives you, so you, as a being, can't take it anymore, maybe then they'd forgive me my decision to want to relieve that. Because as soon as that shifted, and I think from the brain medications I'm taking, actually, I could reduce my morphine and was given medications that balance the effect of morphine, so I could walk around, occasionally I can grocery shop, I can be with my grandchildren, I take care of my grandson; none of this was available to me a year ago at this time.

**RC:** So just to be as clear as we can about this, I hear what you're saying is that this new energy was able to come in because the pain was mitigated to some degree that immediately changed your perspective on living. But also, I'm gathering, the way you just described it, that we're still talking about a person whose life has significant pain. So you talked about the 1 to 10 scale, so where do you find yourself on an average day right now on that scale?

**RR:** I live at a 6 to 7, which is higher than average, but I've been at a 6 to 7 throughout most of my 50's and early 60's, so I know this place. I am not doing the international work at the moment. It's very hard. I've been asked to go to Burma to train and I've been asked to come in to Iraq with a quiet delegation. I would love to do that, but neither my husband or my doctors want me to take that risk. So I'm changing—and this is not so easy—I'm changing my view of who I am. I mean, work I've done for most of my life, it's re-forming itself. But I do live with the knowledge that pain, when it gets unbearable, is in fact unbearable. And those words mean something. They don't mean it's really hard. They mean this body can no longer bear it.

**RC:** So let's talk about something that is implicit in the story that you've been sharing, and that is that during many decades of a life with pain at a 6 or 7. You were making choices what to do with your time, what to do with your energy, your will, that for many people, before this year that is so powerful to witness, even that would seem impossible. Many people would say if lived at a 6 or 7 level of pain, I think I'd just be in bed most of the time watching bad reality television or medicating myself out of it. And so I'm wondering what you can say—I know it's your own life, it might be hard to look at a little bit from outside it, but what you can say about how you came to that choice and how you came to it over and over again; different countries, different conflicts, different

peacemaking, how was it that for you, you could bring both of those things together: your great personal, physical pain and then this dedication to service all around the world.

**RR:** Well, there were times in the last decade where people said, “Are you trying to kill yourself with pain?”—people in the United States. Nobody asked me that in any other country. I think this was so important to me. I began at age 19 with pain, I left university to go down to Selma, Alabama and spend 2 years working with Dr. King and his civil rights workers. It kind of distracts you. It’s like people in pain, you will find are also often working with other people in pain, which I do now. I have a circle of people who are suffering very severe pain. They go to the hospitals. It was a way of not being obsessed with myself. I would’ve died sitting at home watching reality TV; I don’t know what that would have been; it would have been worse.

Anyone who feels strongly will understand this: that if you can know your life’s purpose, you’re blessed beyond being because there’s a happiness in that that rides over everything. And people would call me a happy person. I’m just fragile. That’s what my husband says, that’s what I tell people: I’m fragile. It’s easy for me to get sick or to get in pain that makes me have to go to my room. But I was in Iraq for 5 months and no problem, I just went to my room. Other times when we were working with tribal people, it was even easier; they carried my pack, I wouldn’t walk up hills. Everybody went out of their way to help me be there, much more than in this country. In other countries, it was easier to be cared for and easier to be honored than I find back here.

#### **4. Purpose Comes From Inside You**

**RC:** One thing I want to ask you about, because I can hear ears perking up in something you just said and also I can sense a certain pain that I’m often confronted with. You said something along the lines of it’s a great blessing to know your life’s purpose. And you clearly have. Do you have a sense from your own teaching or your own practice of what you would share, what’s true for you when people don’t know it? Many people come to me and that’s one of the places of great suffering, it’s as if they just haven’t found a sense of purpose in the world and there are some teachings that say that even asking that question, “What is my purpose?” can create suffering right away.

**RR:** That’s right.

**RC:** So because purpose has been central to you, how do you approach the lack of purpose in a person who really wants one?

**RR:** Oh, those are the kinds of people who usually come to me. How do you sum up a life's teachings of the things I do? I work with them over time, but first I tell them "Slow way down. Slow way down. Very seriously, when you come back next week, I want 10 percent of your schedule reduced. I want you to find time for you, because the purpose comes from inside of you and you can't hear it at the speed you're moving in." That's again why it's hard for the young generations that we've got now to, I think—many would call it spirit, but to simply hear within yourself, what's yours to do. You have to quiet down. I spent a lifetime taking retreats within different religious traditions. I've worked, most recently, the last 10 years, in a non-dual tradition where you don't talk about intention or purpose. You show up.

That's a great teaching for me because that keeps me from thinking about my purpose or trying to make it something. But now I know when I'm on it, as anyone does—you know when you're aligned and you know when you're not. And for me, it's not hard to re-tune. For others who've never practiced doing that, it takes some time, they need time with themselves, and with a coach, a partner, a spiritual teacher, saying, "You're fine, you've got who you are already."

**RC:** So I'm guessing that at some point in time you've come across this quote that I love from an African American theologian named Howard Thurman. He says about this topic, "Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask the world what makes you come alive and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

**RR:** I've got it pinned to my corkboard, I'm not kidding you, along with several others. You don't have to look out to find out what you're called to do. It's an inward experience of, I don't want to say 'self' because that's a bad word these days. It's an inward experience, that's all, what you need to do is give it time and not be told by spiritual teachers that you need to practice for 10 years or you need to be a male and come back as a male in order to get enlightened or you've got to walk 100 miles on your knees. As Mary Oliver says, you don't, you can just stop right now and tell yourself you'll stop again tomorrow to listen and rock in your chair. I've never been able to sit in a meditation posture and I used to force myself, thinking that pain was good for me. I sit in a rocking chair everyday now. And I watch what my mind produces and then I watch what happens in my life. And I'll tell you, to be yourself, you've got to be willing to not live a middle-class life. I can't promise you can be your greatest alive self and get a middle-class American life with it.

## **5. Begging For Money**



**RC:** Well I think that dovetails something I was going to ask you about. In a way, it's sort of a base detail, but I think it's also something that people might wonder about. You, and Elias as well, have traveled the world as peacemakers and activists for many decades, as you've shared. And there's this basic question, which is: how did you make a living doing that?

**RR:** It's not a base question. We write a whole chapter on it in the book we're working on because it's critical. From the beginning, I have been gifted with things like scholarships; I grew up in a housing project in St. Louis; one day later it blew up. So I came from poverty. I used scholarships in my schooling. Then I had a few years of good jobs, but once I started working in the non-profit world, you don't get benefits, you don't get health benefits, you don't end up with a pension. I beg for money. I've been begging for money since the 1970's. I asked first foundations, I'm good at writing foundation proposals. Elias and I supported ourselves on foundation proposals to go through the work we did.

This is important to know—then we got to the place where we realized that what needed to be done in the world was not something you could measure with the kind of measurement results that most organizations or foundations want back from you. That moment of change is not one you can predict on a two-year or five-year plan. So we were told by a couple of our friends here in Boulder, “Just do what you want to do and we'll help you raise money for it. And all we're doing is raising money for Rabia and Elias. No projects. You just show up over there and write an annual report and we'll help raise money here.” We did that for a long time.

Then in 1999-2000, I sold my home. I wanted to—our last kid was out of the house, I wanted to go on the road and not have to support what I was supporting back in the States. It was too much. And God bless Elias, he said, “Okay.” And we've never been able to buy a house since. I mean, we haven't got back in the market. I live in a smaller apartment now in Boulder. The reason I live in Boulder is my friends are here, but so are the people who fund me. Every year, I go through a process of anxiety and insecurity about how I'll manage the next year. So you have to be comfortable to live with a certain insecurity if you're not going to follow the American tracks. Living in the rest of the world doesn't cost much. I mean, once you can get yourself over there, there are church basements and ashrams and people who have rooms for you. My biggest thrill will be to check in to a hotel for a couple of days and have that privacy, but I've been willing to live at the level of the people I'm working with for 25 years, so it's a lot less than I have to do now, trying to make my way in America.

So you have to give up a lot of ideas about what's important; where you live or how much you need. I do like pretty things and I do raise money and then go out and buy sweaters, which makes me sometimes feel guilty, good Catholic activist that I am. But I've done it by asking others to support me.

I gave a talk when I came back from Iraq to several hundred people. And I said, "Look, if you can't be an activist, support one." I feel that if your life isn't one that enables you to go where the suffering is in the material world; we all suffer, I mean, the richest people suffer even more. I know because I ask them for money. We all suffer. But if you are the one who is able to go someplace hard and do something good, I think you can ask your friends to help you out. I've recommended that to many and it works for many.

**RC:** Right! Well, thank you for sharing that. It's just another piece of you and your experience that I think people will find really valuable. And we're coming to the close of our time together. I just love listening to you talking, feeling the deep presence that you've brought to all of these really distinct but just moving aspects of your life.

I want to ask you to come kind of all the way into the now with me because here you are on the other side of that year. You have been lit by this energy, you're working in the way you did when you were 40, as you told us. So there's a lot of blessing here; even when, at the same time, there's the pain that's a 6 or 7, and also you shared with us the way that your relationship is evolving and transforming and you're showing up for that. Is there anything else that we haven't talked about in your now where you find yourself at an edge, a learning place, a new place or perhaps an old one that's coming back in a different form? This goes back to my friend, who I've talked about in other interviews who likes to, after I talk to someone, just put it very bluntly and say, "What does she need to learn?" (laughs).

**RR:** My husband asked me that question before I got on the interview with you. What are you going to tell him your edge is? And I said, "Well, I'll see what I'm saying." He said, "Tell him stress." So I do get stressed. I mean, I got stressed in my 40's, I get anxious, having been a poor child. It's that old fear that comes up; just as people say, I don't follow it.

I need to learn a lot. I need to learn everything I teach, just like all teachers do. I need to learn when to stop; I need to learn to stay cheerful with people I'm working with; I need to learn everything I've already learned. It's never finished.

**RC:** Wait, wait, what? You mean there isn't a place where you look back and you say, "I'm done. I got to the plateau?"

**RR:** Well, I'm waiting for one of your interviews to say that. (laughs) No. I used to think there would be. And I'm sure now there isn't.

**RC:** This would not be the series to listen to for that proclamation because for better or for worse, my own filter of invitation is such that the people who intrigue me and who I want to have these discussions with wouldn't say that, but I'm also aware that there's not a shortage of people who continue to say that.

**RR:** Yeah, I don't pay much attention to them. I think there are people who I have met, read, or heard about who are way farther along the path of sitting in a constant place of knowing something that I don't. No, let me say that again. That was not right. There are people who I respect, who seem to have capacities greater than mine to not regress, but it's possible I just don't know them well enough. I mean, who knows what the Dalai Lama does on his off days? He's someone often willing to say he has a problem with anger. If he didn't tell us that, we wouldn't know it. So without a series like this where people are willing to 'fess up, I think we pretend because we want it to be so, that there's an end point. We're human beings as long as we're alive. We're human beings.

My grandson, in the last five years—I've learned as much from him as from all my non-dual training with Peter Fenner. You don't know where your next teacher is going to come and what it's going to disclose about your edge. So I'm open.

**RC:** I love that! And I also, as you were talking, I was thinking, "Oh! That would have been a funny name, too! I could have called it 'Fess Up'." (laughs)

**RR:** (laughs) Right! It was a brilliant idea! You are really graced with a brilliant idea for this series. And the fact that I personally benefitted from it makes that easier to say than as one teacher to another. This is a gift and I think the more that teachers are willing to 'fess up' with their students, as they sit there on their chair at the top or in the circle or wherever; particularly if men teachers would teach more from their personal life, than most seem able to reveal, I think it would be a more balanced spiritual view that our world had. I think there is an imbalance there between the feminine consciousness and masculine consciousness. And the masculine stands on top upfront of the personal too often, and pretends it isn't going on at the same time.

**RC:** Well, I love that! I really appreciate everything you were just sharing. I also really appreciate the conversation that you had just before our interview with Elias with the subject of stress coming up because I think that sitting out front or sitting above is often easy in a satsang or workshop environment where it's set up for the teacher to project peace and to project presence. And I love how you were talking about the Dalai Lama on his off days. I think that a corollary of that question might be what does my spiritual teacher look like when he or she is a half hour late for an important appointment or has to do 5 things at the same time while having a migraine just in order for his or her life or family to continue to function. So stress is an endlessly important topic.

We've talked in the series before about Ram Das' famous saying, "If you think you're enlightened, go spend a week with your family." But beyond that, if you think you're enlightened, just notice how you are when you're at your worst and when you're at your most stressed.

**RR:** Well, and change your definition of enlightenment. I mean, it's such a fraught word. I mean, be full of light, like Ram Das is or the Dalai Lama is. Be full of life when you're talking about the Taliban or your interviewing or working with someone on anything. Just don't worry about hitting a stage. I think this is one of the reasons that my energy, whatever it is that coasting things along right now, is really focused on the feminine, more than I ever have been. I mean, I was an active feminist in the 70's and that word turned bad. But I'm very much concerned with feminine consciousness now and feminine wisdom in the spiritual realm, as well as with every decision point we've got ahead of us in this world.

**RC:** I love how you were saying just a moment ago, don't worry so much about being enlightened, just be full of light and full of life. To me, you are the embodiment of both of those. I'm really honored to have spent this time with you and even more honored that somehow this series has played a role in your life. In terms of purpose now, I think I can go and take a nap (laughs) because that all worked beautifully.

**RR:** I'm going to do the same thing. But find out what gives you that light, for anybody. Find out what gives you that light and that joy. And then no matter how strange it seems, follow it a little bit. Do it again. I go down in what I call my mall quest, mall ministry. I go down and talk to the homeless and young kids or whoever's hanging out in the Boulder Mall late in the afternoon or even early evening. It's the best I can do to get to a third world country in Boulder (laughs).

**RC:** All I can say is I didn't think there was anything that can get me to a mall anymore, but if you were there, I would come. So Rabia, thanks again so much!

**RR:** And thank you for this series.

## **Mariana Caplan**



Mariana Caplan, PhD, MFT, is a licensed psychotherapist, professor of yogic and transpersonal psychologies, and the author of seven books in the fields of psychology and spirituality, including, “The Guru Question: The Perils and Awards of Choosing a Spiritual Teacher” (Sounds True, 2011), “Eyes Wide Open: Cultivating Discernment on the Spiritual Path” (Sounds True, 2010), and the seminal “Halfway Up the Mountain: the Error of Premature Claims to Enlightenment.” She is a leading spiritual psychologist, using somatic approaches to psychotherapy to support spiritual practitioners and teachers with the process of healing trauma and moving towards psychospiritual integration, and working with the complex discernments that arise in the context of spiritual practice and in spiritual communities. [WWW.REALSPIRITUALITY.COM](http://WWW.REALSPIRITUALITY.COM)

### **1. What We Long For**

**RC:** We were just getting a chance to catch up a little bit before we started the actual interview and it put me back in the times when we would go for a walk and have long talks and talk shop when we were in Marin county, California, back in the early 2000’s and I have a sense that this is going to be an experience of which I’m going to be forgetting that people are listening and just talking to you the way we’ve always talked.

**MC:** Yes, right. In some way, I think that’s what we long for, right? To sit in the living room together and to be real and elicit that from each other.

**RC:** But speaking of communing that way, I just want to say that I feel in this moment, really grateful to be talking to you, and also, I just feel a little bit jittery because I was noting so many of the themes I want to touch on with you and it was making me just kind of eager a little bit and

anxious. And so I wanted to breathe into that, knowing that it will all be just right, but I also wanted to presence that sensation I had so that I could be as authentic with you as possible.

**MC:** Thank you. And as you said from your introduction, it's an ongoing conversation, so I'm ready to pick up what we can and put the dot, dot, dot, and let us keep growing and continue it in all the forms that we do over the years.

**RC:** Yes, and so I do want to check with you before we start talking about stuff and just to see how you are finding yourself in this moment, what's your experience, mind and body with your—

**MC:** Well, I'm in a really good mood. I have a one and a half year old son and I'm just completely in love with him everyday. Of course we all have ups and downs and better days and worse days, but I had a really great time at the coffee shop with him this morning and I'm excited for this call, and as I was telling you before the interview, when I got your invitation, it reminded me of the kind of things that I like to do with people, and I'm a little bit nervous because I know you're wise in many ways, so I expect to be challenged a little bit.

**RC:** Wow! I appreciate that reflection and I just want to remind you—well, maybe you don't even really know this, but in everything that I do these days, safety is paramount. So anything that you experience as a challenge, hopefully will come with also a sense of complete safety.

**MC:** Great!

**RC:** Yes. So because we do have our history together and we have this shared intention that we were both just speaking to, I want to reverse something in our talk from how the talks and the series have been going so far, which is we warm up and we talk a lot about the work of the person and what they're sharing and somehow I do my best to eventually wind the conversation to their own personal life, their own personal and spiritual path, their own learning. And I thought because how you are in the world is already so brave and transparent that it would be good to start at the end, so to speak, and to ask you just to reflect in the moment: What do you see yourself learning now? What are you opening to these days as you are living your life as a mom, you're still teaching. What is kind of fresh and as yet un-metabolized in you?

**MC:** Well, in the past several years, probably since we've talked, I put a lot of attention into studying somatic psychotherapy, of all things. And the reason that I did that, right, I had my books and I had my doctorate and I had my license, but when I looked at where I was still getting stuck,

and we're teachers were still getting stuck, and long-term practitioners were still getting stuck. It was in a certain area of the stuff and of the trauma. Trauma in a very broad sense of it, but the trauma that still lives inside of our bodies and the layers that even a whole bunch of insight doesn't seem to get to.

So I think one of the benefits that we share is if you teach things enough, eventually you have to start practicing them or you can't forget as easily. I guess the series is called Teaching What We Need to Learn, and long gone are the days that I expect myself or the teachers to have integrated everything they teach, because that's the whole process, from what I can see. But in teaching this somatic technology, largely to spiritual practitioners or teachers—I'm practicing it more in the moments when I would forget.

So what that looks like in real time is that the ways that anxiety or sorrow, for me, those would go more than rage, for example—and I think we each have our own tendencies—still live in my body. I'm attempting to practice throughout the day bringing love and learning to digest those sensations and integrate them in my body throughout the day. And learning how to practice that efficiently and on the fly, as you said, in motherhood, but attending to that so that I can really try to become the integration that I'm teaching and not try to become it because I'm teaching it, but try to become it because I long for it and I believe in it.

**RC:** So of course I'm over here nodding and Amen-ing because in the work that I do with people and that is the focus of my own life, it's very much about becoming more embodied and tuning in to the sensations that are going on within my body because I recognize when I'm not in awareness and connection with those sensations, I'm not fully present and I'm often triggered or activated unless or until I come back into connection with what's happening in my body. So that really is the essence of what I've come to teach and practice.

And it's interesting, we've had a parallel path, perhaps, in that sense because when I first started writing and teaching, it was more about being with what is all of it, which of course is still the foundation, but I came to see also that it was the somatic piece that was the most difficult for people and where people were most stuck. And then also came to recognize that because emotions exist only in the physical body, that if we're not connected physically, then we're also not connected emotionally. And so I started really orienting my work to emotional awareness and connection



because it seemed like everywhere I looked, my own life included, that emotions were the nexus between self and spirit.

**MC:** Yes. And it's like the perspective on oneness just gains more dimension. So years ago, I went to a talk, I saw that Ram Dass was speaking here in Marin; maybe it was a year after his stroke maybe, seven or eight years ago, and he was giving his talk and there was a young seeker in the back of the room, looked like he popped in fresh from India. And in that beautiful and sincere way, raised his hand and he said, "Ram Dass, Ram Dass, Ram Dass! Is it still all about 'Be Here Now?'" I read the book and it got me to India. Can I believe that?" And Ram Dass, in his stroked and humbled way said like, "Yeah! It still is!" But how I understand that has changed. And now it's about being here now with everything that is and all the different levels: internally and externally and relationally and environmentally and politically and with the relative and with the absolute."

And in so many of the spiritual circles, I think, at least in a collective spiritual culture, we're starting to get over that in some way, or shift because people's experience reveals this need to work out the emotional level, but there's been some kind of contradiction or separation, as though the psychological is less or other than the spiritual. When in fact it's very often the doorway into the closed pockets of the very consciousness that we are longing for. Years and years of hardcore spiritual work deepened my interest in psychology.

I had a wonderful teacher for sixteen years and he still is my teacher, but he passed away a year and a half ago, Lee Lozowick and one of the wonderful things about Lee is he let me argue with him and wrestle with our differences, while still really accepting me. And one of our great debates was about psychology because I've always had a passion for it and he had less of a passion for it, like many of the non-dual approaches, even though his wasn't a classically non-dual approach. And like years and years of spiritual life threw me back into deeper psychological studies, but those psychological studies when held in a non-dual context, which doesn't mean the person's in non-dual realization all the time, but held in that way, it just brings so much more dimension and humanness and practicality to the field.

## **2. Needs**

**RC:** Yeah, and there's something about coming more into touch with our own emotional life and history as it has really shaped who we are and our perception of the world that also leads to a different kind of relatability with other people. I was having a conversation for the series last week with Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt of the world of Imago Relationship Therapy. We

were talking about how relationships are a crucible, and I was speaking about how often people who are having trouble with their relationship will say to their partner, “I don’t know why this is happening with you. It doesn’t happen anywhere else in my life.”

And so what I was describing is that if we’re all to some degree sandpaper and when we move through the world with our friends and family and at the grocery store we’re at least a tenth of an inch separate in our sandpapers, but then we get into intimate relationships and our sandpapers are inevitably going to rub against each other and cause that unique sort of friction. And so the reason that I wanted to share that piece from that discussion is because this spiritual psychological continuum is really alive for me around the subject of needs. On the far side of the continuum that we can call the spiritual, we learn and practice liberation and non-attachment and ability to be with all that is that you were just talking in relation to Ram Dass.

And then on the psychological side of the continuum, we find out what are our needs, and I think that there’s something in me, for instance, that is even a little uneasy about that—having needs. And I see that that’s also the case often with my clients. You might see in the world of non-violent communication, Marshall Rosenberg talks about how needs are beautiful, needs are sacred. So I’m wondering for you, how do you relate to just the idea in your own self and in your own life about your needs and how that plays into your overall spiritual process.

**MC:** Yes, that’s a great question. So all of these answers are more off the cuff as opposed to my global view of it because I haven’t phrased a question like that to myself in a long time. So in the spirit of this interview series, and I don’t know why it is but I’m really okay with my needs and having them, although I’ve been steeped in spiritual practice forever, since my teens. And I think the trick—I mean, I’m not only okay with them, but I’m feel quite entitled to them. And in appropriate situations, definitely willing to voice them. But the discernment here, and that’s been the subject that I’ve been on for several years, since *Eyes Wide Open*, which was about cultivating discernment on the spiritual path. So I often think in terms of discernments or refinements, and the questions; and the discernment being: what happens when life doesn’t correspond and give me what I think I need?

So I don’t mind, I like having them, I do have them, and I fully accept that; I have lots of wants and lots of desires. But the spiritual practice piece comes in when what I, at least perceive I need, I don’t get from the outside at least. And that’s where practice does come in. So I’m okay with having the

needs, but I understand that I don't get them all, and certainly not in the timing that I would prefer. It's always tricky to discern between a want and a need, what I really need, or what I maybe want. And experience shows me that just because I experience it as a need or a want, it doesn't mean that I'm going to get it. And what I often feel in those moments, because that comes with a burn; I have a need, and then it's not being met—that's where the body comes right in because if we go to a body level, there's discomfort then. And can I internally use the practices to be with and digest gently that discomfort and then still carry on in life and whatever's in front of me with...I was going to say elegance or like show up, and attend to whatever's in front of me.

I have a close friend and she's been a teacher in the Hoffman Institute; so a quite sophisticated psychological 10-day process, and she's been one of the senior teachers for many years. And I remember years ago—she's worked with hundreds and hundreds of students over the years—and she said, “Mariana just because you want something in life, doesn't mean that you get it. And really great people with really sincere”—I'm paraphrasing, “but you know, with really sincere intentions and great capacities. Sometimes you get what you want/need and other times you don't. And life doesn't seem to be entirely fair in that way. And what are we going to do about that?” And that stayed with me. And for whatever reason, as I gradually grow up in the path, I feel more willing to accept that. But when I accept that, then it kind of liberates the space for me to have my passions, and my desires and my wants and my needs, and then the task of meeting life as graciously as I can when I don't get them.

**RC:** So one thing I'm hearing is that it takes psychological awareness and sophistication to be able to know what our needs are and to separate them, as you said, from wants. And then also, when those needs aren't met, it seems like that's the perfect place for spiritual practice. And I know for me, that moment is so key because I'm wanting some life that I'm not having. It's supposed to be this, but it's not. And I see that also so often in clients and workshop participants, which is, a lot of their suffering is from having a belief that they are meant to be having a certain life and a certain experience, and if they could just get past all this crap that they're having to go through, then they could have that life. And it seems that something about spiritual discernment, to use that word that you shared, is recognizing that that stuff that we're trying to get over so we can have our real life is actually our journey.

### **3. Turning Toward the No is the Yes**

**MC:** Yes, and that's all we've got, right? Really. And how many people's lives have turned out the way they imagined, that it should? I can think of one friend, you know? They have lots of money and she married the handsome guy and even so, even so, it doesn't prevent the human suffering and the relational challenges. But that person aside, and as the author Annie Lamott says, "We don't like those people anyway!" The rest of us, you know, life doesn't—even if we didn't think we had a picture, even if we thought like I'm open and I want the path to unfold, somewhere inside there, there was a picture because as a child we played house, or we played whatever we played. And even when our lives turn out beautiful or horrible, even if our lives are full of grace, and are given to us, they're still not turning out how we imagined. Life is so rarely corresponding to our wish of exactly how we would like things to be.

And there's often where our psychology comes in because in that moment of a frustrated need and the moment that surely has a deep history to a time when we were much younger and didn't have the consciousness or the skills or development to handle that. And this is taking it a bit further, but a couple of Tibetan Buddhist kind of big sisters of mine over the years, Lama Palden and there's this wonderful, wild Australian nun who I've known over the years, Robina Courtin. And both of them, in their own way, really taught me about, in a practical way, how psychology and karma are connected. And so even our needs at the moment, we could easily trace back to our psychology with the right direction. But then, that psychology, that psychological basis is informed by whatever we perceived to have come before it. It's informed by the historical time and place that we were born into, and our parents and their history, and the wars and the immigration; their depressions, and their alcoholism or whatever they went through.

So all of that, if karma is too vague, even if we think of like our long familial lineage into the past and how it's shaped us. And then we grow up and then we are in a moment where we want some contact and we're not able to get it and we feel frustrated or angry or lonely or empty; by rising to the occasion of even attempting to work with that in the moment and understanding that it actually is difficult because it's coming with a huge velocity. It wasn't just a need that came up this afternoon. When we attend to that, we're doing historical, multi-generational karmic work. While at the same time, we're just taking care of our emotions in the moment. So I have more and more respect for it. And more and more care for how difficult it is to do.

**RC:** Yes. Something that comes up as you're describing that for me is that I work with many people who have experienced serious trauma in early life and are doing their best at whatever

decade they are in of adulthood to unwind and to heal that. And so often they reach a kind of existential moment where they recognize that there's an emotional legacy in them, let's say of great shame or unworthiness or just pain and hurt. And with every bone in their body, their first reaction is they don't want it. They just want to be free of it. And then in this existential moment that I'm describing, they come to a recognition that if they turn toward it and welcome it and love it with a gentle attention that it has never received previously, then the greatest possible healing and wholeness can result.

And conversely, if they continue to turn away from it, then they're choosing to re-wound themselves in the very same way that they were so unjustly wounded in the first place. And sometimes it's the positive invitation that galvanizes someone to go forward into that deeper integration and acceptance. Sometimes just to be honest, it's the opposite. It's the "I would never, ever want to be aligned with what was done to me. So now, once and for all, I'm saying, 'not that.'" And somehow that gives them the leg up to turn towards what has been hardest and to embrace that too.

**MC:** Yes. And whatever it takes.

**RC:** Yes, right. Exactly!

**MC:** And that approach is in all the mystical tradition somewhere, you know? Jesus said, "If you turn towards that which is within you..." this spoken from a Jew, you know? (laughs) "What is within you will liberate you and if you don't turn towards that which is within you, that will be your bondage." I'm paraphrasing, you know.

**RC:** From the Gospel of Thomas—it's always been beautiful.

**MC:** But what else happens is we try to turn toward it and we can't because we hit some kind of wall or some kind of resistance. And then we just need to be taught and remember and apply and we can turn toward that resistance and love that resistance and hold that resistance, and we're still turning toward it. And turning towards the resistance and turning toward the no is the yes, and that's another piece of what's alive for me. It's like making that really practical. Sometimes I turn toward myself and it's like, "No!" "Okay, can I love that No?" "No!" "Can I love the no loving the no?" "Well, maybe! Okay! I'll try!" And in that is the love. And in that is opening. And it doesn't really matter if I'm loving that or in the heart of it because it's all a spectrum of opening anyway.

**RC:** Yes, because when you meet resistance with more resistance, you just create further resistance. And it goes on ad nauseam, literally. And when you meet your resistance with even just a smidgen, a sliver of acceptance, then there's something new, something new can enter the space, absolutely. And one of the things that I share with people all the time is that I really have come to recognize that we can only go forward as fast and as fully as the slowest and the most tentative part of us can go.

**MC:** Mmmmm, beautifully said!

**RC:** Well, thank you! Because what happens is if we push, there's always push back. And so there is what I heard many years ago in the world of voice dialogue, Hal Stone and Sidra Winkleman's approach to Gestalt-oriented therapy is so many people we come across in our psychological and spiritual circles have inside of them what Hal and Sidra would refer to as the New Age Pusher. Like once I recognize that personal and spiritual growth is the way to go, I want all of it and I want it on a schedule. And so sometimes we have to recognize exactly what you were just describing like, "Wow! This resistance is coming strong and that is where I am and anything else would be pretend and a kind of a violence to myself because I'm telling a story about where I think I am or should be and leaving behind the precious, as yet unfelt material."

**MC:** Yes. Right. But like how long does it take us to understand that? I think probably at least fifteen years, give or take five, you know?

**RC:** Yes!

**MC:** Oftentimes we come to the spiritual path motivated by a wound, or our brokenness somehow leads us there, and a lot of us, I certainly include myself and probably someone like you and many of our friends who work in the field. We come with that drive and a forward movement and it's not even until someone tells us; until we get frustrated enough or until it's shown by our experience, it's like we come in and it's like, "I want it all. Give me the drug or the technique or the whatever. How many days of straight meditation without talking to somebody does it take to get to the heart of it and pierce the thing and excavate it, right? Yoga training, okay, 18 hours a day! 8 hours a day of asana! 4 hours a day of Sanskrit!"

That's how I did everything for a long, long time. And then somewhere along the way, when you're too tired for your age or illness or heartbreak or some significant obstacle that lands to you

sufficiently on your butt happens, then we remember when we were 19 and in college, something about the Tao Te Ching, like, “Oh, yeah! The slow overcomes the fast, the soft overcomes the hard.” And I was like I always hated those passages when I was younger. And now they’re appealing! Now equanimity and harmony are appealing. When I was young, it was like, “Okay, if all the spiritual traits are like equanimity and harmony, but also like fire and breakthrough.” I would have gone for all of those. I would’ve pushed aside all of the harmony and equanimity and those are the kinds of things that are attractive to me now. And who knows what it’s going to feel like in another 20 years, right?

**RC:** Yes, yes.

**MC:** Then there might be an urgency because I’ll feel like I’m approaching the last big decades of my work life and I will have to put up the fire again. Who knows?

**RC:** Yeah, well being able to see all of that, I think, is really sweet. I know that I sometimes look back at my 16 year old self and some of what I see makes me cringe but also I see that there’s a lot that my 16 year old self could teach my 51 year old self. And when you talk about fire and equanimity, I’m really drawn to just the yes and yes and yes, because so often whatever I was embracing, like at 16 and the fire, in order to embrace it I had to turn away from so much, including equanimity. And so the practice for me, over the years, has been to just keep unfolding into more, as opposed to taking sides. And so it is truly liberating to me to imagine my way into a fire that is fed by equanimity and equanimity that is fed by fire, or something like that.

**MC:** Yes.

**RC:** So I want to just touch on a couple of things with you related to these themes. One of them is in certain circles which I know are not yours, but you’re familiar with them, they’re nearby, you hear people talk so often about creating our own reality. And I like to say we create our reality and our reality creates us, and it’s kind of a mobius strip, so therefore I don’t have to debate that question. But one thing that was coming to me as you were sharing about looking backwards sometimes, is that we’ve come to know not just spiritually, but also scientifically through brain research and such, that our organ of perception and our map of reality is created out of our experience.

And so the idea of having clear seeing, at least from the relative level of the personality, is always going to be a quixotic idea since I can't even be sensing the reality around me without using the mechanism that has been shaped by my past experience. And so actually for me, there's a liberation in that to some degree we just get to give up. It's not like I can perfect my perception. But also, it inspires me to open further and to be touched by grace when I can, to tap into a more unconditioned awareness that at least in my experience, really does seem to be let's say a field of consciousness in which that life-shaped organ of perception is functioning but that the awareness is not limited to that. So I'm just wondering how that is for you because you have dived so deeply into states of consciousness that are extraordinary and where you're, as you've written and spoken about sometimes, suffused with God-love. And so how do you hold the journey into those unitive states and then also the limitations of our perceptions based on how we were shaped?

**MC:** Yes. Somehow when you share that very eloquently worded question and reflection on it I think about many things, but then there's like a softness inside of me. Why? I don't know. How do I hold all that? I just kind of soften inside and make space for all parts of that equation. I've run a group for my teacher in the Bay Area for several years and one of the well-read students in the group was always in the question of free will: is it all done for us, is it grace or the manifestation versus kind of this larger karmic wave. And all of that seems to be quite true. I had a reaction for a while with the manifesting thing as it was propagated by *The Secret* or that huge wave. And why the reaction? Partially because I thought it was being hugely over-sympathized.

Too many people are blaming themselves for their cancer or their accidents or their illnesses in a way that seems destructive and unnecessarily painful. Too many people were imagining if they could just think about something in the right way, then they should be getting it and what was wrong with them, that they weren't. And on the other hand, as the years go by and some of my friends who really try to work in that direction have discovered really interesting things or created really interesting results from holding that in a certain way. My interest and my respect kind of opens again. And it's like it's all true. It's all true and it's all true at it's own level. And no, not all the levels are exactly equal but they all seem to have their place in life, like I'm so grateful for the mystical states that have opened up at different periods of my life. And sometimes I've been able to tap into manifesting capacities and it's been really useful and successful to certain degrees.

#### **4.Endlessness**



And then other times, I'll remember things like what Jung or a lot of the great thinkers have said about 10 percent of our experience is conscious, give or take. And a lot of it is unconscious. There seems to be one way that we can experience that everything comes as grace and another perspective where we see that all of our practice and effort is totally relevant in relationship to that grace somehow. My only response these days or my main response is to drop into my body and feel as much of my totality as I can and then take care of what's in front of me and just move forward. I love yoga, that's been another, probably the largest focus of my studies in the past several years and much into the philosophy and those aspects of the yoga and the sage, Patanjali, who outlined the modern yoga sutras. He lays on this serpent and the serpent is called Anantha. It's like it's all resting in this endlessness. And in the human domain, on all my especially earlier jaunts around the world, saint-seeking, seeking out saints and interviewing them, making up some book so I'd have some excuse to interview them and have contact with them.

One of them, who was Yogi Ramsuratkumar, who was my teacher's teacher—really a kind of saint of old who was in Southern India, in the same village where Ramana Maharshi lived, I experienced what that endlessness looks like embodied in a person. And Yogi Ramsuratkumar had had his “enlightenment” when he was around 30. And he never rested in that and never looked back. He just kept on developing and developing and it seemed like he just picked up velocity as he went along. And I met him when he was about 76, I think. 70-something. And I didn't even know what I was seeing at the time. I just knew at 25 that I should let in as much as I could so that later I could understand it or think about it when I had more knowledge or more perspective. And what I was seeing was this endlessness.

And that's what I anticipate of life. And even people in the field who have been our spiritual superheroes and some of them have become our friends and some of them have died. But the ones that keep practicing, keep investigating, they're earlier convictions, what were convictions. And the teachings, some of them remain and some of them changed into something else. Because with all of that insight and non-dual awareness they also are subject to the same developmental principles that affect all of us. And they were growing up and they get illnesses and they have teenagers and they work with students for a long time and see that some things changed and some things done and then there is perspective, even that's based on a non-dual understanding, they're teaching changes. And I appreciate that because we're growing up together, just growing. It's so humbling, you know? It's so humbling!

**RC:** Yeah, and you have said that ten years ago, how you would look at a number of the most important themes in your life and your work was very different from how it is now because you allow yourself to grow in that way. And you're speaking of your teachers that way too, which brings me to ask you a question that you may have just answered, so you can say "done" or you can say "there's more here." But in this realm that we've been discussing today of the both/and and the yes to this and the yes to everything, which puts us all on a certain equal footing; we're all in this together and working with it as we can over time. You've also said about the teacher in India who you were just speaking about, that he was the greatest person you have ever known. And you also said about your teacher Lee that you'd absolutely want to be in a relationship with the most helpful, inspiring, and foundational human being that you have known. And you have known so many.

So I think it would be really helpful if there is anything more you'd want to add to what were the standouts of those teachers that even though we're all in this evolving and growing as we do, that inspired you, something that you saw and kind of drank from at their well, that galvanized you in a different way? Because I think that even though almost all of the work that I do is about de-pedestalizing—I think there's so much to learn from people who have experienced great realization, and I'm wondering what you might distill as the essence is their greatness?

**MC:** Right, and this holding of the both/and, that is a discernment, they are a critical discernment is that even as we de-pedestalized—nice word—and understand our essential quality, that doesn't contradict recognizing people with more knowledge and skill sets that we want to learn from. I don't find any contradiction there.

**RC:** Me neither. But that's why I really wanted to know what was it.

**MC:** And in fact even short of finding people of that skill level, if I end up having a free weekend sometime in the next 15 years as my son grows up, I would be happy to learn from you. If I got the chance, I got invited to a seminar at Esalen with a teacher friend of mine, I'll jump on it! I love to sit at the feet of my friends. Even not the most realized people in the world, but just drink, drink from what they have because we're each cracking, we each have this unique perspective. That's a Marc Gafni term, we have this unique gift and this unique perspective, and we're each cracking a piece of the puzzle, and I'm thrilled to drink from those wells, too. Like what did you learn, what's the piece you got to show me here. And I don't have to agree with all of it and I don't have to see

you as perfected to want to drink from that. So that's not exactly your question, but I think that's important.

**RC:** Although I think it's really important and I still think—we only have a little bit of time left, but I would love to hear just a few sentences about what there was drinking there that was so powerful for you.

### **5. Papa Ramdas Plays Football With the Planets**

**MC:** Well, with Yogi Ramsuratkumar, I mean he was really different. He was really different in a sense that the kind of ways that I would describe him, I couldn't really describe anybody else I've met. Like after hanging out with him for seven months, I had this feeling that I could like try to reach out and touch him and my hand, would go straight through him. Or sometimes I would look up and I'd see a heart without skin on it that was just like bleeding compassion. I wasn't seeing it entirely but that's what I would be watching. Or I'd be watching this comet shoot into infinity without stopping.

There was a quote about his teacher Papa Ramdas of India that said, "Papa Ramdas plays football with the planets." And Yogi Ramsuratkumar would call me up and the women who attended to him and he'd have us walking around this big darshan hall with some orchids he was giving and he'd be like just kind of through us, wielding planetary forces and God knows what, literally. But it was palpable. So it was really just quite awesome and it was so utterly, completely selfless. I mean, it was really magnificent and completely consistent.

So to that kind of being, I don't really expect, even what leads into the saints, I don't expect to encounter that more than once in my life. But I can share, I can share little bits from that and part of what I take back from that to the world through books or through a conversation like this is that meeting someone like that completely raises the bar. I mean, it takes the ceiling off of wherever we imagine it to be. And it just removes the ceiling, removes the top and the bottom. I know that's a little uneasy because we're stuck in groundlessness, but it was magnificent. It completely reshaped how I thought of reality and it freed me from getting stuck in the traps of overestimating any degree of realization that I would have throughout my life. That's really nice. I'm sure I'll have my moments of inflation and this and that, and it just raised the bar so high that it's very liberating in that way, that perception of endlessness, it's real to me. It's not an idea.

And then there's someone like Lee. And when I met Lee, I was also really spiritually in love with him, because when you're falling spiritually in love with a teacher, you can have all those feelings because a teacher is somewhere where you're not and it opens up these portals, not for everybody, but sometimes. Lee would say to me from the beginning, "Yogi Ramsurat Kumar is a lion, and I'm a mouse. Don't forget, I'm a kitty cat. I know you can learn from me but I'm a kitty cat and pay attention to what the lion is doing because you're not going to get that from me." But I got other things and one of the things, the domain that I felt from Lee—even beginning with that sentence doesn't really encapsulate the 16 years of close contact with my teacher, but Lee was utterly reliable, he respected my spiritual longing from the moment I met him when I was 25 and that had never even been seen or taken seriously. He never let me down. He continued to grow in his own life, continued to evolve his teaching. Always remained humble. Even when he was being ostentatious and didn't sound that way or was doing, you know, some huge teaching. He let himself be changed by the seasons of life and by what happened in his student body. He was so, so, so human and had a foot in the world of awakening at the same time, and kept everything real, and made sure that we did too. It was very hard to get carried away with one's self in his field, while at the same time he would empower you toward your gifts. I mean, I was 26 and he said, "Write a book," and I said "You're out of your mind. I'm this little girl with crushed self-esteem and some genuine longing. I can't write a book!" And I did and in many ways that empowerment, it led to most of my friendships and all the work that's assigned to me in the world and conversation like this.

So kind of like that. It was always about being on the spectrum of endlessness and accessing great spiritual awareness and practicing that in relationship to each other. And you know, another thing that comes up really relevant for me these days is in the community with Lee, children were always put first and taken care of. They weren't put outside of the domain of spirituality or community or growth. So in continuing my life of practice and teaching, where my formal practice time—I told a friend recently it's been reduced by like 900 percent. That was my estimate. And that might even be like a light estimate in terms of formal practice, and then I'll grump out on certain days and be like, "Oh my God! Am I still evolving if I can't practice 15 hours of yoga a week anymore?" And then I remember the stories that Lee repeated from Yogi Ramsuratkumar in our community.

One of the ones was that a mother of twins was one of the great devotees, she had twins, and she couldn't see her teacher anymore, hardly ever, and she showed up when her twins were like 2 years

old and she was crying at the feet of the master and, “Oh my God! I never get to practice anymore! I don’t get to see you...” And Yogi Ramsuratkumar got really fierce and he just said, “Child is God! Child is God! Serve your child and you’re serving God!” And he sent her away. “Go take care of your kids!” It’s an adjustment, but of course it’s true, because whatever we’re bringing consciousness to and love and relationship too. That’s the domain of our practice.

**RC:** So it’s a wonderful segue to a question I wanted to ask you. We can consider this as kind of the lightning round because I have these two more questions to ask you. The first one is what comes to your mind just in this moment about something you’ve learned personally, emotionally, spiritually, as a result of having your baby, Zion.

**MC:** Okay, so what’s in this moment? So that means I’m not going to reflect on it so much. Rather than what I learned, what I’ve experienced is an opening of the heart that I was always looking for in spiritual practice, in mantra, in sitting at the feet of Mother figures, I just feel all the time, or all the time as in, definitely morning, noon, and night, spread throughout it. It’s like a quality of love that no spiritual practice got me to, I experience daily. And for me, at that stage of my life, it’s better than any meditation state. I don’t have to make it, but it’s as good as it gets for me. And I followed that longing because my life’s circumstances wasn’t really bringing me a child and as we said earlier in interview and the timing and circumstance that I had projected. So I listened to that call in my soul and followed it kind of ruthlessly, believing in myself in that way to find my way to my child. And it’s like it bears fruit all the time.

**RC:** Yeah, I’m just really resonating with what you’re saying, it’s I think we actually spoke about that piece around following that longing before we were recording, I think.

**MC:** I think we spoke about it on our first conversation!

**RC:** (laughs) I think that’s true! Years ago! Yeah. And I certainly was like that as well. I would be ridiculous to the degree that like if I was at my favorite dancing place in Berkeley and saw someone that I like, I thought maybe I wanted to go out with before the evening was over, I found some way to ask the question, “Do you want to have a child?” Even in the most inappropriate moments because I wasn’t wasting any time! But I have a four and a half year old, and so I was reflecting very personally on what you were just sharing. And there’s something for me that is so—in my experience with my daughter, so profoundly a given, like there’s a solidity of love and just vastness that it doesn’t go away. It doesn’t go away through irritation, through needing to individuate or

discipline or any of those things. There's just like a there to it, like "Oh, yes, that connection, that love, that absolute." And I feel inside that I give myself to it in a way that I have never given to anything else before.

### **6. Personal Desire**

**MC:** Yes, I feel exactly the same way. And you know, how that principle might generalize to a wider listening right now; as you were saying, we might forget we're talking to a lot of people as we're having our living room conversation. But something that I wrestled with along the way to that is that sometimes in the spiritual fields—and it's even connected to that "needs" question—our personal desires are kind of dismissed or not valued. They're not valued. So there was conflict for many years in my life where I had what we could label as a personal desire that I was totally persisting with. And what I felt, I had to find my way to it and intuit it, and now I actually can really back that more, is that some of those deep desires—it is Spirit, it is our soul speaking through our personal longing. And we don't get everything we want, as we talked about, but that that is truly sacred. I mean imagine if you have not followed that, especially in the name of some spiritual principle, how devastating.

**RC:** I want to pause and sort of say that again because you have said it so beautifully: that it's possible that through our personal desire, we get to recognize our soul, that we meet ourselves at a soul level that we wouldn't otherwise get to if we diminished that desire or criticized it or repressed it in the name of some ideal.

**MC:** Yes, and God forbid we put it in the domain of the dual and had to re-check it.

**RC:** Well, I want to ask you one last question and I think we're going to go kind of from the sublime to the daily world that we live in, where we wake up and we do life. And I wanted to ask you—

**MC:** Coffee. Coffee is not unspiritual!

**RC:** (laughs) That wasn't the question! But that was the answer, for sure! I love it! Well, you have spoken about how over the years, as part of your practice, you have smaller and smaller axes to grind. And I was really touched as I was reading that recently in preparing for this interview because I think that's true for me too, and yet I often recognized the axes that I still have to grind. Sometimes I see my spiritual work there and sometimes I also just laugh at them and even give them greater voice just for the freedom to be able to be in whatever shadow material was there.

So for instance, I noticed that I have a certain axe to grind about reality TV and it's one of those "Don't get me started..." It's not that I'm right or that I think I am, it's just that I know I've got a big contraction there and I could get myself on a soapbox about it. And so I'm wondering if there's any small axe to grind that we won't go into, but just because you've been such a way-shower in this conversation for endlessness and also for inclusion, if there's something that we might get to see before we say goodbye to you of that same kind of ilk, as if to say Mariana Caplan is not like me and she's just like me.

**MC:** Yes, I've got a really big—I don't think it's a small axe to but it's like when people use spirituality to separate themselves, when people just get too holy or dismiss their own or another person's humanness and spiritual terms. Beginning, middle and end, I can rant on for a long time about that. And when people are just talking the high road and myself, I'm just getting more and more agitated. Not that that isn't true, but when spirituality is somehow made other than us, I get angry. I get angry maybe because it doesn't include me.

**RC:** Yes, well inclusion, that's it for me as I'm hearing you talk because I'm thinking about the communities that I endeavor to create and what I invite people to participate in and it really is about that inclusion. And I feel safe when it's all included and I feel uncertain and sometimes even nervous or scared when I'm sensing that something doesn't get to be included. And it feels to me that that is where all of our hearts sing, when somebody invites us to meet ourselves that way and to meet other people that way: to say yes to everything and that within that there can also be aspiration. So it's not yes to everything like, "We're all the same. There's no reason to do anything, there's no reason to practice. It's all one, etc." But if I can meet myself and if I can meet you, and I can meet everyone with the embrace of all, then it actually seems like we can roll up our sleeves and start to do whatever spiritual work there is. And before that, we can't do it.

**MC:** Yes. And that there's like there's no person or no part of ourselves that doesn't need or deserve love, which doesn't mean...that we get to indulge and act everything we want to in the world. I deeply believe in and am interested in ethics. But there's nobody or nothing, nothing that doesn't deserve love, that doesn't need it, right? Even no place inside of us. It all needs our love.

**RC:** Yeah. Now I'm thinking either the title for this entire talk today can either be Coffee! Or as we just came to a close, It All Needs Love. And that's the title I would choose if there's a title because it seems like that's what you have evoking and sharing with me and the listeners, so—

**MC:** How about It All Needs Love. There's Nothing That's Not Spiritual, Including Coffee.

**RC:** (laughs) Even in your title and subtitle, you have modeled inclusiveness. How perfect!

**MC:** And you can call it whatever you want!

**RC:** Well, I so appreciate you for taking this time with me and for us, to let us drink at your well. And it's a reminder to me of a long lost pleasure that I hope I will get to continue to come back to when we're offline, as well as online. So Mariana Caplan, thank you so much!

**MC:** Thank you. Have a beautiful day, Raphael!



**Kenny Johnson**



Beginning in his early teens, Kenny Johnson devoted his life to crime and served over 20 years in various prisons. He spent most of his time participating in religious and substance abuse groups and attending meetings in the prison chapel. There, Gangaji, a spiritual teacher, answered his most pressing question: “It is my understanding that we have to wait until we die before we can receive God’s Grace. Is that so?” She replied, “Kenny, God’s Grace is here now!” Instantly he knew he would never be a thief again. Kenny now resides in California and developed a model of rehabilitation grounded in psychospiritual growth he calls Sacred Circle work. Kenny teaches and consults families and those who have been out of prison and may be going to jail. His just-released book entitled, “The Last Hustle,” chronicles his years as a criminal and his transformation while incarcerated. Kenny has one passion and that is to share the message, “God’s Grace Is Here Now.”

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### **1. Parallel Tracks**

**RC:** Kenny Johnson, welcome and thanks for being with me today.

**KJ:** Nice to be here. Good morning.

**RC:** Good morning. Well, I like to start off every call just by seeing where we’re finding ourselves in this present moment. I’m sorry to say that I threw my back out yesterday so I’m with you totally but I’m kind of hobbling around and I’m a little crooked. That’s me in this moment and I know that one of the spiritual lessons is that the body does fall apart, but I’m a little bit tired of being such a good example of that. So how about you? How are you in this moment? What’s happening mind, body, spirit with Kenny Johnson?

**KJ:** Right now I just got a new job. I'm working with people in a detox center. I'm at work taking a phone call. I'm somewhat anxious like, "Okay, I want to do this interview and get back to my job." [Laughs]

**RC:** Okay, so you have a little bit the sense of someone looking over your shoulder.

**KJ:** Thank you.

**RC:** Okay, good. Thanks for letting us know about that energy that's present as well.

Kenny, there are maybe many people listening to this interview who aren't yet familiar and who haven't had the privilege of connecting with you so I want to start a little bit with your story. I know you've told it many times and hopefully we'll be able to get past the surface of the story and into the vulnerable depths of it. But to begin can you just give everyone a little sense of where you grew up, your early life and then what happened to land you in prison and what that experience was? And then we'll get to the great awakening that leads us to this call today, all right?

**KJ:** Right. I was born in Arkansas back in 1948. I lived there about five or six years; I would say seven years at the most; it's kind of hazy, you know. At a young age I was living with my mother, my auntie, my grandmother and my two younger siblings and my cousin. That was a very peaceful time for me as a young man—swimming in the swimming hole and we'd run up and down dirt roads. But I really remember about those days was just picking cotton; I picked cotton down there in the south. And then as I was growing up with my family, my mother moved to Kansas City, Missouri and she established a home up there with her new husband. She took the two younger siblings and later, I also moved there in Kansas City, Missouri.

That's when a lot of my troubles started, when I moved to Kansas City. I was really okay, but when I got there in Kansas City things really got kind of wild for me; I became a juvenile delinquent, I started stealing and getting in trouble; one thing led to another and the next thing I knew I was in juvenile hall right at the age of 13 or 14. By the time I was 15 or 16 I was into crime heavily—you know, joy riding, stealing. My younger brother and sister would just watch me in amazement that I was in that world because they were just happy to be living with mom and dad and I was out there stealing and getting in trouble and causing my mother and my stepfather all types of problems.

Then I guess when I got to 17 was when my life took a turning point, when I really committed to a life of being a criminal. That's when I did not come out of that system for 30 years.

**RC:** So I want to ask you a question about that. One of the things that I've noticed is that people, when they are in any walk of life that other people might judge or see as really different from them; these people still inside of themselves have a sense about what they're doing—a story they're telling themselves about why it's okay. I'm wondering when you were deep into that life of crime, before you woke up, etc., and especially during that time when you were really hard core into that as a young man—what were you telling yourself about why what you were doing was okay, or how were you relating to these choices that you made? Could you give us a sense of what was going on inside of you at that time?

**KJ:** I was talking to a friend last night and he was sharing something with me. I said, “You know, I go in to prison and I tell those incarcerated every Saturday morning in San Quentin: My whole mission, my focus is to get these people, my clients, the participants to start feeling their emotions and their thoughts and just feel the energy that's in their body and the guilt and the shame,” because what happens is that as you become a criminal you have to shut those systems down. You have to override that feeling, or consciousness, or feeling sorry for the person or the victim. You can't have any feelings toward them. As a matter of fact, you justify by saying, “Well, I gotta make money. If I don't do it, nobody's going to do it; nobody's going to take care of me.” You start telling yourself your stories over and over to shut down this system of feeling.

**RC:** So let's pause there. I love to hear this because, Kenny, what you just described could be exactly the same description for many people who've never committed a crime or who's never been incarcerated, which is that they're living a certain way that is out of integrity with who they're really meant to be and the only way they could do that is to shut down those very same parts of themselves and not feel their vulnerable feelings, not really allow what's true to bubble up to the surface. So in that sense you're describing something that is kind of like the anatomy of a criminal mind, but really it's the anatomy of any mind that's in resistance.

**KJ:** Yes, because once you start shutting down or overriding those systems—like you know it's just wrong to steal someone's purse; you know it's just wrong to abuse this little girl; you know it's wrong to do these things; or shoot drugs; or this is wrong when you drive 100 miles an hour in a residential neighborhood. Once you start shutting those systems down and say, “I can do this. I can do this,” or “I'm okay, nobody's around,”—once you start shutting those systems down, pretty soon it becomes a normal way of life.

**RC:** Okay, so let's jump ahead. You find yourself in the penal system, in and out, as you said, mixed in with the crime that you're doing for the next 30 years of your life.

**KJ:** That's right.

**RC:** So we're mostly going to be focused today on the now and who you are and how you live today. But let's just spend a little time talking about how when you were in the prison system and when you were continuing to kind of cycle in and out, how was it that—before you got to your experience with Gangaji, which we will talk about, I know you spent a lot of time in recovery groups and things like that—how was it that something started to dawn in you that those ways of shutting down that you described weren't the way? What happened, whether it quick or slow, that got you to paying attention to yourself differently and joining these groups?

**KJ:** First you go to the AA and NA and you go to the Christian church and you go to become a Muslim. You do the basic things that are improving in a place of prison. That's joining groups. "I'll join this group," or "I'll pray to Jesus," "I'll do something like that and maybe my life will change," because in each human being there is a part—the light inside of a person that knows itself as God is one with everything, as love, doesn't die. We might be smoldering, simmering, but it's never really out. It's just trying to make its way to the forefront of our consciousness. So I started going to Christian groups; I started going to Muslim groups and then I met a man who was doing yoga and meditation and I got into that. Then I would sit in meditation where I really started being quiet and turned my attention within, not knowing, but I felt better. I felt more relaxed just by sitting and being quiet about 20-30 minutes a day; and doing Yoga, your attention goes from the outside world to the inner world because you get the feel of this position; you get thoughts coming up and then you're reading some material, Muktananda, eastern philosophies, etc. Those books started to turn me more and more inward, more toward the inner world and that's what started me about wanting to have a more profound connection with my teacher, with life or with the guru because the books kept stressing, "You need a guru to wake up. You need to connect with a guru and once you connect with a guru, then you will find God."

**RC:** So you came across these spiritual texts in prison?

**KJ:** Yes, right.

**RC:** And through the prison library and yoga and the meditation teachers there in prison?

**KJ:** That's right.

**RC:** Okay. And so would you say that over that long period of time it was a slow opening and preparation that led to when you woke up in a fuller way?

**KJ:** Yes.

**RC:** So you might not have been aware of where you were heading but it was all a preparation.

**KJ:** Yes, it was preparing the soil, like when you plant something in the ground, first you can't just throw the seeds down. Well, you can, and it will grow, but if you really wanted a good and nice harvest, you want to do to make an intentional crop of whatever it is—asparagus, cucumbers, or strawberries—you have to prepare the field. So the meditation and the yoga was preparing the field so the message of God, or whoever came in, will grow into good fertile soil and take root.

**RC:** During this period of time had you stopped completely the life of crime? Or as you were cycling in and out of prison were you still in some degree involved in that life?

**KJ:** I was still a criminal in my book. In the back of my book it says 'running parallel to his hustling was his desire for truth and meditation and reading spiritual texts.' It was like two tracks of a train track. One was criminal and the other one was spiritual.

**RC:** Right and that's like somebody who has a secret in regular life. Again, they're not in prison necessarily. They've got some part of themselves that is yearning for healing and wholeness and that's real. And then they have another part of themselves at the same time that is self-destructive. And as you said it's like parallel tracks.

**KJ:** Right.

**RC:** So really, once again, your experience while it was more dramatic while you were in prison, it really matches, I think, a lot of the experience that just about everybody who's seeking on a spiritual path comes to.

**KJ:** That's right, no difference.

## **2. The Last Hustle: A True Love Story**

**RC:** And so then take us to the soil that has been prepared; it's fertile and the experience that you had with Gangaji, tell us about that.

**KJ:** What happened was by that time—this preparation period was between 1982-1992. I was doing 10 years for the federal government. In federal prison you're able to hang out with more enlightened or awakened people, or more intelligent people, at least. So I was meditating, doing yoga and then I started praying for a guru, for a teacher; and I had this dream that I will find my spiritual teacher but I will have to get out of prison after doing 10 years and come back to prison and then I would meet my teacher, my guru.

**RC:** Before you go on, Kenny, I just want to ask you a question because I think that some listeners might wonder about this. You said something about federal prison allowed you to get in touch with people who might be a little bit more awake, a little bit more—

**KJ:** Sophisticated? Yes.

**RC:** Why is that? Because those of us who aren't familiar with the prison system—why would you be in federal prison rather than state or local?

**KJ:** Yes, federal prisons were mainly, years ago, for those prisoners of the federal government that were sophisticated. They were the mafia, Wall Street type guys. Federal prison was for white collar crimes.

**RC:** Right. I got it.

**KJ:** So it's more about money. State prison is more about violence, robbery, rape, capital murder. In federal prison you might have two or three hundred thousand prisoners incarcerated but 90% of them are about making money. They're about financial crimes, so you're hanging out with criminals who are saying, "This is how you become a better embezzler. This is how you become a better drug smuggler."

**RC:** Or "This is how you become more spiritually awake."

**KJ:** Or this is how you become more spiritually awake. Why? Because those men and women would make so much money, they were able to travel around the world to different foreign countries, picking up different religions, spiritual and ritual practices and then they're bringing them back to prisons.

**RC:** Got it. Okay so you had this vision or dream that you were going to have to go out of prison and come back to meet your teacher. That's where we left off.

**KJ:** Yes. I got out in 1992, and lived in Iowa, and immediately got back into crime. I got violated in 1993 and went back to federal prison in 1993, and was transferred to Littleton, Colorado in August of 1993. By September I got back into meditation, AA, NA, church, playing tennis and stuff like that. Then the Buddhist practitioners were coming in, so I got back into that type of doing time. And it was in those groups that I found out that Gangaji was coming in to prison. I didn't really link it up until April of 1994 that Gangaji was the same woman I had the dream about because she came into prison in April of 1994. Gangaji came in again in September of 1994 and in that meeting, she said, "I've been thinking about you," because we'd been writing each other over the summer. She said, "I've been thinking about you." Before she could go any further I burst in saying, "Gangaji! Gangaji," and I'll never forget this, I said, "It's my understanding that we have to die before we get to see God's grace." She said, "Kenny, God's grace is here now." That truth, that eternal truth that God's grace is here now, hit me so hard. I just let go of everything. I just became totally silent, totally quiet and the next thing I know, I was totally just sitting there being totally, totally empty; devoid of any aspiration, devoid of any thought, just sitting there totally empty. When I walked out of the meditation with Gangaji, that hour-long satsang, I looked into another person's eyes, another volunteer's eyes and I saw something I had never seen and that was love.

I would say that this was a love story. It's all about waking up and being in love because once you have the awakening experience you fall in love with life; you fall in love with nature; you fall in love with yourself; you just fall in love so really, it's a love story. So I should have written *The Last Hustle: A True Love Story* (Laughs).

**RC:** Yeah, you're referring to your book.

**KJ:** That's what I should have done, you know. They might put that in my revision.

**RC:** Right, good. So I want to ask you about something that comes out of this moment that you're describing where suddenly you fall in love with everyone and everything because it sounds beautiful and it is, but also there's a way that it's so radically different than the life that you've been leading before. For many people who have that kind of experience, it's very difficult to integrate and to try to figure out "What am I supposed to do with that?" How was that for you? I mean first

there was just the beauty, the wonder of it and then how did it become a part of your daily life and how did your life change as a result?

**KJ:** What happened was I just became—all the guys I'd been associating with totally just fell away. The guys working in the yard talking about drug dealing and robbery, I just fell away from them. I didn't want to be around them anymore and they didn't want to be around me because I'm talking about oneness and consciousness and peace and they're talking about how to rob and steal and kill. So my sangha, or my group of people I'm hanging out with became different first of all. At the same time when I quit hanging out with those guys who were talking about doing crime, what came up for me was there were these people who were suffering and I saw their suffering and they started to be attracted to me. It was really unique and I started counseling them and sharing my insights, my wisdom, sharing books with them and they started shifting—letting go of their story of who they were and changing within themselves.

For the next two years while I was in prison it was just like, “Man, I'm in paradise.” I understood what the ashramic environment was like; I understood about monasteries; I understood why you go to the cave—prison cells are like caves; you go there to do your inner work because my prison cell became my cave, my meditation cave, my yoga cave. I was totally at peace in my cell.

**RC:** Yeah. That's really beautiful how you describe that. There's something I want to ask you that came to my mind. As you were saying that people were seeking you out because there was that peacefulness to you. You came from this background and we didn't really talk very much about your family life, the economics of that time, but for many people who would be listening to this series, they might be of a different ethnicity than you; they might be of a different economic class than you were when you were growing up; they might not even come across people like those that you met in prison, who you were in community with and who you were also guiding after a time. My question is: first of all, do you feel that this message of God's grace that came to you that wasn't religious—it was spiritual as I understand it, it was about peace and how you could find that in any moment just by turning to what is and embracing it. Do you feel that this message is one that anybody from any walk of life can be open to? Do you see any barrier to anybody in any race or class or part of the world or do you think it's for everybody?

**KJ:** It's for everybody. I found guys in death row with it; I found guys doing life in prison; I found all types of people doing it. It's been great, you know? It's amazing.



### 3. Propensity

**RC:** Do you feel that because of the life that you lived and because of who you are as a person, that people could hear you and still can hear you and receive the message from you, maybe more than they could from me or somebody else, because they can relate to your experience?

**KJ:** That's so true because I find that when you're speaking truth, it doesn't really matter who you are. It doesn't really matter who you are.

**RC:** So actually you think it doesn't make a difference. So somebody in prison could hear the message from me or from you and if they're really open to it, it's not about a match between who is delivering and who is receiving the message, it's more the message itself.

**KJ:** That's right. Because Gangaji was from Mississippi and I'm a convict; she's Caucasian, I'm Black—we have nothing in common. She's middle class, I'm poor, and yet, I heard her message. So it surpasses all lines. There is no color; there is no race; there is no gender; there is just this truth. And it doesn't care about anything but connecting itself to itself.

**RC:** Okay, good. So one other piece I want to clarify from what we've been talking about, you use words like "God" or "God's grace", and people use those words in very different ways. So can you describe what that means to you as specifically as possible? What is God and what is God's grace and what is truth for you?

**KJ:** Truth for me is this: it's when you are able to let go of all stories and be empty and realize you're one with everything. That's truth for me. God's grace is being able to have that experience of letting go and being one with everything because that grace, it's the mystery that comes into your life—you can't make it happen. It just happens and that's God's grace coming to your life to provide this mystical experience of your oneness with all mankind, with nature, with everything.

**RC:** And so this became your life, as you said. You dropped away from the previous community. You developed a community that was really resonating with this truth and also as you said, your prison cell became your cave. How much longer were you in prison before you were out and started your new life?

**KJ:** Two years.

**RC:** Okay. So you were in the cave for two years and then when you got out of the cave and it was time to start a new life, were you—was it easy not to go back to any of the previous behaviors or was it still a challenge?

**KJ:** It was easy because there was no attraction. My attraction was to meditate and to hang out with those talking about oneness. Hanging out with those who were talking about drugs, stealing, robbing and hurting people—there was nothing in me for that. I was feeling more compassionate toward myself and to my fellow men, as opposed to dispassionate.

**RC:** And there are many people who will be listening, who will be thinking about the recidivism rate and how so many people who go out of the prison system end up right back in it, as you had for those 30 years because they haven't really had an internal shift or rehabilitation that allowed them to be different in the world. But it sounds like for you, even though there was probably a lot of new learning, "How do I live this way when I'm out of prison?" There was never actually an attraction or even a weakness when you felt like, "Oh, I could fall back." It was almost like it was impossible.

**KJ:** Right. It really was and I just sort of—I mean even to this day, there are things that come up and there's challenges and like, "I can't rob a bank." I mean that propensity is there, but the consequence though, that's too great; the consequences of it—like I can't smoke cigarettes because the consequences are too great.

**RC:** So I hear you saying something again that is a bridge between people who've been in prison and people who have never gone near a prison, and that is coming back to what you said, the propensity is still there. So if I'm someone who's an addict, or if I'm someone who has been emotionally abusive of myself or other people; if I'm somebody who can shift into a, "I've got to get mine" approach where I want to have power over other people instead of power with them, any of those things are part of the human psyche and are going to show up before or after one's awakening experience.

**KJ:** Oh yeah, definitely.

**RC:** So none of that went away for you as potential or propensity, it's just that once it arises, how you be with it is what's different.

**KJ:** That's right. It comes up like, "Oh, you can do this." "Well... no, I can't do that," because you contemplate it, you look at it and you see it; you look from all angles, and you say, "No, the

consequence is too great,” and you feel the pain of it before you even do it. “I can’t do that, that’s too... no, no, no.”

**RC:** So you’re really holding it in conscious awareness and you’re not acting it out.

**KJ:** No. You’re holding it in, looking at it and examining it, contemplating it, and meditating, and by the time you get to doing that, it’s gone.

**RC:** And was it natural for you coming out of prison to start to build your organization to bring the message to prisoners as a free man? Did that take a while to come together or was that something you just knew was going to happen?

**KJ:** It took a while for it to come together. It did. It took a while.

#### **4. Welcome Home**

**RC:** So you decided somehow that prisoners were your people. You wanted to share the truth with them more than anybody else; you could be a spiritual teacher right now talking to people in the middle class; talking to people at universities, but you chose prisoners in the prison system and I’m wondering why and how that came to be?

**KJ:** That came after I had dreams about it, and dreams about it, and dreams about it. Then one day, I was talking to a friend of mine, Michael Meade, and he said, “Something is trying to come through,” and then by a month or two later, I met Bo Lozoff and he says at a workshop, “We’re going to San Quentin.” And then he said, “Kenny, you’d be a good guy to go in with me.” They got me cleared to go in and I was there for that day, but I couldn’t go in because they couldn’t find my paperwork. But then the next week, I went in anyway, and right then, I knew I was going to be doing prison work for a while. And I have been doing that ever since. It’s just like I hadn’t finished going through my time in my life, so it’s like community service in a way.

**RC:** So just a couple of things, you mentioned Bo Lozoff who is the director of something called The Human Kindness Foundation.

**KJ:** That’s right.

**RC:** Listeners might want to know and he’s been doing work for many decades with prisoners. He has a book called *We’re All Doing Time*. I know you came across that book in prison, right?

**KJ:** Oh yeah, definitely.

**RC:** Yeah. And, and you also mentioned the writer, Michael Meade.

**KJ:** Yes. Mythologist.

**RC:** And how did you come to meet him and be friends with him?

**KJ:** Oh, Michael Meade does a lot of men's retreats and workshops and a guy heard about me and he says, "Kenny, you haven't been welcomed home, so it would be good for you to come and do a workshop with Michael Meade." I needed to experience a ritual of getting welcomed home by men after spending a lot of time out there in the world. And so it was, grace showed up in my life again to hook me up with somebody that could help me make sense of this world out here. Michael did that in his men's retreats.

### **5. Integrity**

**RC:** Yeah, wonderful. I'm so glad you had that experience. So let's spend the rest of our talk— we just have a little bit of time left, talking about life for you right now. And then before we close, we'll give you a chance to talk to people about how they might be able to get involved and help your organization. But before we do that, so this series that we're doing the interview for is about vulnerability and transparency of spiritual teachers in their own current life. And we've already touched on that a little bit, but can you share a little bit about how and where your edge is right now? What are you working on? What challenges do you have living the fullness of your piece, the fullness of your truth in the day-to-day life that is yours right now, right here?

**KJ:** The biggest challenge I have I guess is just to take care of myself, financially—survival—that's the biggest one still, making money.

**RC:** And so obviously having a spiritual awakening or understanding the oneness of all things doesn't put bread on the table or money in your pocket. And so do you see it as just, "This is what's here for me. I'm going to, as they say, chop wood and carry water." Or sometimes, is it frustrating for you that the money piece is difficult?

**KJ:** It's frustrating because you figure by now, you would have been able to make enough money, and gotten your things together because you know God, and that would be enough. You see other cats making money doing spiritual teaching. You see your teacher being successful, making money and you say, "Why aren't I as successful as them? I'm speaking—I'm saying the same truth; I'm sharing the same love. Why am I struggling with my financial needs?" But that's just my karma. I

have found that no matter what, I have always been taken care of. I've always had enough, Raphael. And so it's not about having millions of dollars, it's just being able to have basic needs. I have a place, I have clothes in my bag, I have money in my pocket, and I have friends; that's enough and I'm going to be okay with that.

**RC:** Yeah. But it's also really helpful what you were just sharing and I really appreciate it because many spiritual teachers, in their humanity, often compare and often struggle in this way. They look at somebody else, and they say, "I'm teaching the same thing," or maybe "I think I'm even teaching it in a more accessible or positive or effective way. And people aren't coming to my retreats," or "I'm not getting enough money to really relax a little bit about income." I think that's very common. And most people who go to spiritual teachers wouldn't necessarily know that that's going on behind the curtain.

**KJ:** That's right. I mean that's just human nature in a sense.

**RC:** And what about in terms of your relationships with people? Do you find that there are parts of you that arise that don't necessarily go with the piece? Like do you find that you're still working with elements of personality or reactivity in yourself?

**KJ:** Yes.

**RC:** How does that come up for you? For somebody who knew you intimately, what would they say about you in terms of, "Well, here's a place where Kenny is still learning to walk his talk?"

**KJ:** Well, I would say more so in the integrity piece. What I mean by that is just that, well, "We still see you a got a little hustle. We still see you expect people to take care of you,"—stuff like that. Well, that's just from all of those you had been imprisoned. Prison makes you seem like a handicap.

**RC:** I love how you describe that. I'm wondering if you could say a little bit more about that hustle. People might say, "I still see a little hustle in you."

**KJ:** Yeah, because I was a con, I was hustler all those years, so it still comes up.

**RC:** But how would it look today in today's life? You're not a criminal. You're taking care of yourself. You have a lot of conscious awareness obviously for yourself and as a gift to others, and you're a human being as we were talking about before. So if you notice the hustle coming up, in what kind of situation might that be?

**KJ:** Well, I'll just give you an example: I have a program where I'm donating my books to inmates incarcerated, and so I asked this one person, "Could I have my book, my donation program on your website?" And they said, "No, because you seem like you're still hustling." I say, "Well, I'm trying to market my book program." Then he realized that he was out of line and he was projecting on to me simply because of my book.

**RC:** So it sounds like sometimes it might be an energy thing, like sometimes in that situation, you weren't really hustling but sometimes you might be able to notice that hustling energy inside of yourself.

**KJ:** That's right.

**RC:** And then if you notice it's coming up, how do you work with it now?

**KJ:** I really don't do anything, I just wait to get the realization or the insight, "Oh, that's what I'm doing. Okay." Then I might find a book, I might go to a workshop that can really help me move through that. It's just a process. I realize now a lot of stuff I'm going through is a process. So I have to just hang with it and not try to fix or get rid of it. Just, "Oh, this is a process that I'm going through. Okay, I'm dealing with my integrity right now. Okay, cool!" It might be a week, a month, or six years—I don't know how long it will take me to deal with my integrity piece.

**RC:** So it sounds like the keyword in what you were describing is 'wait'; you see it arise and rather than feeling like you're captive to it and you have to act it out, you can let it be and let it work itself out. Is that right?

**KJ:** That's right.

**RC:** And it's also really interesting because there's a fine line between marketing and hustling. It's something that's going to be different in every person. You see some people who market their message of spirituality in a way that they could be selling vacuum cleaners. And other people don't really market at all and I think part of the challenge is trying to figure out, "What's the right place for me on that spectrum?"

**KJ:** That's right.

**RC:** And so I know that you are really passionate about getting your book out there, just like I'm passionate about getting my message out. And there's that moment that comes up, I know for me

and maybe for you too, where it's like, "Oh, there's an opportunity. Now let me see if I can get everything out of that opportunity." And suddenly I notice that I have a grasping energy—I'm not open and spacious; and I know whenever I have a grasping energy that I'm going to limit what's possible; rather than increase what's possible.

**KJ:** You said it perfectly.

**RC:** Yeah. Well, this brings us to your message now and how you are sharing it. Obviously, you would love to be able to share that message with every prisoner in every prison; state, local, federal, in the United States and beyond. So just talk a little bit about your organization, what you do, how people can learn more about it, and how they can support you.

**KJ:** Well, the name of my organization is *This Sacred Space*, and we go out to San Quentin, we go to prisons. Wherever I am, I go to prisons and I share my spiritual message that God's Grace is here now; we dialogue, we laugh, we do meditation. And also, I have hundreds of books that that are available to us that we get mailed to prisoners around the world and that's what we're doing. You can go to my website, [ThisSacredSpace.org](http://ThisSacredSpace.org) and go to a donation page, sponsor page, and \$5.00 sponsors a book. You can go and donate \$100, \$1,000, whatever—well, that sponsors many books being sent to inmates around the world. I'm always getting from inmates, "I want to be a part of your program." We'll send them a book. We'll send them a book because I know that the message is in the book, the awakening experience is in the book; I know if they just read the book, they're going to make some type of shift. Because everything that I experienced, I encapsulated in that book, Bo Lozoff, Malcolm X, everything is in that book; my experience with Gangaji, how I felt to get out of prison, my relationship with women, drugs and all of that, everything is in that book. So the men and women in prison, they can really get a great feel for where I'm coming from, and have some type of awakening experience inside themselves just by reading the book.

**RC:** That's wonderful. And it's [ThisSacredSpace.org](http://ThisSacredSpace.org) where that all comes together. And it sounds like, just to come back to a theme from earlier in our conversation, that the real prison was always in your mind.

**KJ:** Yes, always.

**RC:** And that when you freed yourself in your mind, it really didn't matter anymore that you were for a while behind bars because you were free inside of prison and you were free outside of prison as well.

**KJ:** That's right.

**RC:** Yeah. And now when you go into prison, you said San Quentin, and for people who aren't familiar with California, that's California's maximum security prison. It's where the death penalty is enacted. When you go there and you're working these days with really hardcore prisoners, do they get immediately that you're not selling religion? That you're not trying to get them to convert them to one thing or another? When they're with you, what do you think the essence is that they take away from that experience?

**KJ:** They totally appreciate me being there. They know I'm there by the goodness and the kindness of my heart, and they totally are open and receptive to me.

**RC:** So you don't find yourself often in a struggle or a debate with the prisoners who—

**KJ:** No, no, no. I mean, if they try to do that, I don't have time for that.

**RC:** And the last question is when you look at your personal life right now, not the work in prisons, but just your everyday life, your relationships; and you see yourself evolving, where would you like to evolve toward? What would you like to have in your personal life, let's say in the next year or two or three, come together besides the financial piece that hasn't yet shown up? How would your life be different?

**KJ:** It's very clear—the power of God in my life, to feel this power of consciousness in my life.

**RC:** So you want to feel that more and more?

**KJ:** Yes, that's right. So something like a scepter or a magic wand—feel that power and be able to wield that power for the good of all.

**RC:** Beautiful. And are you currently in a relationship or family situation in your personal life?

**KJ:** Not really. I'm more getting my life together here for myself. I got my own little apartment; I have my own car; I have my own part-time jobs I'm doing and I do public readings now and then. I visit prisons. That's about it. I have a relationship with women, but not...



**RC:** You don't have a partner right now.

**KJ:** No.

**RC:** And it sounds like you're content working on yourself and giving back in this way for now.

**KJ:** Oh, yes, very much so.

**RC:** Yeah, good. Well, Kenny, I know it's been a little bit of a challenge today because you just started that new job and you're at work, and I really appreciate you spending all of this time with us and giving us a completely different perspective on the series. I couldn't be more grateful.

**KJ:** Okay. Thank you so much man.

**RC:** Alright. So be well and have a good rest of your day at the new job.

**KJ:** Okay. Thanks, man.

## Relationship Teachers

### Harville Hendrix & Helen La Kelly Hunt



Harville Hendrix, Ph. D. is a clinical pastoral counselor with over 40 years of experience as a therapist, educator, clinical trainer, author, public lecturer and has received many awards for his work with couples. He and his wife Helen LaKelly Hunt co-created Imago [RELATIONSHIP THERAPY](#), a therapy for couples now practiced by over 2,000 certified [THERAPISTS](#) in 30 countries. He and Helen have authored nine books on intimate relationships and parenting, including Harville's *New York Times* bestseller "Getting the Love You Want," which has sold over two million copies and published into 60 languages. For the past four years, Harville has had a passion to help ignite a global movement to educate the culture about the value of healthy intimate relationships. Harville and Helen have been married 29 years, have six children and five grandchildren and live in New York City. [WWW.HARVILLEHENDRIX.ORG](http://WWW.HARVILLEHENDRIX.ORG)

### 1. The Primitive Brain in Relationship

**RC:** So you are the founders and co-creators of Imago Relationship Therapy.

**HH:** Yes.

**RC:** I would like, if I can, to tell a little story to get us going today. It's a story about an HBO series which you're probably familiar with called *In Treatment*. Have you heard about that show?

**HLKH:** Yes.

**RC:** So I remember, there was a key episode and as somebody who absolutely loves and benefits from Imago and the work that you have brought us, I was so excited when suddenly in that series,

one of the counselors was offering a couple that was having a lot of distress the opportunity to do something similar to an Imago Dialogue and one of them, who was a therapist, mocked the process very cynically from a place of ‘Been there, done that. Do we have to do a kind of pop psych type thing here?’ And then the way that the creators of the show played out that scene was that he went in as a very unwilling participant and then it turned out to be a really amazing and helpful and insightful session.

**HH:** Oh! (Laughs)

**RC:** I was cheering it on. I was so glad that they went from the cynical to the more open and insightful outcome and I was wondering, first of all, did you ever hear about that episode?

**HH:** I heard about it but I never saw it. Several people tried to direct us to it but we missed it.

**RC:** Aha! So the reason that I wanted to start with that is because it was a wonderful avocation of the work that you do and also it moved me very personally because I’m such a big fan and I was on the edge of my seat. “Oh no, are they going to get critical and are they going to find fault where there’s no fault to find?” And then ultimately, they went to a really beautiful place and that leads me to ask the two of you, I guess, what is, perhaps the most obvious question that one could ask the two of you because you’ve been married for many years. You have six children and you have grandchildren. And so the question is: do the two of you use the dialogue process in your own relationship?

**HH:** So I think to me, the answer is yes, we do because I think that dialogue is a skill that becomes integrated into your consciousness and begins to change the way you interact and that once it’s integrated, it’s sort of like a skier on the ski slope moving from the bunny slope to the double black diamond. People on the double black diamond don’t look like they’re using any skills but they actually are skiing because they have skills. So I think the answer is do we all the time say, “Let me see if I got it,” and “Is there more?” and so forth and the answer to that is not often, but sometimes, like this past week. We have a structured dialogue, but most of the time, I think we do something that is more artistic rather than mechanical.

**HLKH:** Yes, we definitely do the dialogue process in our life and one thing, when you expressed your appreciation for that episode, there was a question about the structured process in that episode in a cynical attitude and then it turned out positive; I’ll just say a summary statement, which is that

Harville and I were giving a talk to—it was actually a more intimate group of people, especially business owners and things like that. And they had used Imago and they wanted to go deeper. So we actually had them in our home and they were around our dinner table and we asked each to go around and say what did they like best about Imago dialogue so far? And one of them turned and said, “You two are the Steve Jobs of relationship.” And for that, I think he meant that there was the mechanics—we knew how to create a structure, a mechanic where if you press here and here and here, then there’s a visual. Or you press this or that, it’s a simple process. The dialogue process is very simple and it can feel mechanical but if you do it, and Harville and I do it, a transformation happens. And when that man said that we were the Steve Jobs, it’s really Harville that is the one that structured this system. I have had added a lot in many ways but he is the mechanical theorist behind it and created the structure that makes everything work.

**HH:** And I think what he was also saying is that what has happened is that over our long lifetime of using and talking about dialogue, that we have finally gotten to this simplicity to make it simple even though it’s a very complex process. That’s sort of like the Steven Jobs thing, this iPhone, this smart phone is very complex but it’s made so accessible that when you push your button, you actually are online or you can get a map and stuff like that. So that’s what he was talking about with our simplification of complexity.

**HLKH:** Thank you for saying that more simply. Yes, because you can have plenty of insight and you can understand yourself and your strengths and weaknesses and understand your partner and their strengths and weaknesses, and have studied an encyclopedia worth or information about relationship but when you’re actually talking to your partner, a mechanical structure really can transform a relationship that’s on rough waters to smooth waters and have smooth sailing with the mechanics.

**RC:** I’m reminded of the old saying, I think it’s attributed to Werner Erhard who said “Understanding is the booby prize.”

**HH:** (Laughs)

**RC:** And I think that there are many people and I know I have been included in this at times, who have, if anything, too much understanding about their situation of the relationship, but it doesn’t get them to a place of greater peace and empathy and connection which is, of course, what the dialogue does.

**HH:** Yes.

**RC:** And so I also get what you're saying about simple and deep because I know that as a screenwriter in a former life that the stories that galvanize us the most are the ones that are simple, but we can feel the resonance that they carry in every moment as they go forward and it could be possible, as we've been discussing, for someone to think, "Oh, it's because it's mechanical, it somehow misses all of the nuances of life," but in my experience, the dialogue process is the opposite. It's being able to rest into the mechanical nature of ourselves that allows us to see and hear and feel all that we would miss otherwise.

**HH:** Yes. That's very nicely said. And I think that what I would add to that is that when you approach dialogue initially, especially as a couple, most couples approach it with chaos, that is they have had a rupture or something that's chaotic in their relationship and that the structure regulates the chaos and brings some coherence out of it. And then when the structure has calmed the seas, the structure shows up in less obvious forms to maintain that, but you really do have to have structure at the beginning and practice it until it becomes integrated and probably, although we don't have a piece of research that can do this because it'd be so difficult to do, probably if you dialogue long enough, you actually build some new neural networks in the brain.

**RC:** I would absolutely concur with that just on the basis of my own experience because it really changes one. I want to go back to something that Helen, you were describing. I think it was because there is the everyday experience you have with your partner where hopefully, a deep listening and an ability to mirror and to empathize is part of the natural flow and in that sense, it's just organic to who you are and how you relate; and then also, there are times when something is up, perhaps one or both people in a couple have been triggered and then in order to restore the safety that's necessary to connect, then even if we've got it metabolized and it is a part of who we are, we might come back to the more structured dialogue to get where we need to be. And I know in my own life, that's exactly how I do it with my wife. Hopefully, we're swimming along and then suddenly we recognize we've gotten to a rough patch and will say to one or another, "I think it's a good time to do a dialogue. Are you willing to do that?" And then we'll go right back into the mechanics of it. And Helen, you said that while normally you are in a more organic flow, that just recently you had a more structured dialogue, and so I'm wondering, is it something like what I described or something different that got you to the place where you both realized: "Let's just, for this period, do something more structured."

**HLKH:** It was the same as you and your beloved (laughs), that we were swimming along fine and said, “Hey, we need the mechanics.” And Raphael, you’ve just used the phrase rest into the mechanics and that is really a beautiful concept because I think that’s part of what it is, especially once you can trust it, then you rest into it. But it’s also at a moment when both people are triggered, you also commit to the mechanics. You don’t want to go there necessarily because you have something to say to your partner and they didn’t understand you fully; you need to say it—you feel like you need to keep saying it. But what you actually need to do is commit to taking turns, sharing the space. And that is not our first impulse. Our first impulse is to explain ourselves or to defend ourselves or critique the other.

But once you share space and really let each other explain why they said what they said, why they think the way they think, why they feel the way they feel, and really honor each other’s right to self-express, then the transformation can happen. I think what Harville and I found so illuminating in the last 15 years has been the neuroscience information. I don’t care how many degrees you have. You still have a lower brain and your lower brain is all about survival, it’s very self-protective and it’s functional every minute of the day. How do I survive? When you get triggered, your lower brain goes off. So that’s why you need a structured process to move you into the mid and upper— the higher cerebral functioning so that you can take turns and share space and honor the space between.

**RC:** That was really helpful and I appreciate you saying that. I think that in my own experience, I found that to be true; when I’m triggered, it’s coming from what I would call my ‘primitive brain,’ what you were calling your lower brain—I’m in a state of perceived threat and I’m going to try to get what I want and I’m not necessarily going to be able to do that in a very skillful way until first of all, I recognize that I’ve been triggered in that way. And then second of all, I remember that when I respond from that place, nothing helpful comes of it.

**HH:** Yes, that’s right. Nothing comes of it.

**RC:** Also when I’m in the state you were just speaking to Helen, I don’t right away want to hear what my partner thinks and feels because I’ve already temporarily decided that that’s not okay with me.

**HLKH:** Yes.

**RC:** So that for me is where the dialogue is especially helpful because it says, “Okay. I may be reacting in that way temporarily, but I know that there’s something that I have faith in and trust based on my experience,” also as you said Helen, “I’ll do this even if reluctantly.” (Laughs) And there’s a bridge that comes that takes me out of that threat mode back into a more expansive presence. I know you’ve been doing this, both of you, for many years. You’ve seen it thousands of times but it’s so inspiring, whether it’s just watching myself or watching other people who go from that place where they absolutely can’t tolerate the experience they’re having with their partner to just suddenly being back in love, not in a cliché way, but they’re experiencing love where just moments ago it felt as if that was impossible.

**HLKH:** Well, we actually think this is a spiritual discipline. When people work on spiritual practice, many of them work on emptying the mind and getting rid of the monkey brain and the ruminations of everyday and they just empty the mind and they go to another place—to mirroring and validating and empathizing with your partner before you then speak. To mirror well, you have to go to a different part of your brain and it’s a higher brain where you can sort of meditate on your partner’s words and it’s actually very empowering. Raphael, you just said you get in the state where you can’t stand what your partner is saying, you’re going to hardly tolerate to hear it. When you can develop the strength to move and listen and then validate it; that from their point of view, it makes sense—you don’t have to agree with it but you can validate it and then empathize with how they’re feeling as they’re saying it. You end up developing, as Harville said, a new part of your own brain. The yogis have said it’s akin to the same brain cells that are formed when you reach enlightenment. So you use your partner as a tool for your own spiritual strengthening and your own spiritual development.

**RC:** Well, as you said that, I’m reminded of the famous quote from Ram Dass who said, “If you think you’re enlightened, go spend a week with your family.”

**HH:** (Laughs)

**RC:** And we could say in this case, if you think you’re enlightened, just have an argument with your spouse.

**HH:** Right.

## **2. Relationship As Sandpaper Rubbing Together**

**RC:** I totally get what you're talking about in terms of the spiritual practice. I've just began describing a certain aspect of relationship to people this way because many people will say in relation to the conflicts they're having with their partner, "I don't understand why this is happening. It doesn't happen in any other relationship I have." Of course, in the Imago work there is an understanding about why that happened, how we choose our partners unconsciously for the opportunity they give us to heal; but even just on the experiential level, I like to think that each of us is a piece of sandpaper and when we're six inches away from another person or even a tenth of an inch away from another person, our sandpaper doesn't rub against theirs.

**HH:** Right.

**RC:** But when we're in an intimate relationship, it's impossible for those two pieces of sandpaper not to grate against one another and when people say that relationships sometimes can be the greatest spiritual teacher, it's because of this that I think it is so; that we would never really know where our unhealed places were if we didn't have our partner to rub against us like that.

**HH:** Yes. Absolutely! I've often said to groups and say to myself, "I really think this is accurate and we've said it for years and I have tested in clinics for years, but it still sucks."

**RC:** (Laughs) That's a technical term.

**HH:** That's a technical term, yes. It's still is kind of like "Why in the world is nature set up this way?" I mean couldn't it be setup so that we were attracted to people who did not activate ourselves, in our unfinished selves, in our unresolved and in our implicit memories. Why doesn't somebody come along who's really—that they will listen to us and care for us and there would never be any conflict. But I think that, that the answer to that is what you just said, that unless there is this sense of tension in the opposites, the grating of the sandpaper, you don't know there's anything unfinished in yourself or you don't know you don't have a skill. And the partner is going to catalyze.

**RC:** Yes.

**HH:** I know the other thing that I wanted to say is that for me, I used to and Helen and I would polarize; I would stay with my bad place for I don't know, 2 or 3 days, sometimes 2 or 3 weeks, and I was aware that that was sort of normal for my life—I was that neurotic. But as Helen and I have moved into a place where our relationship as a reliable commodity of satisfaction and pleasure, that



when we do miss each other and produce a difficult moment, it feels so bad in contrast to the long term sustainable enjoyment of the relationship that I don't want to stay there; so I'm finding myself moving against my resistance to approach Helen and connect with her again because not doing that is so painful that I want out of it as fast as possible.

And now I know that if we are in a difficult place and having that bad feeling, there is something in my brain that knows how to move out of that, that we can move out of that, and we want to move out of that. It's so motivational to not be in a disconnected space. It just feels awful there and when I realize how many years I spent disconnected, how awful that was. So now, I know that model of when you live in the sunshine most of the time, a cool wind really feels cold.

Once you're in the sunshine for a long time and the cold breeze comes along, you really want out of that back into the sunshine quickly. And the beautiful thing about dialogue is that it provides that structure that you can immediately move into, back into the sunshine. And for most couples not having to flounder around until the storm passes, they approach each other, which is what we used to do hoping that nobody will explode again. And they usually do, and so you stay in a disconnected space for a long time. But I love the fact there's a dialogue. It is a re-connectional process that regulates your anxiety down so that you can actually and quickly begin to feel safe with each other and move back to—I think it's normal to be in a joyful relationship and I think outside of that is abnormal.

**RC:** Yes. Helen, I just wanted to check with you because I'm curious if that sense that you're aware more quickly of the disconnect and the pain that it caused and it causes and that that's a motivation to move as quickly as possible into a reconnection through the dialogue, whether it's mechanical or otherwise; is that your experience as well after the years together?

**HLKH:** Yes. And the way that I would express it, Raphael, is I feel like I did develop some new parts of my brain and it almost feels like—living with Harville has been like a marathon and I'm now a marathon runner. And I have learned to be—

**HH:** So living with me changed your brain, huh?

### **3. On Duty to Make Sure We're Loving and Connected**

**HLKH:** Right. (Laughs) It changed my brain and mine his, but because I've done this work, I feel, let me phrase it like this: I think this work invites anyone into becoming a spiritual giant; once they learn to empathize for their partner, and you don't even have to agree, but if you can learn that your

partner's intense feelings probably come from some childhood issues and you learn to have empathy, it's a wonderful feeling knowing that no matter what your partner says, you're going to be solid. You're going to stay kind. You're going to stay loving. And it's sort of a gift you give yourself. Harville and I, we really had a terrible marriage 15 or 18 years ago and we weren't even aware of it. I think we were both so excited about the growth of Imago and that sort of took the place of our own marriage and we would fight, and I sort of went, "Oh well, tomorrow will be different." But when we realized it was so bad, we stopped, and we said, "Okay. We've got to have the marriage people think we have."

And so we put up a big chart where everyday we brushed our teeth, and one day, Harville would be, what we called on-duty, whereby the end of the day, he was responsible to make sure we went to bed connected and loving. In the next day, no matter what went on, who said what, I was on duty and when we went to bed, we were connected and loving. And in this chart, we would do a smiley face if the system worked and we put a frowny face when one of us didn't do our job and there were all these frowny faces. (Laughs)

**HH:** It's funny now, but it wasn't so funny... (Laughs)

**HLKH:** It's funny but we can't look at this chart and go, "Now, what's wrong?" But I remember, at first I couldn't wait for my off duty days when Harville would be in charge so I didn't have to be—I didn't want to be—excuse me, I didn't want to feel like I had to be perfect around him. I wanted to be able to make a mistake and know that he would be on duty and make sure we'd end it well. So I loved my off-duty days for he was the one responsible. But after a while, I realized it was a whole lot more fun to be on duty; you stay each day for your partner and stayed loving no matter what and kept—on my on-duty days, it was my job to invite us into our process if we ended up with Harville feeling hurt and I felt hurt and so I loved the process but I also like that personal indictment. Go ahead and grow and when you do the maturing, you get to feel the results of that. You get to feel the joy. You get to feel the inner strength and the inner peace.

**RC:** I want to make sure that I come back to touch on something that you said just a few moments ago: "We realized we've got to have the marriage that people think we do." This series is called *Teaching What We Need to Learn*, as you know, because we're all doing that. And it seems like you reached the moment where you realized that what you had been offering to others, it was really important for you to drink together on your own. So I can see how that would be a really

transformative moment and also, really humbling and vulnerable even to get to the place where you realize we're not living it.

**HLKH:** It was awful. It was really humbling and really, really awful because I think Harville and I both say we were sort of in denial.

**RC:** Yes.

**HLKH:** Because we knew we loved each other and that wasn't an issue. It's just that we weren't using the process and we did feel there was a moral imperative to doing this work ourselves and living the transformation and I just gave Harville such credit for his commitment to saying no to more public appearances until we both could say that our marriage is one of joy. A lot of people who are on the circuit like he is don't take the time to make sure it's happening at home.

**RC:** Yes.

**HH:** And also you need to have the credit that you really brought the discrepancy into sharp focus about how we are not walking our talk and given that everybody is projecting on us a perfect relationship, that there's something to allow that projection to be sustained. So we went public about the fact that we were in difficulty, that you were willing to do that. What's amazing about it is that the Imago community to whom we went public about the fact that we were—I think at that time—it would be safe enough to say we were actually thinking about divorce.

**HLKH:** Yes. And I think our phrase to the Imago community is “We do know how to teach it very well but we don't how to do it.” (Laughs)

#### **4. Unconditional Commitment to Zero Negativity**

**RC:** Yes. I really do honor you for getting to that place and I wanted to draw that out a little bit because prior to this series, the contact that Harville, you and I had, was because you were gracious enough to give a testimonial quote for my book about emotional connection. And so you know that that's mostly what I teach: it's about being able to, first of all, recognize that most feelings arise unbidden and need us to be able to notice them and accept them whether we like them or want them; that if we don't do that, we stay in a kind of locked down mode that Helen was referring to earlier around the lower or primitive brain. So we're constantly having all kinds of feelings, positive and negative; we might evaluate them throughout the course of the day, and certainly within our

relationships. And so it seems that in a thriving relationship that there's going to be the whole gamut of emotions.

I might be really sad sometimes about what's transpiring between myself and my partner or I might feel disappointed or I might feel angry, and those are the initial emotional states that arise for me to bring into awareness an acceptance and if I'm skillful, I'm not going to be blaming my partner or the relationship for these emotions, but they still might be present. So I wanted to see if that actually is true for both of you in terms of your own understanding, because you said that you wanted to teach only if you had a relationship of joy. But is that also inclusive of a relationship in which you have all kinds of emotions, even difficult ones that are, we could say, sacred as well.

**HH:** Well, I think the answer to that is yes and would have to be yes because I don't think any of us can stay in any particular emotional state for very long. So, as Helen and I were talking about how we had a dialogue this week because we had some frustration with each other and a little anger, then you get sad about that; that the connection is lost. So there's a whole range of feelings. And at the same time, I think you would agree with us, that what has happened for us is that having practiced with some unconditional commitment to being safe for each other all the time, knowing that we're not perfect and might not be safe sometimes, that we have experienced, I think it would be called a background or foundational change, in which joy or satisfaction or pleasure is sort of a constant, just like the sun shines most of the time and we know that the sun is still shining or is going to shine in a few minutes after it rains, even if it thunderstorms. So there's a real shift in the ecosystem, from an ecosystem in which you could anticipate years ago that there would be some negative feelings to another ecosystem in which there's been such reliability that we trust that the fundamental affect will be something called joy and the whole range of pleasure that is satisfaction most of the time. And one of the ways that we—shall I continue, it's really about negativity here, Helen, would you like to pick up on that? I'll go ahead?

**HLKH:** Yes.

**HH:** And the way we did that was we were in this bad place about 18 years ago now; I think it was about 12 years, we had some difficulty; It is about 30 years we've been married, so it was about 18 years ago that we got to a crisis point and we were pretty close to deciding to not continue together and decided to give ourselves a breather from a decision for 9 or 12 months in which we would do, the way we talked about it is we went to the end of the line with Imago to what is the outcome of

therapy for a couple who completes the Imago process. And what we discovered is that if you put everything together in the therapy process, it all adds up to zero negativity if you are in a healthy relationship, and by negativity we mean any devaluation of the other person, any put down of any kind, minor like the eye roll or a tone of voice, all the way to contempt; we made an unconditional commitment to remove that from our relationship.

And so even though we failed a lot, what we both knew at that point was that the commitment to zero negativity was unconditional even if we didn't meet those conditions all the time. In my experience at least, the awareness that you, Helen, were committed to that even when you were blowing it, changed my view of our relationship from one in which we were always dealing with the storm and to get down on the storms, to one in which we could always count on calm, beautiful seas and the cases when there might be a storm. And if so, it would blow over pretty fast. There was something tectonic about the ground changing from predictable chaos to predictable coherence.

**HLKH:** Right.

**HH:** And joy in the relationship. Am I saying that right?

**HLKH:** Yes. And that's what gets it. And so we started then talking about that, what a transformation that was for us, people would say, "Well, what's negativity?" And our answer is, "If your partner said that's negative, if your partner feels it's negative, it's negative." Negativity is words or tone of voice or a look in your eye that your partner feels is negative and if you are negative around your partner, your partner feels unsafe and they put up their defenses. And then you don't live with your partner really, you live with your partners defenses.

So we really preach a shift in therapeutic understanding from the individual to the relational paradigm; that our job as we grow in enlightenment, in therapeutic wholeness, or in completion as a human being, or whatever you want to call it, our job is not to just to develop ourselves and be a great person. We think that the paradigm of the individual, that emphasis on self-actualization carried humanity so far. It really did help humanity in many ways, but Imago is about the growth edge of psychotherapy and our understanding of human beings into: We are individuals in relationship. We are in a context, and as a human being, you're only partially developed if you can't manage your relationships well. If you can't grow your relationship and have your partner and you both thrive in relationship, you haven't done your individual growth yet to the extent you can.

A phrase of Harville's is that we're wired for connection. So we are meant apparently to be connected and to be a free, developed human being means we know how to care for that wiring. We are good electricians, we know how to keep the circuit going. And when you have a rupture in your relationship, it's a real indictment. You have to stop. You have to pause and look at your own part. But the thing that transformed us to being able to shift from our own individual paradigm in our relationship to the relational paradigm was safety. When I felt safe around Harville, then I could look at my own shadow work and I could put down my defenses and look at myself. But as long as he was unsafe, I kept my defenses up and look at what he needed to do to change. And the same with me, if I if I didn't make it safe for Harville to be in our relationship, he put up his defenses.

**HH:** Yes. And I was awful.

**HLKH:** (Laughs) You sure were.

**HH:** When I was defended

**HLKH:** You sure were.

**HH:** Yes.

**HLKH:** The only person more awful was me.

**HH:** Oh, I don't know.

**HLKH:** I mean we were both, you know (laughs).

**HH:** We used to compete for who had the worst childhood.

**RC:** (Laughs)

**HLKH:** Yes. We knew the Imago theory really well and—it's just really...

### **5. Growing Psychic, Emotional, and Spiritual Muscle in Relationship**

**RC:** Well, I love what you're sharing about the edge for humanity because so many of us in the spiritual world will say with great ease and almost like on automatic pilot how we're all one or we're all interconnected. But then so often, we go back into that mindset where we think that we're supposed to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps or as you said, Helen, that it's all about self-actualization. And it can't be both. I mean if we are all one, then we're all one. And yes, we have our individual work to do but it's all about the collective.

**HH:** Yes.

**HLKH:** Well, we actually think it's a both/and.

**RC:** Yes. I was, in my mind, I was thinking of that phrase as I said it. So why don't you fill in, shade that in for us?

**HLKH:** Well, what's just awesome about this is that we grow our own psychic, emotional and spiritual muscle in relationship as whoever said, "After the ecstasy comes the laundry."

**HH:** Jack Kornfield.

**HLKH:** There's the Ram Dass quote where you have to go where the rubber meets the road and that's not on a spiritual retreat. You can find wonderful things on a spiritual retreat but there's a kind of muscle that I don't believe that it will touch and it really shows up when you're in that context. So that context helps you build your own strengths within. We think of it as an oscillation, like the infinity symbol. It's about myself and then about the other and they're connected.

**RC:** Yes.

**HH:** Well one of the metaphors that we have used about that is: "You cannot learn to ski without a mountain." And your partner is that mountain that challenges you in all the ways you need to be challenged in order to learn how to ski. And so without the mountain, there's no skiing.

**HLKH:** And actually this helps us zero in to a key point in Imago theory: that you actually are drawn to be in partnership, in intimate partnership with someone whose needs you cannot meet. And you have to actually grow yourself in order to meet those needs of your partner. So it's you becoming stronger but you're helping your partner become all they want to be. The Imago theory is we're attracted to somebody that has the positive and worst traits of our caretakers combined. So we have the strengths of our caretakers where they affirmed us but we also have in our partner the caretakers that wounded us.

**RC:** Yes.

**HLKH:** Our caretaker, they either abandoned us or smothered us. And so whichever one that was, we're going to be drawn to a person that either abandons us or smothers us. And so we are

vulnerable. Harville, you say this better than me. We're vulnerable when we say, "I do," and then the psychological work comes—we pick this person to grow ourselves into our own wholeness.

**HH:** Yes. I think our unconscious mind, at least the theory of it is, and there are some research now showing up that this unconscious selection process as we posit it in Imago is factual. It's that you pick a person unconsciously whose needs you cannot meet and therefore, that person catalyzes in you the development of those parts of yourself that couldn't be developed without that person triggering them. So we, not only become co-healers of each other, we become co-creators of each other because the undeveloped parts of the self that are not available to meet your partner's needs have to be developed to meet the partner's needs. And when they do, then you get more of you than you had without that partner or with somebody else. Those things wouldn't be triggered so you wouldn't grow.

**RC:** Yes.

**HH:** So the relationship catalyzes the growth of essential parts of the self that would remain atrophied without that relationship.

**RC:** Yes.

**HH:** And while that's another thing that sucks, it's nevertheless true.

**RC:** Yes. Well, I heard it or read it once put by the British theater critic Kenneth Tynan, he said, "We seek the teeth to match our wounds."

**HH:** Yes.

**RC:** And, I think that's something that—

**HH:** Oh, that's beautiful.

**RC:** It's something that we've known.

**HH:** Yes.

**RC:** But I think that where you have taken it in your work, both of you, is, "Okay, well that's true and that sucks, but then how is it that the grain of sand can create the pearl for us?"

**HH:** Right, yes.



## **6. To Separate or Not?**

**RC:** And that is the heart of the work. And I wanted to ask you a quick follow-up. We only have a few minutes left. Helen said earlier that there's a place where you realize we both love each other and, and then of course, there's the work. But when I'm approaching myself and also my partner in the ways that we've been discussing today, I will pretty much love everyone and love will be foundational for me and there will be that unconditional positive regard without the negativity that you just described.

And also, I want to do that work. What I'm leading up to in my question is that there also seems a need to recognize that I want to and I'm going to do my work with this person. I could do it with someone else but I'm going to do it with this person. Or a coming to a peaceful recognition, even through a process like Imago that I do love this person and there are issues that I'm working through or maybe even have to work through, but somehow between the two of us, we're not meant to remain in partnership. So I'm wondering what you think about that. Are there places where in relationships where people do the work in earnest and come to either an individual or a mutual recognition that this relationship has run its course? Or would we all stay together with each other forever if we were doing the work full force?

**HH:** I think the latter. My view and experience with the former is that you love the person and you decide you're not going to grow with this person. But in my experience, every couple who decides that they're going to grow together, once they grow together, wouldn't leave each other for anything, because they become partners. And this partnership then becomes really special. And there's nothing else left to do except to live in that space and continue to be curious and creative with each other and something happens. There's a line you cross in which the question of having an affair or divorcing a person or going into a parallel relationship or staying in a hot relationship are just not even on the table because your mind has changed, your whole sense of consciousness has changed. So I think that the people who decide not to go on have just decided not do the work with that person and to do it with some other person, assuming that they would get it done with some other person who is at that time an unknown in their life—this is simply a hope. But I've never seen people who work through, then separate. And let me say one other thing. I have seen some people who thought they worked it through and separated but hadn't worked it through.

**HLKH:** And we do see this exactly the same way. We both believe that a vow is meant to be eternal and that if a person says, "We've done the work. This relationship was meant to do," and

goes on to another relationship and maybe they think that relationship will be better; we believe that eventually, they will end up feeling exactly like they were feeling in the first relationship. This is our thought. We don't know. What we both share is the same bias. And so the question is why leave?

**HH:** Yeah.

**HLKH:** Because you're aborting something—and so because we think that people will feel that way, that the work does continue in that second relationship and why abort it with the first person?

**RC:** Yes. Harville, were you going to add something to that?

**HH:** What I was going to add is that one of the pieces of this is that once upon a time long ago, before I had enough clinical experience and enough couples finishing Imago and before Helen and I finally integrated Imago into our lives, that my answer to your question would have been, “Well, of course, if you grow to a certain point,” and I can still see the logic of that. “You grow to a certain point, and this relationship now isn't catalyzing anymore so it's done its work. I need to go on to somebody who's going to stimulate another part of me.” But what I, as a clinician, and looking at that, what I've often found was that the relationship had reached a point where the growth had produced enough intimacy that it was—with the intimacy was now establishing or activating anxiety. And so people would then decide that they had grown enough with each other and they would have an amicable divorce or whatever and then go on to somebody else.

As Helen said, when they went on then with somebody else, they found that that growth they thought they had, had not really occurred. It's sort of like Jack Kornfield said, and he was so vulnerable with this, he was public with it so I can quote him; the short story is that he lived in India for, I think 7 years, meditated, and got centered. He was single. He came home, fell in love, got married, and he lost his centeredness. And at that point, before that, he had thought that the spiritual path can mitigate psychological process; you don't have to do psychological work, you can go around it or through it or do it at the same time as meditation. But he came to the conclusion that meditation and spiritual journeys do not obligate the need to do your psychological work. So I think that there's a certain piece of self-deception that I've often found in couples who decided that they were going to go their separate ways because they had done all they could for each other. I think they got to the real growth point, which they unconsciously knew was going to produce deeper anxiety and they decided to regulate that anxiety by separating.

## 7. How the Other Creates Friction

**RC:** Okay, good. Well, thank you for that. And we're going to need to close in a moment, but I want to close, if we can, in a particular way because you have been so forthright and just really lovely in sharing that transformative time that you had some years ago. And also in, not just telling us about, but even embodying and displaying in the way that you communicate in this call. This is the only call in the program where there are two people at once in the interview with me and it's fitting because you flow so beautifully at honoring together. So I want, in that spirit to ask you a question about the right now. Because you live in the sunshine most of the time as you described it and because you're also human beings, I'm wondering if there's one thing with love, that you're willing to share that kind of gets you sometime about the other. So like in my life, I have a loving marriage. My wife, it sounds maybe small to most people, but she gets really irritated when I leave wadded up paper towels or Kleenex around the house. And I get equally irritated when she leaves a used washcloth on the water faucet in the sink. So as two people who have really come to live in the sun, is there one thing in your humanness that you're willing to share about the other in relationship that still creates that friction, even if you can laugh at it?

**HH:** So you want to go first, Helen? Or maybe I don't do anything that triggers...

**RC:** (Laughs)

**HH:** (Laughs)

**HLKH:** Well—

**HH:** Or maybe you're now at the point where you're not triggerable no matter what I do.

**HLKH:** Yes. Well, I'll just share a disappointment.

**HH:** A disappointment!

**HLKH:** That I see it as a job to make the home in order for Harville when we're here and when we drive—he likes driving. And so I want the car to be in order when I get in the car. I want a map in case we get lost, which we always do, and (laughs), and I want the right map but...

**HH:** We always get lost. Am I getting this right? (Laughs)

**HLKH:** (Laughs)

**RC:** (Laughs)

**HLKH:** We will drive to Connecticut and we have a map for Maine or California in the car so I would like a map for—

**HH:** Because I know how to get to Connecticut. (Laughs)

**HLKH:** Sometimes. (Laughs) But anyway, and then I would like good music and tape and Harville goes, “Oh, I wish we had a tape.” So that’s what I’ll share.

**RC:** Got it. Thank you. How about you, Harville?

**HH:** Well, I think that Helen may not be as aware of this as I am of her frustration, but my primal wound with my caretaker was unavailability. So when I’m talking with Helen and she interrupts me, and says that she needs to go or do something else, or interrupts me and tells me one of her stories. So I’m aware that the neural network of my mother who was unavailable and died when I was six, but up to then, she had 9 children. I was the 9<sup>th</sup> and so her unavailability makes sense to me, but the neural network is still there. And so since Helen is an Imago match, when I’m telling her about my day or the elephant I saw pulling a wagon outside the window, and she doesn’t have time, that interruption, I feel crestfallen inside and I have to work to say, “Okay. I’m aware that I—” and I do this because I interrupt you which is the other thing we’ve learned is if you want to tell your partner something, ask if they’re available.

But I come in like a little boy sometimes and say, “Oh, Helen, I saw an elephant pulling a wagon outside and there was a fire truck behind...”—you know, like an excited little kid. And Helen says, “Well, I really have something else, I have to do right now.” But if I said to her, and this is the thing, “I would like to talk to you about this. Are you available?” Then she would say yes and then she will stay with that. So I create the repetition of my own childhood and I think that’s one of the major things that is the breaking of the flow.

**HLKH:** And could I make a quick comment? Harville invites me to do the growth I’d like to do, which is to boundary my own world and open up to make sure I’m available for him. So his request of me ends up being a gift to me. I get to listen. Stop anything and make him front and center; it’s a gift that he calls me into that.

**HH:** Well, and you're being very generous but one of your gifts is that you're a multi-tasker, so you can do many things, but when I want to talk to you, I don't want anything else being done.

**HLKH:** Right.

**HH:** I want you present to me and I know that's the primal wound with my mother.

**HLKH:** Right. And so I want to do that growth and I hope you're going to want to have the car clean.

**RC:** (Laughs)

**HLKH:** If we take a trip. (Laughs)

**RC:** Well, also too, it seems like that when you have this mutual willingness with each other, then for instance you have the chance to say, "Yes, I am available but I've got about ten minutes," right?

**HH:** Yes, right.

**RC:** Because then you can really negotiate in a loving way. I'm so appreciative at the end of our conversation what you're sharing, and particularly I'm drawn to Harville; what you just said about being crestfallen because that connects to the core wound because I feel like what you've done is you've given myself and you've given listeners the permission to be crestfallen, maybe once or 50 times in a day and still recognize that this is a beautiful, worthwhile relationship and that getting to that place of living in the sun most of the time doesn't mean that you won't be crestfallen again and again and again. I think that opens up a possibility for love that is just really deeply honest. So I thank you for that.

**HH:** You're welcome.

**RC:** And I thank you for doing this interview and for gifting us with your time today and for being such way showers in the theme of transparency and in teaching what we need to learn. I'm super grateful.

**HLKH:** It's a pleasure.

**HH:** It is a pleasure. Thank you!

**Bruce Tift**



Bruce Tift, MA, LMFT, has been in private practice since 1979, taught at Naropa University for 25 years, and given presentations in the U.S., Mexico, and Japan. He had the good fortune to be a student of Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, and to meet a number of realized teachers. His new CD, "Already Free: Buddhism Meets Psychotherapy on the Path of Liberation," explores the human issues of neurosis, anxiety, body awareness and relationship dynamics. He lives in Boulder, CO, with his wife and twin daughters.

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### **1. The Commitment to Stay in a Complex State of Mind**

**RC:** Bruce Tift, welcome to Teaching What We Need to Learn, thank you so much for being with us.

**BT:** Thanks for the invitation and I'm looking forward to speaking together.

**RC:** I like to start these conversations by coming as fully possible into the present moment together, so I want to start that by sharing that in this moment, I feel particularly invested and excited in speaking with you because I'm in a long-term relationship and we're going through a difficult period right now—not that I'm going to discuss that in our conversation or ask you to be involved in that—but just knowing the work that you do in relationships, I can tell that I will be gaining something significant, even if indirectly, so I feel grateful and especially attentive as a result of that.

**BT:** That's great, yes, I really enjoy working with my relationships and also in my work as a therapist, so that's great to be in the present. I feel sort of excited, a little anxious, just don't know

exactly what to expect, but I love talking about all these issues, so I'm looking forward to our discussion.

**RC:** Okay, great. Well, I want to tell you and the listeners how I came to you as a guest in this series. Some of the people in the series I know personally, the listeners would be aware of that. You and I haven't met, we haven't actually even spoken before, we just got on the line today, so there's a special freshness in that for me.

I came here through one of those great synchronicities, where someone I know who happens to be a client of yours within a couple, had suggested that you are a great person to talk to. This man had said to me that one of the things you had said, in fact you have said this in your Sounds True CD program, is that, as a therapist who works with many couples, you've been married for 30 some-odd years and you will freely say that there's not a day goes by when the woman who you are married to doesn't disturb you in a profound way.

**BT:** Some are less than others.

**RC:** When I heard that I said, "Oh yes, that's the guy I want to talk to in a series that's about transparency and openness." Of course, there's a lot more to what you mean by that and how you choose to work on it, but there's something that's just really powerful and galvanizing about that disclosure because it really takes the conversation away from the idea that somehow a successful and positive relationship needs to be one with less and less irritation. So that was something I was glad to hear about you from one of your clients.

Then shortly after that, you were recommended to me by Tami Simon of Sounds True, who's also a guest in this series. It happened so quickly without there being any link between the two experiences, I said, "Oh yes, I must follow that," and that's how we got here today.

**BT:** Well great, glad it worked out that way.

**RC:** Yes, so I want to start by asking you a question that has come up in this series, in different ways and at different times, because out of the 40 or so people who are taking part, a number of them do spend a lot of their time and energy working on the theme of relationships. What the different teachers share is a recognition that relationship has the potential to be an extraordinary spiritual path, maybe in some ways more powerful to many of us than other paths in terms of its opportunities for transformation and freedom.

It brings up a question and that is—if we are in a relationship and both people to the best of their ability and understanding are seeing the relationship in that way, and doing their work to the best of their ability and understanding, and there's nothing egregious in the relationship or unsafe in a survival way or in terms of the kind of things that would make people need to leave a relationship, like abuse, etc.; if none of that kind of thing is happening, do you see there ever being an experience where people would, in their best interest and to the degree that they're awake and aware, that they would leave, or would the relationship always be the place to stay and do that work?

**BT:** Good issue, I should probably make really clear what I assume is obvious, but I don't know of anybody who knows an objective, correct answer to how to have a healthy intimate relationship. I happen to think we're all just sort of falling through space in general and winging it and making it up as we go.

I make up everything I say, so having said that, I think that to be a little extreme: if I were in prison, and sometimes relationships might feel that way, but if I were in prison, there's no reason in the world why I couldn't work to have a good state of mind at all times, even if I were in prison—but there's no reason why I would want to stay in prison also.

So it's not really, I don't think, a question of need or urgency, or certainly not some moralistic thing. I think that relationships are very mysterious, I think life is mysterious, I'm mysterious to myself, so I wouldn't want to try to come up with some sort of possible formula or correct answer about why people make the decisions they do about staying in relationships.

