



Teaching What We Need to Learn

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

Teaching What We Need To Learn

Selected Transcripts

Dialogues Conducted and Compiled by

Raphael Cushnir

Preface

It's with great delight that I present you with your E-book premium, including ten of the most popular interviews from the online series, Teaching What We Need To Learn. May you be as inspired while reading them as I was while conducting them.

Here's to transparency, vulnerability, and the One that connects us all.

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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

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 25th 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 this 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 wary 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 its 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?

5. 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.”

6. 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.

7. 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.

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. For decades, Brother David has divided his time between periods of a hermit's life and extensive lecture tours. 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, a website supporting ANG*L (