To come back to earth a little bit, I think that if both people are using the inherent provocation and satisfaction of an intimate relationship as a path of waking up, there's probably not a reason why they have to leave that relationship, but I think equally, there's no reason why they have to stay in it.

My commitment is actually not, first of all to my relationship. It's actually, for me, personally, it's more towards the experience of freedom, or open-heartedness, whatever language we want to use. I can imagine that following out my commitment to authenticity might result in my choice, or my partner's choice to end our relationship. I hope not, but I don't have an agenda to stay in our relationship as some sort of inherent good or necessity.



**RC:** Okay, and so, let me ask you a related question that has also come up in some discussions and I think it is really important here: What is the real commitment that you see that, let's say, you choose to make in your relationship or marriage, or that you might invite other people to make that isn't the traditional, cultural one of, for better, for worse, till death do us part? What do you see as what makes sense given your commitment to the mystery and to the not-knowing and to the presence, and the allowing authenticity to evolve? In that context, what kind of commitment makes sense to you?

**BT:** Well again, I don't see it as primarily a commitment to my partner, although that is there, but I think being who I am—I'm a selfish person in many ways—that if my relationship felt like it was starting to, despite a lot of work, feel like it was draining my life rather than enlivening me; if I felt that there wasn't a basis of honesty, or you know, possible things like that, my commitment would actually be to my own sense of integrity, my aliveness, my freedom, my open-heartedness, to the qualities that are most important to me in my life and not to that person.

I know that, especially when we were, let's say, in the first ten years of our marriage, and things were much more immature and so forth, I think that at the time, I went through several difficult stages. Because I actually, for some reason, was committed to the experience of marriage, even though at the moment I wanted to kill my partner, or run away, or whatever was going on.

So I think at different levels of experience, we have different types of commitment, but right down at the bottom, I think my commitment is to a certain quality of experiencing that I hope to share with my partner as long as we both are together and alive, but for me, anyway, it's not my partner over all.

**RC:** One thing that has come up sometimes in my work and also my personal life is something along the lines of leaving would be the last choice, meaning that if we are making a commitment to ourselves and to each other, to do our work and to investigate and explore as much as possible when we're triggered and when we want to leave, that we could promise that we would explore every avenue to grow together and heal together and re-enliven the partnership, rather than making the choice prior to that to leave the relationship. How does that feel for you?

**BT:** Well, I think it's a nice idea, but I don't think it's a realistic one because we're never really going to do everything possible.

**RC:** (Laughs) I get that, and yet at the same time, there's probably a threshold, right, where you can look with integrity and say—wow, I really can say that I have given it as close to my all as I'm aware, that I can or that I ever have, and I keep arriving at this leaving place. That would certainly look and feel a lot different than just making a reactive choice in a difficult situation.

**BT:** Right, but our choices may not be black-and-white, all-or-nothing choices. There's a lot of very complex ground in the middle that I think usually is the most accurate state of mind from which to engage in difficult issues. But again, I don't think it's accurate, for me, anyway, maybe for you, but I don't think it would be accurate for me to say—I've really given it my best shot, because I haven't.

It's like I'll be talking to a parent who's having a difficult time with their kid and they'll say, "Well, I really gave it my best effort to be a good parent"—of course, they didn't. Nobody is going to do everything they can because there's too many other things that are important to them in their life. There's an endless number of workshops, and therapies, and experiments, and studies, it's endless, we could keep trying...

**RC:** Let me tell you what I think I'm hearing you saying and you can tell me if this is right—that the idea, or the concept of "my best" is a false construct.

**BT:** Right, I think it's designed to make us feel good.

**RC:** Right, you're not saying that a person might not be able to say, "I've invested a lot of time and energy and good will and here I am in this difficult place." You're just saying that if somebody goes to that kind of fixed idea, that's not so helpful, or accurate.

**BT:** Not so accurate, I would say, and I would prefer, for myself, to stay embodied with the complexity of my feelings and saying, "I am choosing to end this relationship." I have no justification that I can objectively claim supports my decision or justifies it. I don't exactly know why but I am making this decision, and then stay embodied with the sort of open, difficult reality that actually—there is no objective confirmation that I'm doing the right thing.

**RC:** It sounds like there's a false refuge that you're pointing to that we might often reach for, that is a justification, whether it's that I gave it my best, or I'm not getting what I need—those kinds of things. What I'm hearing you saying is that if we're more willing to step more fully into the mystery, we want to continue to open and explore what's there within us and perhaps between

ourselves and our partner, and yet at the same time, it's always going to remain a mystery—what we do moment-to-moment and why we do it.

**BT:** Yes, I think that's well said and that's my experience. My experiencing is a mystery to me and I would hate to have it otherwise, actually.

**RC:** You said something before, though, that I want to come back to and make sure that it's fully articulated for us. I was talking about that decision of “stay or go” and you were saying that it might not really be so black and white if we look at it as clearly as possible.

I was wondering if you could just say more about that because I think that's one of the decisions, for most people, that does seem like a real fork in the road. So when someone's considering whether to stay or leave a relationship, what would be what you would consider the middle?

**BT:** Well, I would probably start with a commitment to stay in a complex state of mind, a complex emotional state, and resist my impulse to go into some sort of fantasized, resolved emotional state first of all. Because if I have a fantasy that I should be resolved about my feelings, then I'll probably be more likely to act in very impulsive black-and-white ways.

To me this is a much larger issue than just relationships, but for example, I happen to think that healthy intimacy has to involve a tolerance of profoundly contradictory feelings about pretty much anything that's important, including, “Do I want to be close to my partner?” “Do I not want to be close to my partner?”

I think they're both completely necessary, valid feelings and so, any question about ending a relationship, I think likewise, would have to have that complexity. “Well, I want to end this.” “I don't want to end this.” I still have to make a decision that is going to come from a larger ground of intelligence than pretending that I'm resolved about my feelings. I have incredibly complex feelings about this person and about a future without them and about the effect on other people, you know, on and on, and there's no resolution that I know of, into just feeling one way about it.

**RC:** When you say that, I feel inside of me, something exhales; I relax. I experience a kind of invitation to a recognition that all the contradictory feelings and beliefs that I have about any relationship, but especially intimate relationship, is part of what is naturally, and that it isn't a

problem to solve. So I just feel that I get to be more here. Whatever happens, if I'm more here, if I take your invitation, it's going to feel more alive. Is that how it feels for you?

**BT:** Yes, I feel more relaxed, more embodied, more free, the more that I bring myself into alignment with whatever the truth of my experience is, most fundamentally. I just can't pretend that I only feel one way about anything that's important to my life, in my life, especially my intimate relationship. I mean I love my partner, I hate her; I want to be close, I don't want to be close; I'd like to see her, I wish she would leave me alone; I mean, all those things are going on all the time.

Again, I think that's about all of our life, not just intimacy, but intimacy I think really cranks it up, so that it becomes very, very vivid. And for many people I think, it's very difficult and confusing because our society seems to give us the idea that intimacy is supposed to be synonymous with closeness and connection—so a healthy separateness as a necessary part of intimacy, I find, is especially difficult for most of us in relationships.

## **2. The Continuum of Safety and Adult Organization**

**RC:** Yes, I can sense that beyond the relaxation I feel, that there's something that is very kind of operationally positive in that approach because there's the cultural belief that you just described around the idea that intimacy should be something or another, but especially that it's supposed to bring just closeness. But also, we have no other experience that bumps us up against our own stuff, and also another person and his or her stuff, like relationship.

So I know for me, this is to just speak personally—I travel around the world and I do workshops, work with individual clients, and many people really share with me out of their heart, a deep appreciation for the ground of acceptance that I co-create with them and the invitation that I make for them to be, to embrace all of their own aspects. It would seem, if you took that feedback, like I'm some kind of I don't know, wonderful, exceptional, realized being, but that is not the person who my wife or my kids experience me to be.

They have a completely different experience of me because we're bumping up against each other all the time, day by day, and my role in my family and as a husband can't be the same one as it is when I'm out there teaching.

I'm not saying that what people experience of me in a less bumping up against way isn't true. It's just part of how I be, and then there's a whole other part that if I didn't recognize was going to be really different and much more highly frictional, then I'd be in trouble.

**BT:** Right, I would say that from what I can tell, I perhaps have less difference in my work with clients and the way I show up in relationship. I don't have too many clients who just tell me how wonderful and enlightened I am. They usually say, "Gosh, Bruce, how can you say that to me? That's so obnoxious," or, "Ouch," or things like that.

**RC:** It could mean that in your professional mode, you're just more prickly perhaps (laughs).

**BT:** Yes, just as obnoxious professionally as I am personally (laughs).

**RC:** I see, well, that brings up an interesting question and I love being spontaneous in the sense that it was not something that I was going to ask you about, but I'm curious to hear your perspective on. Again, I'm going to set things up as if it sounds like it's black and white and I know it isn't that way, but just for the purpose of discussion, I'll start that way.

So, there's one school that I'm aware of that has to do with how people really open to themselves more fully and experience healing from that, that has to do with creating the safest possible environment, and that's something that I think I'm much more towards that pole and I want to help people to whatever degree I can, welcome whatever is present; especially because I work with a lot of people that have significant trauma in their lives or in their past.

I share that we can only go forward as fully and as quickly as the slowest and most sensitive parts of us can go, so that if we push or if you sense from me that somehow I'm pushing you, that would be counter-productive and there's no rush and let's make sure that we are always checking to see: Is there any push? So that way we could, as much as possible, keep from having pushback.

On the other extreme of the continuum, there's the kind of school where someone whacks you upside the head and I know that there's no right or wrong, and things are situational, but if the let's-be-super-safe-mode might have a shadow of coddling, then the whack-you-upside-the-head-mode might have the shadow of you therefore responding in such a way in the moment that seems like you're being a good workshop participant or a good client; but then you contract as a result of being whacked, and it doesn't actually take and deepen inside of you.

I'm curious to see how you see that continuum or perhaps you would see this issue that I'm bringing up in a completely different way.

**BT:** No, a great issue, and it's something I am curious about. I don't have an answer for it, but I have found that who I am is somebody with a lot of aggressive energy and a lot of my work over a number of years has been to figure out how to do a sane, dignified, compassionate version of, for example, being an aggressive guy. Rather than, not that this is the alternative, but rather for me, anyway, being somehow apologetic for that aggressive energy.

I have been very curious for a long time about just this sort of question you're asking about. I am never going to be a sort of Earth Mother type of person and I don't think I can be a benefit to people, trying to be something that I'm not. I'm sure that my style is not a good fit for some people. The way I understand that sort of the question is: Am I talking to a person's most vulnerable, fearful, youngest energies, and/or am I talking to that person's most evolved adult capacities?

My stylistic preference is to talk to people's highest capacities, rather than to their fear, but I'm not pretending that's the correct way to do it, it's just sort of how I think about it or maybe even justify my style. But I think I have seen too many situations where the therapist joins the client in their resistance, their fear, and their young energy. You can spend a really, really long time waiting for that person to feel safe, so I prefer to sort of differentiate between feeling safe and being safe. So I try to always be a safe person, but I don't try to generate a feeling of safety for the people I work with.

**RC:** There's something very resonant in that. I'm wondering if you could just say a little bit more about the difference between those two things.

**BT:** Well, if I'm generating a sense of feeling safe, the person might feel warm, they might feel not pushed like you said, they might feel—"Oh, this is going to go with my pace, I don't have to get defensive, I don't have to worry too much," but in the extreme, that can also be a type of enabling. Not, of course, the sane version of that, but the neurotic version.

The neurotic version of let's say, more my style might be exactly as you said, that maybe somebody working with me might say—"Whoah, this guy is sort of aggressive, I think I better just agree with him to get him off my back," and that's the last time I'll see him. Then I will say, "Well, that's good, that's a good choice for both of us because I'm probably not the best fit for him," and I'd rather not work with people that I'm not a good fit for.

But the sane version of my style might be that I try my best—that's not exactly the word—but I try my best to be a safe person by being very clean in my interactions, not projecting as much as possible my issues onto them, not exploiting that person's vulnerable situation by creating an atmosphere of dependency in the client, that might be more for my economic or emotional reasons than for their benefit, being very honest—if people ask me questions, I usually answer them.

I don't work in a transference model, so I have a lot of sense of separateness, that's part of that masculine energy as I understand it. I don't tell people that I'm an agent of change, I just describe my job as trying to invite more awareness so they can handle their life more skillfully themselves, because it's their responsibility.

To me, the shadow aspect of the soft style is that it can re-enact very unconscious parent-child dynamics, where even though the therapist is being the good parent, they subtly place the client in a child position, not an adult position, which I think actually is not so safe, even if it feels safe.

Whereas my preference is to make it very clear that I'm going to work with this person as if they're an adult, understanding that some of what we talk about will feel a little anxiety-provoking, will feel flooding, will feel confusing, but I am working with the confidence that they have the capacity to decide whether they want to stay in the relationship and work in that way.

**RC:** I'm glad I asked you to share more about that because I think this is a very critical arena and there's a lot that you shared that I think is of benefit. One thing that's coming through very clearly is that rather than taking a side in the discussion about what way is best, there's a real recognition that you have, that any particular person in a therapeutic or facilitating role is well-suited to, suited is not the right word, it would be great to know one's own natural tendencies and to work with them, rather than pretending somehow to be different.

Therefore, it's also clear that some people may be a good fit for that or not, and there's lots of options, so nobody's trying to be something that they're not, either as a client or a counselor; that's really important, I think, to highlight, so thank you for that. And then also, I hear that there's a very powerful recognition of a client's adult capacity and a care to make sure that there isn't a time where there's a fostering of some kind of dependency that wouldn't be helpful. It seems like that's a great gift in somebody with your role or my role—putting that forward and actually, that that would be something that would be safe in a whole different way to reflect for people their own power and

ability to navigate their own life. So that's another theme that I just wanted to highlight that you shared because I think it's really important.

And then, there's a question that comes from that, which is: If you had somebody come into your practice who you didn't feel that way about, that they weren't capable, because of perhaps serious mental illness. Would you at that point say, again, that this kind of container of working together wouldn't be a match for what you offer or would you work differently?

**BT:** Well, I would hopefully, as soon as that became clear, refer that person somewhere else, and probably to somebody who had a more supportive, spacious, softer style because different people have different stages of their path, different personality styles, really need different types of support. Again, I don't have a fantasy that I'm supposed to be everything for everybody, so I would say, "Hey, I don't think this is a good fit."

I actually do that when I run into traumatic organization that's extensive because my style, in my experience, is most helpful in addressing neurotic levels of organization and not so helpful with traumatic organization. So I often suggest somebody find a therapist who has more of that specialty. I also try to moderate my style if somebody asks, but I just try to be clear that it's going to be basically a moderation of my style. It's not going to be some radical change.

**RC:** Could you just say a couple of sentences more about how you would describe the difference between a traumatic organization and a neurotic organization?

**BT:** Well, this isn't technical, it's just sort of experiential, but for me, traumatic organization has a very encapsulated quality that's not integrated very well into the rest of the person's functioning. So somebody can be functioning in very high level ways and some traumatic organization gets triggered and it's like a very intense energy suddenly sometimes just explodes or bursts open that really captures that person and while they're captured, they have very little access to their adult functioning.

Neurotic organization on the other hand in my experience is very integrated into very pervasive arenas of a person's life and so I would expect to see that neurotic organization in the area of work and relationship and self-image and things like that, and because it's much more integrated, it's usually much more available for accessing with their adult capacities. It's much less black and white, it's much less primitive in that way, and so we can gradually bring in our adult capacities



into participation with neurotic organization in a very different way than our adult capacities have to work with traumatic organization.

**RC:** Okay, good, thank you for that, that's really helpful. I want to turn the discussion, if we can, in a slightly different direction, to the subject of needs. The reason I want to ask you about that is because it's always an interesting place to bring awareness and perspective when talking to people who have a, I don't want to put labels on you, but I know you come from a rich tradition of Buddhist investigations, with a sense of non-duality in the midst of it, if I could say that.

**BT:** I don't mind labels.

**RC:** All right, and the more we bring awareness, and disidentification with the self, the more it calls into question the kind of 'given' in a more ordinary conversation about needs.

It's also really fascinating because some of the richest benefit that has come for many people is work like Marshall Rosenberg's *Non-Violent Communication*, which says that we are humans and we have needs and it's a great blessing to have needs as a part of a human, and it's a great blessing to know what they are and to ask for them to be met in a way that doesn't put any pressure, or expectation on someone else, and it's actually a great part of being human to meet the needs of others.

I'm just wondering, with the perspective you're bringing around awareness and this disidentification, how you approach the idea of needs?

**BT:** Great, I love that you're interested in all these things. Well, I tend to see our experiences happening on many different levels simultaneously and it makes sense to me that at different levels of experiencing, we actually do different practices based on our understanding and our capacity.

So we might do one practice at a certain level of maturation and we might do a completely opposite practice a few years down the road. Or even, when we're in sort of different states in our current life, we might do different practices based on what we're capable of.

**RC:** I'm thinking of the possibility of doing simultaneously different practices five minutes apart from one another.

**BT:** Right, yes, or two seconds apart.

**RC:** Two seconds, because in one moment I'm recognizing a need and it feels vital that I express that need and request it to be met in some healthy way, and in another moment, I'm not feeling particularly drawn to that need or see it, but I'm feeling more spacious about it.

**BT:** Yes, I agree, so from that point of view, if somebody is identified with the display of their experience, this never-ending display of thoughts, feelings, sensations, images, sanities, intuitions, the whole business; if somebody is identified with this display, then it's completely intelligent of them to try to improve that display. So if they believe they have needs, it's very appropriate for them to try to get their needs met, and it's very kind and decent to treat ourselves gently and other people gently, if we believe that we're a fragile self—believe not just conceptually, but actually have an identification with that level of experiencing.

But for, let's say, people who have done a certain amount of personal work or spiritual work, and have adequately experienced a dis-identification with this display, it doesn't mean the display goes away, of course, and we don't want to take refuge in the absolute. It makes sense to me, to learn to hold the more relative and the absolute simultaneously without taking sides. So then, we would handle the experience of needs, but within the larger context of awareness or freedom even, so that we don't really take it seriously that these are actually needs, but we acknowledge they feel like needs.

**RC:** One of the other guests in this series, Terry Patten, he's an Integral Spiritual Practice leader and also a good friend of mine; when we get on the phone sometimes, I'll say something like, "Okay, both of us acknowledge that there really is no problem, as we're going to enter into our catch up, like where we are in our lives, and now that we've recognized and bowed to the idea that there is no problem, there's just what is arising, then we feel free to engage in all of the stuff, you know, and not pretend to be somehow kind of removed in a way that we're not. So now I can tell you where I am struggling, where I'm not at ease, where I'm challenged to learn more, or where I'm triggered," and something about holding both simultaneously allows for an exchange and a deepening that's really rich. As opposed to, I think it would feel dis-ingenuous or unreal for me to start sharing a challenge I'm having or a problem with myself or with another person or a situation without having acknowledged that there really isn't a problem. That would feel false to me.

But likewise, if I just got on the phone and wanted to like be in some kind of what I would call a spiritual bypass of an absolute, and not actually own—"Wow, I'm having real trouble with this

thing right now”—that would also be false. So holding both allows us in our conversation to get somewhere really rich.

**BT:** I agree, and that’s my experience and it’s pretty continual for me. So it’s rare that I actually take my disturbance seriously, but I’m also committed to experiencing it, and I think it would be horrible to go into some fantasy of invulnerability, which unfortunately is floating around in the spiritual community sometimes.

### **3. Character-logical Tendencies**

**RC:** Right, well let me just take us to, kind of like a ‘hits us where we live’ and for me, that would be the subject of stress. I don’t mean like stress in just the clichéd way as talked about in our culture, but I’ll just speak very personally.

I know one of the challenges that I have in my life is that in order to make a living to meet the needs of my family, I have to work really hard and much longer hours than I know is good for my physical body, and the challenges that I have in my physical body. So I’m constantly working with, on the one hand honoring those limitations as they arise, and at the same time feeling a need to push because of these other values that are really important to me, like taking care of my family. Mixed in with that also, is this kind of egoic idea that I can handle anything and actually, the more spiritually evolved I am, the easier it’s going to be to just be with what is and take care of it.

Sometimes, the combination of things that I just described becomes kind of crushing and it puts me in a place where something has to shift, and there isn’t a problem in the broadest sense, even in the midst of that; I know there isn’t a problem, but the stress that is living in my being emotionally and physically is requiring some kind of decisive action and I have to figure that out.

I have to navigate that, both within myself and then also within my family, and with my wife, particularly; it’s less about the kind of need we talked about, like I have a need for appreciation, or I have a need for more connection.

It feels like there’s something about just overall well-being that is a compromising need to be addressed. So I’m just wondering if you’re hearing me say that with what’s running through your own mind, either about yourself, or how you would hold a situation like that.

**BT:** Well, I could share some speculation that arose as you were talking, sort of in a generic way, not that we know each other, but I would speculate, hearing that description, that that person

perhaps has an unconscious investment in generating an ongoing environment of pressure, in order to serve certain functions, because it's not necessary.

That person, of course, could put food on the table and have a condo somewhere without working so hard. So I would approach it as a choice that that person's making, which probably serves a function. The one thing you said, "Well, it forces some action"—then the speculation might be: Oh, maybe that person has a history where they have trained themselves to create pressure as a way of demanding a response, demanding action in the world. So that's how I would speculate about that, not as if there was an actual need that was going on.

**RC:** Just to clarify, that last piece that you said—the creating a sense of pressure to demand a response from the world. Can you just explain that a little bit more?

**BT:** I'm sorry, a response to the world.

**RC:** To the world.

**BT:** Yes, if I had some anxiety about engaging with the world, I might create a situation where I felt that I was forced to engage in some way that was perhaps anxiety-provoking.

**RC:** Uh-huh, and just again on the personal level, do you experience in your life, or have you in recent times experienced stress in a way that is different for you than needs as we might more traditionally describe them?

**BT:** I prefer not to use needs for myself. I know people do it, but to me, a need is something that if you don't get it, you're dead. So I tend to think of most people actually talking about preferences or fantasies, whether they're talking about needs. I would say that in a somewhat similar way, not exactly, that I have a character-logical tendency to assume responsibility for others that I care about in a way that leaves me sometimes feeling, "Well, I'm doing so much, I'm giving so much, what about me? When is it going to be my turn to be supported, to have what I want and things like that?"

It's become very clear to me that that's an artifact of my conditioned history, where if because I did learn growing up to be self-sufficient, in control, smart, things like that; that by being sort of on top of things, I basically position myself so that it's almost impossible to receive love, to receive support. And then, historically I've complained about that experience.

I don't take that so seriously, but it hasn't gone away, and feelings come up about it and so I'd say that if I were to identify some type of stress, that would probably be the closest. I don't think of stress as a major part of my emotional life, but that would probably be the closest—to feel like, “Well, gosh, I'm always doing so much to try to keep everything together and when is it going to be my turn?” Something like that.

**RC:** Yes. I thought I heard you say something, but I'm not sure, so I'm going to check—that character-logical aspect conditioning that you would bring forward as you described would lead you to being in a place where you might ask that question: “I do so much, I give so much, when is it going to be my turn?” And then, I thought what you said, that somehow that would actually keep you from experiencing that support.

**BT:** Of course, all of our young survival strategies have these very ironic or paradoxical quality—that they tend to co-create exactly what it is we initially were trying to defend against. So if I had to become independent as a defense against not having enough engagement, support from my parents, which is what I think what my history was, then my very success at becoming independent confirms over and over again that there's not anybody there for me, because I don't put myself in a dependent position in order to receive support from others. It's sort of like a bad joke, that I think most of us, at some point end up considering whether it's time to dismantle.

**RC:** Yes, I totally understand what you're saying. It seems like I know for myself that for many clients that I work with—that dismantling and having an actual experience of doing it differently—that feels more adult and that gets a different result. That's the heart of the practice, you know, and also therefore, sometimes the most challenging of all.

**BT:** Right, and to me, the way to dismantle that I prefer, given my Buddhist practice, is to basically continually return to an experience of embodied immediacy, because all of those character-logical strategies are created states that actually have to be maintained in the present moment.

And so, if we return to a non-interpretive embodied experience, I think we're not going to find any evidence supporting any of these identity dramas. Gradually, they actually just sort of fall apart through non-maintenance rather than through attacking them or thinking they're bad or something.

#### **4. Immediate Freedom**

**RC:** It's interesting and again, I want to try to make this personal, just for the relatability part of it for our listeners. I'm aware that I might most likely, in your way of describing it have more of a

neurotic organization than a traumatic one. Recently, I had an experience where I was feeling really uncomfortable with a situation that had arisen, and I went to a very embodied state.

So I wanted to surf my experience and when I noticed that I was very vulnerable, I shifted to what I call cradling that other people do as well. I wanted to be with my experience, in a very gentle and allowing way, and I noticed that even though I have this neurotic organization, that I was experiencing the sensations that I associate with trauma, that something had shaken me, and in that experience and being with it, something allowed me to let go a little bit of my “I-can-do-anything, I-can-rise-to-the-occasion, I can find a way to lovingly include everyone and everything,” and I dropped it. I basically said, “Here are certain things that I’ve taken on, and I’m not going to do these things anymore.”

This is my perception, you or anyone else can hear this differently, of course, but it was through going to the experience in my body and really honoring it and staying with it, that a different choice arose that wasn’t my habitual choice, that seemed truer and freer, less character-logical, let’s say.

And coming out of that, one of the things I noticed is that I came back very quickly to a homeostasis, let’s say, a greater sense of openness, expansion and presence, because I had tuned in and listened and responded through that, rather than in a more mediated or conceptual way. So just again, without needing you to speak to anything in particular, you’re listening, you’re taking that in, what’s your response that comes?

**BT:** Well, it’s very resonant with how I happen to work with myself and how I invite people I work with, to experiment. I find that when I stay embodied at the sensation level with my worst fears, my most painful experience, I just find absolutely no evidence that my survival’s at risk, that there’s any evidence about my worth as a person, any evidence that it’s a permanent condition, any evidence actually of any significance at all.

And so, I often invite people to practice welcoming their difficult feelings with absolutely no interpretation, perhaps for the rest of their life as a practice.

It doesn’t mean don’t think about it later, but I find that, when let’s say, to use the example I was talking about: When I feel not supported by my partner, it triggers very intense grief for me, and if I

stay embodied at a sensation level and have no story that it's about her, it's about my childhood, it's about anything, then it's just as obviously not a problem, as we were both saying before.

It's obviously an impermanent workable, intense, uncomfortable experience that sort of sucks, I don't like it, but there's no evidence of any problem at all—and so then, I have choice about how I want to respond.

If it were a problem, if it were a threat to my survival, and I think a lot of times, our emotions trigger the fight-or-flight, sort of freeze type response, then my engagement with my life is likely to be about getting out of these feelings, not about acting skillfully in the current circumstance.

So I think we're probably very much on the same page from what I can tell—that commitment to stay in that very scary sometimes vulnerability, actually gives rise to a sense of immediate freedom, a relative choice to how we want to engage with whatever's going on.

**RC:** Yes, absolutely, and there is that sense that as troubling or painful as that can be, out of it comes much more adaptability, much more of a freedom to make choices that otherwise might have seemed impossible or weren't even apparent.

**BT:** From a Buddhist point of view anyway, a lot of my interest actually is in inviting people to get so immediate and non-interpretive in their experience that they actually then start to potentially be able to ask the more interesting question at that point, “Well, what is aware of all this? Is my awareness disturbed? What is the nature of awareness?”

So I happen to think that most of us actually have an investment in maintaining our sense of problem, basically as a type of entertainment or distraction from our more basic nature of open awareness.

**RC:** Now I want to ask you a question that I know can engender a whole other hour and we have a minute or so left. It's kind of like the lightning round. Would you say that everything that you just described in terms of how you would perceive yourself, and perhaps your relationship with your wife, and everything we just talked about—would you say that all of that is the same for you when turned towards your responsibilities as a parent?

You're a parent, you've raised children, and we enter into such a different sense of what it is that our actual responsibility is to our children and so I'm just curious. Like I said, I know this is a giant

topic, but would you adjust any of that when you're working with children as a parent or would it be the very same?

**BT:** No, definitely it wouldn't be the same. Basically, the fast version might be: The younger the child, the more we take responsibility for holding their environment—protecting them, sort of digesting the realities of life and feeding them a more digestible version of reality.

As they grow up, as they develop more capacities, we have to do this very sort of unresolvable dance with them, so that we step back enough to allow them to be disturbed and develop their capacities, but not so much that they get so frightened that they contract into premature formulas.

We have twin daughters who have just both graduated from high school actually, so they're sort of heading out into the world. At this point, for me anyway, they're right at this sort of transitional energy of holding them responsible on one level, but still wanting to give them a sort of a buffered version of life on the other hand.

**RC:** I really loved how you said that. I loved that sense of giving them back a digestible version, that is, let's say, appropriate to their level of maturation and individuation. I'm wondering though, it almost seems as if, because you did say it's different with children, that there's a way that you approach the subject of children's needs, let's say different from adult needs because you actually are perceiving them as—I don't want to assume that you said this—so I want to hear it from you. But it seems as if what you're saying is that those needs are real somehow, in a way that you might not perceive your own needs to be real as you investigate them.

**BT:** Yes, that's true. I wouldn't see it so much as children's needs, which in some ways are very similar to what we call needs as adults. Instead, I see it as a question of their capacities, not their needs. So I think you're probably familiar with Piaget's work and so of all the developmentalists, too. I think there's a lot of evidence that let's say a 2-year old does not have the actual capacity of an 8-year old or a 14-year old.

So when somebody doesn't have a capacity, it's actually an act of aggression to ask them to be responsible for functioning in a way that they can't, which is why my style of work would not be a kind way to work with somebody who doesn't have the capacity to do it.

**RC:** Right, and that's really fascinating to me because it's obviously a matter of perception and evaluation and interpretation when you're talking about adults. You may meet an adult at 42 or at



65 or at 21, who also, as far as you perceive it to the best of your ability, doesn't have that degree of capacity.

**BT:** Right, and that's always sort of a very open sort of assessment to make and as I said, because of my style of working, it wouldn't be an act of kindness for me to work in the way I do with somebody who does not have the capacity to work that way.

**RC:** Right, well, I just absolutely love this conversation and it could go on and on, but I want to respect your time and the listeners' time. I want to just ask you one last question, do you have a moment?

**BT:** Of course.

**RC:** Okay, so I mentioned Terry Patten earlier in this conversation and he loves to ask me whenever I interview a new person for this series, "So what does he need to learn?"

It's interesting to ask that question having just had a really interesting and well-rounded conversation about needs and the actual invisibility of them, once you perceive more fully, but just in terms of where you are right now, in this moment of your life, where is your energy drawn? Where are you called to bring perhaps a fuller, or a newer attention or practice? What's most alive for you when you look at your own evolution?

**BT:** Good question—well, the thing that immediately comes to my mind is that our daughters are leaving home in a few months and I have an older daughter, so I've been parenting almost straight for about 40 years, so this is going to be a lot of space that suddenly opens up and a lot more invitation for direct intimacy with my wife, and I think it's going to be very provocative, and some of my comfort is going to be really challenged, and so my intention, my hope is to just return to keeping my heart open in the face of what's probably going to be some fairly provocative openness that's coming up soon.

**RC:** So what you just shared with us, and I really appreciate it, gives a whole new meaning to the term "empty nest" and someone once said to me that the Buddha never talked about emptiness apart from fullness and fullness apart from emptiness, so it seems that what you're speaking of is the great fullness of the empty nest.

**BT:** Right, which is a little terrifying, you know.

**RC:** Yes, absolutely. Well, Bruce Tift, again I want to thank you so much for spending this time with us and I hope many people will avail themselves of your greater wisdom around these topics and I know I feel really gifted today by our time together.

**BT:** Well, thank you, I really appreciate it and just getting to know you a little bit from our discussion and I really appreciate the series you're doing, too.

**Daphne Rose Kingma**



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### **1. The Intense Fragility of Our Emotional Being**

**RC:** I was recently reviewing some of your writings and some of the talks that you’ve given and one of the things you wrote that just jumped out at me was of the services that you provide, one of them is that you help people see the new forms that love is taking in their life. That really resonated with me because the nature of our discussion today is really about the personal, and getting a chance to see more clearly and understand how different authors and teachers and spiritual leaders actually live. I wanted to ask you as we get started, what would you say are the forms that you’re aware of that love is taking in your own life right now?

**DK:** (Laughs) Well, you went right to the heart of the matter. I love this.

**RC:** (Laughs) Let’s not waste time.

**DK:** That's right. Well, many forms, and none of them traditional. I've been involved in a transoceanic relationship that began twenty years ago, went into a quiet phase and then recently got reborn into a very beautiful and surprising epiphany of itself. I'm having a very profound love relationship with my own creativity; I'm at a time in my life when I'm seeing the deep, great friendships that have traveled with me through decades and through the coming and going of many intimate relationships; and I'm also seeing the great love and mastery of my work, offering it at a level that is kind of the fruition of many years of doing it.

I have to say, first of all, in response to your delicious and bold question, that I find myself still irritated about all that. It's very interesting—and I don't know if I was anticipating your question—but I'm just going to dive in a little bit further here, right at the very outset, by saying that I remember when I finished writing *The Future of Love*, which, of course, talks about the transforming forms of our relationships, that I was going for a walk on the beach one day and speaking with a friend, and I found myself saying, basically, "Well, now that I've gotten that off my chest and I've talked about how relationships are changing, now maybe I can relax into a 'real' relationship." And when I heard myself say that, I realized that my own inclination, the sort of dirty little secret at the core, was that now that I've been the pioneer, maybe I, too, can go back to the traditional form of relationship; now maybe I can go back and have a traditional marriage. All these things that I had just written about the changing of, I saw that I myself didn't want to change, and it was so interesting to see that.

**RC:** So when you said a moment ago that you find yourself irritated—I love the honesty of that—do you mean that there's a part of you that is irritated that these forms are new and different and that there isn't a more traditional form that love is taking for you right now?

**DK:** Yes. And I think the traditional form for most of us has been the template we call marriage, but I've been on this kind of protean journey of exploration. I have been married, and I have been not-married for many years, but instead have been having—on one level you can call them adventures; on another level, you can call them profound transformations, great gifts. There are a lot of things that you can call them, but I see that the marriage template is so deeply ingrained that even after being an explorer, I find myself thinking: when am *I* going to settle down? And of course, settling down—that's a very beautiful notion, the notion of settling your spirit in a place and with a person, whatever the exact form of that settling might be—but that idea, as it's been held for most of us in the form of marriage, still has a resonance within my own being.

**RC:** I really hear that. It reminds me of a conversation I had many years ago with a leading teacher in the realm of polyamory, which, of course, as you know is a world of people who are pursuing conscious relationships with multiple partners. Not the old “swinging” of yore, but people who are attempting to open their hearts and I was really shocked and then delighted in a certain way when this woman said to me that after all of her writing and work in that realm, what she was really looking for most, was having a really intimate, high-quality, high-integrity relationship with one person.

**DK:** Well, I think you and I both work deeply with people in the emotional realm and with what that means and holds for people in our emotional bodies; and I think what’s true is that we’re all very tender. I’m using the “we,” but I speak also, of course, for myself, and exactly for myself. The “intense fragility,”—I think that’s a phrase from e.e. cummings actually, the poet;—but the intense fragility of our emotional being is always present, and I think we are not, most of us, resilient enough to undertake this complexity of multiple relationships because we’re always healing and we’re always vulnerable and there are things that can rise up like the Loch Ness Monster out of nowhere and scare you and challenge you and exhaust you. So it really is a very great work and labor of love, certainly.

**RC:** Yes, there’s an old joke that I often tell people at workshops: “A guy goes into a bookstore and says to the clerk, “Can you please direct me to the self-help section?” And the clerk says, “Well, I could but wouldn’t that defeat the purpose?””

**DK:** (Laughs)

**RC:** And the reason that I mentioned that is because, following along your insight, it really does seem like every relationship is a universe unto itself.

**DK:** Yes.

## **2. The Fortitude to See the Bigger Picture**

**RC:** And I get that what you do in working with people as a coach, counselor, intuitive, etc., is really help them see that particular universe, as opposed to being more formulaic in terms of what’s supposed to happen in relationships in a more general way.

**DK:** Yes, absolutely! What a beautiful thing you’ve just said, because that is so true. Each engagement is a universe unto itself. And I think, as a person who has been really a pioneer in this

work—not just as a teacher but as an explorer—it’s more like many universes. Sometimes I think of the universes that have passed through me, that I have digested, that have transformed me. On the one hand, I think, how rich and glorious that is, and on the other hand, I think it’s exhausting. There’s a kind of weariness. I don’t like the word weariness because that sounds very gray and worn out; I like the word exhaustion better because it talks about the amount of energy that is expended. It’s a beautiful energy and it moves through you and reshapes you, but it is nevertheless, a very great amount of energy.

And sometimes when I’m—to use my word—“irritated” about it, or sometimes when I’m looking at it from the point of view of exhaustion rather than celebration and expansion, I think, “Wow, that’s a lot to have gone through in one life.” And on the other hand, I feel like: Wow, what an incredible privilege! What an incredible, amazing privilege to have had so many deep loves, to have had so many experiences of profound connection, and that is very rich. That’s very rich, I think, especially when I look back on it through the number of decades of my life. And on the other hand, there is that thing of exhaustion. There is also the matter of the need for resilience in having to say goodbye, and going through *that* transformational process: alright, we’ve had this deep experience, but now it’s time to let go. I sometimes actually marvel at myself that I’ve been able to do that in grace so many times.

**RC:** And that speaks to the point we were talking about earlier: the forms of love, because what is so deeply ingrained for most of us is the idea of the love of a lifetime.

**DK:** Yes.

**RC:** And to open to the idea that the love of a lifetime is happening in the present moment but that doesn’t mean necessarily that it’s either meant to continue over time or that there is somehow something wrong about it or less than if it doesn’t go the distance.

**DK:** Yes, and that’s a huge thing. I somehow have been blessed to not have any judgment about that, I must say. I don’t ask—I never ask myself the question nor do I ask the beloved in the experience—“What’s the matter with us that we can’t carry this to the last gateway of time?”

**RC:** Yes.

**DK:** I never feel that way but I know that many people do, because that notion is so much a part of our internalized myth about a relationship—that it’s only good if it lasts. And I think I’ve had to

digest that myself, and just come to a sometimes very hard-won peace about it. Sometimes a relationship is released and the peace comes easily; but sometimes it's been very hard-won. It's like, "Oh, here I am, needing to let go again; here I am, needing to surrender once again to the fact that this journey is over." And it's tough, sometimes.

**RC:** It seems that challenge becomes greatest when there is a particular expectation or a wish that this is going to be a certain type of relationship that goes a certain way and then suddenly, we're faced with the truth that it has a life of its own and it's not necessarily conforming to that expectation.

**DK:** And I think, Raphael, it's really hard because the expectations can be kind of abstract. It ought to look like this, and it ought to last like that; but where I find it particularly poignant is where it's an experience that has been filled with extraordinary beauty—and I find myself getting teary just saying those words—because to love a person deeply and fully is to enter into an experience of extraordinary beauty, and it goes against the instinct of my soul to let go of that. I speak from my soul, my feelings, my—all those hairy places of "I want to be attached; I want more; I want longer; I want—" there's even that voice of forever in there. And to be in the presence of something so exquisite and yet, get it on some profound level that it's a circle that is closing for whatever reason, or that must close for whatever reason, is excruciatingly difficult.

I think the only way I've been able to hold that in my life is—I mean it's what I really call an emotional spiritual practice—is to recognize that this is a great teaching about our own being. It's a great teaching about life itself and our passion for life and the love that we bring to the experience of living itself. And that great romance, too, must come to an end, does come to an end. The ending is built into the gorgeousness of the experience.

**RC:** Yes. And as you were talking, I was drawn to ask you a question, and it's personal but we can speak to it on a general level—which is, given what you were just saying about the challenge to your own soul in recognizing that there is an end that's built into the experience—that's an internal journey toward acceptance that you have of a love completing itself. But on the other hand, have you had in your experiences, a relationship which came to its end and which you came to accept in the way that you were just talking about without conflict, like a mutual recognition?

**DK:** Oh, many times, yes. Absolutely!

**RC:** So, part of your own personal understanding and your teaching then is that people could come to see that they're diverging and that why they were together has changed, and that it doesn't necessarily have to be that it's the friction between them that's creating the separation.

**DK:** Oh, I'm so glad you asked that question because yes, that is what I have most often lived. That's, I think, what makes it so poignant. It's like, here we are loving each other in the farewell. Here we are loving each other in the recognition that the journey must diverge here. Here we are pausing at that moment of the divergence and asking, in many instances, "How may we love each other in the future?" I mean there are a number of really profound loves in my life, and among them, several that are deep soul friends of my life forever.

So there *is* a forever quality. It's just transformed from the romance/marriage part of the scenario to a deep soul kinship, which is also a great love, a love that I count on, a love that still delights in many ways, and nourishes. And so, I'm glad you asked that, because I see that I was assuming that *you would assume* that these departures have been made in love, and I think it is that very grace which I really like to hold out to people in my teaching. And in fact, I think the real call of the spiritual moment that we're living in is to find the way to do that, and not to do it with friction and nastiness and judgment and self-judgment.

**RC:** Well, I think that one of the reasons I was drawn to ask that question is because I think that that is an aspiration for many people that they might feel far from realizing because most relationships, when they're crashing and burning, as people might experience them, are filled with a sense of loss, and "you should have done this," or "you shouldn't have done that," or "you're not giving me what I want," and therefore there is something wrong here and something's wrong with you.

**DK:** Right.

**RC:** And so to be able to hold the relationship in the way that you are describing is a great practice.

**DK:** I talk about this a lot in my book *The Future of Love*, one of my personal favorites, I must say. And the notion—I mean it calls for us, you know, to really look at the relationship not just from the personality level and the roster of complaints that we all can register. Of course, the ending is always in some way related to the roster of complaints. "I wanted this;" "I needed this;" "You didn't do that;" "I can't give you that;" "We're not a match;"—all the things that emerge and all the



things that we want so hungrily on the emotional personality level. But when you have the grace to look at the relationship, in the larger frame of it's spiritual undertaking, you find yourself asking: what is was the soul's business in this particular engagement? What was the transformation that occurred? What was the great, unexpected gift of engaging with this person? A lot of times, it's not a gift that you wanted, I can personally say that.

**RC:** (Laughs)

**DK:** It's like, "Oh, this is a gift? Shucks!" Like, "I'll be damned. That isn't the gift that I wanted."

**RC:** "Can I return this? Can I get something else?"

**DK:** (Laughs) Right, exactly. But when you have the courage, the fortitude—and let us say very clearly that it takes some fortitude to really see in the bigger picture what was going on—that kind of courage immediately opens the door to holding both the relationship and the ending in a very different way.

**RC:** Yes.

**DK:** And there's such peace in that.

### **3. The Beautiful and Challenging Parts of Each Parent**

**RC:** Now, one of the things that I've noticed and written a little bit about in terms of relationships is that most relationships have maybe one or two main themes that play out.

**DK:** Yes.

**RC:** And that also, the series of relationships that we have, usually there's a consistency there. So, speaking personally for example, in my early life I had a really difficult time bonding with either of my parents; although I've always been a very loving person in a general sense. But then when it comes to that real deep intimacy and vulnerability, where you feel yourself just fully relaxing into a relationship and letting yourself be in it completely, without, as you so beautifully called it a moment ago, the roster of complaints—that has been an ongoing challenge for me in relationships and I'm married now; and it's still one of the challenges in this relationship. It's the second marriage that I've had. So I'm wondering for you, have you found one or perhaps two themes that have been consistent for you on your relationship journey?

**DK:** Hmm, somehow I'm not relating to it so much as themes in this moment as more that I see I keep engaging with both the beautiful and challenging parts of each of my parents. So I would see it more as the form of engagement, as opposed to the themes, because actually, the themes in my relationship stories have been very different—"the what went on" inside them. But what I have found myself noticing is: "Oh, here's that beautiful part of my father. Oh, here is that part of my father that drove me crazy. Oh, here's that gorgeous, sturdy, present, supporting part of my mother. Oh, here is that part of my mother that I could never connect with." So, it's been more a flow of kind of receiving and reliving my engagement with them in a sort of prismatic play kind of thing, this aspect and that aspect, and that's a very interesting—that's a very interesting question. But, in my life, I don't see the themes so much as the form.

**RC:** But it seems to me—I know that you started out life as a poet and language is very important to you, and the vocation of language and its specificity—so I hear you describing it in a really beautiful way, and my sense of it is that's how it lives in you, but it feels similar to what I'm talking about, because of those moments that come around again and again. I know, for instance—well here's my own experience—that being fully seen and understood has been a very important value for me precisely because in my early life, I felt so completely unseen and misunderstood. And I remember one time when I was I think 18 or 19, I decided maybe I've sold my parents short on this, maybe I've withheld, and if I just I just say who I am, if I spell it out so clearly, then maybe finally they'll be able to understand. And so I have a memory of a specific Chinese restaurant in the San Fernando Valley that I went to with my parents with the mission of sitting them down and saying, "This is who I am."

**DK:** Wow!

**RC:** And what I remember was so heartbreaking about that experience was that I basically tried to describe aspects of myself in a nuanced way and when I would experience the reflection coming back at me, it was as if every nuance was kind of shoved back into a pigeon hole and so the reason that I'm sharing that now in terms of our conversation is that I know that as I went forward in life and particularly in intimate relationships, this would come up: do you really get me?

**DK:** I see.

**RC:** And what would it take for you to get me? I remember when I was doing some somatic work with particular counselors in that realm, I came to see that I would labor so hard to get you to get me.

**DK:** Oh. Yes.

**RC:** And I would use my language in such a defeating way that maybe a paragraph would do, but I would give you a complete essay, and you would check out after the first paragraph and so it would go worse for me rather than better; and nothing really shifted in that regard until I literally let myself roll around on the floor and just open into that terrible feeling of not being seen, of not being understood. And so I know that there was a real shift and healing there, and yet, still I can see where that's a trigger for me.

**DK:** I see. I went on that whole journey with you, Raphael.

**RC:** (Laughs)

**DK:** Wow, that was—from the restaurant to the floor. (Laughs) Well, thank you for that. Thank you for that movie. What comes to me is that the theme for me is not inside the relationship, the theme for me is that the people I loved very much when I was a child, which were my father and my brother—were both always leaving. My mother was a very beautiful woman, very present; she was just so steady in a very beautiful way—but what the theme is for me, and of course, it is repeated in my relationship life, is the fact that the two men to whom I was very deeply connected, both were always leaving. And so that set up a template for, of course, this life journey of relationships that I've had: I have these deep experiences with the man that I love, and then for whatever reason, the story is over and the next experience comes.

And I think you and I here are both talking about Chiron, the Wounded Healer: how does the theme of our childhood play out in our life? And so let me elaborate on that—as you did so beautifully—just a little bit for myself. I'm the youngest of five children and I have only one brother, who was the oldest child in our family; and to me he was just this beautiful man. He's almost old enough to be a father to me, and so I knew him first as a tiny girl, and he was always going away. He first went away to a private school and wasn't home very much, and then he went away to the Marines; and I didn't know what that meant, but I knew it was about war. I knew it was about guns. My

brother was a hunter and he made guns up in his room. One of the very profound things I saw as a child was my brother, as a young man, making guns.

He made these beautiful wooden stocks for his guns, gun stocks they are called. And he measured out gun powder on a little scale up in his room, and made bullets. So he had this very powerful male presence that I also knew was connected with danger, and he went away a great deal when I was a child and so there was always this experience of connecting deeply with him and in a very sweet, connected, wonderful way—we had various ways of connecting and ceremonies that we did, and then he would vanish again. And so he went away to school, he went away to the Marines, and ultimately he went away to college; finally, he went away and got married. And all of this happened while I was a very little girl. So I lost him, and lost him, and lost him, and lost him—and the same was true with my father for a number of different reasons. He was there, and then going away; there, and then going away—until finally he would be gone for a couple of years at a time and then come back only near the very end of his life.

So I think the theme, is not in my case so much an internal theme, but it's the theme of profound connection and then separation; the experience of loss and then having to come to terms with the loss, and having to have resilience about that. It was a great set up for being the writer of *The Future of Love*. And that experience of relationship has been the theme that has repeated in my life—to make this very deep bond with a person and then to need to let go for whatever reason. And of course, all these reasons that my father and my brother were separated from me were never nasty reasons; they were never because I was bad or they were bad. They were always a consequence of incontrovertible circumstances that I had to surrender to, and to find a way of accepting as a child.

#### **4. Acceptance and Surrender**

**RC:** So I'm thinking, in the light of that, about the many people who come to me, and I would guess come to you—they would say something along the lines of “I just keep living that story out in my relationships, and I want to it to change. I don't want to be stuck in my story of relationships,” whether it's an internal or an external version. And so they're asking to change their life; they're asking, in a way, to change their brain, what they unconsciously attract. And I'm interested to hear what you think about that, because it seems that in what you're describing and in relation to the grace that you spoke about earlier, there's an acceptance in what you're describing, in terms of your own personal experience. In other words, it's rich for you, you see it coming around, it's

challenging, but at least, so far as you've described it, it's not as if you want to make it go away or be different.

**DK:** I would not—I'm so glad you asked. (Laughs) It's very paradoxical. On the one hand, we have kicking and screaming and being dragged to the door; and on the other hand, we have acceptance. It's like—and I want to be really clear about this—it is very paradoxical—and what comes to me right now is something my father said on his deathbed. He said, "One always hopes for good news." In other words, there is the practice in me of calling for and building toward that which doesn't have an end, but when the end becomes inevitable, then there is acceptance. I guess my deepest belief about the experience of love and relationships in this life is that it's always a gift, and that, you know, our souls—my soul—is really ultimately creating the experience that my soul needs. So while I lean toward and build and invest myself as if and with the hopes that it could be the longest running show on Broadway, when the moment comes or when the time comes that that isn't true, I am in acceptance about it. It's not the passive sort of thing of, "Well, this is the way it is, and this is the template for my life, and so I guess I'm okay with this." Because there is always a kicking and screaming element of saying, "Okay, I'm here with everything: I am here with willingness and the desire till the end of my days; and if that's possible, I'm here for it." And it's only as it unfolds to be otherwise that the acceptance comes into play.

**RC:** And so I hear something that is a gift to listeners in what you're sharing because while that acceptance, ultimately, is where you get to, it's not the kind of acceptance in the way it's really lived that somehow precludes the kicking and screaming.

**DK:** That's right. And it's not the acceptance going in. It's not like, "Oh well, I accept this is a story with an ending." I never go in with that because I think that's very lacking in courage and lacking in the intensity of investment, of heart and body and soul that allows any relationship to come to its fullness. I have to say I'm amazed at myself in the depths with which I go through the door, the excitement, the willingness. And I guess what I want to say here is that this is a very paradoxical thing. We've heard all that stuff from the little film, *The Secret*, which seems to say that you can just think about it and make it all happen. But you know, it's a very paradoxical relationship between our intention and the deepest consciousness that's guiding our lives; and I think sometimes we confuse or prefer our emotional intentions, our "gimmies and our wants," to what is really being offered to us and asked from us on a much higher level.

And it's hard to say, but let me try to say it more specifically as opposed to so abstractly. As a person, I may say, "Oh, I've had all these adventures and intensities and transformations, but what I would like is the forever-after experience." I can say that as an intention, but the forever-after experience might be some other vast experience or epiphany of love that I can't even imagine. I don't know. On the personality level, I'm saying, "Yes, please, let me come home and find the grace of my settling," but on a soul level, maybe something much greater is in store, and it's in that state of surrender (kicking and screaming), that I'm really intending to live my life.

**RC:** So what you are describing is really—it feels rich and beautiful as an offering—for a person to know what they want on a personal level and then to be also aware that there are forces moving at what you would describe as a soul level that may have something very different in store for them, and to be able, as you said, to paradoxically, gracefully hold the seeming contradiction of that, which is going to bring a depth and a peace to one's experience.

And out of that arises a question for me—and this is a huge question, so you can just take one branch of it if you'd like—but how do you guide and support people to attune themselves to that greater journey of the soul, especially when it may be in contradiction with what they are so sure that they want in relationship and in love?

**DK:** Yes. Oh, that's such a wonderful question, Raphael! I support people in that by inviting them to look at their relationships retrospectively, because there we can see things more clearly. To look back, for example, on the relationship that ended that you wished would have gone on forever and to see what actually became of you as a consequence of it and to ask yourself, do you wish you were still there? Or, having arrived at the place that that relationship took you, are you glad to be occupying this new place?

I wrote the book *Coming Apart*, which is about ending relationships, basically on the psychological level—what people go through in that process, all the agonizing steps of it—because even on the psychological level we want to hold on. And what's been amazing to me over the years working with people going through this extremely painful process, is that when they get through it, I really have never talked to a person who says, "You know, I wish I could go back to that 30-year marriage" or "I wish that 3-week romance had gone on for 20 years." So, we're able to see that in hindsight. We're able to see, to get a glimpse of the larger picture, the larger calling that was operating in our lives when we reflect. And so, that's how I help people see it. It's "Oh yes, this is

what became of me. Oh yes, I am someone else on a different journey now, and so I need a different partnership.” And you know, I think this is true of relationships whether they are a 30-year marriage, a lifetime deep friendship, whatever—that these relationships too have stages of death and parting emotionally that we must find a way to work through so we can re-engage with life and love on a different level.

I think the thing that’s hard for me to surrender to—and I don’t want to be presumptuous here and say “for everybody,” but certainly for a great many people—is the paradox of being completely there with your psychological awareness of what you want and what would feel good and would make you happy and serve you, being alive to all that wanting, and at the same time being in a state of surrender to what is being delivered. I know this is true in my life, and I see it over and over again in the people I work with. There is a magic that arises from being in the state of surrender. And I can see that over and over in my own life: at those moments when I was in a state of integration or profound acceptance about the nature of my life, some extraordinary experience of love showed up that just knocked my socks off.

**RC:** Yes. Just the echoes of what you’re sharing are touching me, and I’m hearing that the both of those, the wanting and the surrender, they’re indivisibly related there. One without the other is incomplete somehow.

**DK:** Well, yes, and it’s a darn hard spot to occupy. I love what you said about “indivisibly related,” because that is so true; and I don’t know who said this, but somebody said: “God resides in the paradox.” It’s like we’re standing at the crux, the intersection of these two, and it’s a darn hard place to occupy.

**RC:** Yes. And I remember, just if I can share a personal story, another movie as it were—when I was going through my separation—this was about 15 years ago—it was very painful. It was a very dark time, and I decided that I was going to hold the space for my partner to come through a dark night of the soul, an addiction, etc.. And there was a relative of mine who said to me on a family vacation, “So how are you doing in your getting over Lynda?” And I immediately bristled, and I said, “That’s not what I’m doing.” And everyone around me was saying, “There’s no marriage to save. What are you doing? You’re just in denial.”

**DK:** Hmm.

**RC:** And at the same time, I was reading a book by Barbara Kingsolver, I forget which one. I think it was *Pigs in Heaven*, but it was about the family that we choose. And something about the question that was asked by my relative, first of all, put me in touch with my deep wanting. I wanted this marriage to come back together. I wanted that with every cell in my body and then at the same time, during this short period of time, I deepened more than ever before into a peace with the path I was choosing. I stopped fighting it, and I said, “This person is my family until she decides not to be my family.” And something in that moment which included both the wanting and the surrender, created such a transformation in me, that shortly after that, life was never the same.

And when I look back on that moment, it feels that it’s so emblematic of what you’re describing, that if I had wanted any less or surrendered any less, what needed to break through wouldn’t have been able to come.

**DK:** Yes. And you know, my relationship life has been a progression from a traditional marriage, to a long relationship where I was never married, to a number of very significant life-changing relationships that didn’t have any of the structures of even living together. But it’s like they all put me through these changes of wanting them to be forever, and then at some point, surrendering. And it’s just hard work; it’s hard work. And I’m not saying that self-pityingly, but certainly there is a robustness to it. It’s not for the faint-hearted, as you described. I mean I could just feel the weight of your stance when you were talking about that relationship and what moved through you and what you moved through to fully occupy it and then to be fully at peace with it, to let it go. And yes, these are—it is—I have to say, very surprising. I have to say, I’m very surprised by the path my life has taken.

**RC:** Yes.

**DK:** And I can’t say I was the little girl who said, “I’m going to grow up and get married and live happily ever after.” I never had a picture of my future. I’ve never been a picture-creator in my life, which is both wonderful and terrible. It’s wonderful in that it has freed me to be in the experience I was having at the moment; and it’s terrible in that I’ve never been able to say, “Oh, I know what it’s going to be like,”—so of course, I can just relax and expect it.

And so it is a surprise, you know—I guess all our lives are surprises—and it has surprised me, for example, that my path has been about teaching about love. I never would have imagined that. I was an artist. I thought I was going to be a studio painter. I was a very good painter, actually, and yet



somehow, this other path evolved. And I think this is part of exactly what we're talking about. It's part of that wanting and surrender that somehow I was inexorably led on this path, through many moments of choosing. And I'm not just talking about my personal life of love and relationships here, but also my path as a teacher about love and relationships. In the same way that we were both just saying a few minutes ago, when you asked me, well how do I help people, and I said something about the looking back—I can say that after so many years of working with people about love and relationships, I also find myself looking back. For example, I just came back from teaching a workshop at Esalen, and I realized that in this world so many people have not been well-loved. So many people have not been well-loved.

It's one of the great tragic chords of the human condition—and I say this very carefully and very humbly—but as I've worked with people over the years, I have seen that each of my parents had a very unique gift for love. I never realized this before, because the circumstances of our lives, our family life was so difficult and so excruciating in various ways that I never was able to see that there was always this core of love that was very extraordinary. And so, as I have come to learn that, it of course makes sense—and this is the retrospective look—that I would be called upon to teach about love and to live various experiences of it, even in the often uncomfortable way that I have. So I think when I look at that—I mean, I wanted to be a studio artist; I wanted to be a poet; I wanted to have this sort of personal expressive life; but I ended up being a teacher of love—I see an interesting dialogue between the wanting and the surrender. Because I never said, “Well, I think I want to spend my life teaching about love.” It just sort of kept pulling me toward it.

And so I think there is a kind of beautiful sense about all our lives even though we're frustrated by them. It's like “Well, wow, how did I get here? I was going on this other path.” And yet when I think about it—and once again I say this humbly—I'm a pretty talented artist, and I'm returning to my other poetic life with words; but something larger was saying to me, “Daphne, you have something to share and we're not going to let you out of life unless you do that.”

**RC:** Yes. There's that famous quote that I'm going to mangle from the Gospel of Thomas that says, “That which is within you, if you let it out will—”

**DK:** Oh, save you, yes.

**RC:** “And at that which is within you, if you don't let it out will destroy you.”

**DK:** Right.

**RC:** And so there was a calling that you were sensitive enough and wise enough to hear even if it didn't look anything at all like what you had imagined.

**DK:** Yes.

### **5. Loving Thyself**

**RC:** Yes. We just have a couple of minutes left and I'm just—

**DK:** I'm so sorry to hear that.

**RC:** (Laughs) I've just been enjoying this immensely and I wanted to do two things. One of them is I wanted to let people know that they can learn much more about you and how to work with you both individually and in a group setting at your website which is [WWW.DAPHNEKINGMA.COM](http://WWW.DAPHNEKINGMA.COM). I would recommend anybody to go there and connect, however it would best serve you to get a chance to experience a little bit of what I'm experiencing directly today. We both teach often at the Esalen Institute and I think on the Events page of your website, there might even be a photograph of the cliffs of Big Sur.

**DK:** Yes, there is.

**RC:** So I'll look for your spirit the next time I'm there.

**DK:** Oh, thank you.

**RC:** But I want to ask you a question; maybe it's a good question to end on. You said in one of your books that loving yourself is the hardest thing to do.

**DK:** Mmm.

**RC:** And I hear and experience that everywhere I go whenever I work with people individually or in groups: that they come to a place of real compassion and acceptance *except* for themselves. It's almost as if what they're saying, if they relate to God as a being, is that God says, "Everything is included in my embrace except you."

**DK:** (Laughs) Right.

**RC:** Or, or they say it even more specifically like, “Everything is included in my embrace except that part of you,”—your shame or your anger or whatever it is. And so I’m wondering if you’d be willing to share with us a part or an aspect of yourself that it has been difficult to love and anything you want to share about how you were able or how you’re still working at being able to love that part of yourself?

**DK:** Oh, what a dear, poignant question. What came up for me immediately was my body—that I’ve had a very, a very long, difficult struggle with my incarnation. I mean just being here, being inside my body, managing my body, managing to take care of it so that it didn’t take me on some wretched, emotional tangent of depression or discouragement or self-judgment. Along with the struggle, one of the great gifts of love in my life has been that many people—not many really, one person in particular—whose gift of love to me was a profound transformation of my body through working with healing food, and helping me understand things that I had never before understood, which allowed me to reside in my body in peace. I could go on a long riff about this, and I feel myself kind of at the edge of tears about it because it’s been such a profound journey of extreme physical sensitivities and things that could just drop me off the edge of the earth to a place of just feeling worthless and practically suicidal. And yet various people have shown up to unravel those riddles for me; to, in some way really make a difference between life and death. I’m not even going to talk about smoking—(I was a smoker for many years, and quitting, that was another whole journey of healing)—where there was a lot of self-loathing and just feeling wretched, physically wretched; and so all this has been my journey.

And, as you know, Raphael, I wrote a book about self-love and in it I told a story about going on a trek in the Himalayas. To me, that was a victory of self-love—when I experienced my body as being able to do this incredibly physically demanding thing, whereas in the past I would always feel like my body would kind of betray me, that it wouldn’t be able to come through; and therefore I would feel terrible about myself. And so that’s really been my struggle from very young; very, very young. And it continues to be—I wouldn’t say it’s a struggle, but it’s the place where I have to really care for myself because I have such a high level of sensitivity that if I’m not taking care of my body, it’s instantly reflected in my moods and in how I talk to myself and what I believe is possible. So that’s really been my frontier.

**RC:** Well, I so appreciate you sharing that and it feels like a beautiful way to land in terms of our conversation today because we’ve been talking about love from the beginning and it sometimes can

feel surreal or spiritual in an other worldly way to talk about love. And yet every one of us that is experiencing love or working through our wounding around love is here in a body. And every emotion that we feel is going to arise and move and pass away only in our body. And as you said, the relationship that we have with our body is a foundation for moods and the way we talk to ourselves and think about ourselves, just as you described. So how great to include that and to help us recognize that if it's not embodied, it's not all the way here for us.

**DK:** Yes. I'm so glad you asked that question, because that really has been my journey and my struggle—I mean what comes up for me just now as a kind of grounding of that specifically is: I used to live in a different neighborhood in this town and I would always go out and have one cup of coffee in the morning. That's my ceremony for the day. And I used to go to a particular place in that neighborhood to get my cup of coffee. And one day I noticed—I don't know what they put in that coffee, strychnine or what—but I finally figured out that every time I went to that particular place to get my morning coffee, within 20 minutes, I was mercilessly beating myself up. And so those relationships of food to the body are very intense for me. That's been my riddle to solve. I'm happy to say I loved myself this morning by going for a beautiful walk on the beach before this conversation.

**RC:** Well, I think the beach has been present in this conversation and also a sense of having coffee together. I feel like, for myself, and for anyone who will listen to this, that we've gotten a chance to sit with you and have that ceremonial cup of coffee and commune with you on a very deep level. So I'm extremely grateful and I think that you've added so much to this series.

**DK:** Mmm. Thank you.

**RC:** I hope down the road, I will get to connect with you further and have another cup of coffee.

**DK:** I look forward to that. It's just been an incredible joy, and I want to thank you personally and deeply for giving all of us this opportunity not only to be deep with ourselves, but to be deep with ourselves as a gift to other people. I always used to say to myself about my work, "I spend my life asking people questions and inviting them to explore themselves in my presence." And I've always had this little something inside me that said, "*I hope someday somebody will do that for me—ask me the questions.*" And so you've given me this exquisite opportunity, and I thank you with all my heart.

**RC:** Oh, that's very moving to me, and it's an honor and a delight. So with that, I will say goodbye and I'll be continuing to feel this conversation throughout the day and many days to come for sure.

**DK:** Mmm. Thank you so much.

## Paul Cutright



Paul Cutright has been on a path of self-realization and living in service to the awakening of others for more than 40 years ever since his father gave him a five volume set of books entitled, “The Life and Teachings of the Masters of the Far East,” in 1970. Paul has been motivated by a passionate quest for authentic spiritual connection and the practical application of spiritual principles. His quest led him to and through a multitude of experiences that culminated in two life changing events. The first was a profound experience of rebirth and the second was an unexpected experience of spontaneous transcendence with the young woman who was to become Paul’s creative life partner, Layne. They soon found themselves on an accelerated path that had them teaching, from their own experience, about relationships as a path of personal and spiritual evolution. They have travelled and shared their work in many countries around the world. [WWW.PAULANDLAYNE.COM](http://WWW.PAULANDLAYNE.COM)

### 1. Annoyance

**RC:** Paul Cutright, thanks so much for joining me and welcome to *Teaching What We Need To Learn*.

**PC:** Thank you very much, Raphael. I’m very excited about our conversation today.

**RC:** Well, I’m glad to get a chance to talk with you. We know each other but we haven’t really had a heart to heart connection for a few years. So this is a chance to do that in front of millions of people (*Laughs*), so we will co-create collective intimacy.

**PC:** Okay, (*laughs*), sounds good to me.

**RC:** As most listeners know, I like to begin by coming into presence, myself and with my guest. And so I want to say, first of all, that I am excited to be able to connect with you as I just mentioned and also I'm very tuned into my body and the fact that bodies do their thing over time because over the last few days, I've had a soreness and a stiffness in my knee for no reason. And so it's kind of nagging at me a little bit in the background as we begin today.

**PC:** *(Laughs)* Thank you.

**RC:** How about you?

**PC:** Well, *(laughs)*, I understand what you mean when you say bodies do what they do regardless of anything else that's going on in our life; This may to be a relevant part of our conversation today. I am reluctantly aware of my body's aging, and the things it's going through as it does; unusual aches and pains, soreness here and there that comes and goes, and it's like, those weren't there before and I find it most annoying. So I'm present to that and just some of the physical, medical issues I've been facing in the last year as a result of my open heart surgery.

**RC:** Which we are going to talk about in some detail.

**PC:** Yeah. It's kind of been a cascading effect, and it's just something new to be present to and aware of for me just about everyday, so I'm aware of and present to those things this morning. And I'm just learning to carry on in spite of them and doing what I can to take care of them.

**RC:** Okay, good. Well, thank you for sharing that and thank you also for using the word 'annoying' because one of the things that's come up a few times in this series is this question around spiritual teachers and personal growth leaders and when they get to that place of 'we're all one and I experience that each day and there is no problem, there's just opportunity', sometimes it seems as if they're in a land where it wouldn't happen that they're annoyed. Actually, one of the teachers in the series spoke about irritations, but I love the word 'annoyed' because you live in the world and I certainly do too, where with whatever sense of realization that you've experienced as a human being with a personality and with a body, contractions show up in you, such that you too can be annoyed.

**PC:** *(Laughs)* Yes, indeed. Almost on a daily basis.

**RC:** I see. So as far as you're concerned, there's no particular ticket that you can buy or enlightenment that you can achieve that would remove the human being's capacity for annoyance.

**PC:** I'm still looking for it. (Laughs) I have not found it yet.

**RC:** Alright, and that's after a long and storied career as both a practitioner and a teacher. So I'm going to take that on a high authority from you.

**PC:** Thank you.

## **2. Near Death Experience**

**RC:** So you mentioned the very intense physical journey that you have been on since the fateful day of June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and I think it will be helpful if you just give listeners a basic understanding of what happened to you and how you came through it, and then I've got some questions for you for sure.

**PC:** Okay, sure. I'm happy to share that Raphael because it has been singularly significant event and aftermath in my personal life and in my spiritual life. I have enjoyed good health my whole life. The last time I was in the hospital was 1972, a long time ago. The event of that being in the hospital actually relates to this event of being in the hospital, which I'll touch on later if it comes up. So I've always been healthy and vital and able to function without any problem, and on that day, I had been experiencing for a while a certain fatigue and shortness of breath and the morning that this happened, I had gone out on to our deck and was taking a hot tub to deal with the soreness in my body that morning at about 8:30.

And I came inside and my wife, Layne was in bed but awake and I sat down on the edge of the kiva fireplace. I said, "I just feel kind of dizzy." And that's the last thing I remember until the paramedics were standing over me. And in the interim, I had collapsed onto the floor and according to Layne, I had almost instantly turned blue and stopped breathing, which terrified her. And she didn't know whether to reach for the phone and leave me there not breathing or give me mouth-to-mouth. And so she elected to give me mouth-to-mouth for about ten minutes until I started breathing again a little bit on my own and she went to the phone and called 911. And the operator guided her through what to do until the paramedics came.

And as it happened, I had a near death experience and she brought me back. She saved my life. And that happened twice more that same day in the emergency room at the hospital where they had to



put me on life support because I stopped breathing. And as it turns out, it was the test that they were doing; I remember the doctor standing over my shoulder as the technician was doing an echocardiogram. He says, "Oh, you have had a severe aortic stenosis. You need emergency open heart surgery as soon as possible, but we need several days to stabilize you." As it turns out, I had a congenital heart defect with my aorta, which normally has three flaps in layman's term, but mine only had two. So for an unknown extended period of time, this condition was slowly shutting off oxygen to my brain and vital organs, which culminated in this congestive heart failure event.

**RC:** Let me ask you a question about one part of what you shared. You said that three times over this period, you had near death experiences and you came back. And people bring a lot to the idea of a near death experience. We've certainly heard about many of the classic kinds. It sounds like from what you're saying that as you were near death these three times, you were not aware of having had an internal experience. Is that right?

**PC:** Yes. So disappointing. (Laughs)

**RC:** So no tunnel, no blue lights, none of that.

**PC:** No. No tunnel, no people greeting me, (laughs), no angels, nothing like that. Just gone and back and it's like almost sleeping and waking up. The only reason I know is because that's what the doctors told me.

**RC:** Okay. So they stabilized you so that you could have open heart surgery. Go ahead and please continue.

**PC:** Okay. And, (laughs), you're right about there being a lot of stuff about near death experiences and what they mean and what a person would expect from having one. So anyway, I had open heart surgery, which is a four hour procedure and I was in the hospital. Normally, you're in the hospital 5 or 6 days. They let me out a day early because my recovery was proceeding so quickly. So I was happy to come home and I was on oxygen for six weeks. Now part of the dynamic here is I live at 7,000 feet where the oxygen is already a little thin and people who come to visit here will experience that lack of oxygen for the first week or so until they acclimate.

**RC:** Here, just for listeners, is Santa Fe, New Mexico, correct?

**PC:** Right, yes, Santa Fe. And so I was on oxygen for six weeks and I was so debilitated. I had to have people take me to the hospital or to the doctor or appointments and things like that. So unaccustomed was I to this level of helplessness and overcoming the challenges, asking for help or receiving help from friends who offered to do whatever they could. So there was this whole psychological process that went on as well as the physical process. And one of the most surprising things was how I did not want to do the work that I've been doing with my wife and partner for the last 36 years. I didn't want to do it anymore.

**RC:** So Paul, let's stop there because there's something really important there that we're going to get to but I want to get to behind that a little bit because I think it will be really helpful for people listening. So you're obviously an ordinary human being in a certain sense because we all live and die and suffer these challenges in our body. But also you're an extraordinary human being in that for the last many decades, you've been a really well-known and regarded spiritual teacher and you've had an approach to life and relationships and really just to existence overall that has really been the compass for you in terms of how you meet every moment and every situation. And so I'm wondering if—this is going to be an impossible task—but in just in a few minutes or so, could you share with people who don't already know you and your work. In other words, if somebody said, “Okay, Paul Cutright, what's he about? What's his way of moving through the world? How does spirit inform him in terms of how he lives?” What could you tell us that let's us know who you were before these heart failures and the operation and the near death experiences and how that might have prepared you perhaps differently from someone else for these transitional experiences?

**PC:** Great question, and I'll do my best to provide a thumbnail version. I approach life with the sense that nothing is more important than relationships; that everything about our human existence here concerns relationships; our relationship with our self, our body, other human beings, animals and nature at large. And that dynamic of relationship for me has become a space of deep spirituality and self-examination; it began for me in 1976 when I was going through my second divorce, breaking up with a two-year old son and unemployment. Life was pretty weak at that point and my spirituality was all in my head; it was all conceptual and not particularly well-lived in my life and relationships. And then I had a physical experience of awakening to something that changed the course of my life that had me embark on the path that I've been on. Soon after which, I met the woman who was to become my life partner and my lover and my best friend and co-creative partner, and we had an experience of transcendent love that lasted only a moment and we

committed our lives to finding out what does it take that to keep that alive? What was that? And how can we live in the aftermath of that experience and share it with others as we go through our life. So that's kind of my background.

**RC:** That's great. It was impossible to encapsulate your life and teaching and spiritual approach, but I'm glad that you did that thumbnail version. I think it will be really helpful. And you started out, Paul, by saying that everything to you is about relationships and one of the things that you mentioned in your list of the types of relationships is your relationship to your body. So I'm wondering since you had a relationship with your body and your body was functioning, or we could say it was impaired in its functioning in some way that had been there all along and that was completely invisible to you, almost as if your body had a secret and it wasn't telling you. So I'm wondering if that impacted you at all through the process of both the events and then ultimately coming back to yourself in terms of recovery.

**PC:** Yes, very much so because I was so completely unaware of this. The only clue was that I had a murmur and I had known I had a murmur pretty much my whole life. I was in the Navy in the late 60s and the Navy doctors told me that I had a heart murmur and they didn't seem concerned about it, and other physical exams indicated I had a heart murmur and nobody ever said, "You should have that looked into." As it happens, it was related to this valve issue; I have what's known as 'atrial fibrillation', which is the heart skipping a beat every once in a while and fluttering and that's what the doctors were hearing and that was an indicator of this aortic valve irregularity, but it was never looked into.

**RC:** So your body wasn't actually keeping a secret from you. It was trying to communicate with you but you and your crack team of medical associates didn't quite get the message.

**PC:** Yeah. *(Laughs)* I guess that's accurate, yeah.

### **3. Relationship and Communication with the Body**

**RC:** One of the things that I'm remarking on in my mind right now or reflecting on, is that when it comes to relationships between people, it's my experience that communication is the most challenging and the most important piece; that in almost every situation, where for the purposes of speed and convenience, we assume that we understand what other people are saying. When we check, so often the fact is that we don't understand or there's an important nuance to what's been communicated that we haven't picked up on, and that's between people. But it's so interesting that

that's reflected in the relationship that you had with your body, where it seemed like it was one thing but it was really another thing and nobody thought that it was important to double check.

**PC:** Yeah, I think it's really a good comparative analysis, Raphael, because communication is the beginning of our curriculum, what we call 'heart to heart talks', this authentic, high performance communication. It is a training that helps people become different listeners and different observers of the communication process that helps the challenge of human communication. And it was very important in the beginning of my and Layne's relationship and something that we were very rigorous about in checking in with each other: "Is it what you meant? Did I understand you correctly?" which largely contributed to our relationship being as long lasting as it has been. So the communication part is really important and there may have been a hint early on. As I mentioned earlier, the last time I was in the hospital was 1972 when I was in art school in San Francisco. And I will just be honest and tell the story as it actually happened.

This is San Francisco in the early '70s. I was a child of the '60s. My first real, visceral, unmistakable spiritual awakening experience happened in about 1968 on LSD. LSD and psychotropic substances were a very important part of my spiritual awakening. I never had a bad experience with LSD or anything like that. They were all transcendental experiences that showed me what was possible that I so desperately wanted to have in my normal waking experience without the benefit of these psychotropic substances. That is a prelude to the time I was at a party in Point Reyes, California, about 50 miles north of San Francisco given by one of the teachers at the art institute, and everyone there, including myself, was on LSD. (Laughs)

And I had a sudden pain in my left side of my chest and my left arm went numb. When I was in high school, my father had had a series of heart attacks, so I was familiar with what a heart attack looks like and felt like and the symptomatology of it. I was 24 years old. I thought, "My god, I'm having a heart attack." And I was very lucid and I thought, "I can't tell these people here that I think I'm having a heart attack and I could die. They wouldn't know what to do. They will just freak out and make things worse. So I'm going to go sit down under this tree over there and wait and see what happens. And if I die, well that's okay. I'll become their problem. And if I don't, well then I am my problem and I need to somehow get myself to a hospital." So I drove into the city and went to the hospital where they did whatever test they did and discovered that my left lung was collapsed and they needed to do a surgical procedure to re-inflate my lung, and I was in the hospital for several days.

I didn't think anything about that until several years later when I was involved in a spiritual practice that transformed my life and put me on this path that had to deal with the breath and breathing and it was called breathwork or rebirthing. What had happened in my experience spiritually, is that I was so intent upon waking up spiritually and having an enlightenment experience like I was reading about that I would go to medical school bookstores in San Francisco and just sit on the floor and read these incredible books. I so hungered for this experience, but it wasn't happening short of LSD or mushrooms or something like that. But I wanted it to occur naturally, and there was a breakdown between my capacity to understand and my ability to integrate what I was learning into my body; and the breakdown happened in my lungs and breathing and what I had just come to learn is that the breath is the bridge between the invisible and the visible, between the spiritual world and the physical world. And I was unable to cross that bridge. So it resulted in a breakdown in my lung, the capacity to breathe, to integrate the spiritual insights and learning that I was having; I was not able to live them because I wasn't able to breathe down into my body and into my physical expression, if that makes any sense.

**RC:** It does. And this is a really fascinating gateway into so many different themes and we'll only be able to touch on some of them. But there's a way that you're describing the experience, if I'm hearing you right, that it came to you as a knowing. In other words, it's not something that a doctor could tell you or anybody outside of you could say: that the breath is the link and your collapsed lung is evidence that there was something yet to be developed in you that could provide that link. Am I right in saying that it was an intuitive understanding that you came to?

**PC:** Absolutely, and it came much later. I had no idea at the time. All I knew was that it hurt, (laughs) and I thought I was going to die and so I thought it was something different than what it was; and it was some years and a lot of relational and emotional pain later.

**RC:** One of the reasons I mentioned that is because there are some spiritual teachers and writers who are well-known who have presented certain kind of maps of meaning in terms of the human body. For example, the idea that if you have a kidney infection, it means that you're angry at your mother or something like that.

**PC:** Right.

**RC:** I've noticed that I've always had a contraction around that because I feel like human beings are infinitely unique and mysterious and their experience is going to show that and there's no

conceptual map or framework that could make one person's experience exactly like another on this psychological and spiritual level. A heart attack might be a heart attack but we're talking about a level of understanding, which I think is very subtle from person to person. So in your situation as I understand it, over time and through, let's say, a lot of seasoning of your awareness and deepening of your practice, it became true for you in a way that was verified by your intuition; it was a knowing that was for you and could only be yours that you came to. Is that accurate?

**PC:** Yes, I think it is. So I think there might be the general aspects that I described of a breath being a bridge between the invisible and the visible worlds and a means of access for human beings. But this is the way it manifested specifically for me and it could manifest in a completely different way for someone else.

**RC:** Yeah. I'm really fascinated by that because the breath has been central to your journey and in my journey, emotions have been central and I would say through my own experience, on my own and with the people that I work with that also— emotions are a kind of nexus between self and spirit. They function in a similar way to what you're describing as breath and to what you're describing the breath does; both take us, it seems, to that place in between to bridge where we start to experience and sense what is beyond the here and now that we can use our ordinary sensing mechanisms to experience and perceive.

**PC:** Yeah, I agree and I experience an intimate relationship between the breath and emotions. Emotions for me and for Layne, in our own journey together and individually and in our work are central to our work because emotions are central to relationships. It is in relationship that we experience our deepest feelings; our deepest feelings of pain and hurt and disconnection and isolation and separation; and our deepest emotions of love and connection and transcendence and understanding and compassion. The whole spectrum of emotion exists in our relationships with other human beings, in our relationship with nature and with animals and in all of our relationships; in my experience emotions are the nexus, like you said.

**RC:** I just want to share for listeners that you and Layne wrote a book around this topic. The title of which has always been one of my great favorites; it gives me a smile always whenever I read it or say it—it's a book called *You're Never Upset for the Reason You Think*. And I love that because it's for the reason you *think*: it's your thinking mind that's trying to tell you what's going on and

your practices that you guide people through are to take them into the emotion directly to really understand at the essence what this response is all about.

**PC:** Absolutely. And that title comes from a body of work that was seminal for us in the early part of our relationship and our work, which is *A Course In Miracles*. And so we dove deep into that to find, “Okay, well, if that’s what we think—why are we really upset about? And how can we find out?” And one of the things that I have come to learn is that as human beings, we all have things that we think and feel and believe and remember that we hold as inviolate truth, when in fact, all these is what we think and feel and believe and remember and may or may not have anything to do with the truth or the facts or what actually happened or the meaning of those things. It’s something that we make up. Does that make sense?

**RC:** It absolutely does, and I think it’s something that’s crucial to me in my own life and my work and many of the teachers in the series, each in their own way have reflected on that. And also a number of them have been deeply served by *A Course In Miracles*, which I didn’t know as I was gathering the guests so that is a really interesting theme there, too. But I just want to touch on something personal briefly before we move on, and it’s around the subject of intuitive understanding. Because many years ago now, I think it’s about 17 or 18 years ago, I had a really powerful spiritual opening and experience that I wasn’t looking for, I wasn’t prepared for. It kind of came and grabbed me out of my own suffering. There are a lot of ways to describe it but it seems like the best body of description comes under the heading of Kundalini, and that also wasn’t something that I knew about very much.

But one of the things that happens for many people who have this kind of opening experience is that an energy wakes up inside of their body and seems to have a mind of its own and wants to blast through the body. Sometimes it’s described as through the chakras and out that crown of the head. And anything in its way psychically, emotionally, physically, it just attempts to blast through and this creates all kinds of physical challenges for somebody, if their body-mind state isn’t absolutely pure and refined. And the reason I’m mentioning it is that after going through many different challenges around digestion and stiffness and pain, eventually I ended up having a very large, let’s say softball sized tumor show up in my thigh of all places.

**PC:** Oh my goodness.

**RC:** Which is very rare and when you talk to Western medical doctors about it, they'll say, "Well, it's just a random mutation and it's a wonder that we don't see more of these just because of the way mutations work." So for them, it's not a significant phenomenon, something like that. For me, while I can't say with absolute surety that the two experiences were connected, it felt deeply and intuitively to me that this energy which was moving through my system, which I didn't understand and is beyond almost all of our traditional ways of understanding, was somehow taxing my system. It was so intense that it couldn't really be, let's say, fully processed or integrated and that this tumor was an external symptom of what I'm describing. So a little bit perhaps like what you were talking about as you came to understand the collapsed lung in your life challenge there, I didn't hold it too tightly. It didn't have a meaning that therefore kind of ordered what happened next, but there was a kind of deep relaxing into a knowing that these things were connected in some way and it gave me a certain kind of a peace, I think, to go through the process of how to deal with this tumor, to see it and to feel it in that way.

**PC:** Yeah, that makes complete sense to me. It's like the reason—the doctors couldn't give me a medical reason for why I have this spontaneous collapsed lung. They're just said, "Well, it's just kind of common amongst slightly built young men in their early 20s." Well, that's a pretty lame answer, but okay. It wasn't till much later that I had the insight that I had and it was like your experience with the tumor in your thigh, that's just where it showed up for you and it was a physical manifestation of something else entirely.

**RC:** Yeah, and so it seems like I had to be both comfortable with the knowing that I had and also comfortable with not knowing; and the not knowing often has been a big challenge in my life because I'm a knower and I love to know. So it was some kind of combination of the two: having a trust in the knowing that I did have, while also recognizing that there wasn't a way that I could prove to the not knowing or not understanding part of me what it was that was intuitively clear.

So this was a long and wondrous detour from the statement that you started to make a while ago when you said a surprising part of the experience for you of coming out of the surgery and into recovery was that you didn't want to do the work that you have been doing for so many years that had brought so much joy and passion into your life. So do you want to say a little bit more about that?

#### **4. Work Sans Sacrifice, Punishment and Resentment**



**PC:** Sure. Very good, Raphael, because we really have gone far field into other things from that comment, so thank you for remembering that and bringing that back. Because I think it's been important for me to feel almost a repulsion of being engaged in our work and all I really wanted to do was make art, make photographs, which is what I was doing in art school when my lung collapsed. Going to art school and studying fine art photography was a complete surprise and a total left turn from the life path that I had been on, studying journalism and political science; I wanted to be a foreign correspondent. And I ended up in San Francisco and dropping, spontaneously, all of those plans to enter art school. I was completely unprepared for that, but totally enthralled and loving what I was doing. It's like I was giving myself some kind of gift I didn't even know I wanted.

And that's what it was like following my surgery. I didn't want to do what I had been doing. All I want to do is make images and that's all that's pretty much all I have been doing for the last year. I haven't been able to work and quite honestly, Layne hasn't been able to work either because this whole experience for her was very traumatic. It was like facing the loss of her lover, husband and life partner. And she, I think, was experiencing a form of PTSD as a result of having me die in her arms and being present through the entire ER for four days and surgery and recovery. It was like all of the feelings that she had about it, she set aside to be there for me. As my recovery progressed, I was more able to be there for her emotionally and so she was able to allow some of the feelings and experiences and fears and anxieties that she had about my condition, to speak about them and express them which is very important for her. So we were there for each other using all of the tools and exercises and processes; and everything that we have learned we brought to bear in our relationship with each other to help one another through this really devastating time. And it very much prevented either of us from being able to work up until just very recently.

**RC:** Let me stop you there because there's so much in what you're saying and there's one piece I want to make sure we don't lose. So you had this recognition that you didn't want to work and you used a really important and powerful word, even a 'repulsion' as you described it, to this work that you had so loved and that had served you and that you'd been doing for decades. I'm wondering, at that time, was there just for you a recognition of that and an acceptance of it? Did you wrestle with it? Was there any should in your mind about what was supposed to happen? How would you describe your coming to peace with that realization?

**PC:** Oh, yes. (laughs) Definitely this was not supposed to be happening. I learned some of the important things about myself and how I had been working in the last few years that contributed to this. But to just back up a little bit, from 1977 or so until 1999, Layne and I had a seminar and training business where we would present workshops and trainings in hotels and retreat centers and things like that. And in 1999, we took our business to the Internet and developed teleclasses and programs that were delivered virtually over the Internet, which was quite a learning curve to do that. And part of during that early part of that is we wrote down everything that we had known and we had to produce content for people in these classes. In workshops, all we had was manuals and handouts. We didn't have any books. We didn't have any written course work.

So going to the internet gave us the opportunity to write books and manuals and courses and audio programs and video programs and all of that, and so most of my work was occurring on the phone and in front of a computer, as opposed to in front of a roomful of people or across from a client. So when I would come into my office and sit in front of my computer, I couldn't stand it. I couldn't be there. That's what I was repulsed by. I said, "I cannot not make myself do this," and I had been working long hours into the night for months, maybe for over a year and I was burned out in a way that I had not recognized. So when I returned to sit down in front of this, I was like, "No, no, no. I cannot do this. If this is what my life is going to be about, then I'm going to have to do something else."

**RC:** So to be really clear and specific about it, it was that you were finding yourself facing a computer monitor, telephone, technology.

**PC:** Yeah.

**RC:** It wasn't about the content of your teaching. It was about literally and physically what you would have to be doing, what space it would be in, and how you'd be relating to your environment through these screens.

**PC:** Yes. That's right. The venue was the problem, and also partly, not wanting to listen to other people's problems anymore. I was just like, "No, I can't listen to that. Go read my book and let that be enough." So secondarily, there was a resistance to actually doing the work. Primarily, it was the technology.

And my focus was on seeking beauty, expressing beauty—beauty as an opening to a deeper sense of self in connection to spirit and an appreciation for the need for all of us to have beauty in our lives and to recognize beauty and have a conscious relationship with beauty in some way. So that's what my photography became for me.

And then there was another healing that occurred. I mentioned my second divorce; I left when my son was two years old and he stayed by his mother and he would come to visit us from time to time, but we had a fairly estranged, superficially friendly relationship. Well, in October last year, he came to visit, which was an unusual thing and he had, over the course of the previous six months, become interested in photography and sought me out because of his new experience of my history of photography and viewing my photographs over the course of the last 30 some years, and expressed a lot of appreciation for my work and he was like, "Oh, this is interesting." And he had an iPhone and he was making pictures with his iPhone, which I found fascinating. And so I got an iPhone and I have been making images with this amazing piece of technology that has reignited the passion that I experienced in the early years in art school when I was learning to make images; it was just like that was reborn in me anew, ironically, with a very high form of technology.

So I have made thousands, literally thousands of images in the last year that have been an essential part of my emotional recovery from this devastating experience. And there is a part of me—I could be totally happy doing nothing but creating art and selling it and making it available for other people, which I'm doing a little bit right now and it's very gratifying. And that's alongside, Layne and I have both returned to our work and there is no repulsion or no resistance. So it was very clear that we have to engage in and express and share our work in a very different way. I think one of the things that might be true of, I don't know—many people who are in similar positions to our own, as teachers and leaders and healers and practitioners, is thinking that nobody can do it as well as we can do it. And that was underlying a lot of my overworking and burning myself out: not setting a business up to have a support staff who could do many of the things, all of the things that I don't want to do, that I don't like to do, but I thought I had to do, and not providing an environment for me and Layne in which we do what we do best, which is teach and coach and write.

**RC:** So I want to explore that with you and share in a couple of minutes with your listeners how that's evolving for you and how you're putting that together creatively. But I want to touch on something a little bit more fully that you mentioned before. It turns out as you brought more detail to the subject that it wasn't just the technology and the overwhelm that we can have with that. There

was a way, at least for a time, where you were just saying, “I don’t want to hear anybody else’s problems.” And I think that’s a beautiful admission because again, sometimes there’s a sense that if we reach a certain plateau, let’s say as spiritual teachers or counselors, that our hearts are always open and ready to support people wherever they are. And it’s true when we look at it more closely that burnout happens, that people’s own life force takes them in different directions, and of course, there can be a lot of pain that results both for teachers and their students, if the teachers get locked into a should about what they teach, when they teach, how they teach, or, or even just in any way kind of pretend that they want to be present any more than they really do. So there was a certain kind of a fierce honesty, it sounds like to me, that arose for you, where you knew it, you had to admit it and there was no pretending at that point that you had more to give in that way than you really did.

**PC:** That’s really true and I’m glad you brought that up because I think it’s a very important insight and it’s a trap in many ways for a teacher or healer or spiritual types to fall into thinking that “Out of my commitment to the healing of humanity and the healing of the planet that it’s okay for me to sacrifice myself.” And one of the most important things that I have learned, and Layne and I have learned together and that we teach in our work, is the danger of sacrifice as it shows up in relationship, and that is doing things we don’t really want to do but we think we should do, breeds resentment; and that resentment is a subtle toxin that can contaminate our own relationship with our self, our relationship with the divine, and our relationship with others. Because when we sacrifice, there’s a unspoken expectation and anticipation that some particular thing will come to us because we’ve done this sacrifice and when that doesn’t happen, then we get resentful.

**RC:** Yeah, and as you are sharing that I was nodding my head and thinking of how Marshall Rosenberg, the creator of *Nonviolent Communication* talks about this issue; he was playing the role of the person who had a request of his partner. And he said, “As I’m making this request to you, I would like to share that if you are about to say yes and it’s not absolutely in your best interest, if you’re doing it out of a sense of expectation or responsibility, or guilt, please say no because I’m aware that if you do say yes in that way and we go forward, that one way or another both of us will be punished.”

**PC:** Yes.

**RC:** And it was so clear when I first heard that and many people hearing you speak about that and me speak about that now will have their own responses. And there are a lot of ‘yeah, buts’ and “Aren’t there very blended roles and responsibilities in relationships?” and “Could we really *only* do things that ultimately we fully wanted to do?” So it’s a rich topic, more than we have time for today, but generally speaking to bring attention to the full authenticity of a yes versus all the ways that we offer a compromised yes—it’s just a really powerful arena to explore.

**PC:** It really is and you’re right, it’s one I’m sure that you and I could talk about for another whole hour. And it’s my final thought on it here is that the Judeo-Christian culture we live in is one that exalts sacrifice because that is the true measure of love: to the degree that we’re willing to do something that we don’t really want to do is a measure of how much we love the other; without the recognition that to do something we don’t really want to do will bring about, like what you said that Marshall said, something will come back to punish all of us. And I think it is a distortion that is present in our society that causes us to think that we must do things we don’t really want to do. So it’s one of the practices that Layne and I committed to in the beginning of our relationship and that is to not do anything we don’t really want to do or to say yes when we really mean no. But to have a kind of rigor that you pointed out that Marshall demonstrated in this request, “I really want you to be clear. Can you really say yes to it or is it a no? And if it’s a no, it’s okay.” That’s been a central part of our relationship.

**RC:** And then even if life demands certain things of us and we have to negotiate that, how are we going to handle it, whether it’s about paying the mortgage or putting food on the table—at least we can start from a recognition of where we really are.

**PC:** That’s right—that recognition and conscious making of the choice because the world does demand of us to do things we don’t really want to do sometimes; and how we hold that and handle that and deal with that is a part of the spiritual journey in my experience.

**RC:** Absolutely. Because on the one hand, I’ve quoted in this series many times, Isaac Shapiro, who was a guest who said “There’s only one human drama, which is not wanting the experience we’re having,” and that is a very powerful recognition, but then on the other side of that is how we are going to meet those moments and situations where we actually do have to show up and do things for ourselves and others in ways that we really don’t want to, if we’re honest. And so, “Okay, I’m not wanting this experience I’m having and I can work with that within, emotionally and

spiritually; I can practice acceptance.” But that acceptance doesn’t take away the truth. It doesn’t suddenly make me want to have the experience I’m having when it has to do sometimes with things like making a living or making a living in a certain way. So it’s a kind of a sandpaper that we get to rub up against and there are no simple or easy answers for people, but again starting from a place of real awareness gives us so much more choice and possibility than we would have otherwise, if we’re locked into our shoulds.

**PC:** Yeah. What you’re saying, I think, this is just so central to the spiritual path and one of the paradoxes or enigmas of the spiritual path and I would say my deepest grounding in spirituality is in Buddhism, primarily Zen Buddhism and Esoteric Christianity, the teachings of the Inner Christ. And both of those, from my experience, have to do with this recognition that you’re talking about, of what is, not resisting what is; letting go into what is and in that is the opportunity to lose our ego, to lose our separate sense of self and to blend with the mystery, the great mystery, the ineffable divine. And breathing, coming back to breathing, breathing is a practice that can allow us to do that. Right now Layne is studying the work of modern Christian mystic Cynthia Bourgeault, who teaches about this quite in-depth. It seems to be a never-ending process, as long as we have this egoic personality in the world of time and space and form, and learning to confront and be with what is without judgment and releasing and letting go and surrendering, whether the ego likes what’s happening or not.

**RC:** Yeah, and so let me ask you, building on that, how it was that you found yourself coming back around to resuming some of the work. Was it just a season of life that transformed into the next one or was there more to it that you’re aware of?

**PC:** Good question. I was so impressed and touched throughout this whole experience with Layne’s support. I would say it is my connection to art and beauty and photography and her tender mercies that got me through this. And during a lot of this time, I would talk about, “I want to go be and artist. I don’t want to do this anymore.” So we are looking at, “Okay, well what does this mean about our partnership? What does this mean about the work, the business that we have devoted the last 36 years of our life to? We just like, let that go?” And that was looked at as a possibility in a not knowing kind of way like, “God, we don’t know what this means and this is a really big thing.” So our mutual willingness for that to occur, I think allowed us to come back to the work and go, “No, we have too much of our hearts and souls invested in this work to let it go.” I mean we could release it, let it go, “Okay, (claps hand) that’s done. This is our legacy,” and what we came to recognize is

that, “Yes, it is our legacy and it isn’t complete.” And we do experience individually and mutually together in our relationship, a commitment, possibly a soul commitment before we ever came into this these bodies. This is what we could come together to do and this is our life’s work and it’s not an either/or situation. We can return to our work with the recognition that we can’t do it the way that we have been doing it and seeking support and expressing our work and getting it out there in such a way that will free us, free our time, free our energy for us to do other things as well, in particular for me to continue to pursue my expression of art.

**RC:** So something in what you said really strikes me very powerfully. You had to be willing to let it all go. You and Layne had to have conversations in which there was no fixed understanding of the limits to what could happen in order for you to come back and embrace it in the present in a new way without the kind of resistance that was there previously.

**PC:** Yeah.

**RC:** I think that that’s so important for everybody because in your love relationship, your marriage, your partnership, whatever you have, so often there is great tension and pain and turmoil and a real sense of “Maybe this isn’t right.” And it seems sometimes that you can’t get to a full re-embrace of what it is that the two of you can do together without being able to say, “Well, maybe not. Maybe we won’t do this. And could we even consider what it might be like if we let this go?” and I know it’s even more powerful when there are children involved. Because for instance, I know in my own self, I have certain very strong preferences about the kind of life that I want to provide for my daughter and those preferences then lead to certain decisions that I have to make and my wife has to make about where we’ll live and how much money we have to make. And again, it can be so important to say, “All right, let’s just lay all that down for a moment. Let’s just say that those are beliefs,” or as I said before, “preferences, but they’re not needs. There’s no law that says, “This is the kind of life that we all have to lead together as a family.”” And once again, it seems like only by being willing to entertain the most extreme possibilities can we then figure out, “Okay, what are we really going to do here that’s calling us in the highest good of everyone involved?”

### **5. A Looser Way to Way to Move Forward**

**PC:** Yeah, that requires a certain spiritual rigor to be able to do that, don’t you think?

**RC:** I think so. I think it’s really hard because it comes up against so much of who we are or who we think we are as you were talking about before in terms of the practice of the ego. I’ll give you

just the tiniest example. So I didn't know this about myself, but I came to see recently that I believe that for a growing child in American culture in 2012 as we're talking, that it's really important as a parent to create the opportunity where your child learns how to swim at an early age.

**PC:** *(Laughs)*

**RC:** Now that's somewhat trivial except for the drowning part of it, but let's just leave that out. It was so interesting because my wife was really scared of the water when she was little; she doesn't really feel any kind of push to put our daughter into a swimming program that may bring up some fear for her. And so we find ourselves sometimes at odds where I'm saying, "No, the summer is almost over. We haven't done a swim class. It's really important that she reaches a certain level of comfort in the water," and there's no law about that. There's no good parenting manual that says what year a child should learn how to swim but it was really interesting because as time went on I saw, for instance, around dogs, that my daughter was also really afraid of dogs, and my wife really thought it was important to keep exposing her to dogs; that she gets comfortable with dogs. And finally one day, I said to her, "Dogs and swimming, it's the same thing." Not the same thing like one thing should happen, but at least now we have a really good frame of reference. My whole being shows up egoically around this, "A child should know how to swim," and yours shows up around, "A child should grow to not fear dogs." And then we could start to play with it and see like, "Well, okay. With this child at this moment in time what's a looser way to move forward but still one that comes from what feels right?"

**PC:** Yes. That's such a great story, Raphael. I'm so glad you shared that because I think that kind of challenge is unobserved by most people. Certainly unobserved as a spiritual opportunity or from the perspective of the culture in time, in space, in human history in which we are embedded that gives rise to automatic preconceptions and notions and judgments about what's good and what's bad and what's right and what's wrong and how things ought to be and how things ought not to be; that you just shared from your own experience of observing for yourself around swimming and a child. It's like if we think that those things are real—those positions, those perspectives are real, we hold them so tightly. There are consequences that issue from that that can be actually damaging to a child and to a relationship. And having the capacity to really look at it deeply and to relax our grip and to let go in the way that you described, I think in many ways is the essence of the spiritual path in modern America today. I can't speak for other countries because I don't know, but certainly for our own that's really the kind of examination that we're required to make.



**RC:** Yeah. And I think it's important maybe to make a clarification or to bring an extra piece to it, which is that loosening that grip doesn't mean that a parent, me or somebody else, would or would not go for the swimming lessons or the dog familiarization. But what it does mean is that if you do go forward with more flow, a looser grip, then that experience is going to be a lot different for everyone, especially the child. So it may be that you come back around to saying, "Well, yes they are going to swimming lessons." But the tension around it in the parent, him- or herself, is diminished in such a way that's going to create the optimal experience in that realm for the child.

**PC:** Absolutely. From my own perspective, I would say, "I agree with you. Yes it is important that a child learn how to swim and be comfortable in the water. And from your wife's perspective, it's also important that they learn to be comfortable and safe around dogs. So I would agree with both of you." And it is how that is approached, the coming around again that is the essential part that you described.

**RC:** Yeah, and even, I'm thinking right now about the whole controversy that erupted, I don't know a year or two ago around what was called 'the tiger mother'. I don't know if you're familiar with this but there's a book written by a Harvard professor—I think she's a Chinese American—and she was ruthless with her daughters to create levels of achievement for them in things like playing the piano, etc. And I kept thinking as I was reading about that controversy, "And what is the final purpose? Is the final purpose peace and happiness? Or is the final purpose just getting ahead and why is that so important?" Let's get through that value to the deepest level of understanding because coming back to what we're talking about, I could see a parent actually deciding that their child needed to play the piano and needed to practice an hour a day and being at peace with it and still showing up as the kind of guardian of that discipline, but always with loving kindness and that would be such a different experience than bumping up against the yelling and the foot stomping that often happens when there's a clash of wills between parent and child.

**PC:** Yes. I think what you're describing all has to do with consciousness: the consciousness with which we engage in anything for ourselves or for other people or in parenting. And I think it behooves us, those of us who are on spiritual path or to engage in that level of rigorous self-examination and be willing to change ourselves according to what our ultimate purpose and intention is. Is it to produce a kid who is highly accomplished and has a chance of success or a child who has a love of this whatever it is and to nurture their love if that, in fact, is there? It becomes

something that they can express their life through and take pleasure in as opposed to feeling pressured by having to produce some kind of result for their parents, or... you know what I mean?

**RC:** Yeah, absolutely. So let's use that theme of consciousness to transition to our last piece today on the call. You reached that place where you recognized that there were parts of your work and the legacy of your work that still call to both of you and Layne and that you want to continue doing them, that there are lots of parts of the work that even if previously you thought you were the only ones who could do, you realized now others could do. And using all of that, plus your love for fine art photography, you have created a really interesting and innovative plan to birth this next wave of your life and teaching. So I'd love for you just to describe that for people so they get a sense of it and also know how, if they're interested, they can engage in it.

**PC:** Oh, thank you. Yeah, because not working for a year, (laughs) had certain economic consequences, I thought, "Okay. Well, how can I share my artwork? Many people don't know anything about my background as an artist and I have a photography business and I had gallery shows and images and books; that's the whole other part of my life that most people in this part of my life as a relationship educator and expert don't know anything about. So how can I marry those in a way?" So a friend of mine suggested a term: "What about an Art for Heart project? And you could share your images and give people an opportunity to win or purchase one or some of your images and receive some of your relationship materials at the same time and contribute to the recovery of your mission and vision in the world." And I thought, "Wow, that's a really great idea." So I created a website, [PaulAndLayne.com/artforheart](http://PaulAndLayne.com/artforheart), and people can read our mission there. There's a little ten minute video that I made about my experience and then an opportunity for people to purchase tickets for our drawing to win the piece of art of their choice printed on canvas that they can have to give as a gift or to hang in their home or office or something like that. So that's a project that is kind of ongoing right now.

**RC:** So it seems like it dovetails with everything that we've been talking about because it was again through being willing to let it all go that you came back to what it is that you really want to do and are inspired to do. And from there your creative juices got going, so you saw how things that might have seemed like they didn't fit together suddenly are part of a creative process and a result in which they depend on each other. Your art and your relationship teaching become one in a way.

**PC:** Yeah, it's really true. And one of the things that is very important to Layne is beauty and harmony. She designed the home that we're living in and she's such a creator of beauty in her own way. And that's been an essential part of our relationship teaching: to create beautiful relationships that are filled with a sense of love and harmony and peace and joy and co-creativity, all of which have to do with a sense of beauty. And so it is something we're still working on finding new expressions for.

And actually, one quick thing I would like to share, it just kind of came to mind as you were speaking a moment ago about this. When we first started working together and a community grew up around our work in Hawaii, it was about the spiritual practice of breathwork for releasing toxic emotions and outgrown beliefs and connecting with the divine along with *A Course In Miracles*, which was the conceptual context for our work. We were spiritual teachers and we were recognized and referred to as spiritual teachers in Hawaii with this community, which was called Imperion, which is a Greek word for the highest heaven, the sphere of pure light; the place where God lives. And in our youthful enthusiasm for wanting to achieve that, we created a community that reflected that, and in fact, the people also wanted that. And there came a point after a number of years when that fell apart as often happens with that kind of thing, but it was a very painful thing for us. And in it, we lost our feeling of connection to God and the divine. We left Hawaii and we moved to California, to Del Mar and we were kind of in a similar place. "What are we going to do?" And we literally lost everything; there was just a great absence of spiritual connection.

And for a period of time, I actually had to go out and get a job. I sold cars, (*laughs*), and then I worked for an outplacement corporation. I helped a friend of mine open an international outplacement office in San Diego. And it was clear, we were no longer spiritual teachers. How can you be a spiritual teacher when you don't feel the connection with the Divine? The only thing that we had left in our experience, Raphael, was our relationship and our love for one another, that was it. My boss at the corporation had long ago done the Loving Relationships Training, which was the first thing that Layne and I did together. We were teaching a relationship course by one of our teachers. And she had done it and she had observed our relationship, and she says, "I want you to create a course that will help me find my mate, to be the kind of the person that attracts that kind of mate."

So on her request, we created a relationship course that we taught in our living room in San Diego over an eight-week period, and she came to that course with this small group of people and she met

her husband there. And so that was the beginning of our public identity and assertion as relationship educators because that was the one thing that we had certainty about, that we knew and understood what it takes to consciously create the kind of relationship that a person wants. And since then, there's been the re-involvement of the spiritual component of that, I think, as I have alluded to in the course of our conversation here. But we seem to be at a similar place like reconfiguring our identity with each other and our public identity in the world. And here's the interesting thing I think about as we talk about this and meditate and pray about this: what we are sensing as most being wanted by the people who come to us is how to use their relationships for their personal and spiritual evolution. So we've kind of come full circle to relationships as a spiritual path.

**RC:** Well, also this series as you well know is called Teaching What We Need To Learn, and it seems like right now, what you and Layne are doing is teaching what you are learning simultaneously, which is how to, in your case, continue to draw upon the relationship that the two of you have that is so beautiful to create the life anew that is really going to serve you in this passage. And that's really beautiful. I was going to ask you a little bit what you're learning right now, what your edge is, but it seems like you just described it very beautifully.

**PC:** Thank you. Yeah, I think that does and it hadn't even occurred—so pieces of something together for me in the course of our conversation here because our lives and our career or relationship, everything about what's going on now is so fluid, which is as it should be now. And we are eager to see what will this fluidity begin to congeal into that will be this next part of our life that will have something to do with our legacy to the world and that's what we talked about and are present to and it isn't all done yet. Like I said, it's very fluid.

**RC:** And it seems like the one thing that unites all of it is the heart and then it's so apt that it was the break down of your heart that took right into this new passage.

**PC:** Yes. Amen brother. *(Laughs)*

**RC:** *(Laughs)* So speaking of brothers, I just have to tell you one last anecdote before we close today. I didn't know exactly all of the ways that maybe you and I were connected but you described the time in your life when you came back to California and you ended up of all things, selling cars. And what I don't think I've shared with you is that some years ago, after I had really had a transformative awakening and healing experience and I had even written what was going to become my first book, I ran out of money. And I just had to 'chop wood, carry water' so to speak and get a

dang job whether I liked it or not and I was overqualified for most of the kind of jobs that I could get. And so I just kept sending out the resumes and lo and behold, the one place that wanted me, and they didn't know they were the only place, but the one place that wanted me was a website called CarClub.com, which was all about using the new Internet tools to sell cars. So I was in the marketing department to be specific. I wasn't actually selling cars but that's about as close to selling cars as you can get without being on the lot.

**PC:** *(Laughs)* Yeah. I didn't know that. And that's a great way that you put it, chopping wood and carrying water, the whole Zen idea of doing what's before you to do, to take care of what needs to be taken care of. Thank you for sharing that. And I also want to say thank you, Raphael for putting on this series and including me and allowing me to share and discover for myself because there are things I have spoken about here with you and this goes to the safety I experience that you create; because I have forgotten that you said something about speaking in the presence of millions of people. It's just for me been two men seeking their way in this world, having a conversation. But I have shared things that I don't typically talk about like LSD being the first spiritual opening and the whole thing with my collapsed lung while I was on LSD and thinking I was going to die, and this thing about selling cars.

**RC:** Well, let me just say thank you for that reflection and also kind of giving listeners a chance to peek behind the curtain in a different way, which is to know that all the people in this series have been offered the chance to listen to their recordings and if they want to edit out a part of that, then they can, and that was a main aspect of the safety that would allow people to feel free in the way that you're describing. And I want to share even to a further degree that there was one teacher in the series who actually decided, I'm not going to say the gender because I don't want people to get into a guessing game, one teacher decided after actually completing the interview, "No, thank you. I'd rather that it doesn't get released." So it's one thing to talk to a millions of people on a radio show or a TV show and realize, "Whoops, there it is. I said it and I can't take it back." But actually you can take back anything you said today. *(Laughs)*

**PC:** Thank you. I can't think of anything I would want to take back because my understanding of the essence of your work, as is the essence of our work is authenticity and whether a spiritual teacher or relationship expert or an artist or whatever— authenticity is one of the most potent forces that we can tap into, that gives credence to anything that we might say as a teacher of any kind.

**RC:** Absolutely. So let me offer you in closing the most authentic version of a virtual hug that one can provide. (Laughs)

**PC:** Thank you. I feel it and know that the embrace is returned and I really hope that we get to see one another again sometime soon. It has been entirely too long and I miss you, Raphael.

**RC:** Oh, likewise.

**David Richo**



David Richo, Ph.D., M.F.T., teacher and workshop leader, works as a psychotherapist in Santa Barbara and San Francisco, California. He combines Jungian, transpersonal, and mythic perspectives in his work. He is the author of many books including: “How To Be An Adult In Faith and Spirituality,” (Paulist Press, 2011) and “Coming Home to Who You Are” (Shambhala, 2012).

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### **1. Ripeness Is All, Readiness Is All**

**RC:** I’m really glad to have you with us today and I’ve got lots to talk to you about. But before I dive in, I just want to check in in terms of where I am in the present moment and also give you a chance to do that as well. It happens to be the end of a long week so I’m a little bit tired but also at the same time, I feel really excited and revved up because I’ve been looking forward to this chance to speak with you. And I have a little allergy thing going on and also I feel really grateful. So that’s a snapshot of me in this moment. What would you like to share with us about how you are finding yourself in this now?

**DR:** I also have the allergies, so I know just what you mean, but I haven’t found a way to be grateful for them.

**RC:** (Laughs)

**DR:** However, I’m certainly open to that option; try to find the kernel of value in whatever happens. Anyway, I taught my class today on reading and writing poetry and I am always very juiced up by how that all comes together and how it works. We have 40 people and we write a

poem in class and we read poems and we discuss them. I'm really learning a lot from that whole experience. This class has been going for about 10 years here at Santa Barbara City College Adult Education.

**RC:** Okay, wonderful. So speaking of poetry and literature and such things, I'm going to ask you a question that's not really on the topic of our conversation today. This past week the children's author and illustrator Maurice Sendak died. He was a really interesting and rich person; I saw an interview that he did with Bill Moyers in which he was talking about a letter that John Keats, the British poet, wrote to his brother about how to eat a peach and how to savor the ripeness. I think there's a quote in the letter from King Lear that says, "Ripeness is all." I'm wondering, have you ever come across that letter in your reading of poetry?

**DR:** No, I haven't. I'd love to look it up.

**RC:** I looked it up and I couldn't find it so that's why I was asking you. I'm asking anybody I know about it because it sounds so wonderful as just a metaphor for how to live life.

**DR:** Yeah, "Ripeness is all" is a wonderful quote from King Lear. In Hamlet, it's "Readiness is all." So those two go together.

**RC:** Yeah, definitely. Well, I want to start off our conversation today by asking you a big question but it really touches on a lot of your work and it's about the subject of unconditional love. One of your most popular books is called *How to Be an Adult in Relationships* and I'm sure many of the listeners are familiar with that book. When you speak and write about unconditional love there's also the perspective that healthy adult relationships are an ongoing negotiation and that people are always doing their best, hopefully in a loving and respectful way, to discern what their needs are and to get them met in a way that serves both people in a relationship.

I wanted to ask you your thoughts about that in connection to unconditional love because I think that often people get very confused; they sometimes think that if they are reaching their spiritual potential in terms of being able to love unconditionally, then somehow that means they need to be okay in relationships or in situations that aren't necessarily fulfilling to their needs or not necessarily serving their highest good. For you, both in your own life and as a teacher, how do you square the idea of unconditional love and also the ongoing negotiation that adult relationships are?



**DR:** I make the distinction between the unconditionality of our love and the in-the-moment commitments that we make. So I have a heart that holds an unconditional love for you but the commitment that I make to you is definitely conditioned and what it's conditioned upon are the following things: Are you really interested in a relationship with me and are you willing to make the kind of commitments to this relationship that shows that you want to see it really work? This commitment would take the form of working out agreements together and dealing with whatever conflicts arise by openly discussing them, processing the feelings that come up around them, and then coming up with some type of a resolution that changes something so that both of us get our needs met more effectively.

So just the plain unconditional love sounds like, and I know you don't mean it this way, but it sounds sometimes to people as if it means: "I have no boundaries." That is not what we're referring to at all. The boundaries are not on our love, which is meant to be universal and unconditional to include everyone in its wide embrace. But the relationship between two people, or three, however many there are if it's a polyamorous arrangement, has very specific boundaries. It only continues if the people involved are willing to dispossess themselves enough of their own ego so that they can gratify the needs of the relationship. These needs are the ones I just brought up: the willingness to work things out and the willingness to keep the agreements that make for better relating.

As far as love being unconditional, that's the only kind of love, in my mind, that there can be. There is no such thing as conditional love. Conditional love simply means: "I have decided to keep my connection to you on the basis of how you please me or how you measure up to my criteria." So when someone offers that to us, which is what is offered to us, say, in a school setting—if you follow all these criteria you will get an A, you will be approved. It works in that way but it doesn't work in the realm of love because for love to be real, it has to be unilateral, as in the expression, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The golden rule would not make sense if it sounded this way: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you unless they don't do unto you as you would have them do unto you—it doesn't say that. It just says unilaterally, treat people this way. So the person who wrote that golden rule or it came from the collective consciousness of humanity probably, rather than one specific person, understood that if it's real, it goes one way. It isn't based on what the other people do in response.

So that's why in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says, "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who persecute you. Pray for those who mistreat you," what he's saying is

don't go by what they do to you, go by who you are. You have become a person who loves and you show this love. You don't let people take advantage of you. You notice when they don't like you. You're hurt by that. But that doesn't stop you from being a loving person anyway.

So that's what I mean by unconditional love. And what I've added to it from my Buddhist practice of lovingkindness is that this love extends to all beings; it's not meted out carefully only to those who are in our families or our proven friends or our lovers or partners, or so forth. The words of St. John of the Cross, the Spanish mystic, states it very well: "Love is my profession. It's all I do."

So somehow it becomes a calling. It becomes a realization that this is what my life is about. What is it about? It's about extending this love, which I define as a caring connection. That I extend this caring connection to everyone I meet, to everyone I know, to everyone I don't know. And when I establish this kind of relationship with others, something happens in me and instead of becoming a loving person, I become love itself incarnated in this particular body with this personality and somehow you start to feel that love is coming through you, not from you. So all of this combines the psychological with the spiritual and shows us why there's such an expression as "God is Love."

## **2. Vows and Commitments**

**RC:** Thank you so much for fully diving into that and there's a follow-up on this topic and I want to see how it fits in with what you've been sharing. There are times in adult relationships where there is love but the needs of two people can't be met within the context of their relationship. A really good example I might be able to give is: let's say that there's a couple and one really knows that he or she has a calling to have a child and the other person searches internally and sees that "No, that's not what's right for me."

So it's either going to be a child or not a child, there's no in between. Do you see in certain situations like that where the unconditional love could be present, the adult, wise and generous kind of communication could happen between the couple, and that they could also then come to realize that they're not each going to be able to experience their highest good in the relationship and therefore, it would make sense to end that relationship?

**DR:** That's a very good example because the love goes on because it isn't conditioned by needs but the commitments changes from the plan to live together so that we can, let's say, start a family. Instead the commitment changes and now we have to be more like friends because, what I'm looking for in a partner is someone who will be a co-parent and that's not what you're offering and

I don't blame you for it. The commitment between us, the shape that the relationship takes [probably won't] look like living together as a monogamous couple.

**RC:** Right.

**DR:** Because if you keep living together that way, that biological clock is going to run out and you're not going to be able to fulfill your purpose, let's say. The love goes on but the style of the connections changes.

**RC:** Right. And so then a second part to that question is that often in our society, or most of the time in our society when people are having a more conventional kind of relationship, they make vows and the vows are something like till death do us part or some variant of that. And in that the same situation that I just described, it's possible that the two partners came together and really experienced good, we could say, due diligence—"We want the same thing." And they make the marriage based on the idea that they want to have this child together and then one of the two people in the couple changes, because we're always moving and shifting and changing in our life, and comes to see that, "Well, after all, where I am now, what I thought I wanted then, isn't what I want."

And often in that kind of circumstance, there is a sense of being lost or confused, and sometimes anger and betrayal: "But you said..." and then of course, "Yes, I did say and then something changed in me and I have to be true to who I am in this moment, even if I promised something in the past." So I'm wondering how you would respond to something like that? Do you feel that that kind of vow is more of a wish than a way that people actually live? Or do you feel like when somebody makes that kind of vow, how they change and what they might want in the kind of way I'm describing, matters less?

**DR:** Well the way I look at it is that a vow—let's say the vow to live in the marriage relationship. Will that be a good example?

**RC:** Sure!

**DR:** Okay. The vow as far as I'm concerned is not to tie us, bind us, to a lifelong sentence to what ultimately will not be working out for us. A vow is to the relationship as long as it is remaining in place as something that really works for both of us. Hence, when someone says, "Well, this doesn't work for me at this point, but because I have made a commitment to you, I want to do all I can to

help it work so let's go to therapy, let's try to work it out." And if after using all the state-of-the-art techniques, you still can't work it out, you're not tied to a vow because then it would be more like a kind of an imprisonment. So the vow has to be conditional, because vow is just a religious word for commitment really. Vow is a promise that is very solemn. So I put that in the same category as commitment.

See, maybe a good way of explaining it would be this: from my perspective, a commitment is based on needs and their fulfillment. My commitment to you is directly proportional to the negotiation that happens between need and fulfillment. So for instance, I have a need to have a child, you also want a child, so you're going to be with me on fulfilling that need, if we can. Okay, so the need and the fulfillment go with the commitment because the commitment in that case is going to be based on a mutual agreement as opposed to the other example you gave where it's not a mutual agreement so there couldn't be a commitment. But the love part, how we care about each other, that's the caring connection—that has nothing to do with vows, promises, needs, fulfillments, commitment; it's become our personal practice.

This is where I kind of differ from some other authors. I'm seeing love as a spiritual practice that we're called to by the very nature of who we are, since all of us are mammals, are beings who are in connection with other people. So we've added caring to that connection and that makes it love. That part doesn't change but the other part, which is the part that the vow goes for, the vow goes for the part of the relationship that has to do with needs and fulfillments shown through commitment. And therefore, I don't think a vow is reasonable because it disregards the fact that there may come a time when the needs will no longer be met and that there's nothing that you can do about it to make it any better, or there might be abuse, there might be any number of reasons that the relationship is just not working so we have to let go with love and without retaliation. Does all this make sense?

**RC:** To me it makes perfect sense. And it relates to something that I wanted to share with you and this kind of swings our conversation around to the personal; the series, as you know, is called *Teaching What We Need To Learn*, where all of us are taking a look and offering a little bit more about ourselves perhaps than we usually would. In your work, and this is just my own perception but I've heard it echoed by others, there's something that is really powerful about the way that you bring a very clear and honest and really deliberate attention to the ways that people can come together, work through their own personal difficulties, and also the ones that happen between them. It's as if sometimes in reading your work, a person who has felt like relationships equal chaos or a

sense of hopelessness, the question comes up of how can we ever get to something that is really mutually beneficial and healing with all of this projecting that I'm doing on you and you're doing on me?

And in reading your work my perception is, I'll just speak for me in this, that there is this grounded holding that is very soothing and hopeful and part of it comes from the fact that there's a strength to it as well; like this is the container and you can trust in this container, that if you do your work, then you will really be able to benefit from it. I was wondering if in your own life and in relationship to yourself, does your, let's say, observing self have that same quality when you turn it to your own self, to your own issues, your own feelings? Are we reading, in a sense, a version of how you treat yourself? Or do you see, somehow, a difference between those two things?

### **3. How To Be An Adult In Love**

**DR:** Well, first of all thank you for the very kind and elegant description and I really appreciate your seeing it that way. I can honestly say that every single thing in every book that I've written is how I, myself, live my own life. I wouldn't put anything—I mean if I did put something in there that I was not committed to myself, I would openly say it. But my writing is my spirit—it is part of my spiritual practice and so the topic that I'm working on becomes the work that I do on myself. So for instance, over this past year, I've been writing a new book, which will come out next spring. I've now finished it and sent it to Shambhala. It's called *How to Be an Adult in Love* instead of "In Relationships", and it's about the wider style of loving, not just in relationships but for all beings in accord with the Buddhist practice that I mentioned of lovingkindness.

So I'm really doing all I can to live my life within the container that I describe in the books because that's what I tried and what has worked and so I trust what I'm saying and I have found over and over again that it really has worked for me. I can't jump from that to say it's going to work for everybody but I notice that it has a certain common sense nature to it. And when I look at my various ideas in writings, this has come from my New England background. It's not like a highfalutin' kind of approach to things; it's almost like it's hard to argue with the sensibleness of some of the ideas.

For instance, when I make the distinction between the unconditional love and the conditional commitments, there's something about that that resounds with a certain common sense nature to it and it also let's you off the hook because then you're not stuck in a relationship that isn't working and feels unloving if you live it. You're saying, "Oh, I can keep loving but I don't have to put up

with abuse or a relationship that isn't going anywhere." And I really like the fact that I'm staying very honest about all these things.

**RC:** So along those lines, I'm wondering, in the most important relationships in your life, can you share just a little bit about what had been maybe one or two of the biggest challenges for you in terms of, let's say, what you had to grow into in yourself or work through in order to be able to live the principles that you as espouse?

**DR:** Okay. I was married for 15 years and I have a son and my ex and I are now friends. I could not start writing until after the divorce. First of all, my relationship, by my own making, was full of drama and retaliation. Even though I was becoming acquainted with Buddha's way, I still did not get it that halfway to enlightenment is letting go of your ego, the favorite sport of which is ego-centeredness, and the favorite activity of which is retaliation.

And so I was living that way completely oblivious to how it hurt others. Then when I was on my own and I was through with the years of licking my wounds and the blaming, I just said, "Okay, it's time for you to look at how you can live your life and where you go from here." Then the path opened in a new way and I finally got it about ego and so forth and that's when I started working on myself and seeing exactly how the neurotic ego's arrogance, the inflated ego upsets our chances at true commitment and showing the love that's in us. And gradually, I started following this spiritual path that helped me see more and more of what I had been doing. And only then could I start my writing.

So I've been writing ever since and going more deeply into what the path is really about. When I say path, I mean how we make that transition, the journey if you will, from encapsulation in our ego to the kind of open-heartedness that shows people the affection and attention that they deserve. The style of my thinking, since it comes from a Catholic and Jesuit background, is very logical and has a sense of framework out of which you see things and within which you do things. You were kind of describing that before that you noticed this in my writings. I come from kind of a foundation. It's not the same foundation in Catholicism as it was in my past, but I kept that style of, "Okay, how does this all come together, how does this all work, and how do I do the work?"

I have had the feeling that some people appreciate my books because they don't have that kind of sense of a framework and I think what some of the books provide is a framework that you can start working from. It makes it all easier because you have a way of seeing the world now that makes

sense to you and that isn't helter-skelter and it isn't scattered all over the place. It stays within an edifice of common sense and spiritual consciousness, and the best, hopefully, of what has come from psychology and I feel comfortable to be in that mansion and it's within that mansion that I now live and write.

So that allows me now to give a very simple example because this is pretty telling. My mother certainly loved me and my brother and sister, but she was very high strung and neurotic and she would physically beat me in my childhood. And I always felt, of course, powerless to fight back because she's my mother and in our Italian household, you certainly don't hit your mother back. But later in life, and I never hit my wife of course, but later in life when I was married, I noticed that I would do little things to kind of upset my wife or to frustrate her. And I never understood why I was doing this until years later when I was working on this retaliation issue and I was working on my book, *When the Past is Present*.

I was working on this and I was on the topic of well, what do we carry over from childhood into our adult relationships? And I suddenly had the realization, "Oh, I was getting back at my mother through my wife. I was doing little retaliatory things to her, not because she deserve them, nobody does, but because I finally had a woman in my house that I could get back at. And so I saw suddenly that I was taking some old leftover hurts that came from a woman, the main woman in my life in my childhood and I was now taking them out on the new main woman in my life.

This was a big realization to me and when this happened, when I had this realization, I told her, my ex, now a friend, that I had been doing this. I said, "You know I realized that all those times I was doing frustrating things with you and being aggressive toward you in speech and so forth, emotionally, I think I was trying to get back at my mother, because you weren't really hurting me, but I was still smarting from the hurts of the past, so I took them out on you," and I apologized. Not only did I do that but I also put it in the book. I said, "This is what I did and I hope that you, readers, won't do something like this." And I said I went and apologized so that I could be a model for the reader, "Hey, if you realize that you were doing this in your marriage, then go ahead and apologize for it because our mother stuff is not supposed to be carried over into the adult relationships." So that would be an example of how I recognize something in myself, and work on it.

#### **4. Grace**

**RC:** Yeah, and that is really helpful. And there is another category of stuff which is what's cooking in us, what's not as fully processed, digested, healed, etc., and of course, we don't always know that much about it, but I am interested because you have taken a long journey in your own personal life as you say, learning through each one of your books. What do you notice right now in current days, weeks, months, is an area where you feel like something is developing but it's an edge of consciousness, let's say, or a challenge or something that you notice that you're not fully at peace with yet. Is there anything like that in your day to day life these days?

**DR:** Well, the new focus I have, to which I'm giving careful attention and which I want to have as the subject of my next book is the role of grace in our life. Of course, synchronicity, meaningful coincidences are the archetype of grace; grace being the assisting force that gives us wisdom and strength beyond what could be marshaled by our IQ or our ego. And of course, grace is the central issue in theology of all religions because it refers to how God, higher power, helps us in the course of life. So what I want to do and what has very much captured my imagination is to speak about grace at work in our psychological changes and our spiritual transformations—that they don't come from all the processing only, that they don't come from the spiritual practices only, but they come from another source, which I believe is deeply in ourselves and in the universe that is really trying to help us.

There is something trying to help us. And as children, we thought of that as a guardian angel. We put wings on that realization. I want to show to everyone, not only religious people, that we have to be aware now that we're not alone in doing the work that it takes to become healthier and whole, but that we're getting assistance from powers that are within and beyond ourselves and that it doesn't all depend on our own effort. We're not all there is. There is something else we that's always at work trying to make us more than what we are in our daily lives. In other words, trying to make us what we really are, which is capable of universal and unconditional love, capable of embracing the wisdom of the ages, capable of bringing healing and reconciliations of war and retaliation. This is what is now driving me.

**RC:** Yeah. So is there a place in which you have, let's say, an uneasy relationship with grace or unclear relationships? This is the subject that is driving you and so I'm wondering how you relate to that force of grace?



**DR:** Yes, I'm having a very hard time truly appreciating it and truly seeing the humility and the gratitude that go with it. I do keep falling back into, "Well, if you don't do it, nobody will. It's all up to you. You are the one who's messing things up and you are the one isn't doing enough." And what this offers is to relieve ourselves of that terrible burden of how much we have to accomplish and to say, "No, what I'm doing is I'm joining in on an evolutionary effort that's happening all over the place and I'm just doing it on my own little way and I can appreciate how I'm getting help in doing this." So that's where it's still difficult for me—getting to that appreciative place. Another way of saying it is, I'm not as fully believing it in my daily life as I am in my own mind.

### **5. The Four Directions**

**RC:** That's very helpful, thank you. There's a passage in one of your books in which you talked about healthy selves as being a spacious room with picture windows and they look out to North, South, East, and West and each window point towards something important for us to pay attention to, if we can do that with clarity and equanimity. I wanted to go through that just to see what kind of spur of the moment comes into your consciousness.

So the West-facing window, as you described it, is the setting sun where you can notice what is ending and what's there for you to let go of. And I'm wondering, what's the first thing that comes to your mind that you're recognizing that might be ending and that you might be letting go of?

**DR:** My full physical powers. What my body used to be able to do that is no longer within the envelope of what I can do. My mind is better than ever, but my body is worse than ever. I have to notice that. I don't mean that I'm not doing my proper hygiene and my health habits. It's just that as you get older, you just can't help but have less—

**RC:** The body ages.

**DR:** And so I have to be able to let go and say yes to that process. That's the setting sun.

**RC:** And to the East, where is the rising sun?

**DR:** I hate the West.

**RC:** (Laughs) I hear you. So the rising sun in the East you described as what is starting to happen and what are you taking hold of. What comes up when you look through that window in this moment?

**DR:** What's starting to happen and is happening more and more is that I'm appreciating all my life story and all the things I've learned from so many different sources and how I'm now reshaping them to fit the modern ear and be able to express things like the subject of grace, which goes back to my childhood. And to frame that out in a new way so that you don't have to have faith in order to acknowledge it.

**RC:** And the Southern window, the sunny exposure, is where you experience your greatest liveliness and imagination and playfulness and spontaneity. So where is that showing up for you in your life these days?

**DR:** That's been showing up in how I've noticed myself being more creative in how I do my teaching and supervising of interns. I've noticed that there's a lot more liveliness in how I present things and I have new ideas and it hasn't happened enough yet in how I carry my body in the world, like I do my daily power exercise, bike riding and all that. But I bike ride on the same bike path everyday so I have to open more to new ways of moving my body—that's my next challenge.

**RC:** And so along those same lines, I'm wondering, because you are a mystic, self-described, and there is a great opening in you towards that unitive consciousness and I imagine that as part of that, there are also moments where you're experiencing deep and profound joy and I'm interested to know, and I think our listeners will be interested to know, where does that mostly show up in your life? When you're, let's say brimming over with spirit, what form does that take for you? How does that show up? How would we see you in your most, let's say liberated and free expression?

**DR:** Well, it shows itself most in my growing realization that this is an entirely non-dual world and that what I was calling God in the world is really all one and that the real salvation is of the Earth and that's what we're here to save as opposed to my earlier belief that each of us is here to save his own soul or his own skin. Now I see that it's a planetary destiny and that I'm here as part of a much larger work in progress. I've been very excited by the work of Teilhard de Chardin, who helped us see that the Spirit is in matter and all the material things and that it's all one. It's not spirit and matter. It's all one experience.

There's a statue of St. Francis in the basilica in Assisi, Italy, and the title of the statue is "St. Francis Honoring the Holy Spirit." And of course, in our childhood, we were taught that the Holy Spirit is up in Heaven, up in the sky. The statue shows St. Francis staring at the ground—the title is "St.

Francis Honoring the Holy Spirit”, but he’s looking down at the Earth. That says it all. Whoever did that statue got the idea: not some far away place, it’s right here on the Earth.

**RC:** Right. As you were saying that I was thinking about a couple of things: I was thinking of how this is sometimes is referred to as the marriage of transcendence and imminence—being able to bring spirit into matter; I was thinking of the cross in terms of, "As above, so below; as without, so within;" and I was also thinking about Buddhism because I know that that has been sustaining source of wisdom for you because often people think of the idea of emptiness in Buddhism as foundational, that really everything is empty and yet in my understanding, the Buddha never spoke about form apart from emptiness or emptiness apart from form. That they are indivisible.

**DR:** It’s empty of isolated existence. It’s empty of separate existence. But it’s spaciouly full of existence itself. We don’t know how to translate these original words like “sunyata” which is translated as ‘emptiness’ and Trungpa Rinpoche translated it to “spaciousness” instead of emptiness. Everything is spacious rather than everything is empty. In other words, everything contains everything.

**RC:** Right. So that leads to the Northern exposure and what you call that the “stabilizing spiritual force” and I know one of them for you is Buddhist practice. Anything else that these days is part of your North Star in that way?

**DR:** Yes, I still maintain my connection with the Christian view to whatever extent that has been helpful in appreciating the Earth and my place in it. So I would say it’s a combination of my Christian past and my Buddhist present and I try to maintain my bond with both of those and they serve as a kind of North Star. That is stable, something that is stable you can keep going back to. So in Buddhism, we have no refuge. Our refuge is our practice. Our refuge is mindfulness and lovingkindness and once I saw that, I felt so much better.

**RC:** Well, it also seems in what you’re describing, that you’ve found a very natural synthesis between the Christian tradition and the Buddhist tradition; that they live harmoniously within you.

**DR:** Yes, they do.

**RC:** I think that’s important just to highlight because often there’s a sense that we have to leave one for the other. By one I mean the tradition of one’s birth or something that has been sustaining. There are many people in the American Buddhist community who came from a Jewish background

and often people in the Jewish community don't necessarily resonate with Buddhism or are afraid of it. They want those people to come back—"Find in your own tradition what you're looking for outside your tradition". But often, I think it's possible to really uphold and venerate one's own tradition while at the same time, finding common ground and additional richness in the other traditions.

**DR:** Yes. Very well said.

## **6. Being One Chapter Ahead**

**RC:** Yeah, so I just want to ask you one last question, and it's a maybe a little bit more playful than the ones that we've been talking about so far. If people who have read your books over the years and have come to know you through your writing and everything that you've passed on to them and even people who've been listening to you today, if they saw you in your daily life, is there anything that they would be surprised about? Something, some aspect of you, and I'm not talking about a shadow piece here, but just something in terms of knowing the fullness of Dave Richo, is there something we wouldn't guess about you through the picture and the understanding that we have of you from your work?

**DR:** Maybe how I'm just a chapter ahead of everybody in doing the work. How I still have so much work to do and how I make mistakes every single day in my spiritual practice and my psychological work. So, it's not as if I'm a model of something. I'm more of an ordinary guy who happens to be given the grace of feeling himself in a holding structure of what our psychology and our spirituality is about and how they come together; and then I'm continually making erroneous choices and then re-organizing myself back into what I know really works. The only thing I have going for me is that I'm always ready to apologize when that happens in the course of relationships.

**RC:** Yeah. I really appreciate that you do hold transparency as a value when it comes to being a teacher in this way. And in the spirit of transparency, you've just divulged our secret, which is in order to teach in this realm, we just have to be one chapter or even a few pages ahead of everybody else (laughs).

**DR:** Right, yes.

**RC:** Yes. So now the secret is out. Dave Richo has told us all and so when you look at the teachers in your life, you could ask how many pages ahead of you are they or maybe even just a few paragraphs or a couple of sentences.

**DR:** Absolutely!

**RC:** And then of course, sometimes they have to start the book all over again (laughs).

**DR:** Yeah.

**RC:** Well, Dave Richo, it's been a real pleasure talking to you today. Thank you so much for sharing from the heart.

**DR:** Well, thanks a lot. I appreciate your being so open with me, too.

### **Acknowledgments**

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A deep bow and tip of the hat to you all

## About Raphael Cushnir



Raphael Cushnir is a leading voice in the world of emotional intelligence and present moment awareness. He is the author of six books, lectures worldwide, and is a faculty member of the Esalen Institute, the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, and the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies. He has shared his unique approach to personal and professional development with millions of readers in *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*, *Beliefnet*, *Spirituality and Health*, *Psychology Today*, and *The Huffington Post*. In addition, he coaches individuals and teams at Fortune 100 companies, governments, religious organizations, and leading non-profits. Raphael's own heart was opened by an experience of profound grief.

Raphael's offerings includes an innovative yearlong program for groups of just twelve people called *P4 - Presence, Purpose, Passion and Power*. He also facilitates an online learning experience called *The Vulnerability Project*.

Raphael works with individuals and couples anywhere in the world via phone and Skype.

The interviews in this book are available as a complete audio set, and also as selected singles and albums on I-Tunes, Amazon.com and other outlets.

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# Teaching What We Need to Learn

*Leaders in Personal Growth & Spirituality  
Share Their Own Innermost Challenges*

SELECTED TRANSCRIPTS  
Volume 3: Eclectic Teachers

*Dialogues Conducted & Compiled  
by Raphael Cushnir*



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This book is dedicated to all the teachers who participated in the series. Your generosity, transparency, and vulnerability leave me honored and humbled. You have my deepest gratitude.

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**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**



## **Introduction**

What happens when we teachers of personal growth and spirituality step off the stage? When the workshop is over and we return to our own daily existence?

Are we able to practice what we preach? If not, what gets in the way? Especially when it's really hard?

In the end, aren't we all the same as human beings? Beneath the roles we play? Isn't one of the greatest gifts we teachers can give a glimpse of the way our own lives are altered by the very same principles and practices we share with our students?

In the wake of all these questions, during the fall of 2011, I began to imagine a very different kind of interview series, one I'd host, in which the personal lives of teachers took center stage. In which we were willing to become vulnerable to listeners in a new and exciting way.

### **A New Vision**

But then doubt crept in. Most great teachers love to tell stories from their past. These stories help demonstrate how we all can overcome our flaws and foibles. So maybe my idea wasn't so new after all.

With more reflection I came to understand that a telling a story from the past is one thing, but relating a personal challenge as it's happening is quite another.

What I envisioned were teachers being willing to share, quite frankly, what they're working through right now. What's their edge? What's still messy and unclear for them? What may become a teaching story down the road, but right now is their own work?

Yet as soon as this vision clarified, more doubt crept in. The possibility for such a series would come down to one more crucial question: Would the teachers people most want to hear from actually agree to take part? Would they allow people a truly revealing peek behind the curtain of their lives?

There was only one way to find out. I asked them directly. I started with a small list, and an email entitled "An Invitation to Radical Transparency." Most of the people from that list said "Yes!"

### **Momentum Builds**

Next, I asked the thousands of people on my own email list who they would most like to join the series. The names poured in, and I continued with my invitations. Soon, to my surprise and delight,

there were more teachers interested than I even had room to include. To accommodate them all, I had to create an ever bigger event.

In the series that eventually premiered in the spring of 2012, and ran for 23 weeks, listeners got to know some of their favorite teachers like never before. Plus, they experienced a deep resonance with teachers they encountered for the first time.

Now, you the reader have the same opportunity. Forty four of those interviews are included in this three volume set. By sharing their own lives so candidly, these visionaries will advance our collective wisdom in powerful ways.

### **Getting Personal**

In recording the interviews, I made it my mission to put my own personal challenges front and center. This made it as safe and easy as possible for the teachers to open up right along with me.

So here's to Radical Transparency as a new teaching paradigm for the 21st century.

As a matter of fact, here's to Radical Transparency as a whole new way of being for the 21st century.

Because no matter where we are on our own path of personal growth and spiritual realization, none of us are just students. We're all teachers, too. Our everyday lives are offerings to all the people with whom we come in contact.

Taking the cue from the wise and generous guests in this series, let's all teach what we need to learn...and learn what we need to teach...starting now.

Raphael Cushnir  
Portland, Oregon  
December, 2012

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**Eclectic Teachers  
Daniel Siegel**



Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. is a clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine where he is also on the faculty of the Center for Culture, Brain, and Development and the Co-Director of the Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA. Dr. Siegel is the Executive Director of the Mindsight Institute, an educational center devoted to promoting insight, compassion, and empathy in individuals, families, institutions and communities. He has published extensively, including *Mindsight*, which offers readers an in-depth exploration of the power of the mind to integrate the brain and promote well-being. His latest parenting book, “The Whole-Brain Child; 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child’s Developing Mind,” with Tina Bryson, PhD., explores the application of the Mindsight approach to parenting. [WWW.DRDANSIEGEL.COM](http://WWW.DRDANSIEGEL.COM)

**1. The Grieving Process**

**RC:** So I’d like to begin this conversation just by checking in to the present and especially the sense of mind, body, emotion, and Spirit that’s here for both of us, so we can start from that place. And I just want to say that I’m feeling really excited to be talking to you today, a little nervous, and also I have a little rush in my system because I wasn’t sure I had the right phone number or way to reach you. And I had a session with a client that went over and ended just before we started talking. So I’m sure in a moment, some of that will settle. But right now, there’s kind of a windup in my system and that how I’m starting. So let me just check-in with you. What are you noticing in your experience?

**DS:** Well, you know I’m very honored to be here with you and looking forward to the talk. I’ve had a recent huge change in my life where my father passed away last week. And so I’m continuing the work—you know, he’s been ill for eighteen months and it wasn’t a surprise that he would pass away. Of course, whenever it happens it’s painful—and this has really been a period of deep reflection, transition, and sadness for my whole family and myself. So you may hear in my voice a little less chippiness, and you know, we are where we are. I debated it whether to put off doing the

interview. But I thought, if the topic that you're exploring is about being present with what is, I thought then I will be present with this experience by acknowledging it; naming it can sometimes help make sense with it and be present with it. So that's where I am.

**RC:** I'm really grateful that you shared that. And of course, somehow it would enter into the field of our conversation if you didn't name it and maybe not with as much fullness and beauty and delicacy, so it's wonderful. I'm touched and I really want to honor the space that you're in in terms of the grieving process. So rather than starting in some other direction, I would love—if it feels right to you—and if it doesn't feel too raw or personal—to ask you how you are meeting this passage. You have many tools and lots of life experience around presence and around bringing mindfulness to any situation. And then there are these moments that are bigger than we can really predict or imagine. So how is it for you and how are you approaching it?

**DS:** Well, the starting place is from the inner subjective reality of just healing the loss of that—sadness doesn't even describe it. It's more like pounding pain; sometimes disorientation, sometimes just a longing, sometimes a sadness, sometimes a feeling of shock and disbelief at this moment, and so just being with all that. And I have fantastic family members who go and share the same thing; we can share that with each other. So that's been a part of this past week together. And then friends, being with people who care and who have been on this journey. My father's been very ill for a year and a half so it's been a kind of—we thought he was going to die about a year and a half ago so it's been this extended grieving for my mother and for my brother and for our wives and our kids and everyone. He was so ill. Friends who knew about that have also been very supportive.

So in the place where it's a lesson, just to get a little conceptual on how our minds are not just encased in these skins; that we live within these mind-webs of social connection that are the source of love and nurturance. As this grief unfolds, it's so clear it's not just my grief. It's a transition of our entire family, and the mind sort of plays out these experiences that link all of us who are going through this period of not only loss but adjustment. I feel like it's a—I have this kind of revolving—in the old days, you would say 'carousel' for those people who understand what rides used to be (Laughs). But now it's like a revolving photo file with videos and audio clips and still images of my father and my family and myself. And so I have to measure it out from a personal point of view—I give myself lots of space. I went for a long, long walk this morning with my dogs, giving myself the space to let my mind kind of sort through things in a very aware but not directed way, a kind of open, receptive, flowing process. So that's been really useful. And then I have to really be careful

with the clients and the patients I see. When I can see them or not, and who I disclose this to and who needs to know; maybe it's overwhelming for them to know and I don't think the kind of interactions we have will necessitate me speaking about it. But for some people, it really has been helpful to say what's been going on. So it's a lot of stuff. And if I thought that I wouldn't be able to be present with you Raphael, I would have canceled it or postponed it for another time. But I really felt like I was up to the task.

**RC:** As a matter of fact, I think that's one of the fundamental principles of the work that I do with people around emotional connection. And that I suspect, even though I haven't talked with you about it directly, that you would also subscribe to the idea that we can only really work with what's present.

**DS:** Yeah, exactly.

**RC:** So I trust actually that what is going to happen in our conversation, and I would actually say what is already happening, is right and deeper even than it could have been or would have been if there wasn't this in the field. So it feels like this is exactly what is meant to be happening.

**DS:** Well that's good, I'm glad we're checking it out with each other. You know, it's so interesting to rest in a space of acceptance or letting it happen or not something you have to control with the death of my father. The thing that has been so surprising has been that there's a kind of reorganization that's sorting through inside of me that I never would have expected. I thought "It'll be sad," and, "It'll be lonely," and, "It'll be an adjustment." But it's almost been like a reshaping of who I am. It's so raw and so new, I can't really put words to it.

It's something that's kind of surprising for me in terms of the issue of what the mind is, you know? And for me, in the last twenty years, I've been wrestling with these maybe unanswerable questions like: What is the mind? How do relationships affect the mind? What does the brain have to do with it? That kind of thing—and the whole body—I can feel in my body this participation in some relational reality that sweeps my body up into sometimes crying, sometimes just clarity, sometimes confusion, and I just let it happen. And part of me is really intrigued but the other part of me is, I wouldn't say distressed, but a part of me is aware it is disorganizing. And I kind of let my more observing mind—you know we have these two circuits: an observing circuit in the brain and experiencing circuit. I kind of let my observing circuit, which narrates kind of the unfolding story as it's happening, I let this observing/narrating circuit say "Hey, you have just lost your father. You

need to allow the experience in you to just do whatever it's going to do. And don't overlay expectations or requirements or the 'shoulds of life' onto it. Just let it happen." And it's just been really fascinating to take that stance because things are happening inside me and I'm writing a lot about it; that I'm just kind of like shocked at this re-sorting and how profound and pervasive it is. It's just incredible.

**RC:** Well you know, in what you're describing, there are some of the great themes of your work and of your really special contribution, because one of the things you mentioned was that the experience was unfolding between self and loved-ones.

**DS:** Yeah.

**RC:** You created or synthesized let's say, something that you called Interpersonal Neurobiology, and part of that is the sense that the autonomous self that is part of the Westerner in you and especially the American tradition—a man is an island, I'll pull myself up by my boot-straps. And this an illusion in a deep and sometimes painful sense, and we come to a greater fullness and peace in recognizing that who we are is as much between ourselves and others as it is within.

**DS:** Absolutely.

**RC:** And so that's one piece that you're relying on and opening to as you described it. So really the heart of your work is right there in that process that's unfolding.

## **2. The Relational Mind**

**DS:** Yeah, and I think that's beautifully said. Of course the way we filter things, whether we think about the brain or the mind or relationships or three aspects of one reality—this filtering process of our human experience—it could be, "Okay, so I've thought about this stuff, and synthesized things in a personal neurobiology and this is how I kind of not only keep things professionally, but how I live my day-to-day life. So it's not just some intellectual exercise to me. It's like the bedrock of trying to create well-being inside of myself personally. It's predominant right now in terms of this grieving process, but also professionally how I see things. So it could be that I'm just distorting everything through the lens of this thing. And in fact, the mind can do that; it can turn perceptions in a certain direction based on what believe. So I'm not trying to give this to you, Raphael, or anyone listening to this as like research evidence or experimental data. But it is observational information that to me makes a lot of sense. So I wouldn't try to put statistics—you see what I'm saying? But it is the experience. And I think when I allow myself to just say, "Well, it could all be

distorted by your own perceptual beliefs, so don't be categorizing it," it has a quality of just permitting things to unfold, and it makes sense.

For example, the concept of integration: linking differentiated parts. I find these twirls of images, of audio things of my father and of me, video things I see and still photographs literally in my head or wherever it is in my mental life. I see it as a kind of linking these differentiated parts of my childhood, my adolescence, my adulthood, things that have happened over the last year and a half; which were kind of profound in many ways. And the shift of generations and becoming one of the senior males in my family—I think of myself as seventeen but now, I'm like the old dude, you know? So the whole thing as a member of a relational mind, has a kind of quality that you don't know in your mind.

I think it's an understandable point of view of certain sciences that the mind emanates from the brain. I mean, we can understand why you might think that way. It's easier to do experiments of course, because then you stick a person's body in a scanner and you see what's happening in the brain and you say "Oh, there's the mind." But that view doesn't really embrace, I think, what a lot of studies suggest. And certainly this grieving process reveals that the mind is not just encased by the skin and it's certainly not underneath in the skull. It's this larger relational process in addition to being an embodied process. So as these generations unfold, you know, we all face death. And we are a part of a network—we're embedded in these social connections and we become the next generation if we're lucky, and life unfolds. And we don't have that much time; we have about a century you know? It gives a preciousness to everything that I think when someone dies, it heightens that deep, and I call it temporal integration, but this deep existential sense of how crucial our attitude to our life is to bring a fullness to it even in the face of knowledge about death.

**RC:** Well, the aspect of being in relation to, is really coming through very strongly in what you're sharing, and I just kind of want to go with that for a moment. You talked about the observing and the experiencing. And in the Hindu tradition, there are the two great forces of existence. There is Shakti: the energy of that which arises. And then there's Shiva: that which beholds what arises. And it's said in that tradition that when Shiva and Shakti are in indivisible and exquisite union, that is enlightenment.

**DS:** Wow, I've never heard that before but it's beautifully said. It's fascinating because that would be a good example from a consilient point of view—consilience is finding independent

pursuits of knowledge and truth and trying to find the universal principle. So that would be an example of integration, taking these differentiated ways of knowing, experiencing, and beholding, and linking them in the sense that's called indivisible. But I would ask you, does that philosophy also speak about how they may become indivisible; their need to maintain their own unique integrity as differentiated parts?

**RC:** Well, that's a fascinating question and since I'm not either a Hindu or a Hindu scholar, I want to have a certain 'don't know about that.' But what I do want to say about it, that I do feel on firmer grounds to discuss, is that the allowing that is necessary for that union to occur is really the relational piece that we were talking about before. So for instance, in the work that I do with people in connecting to their emotions, I use the metaphor of 'surfing' to help them understand what it is they are meant to do. The idea is that your emotions are in your body, that's the only place they arise, move, shift and depart; and they are waves moving through you, akin to waves in the ocean. And in order to get the full message of the emotion, which is the sensation—I don't mean the insight that might come later or the understanding or meaning—but to get the message of the emotion that we need in order to be in harmony with ourselves; requires that we stay in awareness from an allowing and non-controlling perspective long enough, (especially for the difficult emotion) to come back to fuller presence, to release a contraction, to feel more expanded into the moment that we're living. And we can't do that if we think somehow that we know what is supposed to happen or if we are choosing consciously or unconsciously to avoid what's happening within us. So my work is about the inner relationship and that of course extends to the 'we' that you write and speak about a lot. So with Shiva and Shakti awareness and experience; it's a sustained connection and then a willingness to be with the flow that results. That's where all the magic is, from my experience.

### **3. The Two Circuits of the Brain**

**DS:** It's beautiful. In relational science, for signs of attachment of love between a parent and child, we use the term 'attunement', in particular to interpersonal attunement where a caregiver, an attachment figure like a parent tunes into the internal experience of the child and accepts it without 'shoulds' and expectations and judgments and is just present literally with this fullness of receptivity and openness to take in not just the behavior of the child but the signals from that behavior that reveals the inner life of the child. It's called attunement and it's really the basis of healthy parent-child relationships, but probably relationships of all sorts.



Mindfulness for me is a new construct. My immersion in it was done as an attachment researcher and someone working on interpersonal stuff. It seemed to me it was a very similar process when I was taught mindfulness meditation and that there was indeed this attunement internally, which would have been an observing self, just like an attachment figure in a kindly, open, receptive, non-judgmental, fully present way attuning to an experiencing self. What's fascinating was I published my book *The Mindful Brain*, I guess it was like April of 2007. In December of 2007, the first scientific data came out to show, in fact, that what's been a wisdom tradition for a while, and for me just felt intuitively what was happening in my own experience from a subjective-reflective point of view—then there was research evidence that came out in December of 2007 from the lab of Norman Farb and colleagues in Toronto, that in fact there are two different circuits in the brain. One was an experiencing circuit that is more towards both sides of the brain. And the other is the observing/narrating circuit, a kind of internal witness if you will, the beholder, that's more centrally located. And that this differentiation of the two circuits, observing and experiencing, for me when I discussed the Farb paper—this is in *The Journal of Social Cognitive and Effective Neuroscience* in December of 2007—when they asked me to do a discussion I said the mindfulness based stress reduction work that Farb and colleagues were studying was a beautiful example of integration of consciousness, that you're differentiating these two aspects of inner reality that have neural correlates. And then once you differentiate them, you link them; that mindfulness wasn't just like losing yourself in the flow of something. It was actually honoring these two differentiated streams of awareness and then linking them. That's different from what other people might interpret those results are saying. But for me, those research findings, those empirical brain science findings were beautiful examples of how mindfulness is a way we integrate consciousness.

**RC:** Yeah, I love that. There are, to me, significant themes in what you were just describing. One of them is this paradox that in order to really fully connect to something, you have to be able to witness it. And at first witnessing seems like it's standing apart. But without the witnessing or observing quality as you're describing it, then you're just reacting and you're not able to come together, as you say, to integrate the experience as fully as possible.

**DS:** Well, exactly. The fun thing with consilience is you look for these different matters or stations of principles, different ways of learning about truth. So there are some great studies on creativity and its connection to attention, two sets of studies, and I'll talk about studies of presence in a moment. But before I do that, let me talk about studies of creativity. Basically they show that when

you have perseverance and are really approaching attention in a kind of stick-to-it kind of way; that's one part of the necessary list of ingredients that you need for creativity, for discovering new ways of thinking about things or whatever. But the other thing was you need to let yourself let go of very directed attention and have what some people would call daydreaming. Now daydreaming is when you let your mind just kind of go in spontaneous ways, making new associations that don't necessarily have a logical and rational way of attaining things. What is absolutely fascinating is that the people who just daydream and don't know they're daydreaming, have no increase in creativity. It's the people who can daydream to the experience and new association arising, but they have an observing self – this is literally what they talked about – they have an observing self that is observing that another part of themselves is daydreaming, and they kind of give that daydreaming circuit if you will, the freedom to do it. But they don't lose track of the fact that they're intentionally daydreaming. Those are the people who use their daydreaming in a productive way to create new combinations, not people who just mind-wander and get lost in something and don't even know they're lost in something. It's really interesting because it goes along exactly with what you're saying.

**RC:** Yeah, that's just a fascinating.

**DS:** Isn't it amazing?

**RC:** Yeah.

**DS:** When you look at Elissa Epel and Elizabeth Blackburn and colleagues' work on telomeres—telomeres are the ends of chromosome that are maintained by an enzyme called telomerase and Elizabeth Blackburn recently won the Nobel Prize for discovering this system. We have this enzyme that she discovered: telomerase—telomere, -ase; so -ase means an enzyme and telomere is the ends of chromosomes. So telomerase maintains the ends of chromosomes and even repairs them. Initial studies showed that mindfulness meditation, for some reason, increases the enzyme that maintains the life of, and health of the ends of your chromosomes.

A new study that's just being submitted now for publication shows that presence; being aware of what you're doing when you're doing it is likely the mediator of increase telomerase. Now interestingly in those studies, where they measure presence is they beep someone randomly and find out if they're aware of what they're doing when they're doing it. And mind-wandering in these studies is the opposite of presence. Now I have to see exactly the methodology of these presence

studies versus the creativity studies. But I would bet you that the presence that Elissa Epel and colleagues are studying, where you're aware of what's going on as it's going on, precludes the idea that you've intentionally let yourself to daydream because then you'd be aware: "I am daydreaming. That's what I want to be doing. And I'm doing it," versus the other folks whose minds are wandering aimlessly and don't even realize they're doing it when they could be doing something else that they're aware of. So it'd be interesting to see that. But in this case, what the presence study suggests is that this ability to monitor, even in an open way, what you're doing as you're doing it, directly relates to the health of your cells because it increases telomerase which maintains the life of your cells; they literally can be younger by learning to be present in life.

As we talk about even now, doing this interview, I said, "Look, I'm trying to be present with my father's death and my feelings and what's going on in my family, and just trying to monitor when I should do things or not do things." What I'm trying to do is really respect the presence from wisdom traditions, presence from neuro-science studies, and all these different ways that we can be present in what's going on, including what my neighbor is doing—moving his trashcan, closing a window. So we have this capacity to just be there with what is as it's unfolding. And I think what my wife and I have tried to do with the grandkids—this is the first loss in their life—is to model for them as best we can that we're present with whatever is arising, whatever feelings come up, whatever non-feelings come up; sadness or not sadness, or feeling like you can talk clearly.

Even my father when he was near death; the last time I was with him he said, "What's going on with me?" And I had to say to him, which at that moment, no one had the opportunity to tell him—I told him he was dying, that his body was giving out, and it was getting ready to be the end. So we sat there, I was holding his hand and, you know, in my observing self, not just the painfully sad self—I was experiencing sadness, but my observing self knew that all I could do in that unbelievably profound moment was just be present with whatever was going on with me, whatever was going on in him, and whatever was happening between us. I held his hand and it was this sense of clarity and strength and profound sadness and also a kind of, in a strange way, I don't want to use the word joy, but a celebration of life that he and my mother gave birth to me and he lived this long life; he was 89. And here I was holding his hand with this body that's a little younger than his, not so much younger but a little younger, that could articulate some things for him about what he asked me, what he needed, and we talked about what do you do when your body is giving out and your heart isn't functioning and your whole system is getting ready to shut down. He was awake enough to have

that conversation; he talked about how he didn't want to be alone and that he wanted to know what to do. We talked about saying all the things to all the people in his life; he wanted to make sure he could say everything that he needed to say. And so he said some things to me and I said some things to him. It was really one of those moments where you just say, "Wow."

All we can do in life, no matter how much the pain is there, no matter the helplessness you feel, is just be present. So in that way, that whole background of knowledge about presence, for me in that moment with my dad, gave me a kind of inner strength and inner clarity so that between my dad and myself I could be there for him. I mean, later on after he died, and I was in his room I was crying my head off and I couldn't have said anything like I said earlier, I just let myself be consumed with the sadness of everything. But there are moments where we need to be present and clear for other people when they're hurting a lot, and then give ourselves permission to, I could use the phrase 'fall apart', but it's really fall together. In some ways when we let ourselves disassemble and not be rational and not have it all together, but rather give ourselves permission to just sort through things.

#### **4. Attunement**

**RC:** Well, you know, the observing, the witnessing that you were speaking about and I was talking about a little bit earlier, my senses say it's not a rational or irrational function—it includes all of that. And so just like one can be aware that one is daydreaming, one can also be aware that one is falling apart or falling together as you described it, and hold that.

**DS:** Yeah.

**RC:** It brings me back to a term that you used earlier, attunement. You spoke about it in terms of parent-child connection, which I really deeply value—how that concept works. I love the work that you did in the book *Whole Brain Child*. I think it's one of your recent publications.

**DS:** Yes, thanks.

**RC:** Really what we're talking about is attunement within and attunement between.

**DS:** Yeah.

**RC:** And my sense is attunement is the healer. That if we think of healing not as fixing something that's broken, but about either restoring or deepening wholeness. That it is the art and practice of attunement.

**DS:** Right.

**RC:** And you described it, as you were with your father in those most moving and powerful moments at the end of his life, and also with yourself after that passage had occurred, and there you were on your own. I think the value of attunement is just inestimable.

**DS:** Yeah.

**RC:** It's really, in a way, what life is about.

**DS:** I think so; to see the internal attunement of mindfulness as a way the observing/narrating self is open and receptive to an experiencing self is really, for me, a way of linking it to the in between: the interpersonal attunement. In the experience these are profoundly integrated in the sense that you allow a differentiated entity, whether it's an observing self or a parent to be open and connecting to another entity in this case, an experiencing self or the child. And this attunement creates this massively integrated state and this linkage of differentiated parts is whole other thing we can talk about. But the journey of life is never—you don't reach some fixed place. When you look at the mind of both embodied and socially embedded process, a relational process as well as an embodied process, you can see that this—what we say in interpersonal neurobiology is mind is not just awareness/non-awareness but also subjective experience and this third process called self-organization, and self-organization of mind is not limited to the skin. When I was with my dad and we were being with each other, I was holding his hand; we were talking about what one does when the organs of one's body—his organs were so old and were so weak that they couldn't give him the nurturance, the oxygen, the blood flow that he needed. Month by month, week by week, day by day, and then hour by hour, it was getting to the turning point where it would no longer sustain life. And none of us live forever so it's like, here we were, a father and son, holding hands, our observing selves together, attuning to each other saying "Wow!" The experience in here is that the body in this life we live as animals and as humans, the body does not go on forever. It was a moment of clarity in both our minds that we can see that this is something the mind depends on. The mind needs a body in which to have this embodied mechanism where energy and information is flowing. I didn't say all this stuff to him but this is what I was thinking when I said, "Your mind is getting challenged because your body isn't having the energy it needs." He was very frightened and he said so. And I shared with him something which I'll share with you now, Raphael, people can take it however you want to take it. I said to him, "Dad, you know, I've never had someone come

to me as a patient saying they were terrified of where they were before they were conceived.” I said that because my father has never had a religious background so it’s kind of frightening for an engineer/scientist to face death—he didn’t have a story in his mind about what’s going to happen. So I said to him, “Whatever your beliefs are, think of it this way: You’re going to the exact kind of place, very likely, where you were before you were conceived. And no patient has ever come to me frightened of where they were before they were conceived. And if you go into that same place which is really a place of infinite possibility, total openness of resting in that spacious potential; that’s maybe where we all go in these bodies which give us a fixed century of experience limited by what we could do with the body and our imagination. But you may be going to a place of infinite openness like that.” And he looked very peaceful. And he said, “Thank you. That makes me feel comfortable.” And you know, I feel that way. I don’t think it’s just a rationalization that we do have this incredible—this gets a little too intellectual—I don’t really want to go to that place except to say—if you say like we do in interpersonal neurobiology that the mind is the self-organizational emergent process that is arising as energy and information flows not just in the body, certainly not just in the skull, throughout the body, but also as it’s shared between people and among people and even with the planet. This sharing we call relational, this embodied relational process is self-organizing. When you say it’s self-organizing it means it’s regulating energy and information flow. When you say it’s about energy, some people roll their eyes and go “Oh, now you’re going to talk about quantum physics or you’re going to talk about whatever.” A lot of people don’t even like to talk about energy. But when you really do, if you’re willing to take that step, which I feel deeply in terms of how I live this life as well as what I see from a scientific point of view, is that energy moves through time by alterations and probability. It’s a probability curve. You can look at the physics and mathematics that’s expressed in quantum theory, which looks at the way energy changes across time as change in probability, and you go from a hundred percent certainty, where something is taking a possibility and turns it into an actuality, or you move it down to zero certainty, which is a hundred percent possibility. I talk about this in different books, like the Pocket Guide. Interpersonal neurobiology goes into this a lot about this plane of possibility. I do believe myself, how I feel, how I think, and what I experienced with my dad is that when we’re living this life, the energy patterns are continually dancing between fixed probability, like a thought or a feeling or an image or something like that, which is the transformation of a possibility into actuality; and then, when I could see this in my father as his body was giving out, his mind was still present. The within mind was getting weak but the between mind—between me and him—was

really so full. And I could feel that he was going to go from this dance between specific certainties to the world of infinite possibility, however you want to interpret that because everyone has a different background and a different narrative that is from where they come or how they see things. For me, whatever I would say about myself, I would say I'm totally a scientist at heart but I see no separation between science and spirituality from what people taught me spirituality as a word meaning: larger sense of connection. So as I'm sitting with my dad and we're holding hands, I'm feeling and thinking and knowing from a scientific point of view that this place that awaits us, is this space of infinite possibility; that the energy curve will move into this open space and that's where it is, and that's where we were before we're conceived. So with that kind of feeling, I looked at my dad and told him I loved him. And we connected that way.

As I sit here now in this different space and time, those manifestations of possibility into actuality that we call our life together, those are things that don't really disappear. We may think time is just linear and okay, you move along and that's gone. But there's a feeling in this whole view that things that exist have a kind of eternal imprint to them, that they're manifestation as actualities from the plane of possibility creates an eternal imprint in the world. I don't think this is a rationalization. I know when my dear friend John O' Donohue, when he was alive, he died suddenly as a young man, but we used to talk a lot when we were working together on some projects on spirituality and poetry and the brain and all sorts of stuff like that—we have to be careful of notions that time is simply linear and that this narrative constriction of the self is only limited to the skin, creates a kind of existential terror. And when you realize that the self is not bounded by the skin; it includes the skin for sure, we need to take care of our bodies, we should enjoy our bodies. But there's a much larger self that is not just within but it's between. And I guess in the passing of my father, all these issues—I'm just living them. I'm not just thinking about them, I'm really just living as present as I can.

**RC:** I'm moved to share something briefly from my own experience. My mom died some many years ago and we had a really difficult relationship. Many people go through the grieving process really conflicted in ways that have to do with that. Like, there's a sense of what I'm supposed to feel if my parent or someone that close to me dies. And then, what if I don't feel that way? Or what if there's an emptiness where it seems like there should be some kind of flow of feelings? And in my circumstance, I went to go see my mom; she was really ill. And then I flew back home and I called her to check in. And she said, "When are you coming back?" And I said, "I'm not sure." And

she said, “Well, you may miss my big trip.” And that was the kind of thing she would never ever say. And somebody who had spent time with the dying had told me that there’s a prescience that also comes near the end, and that if I wanted to see my mom again, I should probably get right back on a plane and return. And I took that really seriously, and I did; I got right back on a plane. And there was a way that we couldn’t really communicate very well and we couldn’t really bond. She wasn’t available for that, I think ever, out of her own pain and sorrow; a lot of it she wasn’t willing to touch. When I went back the second time, she was a little bit out of it on medication. I just arrived with the sense of gratitude for a possible last connection, and I wanted it to be really substantively different from what we knew together. And so I just sat right next to her on the couch and I said, “Could I put my hand on your heart?” And she didn’t really know exactly what I was saying or why I was saying it, but she said “Okay.” And I did. And I felt, in just the two minutes or so that we had together, a purity of connection and loving kindness and really attunement, coming back to that term from earlier. It gave me such peace and gratitude to have had that moment with her; a moment so different from any other that I’d ever had with her previously. And I went home that same night, and she died in the middle of the night. And so I think that I wanted to share that because whether our connection with someone that we love so much is easy or profoundly difficult, self-attunement and attunement between and in the moment of such momentous passages is still possible.

**DS:** Oh yeah.

**RC:** It may look very different from person to person and from family to family. But whatever is there can still be met in the same way, and it doesn’t need to look one particular way or another.

**DS:** No, I totally agree, and thank you for sharing that. I would say, and I’m kind of in a very raw moment now so I don’t feel like I can talk too much about it this moment. But I would say that the relationship I had with my father was profoundly difficult. I’m describing these last moments and it is exactly as I’m describing it. But they were done with a long history of not being like that. And I think it’s important we’re sharing that. It’s a whole other issue, this sorting through process when you lose someone with whom you had a very complex and difficult relationship. People say to me, “Oh my God, you write about all this stuff about attachment. You must have had a wonderful relationship with your parents.” I go “That’s what you think, huh?” (Laugh)

**RC:** Well, this series is called Teaching What We Need to Learn.



**DS:** Yeah, I totally agree. The clarity of presence as an experience and a concept can really help you, especially if you've had a difficult relationship with a caregiver or someone who is now dying. One needs to go deep inside and let resentment go, make sure things are said that need to be said as best they can. I think we are narrative creatures—story telling creature making sense of disruptions in a relationship and making sense of disappointments and disillusionments inside of ourselves. Sometimes it's a necessary place to start so that when we go to someone who's in a state of suffering and with whom we had a very difficult relationship, you can let that be your own internal work and be as present as you can for however long you feel is meaningful for you to be present with that person.

**RC:** I'd love to spend a few minutes on coming back to the issue of attunement. In the work that I do, what I find is that most people who are hurting to some degree or don't feel fully or nearly fully self-actualized—they have a place inside of them, a constellation of feeling and belief that they're not able or willing yet to include in their attention, in their attunement. And usually this has something to do with shame; often it has to do with trauma. But it's as if their saying as they progress on their personal and spiritual path, "I'll say yes to everything but that. That doesn't get to be included."

The healing power of attunement occurs when they finally say "Okay, yes. It's been brought to me over and over. It's begged for my attention." And instead of saying, "That's the thing that's wrong with me. That's the thing that doesn't belong." I'm going to say, "It's okay now. You can come home. I'll let you be a part of me and a part of this as well." I see that that decision makes all the difference for people, and that actually one of the most powerful things to share with them is that if they don't do that, if they keep saying no to that part of them that they like the least or want the least, then actually they're just re-wounding themselves in the same way that they were wounded through their own early development. So I just wanted to share that because this powerful attunement that we've been talking about, I think has the capacity to create healing and wholeness in an absolutely powerful way, and especially powerful way when we turn it towards what has, until this moment, been just too hard to say yes to.

## **5. Integration**

**DS:** Yeah, I think that's true. From astronomy, there's a parallel analogy of a black hole in the sky which has so much gravitational force, it sucks photons, the light out of the region near it. So when we look at it, it's black because there's no light emanating from it. And in the same way, when

there's an item, a feeling, an experience, or a relationship or something which we cannot be open to, we can't attune to, we say, "Everything but that,"—that item is kind of like the black hole of the soul. It sucks the light and the vitality out of our minds. When I say mind, I don't mean intellect, I mean the heart, head, gut—everything. Relationships— that's the mind for me. It pulls the life out of the mind, and so a person feels like something isn't quite right, there's some hole inside of them literally, just this black hole of the soul. So that issue of this one place in me that I cannot go isn't just "Oh well, at least I got ninety-nine percent of..." You need to go to that place of hurt. So attunement is really a kind of statement, if I could put words to it, it's like 'bring it on'. It's like, "I am willing to be in any kind of internal or interpersonal space." And in the case of, if you've had a parent who's difficult like we've been talking about, you say, "Listen, there's a part of me that knows it's difficult, but right now, I need to be here in this way that's good for me and good for this person. It's good for the whole experience of transition and the dying period, and I will be there." So it's not that you ignore the disappointments and the pain. It's that you embrace it and say, "This is not the time to be actually talking about with this person who's dying." Necessarily, you might think this is the time or whatever in a positive, constructive way. But usually, it's not the time to work through things in an acute and feisty kind of way. So this is exactly what we're talking about, that it's this 'bring it on' state of receptivity to anything that arises. And you treat it with gentleness because ultimately, this integrative process inside of making sense of being present for what is, of allowing the experiencing self to be differentiated with the observing self, but letting them honor each other. This outcome of integration when integration is made visible; it's kindness and compassion, and it's kindness toward the self and kindness towards others. And one way of really embracing with kindness, I like to define it, is: honoring and supporting each other's vulnerability. Where you say, "Hey, we all have this tender place inside; places of hurt, places of need that are fulfilled/unfulfilled, ways in which we really depend on others and expose these needs to others; needs to be understood, needs to be connected to, needs to be held." So in all these ways, kindness then is the way you honor and support each other's vulnerability. And if we bring more kindness into the world, we actually bring more integration, which is also the root of health.

**RC:** So compassion is integration made visible. I just wanted to say that back because it's so powerful and so moving to see it that way. And something else comes to me from that: a lot of neuroscience talks to us about the fictional sense of self. The idea that there is this autonomous I who is the author of one's own life, it seems like when we look for that, both scientifically and spiritually, we can't find it. There's a book called *The User Illusion* that refers to this. There's a

book called *The Mind's Past*, which speaks to this very specifically. Both of those books are more for lay people than for professionals. But the reason I'm bringing this up is because the more that we connect to one another, to what's around us, and even connect within, it seems to me again, that there's this great paradox where we start to let go of the idea that we are the doer; that we are the creator of our lives, and the more that we let life surge through us without trying to control it, the more actually we fulfill the uniqueness of our particular life form. I see this over and over both in myself and with others, the sense that when I let go into this process of attunement and integration that you've been sharing with us, it might seem on the surface like I'm going to surrender who I am and what I want and what I need. But in fact, I'm fulfilled and realized beyond my previous imagining. And so the self that I am, is unique and personal and then also connected to everything that is. And the fullness there is, in the truest sense of the word, awesome.

So there's this other gift I just want to bring into the conversation of what we've been talking about; that we get to switch from a much smaller perception of who we are, skull encapsulated beings as you were talking about, or skin encapsulated beings, and to realize that even as we're living this life, until we go back to the place that your father returned to, that we still have the opportunity to be in the fullness of that kind of connection. To source ourselves not as the I who's interpreting this experience but as the whole itself.

**DS:** Yeah. I think that's beautifully said. Absolutely. You know, it's a really interesting notion that there's a dense, deep connection between this observing capacity we have, which does have a narrative, and does have a sense of free will, and does have a sense of choice and purpose, and links the past, present, and future in all sorts of ways. So when you say people say they haven't found the self—I think there are many selves, and they have found certain relational aspects to that and certain neurological correlates. So they may not have found a single self but there are certainly many of these circuits that underlie, for example, narration—we know a lot about that. And then there's experiencing, so this kind of strange tension between letting life surge through you, which is more like the experiencing in circuit, letting it happen, and that's crucial, I think, for a full life. But there's also this observing, witnessing, narrating circuit that also has a life of its own—it is distinct. And it plays a really important role that says “Hey! How do I make moral decisions? How do I actually think about the purpose of life? How do I actually think about patterns that are maybe not so adaptive, maybe not so healthy?” That narrating self of me wants to say, “Hey, there you go

again on automatic pilot. Don't do that! You've learned over years of doing it that way— maybe you want to try it a different way.”

So this ability to intentionally alter behaviors, alter patterns of how we focus attention, alter the way we become aware of things, and even regulate our own feelings, even the way we process our own memories—this observing self has the capacity, literally, to change the structure and function of the brain with intention. And this is where I would say yes, surging through life is good—let life surge through you. But also, having this reflective ability to be aware and make choices that are informed and discerning choices. Like for example, practicing a reflective few minutes each day is a really, really good thing to do. It's intentional. It's really moving between controlling what you do with your intention and letting things happen, if it's a mindfulness practice like that. And then when you do that, you say “Okay. Well, I am choosing to actually be disciplined about how to let my mind be spacious. I want to be disciplined about how to focus my attention inward not just on technological gadgets or whatever.” So there's a fantastic blend of both letting things happen, really important, and also being very aware and present in an observing way where you link the past, observations for the present, and plans for the future. Both those tracks, I think, are really important for a meaningful life.

**RC:** I love that addition. It really comes back to a central theme of our conversation today because you spoke earlier about daydreaming with awareness and daydreaming without awareness. And how with awareness, it brings so much to us. And without, it's just spacing out.

**DS:** Exactly.

**RC:** And here in this situation, what I heard you say was that if you let life surge through you in a way that I described it, without observation, it would be just something happening and then it's done happening. But if you let it happen and then you bring that kind of discerning, intentional awareness that you described, then it's the best of all possible worlds.

**DS:** Exactly. And ideally whatever life presents us with: loved ones dying, complicated relationships, surprising things that have happened, the fate of our planet; the way we can really, I think, bring the best kind of healing and health to everyone, including the environment, is to cultivate these ways of blending experience and observation to be fully present, and bring more compassion and kindness to the world; to bring positive, healing movements of our self and our connection with others into this world.

**RC:** Well, I just want to say by way of gratitude and in closing that you are particularly unique because you have this deep understanding, and you also travel in very sophisticated, intellectual, and educational circles. You're a scholar. You're a doctor. There's a special facility that you have to both travel in those worlds and then to synthesize them into ways of expression that people can really get and put into their own lives. And yet, it seems to me, as I've just spent this hour with you, that your message and your gift is really actually, most deeply present in who you are. The concepts are brilliant and they're really helpful. But just the way you approach the question of would you do the call today and what you've been willing to share from your own heart and from your own experience; it feels like everything that you teach is really present in a very palpable way, and how you move in the world, and how you connect with yourself and in this case with me, but also all the listeners. So I'm just so grateful that I got to have the personal experience to really add such deep dimensions to all the great work that you do as well.

**DS:** Well Raphael, thank you very much. I mean it's been really powerful to connect with you today about all these things. And thank you for the opportunity to explore these really deep and important issues together, and with anyone who's listening, so thank you. And thank you for those beautiful words, I think the only thing we can do in life is really try to live as fully authentic and present and integrated as we can. And if in that journey we connect with others and it brings more kindness and compassion within our world, what else can we do? So thanks for giving me this chance to be here with you.

## Brother David Steindl-Rast



Brother David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B. was born in 1926 in Vienna, Austria where he studied art, anthropology, and psychology, receiving a Ph.D. from the University of Vienna. Since 1953, he has been a monk of Mount Saviour Benedictine monastery in New York and was one of the first Roman Catholics to participate in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. He has contributed to books and periodicals from the *Encyclopedia Americana* to the *New Age Journal*. He authored “Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer,” and “A Listening Heart,” and co-authored “Belonging to the Universe,” with physicist, Fritjof Capra, and “The Ground We Share,” on Buddhist and Christian practice with Robert Aitken Roshi. His most recent book is “Deeper Than Words: Living the Apostles’ Creed.” Brother David co-founded [WWW.GRATEFULNESS.ORG](http://WWW.GRATEFULNESS.ORG).

### 1. Opportunity

**RC:** Brother David, welcome, it’s so great to be with you today.

**BD:** Thank you and welcome to you. I’m very happy to be with you.

**RC:** I think of you as one of the great teachers and leaders and elders when it comes to gratefulness and so I want to start there with my own gratitude and to say that I’m really delighted that you’re doing this interview as a part of our series. And I feel very honored that we were able to find the time where the two of us could connect together. So thank you so much.

**BD:** Well, thank you and I’m glad we have this opportunity. I am grateful (laughs).

**RC:** Okay, good. And for me, gratitude and acceptance are very closely linked. The more I can accept my experience, the more I can be grateful for it. And I like to begin these talks by starting with the present and I want to share with you that in this moment, I feel, as I said, grateful; also excited to be talking with you; also, a little bit tired because of a hectic day; and also a strange experience because in order for my camera to show you me, my room needs to be dark.

**BD:** Oh!

**RC:** So it's a bright, sunny day outside, but even though my room looks light to you, I'm actually sitting in the dark with you, like a brother monk (laughs).

**BD:** Ah, (laughs). Well, we've overcome those hurdles, I think.

**RC:** Yes, well, when there is darkness there is light. And so maybe there is a metaphor in this for us.

**BD:** That's right. And I hope that your tiredness will go away because sometimes when we sit down with a friend after an exhausting day, one recovers. And maybe we can have just a chat like among friends.

**RC:** Absolutely. And so how about you in this moment? What are you experiencing?

**BD:** Well, a little bit of jet lag because I just came 10,000 kilometers from Europe to San Francisco two days ago and so I still have a little jet lag. But otherwise, I am very happy to be here. And it's a sunny day in San Francisco and I feel very comfortable.

**RC:** Okay, wonderful! And I want to ask you another question. It's an aside, but it will come back to our conversation. Do you know and have you had communications with Ram Dass?

**BD:** Oh, yes, very much so, from long, long ago. Lately, we haven't been much in communication, but over the years and decades, very much so. I don't even remember how far back our acquaintance goes but I remember in 1972, he was at our monastery, and that was a memorable experience because it was one of the very first of those events where representatives from many different traditions were together. And it has been imitated many times after that but it was kind of a first and very exciting.

**RC:** Yes. Well, I asked you because I know that you spent many years at Tassajara.

**BD:** Yes.

**RC:** And I currently teach twice a year at the Esalen Institute down the road from Tassajara. I'm guessing you've been there as well, yes?

**BD:** Oh, yes! And I was there for two and a half years as a teacher in residence also.

**RC:** Two and a half years, wow! Wonderful. One of the things about most generations is that we tend to think that we are somehow finding or inventing something and I want to give a great bow to you and your brother Ram Dass, because you're both from relatively the same generation, and you were walking those lands and drinking deep from your mystical experience, where now my generation and people younger than me are doing the same. But I understand that you blazed the trail.

**BD:** Well, I don't know whether we blazed it but anyway, that Big Sur area is a very important, really holy ground. There are four spiritual centers there. The other two are the Hermitage, New Camaldoli Hermitage and I spent 14 years there; and the other one is The Window to the West, a Native American Center. And we have connected all four of them and we call it the Four Winds Council and some representatives of the four centers meet there at one of the centers every quarter of a year so that every year we go around and have made the rounds of being with one another. That has been going on also for a very, very long time. I think several decades now.

**RC:** That's great to hear. And I didn't know that your experience and time runs so deeply in that Big Sur area. That's wonderful to hear.

**BD:** Yes, I feel very connected with it, and also through the poetry of Robinson Jeffers.

**RC:** Yes, wonderful! So I want to ask you a question to kind of get us rolling today. We haven't spoken, you and I, or communicated prior to this interview. We've gone through intermediaries and so this is our first chance to connect. So I want to share with you, I'm not sure that you know this, but the series that this interview is a part of with personal growth and spiritual teachers from many different traditions, about 50 of them. The series is called *Teaching What We Need To Learn*. And I'm wondering just if you can say a few words, your own reflections on that theme, just where that takes you in your own mind and heart, and then we'll go from there.

**BD:** That is very easy because when I heard the title, *Teaching What We Need To Learn*, I thought, "Do we ever teach anything that we don't need to learn?" We always pick exactly what we need to learn and then we teach it, and if you are lucky, then we learn what we teach. And I think every teacher will say how much they have learned from their students, and I think we choose the areas in which we teach precisely because we want to learn. It's not always conscious. I think that most of it is subconscious but I think that's just a fact.



**RC:** And so for you going back to the beginnings, your own spiritual longings and your quest, you probably see now what was maybe subconscious back then. Do you have a sense of what it was that you were needing to learn that drove you into your particular learning and experience?

**BD:** Well, I've been very privileged to meet up with many different spiritual traditions and every time I come across a new one, I'm always surprised that the goal is always the same and it's to bring us into the present moment. And that has been a goal from the beginning as a Benedictine monk when I joined the monastery; even though we don't put it in exactly in those terms, but just to be present, to be there. I think in Christian terms, we would say, "To live all the time in the presence of God." That means to be in the present moment, and that was my goal and I practice that.

But in order to learn it, whatever I taught, it wasn't designed to help me be more present in the present moment. It was gratefulness, that particular label—that was not clear to me for a long time, not even when it was already clear to the people I was teaching.

People kept saying to me, "You need a website, you need a website"—that was the time when people started having websites. And then I said, "Well, what kind of a title should we give it?" And we had all sort of titles and someone, one of the young people who was with me, who eventually became our web master, I think he was about 21 or something like that, and he said, "Well, we have to call it *Gratefulness*. That's really what all your teaching is about," and when he said that, it sounded very reasonable, "Yes, yes, I think that's what it is." I learned it, you see—I learned what I most needed and gratefulness is a wonderful means of bringing you in the present moment.

## **2. Now is Not in Time; Time is in the Now**

**RC:** And it seems to me that often when you understand what you're either not grateful for or where you have trouble being grateful, then you also find the part of your own self in your own life that hasn't been able to be brought into presence for you yet. So, it's kind of like that's where the work is.

**BD:** I think that's absolutely true. And that was one of the steps I had to take, another one of the things I had to learn partly because of questions that people ask me and partly from my own experience daily. Can you really be present at every moment? Can you really be grateful at every moment? And obviously, you can't be grateful for everything. So I ask myself, "Can I really be grateful for everything there is?" And the answer is, "No." There are many things for which I

cannot be grateful—I cannot be grateful for war, for violence, for exploitation, for oppression, for breaches of faith and confidence, and so forth.

There are lots and lots of things for which we can't be grateful. But then I came to see and this was really an important insight for me—Yes, but every moment, even the moment where you are confronted with things for which you cannot be grateful, offers you something to be grateful for; and that is opportunity. Every moment offers you another opportunity.

I ask myself, “Why is their time at all?” When you are in the present moment, you are not in time because the present moment is not a little short piece of time. The present moment is the Now and the Now is eternity. That's not a little piece of time. On the contrary, the Now is not in time but time is in the Now because when you are remembering something from long past, it's Now. And when the future comes, it will be Now. So Now is not in time; time is in the Now.

Then I ask myself, “Well, why is there time at all? What's the meaning of time?” Not where has it come from, we don't know (laughs); but what's the meaning of time for me? And that is very clear: It's opportunity. If there were no time but just Now, then we'd have this one opportunity and time is somehow the expression that one opportunity after the other is given to me. And if I miss one, that marvelous gift, there's another one, and another one, and another one. And that is a tremendous gift. When we pay attention to that, we realize that we are always grateful for opportunity. There is nothing else that we are grateful for. Do you think we are grateful for this beautiful, clean water that we have, while in many other parts of the world, you don't have drinking water? Here you just turn on the tap and out comes fresh water.

But if you did not have the opportunity to enjoy that water, well, the water would be there but what would you be grateful for? You're grateful for the opportunity of enjoying this water and most of the time, you're grateful for the opportunity to enjoy. And the more you are grateful, the more opportunities you find to be grateful, to enjoy. But once in a while, something comes along the way that you can't enjoy and then if you are in practice, then you ask yourself, “What's this the opportunity for?” And it turns out to be often the opportunity to learn something painfully; growing pains—all sorts of difficult things but you do it joyfully because when you are grateful, you are joyful.

**RC:** Beautiful. You said something a few times, I just want to say it again, because it's so beautiful. You said “Now is not in time, but time is in the Now.” That's really quite beautiful.

I know you have said here and in other places that one cannot be grateful for war, which I understand, and now you're sharing with us about opportunity in every moment. And I know in my own personal life when the United States was about to go to war in Iraq, I was deeply opposed to that choice. I wasn't grateful for the war that I could sense was to come, but I had an opportunity in that moment to look within and find a deeper passion for peace.

**BD:** Yes.

**RC:** And a part of myself that really wanted to stand for peace and to celebrate peace; and I was living near where you are right now in San Francisco and there was a march, and people were marching against the war; and I understood that but I also didn't feel called to the energy of protest in that moment, and so the person I went to the march with—we heard some drummers and we followed the sound of the drummers and then we began dancing. And it felt like it was a dance that was a celebration of peace and of a willingness to be seen and to share in a conviction for peace. So even though the war at that time was awful and what has come after from my own sense of things has been awful, there was a personal opportunity there and I was grateful that I had the opportunity to come into greater presence with myself and with life, even in that difficult circumstance.

**BD:** Oh, that's beautiful! It's so personal and beautiful. Thank you for sharing that. And it also reminds me that when I said that sometimes it's the opportunity to grow and to learn something, I should also have mentioned, often the things that we meet and that ought not to be for which you cannot be grateful are the opportunity to do something about it. You see, even if it's very little, even when we demonstrate and you showed your age by saying that you demonstrated against the war in Iraq; we demonstrated before that against Vietnam and against nuclear power. And it goes way back, (laughs) it goes way back.

But always you feel, "Oh, I'm just one little person. What difference does that make?" But if you share with others, if you get together with others, it does make an impact and even if you just raise these questions in people's minds. If you really, really don't know what on earth can we do about it—there are many things in the present situation, like with regard to the environment, that you say, "For heaven's sake, what can we do?" And if the answer is, "I have no idea," then you can ask someone else. And if the other person says, "I have no idea," then you ask again some other person. And if that spreads, you can just imagine a whole nation that asks, "What can we do about it?" And

when we ask, we will find the answer. At least we have started asking, started questioning. That is also a tremendous opportunity that we have and it'd be ought not to miss.

**RC:** Yeah, great! So I want to ask you one other thing about the eternal Now that you were speaking about before. I have been a lay student of many of the discoveries of neuroscience in the past decades and I know that you've had an interest in that. You've participated in some conferences around that theme. And one of the things that we've learned is that the early developing brain, our organ of experiencing and perceiving life, is shaped by our early experience; that the way that we live in the present has a lot to do with the brain that was formed in the past and that to some important degree, we can't be present in time. Not the eternal Now, but the present moment in time apart from the past.

And this is really important to me personally because I work with many people who have experienced severe trauma in their early life; some of them, a kind of trauma that is the nightmare of a moment, but others, a trauma that was more subtle but ongoing for many years as their brain was developing. And I'm wondering what your own perspective is on how those two things come together, the difficulty and wounding of the past and our desire to seize the opportunity to be as present as possible.

### **3. The Actor and the Role**

**BD:** Right. That's a wonderful question and I must admit that I have struggled quite a bit with it. Of course, we keep struggling and we keep expanding our understanding. But from my present understanding, we have to make a distinction between "I"—my individual identity or ego—and the Self, who witnesses that identity. In everyday language, sometimes, we say, "I do this. I do that. I will do that." And at other times, we say, "I, myself." So are there two of us, "I" and "myself"? And the answer is no, there is one, but there is a distinction. Otherwise, we wouldn't make the distinction. There's no separation. So there is not two, but there is a clear distinction. So I ask myself, "What can I do about these two perspectives? How can I understand them more deeply?"

And when I step back, so to say (this is all metaphorical language, but we have no other), when I step back into the Self, I can watch my "I" talking and thinking, even thinking. I can watch myself thinking and I can watch myself doing it. If you go and step back far enough until you are the Watcher who nobody else can watch but who watches everything, that is what I call the Self. And then you have the individual "I" out there.

And so one way in which I understand the relationship between the Self and the “I” is that the Self plays a role out there: As the Self, I am the actor and I play a role. The emphasis here is on *plays* the role, because if I over-identify with the role—if I think that the role is all that I am— then I am back in the ego. The role is given to me. As you say, in my childhood, long before I was born, my genes have already determined a lot about my role. When I am born, nurture comes to nature and all sorts of things, untoward things may happen to me, or very positive things may happen me. In other words, I play this role but it’s the Self who is the actor. I can distinguish between the actor, that’s the Self, and the role or the mask, that is the “I.” And most of the time, the “I” has a tendency to think of itself as really the most important part, and that is when I have to shift my weight. I always go back to the Self, because the “I” that thinks it is the most important part or is everything—that “I” is like an actor who takes the role *so* seriously that she or he thinks they are Hamlet, or they are whoever they play.

So I have to continuously and many times a day, step back from my role, play it well; play all the better if I remember that I am the actor and then it flows through the Self. This is a completely different feeling also whether I’m stuck in the “I,” stuck in war with the “I,” or really *playing* this role. It’s more playful, it’s much lighter. When I’m stuck, the first thing is I get fearful. That’s how I recognize that I am stuck. I am stuck in time. Everything is past and future and no present moment—no leisure, no Now.

So constantly, I have to step back and that is how I see that relationship. That yes, I want to be deeply respectful of people. I’m mostly talking about myself here actually, but when I would be talking with someone else who has had terrible injuries as a child, or has been abused or had terrible difficulties, I want to be extremely respectful and not just say, “Well poo poo that,” or “That’s just a role you play.” But sooner or later depending on how well you know this person, you can get it across, “Look, this is a role you play and if it isn’t this role, it’s going to be another role. What really matters is the actor who plays that.” And when we shift our weight to the Self, rather than the “I,” then it gets so much easier. In moments in which spontaneously we shift, we sometimes do things that afterwards we are highly surprised by: “How could I do that? It wasn’t even me. It did itself.” But that happens only when something really knocks us out of time into the Now. (Laughs)

**RC:** I hear something in what you are sharing that I want to reflect and see if it resonates with you. When someone resides in what you’re calling the Self, sometimes people might call that awareness

or the witness. There's a recognition that who you are on some fundamental and spiritual level is untouched by the role that you have played.

That while you have suffered greatly in your role, as you described it—and maybe sometimes it seems like that suffering has ruined your life—that everybody has the opportunity to relax back into the Self and to know that something about themselves is beyond the wounding, is pure, and is of Spirit, and with that recognition, there's a possibility of healing that wouldn't be there otherwise.

**BD:** Beautifully expressed. I couldn't say it better. I have nothing to add. That's exactly what I tried to get across. But of course, you knew it before I said it, so that's very good. You say it so well (laughs).

**RC:** Well, if I'm in the Now, I'm listening with you and I wouldn't say it the same way in another moment. So we are co-creating together.

**BD:** Exactly.

**RC:** Speaking of creating, someone said of you once: you, 'Not only does he offer stimulating ideas and good theory, but he also creates the climate in which these ideas and theories can be received without fear and then explored in the heart.' So I'm wondering what you can say about how you do that. When that is your intention, how do you go about fostering it?

**BD:** I wasn't aware that anybody had said that, but I find it very flattering. I think that's high praise that one could say about somebody. And if I imagine some other person about whom I would say the same thing, it would seem to me the secret is to live in the Now, because there is one aspect to this Now which we have touched upon. You said we are co-creating. But I haven't explicitly spelled it out—there is one important aspect about this Now and about the self.

When we are in the Now, we are in "the self" and there is only one self. There are not several selves. I mean my self is your self. This is funny to put it this way, but there is only one self and that is the self for all of us and not only for all humans; I am convinced it's the self of the animals, and of the plants, and of the planet, and of the whole universe. It's the one self and at least in the Jewish Christian tradition, it is expressed by the command, "Love you neighbor as your self." That does not mean as it is so often missed translated, "Love your neighbor like your self."

So your two separate selves and you like your self and just like you like your self, you like, now, somebody else? That's not what it says. It says, "Love your neighbor not like your self, but *as* your self." And the self is that which you love always. You can't help loving it. If you understand what loving means; basically as a working definition, I always say, "Love means saying yes to belonging." And you can try that and it fits in every situation; where we say I love you or I love this and I love that, from loving parents, to loving friends, to loving your country and the world and nature, or whatever—it always fits. It's saying yes to belonging. And not saying it with your mouth, but saying it with the way you live.

And when you do that, you are in that self that animates the whole universe and therefore things will blow out just like the birds sing and the trees grow. So you act through that particular mask or role that your self has been given in this "I" that came from such parents and was born under such circumstances and grew up under such circumstances. So we're all very different from one another but our self is just one self and when you live from that, I think you create peace—that is peace. Everything fits together with everything.

**RC:** So if I am following you, I see from the self, I can see the role that I'm playing and that self is actually one, the same self that my neighbor or friend or enemy could see him or her self from and recognize the role that he or she is playing. We are one as we are in that self together.

**BD:** Yes. That's very well expressed and I'm glad you mentioned the enemy because you ought to love also your enemies, but that doesn't mean that they are no longer enemies because if they are no longer enemies, you couldn't love your enemies.

**RC:** (Laughs)

**BD:** So you love them *as* your enemies. That means in your role, you are set up in such a way that you will be the enemy. If you stand up for something, you have enemies and if you don't have enemies, you should ask yourself, "There must be something wrong. I am too wishy-washy."

**RC:** (Laughs) Yes.

**BD:** (Laughs) If you have conviction, you have enemies. But it makes a great difference whether you come to these enemies from the self with the understanding we are basically one. We just have to play these different roles and then you can be an enemy lovingly. We belong together. I am grateful to you for making me stand where I stand and I am grateful for you in many respects. But

as my enemy, as somebody with whom I'm opposed, and then it becomes much more like a very fine football game or something like that, or boxing match or something rather than a cutthroat affair.

#### **4. The Wedding Feast**

**RC:** Yes. And this helps bring together something that usually seems like a dichotomy; it's a little bit like Arjuna on the battlefield in the Bhagavad-Gita where he knows he has to go out and slay some of his own family because that is the role that he is playing. I'm thinking of the way you described it right now as a great gift that I am receiving because I'm thinking about someone in my life who is an enemy. And I know the self as you have been describing it. I live there as much as I can.

But I honestly have to say that I have had ongoing trouble with this enemy because I know that I need to protect myself and my family from this enemy and I have noticed that I am very tight and closed whenever I think of this enemy, or react to this enemy's choices and actions. But as you were talking, I saw that I have the ability not just to see my role from the self but also to see my enemy's role from the self and it doesn't mean, necessarily, that it will change any of my action but it will bring something that you described earlier as some lightness and some ease as we play our roles out together.

**BD:** And we'll bring love into it so it will not change what you do but it certainly changes how you do it. This is quite intangible but if you cook with love, it tastes differently than when you don't cook with love and everybody knows that. But we can't point to this taste of love. We can point to the taste of cinnamon or to the taste of parsley, or whatever herb or taste there is, but we cannot point to the taste of love and yet everybody knows that food that's cooked with love tastes from love. It's just different, you see.

And so a battle, Arjuna's battle because he does it out of with love, out of this true self, not out of the ego that's caught up in time, but out of the self, let's it flow into his role, will be a loving battle and every bit as fierce.

**RC:** And I know as I am slaying my enemy, metaphorically speaking, that I am slaying myself and there is no difference. We are just appearing in these roles that we are acting out together.

**BD:** I find that whole Bhagavad-Gita imagery difficult; you have beautifully presented it, but even when it's understood, it's still dangerous because our ego is too eager to slide back into this 'cut



your enemies down and violence is the last resort.' I believe in non-violence. I really believe in non-violence. So of these images are dangerous but if you understand what we mean, then yes, they are very, very apt.

**RC:** Well, I had somebody who wrote to me recently an email and she was responding to a chapter in one of my books and I talked about killing to eat and how everything that is alive gains nourishment from killing something else and it doesn't matter whether we're a vegetarian or a vegan, we're still killing the broccoli in order for you to take it in for nurturing. And she wrote to me and she said, out of her own understanding, she couldn't accept what I was saying. She couldn't see that killing and loving could ever go together. And so she was going to reject that offering. Which of course, I suggested that it was absolutely the right thing for her to do because that was her truth. I wasn't trying to impress something absolute on to anybody.

But, but you said before that when you cook with love, it tastes better and everybody knows that although they can't put their finger on it. I would say also that that everybody knows the difference between killing without consciousness versus saying, "I know I must kill to live, I must kill something to live; and I'm going to do that with gratefulness, I'm going to do that with presence and I'm going to do it with honor."

**BD:** Yes. I couldn't agree more and I have also struggled with that same question with which your respondent who had sent you the email, and I have come to find very helpful an answer that is in the Christian scriptures. Where Jesus very frequently describes the Kingdom of God; which means the non-violent sharing, egalitarian world order, exactly the opposite from the power system under which we are now living; it describes the Kingdom of God as a wedding feast. And then I stand in the middle and I looked around and I see this is the wedding feast before we came.

All these flowers are sex organs. This is a big wedding. Everybody is mating with everybody and everybody is eating up everybody. The bugs are mating with another and eating up the plants, eating one another, then come the birds who eat the bugs. In the end, we are also part of that food chain, and in the end, our body will also be eaten up. And so this I'd like to think of the whole affair where everything is going on here as a big wedding feast, mating, celebrating love, and eating one another up. And that's not so different from one another when we love somebody very much. We say, "Anyway, I love you so much I could eat you up."

So the circle closes again with that. In parenthesis, I have to add many, many of the practices in which our food is produced are terribly dangerous and one has to take a stand against these meat factories and the way chickens are kept and the eggs are produced and all that. One has to take a very close look. But I'm looking from much further away, the whole picture and there, I can see, yeah, it's a wedding feast and I say yes to it.

**RC:** Yes. I love that. I just want to say in terms of the way that everything moves together in a kind of a loop, in one of the other talks that I've had in the series, I actually was sharing with somebody that we have chickens in our yard here where I live and I took the phone out to the chicken coop so the listeners could hear the chickens. And I shared that my favorite chicken was one that had a very strange bunch of feathers on the top of its head that my children had named "Hairdo." And so earlier today, I was speaking to somebody who had listened to that interview and that person asked me, "How is Hairdo?" And first of all, I was grateful that somebody had listened long enough and fully enough to get to that moment, but also I had to say I'm really sorry but Hairdo was pecked to death by the other chickens.

**BD:** Aw, that's sad.

**RC:** So it wasn't even that they were eating up Hairdo in a feast as the Scriptures tell us about, they were just being mean and expressing power that was in their own nature and I have to say yes to that, too, even though I still mourn the loss of Hairdo.

**BD:** Yes, I understand. It would have been nicer to say, "Oh, too bad, we had Hairdo as Kentucky Fried Chicken last night." (Laughs)

**RC:** (Laughs)

**BD:** Yes, that was Hairdo's role to end in that way and it was the other chickens that ought to peck her to death, unfortunately. And its sadness belongs to that joy that we feel when we are grateful. Gratefulness is the key to joy, which is the happiness that doesn't depend on what happens. And so we have to rise beyond our normal gratefulness in which we are grateful when something nice happens. Really to be grateful means to look at what is, recognize that it is a gift and that it is a precious gift. It's given, we know that because every moment is a given moment.

The whole world is a given world in which we live and my life is a given life, not this, or that, but my given life given to me. So everything is given, that, with little thinking we come to realize when

we look carefully. We see how precious it is, how unique. That moment will never come again. I am enjoying my conversation with you and I enjoy all the more because I realize: never before, never after—this is it.

### **5. Love**

**RC:** Yeah, and I'm really struck by something you said a moment ago which is sadness is a part of gratefulness. That there's joy primarily in gratefulness but also when sadness is there, it's included too.

**BD:** It's included. I would even go so far as to say that sadness is included in joy. When people, at first, of course, we think joy is the opposite from sadness and one can use it that way, but we do need a word for that happiness, I would say, that it doesn't depend on what happens and so rather than calling it happiness, I call it joy because at least it's another word. But we all know that at times, I think, we step back a little bit and we see the full picture and it gives us a deep, deep joy that looks also at all the dark sides, at the shadows, at the sadness in the world. Otherwise we would have to say that we would have to look away from the pain in the world and kind of deceive ourselves in order to experience joy and happiness.

We can look at it if we look from the self in the Now. There is a way of looking at it where we see all the dark sides and can still say, "Yes." And that "Yes, I belong to it"—that gives us a deep satisfaction, whatever you want to call it and joy is not a bad name for it.

**RC:** And you can love what you don't see, what you don't experience, what you turn away from.

**BD:** That's right.

**RC:** And so in my experience and expression, loving requires turning toward and especially turning towards the parts of ourselves and our world that we like the least and want the least.

**BD:** That's right.

**RC:** And I had an experience recently that was a good teacher for me about this. I was going to sit with another teacher and this is somebody who likes to be very provocative. And he was trying to make a point with me and he said, "So you were just talking about your daughter and I can see that you really love your daughter. Do you also hate your daughter?" And I thought about it for a moment and I felt into it. I said, "No, I don't." And he said, "You're a liar." And all the other people laughed in the group like they were in on the private joke.

And I thought about it later, really reflected on it. And what I came to see was that it's totally possible that I could have a momentary experience, I could have an emotion moving through me of hate that would be a reaction or directed towards my daughter. I haven't had that yet. She's 4-1/2 years old. She's hopefully going to be around for a long time. So I didn't think that it was so much really about some kind of persistent state, like I love and I also hate my daughter. That didn't feel right. But what felt right was if I'm really in that eternal Now that you spoke about at the beginning, then I am going to be with, I'm going to turn toward and to say yes to whatever arises and it could be love, it could be hate, it could be anything. And in that case, I would say, "Yes."

**BD:** Yes. I think the reason why you answered, "No, I never hate my daughter," is that you thought that hate was the opposite of love. But it is only the pole opposite of love. The real opposite is indifference. Indifference is incompatible with either love or hate. But love and hate are always together and beyond it is the real love in the deepest sense and that is saying yes to belonging. I belong to you and sometimes I could throw you against the wall, and at other times, I just hug and kiss you. And this throwing against the wall is of course—I used it right now simply as a kind of metaphor they sometimes use in everyday language but the moment I said it, the image flashed into my mind of the Frog Prince, where the princess bashes him against the wall and that makes him what he really is. The frog is bashed against the wall and the prince comes out and stands there.

**RC:** Hmm, wonderful! Thank you, that's another gift. We have just a few minutes left and I want to ask you a couple of things before we're done today. What in your life experience till now and maybe even including now about yourself and about your own life has been difficult for you to accept and to be grateful for? Not the world out there in terms of politics and the environment, but in your own experience of your self and in the life that is your everyday living. Where have your greatest challenges to gratefulness been?

### **6. Class: Everybody is a Prince and a Princess**

**BD:** I don't know whether that greatest challenges but I just tell you something that right now comes to mind, the real challenge of my of the role that I play and there are many, many challenges in each one's role. Now, one challenge has to do with class; obviously class is our last taboo. Formerly, you couldn't talk about sex. Now everybody can talk anything about sex that they want. About money, we are still very reluctant to talk about it but it's still how much do you have and how much are you worth, but it's also coming for you. But class, that is unspeakable. That doesn't exist anymore. You see, just as sex didn't exist before.

And when you are born into a certain class and brought up in a certain class, I find it extremely difficult to overcome that barrier and particularly since I am so conscious of belonging and belonging to everybody and everybody is my brother and sister. In the head, and in my conviction is there. But last night, when I got out of the other car and on the way from the car to the door of the host where I'm living, there was a young couple. They were probably a little bit under the influence of drugs or drunk or whatever; they seemed out of it. They've very exhausted. They were on top of this hill where there is no store or anything, just residential, and they were lost there.

And how they ever got there I have not the slightest idea and the man said, they were sort of lounging there because they were very tired, he said, "There are two things I need now," he said to me, "There are two things I need, a pizza and something to drink." (Laughs). So it just happened that I had half a sandwich that I couldn't finish and I had it with me very nicely wrapped, so this was perfect. And Anthony whom you know, my friend, went to get some water from the car and then we went into the house. And ever since I have been pained because what these people probably needed, totally strange, they look as if they had come from Mars, was somebody not to give them a sandwich and some water but to sit down with them on the sidewalk and to say, "Where did you come from? How come you ended up here?" Talk with them. And this barrier, that is the real challenge for me.

**RC:** So let me just follow that up a little bit. First of all, in terms of class, when you think of yourself and the barrier, let's say that in this moment of co-creation, we can speak about class. So what class would you describe yourself as having come from?

**BD:** It is difficult to say. See I'm from a European background and so that is even very difficult to say what class because it has nothing to do with how much money you have. You never had any money. Money was just not talked about but we knew there wasn't enough money. So for instance, when we went to stores and other children would ask for this and for that, I never asked for anything because I knew my mother just didn't have it. So it wasn't money, but we lived with a sense of aristocracy. We were always a little higher than everybody else. And to get rid of that, when you are brought up in that is almost impossible.

**RC:** I really hear that. And so something about an internal barrier, something that you feel within would make it difficult for you to say, "Well, here is a sandwich perhaps if you're hungry but also let me sit with you."

**BD:** Yes, and, but that is only in the “I,” in the ego out there. Not in “my self.” And I think it could be transformed by the realization and I am working on transforming it, but the realization that, not, “Oh no, this sense of aristocracy and so forth that is—are wrong.” No, but everybody is a prince and a princess. We are all a noble. I’ve forgotten now who said it, I think C.S. Lewis said once, “If we could see what other human beings really are, we would fall down and worship them like gods and goddesses.” You see, everybody has this nobility and I know it. So it’s not in myself that there is this barrier, but it somehow is part of that ego out there, of the role that I am playing. And I think, typically, that we have to work off these barriers out there in the role. And that’s what I’m working on.

**RC:** Yeah. And that was really going to be my next question which is what are you learning now and it sounds like one of the important things that you’re learning is to work out within the role some of the, let’s say knots in consciousness that come from having that inborn sense or environmentally-induced sense of aristocracy.

**BD:** Right. I’m working on it by looking with the highest respect at everybody I meet, you see. And also, counteracting this whole power pyramid that is part of this power system under which we live and to a larger extent, I have already really interiorized that. For instance, when I come by on a highway, an area where people are working or when I drive by a vineyard, where a farm worker are working or something like that, I really have this feeling, a deep sense of here are the real people that matter in our world. Or when I see the garbage collectors. I have the same feeling that I formerly used to have when I saw very rich people come out of the opera or something like that with their fur coats and so forth; or when you see movie stars, and something like that. I don’t have to make an effort. It’s the first thing that comes to mind. Here are the people that really carry the world and I feel this. But more and more to interiorize that; that is what seems important to me right now.

**RC:** That is beautifully put. Thank you for letting us see you in that. You mentioned in the beginning of our conversation that if we sat and talk together like friends, then maybe I would be a little bit less tired than in the beginning. And on the one hand, I still feel physiologically tired but I also feel very light and filled with energy because of everything that you shared today. And so I really want to thank you so much for that. I know you’re in San Francisco for a big conference. I hope it goes beautifully and it’s my great wish that I get to see you in person some time and give you a big hug because you’re now one of my favorites.

**BD:** Thank you Raphael, and I certainly enjoyed our conversation very much and I wish you also a nice evening. And I hope that you can get to rest very soon.

**RC:** (Laughs) Alright. Take good care.

**BD:** All the best to you. Bless you. Thank you very much.

**Seane Corn**



Seane Corn is an internationally celebrated yoga teacher known for her impassioned activism and inspirational style of teaching. A strong and articulate voice for social change, she started her activism work by creating the yoga program for L.A. shelter “Children of the Night.” Since 2006, her work has been focused on training leaders of activism through her co-founded organization Off the Mat, Into the World® and bringing awareness to the HIV/AIDS crisis. Over the last 20 years of her career, Seane has been featured in magazines, Oprah.com, The Huffington Post, numerous radio programs such as NPR, and four self-authored dvd programs, and in 2005, was named the National Yoga Ambassador for YouthAIDS. She sits on the board of both the Cambodian Children’s Fund and the Engage Network. [WWW.SEANECORN.COM](http://WWW.SEANECORN.COM)

### **1. Self Care: How Tension Masks Bigger Feelings**

**RC:** Seane, I’m so excited to be with you today.

**SC:** Thank you very much. I’m very happy to be here.

**RC:** So I want to start out, as I usually do, by just checking in with where each of us is in this present moment. I notice on the one hand of feeling a little nervous energy getting ready for the interview with you; and also I’m feeling a little tiredness behind my eyes; it’s been a long day. And I feel peaceful and grateful, so that’s me in this moment. How about you, in this moment?

**SC:** I’m doing a cleanse right now. This is only day two but I’m feeling committed to self-care, which is something I’m not good at all, and every once in a while I try to recommit myself to that. And so maybe perhaps every time I do a cleanse, I feel a little lighter, a little more high in a good way. I feel pretty focused because I’ve been doing other kinds of work right before you called that got my mind churning, thinking about my own work and it’s forcing me to have to articulate and hone in on my own vision, which is always a good thing but kind of a challenging thing. But all in all, I feel really good; I have a cat on my chest so, you know, how bad can life be?



**RC:** Yeah, I hear you. You know, it's funny; I have a friend who was also a participant in this interview series. And when I check in with him about the interview that I have with other people, whoever it is, he'll say "So, what does so-and-so need to learn?" because of the title of the series, of course. And I was telling him the other day, I said "You know, usually it doesn't show up like that exactly. We kind of get into things a little bit more in a gentle way." But you said something, just as you started that really caught my attention that I would love for you to expand upon a little bit. Because you are somebody who is really well-known as being just absolutely present and loving and bringing both the physical and the spiritual as well as the emotional aspects into your yoga practice and your teaching. And you just shared a moment ago and this is almost a direct quote, "I'm really bad at self-care."

**SC:** Yeah, I am.

**RC:** So this conversation is taking place in a land where there's no judgment, there's no good/bad, there's no right/wrong, it's just all what is and to be celebrated. And so, with that as a kind of backdrop, I would love to hear how you are around that. Like, how is it that that particular aspect of your life hasn't yet been touched as fully by your practice as maybe other parts have?

**SC:** I think it's a great place to launch, let me get off this cat of my chest (laughs). You know I'm pretty aware that in my experience, personally and also in the years of teaching, I've noticed that yoga teachers tend to be some of the most co-dependent people ever. It's my nature always to be more invested and interested in other people's feelings. Even in basic conversations with my friends, if things get too close to me, I have a tendency of flipping it and start asking them questions; how are they doing? What's going on in their life? And I do this very unconsciously—it's probably one of the light aspects of me being a teacher. But it's also one of the real shadows that I have—I have a need to want to take care of other people and put my own health, wellness, and even my emotional life secondary to that drive, that need. And I don't always think it's healthy. I do believe that it comes from my own childhood, my own need of caretaking other people, of getting validation from that, being defined in that role and it carries over. I also operate on a very high level of stress, I think more than is either healthy or normal. So it takes a lot for me to even realize that I'm not okay, that I'm tired or fatigued or depressed even. It doesn't occur to me in the same time frame that perhaps it might in someone else—I usually have to crash and hit hard. So it's something that I have to really, as part of my own practice, self-care is—these are some of my

commitments like my diet for example, prayer, yoga has to be non-negotiable, and the most important is therapy and doing deep inner work.

I have a tendency of bypassing vulnerability—I over-understand because of all the information I've been given, and because of all the studying and just the access to ideologies. Sometimes I can immediately understand what I'm supposed to feel, and even understand the end result of what I'm feeling before actually feeling anything. And so I have to work with people in my own life that hold me accountable so that I can tap into my own vulnerability, and so that I don't shut down or disengage. Did that kind of answer that?

**RC:** Yeah, that was beautiful. There's so many themes in what you shared that are wonderful for us to expand upon a little bit. One thing I want to touch on first, when it came towards the end of what you shared is the subject of stress. One of the other teachers in this series said, in his words, "Stress diminishes our ability to pay attention." That really caught me and so it obviously would be something for anybody who has as serious a practice as yours to be working with. I was wondering, do you find that as well? Are there other especially important aspects of stress that are troubling for you?

**SC:** Well, I know that I'm addicted to it and I'm addicted to it because it's very familiar, it's been a part of my own survival skill. Meaning, when I was growing up, I didn't have the vocabulary perhaps to express my feelings of rage or injustice or fear or even sadness. So these big feelings would come up, and I didn't have the words for them; but like we know, everything is vibration, so these emotions are vibration. And because I wasn't feeling, I would suppress those vibrations. On a cellular level, that's ultimately what becomes stress, it's become tension. But that tension worked for me because it created control, it allowed me to feel almost safe—of course, it was an illusion. But it made me feel safe in the world, like I could protect myself.

So for me, the feeling of tension is actually something that feels good; it's not sustainable, it's not workable. In my adult world, it's not something I would recommend. But as a child, it was just a necessary part of my own pathology. So that's why I said I can operate on high levels of stress because it's just something I'm so used to. But also what happens is I let go of the tension is I start to feel the big feelings. It's not just for me but anyone. People get so caught up in their tension because to let go of that tension means to open themselves up to the unknown. And that's more terrifying than anything in the world for a lot of people. So that's just how I've operated with this

addiction to tension. Ultimately though, not really in my case because I'm aware of it, but drugs, alcohol, food, inappropriate sexual behavior, even watching too much TV, all of these things we can use as a way to numb ourselves out from actually having to feel our bigger feelings. So I use the practice of yoga as a way to release the tension, so that I can feel, even though it scares me; I know I have to if I really want to play big in this world. Tension was just a way for me to mask the bigger feelings, but it's also why we can get very, very sick.

**RC:** Yeah, really beautifully put and a real insight into what sometimes people refer to as Type A behavior, where somebody is very hard-driving and it's not just that it's because of their motivation or they have to succeed, but there's a sense of control and safety even though it's unsustainable, as you said, that comes from having, even if it's false, that sense like, "I got it. I'm going. I'm on top of it. I know what's next."

**SC:** Because on the other side of that high ego, Type A personality like myself, someone who's driven by a high ego, a sense of powerfulness—what's on the other side of that is the opposite: low ego powerlessness, which is low self-esteem, low self-worth, a feeling of inadequacy, a lack of control, a lack of safety, a lack of self-responsibility—it's just a flipside of shame. And so when I meet people out in the world who are really motivated by their tension, my heart goes out to that person because I recognize what exists underneath it is the shame; all that other stuff is there but it's being masked. I know it in myself and I can identify it in others. And so, it allows me to have a little bit more compassion, it's probably why I do what I do—I have a lot of empathy. I recognize myself and all the souls that I see out in the world, and I probably say to them the very things that I say to myself but don't always follow, but wish I could, and know to be true; but like everyone else in the world gets stuck.

## **2. Activism: No Us, No Them—Just All Of Us Together**

**RC:** I wanted to come back to something that you said earlier because I really resonated with it. You were talking about becoming a world saver when you were very young, identifying with those who suffer as a way of sometimes deflecting from yourself. I know in my own experience, I was an activist at an early age and we'll get a chance later to talk more about activism. But I think that I was so drawn to those who were suffering and wounded and broken in the world because I needed some contact with those more vulnerable states and I wasn't yet ready or able or willing to access them in myself as a deeply wounded person, so I outsourced them, so to speak. And that really gave on the one hand, a drive to my activism but also in a certain way, toxified it. Because it wasn't pure

or clear, it was really coming out of my own need and it took many years to really get and unravel that.

**SC:** I think that's very interesting, mine was a little different in that when I got involved in activism, my commitment was around women's rights, gay rights, HIV/AIDS awareness—those were the things that really motivated me and I enjoyed being a part of those communities. But I loved rallies and anywhere where there was raging and screaming and a lot of drama; I loved the good fight, and I was incredibly aggressive. It wasn't until probably a few years into my activism, when I got into yoga, where I realized I was just kind of working through my rage. It's like I was able to process these big feelings by screaming and by trying to change other people's point of view or to make them wrong—it felt good. I don't know how really compassionate I was towards the issue. I was just so out of my mind over the injustice and used those experiences as a way to really rinse myself of some of my bigger feelings. It wasn't appropriate. It only created more separation. It also wasn't sustainable because then the tension would come up in me and I'd get all reactive until the next rally, when I would again purge the bigger feelings.

It wasn't until years later when after I got into therapy and got heavily into yoga and started to understand a little bit more about the mind-body connection that I was able to go into the populations and then see that other mirror on a deeper level. That was a whole other experience of suddenly seeing the communities I was working in not as a cause or a crisis that I was fighting for or against, but as other human beings that were a reflection of my own self; and that I wasn't really necessarily there to solve a cause or crisis, I was there to support the evolution of the soul, probably my own. And the people I worked with became real mirrors of my inflation as well as my own inadequacy or shame. I always say that in my service I learned more and benefited more by the people that I was privileged enough to work with, than I could have possibly ever served them. Because they held a mirror up to the places in myself that I was disconnected from myself and from spirit. They showed me my shadow and as a result it forced me to have to—I don't want to say heal it, but it forced me to have to face it and work towards healing it.

**RC:** Yeah, beautiful. And I know you've written a little bit and I've written a little bit too about the whole Us vs. Them phenomenon. When you are in an Us vs. Them position, then all of that shadow that you just described is going to be perpetuated. And when you are able to really fully embrace the idea that there is no Us and there is no Them, there's just all of us together, then something can happen that wasn't free to happen otherwise. Whether it's an individual healing, a mutual healing;

we're actually moving something forward into a more humane and sustainable version of itself. But it's moving forward out of acceptance as opposed to out of resistance.

And so that leads to a question that I'm really interested in knowing about in terms of your evolution, which is when you are involved in your activism, rallies, trips to foreign countries, your yoga off the map project—how, nowadays, does it look and feel differently for you?

**SC:** It's so different. I mean, when I first got into activism, I was 17 or 18 years old and I'm now 45, so life has matured me and humbled me in so many ways. I approach the places that I go to and the people I meet in a much more, just a balanced in a mindful way. I'm not invested in making someone wrong, I'm more interested in learning and growing and listening and finding out what the needs of the community are, rather than imposing what I think the community might need. I think there's just more of a maturity in it. The work that we do, we often refer to as 'bearing witness' and it's not the idea that we're going into these communities and witnessing their experience, although that's part of it. It's really 'bearing witness' to our own feelings, perhaps our own assumptions or prejudices or privilege or fears and dealing with what comes up and growing as a result. Whenever I go into these environments, I'm often very humbled by not only the people I meet, but my own personal experience and how little I know and how arrogant I can be. These countries force me to have to deal with some of my own limited beliefs as well as some my own, like I said before, arrogance.

So I approach the situations much differently; I'm more practical, I'm more fair-minded, I'm probably a little bit more emotional but in a balanced way; less reactive, more responsive and responsible, and more committed; not to an end result but simply being part of the process, and trying to heal the disconnected parts that are within me, which seem to come up in some of these more heightened or traumatic experiences.

**RC:** So in my own life, my own activism, I came to a place where I would just say "Amen," to everything that you just shared. I also realized that there were some places where it still felt right to me to share what I would call 'a loving No', which, I would say is maybe best represented by the civil rights movement and people locking arms together in the street, singing, showing up in love and care for one another, and the sense of everybody being valued, and also at the same time saying 'No' to a society and a culture that doesn't have that value in it. And I think one of the challenges for people who blend spirituality and activism is that—I'll speak for me:

sometimes the loving kindness and the desire for peace will maybe keep me from taking that stand; being able to stand in the “No” or in opposition to something that feels like it’s anti-life or anti the expression of life that feels progressive to me. So it’s a delicate balance. For instance in 2000, when I went to what was called “The Battle of Seattle” against the World Trade Organization, I made sure that I was dancing in the streets.

**SC:** Right, yeah.

**RC:** Because it was an expression of ‘a loving No’ and there was joy in it; I wanted the experience I was having and sharing to reflect the world that I wanted to help build. So I noticed when I was doing some research about you to get ready for our conversation, there’s a video on YouTube of you and your organization visiting Occupy Wall Street. And one of the things about it is that your presence is really lit up, in other words you’re not in that video, the raging 17 year old, by far. There’s a strength to you, but it does feel very positive and loving. So I’m wondering, does that tension live in you too? Where to stand, where to say “No,” as well as “Yes.”

**SC:** Sure, I mean, when I went down into Occupy Wall Street, that was a very scary experience for me. We organized that rally in less than 36 hours and we did it virally, and there were maybe five or six hundred people there. I knew it was going to be really challenging, I knew I was going to have to speak extemporaneously with a human-mike, meaning I could only say a sentence and then people would have to repeat what I said so that everyone could hear; and that meant I had to stop speaking. I’ve never done anything like that before, usually when I’m on a roll, I’m on a roll and I just kind of let it go. But this forced me, not only to have to stop, but also to hear my own words back at me; and then to try to hold the attention of the crowd, but not to continue to perpetuate the separation. When I first went down to Occupy Wall Street, I walked through the park once, I walked through it a second time and I had an overwhelming feeling of why the movement would never really work and it was because I could see that the trauma that the occupiers were so impacted by, they were replicating within the park itself; it had its own little hierarchy happening, little cliques; it was almost like it had its own 99 percent/1 percent being played out within the park. What has to be understood is that which you’re fighting is what you need to understand and more often than not, that which you reject, it’s something that’s already within you. You can’t heal it out there until you identify it within yourself.

So if there's any place within you that has corruption, that has greed, that is creating any kind of oppression, then you're also part of the problem. So what I was seeing was that there was a lot of big feelings and there wasn't a lot of place for processing, they were creating their own separation and it was all going to implode—that's how it felt to me, spiritually. So when I stood up on that platform to speak, I kind of kept that in mind—why I was there was not to represent the 99 percent over the 1 percent. It was to acknowledge that there was this 100 percent that ultimately we had to come together and be heard and remember that we're one *and* that there was some real validity to the complaints.

But also at the end of the day, we, each and every one of us have to take responsibility for whatever oppression exists internally and externally for real change to happen. So I didn't go there to talk down about big business and corporate greed. It was to support what I do believe in: to exercise this platform of free speech, and to also say "There's another way we can do this. What we have to do is this has to be inclusive. It has to be about dialogue, and it has to be about love, and it has to be about peace. And whatever we have to do internally to make that happen must be our first commitment. That's where the revolution begins." That's what I hoped was going to drive my conversation, and that's what I tried to hold on to. The forum was challenging, I didn't know if I was going to be able to articulate what I meant in the moment; if it was going to anger the 99 percenters, which I wouldn't want to do, or if it was going to continue to alienate the 1 percenters. But I also didn't want to be completely neutral; I wanted to say, like you said, 'a loving No' but, "Where are we also responsible? Where do I have a 1 percent in me?" and I know I do, and so that has to be my first commitment.

So that's what really the effort was about, and it's been very misunderstood. I've gotten a lot of feedback, a lot of comments both very good and very bad about my inclusion. A lot of people felt I should not have been down there; I couldn't not be down there. I had to stand on that, even though I was terrified. I knew I had to and I hoped that the message that I could send was ultimately one of unity.

### **3. Yoga, Integrity, and Celebrities**

**RC:** Thank you for sharing all of that. I just was really touched by the whole consideration that you brought to it. It reminds me of something else that I wanted to talk to you about. We don't know each other so what you wouldn't know about me is that I grew up in L.A., and I spent many years in the entertainment industry, and as an adult I lived in Venice and Santa Monica, so I'm kind of

deeply steeped in L.A. and one of the things about being in showbiz land is that it's a place that is really powerfully gripped by shadow and also surface; and of course, those two things go together. So here you are, your studio is in L.A. and many of the people who you worked with have been really prominent in the entertainment industry. There's a way in which, not necessarily by your own choice, or even as you would describe it... that...yoga and glamour kind of come together. Meaning that you don't present yourself this way but you could be like yoga teacher to the stars kind of person, if you wanted to exploit that.

And so I'm wondering how you have worked with that in your own life, how have you kept yourself straight with that? How do you use it for your own exploration, kind of the way you were just talking about your activism on Occupy Wall Street? Have you had an uneasy relationship with all of that? Or has that been something that has just been pretty natural for you to dance with?

**SC:** I think it's been pretty natural, I mean, it's a weird thing because when I first—you know, you don't become a yoga teacher and think or at least I didn't, not back in the 90s—it wasn't like I thought I'm going to have this extraordinary career or I'm going to be teaching celebrities or politicians that are well-known; it just doesn't occur to you. But when it first started happening, when celebrities would come to my class back in the day I didn't really think much of it because where else are they going to go? They live in L.A.—I'm glad they're coming to a yoga studio, I thought that was pretty cool. I would recognize them but I figured they were there for a reason like everybody else. And so it was important for me to create a safe container for everyone to be able to do whatever inner work they needed to do.

If I got all freaky and weird by their presence, that would make them feel unsafe and that felt like that would be a real irresponsibility. I don't know what their karma is of their past or whatever motivates them in their own story and that really isn't my business. My job is to support all souls, regardless of their gender, color, sexual orientation, or success, into a deeper relationship with themselves, with each other and with God. And so I would check in with myself, my like inner self, my little Jersey girl, and if I saw someone who, maybe when I was 18 years old, I'd be out of my mind, I'd have to take a deep breath and say “Okay girl, you cool? You cool?” And try not to identify with their glamour, just try to connect with the soul of that person and do my work. And then I started getting asked to do privates with celebrities, and again I would check in with myself and make sure I was remembering why I was there and what my purpose was. And after a while, I didn't really think much of it. You've got to remember I'm seeing them at six in the morning,



there's no make-up, their kids are running around, their husband is annoyed or supportive; I'm seeing them in their environment and my relationship with these celebrities would be very normalized.

I would hear rumors about how they were on a set or how they were in their other worlds but that was before my experience of them. When I would be with them, they were relying on me to create a space for their healing and their vulnerability and usually they were very forthright and honest and open. When I started working with people who were kind of heavy hitters, not actors and musicians, but like directors or agents, people who were really behind the scenes of this industry, I thought, "Well, maybe if I can help perhaps support this person in their own healing, maybe the choices that they're going to make or the way that they're going to treat their actors or their extras or their crew will be a little bit more mindful and a little bit more sensitive." Whether or not that proved to be true or not, I don't really know, but I really didn't give it much thought.

The thing, though, that I was very committed to was I really didn't talk about individuals in the press from the very start. Sometimes I would come out of someone's home and there'd be a van with cameras, and they'd start to take pictures of me leaving these people's homes and, you know, I'm dressed in yoga clothing so it looks like I slept over. And so for a while I thought "God, am I going to become like the notorious L.A. hooker?" You know, do they think I'm just coming in and out of these houses? After a while, the photographers, they would reach out and call me to find out who I was and I just said "Look, I'm just their yoga teacher and I'm never going to talk about anything, about any of these individuals personally. That's not why they've pulled me into their life, so it's pointless." So after a while, I'd see the van and I'd wave and then they'd just stop taking pictures because they realized who I was and what my role was, and I made it a real point to not talk about, especially my private clients. If they came to a public class, I didn't even have to talk about it; that was just up for public consumption, anyone who is in the room would see who was there and it would just kind of get out.

But the people that I work with privately, who did not come to class, I wouldn't talk about. And I just felt it was my responsibility and as a result, because they began to trust me, one client would send me to another client, one client would to another client, and—that's just kind of how it happened. I really don't do that anymore because I don't teach privates anymore. Every once in a while if some of these people, who I have a very sincere relationship with, because I've known them for many years; if they're in town and I happen to be in town and it works out in my schedule,

I might go over and do a one off and teach them yoga and leave. But it's not really a huge part of my world anymore, not the way that it once was.

As far as reconciling it, it's been part of my karma, my being thrust here in L.A.; I'm from New Jersey, this is not my world at all. Actually I live in a place called Topanga Canyon, which is a little set away from L.A. proper, it looks like I'm in the middle of Montana. I'm a pretty isolating personality, as extroverted as I am, I'm actually quite introverted and I enjoy being more isolated from community. But it has definitely been my karma to be in those populations and to work with these kinds of people. Of course, there's a lot of narcissism, but like anything, what's underneath the narcissism is insecurity; there's a lot of ambition, but what's underneath the ambition is a fear of loss, perhaps. And so, I just try to empathize with the soul and not really get caught up in who they are and certainly their status.

**RC:** It sounds like there's a way in which you made it your practice, even if it wasn't something that was overt and intentional all the time, to show up authentically and hold a space that would invite someone else to do that as well. So whatever they brought in to the class or the private, your invitation was for them to drop that and be real with you. So that was a gift that was probably as much or more value than the yoga itself was—just the space in which you met them.

**SC:** Perhaps, I was always pretty comfortable and many of the people I worked with, really confided a lot in me at that time and I would never violate that, not for anybody. I wouldn't violate it for you. And again, I don't know if I learned that from yoga or if that's just a Jersey thing. You know, if you're going to share with me your heart, then I hold that as sacred and I maintain that kind of loyalty to this day. It's just a commitment that I make regardless if someone is a celebrity or not.

#### **4. Emotional Yoga and the Yoga of Transparency**

**RC:** Yeah. I got it. And there's something else I wanted to ask you that is connected to your teaching, and that is how you hold the question of how much of you and what you're experiencing, what you're going through, feels right to you, in general and then maybe in specific situations, to bring into your teaching? Some yoga teachers feel like, "Well my life might be a wreck right now but I have to hold this space as a teacher. So I'm going to kind of leave that behind, I'll center myself." Other times a yoga teacher might come in and say, "I'm going to be here holding a space for you but honestly I need you to know I'm going through a lot of grief right now." Or "I'm in a

breakup process and so I'm a little bit more fragile than usual." How do you work with that yourself?

**SC:** I have to say, that would be an "It depends." I probably have done both over the years. I always feel, though, when I'm teaching yoga, whenever I'm talking about anything, I'm always just saying out loud what it is that I need to hear; I try to generalize it so that it's accessible to everybody. If I'm not feeling it, I don't feel like the room's going to feel it. If it's not somehow personal to me, it's not going to land in their hearts. So there's a certain level of intimacy that I share in a classroom without ever getting specific, if that makes sense. Like I might say in my prayer, "Spirit let this class be an opportunity for healing to occur in body, mind, and spirit. Allow me to release the tension, so I can connect more deeply with my authenticity, so that I can move into all my relationships with an open heart and an open mind, with the commitment to forgive myself and all beings everywhere, always, and forevermore." Now that's something that everyone can relate to. But everything that I just said, I was really talking to my own soul in that moment; the urgency behind it was really just a reminder to me. So the class doesn't know that I'm talking about myself, but perhaps they can feel my investment in what I'm saying, and hopefully it lands for them.

If I'm going through something big—my dad died a year and a half ago and teaching was very hard. In some ways, it was better than ever, I was more vulnerable than perhaps I would normally be. But at the same time, I think there was probably a couple of times where I had to say, "My dad just died and as I teach I'm going to commit to teaching with this in the ways that I normally do, but I might choke myself up. Just so that you know, my own words might land on me hard right now. Or if I hesitate mid-sentence and I change the course of what I'm talking about, you'll know that I can't even hold my own space, so I'm going to be a little bit more careful." You know, I may have shared things like that, but not normally. It's not about me, I'm there to facilitate and hold a space for other people. That doesn't mean, though, that my experience has to be separate. I have to engage the totality of that experience, but I can't make it about me, because then my students might want to take care of me and I can't allow that to happen. That doesn't serve the environment.

**RC:** Yeah, I was wondering about that last piece that you just mentioned because one of the things that I think sometimes is helpful to bring up for people, is even just their own discomfort with someone else's discomfort and their need to try to make them feel better. For almost 25 years, I've had something, which is sometimes known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, which really means, we

don't know what's wrong with you. But I talk about it often, openly with my students and in my workshops. And many years ago, I saw this phenomenon occur, where after I finished the public talk in which I may have mentioned that for the purposes of transparency and a recognition that being with my experience wasn't just about some kind of happy talk or a promise of life without physical and emotional difficulty; that usually the first three or four people who would come up to talk to me afterward had a business card for one kind of healing therapy or another, that they were sure was going to make me feel better. And they would even sometimes ask me questions like "Do you want to feel better? Are you ready to feel better?"

**SC:** (Laughs) Remember what I said about the co-dependency? And so many people who are healers out there? You know, of course. It's like "Let me fix you, so I don't have to deal with myself."

**RC:** Right. And also, in that moment, my experience was that there was a certain presumptuousness as well, that one person knows exactly what's better or what's right or what's going to work for someone else. So actually what I ended up doing was incorporating into my very talk, which was to say, "When I'm done, it's possible that a number of you are going to want to come up and offer me your business card. And that's something that we can both look at together and hold in a deeper presence with that intention, if we have it." So, I could imagine that that might sometimes come up in your role as a yoga teacher, where you could help someone see that kind of knee-jerk co-dependent reaction, and turn it back towards them. You know, "What is it that's uncomfortable for you right now? Where are you feeling that in your body?"—that might be a real teaching for them.

**SC:** Absolutely. I teach a class called *Yoga for a Broken Heart*, which is about yoga and grief. Rather, it's about grief and trying to normalize a conversation around grief. Something that my dad who, like I said he died, but before he died, he was also a yoga teacher and he asked me to teach this class and he called it that. I was like, "I don't want to teach that." And he said, "You have to, and you have to do it soon after I die. You can't wait because you need to be really present to your own grief, to be able to do this effectively." And the way to get through this class is it's a series with five different stories, all having to do with the particular loss that I'm dealing with, of course my father's loss, but I don't try to say that that's the only loss. I use these five stories to kind of take people on a journey, to get the dialogue around grief to come up and get inspired. It's very intimate, it's very personal; the stories, they're very deep for me, personally. After it's over, it's the same

thing. I have to be very clear with people that this is my privilege to be able to share and it's also my right to be vulnerable in the sharing. But I need them to know that no one has to take care of me, that I'm okay; that if they want to check in, that's fine, but this is an opportunity for me to be able to normalize my own experience around grief without any shame; and to hold a container for others, that we can do it simultaneously. I can feel my feelings and still be able to hold the space, and no one has to fix or take care of me; that I have a support system behind me that does that, that takes care of me, that I rely on, that I pay; and that I'm not using the space to get their reaction to soothe my own discomfort.

**RC:** That brings us to the subject of emotion because I know that's an important element for you, both in your own life as you've shared it, and also in your teaching. That's actually where I spend most of my time and work in writing—around emotional connection and helping people really surf into and all the way through their feelings. It seems to me that really, you could call what I do something like 'emotional yoga'—meaning that the way that you might, or a yoga teacher in general might invite someone into the stretch of an asana, to breathe into it, to take it a little bit further but very mindfully, not to push but to allow, to open, and to allow. It all transfers very directly to the felt experience of an emotion in one's physical body. So I've always really seen them as quite the same and when I teach at Kripalu I'm surrounded by a yoga university; in our workshops, we're working primarily with emotions, but it seems like it's really all the same thing.

**SC:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, like I said earlier, vulnerability is not my—I know hysteria and I know how to shut down, but vulnerability is very hard for me. It's not something that even just as a society, we don't really support or create space for vulnerability. And so, of course that became the thing that I had to learn more than anything. I worked with a woman by the name of Mona Miller for 11 years, and Mona really taught me the shadow work and how to rinse the emotions and not bypass and not use spiritual language as a way to mask the deeper feelings; to give voice to the shadow, so that we can really understand what true spiritual reconciliation is, which is not the denial of one thing over the other. But to understand love, you have to understand its opposite. To move into the light, you also have to embrace and understand the power of the dark or the shadow.

So Mona was instrumental in getting me to tap in to the emotions that were suppressed in my body, to get very comfortable with my uncomfortableness, with the shame I would feel about losing control around the bigger feelings. Her work taught me that those feelings are there regardless, and even if they're masked, they're going to determine the choices that I make; those big feelings will

ultimately become the limits to beliefs that will color the way that I communicate, and then therefore what I magnetize. She taught me how to do anger work, how to rinse the big feelings, how to process through journal writing, how to get really good at the ugliness and to get unspiritual before I get to spiritual. She would always say, “You have to get to the ‘F-you’ before you can get to the ‘Bless you’.” Her work really helped me to access that and how I was able to bring it into the yoga room is because people are moving and breathing and they’re releasing tension.

They come into my room and they feel one way before they start practicing. Just because of the asana, they’re going to feel more vulnerable as soon as they release the tension. So I have an opportunity in that very sacred moment when the tension releases, all I have to do is say certain words at certain times that can elicit an emotion and bring things up to the surface, and hopefully, harness the energy of the room in such a way that helps to support what the student already knows to be true. So I don’t come into a room trying to pretend that—I don’t come into the room with the assumption that I am their teacher. My job is to remind them of what they already know to be true and help to pull out the teacher that’s already within them. They already know all this information, we all do. The only thing that blocks us from it is our own experience, trauma, limited beliefs and just life. So, the yoga practice allows me a space to create an experience for transformational journey work. Mona is the woman who guided me to this. Unfortunately, Mona died in a car accident 9 months ago, so, I lost, without a doubt, my greatest teacher and one of my dearest friends, and certainly my confidante. It’s very sad for me, personally, because she was the one I relied on to guide me through my own process, since I’m not great at it. So the universe has provided an opportunity for me to get good at it, without relying on her.

**RC:** How would you say through that work and over the years, you see yourself now in terms of vulnerability?

**SC:** I’m less ashamed of it. I can connect more with my big feelings and not feel like they’re going to overwhelm me. When I was young, if the rage came up, I was so afraid of my rage. My rage could feel like, “Don’t put a sharp object in my hand. I don’t know if I’m going to be able to control myself with what I might do to myself, or to another human being,”—that’s what I was so afraid of. Through the work that I did, the anger work, it was just being with the anger, letting it come up and out. And like anything, everything changes; you breathe, you sit with it, you get present to it and it becomes something else. It doesn’t define you, but to repress it, that’s cancer! That’s depression, that’s so many other things. So I had to get good at not being afraid of the bigger feelings, trusting

them, seeing the wisdom in them, the guidance—what else is it trying to reveal? And letting myself be more curious, learning how to become the witness; again, without bypassing it. And so not only did it make me feel much more comfortable with my own feelings, but when I work with people in the world and I can see their big feelings coming up, I'm excited for them; I'm not afraid for them; I know what's on the other side of it. My joy is to support them in the process and not to have any expectations of any kind of end result because I know there's no such thing. I'll be dealing with my rage for the whole of my life, but my rage is also my passion.

My rage is what got me on that podium at Occupy Wall Street. But it's my love that forced the words to come out in a different way. But if I didn't have that rage, I wouldn't have had the confidence to stand up and do that which needed to be done. So you learn how to use all aspects of the human experience but to manage it, so that it's not hurting you or another human being. I think the work I have done with Mona, and getting more comfortable with my vulnerability has allowed to be more empathic. Do I still need to get better with my vulnerability? Absolutely! I hope that for the rest of my life, I'm always going to be willing to work on that. But I also don't want to be a heaping emotional puddle on the floor 24/7. I want to be able to find balance. How do I have the emotion but still do what needs to be done day in and day out and be able to make decisions, even while I'm feeling the big feelings? Like, when I go overseas, there's a lot of stuff that triggers me that I can get very emotional about, but I still have to make a decision; I still have to do things; people are still relying on me, so I can't get overwhelmed by the big feelings. I have to be able to hold both.

### **5. Deepening Intimacy**

**RC:** And you said that you want to be working on what you just described for the rest of your life, which makes sense, because everything is, as you said, always moving and shifting and changing. There will always be new pieces to work on. You also said somewhere else that every moment conspires to open your soul if you are able to hear and to see and to experience what's fully there.

So I'm wondering, just as we're coming towards the end of our conversation, maybe this is a little full circle because you started out sharing about the cleanse and saying that self-care is a challenge for you; but I want to know what and where, these days, you notice that you're called to pay special attention in your own life and in your own experience; like what, if anything, would you say you're curious about and exploring and opening to but is not yet really fully cooked or processed?

**SC:** That's really an interesting one, I've been on the road for 17 years and I'm engaged to be married. I've been with the same man for 12 years. And I really never had any interest in getting married or in doing that kind of thing, it just never called to me, it never felt organic. I would have to say, finding more balance in my life, still doing the work that I do and committing to that work; but also deepening my relationship with my partner, with his children, with my family; finding more intimacy in that probably is going to be a very big challenge for me. It's easy to get on a plane and go, it's harder just to be still and to be really present; I've made my own personal relationships, in some ways, secondary to my other purpose. So getting married and deepening that commitment is probably what's going to bring up a lot of stuff for me. My independence is everything to me, and always has been. Even my senior quote in high school was something I made up, which was "Individuality means listening to yourself, not to the voice of others." And I feel like my independence has been a thing that has defined me, so to go into a partnership without losing my independence, but also allowing space for a different level of unification, is probably going to bring up a lot of stuff. I'm open to it, willing, available, and deeply committed to what it brings up because I feel like it's the next piece, even within my own femininity—being nurtured. I'm so used to nurturing others that being nurtured in relationship in a whole other level is something that can be very scary but I'm willing and I'm available to it.

**RC:** Well, thanks for sharing that and feel free to say that this is too personal if it is, but I'm wondering after having been in that relationship, as you have been for so long, is there anything in particular that was within you or between you and your partner that led to the idea of the shift? Like, after all these years of feeling comfortable as we were, to then decide, "Well, let's get married?"

**SC:** It was after my father died actually. As my father was dying, my dad had cancer and the last year was very intense and because my dad was a yoga teacher, like I said, there was a lot of deep intimacy in my father's dying; a lot of sharing that perhaps doesn't normally happen. I feel very blessed that I got to have this with my dad. There was a lot of openness and my partner was by my side the whole time and I think witnessing my father's dying made me really appreciate the power of living and the impermanence of it all; how important love is, and also how rare it is to be able to deeply love another soul, whether it's your parent, a child, or a partner. That is really few and far between, and if you're lucky, you get a handful of that level of love in a lifetime.



I remember when I was giving my father's eulogy, saying that, "I always knew that eventually I was going to bury a parent." I was prepared in my heart that this would have to happen, it's the timing; it is the way it's supposed to be." I always knew it was going to be an awful feeling and standing there, giving the eulogy, I said, "It's worse than I ever imagined, but to feel this bad and this sad and this awful, only meant that I got to love that big. And I'm so grateful that in this lifetime, I got to love that big, that it's worth feeling this sad for." And when I had to really look at the people in my life, who I really loved, I realized that my partner was in that handful of people that have touched me so deeply, so profoundly that I think it was in those moments where I realized that I wasn't willing to take that love for granted and that I wanted to deepen the bond and the commitment; and share our journey together even more than we already were. We were already deeply committed, I mean obviously 12 years, but it was him though, that initiated the proposal. I wasn't really thinking about it and he probably was so smart in doing it in a time where it caught me off-guard because I always assumed one day we'd get married because I'd look at him and say "Hey, let's get married," and he'd be like "Alright," and we would just go and do it. But he did it in a very traditional way, it was very emotional, he had asked my father's blessing before my dad died. The whole thing just took me so by surprise and it just hit me so deep in my heart that I just knew that this was the path that I wanted to take.

**RC:** That's beautiful, thank you. I want to say that oftentimes I'm quoting well known people, but right now I want to quote someone who's known online as Euromixer120, I have no idea who that is. But Euromixer120 says, "The beauty of Seane is that there is no split between who she is professionally and personally. She lives a message of authenticity and truth."

**SC:** Wow. How beautiful is that?

**RC:** Yeah, that's what they think of you out there and that's what I think of you in just getting to know you for an hour or so. I'm really grateful that you're part of the series; that you opened your being and your heart to the listeners today. It's wonderful.

**SC:** Well, thank you very much. I hope that if I ever buy my own hype, and I'm no longer being authentic, I hope someone comes and smacks me in the head and tells me to wake up, because it's never how I want to be in the world. Not literally, I don't want anyone to literally come around and smack me in the head; but to let me know that I'm off path, because that's not what I'm here to do. It's really easy to get caught up in the hype but it's not what my yoga is. So I'm very grateful to

both you and to that person for acknowledging that because that means the world to me to know. I always want it to be known that who I am in the classroom is the same way you're going to see me if you're hanging out with me in my kitchen. Except that in the kitchen, I'll probably have a dirtier mouth and I'm talking more about sex (laughs) than I would in a classroom. But other than that, it's the same girl.

**RC:** (Laughs) Alright, well with that we'll bring our conversation to a close. And once again, a deep thank you to you.

**SC:** Thank you very much. I really appreciate it. I wish you all the best as well.

**Caroline Casey**



Caroline W. Casey, based in Washington DC, is the cultural cross-pollinating agent for the Trickster Redeemer within us all via myriad media: host/weaver of context of the astrological\*political\*social change "Visionary Activist Show" on the Pacifica Radio Network, (KPFA in Berkeley, KPFK in LA) astro\*mytho\*politico\*story-teller, Saturday night's presenter at the Bioneers conference for over a decade, Green Festivals, Parliament of World Religions in Capetown, and at innumerable venues across the globe. Caroline has been a student of astrology since 1970, founder of Visionary Activist Astrology, (two audio books for Sounds True) author of "Making the Gods Work for You," (Random House), convener of Trickster Training, and Chief Trickster at Coyote Network News, the mythological News Service. Caroline may be booked for customized astrological readings. [www.CoyoteNetworkNews.com](http://www.CoyoteNetworkNews.com)

### **1. If We're Not Having Fun, We're Just Not Serious Enough**

**RC:** I want to start off today with some gratitude. I want to thank you from a very heartfelt place because I feel that when I'm in the world ingesting everything that's happening and often sometimes struggling with my resistance or confusion that when I listen to you it feels like you take in the world and metabolize it and bring it back to me in such a way that it always feels uplifting and energizing and hopeful and that's such a great gift, so I want to thank you for that.

**CC:** Well, that's wonderful. That is my dedicated delight.

**RC:** And this series is specifically about our own experience. It's about as teachers and leaders our own vulnerability behind the scenes. And as I was preparing for our talk today I was thinking about it and I was wondering is that ever hard for you to do or does that come absolutely naturally and with ease?

**CC:** Which part?

**RC:** The part where you live in the same world that we all do and that as you move through it you give it back to us in this inspirational way that allows us to find the deeper themes to tune in to, in

ways that are going to be the most helpful for ourselves and for the planet. I'm just wondering, are there days when you just feel like, "I don't want to do that. I don't want to be that person or I don't know how." Or is it always just a part of your nature that comes through?

**CC:** No. I think it's part of our cahooting with the team. I think it was after the dread of, I can't remember which horrible election, maybe 2004, that I was sort of on the floor and a friend of mine called up and said, "No, no. If we're not having fun we're just not serious enough," and I'm going, "That's the spirit. Let me peel myself off the floor. I've got to do a radio show today. All right, I must rouse myself for the team." So I think it's all of us cahooting together in reciprocal blessing. It is an honor and delight to have the venues that I have, the Visionary Activist Show and other things because it is that sense of going, "All right, let me call in what is needed even from the most humbled, on the floor states." I loved finding the not so well known deity, the Hindu deity Akhilanda, Akhilandeshvari: she is the power that comes from being broken. I go, "Let's embrace her!" It's the power that comes, her name means "never not broken" and I love that quality of going, "Yes, the power that comes from being like ohhhhhhh (broken hearted)," and she rides on the crocodile of her own fear. I go, "Yes, we love that thing."

So certainly I think we're all humbled but that's why we make dedications in a kind of humbled acknowledgment that we can't do anything by ourselves. We can't even be who we want to be by ourselves. The purpose of making vows is: "Spirit of Woof that animates the universe, hold me to this. This is the direction I want to go in. This is the quality of being I want to incarnate or animate and encourage in others. Hold me to this thing." I don't know any spiritual teacher who hasn't been thrown by the wild horse of their own teachings and the best are those who of course acknowledge it. We're all befoibled superheroes stumbling gracefully into the future. So we go, "Oops, okay, no shame, no blame with anything as long we're working with it."

So absolutely, there's very often a sense of humility. But I think it's our engagement and I'm so interested in our mega model right now of what's going down: empire infrastructure, bridges, banking systems, government, dental work, I mean everything. And what's coming up is culture of reverence, collaborative ingenuity. So what's going down is dominance, what's coming up is collaboration, and then we just put the standards in place so that we don't inadvertently serve empire or colonialism in our metaphors, our language or our story.

Its language and metaphoric agility that are my primary kinds of trickster dedication to all of us, so that our metaphors, our language and our story can match our ideals.

The strongest part of that is so many of our progressive team still use the language of, “We’re going to fight global warming.” It like, “No, that’s what got us into this pickle. We’re not going to fight global warming; we’re going to engage the ingenuity of humans to collaborate with nature. We’re not going to fight poverty. We’re going to encourage thriving.” It’s the quality of how even sometimes small verbal changes have a huge energetic difference.

**RC:** Yeah, I totally hear that. Many years ago, I was doing some advocacy PR for a non-profit organization called Artists for a Hate-Free America and I really asked them if my first contribution could be to change the name for the same reason that you’re describing. Because what is this America that we’re for and could we articulate that somehow and get people excited by that?

**CC:** Yeah. Well it’s the same conundrum with non-anything, non-violence, non- whatever. It’s like the mind does not hear “non” so how do we come up with an ever expanding repertoire to align ourselves with nature’s fertile ingenuity so that we have an expanded repertoire of responses and vocabulary?

And what I like to say certainly to myself, and to others: “If we love freedom and collaborative ingenuity then to react to anything is to carry around the portable prison for ourselves and for others. But to be willing to cultivate an ever expanding repertoire of responses, then we’re in alignment with nature’s evolutionary ingenuity.”

So the trickster, my primary dedication; Coyote Network News is the kind of mythological news service I’ve conjured for the trickster redeemer within us all. And so we go: “Trickster liberation—expanded repertoire of responses; responses as opposed to not reacting. Reacting is hot. The world is already too hot. We want to be agents of cool. So yeah, certainly I think we do lay these teachings out and then say, “Hold me to this thing.”

## **2. The Harumphitude Composter**

**RC:** I’m curious about something that you’ve just been talking about and I have a note that I wrote before which dovetails here. In in your dedication to using language as playfully and transformatively as possible, there’s a phrase that I heard you speak recently where you talked about our need to compost our harumphitude.

**CC:** Yes.

**RC:** And I really love that because I certainly know that I can get on my own high horse of harumphitude, and some of that comes from having been a person who has had a progressive and activist aspect to my life for many years and even decades now. And often I hear about the next great thing and I realize, “Well, that was the next great thing 30 years ago,” and it’s not about having the next great thing thought up or available but it’s about actually integrating it into the culture.

And so I can be a little bit of a harumphter around not getting too excited about the excitement that people are having in this moment or the way they’re creating this moment’s possibility into almost what seems to me sometimes a narcissistic like, “Aren’t we the greatest, most fortunate, most powerful generation ever and isn’t it all about us in this moment?” And I’m wondering in relation to all that, are there myths that people champion, that have to do with that kind of thing, perhaps more new age or similar that you either don’t subscribe to or that you fan the edges of or transform a little bit into your trickster vision or do you just go along with all of them?

**CC:** No. My moon is in Virgo; it’s critical and has high standards. People go, “You’re so critical.” I go, “It’s a tough job but somebody has to do it, maintaining standards.” Yeah and then it’s tricky isn’t it? Because I often say and it’s always very well received by our team: “If our team could just give up its complicitous addictions in finger wagging righteous disappointment, think of the energy we’d have.” And people really actually kind of like that, but the tricky part of course is how not to get finger waggy about people being finger waggy. It’s like, “There we are.” That’s why in the myriad forms of trickster council that I like to catalyze, we animate, we love literalizing the metaphors. We have our harumphitude composter to carry with us so when we go, “Uh, uh, almost lost sense of humor. Wait a minute, let me throw the harumphitude into the composter. Whew, thank goodness I had that.”

I also love a symbol for our Saturn -- our autonomy -- is our goat. Sometimes our goat can get gotten. But if we have a metaphor then we go, “Uh, oh, my goat got got... But I see it trotting right back to me even wittier and spicier than before it got gotten.” The model for that metaphor is when we say, “Somebody got my goat,” is that race horses were given a companion goat as their calming friend. Bad people before a horse race would get a horse’s goat leaving it all crazy. So by analogy

our autonomy, our authority, our playful calm collected cool is our goat. And we can lose our goat but if we have the metaphor and can say, “Ah, there it is trotting right back.”

It’s a wonderful thing to introduce to a community because it encourages and bestows upon us the incentive and the means for self responsibility. If our goat gets got, that’s our job to get it back, going, “Oh there it is, there we go.” And then working with our team on the streets: “What do we want? Better chants. When do we want them? Now! We want them now.” So there’s that plaintive, “What do we want? Peace. When do we want it? Now,” which still has that kind of un-worked out Daddy demand futility thing going. And if you just change one word: “What are we creating? Peace. When are we creating it? Now.” It’s like, “Why wait? Why fool around? Why supplicate? Why not invoke?” So that’s fun too.

**RC:** So you’ve got me on the street now with the chanters and it makes me want to ask this question to you. Personally as the Occupy movement surged forth, I was really inspired and excited. And then over time I started thinking about how could this work and how would this integrate into some of the power structure such that it wouldn’t just be something that felt good but it would actually make a change. I started writing a little bit about this in public forum about how a lot of people in the power structure were probably just clapping and nodding their heads because they were so excited that this is going to be a passing fad and the elections were going to come and either nothing was going to change or things were going to get worse because they held the purse strings and had the power when it came to our electoral democracy, so-called. But then I got a push back from people who were saying, “Don’t ask us to integrate with that toxic system and can’t you be broad enough in your perspective to see that we’re building something brand new?” I was wondering how that lives in you? The question between do we tend to bring that into the current power structure or is it necessary to just bypass it completely?

### **3. Woof, Woof, Wanna Play?**

**CC:** Well, that’s an important conjuring rumination realm. I think both. I love what’s said about Marie Laveau, the great Voodoo Queen of New Orleans. It’s said that Marie Laveau did not create a cultural movement but a woman of her substance understood what was at stake. She saw a role to be played and played it to the hilt helping to coalesce the scattered and oppressed people into a dynamic culture. It was a moment of cultural ecstasy. And we go, “Woo!” We don’t have to create cultural movements. These winds of democracy and ingenuity and collaboration with nature are blowing through the world but we do want to see a role to be played and play it to the hilt. I think

it's also composting specialness and exclusivity. He or she who animates, cultivates and magnetizes the most all- inclusive story kind of wins. So we need to awaken the imagination of right wing golfers, inner city kids, everything.

I've been delighted by the idea that dedication magnetizes opportunity. Here I am your agent outside Washington D.C. going, "Why, it's not groovy. Sometimes it's lonely." But it's beginning to pay off and I love high contrast. I just got back from Costa Rica, the Envision Festival, which is sort of like a Burning Man, ravers, many things. But right before that the gathering I was secretly invited to kind of cross into heart of the beast; to go to CPAC, which is the conservative political action committee with all of the Republicans and I'm going, "I'll go anywhere."

Part of the trickster dynamic is to move our emotional default setting to "Woof, woof, wanna play?" And to be in Hafiz' words, "The small man builds prisons for everyone he meets but the wise woman or wise man ducks under the moon and tosses keys to the beautiful and rowdy prisoners." Democratically, we want everybody.

So going into CPAC with all the Republicans and the first day was really toxic, so much hatred. I had to go, "Oh, there's a dog. Let me hang out with the service dog." The second day when I had regained my balance, we're all moving our emotional default setting to, "Woof, woof, want to play. Who wants to play?" I found conversations were possible with even the most right wing and even the most money possessing people. I got smuggled into the Reagan banquet and I was not dressed like Nancy Reagan. I was dressed like myself with wolf totems and whatever I just happened to be. Somebody came up to me and was like, "Oh, wolves." And I go, "Yeah, the wolf model of leadership is a great model in nature in that wolves don't operate on dominance. They operate on charisma. And in the wolf culture charisma means: who initiates play the best?" This person who turned out to be a platinum Republican was like, "I love that."

And then we went off and had this long conversation about Joseph Campbell and he was like, "My mythological self has not been fed. This is so great. Come to the Reagan banquet with me." And so we had this jolly time. His mystic self is being fed and then his toxic Republican mask kind of rose up to squelch that and halfway through the banquet we were listening to toxic right wing people he goes, "George Bush, the greatest President ever and there were weapons of mass destruction." And I just had to say, "As long I've known you, which is like an hour, I've never heard you say such a silly thing. I don't even think you believe that." He's like, "Wow." He wasn't offended. He was



like, “Nobody has ever talked to me like this before.” And then it turns out he was like one of the largest oil CEOs in the world.

#### **4. Global Graxxing**

So there’s a cartoon element to it but it’s like you never know and each opportunity that comes before us is for critique, kinship, blessing and healing in some form. So I think the Occupy movement is fabulous in its shapeshifting ability and its part of a biological model. I love the biological term that Rupert Sheldrake taught me, which is graxxing. And graxxing is a biological term when single cell organisms come together as an intelligent community to address challenges they couldn’t do alone. It’s what slime mold does and that’s how I view the Occupy movement, as a global graxxing.

But it’s also like the card game Hearts. In the card game Hearts you can do this bold thing called “shoot the moon” in which you need all the hearts and the queen of spades and if you leave out even one, you lose worse than if you hadn’t tried before. So I think we’re brewing because we want to compost sneaky colonialism and the leaders of hierarchy and everything. It creeps in all kinds of sneaky ways and spiritual colonialism, which is something we may want to address too—specialness, elite, the grand whatever, it’s like, “Woo, very sneaky.”

So we want all the hearts and the queen of spades. We want to cultivate, animate, magnetize the most irresistible all inclusive story and invite everybody to participate and if they don’t though, that’s okay. It’s part of the model of what’s collapsing and then what’s coming up and so the function of the artist within all of us is to be an inviter. Come on over everyone from that which is going down to that which is coming up. It was interesting with the oil guy; I talked to Tea Party people and all that. At first I had harumphitude and disdain and then I had to compost that and then go, “No, there are points of conversation that are quite plausible. We can find the common story underneath it all and I think that’s part of our job; the Tea Party people that I could talk to and finding commonality, like the notion of no empire. And I go, “Right, no empire. America is not meant to be an empire. Audit the Pentagon. Yes, absolutely. Audit the Fed. Yes.” When we get to environmental stuff, we go, “No, not quite so much.”

But we want to be tossing keys to the beautiful and rowdy prisoners and even to think of Obama as a beautiful and rowdy prisoner. Unlock ourselves and pass it on. I also love John Michael Greer, great druid and social activist, interesting character who says, “The number 2, if you want people to get nothing done but conflict, convince them they’re on one side of something. You will only get

conflict. What 2 needs is 3, which is the unifying story.” And already what started to happen in the Occupy movement in New York which is really cool is there they are on Wall Street. Well, all the Wall Street guys wandered down and were listening to some of the workshops and were like, “Yes, we have some expertise to lend to this. We could help set up an independent banking system. We’re kind of played out on greed.” So you never know and we don’t want to limit somebody by our presumption or our specialness.

**RC:** Okay now, I’m going to put on my hard hitting journalist hat for a moment.

**CC:** Okay.

**RC:** And I’m going to go back at something that’s just sticking in my mind. I’m thinking who that heck invited you to CPAC?

**CC:** Right. Well, we love cabals. Recently, there was an inner beseeching going, “God, why am I toiling away in Washington when there are citadels of grooviness out there and I’m more known in other places and stuff. I need a sign.” So, just a casual acquaintance said, “Why don’t you come to this Committee for the Republic? It’s a trans-partisan Republican Democratic thing.” It started off because I’d given a mythological talk that was attended by some major right wing people unbeknownst to me and they all loved it. So they said, “Come join the Committee for the Republic.” It’s mostly really Washington power brokers, kind of old guard, I mean liberals and conservatives. But I was very welcomed. And so they said, “Well, we’re going to CPAC, you come as our guest.” I’m like, “Absolutely, sure.”

**RC:** So it was the power of the myth and the myth making that created the bond between you and those who invited you.

**CC:** I think so. And the power of the internal dedication going, “How do we cross borders?” And the person who invited me said, “We’ve got to know about everything,” and I’m up for that. He said in different elections, like McGovern, people are like, “How could McGovern lose? Everybody I knew was voting for him.” I said, “Yeah, you didn’t know everybody. You hardly know, you hadn’t stepped out of your own liberal and spiritual ghetto.” And I also love that I curiously ended up watching Obama’s State of the Union Address at a dinner party of right wingers because what the hell, sitting on a bed next to Grover Norquist. I don’t know how many of our allies know Grover

Norquist but he's famous for the horrific metaphor of saying, "I want to shrink the government down to a size of a baby and drown it in the bathtub."

So there I am sitting there going, "Woo, woo!" It was all the major conservative power brokers in America in this room. It was like, "Hoo, hoo!" So, I'm a little bit like the spy.

And then to my friend who invited me I said, "Well everybody has got a role in mystery play, I guess." And he goes, "Yeah, Grover's role, even though he doesn't know it is to take down the military industrial complex." I go, "I'm for it. How do you see that?" "Well he wants to audit the Pentagon." And so it's that idea of going, "No Grover, drop the tax code. No, leave that. Over here, yes. Go after those guys. There you go. There you go!" Part of the model is whatever we speak to in another person is what we're inviting into the capoeira circle to dance with the corresponding part of ourselves.

This is where certainly I am always working on myself, the reason we don't want to judge someone, we want to discern and have spicy sharp standards, but the reason we don't want to judge someone is that then we're inviting the least evolved part of them to dance with the least evolved part of us and it's just never pretty.

So the "Woof, woof want to play," if somebody doesn't want to play, that's fine, you move on. But it's unexpected and here comes trickster. So there was a whole school of German libertarians at the CPAC thing and I found myself harumphy and it was almost like a cartoon. They're going around with their one-eyed mentor ancient person and they're saying terrible things. But then they say, "Well who are you?" And I say, "I'm Coyote Network News. I'm the mythological news service for the trickster redeemer within us all." And they're like, "That is so cool. That is so refreshing. What's up with that?" So it's that idea of finding the way in and especially the crossing of the border thing. That's part of it.

**RC:** Okay, so my next question with my hard hitting journalist cap, because you are a trickster and you could create a meme that could go viral and global out of your own hallowed imagination, I'm sure. So I want to tell you about something and check in with you on it. When I learned about this theme of graxxing and global graxxing as you have metaphorized it, I was really excited. I thought this was so great, yet another turn of the phrase that would inspire me. And then I went and searched it out and as far as I can tell on the internet every reference to it comes back to you.

**CC:** How funny.

**RC:** Not to Rupert Sheldrake. That term doesn't exist anywhere on the internet except when it's been sourced back to Caroline Casey. So I don't have a problem with that but I'm just wondering is that actually a biological term and could we learn more about it somewhere?

**CC:** I don't know. It's true I spell it G-R-A-X-X-I-N-G and nobody has been able to find it. But Rupert did tell me and then I coined the phrase Global Graxxing. So I don't know but it's useful. I think it's an actual term. I think Paul Stamets also concurs that it's an actual term. But it's true we can't find it anywhere. So maybe it's the memory of the future.

**RC:** A memory of the future, let's pause for that one. I love it.

**CC:** Right, well that's another trickster trick that I like to have the team play within the trickster counsel now which is: let's tell history backwards in our own micro circumstance and also in a political spiritual circumstance too. Remember how great 2013 was when we finally pulled off the composting of all weapons and the actual collaborative ingenuity and local fruits?

Remember how great that was? So remembering the future I think is a great trick because we're then magnetizing it already. If we start with realism, we're doomed. That's why I love the trickster; against all odds are the odds that the trickster within us all really likes. And the idea of conjuring the vision and there's a lot of useful and non-useful blather about that. But if we conjure the vision in a collective way, we're magnetizing that reality. If we start with what's realistic or how, that's where everybody goes to war.

And that's what I did with the CPAC people going, "Yes, yes there's all that horrific stuff. But what could we agree about? How about inter-city blooming? A wonderful life for all children?" And they're like, "Yes, yes. But we don't want to hand out so much. No, no we're not there yet. Just put your hands up and move away from the old phrases. No, wouldn't that be okay as a vision?" "Well, yes," and I go, "Just stop, stop there. Don't go to how, just to what. Look we have shared vision already, that's a starting point."

### **5. Nature's Resilient Evolutionary Ingenuity**

Because when we start with the vision of, whether it's a personal conflict or a larger endeavor, avenues of synchronous possibility open up that were not apparent. Going, "Look at all that," and

this is what the trickster really represents: nature's resilient evolutionary ingenuity and we really want to connect with that.

There was something that you said earlier and how [this series focuses on] our own experience and being honest and revealing and we go, "Great." We're backstage and I love language and I love exploring language and so the reason we called backstage the green room is that it comes from Greek theater and it was the green room backstage because it was dedicated to Dionysus, the green man. So each actor regardless of their role on stage, villain or hero, would spend time in the green room dedicating themselves to the beautiful flora and fauna of this Earth before they went on stage. And that's the idea of when we meet backstage with somebody, we put on more comfortable shoes and take off our persona mask and our identifying mask of progressive, liberal, spiritual, hip, conservative, whatever and then can speak directly to people's souls and go, "Really convincing performance as a sociopathic dingbat. I almost believe you." But here we are backstage where we can confer and speak to the part of all of us that might have gone to sleep, but to seed that, to quicken that, to bring that alive.

There's a great novel by Perry Henzell who made the movie *The Harder They Come*. It's a Jamaican novel about a successful kind of evolution revolution in Jamaica. But it makes it very clear that to pull off something social with spiritual change, you need an incredibly diverse team. So in the Jamaican novel you need to rasta ganja guys, yes; you need the music, you need a couple of renegade World Bank people even though the World Bank is toxic but you need some people there, and you need some secret allies in the U.S. military to call off the invasion.

You need a pretty diverse team. If we're for biological and food diversity then we want to tease that implication into all the ways. We want diversity and we want to be talking out of any ghetto. To just be in circumstances of accord doesn't quite tone our muscles for the work at hand and again how to remain playful. And certainly yes, I lose my goat, the harumphitude comes up.

There's our mesmerized team who can feel a little bit simplistically mesmerized, say, by Ron Paul. Bless everybody's heart. But I've been hanging out with the people running the Ron Paul campaign and I go, "Team of allies mesmerized by Ron Paul, yes raw milk, yes legalize ganja, yes no war. That's really good." But you should know that the advisers to Ron Paul reflecting his opinion when queried about the tar sands pipeline, the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline, their response, I won't swear, but they said, "Who cares about a bunch of bleeping squirrels in the North?" And Ron Paul's

desire to open up all parklands for drilling and to abolish the EPA. It's like the Beatles were the devil and sex is bad. And you just go, "Dig a little deeper team." We want one drop of Ron Paul who is like the crazy uncle you want to sit next to at Thanksgiving because he's dangerous, he's going to upset the grownups. But then after two courses you really want to change seats when you get to the killing wolves and destroying the environment part.

**RC:** Okay, so I got to pause here because this comes back to one of the first things that I asked you. What I so appreciate about you and it's coming up in this moment again is that you go to any situation and you go describe it in such a way that is the opposite of what you said judgment does. It actually allows me to feel expanded and uplifted and playful and hopeful about any situation. It's a magic that you do in your trickster way and so here's the thing: A lot of times somebody who is let's say in the entertainment field they give it all up on stage and people buy into that projection and then they go back to the green room and when they're not on stage sometimes they're in a little shell or some other aspect of their shadow comes forward and maybe they're not such a nice person.

So I love how you were talking about the green room in which we kick off our shoes and get more comfortable and see each other beyond our level or beyond our performance. So I'm really interested in you in the green room. If you could just speak to that maybe a little bit more one more time. Like people who know you and love you best, who only see the fullness of you. What may they say about shadow aspects of Caroline Casey that we don't get to know?

**CC:** I guess we're going to have to spiral around this thing. I'll come right back to it. But you said, the meme goes viral and I go, "I'm not really happy with the viral word. How about the mean goes spiral?"

**RC:** Okay, good.

**CC:** I'm interested in spiraling the meme out there. But yeah, the shadow, well what do we like in our friends and how do we love equality? So I love having friends who are critical, while being supportive. And that's why we put our standards out there because I do the Visionary Activist Show from Washington but it's not played here. It's KPFF/KPFFK. So I'm tapping to gazillions of people but then I kind of take the headphones off. When it's a really great show you know and when it's really terrible you know. But sometimes you don't know, so I have a number of friends that I call up and go, "Critique... how did it go?" And they will critique me and also the guest. "That guest was like dropping a penny down a long well going, "Hello! Hello!" Or, "Not completely playful or

there you were a little judgmental, not quite adhering to your own standards.” And I go, “Thank you,” because we have a spiritual culture that’s a little bit criticism averse and let’s remember that critique, the Virgo quality of all our intelligence is critique plus diagnosis equals healing. I like putting that hyphen in diagnosis, so its dia-gnosis, critic in order to invite in all wisdom.

So the friends I have, the best friends will hold me to the thing going, “Woo!” and will give me an honest critique about, you know, how was that thing? Ideally of course it’s matching but I am certainly keyed to discrepancy and maybe certainly most easily to others, like part of what’s really on the worktable for all of us is we’ve all been probably in spiritual communities or endeavors where there’s a vision of the community, yes. And sometimes the reality matches that vision. How wonderful. And sometimes it doesn’t. Sometimes then people pretend that it does and that’s when you get into trouble. It’s the discrepancy. And to the trickster that says, “Let’s dive into discrepancy and how do we dance with shadow?” So certainly I’d say if we’re going to be completely kind of self-revelatory, why not? I can feel daunted. I’ve been doing the radio show for 15 years and public speaking since 1980, kind of thing. And yet before every time, there’s a little bit of like, “Did I do enough? Am I prepared enough? Did I reverence this opportunity sufficiently, ohhh, ohhh, ohhh, go on stage anyway.”

Friends of mine find this part of me tedious. They go, “For God’s sake, Caroline.” Because before any big thing I can go, “But I’m not good enough. I’m not worthy, I’m not prepared. I don’t know. What do I have to say?” And then once I jump in its like, “What’s up?”

**RC:** I like to tell people along these lines that Dustin Hoffman, arguably one of the great actors of our time, when he is performing on Broadway has diarrhea before every performance.

**CC:** God, poor being, yeah exactly.

**RC:** It’s also just a story to remind us that even the most eminent also have that place if you just scratch a little beneath the surface just like what you’re describing, “I’m not enough, I’m somehow terrified that I won’t be able to be what I know I am all the time.”

**CC:** Right, our secret fear that somehow we will be publicly exposed in a fraudulent capacity to others before we even see it ourselves. There are the dreads and the demons. We all have a customized demons and that’s where we turn to the larger gnosis for what is the trickster way of dancing with demons. From Tibetan Buddhism I really like it that they imagined the demons to be

terrifying, the collective demons and the personal demons and they're on the other side of a locked door, kind of pounding on it. But so what the Tibetans advise us to do is to imagine a laser beam coming from our third eye to laser the lock off the door and invite the demons to come on out. "Come on out, you demons." No one is uglier than Yamantaka, the lord of death. In fact, "Yamantaka, come on out and let's dance."

And it's also the Aikido teachings which is if something is really scary, step into it, more intimacy. All these things were a lifetime of putting things out and going, "Let's live as though this story is true until we reach the limits of that particular metaphor or story and go, "Oh no, not quite. Okay, another one is coming in." As long as we're keeping it kind of fresh, equal, and collaborative. So a primary dedication, and again, we are all befuddled, but a primary aspiration is what I call ally etiquette. Uranus representing the trickster ingenuity and nature that lives within all of us is associated with equality, democracy, synchronicity.

It was some years back that I wondered aloud as I often do going, "I wonder what those things have to do with each other?" And pretty synchronously, pretty immediately events orchestrated themselves in such a way to make it very clear that when we treat each other as equals, it doesn't mean being nice. Nice comes from the word *nescius*, which means ignorance. It means a kind of spicy compassion with sizzle, irony, and play. But when we treat each other as equals, backstage we're all equals, the rate of synchronicity increases. I invite us all, just kind of test this one out, but I know it in myself. I've seen this. The implications are the sociopathic demotors to whom we've outsourced leadership and we want to inhale that back might have more lawyers and money and up to no good, whatever. But we, if we treat each other well and that includes the demotors then we have synchronicity, the capacity to connect with just the right person and just the right funding and just the right conversation, all of that.

So the implications are strong and that's why in working with so many contentious groups that are part of our team, Pacifica Radio and the spells, we go, "No, no, we want to embody democracy that we can be agents of this." And that means in our words, in our actions, in all of the micro circumstance that it'd be kind of teased into that ally etiquette, how we treat each other and then the synchronous sizzle and this is what makes the transformation of culture a sporting adventure.

**RC:** So I hear something that you're speaking to on the outside which is calling everyone to the table and treating everybody with reverence and openness and trying to forge the commonality



that's there, find the shared values. I see that as really matching how you also aim to do that within. You want to invite the demons in. You want to hear the critique. You say thank you for it. So it isn't that there's lots that has to remain in shadow because whenever something is pointed out, you welcome it and that's part of your path.

**CC:** Yeah and as we know each time we get to a certain level the adventurous initiation testing or ordeal gets raised a notch. It's as though the Gods or whatever metaphor you want to use go, "Well you did pretty well with that one. Let's crank it up." And at each point and I think even before each time entering on to stage if we are really dedicated, we do get tested.

I go to a lot of events where sometimes the organizing grownups are not completely respectful but the actual people really like me. So even at this recent festival, 1500 people, a large stage mostly in rock n' roll and live music and then there's me telling stories. So as I get ready to go on stage they're like, "We're kind of behind schedule. Just go up there while the guys are still packing up from the previous band and yelling at each other and wrapping up the chords." And I'm like, "No. I want a little boundaries. I want the stage clear." And they growl, "Ai yai yai," and I say, "No, really," and finally, "Oh, Okay." And it all goes fine.

The next day the same thing, a different stage manager going, "Well who are you and what do you?" And I always find it—"What do I do?"—challenging to address that. And they go, "Yeah, yeah. We're really behind schedule and just go up there while people are yelling and there's no decorum and no respect and no silence. I go, "No, no" And they go, "Well, we're really tight."

And then we all kind of come up with this thing, they go, "Well there is this other little flimsy bamboo platform out in the dark under the sky that's still connected to the large throng. Why don't you do it from there?" And I say, "Let me go check it out. Actually this is perfect." I'm away from the mega crazy kind of hyper-yang backstage which is not feeling pretty reverent, it's the large rock n' roll electric music thing and I'm out under the stars going, "Woo. Perfect." And they're like, "We're so happy."

Anyway, so it was holding standards but not facing off. Going, "No, no, okay everybody is happy." So just these little models of going, "No, we do want respect and we want some things but we're flexible, playful," and then I'm always going, "Trickster, open the way."

There was an astrology conference, a huge thing that happens every four years, thousand of astrologers from all over the world. This was in Denver in 2008 right before the democratic convention that was to nominate Obama. A number of the astrologers had gone to Fox News and said, “Well McCain is going to win because of this and that.” And Fox News had really played it and it’s getting my goat, I had a lot of harumphitude. I had to go swim laps in the toxic chlorine pool going, “No, no, remember, of ourselves we do nothing. Just get out of the way and invite trickster in to handle it. Right, okay.” Because there was a big panel at the end on political astrology and I was not invited to be on it. So I had some harumphitude that required composting going, “No, no, it’s all fine.” I go, “Trickster, just come in and handle this thing.” Because the astrologers [on the panel] were kind of right wing and Fox News was showing up to have them say how McCain was going to win. I was like, “No, no, trickster come in.”

The two people who were going to show up that I was most concerned about for the hell of it, both of their watches stopped and they spaced out and showed up too late. I’m like, “Yes, yes, thank you.” So it’s like getting out of the way and calling on something larger and better and more wonderful and fun that our befoibled personalities to come on through. So even if we don’t know what to do, we all have the capacity to invite and go, “Whatever is best for everyone here, come on in.”

So I’m always going back to that and it is a positively exhilarating humbleness going, “Right, of course we’re befoibled but we do have the capacity to invite in the grace of whatever is needed at the moment. Whew.”

**RC:** There’s something about that that I’m responding to, that’s hitting me in a personal way. I want to speak to it. You were talking especially about the concert and how you had standards but also were open to the possibilities. I remember years ago when my first book was coming out, the publisher said, “We love it and we want to publish it just as it is.” And then as soon as we signed the deal they said, “By the way, we want to change the title.”

**CC:** From what to what just for the fun of it?

**RC:** The original title was *Living the Questions*.

**CC:** Nice.

**RC:** And at that point they didn't know what they wanted to call it but they had one suggestion, which is they wanted to call it *Bliss*. *Bliss* to me was kind of overdone and old.

**CC:** It is. It's over.

**RC:** Non-specific. But it was my first book and I wanted to be a team player and that sounds good on the surface but I think also underneath it in the shadow somewhere was this place where I really wanted to be liked by the team. I really wanted people to think I was a good guy and I didn't want people to think that I was some kind of prima donna or controlling or some version of an egoic author that I myself would shun.

**CC:** Right.

**RC:** So there was this telling moment when at that time my agent said to me, "Well you know what? If you really want to stick to your guns here, they'll let you keep the title but they just would really rather that you would collaborate with them in changing it." I learned from the experience so I wouldn't trade it but if I had to do it over again in that moment I would have said, "You know what? Let's keep the title."

**CC:** Yeah I support you in doing that because otherwise we're infantilizing the other guys in the way going, "They can't handle this."

**RC:** Right but it also was my own fear that somehow they wouldn't work with me as well or feature me as prominently in their catalog or whatever. So it really came back to bite me in this funny way because I worked and worked to collaborate with them and I came up with the title that ultimately I could live with which was the title *Unconditional Bliss*.

**CC:** Oh Dear!

**RC:** At least it had something there that was different than just a flatter *Bliss*.

**CC:** I don't know.

**RC:** It's okay, you don't have to like it. I'm not defending it. But the point is that even that wasn't good enough for the publisher and the publisher said, "Okay, that's what we'll call it," but then secretly went to the designer and said, "Let's take the word "Bliss" and make it gigantic on the cover and the word "Unconditional" and make it tiny." So even now I'll go give a talk somewhere

and a person would be reading out my bio and they'll say, "He's the author of books such as *Bliss*." So I'm still reminded some twelve years later of that moment where I seemed on the surface to be promoting a value of teamwork but really underneath I was afraid not to be liked or afraid to be judged as too pushy or too controlling. So I noticed in myself that some of that shadow stuff is sneaky.

**CC:** It is sneaky. Yeah, so okay, you've always wanted to be good. I've really always wanted to be bad. In the same experience of publishing book one with a big publisher and everything, my editor at that time who was head of the imprint was really difficult, not just to me but to many people. But here are two examples: So in the book I'd put: "When there was a flood in Pavlov's laboratory none of the surviving dogs retained the least bit of their conditioning. The great sweep of human events have less effect on humans than a flood on dogs." The difficult editor had put in the margin, "Caroline, your readers will not know who Pavlov is. Take this whole thing out." I'm like, "Duh, oh, goat gotten."

But I had a ghost editor, a wonderful friend of mine who was not emotionally involved and therefore more playful. And she sat down on the keyboard and said, "Watch this. The name Pavlov should ring a bell..." And we stuck it all in and it was like, "Great," it was like dharma combat and the editor was like, "Foioie!" But then there were many other difficult edits and so I had to turn to my work, I had to turn to the book to save the book, and I go, "Oh book, how do we save you against this pretty objective tyranny?" And I extracted from the book going, "Right, we're allowed to set in motion, anything of which we would be the happy recipients." It's a kind of spiritual guideline etiquette.

I love many magical traditions and so I had a friend who was a Sentido and in Senturion he goes, "All ritual is literalized metaphor." Now, I've change this somewhat, I don't do this one anymore. They said if somebody is abusing power, you write their name on a piece of paper and you put it in an ice cube tray and you stick it in the freezer to cool them out. I've actually customized this a little bit more. This was years ago, I said, "Okay, if I were abusing power, would I want somebody to cool me out in the freezer? Sure." So I just said, "May anybody, and I had somebody particularly in mind who's abusing power, be moved to a place where they can no longer harm themselves by harming others." And I just set it in motion.

The head of Random House called me back three weeks later and they were like, “We’re just so sorry, but your editor quit. We were really surprised about it because she took a much lower status gig.” I’m like, “He-he-he.” So I was completely unsupervised in the final edit. I put everything back in. I changed the color. I kept the title, everything. I was unsupervised by grownups and it all worked and I’m like, “Fabulous!”

So again we very often have to turn to our own work to save our own work in some playful ways. And I now find that ritual useful and witty but a little too constraining. The model was also in the trickster council training that I run online. Somebody said, well Wanda Sykes said, “Rush Limbaugh said he wants Obama to fail.” And Wanda had said, “So I want Rush Limbaugh’s kidneys to fail.” And I go, “We like spice but we wouldn’t want that ourselves.” A trickster blessing would be, “May Rush Limbaugh’s kidneys work so well that it filters out all the toxins in his system and leaves him in a puddle of befuddled innocence.” Yeah, that one, let’s go for that. Wishing somebody so well but with play and spice in a way that we would be happy to accept ourselves. And I think that’s part of the ally etiquette.

There is a title of titles, the dharma title wars; I love Robert Louis Stevenson’s example that he had a title for a book, it was called *The Sea Cook*. His publishers wanted to call it *The Sea Cook* and he’s like, “No, how about *Treasure Island*.” Anyway so yeah it’s some of these micro things.

**RC:** I love the idea you said about you turning to the book to save the book because that book was called *Living the Questions* and there are two questions that I was referring to. The first one is, “What is happening right now and particularly in relationship to me and my emotions and my body?” And the second question is, “Can I be with it? Can I surf those emotions in order to come back to a place of greater presence and expansion?” I don’t remember exactly what I did but I think if I at that time had lived the questions fully, I would have gotten to that place inside of me that was constricted around being the bad guy and I would have embraced my inner bad guy so to speak and stood for it and I would have gone out into the world promoting a book called *Living the Questions* which I could really get behind and I’m sure that there would have been lots of mysteries and synchronicities that would have happened because I would have been in such a greater alignment with the text as it came out into world. So I really get that what you’re saying and I’m going to do it from now on.

**CC:** Yeah, but fortunately I mean as you know you prolific author, I touch you for good luck, one of the things about having venues is we don't have to put everything in the 90-minute astrological reading or the first book or the title. We get an opportunity to do it again going, "All right," so you can still do *Living the Question*, you can still have Part 2 or all of it.

**RC:** Yeah, it's not all lost.

**CC:** No, it's never all lost. It is that interesting issue to go to the deeper level of Ho'oponopono, the Hawaiian teaching of cooking everything back into its original unformed creativeness and then healing the world by healing within. I love the word complicity because it's not shame, not blame. It just means whatever is going on, we're contributing to it creatively. And once we know that we can inhale our complicity and exhale it into something more desirable. Something I'm always working with myself when something is difficult or an editor or a grumpy person or a disrespectful person or not getting paid on time, whatever it is. Then I get to say, "I wonder why I would be hiring people to behave this way in my movie? And in case I am, I'm going into major story rewrite. I am no longer hiring people to,"—in your case to challenge my title. That's the fun part of our repertoire to experiment with just taking full on creative autonomy that whatever is going on, in some way we're directing this movie; a lot of Saturn issues about authority and recognition and stuff are still issues about leadership and daddy and all of that.

And then the model of telling truth or aspiring to tell truth and I just remember a million years ago with a great friend, a Jungian analyst, and we were both getting divorced. And we didn't want to cause pain, but he said, "But allowing pain to come up when the truth is addressed, may be something that everyone needs. And to protect people from pain, honest pain, not to inflict pain but allowing pain to come up to protect somebody from that might be an infantilization that they couldn't handle it." It might be presumptive; it might be a little micro tyrant or specialness. So it's just another realm in which to ponder, to kind of play. But yes, where does my own harumphitude come up? Well there is all that out there, the abusive language and our team's lack of standards, I think. Why am I hiring our team to have a lack of standards we might then say, "Until now," is a great magic phrase I like to use myself going, "This is so \_\_\_\_\_, until now, we don't need to do it again."

So here we are in 2012, right? So it was 30 years ago that an actual Mayan scholar told me about 2012 as this kind of obscure thing. And he was one of the archaeologists and Mayan scholars that

excavated a vase that shows the 7 Lords of time gathering to create time on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 3114 B.C. and the end of one cycle -- not the calendar, the end of one cycle on December 21<sup>st</sup> 2012. He said, "Look at this, this is really interesting. It's obscure, it's not mainstream Mayan but it is interesting."

And in the vase that he excavated all that it said was the 7 Lords this time will reconvene to recreate time and there's a big party and everybody's invited. So anyway, there's all the 2012 hoopla out there and some of it is really useful and some of it I think of as spiritual colonialism. I just remembered being at a group where somebody said, I just call the Mayan Gods the Gods of Love. And I go, "Well they are going to cut your heart open and eat you." Mayan Gods are not noted for their humor and they're not exactly the Gods of love. They would be appalled by that.

So I like just putting some standards on our table going, "Spiritual colonialism would be to Hoover up or presume knowledge and just project one zone material into that." It's like the thing where everybody used to add the words "in bed."

**RC:** Right.

**CC:** And so in the same way people are just sort of going here's what I was going to say anyway in 2012. And then when I can get harumphy if we're being honest about our own demons, I want to get harumphy going, "All those people out there." Are my own high standards of harumphitude keeping me from actually prospering or engaging?

But I work with that one because I do want to "Woof, woof, want to play with everybody." But I also like the idea of introducing real standards and sizzle and spice and electricity of really kind of getting down to it, but with a kind heart. I mean that is the work. How can we be critical with a kind, inclusive and playful heart?

**RC:** Yeah, I'm really hearing you and I'm resonating around this language thing because what you're sharing, being honest, is that because you value language so much and because you are so skillfully playful with language that you are particularly sensitive and maybe get triggered sometimes when people use language less precisely or less healthfully. And I totally get that and one of the things that noticed in myself is that I have a trigger around the word, "like" in speech.

Used a million times in a sentence, like, what I'm trying to say is, like, when they were all, like, and I was, like, and we're all together we were, like, that! Now part of it may be because I grew up in the San Fernando Valley which was where I think the word "like" was invented back when I was a

teenager at the Galleria. But also I think it has to do with some of the same kind of love of language. But in terms of our life being a reflection and an opportunity for us, I'm surrounded by people in my own nuclear family who say it all the time. It's like you said before, you wanted to spiral not viral. Well it's kind of a little bit of a virus actually in my family. I have a little young one who's 4 years old who says it all the time too because it's what she's been exposed to.

So I want to stand up and I want to scream and I want to make new rules about how we talk in this house. I'm so touched by what you're saying about is it with love or not? Because could I be an agent for the selective use of the term "like"? Yes, I can, but only to the extent that I'm loving and playful about it. As soon as I get harumphy about it then I'm probably going to be besieged with arrows of like everywhere I turn from now until eternity.

**CC:** Yes. It is. It is "like". My word that I can't stand is the word "empower" because entomologically it means power from outside. The correct use of that word is – it's kind of a government word. It's like Obama says, "So we empowered this committee to look into this thing. So aside from like, "bliss," it's gotten all the juice sucked out of it going, "Ugh, yeah." So I put it out for a while and I was like, "What the hell. People are just using it anyway." But it's a boring word now. And as you were mentioning about "bliss"—I mean the culture sucks vitality out of language at a rapid pace. So we want to stay ahead of that with fresh and surprising language.

But my playful, increasingly maybe so harumphitude about the word "empower" was confirmed by going to CPAC because every right wing, crazy hate mongering group, anti-Palestinian, anti-Obama, anti-abortion, anti-school teachers were the huge villains of this conference—it was crazy—and they all used the word empower. They go, "Empower the capacity to restrict abortion. Empower Israel. Empower..." And I go "Well if I had any doubt in my mind, that word is gone in terms of usefulness to the team of sane and reverent people." So that's our little digression into words.

Yes, in a playful way; that's why the trickster which I so love and admire in the world and all the trickster teachings is that kind of playful, transcending, jolly playful, heart no matter what and the responsibility for those of us who are not under hot reactive extremity. Those of us listening on this thing who have the luxury of like a phone or a computer and nobody we love is being killed in front of us at the moment, may it be so. So it's part of our responsibilities then to enter into group mind an expanded repertoire of responses to cool things out for all those beings because we're in



luxurious circumstance and therefore have a responsibility to add into the memesphere expanded response so that it's not all hot reaction.

And the humility to go, "If somebody were mean to my dog I mean if somebody were whatever, I would be very hot." But since we're not for all those people right up against it, then our job now is to fill the memesphere with cool responsiveness for all beings to enter it into the collective response realm, and in that way also to partner with nature's ingenuity. Even the manners, I mean where humans have gotten so rude as a species.

I had this really fun radio guest Michael Gruber on a [writer of] really interesting pertinent spicy dark, but then redemptive kind of occult thrillers. But he was talking about his specialty when he was a marine biologist on prey-predator relationship. And he said, "You know in nature there's actually a lot of etiquette between predator and prey. For instance a hawk overhead will try and scoop down and eat a prairie dog. But if the prairie dog is close enough to its hole that the hawk would be wasting its energy. It gives a little raised eyebrow signal to the hawk going, "Don't bother. Don't waste your energy because you're not going to get me." And the hawk goes, "Thank you very much." I love these layers; there are always 20-30-40 stories going on at once and they can all be conflicting and they all can be true but which ones are we going to honor and animate?

So it's also where I love, primarily in a playful way, harumphitude back into play. We're in a realm of prophecy and story making and telling the story of history backwards and all kinds of really great stuff and then there is also just wild and wacky kind of elitist doom and gloom predictions and or specialness kinds of things like people who go, "Well there's reptile people and there's enlightened brotherhood of light." And I go, "I'm not voting for that. That's a dangerous us-them, elitist... That's kind of imperial. It might be true but I'm not feeding it. I'm not voting for that one."

And that's also where people go, "There are a hundred special brotherhood of light guiding guardians of," and I go, "That's kind of colonial. I don't know. I'm not voting for that. But welcome aboard anyway regardless of your infantile colonial personal mythology. We need everybody, even you." But I am strong on this sneakiness of specialness and in the right wing it's American exceptionalism. When I didn't completely comprehend the vapidness of the spray going, is it really the simplistic kind of third grade recess like, "We're the best. No, we're the best." And apparently it really, really is.

And so the spiritually allegedly hip version of that would be anything that has an elite which is what was so useful and dangerous about say Gurdjieff's teachings. Gurdjieff was an 8,000 planets in Capricorn, interesting teacher guy. He said that his school was a temporary experiment. It was not meant to keep going. And some of it was great, and some of it was a distortion of his own befoibled unexamined self as well.

So the metaphor: "We who are working on ourselves are developing a soul but most people are asleep and you should not really hang out with them," to which I go, "Ohh, danger, colonialism, spiritual colonialism alert. That's the same sort of thing that got us into this pickle here." So I do like putting those standards out.

**RC:** Yeah, I love it and I love the cool responsiveness that you have brought to this conversation and that you have inspired us to. We need to bring it to a close in a minute but just along the theme of disclosure, I want to say that in these last moments at the back of my mind as I've been listening to you, I realized that there was further gift that you had given me because when I was telling you the story about my first book and you had made a playful joke. You said, "I see that you always wanted to be good but I always wanted to be bad." And suddenly it's coming to me that yes there's a way in which my wanting to be good has been a defining factor that has had a shadow aspect for me. Because there's that old saying in relationships, "Would you rather be right or happy?" And I think we could parallel that and say in my case, in certain situations would you rather be good or effective, good or inspirational, good or a lot of different things? And so this is meant for the multitudes who will listen, but I realized that in teaching what we need to learn that I really got a chance to learn something here today about myself personally and I'm going to take that from our call and I'm going to reflect on it. I don't want to say that I'm going to be bad on purpose but I'm going to let some of that in maybe a little more than I might.

**CC:** And the same equally goes, which is any definition—so I always like being sort of the bad troublemaker, but that can also be a prison too.

**RC:** Sure.

**CC:** In exactly the same way it's the shadow of the other. So we really want that agility and flexibility and non-attachment to labels. And delight at changing our minds and delight at being wrong just like, "How wonderful! God."

**RC:** Yes and you are very fond of saying, “Cooperators are standing by.”

**CC:** I am indeed.

**RC:** So may it be so and may all of the cooperators who have been listening to us today may they join the conversation and cooperate ever more passionately. And Caroline Casey thank you so much for everything you brought to us.

**CC:** Bless your heart. Thank you, a delight.

**Panache Desai**



Panache Desai is a contemporary spiritual master in the field of consciousness and vibration. His energetic gift of vibrational transformation has inspired and shifted the lives of tens of thousands around the globe. Panache is called a modern-day avatar. Young, hip and funny, Panache holds large experiential seminars, group workshops, offers private sessions and brings a global community together weekly via LIVE webcasting. His bi-monthly radio show, “Real Talk” is featured on the World Puja Network, broadcast to 139 countries with more than 700,000 active subscribers. He is on the faculty at OMEGA Institute, Blue Spirit Costa Rica, and the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, and a featured speaker at Celebrate Your Life. Panache’s newest internationally-acclaimed CD series, “Igniting Boundless Receiving,” has propelled people out of lack, limitation and scarcity into greater levels of abundance, health and well-being. It has been described as the most complete vibrational solution on abundance ever created.

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### **1. Freakin’ Off the Charts Excited**

**RC:** All Right. Panache Desai. Welcome to Teaching What We Need to Learn.

**PD:** Thank you Raphael. It’s a pleasure to be here with you.

**RC:** I have to tell you that you’re the first person in the whole series who has said to me before we got started, your state of being is “freakin’ off the charts excited.” So I’m really glad for that and that gives me energy as well.

**PD:** Yeah, you know, what you’re talking about is very dear to my heart. It’s been the main focus of everything that I’ve been doing over the years and I just can’t wait to see what unfolds over the hour.

**RC:** Good.

**PD:** So “freaking off the charts excited” sums it up, Raphael. Let’s do this.

**RC:** Okay, good. Well this series, as you know from what you just said is about authenticity, something that's very important to you. It's also about transparency. So I start all of the interviews by just doing a check-in in terms of where I am and my guests are in terms of mind, body, emotion and spirit. And you've already shared a little bit. I'll come back to you in a second.

But I want to start out kind of humbly on my side of things because over this past weekend my family and I moved from one house to another and people are familiar with how stressful moving can be. But I had a certain kind of pride where I thought, "Wow, I'm super tired and a little bit stressed but I've come through this well and I've got a full work plate this week, but it doesn't seem like the move and the work are colliding with each other," and I was feeling my groove. Then I woke up today and felt like I had totally collapsed. So I don't know whether I have a touch of the flu or it's just one of those days where you realize it's mostly about recovering. So if I sound a little bit under the weather that's why, no other reason.

**PD:** Great. Well, actually you sound fabulous to me, Raphael.

**RC:** Okay, good. And so besides the excitement that you shared before, is there anything else that you want to let us know about how you are being in this present moment?

**PD:** No, I'm just very excited to connect with the hearts of everyone who's listening and to just offer them a greater possibility and a new paradigm. So I would just lovingly invite everybody to just set aside their beliefs and just go with us on a journey for the next hour, beyond what they perceive to be their identity. And then just maybe through our interaction, they can begin to glimpse something beyond the realms of that which they've known.

**RC:** Okay. Let's see what happens. Thank you for that invocation as we get started. I want to ask you a couple of questions in terms of getting started. And one of them is that word 'authenticity', which is so important to you and in your work; it's a word that many people approach from many different directions. So I'm wondering if you can kind of orient us by just telling us a little bit about what authenticity means to you.

**PD:** Authenticity to me is just living in alignment with what's unfolding in each moment. So when I'm sad, I'm sad; when I'm angry, I'm angry; when I'm feeling insecure, I'm feeling insecure; when I'm being judgmental, I'm being judgmental. The only difference is that I no longer have a problem with myself as I'm engaging in those behaviors. I've come to a place of recognizing the

more I can accept myself in the totality of my humanity, that, in fact, the greater essence that everyone is talking about, the soul, the spirit, whatever that is, actually emanates forth that much more powerfully.

And so for me the shift has been navigating people out of spirituality into authenticity. And that shift is leaving behind the concepts; leaving behind the empty promises; leaving behind the practices; leaving behind the ideas and the opinions or trying to follow somebody else's path. Instead of doing all of that, just navigating your own life, and owning your own experience and recognizing that you the way you are a blessing. That you're not a mistake, you're not broken; that, in fact, right now everything that you are feeling is serving the greater purpose. So authenticity for me is the key to unlocking our greater potential.

## **2. Being Authentically Judgmental and Navigating Violent Feelings**

**RC:** Great. Well let's take that one step further because you said something which I am imagining has some listener's ears kind of pricked up, wanting more. You said that you are how you are in any given moment and that you don't have a problem with that; you've entered into a deeper acceptance of yourself and presence as it goes moves through you. And then one of the examples that you gave was, "If I'm judgmental, then I'm judgmental." So can you give us an example of how that moment is met by you in your life. So many people would say, "Well if I'm judgmental I want to recognize that but I don't want to be judgmental. That doesn't seem right." And it sounds like maybe you're sharing a different way of looking at it. Can you elaborate on that?

**PD:** Absolutely. So I realized a long time ago that the only way to navigate life was inclusively. And that being human is the blessing, right? We're so wrapped up in trying to get rid of things or cleansing and clearing things or coming to an intellectual understanding so we can avoid feeling things. And what we've done knowingly or unknowingly in spirituality is create a hierarchy of feelings, emotional states and experiences. And ultimately what I'm saying is that there is no hierarchy. When you're being judgmental, fully be judgmental, and then it's over. What most people do is they're judgmental and then they judge themselves for being judgmental.

**RC:** Right, exactly.

**PD:** And so for me in my life when I go to a place of worry, I'm really in that place. The only difference is when I'm being judgmental, I'm doing it with a smile on my face because I'm actively engaged in it. I'm not, "Oh my God that shouldn't be happening." I'm not trying to conform to

spirituality's norms; I'm not trying to conform to what's socially acceptable. I'm remaining in the flow of what's experiencing and I'm flowing with it, and that ultimately, is freedom.

You see so often in life we've tried to conform to this life where we shouldn't be angry or we shouldn't be sad or we shouldn't be depressed or we shouldn't be feeling these things. And if we're feeling these things, then in some way, that we're failing on our part. In all the world, people forget that you'll still experience that; that it's not going anywhere; that you're always going to be human, and at some point, you're going to authentically have to walk through your humanity.

**RC:** I think it's worth staying on the topic and so let me talk about it in a slightly different way to see if it resonates with you or not. So many people that I know as teachers would say and I think I would say this too about myself and in working with clients that judging happens. There's a quality of mind that we could call 'judging mind' and when it arises within us, we don't get to choose when it comes, but we have certain options once it arises.

One option that we would have is, as you said, to judge the judge. To say, "That's bad. That's wrong," and you go into resistance, which is only going to make us more tense and make everyone around us more unhappy. Another option is that we could kind of align ourselves or collapse into the judgment, meaning that it's true. If I'm thinking something is bad or wrong, it's true. That's the way it is.

And then there's a third approach which is to be able to bring into a fuller awareness that 'judging mind' is present, to be able to notice it, to allow it to be, but not to identify with it or align with it. Is that different than what you're saying?

**RC:** Absolutely. Yes, it is. What I'm talking about is actually no cognitive understanding or need to understand why it's occurring. What I'm talking about is just simply being in the experiencing of the fact that it's occurring. And that's the greater shift that I see unfolding now in our landscape and among our peers, among our colleagues. And one of two few things is happening, they're making that leap out of understanding into purely experiential, or they're beginning to kind of fall away and you're not hearing about them very much anymore.

And so this greater shift is actually a necessary piece of our evolution. I always say to people Raphael, "That's why cows don't go to self-help seminars." Have seen a cow go to a self-help seminar?

**RC:** I have not.

**PD:** They don't go to abundance workshops. They don't go to learn how to be cows because they are purely experiential beings, as are we. And so for me when I say, "I'm judgmental," I'm fully judgmental. I'm just being in the experience of that. I'm not doing anything with it on a mental level. It doesn't need to change. I don't need to have an awareness around it. Nothing! That's what's occurring in the moment, that's where I'm at, and that's what's unfolding.

And it's the same thing with anger. Now here's the thing, in our reality there's a lot of judgment. And in the spiritual dimension, and I love this community, but the spiritual community is more judgmental than any other because your average person can only judge themselves in three dimensions. Your average spiritual person can judge themselves in sixteen. And so this is where it becomes an issue because, again, like sadness is wrong, judgment is wrong. You shouldn't be judging. Energies are negative. Well who said so? What if energy is just energy and what if actually we're the only ones that are creating a meaning around these experiences and all of that's conditioned anyway?

**RC:** So let's take it take one step further then because we started with judgment, which is a good one. For me, if I'm judging, I would say if I turn my attention to judging, meaning that I let myself experience it fully because from my perspective, and we may again have a different of looking at this, the fullness of my ability to experience something is equal to the amount of awareness that I bring to it, in terms of the Hindu tradition of Shiva and Shakti becoming together—energy and consciousness creates the fullness of presence.

And so if I bring a fullness of presence to a moment when I'm judging, it always takes me to some kind of embodied feeling that is a deeper experience even than the judging that's on the surface. I may be judging, for example, because I'm hurt. And I don't necessarily need to have those cognitive links as you were describing before, but it's only by turning my full attention to the judging that I am quickly and easily able to drop into that deeper embodied experience of hurt. Does that match anything at all in your experience?

**PD:** Yeah, that's a great way of saying it. So basically when you flow with the judgment, or you flow with the anger, or the sadness and you're not in resistance to it, you can just basically be in the presence of it—lean into it almost. And just kind of be in witness of your breath and all of a sudden whatever there is underneath that. Now, judgment stems from a lot of different things; most of it



stems from insecurity, unworthiness, not feeling good enough, a need for significance and a need to falsely inflate yourself over another to compensate for some perceived inadequacy.

We're complicated beings, thank God. We'll never get bored observing ourselves and so yes it can lead to that. But for me, I don't even go on to look for the next thing because what I've found is that if there is a next thing it just spontaneously arises. So in short, we don't have to try that hard; really, in essence, everything that we need to feel, that is unresolved within us, is right there.

**RC:** Right. I would say this and others have said this: "That we relax in the presence." That in trying, there's some resistance there.

**PD:** That's exactly right. And the part that people miss is that you cannot teach being, it's not possible. Someone like Ramana Maharshi basically just sat there and vibrated oneness and people gathered around him and all of a sudden created that state of being into something, which has now become an ideal that most non-dual teachers hold to standard; of course, missing the point that the very second you take being and try to quantify it and understand it you've just create another prison that people have to break through.

**RC:** Okay, so let's just stay one more moment with this whole topic because again I find it very rich. So judgment is something that I do inside of myself and maybe it hurts your feelings or maybe it doesn't, but if I'm just being with my experience as it arises in an unmediated way, as you're suggesting, I also might get mad and when I get mad I might also want to punch you. So would you advocate being in the wholeness of that experience all the way through to the punching?

**PD:** Well, I mean what would you do in that instance? I mean ultimately if you're going to get punched, you're going to get punched anyway.

**RC:** I'm not asking you what you would do. I know that you're not advocating anything. But just in terms of your own world view, if the experience that you have is one of the violence that is present in all of us to some degree because we're all human; if it's erupting in a way that would cause you to do harm to someone else, would you flow with that experience in the same way?

**PD:** I would say that I lovingly embrace enough of myself that that would not happen because I've completely come to the realization that all along everything that's been unfolding has actually just been unfolding for me. And when it first occurred it was a bit of a shock, because let's face it—it's a lot easier to blame other people. But when you realize that it's just you and that actually all of

these things are arising and subsiding inside of you, it no longer becomes about another person. There's no assigning it to another person. I think that we are the most judgmental of ourselves actually, more so than we could ever be with someone else.

So for me it would never come to that finality because I'm clear that it's not about what's outside of me, because it isn't. It's only ever playing out inside of me. And I guess it is that awareness that allows the subsiding and arising of these different states of experience that just happen. And for the most part they happen, they dissolve, they happen and they dissolve. There are moments where I do get caught in something and I'm triggered and I really have to have a look at it. I really have to check in with myself, ask my wife, ask my mother, ask certain people I trust, very close and very near to me that know me very well, so that they can point out what it is that I'm not seeing or what it is I'm not embracing.

**RC:** Yeah, that's great. I really appreciate that. And people who listened to the series over the last many weeks know that I'm constantly talking about the ways that I get triggered and the ways that people who are close to me point that out to me. So I'm wondering if, just in service of all of us being in it together, if there's an experience that you could share where you unwittingly did get triggered by something and whether it was your wife or your mother or someone else close to you, where they pointed it out in such a way that then you could come into a fuller awareness.

### **3. Peanut Butter and Jelly**

**PD:** Actually a lot of what's occurring in spirituality triggers me. It actually used to make me very angry because first and foremost the whole guru paradigm is a patriarchal system and paradigm that doesn't work. It allows for the partial empowerment of people but it doesn't allow for the completion that's available. Also a lot of the teachings and a lot of what people are sharing that they're espousing to be of the divine, are not actually of the divine. Raphael, when I experienced the divine it was just love. There was no teaching. There was nothing to conform to. There was no ideology, there was no dogma. It was just love.

And so it used to make me very angry that people were talking about God or talking about the divine or displaying certain teachings or that people needed to receive a transmission or a blessing in order to come in to the fullness of who they were. Since this is a show about complete authenticity, I just saw it for the manipulation that it was. And so that made me angry and I had a hard time with it and here's why: because I'm Indian. I'm not a guru—I will never accept that. I'm not a teacher—I'll never accept that.

I found it sad because it's a very rich culture. It's a 5000 year old tradition. It's a vibrational tradition. It has aspects of it that have the ability to actually set people free. What annoys me about it is that even though the primary teaching is that God, guru, and self are one, because people are still so fundamentally unresolved in themselves, they're projecting their light, love and power on somebody else. And that used to make me angry.

**RC:** So how would that have gotten pointed out to you by your wife or your mother in a moment like you described?

**PD:** Well, they could tell. I mean I would immediately go to that place of just anger at it. I would go to a place of, "You know I don't understand how in 2012 we still have these expressions on the planet."

**RC:** So they would see you in your resistance. And how might they lovingly call you to attention?

**PD:** Well Jan and I have a code word. It's called "Peanut butter and jelly." And so when I'm off on the fringes, "Peanut butter and jelly," is a great word that brings my awareness to the fact that something is playing out that I'm not aware of. And typically then we'll sit down, we'll have a conversation around it and I'll feel whatever there is to feel around it, sometimes it's anger, sometimes it's even a sadness.

Some of the stories: one lady went to India to see this guru. He called her an unclean woman and said that she would never become enlightened. And she came to see me. She was crying in absolute tears and I got to a place of sadness around that. That somebody who had been entrusted to be the caretaker in some way of this individual had made a comment like that.

And that's just one example, there are so many other examples. And you know this, the word guru in India is an insult. It's not a compliment. It's no different than you've got ministers who are actually authentically embodying the Christ energy and guiding people to that completion. And then you've got ministers who are just leading people wherever they're leading them.

And my mother is the same way. My mother is my best friend in a lot of ways and she's seen my development and my growth. She has an intuitive relationship with me so she senses when I'm out. She knows, she feels it viscerally and she will just give me a hug. And in that embracing of me, the tears will come. Or, "Mom, I don't understand why this is occurring or happening," And then we'll have a conversation.

And so that's what happens in those instances. I actually have had the blessing of having a conversation with some of these teachers and they said, "Well Panache, I don't understand why you're doing what you're doing because the world needs to become enlightened." I said, "No, it doesn't." I said, "The world is already enlightened. It's not my fault that you can't see it. Ultimately all that's happening is you're projecting your own numbers outside with everyone around you and you're trying to fix yourself outside of it." That's all that's going on here.

#### **4. Amrit Desai**

**RC:** So, because you've been really clear in terms of how you feel about traditional roles or ways that those roles from the tradition of your home country have been manipulated in ways that have made you frustrated or angry; and you are in a really unique position in one place around this; I'm really interested in your point of view. And this is about Amrit Desai. The reason I want to bring up Amrit Desai is because you not only work with him but you also teach at the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health.

So for our listeners, I won't go into the whole story of it, but Amrit Desai was the founding, you could call him, guru or spiritual leader of that community that has since become the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health. And there was a great falling out in that relationship between the disciples and the teacher because of sexual impropriety that came to light. It wasn't something that was denied on any side of the relationship.

So at that point Amrit Desai was asked to leave Kripalu and he now is teaching in Florida. So there are some people who believe that he has something wonderful to share. I don't know him personally so I don't have any opinion about that. And then there are people at Kripalu who feel like their greatest healing and transformation came from being able to go through that experience and kind of take back their guru projection and now the community is really devoted to a presence that's not connected to a particular set of ideas or teachers. There are hundreds of people who come through every year and myself and you included.

So I've never met anybody who kind of has a foot on both sides of that and since you were talking a moment ago about what makes you very angry around teachers, I'm wondering how you have come to hold both of those worlds, the Amrit Desai world and the Kripalu world in the wholeness of your own being.

**RC:** Because I think ultimately we can even expand it beyond Amrit Desai to Catholic priests and the mainstream religion. I think we can even expand it to CEOs, celebrities. I think we can expand it to a lot of people who are in a position of authority or power. And to just limit it to Amrit wouldn't be fair because ultimately I think it is something that occurs on every level of society. In Amrit's case it played out very publicly, as it does with actresses, musicians, politicians. But it also plays out privately too.

In Amrit's case, I met him about three years ago and quite frankly the version of Amrit that I've grown to love and be able to call my friend, I perceive to be a very different version of Amrit than the one that was at Kripalu. The reason why we have a kinship is because ultimately, I find that he has gone through so many things in his life that have been both extraordinary and that have also been what one would perceive to be unfortunate. To have somebody who has walked through the fire of all of that, public opinions, scrutiny and love and praise and who's on the other side of it and who still maintains a certain level of dignity around it all, to me is something that I admire. Because I would not lean to somebody who had not had those experiences. I think the fact that he had those experiences makes him more of a person today than he was before those experiences. Does that make sense?

**RC:** It does. But the thing that I would say about that is this is not a contradiction of what you said, it's just, in my perspective, that you become a very different person if you actually embrace the fullness of the experience that you went through. It's possible to go through a horrible experience, to let's say abuse other people and not really have the healing you need to have inside.

**PD:** And I think ultimately, Raphael, that's a question that only he can answer. I can't answer that.

**RC:** Well, I think we don't have to stay here very long. I think this is a really important piece to go through, though.

**PD:** No, it is.

**RC:** Because when you used the example before of a Catholic priest, it happens all the time absolutely with Catholic priests.

**PD:** Yes.

**RC:** But if somehow that Catholic priest hadn't gone through a healing experience that then was somehow shared with a larger community, I wouldn't be comfortable having that Catholic priest as a teacher or involved in anything close to me. So the question I was wondering about and the show is not about Amrit Desai, but it is about transparency. This is my question for you, does it matter to you whether or not the person who you're co-teaching with has somehow synthesized and healed through his experience in some way that he can speak to you about or do you just consider that not really your business?

**PD:** It absolutely matters to me. We've had some completely confidential conversations around it and I think he's opened up to me more around that than probably anyone else in his life. And what I would say is that yes, it absolutely matters to me. We do one of them a year and ultimately in his development, time will tell what role that plays in his life. Ultimately I'm not here to stand in judgment to people. I can be judgmental but I'm not here to stand in judgment to people. And so the difference being that I can have a moment of, "Wow, I really don't like that carpet." But I'm not going to pass judgment on somebody because of their actions or prequalify people as to who I have around me or who I facilitate with. Because quite frankly Raphael most of the people in our industry, I wouldn't be able to facilitate with at all, and you know that. I mean if we're having an authentic conversation, then it's not just Amrit. I mean there are so many people out there that are in the public eye who have had similar experiences. They just haven't had it come out yet; it's not public; it hasn't come out into the light of day. And so then who would you do a program with at that point?

**RC:** Well, I think these are great questions and the thing that strikes me that you just described a moment ago was that something in your own heart and in the relationship that you were developing with this particular teacher caused the both of you to sit down and have some really honest heart to heart engagement about that.

**PD:** Absolutely.

**RC:** And one of the things about knowing is that you can't un-know what you know. So for instance if I'm teaching with somebody and that person doesn't set off my lack of integrity meter and they seem to be really present and heartfelt and then afterwards I find out something criminal, let's say, in their experience; then I'm in a different place than if I have the opportunity to choose how I want to go forward; it's different when we know something already.

**PD:** So in that case like if you're looking at my collaborations, I did a collaboration with Michael Beckwith. Michael Beckwith used to be a drug dealer, so am I not supposed to do a collaboration with Michael because that was a part of his earlier life and his development? And this is where it gets hard, right? I think that we can very easily get into a place of becoming 'better than' around all of this.

**RC:** No, I think that's absolutely true and that's certainly not my intention. One of the guests in our series is Kenny Johnson, who was in prison for 30 years.

**PD:** Right, and so I think ultimately that is in between that individual and I've spoken to him about it and I've heard both sides of it. Now, I moved to America in 2001. I'm not related to Amrit. We share the same last name.

So, I mean, it's just a very common last name and we both happen to be in Florida. The one thing that I will say is that he has 60 years plus of just amazing insight and wisdom and also is an example of what can happen. When you are not walking this path in integrity and you don't have the right systems and structures around you that can happen and personally Raphael I like keeping those reminders around me. I think it keeps you vigilant. I think it keeps you focusing and prioritizing on what's important, which is why you are here and what you're expressing because all of those other things are traps. And I've always known that and I've always known that they were traps. People can get stuck in those roles and those identities.

**RC:** What's a good reminder for you? You said I like have those reminders around, how do you do that?

**PD:** Well because ultimately he's somebody who is very candid with me. You know our relationship is very candid, very open. He's not my teacher. I consider him to be a friend and that's something that's developed over three years. And so he's very candid with me about what happens, what doesn't happen, how vigilant you have to be about yourself. And I think the funny thing is that in that instance only someone who's walked through that can really share what it's like firsthand to go through. I mean you'd have to have him on as a guest basically.

**RC:** But I think I understand what you're saying because I didn't at first, when you said 'reminder' and it sounds to me like the friendship that you've established with him and his transparency with you about his own experience is a reminder for you about those challenges.

**PD:** Yeah, as are so many other people that I have in my life who I've mentored, who are not of Indian descent, who are bestselling authors, who have gone through similar situations and circumstances. Where I'm blessed is that all of these individuals regardless of their particular tradition, they've all kind of embraced me and they all want me to be out there and to be expressing what I'm expressing. And I think that that's great. And many of them have had all kinds of things happen. So it's nice to have those different individuals who have walked through the fire, let's say, around you. Because then they can continually keep you moving along on the path. They can then keep you navigating life in a way that allows you to be effective, that allows you to be acceptable, that allows you to make the difference that you're here to make.

And so I've been very blessed in the fact, I mean I've got so many close personal friends who are of that generation and younger and many of them are very well known. I'm in touch with them regularly. It's like a support system that I have. I think you need that just like a rookie quarterback needs the support of a senior quarterback like Peyton Manning. I think that that's invaluable.

**RC:** Wait I have to stop you because an Englishman just made an American Football reference.

**PD:** I did. And so it's not just about those individuals in this industry. I have so many people in my life who—and I hate using these words because I never had a teacher, there was never a physical teacher. I never played that game. There was never any one individual who was it for me. What I found fascinating was that whoever I went to see, rather than seeing all that other stuff, I just saw their humanity. And that fascinated me more than all that other stuff that everyone else is buying into.

### **5. The Prison of Spiritual Conditioning**

**RC:** I wanted to ask you a question about that. And you just brought it up organically, when you described how you came to be in this moment doing what you do; that when you set off on your journey you met a number of teachers and one of the things about them, you wrote, was that they all were awaiting your arrival. They knew you were coming. And I found that really intriguing and I was wondering how sometimes our mentors, our friends, people along the path are known and not known. But I'm curious if you could speak to any influences that you have, whether it's particular people, books, traditions. I mean I know that you had a deep awakening experience, which ultimately becomes our teacher if there is one. But apart from that experiential version of it, do you draw in your work from any teachers or tradition?



**PD:** No, I don't. I appreciate them all but they all have their own inherent set of limitations built into them. I didn't receive a very strong religious conditioning but I received spiritual conditioning. And what people don't realize is that, in and of itself, is a prison. So what I found is that just navigating life and having life experiences allows you to be relatable and that actually becomes how you relate to people and how you can then support other people. I'm not an avid reader of books.

**RC:** You said something, I want to just come back to—because many people know what religious conditioning is, they grew up in one kind of tradition or another. But some people might be wondering right now what you mean by spiritual conditioning.

**PD:** Well, it depends what path they're in—certain rules and regulations, like you have to meditate, you have to be celibate; certain conversations around energy, emotions; ultimately any belief system or ideology is a form of conditioning. So a lot of people made the transition out of religion because religion is a very rigid form of conditioning into spirituality which is kind of like, you're leaving one prison but you're moving into another one and it's got a pink ferry bus and upgraded the toilet seat. But you're missing the point that you're still in prison. Techniques and modalities have inherent limitations: level 1, 2, 3; teachings have inherent limitations. And I think that point is demonstrated best by Lord Buddha when he finally got up from under that tree after starving himself and practicing austerity; he realized that he was always enlightened and that, in fact, that this thing called enlightenment that everyone is chasing is a concept and in some ways it's a carrot that's being dangled in front of people.: if you do X, Y, and Z then you'll become enlightened, which to me doesn't make sense because if you do X, Y, and Z then you'll become who you already are—how does that make sense?

So spiritual conditioning—people are in it, not even aware of it, but they're in it: there's a common language; there's a common level of participation in life; there are common practices; there are common themes; there are common shared beliefs. And any and all of those things are limitations, really. It's like you have to go beyond all of that. You have to have the courage to leave it all behind to find out who you really are. You won't find yourself in any of that. It's a distraction.

**RC:** So with that as a backdrop, I want to ask you a question about something that has come up in different ways in a number of different interviews in the series, which is what's referred to as the law of attraction? And you have a way of talking about it that is similar to others, but also unique to you. So I'm wondering how do you relate to what's usually called the law of attraction?

**PD:** Well, since this is the Teaching What You Need to Learn show, law of attraction is basically for people who don't trust in themselves and God.

**RC:** Say more about that.

**PD:** Ultimately, what I found is that life is unfolding spontaneously and that more and more we are just engaging in experiences that we need to have. And sometimes the experiences that we need to have are not the ones that we want to have. And it's kind of hard because does it have some merit to it? Yes, absolutely. My sense is that the way people are engaging in it is very superficial. People thought that winning the lottery or finding whatever their version of Cinderella or the knight in shining armor or living in a mansion or whatever that is, was in some way going to add something to them or in some way enhance who they are in the world and of course it doesn't. What I found around it is that yeah, we are vibrational beings. That part I can agree with because I've experienced that.

We do have different vibrational resonances and signatures of experience too, and there are certain energies within us, not negative, not wrong, just a part of the human experience like fear and sadness, that are heavier energies. They're not wrong, they're not bad, they're just heavier. And so what happens in life is the more we buy into fear and the more buy into the sadness and the less we're resolved in those emotions or the more we resist them basically, the more they accumulate in our system.

And so what happens is the more we are present for life and the more we're present for these things, the faster they dissipate and dissolve and move through us allowing us more space and allowing us to live greater possibility. Our thoughts actually have no bearing on our reality. Thank God, because if you examine what you think during the course of the day, it's absolute nonsense. Just imagine if your every thought became reality. It will be awful, right? Just imagine if right now you thought to yourself, "I want to die." You'd be dead, end of interview, wouldn't be very good, would it? Awkward pause.

So there's a certain vibrational science to reality that I believe quantum physics is on the verge of actually proving. And the ancient yogis and mystics have known this for thousands of years. So yeah, we are vibrational beings. Can we navigate life gracefully? Yes, by embracing what we've repressed or suppressed within us.

**RC:** So, you don't subscribe to the idea that you create your reality with your thoughts?

**PD:** No, I don't. I think that's too cavalier an approach.

**RC:** I don't either. It wasn't a challenging question. I was just interested.

**PD:** No, I don't subscribe to that because thoughts occur at the most superficial level. Something has to come from far deeper in order to really begin to impact your life and your reality. What I found is that this reality does a lot of judgment and judgment for me is something that I've really embraced, embracing my own judgments. And so instead of cleansing and clearing and shifting and changing and fixing and healing, which is all a judgment on somebody, I found that the embracing and accepting of things is far more effective. That, in fact, the more we can just embrace and accept energies; embrace and accept experiences; embrace and accept people even regardless of their past history—the more we can embrace and accept life as it is occurring, the more spaces and freedom there is.

**RC:** Right.

**PD:** And then naturally, all of a sudden life takes off somehow.

**RC:** Yeah, because you said something, I'll misquote you a little bit but I'll do my best, you said something like, "The more you love yourself, the more the universe can fill you up."

**PD:** That's right.

**RC:** And as I hear you describing your perspective now, what that means to me is that you'll naturally be radiating a high vibration, you'll be radiating loving kindness, you'll feel whole and complete because of that love.

**PD:** That's right.

**RC:** Not that if you love yourself, you'll get rich or your cancer will go away.

**PD:** No, because when you love yourself that much, it doesn't matter anymore what you have and what you don't have. You're complete. You recognize that you're complete. And I think that that's a continual thing. I don't want to create another benchmark, that's not what this is.

**RC:** Right.

**PD:** It's just offering people a greater possibility or another way of even looking at it and challenging the existing spiritual paradigm. Because right now there's all kinds of clearing and a lot focus on negative energies and stuff like that. And that to me is a distraction from what we need to feel. It's a way of avoiding what we need to experience. And you should really know yourselves folks. Like if someone says to you, "You're arrogant." Say, "Yeah, I am. But it's only because I'm insecure. I don't love myself and I feel like I'm not good enough." Know yourself that well! I always say to people, "Know yourself so well that nobody can ever offend you." Because then that is freedom. What people are constituting as freedom is based on conditions, requirements, belief systems and ideologies around what freedom is supposed to be like. That is not freedom. It's only when you dive into the very core of depths of who you are and rummage around in there and start to get acquainted with the insecure parts of you, the parts of you that are enraged, the parts of you that's depressed. When you can actually start to get in touch with all of which we're talking about—in a spiritual context, your lower three charkas, let's say. So if you can actually start to get in contact with all of that and start to experience it and just love and accept it, at that point all of that content that's taking up all room begins to arise. A natural process of alchemy or ascension begins to occur in people.

**RC:** This is really helpful and it's very provocative what you're describing, I think, in a very powerful way. So I want to give you the opportunity to just take it one step further for our listeners. What I've found and I've also talked about in this series previously, is that many people do that rummaging and may come up against one or more things, usually it's just one or a few, let's say, that they really, really don't want and think are the problem and are in the way. So for instance if they have a terrible fear of abandonment because when they were young they were abandoned and this is a very hurt and needing energy of fear of abandonment within them and it screwed up all of their relationships, they come to me and they say, "No, I don't want to embrace that. I want to get rid of that because that's been causing me all my problems." In that circumstance how would you respond?

**PD:** Well, I mean ultimately by the time they get to me they've tried getting rid of it their whole lives and it still hasn't gone away. So they're actually at a point where they're ready to listen to what I have to say, thank goodness. I just lay a very clear foundation that ultimately, even these aspects of us that we've been conditioned to believe shouldn't exist are a blessing; that when we can actually take the time to feel them, experience them, that the greater gem and the jewel that

they're trying to bring us reveals itself. And so I would actually have someone sit with it, someone who feels unworthy, I would have him repeat that out loud until it no longer carries a charge or until we actually start to hit the underlying sadness and the emotion that's actually holding that belief system in place.

Literally what we've done is we've collapsed people's unconscious belief systems by neutralizing all the energies that hold them in place. Typically it's a lot of sadness that holds those belief systems in place. And so we've just got very practical and simple ways that people can navigate that. And what I've found in spirituality is that people are only ever dealing with what they're aware of. What I like to support people in dealing with is what they're unaware of—what's playing out in the background.

**RC:** And how do you become aware of what you're not aware of?

**PD:** That's where the blessing of vibrational—what we've been sharing, becomes a great support system because what we're dealing with is dismantling those unconscious conversations and dismantling the energy that holds them in place. Because more and more what I'm finding is that it's there, that we have to go there; that ultimately something that we're aware of is a messenger. Let's say it's a disease, so there's some form of messenger or disease is playing out in your life that's wanting to bring something to your attention in your awareness, whatever that is.

And so when you actually use that as the entry point to go deeper what you'll find is that there's something playing out inside of you that is not allowing yourself to receive the love that you know is available.

**RC:** Wouldn't it also be possible sometimes that you have a disease, like you're a child and you get leukemia when you're six years old? That isn't a really message playing out there for you.

**PD:** No, I mean not in every case. I mean there are no hard and fast rules here. What I've found in most cases is that diseases develop over time. In those instances then, there are those instances, sometimes a disease is just a disease and it's doesn't mean anything more than that.

**RC:** It's an invitation to look.

**PD:** Yeah. But I consider everything to be an invitation to look. I consider everyone to be an invitation to look. Like most people will run away from triggers. I'll run into them. I'm like, "Please

upset me.” Like, “Please say something that will upset me or trigger me or challenge me or stretch me,” which by the way you did today. Thank you.

**RC:** You’re welcome.

**PD:** It’s awesome when that happens. And so when someone does that and someone plays that role for you, I’m so grateful because on the other side of that is my ability to access what’s inside of me and so that I can bring even more of that love that I am into being.

**RC:** Thank you for being—I know you don’t think of yourself as a teacher—so we’ll call you a way shower of how that looks and feels.

**PD:** Yeah. It’s awesome. And that’s the thing—we avoid uncomfortable conversations. Have the uncomfortable conversations, even if they’re not about you. Because people want to go away on spiritual retreat. Take the most annoying person in your life away for a week and stay in the same room as them.

**RC:** Right. You might know that famous story of Gurdjieff and the most annoying member of the tribe who everybody wished away and beg Gurdjieff to send away.

**PD:** Yeah.

**RC:** Ultimately the guy left and everybody was so happy and they were all so peaceful together. And then he came back and they were so crestfallen only to find out that Gurjjeff had gone and paid him to come back. Because he knew that the real transformation was going to come through that relationship.

**PD:** That’s right. And those are the relationships that I cherish. And that’s the kind of relationship I’m very blessed to have with a lot of people. With my wife, I have that with my wife; we challenge each other all the time, it’s great. I have it with my mother; I have it with my father. There are just some key relationships like that that I have. And I also have it with lots of friends that I’ve grown to know and love over the years that are in this industry or not. I’ve always said to them, “The most important thing to me is that we’ll always be able to tell each other the truth, even if we don’t want to hear it. That’s the truth that I want to hear from you.”

## **6. Vibrations**

**RC:** So I have a question about the vibrational piece because I know that that's very key to your own experience and you've mentioned that a few times. In getting to know you a little bit more than I had previously, I saw a video online in which people were at a workshop with you and you were doing something with them that, to the uninitiated eye, might seem like a kind of faith healing, a laying on of hands. You put your hand on somebody's chest, or on their foreheads, and they collapse back down into the ground and they're held by your attendants and something is happening. I'm wondering from your own experience and perspective, what is happening?

**PD:** Well, the first thing is when it started happening I thought it was weird. And I'm like, "My God, how am I going to navigate this in my daily in life?" Like when I'm on a bus or in a plane. Thank God we're dealing with the universe's intelligence. What's happening is just like someone goes into a state of presence within themselves, they go into a state of connection and they then start embodying that and through their embodying of that they start reminding whoever is in front of them that that's who they are.

Typically the interaction gets to a point where the individual can no longer sustain it and they'll fall over or I'll get bored and I'll just push them over. Ultimately they'll end up on the ground. It doesn't matter. And then they'll have whatever experience they need to have. What's happening is a kind of a vibrational communion. It's like who they are as an energy and frequency communing with who I am. And it's just love.

**RC:** You said something that was quite remarkable a moment ago. You said, "Or I'll get bored and push them over." So in that situation other than you being bored, is there anything else happening? I mean, why would you choose to do that?

**PD:** When I first started doing this I was like 24. So all these teachers and all these people were coming to see me: "What's the big deal with this kid?" And so some of them come and I think they had achieved something, they have a certain level of attainment; they had created techniques and modalities and they're well known and established and they would stand there and do everything in their power not to fall over. And I'm like, "You know what? Fine, I'm not going to—it's okay, don't fall over. This isn't a competition to see who's more powerful." And so sometimes I just get to a point where I'm just bored; I'll even say, "Just lie down there," or I'll just push him over. It doesn't matter. That interaction, actually more and more, I've stopped because it became something.

**RC:** It's hard not to bring a lot of attention to that in ways that are going to be distracting from what is really there.

**PD:** Right, and I realized that it became something. And you know what? When it became something I stopped doing it. So now it occurs maybe once or twice a year at special events because people enjoy it. I'll play like the Black Eyed Peas or Muse or The Who or The Clash while I'm doing it to take all the meaning and significance out of it. So we're all just having a good time basically.

**RC:** Now because you're younger and you like music, before we go on I've got to ask you a question. What song by The Clash would you play in a moment like that?

**PD:** London Calling. I'm from England.

**RC:** That's right. I have a special fondness for "All lost in the Supermarket" but it wouldn't really be appropriate in that setting.

**PD:** I can't say I've heard that one.

**RC:** I won't sing it for you because people will...

**PD:** Go on, come on!

**RC:** Well it starts out like this, [singing] "I'm all lost in the supermarket. I can no longer shop happily. I came here for a special offer, guaranteed personality."

**PD:** Sexy Raphael. You've got a career, my friend.

**RC:** I don't think you can get that guaranteed personality at the supermarket. I've tried many times, even at Whole Foods, I don't think you can get it.

**PD:** No. So yeah, it was an interesting thing that began happening and people were having all kinds of shifts in their lives. But what I didn't want to happen was the people to attribute it to that experience. So in oneness there's no giver and there's no receiver. But it looks like somebody is giving something to somebody else, which immediately implies that there's some kind of hierarchy. And that to me didn't work well.



**RC:** Well I really am to that because when certain types of energies started playing out inside of my body and mind, there were times when it would show up like a healing energy. I would just be spontaneously led to put my hand in a certain place near someone's body and they would feel a very powerful energy. But also, there were times, like in a private session with somebody where the energy moving through me would connect with the energy moving through them and it was just one energy that we were both opening to and allowing and it's all very fascinating and sometimes very helpful. However, as you said, it's so easy to start attaching to all of that.

**PD:** Because what happens is people naturally go to that place of, "Wow, my God look at that person." And all the while missing the point that being what Jesus said, "You will do everything that I've done and more." They don't get that. To me, that's an invitation, that's a promise. That's not just to throw away. And by the way, "You'll do everything that I've done and more."

We all have this ability and ultimately we're moving our participation, I feel, in spirituality, into a vibrational arena where we just sit and commune with each other, where we're just being with each other. And we'll get to a point when no words are required anymore because for me all the language—language perpetuates the separation. In the absence of language, if you're just sitting with somebody and no words were exchanged but you're just communing, your being is just emanating forth and they are able to go to that place and meet you in that place, that's exquisite.

**RC:** Yeah, absolutely.

**PD:** And so that's what happens. It's been a funny evolution for me because my whole life I just thought I was strange. Prior to that, I'd sit next to people and they'd just start crying and start telling me their whole life's story. Things were just happening and I was just a child at that point; I remember when I was seven someone sat on the bench next to me and started crying telling me their whole life story. And I felt guided to touch them and all that they have this experience. And I'm just, "This is weird like, this is just weird. I'm weird."

**RC:** I had that whole exact same experience Panache, except I always wanted those people who would connect to me, who were almost always girls, to fall in love with me, and then when they didn't there was a lot of suffering.

**PD:** Nice.

**RC:** So I finally got a job later in life where I could do it and I wouldn't have to have that fallout from the experience. But I wanted to ask you about what moves through us in presence in that way. So if you were in one of those rare experiences now where you still do something like that, if someone were to stand up in front of you and you were both in presence together and something else were meant to happen; maybe suddenly you're dancing or spontaneous chanting is arising between the two of you. Would you just allow that in that circumstance?

**PD:** Yeah. I mean, for me it's been very interesting because coming into this country, as I'd never experienced like evangelical preachers, I'd never seen anything like it. They're far more reserved in England. And so you turn on the television with those preachers like [making sounds] and I'm just like, "What is this guy doing?—he's just doing it because he wants more money. This is just the biggest bunch of nonsense I've ever seen." And then all of a sudden, during one of those moments where I was just being with somebody, I started speaking in tongues. And I'm like, "My God! I'm speaking in some inaudible language that this other person can understand. They're having a conversation back with me." At that point my life got even weirder.

And here's what happens. In the vibrational dimension the mind is no longer able to comprehend or understand what's unfolding. So in the yogic tradition we call them "kriyas"—people go into spontaneous body movements; they start making sounds; they start speaking in tongues; they start rolling around on the floor laughing hysterically. Almost an induced state of catharsis arises where they start experiencing all their sadness or their anger or they start shaking all their fear out of their body. And more and more this vibrational dimension is what's serving as the catalyst for people's evolution.

So everything that's occurred as far as all the teachings and all the books and all that stuff is all well and good but there's something else arising in the midst of all of that, which is experiential; which cannot be quantified; it cannot be understood; It can just purely be experienced. And that's the shift, again, from the intellectual understanding of concepts, ideas and teachings into the experiencing; into the actual vibrational nuts and bolts and diving into the depths of that so you can fully embody that, and be in that—that's what's happening. So people are shifting their identification from intellect and mind into being and vibration.

**RC:** I hear what you're saying and I'm just nodding my head vigorously because as soon as that happens where something moves through us that mind can't put a concept around, it still tries

desperately. And it's easy to create boxes. This is what's happening or this is good or this is bad. And besides meeting people in those energetic places, one of the things that I intend to do is to normalize the experience: "Yes, this is what's happening right now. It's not better or worse than what was happening a moment ago, it's just different. And the truth is that when you do open up to all of who you are, you awaken aspects of consciousness and energies that weren't there before and that are often challenging to integrate, but really you don't have to do anything different than you ever did," which is what we started our conversation talking about; which is, "just be."

**PD:** That's right. It's like chop wood, fetch water.

**RC:** Right. It's also as best as I can see a self-directed process beyond our own choice. I once talked to George Feuerstein about this, the emanate yoga scholar when I was in the midst of some of my most challenging kriyas and I was wondering around looking for my teacher because I wanted someone so much to look me in the eye and say, "I understand. I see and what you need to do is take this herb and anoint yourself with this oil." But what George said to me in the conversation, that was so helpful, was, "Anything that you do because you decide or because someone else tells you what to do about this unfolding experience is only going to make it harder and going to create a longer process of integration."

**PD:** That's right. That's exactly right.

**RC:** That was really powerful for me. Often people think they're going crazy and they're concerned. And just to have someone there to say, "I know where you are. I've experienced something like that. Let's just keep allowing, keep unfolding," is sometimes the only real gift to give.

**PD:** That's right and that's why I've always said to people, "I'm just a friend listening. I'm just another bozo on the bus and we're walking in this journey together." And that to me is the greatest blessing of all; allowing for that and that feels good to me because this really is an age of personal empowerment and ultimately until people are fulfilling who they are, we're not going realize what's available to us as species. And so these greater shifts that are occurring vibrationally are actually allowing us to evolve beyond the mind to move into another dimension of who we are. Just to be able to kind of be a tour guide of that and support people in that and just kind of be a loving space for them. It's great. It's a great thing.

**RC:** Yeah, it is a gift. So Panache Desai, again I'm super grateful and what I didn't tell you is that you are the very last person interviewed for this series. So you've put a beautiful capstone on it and so I want to give you a special thank you and a big hug for that.

**PD:** Thank you. This was quite the experience, Raphael. It was all it was all it was billed to be, I have to say. Thank you very much for having me on the show.

**RC:** All right, you're so welcome. Take good care.

**Guy Finley**



Guy Finley is the best-selling author of “The Secret of Letting Go, The Essential Laws of Fearless Living,” and 40 other works, including his newest book “The Seeker, The Search, The Sacred: Journey to the Greatness Within,” that have sold over a million copies in 18 languages worldwide. His work has been featured on hundreds of radio and TV networks including *NBC*, *CBS*, *ABC*, *CNN*, *NPR*, and *PBS*. Guy has spent the last 30 years showing individuals the authentic path to a higher life filled with happiness, success, and true love. Finley lives and teaches in Merlin, Oregon where he is Director of non-profit Life of Learning Foundation. [WWW.GUYFINLEY.ORG](http://WWW.GUYFINLEY.ORG)

### **1. Transparency is Vital**

**RC:** Guy, it’s a pleasure to be with you today.

**GF:** Thank you, Raphael. I feel the same.

**RC:** So I like to begin these conversations because of the nature of the series by dropping into the present moment and just finding out where we each are. I noticed that I’m feeling pretty peaceful and I’m glad to be walking around my office as I talk to you because it gives me a freedom to be in the flow and to feel my physical body. I’m grateful for this opportunity to connect with you. So can you share with us what you’re finding about your own present moment?

**GF:** Well, I’m sitting where I always sit, which is in a small room with a large plate glass window looking out at the woods where I live. My days are outwardly pretty much the same in one respect, Raphael, and I seem to be more engaged in the work that I’m doing, as more demand appears to get it out. There’s always that marriage, the necessary marriage of these seemingly diverse worlds: what one must do versus the fact that doing is downstream from being.

So there’s always that demand and inward command that these worlds, when they meet, require. Ultimately if you want to know in a nutshell, I’m grateful to be here, what I call in the present

moment, which is where doing and being meet. So I'm happy to be onboard. It's a rainy day here in Southern Oregon, I've got my fireplace going and I'm ready to go.

**RC:** Okay, excellent. Well, the theme of being and doing and even of doing that comes from the source of being is something that has come up in a lot of the calls in this series. So I'm glad to hear you immediately speak to that and to honor it as a part of your own experience and your path. Before we go any further, I just want to say something, which is personal and you may not be aware of but a couple of years ago you and I were at the Omega Institute teaching at the same time and your seminar room was diagonally across from mine and it warmed my heart to see and to hear the joy on your participant's faces and the laughter that was coming from the room. I never got the chance to say hello and meet you.

**GF:** It's just the way it is.

**RC:** Yeah, and yet it feels like a kind of a coming full circle. We were neighbors then and now we're neighbors in being in the series.

**GF:** Yes, well that's fun Raphael. I always have a good time at Omega and I appreciate the campus and the people that work there. So, I'm sorry we didn't get the chance to say hello. In fact, I kind of try to make a point to say hello to some of the other people presenting there just because obviously no matter what the discipline is there's a common thread and it's always nice to touch base. So we'll consider this our hello, Raphael.

**RC:** Yeah, just in terms of transparency, one of the things of being "on the circuit" is that we're often moving around in close proximity to people from whose well we would love to drink from but there isn't the time. I had a conversation with the programming director at the Esalen Institute about how wonderful it would be if there was some kind of special week of round robin presentations where all the teachers could come and actually have the time to show up and be present for the other teachings. It hasn't happened yet but it's a dream of mine that it does.

**GF:** I do like that idea because there's never time to feel another person's energy, which is more important than what they say, and to see, "Who do I really resonate with?" and to establish that kind of relationship. As rare as it may be, it sure would be nice to have something like that. Keep the thought.

**RC:** I'll work on it. I want to just ask you also as we get going today, the series Teaching What We Need to Learn and the invitation to what I called 'radical transparency' when I put out the call for participants is really specific in nature. And since we don't know each other and we haven't gotten a chance to commune yet, I'm wondering just in general how you relate to, resonate with, or don't, the idea of transparency amongst teachers and the role of it perhaps in our teachings.

**GF:** It's a good question because there is a very fine line, I think. As someone who is considered a teacher and at the same understands that if you walk around with some idea of you being somehow unique or special for what you've been given as an instrument of what is divine—I think that's a surefire path to a lot of pain for yourself and everyone that you work with.

So I think transparency is a very personal choice. I teach it myself, not in the sense of that a person should walk around and throw open their shirt and pound their chest and say, "Look at me." But rather as the continual activity of a mind inquiring into its own activity to be present to oneself; to stand in the mirror of this present moment is the request, not only for revelation, but the demand that a person be transparent to themselves, setting aside whatever images that may plague them, because that's all an image can do in my opinion.

So transparency is vital. Ultimately, properly employed, it is the only instrument that guarantees the integration of an individual with who and what they are by revelation of what they're not.

**RC:** I was talking to one of the other participants in the series, a Vipassana and meditation teacher and psychotherapist named Tara Brach and she was saying that one of the great teachings that she had in her training with Jack Kornfield was confessing grandiosity. The idea was that as meditation teachers who were seeking to be transparent and vulnerable, that one of the greatest things they could do is notice a moment when a thought pattern around specialness or privilege would arise in them so that they could name it, accept it, dis-identify with it and ultimately even have some humor around it. I really related a lot to that story; that sounded like a wonderful training.

**GF:** I think that I would use the word "vital" for any individual to continually be willing to place themselves in that kind of crucible. And I would also say I don't know, Raphael, I don't know I would use the word, "dis-identify"—I think that when we are awakened to where some aspects of ourselves is saying, "Look at me" or "I deserve special attention"—that if we're really present to that moment, there's pain in that because there's always an unseen demand underneath it and

truthfully you wouldn't have the thought if something in life wasn't resisting that image that you have of yourself.

So the appearance of that part of your nature, if taken with transparency, meaning to be fully present to it—you don't want to drink from that cup anymore. You see how distasteful it is and what a disservice it is, not only to your own interior integrity but to anybody else that you might be working with that you could somehow unfortunately convince that they should treat you differently.

**RC:** So I appreciate that clarification and attention brought to that word, “dis-identify.” How would you state it in your own terms that would speak to what you just described in that moment of recognition?

## **2. Fear: The Feel is Real, The Why is a Lie**

**GF:** I'm a firm, I don't even want to use the word “believer”—I am quite certain that every moment of life notwithstanding its darkness or light, joy or sorrow, every single impression that we take in from the world around us has a very specific purpose connected to a much bigger story than our personality could ever design. It's a revelation: whatever moves around us, moves something within us. It's a perfect mirror.

And so the moment of revelation in which the impression the moment touches us with, we're given an opportunity to see something about ourselves that we wouldn't see if we hadn't been touched that way in that moment. It's an opportunity to bring to into—actually another order of intelligence is brought into existence. For example, I'll put a tortilla on a piece of an aluminum foil on top of my fireplace because I can cook something that way. And if I inadvertently reach over and touch the fireplace, I don't have to think to myself, “Let's see now, your hand is on something that's really burning it badly, you better get your hand off,” because that physical intelligence knows not to harm itself. Well if that's true for our physical being, how much more true is it for our spiritual being? So the instant I'm made aware of something dormant or momentarily inactive in me that's compromising or otherwise self-limiting, that split second of awareness is the same as the release of that part of myself. Because in the revelation there is the sudden realization, “Hey, you know what? This still is here. You still think people should treat you this way,” or “You still think nothing untoward should come at you,” and all of that revelation just continues the process of this integration where we realize we're not separate from the life that's revealing us to ourselves.



**RC:** So it was described in that same conversation that I had with Tara Brach, the idea of resting into or relaxing into the ocean and yet still seeing that the waves of our personality and our responses, like the ones that we've been talking about, will still arise. So it's not about trying to not make them arise or feeding into them, it's really just about a trust and a being, and a peace that comes from not resisting.

**GF:** Yes, that's the key Raphael.

**RC:** Yeah. And so maybe that term "dis-identify" sounds like a push-away when in fact it's all coming together in that moment.

**GF:** Yes, exactly. It's a singular movement. And the key here is that, to speak boldly, if you find somebody who says, "Yeah, I'm going to teach you to be a fearless human being," meaning they somehow are going to place you in a state of psychological prowess or whatever, where you won't have any problems or feel fear, you should pack up your little tent and run. Life is not about becoming a fearless person. It's about discovering that everything that frightens us serves a very distinct purpose in our transformation...I have a little poem that when it comes to fear:

*The feel*

*Is real*

*But the why*

*Is a lie.*

So it's not like you're going to suddenly arrive on some mountain top where you're not going to feel the waves. Quite the contrary actually, the more awakened an individual becomes to real life, the more present they are to the infinitude of waves. And the beauty of that broader relationship is one clearly understands as a result of that relationship, clearly I couldn't be experiencing these waves if there wasn't a ground over which and through which they were moving.

It's a marvelous process to realize that real fearlessness is basically coming to understand that whatever comes to you, comes to you for the good of you—never for the bad of you.

**RC:** So I want to jump to a natural follow-up to this discussion but first I just want to say before I forget that in picturing you at your fireplace with your tortilla, it reminds me to share with you and

with our listeners that this is probably the one conversation I will have in the series in which I'm speaking to someone in the same state and general ecosystem as me because I live outside of Portland, Oregon and you live down in Southern Oregon.

**GF:** Yes.

**RC:** We are fellow Oregonians. We're sharing the same cloudy sky today.

**GF:** Yeah and we better build an arc. It's raining and raining and raining.

### **3. Choices Made with Tears Falling**

**RC:** Yeah, absolutely. So yes, back to the follow-up, you have said and it's a beautiful evocative phrase and I know it goes to the heart of your teachings, you have said "Life will give you something more than whatever it is asking you to give up." That it will always do that. And I was wondering if you could share one or two moments in your own life experience where it took a while for you to perhaps to get to that clarity and that knowing because life was asking you to give up something that felt either too much, too painful, too precious to let of.

**GF:** Let me count the ways. Honestly Raphael, it sounds kind of big and maybe even too much, but in one respect I don't think that a day should go by where we don't have that experience. I mean in my personal life, for whatever reasons, I kind of started down this path around 10 or 11 years old. I was moved inwardly to consider things that weren't the kind of things kids thought about as a rule and it may be by good fortune, not by pain of regret that I was born into a very successful family. I was raised literally with the so-called illuminati of Hollywood. My running mates as a boy were the children of the Martin's and the Sinatra's and the Minnelli's and the Arnaz's.

From the earliest age, I mean literally, I think I was like 7 years old believe it or not, sitting on the lap of Jane Mansfield, a name some people won't even remember, in the Hollywood Christmas parade. And I remember I could feel her fear and smell the alcohol. And at that age I'm thinking to myself, "Everybody is kind of pompous here in the green room waiting for different cars" and I remember as clear as a day, "something is really wrong here. How can these people have so much and be so attended to and be so empty and broken?"

So kind of, "Gee, how do I resolve this contradiction?" Because as a boy with no worldly experience, you look at what you're told everything should do and be and give, and you sense the innate emptiness of it. What do you do? You can't go along with the world within you. Meaning the

part of you that says, just as your parents and aunts and uncles always tell you, “Don’t think about these things, just be happy with what you’ve got and you’ll have more than they did.” You know the whole spiel.

And from the earliest age all the way through my entire life, honestly, that kind of disparity would continue to appear in my mind and in my heart. So it isn’t a question of some courage or having a conviction to choose something higher, as much as it was a very great clarity that this road that I’m on and where it leads is untenable. A lot of the choices were made with tears falling down my cheeks, not with the chest held high and the chin up.

**RC:** When you say that, I’m drawn to know more about that, like what kind of choice do you mean you would make with tears running down your cheeks?

**GF:** I really don’t talk about these things and I know the interview is about that so I will throw in a couple of personal stories. I don’t really like to talk about Guy. When I was, gosh, Raphael, I think around 19, my partner Tony Martin, Jr., the son of Cyd Charisse and Tony Martin; again names most won’t know, but huge stars in the 50’s. We were signed to Motown Records, first white soft rock artists ever to sign with Motown Records. We had a great run. I worked with Neil Diamond after I left Motown. He signed me to his prestige label, and I remember about, I guess it was 1977 maybe, I’m sitting there realizing that as much as I love music, somehow I’ve become a slave of the thing I love. What started out with a great desire to sit down on the piano and hatch melodies and lyrics, now I got to keep doing it in order to support a lifestyle. You’re in your early 20’s and everybody is saying you’re the luckiest man on earth. And you’re sitting there and thinking, “I’m not.” Suddenly I’m burdened. I’m not liberated. Of course all of the music down in that time of my life, it was always about spiritual matters. I just covered it up with things that sounded like love songs. But the fact of the matter was that I was kind of miserable in my majesty. And there came a point where I had the great fortune, and I quit for a bit, Raphael. It just didn’t work and I traveled around the world. I went to India, went and dusted more feet with my forehead than I could tell you, hoping that somebody was going to give me some kind of a shaktipat and change my existence, which is really unreal.

Nature has to change. Momentary energy patterns—anyone with certain understanding can do to someone else. But to make a man different inwardly so that his being is the expression of what he does, not the other way around, is a different story. I came back from that trip disheartened, not in

the fact that I believe that something else existed, but that I wasn't going to find it that way. And then sure enough as these things work, you let go and I had the great fortune to meet a Christian Mystic, an author. His name was Vernon Howard. I spent 15 years with him. It was during that time when I first met him, that I had to choose, "What do I want? Do I want to follow my heart, which has this incredible longing to reconcile this fear and anxiety, this trying to prove myself; do I want to live that life and have all the trappings that make it appear like I've done or do I really want to be a human being who escapes the trap of his own nature?"

I can tell you there were times when I knew I had to retire from the music business in order to, believe it or not, drive all around and become a carpenter, a handyman, in order to make a living for myself. So I'd sit at the piano in those days and tears would run down my face. I would even bang my head on the piano because I did not want to go through what I knew was coming, which was the alienation of my peer group, not alone the fact that I would and was, but ultimately it was reinstated—I was disinherited from my family. I mean, I can't tell you at that time how terrible the cost seemed for something that has no absolutely no promise anything awaited me past that point.

So I've come to say, "If you think that the Kingdom of Heaven, whatever you call that, the gates of it have footsteps walking into it and you think you're going in that way, you're going in the wrong direction." The real Kingdom has heel marks where people are dragged backwards into it. We don't go in standing up, we go in on our knees or by our heels. I think as difficult is that may be to understand, most people have had a moment where some epiphany or insight made them realize that they could no longer remain the kind of man or woman they've been; it wasn't so much they were choosing to become something other as it was clear what they could no longer be.

#### **4. Limitation and The Light that Heals and Integrates Unconsciousness**

**RC:** I really appreciate you sharing that and one thing you probably don't know is that we share a background, a history in the entertainment industry. I, first of all, grew up in the same area that you did, maybe some years later.

**GF:** I bet you that. How old are you?

**RC:** I'm 51.

**GF:** I'm 63. You're right.

**RC:** But I ran with the pack of now Academy Award winners and superstars.

**GF:** Yes.

**RC:** And I also had a run. One of the things that I saw was, to go back to Sinatra, you mentioned earlier, a very different version of the, “If I can make it there, I’ll make it anywhere,” because the entertainment industry is a magnet for every kind of neurosis and intense attachment and fixation that you can imagine. And pretty much everybody is acting out their unresolved and unhealed story upon one another in this crucible, to come back to that word that you used. If one flips it, it could become an amazing spiritual practice to remain connected to one’s own heart in the midst of all of that.

**GF:** Yes, if that’s possible for someone, of course.

**RC:** And of course anyone who’s going to try that is going to do it imperfectly. I certainly did it imperfectly. But towards the end of my run, at least I had that intention and that meant that I had incredible grist for the mill of my own healing and initiation to be living in that environment. And now I have some tangential connection to it, but mostly not. It’s so interesting having been in the belly of the beast and then outside it and having the experience of oneself in both worlds.

**GF:** Yeah, that’s well put in and so true. One of the things that I like to help people understand and it connects to what we’re saying, is that the whole reason that we are, I call a divine dissatisfaction; we’re all born with this sense that there’s something missing and that we need to find and understand what it is. And it’s that divine dissatisfaction, I believe, that draws us, attracts us into whatever relationships in life we are ultimately handed over to for that wish; because it’s through the relationship that we’re introduced to some quality or character in our essence that we would never otherwise be made conscious of, were it not for that mirror in the world seemingly apart from us.

So in show business or in California or in any world, we are ultimately drawn to that which will reveal to us aspects of ourselves that we have to meet and ultimately reconcile through this process of awareness that we’ve been describing.

**RC:** So you said as you began to describe this, it may seem like a tall order or too much or words to that effect, but that you sensed that just about every day if one is paying attention, one might come across the request from life to give something up in return for something much greater. So if we jump forward over the decade towards the now or the near now, how does that show up for you?

**GF:** Through a very gradual but finely, fairly well established understanding that it's impossible for any of us to grow without meeting limitation. Limitation for me is invitation for transparency. We're kind of convinced, especially God help us, if we think we're something special, that we're not meant to encounter limitation. I'd argue the opposite. In one respect I'd say the more special you are, the more limitation you'll meet, because that means that you're increasingly willing to run into aspects of your own character to which you've been unconscious. And understanding that which reveals what is unconscious is the same as the light that heals and integrates that unconsciousness into who and what we are.

So if there's a blessing in my life it's that I don't—you don't go looking for it. No one says, "Boy, let me go out and suffer something today." But never run from anything that reveals to you where this gulf exists between what you understand versus what you're manifesting.

**RC:** So, again I think it's really helpful at least to some degree for our listeners and for our students to get as much of a direct sense as possible: how we navigate that. So are there particular, let's say, limitations that you have recognized in recent times that you turned into invitations and then therefore seen aspects of your unconscious for the purpose that you've been describing, such that you could then embrace them and come into greater wholeness?

**GF:** Well I'm sure I can come up with some things, I know that's not a problem. It's selecting.

**RC:** Right, there's no wrong choice but you just pick what comes to mind.

**GF:** Yeah I mean it's not. Like for instance, my whole life I suppose you could classify me as a kind of a "Type A" person. What I enter into, if I don't enter in with all 220 lbs. of myself, I don't go in—I jump. And when I jump and begin this process of working in and through what I see is needful, I'm not a huge fan of delay.

Now the problem with the idea that things should continue to be processed and worked through, that's proper. But the idea that one meets life with a demand upon it is the very thing that then seems like life is saying 'no' to you. This idea that someone or something has to happen the way that one wants it to happen, when it's supposed to happen—that's a killer. But just because you know it's a killer doesn't mean that whatever that essential quality is in this body that you have been given and the energies that manifested and that brought it forth, you could say, "Well I shouldn't be like that." It doesn't change it, does it?

**RC:** It might soften it but it doesn't change it.

**GF:** It might soften it but I say softening it through the idea that "I shouldn't be this way" is really strengthening it. So there's very fine line between where one recognizes this demanding self still lives in me. But to assert it and to place it over someone else is to not only to do disservice to the relationship but ultimately to place yourself in a situation where you still believe there's value to insisting. So there's a very fine line, isn't there?

**RC:** Yeah. And so if I'm getting what you're saying, and I'm going to try to extrapolate from it: sometimes where you might be challenged and come up against your own resistance is where, because you're an achiever, a Type A kind of person or have that tendency, you might arrive in a project or in a relationship with a certain kind of impatience or a "Let's get this done."

**GF:** Absolutely. It's impatience—but what a teacher it is. In fact, I would even argue that in one respect the more that one has a character or quality like that, the better off they are because they get to see, first the inherent punishment in believing that somehow things have to go the way you want them to go when you want them to go that way. But, to the high side of it, I've come to see that life never says 'no'. It says 'not yet' and 'not the way you wanted' perhaps, which is pretty different. But if you're sitting there pressing against what seems to be a denial, then tell me how is that nature different than what it's fighting with?

**RC:** Right. And so the more we recognize those places where we're saying that "It has to be this and it has to be a certain way and it has to be on our timing," then we're just resisting.

**GF:** Absolutely. And if we're willing to taste it, I have a little saying that I teach, but I teach it because I use it myself. In a moment that's unwanted, in the face of someone that's unpleasant or being in some way that you think is disrespectful no matter what there is, no matter whether they are or aren't, I say, "Thank you, I didn't know that about myself." You turn the mirror around because if you don't—

### **5. Awareness: A Feast of Possibilities**

**RC:** It's so interesting how those around us and those close to us reflect differently than people who, let's say, are our students and come across us in a teaching context. I would say, for instance, that my own family, my wife and my daughter and my stepdaughter, they love me, I'm sure of it—but I think that in most ways they are profoundly unimpressed by me. And they will constantly reflect aspects of my being and give me a chance to see them that others either wouldn't or

wouldn't be able to. Actually one of the things that they have shown me is exactly what you were talking about, the 'let's go, let's do it on my time frame'.

I've mentioned this in some of the other interviews that it's given me the opportunity to be much more mindful about that. So I'm wondering in terms of your most intimate relationships, those around you in addition to that Type A tendency, is there anything else that they reflect back to you that gives you the opportunity to say, "Thank you for showing that to me."

**GF:** I have two main reflectors that way. My wife, we've been together for over 30 years, to whom I am more grateful than I would ever be able to express because she is such a sensitive woman, not in the sentimental, sickening sense of it. If I'm too intense, it's instantaneously revealed in her. Now I am by nature, intense; there's a constant—again I don't know if you can separate the degree that an individual is aware of the life around them from the taughtness of the web that they are. You know what I mean, Raphael?

**RC:** That one I would love for you to unpack a little bit.

**GF:** Well you put a spider web out and isn't it most sensitive because it's strung to perfectly feel the touch of the wind? So our spiritual work is intended to create within us this gradually perfecting body of the opposites by which this tension, kind of conscious suffering really, is always present because everything touches it; there's an intensity. It has to be, to use the word 'tense' not in a negative derivative but in a sensitive derivative. So how does one deal with consistently entering into this conscious willingness to be drawn tight with the fact that that same intensity can be a punishment on anyone that just happens to hear you speak. You know what I mean?

**RC:** Yeah.

**GF:** So there's always this beautiful marriage and my marriage with my wife is this wonderful mirror for me in which I get to see and then have to suffer the tension more consciously, so that it's not expressed unconsciously. Because consciously understood, it allows for compassion. Because compassion is the ability to instantaneously feel the energetic body of another human being, not respective of what they say or how they discount themselves, but the state itself.

**RC:** So give us a documentary moment, this is fascinating—I think it could be really helpful for people listening, when you might be in your intensity to a degree that could be painful energetically to other people and in this case your wife, specifically. She has her way of drawing your attention to



that. Once it comes into your awareness, take us through and it might even be like micro moments, but take us through the moment of awareness to the experience of compassion and to whatever shift might come of that.

**GF:** All right, first a broad statement. All pain visited upon another human being is the negative byproduct of the individual delivering that pain for his or her having become identified with something. Because when we're identified with something, no matter what it is, no matter how seemingly important, if you're identified with it—you're asleep. And it's when we're asleep that we deliver this suffering that we're actually experiencing ourselves without knowing it unto those around us. If I had a particularly productive day, for instance writing, which takes tension believe it or not, even though it's a soft experience there's still that energy—I have to have that kind of energy.

My wife comes down to the office or I go up to the house and I'm in that gear where my mind is dwelling on whatever the process was or I'm immersed in that state of being. There's no relationship there. I can see it immediately on her face. She may not even know that she's registered my isolation. But the instant that you are present to that impression and are open to it, what a great paradox—open to it because of how tense you are. Bang! There it is, the reverberation is there and suddenly the revelation and the recognition, “Okay, I need to quit. I need to get out of this identified state that I didn't know I was in.”

I had a student once come up here where I teach in Southern Oregon. It was very funny. His name was Wan and he came up and he said, “I was walking through the supermarket and I was working so hard to know that my hands were on the cart and I was being as present as I could. I walked over it and there it was—I was so happy—there was tuna on sale and it was so cheap I couldn't believe it so I got a case. And when I got in the line to check out, the supermarket person said, “What kind of cat do you have?”” And Wan said, “I don't have a cat.” Because I was identified with the word tuna and then the cheap price, I didn't see it was cat food.” Isn't that delicious?

**RC:** That is and I'll tell you something else that may or may not have been in the story as told, but it was in the story as I took it in. I've got this thing where when I discover, whether it's an item of food that I love or a shirt that seems really great, then I think “I should buy a bunch of that.” I'm telling myself a story that it seems like I don't want to be without that great shirt so let me wear through six of them. But then of course by the time I've worn through the first one, either I don't

like the other five that are stacked in the closet or I found something that I think is so much better and now I don't have the money to buy it because I've invested in the tuna.

**GF:** That's classic. That characteristic, that quality, we all have it to a degree. You won't find some of these characteristics in any of us that aren't present in all of us. And to me, I teach my students, "There is no such thing as a bad fact about yourself." There is no such thing as a bad fact. Facts become painful when resistance to them exists to prove to us that we're not what we've just seen. We are all things that we see. In fact you can't experience something that's not already a part of your consciousness. So if it appears to you, learn to embrace it, confess it, to go back to that word that we started this with.

**RC:** And also I'd like to go back to the example that you gave because I think it was really unfolding in a super way. Because there's a moment where you noticed that you're in your writerliness, let's say. And then you encounter your wife and you see the look on her face and you recognize since you're not in resistance that immediate invitation to engage. But why I wanted to come back to that moment is that it seems to me and I want to run it by you that there is still in that moment infinite choice.

So, for instance one might choose to drop the writerly mode and find out what's between you and, "How was your experience, honey?" or "What are you feeling right now?" But also on a certain day it might be "It's so good to see you and I'm looking forward to connecting and I'm realizing that the reverberations of what I've been in are unwinding slowly, so it might be a good idea for us to come into greater connection a little bit down the road."

**GF:** Of course. And all of that in is in one respect presented simultaneously. It's synchronistic with the moment but again, it really goes to the heart of what we're talking about: that awareness itself changes us, not what we do as a result of the awareness. Awareness itself is the changing energy because if I walk in and I'm still identified either with a thought process or maybe just an energy, because sometimes these things can be quite—you can be very deeply absorbed in a certain state. It's not that it's bad to be absorbed. It's just that now life has changed your environment. And you can understand that being absorbed here isn't going to work. You've got to come out.

So when life shows you by contrast that another possibility exists, in that awareness is a kind of a feast of possibilities. But awareness ultimately will make the choice I believe, not, "Well I shouldn't be like this" or "I should be like that." Because then you've just move into a model by which you're

identifying with something else. And you're still not present because if you're identifying with an idea or an ideal, an image, you're not present to the person; you're first in relationship with the image and then hoping the person will reflect to you what you're trying to be.

**RC:** I think I get that and I want to come back to your original statement which was awareness changes you, rather than something that you do as a result of awareness. I want to double check that because I know I've worked with a lot of clients over the years who come to have an awareness of some pattern in their behavior or what their feeling or their thoughts. But that awareness doesn't as yet have the capacity to heal or free them.

**GF:** Yes, that's because they are aware of the understanding intellectually that the pattern is self-limiting or destructive. The actual awareness of the nature that is the parent of that pattern as its acting is a different story.

**RC:** As it's acting.

**GF:** Yes, as its acting. That's the key. None of us actually believe that we could be set against ourselves. How is that even possible? So we only have the evidence after the fact that I've acted against myself. What we want, for the sake of being both students and teachers at all times, is to be present of the nature as it is acting against itself and me not knowing it because I'm identified with what's it's promising.

**RC:** So I wanted to give a personal story that is along the lines of this example of you coming out of your office as a writer. Because I think it's worth running through a different version with personal and vulnerable version of mine.

**GF:** Before you do it, can I amplify this a little bit with something else? Because it's right to the heart of this. Where I live here in Southern Oregon over these many years I have cultivated a very nice relationship with a handful of deer. So there's one doe, her name is Angel, that is the matriarch of this cluster of does. I've been hand feeding Angel for over ten years.

Now yesterday, this is so funny, I think. I came out in the morning—I'd had a very quiet morning, beautiful morning; I was quite contemplative. And I walked out and I know that Angel reads me instantaneously. She comes out, "Come, girly girl. Come over." And she walks over expecting to be given something to eat but she picks her head up and looks at me. And her eyes go wide, like she's sees a mountain lion and throws her feet forward and runs backward 15 feet. I go, "Angel, what's

the matter baby girl? Come on.” And she comes again because she knows me and gets within 10 feet; I got ready to give her some peanuts. She looks at me and runs away again. I go, “My God, I think I know what’s going on.”

So I come back into my house and I look in the mirror and my hair, for whatever reason, looks like Don Kings, standing completely straight up, all of it. I must have slept hard or something like that. And hair on end is a form of aggression to animals. So Angel is picking up aggression from my physicality. Now I have also walked out after being on the phone or being involved in something and there’s that pressure; I’ve also walk out and seen her do the same thing even though my hair is fine. So she picks up the energy.

And that’s what I’m getting too. If we are present to everything around us, we can be asleep in ourselves and not know it. Because of this inclusion, this is really an exclusion from life through this process of being identified with our own states, whatever they may be. So I wanted to share that because I thought it was so delightful. I went back in the house, put a hat on, a skull cap, came out and everything was fine.

**RC:** I love that and I love how it can be the same, even when your hair is its usual not raised fashion—she just gets it. I think we all have that same sensing ability and whether either we tune into it or not, we all have it; when we walk into a room and we know.

**GF:** Absolutely, that’s the lesson. That’s it. Life, I think is always doing that with everything around us.

**RC:** Yeah. So the story that I wanted to tell—it happened just last night and so it’s connected to this because in the midst of the awareness piece that you’re sharing, there’s also the way that we can kind of do violence to ourselves and others with the should part, the efforting part that you also alluded to. And becoming more aware of that in myself in every situation always feels like freedom.

So it’s an interesting moment because I’ve had a very long day and I’ve worked very hard and I know I’m going to sleep soon. I have a short amount of time to watch my favorite show. In our house because a lot of the rooms are close together, we have wireless headphones when we’re watching TV late at night. So what it does is it takes you kind of out of the room and puts you into a direct relationship with the TV and also it makes you less available to the environment around you.

**GF:** Yes, clearly.

**RC:** My wife was coming home from a long meeting that she had. So the first thing that I noticed was just a slight tension in myself. The first thing I did, I smiled and I waved.

**GF:** Yeah, right, which is a wave off like, “Don’t land here.”

**RC:** Well, I wasn’t sure really because, first of all, I knew what I was called to do in that moment, which was to continue watching my show. And I also felt the should arise very quickly and suddenly I was in her business such that I was imagining that if I didn’t pause the show, if I didn’t take off the headphones, then she would experience that as a slight of some kind or a lack of interest or care. So it was just one of those moments that I think so many of us are in all the time, when we’re in close relationship to other people, which is “What is authentic for me? What is compassionate? How do I relate to a drive I’m having and also a desire for connection that I have with someone else?” It seems like all of that can’t be satisfied at the same time.

**GF:** And you know what? It can’t, but there can be a balance and that’s where a marriage between two people really comes into play. I understand completely. I’m down here, I’m working, especially if I’m writing; and my wife comes in and she wants a kiss, she wants to sit, maybe on my lap—for whatever reason she’s wild about me. I know that I mustn’t take my attention away from what I’m doing.

Now same token, I can be sitting at 6:30 at night after I’ve had a very hard day working and I want to sit here and eat my apple and watch my Discovery Channel. She comes in and just seeing her come into the frame of the room. you can feel the pressure come up—it’s irritation. But the irritation is never right. No negative state, meaning being identified with the irritation, is the problem—resisting it—so then one is brought back to that crucible moment. First, am I willing to be transparent right now? Boy, this is pretty amazing. Are you that set on being identified with sitting here quietly that you can’t stop this while your mind is saying, “But you have every right, you’ve worked hard, ya-di-ya-di-ya,” so you’re sitting in the midst of a clamoring set of voices in your head, all trying to figure out who you should be. And what I’m saying is that none of them know.

## **6. What-I-Am-A**

**RC:** So I think this conversation is awesome and I think so many people will be nodding their heads here. For me though, this goes back in some ways to the deer in your yard and also the ability that we have to sense ourselves ever more fully as if we were the deer. So what I mean by that is

that there are an infinite amount of ways that I could, let's say, leave the headphones on, right? One of them has a kind of a body language and an irritation that you're describing that says somehow to my wife, "You're not welcome or you're an irritant to be here now." But I could leave the headphones on with a smile, and whisper, "Hey, honey welcome home. I want to talk to you about your meeting but I'm going to watch the show for a few more minutes. I hope that's okay."

**GF:** Absolutely.

**RC:** And suddenly there's an inclusion and an ease and a sense that all these things that seemed like they were in competition were never.

**GF:** Yes, that's exactly right. And then you'll have to use the words: "You've honored your own wish and you've been respectful at the same time." That happens quite often.

**RC:** Yeah. And I think for me the point is that if I'm not in that mode that you just described and I'm attentive, I will feel that energetically in myself. So if I have that intention and I'm willing to tune in, it becomes pretty clear very quickly and also kind of painful and untenable to be in that purposeful separation.

**GF:** Exactly. Then to use the words, I would say, "One is properly reading the moment," but in truth you're not apart from the moment, as its being read. This is why awareness ultimately, being present, is the ground of all proper action because otherwise choices are being made based on shoulda or woulda and coulda's.

**RC:** Right.

**GF:** As opposed to what-I-am-a.

**RC:** Right. And this is why I've always loved this statement from Marshall Rosenberg and I don't know if you spend any time with the model of Nonviolent Communications that Marshall created.

**GF:** I'm not familiar with it.

**RC:** One of the things that he says when it has to do with negotiations amongst conscious and aware adults is that if I make a request of you, Marshall says, "Please do not say yes out of any sense of duty or obligation. Because if you do then I'm aware that there's going to be a payback somewhere for one or both of us down the road. And so please instead start with your "no" if that's

the truth and then let's see if we can further negotiate out of care and compassion a solution or a settlement or a way forward that we both can fully embrace.”

**GF:** I like that whole idea because if compromise is born out of fear of arousing something negative in a person, you will meet that condition again. It's impossible that you don't. Whereas if it it's a compromise born out of mutual understanding where we are both saying yes to what we know is good and true, even if it means a limitation to some degree to a wish, then you've got the basis for building something.

**RC:** Yeah, absolutely. And I remember a great moment of freedom and liberation for me happened—this is many years ago in my 20's and I had agreed to take my Dad and Mom to the airport. They were going on a trip to China. At the same time I was offered these amazing free tickets to see my favorite band and I called on the phone and I wanted to find out if there was a way that they could get to the airport and be completely satisfied and if I could also go to see my concert.

You might not know about this me, but I'm Jewish and so somewhat Jewish guilt has played a large part in my own life and also in the generations that were before me. And so it just so happens that at that moment the very idea that my wish would matter or would be relevant or need to be considered was anathema to my father because all that was required was fulfilling one's obligation to one's parents and any noise that would interfere with that had no place in the conversation.

**GF:** That's right.

**RC:** And it just so happened that the band, which at that time was The Clash that was so important to me; for the first time in my life, I think, in that moment I was able to stand apart from that almost automatic or genetic sense of guilty responsibility that I could begin to have a conversation both with myself and my Dad about how we may go through this differently. And he was not happy.

**GF:** No, but that's the right thing. That's the right way to understand that not only do I not live in a world exclusive of all others, but neither do you. And if I'm willing to be as honest as I can, true as I can, even though I may miss the mark by 100 miles, the very action I take to be true to myself, as I understand it, requires that you're going to see where it is that you have created an exclusive life. So my work becomes your work—then it becomes valuable for everybody, even if no one gets the point of the lesson. You still made a new possibility appear.

**RC:** Yes, and the genes and the conditioning runs deep so I'll never forget it; I can laugh about it now with my Dad, but at that time when I finally said 'no' to the only ultimatum I was being offered, he said to me and in this very tone: "Someday when you are a lot older and a lot wiser, you will look back on this day and you will realize what you have done."

**GF:** I know it. I've heard the same sentence. In fact it's somewhat of a—I was born into, my father was Jewish and my mother was Presbyterian. My mother's family was all basically gone. And so my grandmother and grandfather, uncle, aunt sold that business. I was raised fairly well into the Jewish tradition, seder dinners ya-di-ya-di- ya. As a result when I was I don't know 11 or 12, I was sent to Temple Emmanuel to be set for a Bar Mitzvah. My parents, God bless them, about three or four weeks before the event, I went to them and I said, "I've done what you've asked, I've tried to understand but honestly, the Rabbi is angriest man I've ever met in my life. I don't resonate with what I'm learning and I'm asking you, I don't know what I'm going to do but I'm asking you to relieve me of this responsibility that you say I have to go through." And they did.

And then from there I went into this Presbyterian school for a little bit then I went to Catholic school; then I went and got involved in some Buddhism things. I've wound my way through my teens with all these different ways trying to figure out something that fit. Ultimately nothing in its existing case or perhaps the way it was presented to me fit the bill. But my parents, when I first presented that, my mother understood, but my father said something to me similar to what your father said, which is, "You don't know what you're doing here. You'll regret this and you'll see that I was right in my insistence." But they acquiesced to this more interior demand that I had to honor that which I knew I couldn't honor the way they wanted me to.

**RC:** Yeah, that's so important to hear and to reflect on in this way. We just have a couple of minutes left but I want to say that another participant in the series, Susan Kaiser Greenland works with mindfulness and children and I'm thinking as we're talking, we're both talking about our relationships with one or both of our parents. I'm a parent now and I have a 4 ½ year old who is a rascal in every sense of the word. Just full of life and has a very strong will. I'm not an astrologically oriented person but she's a Scorpio and she fits that description. She's just filled with joy, exuberance, and I couldn't love her more.

Actually it's an ongoing spiritual practice for me to enter into those dozens of moments that happen each day where a parent can just unconsciously and automatically revert to "I'm in the power



position and I want something and I want something from you and I want you to do to it my way. And that's just a part of what being a parent and child is all about." I do my very best to catch every one of those moments and to ask the question, "Is there a way that I could meet her, such that the will that she is expressing is valued and is esteemed as some kind of wisdom that can be worked with as opposed to against?" It comes up in the tiniest things like, "Okay, honey it's time to turn out the light." "No, I want the light on." And I could just say, "Well, no,"—and parents have to have boundaries and everybody has to learn they can't do whatever they want. But if I pause, often I realize, "Well the goal here,"—and just to use that example—"is for my daughter to go to sleep. She may have a way to do that that's different from the way that I imagine that's going to happen for her."

So I feel that, as I said, it's a spiritual practice for me to keep waking up to those moments where there's a kind of even very subtle power over that can enter into the relationship when it's unnecessary and take something away from her.

**GF:** Yes, of course. Because how many of us remember just like your father said, only mine was the question, "Why?" and the answer was, "Because I said so." How nice it would be for parents and for all of us to understand that of course there are boundaries, like say, a child is afraid of the dark. Well, you can't drive them into the dark. You need to help them understand that there's something in their mind; even if they're 4 years old you can begin to share the experience, instead of demand that your experience is corroborated. I'm wholly on board there; learning to get out of the rush because I'm not going to say, "Because my TV show is on and I don't want to mess with you." I need to slow down; if I slow down I'll see more; if I see more, I'll be introduced to more parts of myself that I would blame you for producing. If I stop blaming you and thank you, meaning be present to what the relationship offers up, then change becomes possible not only within me but in my relationship with you and everyone else.

**RC:** Yeah, and in hearing that I'm thinking that you actually can drive your child or anyone into the dark. It's just that you and that person will pay for that over and over and over.

**GF:** Over and over again. That's right.

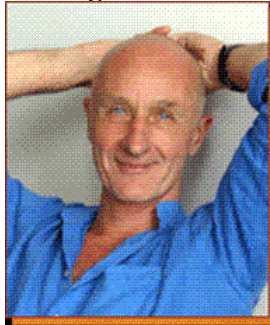
**RC:** Yeah. So I really wanted to just take a moment and bow in gratitude to you because I feel that in the course of our conversation, something opened up and there was a possibility for us to commune around some of these themes in a very personal way and it warms my heart and I love

having the opportunity to get to know you a little bit that way and to feel the way that you're teaching is your learning and how you embrace that. It's inspirational in a very heart full way, so I'm very grateful.

**GF:** I'm glad we had a chance to talk too Raphael. Now we're going to have to actually meet.

**RC:** Yes! (Laughs)

**Roger Housden**



Roger Housden grew up in the cleft of a Cotswold valley on the edge of Bath, England. His writing career began by writing features on the arts for *The Guardian* in the UK and serving as an interviewer for *BBC Radio*. Housden's first book was published in the U.K. in 1990, and as of 2012, he has published 20 books, including the best-selling "Ten Poems" series, which began in 2001 with "Ten Poems to Change Your Life," and ended with "Ten Poems to Say Goodbye," in 2012. Roger moved from his native country in England to the Bay Area in 1998 where he continues to write and teach writing courses. [WWW.ROGERHOUSDEN.COM](http://WWW.ROGERHOUSDEN.COM)

### **1. Those Who are Willing to be Vulnerable Move Among Mysteries**

**RC:** I want to start as I often do just by noticing what I'm feeling in this very moment so that you can have the opportunity as well and that we create a field of felt presence together. I'm feeling, I would just say, grateful to be talking to you. Also, my body is acting up a little bit, so I feel kind of a little like I would say scratchy internally and I'm hoping that as we get rolling that the energy between us will expand my experience a little bit. But that's me. How about you in this moment?

**RH:** I'm sitting in a comfortable armchair and I'm looking at a big, blue sky in California. So I'm feeling pretty alive this morning, which I don't always do, but I am this morning. Alive and very interested really in our potential conversation.

**RC:** Yes, good! Well, I want to start out with something that is on your actual homepage at RogerHousden.com. Very prominent is a quotation from Theodore Roethke. And the quote is, "Those who are willing to be vulnerable move among mysteries." And I was so moved myself to read that quote and vulnerability is really one of the themes of this series. So I wanted to begin just by asking you to share a little bit about how vulnerability works and is a part of your own life. How do you move with it?

**RH:** Well, my first response to that is that in our willingness not to know, I think lies our vulnerability. So in the realization that we really do live in life as a mystery which is unfolding as

we speak, our life is not something actually we control directly from some throne somewhere inside the head, the brain. But that my life, your life, life unfolds in ways that we cannot fathom beforehand. That condition of not knowing produces in a way a sense of wonder and a sense of openness to what may come. And it's that sense of openness that I would call the root vulnerability. Openness both to what may come from our internal world and also from the world itself outside. So really not knowing, I think. I've always loved the title of that very old, English-Christian book written in the, I think, 13<sup>th</sup> century called *The Cloud of Unknowing*. It was written by an anonymous author. And the essence of that book is to lean into the fact of our unknowing. That's what he's writing about. We presume it's a he, I don't know, it may not have been. So I very much like that. It's what we could say Rilke's holding the question rather than running for the easy answer.

**RC:** Yes. And just to speak for a moment about *The Cloud of Unknowing*, it played a very important part in my own personal life. There was a time where I was going through a very powerful spiritual opening, at which times it's very easy to become very grandiose or inflated with what one is experiencing. And I happen to have read *The Cloud of Unknowing* at that time. And there was a passage that I'll transfer into our vernacular. It said, "For those of you who think that you are special as a result of having some kind of spiritual experience, perhaps you should look at it this way. Maybe you were so hard-headed that that was the only way you would ever get it." And I remember when I read that passage I felt guilty as charged! And it was powerfully humbling for me in a really helpful way.

**RH:** That's wonderful. Yes, with the poets, one of the lines that T.S. Elliot wrote that I've always attempted to remind myself of is that everything ultimately, in terms of any kind of spiritual practice, returns to humility. And that humility is endless. In other words, we would never find the source of our own humility, if you like, because we're forever covering it over with who we think we are and who we think everyone else is and what we think life is and essentially unknowing, whereas the humbling process is the gradual peeling away of all our certitudes.

**RC:** Which life will do whether we want that to happen or not.

**RH:** Well, sometimes we can cling pretty hard, you know? I would say that denial is a pretty powerful force in human life. Mine is as much as anybody else's.

**RC:** Sure. Well, I want to talk for a moment on this theme of vulnerability, specifically about emotional vulnerability because in the work that I do with people, individually and in groups, one of

the things that I find over and over, is that we have this natural protective mechanism. We want to shield ourselves from difficult or challenging emotions and we feel that we gain our power from being able to protect ourselves that way and then eventually when that doesn't work and we suffer enough, we go the other direction and we turn to our emotional pain, and we find that through that vulnerability to our emotions, we actually become more powerful paradoxically. At least that's what I've seen over and over and certainly in my own life as well.

And I'm interested in talking to you about emotional vulnerability for a specific reason and that is because I don't know if you see yourself as this way. This may make you laugh, but you are a very regal person. You invite us with a kind of a majesty into the mystical realm through the poems that you present in your anthologies and through your own writing. And there's something that is really inspiring in that persona that you present, at least to me personally as I read your work and as I see you speak. And as a result, it makes me wonder about the messiness behind that because I know that I sometimes, when somebody is kind of magisterial in a positive way, it inspires me on the one hand and also I noticed the places where I don't feel that way. And so I'm wondering what you're inspired in this moment to share about Roger and Roger's life that we wouldn't guess or sense in terms of the mess, the shadow, etc., because of the way that you share with us in such a powerful and kind of an almost classical way. And some of that may have to do with being British and your beautiful accent! But I think you get what I'm asking.

**RH:** (laughs) Yes! Well actually, most of my books are pretty full of my own personal stories and my frailties and vulnerabilities, especially around relationship. So what I tend to do in my books, especially the poetry books, I mean, really, I use poetry in those books as a doorway to reflecting and exploring different existential themes that concern and interest me and concern and interest most people. One of those being love and loving and falling out of love and relationships. That's been an ongoing theme for me, so it's interesting you use the word classical in relation to me, which I can sort of understand and maybe it's partly the American perception of Englishness. But I'm essentially—not essentially—I'm an out and out romantic. But romanticism and classicism are not opposites, really. I can certainly see that both are part of who I am.

So the whole romantic story of the beloved and longing and losing and loss, I've just written a book all about loss called *10 Poems to Say Goodbye*. That's a theme certainly where my life has become chaotic or fallen down black holes and I've had 3 major relationships in my life, people I've either been married to or lived with for a long time. And the ending, quite apart from the beginning of

each of those, the ending of each of those was absolutely, of course, a profound shaking of who I thought I was and also my whole world really, because each time my world changed dramatically. One of those times was actually the time I came from England to live in America.

So along with the emotional vulnerability and also tenderness, goes the uncertainty of the outer world that went with it. So my livelihood changed each of those three times, my place of living in the world, where I was living in the world, changed. So all those things together, I think, really constituted an ongoing question of identity that is who I think I am, what I take myself to be. That echoes back to what we spoke about in the first place, which is not knowing, because as the layers of who I take myself to be start to, in some degree, peel or reveal other layers, I realize I'm less and less sure of who Roger Housden is.

**RC:** I really appreciate that and I want to follow up on it. And of course, when we're talking about these kinds of truly wrenchingly emotional transitions, a lot of it is personal and can completely stay for as long as it needs to. But still, there might be something you want to share around that idea of who I thought I was really changes. So for instance, the most recent relationship transition of the three that you talked about, is there anything that you can say about who you thought you were previous to that ending and loss and what you came to see through that?

**RH:** Well, I think it's more to do with beliefs that I carried into that relationship and the way in which I saw those beliefs change and eventually fall away. And this is not about the other person, who they were or weren't. It's really more about who I thought they were or what and who I thought I was in relation to them. And so that whole projective power, if you like, I mean, you know that the last relationship, which is marriage with Maria, a woman called Maria, was like a fairy tale; in its beginning, which I speak about in some detail in *10 Poems to Change Your Life*, because it was a life-changing event.

I dreamt of this woman six months before ever knowing she existed and literally saw this person, so that when we actually did meet, of course, I took my own vision, if we can call it that, six months prior as some kind of proof that this was—in other words, I put a layer of meaning on our meeting that took it out of being a delightful meeting into something more. My mind had made something a great deal more of it because of the somewhat cosmic experience I'd had several months before on my own.

**RC:** Wait, I just want to add before you go on, Maria has written in her own way about that also. I remember reading it. And that there was a kind of fateful or momentous aspect to the first time that you actually met in physical presence and shared a gaze. So there was something mutual in that meaning or projection that you're describing. It wasn't just happening on one side of the relationship.

**RH:** No. I think that's true. And you know, again, I keep referring back to 'don't know' because at the time I was convinced I knew, you know, that this was it and that this was... many reasons, you know? She walked into my life this perfect time, which of course in some way she did because that's what happened! But what I saw in myself was the way in which even at the time actually, but I was powerless to not do it. I saw how we—all of us, I think—desperate to place meaning on anything and everything that happens where fundamentally something just happened.

And I think it's always impossible—to me, anyway—to understand the reason. There's such complexity in any event that occurs in our lives, stretching back who knows how long, that I can only return to it as a mystery. But at that moment, I consolidated that idea of a mystery into 'this is it and this is what is meant to happen and we're going to do this and we're going to get married, etc.," which we did do. And the fact that it lasted what, six, seven years doesn't mean that it shouldn't have happened, of course. It doesn't mean that it was a failure even, necessarily. What might have been a failure was my image of this being a lifetime bond. But the value and the richness of those several years, I think, wasn't diminished because they ended, because the time ended. But that's not the beginning. I shaped the whole experience into "This is the mate of my life and this is how we're going to live our lives." And that's not what happened. So that's a humbling process.

## **2. Faith and Failure**

**RC:** Yes, and I really appreciate you for sharing it and I wonder if you can say anything about something that you believed about yourself or about who you are in relationship and how you function in relationship that somehow came apart or dissolved through that process of transition and loss. In other words, the personal part, like you said, has to do with the two of you and that particular intimate dance, that's not our concern. But did you come to see how you'd be in relationships as different from perhaps your own self ideal or something similar to that? Because I know that's been the occurrence for me, for sure.

**RH:** I'm not sure that I felt that, actually. It's not so much that I thought I was one person going in and realized that I was another person going out, but it was more of the process of bowing down to inevitable apparent failure. 'Failure'—being human, it's a humbling process because we make fools of ourselves. I make a fool of all of myself. I fall down and I confirm a certain something that turns out not to be certain and I go this way and then I realize actually I was meant to go the other way. Essentially, having faith in life and in the journey, includes having faith that all these apparent failures are part of an intelligent mosaic, if you like, that makes up my life.

So it's really an ongoing journey of accepting not so much particular character foibles or weaknesses, although of course they will be there as well. But just the fact that I'm going to make decisions not that I'm going to regret later, but that take me in a different direction that I thought they were going to. And so the feeling of being a failure—certainly when the marriage ended—I really did feel a real love there, an ideal, and out of and because of that, I felt a failure. Part of the process of healing from that was embracing that sense of failure into my understanding of who I am. Does that make sense?

**RC:** It does and it brings up a question for me, too, because when you entered into the relationship as you described, there was meaning that you projected onto it, and then at the end there was a different kind of meaning because failure is an interpretation as well or it could be literally an emotion that you feel in your body or it could be an interpretation of the events or a judgment about the way that you acted or didn't act.

**RH:** Absolutely! I mean the feeling, it's a feeling response to a belief, really, to an idea that has been going in a certain way. And part of the learning is the humbling process of realizing I don't know the way this is meant to go. I don't know ultimately what this is for. I do know that this is an integral part of my life experience. I know that. So if I set it up in the beginning as being for this and it doesn't turn out as that, I'm setting myself up to feel a failure!

**RC:** Yes.

**RH:** Until a point where I come to accept and embrace that and acknowledge that and realize that it really is all part of the pattern of my life.

**RC:** And so something about failure seems like it's important to stay with for a moment because it also has to do with an original idea of purpose. So we come together in a partnership and what is the



purpose? Are we going to be there to serve each other's opening to love? Are we going to be there to heal, are we going to be there to raise a family? And later on we might find that our original purpose no longer is what's truest in our heart or we may find that we're not called to share that purpose with the other person in the same way.

I spoke about this in another interview for this series with Daphne Rose Kingma, who was really just quite beautiful in terms of the end of relationships in her own breakdowns and healings. And you've written about that too. You've talked about, at the end of one relationship, being able to really honor the ending and even honor the moving of your previous partner into another relationship. So there's been a way that you have reached a deep acceptance that the original form of your connection to that person was no longer. But I gather that getting to that place of acceptance is often a rocky road.

**RH:** It's a process and yes, absolutely! I'm part of it, actually, and this is not just in relationship to relationship, but to everything. Part of it is a deepening and deepening acceptance of the nature and fact of change, that everything changes. And it's so easy to say that as a kind of glib statement, but for me anyway, bowing to that reality day by day, actually, is pretty central. I mean, I'm in that process right now where what is changing is the way in which I'm working and the kind of work I'm doing. So I'm moving from—it's not that I'm moving away from, but I'm giving less emphasis on writing books now than I am to teaching and especially teaching writing, working with creative writing. And there are reasons for that both inner and outer, the outer reason is the changing nature of publishing. So I can no longer live in the way in which I have for the last 12 years on book contracts, which have been a very wonderful existence. But life changes and so I needed to change also and actually, I'm finding it very valuable. And it's also acknowledging the uncertainty.

**RC:** So I want to highlight what you just said because I think it's so important. There are many people who are going to be listening to this series and they're going to hear from people who have reached a degree of success and notoriety in their particular arena, whether it's publishing, as you just described, or the workshop circuit that some other people are on. But in terms of projection that we've been touching upon, many people get a sense that somebody has arrived—

**RH:** Yes! (laughs) Arrived where?

**RC:** (laughs) Well—

**RH:** In bankruptcy court!

**RC:** Yes! Well, I really resonated when you talked about the changing world of publishing because, of course, that has affected me as well in my own books. And we're all trying to reinvent ourselves. But I know that there's this moment that happens with a lot of clients that I have who are coaches or in a similar occupation where they come to me and one of the things that they say is, "I want to be able to do what you do. I want to be able to reach the place that you've reached." And so often I have to be the deflator of that vision because I explain to them that over here, there's what probably you'd refer to as the lower-middle class lifestyle in terms of the funds that I have available to me. There's overwhelm in terms of how much I have to work in the course of the day in order to make ends meet for myself and my family. And then there's also health issues that I have that limit the amount of actual productive time that I could spend in any day. And I often unwittingly or inadvertently send people hobbling away saying, "Oh my God!" you know?

**RH:** You don't know what hit you!

Even a little more desperate than that, like, "If he's been in Oprah's magazine and if he's had all these books published and he has this profile and yet he's struggling in all the ways that I'm struggling, then what does that mean for me?" And of course, everyone's journey is different, but I wanted to highlight this piece that you were talking about because I'm sure that a lot of people, like they do for me, would do the same for you. They would say, "Look at that person's amazing public profile and look at the grace with which he moves through the world. I would love to have things as easy as that!" And of course, what you're saying is it doesn't look at all like that on the other side.

**RH:** No! Absolutely it doesn't! And you just never know. I mean, for example, a book I did that came out last year, quite different to the books most people identify me with, was a book about Iran. So I went to Iran and the book essentially is about I wanted to give a human face to the culture of Iran. And I did that and when I did that it sounds all wonderful and exotic, and it was in many ways. But it ended up with my being escorted out of the airport back into Tehran and interrogated for three days and basically being on the edge of being in jail for 5 years. And so that's how that apparently wonderful journey ended and I think having a great book contract to do this, which was a wonderful gift from my publisher. But when I got back, actually only having just managed to get out of the country anyway by the skin of my teeth, I realized the whole 2008/2009 financial crisis was in full throe and the publishers were scared stiff of everything and they were trying to cut all

their book contracts back. And so I just spent all this money going to Iran and they were right on the edge of canceling the contract. And then eventually after a year or so, they agreed to stick to the contract. They published it, we published it last year. And for me it's the biggest, it's really one of the most important pieces of work, personally I feel, that I've ever done. And the book ultimately failed.

**RC:** I wanted to say that this book is called *Saved By Beauty: Adventures of an American Romantic* in Iran. I just wanted to let people know that in case they wanted to look it up.

**RH:** Yes. And it hardly sold anything. In fact, it sold less than any other book I've ever done by far. So that also is a humbling process. What you think is going to be your best endeavor and most important piece of work to give to the world ends up becoming utterly dismal!

**RC:** Yes. And there's a moment that authors, many of them, can share when your publisher gets in touch with you and says, "We've decided that your book is going to go out of print and before we send it to a remainder house, we'd like to offer you a very large discount on as many copies as you would like." And on the one hand, there's a sadness and a resignation that the book didn't connect in this time in the world, and then there's also the sense of, "Oh, well then I'll be able to get a lot of copies so that I can sell to people more cheaply and get it out there or perhaps it's just going to end up in boxes in my basement." So it's the strange mixture of being given an opportunity in terms of buying back your book for a dollar or two, but at the same time it's only happening because the book didn't work in the way that everybody hoped it would.

**RH:** Right! So another example of things not working out the way in which I thought and again, that actually also was questioning, not challenging, questioning an idea I had of myself, which had something to do with writing books. I mean, I have three books like this, of which *Iran* was the third. Writing books about particular cultures and bringing those cultures, a bit like being a foreign correspondent with a spiritual bent; bringing an awareness of those cultures to an American public. And I've found that that actually is, for me anyway, has proved extremely difficult and simply my publisher would never pay for me to do something like that again. So that's a real reorientation of what my own dream is, if you like, or what I've seen myself doing.

**RC:** I think there's something really moving in what you're describing and it comes back to this question of meaning versus just the humble not knowing. Because when these kinds of things happen in our lives, it's so easy to ascribe a positive or a negative meaning, and certainly easier to

ascribe the negative meeting. So often my clients and even friends of mine will say, “I need to understand why this is happening in my life? Why have I created this once more?” And I think that that can be such a trap. On the other side, there’s a line from some teenage movie that I haven’t been able to source that I love so much where something crazy occurs like a car hits a deer or something like that. And there’s this long pause and there’s this one character turns to the other and says, “That happened!” That’s all. But I thought, in that moment, how perfect to be able to arrive at any one of these calamities in our lives and to start from the place like, “Okay, that happened,” and not immediately go into the why it happened and why I have to understand it so that I don’t repeat it, but to just actually be with the full resonance of the experience.

And in my own life, I can think perhaps the most dramatic version of that is some years ago I was accused of a crime that I did not commit and the mechanism of accusation was rolling forward. It’s an incredible experience for anybody who’s never had something like that happen. When it’s not just within a family but like when the legal system is involved, a whole chain of events that has a life of its own gets thrust into motion and you can really feel just kind of like a pea being squished by all of that. But really, for me, the challenge was to keep coming back over and over until this crisis had passed and everything had resolved, to just keep saying, “Well, look at this! Look at this!” And what am I feeling and what’s moving through me in this incredibly humiliating and scary situation.

**RH:** So were you able to do that?

### **3. We Always Need A Story**

**RC:** Well, I would say, as with everything I do, imperfectly, which is one of the “sins” that you wrote about in your book some years ago, *The Sin of Imperfection*. So I did have some real powerful moments in that regard, but others, of course, no, I would resist like anybody. But in those powerful moments, I would say that I was really brought low in a kind of profound and awful, but somehow also beautiful way to be saying like, “Here I am, there’s nothing about this that I can get on top of. I can’t find a sense of power or control. I don’t want to go to some kind of reactive indignation, an Us versus Them. But if I’m just going to let all of that go, that I feel kind of like a worm here under a microscope where everybody is getting to look at and judge me or wonder about me and it was a kind of stripping bare and an education in that that I don’t think I could ever have gotten any other way.”

**RH:** No. That's an incredible experience. I cannot—God! Yeah! Well, to keep saying—I love what you said about the teenage movie, just “That happened!” To walk through my day going, “This is happening,” I think that's the ultimate way to be actually, and to live. We're meaning making creatures. In other words, there's an automatic function in us, which wants to and has to try and make meaning of things. Maybe we should see it as if—we can act as if this was meaning. Because in some way we always need a story, don't we?

**RC:** Well that is really important. I think if I came away from this discussion with the idea that somehow meaning making is a problem, and that wouldn't be helpful either because meaning making is a part of what happens and it's something we can share in and just as so many spiritual traditions talk about letting go of our stories, other traditions talk about the power of our stories to heal us and to join us together in our collective humanity.

So that is going to happen. But I think one of the things that we've talked about today that is so important to me is that when we have a story about who we are and the way our lives are supposed to go, that one of the really deep and scary passages in life is when we—it's not that somebody else decides not to participate in that story with us anymore, but it's when we realize that it's not our story anymore. I mean, I have clients that will say to me when they're having trouble in their marriage and they're thinking about the kind of counseling that will be required in order to see if the marriage can be rejuvenated and restored, and sometimes there's just this incredibly painful moment where a client will just say, “You know what I notice? I don't want to do it. I don't want to do this anymore!” And that comes right up against the whole idea of a promise and what is a promise that a human being makes, especially to another person, about the future that will inevitably, as you said earlier, just keep raking us over the coals with change, that we can't predict or control. And it seems that one of the great tensions that all of us experience is the promise that we made versus the changes that have inevitably happened to us and the distance so often between those two things.

**RH:** Well, yes. I mean, that's part of what I felt in my marriage with Maria. But promises are made in the moment and ideally made with absolute authenticity, that to the best of my knowledge and felt understanding this is what I say now and this is what I want now. And I don't think that's invalidated if a year later or five or ten years later you realize something else is now true. I don't think that original promise is invalidated because it's not something that's in stone, like the tablets of Moses or something. This is a thorny question.

**RC:** Well, as I was hearing you speak about it, I was nodding my head in assent to what you were saying, but also with a recognition to how much pain that realization can often cause, just within the individual him or herself. In other words, it doesn't mean that my promise necessarily was invalidated because things have changed, but still, it may be the hardest thing in the world to accept the fact that the change that has happened to me and through me is one that makes me a person who either can't or doesn't want to keep that promise anymore. Just to accept that, to be able to say I'm going to have to not keep my promise is huge.

**RH:** It can't be now, because things change. Doesn't mean we don't act in the present moment or present time with the given knowledge and feeling that we have. I mean, ultimately, if we take the large view, we know at least conceptually that we're going to die. In other words, this whole story that we take to be our lives, it's going to dissolve sooner or later. That doesn't mean that you just don't bother to live your story? That you then you don't bother to immerse yourself in this even though you know it's going to end, because it is going to end. The whole thing is going to end. Does that mean you just don't bother? I don't think so.

There's a parallel there in some way. I mean, the deep acceptance of change is probably one of the most, if not the most, profound understandings we can have. And to return to your question of story, it strikes me that in some way, in other words, there are traditions that say, "Who are you without your story? Dispose of your story," and then, other traditions valuing the story; it's surely, really, the distinction between an absolute view and a relative view. Maybe on an absolute level nothing is happening, no one is going anywhere. But we don't live in an absolute world. We live in a world of relativity. And in the relative world, you've got to have a story to be here. So why try and get rid of it? You've got to have one! However, seeing it as a story which gives a certain distance and perspective as well, or a witness quality while you're traveling through it.

**RC:** I'm sort of paused and stunned in a positive way by the statement that you made a moment ago where you said, "We've got to have a story to be here." I'm just letting that resonate because I've never heard that before. Something about it feels really compelling and true, even if as you say, it's the opposite of so often what we hear in spiritual circles.

**RH:** Yes, I don't see how you can be here without a story. Everyone has a story. Any great spiritual teacher also has a story. But perhaps the difference may be in how lightly we read the story.

**RC:** Yes. So holding a story lightly is perhaps a blending of the relative and the absolute. And you have a quote, another wonderful quote, on your website from Henry Moore. Would it be okay if I shared it with the listeners?

**RH:** Oh yeah!

**RC:** Okay. So what you shared on your website is, “The secret of life is to have a task, something you devote your entire life to, something you bring everything to, every minute of the day for your whole life. And the most important thing is, it must be something you cannot possibly do.”

**RH:** Isn't that the most incredible quote? That was just wonderful!

**RC:** Well, I thought of it as a kind of way to ring the bell as we're coming to the end of our conversation, back towards some of the original things that we spoke about. Because if that thing is the idea of just living my life as beautifully and authentically and with as much integrity as possible, and being open to what is and being a mystic at heart, if all of those things are just beautiful, sacred, intentions, it also is true—and I think this is what we've been touching on today—that you can't do it! You will fail a million times over and something about being able to accept and embrace that failure is what makes us real and human!

**RH:** That's beautiful, Raphael! Absolutely! That encapsulates, I think, everything that we've been speaking about. Yes.

**RC:** Well, you know, every time I talk to someone in this series is another flavor of transparency and vulnerability comes forth. And I really want to thank you so much and honor you for what you've brought today, because it is different and very powerful. And in your response to my first invitation to be part of the series, you said, “I do not see myself as a spiritual teacher, but as a writer who tries to use the grist of his own life to explore the perennial themes of being human.” And I really get that and I see that you do that and I feel it's a profound gift. So I want to thank you, not just for this conversation, but for making that your mission which you succeed at and fail at and succeed at again, but that you keep doing it because it's really important to me personally and I think for all of us. So thank you so much for today and beyond.

**RH:** Oh, Raphael, thank you! Really a delight to explore with you.

**Sam Keen**



Sam Keen was, in his words, “over-educated at Harvard and Princeton” and was a professor of philosophy and religion at “various legitimate institutions” and a contributing editor of *Psychology Today* for 20 years before becoming a free-lance thinker, lecturer, seminar leader and consultant. He is the author of a baker’s dozen books, and a co-producer of an award winning PBS documentary, “Faces of the Enemy.” When not writing or traveling around the world lecturing and doing seminars on which he claims he is “not necessarily an expert but a skilled explorer,” he cuts wood, tends to his farm in the hills above Sonoma, takes long hikes and practices the flying trapeze.

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### **1. Men, Emotions, Initiation**

**RC:** I would like to begin by starting with a really beautiful and deep quote of yours. As a matter of fact, one of the things I love about your work is that I’m often just stopped short by a turn of phrase or something that really resonates deeply within me and needs some time for me just to soak it up. This particular quote comes from an interview that you did and that you spoke about with Ernest Becker the philosopher, who wrote *The Denial of Death*. And what you said that so struck me was, “He thought with his life.” And when I heard that and I reflected on that, I thought that might be a wonderful place to begin today, to ask you what is your life thinking these days?

**SK:** Well I love that idea. When I went into talk with Ernest Becker he was on his deathbed. When I entered the room he said, “Now, you will see whether a philosopher dies the way he lived.” And he did. We shouldn’t just think with our heads or with our hearts or with our bodies, we’ve got to do it also with our imaginations and with our communities. We have to think out of a situation where all of us are involved. And I’ve always tried to do that. I’m sure I failed a lot of times, or more likely I would say that very often I have written maybe ten years ahead of what I could live. I was trying to write my way into some understanding of something. So in that sense, writing has always been for me a spiritual discipline. It’s been my greatest meditation, my way of finding out



what it is that I do think. I don't really know it until I've said it or written it. So I could almost go back over all of my books and tell you what it was that I was trying to live out at the time I wrote that book.

**RC:** I'm really once again taken by that description of yours because so often, what we see in people's writing is life experience that has been fully digested and it's evocative and beautiful and in some ways, tidy because they found a way to describe it, that is—whether it's a memoir, or whether it's a teaching story, it has a sense of rightness and completion about it. Whereas life as we're living it is usually a big old mess in one way or another, and so you've turned that on its head in what you just shared with the idea that you're writing towards something. Let's see, we're in 2012 right now, and twenty years ago was 1992 which is when *Fire in the Belly* came out. So by that math, we could see a little bit about your life today by reading that book. Does that seem right?

**SK:** No, actually that's an exception (laughs). I was building my house in that year with my son and I didn't have enough money to put in a septic system. I had been keeping notes for years on the whole thing of men and their identity. I was in a group of men that met and I realized that the way that people talk about men is no more accurate than the way they talk about women. So when I had to have at least \$17,000 to finish up the septic system I took this wild group of notes, and by golly, sure enough they [the publisher] picked it up and gave me a small advance, so then I had to write the book. But I would say that I wrote the book *Fire in the Belly* about being a man. I really wrote that out of what I had experienced, not what I was hoping to experience.

**RC:** But you wrote it primarily to get a septic system?

**SK:** Well, I sort of jokingly say that. I always write something because there's something that I feel has to be said that isn't being said. And that book about men was definitely that. This was the era when the men's movement had just started and there was so much of sort of a way too romantic ideas about initiation and things like that I wanted to put it on a more down-to-earth basis.

**RC:** Let me ask you a question about that, because I do workshops throughout the year around the U.S. and also sometimes in Europe and Canada. And as you might guess, since my topic has to do with emotional connection which requires vulnerability, except in rare instances we're looking at about 80-90% women participants and 10% male participants in these workshops. And we certainly could say that when it comes to learning and practicing the art of emotional vulnerability, that many men would seriously benefit; but still to this day, it's really challenging to get them there. And I'm

wondering if you see that changing, if you think that's the way it's always going to be. What's your take on that?

**SK:** Well, it's changing gradually for a subpopulation. But as I try to show in *Fire in the Belly*, you're not going to make major changes in that so long as you're primarily conditioning males be the warriors and the aggressors, and we have everything that reinforces that from the NFL and the idea of winning and the only victor is the one who gains 1<sup>st</sup> place and all of the kind of marginal virtues that we think that men should have. And those virtues are not our listening, and sensitivity, and compassion, and gratitude, those are left to the side. So to change the inner part of a person, to change your soul, you also have to change the culture around you.

Now having said that, there are a lot of new men who are acting in very different ways. My son, for instance, who has two children, when he puts me to—I'm writing a book with him right now—he puts me to shame in terms of a way that he parents his children when I think back to the way that I had parented mine. He's so much more available to Amanda than I was to him. And a lot of his friends who—well, I can remember one time three of his men friends were there. They all have babies; they're all changing the diapers, and talking about that. Well, believe me, that didn't happen in my generation (laughs).

**RC:** So, it's interesting when you talk about that warrior conditioning. It may just be my own frame of reference, but to me, there is nothing scarier for most people, and nothing more courageous than actually turning toward and leaning into the emotions that are the most challenging and difficult for them to feel. So I, in my own way, would make the case that a man who wants to be the bravest warrior of all would actually pick up that mantle. So far, I'm not getting anywhere with that story but I'm wondering—

**SK:** Yes, because you're using the wrong language.

**RC:** Yes?

**SK:** With the people in the new warrior training, I said look, "We don't need the hair of the dog that bit us. It's a bad metaphor. It's a metaphor whose time should die." Now I agree with everything you said about the first part. It is a very fearful thing to become vulnerable. It is not a martial kind of virtue, vulnerability, to open oneself up that way. As a matter of fact, one of the

things that the body therapists have taught us is, when you try to do what you described, lean in and open up, what happens to your muscles?

**RC:** Well, usually you'll start that because you've been tense to begin with.

**SK:** Well, that's right, exactly. So what happens? I mean what happens is the whole character, what Wilhelm Reich called the character armor softens. You have to soften that in order to be available to those feelings. Now, what happens whenever you are in a situation where you're thinking in terms of conquest and the warrior model? It's exactly the opposite. You tense the chest. You tense the stomach. You hold the breath. In other words, you prepare your body to flight or to flee. So I just say do away with that metaphor when it was all the rage that men had to be warriors, magicians, and kings. You ask women, "Well, how do you feel about the metaphor of king? How do you feel about the metaphor of warrior?" And you would not find a very friendly response to those as being organizing metaphors for what a man should be. Say what you said in the first part and dump the second part (laughs), and you'll be right on.

**RC:** Okay. Well, I just want to tell you as an anecdote that one time I went to one of my publishers and I said, "I'd like to write a book called *Emotions for Men*." And the editor said, "That's the worst idea I've ever heard. Because in publishing, what you're supposed to do is determine an audience—a market with an unmet need and meet that need. And men are not interested in that need at all so you'll have no readers and we certainly wouldn't publish it. But on the other hand, if you'd like to write a book called something like *Teach Your Man to Feel*, and if you could counsel the women to hide it so the man doesn't know that she's got it nearby, now, maybe you're onto something." (Laughs)

**SK:** One of the most interesting things about *Fire in the Belly* was that it went every which way. It may have started with men but then men said to their wives, "You read this." And I know because when people ask me to autograph books: fathers gave it to their sons, sons to the fathers, mothers to the sons, sons to the mothers, lovers back and forth all over. Because fundamentally, it wasn't just a book about men, it was a book also about women, and about the way that we relate. And I think it was precisely because I tried to tear a piece of the metaphor of the warrior and the metaphor of the worker, saying "Look, you have to be more than that."

**RC:** And so if we jump back to the now and to that idea of—

**SK:** The now just left so you're going to have to jump on the next now.

**RC:** (Laughs) Say that again?

**SK:** The now just passed.

**RC:** Oh yeah, that one (laughs).

**SK:** So now you have to jump on the next now.

## **2. Between Father and Son**

**RC:** Right. Well, I'm still interested in the now of you and your life these days. You just shared with us that you're writing a book with your son and I'm wondering if that's a little bit of a map of where you're heading or what you're wrestling with right now. But what can you tell us about what's very much alive for you.

**SK:** Well, I'm getting well into the middle age. (Laughs). I mean I just turned 80. So I'm really thinking a lot about what is next for me and what I want to write and things like that. The whole thing with my son was unfinished business. We've had a fairly stormy and loving relationship and we've come through that really to a total kind of vulnerability with each other. And so it's about the whole thing of the necessity of men telling or our fathers telling their stories to sons and sons to fathers. Because my basic belief is that, what initiation means, the real right of initiation, is a father telling his son "Well, this is who I am. This is who I was. This is what I experienced," and the son telling the father the stories. So we're telling the stories of our own life and of our own journey in some pretty intimate detail, which I mean, there had been a lot of stuff in the men's movement about fathers and sons, but not much of it was very revealing but this is pretty revealing stuff; a lot that is revealed, especially in the beginning, is not very pretty.

**RC:** Yes, yes. Did you get a chance to tell your story to your father and have him tell it to you in any kind of a similar way?

**SK:** Not very much. That's one of those things. I was very close to my father. But there are many things that he never told me about himself and I really, really wish I could know. And the same thing, there are lots of things I wished I had told him. And although we were very close in some ways, it wasn't in the telling of the stories.

## **3. Humans as Biomythic Creatures**

**RC:** And that's one of the things that you talk about in terms of humans as being biomythic creatures. And how there are the stories that you could say of the things that happens to us. But then, there are also the stories that we choose to tell. So it sounds like you've made a very conscious decision for right now, at least in terms of your writing life, to tell the story of you and your son and that relationship.

**SK:** Yes. In my way of thinking that we're all born as biological animals but the moment we're born, people superimpose myths over us. So you're a Christian, you're a Jew, you're an American, or an Iraqi, or whatever and those form us. And the task of living a life is taking those myths, looking at them, and replacing them with your own stories which come out of your own experience. So I'm always doing that. That's always been a theme of my life and I'm absolutely certain I will be doing it until I die. And here at 80, I also have to begin to get some new stories. I've lived pretty vigorously and still do. But I also know that there will be some point where I have to adjust to a different kind of view of myself and a different myth about what aging is. So I hope I will be able to prepare for that and do it well.

**RC:** And that leads me to a question that you put to anybody who is interested in exploring what you call restorative philosophy. You asked, "What's new and interesting and exciting?" Usually, at 80, people are not so much alive to that. And you're a person who has always gone beyond that those kinds of superficial norms. And so it's an obvious question to ask you, for you at 80, what is new and interesting and exciting?

**SK:** Well, my life changed quite considerably about twelve years ago. I got divorced and I married again. And I have a very wonderful marriage. My wife is a Senior Minister at a first congregational church in Berkeley so we go back and forth. I have a commuting marriage. I'm by myself half the time and down there we're together half the time, that's new. And I live out on a 60-acre piece of land. And the whole thing about that is that's always new. I find so much novelty that comes when I just pay attention. I am at that stage of life where I don't have a lot of goals. I mean I like to say, "I've taken all the required courses except one and I'm not in any hurry to take that one." (laughs)

But you do live more in the present and in the past, in that sense, than you do in the future. I guess my major thing is really the practice of awareness. And I look forward I think to the time when I'll be writing less and playing outside on my farm more. And now I have grandchildren. I have all those kind of normal things.

I teach a seminar which has been very popular recently called *What's Next?* Because what I found out is that's everybody's question. Every change in the life cycle, you wonder what's next? We wonder what's next for our nation. And I have a whole lot of ways of getting at that. All of which, of course, I practice myself. How important fantasy may be and what you've left behind.

And just to give you a frivolous one, my dad took me to the circus when I was a kid and I always had thought, "If I had another life, I'd like to be a trapeze artist." Well, when I was 62, which was 18 years ago, I suddenly had a chance to learn to practice flying trapeze and that developed into things where I have a whole trapeze school in my backyard. Now that was quite renewing to me because it was a fantasy that I brought up into the present. And said, "You know, I wish I could do that. I want to do it. I will do it." And so in all kinds of things there are ways of trying to find out about what it was that you didn't do. Like, I very often start off this thing on *What's Next* and say, "Well, what unused futures do you have? What futures did you set aside early on in your life? What were the roads not taken that may be you should have taken?" So you may have to go back into your past to find out what's new for you. As a matter of fact, everybody has past dreams that they put aside way too early and didn't do. And a lot of times, the novelty in your life is going to come from looking at those again.

**RC:** Now, I only have one question about that for you because when you spoke about the trapeze school, of course you wrote about that in your book *Learning to Fly*, which came out in 2000 and it's very rich; I was surprised to hear you use the word frivolous, when you said I'll give a frivolous example. Do you really feel like it's frivolous?

**SK:** No (laughs). I mean it wasn't frivolous but you know it's not like I decided I wanted to be present or something. I said frivolous because a lot of people say, "Don't you think at your age, you shouldn't be doing something a little more dignified?" (laughs) It's a lighthearted example.

**RC:** Yes, lighthearted but definitely not frivolous. I think that for the people listening to this series that would be inspirational. The idea of you learning the trapeze at 62, that's it's always for me just been so touching to know about and it's inspirational or maybe even aspirational, I should say that if I'm at 62, that I would be learning something like that. I'm still trying to, at 51, I'm trying to get my knees and my shoulder to function so I can keep playing my weekly beloved basketball game.

**SK:** (Laughs) Well, another example was when I was a kid I wanted to be an ornithologist. And I sort of got edged out of that because in my Christian environment that wasn't considered quite

enough. And now in the last two or three years, my love of birds has come back out. And I'm sitting now in a place where I'm feeding everything around and (laughs), and birds are all over. As a matter of fact, we have just had a duck come up here. We have no idea where it came from but he's totally tame. He'll sit in my lap and eat bread. Well, that's another example, that's been enormously enriching to me, to take up that old love again.

#### **4. Leisure**

**RC:** Beautiful. Well, I want to ask you a question about that 60 acres that you have up in the country which is actually an area that I lived in very close to you up until 2006. So I can almost smell and feel that earth where you are. As I have spoken to many different teachers and writers in this interview series, one of the themes that we've come back too often is the stress and the overwhelm that are a part of everyday life now in a way more than ever. And so many people are feeling that just in order to live to get by to take care of their loved ones and themselves that they have to buy into all kinds of unsustainable schedules and pressures. And I'm wondering, when you went up to the farm, and you began to work it; as you said, it could be a full time job, but are you on the other side of that? Do you feel that your life has a pace now and a rhythm that you need?

**SK:** Yes, absolutely, I don't stress. My wife does, as head of a church, she's something like CEO of forty organizations, but I just don't. I have a very leisurely or rhythmic way of working. I have certain habits; I go in the morning after I've had my tea and oatmeal, and I go in and I write. It is quite true that very often I write too much because writing is one of those things you do—writing is like trapeze, either you're doing it at a 110% or you're not doing it. And I will get caught like I did this morning; I sat two and half hours before I got up. And then got up and cut a little wood, another two and a half hours, well that's too much. And so in that sense, I still am not as alert to my rhythms as I ought to be. But by and large, no, I have plenty of time. Sometimes, it's too much.

**RC:** And so, do you come across that? I know you said you're teaching a seminar now. Do you come across that in your students or with your clients that you work with? And if so, is there something that you offer or your share around that issue of just time and pressure? Because yesterday I was talking to one of the series participants, Isaac Shapiro, and he put it in a really interesting way. He said that, "Stress reduces our ability to pay attention." And you had mentioned earlier that being aware is really your practice, practicing awareness. So I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts on that for all the people who don't get to be up at that farm.

**SK:** Well, most people who just say they're way too busy to do this and do that and do the other, are just lying to themselves. I do have one, I don't know what to tell— I give away all my secrets. Somebody else has got—it's like my old house drawing, everybody uses it, and now they think they invented it, so I know that people are going to claim they invented this. But I invented it.

I do a whole lot of stuff here about what you want to do and what hasn't happened, and everything else. I have this, what I call nasty little exercise. It's very simple. You draw a circle and in that circle you have to signify the 168 hours in a week, okay? And I say, "Alright this is an average week. You have to account for every one of those 168 hours in the week. And cut up the pie chart in such a way that you got in there how many hours you sleep, how many to eat, how many is television, how many to do this, how many to do that." And then I say "Well, now look. If you're too stressed to do X, Y, or Z and go and take a walk or something, where could you cut something out of that?" And most people have enormous amounts of totally wasted time. They never think, "Well, if I want to do a new thing, I've got to find some place to put it in the temporal order."

**RC:** So your sense is that for many people, job number one would be pairing away what is unnecessary.

**SK:** Exactly. Take a knife, a knife is the first tool for changing. That wonderful word "decide" which comes from "cido"—to cut off. What are you going to cut off? The essence of the life of the Spirit or something has to do with cutting first. You've got to cut time away. You've got to cut stress away. You've got to cut busyness away. You have to cut noise away. You have to cut speed away. Until you do that, you can't hear yourself think. You can't hear, you can't listen, you can't take in, you can't wonder. When you're too busy to stop and wonder, you're not going to have much of a life of the Spirit.

**RC:** And now, let me just gently push back on that a little bit because I know lots of people, and I put myself in this category, we claim a life of the Spirit. We know it's part of who we are. And given especially what's happened in the economy over the last five or six years, as well as what has been happening long before that; the *fact*, so to speak, that could be cut or decided away, to use your language, is less and less and less. I know, for instance, that the life that I grew up in and my parents had while I was growing up is so different from the one that I have with my children. And so it feels like there is something happening in society and in culture that takes away some of that choice.



**SK:** Absolutely! To quote Eliot's line, "We are distracted from distraction by distraction." You want to see what is happening that is gobbling us up, look at the internet. Look at the iPhones. Look at the iPads. Look at the incredible kind of quest for virtual experience so that we're living more and more in virtual world and less and less in the sensual world. And that for especially young people consumes an enormous amount of time and attention.

### **5. Economics in the Life of the Spirit**

**RC:** Well, but that's elective in a way. But also, if you look at for instance the message of the Occupy Movement, currently, that the wealth in our society which often comes with choice has gone to such a small percentage of the population. And where there used to be a middle class, there's almost none left. And so, many people aren't noticing that they've got—I mean it's true that the virtual world is seductive for everybody—but there are also many people who just feel like in order to make ends meet, they've been squeezed to the point where to have the time and the space for spiritual presence is a big challenge.

**SK:** Well, let's first of all start with—it is true that there's more stress, there's more economic stress on people. But the idea that that only 1% has the substance and leisure life is nuts. Now, I was in Kenya a couple of months ago. You go through a culture like that and you come over here, and I defy you to walk out on any street or on any major city and tell yourself, "Well, there's so little that people don't have time for any kind of leisure." We are such an enormously rich culture; if the middle class has disappeared, who are all these people driving Acuras or buying at Nordstrom's? There's an enormous amount of wealth still there. Now what happens is when you lose a percentage of that, for a lot of people it panics them. For the vast majority of people, it is not the necessities that are absent, it's the luxuries.

Most people in this society have lost the luxury not the necessities. And you can see that very easily by traveling to any third world country and asking yourself, "Well, what have they got?" You know my friend Peter Menzel did a book, he's a photographer, called *Material World*, in which he went to sixty different countries and he asked them to bring everything they owned out of the house. And you see what people have in Bhutan or in Bangladesh versus Italy or the United States or Sweden. And that was a real—that's real meditation that will discipline our talk about poverty a great deal, I think.

Now that's one of the things I do not like about the motto of the Occupy Movement. There is no 1%. It's not 1% against 99%. It's 1% versus accidents, 5% versus that, and 20% versus that, and on down the list we get a truer picture of a distribution of wealth.

**RC:** Point very well taken. What I means is, wealth in our world, the United States, Western Europe, etc., in comparison to the majority of the world and what people live on in different places. But how to get off of that wheel? It's not always as easy as just pairing down. So for instance, my wife said to me the other day, "Why don't we get some land? And why don't we practice permaculture? And we could get our expenses way down if we got much more simple in that way." And it's appealing on the one hand, but on the other hand—

**SK:** It costs a lot of money to get simple (laughs).

**RC:** Yes. Well there's that and then also you're 80, I'm only 51. But I said, "Honestly, I've never said this before in my life honey, but I think I'm too old for that."

**SK:** Be assured, you're not (laughs).

**RC:** (Laughs) Well, but I guess the point is that if you're going to live somewhere, and your children are going to school somewhere, and you have to buy food somewhere, that to stay in the current of the way of life where you live, you can't quite compare yourself to the deeper poverty in other places because things cost much less, where you live costs you much less. So I think there are people legitimately in our society right now who really would actually, if they had a way, live more simply and have more time, less stress, practice greater awareness because of that, and even make room for more being and more spirit, and wonder. And I think they are actually at a loss.

**SK:** Well, I think that's true. It requires a lot of not ingenuity but of spiritual work to simplify. I mean, we all are bitten by the bug of a consumer culture. You know, I myself, I see something, and think "I'd like to have that". And it's a discipline to not to buy when I can afford it. But I'm fortunately not limited in anymore by economic pressures from children going to college and all of that. But I know a lot of people are. They make \$150,000 a year and they can hardly make it. But then there are kids who are probably going to a fancy schools and things like that. And it's a discipline of continued awareness and willingness to look at what it is that your lifestyle is costing you that will allow you change and it could be gradual.

**RC:** So it seems like what I could glean from what you just said is that it's really a life practice, if not a spiritual practice, to keep addressing those hard questions. It's not going to be easy.

**SK:** Well, I wouldn't even separate that – it's a life practice and spiritual practice. Yes, what is your Spirit? What satisfies is the fundamental question of the Spirit.

**RC:** But I get that for right now, for a lot of people who are struggling and asking some of the questions that we've been talking about, that it's really hard but still possible. That's what I'm taking from what you're saying.

**SK:** Yes, and I think for large numbers of people, that they probably, if they want to simplify, may need to relocate. I mean one of the tragedies of our society is the United States is filled with lovely little towns where houses are \$120,000 and salaries are less than they are in Minneapolis. You're in Boston, aren't you?

**RC:** No, I'm in Portland, Oregon.

**SK:** Portland, Oregon? Oh well, you're in the good place. That's a very good example of what I'm talking about. A lot of people move to Portland precisely for those lifestyle spiritual concerns. They said, "Look, this is probably the best small city in the United States and the quality of life means a lot in Portland, a lot more than it does in Bayonne, New Jersey."

## **6. Basic Trust**

**RC:** (Laughs) Yes. So the subtitle of this series is *Leaders in Personal Growth and Spirituality Share Their Own Innermost Challenges*. And so, I want to ask you; we've been talking a lot for the last few minutes about other people's challenges. I'm wondering just in the spirit of transparency, what you might share with us about your challenges? What's hard or incomplete for you right now in your everyday?

**SK:** Um, I think I'm always working on what Eric Erickson calls basic trust, of trusting myself to the universe, of what the religious people have called, "Trusting myself for the Love of God." I'm always working on availability, on compassion, on living what it is that I see; so that in my last book, *In the Absence of God: Dwelling in the Presence of the Sacred*, I'm always working on that thing of how to dwell in the presence of the sacred. And that's a constant discipline and in some way it's the most simple discipline.

I'll give you an example. The other day I went in the grocery store and the checkout clerk was just dickin' around, and I was kind of irritable. I said, "Come on, come on, quit dickin' around. I've got stuff to do." And just then, I looked over and I saw the tendons in her neck were just strained and her eyes kind of looked kind of bruised a little bit. And I suddenly said, "Oh, oh I'm sorry. I'm just in a pissy mood today." She said, "Yeah, you know I am too. I get that way too, you know? Don't worry about it." Now, in that moment, there was a transition from a secular way of dealing with a human being to a sacred way. I changed from dealing with her as an "it", as a function that somebody who I considered only had an outside and she was doing her job, and she owed me this and that, and to a vow of seeing this and she responded back.

So I think my effort to stay on the edge of wonder, of awe, of gratitude, of thanksgiving, compassion, and sympathy; those are what I called in the book all these great elements of the sacred. That there are basic elements of what it means to live in the presence of a sacred. And my discipline is always that way to try to remember to treat people that way. Sometimes I think all the greatest spiritual discipline is just to get in the habit of looking. Look at people, see what it is that you really see. Look at the environment around you to see what's happening. Always remember the first and the great practice of the light of the Spirit is to wonder. D.H. Lawrence put it, "There is a sixth sense, the natural religious sense, the sense of wonder." Well that, I think, I live with.

**RC:** And you said that when you listed some of those challenges based on Erikson, the first was trust and the second was availability. I'm wondering if you could just go back quickly to each of those. So what do you mean by trust in the universe?

**SK:** Well, a part of being aware of the world we live in is to be aware of the terror, and of the evil, and of the contingency of things. We don't live in a world that's pleasant or not only pleasant. So how do I come to terms, how do I trust myself to an order in which there is so much evil and so much pain and which as the Buddhists say that the first law of the Spirit, the first noble truth is life of suffering? So how do I trust myself in a context in which I am brought into a world where suffering is inevitably a part of my destiny and it's even a larger part of the destiny of my neighbors? And it's always to have faith, to have hope, to have love, it's always a great human challenge. And that's different; I mean what the trouble is the new age movement, is it's just concentrated on how to make yourself feel better.

**RC:** Yes, so when you trust and I know that you're not traditionally religious, I understand that. But for you, personally, in that world that has so much suffering as you described where it takes a kind of a leap of faith to love and to choose to wonder, what are you trusting in? Or what are you intending to trust in?

**SK:** Well, let's put it this way: for me, hope comes before trust. And hope means my openness to the future and my realization that for instance, hope is not optimism. It has nothing to do with optimism. Optimism is a statement, "I can see the future, and it's good." Just like pessimism is "I see the future and it's terrible". Hope is saying, "I live in openness to what is becoming, not knowing the destinations, not knowing the end, not knowing the answers but I live in hope that when the last stone is thrown, that this is a world in which good outvotes evil. Not in the penultimate time of now but in the ultimate time." And you say, "Well, what do you mean by that?" And I say, "I don't know, I don't know."

**RC:** So, it's an openness that it may be so?

**SK:** It is an openness not only that it may be so but that I trust in some way that this enormous cauldron of creativity aims toward some benevolent end that I am incapable as a human being of seeing. That's why I say in the end, you see I try to be a trustful agnostic. I do not know the end toward which history is moving.

All I see is this enormous kind of creativity of the universe, which is staggering. Last night I spent four hours looking at things on black holes, in black holes and galaxies, and how our galaxies were formed. And you know, you just sit there, "My God, my mind doesn't even stretch that far." And then, "How were the galaxies made? There are billions of galaxies." And now a damn black cat just wandered by here, and he just caught a bird. It pisses me off.

## **7. Availability**

**RC:** (Laughs) So tell me just a little bit about availability. What do you mean by that?

**SK:** First I take that whole idea from Gabriel Marcel, the so-called French Christian existentialist. First of all, let's start with unavailability. "What is it that makes you unavailable to somebody?" There are all kinds of ways. You may just be unavailable to him because you're too busy all the time. You may be unavailable to them because you have prejudices like, "I'm not opening myself to somebody like you." Surprisingly, you may be unavailable to them because you're too concerned with your own spiritual life. There are all kinds of ways things make us unavailable. You may be

unavailable because you're too stressed out. So availability is reversing that and saying, "How is it that I remain open to other people, to the gift they're bringing me, and into the sorrow that they have? How do I become available to be a compassionate person?"

**RC:** So it's an intention that you have, and if I heard you right, it's a place where you recognize that you're always doing work. Like all of us, you're falling short, you're failing but it's where you continue to bring your attention and to bring your intention, as well.

**SK:** Absolutely! Anything in terms of the Spirit that I intend to exemplify is probably because at least half of the time I'm failing. I'm not there.

**RC:** And along the lines of the transparency and the vulnerability that we're exploring, one of the questions that I often ask and I'd like to ask you as well is, the people who are closest to you who often act as reflections for us and especially reflection to things that we don't necessarily see or don't want to see. What, if anything have they been showing you recently about yourself. Would they have a different story about you than you have about yourself, and might there be a grain of truth in some of that?

**SK:** Well, my son has, especially as we have been writing this book, had just stuck my nose in how angry I was when he was a child, and how much of a bully I was, and how much I was pushing him to, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and all that stuff. He has just pushed my nose in that. And I sort of knew it a little bit but when he tells me that with the kind of pain that it's obviously caused him, it makes me have to look very carefully at that and do an enormous amount of repenting.

My wife would say that I frequently put myself at the center of the discussion, let's say publicly. To which I reply, "Well, sweetie, I'm also good at listening. And who should be putting themselves at the center if not me?" (Laughs) I've thought about this a lot more than some people... I know that's a little of my arrogance. I think there probably would be people would say I'm arrogant.

**RC:** Let me ask you another question. A follow-up on what you described between you and your son. There's a theme that comes up a lot in the work that I do with people where parents, when they were parenting, made all kinds of mistakes and reacted out of their own pain in their own unconscious issues. And then the kids grow up, and are working through their own healing and trying to assess their conditioning and all of that. And the parents have moved on now and they

don't have the same kind of stresses they had before. And they kind of just want to have a nice life and it's very inconvenient for many parents that I hear about to go back and do what it seems like you're doing with your son. So there must be for you, a drive. Something that actually you get from that or something that's making you willing to do that as opposed to just saying, "You know that was a long time ago. I'm sure I made lots of mistakes. Can we just focus on the present and have a good time together?"

**SK:** Well, I said that and then my son kept throwing the stuff in my face about how I failed with the divorce and abandoned him. And I finally said, "Knock it off. I don't want to hear that anymore." And he says, "Yeah, you'd like it to be just nice. You'd just like to say 'I'm sorry' and I say 'I forgive you,' and go on." And then he says, "But you're still doing it." (Laughs). And we had to go into it. But it has been the willingness of both of us to fight it through, that has made all the difference. The commitment to it that we're going to tell each other our stories and we're going to really talk to each other about it.

Steve Jobs' biographer, he asked Steve Jobs, he said, "You're a very private man. How come you're willing to open up and talk about all these things?" And Steve Jobs said, "Well, you know I wasn't there a lot for my children and I want them to know who I was." So I have that feeling also about my stories.

**RC:** You said that your son kind of fought you and that you remained engaged. And it seemed like if either one of you wasn't willing to keep showing up, you wouldn't have gotten to the good stuff?

**SK:** Exactly.

**RC:** So, it really takes a mutual willingness, if people are going to be able to get to a clearer, more open place with each other when we're talking about parents and children.

**SK:** You know it's not in that way much different than the twelve-step program. You've got to go through the whole thing. We're addicted to anger; we're addicted to our alienation. We're addicted to our stories, like you were a bad parent, you were a bad son, and then you have to move through that thing of repentance and of saying--well, first of all, listening, listening to the pain of the other person. And then of speaking back to them, and repenting of what it is that you have done, and asking forgiveness, and then changing your ways. It doesn't happen in a single weekend.

**RC:** But at this point in your life whether it's because of your son's relentlessness or what you brought to it or both, somehow, the two of you came to an agreement: "We're going to roll up our sleeves. We're going to do this." And both of you ultimately took that dive together?

**SK:** Yeah.

### **8. Stories**

**RC:** Well, I have one last question for you. I really appreciate the wide ranging nature of our discussion today. And I want to bring it back around to stories. This is another theme that has come up in a number of our conversations. In many spiritual circles of the teachers represented in the series, dropping our stories and trying to approach our experience as much as possible from "beginner's mind" or "don't know mind" is really a sacred intention. Not that we can ever be without our conditioning fully, but many of those teachers will say, polish the lens, so to speak, to see clearer and clearer. And then there are other people and maybe you would fall in this camp that focus on the healing and renewing and liberating aspect of stories. So, I'm wondering just because both of those things have been present, if there's anything you want to say about that flipside of the discussion, about the value of dropping stories.

**SK:** Well, Carlos Castaneda supposedly had this thing from *Don Juan* that's saying "Erase your personal history. Erase your stories." I always found that was very bad advice. I have different kinds of stories. Some of those stories are stories that are put in me by my parents, and by my society, and ones that I created for my own good. And I have to go through those and I have to demythologize a lot of that. I had to throw a lot of them out. But then there are a lot of other stories have come directly out of my experience. And I think that the whole thing of get rid of your autobiography, get rid of your stories and just stay in the now—I think it's a snare and a delusion.

I think that's one of the problems like with Eckhart Tolle and "being in the now." The people who are most expert at being in the now, if you look at them, surround that whole thing with the most enormous numbers of stories. Look at Zen, "be in the now." Who says? Basho says "be in the now." And then you just said, the teacher is telling you "be in the now." All of those "be in the now" things have enormous traditions and enormous repertoires of stories that go with it. Just like Catholicism, they have these saints and all of those people. So I think that what I would say is to always work the immediacy of your experience against the changing natures of the stories, that make up your autobiography.



**RC:** So, then let's just leave it with this last, kind of coda question which is if you lived for another ripe period and you were looking backwards from now until the end of your days, what would you want that story to look like to the best of your current understanding? What story would you like to be telling now and be satisfied about when you got to the end?

**SK:** I would like to feel that I had loved my children well and that I had loved the people that I had been intimately involved with, who I've been married with before, my wives, actually two, and the people that I had dealt with lovingly, either then or now that I had picked up as much as possible and healed as many of the wounds that I have caused as possible. I would like to feel that I had been faithful to my vocation as a writer and as an explorer. I'd like to feel like that I had contributed something. I would like to feel that I had enjoyed to the fullest what had been given me to enjoy. I would like to feel that I had glided down to a—I would like to go gentle into that good night in the end, reaching “full of days” as they say.

**RC:** Yes, beautiful. So what a wonderful place to leave our conversation, the idea of actually choosing to go gentle into that good night. I really appreciate that. I appreciate you, Sam Keen. And thank you so much for spending this time with us today.

**SK:** Did I say in the end that even though I would like to go gentle in that good night, I would like it to be a long time from now (laughs).

**RC:** (Laughs) Maybe it goes without saying but I'm glad you said it and I hope it's a long time from now, as well. Alright, Sam, well thanks again.

**Tama Kieves**



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### **1. Following Love, Excellence and Intelligence**

**RC:** When we were just about to go live with the interview, you offered up a blessing that this may all be lifted up for the highest good of all and I want you to know that that’s the first time we’ve had a blessing before we began, so that was a special treat.

**TK:** I do it as my insurance plan, you know? (laughs) That way I don’t have to take responsibility for anything, whatever comes out of my mouth now, we’re fine!

**RC:** I see! You’ve turned it over!

**TK:** I’ve turned it over, baby!

**RC:** That’s good! Well, one of the things about you that makes you a natural for this series is that already in your work and in your approach to how you work with others, you bring in a lot of transparency, you speak honestly and very honorably about your own life and your own challenges, and so we’re going to draw on that today hopefully to go to some really wonderful, deep, and enriching places.

**TK:** What I attribute that to is the value of being self-absorbed. (laughs) I figured it's way cheaper than therapy, you know? Like why lock myself in a little room with a therapist when I could share it with thousands and millions of people and get paid for it!

**RC:** I see, okay. Now we get to know a little bit of the snarky side of you!

**TK:** (laughing) Yes! The big heart is now melting! (laughs)

**RC:** Well, let's just start with the present moment. I just shared with you a moment ago that I'm fighting off a cold, so that's part of my experience; I have a little bit of a sore throat, a little extra tired, but also I'm feeling open and grateful and also somewhat sun-deprived. I'm looking forward to being well and being able to cavort a little more outside with my kids. So how about you? How are you and where are you in this moment?

**TK:** Oh, wow! Great question! Where am I in this moment? I've been in this mix lately of real excitement and you know I have a book coming out, *Inspired and Unstoppable*, and it's coming out in August, so I'm consumed with the launch of it and all the stuff you have to do.

I've been excited but I also have just been going through this shadow walk with it. I think that any time you're going into your next evolution or your next sharing or exposure or expression of greatness, you face your own stuff, and I've been amazed, "Oh my God, really? That's still up for me?" Things I thought that I vanquished or healed or prayed away or meditated long ago, so it's been this mix of: I'm really excited because I feel like I'm opening up to this truly inspired path and I'm excited about what's going to happen, but I've also been scared and I've been saddened by myself, seeing that. "Oh wow, these things are still operating." And I know what I would say to my students, and I know what I would say to the public and I'm having to say that to myself.

**RC:** So tell us what you're saying to yourself.

**TK:** So much of what my work is about, and particularly this new book, is about wildly succeeding in your life's work. And so, so much of what my work is about is that to really do your life's work is a spiritual path, it's a calling, and it's not just about like wildly succeeding, it's not just about fame and money and all the stuff that we assume in the American culture about what success is. It's more about really going past your limits or your weaknesses and it's this path of being inspired and excited and then you're freaked out. And you're inspired and you're excited and then you're freaked out. And so that's what's coming up for me: I'm starting to realize, "Wow! I'm freaked out

again!” I’ve gotten to this lovely place in my career where I’m successful, I’ve got a following, people like me, and it’s pretty cool. And now I’m having to face the fears again of some of those things.

**RC:** It would be good to just kind of drop down one more level and say to whatever degree you’re comfortable what those fears are and what comes up.

**TK:** Sure. You know, it’s so funny because the whole thing of *Teaching What We Need to Learn*, this is everything I teach and everything that’s in this book, so of course it’s like, “Oh great!” It’s so up for me. The fears that come up for me is all the comparisons that I’m not doing it right; I have a lot of dreams for this book, I have a lot of dreams for my work and there’s certainly an ambitious side to me and a driven side to me, and I want to be really wildly successful. And then the fears that come up: “You’re not normal, you’re not doing it right, normal businesspeople would do some fancy, slick campaign and you’re trusting inspiration.”

So there's all the junk of: I want to do what’s right for this book, I want to do what I’m called to do, and so in working on it I start seeing what others do, and like I said, there’s all this comparison of looking at, “Oh my God! That person’s that successful? Oh my God! They haven’t just been on Oprah, they know Oprah. I was happy to get a column somewhere!” For me, I think, that’s one of my painful places or demons is trusting that what I’m doing is right and trusting that my way works and trusting that I am listening to my inner voice, I am listening to that calling, I am meant to do this and it doesn’t matter what someone else is doing. That’s some of the stuff that’s come up.

**RC:** I think it’s really important that you shared that, and particularly around the topic of comparison. We have talked in this series, myself and some of the other participants, about the role of comparison in a student when they are looking at their teacher and how either positive or negative projection or just plain, old comparison, all of those are quick and easy routes to suffering.

**TK:** (laughs) Highways!

**RC:** Right! And not really conducive to stepping in to the fullness of one’s being or seeing a truth in a less varnished way. And so what’s great about what you’re describing is that you’re on the other side as a teacher with the same kind of comparison—

**TK:** Oh, absolutely!

**RC:** Because you are a human being, it's arising in you, not necessarily reverse towards your students, but put out there as you hold yourself up against either what's considered the industry standard or what seems over there like it's more successful or easier or done the right way.

**TK:** Yes, absolutely!

**RC:** And you know, one of the things that has occurred to me in my years of doing this work is that how a person approaches the idea of marketing and promotion is a very delicate business because there are many different ways to do it, some of them are on the more, let's say, extremely sales-y, promise-y way, and then on the other extreme there's the kind of promotion by a non-promotion where somebody just doesn't do anything at all. And what I've noticed, as comparison has come up for me is that I first of all notice what arises in me as I imagine putting myself out there in certain ways.

A lot of times I have a contraction initially, that as I feel my way through it, I see is about my own stuff. But then if I stay with it, I also come to recognize that there's some channel on that continuum that actually matches me, like I'm not going to be no marketing, but I'm also not going to be rah-rah marketing. And what I found is that whenever I have, for whatever reason, experimented with not being on a channel that resonates with me, it always falls flat. And so I always talk to people about this if I'm coaching them in terms of their own coaching practice or whatever. Yes, there are all those things to absorb and shoulds, the ways of doing it and models that you can compare yourself against, but you've got to come back over and over to what actually speaks through you.

## **2. Any Teacher Worth Their Salt is Struggling**

**TK:** Absolutely! And the irony, which of course is no irony, my whole book is about this. It's about inspired success, it's about following your own inspired success strategy, which is exactly what you were just saying. It's really about this deepest listening to a place—I know that there's a place in me, I know that I'm meant to do this work, I know that I'm being led to do this work, there's this inspired force that moves through me to do this work. And for me, it's about the courage to follow that all the way. And it's just so funny because I felt, like I said, this is so much what the book is about and that's the thing that I continue to need to learn always: to trust my way, to trust that path, to trust that voice, because my own success has come that way. I've done wild things, I left a legal career and I wrote a book for 12 years without an agent, a publisher, a contract, or anything and then it got discovered by a major publisher and picked up. Just following that love and following that excellence and that intelligence; that's so much what I see these times are screaming

for; that we each have these unique paths and these infinite ways to do things. But again, what comes up for me is that stupid comparison.

For me it's the paradigm of which world are you going to do it in? Are you going to do it from the place of knowing that there really is a force and a vision and a love and an integrity and an energy that's meant to do this or are you going to believe that no, there really are formulas and slick and contrived ways? I don't know if this comes up for you, but what comes up for me is I can easily turn away from the formulas and I can turn away from all of that and say, "You know what? That's just not my way, that's not what I want, it's selling to fear, everything in my work is about undoing fear." But then, in all honesty, getting back to the transparency, I'm jealous! I get envious! "You can have all your integrity, Tam! You can have your beautiful, excellent way, but these people are laughing their way to the bank or their retreats are packed." Thank God I'm starting to see the victory of doing it my way, as well, because my retreats are starting to be packed and I'm starting to see way more success than I've ever seen. But that is what comes up. That is the crux.

**RC:** That's so great! And what you just shared to me that is really worth pausing to recognize: that you walk into a retreat center and you and I teach at some of the same ones, and who knows what each individual participant in your workshop or intensive is going through, but they're probably not really tuned in to the idea that there's that part of you, the comparing part of you, maybe the insecure part of you, who's looking into the other rooms and noticing, "Oh, how many are there?" And the whole point of all of this is that if we recognize and allow these parts of ourselves, then our resistance to them doesn't run us. So it's not a sign somehow that there's something wrong, if comparing mind comes up, or if insecure mind comes up. But it's interesting for a student or a participant to know that that might happen for a teacher.

**TK:** I think it's important for them to know.

**RC:** Yeah! I was just going to say that it's a really interesting experience and I think a growth experience to show up and give everything you have with your group and to know that one or two seminar rooms over, somebody else has three or four times as many people.

**TK:** Yes.

**RC:** And there's no way that that doesn't register with any presenter.

**TK:** Right, because we are these distinct, amazing animals: we're visionaries, we're probably drawn to do this because we have a message, we have a dream, we have an intelligence we want to communicate, but we're also human beings and we also want to get it out there. I keep asking myself what is this about? What is this need for success, what is this need for numbers about? Is that just totally my ego? Which it is, I mean, some of it certainly is because I like to look good, recognition, and all that good stuff. But I've also realized that some of that's just my calling. I love this work, I love inspiring people, I love seeing people live their calling and I want that reach, I want that exposure. And so it's both. But I wanted to say something. I think it's really important that students know that teachers and presenters and gurus or whatever really struggle with the same, exact things. I think any teacher whose worth their salt is struggling.

I used to think I was inferior. I used to think, God, I should be past this. You know, I teach *A Course In Miracles* and I've taught that for twenty years and I thought I should be past fears. I teach *A Course In Miracles*, for God's sake! But I have come to look at that as: I'm proud on some crazy level of my fears or my struggles because it means I'm growing, it means I'm still reaching out to my highest inspiration; I'm reaching out to the places where I'm not in control and I don't know the answers and I'm working with something infinite and magical and gorgeous and it's scary and it's alive and it's awesome! And you should be scared, in a good way. And all these fears that are coming up for me around the book launch and all of that, it means I'm healing, it means I'm growing to my next level. It means that I'm purging this yet again or that I'm, like you said, in awareness, love, and compassion letting these parts of myself come up and I'm nurturing them and I'm being kind and I'm inviting them to the party, like, "It's okay to be scared and it's okay to compare yourself and we're still going to go forward." But I think it's so important for students to know that it's not just because you have a message or you teach that you have it together. If you are a true teacher, I think you're learning, you're growing, you're stretching. And I think it's important to communicate that to students.

### **3. If You Want To Burn, Squirm**

**RC:** Yeah. Beautifully put! And it comes up in so many ways. One of the things that I wanted to share is that you have a wonderful blog post that's titled—well, this is part of the title—it says *If You Want To Burn, Squirm*. And it's kind of about that in a way—that if there's something that you're reaching towards, it means almost by the nature of that reach, you haven't fully integrated it yet. If you haven't fully integrated it yet, then some parts of you aren't going to be completely conversant with it and aligned with it and that is going to create friction, whether it's the friction of

fear, or the friction of shame. And I wanted to share something along those lines and maybe it will spark something from you as well.

I was doing an interview with one of the people from the series and there was a phrase that happened in passing where she said something like, “Oh yeah, then there’s the subject of money and you could probably do a whole series just on that.” I loved that! And it just came back to me in these last couple of days because there’s what we were talking before, about different ways of marketing and this is an "interview series" and that sounds like something, it means something to most people. But also it’s created kind of along the lines of what is known as a tele-seminar. And the tele-seminar has varying modes, but generally speaking, somewhere along the line, somebody’s going to be asked if they want to buy something. If I want to buy the series as a package, either for download or an ebook or something like that. Or they might want to buy something later on that I might offer as a learning program or something. But the reason that I’m bringing that up right now is because I’ve noticed that when I’ve approached people to take part in the series, I squirm a little bit around the part that has to do with the money. Like it’s kind of a little un-pure and what I’ve noticed in life is that when there is something that you’re squirming about a little bit, then life has this amazing way of guaranteeing you’re going to keep rubbing your nose in it.

**TK:** Yeah, I’ve noticed that too!

**RC:** (laughs) Well, here’s what I wanted to share. It’s that there’s a person who is a really wonderful and prominent speaker and personality in the non-profit world who had agreed to do the series and then came to a fuller understanding that at some point down the road, some part of it may be made available for sale. And then this person decided on the basis of that to drop out.

**TK:** Wow.

**RC:** And that’s a completely fine choice. I have no problem right there, although I’m sad for that person not to be participating. But it immediately brought up in me—

**TK:** You bad boy, you! You asked for money! Now look what happened! (laughs)

**RC:** Yeah! On the one hand there’s that, like the feeling, as you’ve said, that I’ve done something wrong. Then there’s also this other feeling which is very deep in me around the idea of a false characterization or like being the victim of being seen not only as something that I’m not, but as the opposite of what I know myself to be. And so just having had that person make that cancellation out



of their own need, just got all that churning in me and then it was a real opportunity to say, “Oh look at that!” And kind of like what you said, yeah, I’ve been there before, I’ve worked on this, but right here, right now...

**TK:** (laughs) Here we go again!

**RC:** Absolutely! Take this opportunity to just stay with a little bit more, maybe a little bit more loving, take it a little bit more deeply.

**TK:** Which is so beautiful! There’s a line in *A Course in Miracles* that says that trials, the things that keep coming up for us, challenges and trials, are opportunities to, where once we didn’t make a loving choice, we have a chance to do it again. That’s all this is for. It’s where we haven’t loved enough or fully. So like in that example, it’s a great example and I think it’s such an important topic for those of us in the spiritual visionary artistic community because if we really want to thrive in our work, the money piece is there, the marketing is there, and I think this is all about the integration of: “How do I live an inspired life and honor these amazing principles and live in this world, doing it a different way?”

Those trials come up for us, wherever we’ve had squeamishness about anything. It’s the same thing for me where I’m having my squeamishness, that’s where I get to look at it again. As much as I am excited about the work I do and I’m excited like, “Wow, I have a book coming out, maybe this is going to happen, maybe that’s going to happen,” whatever. Really, at the end of the day, what this work is really about and what it’s really for, is my own healing. That’s what it’s for. I may think it’s so that I become a best-selling author or a rock star or whatever, but I know in inspired work and living your calling—it’s the thing I teach, it’s really about my healing, my freedom in every single situation, my self-love in every single situation, my sense of safety in every single situation. It’s the things we care enough about, the things that we feel called to do that take us down the roads where we’ll face those particular places or squeamishness. And I think money is a huge one and I personally—I could go on about that, like for me, that’s my soapbox, thank you. (laughs)

That’s my soapbox where I really have a hard time with the discomfort that we sometimes feel about charging money for what we do. Because I think this work deserves payment. It kills me that as an attorney, I could charge you \$350 an hour to sue someone, be bitter, be vindictive, be cruel, and nobody would blink an eye. They’d say, “Oh wow, she’s really good!” But as a spiritual teacher, as a leader, as a visionary, as somebody who is taking humanity to whole new level, I’m

not supposed to charge money. That doesn't make sense to me and I would really love to see artists and spiritual teachers and visionaries start integrating the value of money; that it's not an evil thing, it's not impure, it's an energy, it's an expression. And we live in a culture that does value money and people are going to value what they pay for. I would just love to see that be different and I do think people project all over it. So, I'm glad you brought that up. (laughs)

**RC:** Yeah! Well, again, this comes back to me to what is each individual's sweet spot in terms of these values. So for me, for instance, I come from an activist background and I spent the earlier part of my life really focused on working on the behalf of those who are the least fortunate and who have been the most abused in our society, and particularly by political power. And so I've always felt that if I price what I do at an amount such that most people can't actually take advantage of it, it doesn't really work for me. So what I've done is often created a sliding scale, but then also created a scholarship rate so that people could work with me if they could just get together a little bit of their resources. But again, this is where you were talking about the squirm: I would also love to be able to get to the point where there are enough people who I could recommend as trained facilitators in emotional connection so that if you can't actually pay what my rate is as the creator of the process, then there is somebody who can help you, but that doesn't mean I have to be the one to help you.

But even as I say that, and I know that that's a truth for me, there's a part that's very deep and very old and maybe it feels, although I can't say for sure, that it's multi-generational and probably connected to my Jewish culture as well, or conditioning, that actually in the very moment, that even as I put that out there and share that with you, recoils and rails against me for abandoning those in need. So that's what you could call a savior complex or a guilt complex or a combination of the two, but there's something in me that if I was able to wave a magic wand and create a reality just like I described where I made sure that there are resources for people who need that, that I'm no longer working directly with those people, something in that goes, "Ooh, ahh!" I don't own that yet. I can feel that and I don't even know ultimately if it's right for me and I'm still, let's say, in process with that; allowing it, moving with it, and not really at the end of the journey with that. There is no end in a grander sense, but just this particular piece I'm talking about, the end where I would either come to recognize that I moved through feelings that I needed to, to get to the place where I was in an expansive and peaceful version of that offering I just described. Or I would have to come to a real understanding in terms of me, that the unique fingerprint of God that is Raphael, after I've done

my work and I felt my way through, is actually meant to work with people directly who are on the lower end of the financial scale. And that may be right and that may be something that I may rail against in the opposite way.

**TK:** In the opposite way.

**RC:** But need to accept.

**TK:** Right. And that is the beauty—you just described that so beautifully and I really so appreciate your integrity and honesty. And I love the witness of it because for me, what fascinates me about this work so much is that when we're living our calling, it's these things that come up, our own personal healings, whatever they are, and they'll be distinctive to us, like the places where we squirm or the places where we've held back the places where we're not free, the places where we react rather than consciously choose or that our programming takes over. And I think that's the work—to start consciously looking at what's true for me. And the guts to say what's true for me, even if it's not popular, even if that's not true for someone else, even if it doesn't sound right or politically correct, or spiritually correct: "I'm going to honor this essence and this vibe in me, this unknown, this discovery, and I'm going to be true to it."

And I think that's what you're on the verge—that's exactly what you've just articulated and what you've made me think of, which was fascinating because I never realized it until I was listening to you: I think our views around money in this career, let's say, come from what you said, our background or our own personal healings, because I have such a soapbox around it. I grew up in the Jewish tradition and I grew up wanting to be a creative artist and a writer. That's really what I wanted and in my culture, or my family anyway, that wasn't really okay. It was like, "You're going to write? You going to write?! You're going to starve!" And so immediately it was law school or medical school or whatever and I guess my thing around money at this point is I want visionaries and artists and healers and people who are doing amazing work, I want that to be as valid as medical school, as law school, as whatever. And some of that might involve money. I don't want it to be this choice that if you're doing your right work and you're doing what you love, it's a given you have to starve. And I think a lot of us take that on.

And so I think my issue around money is related to that, where I want these careers to have dignity, I want them respected in the world. And I'm never saying that you have to charge a lot of money or be unavailable to people because that's not my stance either. But I guess that I don't want people

squirming about valuing this work because I think people do squirm about charging money for “spiritual work” or stuff they love or “I would just do this for joy,” and I would too but we also need to make a living. So it just made me think of that when you were saying.

**RC:** Yeah, good! I’m glad we just got a chance to talk for a few minutes about money; of course we just scratched the surface. But every listener who’s looked at the cost of workshops and seen whether there are scholarships or been excited about some kind of learning opportunity with a person they admire and want to learn from it and found out that it’s absolutely prohibitive for them to do so, or people who have been pressed to spend money that maybe they can’t afford, because if you’re really interested in growing or healing, why wouldn’t you invest in that? And therefore having to come up against one’s own insecurities and one’s own issues around money, even in the process of deciding who to learn from and how and when. Anybody listening to this right now is going to have his or her own examples of where the money thing and the spiritual and personal growth thing have intersected uneasily. Because I don’t think there’s a single person with whom that all just flows without any kind of glitch. And one of the things that you find so often in people who are more spiritually-oriented is not even so much of a judgment but a deep resistance to actually dealing with the money stuff, even in their own personal life. “I want somebody else to handle that, you know, spreadsheets aren’t really my thing, I can’t have a budget, I can’t look so carefully at what I spend.” So that’s just another way that we can see how money can show us where our no’s are or where our edges are. And it doesn’t mean necessarily that in order to be a fully realized spiritual being that you have to be able to do your own taxes—

**TK:** Oh thank God! (laughs)

**RC:** But if you found that your resistance was really powerful there, it might be a good experiment to do it one year and to feel all the feelings that are connected to being in such a gritty kind of “unseemly environment” that you would usually avoid at all costs.

#### **4. Resistance**

**TK:** Yes. You know, you just brought up a really interesting thing too, of going where there is resistance because one of the things I’ve had to look at in my own career has been when there are times where I have resistance, you know, going back to marketing this book or writing this book. I wrote a book without thinking about, “Will this be a hot topic, will this sell? I wrote—and this is always my standard— I wrote what I needed to write, what I wanted to heal. I wanted to learn

exactly what we're talking about. How do you become wildly successful, but in your way, an inspired way, and really, how do you make this a spiritual calling?

And what I've had to look at is sometimes that resistance is my inner voice saying, "Hey honey, that's not your way, not right. And you're squirming not because you have to face that, but go where your joy is, go where it opens wide for you, go where there's love, go where there's ease." And then there's other times, exactly like what you're saying where I see this in a lot of students, like they love the desire and the joy part and then they can use it as an escapism. Like, "I don't like that part and I don't like the money part and I don't like the sales part. I'm just going to trust the universe." And I think this walk is such an amazing, vigorous path of honesty and awareness of what things do I face? So for me, how I've distinguished that, and I don't know for you what that might be, but for me, it's where if something is holding me back.

I'll give you a stupid example. I live in Colorado and so it's like everybody here skis and I don't ski. I'm neurotic, I have tons of fears. I don't need to face that, though! It is not holding me back. There is no part of me that thinks, "Oh shoot! You really should face this resistance." But in places where it does hold me back, where for a while I was having a really weird energy about flying on planes, and I'm a speaker and I'm doing retreats and so that's an area where I did have to go past it because it would hold back my joy and my expression and my needs. So I think with resistance, it's where do we go forward and where do we honor it? So that's what I was thinking when you were talking about resistance.

**RC:** Yeah. Well, I think that the key, from my experience and what I've shared with people, in determining whether that resistance is something that will melt away if you pay close attention to it or something which actually is a signal that's important for you to listen to, is to put in the time with the feelings so that you can clear away any unfelt emotion that is a part of the experience and then you can reliably hear and trust your own intuition. So I believe that at first it's impossible to know which is which, and that's why I ask people to hang out with the resistance.

**TK:** That's interesting!

**RC:** And give it the time and the space to reveal itself for what it is. And then you have much more information with which to make the truest possible choice for you.

**TK:** That's beautiful! I can see that. I am teaching constantly trusting your inner voice, trusting that guide, trusting that magnificent trusting, moment by moment, breath by breath—that path. And that's what I struggle with. It's like I do it, I live it, it works, it's been amazing! And at the next level there's always this theory that I'm doing it wrong or normal people would do this or other people would do that or Raphael does it that way, and that he knows how to put up a tele-seminar on. And I think so much of that resistance is always going to come up in probably the places that we're gifted, actually. That our gift is looking at—you use the word resistance, but I think our gift is that the place where I struggle most is also my greatest healing, is my greatest freedom, it's where I am really shining and it's also where I'm a great teacher.

I used to think that to be a great teacher, you had to be perfect and you had to handle all this stuff and have the 7 easy steps that people could master. And it's taken me many years to realize that what makes me a great teacher is because I'm learning the same stuff and I'm honest and I'm sharing and I'm real about it and that again, you're going into to your own deepest freedom and liberation and healing and you're bringing back these little glimpses of genius for people and you're sharing it. And that's why I think this series is just genius.

**RC:** So let me ask you, though, as a follow up to that, because this has come up as a question in some of the other dialogues. Isn't it also true that even when you embrace the power of that transparency and the "we're all in it together", that you also often, like all of us are editing too, like, you don't tell us everything.

**TK:** Oh yeah! Definitely! (laughs) Oh yeah! And some of that is a professional ethic, you know? I mean, some of it. There are definitely retreats that if I were really being honest, I'd be like, "I'm scared right now! I don't know if any of this works!" That's what is going through my mind in that moment and that probably wouldn't be nurturing or loving or appropriate for my students. And so I don't consider that hiding as much as I consider that, again, a professional ethic and I also know that what I've seen is—and I've trusted this—that even though I might be feeling those feelings as a human being, I still have integrity to the work that I can feel all those fears and all that junk and then I can show up and the genius takes over and the love takes over and when you actually do your work, you're stronger. It's not that you have to be strong before you do your work, but yes, I think one of the trademarks of my teaching or my writing, you know, my first book *This Time I Dance*, of what people loved about that book more than anything was, "Oh my God, you're so real and I felt like you understood what I was going through." So I'm very, very honest and I'm very, very real

and that said I'm not exactly going to tell you what happened to my sex life last night, you know? (laughs) I'm not going to tell you! I'm not telling you everything! Of course not!

### **5. Getting Out of The Way**

**RC:** Yeah, but I think you hit on something though that's really meaningful to me in terms of the teaching of my own and then others, is that on the one hand we're all doing it for ourselves, we're all walking through the world learning what we can and opening to what we can no matter what role we're in, whether we're called the teacher or we're called the student, and you mentioned that before and I think that's a really beautiful way to hold it. And, on the other hand, when I step into a room in the role of facilitator or teacher or whatever you want to call it, nobody's asked me to do this, but along the lines of the blessing that you offered before we began, I recognize it as a sacred mantel, so to speak, and that in my role I'm there first and foremost for the highest good as I can see it through my loving heart for the people who are there.

**TK:** Yes.

**RC:** So it is possible that I might have a moment where I'm driven to share something that feels like it would be good for me, but doesn't feel like it would be for the highest good of the people in the room. And so I'm going to edit myself not because I'm trying to hide something, but because I'm there for a particular purpose and I know what that purpose is.

**TK:** Exactly!

**RC:** Sometimes I am listening to myself with hopefully a gentle but let's say, careful awareness; I might, in the course of my teaching, think, "Hmm, did I just over-share?" I might be wondering about that. Or conversely I might think, "It's getting a little bit dry in here and it might be time to just mess it up with a little bit of my own mess. I might try to use what they call in Buddhism 'skillful means' to take the temperature of the room, myself, the moment, and respond in kind. And I think when that happens in the best possible way, it's because I'm getting out of the way and trusting presence to lead and that's something that's ongoing.

**TK:** I think you're so right. There have been so many times during retreats I'll be honest and I'll share stuff and then later I'll think, "Did you really need to share that? Did you really need to go into that with these people who are paying money to see you?" And then of course, always—and I'm sure you've had this—somebody comes up afterwards saying, "I cannot believe you shared that! That was so meaningful to me...." And so I think if you really real, as a teacher, you are being

open to that presence, you are being spontaneous, you are being alive, and you're being willing to go where maybe it doesn't look good for you to go and it's just being real in that moment and listening to the energy and presence and sometimes we don't know what we're meant to share.

One of the things that blows me away constantly lately is, you know, I think I'm such a brilliant teacher and everybody's getting so much out of my work and my concepts, and I'm teaching them how to find a calling and live it and find out what the passion is, and I think more people lately have been telling me, "Oh my God, I love being around you. I love your workshops because you're so alive and you're so free!" I'm beginning to realize that it's like what other people have always said that you teach by example or whatever, that people aren't coming to me because I'm wise and I'm brilliant, which I keep thinking they should, but it's the aliveness, it's the realness that you're talking about, and I'm beginning to realize that's what we're modeling. And I think in this generation, in these times, we need new teachers, that the time of head knowledge—I don't think that's helping anybody anymore and information—I keep saying the 7 easy steps, I don't necessarily think that that's always helpful to people anymore. I think people are craving and needing an experience of freedom and truth and emotions. And as teachers, if we're being honest and real and holding that professional integrity that that's the purpose, like I started off telling you, you know, "Hey, I'm self-absorbed." I love talking about myself! I could spend the whole retreat just talking about me, but that's not useful. I'm constantly aware of you're there to serve an audience, you're there to serve people who signed up to have a certain experience, and you're there to serve that presence and the courage to serve that presence when it may go where you didn't think you should go.

**RC:** Yeah! And someone once said something to me after I gave a talk that it didn't really matter what I said, that I could have just been reading the phonebook, and that what was valuable, they thought, to the people that they were with was the quality of the presence and the convening that was happening. And on the one hand, I feel so honored by that and also know that I don't own it, it's really about getting out of the way. If there's any way showing I'm doing, that's it, I'm letting Spirit move through me and animate Raphael but not in some kind of way that I could take credit for. And then on the ego level, there's also a certain frustration, which is, "Wait, you mean all that time and energy I put into writing the book or thinking that I have methods and techniques that are unique and original and important for people, that's all just an excuse to get us all together?"



**TK:** Amen! That is so it, Raphael! And I will give you some feedback: I get asked to do a lot of different tele-seminars, interviews, blah, blah, blah; they come across my desk and I kind of look at them. Your name came across my desk—when you wrote to me, I immediately said yes. I didn't even know what it was, but I just said yes. And the reason is because it's not even your work, it's you. I love you! I love your energy, I love your truthfulness, I believe in you. I felt, "Okay, I can vibrate with that." It's like I knew that whatever you were going to do, it was going to be real. And it was going to be truth, there was going to be a quality or integrity to it that made me feel, "Okay, I'll lend my name to this." So I can reflect that back to you, your energy and your realness and how you show up, who you are, to me that's what teaches.

**RC:** Well, thank you! I bow in recognition and of course, you only see what is a reflection of you, not just as a spiritual truism, but really, it is so. So thank you for that. And let's spend the little bit of time that we have left to going the extra step on behalf of the listeners. When we spoke a little bit before we actually did this recording, maybe a couple of weeks ago, one of the things that we were talking about that is often really challenging is living and practicing the spiritual theme of letting go of the outcome.

**TK:** Yeah! Oh God! (laughs) No, let's just talk about how wonderful we are! Let's not talk about that! (laughs)

**RC:** And I remember that there was a squirm—

**TK:** Yeah! So you go for the jugular, huh? (laughs)

**RC:** Yes, I do! That's my job. But I thought it was really beautiful that you were honest about that too because we speak about how important it is to give everything we have and surrender the outcome because that is the way to peace and it's also the way to open up and let the wind of spirit be at our sails. But you are honestly acknowledging to me when we were talking that it's hard for you to do that.

**TK:** Oh, it is! That is probably one of my weakest links. Just because I am passionate and this is my life's work and I care so deeply about it. And probably my thing is writing and it's like these books are amazing! They're not just schlock! I spent years crafting every little sentence, and so I do care deeply and that is probably the hardest thing for me: the letting go of that. I'm going to put everything I have, and again, it's part of what this teaching is, I'm going to put everything I have

into it, I'm going to put the excellence in it, I'm going to put the trust in it, I'm going to go where my God leads me, my soul leads me, and I cannot determine what that looks like externally and that's hard because, you know, I went to Harvard Law School!

I have a driven personality, I'm logical, I'm ambitious, that junk is in my veins, baby! And so letting go of the outcome is not usually what you do! You know, I was a straight A student, it's like there will be no letting go of the outcome there! But I know, like you said, the healing is that so far in my career; every time I have done that, the outcome has been even more beautiful than I imagined, but not the way I imagined. It wasn't that, "Oh wow!" And I did go to the New York Times best-seller list immediately. It wasn't necessarily that. It was, "Oh my God!" My heart opened and I had so much more joy and beauty in my life. I would never have even known those as goals and I did succeed externally as well. But right now, particularly that one is certainly up for me because this is all the hopes and dreams, you know? This is my second book and this one, like I really love this one now and we're redoing the website and we're putting stuff in and I'm deciding who I want to be in the world. So there's all this stuff of what you dream it to be and it's hard to let go. You know, one of my prayers is like, "Let my true life use me. Let my true life use me. Let my true life use me. Let that take over. I don't even know—" you know, from *A Course of Miracle's* point of view, I don't know what is success and I don't know what a failure is. I don't know where this is supposed to go, I really don't. But like I said, that other part of my personality sure has some ideas!

And it's scary because then there's the other part of it, the letting go of the outcome where I also, like I said, I've seen a lot of people in spiritual communities or in creative communities that sometimes use letting go of outcome as an escapist path, like, "Well, I don't really know, it's not my hands. I'm just going to let it go." And sometimes that's a passivity, not showing up and doing what you can do. So it's that razor's edge of I want to show up and do anything and everything I can do that I'm meant to do, and then I want to let it go where it goes, but oh God, I'm squirming! (laughs)

**RC:** Yeah! And I remember reading—

**TK:** I can't believe you asked me that! (laughs) And I love you for it! (laughs)

## **6. Completely Involved and Totally Detached At The Same Time**

**RC:** I remember reading Allan Watts in high school and coming across that idea of being completely involved and totally detached at the same time as a paradox for living. And I think when you're talking about that razor's edge, if you give any less than you can give, then surrendering the outcome isn't really going to be the fullest path for you and if you surrender any less than you absolutely can, then you're also tilted in the other direction, so it really is a balancing act and each side, I think, needs to serve the other. And I think that also, for many people listening—and certainly this is true for me—the whole issue of perfectionism comes into play here because for instance, in the movie business where I spent a good many years working, it was so maddening that some of the people who were clearly mediocre were rising to the top. The top meant getting the most jobs and making the most money as writers, directors, etc.. I used to really, on the one hand, want so much what they had but also judge them because I was somebody who—

**TK:** That's where I'm living! That's exactly where I'm living these days!

**RC:** I was somebody who was very perfectionistic. And just the other day, I don't know whether I was at the gym or I was in the shower, whatever, I had this inspiration that, in my life, it would be really good to champion more mediocrity because sometimes the people who are more mediocre are the ones who actually get the stuff out there and they're a little bit heedless to the criticism of others or to their own niggling internal editor and they just kind of get it out there and they move on. And now there's no one approach that works for any person and for any moment. I think it's all about what the moment requires, so I'm not saying...

**TK:** Have everybody go, "That's what Raphael Cushnir stands for now – championing mediocrity—you heard it, folks!"

**RC:** But it is all about noticing where we are—

**TK:** It's that tilt, that's where you need to tilt.

**RC:** Yeah, and so sometimes just doing it, getting it done, and moving on is a value if in fact you're like, I think it's the book *The Plague* by Albert Camus, there's a character who's writing the greatest novel ever written, who's been actually writing the first paragraph over and over for many years and he's never gone past the first paragraph.

## 7. The Hearts Desire

**TK:** (laughs) Yup, I can relate to that! I was thinking about that razor's edge again, of putting everything into it and then also fully letting go and when you were saying that, it made me realize that my way or my healing through this, I think, is taking the joy now. That's the whole point of doing work that you love, of doing something that means something to you; that it's not about whether this succeeds.

For me, writing the book was the success—I mean, I healed through writing this book. I'm sure you've had that experience, too. For me, even if this book never sold a copy, which would kill my ego, it really did change my life. I'm already grateful. If this thing never went anywhere, it's already completely changed my life, I know that. And so I think my healing is taking in the success, it doesn't need to go anywhere because I've already gotten the goods. If you're putting everything into something, it's not because later on it'll turn out. It's because it's giving you something now, like we put everything into our love or our spiritual work or our health or whatever because ideally, we're receiving it now. We love people, we open our hearts, hopefully for really giving and loving, we're getting the benefit right there; it's not the deal later. And so I think that's what I'm realizing is that maybe my edge of letting go of the outcome will come more as I just take in what I'm already receiving.

**RC:** Yeah! That's beautiful! And it makes me think of something that is related to it. There's a writing exercise that I do at workshops where I ask people to start with a phrase that I write on the board and then continue to do some automatic, uninterrupted, unedited writing. The phrase that starts it out is, "If I truly lived in accord with my heart's desire..." and then to just let that take you where it takes you. The reason that I'm bringing it up in this context is because I think that that's a way of tapping into what you value beneath some of the wants that are more egoic or personality-driven.

And sometimes there's a first response, like I'd like to spend more time on a beach doing nothing or whatever, but clarifying those values that are really coming from your heart helps you realize, "Oh yes, I choose to write the book as a personal and a healing journey for myself. And that's how I'm approaching it, so that is the gift." And I know that in my own life, for instance, if I didn't have a family, if I didn't have young children to raise, there might be a whole set of things that I would be doing with my time and I might have less financial pressure. But I actually was very intentional about creating a family and it's something that I wanted so much and it's a great gift for me and it helps me to know that that my deepest value is in being there for my daughter and my step-daughter

and allowing them to have not the stuff that they want, but to have a life that nurtures them and lets them know that they are loved as they are. That's really my highest value. So when I'm feeling a little extra pressure or uncertainty or maybe I want to take some kind of fanciful leap to the next level, but I can't quite do that at this point because the financial risk might be too much, I can temporarily feel like I'm hemmed in, but then I come back to what my heart's desire really is.

**TK:** Absolutely! And I've seen on my own path that the places where I thought I was hemmed in or, oh my God, I could be so this or whatever, they've actually been the places I've healed the most or they've been perfect for my path. I mean, I used to rile against God, "Why can't I have money?" you know? I waited tables for a while when I first left law and all these people would have trust funds and I'd be thinking, "I'm doing something worthy in the world! Why can't I have money?" But then I deeply believe because I didn't have money, it's made me do this work and it actually goes back to your championing mediocrity thing, like I would have been perfecting workshops and books forever! I would have been *The Plague* person. But because I didn't have money, it's like, "You're either going to teach that workshop now or you're going to have to get a job."

So it ended up growing me in a different way. I think a lot of times people have these ideas that there's this perfect way or, "If I was just totally listening to my heart, it would be so liberating, everything would just be a certain way." And I think that the universe is so brilliant and there's a co-creative force that's actually helping us. I think my not having money actually helped me to become what I am, it also gives me the track record that I can honestly say I've created the work, I love I pay every single bill I have based on totally what I love and people can't go, "Well, she had a trust fund," you know, or a rich husband.

I've found that so much of what I've grown to, was not anything I would have known I wanted. In a million years, I would not have said to you, "I want to teach listening to your inner voice," or "I want to be in a spiritual realm." I made fun of those people. You know, it's like I didn't respect spirituality for years! I thought, "Well, that's for people who need a crutch or something." And then of course, when I had enough fear, it's like, "I needed that crutch!" I think that I grew, like the things that bring me the deepest joys and freedom now are not anything I ever imagined. I never, in a million years, thought I'm going to teach *A Course in Miracles* for God's sakes! Or I'm going to lead retreats in spiritual centers or whatever. I would never have taken that out of the hat.

**RC:** So one thing about that that's really important is it's a great spiritual practice to pay very close attention to what you make fun of.

**TK:** (laughs) Yes!

**RC:** Because I know for instance that there was a person I knew years ago who was very gross in her speech and she used to say things like, "That person bores the snot out of me." Or instead of saying like I have something in my eye, she'd say, "I have something in my eyeball." And I would always think, "I could have gone my whole life without hearing that." And then I found out later that she was owning a certain part of my shadow, because there was a certain part of me that really reveled in being inappropriate. And so when I freed that part of me in our relationship, I became the one often who was the grosser in communication because I had recognized that there's a place. But there's something else that I want to do. In honor of you and your creativity and spontaneity, I want to bring sound effects into this interview in the way that I haven't done with any others. So I'm going to count—it's not going to be gross. (laughs)

**TK:** I know! I'm not liking where this is going! (laughs)

**RC:** I'm going to walk into a different room and I want you to see if you can hear anything. Can you hear anything?

**TK:** I can hear birds or what I think are birds.

**RC:** So what I just did was I walked outside from my office into our chicken coop. And you were saying that sometimes the things that have happened to you or that has come into your life have been the last things that you thought that you wanted. And I had a long conversation with my wife about how I really didn't want chickens. And I had a lot of really good reasons for not wanting chickens and I knew that my kids wanted them and I knew it would be a good thing for them to have them. And all those reasons that I had were good reasons, but it seemed that it was somehow also inevitable that chickens were coming in to my life.

**TK:** Well I could tell you, if your wife wanted it, that's it, honey! It's done! (laughs)

**RC:** There was more to it than that.

**TK:** Okay!

**RC:** But the main thing is that the chickens really are a metaphor for me because—I'm leaving them now, they'll head back into their own, little—

**TK:** Aw, I liked hearing them! They were lovely!

**RC:** The point I was making, using the chickens to do it, is that we have to take care of ourselves where we are and we have to make choices that are what seem like they're going to be the most nurturing, but then there's always going to be these chickens that come regardless.

**TK:** I love it!

**RC:** And now, I really feel like I'm glad they're here. And I still think all the reasons that I had for not wanting them were good reasons, but if I stay with that then I don't get to enjoy them and I will tell you that there's one chicken that my daughter named Hairdo, it looks like it was from an 80's band, like Duran Duran or something like that because of its crown or crest or whatever you call that. So thank you for your flexibility and allowing me to bring sound effects and poultry—

**TK:** And poultry! You never know where you're going to go, but I think that point is excellent though, and I hope what people will take that is that even those of us who teach, do what we love and follow our ultimate desire, which is everything my work is about, is that sometimes you don't even know who you are. Sometimes I think the path of a calling is going to take you into territories you never even dreamed of. Anybody who's on a spiritual path or a creative path or an entrepreneurial path, a visionary path, again if you're growing, it's about discovering. We keep shutting down, thinking, "Oh I'm not that!" I had all kinds of ideas of what spiritual people are. And so I was like, "I'm not that!" And then you discover like, "Oh my God, you are so that!" (laughs)

**RC:** We have to go in a minute and I'm going to give you a chance to tell people a little bit more about how to find you, but I want to tell you one thing along those lines, is that I've always had a dream that, again, if I could wave a magic wand and do anything different than what I'm doing, I would love to have a talk show. And you were just saying that when you follow the path and you let it unfold for you, you never know where it's going to go and it's always going to be really surprising. And the other day, all of a sudden, a light went off in my mind and I realized, wait, that's what this series is! It's a talk show! (laughs)

**TK:** Yeah, it is!

**RC:** But the point is that I'd probably done 20 interviews for the series before I even realized that's what it was, that I found my way to a home base of my own choosing without even realizing that that's where I was or that's where I was heading.

**TK:** And those of us in our sweat pants who can talk to you are very grateful you're doing it this way, so people don't have to see what we really look like! (laughs)

**RC:** Well, I do have a special technology that you're not aware of.

**TK:** Oh! That's where my spontaneity ends, my friend! Chickens are one thing, but vanity is a whole other deal, baby!

**RC:** I hear you. So Tama, do tell us before you go a little bit about—other than your book, which is coming out this summer, how we might be able to interact with you.

**TK:** Obviously, the website is the best place to go. TamaKieves.com. I'm also on Facebook, I have a really active following on Facebook and it's just a great community and tribe of people who are living their dreams, thinking about their dreams, being visionary artists, entrepreneurs. If you want that kind of support, join me on Facebook, join my blog. I have a newsletter that comes out once a month where, again, I really do write an article. It's not anything to sell you and it's not product list, it's more just really keeping you on this path of nurturing you and strengthening you on really living from inspiration instead of fear.

So the website again is TamaKieves.com or it could be AwakeningArtistry.com, it might be that; the old site is that. There's also a gift, if people would like for this series. I have a CD called *Trusting Your Inner Voice* that's been so popular. And so we decided to have that as a free download, and so you could just go TamaKieves.com/trust and it's a free download of that CD of *Trusting Your Inner Voice*. So you can go there. And then if you have any problems, just let us know. But I would love, love, love to connect with you guys. I would love, love, love anybody who's interested in transparency. It's my crowd, my vibe! So I'm grateful you're doing this, Raphael. I'm so grateful to all the listeners that are interested in teachers who are true and who have real dreams and passion and integrity, and I'm just so grateful to be in these times where we're all really looking at our inner voice and we're looking at giving our gifts to the world.

**RC:** Well, again, a deep bow of appreciation to you. Thank you for being with us today and traveling on to some of those skinny branches. I really appreciate it.



**TK:** Oh, I'll think twice before your name crosses my desk again! (laughs)

**RC:** On the transcript we have to put laughing. She didn't really mean that!

**TK:** She did not mean that at all!

**Gail Larsen**



Gail Larsen is the founder of Real Speaking® and the award-winning author of “Transformational Speaking: If You Want to Change the World, Tell a Better Story.” She delights in each person finding their distinctive and influential way to speak from the truth of who they are. An SBA award-winning entrepreneur and catalyst for life-affirming ventures, her original approach to communication draws from her own journey as a previously reluctant speaker, her respect for indigenous wisdom, 25 years in the world of speaking, and wide experience in business and association management. She is a former EVP of the worldwide National Speakers Association. Gail teaches annually in Vancouver, BC and at Omega Institute, and offers her Transformational Speaking Immersions exclusively in Santa Fe, NM. [WWW.REALSPEAKING.COM](http://WWW.REALSPEAKING.COM)

### **1. Today’s Masterpiece**

**RC:** Gail Larsen, welcome to Teaching What We Need to Learn.

**GL:** Thank you! Delighted to be with you, Raphael.

**RC:** Well, I’m delighted to be with you and I was thinking, as we were getting ready to do this call, that I was going to give you the vulnerability prize because we did a conference call together, you and I, which we recorded a little while back and you decided you wanted to be more vulnerable! So we are getting a chance to do it again and to let that sacred intention permeate our conversation, that whatever is meant to be revealed for the highest good of all, we will be fearless in that endeavor.

**GL:** That’s wonderful, thank you! As I mentioned, it’s so true, it’s rare in the speaking world we get to do anything over, so I greatly appreciate your willingness.

**RC:** Oh, it’s definitely my pleasure. And because the project is about transparency, I thought it would be really great to let people know that we are doing that so that there’s as little presentational quality as possible and more of the authenticity that I know and really adore you for.

**GL:** Thank you!

**RC:** I want to start off with a check in where we are right here in the now. I know there's a dog barking in your world, so we've located you environmentally. In my world, it's an interesting moment because my little 4 and a half year old is across the way from my office in our home and she's with her 11 year old sister and a friend and there's no adult with them in the actual house. I'm here if they need me, so I have a little special antenna going out across the lawn. I don't think there's going to be any issue, but as a dad, I can't help but recognize I'm just leaving a little tiny bit of awareness there.

**GL:** Yes, absolutely! And I apologize for Pachelbel's disturbance. He may continue, but I've done my best to contain him.

**RC:** Okay, alright. And so how are you in this moment as we're getting started?

**GL:** I'm good. I have an interesting—I actually have a tape for some soul work I had that Jill Kuykendall did with me. I listened to her recording last night and she said, "One of the gifts we can give ourselves is to stop for 10 minutes and to say, "What do I need energetically right now?" So I did that 15 minutes before our call and realized I just needed to settle in and enjoy and trust and delight in our time together.

**RC:** That's great! I love hearing that. And also that you, as a teacher, an expert, someone renowned in your field, are open to receiving guidance and helpful information, so you're teaching and learning simultaneously always.

**GL:** Always! I actually think it would pretty boring otherwise, don't you, Raphael?

**RC:** I do.

**GL:** It's enlivening to what it is we bring to others.

**RC:** Yeah. There's that famous cliché of the rock star who has done it so many times that he or she is standing in front of the crowd and says, "Good morning, Detroit," when they're really in Cincinnati. That happened a few times when I've given a talk that I've given many times and I'm at a church, a Unity church, a New Thought church, or something similar and I hear myself and I start to be a little bit bored because there isn't any newness or aliveness in the presentation.

In that moment, I'm always called to wake up and see what is fresh and to bring that for myself and for everyone else, so I think you're absolutely right. In that moment too, I know there's a way I

could be critical about myself or I could pull away from what I meant to be doing there because suddenly the life is drained a little from it. But for me, I find that if I'm open in that moment, once I recognize that, something new always can come through.

**GL:** Oh great! I had a client who called it Yesterday's Masterpiece. It's time to start looking at, okay, what's the story that enlightens me now. And as speakers in particular, I think we go with what's worked so far, but there's so much more informing our lives that we can get out of jet lag and just catch up with all the new information and stories and materials available to us.

**RC:** Yeah, that's beautiful! So in the spirit of today's masterpiece, I want to begin with you on a topic that really, in a way, makes the most sense because you're someone who teaches people to overcome issues, challenges, fears, they have around public speaking; that is your vein of gold that you mine for people. And a fear of speaking is something that has been powerful for you in your life as well. So clearly you're teaching what you are learning in this realm too, and I was wondering what you could share with us about that, in your own journey and how, in today's masterpiece that is present for you.

**GL:** You know, it is. I think many of us are asked to speak and it's like, "Oh, I can't do it!" When I was a young professional woman in Nashville, Tennessee, it was so scary for me, Raphael. I couldn't even introduce myself at a professional gathering without being so nervous. And actually last week I sponsored a luncheon; I was to speak for 5 minutes. And I felt what I used to call fear and anxiety in my body and I reminded myself of what I say to others, the Fritz Perls quote: "Fear is excitement without the breath." For those of us who are soft-spoken and never thought we'd be speakers, our bodies need more energy to be in front of the group.

I've been able to transform how I interpret it in my body and I find that is so helpful for others as well because my sense now is that we all have a voice that needs to be heard. We all hold a piece, a strand of the web of life that requires us to step forward and claim what we know and believe. And if we don't do it because we're afraid, we're missing an important piece of the puzzle that allows us to heal as a world, as a planet. So I think one of the bigger things for me and for others that I have the privilege of working with is that the soul call and the purpose is so much bigger than our own ego state of, "What will they think of me?" that it moves us out, even when it would not be our preference to show up on a public platform.

**RC:** I want to dive a little bit more into that idea of the soul's purpose, but before we do that, I want to discuss something else which is I noticed that the kind of vulnerability and fear, "excitement without the breath," as you described it quoting Fritz Perls, for me tends to also be an indicator that I have, let's say, some skin in the game; there's something that is on the line for me. And I want to give you an example of what I mean. If I go to one of those Unity churches that I described before where I've been many times and where I feel welcome and I feel like I'm in the right place to deliver my talk, I don't usually feel nervous at all. But where I noticed that my fear of speaking or just showing up comes is when there's some extra vulnerability for me.

So for example, I don't know exactly why it is, but a community that I have an aspiration to be a part of is the world connected to The New Yorker magazine. It's something I've been reading for maybe almost 30 years; there's a quality and a depth of introspection that is there in the writing. And so it's really something in my head because there isn't actually a New Yorker community of readers; it's more kind of a virtual assemblage and you don't really connect with those people personally. But one time I wrote a letter to the editor of the New Yorker magazine and they got in touch with me because they were going to publish the letter. And I felt like on some level I had arrived, you know? Because for somebody else, The New Yorker magazine would mean nothing, but maybe a different magazine or a different kind of community would be a place where they're a little uncertain, "Do I really belong, am I okay, do I have something to offer, am I equal to these people with whom I'm joining?"

And so I got a chance to be really honest and open and watch that in myself, realizing that, "Yeah, this is the place where I feel insecure." I got to embrace my insecurity, but I still wasn't fully in my power, because when they got to the point of editing the letter to the editor, which they often do, I just kind of said, "Uh okay! Whatever! Whatever, that's fine!" And when I saw the letter in the New Yorker, on the one hand I was thrilled, it was beautiful to be in those hallowed pages, but there was also a little sinking feeling in me because I realized that because of this issue of having a little more skin in the game, I didn't stand up and say, "Well you know what, I hear what you're thinking about in terms of that edit, but here's another possibility that might be a little bit more clear and impactful— what do you think of that?" So I guess for me, what the story represents is no matter where we are on the ladder of success or where our energy is as we see it, that there's always going to be some place that even if we're comfortable, secure, etc.—that place is going to test us and it's going to show us exactly where our next steps are.

**GL:** Well, I experienced that in the first interview with you.

**RC:** So say a little more about that.

## **2. A Tough Ask**

**GL:** Well, I was disappointed that we didn't cover some of the things... because I'm so used to interviews where I am able to respond and I realized that I didn't prepare a longer list for you of the things where I'm teaching what I need to learn; and it would have been easy since you thought it was acceptable to say, "Let's go with it." But I realized that if there was a chance for a redo, it would serve the series and I didn't want to put myself out there in a way that wasn't a better representation of the breadth of this question for me. So it happens, I think, when we're upping our game a bit to new audiences and sometimes it works, Raphael, and sometimes it doesn't.

The significant things that have shaped my direction have been the things that didn't work well at all. I wrote about it in my book called *Anatomy of a Bomb* (laughs). I laughingly say, "If you lay an egg, step back and admire it," but it is painful when it doesn't work." Our willingness to say, "Okay, why?" Maybe it isn't the right audience when we have that kind of experience. And maybe more is being asked of us. I mean, The New Yorker? That's a pretty big deal! And so to get in there at any cost, I can see why it would be easy to say, "Well, do what you think." It would have been easy for me to say that to you on our first go-around.

**RC:** Right, because there was a certain amount of time and reflection that you had, where you were thinking, "Was that enough?" Perhaps you were wondering are you going to inconvenience to me, or are you going to be pushy or high maintenance; all those things that come up for us when we ask for more of what we need.

**GL:** Yeah, absolutely! It's a tough ask and I decided it was worth it to check in with you on that.

**RC:** Oh, you just used the phrase that I haven't really heard before that I just want to highlight. It sounds really important. You said it was "A tough ask." Did I hear that right?

**GL:** Yeah.

**RC:** So I love that because anybody can relate to places where it's easy to ask and then the places where it's tough and that kind of echoes what I was saying before; it's not necessarily when it comes to a community you want to be involved with; whether it's your partner or someone you

work with, if it's important and it's tough, it seems like there's always going to be real treasure there.

**GL:** Absolutely!

**RC:** So let's go back to what you've described as a way that in order to really give your most when you're presenting in one form or another, the way you describe it is that your soul's purpose must override your personality to make it possible to show up fully, so can you speak a little bit more about that?

**GL:** Yes. It's easy to be silent; when we're frightened and the personality says, "Just sit here and be comfortable; this isn't a place to stretch." I think only speaking from what our purpose is can move us beyond that comfort zone. I think speaking just because someone asked us to speak without a real investigation of that core message on what we most care about in the world, waters down what's possible and we can shrink from what's being asked. And when we get real clear about our purpose and what we're here to do, every invitation is an opportunity to move in to that with passion rather than trepidation.

**RC:** It's interesting. It kind of reminds me of what happens in media training where politicians and other public figures are told to listen to the question that is asked and then answer the question that you wish was asked. That's why often you hear politicians taking a question and they give you some information and then you realize, wait a minute, that's not really what the question was. But rather than that being a devious or avoiding kind of goal in what you're describing, it's more "Let me take the fullness of the question as an invitation to bring the fullness of myself and find a way to merge those two together because if I divert too much from the fullness of myself and my purpose, or I have to squish it into some format where it's not really going to breathe, then nobody's ultimately going to benefit."

**GL:** Right. It's pretty mind-numbing to listen to when that's what's happening.

**RC:** So I wanted to ask you something else about this that I think may serve a pretty large subsection of the listening audience. And this is a topic where we could go on forever, but I just wonder if you could say a few words to people who heard what you said and what I echoed about coming from one's soul purpose and are at a place in their life where what they're saying is, "I don't know what my purpose is."

**GL:** You know, the way I get to it when I'm working with people is an exploration of our life stories, our turning points, and then to ask the questions: "If you had just one minute to speak, what is it that you would say?" Because I think part of the problem is we get so expansive and life has given us so many possibilities of messages and ways to put our energy, that it's easy to wander around in that in an experimental phase, rather than taking a stand. So I think what I would say is "Where does your energy rise? Where are you excited?" We have to put aside "Where can I make money?" because that interferes with the true question. And give it a shot. Put some energy into it and see how you feel.

### **3. The Scar Clan**

**RC:** You know, I was reminded, as you were talking, about an exercise that I use in my P4 Year-Long program, which is called Presence, Purpose, Passion, and Power. It's a small group of people that come together for a really kind of intensive transformation over the course of a year. And they get together for the first in-person retreat and they don't know each other, most of them. And part of what I'm wanting to do is establish a sense of connection and community as quickly as possible. And in that first weekend retreat, one of the practices is I ask everybody to write their life story in three sentences.

**GL:** Oh, you know, when I first met you, you did yours like a telegram. That's how you opened the speech, and I totally loved it! It was so compelling—do you remember it?

**RC:** I do! So I would joke that I've told my story so many times, I got it down to a telegram and the telegram goes, "Had great life. Stop. Everything fell apart. Stop. Dark night of the soul. Stop! Came out the other side." And then of course I'd fill in the details. But one of the things that I do these days is before I go on, I ask people to raise their hand if they have experienced in their own life something that they would consider a dark night of the soul. And almost every hand goes up and suddenly we all have skin in the game. It makes what comes next just that much more galvanizing for people.

So I've always found a real benefit from really distilling it, as you're describing, and as the three sentence life story describes it. I hear what you're saying: if we have too much to muck around and too much freedom, too much space, then it confuses what's central for us. And by telescoping in these different ways we're talking about, what really matters to us maybe has a better chance to come through.



**GL:** Yeah. We all have our version; we're members of the scar clan, as some of my teachers have said; to recognize that what people relate to is the emotion and the feeling, even though the details are different. We can really get stuck in an old story and in the hero's journey, of course, the last part is the homecoming, to go back to the village and share the victory. I think the speaking platform today is that village where people care about how our story connects with theirs and the aspects of it that they can learn from and use to triumph in their own lives.

**RC:** Well, I've known you for a long time and in this conversation I'm hearing certain turns of phrase. I know sometimes you're drawing them from other sources, but I'm so inspired. The one that just came up in what you shared this last time is the "scar clan." I've never heard that term before.

**GL:** Yeah, when I studied—I studied for 10 years with cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrien, and she would say, "We're members of the scar clan." And in June of this year, I did a week with Clarissa Pinkola Estes because she was working with fairy tales and I thought, "Gee, it would be nice to have a more feminine version of the hero's journey to work with in my classes." And she used the phrase again as well, "scar clan". I think it's one that comes from indigenous teachings.

**RC:** I love that! It is so evocative because who isn't a member of that clan? And yet, when we use that name and we claim it, something opens up and brings us closer together and maybe our listening can be deeper. It's interesting because as we're talking, there's somebody who is editing the transcripts of this series for the book that it's going to become and he is always looking for subtitles as we break the conversation into sections. And I'm sure that The Scar Clan will be the subheading for this section because it's so rich.

And one other thing before we move on from this topic; I want to say that it was a really great and inspirational day for me when I got an email in my box from Clarissa Pinkola Estes; who I do not know personally and didn't know that she had any awareness of who I am and what I do. She wrote in to give a big thank you for this series and a vote of confidence. I was really moved—of course I asked her if she wanted to be in this series, as well, and she said no, she thinks she would cede that to others. But I feel like somehow her spirit has come back, and she is with us through what you shared and Angeles as well.

**GL:** Yeah, two wonderful teachers.

#### **4. Standing in the Strength of Who We Are**

**RC:** So I want to move to another topic that I know is important to you, and it's something that comes up very often in the work that I do. I teach people about Emotional Connection and how to be in touch in their bodies with emotions that are meant to be felt directly, so they can do their job and then disperse and leave us in a more present and open and expanded state. And almost every time I do a workshop or training with that purpose, somebody says to me, "The problem I have, Raphael, is that I'm not only connecting to my own emotions. I'm super sensitive, I'm very empathic, I'm feeling what other people are feeling, and often it's way too much for me, and I don't feel I can handle it." I know that that's an experience that in some ways is very important to you, as well, so I'm wondering if you can share a little bit about your own journey and perspective with sensitivity in that way.

**GL:** Well, I think it's really good that the person you're referring to named it because I think until we recognize that we are highly sensitive people, we wonder why being in crowds that exhaust us; why showing up at a reception before speaking can, you know, it takes every bit of energy to get up on the stage. Until we recognize that it actually is a named condition that many people experience, we can think we're sick; we can try to label it in a way that doesn't have anything to do with the fact that we are letting in a lot of what's going on in the energetic field.

So it was a real lifeline for me to understand it and to start working specifically with how I take care of myself in order to show up 100 percent. It's a moving target; some days it's not so hard, some days it's like climbing a mountain, and that's where purpose will have to show up anyway. I say that when we know our medicine and our message, it's really going to simplify and amplify everything we do, and knowing that helps us show up even when we don't want to. Because the truth about speaking and life and commitments is we agree to some things that are down the road and we don't know how we're going to feel or what's going to be influencing us.

So I think it's huge for each person to understand, hey, if a crowd turns you on, terrific! You can book a busy schedule. But if you need a lot of time for renewal, then you're not going to have lunch with your classes. In studying with Clarissa, her request was that we did not touch her, nor were we to approach her because she said she'd rather stand behind a screen and talk to us, rather than be in person in a group for exactly the reasons you described. So I'd say number 1: awareness; number 2: that it's one of the most important practices we can develop—to know our own needs. And then 3: we have to speak to it and ask for what we need. So for me, it shows up with people saying, "Oh, all

your classes are booked this year. Why don't you add another class?" That would be not in service of my gift because I couldn't show up 100 percent.

I used to add a class, you know? I would go into this sense of, "Oh my gosh, it took a long time to build this business, I should make hay while the sun shines." And people would say, "Come do a class in my city, we'll host you." Well, that's a lot harder than doing the immersions here in Santa Fe where I have a space that works, I have assistants that support me and I don't have the air travel. It was a big stand for giving my gift 100 percent to say all the immersions will be in Santa Fe. Now, I'm really lucky to live in a place that people want to come to. It might not work in other cities. But you know, I work with just 6 people at a time for several days. So it doesn't seem to be an issue since I made that commitment to myself for people to decide to make the trip. So that's one piece. And then, you know, whether to have lunch with the group—not a big group, but if we're doing deep work, sometimes we all need to disperse. Some days it's very celebratory and we want to have a meal together. And as I said, it's a moving target, so that capacity to keep checking back in with ourselves to say what's going to support my well-being right now so that I can give what I'm here to give is an ongoing inquiry.

**RC:** Yeah. And there are a couple of things that I just want to reflect on or perhaps add to because I think the themes are really important. There was a book that came out many years ago, I'm going to guess about 20 years ago, called *The Highly Sensitive Person* by Elaine Aaron, I think is the name. It was one of those books where for many people, regardless of the great gifts inside the cover, the cover itself was enough. And for someone just to say, "Oh my God, there is such a thing? I am that! I'm a highly sensitive person, I get it." That is the beginning of a journey for people. I know some people in my life, would kind of, with a little wink and a smile say, "Yeah, I'm an HSP." We've got it down to an abbreviation. I think that there is a truth here that while there are degrees of sensitivity, everybody is way more highly sensitive than they're aware of.

A classic example is going into a restaurant and having a nice meal with your friends and then walking out and feeling like you need to take a nap because so much of your consciousness had to go into filtering out all the ambient noise and the other conversations. And so with that recognition that everybody is taking in way more than they're consciously aware of and then on top of that, some people have an extra sensitivity, it really changes the way we look at how we interact in the world. I love how you were talking about going back to one's soul purpose as a way to help work

with that skillfully because for many of us, we've heard all of the horror stories about prima donna artists who have crazy requests for what they have in the green room before the show.

"I have to have my water that comes from Indonesia and nobody can talk to me and everybody has to wear green if they come in." And we laugh at it as a kind of a crazy, narcissistic indulgence. So therefore, when it's time to actually say, "You know what? *I need* certain things before I'm going to show up fully and offer my gifts," that we can shrink from asking what we want or need because there's self-consciousness and self-judgment about it. But if we know why we're really there, it can help us really override that self-consciousness and judgment for the good of that purpose and what we are communicating. So I think all of what we've been talking about today goes together in a really powerful way. Even for me, on a personal level, the whole question of "When do I," like you say, "eat lunch with my workshop participants," brings up all of this because I can't do it during a workshop. I won't be serving them in the rest of the day to the degree that I want to.

And that's why I have always been so grateful, for instance, for the Kripalu Yoga Center in Massachusetts. They have a silent dining room off the main dining room, so I can go there, I can have my meal and then I can rest and come back regenerated. And then when the workshop is all over, I can spend the lunch with everybody, and let them know I've always been there with them in spirit throughout. But it does still take a little overriding of that voice inside that says, "Who are you to say... Are you too good for the group? Are you setting yourself apart?" And the only way I can easily move through that is to come back to the deep purpose that you were sharing with us, and then it's much easier. I don't have any kind of internal friction when I go to that place.

**GL:** Well, I think there's another piece of that too, to be aware of: it's good modeling. I mean, I will now say to people, "I likely won't join you for lunch. This is how I regenerate to be able to continue to be 100 percent with you and I invite you to start looking at what you need because you're doing deep work. And you may find if you're an introvert," or Judith Orloff calls it an Intuitive Empath and has some good material on this as well. If you know this about yourself, honor your needs. This is a place to begin your practice because as a speaker, you've got to do it if you're going to be able to be sustainable."

So for me, it's become a way of saying, "I'm doing this because it's what I need and please look at what you need." It comes up in a lot of ways over a 4-day program, to look at how we sabotage our investments and our intentions by not looking out for that. I call it "Extreme cherishment of your

precious, worthy self.” Another way it shows up is I work with a lot of coaches, for example; and it’s so easy in a class to decide to help someone else rather than to be there for our own learning. So I always say when you’re tempted to jump in and help someone else, look at where you’re not allowing yourself to see what’s up for you. Because when people are investing time and money in an experience for their own development, they are going to sabotage what they came for if they move from that place of, “Oh, I can help you! I can help you!” instead of allowing the full learning for one’s self.

**RC:** Yeah! That’s wonderful! I was just thinking to put a kind of an exclamation point on this theme around—can you say that again? Those words that came together quickly and poetically about cherishment. What was that phrase?

**GL:** Oh, it’s one of my 6 principles.

**RC:** Let’s hear it!

**GL:** Informational speaking: that we must practice extreme cherishment of our precious, worthy selves because we have to be firstly sustainable to do the work of change.

**RC:** The reason that I wanted to hear you say that again and to get to kind of simmer in it is because to be a person in this particular world, aware of the sensitivities that we’ve been discussing and to not succumb to the self-judgments of being a wimp or too weak or we might have heard many times, “You’re are too sensitive.” We have to recognize that some of the things that you and I are talking about having to do with facilitating our workshops are the same as, let’s say, for this classic, mundane, industrialized nation version, going into a mall. For me, I had to come to a recognition that if I was going to cherish my precious, worthy self in the way that you’re describing, that I have to prepare myself to go into a mall, if there was any ever reason to actually do that; and then be very aware of all the stimuli around me, and be especially aware of when I was getting overloaded and try and catch that before it happened.

So it’s obviously from the sublime to the ridiculous, the example that I’m using, and yet if I’m really cherishing the way you’re describing in my daily life and wanting to show up for myself and others as authentically as possible, I might have to say, “Okay, this thing that people do as a sort of a daily occurrence, it takes everything out of me and I must adjust accordingly.”

**GL:** I'm in that constant inquiry that you're mentioning right now because I'm moving; and moving both my home and my office is a huge physical energetic and shopping-type extravaganza. I have to notice that edge where my energy starts to drop and say, "That's enough for today," because if I don't, I'm laid out for a day or two. It's part of aging as well, you know? It's the whole mixed bag right now for me. I realize that it's the most important personal work I'm doing. Because you know, it's no fun if we don't get to play.

To play in the world that our soul has led us to, to make a difference, to bring our gifts, requires such diligence around what's going on in our bodies and our energy fields. You may have noticed, Raphael, that when I wrote my book, it was really a book on speaking; I didn't want the same old technique thing, so it was the heart, the art, and the energetics of speaking. The energetic for me was really my learning edge. I feel for so many of us that if we don't start recognizing that, "Hey, maybe this is a presentation I've done before, a workshop I've done before, a meeting I've been through before"—every time we step into it, the energetic field is different. We have to create and adjust in the moment, check in with ourselves watch what's happening with others in order to be fully present and to bring the value that we're capable of bringing.

**RC:** I really love that. And one of the things that was coming to me in this part of the conversation we're having is that there are other people who don't necessarily see themselves as highly sensitive in the same way, and yet all of this registers with them as well. What I'm referring to is: let's say, in my family when I was growing up, I didn't have parents or siblings who would consider themselves like that. But we would get into environments like malls or even like a baseball stadium for instance, and it would be very overwhelming to everybody in a way that would lead to all kinds of tension and snappiness. And while it was good as it was, and in the aftermath, there was very little consciousness of the impact that it had taken out on everybody. So sometimes it would go from the great to the horrible: there would be a big explosion of anger, punishment, etc., which to me was all playing out our all being unaware of what you're calling us to be aware of.

**GL:** Yeah, it's just so interesting to look at that because these are the things that are supposed to be—and I think that's the key word, supposed to be—fun!

**RC:** Right! And I think everybody, in my experience, was at a loss, like "How did we get here? It was," as you said, "supposed to be fun, and now we're all sitting in the car," and someone said

something out of their tension and overwhelm that was rude or disruptive or reactive, “and now it’s a big, old bummer.” It’s not an accident when that happens.

So imagine, for instance, that everybody gets into the car and maybe one of the parents in that situation who is more mindful and aware just says, “Okay everybody, now we’ve been in a place where there’s been a lot of hubbub and everybody might be a little bit frazzled, so before we even turn on the engine, let’s just breathe a little bit, let’s just recognize we’ve had a lot going on, see if there’s anything that you need to feel, and let’s just be a little bit more soft with one another, so that we can smooth out of this experience as best as possible.” No guarantees, of course, because as with every family, every moment is different. But what a gift to offer that.

**GL:** Absolutely! So you mentioned your daughter, 4 and a half years old. I have known you for a while and how wonderful to have parenting like this. I think so many of us spend our whole lives trying to understand it; the kids coming of age now and the kids growing up need to cultivate that understanding so it doesn’t take a lifetime of stress and strain, and what the heck happened to be able to stand in the strength of the truth of who we are?

### **5. Over Scheduling**

**RC:** Yeah, that’s great! Now, in the time that we have left, I want to make sure that we touch on a couple of things that I think that are really important to add to this discussion. One of them is, something in my own mind, I refer to as the Stevie Wonder effect, and that’s just personal to me because many years ago I read an interview with Stevie Wonder where they talked about the fact that he was perennially late for everything. Like sometimes people would be waiting for him for 2 or 3 hours for a meeting. And on the one hand, at first, I was horrified, like, “Gosh, how irresponsible!”

And then he spoke about the fact that it was very hard for him to keep to a schedule because he was really pulled in to the fullness of any given moment and not wanting to leave it just because he had a schedule to meet. And that kind of rocked me—this was decades ago when I read this. I thought, “Wow, what a different way to look at life!” You touched on this a tiny bit earlier when you were talking about making future commitments of having a schedule when you are paying really close attention to these sensitivities that you and I have been talking about. So I’m wondering if that’s an edge for you still and how you navigate that edge?

**GL:** Oh, I allow a lot more space. Being over-scheduled makes me crazy; I'm not present with other people and the stress level is too high. So I'm very conscious to leave lots of time between commitments and it's the only way I can do it. When I schedule things too closely, I pay a price, and I think those around me do too. So for me, it's about a lot more spaciousness so I can really experience my life rather than run from one thing to another. And again, it's another moving target that takes a lot of checking in and sometimes renegotiating.

**RC:** So this is a key thing I just want to pause and highlight because one of the themes that has arisen in many of the conversations in this series, and I think honestly because I keep raising it, is the business of our lives; the pressures of our lives; the amount of information and just what's coming at us, the kind of bombardment is so different now from any other time in human history. And the piece that you're drawing our attention to is the scheduling one. Not everybody has the freedom to create lots and lots of space in their schedule. Yet we see a kind of epidemic of over-scheduling in our society, especially the over-scheduling of children and their activities.

The reason why I wanted to touch on this or highlight this piece, it's a little bit like the mall or the baseball stadium that we were talking about a few moments ago, because whether it's conscious or not, if you pack the schedule, then you're already creating a situation in which everybody is going to be over-stimulated. It doesn't help to want to go out and seize the most of life if you're not really present or in a state of wellness, when you're doing all those things that you've scheduled.

So I'm hearing, first of all, a call to be more mindful about scheduling spaciously wherever possible. And then the other piece that I would bring that we haven't talked about yet is being able to cultivate an inner spaciousness for those times especially where we do have to be on the clock, or we are compressed because of financial needs or family needs or otherwise. I know, for me, there's a practice often of saying, "Okay wait, I'm here. There's too much going on. What can I do? What's an awareness practice I can bring? What's an energetic or embodied practice I can bring that's going to open me up so that more can flow through with less of a cost?"

**GL:** Yeah, very important.

## **6. Stating Our Truth On The Spot**

**RC:** So I want to also just check with you because as we've been communicating since the first time that we talked, you spoke about a big edge and this is something I have not got a chance to learn about from you at all. What you described was being a change agent: are we letting ourselves



off the hook for the actions we ask of others? I love the question so I want to ask you to expand on it and describe how that's meaningful for you and how that impacts your life.

**GL:** I think it was around the Obama election that I thought, "If I hear one more really intellectual and stimulating conversation about how we got to where we are, I'm going to run out of the room screaming." Because I think many of us who support change in the world may think, "That's enough, get others to do it." And I've started looking at my own commitments and where it's easy just to say, "Well, I'll do that later because I'm busy and what I am doing matters and gets other people into gear." I'll give you an example that struck me again today and that I saw last month. I was speaking at the LOHAS conference, Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability.

And there was an 11 year old boy there from the Northeast who had created an entire platform, got legislation behind him and changed the laws in his state—I think it's Maine, I might be wrong—because he realized that sticking a plastic straw in a drink without someone even asking for it was contributing a lot to plastic consumption and waste. He got a law passed and they reduced straw consumption 60 percent in his state. I noticed just this week that it was a 10 year old from a school system in Santa Fe who went before the City Council and said if Los Angeles can outlaw single-use plastic bags, then Santa Fe certainly can. And I look at—it's what I was saying earlier about the kids and how they're being supported and raised right now; that we need their voices, but you know, couldn't an adult have thought of that?

So I made the commitment. Okay, when the City Council meets on this, I'm going to talk about it because they think it's about education. Raphael, we have had enough education and we still don't change! If it's legislated so that we really pay attention and start taking our own bags or paying extra because we forgot, that seems to be what it takes rather than inspiration. So I started when anyone gives me a straw, I start asking for the manager and saying, "Are you aware that..." And actually there's a place in Santa Fe called Joe's Diner where I had the conversation and I went in last week and they did not automatically stick a straw in my beverage. They're small things but they make a difference, and I think maybe it's the small-fries that are showing us the way. For me it's we talk such a good game but where are we actually making the change and being the change that we really care so much about? We can no longer let ourselves off the hook.

**RC:** Well, I really appreciate what you're sharing because you're coming from a spiritual perspective, but you're talking about action and choices. And choices that are actually influenced

for us most of the time around convenience because we do have these busy lives, these over-scheduled lives we've been talking about. It's hard sometimes not to make the choice to use the packaging, the bag, or whatever because we forgot to put it in our car or it's easier to let them do it that way.

And there is something so important, I think, for all of us in recognizing that the smallest daily choices are where ultimately our spirituality plays out and allows us, if we're really paying attention, to notice where we're called personally, because everybody is called differently; where we're called personally to make that kind of stand, even if it's uncomfortable or even if suddenly we feel a little bit like a troublemaker and an irritant. Because you know, that restaurant manager that you asked for, he or she is really busy; they've got a lot on their plate; they might be annoyed by what you have to say, and it takes a certain amount of presence and conviction to make the request to have that conversation and then to show up in that conversation not with reactivity, but with openness and invitation. So that's a perfect moment to really put our practices and principles into action.

**GL:** Yeah. You know, I would just suggest we look at all the moments where it comes to mind and we squash it. The conversation we didn't have today, that we had last time, at length, about how it's so easy not to state our truth and to at least put a placeholder there when something is really uncomfortable so that we can come back later with a response that we feel is true and trustworthy. I think if we really start tracking ourselves, we'll see where we don't fully show up with something that internally is asking us to. And if we did it just one more time a day, what reverberations and results might come from that? Sometimes we never know, but I still think it's worth our energy.

**RC:** Yeah. As you've been talking, I was remembering something from a very long time ago that happened for me, a kind of moment of truth that is connected to this topic. I was doing that business negotiation with someone on the phone and I was asking a question about whether there were any further discounts that were available. And the woman said to me, without paying any mind whatsoever, "Yeah, I think we can Jew that down for you."

And first I went into state of shock because I'd never heard anybody use that term. I'm Jewish and it took me a while to even realize what was happening. And then as the conversation was going forward, I remember that I had this internal dialogue, "Should I say something? Should I let this go? I'm sure she didn't mean it personally. She's going to be embarrassed. Maybe it's going to mess up

the deal.” So many considerations and reasons to say, you know, “Just let it go.” And then something inside of me, just what you’re describing, that still small voice came up and said, “No way! You can’t leave this moment with your integrity intact if you don’t bring it up.”

And so I did my very best to breathe into it and bring it up in a way that was the least critical, but more drawing attention. And of course the woman was mortified because she had no idea even what she was saying. I don’t think she had ever even met a Jewish person in her life. She came from one of those states where that’s possible. She not only apologized, but she said she would be more sensitive, and I came away feeling so grateful I gave myself the opportunity to do that, knowing how easy it would have been not to.

**GL:** Oh, what a great example! I think we get those all the time and it’s awkward; one of the things that happens is if we wait to get it right, either we don’t do it or it lacks any authenticity—it’s so prettied-up that it doesn’t have any impact. I think that’s true in these one on one situations and very definitely from speaking; scripting as opposed to being fully present and in our heart, just doesn’t work.

**RC:** One of the things that came out of that experience for me is a heightened sensitivity to the way that sometimes our language comes as second nature to us, and includes certain disparagements that bringing in to conscious awareness can only help. So for instance, there are a lot of people who would, in a similar way, without a second thought, say, “Hey, you just gyped me,” and not realize that gyped comes from gypsy. Or they might say, “You welched on a bet,” and not realizing that that’s referring to Welsh people.

So I became more sensitive in my own speech as well, as a result of having had that experience. So it was a gift in both ways: for more sensitivity and more willingness to take those kind of actions in those moments that you described. So I want to ask you, before we go, Gail, sometimes it takes a while, you know, when we’re delayed processors, to know where we are in space and time and what is being called forth. I’m just wondering, before we go today, as you just take a moment and reflect on where we’ve traveled together if there’s anything that you want to add or amplify that will help you feel like you got the most out of this experience and you gave the most to this experience?

**GL:** Well, there was one saying I thought about after we agreed to re-do this conversation that I’d like to add because I think this over-arching story that we often carry about our life and our life experience needs to be shed sometimes, deserves a good look individually. As you know, the

subtitle of my book is, *If You Want to Change the World, Tell a Better Story*. And what happens when we want to change our world? And what's the story we tell ourselves that could use some revision, some editing or change? I realize that the story for me for a very long time was, "I'm too old to start over."

And with the disruption in people's lives, the times we're asked to start over and to look at what life is asking and how we make a living and how we bring our gifts forward—what is the story that gets in the way? For me in my mid-50's, really committing to this business that I'm in now—it was hard; I wasn't well, I've been through a lot of grief and loss, and the story was I'm too old to start over. And I recently said to someone, "Gee, if I hadn't worked past 65, I wouldn't have known I can make it!" (laughs) That's my new story! (laughs) Think at how we look at these stories because at 65 used to be: you retire, you should have it together. That isn't the reality for many people right now. To let go of the stories of how life was supposed to be or the bad deal we got or that shouldn't have happened and to open up to the greater possibilities of showing up for life and our gifts at this time allows things to emerge in our life that we never would have dreamed.

I was a long time student of Angeles Arrien and the fourth part of the Four-Fold way is to be open to outcome not attached. At first I thought that meant, oh you just better get used to it being bad, but of course it's a creative process. If we think we know it, we're only going to get what we already got. But if we're open to outcome and allow something new to come in, life can be so much more amazing than we would have thought, sticking to that old story.

**RC:** (Laughs) And so if there's any point in our life where we feel somehow the opportunities are past us, it's too late for anything, I hear you saying that that's a great story to reconsider.

**GL:** Absolutely! You know, there's many different stories—whatever our version of it is.

**RC:** Right! Because "I'm too this" or "Not enough that," it doesn't have to be just chronological.

**GL:** Yeah!

**RC:** I love that question, it's a good place to leave our conversation today. For anybody that's listening, the story that is limiting you based on any kind of self-assessment that something is over; that something is missing; that something is wrong—and how just letting even the question live inside of you gives the opportunity for something new to come in.

**GL:** Yes. And for me, summing up today would be to look at the places where we're not questioning the things that keep us from showing up for life, in possibility and passion, because when we just start that conscious practice of being aware of it, then it can be transformed.

**RC:** Well let's end then on a particularly vulnerable note. I want to ask you just right now in this very moment and over the span of days, is there anything that you're noticing in yourself that is a current version of the something that might be in the way that you're questioning or beginning to question?

**GL:** You brought it up today about, you know, where I really tuned in—that's a learning edge for me—how to create the inner expansiveness, even if the schedule doesn't seem to allow it? I think that's it. You know, what is my story that I'm too fragile to do A, B, or C—is that's still true? Because at times it has been physically, is it still true? Might more energy be available to me if I were to practice the inner expansiveness you spoke about. That's the one I think right now feels like a very juicy question for me to be tracking.

**RC:** One thing about it is the value of just checking our edge periodically to see if it really still is our edge. In an incredibly prosaic version of that, I have a great sensitivity to vinegar and other fermented things. And it means a lot of the greatest tasting things in life aren't available to me. But it's not like the kind of allergy where you go into anaphylactic shock. So every once in a while, maybe a few times a year, I'll think, "Let me check it out!" Let me have some balsamic vinegar on my salad. And I can tell you that to this day, every time I've done that, I've had a bad reaction and realized okay, maybe a little tiny bit, but not more than that. But I'm committed to checking every once in a while because if there is a new possibility that has arisen, I don't want to miss it!

**GL:** (Laughs) Yeah, that's a great example! Whether it's something more we schedule or something we'd enjoy eating or whatever!

**RC:** A flavor of life!

**GL:** Yeah, to keep checking in periodically! I love it!

**RC:** Good! Well, I appreciate the expansion of the flavors of life that you have shared with us today and that knowing you has brought to me. So Gail Larsen, thank you so much for a beautiful round two!

**GL:** Thank you, Raphael! I appreciate it! Big blessings to you!

**Mark Matousek**



Mark Matousek is an award-winning author, writing coach and teacher. He is the author of five books including acclaimed memoirs and most recently published, “Ethical Wisdom: The Search for a Moral Life.” Mark has worked with Sogyal Rimpoche on *The Tibetan Book of Living and dying*, Andrew Harvey on *Dialogues With A Modern Mystic* and co-wrote Ram Dass’s book, *Still Here*. Mark is a contributing editor to *O: The Oprah Magazine*, *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* and a frequent blogger for *The Huffington Post*. In 2008, he became Creative Director of V-Men, the male arm of Eve Ensler’s V-Day, an organization aimed to end violence against women and girls.

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### **1. Memoirs: It is Personal, But It’s Completely Transpersonal Too**

**RC:** As we were talking before the recording went on just a few moments ago, we were discussing the fact that your profile in the world is a little bit different than some of the people that I have been speaking to in this series. You’re a very well known author and memoirist and a lot of your writing has been about spirituality, your own search, other people’s search, other people’s healings; so I’m just wondering, to start off, how would you describe yourself right now? I know that you’re aware of the multiplicity of all of us so you’re not going to be able to capture it in just one phrase or two, but how do you be in the world? How do you see your role right now?

**MM:** I see myself very simply as a writer first, a writing teacher, second, and being a seeker is really part of both of those roles. The things I write about are psycho-spiritual and my books have been about the spiritual journey but I don’t consider myself a spiritual teacher. I think of myself, at the best, as a spiritual friend and that’s what I tell people who come to me looking for some kind of spiritual direction—the most I can give them is friendship and then some sense of what my experience has been. But I certainly don’t claim to have any kind of mastery in that area.

**RC:** And, and how would you—this is a big question that you can jump in wherever you’re inspired to right now—how would you say that your own spiritual practice has really changed you

over the years and impacted the journey that you've written about so extensively and so beautifully over the years?

**MM:** Well, I mean my spiritual practice and my work are completely connected to one another. When I found my practice, I found my real work as a writer. I had been in a pop culture; I was an editor and a journalist, but it wasn't until I started an inner journey which was prompted by a personal crisis that I really found my voice as a writer and my form, the form as a memoirist because my work is all about asking questions. And so the questions that a memoir writer asks himself and a spiritual seeker are very similar: the question, "Who am I?" So investigating that, which is also my spiritual practice, I'm interested in self-inquiry and non-dual Advaita philosophy; and my literary work are completely parallel and intersecting. The same questions drive both of them.

So the deeper you go into spiritual practice, the less you know, and the same thing happens as a writer and as a memoirist. The more you write, the more you realize it remains unsaid. And that's what's exciting about it, that's what pulls you deeper into it, it's the unknown and the mystery, which is obviously so important to seekers and people who are interested in self-investigation and writing which is what I teach and then what my own works is really about.

**RC:** So it sounds like there's a paradox in what you're describing because as you've gone more into memoir and the story of your life, that practice has made it such that a lot of your previous identity or understanding of your identity has fallen away and left you in that place of greater clarity or not knowing, is that right?

**MM:** Yeah. That's really what happened. First of all, the deeper you go into your personal experience, the more universal the experience becomes. So I found that describing my own stages of seeking, my challenges, the teachers I've worked with; the more intimately I write about those things, the more general and universal the work becomes and this is something that that's interesting about memoir writing is that when people read your story, if the story has a universal dimension to it, they're not reading about you, they're reading about themselves.

So that's how memoir writers can get over their sort of false modesty or this fear of seeming self-absorbed—if you're actually doing the work for the reader, you're revealing insight for the reader through your personal journey, so it's not actually a selfish pursuit. People love to think of memoirs as a selfish form or a self-absorbed sort of naval gazing form, and it's really just the opposite



because you're trying to penetrate the core questions of human existence if you're writing the kind of memoir that I do. So it is personal but it is completely transpersonal, too. And that's actually what inspires me about it and keeps me interested. If I were just writing about my little biography, I wouldn't do it.

**RC:** Well, that makes me want to take a slight sideways turn here about memoir writing because there's been in our culture especially with what happened with James Frey, this whole question of "Is memoir fiction? Is it non-fiction?" And this connects to the spiritual practice in which we recognize the elusive nature of memory and the fact that we create narratives of our lives pulled out of an infinite amount of memories that we're not even aware of and then we reinforce our life story by telling it over and over again as if it's the truth when it's, of course, one truth and one slim thread in terms of our overall life experience. So with that, I'm wondering, how do you come down on the issue of embellishment versus fact and do you give yourself latitude when writing to create the most truthful impression even if it's not actually exactly data specific?

**MM:** Well, that's a slippery slope and a great question. I mean there's a difference between autobiography and memoir. Autobiography is giving just the facts and then chronology is strict. Memoir, it's how you remember experience and how experience filters back to you through emotion. So you don't want to lie about anything. I don't think it's okay to embellish too much. There are things that we don't remember so there's an element of invention to it, but you try to stick to the facts.

The thing that memoir and spiritual questioning have in common is that they are both looking at what the story is and like you say, we create these narratives out of a lot of information. We narrow it down to a particular story and then we fix on that story. We do that as writers and we also do it as human beings. So in the same way that we're trying to dismantle our own story as spiritual practitioners, we're trying to do that as memoir writers too, and get to the heart of what actually happened.

I talk to my students a lot about the difference between situation and a story. The situation is the fact; the story is what it means to you. A lot of writer's memoirs get in trouble focusing on the journalistic aspects, just the strictly factual aspects of their lives, thinking that's going to capture the drama of their story or what it really meant to them. And they don't connect the dots. They miss the figure in the carpet and the significance of these facts to them in their wisdom journeys.

**RC:** So, let me give me an example of that because I'm fascinated by this question. So I have a scene out of my own past that comes back to me frequently and it's a picture of me at about 5 years old. I've gone running out of my family house and I'm swinging around the mail box pole, looking forlornly at my house because I have this deep recognition that that's where I'm supposed to go for nurturing and for support and connection and it seems like everything I'm experiencing in that house is the opposite.

I'm experiencing isolation, I'm experiencing rage and pain, and I feel completely hopeless and powerless around what to do and I'm just spinning around that mailbox pole over and over and over, it's deepening my confusion and my anxiety. The interesting thing about that is that I have no way of knowing if that even happened, when it happened, or if it happened in connection to the events that I tie it to in my own mind.

So it feels like in terms of meaning as you were describing it, that's a significant and meaningful moment in my life and I know that a lot of where I've traveled in the decades since then is connected to the meaning that I have in that moment but I also have to be completely willing to recognize that it may never even have happened that way.

**MM:** Right. Absolutely, and as a memoirist, you could write it that way with doubt, or with questioning. "I'm not even sure if this is how it happened." You don't have to be dishonest about it but you can conjure it through your own doubts and skepticism and it won't lose any of the power as an emotional image for you or for the reader. We don't care as much about exactly how it happened as we care about what it means to you. And if you can communicate that vividly enough, we don't care if it happened right after your mother slapped you or not. What we care about is the image of this isolated, lonely kid swinging around the mailbox pole. That's what matters.

I was talking to a novelist friend the other day and she was saying that, "Fiction is a lie that tells the truth." That's similar to what I'm saying—obviously we're not talking about fiction but it's whatever communicates the emotional truth that matters to you. That's what you want to do in your work. There are skillful ways of doing it so that you're not lying.

## **2. Why Questions Suck**

**RC:** Yeah. So in the counseling realm, which I'm drawn to bring in here because there's a really interesting parallel—I work with many clients who have a very powerful and deep story around abuse. And they're often tortured by the fact that they don't have specific memories. Therefore,

they go to that place of “Am I just making this up? Am I just looking for someone to blame? Am I just screwed up and it’s really not about anything in particular that happened to me?” So often, what I’m sharing with them is that this is the felt reality that you carry forward from that time. And we’re not really interested in a documentary way. We’re interested in how you can work with it for your own healing.

**MM:** Right. Exactly!

**RC:** So, yeah. So it seems like whether it’s a memoir or whether it’s counseling, they have that in common.

**MM:** Yeah.

**RC:** That it’s not about the factual narrative, it’s more about the felt narrative and the way that that’s gone into creating knots or wounds in someone’s psyche.

**MM:** Exactly, and their pain is real, where it came from is completely secondary. That’s why a teacher said to me once that “why” is the wrong question. “Why” is one of those questions that can just put you into a sort of a dog chasing its tail because you may never penetrate that act, the factual reality of what happened. What matters is, is what it meant to you and the residue of it and the ways you’ve adopted to it. That’s what matters, less than the actual biography itself.

**RC:** Yeah. Just to put an exclamation point on what you came across, I remember being delighted many years ago taking a workshop with the Buddhist nun Yvonne Rand in the Bay Area and she was wearing her robes and she seemed very nun like and when this subject came up, she told the gathering that she thought that there should be a giant poster unfurled across the Golden Gate Bridge that said, “Why questions suck.”

**MM:** (Laughs) That’s good. Exactly.

**RC:** So there was a great shock value there but I’m glad because I never forgot it.

**MM:** Right, absolutely.

**RC:** But there’s something that I wanted to come back to that connects again between memoir and spirituality in that you mentioned that when you get into the depth of your own experience and you

share it in memoir, that you're ultimately touching the human experience and that as people read it, they're recognizing their own story or their own selves in your story.

**MM:** Yeah.

**RC:** And something that's required in order to write that well is to allow the fullness of the experience to be accepted as it is such that you can be curious about it, you can explore it, and you're not fighting against it or somehow banishing it from what is allowed to be and allowed to be okay. And whether you like it or not, whether you didn't like it, it's the fullness of your acceptance that can allow you, I'm guessing, as a memoirist to really mine it fully.

**MM:** Absolutely! It's also being willing to see it in the big picture. I mean we think of ourselves in such small ways instead of seeing ourselves as pilgrims on a journey of awakening or seeing ourselves as creatures set against mystery and infinity; instead of seeing ourselves for how we are, we tend to think of ourselves much smaller than we are. So as a memoirist, part of the trick is to see yourself, see your story as archetypal and once in a lifetime—once and never again, and really important. It's a way of redeeming your experience from triviality and banality to sacredness, and to a spiritual journey that has a deeper significance than just the facts of your life or even the ups and downs of your everyday emotions.

So it's being able to obviously see the details of your life but set against the bigger background and the background, that's the human story. We're living in the human story, so if you see your life that way, then suddenly your breakup with your girlfriend becomes a whole lot different, and has all kinds of resonance to it or losing a parent; these passage experiences have a really universal resonance to them and you as a writer, you can mine them and turn by going deeply enough, and like you're saying, accepting fully enough, those experiences and being intimate enough with them. You really can make them a part of a human story that other people see themselves in and maybe even learn from.

**RC:** So, to draw on that, I want to just speak to the fact that in the work that I do with individuals, what I see happening so often is—I've hesitated to use this term because it sounds clinical—but a kind of a negative narcissism. What I mean is: "That the thing about me is so bad that..." And it creates a really interesting challenge to healing; it's about that secret shame or not even so secret shame. But the point is that on most people's journeys that I encounter, they come to a place as spiritual seekers where they understand the importance of embracing all that is, and if they relate to

God as a concept, they could say “God is everything and everything comes from God and therefore, everything is divine and sacred...except this—except my abuse.”

**MM:** Right.

**RC:** “Or my crimes that I committed,” or, “except my unworthiness,”—that there’s something in themselves, in their own experience that they have decided doesn’t belong.

**MM:** Sure.

**RC:** Is it allowed to be in that wholeness?

**MM:** Sure.

**RC:** And it’s only when they find a way to soften into an allowing of that to be, that they can actually begin to heal in the way they want to.

**MM:** Absolutely.

### **3. Tell The Scary Story**

**RC:** So I’m seeing this parallel because in memoir writing, which could definitely be a spiritual and a healing practice, there’s a way that you have to allow that piece of you which always felt like somehow it was forbidden to now become one that you can include enough and explore enough to give life to.

**MM:** That’s really well put. Absolutely! I mean part of the fun of writing memoir is exposing secrets and going into the shadows and telling the truth about things that you can’t actually talk about in your life. I mean that’s why it’s important to be as shameless as possible and as transparent as possible around those things that are hardest to accept because that’s where the juice is. I mean creatively, that’s where the juice is.

And helping people to get to that place where they come up against their closed door is exactly where you want to start as a writer because all the demons, all the skeletons in that closet are the most—the stuff in you that most needs healing and exposing is also where the best work is going to come from because it’s undiscovered territory. It’s not the same story you’re telling over and over. You’re pushing the envelope. You’re letting the forbidden in; I think all good work has to have some element of the forbidden in it.

You want to have the sense that the writer has stakes and that they'd actually push themselves into a dangerous or scary place to do the work, or it's not compelling. It feels sort of like a walk in the park. What interests me as a reader, as a writer is, people who are willing to—like Dorothy Allison says, “Tell the scary story.” You have to be willing to tell the scary story or else it's not going to count for anything to anyone else. It's not our job as writers to play it safe. If we're playing it safe, nobody learns anything, and we certainly don't grow as writers.

So I think it's really important to do exactly what you're talking about in terms of accepting the things and opening the things that are the hardest to open to and realizing that's where the gold is. That really is where the insight is, it's where the epiphany has come from, and it's where the wisdom comes from that elevates your work, sort of beyond what familiar and acceptable to what's amazing. I mean you want to be amazing. You want to blow your readers away. You want to give them something that they haven't seen before. And you can't do that if you're playing it safe.

#### **4. Discernment With Spiritual Teachers**

**RC:** Yeah. So in your experience as a writer or your history as a writer I should say, you have been a memoirist. You've also worked with and been very close to lots of people who'd have their own transformative experiences, as well as teachers who have been in a role of teaching the spiritual version of what you're describing as that common human journey, the role that we all have as pilgrims in this exploration. And so you're describing a value for transparency from the standpoint of the writer and I'm wondering what you've seen and what you've come to understand about the role of transparency for a teacher, because even though you don't recognize yourself as a spiritual teacher, as I said, you've spent lots of time amongst them. And you've probably experienced teachers who keep their own vulnerability all the way out of their teachings. Some teachers who've hidden behind their role, other teachers who have decided that to bring forth their greatest vulnerabilities are a gift to their students. So I'm wondering about that, just in general, transparency when you're shifting your focus from being a memoirist to what you've seen around spiritual teaching.

**MM:** Well, what I find is that it's a very slippery slope and it's very tricky. It's a case by case judgment call in terms of what any teacher wants to reveal or not to their particularly group of students. It's impossible to give black and white generalizations about the roles and the boundaries of spiritual teachers in terms of what they show about their lives.

I've seen both. I have seen teachers who kept their lives to themselves and alienated students because it turned out there were things going on behind closed doors that were not public information and that ended up alienating students. And I've known teachers who opened up too much of their lives and alienated students in that way because they didn't fit in with the sort of sacred cartoon that we have, the sort of pious idea that we have of what holiness looks like and what sacredness looks like.

So it's a bit of damned if you do, and damned if you don't. What matters to me as a seeker is that the path they're walking doesn't contradict their teaching. So I don't need to know everything about my teacher. I don't really want to know anymore than I want to know everything about a therapist. But it does matter to me that they not be hypocrites and that they not be actually contradicting their teaching in their private lives. I don't believe that it's appropriate or desirable or advisable to completely separate the teacher from the teaching. There's this cliché that the teaching is one thing and the teacher is something else. And I truly don't believe that.

For me, it's a violation of trust when I find out that somebody is lying or cheating or in some way being dishonorable whose teaching I'm taking to heart. It's hurtful. Meher Baba has a wonderful essay on spiritual jingoism, it's sort one of my things that I keep on my desk because he talks about how easy it is to manipulate spiritual seekers because our hunger of spirituality is our deepest and most tender and important pursuit in life. So we're so easily manipulated because we need so badly to find people who can teach us and guide us. That's why it's so easy for spiritual teachers to be charlatans and manipulative—because we give them our power because it matters so much to us and we so desperately want wisdom. But that's why spiritual teachers have so much responsibility, that much more responsibility to not abuse our trust.

To me, it's inexcusable when you hear about a teacher who is either lying to students or seducing students against their will, that kind of thing. I find it really so morally reprehensible. And so transparency to the degree that what they do in private doesn't contradict what they teach in public. I don't need to know what they have for breakfast. I don't need to know the details of their personal lives. I think that they're allowed to have those but I've seen enough behind-the-scenes with people who said one thing and did another that I'm very wary and very skeptical and very careful about the people that I take on as teachers.

And I think it's important for people to keep their eyes open and not infantilize themselves around spiritual teachers and not suddenly sort of throw all caution and discrimination to the wind and then blame the teacher later for not sort of living up to the ideal, the pedestal that they set them on. So I think it's a two-way street. The teachers need to be transparent but students also need to be smart. Students need to keep their eyes open and they need to be willing to change course when the evidence contradicts what they want it to be and not blame the teacher. That happens a lot. It's like that dysfunctional relationships where a lot of students overstayed their welcome with teachers—when it's time for them to move on, they don't and they end up blaming the teacher.

So it can become very dysfunctional and very sort of co-dependent in an addictive way so the students needs to be honest with themselves about their expectations, what they're seeing and feeling and not lay all the blame on the teacher. And the teacher needs to really respect the fact that the power they wield is fierce and they are held to a higher standard considering people's desire and need to be led skillfully and caringly.

**RC:** Well, I was listening really intently to what you're saying and I just want to have a bow of appreciation because I feel that there are maybe 10 or 12 different themes that you laid out in the last few minutes that are really powerful and crucial and could allow for a full interview's explication. So I know if I were listening to this right now, I would click backwards on my audio player and listen to all of that again and really let it sink in.

But for the purposes of our conversation, I want to come back to this mutuality that you've spoken to; that when it comes to the theme of transparency and even this series of *Teaching What We Need to Learn* that it's not only about the teacher, it's also about the student and what you said, as a student, or as a seeker, you want to know enough to be pretty clear that your teacher is not saying one thing and doing another, that there's not hypocrisy behind-the-scenes, and that seems like great advice, but it also seems like in the mutuality that you're referring to, there has to be a mutual willingness. In other words, how would a student know if that hypocrisy were present if the teacher wasn't willing to have a certain degree of disclosure or transparency about his or her own life?

**MM:** Well, I mean that's a good point and obviously, one can be fooled. But I'm all about asking questions and you can get a pretty good sense especially when you talk to the older students in the community. There's a pretty good sense if your antenna are up of whether all is as it appears to be. Obviously, people can be deceived, teachers can be sneaky and hidden, and we can't be responsible



for everything but we can be responsible for more than we give ourselves credit for often. I really recommend that people ask questions.

They put their nose to the ground and before you give your devotion or your deep practice to somebody, you need to check them out very, very carefully. I think it's said somewhere that Tibetans test their teachers for 10 years before they take on a teacher fully with their heart and maybe more than that. We're a little facile sometimes and a little sort of smorgasbord-y in the way we hop from teacher to teacher and we are sort of willing to take things on reputation. I believe in coming to things personally, it needs to be right for you.

So whether or not the teacher is actually hiding something from you, they may just not be the right teacher for you and it's up to you to pay attention to what your body and heart are telling you, which I think some seekers and students don't do. They think, "Well, if everyone thinks that so and so is great, then it doesn't matter that I get ulcers when I'm sitting in the audience. I'm going to stay there, too." Well, that's not being true to yourself so you need to investigate not only the teacher, but your own feelings about the teaching and we do need to trust our intuition about these things. It's very personal, the relationship between a student and a teacher.

So the teacher can be completely transparent but if you're not being transparent to yourself or if you're in some kind denial or have some expectations that are hidden or sort of not known, or not do, that you're not being honest about, that's our responsibility. That's not the teachers' responsibility.

**RC:** Well, it seems that there is something about a teaching style that tells us something about that to begin with. I know one of the things that I've been sensitive to are those kinds of arrangements where the teacher is kind of whisked on to the stage and then there is the satsang or whatever is meant to happen there, and then the teacher is whisked off the stage and often, I'm left thinking, I really want to know happens next. I want to know what happens with that teacher when they're not in presentation mode.

And you know, you were speaking eloquently about hypocrisy and teaching one thing and practicing another, it draws me to this edict I once made for myself around teaching about relationships. Because every time I ever saw a couple that had a seemingly positive relationship from what I could discern, when they decided they wanted to teach relationship they would then breakup.

**MM:** (Laughs)

**RC:** Or something really unfortunate happened in their relationship and I thought, “When I find a relationship that I value and nurture and treasure and want to keep healthy and whole,” I promised myself, “I’m not going to teach with that person,” for that very reason.

And so, when it comes to a congruency in teaching, it’s also of course—there are degrees; like there is preaching abstinence to students and then having secret affairs. That’s obviously very extreme in the hypocrisy, but then there’s also teaching for instance using this relationship model, teaching how people can get through conflicts with their partners and then what does it look like when that teacher actually gets triggered?

**MM:** Absolutely!

**RC:** In his or her relationship and so that’s one of the reasons why I’m drawn, maybe a little bit more on the continuum, towards more transparency rather than less because if somebody tells me, as a teacher, where they find their own foibles, where they find their own wounding and reactivity coming to the surface to be witnessed and to be accepted and to be moved through, then I start to deepen in my trust of what they’re going to tell me about me.

**MM:** Absolutely! Yeah. Absolutely, and the real teachers, the real masters that I’ve been with are completely transparent about their foibles and about the places that they get plugged in. My experience is there’s an inverse relationship between transparency and mediocrity. So the most realized masters that I’ve been with are also the most transparent people. They just have nothing to protect. They’re not hiding anything. They have done nothing to protect. There’s not an ego there that’s trying to create some other impression than who they actually are.

And the more veiled and hidden and secretive teachers are, in my experience, the more unrealized they are, the more of them remains sort of uncooked. I mean I’ve seen some teachers that you wouldn’t believe have the nerve to call themselves masters, taking people’s money, and taking people as students and being complete lunatics behind-the-scenes. They are invariably the most self-protective—there’s the biggest split between what they show and who they are. But I can feel it. I know other people can too, not everyone, but most people, if they’re honest and have open eyes, they can feel whether this person is the real deal or not.

And then once you determine that somebody is basically the real deal then you have to drop the perfectionism and remember that they are human beings. We can have a very pious, one-dimensional idea about what holiness is. Well, holy people smoke, and drink, and cuss, and have sex, and do all kinds of things, that doesn't make them less holy. Only if we kind of hold them to this puritanical standard, then we feel betrayed when we find out that, "Oh, they eat hamburgers."

**RC:** Yeah.

**MM:** But, when you drop that kind of perfectionism, and get that they're human beings, the margins of acceptability get a little wider and you're not so likely to be feel betrayed when they turn out to just be people.

**RC:** Yeah. I'm reminded of back in the days when people used to buy books and then authors used to go on book tours.

**MM:** (Laughs) Yeah. I remember those days.

**RC:** Yeah. (Laughs) One of the event coordinators at a bookstore that I was giving a talk at told me that from her perspective, spiritual and personal growth authors come in two basic categories. The first category is where it makes total sense that the person who shows up to give the talk is the person who wrote the book and the other category is you absolutely can't believe that the person who's showing up is the one who wrote that book. (Laughs)

**MM:** (Laughs) Right.

**RC:** But I think it actually is, from my perspective more complicated than that and it goes back to what you've been saying in a number of different arenas, which is coming to pay attention to your own intuition, your own knowing, and to trust yourself. Because we are walking such different paths in this world that we can have actually very different knowing about the same teacher, not even whether that's the teacher for me or not. I mean I can think of one teacher who of course, needs to be nameless in this conversation where I know people who say, "My heart opens to this teacher. I feel the genuineness and the power and the benefit, and just the truth of this person—who this person is," and then I know other people who say, "Eh, I won't go within a hundred miles of that person. And I would advise anybody not to trust this person, whatsoever."

**MM:** Right. Absolutely! You're right, it's a subjective experience and if the teacher isn't doing anything objectively to be hypocritical then the rest is on us. I mean the rest is up to our personal taste and where we are in our life, what we particularly need, the kinds of buttons that gets pushed in us. For instance, Mother Meera is an excellent example of that because she does all of her teaching in silence. She is the perfect mirror for people to project their fears and problems on.

So I know people who have walked into her darshan and had blissful experiences. I know people who have walked in there and felt terrified. I know a woman who went up in front of Mother Meera and felt that she herself was sort of covered with trash. So it's all about what we bring to the experience as long as the teacher has integrity. Then they can fulfill their function as a mirror for our psycho-spiritual state. That's why it's so important for spiritual teachers to be as blameless as possible so that we can do our work with them.

**RC:** Yeah. And there's one other piece here that I want to address because I think you probably can speak to this: if a teacher is pretty transparent, pretty blameless as you described, then if they wield the sword that they have to use in their teaching with particular power, then it gives us an opportunity to see that that's being done for us as opposed to being done to us.

But if we don't really know what's behind it then it's very easy for a teacher and for us to get lost in the question of was that just the power game? Was that just abusive—that they just cut me to ribbons because it was really more about them than it was about me?

**MM:** Right.

**RC:** And it's so delicate. I remember one time I went to an informational gathering with a very well known spiritual teacher and someone brought me. I was just there to listen, to be open to learn and they had one of those classic hot seats at this gathering and I happened to be sitting like a couple of chairs away from the hot seat, and somebody got on the hot seat and I won't go into all the specific details, but they were being asked to be able to look around the room and point to different people and say things to them. And somehow, it came to be that there was a woman in the hot seat and she was supposed to turn to me and say, "You're a worthless piece of crap."

**MM:** (Laughs) Right.

**RC:** And the teacher said in that moment, “And this is really good because that guy actually thinks he’s a piece of crap underneath it all.” And I was stunned because I’m all for, in the right moment with the right amount of trust and clarity and safety, being drawn into exposure.

**MM:** Right.

**RC:** But I hadn’t asked for it. I had no connection to this person and I felt really violated by that.

**MM:** It is. It’s presumptuous and you could feel the aggression in it.

**RC:** Yeah. And one of the things that’s maybe interesting for the listeners of this talk is that I actually sat with it. I wanted to see if there was something in it for me and that was my piece. But then I also felt like it was incumbent upon me to reach out to that teacher and to say, “Hey, here was my experience and I offer it up to you in the hopes that it might be valuable to you.” And then I went out and got the very best email address I could for that teacher which I knew was a private address and I sent an email and never heard back from that teacher.

**MM:** Right.

**RC:** And that made me sad. It also allowed me just to let go of the experience for the most part. It’s just something that happened, something I could use if I wanted to for my own benefit but I would have been so thrilled to engage a little bit with that teacher, to have heard that teacher’s understanding about what happened and some transparency even if there was even little memory of what happened; just an ability to know that that person cared enough about me and cared enough about the experience to at least acknowledge it.

**MM:** Yeah. I think the key is caring and having the sense that it wasn’t just a potshot and it wasn’t just a theater or you weren’t just being used as a whipping boy or as an example, but that it came from a more caring and heartfelt place.

**RC:** Yeah.

**MM:** And that might have deepened some teaching there for you but it sounds to me like it didn’t happen, that you couldn’t really take it to a deeper level because the teacher hadn’t joined the conversation. Your trust wasn’t there to be able to go any deeper with what he or she had said to you.

**RC:** Yes. And I wasn't in the community and of course, I don't even know whether ultimately the email got through. Who can know these things? But you spoke to something that's really important which is that if the teacher cares enough and if the teacher does wield the sword, then that teacher is actually going to stick around and be with you in all of the muck that you're now swimming in and that you'll be able to feel, not just wish, that there's loving kindness there, and you'll actually be able to feel the loving kindness as you're moving through whatever it is and however difficult it is.

**MM:** Absolutely! And that's very important. I mean the follow-up and the sense that the teacher is with you in the experience, I think is critical. It's one thing to sort of have a quick hit with somebody but having a relationship, the relationship that's possible between a teacher and the student is so profound when you have the sense that you're actually seen and you're actually remembered and you're actually held in this person's heart in some way. And like I said, the real teachers that I've worked with are profoundly caring and take a deep responsibility.

They feel a deep responsibility towards their students and would be very unlikely not to respond to something like that because it's a cry at the heart. I mean you're really reaching out and saying, "This touched me deeply. Are you still there?" and when you don't hear a response, the possibility that that chance for a breakthrough or for some kind of an epiphany goes away. So there might have been something very deep there for you but you couldn't get there because there was no dialogue.

**RC:** Yeah. And I'm thinking about this in one other way and that is that I know that there are some teachers who will teach a weekend workshop, for example, in something like a breath work technique, and they're in town and then they're gone and you were talking about the sacred responsibility that a teacher has and whether that teacher has a big public persona and whether they have a following or whether they barely have an email list, oftentimes people are working with techniques and modes that have the potential to create great uprising in people.

And it feels to me that if I were to make the code of ethics for teachers in this regard, it would be: if you're teaching something that has a large transformative capability, which then also is going to have the possibility of throwing someone into a degree of psychological or energetic or spiritual confusion, then you have to be willing to somehow create a holding across time and space for that to unfold and to be accompanying of that person through the experience.

**MM:** Absolutely. I think that's part of integrity as a teacher. If a teacher of anything that, like you're describing, tends that possibility of creating unrest or confusion and has that kind of

transformative edge to it, there needs to be some kind of follow-up or sense that you can take the next step in some way. Otherwise, it's like somebody leading you into an open space and just walking away. That's hard, it's hard. I think it explains the feelings of abandonment that a lot of seekers have, a lot of students have toward their teachers.

The sense that they're not really there, that they want your devotion and they certainly—most of them want your money but they don't necessarily want to be bothered with you between workshops or retreats. That would not work for me. I'm looking for connection and the deeper connection. We go to teachers because we're trying to heal the kinds of wounds that happen in the careless world and everyday world. So it's a sacred connection, it's a sacred relationship. And that ups the anti and I think it's important that teachers take that very, very seriously.

### **5. The Crucible of Relationship**

**RC:** Well, we only have a little bit of time left, and I so appreciate this conversation. And I want to end it in a way that speaks to that kind of transparency and also the continuum of transparency, or the idea that spilling everything for no purpose isn't helpful and withholding everything isn't helpful either. So I'm wondering if we could turn to the personal and if there's something that you'd be willing to share about your own life in the now and I'll be specific because one of the things I've noticed about both great memoirists and also spiritual teachers is that they become experts at the teaching story and the teaching story is usually about taking something from the past that was challenging and traumatic at the time and ultimately was overcome or was moved through to a greater place of healing, but it's not usually very vulnerable in the moment to tell that teaching story because obviously they're telling it and they have come through and kind of triumphed over something that in the past, of course, they weren't there with yet.

So it's very different to talk about the now and I'm wondering if there's maybe one thing that you'd be willing to share that you're working with now, that you're trying to soften into a deeper acceptance or integration or wholeness to some aspect of your own life that maybe 10 years from now is going to be part of another memoir, but right now, it's still very live for you and that there's still a lot of not knowing and maybe even some turmoil around.

**MM:** That's a great question. And then the thing that comes to mind is love and trust in terms of relationship, in terms of a partner relationship because I came through a couple of devastating experiences, back to back relationships with people who where there were betrayals, there were lies, there was addiction, there was a lot of ugliness that left me in a place of feeling like the only person

I could trust were my friends and my spiritual teacher and that I was just going to focus on my work and sort of withdraw from the whole relationship thing and of course, at that very moment, I fell in love.

And I saw very clearly that if I said no to the relationship and to the risk of that, I was really saying no to life. I was saying, “No, I’m not going to live. I’m going to shut the door and keep my heart guarded and not take the chance.” And it was amazing because I could feel the two voices in me, pulling me in different directions but the desire to love was a lot greater than my fear of being hurt. And it was a big healing for me.

Just saying yes to the relationship and just being willing to try again, and to learn to trust again, that was very scary. But I’m happy to say, two and a half years later, I’ve never been happier in the relationship than I am now and I’m just so grateful that I stepped through that because there was a lot of fear and there was a lot of bringing up of the past in my mind and things that could happen. It was almost like having PTSD, and every time, a little button would get pushed. I’ve flipped out but gradually, it calmed down I was able to see beyond the nightmare I was projecting my fears to the actual person who was there and who loved me. So for me, that’s been the biggest hurdle that I have walked through lately and it’s been wonderful and really profound.

**RC:** So I love to hear that story and because you are such a great guy, I feel like I also want to say that that was a teaching story. Because that’s what happened two and a half years ago and right now, as you said, you’re happier than you’ve ever been in relationship.

**MM:** Yeah.

**RC:** So I want to kind of go one step further and then I’ll let you decide whether you want to. I was talking to a therapist and somebody who I have a deep relationship over many years with. We were talking about our lives and relationships in our lives and one of the things that I came to and he came to at the same time was a recognition that because of the lack of bonding that we had in our early relationships with our parents, that was true both with my mom and my dad, that on some kind of fundamental, almost even like neurological level, emotional bonding most likely will always have a challenge within it for me.

And so I’m married in a happy and healthy relationship, I would say at least for the most part, and I’m really grateful for it but I think that almost every day, I come up against this place in me that



just doesn't feel like being fully bonded. It's certainly not my default setting. And so I'm always kind of scratchy there a little bit. I love my wife and we have wonderful and intimate, trusting connection, and yet, I think that I'm learning every day and also kind of failing every day at being as fully open-hearted as I can be and being as fully surrendered to the relationship as I want to be. And so that's why my relationship is a practice for me and not something that I would say that I have mastery over.

And that's right now. That's today, and so I'm excited to ask people about their today because I think that that brings us to our greatest common humanity. I want to certainly respect your privacy but I also want to see, is there anything that you notice in the right now that you find yourself working with in a similar kind of way?

**MM:** Well, yes. Because I dealt with a lot of betrayal in my past relationships—that's what I meant by PTSD—there are moments when my partner will say something that triggers a fear of betrayal, having no basis in reality, that I need to stop, step back, take a breath with, and see that it's this old mechanism, this old mechanism getting tipped off; and in it, there can be anxiety, there can be anger. What's different now is that I tend not to act out on it; but internally, absolutely.

I mean every wound that ever was there is still there and I'm still raw in certain places and that wounding goes back beyond my relationships to my childhood and being abandoned—my father disappeared when I was four and we I never saw him again. I have all kinds of stuff around people disappearing and being able to trust that I'll be working with for the rest of my life. What's different for me now is that I'm aware of it and I really get it for the first time because I'm with someone that I actually do trust.

I can see clearly that the issues are mine—there's nothing happening out there to justify this, whatever intense reaction I'm having. So in that way, the lover can become like the spiritual teacher as long as they are blameless, as long as they haven't compromised their integrity or their trustworthiness in any way. It gives you a perfect container to watch your darkness and watch your fears and anxieties come up, dissipate, and disappear. So absolutely, I mean it's going on all the time, but the difference between having a healthy, solid relationship and what has been in the past is, is like night and day. So I'm sort of amazed by it.

**RC:** Well, I'm so glad that you have that and I also really appreciate you going the extra distance to describe how that conditioning comes up and how you intend to work with it and how you're

able to work with it now. I think that's really great for people to hear and I would just even go so far as to say that our partners can be our spiritual teachers even when they are blameful. Because if they have something to take responsibility for, that doesn't mean that we don't still have the opportunity to polish the lens and to see how we interpreted some or all of what they were sharing with us through our own past and our previous relationships. And I know, I've had experiences in my relationship where I'm sure that I'm seeing my wife act in a way that is critical and condemning, and then when we finally have the discussion about it, I come to know really deeply that that interpretation was the opposite of what her intention actually was. And those, I think, are just the greatest opportunities to try to sit back, and not only work with my own stuff, but also see, "Do I have enough here to give this person the benefit of the doubt?" And if I can give her the benefit of the doubt, then I've got some freedom and some space to work with my stuff and not suddenly to make it about her.

**MM:** Right.

**RC:** So, and of course, in most situations, it's a little me, a little her or back and forth, but what you described as your process, I think is something that I, at least, endeavor, intend to make my process on an ongoing basis and that's why relationship, I think, is probably for me and I know for many people, the great crucible. The healings that are available for us in relationship couldn't possibly be available any other way. And I was talking to someone just yesterday about how so often people will say, "I don't understand why this happens with you. No one else in my life do I have this experience with."

**MM:** (Laughs) Right.

**RC:** And, and it's so obvious that the sandpaper that is me is nowhere near as close to the sandpaper of another in any other relationship besides my marriage, or maybe my kids. But it's because we're so close that we get to burnish each other in that way.

**MM:** Yeah.

**RC:** And I don't know of another way to do that.

**MM:** No, neither do I, especially because the body is involved, too. When the body is involved, you open a whole other Pandora's boxes of issues. So I agree with you. I think intimate relationship is the crucible.

**RC:** Well, I can't tell you how much I thank you and appreciate you and I really want to speak to the gift that you've given me and our listeners today. I'm so happy that we got a chance to have this discussion so big, big, big thank you—big hug to you, Mark.

**MM:** Oh, thanks, Raphael. It's great to talk to you.

## Jay Michaelson



Jay Michaelson is the author of three books and two hundred articles on the intersections of Judaism, spirituality, sexuality, and law. His most recent book, “God vs. Gay? The Religious Case for Equality,” was just nominated for a Lambda Literary award. Other books include “God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness,” and “Embodied Spiritual Practice and Everything is God: The Radical Path of Nondual Judaism.” His advocacy on behalf of LGBT people in religious communities has been featured on *NPR*, *CNN*, and in the *New York Times*. Jay holds a J.D. from Yale and a B.A. from Columbia, and is completing his Ph.D in Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has held teaching positions at Boston University Law School, City College, and Yale University. Outside the academy, Jay has taught meditation and spiritual practice at Kripalu, the Omega Institute, Burning Man, and at universities and religious institutions across the country. [WWW.JAYMICHAELSON.NET](http://WWW.JAYMICHAELSON.NET)

### 1. Deep Eclecticism

**RC:** Jay Michaelson, welcome to *Teaching What We Need to Learn*.

**JM:** It's my pleasure to be here.

**RC:** I'm really glad to have you. As I was just mentioning to you offline, a mutual friend of ours told me I could talk to you for hours and as I got more and more steeped in your work, I realized that was true because you wear many hats as writer, scholar, activist, and also spiritual teacher and practitioner. So I'm hopeful that we can synthesize all of those and somehow provide an offering for people that is really unique to what you bring around this subject of Teaching What We Need to Learn, transparency, vulnerability, etc. So my sleeves are rolled up and I'm ready to begin.

**JM:** (Laughs) Alright. I have failed where you're now going to try so let's see if we can make it cohere.

**RC:** (Laughs) Okay. Well one thing that I like to do to help in that regard is to ground these conversations in the present moment, so I want to share before we begin, just a little bit about where

I am in this moment and then I'll ask you to do same. I'm here in Portland, Oregon; it's the morning here and I'm in a strange kind of physio-emotional state because we have a warm day coming with bright sun, which is one of the first in a long time. So I'm kind of leaping towards spring summer feelings, but it's also early enough and I'm in an office that's chilly enough that there's a distance between what's to come and what I'm actually feeling. So it's a funny thing where I have a t-shirt and shorts on but also warm slippers. I can feel all of that and beneath all of that, or maybe I should say alongside of it, I'm also feeling really excited about this conversation and I can feel that I'm reaching for my brain to come into a more fully alert wakefulness because I feel my synapses aren't all firing yet and I want them all here for our conversation. So that's me. How about you in this moment?

**JM:** Sure. So it's funny actually, I was just in Portland a couple of weeks ago and it was still tail ending the kind of rainy spring weather and my understanding is it was a pretty rainy winter, even more than usual this year and some people seemed to be really suffering through that actually. For me, being in Portland for a couple of days, that's exactly the weather I wanted to have, the full Portland experience. So I'm here an hour north of New York City. I live right here at the Garrison Institute, which some listeners may know about. And it's been a very strange weather pattern just for the last several months.

But right now, I'm looking out at the woods. I kind of live in the woods and have sort of a writer's cottage. And I'm feeling actually really nice; the mind is present and as it always is in a certain way even if the brain isn't. I'm also coming off of a week of kind of celebration of Beltane, which is earth-based festival. It happens on May 1<sup>st</sup> and I was with a large group of friends down in Tennessee doing that. So I'm feeling really good, actually.

**RC:** Great. I'm glad to hear it. And you mentioned Beltane so before we dive into some other themes, I think it would be great for people who aren't familiar with you and your world, just to share a little bit about the very different streams that make up your spiritual practice and orientation. You mentioned Beltane, I'm guessing you would put that in the earth-based spirituality that's a part of where you come from. Is that right?

**JM:** Yeah, that's right. I think it's very helpful, one of the streams in there is Theravada Buddhism and the doctrine of non-self is very helpful for me just in not trying to make all of the pieces cohere necessarily. And it is definitely not just different hats but it's different drags that I wear in different

moments. This morning—I'm finishing up my PhD in Religious Studies—so I was finishing a passage on a very strange myth that was common in heretical Kabbalah for a couple of hundred years that nobody has ever heard of and I've been working on it for several months. And now I have some law documents opened in front of me and doing some work on what will probably be my next book, actually a book called *Evolving Dharma*, which is how Dharma practice has shifted in the last 20 years—I'd say, sort of the iPod generation. But for me in my spiritual practice there's, I guess three or four major pieces.

There's the Buddhist piece which I mentioned; the earth-based kind of radical theory; body positive spirituality, which is a very important part of who I am, and my Jewish practice. I've written two books on contemplative Judaism, one on non-duality in the Jewish frame and the other on body-based spiritual practice, again in a Jewish context. And those plus a pretty strong LGBT queer identity and activism are the pieces that animate a lot of my work.

So my most recent book, it's spiritual in the larger sense but not in the more narrow sense of: here's how to meditate. It's a book called *God Vs Gay? The Religious Case for Equality* and it's really put me on a lot of frontlines of some very contentious debates and issues and it really comes from not just my spiritual practice but my spiritual practice writ larger, which includes a real sense of activism and it's been really powerful. Meeting people who are really struggling with these issues and what I perceive to be not just a false contradiction between religion and sexuality but just having it a 180 degrees backwards that to be more spiritual, we need to repress the body and repress desire. So those are some of the pieces.

**RC:** I want to go back to something that you mentioned a little bit ago which is that you're Buddhist practice helped you, because of the no-self orientation, not to have to synthesize it totally into one kind of unified perspective. I think that's a really interesting way to look at it because while I was speaking to someone else in this series and they were talking about Ken Wilber's recommendation that we pay attention to what he calls our 'cosmic address'—meaning where we are in space, in time, and in human evolution and how that impacts and shapes our spiritual approach.

So you are somebody who has, let's say, drank deep at many different wells in a way that never would have been possible in previous generations, let alone through all of human history; and in a way, it seems your whole life and the way you live it is really an example or a model for on the one

hand, a spirituality that is really inclusive but also a spirituality and a life-approach that's broad enough to encompass all that we have available to us now in a very new way. Does that make sense to you how I'm putting it?

**JM:** Yeah. Thanks, I appreciate hearing that. I'm certainly somewhere between an eclecticist, the Renaissance man, and a dilettante. A friend of mind once called me an intellectual drag queen, and I'm perfectly happy to take that one on. That was absolutely true. If it weren't for the fact that the word 'integral' sounds a little bit like integrate, I would definitely embrace that as well, since I do feel really fortunate to be at this very post-modern confluence of different spiritual practices and technologies and paths and it's enabled by information technology. And it's interesting doing some of this work around the book, where folks are really embedded in a single tradition, so much so that for a lot of people, it's hard for them to see their world from a different position because there's so much thinking into it, whether it's a Fundamentalist Christianity and Orthodox Judaism, or what have you.

It's interesting being in communication with people in those positions, because my own position is so different. I am an eclecticist and I really feel nourished by that. There was a time in my life actually where I was really searching for a guru, like for the one teacher who was going to be my teacher and I know a lot of folks really feel that's essential. But actually for me, giving that up was essential, that there was not going to be—and this is about, I guess, 10 years ago, or maybe a little more. It just became clear there would not be one teacher who would encompass the whole me and I didn't really want that, actually. So taking pieces from different traditions and different human beings and communities has really been nourishing for me.

**RC:** So I want to just pause there because I think it's very rich and in a great way provocative how you've been speaking to that, because I will just love listeners to reflect on the idea that who they are is so vast and diverse and that all parts of us really need awareness and inclusion. In the series so far, we haven't really talked about this particular theme, so that's why I'm pausing to elaborate a little bit on it. I know that you're a person who has written many different approaches that match many different people, many different times of their lives; there are people who are called, as you said, to a guru-disciple relationship or even a teacher-student relationship in which they say, "This is where I'm going to land," and we know that often going deep with one tradition can give us something that we couldn't get if we just skimmed and that's why you were half-humorous with using the word "dilettante" before to describe a little bit of the way you approach things.

So there's, let's say, a continuum between eclecticism and some kind of uniform singular path and it's just a great question for everyone to notice where are they called in that; as opposed to thinking that there is one way that it should be done. "What works for me?" So that when they make that decision and they go forward, it's not out of some kind of resistance. They've really come to an understanding that "Oh, yes, this makes sense for who I am and where I am," and it sounds like that's really what you did as you came to understand your path more fully.

**JM:** Yeah. I guess I have two thoughts that came up listening to you. First is, I definitely do go whole hog into stuff. In my Buddhist practice, the longest retreat I've done is 5 months in silence. It's actually a two month retreat and then a week break and then another 3 month retreat. So I'm a big believer in intensive practice and I feel really fortunate to have had the life circumstances that enabled me to do that. I didn't feel fortunate at the time, I had just been in a break-up of a long-term relationship and it was actually Baudrillard, I think, said, "Once you're free, you're forced to examine who you are." (Laughs)

So I was very free and had the opportunity to do long practice and I lived in Israel for 3 years when I was studying Kabbalah more seriously and that was a big immersive piece of my life. I do feel like a lot of times, I've noticed in my own life, there's an unconscious immersion; the spiritual practices, whether it's a 'salad bar' kind of method or even if it's diligent [study and practice], is actually often for me taking second place to being a kind of Western capitalist householder, which is not actually a spiritual practice that I find that nourishing (laughs). It's interesting for me to reflect what the percentage of time that's spent and mental energy that's devoted to different parts of our lives and certainly I am a householder. I'm not putting it down in any way. But just noticing what does it mean? I think sometimes when we get the notion of eclecticism, it feels very superficial, but for me it's been pretty deep.

I guess the other part I wanted to kind of speak to a little is one of my teachers is Lama Surya Das and what I love about him is not just his clarity around Dzogchen teaching, which has been really transformative for me; it's a form of Buddhist practice, but also the fact that he's very much still Jeff Miller, the Jewish guy from Brooklyn. I think if there is one thing that spiritual teachers should not be, it's pretending to be somehow pious or always swathed in white light. Anytime someone gives that, it's fine in moments to cultivate that as a mind state and I can do it and a lot of people can do that and get that vibe going, but to really be clear that one can't do that all the time.



In other words, they sort of pretend that “Well, yeah, I’m actually always bathed on white pillows in soothing light,”—I think is really harmful and it leads to some of the abuses that happen and it also leads to a really dispiriting situation when you think, “Well, jeez, I’m a Jewish guy from Long Island and I still interrupt people and I try to be more kind, but I still have my edge,” and stuff like that. And I think with Lama Surya, who’s very kind and very compassionate. But also he doesn’t have a whole lot of BS in his teaching and I find that really nourishing.

**RC:** That theme, what I would call ‘deep eclecticism’ really speaks to me. I’m glad that you clarified that in terms of your own life and practice—it opens up the possibility that one could have diverse streams of practice, exploration and wisdom and it doesn’t have to be a superficial salad bar. So thank you for that. Also, thank you for mentioning Surya, who you may or may not know is a part of this series and in terms of the not bathed in white light or wearing white robes all the time—when I did the interview with Surya, who I know personally, I let everybody know that we had spent some time watching the World Series together many years ago.

And similarly, when I’ve had conversations with spiritual teachers from different traditions and I wanted to kind of jump the conversation to something a little bit more personal or intimate I’ll ask them questions about “What’s your favorite junk food?” Or “What kind of TV do you watch?” Not because it’s gossipy, but because I think just like you intimated a moment ago, I think it’s really helpful to realize that this is a full life and it doesn’t reduce all those other aspects of consciousness, even if one is sitting for months at a time in meditation or teaching on a throne, etc. So that’s all very helpful and along those lines, I wanted to ask you another question before we switch gears. In your own personal description, you describe yourself as being as a Halachic Jew for three decades and many people won’t know exactly what that means but I think that’d be great for them to know. So could you describe that a little bit?

## **2. Halacha**

**JM:** Sure. It’s funny, I’m sort of wondering if that’s still on my bio (laughs). So I would still use that term but yeah, ‘Halacha’ is the Jewish Way, it literally means the Way to walk, the Way to go. And it refers to a life that is—traditionally understood—shaped by Jewish law; less traditionally understood, you could say it’s shaped by Jewish tradition or even Jewish spiritual practice. And for me the way that manifested, and this was a big part of my second book *Everything is God*; it manifest in a kind of devotional religious path that doesn’t pretend to justify itself philosophically.

There is a review of that book *Everything is God* titled “Is Jay Michaelson’s God Too Mushy?” (Laughs) And I was willing to talk to that actually. I’m okay with the mushy God. I don’t think there’s been too many wars fought because people’s deities have been too mushy and not judgmental enough. So that piece for me is a heart piece. It’s more a bhakti yoga than a jnana yoga; it’s more about devotion and the heart than it is about the mind and wisdom. Not to say, of course, there’s not wisdom in the Jewish tradition, but for me, it’s what I was raised with and for that reason, I’m fluent with it, I think. I know the words, I know the language, I know the feeling and the food and all of that. And that’s why I do it.

**RC:** Let me ask you this so just for clarification around that deep eclecticism that we were talking about. Are there specific observances that are part of your daily, monthly, and yearly practice?

**JM:** Oh sure, yeah. I keep the dietary laws, I keep Kosher, not as strict as I used to but I still do. And I keep Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath; it’s a little flexible in the last couple of years but in general, I don’t use electricity, I don’t drive and just having a day—it’s interesting that Shabbat is a practice that’s 2,500 years old but I don’t think it’s ever been more relevant than today when we’re totally wired in and plugged in all of the time; just having a day where I’m unplugged and I’m not on the phone is really, really valuable to me; and I have a Jewish prayer practice that’s irregular and idiosyncratic, but that is certainly there; and I practice and observe the holidays as well.

**RC:** Okay. And one of the reasons why I asked you to elucidate that to some degree is many people who will be listening would consider themselves spiritual but not religious; that means different things for different people, but it’s always interesting to hear of somebody and their particular daily observances and rituals because we don’t, most of us in the West have that, to the same kind of degree that it existed before. So you have chosen, even though you’re, as you said, post-modern and certainly highly educated across the different traditions and different arenas, not just spiritual and religious; you’ve decided to keep certain, very specific observances in your daily life.

**JM:** Yeah. In the old days, 300 or 400 years ago, which is pretty recent, actually in Jewish time, there weren’t the different streams that there are today with Orthodox and Conservative and Reform, the sort of largest American denominations. There were just—the English translation would be people who keep Shabbat and people who don’t keep Shabbat. And that, for me, feels like a much healthier distinction. People who choose to make this pattern of order in time part of their

lives or people who don't and that's kind of how I understand my own practice. I don't have a denominational label that I really identify with. The founder of Jewish Renewal, the spiritual renaissance that's happened in the Jewish world in the last 30-40 years, Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi, said one time, "I don't believe in the same god that you don't believe in." And that's definitely true for me (laughs).

**RC:** I got it. Great, thank you. I just want to say parenthetically that another thing in your bio is that you spent time studying at a center in Jerusalem called Pardes and many, many years ago, we're talking like almost 30 plus years ago, I spent some time at a kind of organization called Ohr Somayach, so we're both nice Jewish boys who went to Israel and studied in similar environments.

**JM:** Although yours is a lot more hardcore than mine. Pardes is co-ed and it's progressive Orthodox and progressive politically, relatively speaking as well. And Ohr Somayach, I don't think there's any of those three (laughs).

**RC:** No. But you stayed for a lot longer time than I did . I was only there for a few months and my greatest claim to fame before I left was that I, kind of without realizing it, got Paul Simon the singer, to come to Shabbat at Ohr Somayach.

**JM:** Without realizing it? Or that's just happened? You were sending him an email or something (laughs)?

**RC:** (Laughs) No. Well, it's a long story. I'll put it on the blog or something, but basically I snuck into his dressing room when he gave an Israeli anniversary concert. And I just talked to him about my experience of what was happening there and suggested that maybe he could avail himself of that while he was in Israel, and then I left to go to a kibbutz and when I came back, I found out I was famous because in fact, he did show up and have Shabbat with one of the rabbis.

**JM:** That's impressive.

**RC:** (Laughs) Yeah. But anyway, back to more relevant matters...

**JM:** (Laughs)

### **3. How A "Spiritual Person" Acts**

**RC:** I'm thinking that that timing and synchronicity is really at play here because just recently, as in like a couple of weeks ago, you wrote an article for Reality Sandwich called *How Is A "Spiritual*

*Person” Supposed to Act?* And in this article, which I would recommend everybody to read—it’s really wonderful—it’s very revealing and really honest and incisive and one of the things that you say in it and I’m going to just read a little bit and kind of edit it or bring pieces together. You said: *“Making progress on the Buddhist path doesn’t lead to the knowledge of how to change the oil in your car, it doesn’t lead to sympathy with crystal healing, or patchouli, or hempseed vests.”* I would love to have one although I have never heard of one.

**JM:** (Laughs)

**RC:** But then you went on to say something, which I thought was really wonderful and I just want to expand on it with you. You said, *“It hasn’t even lead me to be more socially skillful. I was, and remain, somewhere on the autism scale when it comes to predicting how other people perceive me. I’m an introvert, and I neither understand nor particularly like complicated personal interactions. My various dharma accomplishments have not changed this. On the contrary, they’ve made the behaviors worse.”*

And you went on to say, *“Because I don’t get as bothered by a bit of negative energy here or there, I have grown even more oblivious to how deeply others are upset by it. Okay, somebody is having a meltdown. It’ll be okay eventually; why does someone else now want to process it with me? In other words, in many ways, I’m an even bigger jerk now than I was before I did my long meditation retreats.”*

**JM:** (Laughs) Right.

**RC:** So I understand the humor, the self-revelation, and also just kind of the ‘cutting through a lot of noise approach’ to what you wrote and that’s why when I went to read that, I thought that was amazing. But I’m also wondering if you could expand on a few of those things because here you are, a person who is an author, a scholar, a teacher, and we’ve been talking about the depths of your practice. And then what you revealed and this is of course, what our series is about—this kind of revelation that you see yourself as somewhere on the autism scale when it comes to predicting how other people perceive you. That seems like something I’d love to hear you talk a little bit more about.

**JM:** Sure. That’s actually been a lot of my work the last 6 months, I would say. First of all, I have to say, I stole that thing about the Buddhism doesn’t teach you how to change your oil from Ken

Wilber, and I don't think I credited him in the article (laughs) so I'll do it now. He was actually being interviewed by Tricycle and sometimes, some of the editorial staff of Tricycle can be very earnest and very Buddhist and one of the sort of tenets of really hardcore Buddhists is that the Dharma is perfect, right? So there's nothing that's not in the Dharma.

And Ken Wilber, as you might imagine, given his interests, thinks that that's ridiculous. And of course, there are things that aren't in the Dharma. And so the earnest Tricycle editor asked him, "What's not in the dharma? Everything is in the dharma." And he said, "It doesn't teach me how to change the tire in your car, change the oil in your car." And I thought that was a really good point (laughs). There is another—I forget who actually said this but someone said that on the Theravada path in particular, you take one of these sort of arhats, people who've completed the path and who aren't suffering and who are just sages and in monasteries and take them and put them in Manhattan and give them a wife and a mortgage and see how enlightened they seem. I think that's really an important piece because there are things—I'll speak now specifically in the Buddhist path because that's where I have the experience.

There are things that do happen. I mean in the old language, which I think we're moving away from in the West a little; the old language is 'attainment' and the notion of that language is that once you attain something, you've attained it; it's not like a nice state, like we go on a seven-day retreat or go to have a really good Kirtan chanting, and so you feel really great and God consciousness for a couple of hours and then you don't (laughs). An attainment is meant to be different. It's what Wilber again would call a 'stage' rather than a 'state'.

And in my experience, I know it's limited, but it's been, let's see, 4 years I guess, since I got one of those attainments in the sort of crass Buddhist language. That is reflective of some psychological reality but it doesn't make you a sweetheart. It allows, in my experience, it's allowed me to kind of settle back very, very quickly and be in a position that used to take 4 days of the Vipassana practice, now takes a 2 second moment of settling back. And it's really, apart from perhaps my marriage, the most valuable thing I have in the world.

But like I said in that article, in some ways, it does make things worse. It's funny, I'm going to be in a study that's going on at Brown about the adverse effects of meditation practice and I'm participating in that tomorrow. So I guess this is the dark night of the soul meditation week for me. But it doesn't necessarily make you kinder unless you focus on kindness, unless you focus on

cultivating loving kindness and cultivating compassion. It doesn't make you a Bay Area, California resident if you're a New Yorker. You have to focus on cultivating that, too.

So for me, one of the things I've done in my life is start two non-profit organizations. And one of them this year was really in a meltdown. We had transitions to a new executive director and that person resigned and so I had to step back in and then we have a board crisis and it was just— what all of that entails is that's a lot of organizational stuff. And it was a real mirror for me to see a lot of my own limitations and if it wasn't a mirror, some friends of mine and colleagues of mine held the mirror up to me. And I think I have emerged from that experience, which has now kind of resolved and we're through the difficult part; I've emerged from it, I hope, a little bit wiser, but actually I think with a heightened awareness of where my limitations are.

**RC:** So could you describe this a little bit more? Specifically because I heard you say that you have to focus on kindness to be kind, it doesn't just come necessarily. And just in knowing you in this conversation, I can feel your sincere intention; I can feel your heartfulness, if that's a word. And yet at the same time, you're honestly self-disclosing about something, which, it's not about dirty laundry or anything like that, but I'm speaking about these kinds of thing myself all the time in the series. I'm just wondering if you could speak a little bit more specifically about what you mean: is it that you find yourself being brisk and irritated when people are process-sy or you don't have the kind of patience that you use to have with things because you don't want to participate in a kind of a false circle of "I'm okay, you're okay" kind of thing? How does it look in your daily life when this piece that you wrote about comes up?

**JM:** Sure. Well, the number one villain, it's email; and like you, I suspect, I get a huge volume of email every day and if I had different financial resources and had an assistant who would type out all of my email and I could speak warm emails or thoughts of greetings, I think that'd be more effective (laughs) at my work. Unfortunately, that's not the life that I've chosen financially speaking. So a lot of it is just being careful to not be as goal-oriented as I naturally am. I love heart circles; I love processing in heart circles; I always got a lot out of them. When I then shift to work, I tend to get pretty goal-oriented and I work quickly. That's how I am on my own when I'm working by myself; I tend to work quickly and so I have to work on cultivating patience for people who don't work quickly. So for me, this stuff has manifested in not just the last 6 months not doing enough of the empathetic work of the people who I was working with.

And the situation which I described a couple of minutes ago, that's a tough situation and there's always going to be fallout in that kind of situation. I'm not taking it all on as my fault or my responsibility, but given that situation, I think other people with different attitudes might more naturally move into more of a caregiving roles. I'm an Enneagram 7; maybe that moment needed an Enneagram 9. The 7 is the individualist, the 9 is the caretaker. There was a time a couple of months ago where this was really about beating up on myself and that's not so helpful. I think where I am now, having done some work around this stuff—a lot of work on it, actually—is just seeing we all have different emotional intelligences and capabilities and I have a lot of good features with my emotional intelligence: I'm very generous and I am very loving with people in my life and I feel really happy about those aspects of who I am.

It's also true that in these last few months, there's just been friction over my wanting to get things done rather than heal relationships. When someone leaves like this person who we had at the organization does, that's personal as well. A lot of people who are on the board felt really hurt and I got into crisis management mode and we did have a crisis and it had to be managed. And I did manage it and I think the organization is around because I did that. At the same time, there was another crisis going on, which was the people who were feeling really betrayed by this person who made this decision and that was tough and I really resisted the opportunity to get more involved in helping people through that process.

And so that's how it manifested and as I said in that article, I assume that anyone who's listening is already a pretty hardcore spiritual practitioner and this is like Adyashanti sometimes says, "It's like the advanced class." I don't think I'm scaring any one away from meditation or from spiritual practice by just noting that—I've always been the way I am to some extent, but I really am okay with a lot of other people's negative energy when that happens. It's like, "Okay, well here's somebody expressing negative energy and here's the negative energy being reactive coming up in my mind and I can sit back from that and there it is," and hopefully not respond in that moment and just be in that space, which in the case of this organization involved a lot of financial uncertainty about what's going to happen next. And that's not necessarily the best in terms of cultivating empathy with people who are freaking out; who need someone with them when they're freaking out, not someone sitting back.

**RC:** I hear in what you're talking about that there's this one kind of energy that can move through you and I know this is in me, too—kind of like "Let's get with the program. Let's go. We've got

decisions to be made. We've got to take charge." Even though in the broadest sense, I care about everyone and I care about their feelings; this isn't a moment or a situation in which the right and best thing for us all to do is sit around and stop and make sure everyone feels okay. And then there's other times, of course, where what I just mentioned is the most important thing to be done and it seems like as we get more skillful, we could apply these different aspects of our being or personality as the moment or situation really calls for, as opposed to approach it out of our habit or conditioning. And that seems to me to be like what a Jedi would be (laughs) in what we're talking about because I feel it and I'm guessing you feel it too when that "Come on, come on, let's go," comes up. And then if I'm aware of it, it gives me an opportunity to see, "Okay, do I really want to ride that horse right now or do I want to recognize it as a habit that might not be what's most appropriate here?"

**JM:** Right. And it's time-sensitive because that same proclivity has served me really well over the years. I'm pretty prolific as a writer and I've started all these organizations; I have accomplished a lot. And so it's hard to mistrust even though sometimes it should be mistrusted. Because it's served me really well. I mean, for the four books that I have published, I have four other books that haven't been published, but that I still finished. I do accomplish things. So that brings me all kinds of good feelings, as well as accomplishments in that traditional sense. And so it's a matter of time and place, exactly like you said, I forgot which transportation metaphor you used, but is this the train I want to get on right now? Because I know it will take me somewhere but actually I may need a different vehicle for the work that needs to get done.

**RC:** Yeah. And I'm smiling because both you and I probably have a proclivity towards precision and it seemed like you wanted if possible to match my transportation metaphor.

**JM:** (Laughs)

**RC:** I want you to know it's really not necessary (laughs).

**JM:** I think it was a horse in the end, actually. Well, look, you've started this series, right? I mean nobody, as far as I know, unless you got nice grant from somebody, nobody told you to do this, right? Nobody said, "Geez, Raphael, we really need this thing and can you just do this for us?" I mean it sounds to me and I could be totally off-base here, but I think you created something. You had a vision about it. You then emailed a whole bunch of people. Some of whom you knew, some



of whom you didn't. Chances are there have been ten times where the things fallen apart but you've held it together. Anyway, that's how my projects always go. (laughs).

And so I think it's endemic to creating like that, that there's also going to be sometimes too much focus on that. I took a little bit of nourishment from, after Steve Jobs died, there are all of the wonderful eulogies and then there was like the weird Steve Jobs backlash in which all of these people said what a jerk he was and how hard he was to work for. And I'm no Steve Jobs but in my own way, it was very helpful to just kind of see that, yeah, I mean to be as driven and as successful as he was, is a force for a change—that had a cost as well and it had a really significant cost in his personal relationships. And so I think for me, I actually had a really dispiriting moment over the last couple of months when I was journaling about all this stuff and just trying to—I was talking with my spiritual director and doing different kinds of work around it; then I was journaling and then the dispiriting moment came on when I realized that it all just came down to the freaking Serenity Prayer (laughs).

It's like, "Geez, is that it? That's what I need? The Serenity Prayer?" We all think we're sort of above the basic spiritual lessons, but that was it. It's like, "Well, there are things about myself and about a situation that I cannot change or at least, they would take a lot of work to change. And there are things which I can, which need some courage and need some work and then well, yeah, if I could have the discernment or the wisdom to know the difference." So that was humbling; I was still working around The Serenity Prayer.

**RC:** I love that. And I want to just bring in for a moment a couple of things from my background in the film industry because the first thing is that if you're a good storyteller, what you learn is that the real art is in taking very complicated themes and collapsing them into a simple story that then resonates deeply, that it's simple yet deep, not simplistic at all. And that actually, if your story isn't collapsing into that simplicity, then somehow you haven't delved as fully into it as you need to, to make it really compelling to the people that are going to immerse themselves in it. And so in my practice now with clients and in workshops, etc., I'm forever telling people that as much as a whippersnapper as I may be, that I came to recognize that this is always simple, everything that I'm offering people. It's not easy most of the time or much of the time, but it's always simple.

And so coming back to the Serenity Prayer as you just described it, being somebody who's, I would dare say, even more of a whippersnapper than me seems like just the right thing because everything

you've brought to your life is going to be collapsed into that simplicity. So that's the first thing I wanted to just reflect on with you. Does that make sense as I'm saying it?

**JM:** Yeah. It's food for thought actually. I think it's interesting that, I don't think, it was originally called The Serenity Prayer. It's interesting that it's acquired that name because there is a certain kind of serenity that arises with just recognizing what's beyond control, and then not coping out, not saying, "Oh well, this is who I am. I'll never going to change." No, actually seeing what can be changed and trying to face it courageously, I think in that dynamic balance, there is a certain kind of serenity—it does feel elegantly simple.

**RC:** Yeah. And just, as I said, some other things from the film business; a great director has to be a control freak because the whole art of directing is about having a vision and making sure that everything in the film from the curtains behind the character speaking, to their inflection in their speech, to the arc of the scene in particular and how it relates to the overall film; the more clarity and attention to those details that a director has, the more that the piece will actually come together and resonate in the way that I was describing.

And so on one hand, the director needs to be a control freak and make sure that everybody lines up with that vision and then also I would say if the director wants to keep working in the business he or she also has to be a really good consoler and relationship repairer, after perhaps maybe someone's ego got bruised or someone was really upset. The director has to be able to sit down and then empathize so that we're all together as a family for this film or the next one. So it seems like those skills are part of what you were talking about when you were describing the non-profit situation. In my own personal approach, it really comes down to giving everything I have to the outcome I've intended and then surrendering that outcome over and over and over.

So like with this series, when you said you're guess was maybe it came together and fell apart a bunch of times. Well, it didn't really fall apart a bunch of times but there were many situations where what I wanted to happen wasn't happening. And so whenever that occurs, I'm immediately aware of it. There's a contraction in my being and so then I get to decide, do I want to just knock on the door a bunch of times for that outcome before I reach the place where I realize, "Okay, let it go." Or do I want to pound on the door really hard or try to kick it open? And so for me, part of the art of moving forward skillfully with that real assertion that we're talking about is also kind of judging or perceiving, I should say, in each moment or situation, how hard to push; and when that

push is really required and it's coming out of my, let's say, beingness to reach the goal, or whether it's coming more out of my ego because I think I know how this needs to happen.

**JM:** Yeah, I learned that the hard way with the covers of my first two books, both of which I really don't like. I was really fortunate for the most recent one; I actually basically liked it. I had one change I wanted to make but exactly, it was learning where to push and where not to push. And it wasn't so important to push some of that stuff, as it was on other issues. But I think there are two. I was really struck in that interchange around the book covers and this was going back about 4 or 5 years. I just didn't really understand how annoyed the folks at the publishing house were getting with me. I felt like there was an invitation to dialogue about the book cover and I just didn't get it. I didn't pick up on the cues that, "Oh wow, they must be getting really angry now, I should probably pull back." So I was actually really taken aback when they finally just were really angry and it felt to me like it came out of nowhere, but where it really came out of was me not just not really cluing in to where other people were.

One time actually, I should probably not disclose this; I don't really believe in astrology, but I had my star chart done at one point a few years ago and it was, and like it happens to all people who don't believe in astrology, it so eerily accurate. And the person who was reading the chart who had done this work, said it was a very complicated chart and at the end said, "Well, I've looked at this for a long time. Basically who you are is you want to go off and be by yourself for a while and then come back and tell everyone about it (laughs)." And that's exactly what I've done with my whole life.

**RC:** Oh, wow! That's great. I think basically, there is some kind of unwritten law that says whenever you want to share something about astrology, you should always start it by saying by "Well, I don't really believe in astrology."

**JM:** (Laughs) Well, my real disclosure, which I also shouldn't make, which I will, is I also don't believe in the Law of Attraction. And that law, that's cost me at least one friendship (laughs).

**RC:** I want to go back to that in a second, but before we do, I just want to say what you wouldn't know how powerful the whole thing about book covers is because in another conversation in the series that I had with the activist and spiritual trickster, Caroline Casey, we had a whole discussion about that subject and, and the funny thing is, this goes right back to there's no one way to do it. It's all about bringing that Jedi skill of discernment for what this moment is requiring. In the

conversation I had with Caroline, I was talking about my struggles with covers and titles also of my first books, but the lesson for me in that situation was the exact opposite of yours.

Here what you're saying is that you weren't taking the cues and weren't being collaborative enough; and in my situation, what I had to take away was I was being too much of a collaborator, too much of a nice guy, and I kind of gave away the store and paid the price of it for many years in terms of how my book and I travel through the world. So same kind of author crisis moment, but what came to us from it was really different.

**JM:** As far as I know, no one has ever complained that I've been too much of a pushover.

#### **4. Minus The Law of Attraction**

**RC:** (Laughs) Well, let's come back to what you said about the Law of Attraction because it's something that's very important for me and I talk about this with people all the time. I have no idea because I haven't read about it yet what your thoughts are, but I have a feeling because you are so eclectic and because your practices are also deep, that it would be helpful just to hear a little bit about how you relate to the Law of Attraction, what it means to you, why you don't feel like you're in alignment with it. And again, even for somebody who's listening who feels like the Law of Attraction is the core of their life, the idea isn't that anybody should be convinced of one thing or another, but if we're not willing to listen and really open to some other perspectives about whatever it is that we believe in, then we're holding on too tight. That would be my sense of it. So in the spirit of not holding on too tight, tell us about the Law of Attraction from your perspective.

**JM:** (Laughs) Alright, I hadn't planned on this one. There's three perspectives: the first one is just we do know a lot about human beings and verification bias and the Law of Attraction can never be disproven, right? You can always find some reason why you were intending and manifesting and it didn't manifest and that to me suggests that it should be read with intense skepticism. It's like a religious claim that cannot be refuted no matter what. And I know a lot of people who are really into the Law of Attraction who have gotten sick and blamed themselves for getting sick and I think that's awful. And I know people who don't care at all about the Law of Attraction and don't practice it in any way and who are actually pessimistic and who have done really well in their lives.

And that leads to my second objection, which is that on a macro-level, it becomes, I think, deeply, deeply ethically problematic. So one Jewish guy talking to another, I mean how do you do the Law of Attraction in Auschwitz? I mean like those people brought that on themselves in some way, or

9/11—they attracted the planes to the World Trade Center? Now I know that anyone who takes the Law of Attraction seriously, what you put out is only one piece of the whole puzzle. It's only one piece of the whole big thing and so of course, it can't be reduced to that. But for me, that also then makes it functionally useless.

It doesn't do anything in a way other than just—I would rather cultivate a positive mental attitude because having a positive mental attitude is generally better. It leads you to do better work and be kinder and be happier and stuff like that. So that feels much more sane than claiming that there's some kind of cosmic force at work because if it doesn't work in cancer wards and in concentration camps, then it shouldn't work in our comfortable sofa's and futon's times either. It's not kosher to just say, "Well, it works when I want it to and I'm just going to ignore when the consequences would be really unfortunate." But then finally, and this does go sort of a little bit to the Buddhist piece and it also comes for me because a lot of what the Kabbalah center teaches is actually teachings of Abraham, New Thought, Law of Attraction, three terms for the same thing. Which definitely is not found in traditional Kabbalah but the idea that you create your reality and/or co-create your reality.

It actually for me does the exact opposite of what I'd like my spiritual practice to do, which is not about "How can the universe meet my needs better or how can I arrange the conditions for my happiness." But "How can I find the happiness that does not depend on conditions?" And that's like a traditional Buddhist phrase for Nirvana, for the unconditioned, but even just in a conventional sense, I mean one of Byron Katie sayings is, "What we really want is to want what we have." And I think that's right, I think she's really right about that, and in a really powerful way. And so I understand again that doing the work around the Law of Attraction does involve feeling abundance and satisfied and dadadadada, but basically subscribing to a view wherein I believe that the universe is going to better cater to my needs, wants, and desires, is for me, just personally, and in the spirit of listening, for me, the opposite of what I want my spiritual practice to do.

**RC:** I get it. I really appreciate your thoroughness in describing all those pieces that you bring to it. And I want to add, just a couple of things. One of them is for me, the hardest part having to do with the Law of Attraction is that it's usually taught in such a way that I can't afford the luxury of a negative emotion. And that when I'm feeling bad, I'm going to bring more of that to me so I need to somehow uplift or transform that negative emotion into something more positive and I'm the emotional connection guy.

My thing is always about when we're resisting emotions, we're not free, we're not in harmony and I don't even think of something as a "negative emotion". And I think more importantly, if I have it and I resist it, then resistance rules my life. So if I'm standing in front of a mirror and repeating affirmations, "I love my beautiful body" and I'm actually 50 pounds overweight and the truth is I hate my body, then I can speak those speak affirmations a million times and it's never going to help me lose weight. But if I actually feel that hatred in my body, I find it, I surf it, I let it move and change and ultimately it releases and I feel lighter; I feel more present and expanded; then through my being with it I'm going to become clearer; I'm going to become more positive naturally and be able to make better choices for myself. And so anything other than that to me feels like a bypass; if I think that somehow, in order to have a successful or happy life, there's something wrong with the way I feel, then I'm in trouble.

**JM:** Yeah. I agree a thousand percent. That's just right. It feels so inauthentic to me, personally, like to just say, "No, I'm not going to feel that feeling." I certainly went through plenty of that for the last few years. "No, I'm just not going to focus there. I'm not going to put my energy there," which is basically saying I'm going to close my eyes and pretend it doesn't exist; this negative story which does have something to teach and it's just like your language around it was perfect. It needs to move through and it will release hopefully, but it will release on it's own by being seen and by being authentic with it and being with it. Just seeing it for what it is.

### **5. Practice, Neuroscience and Conflicts about a Dog**

**RC:** I want to give a very personal and sort of small everyday life kind of example to what we're talking about. So in my personal and my home life, my wife has really wanted a dog. And I don't want a dog and we've had lots of discussions about it. And I won't go into all the details except to say that there's a dog here now. And I don't like it. And we still have lots more to work through about that, my wife and I, but the reason that I'm bringing that up is because I have felt very uncomfortable, physically and emotionally around this experience. And I don't know what the outcome is going to be for the highest good of all; myself, my wife, our marriage, our children, around this issue, I'm still in process with it. But the one thing that I keep having to come back to is that I'm feeling really bad inside about it. And I'm not even really talking about telling myself a story or who's right or wrong or what should happen; it's just that I'm feeling very tense and it's coming up in lots of different moments and lots of different ways. So I feel like that's job number one, to attend to that tension and that lack of ease and well-being because anything that I would do to try to escape that is just going to come back to bite me, not with the dog (laughs). So it would be

great to feel better. I want to feel better. I don't like having this discomfort where what I'm wanting and what my wife is wanting are two very different things. But, but I can't. I mean, if anything I do to try to feel better isn't going to help the situation. So I love that edict that that I heard, I don't know where it first started. It may have been with Gay Hendricks because that's who I heard say it. He said, "If you want to help someone, tell them not to feel better, but to feel more." And so in this situation I'm describing, I know that's my job, to feel more, to keep feeling and to trust that that is going to bring me to a place of greater openness and then hopefully, what most needs to happen will kind of take care of itself.

**JM:** Yeah, absolutely. And I think, too, one thing that's useful about this situation with the dog; I mean it's a conflict with your wife. It's a serious thing but it's not like a terminal illness, right? This is why I think one of the things that's nice is the word "practice." I mean ultimately, if you have to suck it up about the dog, you probably could, right. But by doing this practice, you're becoming more adept so that the next thing that happens, whether it is an illness or whatever the next major really big thing is, you've done all this work. And I feel like, again, not to go back to the Law of Attraction and beat it up some more, but it's a way of not doing the work; so you're working now with this conflict, which as conflicts go is not the worst conflict in the world, but it's a conflict and you're working with it and you're building up this stuff.

In the last couple of years, I've gotten really into neuroscience; it's very early, the neuroscience around meditation in particular in the pre-frontal cortex; I've gotten really into it even with all the caveats that are there and I'm just really inspired and interested in it. One of the most useful things for me about that way of seeing stuff and seeing the practice, is to see it more like going to the gym; like when you go to the gym, you've got to put in the work, you do the intention but you don't have to sit there and tell your muscles to grow or tell your fat to burn. You do the work and the somatic system does the rest in a way. And seeing meditation, or in this case being with a conflict and seeing what's going on emotionally and so forth; seeing it that way, for me, has been really liberating, probably again for non-self reasons, to just see it as a process that's unfolding, to see it as dharma and not self. But also because there's a certain release that happens around it that I don't need to be in the driver seat of this practice or if I am driving, the GPS will tell me where to go. I've just got to keep moving forward. And that's really, for me, been really liberating.

**RC:** That's really to the point we were talking about before, in terms of the kind of type A, 'let's get it done' kind of thing because while there are times as we both talked about to get in there and

make it happen, often, if we are practicing the way you just described and we are aware of the ease of which things happen as a result of our practice, then we realize that it's an error of perception when we think we're so in charge of it anyway and then that that gives the possibility for something bigger and richer to flow. And the only thing that I want to come back and critique you on is idea that somehow this issue with the dog is not life and death, what are you talking about?

**JM:** (Laughs) Alright. I was worried about that. Go see one of those dog therapy people. I'm not a dog person; I'm a cat person actually. I wouldn't be thrilled to have a dog running around.

**RC:** (Laughs) No, I'm just joking and we already do have a cat, too; and as I shared with people on another one of these calls, nine chickens. So we've got a lot going on in this small house.

But I do want to just say one other thing coming back to the Law of Attraction, not because that's our major theme but because there's one piece of it that I think is really important, and that is intention. So to be able to look at a situation and see to the best of my ability, "What do I really want to have happen here and what seems like, when I try to get out of the way as much as possible, is in the highest good of myself and others?" Then I have the opportunity to really notice with each step I take and each action, am I moving towards my intention or am I moving away from it?

And so that, I think, is a way to have a really rich and full life that's in alignment with who I am and with source and mystery, giving all I can, surrendering the outcome as I described before; and then also continuing to revisit my intention: is it time to reinforce it or to change it? And all of that I think is possible for anyone and everyone without the law and without the idea that there's something I'm supposed to turn away from or that I have to feel a certain way in order to build my life and to serve others as well. So it's interesting because even the word intention has been overused and become kind of bland in contemporary Western spirituality, but I try to reclaim that word whenever possible because I feel like it can orient everything in the most positive way without any of those kind of Law of Attraction side effects.

**JM:** Yeah, do we really need more law? It feels like a new way to be neurotic (laughs).

## **6. Sitting in Unsolvables & Writing Worth a Thousand Flames**

**RC:** When you said do we really need law, that's spoken by somebody who went to Yale Law School, so if you say we don't, I'm going to believe you. So listen, we just have a couple of minutes left and I want to tell you a little something and then it will lead to a question for you. So I have a good friend who, of course, knows I'm doing this series and whenever I tell him I've interviewed



the next person, he says, “So what does he need to learn?” And I’m always laughing and I’m always telling him, “Well, the conversations don’t really unfold that way exactly and it’s not confrontational and we dialogue and we go where we’re meant to go.” But, but I just thought because you are who you are and our conversation has been spirited and free-flowing, I thought it might be interesting to end our conversation by asking that question to you directly. From your own perspective, this series is called Teaching What We Need To Learn, what is it that in your life these days, right now is where you see that you’re wanting to learn, where you’re wanting to put your attention towards healing, growth, or self-change?

**JM:** That’s interesting. Yeah, it’s a great challenging kind of question. I think right now, I turned 41 two days ago, and my partner’s 44, about to turn 45 and we just got married in September and we’re thinking about kids. And for us, because we’re a little bit older than many people are when they start on the parenting journey, we really like our space and our time and flexibility and freedom and things, which we would need to really re-adjust in family life. And I think what I’m needing to learn right now is some way of some process of discernment around that.

We’re gay guys so we’re not going to get pregnant by accident. In fact, it’s probably a \$100,000 if we did this the way we were intending to do it, as an upfront cost so it’s something that one does very deliberately in our family structure. And so I personally feel I’ve sussed it out ten ways from Sunday; I’ve done the pros and the cons and the this and the that, the journaling, the discernment. So at some point, there’s a decision to be made jointly and there’s a real sense of readiness and also fear of loss.

There’s a fear of loss, anticipatory grieving. I’m up here, we have a place in Brooklyn and a place I mentioned—the house that I mentioned earlier upstate. I’m here by myself; I’m doing my writing; I’m doing my work; it’s quiet; it’s really precious. And so maybe that’s what I want to affirm or maybe I want to take on this very new chapter in my life. So it’s something around that kind of transition, which would be even more than marriage to me. It feels like the biggest transition of my life, of our lives, and yeah, that’s where the learning is for me now.

**RC:** So I really appreciate your sharing that. It’s really touching and you’re speaking to somebody who is 51 and whose daughter is 4 and a half. So I made that decision very intentionally late in life, to have a child and I know all that goes into that. And so you might be thinking “Oh now, I’m going to say something about it like ‘Oh, that was the greatest decision ever’ or ‘you should do it’.” I

mean, no, I would never do that because everybody's situation is unique. And I'm absolutely thrilled to have my daughter; what a great blessing in every possible way, even when she's impossible, which is a lot; because speaking of astrology, she is a Scorpio in the fullest sense of the word (laughs), and besides which, if you name your daughter Aria, then you really better be ready for her to be singing one, every day.

**JM:** (Laughs) For me, it's the Law of Attraction when you have kids and there are consequences. You have reaped what you sowed (laughs).

**RC:** Right. Yeah, I never thought of that. That the flip side in the Law of Attraction is "Be careful what you wish for."

**JM:** Yeah (laughs).

**RC:** But I just want to say that in a way, what you're talking about comes back to one of the themes in our conversation today because assertion, surrender—type A 'get it done' versus more going with the flow—these are all things that in some ways when you talk about them are conceptual, and then in some ways like with the non-profit you were describing, they really come into play, but it's all about a continuum. And then there are these times in life, like the one you're facing with your partner, where there's just a do it or not do it, there's no middle ground. And when you have a deep Buddhist practice, as you do, which is all about being and as you said, finding happiness that is not dependent on conditions. But then you also live in the West and it's deep in yourself to want what you want and to believe that you can have what you want. It feels like a koan of the greatest kind, I mean the most absolutely unsolvable kind, to sit in that. Do I do this or not do it? And I have clients who are often wanting to spend time exploring that kind of question and I don't have any special wisdom about it, it's not what like I'm ramping up for, I'm just saying that like that's where it all comes together, doesn't it?

**JM:** Yeah, I mean that's where the rubber hits the road. I mean that's where the practice turns in into reality—it's in the big stuff. I remember sitting with Joseph Goldstein at one point and he was describing how he really was hoping that his last breath would be a mindful breath and that he is practicing for the big questions, not just knee pain, but the big joys and the big sorrows. And yeah, I think we'll be up to this decision.

**RC:** Well, one of the things that I tell people all the time is that if you're not making the decision out of resistance, meaning "I'm going to choose one thing to avoid a feeling." And you talked about, what was the word you used for, not pre-emptive grieving, but there was another word that you used for this.

**JM:** Anticipatory grieving.

**RC:** The anticipatory grieving. If you're not trying to avoid an emotion in making a choice and you're willing to be with anything and everything that might result in any one of the choices that you make, then you have the opportunity to open more fully and most of the time, there's a call that's deeper than the pros and cons and you can hear that, and you can kind of let it unfold and follow it. Maybe people would call it intuition, for instance. So often that happens, and it will be really interesting to find out if that's what happens for you; that in the process eventually it feels like a decision is happening rather than you're pushing the decision bolder up the hill. So we'll check back with you hopefully and see (laughs).

**JM:** Yeah. Let's do another one in a year (laughs).

**RC:** Yeah. And before we go, I want to ask you one sort of bonus round question that I would regret if I didn't squeeze it in before we have to go. A lot of what we've been talking about in the different interviews in the series has to do with the ways that we get triggered in our life and what those opportunities are for us in terms of deepening in our self-awareness, our emotional connection, our practice as teachers, and also just of human beings. And so you do so much writing in so many venues online where people get to give you immediate response and feedback.

And so the question is last week you wrote a piece in The Daily Beast about Dan Savage and the controversy that happened when he spoke disparagingly of religion at some kind of gathering at a high school. And so you wrote the piece, I read the piece, and then I read 30 comments; I don't know how many there were fully at that time or past that time, but I just read 30 before I stopped. And almost all of them were mad at you. They were all saying "You got this way wrong," and everybody was telling you about your piece, how you missed it, and so I was wondering, and this is kind of a 'how we live now' question. First of all, do you read those comments, and secondly, do you get triggered in that situation?

**JM:** So yeah, I never read those comments. It's not a venue that promotes a worthwhile conversation. What actually happened in addition to those comments with the piece, and my partner read some of them (laughs) so I've gotten a little of the benefit of what they had to say; I got really taken down by a writer named Amanda Marcotte in Slate; a full blog post just devoted to showing what a jerk I am. And then I responded.

So we're actually in a back and forth a little bit and it's a little self-serving but my friends liked my response to her more than my original piece, actually, for what it's worth. I don't get triggered by that. I wrote an article for *The Forward*, which is the largest Jewish newspaper in America called *How I'm Losing My Love for Israel* and the title kind of expresses it. And that piece won me an award and it put me on a lot of self-hating Jews lists and the amount of negativity that that piece, which was a subjective—this was before Peter Beinart wrote his article basically saying the same thing, which that triggered me (laughs).

But there was so much negativity around it; when the negativity comes at me like that, it's much easier than when it's either somebody I know or it's something subtle or I'm actually at stake. I was giving a talk one time about *God vs Gay?* and somebody asked me about "Isn't homosexuality the same as bestiality?" I mean I'm married to a man so when someone comes with something that offensive and that over the top, it's actually easier because that's an opportunity for me to see that this is a teaching moment and I did what I did in that moment. There were 50 people there in the talk and they were all ready for me to explode and I didn't do that at all. And so actually, that's not what triggers me. It's much more the personal stuff or things like that. As a writer, I think it's a good thing to be able to provoke a reaction and if people feel that strongly, I'm glad that they read the piece and I'm sure they've all completely misunderstood it because actually I'm so brilliant, but (laughs), it actually does feel good to inspire that level of a reaction.

So that doesn't call on my Buddhist piece; that's just me as a writer, actually. That's me wanting to connect with people. It's funny when you told the story about the film story and the director because I've written a couple of screenplays; like everyone else, unproduced screenplays. And I have a very different view towards it; it's like when the screenplay—I did a number of versions on it, edits revisions, etc. When it got to the point where I felt it was finished, I sent it off to some contest that it didn't win, but if it ever, God willing, gets picked up and produced, that's not what I do. What I've written is finished—or not finished in the sense I'll never look at it again or be resistant to change. But it's like, "Okay, I've done the best I could on this piece," and that's how I

felt with that Dan Savage piece and others. And my work is done until then next piece, until I then interact again. But I put something out there and people have taken it up and that feels so fulfilling to me.

**RC:** Okay, great! And so the flipside of that too is, as you said, that where you might have your own triggering is when it's more personal, more intimate, people that you're close to as opposed to the world out there that's reacting to your writing, so at least they're paying attention.

**JM:** Yeah. I know, first of all, I've gotten plenty of positive feedback on that piece and on others that I've written that have also been flamed a lot. I've been very fortunate; the work has had a really positive effect on people's lives in this particular area. I actually just got an email right before we started talking from an 18-year old kid who's in a very religious Jewish community and he's exactly who I had in mind when I wrote that Dan Savage piece.

And he's doing alright but it's a very tough situation that he's in. Back to spirituality and religion, there's that quote there, "Religion comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable." I'm not really so worried about people who are so self-possessed in their very strong opinions and their writing and they take the time to write a comment on some online article and that's fine. I'm glad to have them as readers. But that kid who read the book and that has opened up a new way of being in the world for him, that's worth the thousand flames on some comment sheet.

**RC:** Well, beautifully stated and a wonderful place to end. I'm sure that there are many more of those kids and adults who have been really moved and felt a sense of connection and belonging as a result of the work that you do in the world. And so I want to give a deep bow of appreciation for that, and also to you for just being present and available for a really wonderful spirited conversation today. I feel really privileged and now the day is warmer and so if I go out and drink up the sun, I'm going to be doubly blessed.

**JM:** (Laughs) Awesome. Well, we have Portland weather here in New York right now so I'll be thinking and cultivating some mudita, some sympathetic joy for you out there in your shorts and t-shirts (laughs).

**RC:** (Laughs) Alright.

## Devaa Haley Mitchell



Devaa Haley Mitchell is a spiritual guide, public speaker and musician, offering Soulful Women programs and devotional music in support of feminine awakening. She is the founder and co-host of the Inspiring Women Summit, a virtual gathering of 55,000 participants from 160 countries. [WWW.INSPIRINGWOMENSUMMIT.COM](http://WWW.INSPIRINGWOMENSUMMIT.COM) She also serves as the Chief Transformation Officer at The Shift Network, which she co-founded with her husband, Stephen Dinan. Ordained as an interfaith minister, Devaa draws upon 20 years of study and practice of the most respected systems of personal growth and spiritual development. Her debut album Sacred Alchemy aims to reawaken and liberate the many dimensions of the sacred feminine. [WWW.DEVAA.COM](http://WWW.DEVAA.COM)

### 1. The Worm Full Moon

**RC:** I want to begin today with a synchronicity because I was reading a blog post of yours that I'm going to share with listeners in a moment; and then something happened that made me realize it was just right to begin with this post. So if your will indulge me, I will read your beautiful words, okay?

**DH:** I'm so excited because I don't even know what you're going to read!

**RC:** Okay! So we'll be the moment together! You were speaking about an experience you had in Peru, when it was supposed to go one way with you being a space holder and a participant in the beautiful sacred experience and then you got violently ill. And what you wrote was:

*"This experience gave me a chance to strip away all the labels of teacher, guide, facilitator. I was none of those. I also got to give up, at least temporarily, the part of me that's attached to helping someone else because I really couldn't do much at all on this day. And I certainly was not very helpful. I also had a great opportunity to let go of the need to look good as I stumbled around with my stinky breath, sweaty body, and disheveled hair.*

*And while it was not a pretty sight, it was also pretty freeing. But most important for me, I was able to really open up to receive on a much deeper level. I have been known to put up a bit of a guard or*

*give the impression that I have it all together. But here, my façade was pried loose. I had no choice but to allow people to take care of me and mother me, which is actually something I deeply desire. I found that in my worm stage, I was actually quite an approachable snuggle puss. I kept finding myself in the center of a big snuggle pile up, which was really very sweet. I found that as my own vulnerability was more exposed, I experienced others being more vulnerable with me too. And so friendships deepened and softened.*

*Of course I've known all this on a mental level, but this experience just underscored the point. So while this experience was perhaps not magical, and it was certainly not what I wanted or expected, it was actually quite valuable. It made me realize that some of those things that I long for, like nurturing relationships and a deeper heart connection, are more easily fostered when I can embrace my worm nature." Do you remember writing that?*

**DH:** Yeah, I do!

**RC:** Feeling all that?

**DH:** Yes! It's something that didn't happen very long ago, so this is very fresh and yeah, it's interesting to hear you reading it back. It's that often said that you don't get what you want, but you get what you need. And in my own work, one of the archetypes that I've worked with, this archetype of the Great Mother . . .

So for those who don't know me or my background, I work a lot with the Divine Feminine, the different aspects of the Divine Feminine and how they live in each of us. So the Mother is one of those archetypes as would be the Goddess of Compassion, as would be the Fierce Feminine. And my husband had actually said, "Why?" In looking at these archetypes, we don't have kids, and he said, "There's one archetype that I think you haven't integrated as well as the others. And it's the archetype of the Mother," which for many women comes really naturally. And for me, it's something that is just not as integrated as the others. I said I don't have children and my own mother, while I have a good relationship with her, was someone who was a bit more masculine. And that's something that she would say about herself.

And so there's this part of me that really longs for that deep mothering energy, that nurturing, holding space where I can be young, where I can be small and not have to take care of so many details. I'm one of the co-founders of this organization called the Shift Network and for most of the

time I have to be so adult and so responsible and really handle so many different pieces. But there's this other part of me that really wants to crawl under a big, red blanket—red's the color, dark red, that we associate with the Great Mother, and I really had been longing for that.

And I think when this particular event happened, I was also at a point of really running on empty and feeling that I just want someone to take care of me on some level, but I didn't really expect that that would happen on this trip to Peru because I was traveling actually with a bunch of women who would become friends, but who had been participants in a year-long women's circle that I was facilitating. So this was a gathering of friends and equals and I was not in that facilitator role. We made it very clear, okay, I'm taking off that hat. I'm now just a fellow participant on a journey to Peru because of the nature of the work and because we were doing a lot of deep, sacred ritual processes.

There was that other part of me that felt like, well, I actually do need to kind of hold the group and people are going to have issues and traumas and triggers and things could be activated as we're traveling. And because I've been in that role with these women for over a year, though I'm saying that I'm not in that role, it's actually hard to get out of it. And then the universe, which you pointed out, Raphael, gave me an experience which actually forced me out of that position, forced me out of any facilitator/teacher type of role because I was so ill, that I just could—I mean, all I could do was move slowly from one location to another.

And I remember, one of the real low spots was sitting, everyone else was doing this beautiful ritual out in the sun, it was really hot, and I felt so ill that I could only sit in the shade. And the only place that had shade was sitting literally on top of the sewer. And so I was sitting there like, "Okay, here I am. How humiliating can this be? I'm really ill, I'm vomiting, I'm sitting on top of the sewer." And my former students/participants really had to show up for me and take care of me. They didn't have to but they chose to. And it was such a beautiful role reversal and also such a deep humbling experience, but also healing experience, to see that kind of energy doesn't necessarily need to come from my physical mother or doesn't necessarily need to come from my husband who sometimes will step into that role. We do that for each other, but the people that I had been leading could then take care of me. And it really took our relationships to another level too, beyond any roles or labels. So it was a real gift.



**RC:** That's so wonderful to hear about and to have you expand on. And so are you ready now for the synchronicity that I mentioned?

**DH:** Oh! Yes! I thought the synchronicity just had to do with this being a lot about transparency!

**RC:** Oh no, we go one step further than that.

**DH:** Okay! No, yes, I'm ready!

**RC:** Alright! So at the end of that blog post you proclaimed, "I've decided that I'd rather like being a worm," and of course this was a testament to the vulnerability that you had experienced in that. And just moments after I read that blog post, I learned that tonight's full moon is known by many Native Americans as The Worm Moon.

**DH:** Oh wow!

**RC:** And it's named after the ground as it starts to thaw, suddenly reveals lots of worms and tracks of worms along the paths that have been frozen during the winter. As soon as I read about your "worm" experience and the fact of the worm full moon, I knew that that's where we were meant to begin today.

**DH:** This is the beginning of our relationship! We met today, too, formally. So that's really great! And to explain why I called this The Worm and why we're talking about the worm is because I felt like a worm, basically, in this experience in Peru. I was most of the time flat on my belly, laying there, and there were people doing sound healing and all this magical stuff is going on for everyone else. But for me, flat on my stomach, just looking down into the grass, I said, "You know, I really feel like all I can do is be a worm right now." And I embraced that worm nature in myself and I didn't have a choice! And that's why I called that article On Worms and Lemonades. Then it was about how do you make what might seem like a lemon, a lemony situation, something you don't really want to have in your life, how can you really turn that into lemonade and something sweet, which is what came out of that experience for me. So thank you for bringing that up!

**RC:** You're welcome! And it's great to be able to celebrate worms because we don't usually get to do that and they are part of the sacred whole—

**DH:** They are!

## 2. Embracing Failure

**RC:** It's almost a foundation of your teaching to be transparent and step out from behind your role as a teacher. So it's not really so different or a big stretch for you to do that. And when—

**DH:** But it is, actually! This is pretty new for me, to be so transparent. So it is actually a stretch and it's a stretch I'm stretching into by being willing. I'll tell you about another synchronicity that happened to me that I was horrified about, but that really showed me that there's something more to this and that people are actually more hungry for my authenticity and my transparency than they are for my polished version of myself, because in the past, what I presented was actually—I mean, this is not in the distant past. This is in the past like last year. I would really show the good stuff and show the polished version and wouldn't want to show the worm, would never want anyone to know about that before. And I'm really shifting the way I'm thinking about it because I've been getting feedback from people about what really touches them and what actually is helpful and supportive.

**RC:** So you were going to tell me about a synchronicity that was horrible.

**DH:** Well, yeah. It was something that I didn't chose to embrace at the time. I felt it was a bit horrible. I was practicing public speaking because I normally do very long, deep workshops. I say to people, "Give me 4 days and I'm golden. But ask me to make a presentation a half an hour or 5 minutes, it's really difficult for me just to speak a lot about myself and my own experience in such a concise way," because a lot of the work that I do is about facilitating a container that is more about the participants and more about their healing journey and it's less about me as a person and my own stories.

So I was practicing in a course that I did and they filmed everyone. And they said, "Think about a time in your life when you had something happen that is painful, but there was a moral to the story, but don't choose the happy, shiny moment. Choose something that feels a bit gritty, feels a bit hard to share about." And so I talked about an experience that, again, until just recently—again, this is maybe within the last 5 or 6 months, I've been willing to share about. And it's actually—you'll see the other synchronicity, Raphael, at the end. What I shared about was an experience of getting fired. And it was a very, very humiliating experience for me, especially humiliating because I was someone that put a lot of value on my jobs, my external things in the world, and I had a job at a fancy consulting firm that I felt really good about working at, and was working my hardest, you know? Didn't think there was anything different that I could do to do a better job, but I went in to

get a performance review and it didn't go the way I expected at all. And I just remember, the room was one that was all glass.

And so everyone in the whole firm was basically watching what was happening to me inside the room and though they couldn't probably hear the words, they could read the body language and they could see the tears that were welling up in my eyes and the flush in my face and the humiliation, probably, that was written all over me when I was being told that I wasn't meeting the company's expectations. And so I went on to talk about this, and for me it was an experience of really feeling like a failure. And I went on to later realize that one of the core things most entrepreneurs have in common, people who are really successful have in common, is their willingness [to fail]. Or not even their willingness, but the fact that they have failed. It's more how many times they've failed, 10 or more times of failure usually breeds success.

And that's what some of the most successful people have in common. But for me, at the time, it was really humiliating. And then what was more horrible for me later was that they sent me this video for my own viewing purposes, I thought that I would just view it and I asked my assistant, who was working for me, if she would upload it to my YouTube where I keep all of my videos so that I can have all of them in one place. But to put it private. This video is just for me; this is not something to be displayed to the public. And I guess the way that the email system was setup on YouTube, every time I post something, it automatically gets posted on Facebook and tweeted. And so I didn't even realize any of this is going on, but suddenly I started getting this flood of emails coming in saying, "I so appreciate your willingness to be vulnerable," and "I can relate to that experience. Something similar happened to me." Way more response than any other email I'd sent out and any other posting where I'm teaching, where I'm doing this or I'm doing that.

So at first I was very mortified because I thought this was not for public consumption! This was just a practice round for me. But I was really struck by the fact that so many more people responded to this, as I said, than anything else. And to hear their stories about their own failures, their own places where they felt ashamed, their own places where we've all felt not good and not up to snuff or not meeting someone's expectations and the pain around that, which is really common for all of us. And to see that that's not a place we have to dwell or remain, but to know that that's part of not only the path of being human, but that's also part of paving your own path to success, being willing to fail.

And so through that experience and since I didn't have a choice, I basically decided to embrace it and then I said, okay, since it's already out there and people are already seeing it, I'm just going to go ahead and put it in my newsletter and I think that that was the video I even sent to you, Raphael, when you were approaching me about this series. And to say okay, this is really kind of my own cutting edge, I'm comfortable and yet there's something about people getting to see the full picture of all of us, not just the shiny parts; we all have the shiny parts, but we also all have the warts and the places that we all struggle. And there's a common humanity that can be found there when we level the playing field in that way and give permission to be all of who we are. And so this is the area that I'm stretching into my own life right now. And so this series and even deciding to be a part of it is my taking a stand for that in my own life and for that amongst people like myself who are facilitating and teaching different kinds of ways.

**RC:** Well, I'm so grateful that you shared that great story and that second synchronicity, it's really moving to hear how you've come in your own life, in your own work, to embrace that kind of transparency. And what I'm hearing really links the two different stories is your commitment to be vulnerable. And one of the things that I've found is that it's a paradox but we become our most powerful when we allow ourselves to become our most vulnerable. And I wanted to share something with you because you and I both facilitate workshops and long ones at that, and so we both know the importance of creating a very safe space for people as much as possible to enter into the kind of vulnerability that you've been sharing about.

In one of the workshops that I teach, people are asked to co-create an experience for themselves specifically that we all support them in that's going to take them through their growing edge to a place of transformation that they're really ready for. And one of the people many years ago in one of these workshops came to recognize that her challenge was to receive love; that she was a great giver and she talked a good game about being in a mutual loving relationship with friends and family, etc. But it was just really hard for her to let it in. And so she and her team members in the workshop decided that what they were going to do is create a nest for her in the center of our circle with pillows and blankets. And she was just going to get all cozy and really open to that child-like part of herself and they would sit like sentries on either side of her, keeping it really nice and safe, and one by one, each person in the group would come up and whether it was with a whisper or a soft touch, they were going to offer something loving and her job was first of all, to take it in as best as possible and not to keep going unless or until she really felt like it had landed in her.

And as she did this, the tears were just flowing because it was so moving and sometimes painful, but also ultimately healing and releasing for her to have this experience. And everybody was really touched. And the coda to that story is that everybody in the group decided, when it was all done, “Hey, I want that experience too!” And while they each had their own experience they needed to do during workshop time, these people actually got together during the breaks of that long workshop so that they could give each other that experience. And then ultimately, they dragged me in and said, “You’re not going to be without this experience either.” And so I got to have it as the facilitator as well. And I wanted to tell that story because I think vulnerability, which is so linked to transparency, is so hard for so many of us, especially those who have embraced some kind of power or skillfulness or success in their lives, they have a lot of ambition, and yet it’s something that everybody craves. So the way that people were so touched by your story makes complete sense to me because I think that it resonates backwards towards them so much as well, not only in “I’ve had similar experiences,” but, “Oh, wow!”—just to be that vulnerable is to really be fully alive.

**DH:** Yeah, yeah! And I think we also feel, as you said, fully alive and also fully ourselves that all of who we are is lovable. At that core level, there’s that question, I think, we ask as a little kid but it stays with us, which is: am I normal, am I okay? Or even deeper than that, am I lovable? Fully, with all of this beauty and all of this history and all of these scars and battle wounds and heart tenderness areas. So it’s really beautiful.

### **3. Accessing the Goddess Through Strawberries Dipped in Chocolate**

We built the whole retreat around somewhat similar experiences to what you’re talking about, and the retreat is called Embraced By Love. And it’s a lot about just that. It’s not just a women’s retreat, but it’s about really creating a space where those people who are so nurturing for everybody else really get to be nurtured deeply by each other, by the feminine and by that loving presence. And there’s this deep longing for it in all of the women who come to our retreat, but also there’s a part that terrifies people as well to open up deeply, to give and receive just even gentle touch, even if it’s just a massage or choosing to anoint each other with oils or with fragrances. Or to allow ourselves to be sensual, not sexual, but just sensual through expanding into our senses with another person, just allowing someone else to tickle us with a feather or feed us with strawberry, and give us permission to just enjoy this incredible sensate nature of our being, which on the path that I follow, the Divine Feminine path, is really a portal, it’s an access point to connect with Spirit. If you or I really open fully; let myself open fully through sound or through taste, to take it all the way; let my

being, let myself, let my whole spirit open to that strawberry dipped in chocolate, I can access Goddess/God. God is there.

And so it's a really beautiful and vulnerable, and therefore scary opportunity, but I think it's so beautiful to see how just naturally these kinds of experiences are getting created for people all over the place in my work and your work and in so many different places because it's what we really long for and it's not normally the way we interact. You go to a cocktail party, probably most of us would love to have something really deep and meaningful and nurturing and enlivening happen. But the way our social constructs are set up, that's not usually what happens when people generally get together outside of a workshop context. We're chitchatting, we're maybe sharing a coffee or a glass or wine, but we're not really deeply communing with each other. And I think that's a whole different ballgame and that's probably why I'm in the field that I'm in because I really long to be in that level of connection with people a lot more of the time.

**RC:** Well, I think you just hit the nail on the head for me. I say sometimes that I have the greatest job in the world because what I do is I travel around and I co-convene these spaces with people in which we have the opportunity to be as absolutely authentic as possible. And what could be better than getting to partake in those spaces so frequently all around the world? For me it's an antidote in a way to some of those other environments that you just spoke about. Even just to be personal, in family gatherings, I so often am feeling a loss, a grief of what's not possible because I'm coming from one of those workshops usually, whether it's a week or a month ago, and I would love to be able to connect in that same way with the people that are closest to me in my family of origin and it's just not going to happen. So I'll take it where I can get it and I'll try to show up with an open heart wherever I go, but that's why I would say I've got the best job in the world.

**DH:** I think you bring up a really important point two around families and for many of us, there is this pain point there where, as you were speaking about family gatherings, I'm remembering gatherings in my own family where my husband—his name is Stephen—and I will often think about different holidays and will say, “Okay, we're going to have family and friends for a Thanksgiving, as an example. And that's a time...you know, it's a cultural holiday here in the States, but also it's about gratitude and so we'll say to ourselves...and it depends on who is invited. If it's our friends and it's on our home turf, then we create a gathering as we would want it to be, where it's a lot about people sharing their hearts or sharing what they're grateful for and talking about that.

But I can see the members in my family really screaming and kind of hating that part of the gatherings where it gets really mushy or deep and then we go to other families for the same Thanksgiving. I've had family members say, "Well, now you're on my turf and we're not going to do any of that New Age-y sort of stuff. We're going to have turkey and we're going to talk about TV and films," that can be fine but it will really be painful to say, wow, some of these things that are not cheesy or New Age-y to me, how can it be wrong or weird or strange to just share what we're grateful for, something meaningful?

So I think of some place in my own family, I find a place where I am learning constantly. How do I cultivate the compassion for the differences that my way of seeing the world feels natural to me and to some of the other people in my family it doesn't actually even appeal? Maybe there's a toe that will be put in the water, but this is the place for me. How can I really hold my heart open, not just to someone in my family that might be very different, but to people who have very different social-cultural backgrounds? And I think it's one thing when we're preaching to the choir or in our groups or bubbles of very like-minded people. But for me, that's a place where I know I constantly feel stretched to walk my own talk; okay, what about in situations where what I'm saying is very unpopular or seen as very other than? How do I keep my heart open? How do I stay in my embracing feminine inclusive spot when I feel what's valuable to me is really even being ridiculed by others?

**RC:** I really hear that. And it continues to be a challenge for me in my life. I'm constantly reminded of that famous old quote from Ram Dass who said, "If you think you're enlightened, go spend a week with your family."

#### **4. Goddess of Love**

**DH:** Yes!

**RC:** But also I know that the family is the place where we first come to in understanding of who we are and what's okay about us and what isn't. I'm so often talking to clients that I work with about the parental gaze that is meant to allow us to come to an understanding that we are okay and loved and safe in the world no matter what we're thinking or saying or doing, even if we need to be disciplined or even if it's not okay, but just that look that says, "I'm with you, I've got you, and you don't have to change fundamentally who you are or any part of who you are to keep in this connection with me." And that is something that is vital for a healthy, thriving child and what, quite honestly, through no one's fault, most of us didn't get. And so I think the call to vulnerability and

the call to transparency is something that touches us all so deeply, even if we're threatened by it, even if we aren't comfortable with it.

So I think my M.O. around those people and environments that you're describing who might even be sometimes hostile to the kind of work that you or I do is to knock on the door, to keep knocking, to keep inviting, but then surrender the outcome and just not be attached to anybody RSVP-ing they're actually going to come play in that way. For me also, it's become really important to say this is who I am and this is what my life is about, let alone the teaching that I do. And I wanted to share something with you because I think you would appreciate it.

One day I was playing around musically with my stepdaughter and she and I composed this song. She, to this day, says that she wasn't a part of it because she's had a hard time being vulnerable, but it's a song that we came to sing to everyone in our family on birthdays and special occasions. And it's really simple and it's totally corny—hopefully in a good way—but it forces people to step into what you and I were talking about. And so I'm now going to sing it for the millions of people in the world—

**DH:** Yay!

**RC:** Singing's not my strong suit and I never I knew I would do this until right now, but the song simply goes like this, "We love you, we love you, we love you because, because we love you, we love you, we love you because, because we love you, we love you, we love you because, because we love you, because you are you."

**DH:** Aw! I'm just going to take that in right now as if it was meant for me!

**RC:** It was! It was meant for you! And for everybody who is listening! Just the idea that you do not have to be or do anything different than who you are in this moment and that there's no part of you; the part that you like, the part that you don't like, the part that you don't even feel should be here. There's no part of you that's not included in that embrace, in that acceptance.

**DH:** So beautiful! What you're saying there's the way you're expressing it through your lens and your filter and in my lens and my filter, as I spoke of before, we work with these different archetypes of the feminine, and one of the archetypes is the Goddess of Love. And the Goddess of Love is that aspect, when you really step in her energy, of love that is unconditional, that aspect of love that is just there for no reason. And when people come into—we set up these temples, so when



they come into the temple of the Goddess of Love, there's someone who's usually a gate guardian and that gate guardian is someone who helps people really get into the energy of this particular temple. And the gate guardian for the Goddess of Love and sometimes also the gate guardian for the Great Mother, says to you, "There is nothing you can do to make me love you. There is nothing you can do to make me not love you. I simply love you."

**RC:** That's so great!

**DH:** And to have someone really mean that, looking into your eyes and channeling that energy of deep, unconditional love, I know for myself, as I experience people offering me that and showing up with that energy, it's become some kind of a mantra that we say in our community. It goes to a part of my being and I've seen this happen for so many other women in our programs, that is like this hard place in us and it allows a melting to occur. And what does it look like for all of us to live in that kind of world? This is not easy for me, or for anyone to really take that on. What does it mean if you're really going to live from that place? For me, the practice is expanding who's in that circle that I'm going to extend that to.

I would love to be in a place and get to a place where I feel I'm really honestly extending that to everyone, but I know that is still work for me. But to get to that place where you can have unconditional love but also you have conditional presence, it doesn't mean that you just allow someone to walk all over you or invade your boundaries or that you have to tolerate any kind of abuse that doesn't feel appropriate, but what would it look like even if you are not present with that person or you don't choose to have them in your physical life. What does it mean to not actually cast them out of your heart and to still hold a loving space towards them? And for me, you know—you spoke of Ram Dass before and he comes to mind when I think about this.

### **5. Loving George Bush**

I remember him (Ram Dass) telling me a story that his measure of noticing and gauging where he was in his own spiritual practice was he has pictures of all these different characters on his altar. And he looks at each of them and has a moment to resonate with each one. So I can't remember who it was exactly on his altar, but for example it might be, oh, Dalai Lama, yes, good morning! And oh, Jesus and Mary, I welcome you. You're so beautiful! Maybe there's a picture of his family. And then on the side of his altar, was a picture of George Bush, who was someone that for him was very difficult to have that loving connection with. And he felt a lot of anger, rage, and even despise

of George Bush. So, “Thank you Buddha, Mary, Jesus! Hello, George.” And then that was his gauge. “How am I really doing today? How open really is my heart?”

And I think, for me, I think about that same thing. There’s someone who’s really challenging in my own life that has been like really menacing me and leaving me all kinds of various threatening phone messages, someone that I don’t even really know, but that I just made myself available to. And it’s been watching my own experience, “Okay, wow, how can I continue to set boundaries with this person, but also making a practice for myself. How can I sit in my meditation and send this person light, send this person compassion, know that though this is really feeling challenging for me, how they’re showing up with me, there’s nothing other to do but just to really hold this space of I know they’re working something out. They’re working something out and I just need to continue to be a presence of love that he really finds a highest expression, even if it’s feeling pretty challenging for me to be in the line of fire right now.

**RC:** Yeah. Well, one thing I want to say before we go on is that it seems that somehow George Bush has become a spiritual practice. Even though he’s no longer the president, certainly his influence still lingers. And I say that because I remember something that always has stuck with me from Marianne Williamson who said, “If I hate George Bush, that’s my problem.”

**DH:** Right. Yes, yes! She does! She talks also about—she’s clearly a very strong Democrat. I remember her talking also about Sarah Palin and saying that she was having a conversation with God and she was feeling a bit sad in her life. And she said the message that kept coming back from Spirit, in her own dialogue was who are you judging? Who are you judging? And she would say, “I’m not judging anybody! I’m not judging anybody!” And this voice kept, “Who are you judging?” in terms of this is why you’re upset. Who are you judging, and then she said finally, one day, she admitted in a small voice, “Sarah Palin.”

And then she just went on to buy her book, read her book, and recommend to my husband—the two of them are friends and they also really enjoy political interactions together and she said, “I really think you should read this book. I learned a lot. I still don’t agree with her politics but I really respect her as a woman and her humanity. I can see there’s common ground even though I don’t agree in so many different things.”

And so Stephen took it on as well and whoever that is for each of us in our lives, no matter what our politics are, it could be the opposite. Some people right now, that could be Obama or that could

be...whoever it is in our own lives that represents that really challenging person that we feel has crossed that line. Maybe it's a spouse that is no longer a spouse, it's like the ex, the ex relationship, whatever it is, that, for me, part of my own internal judge, "Okay, how am I doing?" I really look at my most challenged relationships and how am I able to take all these great things I might talk about, how can I apply them to those most intimate places where I'm triggered, where I'm not anymore in my highest self or my essence, but where I'm regressed into my own child that feels threatened or feels afraid—

**RC:** I think threatened, threatened is really the operative word. I think that whether it's a Democrat or a Republican, your mother or your father, or your sibling, it's anybody that you've turned into a them, into the us and them formula. And this is such important work. In a book I wrote many years ago called *Setting Your Heart on Fire*, I suggested in one of the 7 Invitations—that's how the book is divided—that people, for one year, subscribe to a magazine that has absolutely antithetical views to their own and read it cover to cover, looking for common ground. And if they don't want to support the organization with their money, then go ahead and check it out from the library but really go for it in the way that Marianne Williamson was talking about when she delved into Sarah Palin's book.

### **6. Unconditional Love but Conditional Presence**

I want to go back, though, to something that you touched on that I think is really crucial. I think people, especially people who want to open to the vulnerability that we've been talking about today, and who really embraced the idea of the unconditional love that the guardians at the gate of your ritual speak to. They can get very confused because actually every adult relationship is an ongoing negotiation. We come together because we have certain wants and needs from each other and we choose to fulfill them. And when people continue to negotiate in good faith and it seems like they're meant to walk together, then the unconditional love supports all of that, but the negotiations continue and so there's something that's both unconditional and conditional happening simultaneously.

And then often a situation arrives, it's either because people are growing apart in different directions or maybe people aren't accountable to their agreements or they wound or betray the other people, that now there's both a present moment reassessment of what's best here, what's okay or not okay for me in terms of the other person and what they've done, and where we find ourselves together. And the reason I'm bringing that up is because so often people say, "All I want is

unconditional love from you,” or “I’m giving you that unconditional love and you’re just not getting it.” And that unconditional love is something that would be underlying the whole experience. It would be an emanation of who we are and it’s actually true that you could say to someone, “I do experience unconditional love for you,” and “That’s not okay, that’s not okay, that’s not okay,” and even, “I’m choosing to leave you and leave this relationship but it’s not because I’ve taken my love away.”

**DH:** Right. That’s exactly what I was saying. I say unconditional love, but conditional presence.

**RC:** Yes!

**DH:** Like I might unconditionally love someone in my life, a past relationship as an example. I still can really feel deep love but I can also say I choose to not have you in the same intimate relationship with me. I choose to have conditional presence. There’s a negotiation about what’s the right level of this relationship, were my needs being met or not met? How well is this working? You could say I’m agreeing to disagree with you. It’s not working in this way, but I’m still going to keep my heart open to you. I’m still going to love you, I’m still going to find that place where beneath it all, love exists, and yet the witness dynamic of how we’ve been dancing together might be one where I say I’m choosing not to continue this dance in the same way.

My presence is conditional, but the love I’m still going to hold towards you, I’m still going to meditate for you, I’m still going to send you energy, whatever is the right configuration. And often it’s that binary thing, though. It’s all or nothing. And what I’m really looking at in my own life is there a both; it’s possible that I can really have that love and also set the boundaries, that person that’s really challenging me, I’m putting a boundary up where I’m not going to be having a deep friendship with this person but I’m still going to hold them with compassion and love and open my heart to them, but not allow them to harm me in a way that is really destructive for me.

**RC:** Yeah, absolutely! And I’m glad we touched on that for a couple of different angles and a couple of different ways because I see that showing up in many people’s lives, especially people who are spiritual seekers or practitioners where they want to keep opening up to love and they also find themselves in certain unsafe situations. So the both/and that you’re speaking to, the ability to keep opening to love and also keep realizing where it’s important to have a loving no or a boundary is maybe one of the most important skills in growing both personally and spiritually.

## 7. Open Love Relationships

**DH:** And then there's the opposite too, which is you can become—I mean, I see this a lot in the community where I live, which is in California, in Marin County, there can be sometimes this over-privileging of the love space that everyone gets so loving and it gets very sexualized that there's even an unwillingness to be in more committed relationships.

So for example, there's a lot of open love relationships, which I don't have a judgment around, it's something that is around me quite a lot. But what I see is that oftentimes there's like an almost an unwillingness, like it's so un-cool to have to be in a more monogamous relationship or more defined relationship and that it's just all love and that almost the boundaries get too mushy. And why I say this is because I see so many people really getting hurt and so many of those relationships are not working out and causing a lot of pain.

Though other people are very committed to that lifestyle and that's certainly anyone's choice, but there's a way that I'm in a more traditional—well, not traditional—but I'm in a monogamous marriage relationship and there has certainly been that energetic around of we're so old school in that way, being in a monogamous marriage and that's been our choice. But I've seen—because I've actually lived in houses where everybody else besides us have more amorphous boundaries and more open situations, being we're all sharing love with each other and everyone's just in love, but there wasn't healthy boundaries and I saw people getting really, really hurt on a very deep level. So I think that the healthy boundary in both ways: keeping people out that are challenging but also just establishing what is healthy for you in your friendships and who's in your room energetically. It's a phrase I heard from a man named Stewart Emery who was just saying, “Once you let people into your inner circle, your inner bedroom almost, or family room, even in your life, it's very, very hard to get them out.” And so to really bring a lot of conscious awareness to who exactly is in your room and who are you choosing for whatever reason, just be really conscious and not that it means that you're closing your heart to other people, but just maintaining your own energy field and what is really serving all parties. So it's an interesting dance.

**RC:** Something about that I just wanted to add is I do a lot of work with people with serious trauma in their lives, especially early trauma, and my way of expressing what you just shared is that you can't really love in a whole and healthy way if you don't feel safe.

**DH:** Yeah.

**RC:** And so in whatever relationship, however complicated, however hard you're working to heal your own heart, such that you can practice the unconditional love that we've been talking about, safety first, always, or else it's going to be some kind of a spiritual bypass that's going to wound you or wound other people

**DH:** Right. That's the word that I was looking for. The spiritual bypass. Yes, I see that happening quite a lot in the communities that I'm a part of and it's a tricky, it's a whole tricky topic to discern and I think that's really the call for any of us: to be in discernment about what really is true. But that thing about safety that you mentioned, that I know; oftentimes when we've asked women what does it take to be intimate with the others, they need to feel safe and that's really a value that seems actually more important, at least in the women that I've worked with, than for men. It doesn't seem to be as foundational there. But amongst women, it's usually one of the first things that people are looking for and need in order to open up to some of those vulnerable places, and then how do we create that space of safety and trust and maintain it through time, not just in our personal relationships but in the groups that we're a part of, and I'm sure this is true for you, Raphael, as well, as group facilitator. How do you really maintain deep love, support, and trust within a group where things happen and that trust gets violated and how to bring that back into healthy situation again is also something that we work with a lot in our groups.

### **8. Masks**

**RC:** Yeah, absolutely! It definitely happens from time to time and it's a challenge for everybody, certainly me too. One thing that's a challenge is ending these conversations, especially when they're as rich and rewarding as this one. And we have to end in a minute or so, but I wanted to see if you would play with me for a moment along the lines of transparency and teaching what we need to learn, that this series is presenting and that we've been already diving deeply into today.

I'm thinking of the now and I'm thinking of myself and I'm thinking of your work. And in some of your work, you invite people to look at the masks that they wear that help them feel like they're okay and proficient in the world. And you talk about naming and dropping some of those masks in the service of authenticity. And sometimes those masks are roles that we play, sometimes they're beliefs that we have. And so I want to share with you just what's coming to me in the moment as a mask that I know that I'm in the process of working to let go or at least have more freedom around. And I'm hoping that you'll hear me and then you'll be inspired to share something that's really in

the now for you that you're working with along those lines with regard for your own greater freedom and ability to love. So can we go for just one round of it before we close today?

**DH:** Okay, let's go for it!

**RC:** Alright. So here I am in these series, I'm getting a chance to interview lots of wonderful teachers and lots of wisdom and I get to seem really wise as well in these conversations, at least sometimes. And I realize that one of the masks that I have that was actually handed to me when I was very young is being a whippersnapper, you know, super smart, being able to talk really cogently about a lot of things. I think sometimes it's really helpful for me to choose to go into places where I don't know very much and where I can be naïve and new and innocent and where I don't have to quickly try to figure out how to do or say something that is going to get me approved of once again for being on top of things. So being a kind of blessed newcomer is something I'd like to be able to do more and more and I know that's one aspect of my work at the moment. So what about you?

**DH:** Thank you for sharing that. Well, one of the masks that I am actually working to own more, I would say almost the opposite of you. You're putting one down and I'm really wanting to live into it more is this mask of the really spacious sentiment that is open, receptive, and not so damn busy all the time. And it's something that I talk about, one of the principles we work with is called Feeding the Feminine First. And there's times when I've really done that, like feeding the feminine part of yourself, the beginning of your day, before you do anything else. And what I found is that I was really loving that principle during a time when my life was not as full as it is right now. And so I'm really working, actually, to sort of like, well, I didn't have a kind of to-do list back then that I do now. And I wasn't trying to mount a huge, inspiring women's summit and I wasn't performing with my band all over the place.

And now, it's more of a struggle for me to really reconnect to that part that is the Radiant Feminine, when I'm just running around, trying to get all these things done on my to-do list. And I think that part of my own wiring, for those of you who are familiar with the enneagram, I think that I'm an 3, and what that means is you're someone who's more of an achiever. And the way that you know how to receive love and validation in the world is through achieving external things.

And so part of what I'm undoing in myself is that that is what brings me value as a being, that all these things I accomplish externally, but just really allowing myself to live into even—and I'm

purposely right now in my life, not starting new things up. I just ended a year-long circle and I've decided not to start another one right away. And I'm looking at what are the programs that I can actually take off my plate, even though they're great, even though there's people that want to do them, but just live more into this radiant, spacious feminine and even if I'm not accomplishing as many things in this next year as I did in the past couple, that my value isn't diminished and that I can just stand in the power of my being-ness and not need to focus on my doing this, which is something that I talk about and I've embodied at different times in my life, but right now, when things have been so full and so busy, I've been finding it more difficult to live from that same level of radiance, spaciousness and to feel valuable while I'm turning things down.

**RC:** That's so great! I'm reminded of a song by Jonathan Richmman called "That Summer Feeling." And he says, "That summer feeling's going to haunt you the rest of your life," and what he is referring to, I believe, is when we were young and we were on vacation, and we could just roll around in the grass or daydream, looking up at the clouds or just play as nightfall came with our friends. And if I could travel back in time to the me who was 12, 13, 17, I would say, "Love this! Eat this up! Drink this up because you're going to get really, really, really busy and you're going to long for that radiant spaciousness that Devaa's talking about." And the fact that you're bringing that back into your life is beautiful and it's such a challenge for so many of us who by necessity are so scheduled. But just even a little bit of it, I think, is just precious.

**DH:** Oh yes! I'm really scheduling in a massage for myself every other week and if nothing else, and actually right now, it's not a lot else. I'm really making it a priority, but it's something that tends to be the first thing to go—the ways we nurture ourselves so we can really have that extra juice that we need to show up fully for our whole lives. So I'm putting it back into the priority list for myself.

**RC:** Well that's excellent! And I hope that other people listening will take that example and see wherever, even just a tiny way, they can nurture themselves a little bit more. And I feel really nurtured by this conversation and by your willingness to travel with us into this vulnerable but really beautiful territory. So Devaa Haley, thanks again so much for being with us today!

**DH:** Thank you so much, Raphael! It's been a blessing to be with you and to be with all of your listeners that are going to be a part of this as well, so blessings to all!



**James O'Dea**



James O'Dea is a well-known figure in international social healing who has conducted reconciliation dialogues for 15 years. James is currently the lead faculty member for the Shift Network's Peace Ambassador Training program, currently ongoing and attracting students globally. James is also an extended faculty member of the Institute of Noetic Sciences where he formerly served as President. He has served as the director of Amnesty International for the Washington office, and CEO of the Seva Foundation, and is also a member of the Evolutionary Leaders Group. His is the author of *Creative Stress: A Path For Evolving Souls Living Through Personal and Planetary Upheaval* (2010), and a number of essays and most recently published *Cultivating Peace* (2012). [WWW.JAMESODEA.COM](http://WWW.JAMESODEA.COM)

### **1. What is Peace?**

**RC:** I want to ask you, just to start out with a very simple but also profound question: to you, James, what is peace?

**JOD:** Peace for me is now an unfolding journey and it's not a set place. It's a becoming and it's a place where the inner and the outer meet. In other words, there is a state of inner peace and wholeness and wellness that we can locate but it's not complete for me unless it's also vibrating, resonating out into the peace for others and the contribution to that peace for others in the social context, in the political context, the social healing context, and the global context. So it's like a story that's unfolding for me, peace, and one in which we learn that there are layers and levels of connectivity that must be discovered and reached. Ironically in some sense, we are always reaching for peace but we are reaching for peace with peace rather than reaching for peace with anxiety and frustration and anger and rebellion.

**RC:** It's really moving and as you were sharing that, I was reminded of that spiritual phrase "As without, so within and as within, so without." It seems that in your personal definition of peace,

you're suggesting that it wouldn't be possible to have the peace with others if we weren't at peace with ourselves and also vice-versa. Is that correct?

**JOD:** It's a continuum, it's a loop. So as I gain more peace in myself, I contribute to more peace for others. I enact peace. I demonstrate peace. I manifest peace. And the question, "How can you have a healthy person in a sick society?" would equally apply to peace. How can you have a peaceful person in a completely violent world where your task if you are a peaceful person in a violent world is to extend the peace? And when you do get this feedback loop and so much of my life has been this discovery of the levels of initiation, of thresholds. So that I go round and around and then I'm taken into a deeper round and then even deeper still. So the personal and the transpersonal meet at various levels of connectivity and it's a great journey of discovery.

**RC:** I'm taking that in, it's very powerful. And before we get to you, which is the subject of our dialogue for the most part today, you touched on something I would like to expand upon a little bit with you. Many people who I know and work with, when it's time for their own healing, when they recognize the depths of their wounds and they're ready to deepen in their own self-awareness and into their healing process, they find themselves becoming removed from the world and particularly the world of conflict, the social and political arena. They say, "I can't go there now, I can't pay attention there, and the only way that I can really give to the world is to turn inward and create a smaller space in which I can be with me." And I'm wondering what you think about that given your definition of peace and the continuum that you were just describing?

**JOD:** I think what you've described is an optical illusion of consciousness. We have to recognize that we do get damaged and hurt many times when we go out to offer ourselves to the world where there is that feedback loop that's pretty rough and tough and I've experienced it in my own story which we can talk about in a while. But I think because the personal and the transpersonal are really in resonance together, that yes, what we do for ourselves, we are doing for others as well. There is no separation, no real actual separation between the individual and the rest of the resonance of life. Sometimes we create those optical illusions of separation for our own benefit but really, I think the heart of the matter is we're all interconnected, we're all a part of each other.

So the work you do when you pull back and withdraw, you're doing for your parents, for the ancestral line, for all the karmic relations that has gathered in you and maybe stuck or congealed in a particular way and you have to take a pause to work on them. But as you do, as you do that work,

you will find that you are in fact not just doing it for yourself but you are doing it for the whole. That's my thought on that.

**RC:** So it sounds like when you say take a pause, that then there is a returning at some point into a more worldly connection, is that right?

**JOD:** Yes, there is a quantum connection. There is a field connection. Everything that we have been learning in contemporary science talks about our participation and connectivity in those fields where there is really no separation.

**RC:** I teach at places like the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health and the Esalen Institute and I find that the people who come to the workshops and retreats I do are just gorgeous souls and very heartfelt individuals. And at the same time, most of them have rejected involvement, engagement in the areas of our society where there is the most conflict because people are acting out, there's often little consciousness, there are power dynamics, there is a lot of yelling, and many of the people I work with feel very sensitive, almost as if their previous thick skins have become much more soft and permeable as they've opened their own hearts.

So as a matter of self-protection, they turn away from some of the great struggles of our time towards peace or towards justice. And I'm wondering if you see that and if there is anything you would want to share about the way that sometimes when people heal, they also decide to stay away from all of that and therefore, they're still having the inner impact through their ongoing personal transformation, but maybe not finding themselves as engaged as directly, in perhaps what you might call in your work "sacred activism."

**JOD:** Yes. Well, there's no judgment here. There's only our deepest effort to understand the nature of reality. And I believe in the nature of reality you have energy that is moving in the universe from raw or gross to subtle, and then highly subtle and refined and that the process of the movement of that energy is through consciousness, through spiritual work, through intensity, through effort and sometimes effortless effort. But it becomes an illusion of consciousness when we put the sacred over here and sort of attempt to protect it like this is the sacred territory. This is where the light is and over there, that's where the shadow and the darkness and the rough stuff is and I'm going to keep cultivating the sacred as some sort of perimeter in which I am safe to be clear. Then what happens is that the universe is very precise and that energy is moving all around your little sacred

patch and then it blows through, it builds up and it blows through because it isn't in a separate patch at all.

And so again, in my own life, I have experienced this profoundly. It's been great revelation to me that as I worked in places like Beirut and I worked on torture and mayhem and murder in the world, when the real [personal] stuff really hurts and happens—it was around my divorce, it was around my personal relationships, it was around the unfinished business there. So the energy is going to work, the universe almost gets periodontal, doesn't it? It's like, "Aha!" right in there, you have stuff that you haven't really been working on and you've created this very good initiative and we all appreciate your work to make the sacred patch even more sacred, but you're not—no man is an island entirely to himself, but is a part of the continent; the whole and it's written by a metaphysical poet, John Donne in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. I think that's my sense of that. Another sort of poetic but playful turn by the poet and playwright Thomas Stafford, he says, "Eventually, the skeleton in the closet will come home to roost."

It's not a dead thing, the skeleton in the closet. It's actually going to come back and it's going to roost inside your psyche because it's the stuff, it's the energy that's blocked, that you have pushed aside and you've said, "Not this." Like the instruction of the Third Zen Patriarch, "The great Way is not difficult for he or she who has no preferences." So when you can walk into the Way and not prefer the sweet, sacred patch to the other patches that are surrounding you; but walk through them all, and if I could just continue for one moment...

**RC:** Sure, please do.

**JOD:** I am reminded of a profound Sufi saying of Rumi: he said, "Your heart must face its test. Until some sweet turned bitter in the end, your heart won't answer yes." So until those sweet turned bitter, our heart won't answer yes. Try to make it all sweet and light and beautiful, your heart will never answer yes because it's not a reflection of wholeness, of reality, of the bitter and the sweet. So I say let the bitter be bitter and the sweet be sweet, until the bitter and the sweet become one. That's our task and by the false positive that we create, we're trying to make the bitter sweet when it's not, it's bitter. And to know it is bitter is to know it's true essence, only then can we reach the non-dual state where that truth essence becomes one.

**RC:** So I hear in what you're sharing a deepening of the definition and the understanding of peace that you were sharing earlier with the recognition that there is no, as you were calling it, sacred

patch. Even though we might try desperately to create an island, that ultimately there won't be peace in that approach unless or until we recognize that there is no separation and our peace comes in a complete embrace of the sweet and the bitter together, the calm and also the dissonant that we might find out there "when we engage or re-engage" after our healing process.

**JOD:** Yes. I think that's a good summary.

**RC:** Yes. Well, I also appreciated what you said at the beginning of what you shared last when you started out with no judgment, certainly, it's a place that I come from as well and do my best to draw from. You've spoken elsewhere about a person who wants to become a peacemaker or a peace ambassador; that they're looking not to do any particular thing or to engage in any particular arena, but to find out what are their essential qualities and to live those qualities that you even said it might be poetry or might be dancing. So when gifting one's self to the world as a peacemaker, it seems very important, hearing from you, to enlarge our understanding of what it is to create and to promote peace.

## **2. The Magical Jigsaw**

**JOD:** Yes, indeed. I think the maps of reality that had to do with illuminated hierarchies are being transposed into maps that are maps of reality these days. This is like in that end saying, "There's a jigsaw and it's a living jigsaw, it's an evolving jigsaw, it's like a magical jigsaw. In the evolutionary process, you must hold up your part in the puzzle, in the jigsaw puzzle and really know it; so self-knowing, know your contours, know who you are, and then you can descend into the great puzzle and place your piece, place your quality, place exactly who you are, knowing that you were never in any state that was wrong at all in any sense of the word, that you were born the way you were, that as your peace lands into the puzzle, then of course, and you want to get done the jigsaw: the whole picture starts to get bigger and clearer. So each piece illuminates the whole."

We take that out of the mechanical world into a living one and always, it's a never ending process of now in this moment, who can I be? What qualities can I pour into the pictures that are a part of my essential nature? That's why we talked about building a culture of peace and why we sort of claim it now as we're no longer at the walls shouting and screaming to get inside of the opposition. Instead we've reached those walls and we're teachers, we're doctors, we're nurses, we're poets, we're dentists, whoever we are, contributing our qualities into the culture of peace from the ground up, from the inside out.

**RC:** And this of course brings a new light to the idea, for instance, of protest, which is what we're used to, and I just want to just share briefly if I can something that came to me as I was reflecting on your own ideas about this. Back when the war with Iraq was about to begin and there was a "protest against the war" where I lived, I wanted to take part but I didn't want to take part in a way that had a contracted energy to it. I wanted to celebrate peace and bring that kind of energy to the gathering.

And so when I got there, I was with a friend and there were lots of signs and there was lots of chanting and we just tuned in, I believe it was to our own essence and also to what was truth for us in that moment and we found that our contribution was to go hang out by the drummers and to dance rather than to march in a way that would be more adversarial. And I have to say, it was one of the most moving and powerful experiences that I've had at such a gathering and it seems that I was doing my best in that moment to call forth what you're describing, to come from a place of essence so that my piece of the jigsaw was being offered rather than me joining up with something in a way that didn't feel quite right to me at the time. Is that a reflection that's accurate in terms of what you're describing?

**JOD:** Yes, very much so. And then we add that added component of what I call journey of the universe: always, if you open at one level, it will take you on a journey to the next level of initiation. So what is truly celebration? You want to celebrate peace, great! Now, let us see if you can celebrate in the midst of suffering. In my own journey, I've been taken to those places where literally in the ashes of the suffering with people, I have been able to celebrate the indomitable spirit of human beings and then on again you know as the the journey progresses. Where can we deepen these qualities?

So these qualities are always available to the next level and their next threshold of initiation as we deepen our capacities, it's not static celebration or static journey at all. It's very much one in which we get to grow. And I love the theme of your conversation, Raphael because we must all confess to each other the deep story of our own growth experiences to make it real, to initiate each other into these next levels of truth, reconciliation, forgiveness, restorative justice, and healing.

### **3. The Fractal of the Whole**

**RC:** You said something a moment ago that I think many listeners would pause to reflect upon and to wonder about. You mentioned being in some of the places of greatest suffering and perhaps the greatest inhumanity brought by one human to another: torture, war, atrocities, etcetera, and you said

something along the lines that you had been brought to a place where you could celebrate peace in the midst of all of that horror. And I'm wondering if you could expand upon that because for many people, that would seem not only impossible but even counter-intuitive.

**JOD:** I'd like to sort of begin with, if you like the fractal of the whole that my life has been about, I think, and I think each of those represents a fractal of the whole. In my case, I was conceived on the eve of my sister's death where she was coming to her 11<sup>th</sup> year, she actually died on 11-11-1950, on November the 11<sup>th</sup>, and I was probably conceived on the 9<sup>th</sup> or the 10<sup>th</sup> and my mother experiences in her womb this wrenching suffering and loss as she's experiencing the birth of her seventh son.

And that fractal, Raphael, of wounding, of hurt, of pain, of loss, I mean the great, great pain a parent would feel at the loss of an 11-year old daughter and yet, at the same time, I'm growing into life. I'm coming along with my story and so my mother in her infinite wisdom opens to the celebration. She said at that when I was born, that ends the period of mourning for Patricia. She said now, "Let us convene our energy." It was very, very hard for my father but my mother mastered that quality of "Here's a new life, let's give it all attention and love and celebration however we can."

And so it's almost as if those, the issues that I have as a teacher and my personal issues of growth and my gifts are intertwined in that story, so that I'm able to go to the places of suffering on planet Earth but knowing that that's not the end of the story. Looking for the next chapter in the story where something else is born or something is renewed and seeing what I call the indomitable spirit of the human being there, reminding us that there is out of even our most tragic situations, there is something that is born for humanity in the evolving story of humanity. So I'm very much a voice for that evolving story; that out of every effort, even the most incompetent and unskillful behaviors of the past, nature and evolution seem to be able to synthesize those and offer us something greater and we're invited to step into that initiation of greatness and move on in the evolution of story.

So being with a former holocaust survivor and a former Nazi and seeing them reconcile, seeing them offer each other love and truth, for me is that sweetness that can arise in the heart of the bitter that's so authentic because it's saying, "Let's now not carry that story forwards. Let's end that story of polarity, let's transcend that. And so we have the way-showers in so called average human beings around the planet who will be moved beyond the death of their children, the murder of their neighbors to offer some sign posts that human beings can in fact go further and when they do, the heart is lifted so high, there is so much inspiration. The family in Israel that I met whose daughter

was blown up in a terrorist bomb; they found her dying and she said, “I dream of peace with the Palestinians.”

They have dedicated their lives now to freedom together, the victims of violence on sides of Israel and Palestinian story. The woman in Rwanda who forgave the murderers of her children. When we can rise to that level of energetic participation in healing and forgiveness and reconciliation. That’s a very advanced class for many of us to be able to step that high but that’s where I keep pointing the finger and saying “We can do it. We can take that journey and we shouldn’t get lost in our individual stories so much that we either over or under emphasize our suffering.”

**RC:** As you were describing that, I felt a very rich inspiration and I was led by your vision and at the same time, it seems to me that to some degree, you could only embody what you were just sharing to the degree that you are able to stare unflinchingly at what is. Meaning that in your past, for instance, working for Amnesty International and as a peacemaker in other ways, you have been in places where the depths of human suffering are very intense and there doesn’t seem to be anything as a turning away for you and I’m reminded of a writer who once said, “We only see what we look at.” It seems as if you have chosen to see and to really accept so deeply this suffering that you were describing and it’s through that embrace, through that acceptance that you’re able then to come to this inspirational place to see the evolutionary possibility. Do you see that as well? Do you see that your vision comes from the acceptance of the darkness that you’ve experienced?

#### **4. The Lump Under the Carpet**

**JOD:** Yes, very much so. Having been touched so deeply by suffering, I am sort of immunized in a particular way. My subtle problem if you like, is what I call the lump under the carpet. I get switched off. I get unsettled in some way, by what I call the lump under the carpet. It seems that I know there’s something down there and it’s moving around but it won’t come out, it won’t show its face to me. It won’t declare itself. I can deal with the most unfathomable levels of pain and injury when it’s confronting, when I’m standing in its presence. But when it’s lurking under the carpet in innuendo, in insinuation, and it won’t reveal itself, then I find my power is incapacitated. And then there is this other dimension that I’m talking about, these levels of initiation.

So yes, I’m knifed in Turkey, and my house was machine gunned, I’m in Beirut during the war, the massacre of the Palestinians. Again, as you say facing, going right up into the front row of facing these awful energies and cruelties in the world and experiencing them directly in my body; I mean being knifed is not a pleasant experience. And yet, the greatest pain that I experienced in my life



was the separation and divorce with my wife. How about that? The universe said, “We’re going to take you even in another spiral of this journey.” The word separation fills me with chills. It’s almost like the poisons in myself. Separation? I’m about integration, about wholeness, about connecting... And then facing, in a 21-year marriage, the separation and divorce was really where the hammer fell and it nailed me into: “I have to look at the nature of the wound in my own life and how this wound has insidiously attached itself to me even though I go about the world trying to promote the release of wounding, which is authentic work. I tell you I do it truthfully and authentically and well, but it’s a part of the journey that the universe says, “Okay, well, let’s see how you do it in this dance.”

**RC:** Yes. And just so our listeners can know, how long ago was that divorce?

**JOD:** Ten years ago.

**RC:** What you’re saying now goes exactly to the subject of our series, teaching what we need to learn and you’re describing a heart-rending that isn’t from physical violence but it’s emotional at its core. And so I want to ask you the question, what about that was and perhaps still is most difficult for you and what does it look like in James O’Dea’s life when you are struggling with these principles that you have been sharing with us as opposed to those moments when you’re soaring with them?

**JOD:** Of course, that’s a great, great question and I’ve reflected on it much. And it seems to me to be about the access around power and strength and then the other, the wounding healing. It seems that I give my power away still; I mean that’s my growth edge in protecting myself, in deeming myself worthy of all the energy that I thrust out into the world to get the torturer to stop torturing, to rescue people, to find people who have been wounded by human rights abuse and human rights violations of every kind and genocide and so on and help them dialogue their way into the healing process. So what is that way in which the wound in me allows for, in an exaggerated sense, the lords of ego to ravish me. That’s poetic language but you get my thought.

**RC:** Yes.

**JOD:** I lose my power, I get weaker and I have to stand up for myself. We all know the lords of ego; we participate in them in various ways and we meet them in so many guises in our life. It doesn’t matter where they are, the non-profit board, even in all the holy places they show up, of course, don’t they?

**RC:** Yes.

**JOD:** And they're really sent by the universe, I believe as tennis partners. How good at the game are you and where do you need to grow in the game of your own capacity? And that's where after I feel the wound, somehow, insidiously stayed in there and said, "You won't stand up for yourself. You won't value your own core, what's that about?"

**RC:** So how would we see that in a moment? I really appreciate your candor about this. In a moment where you're finding it difficult to stand up for yourself, how would you be different than the person that we know through your really eloquent passion for peace? Would it be that you speak differently? You said that you lose your power, does that mean that you retreat, that you don't speak as well, or that you speak harshly; what does that look like?

**JOD:** No, it's truly a collapse of power. In some ways, everything has two-dimensions. So you could say that the separation and divorce was ultimately the right thing and that it liberated energy that was stuck however painfully those energies bore through to create the liberation. That's one version of reality and it's an authentic one. There is another of course, that says in that moment in our story, let's say my weekend had a lot chores to do around the house and I would have had a very full week rescuing people from the torture slab at Amnesty International and I got sometimes depressed. I was a little depressed sitting in the garage of the house with the list of things to do and just feeling down.

We've had issues in the marriage, gathering issues, and my wife opened the garage door and saw me sitting on this cement slab and said, I think from her subconscious soul, "You are going to leave me, aren't you?" And out of nowhere, I think this collapse occurred in me of power and I said, "Yes, I am." This is a moment that I had not rehearsed in any way. When I think of it now, I think of it as probably I could have said, "No I'm not but we're really going to have to do things somewhat differently and you can't expect me to do all these chores on the weekend when I am living at this degree of acceleration and intensity in my professional life. We have to find a new balance." So that whole empowered voice was not there as I said, "Okay," I took the hit and said sure, we will let it go, and down it went.

If they're doing something to somebody else, I mean I'm there. I am your defender. When I testified in Congress the members were stunned at the level at which I talked back at them and said "No!

You are wrong about this. But if they come after me, I am learning how to distribute that power for myself, within myself.

### **5. When Power Collapses into an Old Wound**

**RC:** There is so much that you just shared that I, I want to honor you for because it is powerful and rare to reveal in that way. The last piece that you just shared though, I think maybe it's worth especially spending some additional time with, "when they come after me," and then you said something along the lines of "I'm working to distribute that power." Can you say a little bit more about that?

**JOD:** Yes. I think this image I have of when power collapses into an old wound, and still even after intense spiritual and activist work, there's elements of that wound and so there must be some level of wound attachment there. I call it collapse, where the power drops and the other power enters in. I know its signature well, it's got a slightly arrogant or pompous note to it and I detect it, and I say, "Here it comes," and I have a sense of moving through it beautifully. Earlier I had a sense of "I am not going to be arrogant and pompous. This power will not provoke me to be its..." You understand what I'm saying?

So it's almost like maybe there's a deep fear somewhere that if I really let it go because I have a capacity to show my Irish passion, rip back at this force with greater arrogance and with greater destructive power. And so the energy would collapse because I would say to myself, "You're not going to provoke me into that", and really, it's in the rich days and months of recent time for me where I can say inwardly in affirmation and experience it, "I am peace. I am love. The game is up folks because you lords of ego, you power brokers, you can't provoke me." I now am self-knowing to a place where I say to myself, "You know what, you can't provoke me to be your kind of arrogant and destructive nature. I am peace." My life has matured and fructified to that place where I know myself that I will not lash back in anger. I will actually move towards dialogue, towards forgiveness, towards embrace.

And so it's a very exciting moment in my own growth and development to know that I am peace and I am love. I can self-reveal at this level because I'm through that lesson. I went through the collapse process enough to learn that in fact peace is strength. All I need to do is reveal my nature as inherent strength and wisdom rather than fear that I have to be the mirror and of actually a bigger, bulkier, more dominating mirror of what the thing that I fear is.

**RC:** Yes, yes. Now, in what you're sharing, James, it seems like there might be an important distinction to be made, you tell me as I share this with you if you concur. If you don't come forward with that pompousness or arrogance that you are describing because the lords of the ego have not taken you, and you're in a situation where someone might mean to do you harm or someone might be meaning to do harm to others, I think what I'm hearing you say is when peace is strength and you're not taking the bait to meet arrogance with arrogance in the way you just described, it doesn't necessarily mean that your response is soft or that your response is loving in the sense of what might be considered capitulation. I'm guessing from what you are saying that you might come forth with even greater strength in that moment than in previous times but it's just going to be essential and true and clear what you are speaking and it's going to be heartfelt as opposed to egoic. Am I getting that right?

**JOD:** I think you are absolutely on track. And I think in the species as an evolving man, I and many others are in that discovery process, and so in that evolutionary juiciness where we discover how to be really strong in peace rather than a parade of male skillfulness in battling others.

**RC:** Yes, and I am just personally touched by what you're describing and there is something that happened to me some years ago, I won't go into the details except to say that I was accused of something that was very heinous that I absolutely didn't do and I was in a situation where I saw so many opportunities to fight back in the way that you're describing as arrogant and to go into an "us versus them" mode and to use all of my power to win. And that, of course, was very seductive and I didn't do a perfect job at that time for sure, but I was also aware that I was being called to meet the experience more in the peaceful way that you are describing.

And it was a growing edge for me then and I'm sure it's a growing edge for me now, but the distinction is very powerful. And you suggested that you know it in yourself, you can feel a quality of energy when you go towards "the old way," let's call it and I definitely can, too. It's something that comes into the tone of my voice. It's something that comes into the way I'm looking at another to the way I am holding myself with body language and it is a great and important edge I believe to see all of that even more clearly so that we can clear the way to speak with strength but heartfelt or peaceful strength.

## **6. The Evolving Edge**

**JOD:** I think it's the evolving edge and one feels that there is so much that can emerge when we take it on. When we really get into it, we cross the line between the personal and the transpersonal

and we meet the male psyche as we've inherited it across generations and we start dancing with that stuff and places where we feel it's rarely blocked, it's rarely jammed, and I am the one in my own personal experience to help undo it.

And then the exciting thought of course, Raphael, is when do we reach that field effect when enough has created the shift moves through it as we get a resonance in the field and your waveform and that the generations to come no longer inherit these old wounds of the masculine psyche or the religious fundamentalism or whatever those transmitted wounds are. We reach this waveform where the next generation reaches, it receives that waveform in an ample enough degree that it turns the tide of human development and takes us to another octave of initiation.

**RC:** Now, we just have a few minutes left in our conversation and I want to touch on something with you. Often, a teacher, a spiritual teacher, a psychological teacher comes and takes the podium or sits in front of the group and they're in their most expansive and loving state. And then they are done and they leave, or they're whisked off and we don't get to see them in some of their other states. And sometimes I think that it's a real disservice to people because it makes them seem like somehow, there's a state to attain that that they are so away from and I've been thinking recently that human beings are kind of like sandpaper on the surface and when you're far away from other human beings, it's easier to be loving because you're not rubbing up against each other, or you're rubbing up against yourself in those times when you're just in bad moods or you're irritable.

And in my own life, for instance, I know that when my sandpaper rubs up very closely against someone else, I might be very much along the lines of what we're describing: I might be short, I might come across as very one-pointed and intense and not spacious, I also might come across as irritable and harsh. And so I'm wondering if you'd be willing to share in those moments of contraction or when you might be triggered, when you're not in presenting mode; if we were to see you in some of those absolutely human moments of other kinds of energy or response or engagement, what might be some of the most common behaviors or attitudes that we haven't talked about that you find yourself displaying that it might take a little bit of time for you to become once again mindful of so that you could come from a deeper place?

**JOD:** Yes. When one is in that field with others and feeling generative and connected and very expanded, the contrast for me when I am triggered is to withdraw, is to move away, as I said, from power, to retreat into my cave or my corner and lick my wounds.

The goal is to experience the We, the arising of the evolutionary moment where we get to experience each other, where really those jigsaw piece puzzles come in, in a way that we see now with those fresh eyes that what is generated from one can be generated from all and that everywhere I turn is the face of my teacher. So it's a rebalancing on both sides so that it's not the extreme of "Oh my god, I have to generate in order to save the world and if I'm not out there, in that expansive, generative state, more people are going to die and more people are going to suffer." But rather this revelation, that too is an optical illusion of consciousness. What is arising in this beautiful evolutionary process is the generative We, not the We that collapses identity, and says, "Well it's about us and our techniques and our missions to rewrite," or any of that exclusive nonsense. It's about a new open field of the generative We that holds then the responsibility in the collective field so that when we're back in the practical side where there's a holy balancing. I feel it's happening in my nature and energy system. So it feels as if there's a continual path of cyclical healing and the joy gets deeper, and in some ways the challenges get deeper that they are also get resolved at higher and higher levels.

**RC:** I know I'm personally so excited about what you are describing and I know I could talk to you for another two or three conversations about that we, so thank you for bringing us to that. I want to just double back on one thing to make sure I heard you correctly. When you're contracted response as you described it is to withdraw and as you said, to go into the cave and to lick your wounds; so would that mean to someone on the outside if that had happened and you hadn't yet come back fully into your own presence and connection, could that look to them like a withdrawal? In other words, would somebody say about you in those moments that, "I can't reach him? He's not available to me. He's become distant." Would it be something like that?

**JOD:** Yes. "He has become distant or he seems a bit aloof or he seems a little bit intellectual." Yes, any of those ways of looking at someone's experience of I withdraw and somehow not being in full passion, not in full warmth, not in full reciprocal engagement and because I really live more and more in the flow of reciprocity, but teaching is only really effective when it's like reciprocal maintenance and so yes, they would feel some level of reciprocity has been cut off.

**RC:** Yes. And I'm glad I asked you to share more about that because it is all too human and I heard myself very much in what you were describing and so yes, I do appreciate that. And I'm excited that your book, *Cultivating Peace*, is being published in May of 2012. Is there anything that you would like to share with listeners about it?

**JOD:** Yes, absolutely. *Cultivating Peace* is really about this new peace movement as we've richly discussed in this conversation together, Raphael. The culture of peace, the new science of peace, the new learning of many, many levels of how we dialogue and so on. And the book is part methodology and it's a part medicine. It works as medicine as you read it because it's designed to go in with you and to come out and show you the systemic change and transformation of the planet. It begins with the science of humor and smiling because you can't really have peace without that smile, it's the fundamentalists who are having no fun and it's the kind of ultra serious people who in some way are creating the challenge. The signature of peace is that smiling being. It doesn't have to be a fake smile at all but the whole embodiment of the smile and the book ends with the practice of smiling all the way to the generations of the past and all the way to the generations in the future knowing that you stand into play where that smile is a knowing smile, that yes, we are evolving; yes, it is going to be transmitted to future generations. Boy, is that a smile that warms the heart.

**RC:** Well, I'm listening and smiling right now and it seems like at that smile and at that vision of peace, it's the right place for us to leave off now. So James O'Dea, I want to thank you so much for not only sharing your inspiration but also for being willing to step into, perhaps a new kind of vulnerability from teachers and leaders that is a fundamental aspect of creating the field that you just described in which it's no longer anyone one up or above, but all of us in it together developing peace as you've shared it with us today. So thank you so much again for that inspiration.

**JOD:** Thank you, Raphael. It's been such a deep honor to allow this conversation to evolve in the way it did and I really celebrate you and your work in this series because I think it is the right moment to try to reveal the inner and the outer in the most authentic way so that we can each share at the next level of the game. So thank you, Raphael.

## Milagros Phillips



Milagros Phillips specializes in transforming relationships between the races using a powerful approach that leaves participants empowered and hopeful. Her program, "Race Demystified: A Compassionate Approach to the Healing of America," has been utilized by Fortune 100 Companies, colleges, universities and communities throughout the country. Ms. Phillips was the founding Executive Director of "The National Resource Center for the Healing of Racism," and has served as Expert in Residence for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. She has lectured in the U.S., Mexico and Europe, and develops seminars and retreats for the private and corporate sector to help leaders understand Race in America. She is a CREATIVITY COACH, and is currently developer/co-facilitator of CONGRESSIONAL CONVERSATIONS ON RACE (CCR), a project of the Faith and Politics Institute and Search for Common Ground. This project helps national leaders craft a productive conversation leading to community action and collaboration.

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### **1. Race and the Journey of Self Discovery**

**RC:** Milagros Phillips, thank you so much for joining me on Teaching What We Need To Learn!

**MP:** Thank you so much for inviting me. This is wonderful, I'm really excited!

**RC:** Good! Well, as you might know from listening to some of the interviews, we start by checking in, to be as present as possible. So I want to share to our listeners that I'm a little bit, as they would say in Yiddish, the language of my forebears, I'm "fermished" because we were having technical troubles and it took a while to get our recording to work. And what you don't also know, Milagros, is that right before I called you, I found that I had to send out an email to everybody on the list for the series, telling them that the current week's interviews are available and that was the moment when the website chose to go down.

So as you and I have been trying to solve one technological problem, I had people emailing me from all over the world saying, "Help! What's wrong? I can't get into the site!" So I'm ahhh...! I'm



exhaling, I'm remembering that all is well, and coming in to a more relaxed presence, but from a slightly anxious place. So that's me in this moment, how about you?

**MP:** Well, I have been really excited about this afternoon and really looking forward to it. And right now, my daughter lives up North and I just said goodbye to her, I mean, literally, just a couple of minutes ago, and so I'm a little present with that, you know? I'll see her again in a little while, in a few days or so, but I was just present with the, "Oh, I need to say goodbye," and kind of with that and just really feeling that.

**RC:** I'm glad that you shared how you are in this moment and I'm really excited to launch from here into a discussion that I think will really be unique in terms of the series. What I would love to do is to ask you the kind of open-ended question that you could take in lots of different directions and I trust that you will take it in whatever is the best direction for right now; you are a person who has brought spirituality and race together in your own life and in your teaching and as a healing modality, and you're obviously very steeped and wise in that, and it leads to a question for most of our listeners who wouldn't have even considered something like that before, so I want to ask it to you like this: what would you say race and spirituality have to do with one another?

**MP:** Interesting! That's a great question. For me, well, let me give you a little bit of my story and how I came to this because that will probably answer this question. I have been born into a racial cast as a black woman. I'm also Latina; I was born, and spent most of my formative years, in the Dominican Republic. And so I had a lot of experiences with race, but I had absorbed them and didn't realize the impact that they were having on my life until way into my 30's. For me, this has been a journey of awakening, of understanding who I am, of understanding and trying to find my place in the world based on who I am rather than what the world has said I am, through this whole thing of racial casting.

So it has really been an awakening of my own spirit and understanding and awareness of who I am as a human being and really finding that my connection to the world is part of this whole racial experience because it's part of what I came to experience. And I didn't start there; I had to get to that place of understanding that this is part of the experience that I came to have on this planet. But it was very difficult for me to get there because it felt like it was an external thing that was being placed upon me.

**RC:** Yeah. And I really appreciate the way that you're bringing us to this question because if I'm hearing you correctly, what you're saying is that the world was defining and in certain ways, kind of confining you to a certain sense of who you were and what you were meant to be in this world. And in your case, that had a lot to do with race as you came to see over the development of many years. So many people would say the same thing about how the world came to define them and would see a similar road to their own freedom and the opportunity to have a self-definition, a way of being in the world, and even a way to connect to spirit that is more authentic.

So in a way, we could say that that's the journey for everybody, to kind of cast off what was conditioned and find what is truer and connect from that place. And so there's a universality in the particular that you're describing. But the particular is also really important. So I'm wondering if you can share a little bit about how race specifically—was it something that you had to come to see more clearly, your role in the world, how you had been defined? Anything about that journey and how you've come to understand it today that's mostly about race, I think would be great; because as I said a few moments ago, while all of us have had our own unique journeys around expanding into the fullness of who we are in the more authentic way, many of these listeners might come from races where they were in a more dominant position in culture or they didn't have to think about race as consistently as someone does in a minority race. So what about that feels it would be helpful to share?

**MP:** Well you know, I really like how you use the words cast-off because while it is a universal journey, I think we're each given an individual port to cast-off from and so mine happened to be race; where someone else's might be alcoholism or, you know, the different places where people cast-off from to go on that journey of self-discovery. So for me it was race and one of the things I wrote—I'm working on a book and one of the things I wrote in it was the early indoctrination—how that happens consistently and how we receive this training that becomes part of who we are and part of the way that we define our lives as we move forward.

So I started out early learning about race, although I didn't realize that's what I was doing because I was still a young child. But I had some experiences that were really poignant and I didn't realize just how poignant they were until I really began to look at a journey of healing and transformation for myself. It was something I really needed, I was hurting around a lot of things that have happened in my life, and so I realized that I really needed to heal. And interestingly enough, the

doors of healing opened to me through an understanding of whom I had been defined as, when it came to the issue of race.

**RC:** That, I think, is really helpful and I'm wondering if you could share a little bit about that indoctrination and what's so specific, I think, and helpful about the word 'indoctrination' is that it's often happening underneath the radar of the person who's getting indoctrinated. So as you said, at the time you weren't aware, but what were the messages about who you were that were connected to race that you internalized early on?

**MP:** Well, you know, one of my earliest, I think it was one of my most poignant memories and one that really impacted me and really helped open the doors of healing later on in my life was when I was in Catholic school. I was probably about 6 and a half, 7 years old, and in the town that I lived in the Dominican Republic, that particular Catholic school would put on a play and the whole town would turn out for this thing and it was big deal, and I wanted to be in the play. Now, mind you, just to give you a little bit of background, I feel like I was born dancing. I love to dance, love to sing, and it was one of the ways that I felt entertained from the time that I could walk.

So acting was sort of just natural, of course I could do this and it was really exciting to think about the possibility of being in this play. So I shared with one of my classmates—she was probably about 10 or 11 years old, she was a bit older than I was—that I wanted to be in the play. And she said to me, "Oh, you can't be in the play because all the major parts are taken and the only parts that are left are parts for angels, and everyone knows there are no black angels." And it was interesting how I didn't realize how that had impacted my life until I came to unravel it in my mid-30's.

I'll also share another story that came prior to that. As I mentioned, I loved to dance. And one of my neighbors had come by one day and she would see me dancing on the porch, which was a regular ritual for me. And she asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up and I said I wanted to be a ballerina. And she said, "Oh, well you can't be ballerina because there are no black ballerinas." And I said, "Of course there are!" And she said, "No, there aren't. The next time you turn on the television, look to see if you see anyone that looks like you." Of course, back then, in the Dominican Republic, I looked and sure enough there weren't any ballerinas that looked like me. And how I felt that, I mean, I still remembered when I started unraveling it; I still had the memory of how I stored that in my body and where I had stored that pain in my body. It was really interesting.

So I had had some interesting experiences around race. We were the only dark-skinned family in our town, so already as I look back, that was part of the indoctrination, being the only one or being two of, you know, that kind of thing. So it started early, it was often, and I didn't realize what was happening except that every time someone said something like that to me, I felt it—it felt painful, it was hurtful, and I didn't quite know what to do with it as a child.

**RC:** I really appreciate the embodied way that you're talking about that because the work that I do around emotions focuses very much on the body. And you said a moment ago that you came to recognize later, when you began your healing journey around this, that you actually felt the wounding of the limiting comments, these defining comments at the time, in a certain place and that you could access it in a certain place. Would you be willing just to share so we can kind of go into the embodied experience with you, where you found that in your body and specifically what that pain was like to encounter?

**MP:** Sure. A lot of it was stored around my stomach and my heart chakra. It was very interesting because when I started to really unravel it, it really felt like a knot. And as I began to unravel zones, like peeling back the onion, all the stuff started to come up: all this anger and rage and all these feelings and all these limiting experiences that I'd had in my life where other people got to define what the limitations were for me and where I could and couldn't go in and what I could and couldn't do. So it was just really interesting for me to begin to unravel that and look at the emotions and where they were stored in my body and how painful that was.

**RC:** And as you did that, Milagros, was there a particular practice that you were using to connect with and help move through and release those places of pain that had been stuck?

**MP:** For the most part, this took years and it's still ongoing. It's not something like, "Oh, I did that yesterday and now I'm fine," you know? There are things that still come up for me and there are places where it still can get triggered. The difference is now I have an awareness that allows me to recognize what's happening so I don't have to go "Deep into ugly road," like my friend calls it. And so what I used to do, well, of course I did a lot of meditating, a lot of silence; I had to learn to silence a lot of those external tapes and try to hear what it was that my soul was telling me about me.

I remember once asking the question, "Who am I without the woundedness? Who am I without the oppression? Who am I without the pain?" And just really sitting and not getting anything for the

longest time and then there would be glimpses, you know? I was working with something completely unrelated or I was in the middle of something and suddenly an answer would come about who I was and the reality that I could redefine myself. So before I would do that, I really had to go into my history, into really learning how I got to be in that place.

## **2. Freedom in the Midst of Toxicity**

**RC:** This is really so helpful how you're describing it because it was Robert Frost, the poet, who said, "The only way out is through." And what I'm hearing is that you're being was questing for an identity; that wasn't limited by these wounds, but that if you try to create that without including the wounds, without letting yourself be wounded and then heal and taking the time to do that, then you would still be trapped by the wounds because you would be creating another false identity that was in rebellion to the original false identity, if that makes sense.

**MP:** Exactly. In fact, one of the things I tell people in my workshop is that encountering racism is like someone taking a wooden dagger and stabbing you in the heart with it. And that the first time you get stabbed, you might pull it out right away. The second time you get stabbed, you just kind of go, "Oh, maybe I should just leave this be." By the third time, you just kind of leave the dagger there, thinking that, "If I just leave this here, then no one else can put another dagger in this particular place because there's already one here." And what happens is, as time goes by, then—oh, this is really graphic—I'm going to say it anyway—what happens is that the flesh begins to grow around the dagger. So then we go around protecting the dagger, as opposed to taking it out, dealing with the ooze and oozies that are in there, so that it can finally heal, it can scar. The scar might even disappear or it could stay there, but it stays there in a different form than it would if you never pulled out that dagger. And so what I find in my work is that for the most part, most of us go around protecting the dagger, as opposed to pulling it out and then healing the wound. So for me, a lot of this had to do with walking through a very painful path, understanding how I had colluded with the dysfunction, understanding how I'm trying to heal in a world that's still toxic, that's still trying to find its own way around this whole racism stuff—

**RC:** Okay, let's pause there because those are two really wonderfully rich things that you just said. The first thing you said is that you had to come to terms with how you colluded with the wounding. Can you just share for people who wouldn't quite know what that means what you came to see about that in your life?

**MP:** Sure! For me, it was kind of owning some of those definitions that came with race and sort of going against them so that, let's say someone says, "Well, part of the global definition is blacks are poor or blacks aren't smart or blacks are blah, blah, blah," whatever it was. And so for me, let's say it was, "Blacks aren't very bright and so therefore they shouldn't be in our organizations and they don't do well in school and blah, blah, blah." For me it was, "I need to be the brightest of the brights," you know? If there are any academic scholarships, I need to get those. You know what I mean? So this constant state of doing—overdoing, really—in order to counter the definitions that I felt were being placed upon me.

**RC:** So some people are going to hear that and they're going to think, "Well, what's wrong with giving 110 percent to surmount the obstacles that the world presented to you so that then you could thrive on your own terms?"

**MP:** The difference is coming from your own place of wholeness, a place that says, "Well, you know, I can do this and I'm going to do it just because I want to," as opposed to doing it to counter something else. So they're two very different things, you're coming from two different places. If you're coming from freedom around it, you can just make that decision "Just because I want to, I feel like it," whatever, you know? Versus coming from "I need to do this because of the world's definition about me." So it wasn't coming from a place of freedom; it's coming from the dysfunction.

**RC:** Yeah. And for a person who doesn't have to heal from the wounds of racism but has to heal, for instance, through the wounds in their family, they might have a place where there's a response countering, like you're describing, where they'll say, "I'm never going to be like my parents and then they go off and do the exact opposite," in order to prove their independence. While it seems free on the surface, in fact, it's still bound to the original wound that they're reacting against.

**MP:** Absolutely!

**RC:** So the next thing that really struck me, was you had to recognize that you are healing your wound of race in a world that's still toxic around the same issues. So can you speak to that a little bit as well?

**MP:** Sure, yeah. So part of what we deal with in our world, indeed in our country, is there are all these things that happen, and when there's a racial component to it, we go right to the wound.

Immediately people start dividing and everybody, you know, I always say, “People swim restlessness along the river of denial to their own separate side.” And so it divides us even further. But the reason that can happen is because we’ve never really dealt with the wound as a nation. And so every time one of these things come up, we go right to the wound.

And so when I had to deal with my own understanding of how we are still living in a world that’s racially toxic, in a country that has never really dealt with its racial wounds. How do you heal in an environment that is still filled with the same stuff, only it’s less obvious than it was when people had separate drinking fountains or when the neighborhoods were even more segregated than they are today? Those things were visible, they were obvious: “You can’t come into this restaurant, you can’t sit at the counter,” you know, all of those things that were really poignant.

**RC:** So how do you do that? Is it even possible to fully heal those wounds when the environment that you’re engaging in daily is still actually perpetuating that wound?

**MP:** I don’t know that it’s possible to completely heal, but I do know that it is possible to become more whole. And part of it has to do with owning our own shadow around some of that stuff; our own anger or the emotions that we have around it, and realizing that that’s just part of being human; that if something doesn’t feel right to us, if we feel like something is unfair, whatever our judgment is, whatever judgment we place on it—it’s part of the human experience and that the best that I can do is to be conscious of where am I adding to the dysfunction and where can I pull my brick out of the wall of separation.

**RC:** That’s really beautifully put. And I’m thinking, as you described this, that there’s a parallel with people who are especially attuned to the way that we are destroying our environment. These people who are interested in what’s sometimes called ‘environmental justice’ will speak about the challenge of trying to become a healthy and whole person regarding one’s inner environment when that inner environment is constantly interacting with the toxic environment outside.

There’s a sense that you can become ever more whole, as you described; that it would be kind of a false ideal to think that you, separate from your environment, and in this case I’m talking about physical environment, but in your case you’re talking about the cultural and social and racial environment—the wound, as I hear you describing it, and as I’m taking it to this other parallel, in both cases, the wound is with us. If we’re going to be whole and accept everything about our

experience, it seems like what you're saying is that we have to really deeply and profoundly accept that it is present.

**MP:** Indeed! Yeah. And I think part of it too is that I always tell people, "It's not our fault. It's not our fault that stuff is the way that it is, but it is our responsibility to take a look at how we are adding to it by not being conscious, by not choosing to open ourselves up to the possibility that we could possibly have racial tendencies." People often close themselves off when they hear the words 'race' or 'racism'—it just really seems to turn people off and I always ask them, "Why does it turn you off?" I always think of the fact that if somebody's pushing your button, if there's nothing behind that button, they could push your button all day long and you're not going to go off. But if you are getting triggered, then that means that there is something there and if there's something there, it might be worth taking a look at.

### **3. On the Side of Healing**

**RC:** Yeah, and I personally really appreciate this discussion and the topic in general from my own personal vantage point because on the one hand I'm white, so I'm from a privileged race in America, historically and still today; and I'm also Jewish, so I was born into a culture that actually sees itself not racially, but ethnically as a minority and has fought against all kinds of injustice for centuries; and now, actually, there's that and then there are also the challenges which have come from a greater freedom and success and ease that Jews have had in American culture and elsewhere.

So being American white/Jewish has both minority and majority roots to it; I feel kind of a little bit on the both sides of that fence. And with that recognition, I'm thinking that there's healing that is important and can happen for people not just of the minority race, but of the majority race. When we talk about healing the wounds of racism, for the people who are listening to this interview who haven't necessarily thought that they have been participating in some of that wounding, and who haven't even had it on their radar, what would you say is a way that if they're motivated from a heartfelt place to bring that into their consciousness; how might they look at the world and be in the world a little bit differently to really be on the side of healing in this case?

**MP:** Well, one of the first things that I tell people is look at your history, look at your racial history, specifically, because everyone has one. Even if the history is, "I never had to deal with anyone of any kind of minority growing up, or in my life, or where I lived," and so on and so forth; right through to the people who lived in, let's say, New York City, where they thought they were in



this Mecca of people from all over the world and so on and so forth, and yet they lived in segregated neighborhoods, you know what I mean?

So this stuff really just permeates the entire culture. I always remind people that if you really want to become conscious about this, take a look at your own history and ask yourself, “What did I learn?” “What did I learn about race?” “What did I learn about my own race?” Which, by the way, I use the word ‘race’ because it is the word that’s most commonly used, but as far as I’m concerned there’s only one ‘race’ on the planet right now and that’s human. I don’t know of any other human ‘race’ on the planet, but maybe there are some, I just don’t know. But we do define ourselves in that way so that’s why I use that.

So ask yourself, “What did I learn? What did I learn from my parents, from my siblings, from my teachers, from my environment, from the politicians, from the world around me: what did I learn about race?—about my own race, and about other races?” And when people start to look at that, what they find is that everyone has some kind of history that’s related to race, and that history could be something as simple as “I never encountered a person of color until I got to college,” or “My parents had people of all races come to our home,” or “I have a lot of black friends but they’re all from Africa, none of them were from the U.S.” Things like that. I mean, it’s really interesting, as we begin to look at that and see if you can tap into your earliest memory of race because that too is very powerful.

You might have heard something or someone shared a story or something that someone experienced and you heard about it. Everyone has some kind of history with it. So it’s important—the history piece is really important because our personal history is inextricably linked to the collective history, to the larger history of the country or wherever it is that we’re living. And that informs what we learn or don’t learn about race. And that then begins to impact our relationships, the way we view people, the expectations we have of them, and all of those kinds of things and we’re not always conscious of it.

**RC:** So in what you’re saying, I’m hearing, that to let the issue become visible in someone’s own life and consciousness where previously it might have seemed invisible is a really important first step. Nobody is excluded from this issue in their life, regardless of whatever race or color they are. And if you can—and I’m paraphrasing to make sure I got it right here—if you are willing to look and see about your own history and what you learned and how you learned about race, then from

that point, it's going to be a lot easier to see what's already present in you in terms of prevailing attitudes, things which otherwise might go unseen because you've got it going. And you realize that whatever you learned had to carry forward in your conditioning.

**MP:** Absolutely! The other thing that I always tell people is the importance of sharing your story. One of the things that has traditionally happened around race is people just don't want to talk about it. And when they do open up to talk about it, they just don't want to shut up. They have so much to say and so much to share. But there's almost like a code of silence around race. We just don't talk about it, certainly not in polite company and we want to be politically correct, but certainly we'd never bring it up. And yet, that's exactly what people need to do: to be able to find someone they trust to share some of those stories with—it's really powerful and it can be very, very healing.

To find someone who will really listen to you, not judge you for your story, but really listen to what you have to say with an open heart and an open mind. And when we do that, when we create that sacred space for that other person to share those stories, it's amazing what begins to happen and how healing that is, not just for the one telling the story, but also for the listener. So to me, that is another piece that is extremely important, that people open up and share those stories because we don't usually do that.

**RC:** So one of the things that I'm taking from what you're saying is that a person who, let's say, comes from white America or white Europe, etc., they could first of all, as you said, start with their history, but then they also could seek out somebody who they feel that they could have a trusting relationship with. Whereas before, they might have tiptoed around the issue, now they could engage, they could invite that other person to share their story as they share their own. So another part of the healing journey could be to make that effort, to, let's say for instance, if I have an African American friend or a Latino friend, to say, "We might not have talked about it before because it was uneasy, but I'm really open and interested in hearing your experience around race so that I can learn, understand and become part of the solution in any way possible."

**MP:** It's also important for that person to share their story, not just to listen to a person of color to tell their story because it's exhausting trying to be a teacher all the time when you also want to learn. Here are some things that I think are really interesting when you start to look at the way that people encounter race and the telling of the stories. For the most part, particularly in this country—let's stick with this country for right now because race really is a global problem and we need to

address it as a global problem, but we live here, so we need to address what's here and now. And so when we start to look at race in this country, the issue has been segregation. People have been separate from one another. They live in different neighborhoods, they visit with and have friends that look like them, act like them, have the same basic socio-economic background and so on and so forth.

And so now you bring people together who are of these different backgrounds and we expect them to get along; we expect them to work well together; we expect them to do whatever it is that is expected of them. But the reality is that because there hasn't been the camaraderie there, there are issues of trust that come up, there are issues around the way people who work together, even the way that people learn. And those things don't necessarily get addressed. If we never take the time to make friends with and really get to know and really have relationships with people who are "different" from us, then we are missing a big piece of the puzzle. It's like saying, when you go into the garden, the only valuable flowers there are the roses and nothing else has any value. You know, everything in that garden has value, even the weeds! That's why we pull them out, you know? There's something about them that is essential and we are all part of the human garden. And these are the Creator's choice of colors. And to be honest with you, I don't know a better artist than the Creator.

Have you seen the sunset? You know what I'm saying? It's like, come on! You know? We can't miss it! And people will say things like, "I'm color blind" or "I don't see color," and what a shame because you're missing it! If you don't see the different shades that people come in, the different eye colors, the different shades of color, you're missing it! This is why we're here, you know?

**RC:** I want to share something, just personally, if I can about that. There's a book that's written for children by a woman author/illustrator named Karen Katz and it's called *The Colors of Us*. I got it from the library and I read it periodically with my young daughter. And just to be honest, I have to say, every time I read it, it makes me cry because it's about celebrating that whole garden of colors and looking and seeing, "Ooh, what color is your skin? Is that honey color? Is that the color of chili pepper?"—The celebration of color in such an innocent way. I felt like one of the best things I could do with my child is at a very early age, just instill that sense of uniqueness that everybody has and how beautiful it is, as opposed to how separating it often is instead. So anybody who has children, I recommend that book. It's just beautiful.

I also wanted to say that as you were describing the garden, it occurred to me that in our spiritual circles, the ones, let's say, most of the people listening to this series would be familiar with, we talk a lot about the shadow. And when we talk about the shadow, we're referring mostly to the human shadow and to the emotions and the beliefs and the aspects of one's self that have been locked away in the unconscious because we don't want to or can't look at them. And when we talk about doing shadow work and integrating the shadow, we're talking about including and coming to it, to work with, to bring forth into consciousness those parts of us.

But as you were describing the outside world, I began to see how clearly there is a social shadow, a cultural shadow, and even, very specifically, a geographic shadow. Because I realized that I could and our listeners could look at even the routes that we take through our town, the places that we go consistently and then the places that we avoid consistently or the places and neighborhoods that we feel uncomfortable. And some of it is just plain old fear, but some of it is also exactly what you were describing. "I just don't feel at home here, I don't know these people, I don't know these ways of being." Even just to take a step to say where I'm ready and able, without pushing myself or making it about self-judgment, where I'm ready to go down a different street literally could be an expansive and healing effort, not just for one's self but for one's community.

**MP:** Absolutely. You know, it's funny, one of the chapters in this book that I'm working on is called *Acknowledging The Shadow* and I'll just read you one line from it, which is, "The journey from shadow to light requires that we not only acknowledge our own shadow, but that we extract from it the gifts and the wisdom that lead to an empowered life." So for me, this whole thing of looking at the shadow and acknowledging it, being aware of it, not hiding from it, is really a very important part of this journey. It's being able to say, "I don't know" or "I don't understand" or "Here's where I don't do that well with..." whatever it is, and it's just part of the human experience.

**RC:** But part of that shadow work, if we're going to make it not just metaphorical, but kind of visceral, a person of privilege might say honestly, "Black people scare me." And they might not want to admit that, they might not want to let themselves feel that fear or let that fear take them to another place, so they might have previously stopped there, or they might say, you know, "I get triggered around black people because I'm supposed to pay the price of sins that were done to them generations before I was born that I didn't have anything to do with," and there's a whole story that might come up around lack. In other words, "To give to that person opportunity or possibility feels like it's taking something from me, and I feel like I have to hold on to what I have." And that's just

one of a million examples, but if we're really going to do that shadow work very honestly and at the level of our own actual personal experience, we're going to have to acknowledge all of that.

**MP:** Yeah. And also to realize that once you start that journey, things are never quite the same. It's important that we allow that to be exactly as it is, if we're really going to commit to that. I'll give you an example. I had a gentleman who had attended one of my workshops. He had attended in 2000, and when I saw him again, it was 2003. He said to me, "You know, I wish my wife had gone to that workshop, the two-day intensive," that I still continue to do to this day, "because we were at a ball game last summer and she made a joke that the summer before I would have laughed at. This year it made me sick to my stomach." And I looked at him and I said, "You know, that's the difference between information and transformation; the difference between "There but for the grace of God go I" to "There go I." All of a sudden that joke wasn't about someone else. He owned that. That joke was about him as a human being. He had made a connection that had allowed him to do some deep transformative work. And that's the kind of stuff I'm talking about.

It's the allowing for those stories, from listening to those human experiences that may not necessarily be our own, but that transform us in such a way that we become that story. And from that place, you can no longer laugh at that joke or you can no longer see life the same way as you saw it before. Now it looks different. I ran into an executive who also said to me, "You know, after that workshop, we don't interview the same way; we don't mentor the same way; we don't even advertise the same way anymore," because it makes such an impact on the lives of the people in his organization that had attended.

Someone else from a different organization said, "You know, we can tell the difference between the people who had been through that program and the people who haven't by the things they say at our national conference." Because once you know, you can't deny that you know what you know. And there are a lot of missing pieces to this whole race puzzle, and when people start to get those pieces and they let themselves emote over those pieces, it touches them at a place that they're just never the same again.

**RC:** And in racial terms, we talk about segregation as you described it a few minutes ago. In spiritual terms, we often talk about separation and that the true spiritual journey is one in which we come to understand that there is no separation between the one who experiences and what we're experiencing. That union of the observer and the experience in some traditions is considered

enlightenment. And so in order to experience the fullness of no separation, we have to include, as I'm learning from you today, the racial part of that as well.

You said something that was so extraordinary a few moments ago. You said to move from "There but for the grace of God go I" to "There go I." And I wanted to come back to that and highlight it because that is in such a clear, stark way the difference between separation and no separation. So one of the things I'm opening up to through our discussion is I can look at somebody from another race as a part of my spiritual journey and my healing psychologically as well, and I can say, "Where, if anything, in the way I look at that person is there something that is keeping me from saying, "There go I"—what do I think is different or other?" Because since there is no separation, asking that question and listening to the answer tells me exactly where I need to pay attention.

**MP:** Absolutely!.

#### **4. Divine Ordination**

**RC:** So I would like to spend the time we have left talking a little bit about you personally because anybody listening to you can really recognize, first of all, the history that you've come from, the healing that you described earlier, and yet at the same time, there's something about you that feels so transcendent of all of that. Your heart is huge, your wisdom is really powerful, and that was always part of who you were, I'm sure, even if it got obscured by the wounds of racism that we were speaking about earlier. So I'm wondering in some way did you know yourself to be this unique, Milagros, that you are, with the gifts that I just described, early in your life or did that only even become clear to you through that healing process that you alluded to earlier?

**MP:** Actually, you know what? Growing up, I had a lot of confusion about who I was and my place in the world. I still struggle with that. I'm certainly not there yet. I'm a lot better off than I was before, but not quite there yet. There were some things that I knew about me; like I knew that I was very talented as a child. That was just sort of knowing and not in a conceited way, but feeling like I know a lot of things that I probably shouldn't know or I don't know what I know them from. And so I had that kind of awareness, but I didn't know what to do with that. And I certainly was not going to do race work with it. There's no way in the world (laughs). I mean, I call it 'divine ordination' and getting to a place where you can't say no.

I did anything that I had to do except doing race work and I certainly was not going to deal with my own internalized racism or my own, you know, looking at the impact of that in my life because it

made me feel like a victim. And I was much too powerful and too much of a warrior to be a victim. And of course once I came to unravel it, I had to deal with my own victimization, but I also, interestingly enough, had to deal with the victimization of the people who are in power. And that was really hard for me. It was like, “What do you mean? These people have privilege?” (laughs) “Where I don’t?” But really... I’ll tell you a little bit of a story to illustrate that. I call it, *The Physician in Need of Healing*:

My sister had come to this country because her child had a bad heart and she had met this doctor who—I was really young at the time, but I’m guessing he’s one of those Doctors Without Borders folks. And he told her that, because all the doctors she’d met prior to that had told her child would die before she was a teenager. And so this one doctor said, “I think your daughter can be saved, she might need surgery and special treatment, but you need to bring her to the U.S.” So my sister went on to gather every penny she could—anyway, she managed to come to the U.S. and she asked my cousin to take her to that doctor. And my cousin was like, “Oh, are you sure you want to go there? There are a lot of good doctors.” And she’s, “No, no, no, no! I want to go that doctor,” because this is her only child and he told her that he could save her life.

So they walked into his office and his clients were all white and the receptionist and so on. This was back in the 60’s. And so she walked into the office and everyone’s staring, she went up to the receptionist and said, “I’m here to see Dr. So and So,” and blah, blah, blah. The receptionist didn’t even let her finish what she was saying. She got up, ran to the back, got the doctor, the doctor came out and said, “Oh, you have to leave.” My sister was in shock, you know? He said, “You have to leave right now.” She said, “But you said—“ and he said, “No, I can’t treat her here. I can’t.” My sister didn’t really know what was going on because she didn’t really understand the fine points of the racial dynamics in the country. She had just gotten here, she’s been here just a few weeks. And my cousin, who had lived here all his life, was trying to explain it to her.

But the part of the story—I mean, eventually she was able to find another doctor and save her daughter’s life—but the part of the story that was key to me was how that doctor, because of the racial conditions, because of the caste system, because of the dynamics in the country, he didn’t feel free enough to do what he obviously knew in his heart was the right thing to do. And so to me, I think the biggest piece of this for me has been finding out that those who believe themselves to be in privilege are just as imprisoned as those who are being victimized. It’s just a different form. And because it’s hidden behind the privilege, it’s even harder to see.

**RC:** And you're imprisoned, whoever you are, in whatever social strata you are, if you're not free, if your heart isn't open, and if you can't allow yourself to be the fullest, most loving version of who you are.

**MP:** Exactly.

**RC:** I think that's a really beautiful addition to what we've been talking about today. And I want to come back to what you said a few moments ago where you said that you still struggle with my place in the world and you are a person who teaches about race, you facilitate people, healing about race, and you're also not just that, you're a talented artist as well. And much more that I'm sure I couldn't even scratch the surface because we haven't got the chance to meet, I don't know all of the dimensions of you. Because the series is called Teaching What We Need to Learn and we do focus on kind of coming out from behind the curtain when we're in a leadership role, I appreciate how you say, "I'm still working with that issue," and I'm wondering what you could add to fill that in for us. How does somebody who is so skillful in navigating race and who has found a healing through that journey such that you can be your authentic self and you can know what's truly you outside of or beyond that conditioning, how do you still struggle? What form does that take?

**MP:** Sometimes I look at things and I see them through the eyes of race and I don't always know that that's what they are. It could be something else. But because that's where the wound has been, that's where the work has been, that has been my journey of learning and understanding; I sometimes look at life and things that happen and I wonder, "Hmmm, I wonder what that was really about? I wonder if it was racially motivated, I wonder if it was something about my appearance, you know?" It's the question that comes up. And it's not always present with me, but I have to acknowledge that it is there.

**RC:** So there's that old saying if all you have is a hammer, everything will look like a nail. And it sounds like what you're adding to our discussion—and tell me if I get this right—is that when you bring a very deep and refined understanding about a particular theme in life, your own life and the world around you, and you develop that and you share that and it becomes a real big part of who you are; there's a subtle way in which you can sometimes bring everything back to that—like you can see that in hyper clarity, such that sometimes you'll miss other dimensions or aspects of what might be going on in a situation because of your great development in this other arena. Is that what you're describing?



**MP:** Yeah. And it's not something that's a constant that—there was a time that it was. But it does come up from time to time and I just go, “Hmm.” I just question it. A lot of my journey has been being self-reflective; just really looking at why am I thinking that way? What is really up for me right now? And just really constantly questioning. For me it's important that I'd be able to do that for myself because it keeps me sharp and it keeps me in the loop of where I am in the moment.

**RC:** Yeah, and in Buddhism or Zen, they call it Beginner's Mind. And Socrates said “The more I know, the less I understand.” And then back in the 70's, I think it was, there was a comedy troupe called the Firesign Theatre that had a famous comedy album called *Everything You Know is Wrong*. All of these efforts to keep reminding us to be humble and to recognize that whatever you've come to see as the truth, if you can now surrender that, then you can show up in this new moment and see whatever is actually there, rather than you need to see is there.

**MP:** Exactly. And the whole thing about being present is so deep within me and that's part of that going back and realizing “What am I really seeing? And what filters am I looking at it through?”

**RC:** Yeah, and so I want to ask you about it as we come close to our close. Who have been your teacher and your touchstones around this way of being that so beautifully emanates from you and wouldn't necessarily be part of the tradition of someone who grew up in the Dominican Republic, etc. Who did you find your way to on this healing path, whether they're people that we wouldn't know or whether they're teachers that we would read, what has been seminal for you in coming to this place where presence is so important to you, so central?

**MP:** Well, you know, the part of me that felt really strongly entrenched in a spiritual journey has been through the reading of *A Course in Miracles*. In fact, one of the things that I always tell people is that my race program is based on *A Course in Miracles*. And it's based on the understandings that I gained through the reading of *A Course in Miracles*, then attending groups and then teaching *A Course in Miracles*. That really has been, I have to say, one of my best teachers.

**RC:** How old were you when you first came across *A Course of Miracles*?

**MP:** I was in my 30's.

**RC:** It's fascinating because another guest in this series, Tama Kieves, is somebody who focuses a lot on people finding their calling, doing the work that they love, and she came through *A Course of Miracles*. She's a lovely, bright spirit, as are you, and I think it was—I could be wrong, but I think

it was Jesus who said, “You shall judge them by their fruits.” So if Tama and if Milagros, you are the fruits of *A Course of Miracles*, then that’s a lot to recommend because anybody listening can just feel the loving kindness that is so essential to who you are.

**MP:** Thank you!

**RC:** So I want to just touch on two quick things. One of them is it’s a little harder to find you on the web than it is some of the other guests in our series. And if there are people who would love to be in your sphere, knowing what you’re up to and especially knowing about when your book is finished and out there, what do you recommend is a way for people to be in touch with you?

**MP:** Well, they can always email me. I have a long email address. It’s [WHOLENESSINDIVERSITY@HOTMAIL.COM](mailto:WHOLENESSINDIVERSITY@HOTMAIL.COM). If they want to read a little bit about me, they can go to the CongressionalConversations.com website and read about some of the work that we’re doing with race.

And then I also have a program, a two-day intensive and they can get that information by going to the Center for ADR, which is a Center for Alternative Dispute Revolution. I do a two-day intensive for them, which has actually become part of their course. They train people in the judicial system. And the two-day intensive has now become part of the requirement for graduation from the one-year course.

**RC:** I’m curious, where was a place or the people who you learned the most from in terms of doing the race work, because you’re obviously a leader in this regard. And when you got to the place where you wanted to look at your racial wounding, your racial identity, and how to heal through that, where did that happen for you?

**MP:** Actually I had taken a course at a college, a diversity class, and it was with a multi-racial group of people and we all really liked each other and we visited one another. And we watched a film on television that was actually an Oprah Winfrey Show, it’s called the Jane Elliot Blue Eye-Brown Eye experiment. Oprah Winfrey had done it on her show. And we weren’t engaged in the experiment itself, we were just watching the experiment and it divided the room and you could cut the tension with a knife; it was that powerful. It was just so—the negativity was just hanging there, it was really awful. The group was never the same again. But I remember going home and saying to my spouse at the time, “You know, there has to be a way to do this race work that allows people to

face the wound that leaves them empowered on the other side.” And my spirit must have been listening because it became a quest. All of a sudden I was on this path that I never wanted to sign up for and never wanted to be a part of and suddenly found myself doing race work.

**RC:** Did you kind of develop your own principles and practices and ways of teaching on your own?

**MP:** I did. Because I couldn't find any mentors, it seemed like everyone was angry and everyone was approaching race from a place of anger. And one of the things that I had to do, just for me, was to really look at my own anger. And in fact, I remember a time that anger was so deep and it felt like I was in an abyss that I was never going to come out of. I was just so angry. I remember the first time that I spent the weekend in silence, all this rage came up. I mean, just pure rage.

So I had to really deal with my own anger before I could go out there and do this work, because it is toxic work, people are very hesitant to do this kind of work. A lot of people feel they don't need it. In fact, some of the most interesting people in my workshops have been the people who their boss made them go to the workshop because of something they said or something they did. And to watch those people transform because they didn't realize what was missing, all the pieces that they were missing around some of the stuff. So I really had to, and continue to, work on myself on a regular basis. For me, this is an experiential journey, it wasn't something that I just read about; it's been a lifetime of continually facing things and asking myself where I want to go with them. There was a time that I would "sharp tongue people" is what I call it. I would say things and they were never actually nasty, but they actually were sort of, underneath, they were mean.

And I used to say, "Oh yeah, I could cut them off at the knees and they keep walking and don't realize that they've been walking around without legs for a while." Because I would say things that were so sharp and cutting to people, and coming to a place of realizing I don't want to do that anymore. If I have the power of words, I can use my words to empower people. And so I had made that decision, the empowering piece, I want to empower people with my words piece, early on. So when this stuff came around of doing this race work and then I had to deal with my own anger, that really was not easy (laughs) because it was really having to look at the things that I had said and done early on out of anger. And then really looking at the examples of the people around me who were activists and were doing wonderful work, but they were so angry. And then there were the peace activist, who seemed to not have any peace (laughs). I was like okay, "This is just not going

to work for me. So what is it that I need to look at within me and what is it that I need to clean up?”—I always call it cleaning the inside of the cup—“What is it that is it in my own cup, I need to clean up so that when I show up, I’m not bringing that anger with me, so that people can’t heal my heart and they can’t see we’re connected and they can’t see where we’re together and where we’re one because my anger gets in the way with that.” So I had to do a lot of work before we went out and did this work.

**RC:** It sounds like that work of cleaning the inside of the cup that you did is what then naturally led to the way that you teach about race. In other words, you couldn’t have developed your materials and your approach any other way than going through that yourself.

**MP:** Exactly! And I do tell people of the union of the seminar, “This comes from my personal experience. I would challenge you to find your own history, to find your own way through.” What I give people are tools that help them do that. And what’s really powerful for me about those tools is that they’re universal tools, so it’s the same process of healing, whether you’re healing a broken toe, a broken arm, or a broken heart. We walk through these layers and when you understand them from that perspective and then you take that knowledge and you superimpose it on race, you’ll begin to understand where you yourself are on your path to healing around race. I really believe that our country needs to do that work. It’s important work, it shouldn’t be left behind and I really don’t want it left to another generation.

**RC:** Yeah. Beautiful! When we started talking a while back, I asked you the question what do spirituality and race have to do with one another, and my sense is that this whole talk that we’ve had together has really been the answer to that question and that you’ve shared so many dimensions of it. I feel really moved and grateful for the opportunity to be a part of it.

So I want to thank you so much for the bottom of my heart. I feel that you have provided a beautiful service for the listeners of this series. And for me personally, I’ve learned a lot and I know if there’s ever a chance for me to take part in one of your experiences I know I’ll do it because I’m especially excited to open doors, as you’ve described, to come to know what I don’t know and I feel that you’re a beautiful way-shower about that when it comes to race and much more than that. So again, Milagros Philips, thank you so much for being with us today.

**MP:** Thank you so much, Raphael. It’s really been an honor.

**Marilyn Schlitz**



Marilyn Mandala Schlitz, Ph.D. is a pioneering clinical research scientist, medical anthropologist, writer, speaker, and thought leader working in the area of human transformation, consciousness studies, worldview literacy and cultural healing for more than three decades. She is the president and CEO for the Institute of Noetic Sciences and senior scientist at the Research Institute, California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco, CA. Dr. Schlitz has published hundreds of articles on consciousness studies in both scholarly and popular journals. Her books include: “Consciousness and Healing, Integral approaches to Mind-Body Medicine” and “Living Deeply: the Art and Science of Transformation in Everyday Life.” [WWW.MARILYNSCHLITZ.COM](http://WWW.MARILYNSCHLITZ.COM)

### **1. The Edge of Open Minded Skepticism**

**RC:** Welcome to Teaching What We Need To Learn. My guest today is Dr. Marilyn Schlitz who is an esteemed author and researcher and also the president and CEO of the Institute of Noetic Sciences. Welcome Marilyn!

**MS:** Thank you! Delighted to be here.

**RC:** So this series is about what I call radical transparency and in the spirit of radical transparency, I want to say that in this moment I’m noticing that I’m a little nervous and I have a little bit of a rapid heartbeat and I could feel myself talking a little quicker than usual. The reason I wanted to share this at the outset is because I have so many things to ask you and so many things I want to learn from you that I feel like we could spend all day together. So that’s where my nervousness stems from—wanting to make sure we get to the good stuff and that we have enough time to do that.

**MS:** Well, I feel excited, so I’m eager to push on.

**RC:** Okay, good! So I want to start today with a thank you, a very specific thank you to you because in the world of personal growth and spirituality and the merging between science and spirituality, there is so much that has changed over the last decades and it’s so difficult to ferret out what feels deep, powerful and true versus the ideas of the day—what we would wish would be true

rather than what really is true. And I can't think of anyone, Marilyn, other than you, who is poised as a filter and a discerner and also a way shower in terms of being able to be incredibly open-minded and also very clear and discerning at the same time. So I do want to offer special appreciation and that's why I'm excited to have you on this series.

**MS:** Well that's very kind. I appreciate that. And I think any of us who are living on the edge of that kind of open minded skepticism, trying to make sense of all the things that are happening in the world right now are in a kind of challenging position. It is confusing to be alive in this moment.

**RC:** Yeah, definitely! And I want to be really specific for listeners about some of the kinds of things that I'm talking about. So back in the 70's was when one of the new age memes arose around the idea of the 100<sup>th</sup> monkey. The idea of the 100<sup>th</sup> monkey that was popularized was the idea that if a bunch of monkeys on one island adapted a new skill and there was a critical mass of the monkeys who did that, then somehow through a mechanism we didn't understand, a monkey on another island that never had access to the skill that was developed directly on the other island would somehow learn that skill. And when the 100<sup>th</sup> monkey phenomenon was presented, it was presented as scientific observation. Then it became clear that in fact there was no scientific verification of that phenomenon. But by that time, in fact, it was so powerful an idea that even to this day people will talk about it as a fact.

And while there may be a lot of power in the metaphor and there may even ultimately come to be things connected to that kind of phenomenon that we understand more deeply and that are even true in a different way at a later date from a scientific perspective, it was important to recognize that it wasn't actually something that had been studied and demonstrated. So I think we see this kind of thing all the time and one of the reasons why the Institute for Noetic Sciences, your organization, is so important is because it allows us a place to go, to really check in to what's been demonstrated, what hasn't, and what the leading edge of the research is. And so I wanted to spend a couple of minutes elaborating on that because those kinds of things especially are confusing, even for teachers who want to use metaphors to help people open and deepen in their consciousness.

**MS:** You know it's funny you brought that up. I was just in a conversation with one of our staff members the other day and they brought up the 100<sup>th</sup> monkey and I said, "You know, that's kind of an urban folklore." And they were so sad (laughs). They were like, "Really?" And I think that that's part of it—there's a way in which these metaphors are very comforting and it can be hurtful to us in

our psyches when these ideas are dispelled. I've seen it time and time again. You have to walk a very careful line. I had a woman who was a serious breast cancer patient. She was in an advanced stage and she'd gone to the Philippines to have psychic surgery. I was teaching a class and as part of the class I had intended to show how some of those psychic surgeons use sleight of hand. And it doesn't mean that they don't have the capacity to heal, it doesn't mean some of them aren't truly legitimate, and it doesn't mean that people haven't had astonishing experiences.

But in this instance, they were able to show very unequivocally how what the psychic surgeon was doing involved magic and deception. I had a real ethical bind about whether I should show that movie because we also know that our belief systems are so powerful and can catalyze healing in ways that are also truly miraculous. And so a lot of these indigenous healers will talk about the ways in which they play with expectancies to promote a person's own healing response. So it may not be coming from the other person, it may be coming from an ability to help facilitate the belief system that can then initiate a whole cascade of responses in the body that may lead to a healing response. I didn't end up showing the video that night with the woman because I felt that she so strongly believed it and it was so important to her.

And then I remember another time in a conversation with a group of people, and it wasn't in that delicate of a situation, where I brought up again the idea that there were aspects of these popular culture belief systems that hadn't been supported by research. And this woman got indignant with me. She was so mad she stormed out of the room. So people's belief systems are tender, they're precious to us, and it's often very tender territory to try and have a conversation that involves both the discernment and the openness to what is possible.

## **2. Seeing Multiple Perspectives and Worldviews**

**RC:** Well, I really appreciate how you stated that and it reminds me of a phrase that is a part of one of your programs. You say, "Come with an open mind, leave with an open heart." In reflecting on that phrase and then listening to you right now, it seems that there's a guide that you have living within you that is about heartfulness and compassion that you lead with even as you work with a scientific paradigm and continue to research in this way. I'm wondering is that heart connection and the way that you just spoke about the issues of beliefs so tenderly something that has always been a part of you or did that develop through the course of your work and study over the years?

**MS:** I guess I've always been drawn to seeing multiple perspectives. As a kid, I really thrived on spending time with somebody who was a super liberal and somebody who is a super conservative

and not feeling threatened by their positions, but intrigued by how differently they could see the world. So I guess I've always had this kind of curiosity for truth construction. What is truth and how do we find it? Over the years, I guess I've come to a greater awareness and appreciation that there are multiple ways of knowing about reality in our experiences.

So the head tells us one thing, but truly our own experiential knowing is more powerful. I did a project when I was at Stanford that was looking at the discourse of controversial science and the nature of truth construction within the skeptic proponent debate in parapsychology. So you have people arguing within the scientific tradition about objective data. And in our culture, "the experts tell us," and there's something sort of reassuring about that for people. And yet when you actually got down to how people shape their belief systems and what they accept to be true and valid, it almost always comes down to a first person pronoun.

So "I had an experience" or "a colleague who I trust had an experience in his laboratory that I believed." These kind of first person appeals to truth are in some ways kind of contradictory to the third person objective, rational discourse that we tend to use as the basis of our arguments. And so how do we hold to the paradox of these different ways of engaging truth?

I'm doing a film right now with Deepak Chopra called *Death Makes Life Possible*. And in it, we are looking at different cosmologies from different cultural traditions about what happens when we die. It is fascinating that there are so many perspectives and oftentimes they contradict each other. So how is it that we navigate together, we share grocery stores, we share schools and hospitals with people who may be sitting next to us, who are living in an entirely different model of reality? I just find that really intriguing and it's one of the things that has really galvanized my work and my life.

**RC:** Yeah. And there's something I'm really excited to ask you about because one of the other gifts that you particularly offer us is a way to take these themes and apply them to our personal lives, to the everyday. So when you were talking about the expert in our culture versus the I—I was thinking, in a very grounded everyday level about the way that what we learn from experts changes and often is oppositional over the years. There's that movie *Sleeper* that Woody Allen made in the 70's where the joke was that somewhere in the future, whatever, 2030, when the movie was supposed to take place, that scientists have discovered that smoking was good for you. And so anybody who's paying attention over a while realizes, "Oh, I'm supposed to eat this. No, now I'm supposed to eat that." And it becomes very confusing and ultimately, most of us do come to a



different way of knowing, as you described it, in terms of making our own decisions that aren't just about some kind of expert, socially validated voice. So being someone who's so fascinated, as you just described, by multiple versions of realities, ways of being in the world, do you have a sense of how steeping yourself in that professionally over the course of your career has changed the way you live on a very day to day level?

**MS:** Well, you know there is also within everyone, and some people probably have developed it better, but the way in which our work life and our personal life sometimes are in opposition, and we forget. So I do a lot of work on worldview. And Worldview Literacy is a program we've developed out of our Transformations in Consciousness work. It's intended to educate young people about the fact that they have a world-view and they see the world through a lens of perception that colors everything about their experience, that other people have different world-views and that we may be living in different parallel realities. But I also have a 13 year old son and there are days when he comes home and he's really sure about something and I'm really sure it's not that way (laughs). So you have to kind of bracket it sometimes; as a parent where our own reactivity comes up; as a person in a workplace or in a relationship where we get triggered. Those trigger points come up for us.

I think that the takeaway for me for a lot of the work that I've done is forgiving ourselves when we haven't done it perfectly because there are always ways in which there's the kind of abstract knowledge and then there's the personal response to whatever that situation presents us with. But you know, remembering that we can breathe into it, remembering to give it a little space, listening. Last night I was just doing some work on my computer and he came in and he really wanted to talk about gangs and racism and class consciousness stuff. And I just realized this was a very special moment and I should just stop what I was doing and I turned around and I completely listened to him. I didn't try to negate what he was saying or condone it. I was really listening with an open heart to him. And this morning when I woke up, I was so grateful that I'd had that opportunity and that he felt safe enough to have that conversation with me. But it's not always that way.

We did a big research project over a 10-year period looking at consciousness transformation. We were looking at what triggers these transformations, what sustains them, and then what are the products that come from that—how does it change our lives? We interviewed 60 masters from different traditions and beautiful, beautiful deep wisdom. And I was driving one evening, taking my son to his music lesson and we were a little late, and there was a woman walking across the street

and she had a dog in one hand, a dog carrier in the other, and she was weaving in and out of traffic. So all the traffic stopped. There was this impulse toward road rage, like, “What is wrong with this woman?” I could feel my reactivity in that moment and all of a sudden I remembered. I just remembered some of the insights that I’ve gotten from this work that I’d spent all day in and I just took a deep breath and I realized something was wrong with this woman. As soon as I could switch from that place of reactivity to that place of empathy, I could no longer have that rage. It’s easy to forget and it’s important to forgive ourselves when those moments of reactivity come up because we’re all primed and we have these deep-rooted limbic responses that are hard-wired into our bodies and our brains. The opportunity is to begin to cultivate new habits so that rather than coming from those reactive places, we can come from that place of caring. And it’s not always simple, it’s not always easy, but it is the work that I try to stay mindful of.

**RC:** It really seems to be a huge part of the work for all of us, of just being human, and I loved how you talked about the habits that are deeply ingrained and then there’s the opportunity to create some space of awareness, which also leads, or has the potential to lead to a kind of re-wiring and a creation of new habits. I loved how you were talking about your son.

I have kids too and one of the things that I’m fascinated about with my 4 year old is that I will share something informational about maybe what’s happening in that day or just something that I’m thinking, and as I share, it is so obviously just a piece of information that as a dad, I’m going to pass on to my daughter. And often she will say, “That’s not true!” And what blows my mind about that is that in terms of the development of a human brain and human being, at the age of 4, she feels completely clear and entitled to her world view and a recognition that she knows what’s true and what’s best; and is definitely not wired to start with the place of not knowing. So it’s obvious in a 4 year old, but it’s still there, I think, for all of us as we get older—that default that we know how it is, and that we also know what’s supposed to happen. So even in your story about the woman with the dogs, part of the road rage for most of us is that we have an idea that we’re supposed to be somewhere at a certain time and something is in the way of that. And so that thing is wrong, that thing is a problem. And of course if we do breathe into it and create some space, then we have the opportunity to, as you mentioned, develop empathy and compassion in the situation, but also kind of take our foot off the gas of certainty that we actually know what is supposed to happen.

**MS:** It’s such a tricky issue. In social psychology and cognitive neuroscience today, there’s some fascinating research happening. For example, Kevin Dunbar did some research where he was

looking at how scientists debate their hypothesis or the conclusions they reach from their data. So he went around and he studied these scientists and then he was actually able to study them using brain physiology measurement. So he was able to show actually that people have a hypothesis or a premise and sometimes this is true in all of life, but he was focusing on scientists.

So people spend a lifetime formulating their hypothesis and doing the research, collecting the data. What happens is, if new information comes in that supports that hypotheses, the learning center of the brain lights up and we take in that new information, we gobble it up. However, if new information comes in that refutes our hypotheses, the warning center of the brain lights up and we actually go into shutdown. We oftentimes don't even process that information. It just disappears from memory so that we aren't able to learn the new information. In another set of studies that were done, a project out of Yale, they were interested in looking at value systems and they pre-selected people who had opinions, strong opinions for and against particularly provocative issues in our culture, whether it was the global warming question or the right to life issue. And they brought people in and they presented them with identical data. And then afterward they asked the people what their beliefs were and how much they were impacted by the new information that they'd just gotten. And to a significant degree, people left more strongly reinforced in their previous position than they had been before.

So there's a way in which our brains are actually hard-wired to continue believing whatever it is we believe and supporting whatever it is that our value systems hold to be true. And it is very hard for a lot of us to grow and develop and maintain this sense of openness to possibilities that are other than what we have been taught or that we hold as sacred within ourselves. So I think knowing this, knowing that we have a worldview, that the worldview is informed by our pre-conceived assumptions, does allow a kind of opening for people to question those assumptions, and begin to think, "Well, you know, if that's true, what can I do to listen in a new way or to react a little slower next time instead of immediately jumping on the case?" So these are things that we may not be able to solve right away, but I think that we can become informed and therefore begin to train ourselves in new ways.

**RC:** That research and your description of it is really eye-opening and it kind of shows the scaffolding that holds up belief in the way that we see. In workshops that I do, there's a moment where we're focusing on belief and opinion and I ask people to think of an opinion that they feel very strongly about and that is perhaps one they would feel is connected very deeply to who they

are, who they see themselves to be. Then I reveal a list on the flip chart of a number of elements such as race, gender, class, era in history, geographical location, family of origin, peer group, etc., and I ask the people to consider if one or more of these elements were different in your life, is it possible, not for sure, but is it possible that this very deeply held opinion that you have might be different.

And for many people in the room, it's obvious that that's true. But there is usually one or two people who are taking it real seriously and are very good-hearted and are saying I can't imagine any circumstance in which I wouldn't believe, let's say, that animals should be treated humanely—just to pull one idea as an example. So it creates a really healthy dialogue around this issue that you were just describing, the way that belief perpetuates itself.

I'm drawn to ask you, since your work, the way that you're living it, leads you towards an ecumenical point of view around belief and world views, are there beliefs or world views that you notice cause you to contract, that cause you to react, that on a personal level you find it takes you an extra moment to breathe into and allow space for?

**MS:** Well yeah, there are certainly values that I hold. I think that the social inequalities piece or what happened a couple of days ago with the kid experiencing the bullying and feeling that he had no recourse and basically wiggled out, went into the cafeteria and shot a bunch of kids. I hold not a judgment of him, I hold a judgment on society that we allow that kind of behavior, and that a child would be pushed to the edge that way that they experience that kind of suffering. And it's also heartbreaking to me that that kid now is going to be tried as an adult and that there will probably be nothing positive in the future for him. That's deeply sad to me.

So it's not as though I think that everything is relative and there are no places in which we need to put our stake in the ground. There are some values I hold that I think are essential to being together in society, such as not doing harm to others. On the other hand, I think we spend a tremendous amount of our resources on these non-violent crimes that are issues of lifestyle where people are not harming another person and yet we spend an inordinate amount of our collective resources policing and controlling. So things like that. I think violence is something that maybe has a place under certain circumstances, but by and large does not. We can find ways to accommodate another person's point of view without yielding our ground of what we think is important.

The Worldview Literacy Project has been really interesting for us; going into classrooms and working with kids and you can see that there is this wisdom and then when they're out of the classroom they can revert back to those more dysfunctional behaviors. I see it in adults. I see it in the transformational world that we're living in. You can have the most enlightened teacher who has millions of people following them and then see them throw a hissy fit, you know? It's a paradox of who we are and how do you hold that people can be both and that in fact sometimes seeing these teachers do things that aren't necessarily enlightened behaviors is actually an indication of their humanness and an opportunity to take them down off of their pedestal and bring them into the realm of all of us being flawed creatures that are trying to do the best we can.

**RC:** Yeah. And it seems to me that a big dividing line is a person who places him or herself in that role of teacher and has an investment of one kind or another in followers believing that there's something different and superior about their way of being versus the kind of teacher who says, "Well I have something to share and I hope it is of value to you, but I'm also a flawed human being and I'm not here to try to create an impression of anything otherwise." It seems to me that most of the damage happens in the world of personal transformation and spirituality when people, either the teachers or the followers, buy into the idea that somehow the teacher is of a different realm.

**MS:** And they release their own personal power to that person.

**RC:** Right.

**MS:** I think that's where the mistake can come and where victimness can fall into place.

### **3. Technology and Modern Life**

**RC:** Yeah. So I would like—if we could change gears a little bit, because one of the things that somebody will quickly come to see if they dive into your work and your contribution over the last decades is that you're somebody who is very prolific and wide-ranging in your work; and also, in order to do everything that you do, would have to be really, really busy. It seems that something that almost everyone I talk to shares is a sense that things have speeded up and that information is coming in greater volumes and faster than ever; and that our bodies and our brains from an evolutionary perspective were not made for this life that we as humans have co-created. So I'm wondering what that looks like on the inside, kind of behind the curtain in your life. Do you find that you, for the most part, have found a way to create some ease and spaciousness around all that you do or does that show up as a challenge for you?

**MS:** I think it's a both/and. I do think that we're all challenged by all of the inputs, you know, all these weapons of mass destruction we've seen. It's challenging and I think I can start out the day feeling completely ebullient and ready to take it all on and by 9 o'clock at night I'm pretty overwhelmed some days. So I do try to find a balance and probably my key lesson or key insight is forgiveness of self and trying to recognize I can't do it all and if I don't respond to every email or get every article written in as perfect a form as I would like or those grant proposals that need to get out, that I just have to forgive myself and I have to kind of come up with a set of priorities that I absolutely have to do. If I've made a commitment to pick my son up at 3:15, I'm going to make sure if I'm not there, somebody's there to get him.

On the other hand, I think things like emails, people assume you're going to reply to every email or requests for endorsements. I have found that it's a very hard lesson for me, but learning to say no in a graceful fashion is very empowering. And knowing that there are only so many things one can do in the course of a day and that we need to prioritize those things. But there are issues for me right now. I would love to be writing more blogs about what's going on at the Institute of Noetic Sciences in the course of a day or in my life every day. And I often don't have time for that little moment of reflection. I'm a Twitter person. I'm on Twitter and I guess I like it because the 140 characters allows me to communicate, to engage, but it's not the same as writing an essay. So I guess there are different social media that work for different people. But I would like to find a little more time and I'm actually traveling this weekend and I'll be on a plane. And we had some extraordinary things happening in the last couple of weeks; people coming through. We had a Special Ops Team from the Navy and Marines that came in to talk with us about what would happen if the electro-magnetic field collapsed and we didn't have the cellular communication and the standard forms of communication that we have. What would be an alternative kind of information transfer? Well, that's just mind blowing! And I haven't had any time to even reflect on the implications of that, let alone to write about it. So there are things like that every day, truly.

We've had extraordinary people who come to visit, who stumble along the path, who make opportunities open. I'm going this weekend to the conference for Deepak Chopra called Sages and Scientists. And there are going to be so many precious moments in the course of that weekend; I can already anticipate that. And what is sometimes disheartening for me is forgetting those, losing those, because the next extraordinary thing comes along and we've kind of moved on. So I'm kind of archiving that and finding a way to be more vigilant, I guess, in keeping track of some of the

things that are happening. And at the same time, clearing the space for nothing to happen, and I'm actually good about that. I work in my garden or I take long baths or I go for walks. And I think that's an important thing to try to keep the balance.

**RC:** Yeah. I'm thinking about the desire, as you were expressing it, to have an experience and create an opportunity to reflect on that experience and even to kind of give it its place in the archive of our lives. For me, one of the things that demonstrates my own personal approach to that is when I was growing up, movie making was obviously in its infancy in terms of what laypeople could do, so there are some super 8 films of my birthday parties. But that's kind of about it. So if I wanted to know what kind of child I was, I don't have a lot to go on in terms of being able to watch. So when my daughter was born I thought I wanted to do this differently. I wanted her to have an opportunity to see who she was at different times of her life, more in a documentary way rather than something kind of staged or just about celebrations.

So that's a challenge because of all of the requirements of life. And then in addition, when the video camera comes on, often kids change in their behavior and they get frustrated too because they don't want to be filmed all the time. So this is a very small, personal family version of the question you were describing. And I came to a basic decision that what I would do is I would gather snippets of video throughout the year whenever the camera was nearby or I'd grab it if something important seemed to be happening. And there's no way that I would really have the time to finesse all of that, so I would just keep it in the big file and then at the end of the year between Christmas and New Year's, I would carve out a little time to edit and create the movie of that year. And I would keep it short, keep all of the snippets short so that we didn't have that whole eyes glazed over from home movie phenomenon.

So that my kids will be able to look at, "Okay, in 2012 here's a representative picture of where we were all at and what we were doing." That process feels sacred to me. I'm sure I do it imperfectly and some years will be different than others, but it feels sacred because it is along the lines of what you were describing, it's wanting to be present and then also wanting to mark what comes in presence that feels like it's illustrative of who we are now so that we can also honor who we were then when we look back on it. So that's one version of it for me. I would say that I wish I were as mindful about that in other aspects of life or had the time to do it in the way you were describing. So I could really empathize with that whole question, the simultaneous desire to fully experience and to also to be able to reflect and record one's experience.

**MS:** Well I celebrate you doing that. I had some intentions in the first couple of years to do that, and now I've got a whole bunch of little cassettes sitting in a drawer and I haven't even gotten to those, so it's hard. I also think there's something about the freeze framing of life that's happened through digitizing where do we throw things out anymore because you've got a file, it's an electronic file, you put it into electronic thing. So we're not really, I think as a culture now, expressing as much vigilance about what needs to be pushed away, because the easiest thing is to just stick it in a file and keep it and now we're amassing these huge data files that—do we look at them? I mean, how often do we look at them? How much of that stuff do we really need? It's an interesting and peculiar moment, I think, for our culture. How much are we living in the past, living in the future, living in the now?

So we're doing this movie. One of the things that's very interesting to me as I've been collecting all these stories from different traditions about what they think happens after you die, is the whole digitizing of our being. So we now know that you can project a person in three dimension using holographic technology. So that's pretty mind blowing. So you think, "Okay, my grandma, I took pictures of her, I digitized it, I 3D'd it, and I can now call her up in my living room, but she's been gone for 10 years." There's a way in which we have created these kind of complex boundaries between our identity, like who we are, and then what is that digital representation of who we are and our life is becoming this very multi-dimensional and overlapping, almost string theory-like lived experience. I don't know what to make of that, it just kind of came up for me as I was listening to you, but it is a really challenging time, I think, for all of us.

**RC:** Well, yes. And to follow on what you were just saying that if someone, for instance, is drawn to spend a lot of time on Facebook then they're engaged in creating a presentational version of self. Every time they're posting they are thinking or at least hopefully thinking about, "What am I wanting to say? What am I wanting people to know of me." And in a way also trying to control what people know of me and think of me. There's a Facebook persona that is obviously at least one or many degrees of separation removed from a much less mediated experience of that individual. So there's a story of who we are, or who we want to be that we can invest way more time than ever before in creating with way less connection to how we actually live and breathe moment by moment by moment.

**MS:** It goes there to your point of authenticity and who is the authentic self when we have so many different forms of representation and construction of self. I think it's a dilemma. I mean, I don't



think there's an easy solution for it, but I think a program like what you're doing here and the kind of work that I'm engaged in and just the ways in which we can help each other to stay mindful of the kind of meaningful exchanges we can have with one another. You know, it's scary, I tell my son, "Be careful what you post on Facebook because it's not going to go away," and now, even college admission boards are reviewing people's Facebook pages to see if they want that student in their school.

So what somebody's posting at the age of 13 could impact them into the future. We have to be more mindful of that presentation of self. I think there is a stronger need now, with all this virtual communication, for the kind of intimacy that comes when you have one on one communication. When you have the spaciousness to sit down and have an honest communication with somebody. I think in a certain way, there is a nostalgia for that day when we really took a long time to prepare the meals together and we ate together and we talked about our days. Those are the things that we can still bring into our daily practice. And I think they're important things to do.

#### **4. The Inter-Subjective Space**

**RC:** When I facilitate a workshop, there's material that's being shared and there are practices that are being taught and then worked through, but on the first day or first evening when we come together, I talk about co-creating together what we can call the safest room on the planet. And really it's all about a space of deep connection and respect and fundamental acceptance that whoever you are and however you show up, moment by moment here in our group, is going to be accepted and allowed, where there's going to be compassionate space for it.

And I think that something starts to soften and relax in people when they believe that that is true, at least to a large extent. When people leave the workshop, hopefully they take away a learning piece and they have practices to work with. But over the years, I've become convinced that the real benefit for them is just being in that kind of field of loving kindness and acceptance; that people, myself included, are so hungry for that, it feels like a balm for the soul. Even if it disappears a week later in the rush of everyday life, there's even just a small sense memory of what it feels to be like that and to be with others in that. This is my way of saying amen to the idea that we're so craving that ever more because whatever was in the way of it in those times that we might pine for nostalgically, there's so much more in the way of it now.

**MS:** Yeah. That inter-subjective space that we can create meaning together and share in an intentional way, that is a beautiful gift. And I think it would be great to come into one of your workshops. Sounds divine!

**RC:** (laughs) Well, I feel in some ways I'm the luckiest person because to be able to convene that means that I also get to participate in it. So yes, I'm always inspired in that way. We begin each workshop and end each workshop with an eye gazing exercise where everybody just gets to be in silent connection with each other. And on the first night, often it's very difficult for some people. They have to look away, it might bring up a lot, they might cry. But you know, two days later, from having shared this space with one another, if there are tears, they are tears of joy and connection and people are so much more available to be with each other. And it's that quality of beingness and that's something that I wanted to ask you about as we're coming to a close. I've noticed that the people who seemed to be creating a lot in their lives and also experiencing a lot of peace as they're doing that, are people who are finding a way to have their doing come through being. I was wondering if that idea or some version of that idea is important to you?

**MS:** Well, I'm not exactly sure I understand the question, but I know that I can get into a flow state and I do produce a lot of things. And I love that. I love the creative expression; when I can get into a writing jag, I wish I had more time that I could do that. We've just submitted 5 grant proposals in the last 2 weeks. And working as a small team where somebody does some part of the work and then they send it off to the other person who makes some changes and sends it back to another person. And that collaborative spirit of working on something that is bigger than any of us and we're doing it with a sense of purpose because the project's really great and we're excited about it, feeling supported and nurtured by each other, feeling critical of each other in a positive way. Because it's not all about, "Oh that's just perfect! You said it so well!" It's like, "Well, that didn't make any sense at all!" If you can hear that from the space of 'we're helping each other to be our best,'—you know, some people don't like the editor. I think a good, very clear editor is your best friend as a writer because they can help you to make your message clearer.

Yesterday, we had a conversation at the Institute of Noetic Sciences. It's a hard time for all not for profits and organizations like ours; we've been around 40 years and it's in a period of growth and adjustment and self-reflection. There are a group of us responsible for what the core message is; sometimes there is some confusion about what the core message is. Sometimes there is a lack of time to really have an honest conversation about: "Oh this is what I value about it," and somebody

else values something different. And yesterday, for whatever reason, we had this breakthrough conversation where there was some tough love in the room, but there was also a real honesty about our own confusion, our own sense of passion for why we're doing what we're doing and what the gift is that we have to offer. It went an hour longer than it was supposed to; I ended up having to get somebody else to pick up my son so that I could stay in the conversation. We all felt, as we left that room, that we wanted to stay longer. And that's not often the case in these management meetings, I tell you! (laughs)

So how did we find that space where we can really be honest about our own confusion, about where those passions and those values crop up, where they may be different from another person's, and how can we have those conversations with integrity and curiosity? That, for me, is really where, in the spirit of your topic, the transparency comes and we can really take down some of the masks that we wear on a daily basis and begin to be real with one another. Those are the moments that are most precious.

**RC:** Yeah, well I think that was a beautiful answer to my question. Because what I heard you speaking to is showing up in a process in life in a creative moment, whether it's individual or collective, as in the meeting yesterday that you've talked about, where we're willing to open to what is meant to come through here if we aren't clutching our first ego response of what we think is supposed to happen or what we think what we're supposed to create or what we think the organization is supposed to be. What happens when we open to a wider sense of possibility and of inclusion for what's within us, what's within the other people in the room, and what is also here holding all of that. So much more can come through and it often feels so much more beneficial and surprising and leads us to that place where we recognize that it's all coming through us anyway, even if we pretend to be the owners and creators of it. Does that make sense how I described it?

**MS:** Yeah.

**RC:** And so when I'm holding that perspective and when I'm living that, the best stuff always happens and more love occurs within myself and within others. And so that's what I meant in terms of doing from being, coming from that place of greater wholeness and allowing an openness and that's what you spoke to really beautifully.

## **5. Intention**

**MS:** I also think there's something about having a directionality or intention. The outcome may look very different than what you started with, it almost always does, I find that particularly working with groups. Because sometimes it can be so much easier to just do something yourself. I mean, for me it is. I worked with a group and we created this integrated health community and we spent 6 months designing a program. And at the end it failed. The group kind of broke down; we couldn't get the agreement and they just didn't know what to do. I had said about four months in to this thing to one of my associates, "You know, I could do this thing in a couple of hours by myself." And she said, "But that's not the work, Marilyn. The work is that we're going to do this together." And in the end, I ended up in the last two hours pulling the thing together, finding the keynote speakers, and making use of my influence.

So it was a combination, you know? There are moments when it is easier to just get on with it, if you have clarity, and do it. And there are other places where that inter-subjective space of working in a collaboration, developing a field of dynamism, doesn't always mean it's easy or simple, but there's richness in that. So in the being and the doing, it's how to also recognize the autonomy of the self, the need for the collaborative spirit, and having this kind of directionality because if there's a forcing function, it's kind of like in non-linear dynamics—you have your boundary conditions that help to drive the tipping point. I think that's really helpful, whether it's a grant proposal or it's a conference you're organizing or a workshop you're establishing. Even when we sat down to have a meaningful conversation today, it's with that kind of intention; I think it can often be very helpful because it feels more purposeful.

**RC:** Well, you used the phrase 'inter-subjective reality' and I've heard you speak of that a few times in today's talk, which is so important and valuable. It brings me to a question I want to ask you; it's kind of an open-ended question, a way to end our time today. I've been noticing that that inter-subjective reality has a really deep healing potential and that there are models that we use now, like let's say therapy or coaching, in order to move people into a greater sense of peace and wholeness and well-being and success; where you go somewhere, you talk to someone and then you go back and live your life. But they're not really there for you in mutuality at a moment of truth, let's say when your compulsion is taking over, or when you're most reactive about your kids or your partner.

And so I've been exploring in my work and putting the question out there to people: How are the models perhaps changing or what, from an evolutionary perspective, is wanting to be born and how

we can come together with greater intention, as you described, and with more consistency in our connection? So I'm wondering, especially because of the work you do and the broad range of awareness that you have of so many of the experiments on the leading edge of consciousness, what, if anything, do you see, if you look forward two, three, eight decades into the future, what do you see the seeds of now that maybe down the road people will come to know as ways of being, ways of connecting, that will seem common to them and a part of the collective consciousness whereas now people are iffy about them or only small pockets of people are putting their toes in the water? What to you is one thing that you sense is coming through that is going to have value for us as people in the planet?

**MS:** Well, for the good or bad of it, our technology—it's the ways in which we are becoming bionic, we're becoming interconnected, we're becoming fused. In thinking about social change or positive transformations in our collective being, there's a lot of merit. You can look at the shadow side of it but you can also look at the merit of people being able to see their humanness across long distances. Even in the gaming world right now you see these collaborative games where people are coming online. This is one of those choice points that we can make: to begin to direct some of those collective activities towards the nurturing of the well-being of each other in the planet; you can have these games where the incentive and motivation is really about the thriving rather than the killing.

I think that the technology can really be used as a powerful way of showing our interconnectiveness. That's not me being overly clever; I think all of us know that technology is playing an increasing role, and as a parent, there's are moments when it's just mortifying to see how—I just read an article about how people really are in love with their iPhones, like really in love with their iPhones. Their body and the biochemistry is changing as a result of our relationship to this little inanimate object. One can feel dismayed about that or one can begin to see that there is huge possibility that comes when we can communicate with somebody on the other side of the planet in a moment and feel the connection. That is something that I would hold on to.

**RC:** Yeah. So it really comes down in the way that you're describing it, at least in large part, to intention. And what I mean by that is that if we start out with an individual and especially collective intention, then the best version of what you're describing is the most possible. I'm thinking about all the ways in which our society is fractured right now. For instance, here in the United States, it's almost impossible for our federal lawmakers to get anything done because of all the shouting and the polarizing. But I can imagine, based on your inspiration, how different it would be if before any

sub-committee meeting in Congress or community meeting that's about re-doing the sewer system, if we all paused and said not in a woo-woo way, but in a very grounded way, "Let's just, first of all, state our intention," and see if anybody here is in opposition to that, and if there's a way we can make room for their concerns so that before we go forward and create something today or debate something today, we feel that as much as possible we're coming from the same shared understanding of what success would look like for us.

**MS:** I was just talking to somebody about some political reform in education and they were talking about having gone to a debate in, I think it was in Congress, and they were talking about how the polarity and tension was there. She asked people in the group, "How many of you have a child in your life? Stand up." And 100 percent of the people stood up. And then, "How many of you care about what happens to the future of that child?" And they all felt emotionally moved by the question and connected because they had somebody they could associate it with. Then it provided the kind of framework for a conversation that was different than rhetoric and polarities, but was really based on that sense of humanness and our own personal attachment to the innocence of our children.

So at finding that common ground and then moving toward this idea—you know, and I know we're out of time, but this idea of intention for me is a really complex one. I think that we have tended to ignore it; certainly science has neglected it; unfortunately I think the New Age has over-embellished it. So how do we find that the right way of recognizing that intention isn't just as you said, the kind of woo-woo construct? It is about us dealing with some of the complex issues in a way that allows us to move with a common goal toward an object or outcome. When we can harness our intention in that way, recognizing that it requires not just sitting on a pillow and meditating—not that that's bad or that's not useful—but it also requires taking the wisdom that comes from that meditation into our actions so that we can affect positive changes in the world. That's really what we're looking for as we become more transparent, more authentic, more real about what the future holds for all of us.

**RC:** I love that. It feels to me that we've come full circle because what you're sharing is a combination of open-mindedness and open-heartedness. I'm thinking about our listeners out there and I know that they're going to be asking this question, so even though I said that we were done, I have one more for you as a quick follow-up. You said something that has a provocative component to it. I know people will be asking what does that mean. You said that you believe quite honestly that when it comes to the subject of intention that the New Age has perhaps—and this was your

word—over-embellished it. Can you give us a paragraph describing a little bit of what that means to you?

**MS:** I'm a believer in the power of positive thinking. And I believe that intention works at the level of our biology. I think that the mind-body connection is very important. Clearly, the intentions we direct toward another person through expectancy, suggestion, placebo, are very important. I believe there are ways in which our intention can transcend just our physical. A lot of the experiments we've done in our lab are about the intention of one person to influence the physiology of another person at a distance. At the same time, I think we don't truly understand what we mean by intention, how we harness it. And I think there are ways in which people exaggerate it. In exaggerating it, we often then look away from some of the shadow sides of what these kinds of trumped up intentions might mean. Some of the experiments, for example, when looking at distant intention, prayer and healing, it isn't really clear that it's all positive.

Herb Benson did a study at Harvard, looking at cardiology patients. There were three groups. One got prayer, the other didn't but they were blinded as to which group they were in, and a third group got prayer and were called every day to be told that the prayers were praying for them. That group in the expectancy condition actually had a higher rate of mortality than the control group. So this suggests that something is else going on and we shouldn't just overly gloss and think, "Oh, all intention is good and if we're all aiming for it, we're going to get rich." I don't think it's this simple. I really invite people to that: open-minded skepticism is really healthy. Even the Dalai Lama who certainly believes in the powers of meditation and consciousness, will say, "It's time to get off the cushion and go do work in the world. Be effective. Make it happen." And don't just sit and think, "Well, if I think the right thoughts, it's going to manifest." It helps to think the right thoughts; it also helps to take the right action. I would say if people are interested in all of this, the Institute of Noetic Sciences has a lot of information. The Noetic.org website, we have a whole area on the website around prayer and healing and what is all the science on that. We have probably the world's largest searchable database on the science of meditation. It's available for people. We have a lot of tele-seminars.

**RC:** And you have a personal website too, don't you?

**MS:** Yeah. MarilynSchlitz.org. I haven't updated it in a little while, but there is a lot of the articles that I've written there as links and people can download some of my work. And also we'll be

gearing up to do some workshops around World View Literacy. So if people just keep an eye out for that, we would love to have more conversation.

**RC:** Well thank you so much, Marilyn, for a really deep dive today, and especially for showing us just a little bit about how everything that you study and have devoted your life to really impacts you. As a fragile, wonderful, vulnerable human, it's great to get to know you a little bit in that way, and I think it makes studying your work and studying everything that you've brought together that much more impactful and moving. And I'm really moved from this time that we spent today and I've got to offer a heartfelt gratitude for giving me a chance to connect in this way.

**MS:** Well I feel the same way and I look forward to connecting in a workshop or some other face to face. That'll be fun!



**Howard Martin**



Howard Martin is one of the original leaders who helped Doc Children found HeartMath, a company offering a range of products and services to boost performance, productivity, and health while reducing stress. He is currently serving as the executive vice president of Strategic Development, and has developed and produced a number of solutions since the company's inception in 1991. Previously, Howard had a successful career as a musician followed by a financial consulting career. He is a member of Transformational Leadership Counsel and has played a key role in launching the Global Coherence Initiative. He speaks internationally and has appeared in media outlets including: *ABC Good Morning America*, *ABC World News Tonight*, *Discovery Channel*, *CNN*, *New York Newsday*, *Boston Globe*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *US News and World Report*.

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### **1. Emotions: The Transfer Point**

**RC:** A big welcome to you, Howard!

**HM:** Thank you very much, Raphael. I'm glad to be with you today.

**RC:** Well, in reviewing my awareness and understanding of Heart Math in preparation for our interview today, I was made more aware than ever of the harmony that is between the work that I do in the world around emotional connection and the work of the Heart Math Institute, so this is going to be really exciting for me. We're singing from the same hymnal, so to speak.

**HM:** Yes, we are. I mean, emotion and the importance of it and the portion of learning of how to better regulate it is an essential part of Heart Math.

**RC:** These days, there's so much focus on neuroscience and neuroscience research and a recognition of all the ways in which the brain is so much more interesting and powerful and

different than how we've thought all along; and there's also a kind of collective understanding that brain science is the way forward to understand humanity and to shift us more positively in so many ways as we go forward. I'm wondering if ever there's a time where you feel, let's say a personal contraction or a, "Hey, what about..." kind of thing because there's so much wisdom to be had from the heart and there's so much great research and so many tools of Heart Math; do you ever feel like the heart still, after all this time, get short shrift?

**HM:** Well, not so much that. A little bit, maybe, but I think that the neuroscience research is important and we're discovering new things about who we are as human beings and how our consciousness and intelligence works, etc. I take comfort in knowing that part of the changes that are occurring in the world today are actually showing that we have intelligence in other parts of our being as well; and heart intelligence, this intelligence we're born with that has everything to do with our well-being and fulfillment, is coming to the forefront in people's consciousness. The recognition of it is becoming stronger. I think when we look at it from physiological stand point, we have to look at the whole thing as integrated. It's not a competition between heart and brain and all that. It's all part of an overall intelligence we have. But the recognition that intelligence is not just locked into the brain is something that I do think people need to understand.

We have intelligence distributed throughout the entire system, even down to the cells in our body. We need to acknowledge and recognize these types of intelligences. I think what's important also, is we need to understand that there's an intuitive bandwidth of intelligence that we have available to us more than ever now, that we can operate in and it has everything to do with emotions; emotions are the transfer point for that. Intelligence is certainly more than logical, linear intelligence. It's certainly more than memorizing facts and being good on Jeopardy. There's a whole lot involved in what intelligence is and what consciousness is. So heart, brain, neuroscience and new science unfolding about the heart; it's all part of something that I think is important as we now move forward as a global society and a changing species, really.

**RC:** So that's a really integral approach to all of what has been referred to as the multiple intelligences. One of the things that fascinated me for a long time is the way that the digestive system or the gut has more information going toward the brain through the vagus nerve, than from the brain to it. So sometimes doctors have begun referring to your digestive system as the 'second brain'. And in the Heart Math research, as I understand it, there's been a similar recognition that there's a tremendous amount of information coming in many ways from the heart to the brain, and

that—in my understanding, again, this is scientifically demonstrated—the heart actually has cognition, so to speak, of certain kinds of events and experiences before the brain even registers them. Is that correct?

**HM:** That's true. Well, there is a nervous system in a solar plexus and they refer to it as the 'gut brain', but there's a nervous system in the heart and it's the second most complex nervous system we have in our body, the brain being the first. We have this amazing nervous system existing in the heart itself, studied through a field called neurocardiology. It sends information to the brain as well; it sends a lot more information to the brain than it receives from it. What's different about the gut brain and the brain in the heart is this: the gut brain's information terminates in only the lower perceptual centers of the brain, in the medulla; in the instinctual, the very the most basic part of our brain—the reptilian brain, it's sometimes called.

Conversely, the nervous system that the heart has sends information to the brain that goes all the way through the lower centers of the brain, through the mid-level brain where a lot of our emotional processing occurs. It terminates in the higher perceptual centers of our brain, in executive decision-making centers, the neo-cortex. So the information is reaching a different part of our brain, and the nervous system in the heart is far more complex than the one we find in the gut. And that's just one of the things that science has uncovered over the last 20 years. There are really new understandings of even how physiology works and how important the heart is in playing a role other than just being a blood pump.

**RC:** You mentioned something a few moments ago that I wanted to come back to. I think it's really important. You talked about emotions as being the transfer point for being able to take some of this information that's not just conceptual or brain oriented and being able to have access to it and also being able to work with it for one's highest good and by extension, the highest good of all. Can you speak a little bit more about that idea of emotions as the transfer point?

**HM:** Sure. If you think about it, if you even think about just the context of intuition, intuition is often a feeling, isn't it? Something we experience as a feeling or a knowingness, it bypasses sort of the digits of logic and comes into an inner knowing; sometimes it's thoughts, but a lot of times it's just a good feeling sense. An example might be let's say in our businesses, when you need to hire someone, we look at the resumes and all that. But when we walk into the room and we sit down with someone we're interviewing, there's a feeling, right? An intuitive sense of 'this is the right

person for our organization'. So it's more than just thought; emotion plays a big role in that—what are we actually feeling? To me, emotion is this great gift we have: we can feel; human beings can feel more than any other living thing on this planet.

There's a myriad of emotional textures we have available to us. I see them as the colors on an artists' palette we paint the picture of our life from. It's through the emotions that so much is transferred. Intelligence enters our system and sometimes it manifests in thoughts or impressions or visual images, but so often it's this feeling sense that we get about things. That's that transfer point. Because we live in a field of energy, a consciousness field that is reflecting back to us, not just what we think in our minds, but especially what we feel in our heart. We're constantly interplaying with this information field, and quantum physics is beginning to uncover more about that now: we're pulling information in from a variety of sources and from a larger information field. It's through the emotions that we experience this first. It transfers itself then into the thoughts, into the impressions, etc., but it's a feeling state that we have.

So the emotional regulation piece, I think, is a missing piece in unfolding consciousness. We want to develop the mind, we want to develop our intellect and our understanding of certain things and we will put emphasis on our physical body; we're doing things with our health and our exercise, etc. in order to be, in a way, more fit for consciousness expansion. But very often we don't put nearly as much emphasis on how we use this great gift we have, this great gift of emotion. Emotions still have this stigma: we don't want to look at these things, or emotion is soft. That's another sort of characterization of emotions. So we sort of let emotions run us instead of having some conscious control over them; in the process of that, we not only get beat around by emotions, we miss the gift.

**RC:** Yeah. Now, I just absolutely resonate with everything that you're saying. And what I share with people is that when it comes to accessing intuition, you need to be open emotionally, and also able to connect emotionally, meaning that if you are resisting your emotions, it will cloud your ability to recognize intuition or to perceive it accurately. And this transfer point, to use your term again, for me, requires that we actually know how to locate and tune into our emotions in our physical body; this is what's so challenging for most people. We don't get education about that, even today, most of us. Even in more progressive realms where people are teaching what's called social and emotional learning and they're focusing on emotional regulation, they often actually jump to the idea of regulating or managing our emotions before we even have the opportunity or give ourselves the time to feel them fully. It's my sense that when we feel our emotions fully, we

harmonize and get to a place of greater presence and expansion and then can actually be responders rather than reactors, and come from a more heart full place. It seems to me that's something also that has been demonstrated by Heart Math, would you agree?

**HM:** Yes, I agree with all of that. I think that most of what we feel, we don't notice. This talk about subconscious emotions—it's not about subconscious, it's about what I call the subtly conscious. It's this river of emotion running under our perceptions 24/7. When we slow down just a little bit and we tune into that, we see a lot that's going on in there in terms of what we're actually feeling, and that's a very important step in the process of regulating emotion. I want to be clear to you and to the listeners that when I speak of regulation, I'm not talking about repressing. I'm talking about looking at what we are feeling and making conscious choices over what we want to feel and making choices to choose whatever we want to feel. There's no emotion that's bad. I will say that certain emotions benefit us more to lead us closer to our fulfillment than others do. So it becomes a matter of maturely looking at what we're feeling and saying, "Oh, gosh! I don't want to feel anxious or upset about this right now. I'm going to regulate that, I'm going to choose something else." You've acknowledged it, you've felt it, you've looked at it. And at the same time, you're not going to allow it just be there, you're going to move it to another direction because you know that's what you want to do. That seems to be intelligent choice.

So regulation really starts with observing to your point earlier: you have to slow down enough to see what you're actually feeling. The pace of life today, the speed of which we're moving, the speed of which we're getting information and input. we end up living life from the neck up, for the most part; the roar of ambition and survival begins to drown out the more subtle and more refined voice of the heart, which can look into things like emotions in a different way, discriminate them, and also provide the impetus and the power to go ahead and shift them when we find ourselves in a places where we don't want to be. I've said it before, people want higher states of consciousness. One of the highest states of consciousness that I think we can have as a human being, especially now, would be to have the ability to feel like we want to feel, when we want to feel that way. And that gets into regulation. So it's not suppressing, it's not saying you're not feeling anger or things like that; it's about balance, it's about really looking at what's best for us, what's best for the whole, really. What's best for those around us and for everything that we do? And then they can make some choices to shift those emotions back to something that regenerates us and feels better.

## **2. Re-Wiring the Brain with Greater Heart Coherence**

**RC:** Yeah, and I think that what we're talking to right now is it's worth spending a little bit more time with because there's so many concepts here that can be hijacked or misunderstood. I love what you described as subtly present emotions as opposed to subconscious, because they are there and they are available for us to tune into, I believe, if we choose to. One of the challenges we have when there are difficult or challenging emotions, is that our primitive brain, you called it the reptilian brain earlier, can't really distinguish between an internal threat or an external threat. So it perceives sometimes, let's say loneliness or jealousy or longing or grief, the same way it does footsteps in a dark alley. It wants to shut us down and protect us from those emotions and it's only by tuning in and being willing to open up to those subtle emotions or the subtle dimensions of those emotions that we actually can rewire our brain to recognize, "Oh, that painful emotion isn't life threatening. If I feel my way through it, then I will get to the emotional state that I would like to. But I can't go around it; I can't block it. I've got to go through it." Does that reflect your understanding as well?

**HM:** Yeah, I think what you're saying is we have some outdated equipment going on right now. The emotional response patterns that have been built over many, many thousands of years that have been used successfully to navigate life in different times. But now things have changed and we have so much input coming in that we're almost in overload; our emotional processing capacity is in overload mode right now, just from stimulus and from the information we can see. I think that's the bad news. The good news is I do believe that we are evolving very quickly and we are developing new capacities all the time and it's happening much, much faster than it ever has before. We're sort of defying time, in a sense, with how quickly human beings are changing; part of that change is coming from our ability to better deal with the amount of emotional responses we have. But we've still got some old programs in there and we have to rewire those in order to really ride these waves of change with more poise and more grace. That's where heart intelligence comes in.

At a physiological level, another concept for everybody: more heart coherence, which is really an improvement in the communication between heart, brain and body. That heart coherence really begins to change neural pathways in the brain. Then it's easier to make emotional choices that regenerate. It's easier to feel emotions that feel good to us, like care and love and compassion and those kinds of feelings. But it takes a little practice and a little work, and the trainings that we do, and we do trainings all over the world with all kinds of different audiences, and depending upon the audience, but a lot of audiences—what's interesting, Raphael, is that some of our techniques require activating a positive emotion, and people have a hard time doing it.

**RC:** Yes! As a matter of fact, I do an exercise to begin every workshop where I ask people to activate a positive emotion, and after it's done I ask people to raise their hands if they weren't able to do that, if they weren't able to find one particularly in their body. And just to concur with your observation, there's always at least one and often many more people who raise their hand because they don't have that facility. So I think that we're all carrying, let's say, that evolutionary baggage to one degree or another, and you described the way that heart coherence is probably the best way that we have going forward to live in this overloaded time; that brings me to a personal question I want to ask you. It'll just take a moment for me to get there. I want to speak more generally first. So what I find is that when I'm working with people around these themes and practices that we're talking about today, they come to recognize very quickly that that state of coherence is the place from which they can function the most peacefully, the most positively, and in the world, the most successfully; it's as if the wind is at your sails when you're coherent. Instead of efforting and pushing the boulder up the hill or seeming like one has to do that, you start to experience flow and synchronicity. And yet, most people also then come to a recognition that the type of world that they're surrounded by and the way that they've been living and what's required of them to live in this world that we have right now is... I guess maybe the simple word to describe it is insane.

People really want to get off the bus somehow, or maybe it should be like a hyper speed train, to make the metaphor work, because they find that if they're really listening to the coherent message from their heart and that synthesis that you described of mind, body, and heart, that this doesn't work; how we're living today doesn't work. And then they're stuck with the question of "How can I participate in our culture and our society without dropping out and still have the degree of well-being that I long for?" I know that Heart Math has many approaches and tools for that purpose. But I'm wondering, just personally again—do you ever find that a challenge? Do you ever hear your heart wisdom saying, that in order for you to experience your greatest well-being, you can't participate in the way that the world lures most of us towards doing?

**HM:** Yes, Raphael, I do. I feel it all the time. But I have to be careful with myself to not come at it from a judgment perspective that something's wrong, I'm better than them, or those kinds of things. It's really got to be coming at that whole understanding and that integration from a more compassionate place in me. I can have better days and worse days in that regard. There are times when I have to just step back and say, "You know, obviously it's not going to work for me this way, I can't live in the same ways, I can't do the same things that people do—I just don't function that

way,” but I don’t have to see myself as better than in a certain way for starters. I just need to function in a way that allows me to fully participate.

When the judgments are gone, it allows me to move back into those situations, whether it’s relationship stuff with people and I have to do a lot of business in a lot of things; whether it’s environments and I have to expose myself to all the travel that I do and that sort of thing; I just have to do it from a more loving place. As I do that, it helps to balance out the things going on in my own system. It just makes me more perceptual about that. It allows me to connect with people and where they’re coming from, so that it’s easier for me to interact with them and to understand them. But it all starts with me getting right inside myself first, and that goes back to emotional regulation. Am I experiencing a sense of frustration and judgment about these things or am I coming at it from a place of more balance and understanding and compassion?

**RC:** So I want to say that I really appreciate that distinction, and I certainly didn’t mean to bring a presumption of judgment or better than to a coherent place versus a non-coherent place, because in fact, as you suggest, we come to greater degree of compassionate acceptance of all that is when we’re coherent. And yet at the same time, that brings us into a place, I believe, of greater discernment where we can see what’s working and what’s not working with greater clarity; even though we don’t bring a right/wrong, good/bad approach to it. So I’m wondering, just as a follow-up question, when you’re tuned in and coming from that compassionate place, do you choose how you interact with the world in a different way, maybe, than somebody who hasn’t had the opportunity to tune in that way? How do you consciously determine what kind of media, for instance, you’re going to allow into your life because of the impact it has on your heart, your brain, your body, etc.? How do you personally do that?

**HM:** Like media, like what I’m going to look at, etc.?

**RC:** Well, like TV, internet, social media. Right now, people, they’re getting bombarded with the idea that, as the Sprint commercial said a few years ago, instead of *be here now*, be *there* now. So people have more opportunities to not be present to their felt experience, and I’m not even making a judgment about it, I’m just saying that you could live in a presentational, technological field for most of your day if you choose to, through your smart-phone, through your laptop, through your television, etc. And I’m just wondering, I think the listeners would gain a lot from just knowing personally, how you choose to navigate all of that in your life.



**HM:** That's really an interesting question. It's actually very funny, in a way, because I've been on to some of that lately. One of the things that I just finished doing about a week ago is something I've periodically done—it's the 3<sup>rd</sup> time I've done what's called 'take a news fast'. I'll usually go about 1-2 weeks, and I call it a 'news fast'. During that time, I don't watch the news on TV. Sure, I have to be online for various things, but I'll open up the browser and I just won't look at it, I'll just go to the bookmark or whatever I need to do and I just don't get involved in that and I don't engage myself in the story. It gets pretty interesting because part of what sort of brings me into that stimulation and puts a lot of information in my mind that I don't necessarily need is sports. I like to follow sports. But you can get lost in the story. Who's whipping up on who and all that, and it just ends up being, "Okay, it's not bad, but it's just taking up consciousness."

So I'll back down the whole news thing for, like I said, a week, sometimes maybe even two weeks. If something big came up, I would know—if there's some major catastrophe in the world or some major event or some kind of positive event—I would hear about it. It gets to you. It's not like you can, in modern life, just escape from all of that. But on the general stuff, with all of the different things that are going on in this world, the stories that are being pushed at us and the involvement in those stories, I just ignore that for a while. Now, going back to the previous comments that I made, I'm not doing that from a position of, "This is ridiculous, I hate this stuff, and the news is terrible. I'm not going to watch it!" It's not that energy at all. It's just saying, "Okay, you can get lost in this story and there are so many other things you can be doing." Especially for other people, and being present for other people and for clearing your consciousness out in a way that allows for new things to come in; new creativity, new understandings, new insights about yourself, about your others, about life. So back off on the news for a while and give yourself some space, but it isn't coming from me just hating the news or I don't want to know about this and these people are crazy, you know, that sort of thing.

### **3. The Role of the Heart in Politics**

**RC:** Right! I think that many of the people I come across and who might be listening to this series can really relate to the idea of a 'news fast' and they hopefully are able to come at it from a place that you're describing. I know all of us, from time to time, may enter into a little bit of judgment about all of that overload. But coming from the more accepting and compassionate place that you were describing, I want to ask a question which is kind of the flip side of the first one that I just

asked; which is, from your perspective, even though the work of Heart Math is, of course, non-partisan in every way—it's available to everybody, from every walk of life—do you find in any way that your experience or the research has shown that the heart is a political organ?

What I mean by that is, there are so many issues that face us in our society where there's screaming matches between one side or the other, which, of course, isn't helpful and just adds to all the noise we've been talking about. But when people tune in to their heart, do certain values tend to emerge that might chart a course for us through different issues, particularly in the political sphere? I want to be clear: what I mean is just the realm of power—how power is used and applied in our world to move us either toward directions of sustainability or often towards places of destruction, etc.; what does the heart have to teach us, if it has anything to teach us, about how we can engage more successfully in the political sphere?

**HM:** Well, certainly it puts us in touch, Raphael, with more of what I call our authentic self: what's really important, what our true values are, and all that. It just gives us insight into that and also an alignment with that; from that, perception is going to come. Perception is about things like the political landscape and what's going on there and how power works and what we want to align with and what we want to support, etc. Again, it goes back to, the previous comments; it's one of the things that is so easy to fall into judgment on—all these political situations, right? There's also a story that can go on in there; it's a story we can be telling and playing at inside ourselves; it's also an easy story to engage others in.

So I'm really careful of that. I mean, there's the old saying, "Two things you don't talk to people about is religion and politics," right? And you don't ask a woman her age or how much she weighs. I mean, these are basic principles built into me by my mother and father. But it's easy to fall into those conversations. I think again, it comes at it from—politics can evoke so much strong feeling, so much opinion, and that can often be so judgmental. I've experienced a lot of that. Of course, I will be honest with the listeners, I was not a fan of our last president and he brought up a lot of judgments for me about a lot of things, and I found myself getting caught up in that and I had to step back and realize, "Okay, I don't have to agree with this, but I don't need to let this type of emotional judgment poison me and cloud my perception about other things."

So I needed to step back and to not agree with what's going on there. And then as I began to look at it, I found I could have more understanding and more compassion and more respect for something

that he was and that he was doing, even though I was not going to agree with the direction he was taking the country, etc. That was coming from a choice and need based upon my values, based upon me being in touch with my authentic self and then able to adopt strong beliefs or codes or an internal compass regarding these things.

**RC:** Yeah. So in workshops that I do, there's a particular exercise in which we focus on opinion and the power of opinion to divide us from one another, and also the power of opinion to keep ourselves separate from our loving kindness. It seems like the more we tune into the heart's intelligence, the more we are able to hold our opinions more loosely and more lovingly and not be hijacked by them into a kind of an Us versus Them type of orientation. At the same time, our heart, I believe, often calls us through a clarification of those values that you were just describing, to take action.

So I'm really passionate about what I would call a heart-based activism. Sometimes a situation in which we see something that feels like it would really not be helpful for the highest good, as we see it, might bring out what I would call "Loving No"—our ability to stand with an open heart and proclaim a value on behalf of ourselves, our human brothers and sisters, our animal friends and the nature that surrounds us, and still go forward with the power to serve all of that that I just mentioned. Does that resonate with you as a possibility? Can you see a heart-based activism even if you're not speaking to a particular issue or another?

**HM:** Yes, I can. I also think that's a great exercise that you take people through in your workshops, about opinion like that and finding a sort of heart-centric approach to opinion. That's a skill, it takes a lot of maturity to do that, it takes sensitivity. I think that is a part of a heart intelligence package; the type of intelligence that we associate with the heart gives us that ability. I think that there is a way you can have definite actionable steps that you take in things, and that you can move forward with purposeful intent. And I think a lot of people are inspired to do that, but it's a slippery slope that requires constant maintenance or whatever techniques and things people can get, like the ones from your workshops or other things like that. I think it's important that they are reapplied as we move into a sort of heart-centric activism so that we keep it that way. That's a powerful activism. Truly coming from that intelligent heart and not some squishy heart, but that higher intelligence, that higher bandwidth of heart intelligence; that's when something can get done. It's clean, it's clear, it's precise; it's not caught up in the other frequencies of judgment and blame and all that. From that place—that's a powerful activism. I think that's great; I do agree with you; I think it's

something that you aspire to have and something that would require a constant maintenance to keep it that way, as I said earlier.

**RC:** When I was reading a little bit more about you personally and the work that you do, I noticed that some of the teachings that you have done are for the armed forces. I'm wondering if you could speak to how Heart Math and the wisdom there, would or wouldn't apply to an organization like the armed forces; where are there values that are being upheld? Because at the same time, for people who joined the armed forces, they're taught in most ways to obey orders, to not follow their emotions, and ultimately—there's no reason to say it any less boldly than this—they're taught to kill. So how does the wisdom of the heart come into play on that kind of an environment?

**HM:** Well, the way we approach it is two-fold, Raphael. We do training in the military, and a lot of it now is pre-deployment training. It's actually equipping them with some skill set before they go into the theater. And then, of course, we work on the other side of that with the military mental health professionals in VA hospitals and military facilities when people come back with PTSD and things like that, to help them reintegrate back in. So we're working going in and we're working coming back home. I think the way we approach it is these are people and they have a job and we want them to be as balanced as they can within that job. We want them to be able to do what they do and not have to take them out, not have to cause them to experience PTSD to the same degree or to make decisions that are going to be not good for the whole there, like some of the things that have been in the news recently.

So it's tricky, and a lot of people we train in the military are actually not in the position to kill anybody. I mean, I think for every person who's on a frontline situation, that's manning a gun, there's eight behind them. So we train a lot of people in the military that are on the positions of doing that, but we have trained special forces people as well. We're trying to create operational efficiency in them; we're trying to keep them clear emotionally as they go about what they do. They are going to experience a myriad of emotions. It's not that they're unemotional people at all, but we want them to be able to experience things in an emotional way that allows them to protect themselves, for starters, and also be able to function within those environments in the most clear way that they possibly can.

And if you think about it, warfare today, the way we're trying to conduct it, is changing some. There are times when we have to do certain things, but military people on the ground, a lot of times

they're in a different sort of role now. In Afghanistan, for example, they're trying to integrate into the society itself and not have to shoot anybody as a goal. Sometimes it goes the other way, of course, but that's—it's just helping them as human beings, really; I guess, is a simple way of saying that, and they have a job like other people have jobs. We don't see this as good, bad, right or wrong. Heart Math has got to bring a neutral approach to things and we're trying to equip people to be the best people that they can be with whatever they do for a living.

#### **4. The Plate**

**RC:** Okay. Thank you for clarifying that. I'd like to, if we could now, just take a moment to talk a little bit about you, a little bit more on the personal front, because you spoke about some of the skills that we can learn in terms of coming into a place of creative coherence. And for each of us, that journey looks different and particularly when we find the places that are the most challenging for us, both within ourselves, those aspects of our own identity that are most difficult for us to accept, to open up to and to heal through, and then also those things that trigger us in our external environment, particularly our relationships.

I'm wondering where in your life today you're finding that it's especially important to call upon the practices and principles of Heart Math, because otherwise, you might sort of fall into your triggers or lose the kind of awareness with which you would like to bring to everything. What's particularly challenging for you? We talked about the news so far, is there anything else you want to share?

**HM:** Oh yeah, that's easy, really. It's all about the amount of things that I have to do. I call it 'the plate', what's on my 'plate', and the amount of things that are scheduled and all of the activities that I have. Because I work in multiple ways here at Heart Math, I have a lot of different responsibilities. It can get overwhelming and an overloaded feeling to me; and when it gets that way then my attitude is not right about things and I begin to question things; and I'm not there for people the way I need to be for people. It's when I have communication errors or things that have to be gone back over and need to get cleaned up later.

So it's really about how do I manage that better, how do I maintain a certain balance and equilibrium and doing what I have to do and doing it from the right place so that it regenerates me, so that it allows me to do well at what I do; but also so that I hold to my heart, to my principles, to the care that I want to put out. Every single day, I try to put kindness and patience and care in front of every single thing that I do. I approach each day from the perspective of continuous growth: what am I going to learn today? How can I be a better person at the end of it? And then the other part of

that is my life needs to be about service, so what am I going to do today that is going to be of service to others?

So those are the things that I aspire to do. What gets in the way of that can be reactions to all the various things that are going on in my day and all the things that I have to do. And I think for a lot of people today, overwhelm is one of the big things that we all are dealing with. I can certainly hit places in my system of overwhelm; I can go very immediately to that. I was away this weekend, speaking. Speaking is one of the things I love to do. It takes a lot of energy. I have the energy output from the stage; you've got the energy of dealing with the audience offstage; all of the things you have to do the book signings and the picture takings and all that happen and it's a lot of fun, but it takes a lot of energy.

Sometimes the next day I have what I call 'speakers hangover', where I feel more depleted from that and conscious of the fact that I can be more vulnerable to things. Just flying home on the airplane yesterday and thinking about the schedule for today, it was starting to cause this feeling of angst. I started thinking about the resources that I don't have, the changes that needed to be made internally to facilitate certain things that are going on; and then it goes into why haven't we done this and why haven't we done that; and that gets into why haven't they done this or why haven't they done that. So that's when the attitude is headed the wrong direction, that's when my emotional energetics are in a downward spiral. Then it all gets out of hand and I'm sitting on an airplane fuming, but it is in there.

It's emotions and thoughts and things that I'm feeling that are not productive. And at that point, it's when the Heart Math tools and what I've learned in all these years of work have to be applied. I can't sit there and let that to continue to go on. I have to be better than that. So I have to stop and recognize what's happening by acknowledging the subtly conscious thoughts that are floating around in there and the emotions that are associated with them and then making an adjustment back. At least be more neutral about these things and saying let's take a position in neutrality.

So I get up this morning and I'm looking at the calendar and I suddenly find that there may be a change in schedule where a film interview that I was supposed to do this afternoon, they would like to move it to a different date. That makes better sense for me, so there's one out of the way. So I don't have to do the film interview this afternoon. Then I had another meeting on my calendar, right after this one, an executive strategy meeting, and it got moved. So suddenly this big bad day that I

could've just had a lot of angst over if I had let it run is not so big and bad after all. So I'm having the opportunity to have a great conversation with you, which is fun for me, and I've got some other meetings and things today but I don't have this sort of big, long meeting and I don't have a film interview. So life rearranges itself.

So what's the big deal? The point is that whether it rearranges itself or not, I'm responsible for what I feel. And I have to be responsible for that, not in some big disciplined kind of way, but just in a good old common sense, "Howard needs to be a good man," kind of way, and to arrest things as they come up as best as I can. If I can't shift something completely, life is life, it is what it is, then at least I can be more neutral about some things, so that I don't let things run away with me and create unnecessary emotional stress.

**RC:** I really appreciate you sharing that and being open about that with our listeners. The gist that I was hearing was that when you either are overwhelmed in the present or you anticipate something in the near future that might be overwhelming or stressful because there's so much happening that it makes it more challenging to get to that place of neutrality, you may find yourself reacting more or being less generous in the way that you deal with yourself and all the people around you. And that really brings up a question that may be an echo of something we talked about earlier. There are many people—and I know I would include myself in this—who really want to live from a heart full place and find the same stress that you do by overwhelm. Especially in today's economy, they look to try to find the places where they can take things off their plate, where they can focus in on what really matters; and still because of the way the world is organized, it's not just an individual choice of course, because the way the world is organized right now, they still find it hard to just take care of the basic needs of themselves and their families without ascribing to a level of overwhelm.

So I guess what I'm trying to say is that I hear all the time and I experienced it in my own life, in my own family, that this overwhelm and overload is unavoidable unless we decide somehow to check out of society, to go live in an ashram or some kind of commune. I don't even know exactly what, because it's more of an idea than a reality. So I guess what I'm wondering is, do you see that? I'm wondering do you feel that humans—because you said we're evolving very quickly earlier—do you feel that we can evolve to such a way that we can live at that degree of overwhelm more skillfully? Enough so that we can take it moment by moment, be heart fully present, or do you feel that as we tune in, we're reaching certain limit points? Recognizing that the way that we're living with that degree of overwhelm isn't sustainable for us.

**HM:** I think it's both, Raphael. I think, first of all, there is new awareness, new consciousness, new bandwidths of consciousness that are coming in to view today. One thing I'd like to point the listeners to is go to the Heart Math websites: HeartMath.com, HeartMath.org, Globe Coherence Initiative, any of those, and download *The State of Ease* booklet, it's free. It's a technique designed around an energy or a frequency that's coming into the planet through the new bandwidth unfoldment associated with these changing times. It's a simple technique, and some information around it, that we can all use. I certainly use it to help navigate these changing times better.

So yeah, we are developing new capacities and we are getting help. There's a newness to things that gives us the ability to adapt and go. At the same time, yes, some changes have to be made and they will come. They will come societally, and they will come individually because we can't keep doing things the same way we're doing them now. We can't keep living the same way that we're living now. There will be some changes coming and we'll be making our own changes. I don't think we can run from things right now, we cannot hide, we can't shirk our responsibilities. If we try to run, it will find us someplace else, until we make the change on the inside, first. But there are some changes that will need to be made in terms of how we operate as a global society. I think they're coming. But we can't stay in the same pace, the same level of overload forever. It isn't working; it's affecting everything from the quality of life to our physical health—all of that is up for review right now. So the answer to your question, again, is it's both. We have greater capacity to deal with these things now and more of that is coming, but at the same time, we also have to be smart enough to make the changes we need to make individually and collectively.

### **5. Heart Coherence Preparation**

**RC:** Okay, great. Thank you for that. We're coming to the close of our time today and I want to ask you another personal question. You speak in the world of Heart Math about prep and bringing one's principles and practices into play before we go into a situation that may be challenging for us or just a situation in which we would like to be at our most coherent. So I'm wondering if you could share with the listeners, for you, what are the most important elements of that kind of prep when you are entering into a situation that may be overwhelming or stressful in the ways that we've just described, and what do you rely on to get you as quickly and as fully to the place where you want to be?

**HM:** Well, the way I look at it is through the concept of energetic field environments; we know that every living thing generates an energetic field of some kind. We are living in a sea of energetic



fields; and that the energetic field environment that we create is being fed by our feelings and our emotions. That's what feeds the field— it's whatever we're feeling. And so the first thing that I do in preparing for something—and when I talk about prep, it just can even be a few minutes before I go into another meeting or another call. It's just taking some time to go in, make contact with my heart, make contact with the better part of myself, and put out more love and care and compassion and feed the field that I'm producing with that; and then in the, let's say, meeting situation, to carry that in there, first of all. And regardless of what anybody else does, whether it's up and down and all around, I try to hold to that field environment that I'm bringing out. It doesn't mean that the meeting's going to go great just because I did that, and it doesn't mean that everybody in the meeting is going to be an angel because I'm trying to do that, but I'm responsible for myself. And so what it does, is it allows me to deflect stress before it happens.

Sometimes when I'm prepping, the sort of conceptual framework of my prep would be, "Don't react the same way you usually do when they do what they do." Because it's a predictable pattern to me. So "Don't go in there and be the little jerk you can be sometimes. And don't be in there trying to muscle anybody around or get defensive when they don't want to see it your way." All the little stuff that I've done in the past. So I would just say, "Nope, not going to be that guy today, I'll be somebody else today; I'm going to feed the field—I'm going to bring more understanding, be more compassionate, more patient with things." That's what I take to the meeting. It can be 5 minutes, it can be 3 minutes to do that. The effectiveness of it, however, is how sincere I was in doing it. Was it cursory? Was it just running from one thing to the next going, "Oh yeah! I've got to remember to prep now!" Or did I really take that time and take that 3 minutes and slow down the vibratory rate of my emotions and found that place inside that puts out that love and that care and that compassion and feel it, and then feed the field with that and then go to the meeting. So the question is always around what was the degree or sincerity in my application versus just remember to do something and running from one thing to the next like a chicken in his cutoffs.

**RC:** I got it. So I was speaking in an interview the other day to Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt of the world of Imago Relationship Therapy. And they were sharing that there was a period of time where they realized that although they were the happy, healthy marriage experts, that they did not have a happy, healthy marriage and they're quite candid about the fact that they needed to stop teaching and work on their relationship before they could go out and with integrity, continue to teach what they did. So I'm wondering along those same lines, are there meetings, are there

moments, or have there been times in the world of Heart Math where the people have had to say, “Hey, hold on! We are not living up to our teaching or we’re being especially challenged here and we’ve got to do some kind of reset to get back to what we know and what we believe.”

**HM:** Sure! It’s like our founder Doc Childre says, “Look, nobody’s going to get it right and be perfect.” There’s going to be stuff that comes up and sometimes it could get heated at meetings, and all that’s part of reality. I’ll put it in a different context. They are founders of us here at Heart Math, we employ over a hundred people in these facilities we have here now. And probably 70 percent of those 100 people are not part of the founders group.

So they can come with expectations about coming to work for Heart Math: these people are going to walk around and are not going to be in heart all the time. I explain up front to people when I’m talking to them that you all have these things where people are not in total coherence with each other. But here’s what you need to look for. Not look at whether there are problems that come up or not, but look how they are resolved and look how quickly we resolve them. So it’s the process of resolution that I think separates us here. To be able to work through these things more quickly and work through them in a different kind of way, that’s what stands out to people who observe us and observe our behaviors in the work environment because life is life. Speedy changes are happening. Heart Math is a busy place.

All that’s true and it’s about how do we carry ourselves in general and then if stuff does come up, how fast do we get back to where we know we need to be— living the base of that we teach and that we put out to the world. I think there’s the beauty in that and taking myself out of the equation, it’s not about me, but when I look at the organization itself and I look at how it functions and I look at how people conduct themselves here, I can take some pride in that. I think we do pretty good at that. But certainly there can be times when there can be some tension in a meeting or something because we’re having to make decisions, and so not everybody agrees all the time.

**RC:** Got it! So just a couple of last questions. One not personal, the other, personal. I’ll go with the not personal first. In many of the spiritual circles that I’m familiar with, and that I travel in, people refer to the heart center or sometimes the heart chakra, and that, of course, is different in a certain way from the heart itself as the wise organ that Heart Math describes. I’m wondering for you, does that distinction matter? Or, if I tune in to my heart center and I feel a sense of loving kindness and

compassion right in the center of my being, but not within my pumping heart itself, are those emanations of the same thing or do you see that as somehow different?

**HM:** No, they're the same thing. It's like we talked about, the energetic heart and heart intelligence really is dimensional in nature, so there's definitely an energetic component to it. All the physical heart is in that context is just a representation of it on a physical level, which, it's a pretty amazing representation if you think about the physical heart. But the heart center is just located in the center of your chest. It's an energetic heart. That's where the real information exchange is occurring. That's where the real magic is happening, through the energetic heart. The physical heart was something that—we looked at the physical heart differently, doing the research that we did so that we could give this notion of an energetic heart or a heart chakra or whatever; to give it some context, give it some groundedness so that there's a better understanding of these things. What we discovered was that the heart was an information processing center of the body, not a pump only.

**RC:** Got it. Okay. So last question for today is when you look at your life as it is right now and you think of what we might call your growing edge, the place where you see that you're opening or growing or changing or healing in a particular direction, such that a month from now or even a year from now, there'd be something different, something more positive or fulfilling for you. In your life right now, what is that? Just speaking to whatever arises in this moment. I know, in my own life, I have a family and I sometimes can be kind of bossy in terms of "Let's go, everyone!" and I seem to know what's best for our schedule, for our day, and so I'm growing in terms of finding a rhythm that meets everybody's needs and that isn't so directed from a kind of a top-down or cheerleader type of approach. In your life, what are you working with, perhaps in a similar way?

**HM:** Well, in this kind of thing, I would say I'm working on three things. One, I'm working on being a much better listener. I'm a pretty good talker. I need to be a much better listener. The second one would be I need to really be more fully present with people on really refined levels, like with Doc, someone who's known me for 40 years. He points out things, like the ability that I have to be sort of split screening things in life. I can be in a meeting or be with somebody and be right there on one level and be off someplace else and working them both, but it does create a sort of separation or split screen and sometimes people pick up on it. I need to knock that off, I need to work on that more and really become better at being right there with whatever I'm supposed to be right there with. That's one that I'm working on. And it all adds up to the third one, which is I'm trying to keep always removing separation. Separation within myself, separation within my

relationships, separation within the context of Heart Math and the whole, and separation from what's going on in the world today. I want to be a part of that. I want to be integrated into it all in a way that's got less of my personality in it and more of my care in it. And these three things would be where I'm trying to go.

**RC:** Beautiful! And when you make that intentions clear and then you put it into action, do you focus primarily on the Heart Math approach to get there or are there additional, other pieces that you bring in.

**HM:** Well, of course being part of Heart Math since its inception and having worked on myself from a heart-centric place for years before that, it's going to be brought back mostly to that kind of thing. Although I respect and honor a lot of different things that people are doing, different personal growth, spiritual traditions, all of that, and they all intrigue me and I love them all. Anything that takes people deep within, I'm into that. But my methodology's going to pretty much default to that which I have known and that which I helped create and that I teach.

**RC:** Okay. Well, I just want to make a deep bow of appreciation to you as a teacher. I know you said a few moments ago you're a pretty good talker and you want to be as good a listener, and I appreciate that, but I do want to just really honor your power of communication because I think that you speak to some very subtle things, in a way that is graspable for just about anybody, and that your relatability creates in you a messenger that we really need. So I want to thank you so much for being that messenger today in our call and also throughout the world in all the work that you do.

**HM:** Well, thank you, Raphael, for the compliments. I appreciate that. And also for you, what you're doing and the type of work that you do, I think is really important, because as I said earlier, I think a missing link in unfolding consciousness and where we're trying to go is to get a better handle on what we can do with ourselves emotionally—it's a translator so much into humanness. And so the work that you do is real important and I want to thank you for taking the time and energy to conduct a series like this with all these different speakers and bringing all this together. I know everybody listening can probably appreciate it and know that there's a lot involved in that. It's a commitment you have to make to do that, to bring messages other than your own into the world. And so I honor you for that and for wanting to do it and I think it speaks highly of you and your mission of care for others.

**RC:** Ah, well, you are so welcome! And thanks so much for seeing that. I really appreciate it. It feels good to be seen.

**HM:** Good!

## Craig Taubman



Craig Taubman's dynamic music and moving performance style have been an inspiration to audiences for more than 28 years. Craig first began performing when he picked up a guitar and led services at Camp Ramah in Ojai, California. He went on to graduate from Northridge University and the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. Craig's music bridges traditional Jewish themes with the experiences of contemporary Jewish life. His award-winning and top-selling releases include "Friday Night Live," "Celebrate Series," and his newest release, "Celebrate Jewish Lullabies." Craig's performs sell-out concerts that draw thousands and produces interfaith concerts and events throughout the world. He is the Founding Director of Yad B'Yad, a city-wide teen performing arts program funded by the Jewish Federation Council of Los Angeles. [WWW.CRAIGNCO.COM](http://WWW.CRAIGNCO.COM)

### 1. What is Peace?

**RC:** It's my great pleasure to have you with us and part of that is because you walk in worlds that are a little bit different from some of the other people in our series and so, I think it would be good just to take a moment to let listeners know how we first connected.

I was a participant in a beautiful project that you have created and have had going for a number of years called Jewels of Elul. Would you be willing just to share a little bit about that project for our listeners?

**CT:** Sure. The month which precedes the holiest time of the year for the Jewish faith is in Hebrew called Elul and it's 29 days long and the 29 days ends with the celebration of Rosh Hashanah which is the Jewish New Year and then, 10 days later, with Yom Kippur, which is a day set aside for contemplation and literally asking for forgiveness from either your creator, your family, your friends or partners. I learned about this when I was commissioned to write a song using a psalm that is recited during these 29 days and the person told me that it's recited during the 29 days because those days are supposed to be used in preparation for this holy day of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The metaphor for me was if you go running, you just don't start running automatically, you stretch, you prepare yourself. Most people in modern society prepare themselves for great holidays

by buying a new suit or a new pair of shoes or a new dress and they don't prepare themselves spiritually.

So I came up with this notion that I would ask 29 people to write introspections that were no more than 300 words long, to inspire people each of the 29 days preceding Rosh Hashanah. It started off with primarily Jewish people and then, over the last seven years that I've been doing it, I got people from every walk of life that I feel have something to share even if I don't necessarily agree with them. So the contributors have been rabbis and priests and ministers. For example, Rick Warren, who is a fairly conservative preacher, a huge leader in the evangelical community, wrote a beautiful introspection, a beautiful jewel. The Dalai Lama did too, as did Desmond Tutu and folk singer Debbie Friedman and Toba Felchuck; Barack Obama did one, as did John McCain, Arnold Schwarzenegger, people from every walk of life, artists, musicians; Kirk Douglas and Peter Beckel; Jeffrey Katzenberg and Ruth Messinger. Our goal was to say, "Take this time, use this time to grow spirituality and learn from people who might have different experiences than you and different perspectives than you."

**RC:** That's beautiful. I was honored to be a part of it and the project is ongoing. Is that right?

**CT:** It is. We print 50,000 books a year and people are able to access the material free at our website [jewelsofelul.com](http://jewelsofelul.com). This year our theme is the art of aging. And so, I'm looking for people to talk about wisdom. I'm looking for people perhaps to talk about dementia or Alzheimer's. I'm looking for people who are octogenarians and I'm looking for people who maybe are trying to avoid growing older—at least looking old—and I will be speaking with a doctor who does plastic surgery and perhaps the person who invented the use of botox to stop people from having facial expression.

**RC:** Well, I'm glad that you let people know where they can avail themselves of both the previous jewels and the new ones coming up. It's a wonderful creation of the earth and it speaks to the particular kind of leadership that you have within the Jewish community. It's about acceptance. It's about bringing in many divergent points of view and also about a connection spiritually that's deeper than the way that many people ordinarily walk through their lives; your music is about that as well. You sing very passionately about these kinds of themes both for adults and for children and you are really well-known within the Jewish community. But for the larger community that will be listening to us today, I'm wondering if you could just speak a little bit about how you see your role

because it's certainly, let's say, a hybrid role. There's a way in which you're a performer. There's a way in which you're a teacher. So yes, just how do you see what you do in your professional life?

**CT:** Okay. I view myself less as a performer and more as a communicator, or facilitator maybe could be a better word. For me, a great concert is not when somebody who comes up to me and says, "You were great", but rather somebody who comes up to me and says "Wow, that felt great." For me, a great performance will be my ability to move a group, a congregation, whether it would be five people or 5,005 people literally out of their seats, physically to transform the room so that people feel like they were part of the evolution of that evening, morning or afternoon and I like to facilitate that.

**RC:** So you're really calling people into a greater presence and connection and an ability to feel what's within them and between them.

**CT:** Well, I'm going to edit your word there. I don't even want to say greater. I would say different, new. Greater can sometimes be perceived as being better. I don't need it to be better, bigger or smaller. My desire is to make it an opportunity for discovery of something different. One of the guys in my band years ago coined this phrase: "Craig never dooe the same thing once." And I always appreciated that because it was funny, first of all. But more than that, what a great way to go through life or go through one's work—to always try to reinvent one self. You know, you wake up in the morning and you get dressed, you brush your teeth and things like that—that's tradition. But how do you do it differently? How do you do it in such a way that new light is shed upon what you might have not seen an hour or a day or a week or a month or a year or decade earlier?

**RC:** I love the clarification and it's really great to just contemplate that. We can call it like a Jewish koan, if we're going to combine traditions, the idea of never doing the same thing once. I'm interested in knowing about two things. The first one is in terms of being a person who invites or facilitates people into that way of being or into that experience, what do you bring of you, of Craig in your own life, in your own spirituality, into that practice, that invitation and also how does that fit with you in terms of your own understanding and practice of Judaism?

**CT:** Wow. The second, I'm just not going to answer. And the first question, I'll ask you to repeat.

## **2. Tzimtzum**

**RC:** Okay. Well, this series that we're having our talk within is a little bit more about the personal when it comes to spiritual teachers, leaders etc., and so, there's something about who you are that



makes you be the person who wants to open up that space for people. And so, I'm interested in anything you want to share about you in terms of how you came to that and how you bring yourself into that moment with people.

**CT:** Okay. Well, a few ways. I have not given that much thought up until very, very recently. To me, it was just the no brainer, "Well, of course," that's the way one should be, of course, you should empower others. Of course, in rabbinic or biblical literature, the notion is called Tzimtzum, that you should contract. You should make yourself smaller and only by making yourself smaller do you give room for other people to grow. You give room for nature to take over. If you were always on, if you were always bright, if you were always light, if you were always big, then there's no room or no need for anybody or anything else. So for me, it was really just a no brainer. I have a decent voice and I write very good songs but I derive much greater pleasure by empowering others to do it concurrently or simultaneously with me, and I just thought that was in everybody. Doesn't everybody do it that way? And it wasn't up until very recently where I found out that no, that which comes so easily to me, that which I love so much, is not only not easy for other people but it's very, very threatening to other people and scary to other people and sometimes even offensive to other people. Is that clear? Can I elaborate on that?

**RC:** Yes, I would love for you to elaborate on that.

**CT:** So to me, it's easy. I have my band and I always have new people in my band and I always have new people with me, not just Jewish people. I have people from all different spaces, all different ages, sizes, colors— you name it. The more colors in the rainbow and the more backgrounds, the more I appreciate that and I will just turn to somebody and I will say, "So what do you think?" And sometimes people just like wow, that's hard. It's really, really hard and I didn't realize how hard. Ninety percent of the time, people steps to the plate and make it happen.

Recently, people who have become more comfortable with me have shared that "You know what, for years that was the most intimidating, frightening thing I've ever gone through. That which comes so easily to you, Craig, just to step to the plate and give of yourself is next to impossible for me," and they didn't enjoy it. Or not only they didn't enjoy it, they felt it might have even been manipulative on my part that I gave so much room. "Hey Craig, you're the facilitator. You're the leader. You're the performer." And now that I've been doing it for so many years, I obviously became better at it or wiser or more sensitive and also people have become close with me where

they can share that feedback, where people actually come up to me and say “You know, I prefer if you don’t give me the space. I don’t need the space. I’m much more comfortable in the background.” And that was an eye opener for me. That was a real eye opener.

**RC:** So it sounds like the mission that you have and that you have followed over all these years is it really comes from your essence. As you said, it comes natural and easily to you but it’s also really just the reflection of who you are.

**CT:** One hundred percent, totally uncalculated. I might think about it in advance but if I do think about it in advance, the odds of me pursuing a specific direction or that direction are highly unlikely. The more I think about it, the less I would go in that direction.

**RC:** So there’s a spontaneity which goes back to that idea of never doing the same thing once.

**CT:** Yes, but I am not obsessing about it, I don’t have to be spontaneous.

**RC:** I’m laughing as you said it because to obsess about spontaneity would be anti-spontaneous.

**CT:** Which is similar to the quote before we got online that you said about the self-help section with George Carlin. If you like, you might want to share that quote.

**RC:** Sure. I was telling you about the quote that I often share at the beginning of workshops; it comes from George Carlin, we believe. A guy goes into a bookstore and says to the clerk “Can you please direct me to the self-help section?” And the clerk says “Well, I could, but wouldn’t that defeat the purpose?”

**CT:** If I were that clerk, I would say, “Sure, go to the go to the children section, pick out your favorite book or I would say go to the gardening section or just go outside and breathe.” I wouldn’t do it the same way every time. I would say whatever comes off the top of my head.

**RC:** So I wanted to ask you something else too. When I asked you part two of that earlier question. How does that relate to your understanding of Jewish practice you sort of made a half-joke. You said, “I’m not even going to answer that one.” And then, you actually went ahead and in a way you answered it because you related all of what you were just sharing to the concept of Tzimtzum, which of course comes from the Jewish tradition. So I guess I wanted to ask you first of all, when you said “I’m not going to answer that,” what was behind that for you? And then, maybe there will be a follow up.

**CT:** Jewish values are incredibly important in my life; Judaism is not. I might even get in trouble or some people might be confused and/or disappointed in that answer. To me, to sustain Judaism for Judaism's sake is absurd. To sustain Jewish values is for me the ultimate celebration of Judaism or any faith. To sustain the Republican Party or the Democratic Party because we need a strong Republican Party is absurd. If the Republican Party or the Tea party stands for something then it deserves a voice and it deserves for that voice to be heard.

### **3. The Core of the Celebration**

**RC:** Craig, I'm glad I asked you about that. I think this is really a great thing for us to be talking about and most of the people listening know that I come from a Jewish background as well, although much of my spirituality is, let's say, ecumenical or wide-ranging. But I've always felt in my cells and my bones to be Jewish and one of the things about my own Jewish upbringing was that I had some of the older relatives who come from other generations, and this is really common for people of my age, where we would sit around the table and whenever something would come up having to do with current events, it would always be seen through the lens of, "Is it good for the Jews?" And there was something about that that as I was growing up and coming into my own sense of the world that didn't quite work for me.

**CT:** Right.

**RC:** And I hear you saying something that's so powerful, which is that it's the values that move you and that are really at the core for you of your own celebration, and so, that leads to the natural question which is ...

**CT:** Well, let me give you... write down that question.

**RC:** Okay.

**CT:** If I may, just an incredibly powerful story I think. My son might have been eight years old, so that was 16 years ago. He'll be 24 soon, in July and we were having a celebration at our home following Rosh Hashanah, following this holy day that I addressed earlier and my son led the traditional blessing over the wine which essentially is the sanctification of the day. It says this day is a holy day. This gathering is a holy gathering and my mother turned to me and she said something like "You must be so glad to know that your son will marry a Jewish woman," and I said, "Mom, eight years old." "Yeah, but he's so educated and so tracked into this Jewish thing." I said, "Mom, I don't know if he's going to get married and if he does, how do we even know if it's going to be a

woman? And if he does, you think I really know if it's going to be a Jewish woman, and what are the odds that knowing what I know now will influence him to be in a happy marriage? I would find great comfort to know that he has partners in his life that love him and that he loves. Outside of that, I don't care who or what they are." And I went one step further. I said, "I think there's a good chance that he'll marry a Jewish woman or that he will find a Jewish partner but that's because those are Jewish values not because I feel that he's obliged or must marry somebody in order to perpetuate Judaism."

**RC:** Yeah.

**CT:** I don't know if I said too much.

**RC:** No, absolutely. I'm just pausing and saying that I'm glad you shared that story because they're really it's a deep affirmation of what I had heard from you previously. But this really it draws it out and that is that the value of happiness, the value of community is...

**CT:** Joy.

**RC:** Yeah.

**CT:** Caring for others. Respect for your parents. Respect for your tradition. Respect for other's tradition. Respect for the environment. Those to me, are Jewish values and I don't think they're exclusive to the Jewish people. I think people of faith whether it would be Christian, Buddhist, Hindu; whether it would be Muslim, whether it would be whatever your faith is, whether it would be a deity or something based in theology or something simply based in great readings like Rumi; as long as they reflect values that don't hurt you or others, fine. Because I could have just as easily been born on the other side of the border, on the other side of the bridge, on the other side of town to different parents. I wasn't. This is my lot in life and I've been handed a great tradition. But that tradition better be something that reflects well on me and that I reflect well on it.

**RC:** Yeah, beautifully put and I certainly resonate with that. And it brings me back to you and what I'm wondering about is: do you find that in your role as facilitator that you described previously, even though you open the space, you contract as you describe it to open the space and let people share in it and discover it? Do you find that your own personal journey and your own challenges enters into how you show up for people and do you feel that it is helpful and appropriate to share about that or do you choose to keep that often in the background?

**CT:** Well, if you asked my wife, she feels I'm far too transparent and share far too much. She calls them boundaries. She's an educator and she's fearful that sometime I don't respect on my own boundaries enough. Do people really need to know about this, that or the other thing? Maybe you don't need to share it. I on the other hand, find transparency, that willingness to share my strengths as well as my weaknesses, to be empowering for me and for others.

**RC:** We've talked in a number of dialogues in the series about the fine line that you were just addressing. Sometimes there's sharing too much. Sometimes there's not enough. And then, there's also just a question of, does it serve? Is in the sharing and the transparency a sense that this is in the highest good as we understand it of the people who we're there to serve? The answer is going to be different of course for different people. There's no one right way to do it.

**CT:** What's the answer that resonated best or most strongly for you?

**RC:** Great question and thanks for asking it. In one of the dialogues, a spiritual memoirist named Mark Matousek, who has spent a lot of time with many spiritual teachers for many traditions, shared that when he looks at spiritual teachers and the ones that he has appreciated the most, he comes to see that they're not hiding anything, that the effort to hide, whether it's a part of one's personality or a part of ones organization almost always leads to a diminishment of possibility of what can happen, what kind of realization is available for people in that community. So it really resonated with me to ask the question, "Is there an impulse to hide or exclude for any kind of personal motivation?" And when that might be the case, it seems that there's really something to look at and if there is no impulse or need to hide, then it seems like the space is open for a real deep consideration of whether that sharing is going to be helpful or not.

So that was something that really stuck with me and it went on in another dialogue that I had with a Buddhist teacher named Reggie Ray who comes from the tradition of Chogyam Trungpa, a very controversial teacher who came to United States, to Colorado to be specific, in the 70s. He was a controversial figure because he on the one hand had abusive tendencies, he also was an alcoholic and so many people completely condemned him for his behavior. But what Reggie was saying is that the one thing he never did was pretend that he was something other than who he was. And so, that really resonated with me, the idea that if I choose to show up in a role of facilitator, convener, leader, that the most important thing for me is that I'm authentic.

And, going back to the theme of spontaneity, every moment, every person, every group would require a right here and now kind of deliberation. But if it's starting from that authenticity then I would trust it whether that's me as the facilitator or someone else. Does that makes sense?

**RT:** Yeah, beautiful.

**RC:** And so, coming back to you in this series, one of the things that we talk about for the purpose of everything that I just described, and that you did as well, is what alive for us now as teachers, conveners, etc.? And so, I'm curious as you are just going through your days, weeks and months, as you obviously have a rich inner life—what's up for you? Without, crossing those boundaries, as your wife would say, that aren't necessary for us or helpful, what can you tell us about just what is alive for you right now that might be informative and helpful for us in terms of our own consideration?

#### **4. The Oasis**

**CT:** Well, I don't think this is the question but it could be the answer. The thing that I'm struggling with right now is that I would like to do something very different with my life. But, because of the fact that I'm 54 years old still with children that I support and an infrastructure, my business, that I support, and a house, and a car, and this and that, I'm too nervous to change direction. I would love to create what I call "The Oasis," which is a mall with intent. So instead of having your traditional strip mall, (we have pretty much more strip malls in Los Angeles than trees), I would like to have a mall with intent. Instead of having a donut shop, nail salon, taco plate and an A.M/P.M. I would love to have a plant nursery surrounded with a coffee shop and an art studio and a movement space, and the retail commodity that we'd be selling would be Spirit, not nail polish. And that's scary, that's a huge risk. Something that frankly I do currently in my life but I do it at other people's spaces. I want do it in my own backyard literally.

**RC:** Not literally, not in your backyard.

**CT:** Not in my backyard, although there are aspects of that. I thought, "Wow, buy a farm. Buy acres of land and convert some of that space, some of that acreage to a co-op of artists, thinkers, creators to do their thing." I just got back from France and Israel and you know, its 11:00 or 11:30 (a.m.) right now here in Los Angeles. Most people in Los Angeles are in their office buildings and in France, most people, at least it looked to me, were out having coffee or wine sitting on a big boardwalk. I look at their park, Luxemburg Park, and it's stunning with beautiful gardening and I

look at my park around my neighborhood and it's wrapped in chain link. It's inspiring and motivates me and makes me want to say, "Wow, I can do that" but I'm scared to death.

**RC:** Yeah. I think this is a wonderful aim to pursue a little bit and just as an anecdote, I've done a lot of presentations and workshops at what are called Unity churches—it's a broad based, all traditions are welcome kind of movement. Many of our listeners will be familiar with it. And one of the most wonderful Unity churches that I visited is in Amesbury, Massachusetts. I think it's called Unity on the River and they took a retail space in a strip mall and turned it into just a gorgeous place of worship and celebration. And I was joking when I was there that this is a great vision for a mini mall. We can have you know, the Jamba Juice...

**CT:** Which would of course be run by the Semitic people if it's called Jamba Juice.

**RC:** Right. The Jamba Juice and the Starbucks and then, the Unity church but I like your vision even better and I like and I appreciate that you're sharing the struggle because I can't tell you how many people I come across who have some kind of vision that feels like it's speaking to them from their heart and then, they also have very serious practical considerations or responsibilities that makes pursuing that vision very scary. And so, you spoke to that really honestly in your life and I'm wondering how is it right now? Are you feeling you're taking baby steps toward that vision or you're just nursing it within?

**CT:** I've been nursing it for several years now. It's a challenge. I have reinvented myself, I would say four concrete times. But each time, they were transitions that were fairly easy. I went from being a writer of jingles to being a writer of kid's music and a performer of kid's music for Disney for many years. And then, I went from being a performer of kid's music for Disney to writing music for kids for television and then, I went from writing music for kids for television to producing and creating programs and music within the Jewish community and then, a little later on, the last eight years doing it in multi-state communities; a lot of ecumenical staff as well. This is saying, it's not even a U-turn. It's like a fast stop, turn the car around and go in another direction and I don't know where that direction will necessarily even take me. I do know that it's going to take huge amount of money to do so it's a tough one.

**RC:** So in that kind of process that you've been in, I recognize that you say you've been nursing it for a long time. How do you work with or meet fear? That's something I think the people would

really be interested in because we all have that question for ourselves. Do you question it? Do you let it be? Did you try to feel it as equally as possible?

**CT:** The only fear that scares me is financial fear. I've been blessed to have in-laws who have always told me, "don't worry, you know, don't worry." I've never taken money from them but just telling me that has empowered me not to worry as much as most people might worry in my position. I mean, for God's sake, I'm a musician who is a niche, niche, niche, niche market. I'm not even a normal musician. So that that financial risk is very, very scary. Everything else, will people like it? What do I care? Will it be transformative? What do I care? That I can't control. On the other hand, if I don't control the stream of money, then how do I afford to send my kids to great schools? How do I afford to take trips to different parts of the world? How do I afford to buy art or buy stuff for my garden?

**RC:** So how do you—and I know this is evolving for you as for all of us—how do you decide what about that fear you're going to actually let be a part of your guidance as you go forward into this new phase, whenever that is and exactly however it looks, versus the kind of fear where you say, "I know it's scary but I also feel called to do this so I'm going to be afraid and still go forward." How do you make that distinction for yourself?

**CT:** Well, I think this is very pragmatic at this point. My kids are 22, 23 which means they're going to be 23, 24 very soon. They are gaining more and more independence and so financially less and less dependent on me, which hopefully will free up time and money for me to pursue this new journey. You know, I don't even think there are any baby steps here. I have to go out and find the backers and we're not talking about a \$100,000. We're not talking about \$50,000. We're talking about huge amounts of money.

**RC:** So I want to go back to what you said about the pragmatic piece because I think that's important. It sounds like what you're saying is that you are aware that when the responsibilities that you hold dear lessen, when your kids are at the age where you and your wife and the kids decide, together, however that looks, that they're more on their own now and less dependent on you, you'll feel ready and confident that without that obstacle, you're ready to roll and get started.

### **5. The Business Side of Creativity**

**CT:** Right. And also I think, this is something very concrete for your listeners. It's very easy to wax poetic on art, on independence, transparency, Tzimtzum, you know, making yourself small.



But something someone told me many years ago still to this day resonates with me very strongly. I am in the music business which means that I practice my music chops, which in that case, it's not just performance. Remember that sharing, that being honest, that being free and etc.; I also practice my business chops. I am very cognizant that I have been given this great gift to share of myself and to share of other people. That's the creative side. But unless I am a responsible business person, unless I am aware that other people depend on me and I depend on myself and take care of business, then I will not have the freedom to pursue the art. And many artists that I know don't have that dual focus or find somebody who is in the business side that's not really looking out for their best interests. I surround myself with great people who I want to be a reflection of me and who make me look, feel and act better, to make me a better me. And that's not just about music. That's not just about art.

**RC:** So it sounds like what you're saying is that you had a value in cultivating the artistic and the business acumen side by side and that served you well with your career.

**CT:** Yes. And I think it's something that people need to hear because a lot of times, artists look at that business side or creative people or spiritual people look at that business side as being less than worthy or not as valuable as the spiritual pursuit and I think they go hand in hand; kind of like saying an intellectual person only nurtures his or her mind and doesn't stretch their heart muscle. And I'm not even referring to the heart muscle as their Spirit. I'm referring to the heart muscle as their physical being. So they sit stagnant, they become obese and develop plaque on their arteries and suffer heart attack as 45-year-olds. It's a balance. It's all a balance.

**RC:** So we touched on actually just in a spontaneous way another important value for you in your life and on your past, which is balance.

**CT:** Yes.

**RC:** And so, I'm wondering also going back to the role that you have now because hopefully, we'll talk in a few years time when the center is up and running and maybe even if I'm lucky, you'll invite me to come and convene there. But for now, doing what you do, do you find that anything about yourself and the way you experience yourself and the way that others experience you gets in the way at all or has the potential to get in the way of you showing up the way that you most want to?

**CT:** Can you say that one more time?

**RC:** Yeah. I'll do it with an example. So I was asking you if you noticed anything gets in the way of your personality, your issues etc. when you come together with people to open up the space as we've described. In my case for instance, I know that, speaking of intellectual, I can be in my head a lot and so, it's especially important for me to drop into my body, to connect to my emotions, to speak often more slowly than I would otherwise just to create more space for being in presence, and along with all of that comes the fact that as you can probably tell, because I'm hosting the series, I'm a talker.

**CT:** A very good one. You're an excellent facilitator, a good listener asking good questions.

**RC:** But as a talker sometimes I could be a person who might, you know, unintentionally live by the motto, "Why use one word when a hundred will do?" So those are things that I'm mindful of when I convene because I'm aware that if I'm not really mindful of them, they might be habits that would curtail the space rather than open it up. So I was wondering if when you reflect on your own self, if you noticed that there are things that are important for you to be mindful of to do your best job when you were doing your piece.

**CT:** Not enough. That goes back, I never did the same thing once. When it comes to my business practice perhaps, but when it comes to my spiritual art practice, no. I'm not. I would guess the fault would be that I'm not mindful enough.

**RC:** But just be a little bit more specific if you could in that, or maybe if your drawing a blank, think about what your wife might say, your kids might say or anybody who loves you but sees you in an unvarnished way.

### **6. Isn't Everybody Open, Free, and Transparent?**

**CT:** I remember a meeting we were at, my wife and I. My wife and I are sitting on the couch and another person was sitting across from us and my wife says something about me, that I wasn't listening. I said, "Don't be silly," and I guess my hands were flailing and this person said, "You don't know, Craig, where you begin or where you end. You're so big in this room that you were not just taking up your space, you're invading her space." So in my desire to be open and free and inviting and I kind of hinted at that earlier in the conversation. I say, "Come on. Talk, talk, talk!" "Well dammit, maybe I don't want to talk. Leave me alone," the other person could be thinking. I

think, “Isn’t everybody open, free and transparent?” And no, you know what, it might not be the most important value in the world. It might not be a virtue.

**RC:** Yeah. I think this is really great. I’m so glad that you shared this piece and I want to paraphrase it and if it’s a little bit different then how it said I want you to correct me but what I’m hearing I think is that there’s a way in which your energy as it has been reflected to you is very powerful. It has the potential to kind of fill up the space for people who might not have as strong energy as you. It might feel like a pressure. It sometimes might feel kind of bullish.

**CT:** Right. Well, to use to join two words perhaps and I’m not suggesting that it’s either/or but the two extremes would be energy: one’s energy can ignite, and one’s energy can consume. And I think I’m pretty good at it, pretty good, but there’s a balance.

**RC:** Yeah. I was glad you were bringing it up and it’s something that we’ve come to from different aspects in some of the other interviews, that there’s an element of self-awareness that has to do with how we be and its impact on the people around us. On the one hand, we talk about being free and transparent as you were just reflecting on and spontaneous and authentic and we want everybody to be their fullest self that they can be in the world. That’s an important value. And then at the same time, the more we grow in our self-awareness and self-realization, the more we grow in our awareness of others and our compassion and our wanting others to shine as much as we do and with that, we can see sometimes how our own light might somehow, as you say, unwittingly consume.

**CT:** Right.

**RC:** So there is a great spiritual practice in just knowing about what I bring to a room and it can even be the opposite too. It can be somebody who sort of sucks the energy out of the room because they are so inward and unwilling to join. There’s many different aspects of this question. But how does my own way of showing up connect with and impact those around me? That is a really powerful question that I think we don’t ask or reflect on that much.

**CT:** It’s very true. Another observation is when I do my work, my art, I don’t do it alone and there is another Jewish expression from the Bible: *Lo Tov Heyos HaAdam Levado*—it is not good to be a person alone. My, to use your words "spiritual practice" is not typically solo. I don’t practice alone. I surround myself, as I shared earlier, with great people who make me look great and make me feel great. But I bend to over backwards to make sure those people are not like me but compliment me;

that they're smarter than me, that they are better performers, singers, players than me, that they're more contemplative than me perhaps, that they don't look like me or sound like me necessarily. And in so doing, where I might be the dog personality, I make sure that there's a cat personality who is there as well, to create a more balanced communal experience.

**RC:** And I'm often saying to people that I work with that we're not meant to do it alone and that to me personally that's true whether we're talking about healing from an addiction or healing from childhood trauma or healing from current trauma that we're experiencing; that there is a communal aspect of our beings and in our society, ours meaning American society, in particular, the pull yourself up by your own bootstraps ethos has been really powerfully bred into many of us so that we even can talk a good game about the importance of community and then, when we're dealing with our deepest stuff, we are ashamed to bring it to others.

So, I appreciate what you're sharing in that regard because you're saying that it is a value that when we share, that it comes from your own Jewish education around being a person and growing as a person through community and what I hear you doing is kind of extending beyond the way that I talk about it in terms of working on our stuff, because you're saying even just the practice of being a person for you is informed by doing it first of all with others but also by doing it intentionally with diverse others.

**CT:** Right.

**RC:** Yeah. That's great.

**CT:** Within a congregation when we will have a Shabbat service... We just had one that had the theme of addiction—slavery and enslavement because it's Passover and Passover deals with the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. We were once slaves, but now we are free. That doesn't mean everybody is free. As a matter of fact, according to studies, 10 percent to 15 percent of the community that we live in the Western world is addicted to drugs, alcohol, sex, Internet, you name it, gambling. So we had our Shabbat service; our guests were people from a recovery house and the things that they shared were empowering for everybody because there wasn't any more of this 'them and us'—it was just us. And sitting in the congregation are people that look just like them and we look just like the others and we are all one community. We were all one. And that's something that I could intellectually talk about, but unless I bring those people into my community, unless I collect those fringes, not that they are any less or more than me, they just are of me, and

bring them into my community and share them and allow them to share themselves and for them to share me. Otherwise, we don't have a community.

**RC:** Yeah. And there's something missing in our completions as individuals as well.

**CT:** Yes.

**RC:** That's a really important point and I thank you for making it and I just want to add one thing which is if you take the word addiction and you switch it to compulsion, then instead of 10 percent to 15 percent of the population, you're probably talking about 95 percent or 99 percent of the population.

**CT:** Right.

**RC:** So wherever we are not free, we're not free and that means the place that when we're uncomfortable, we make a choice to do a thing or have a substance to block that out. Of course, that's a lack of freedom.

**CT:** It's a foul.

**RC:** And I love how you're connecting that to the Passover Seder. I did one for my young kids for this year and it reminded me back when I was a very earnest 14-year-old and I told my family I was tired of the same old, conservative, suburban, old Haggadah, the storytelling of Passover. I wanted to do it in a new way and I went to my record collection—we had vinyl in those days—and I made a soundtrack. Each song spoke to a different Passover theme and my parents and my siblings, I'm sure they were just rolling their eyes as I was doing my thing. But I really wanted it to be alive and not just an empty tradition. So whenever somebody makes a bridge like you just did like slavery as addiction, compulsion, etc., it lifts me up and it puts me in touch with that 14-year old. And I didn't know how to dress and I had a little scraggly beard that I didn't want to shave. But I think the soundtrack was good. I wish I had copy of that.

**CT:** You should have kept it.

**RC:** Yeah. I wanted to just also come back to that theme of inclusion that you were speaking about in terms of your own life, in terms of your work community and I wanted to say how much I appreciated that and also it's the very reason that I invited you to be a part of this series because we don't know each other. We only communicated by e-mail but I love your spirit and what you

represent and the work that you do and I knew it would add a very different flavor to the series today. So I'm so glad that you said yes and that we got to include you.

**CT:** Well, thank you. I've enjoyed this.

**RC:** Good. And so, just before we go, for people who have been intrigued by you, who want to know more, who want to have you in their community, how can they find you?

**CT:** Well, they can come to Southern California. They can invite me to their community. But in all seriousness, they can find me at [WWW.CRAIGNCO.COM](http://WWW.CRAIGNCO.COM) or on Facebook which is: Craig.Taubman. It's a fan page.

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## About Raphael Cushnir



Raphael Cushnir is a leading voice in the world of emotional intelligence and present moment awareness. He is the author of six books, lectures worldwide, and is a faculty member of the Esalen Institute, the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, and the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies. He has shared his unique approach to personal and professional development with millions of readers in *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*, *Beliefnet*, *Spirituality and Health*, *Psychology Today*, and *The Huffington Post*. In addition, he coaches individuals and teams at Fortune 100 companies, governments, religious organizations, and leading non-profits. Raphael's own heart was opened by an experience of profound grief.

Raphael's offerings includes an innovative yearlong program for groups of just twelve people called *P4 - Presence, Purpose, Passion and Power*. He also facilitates an online learning experience called *The Vulnerability Project*.

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The interviews in this book are available as a complete audio set, and also as selected singles and albums on I-Tunes, Amazon.com and other outlets.

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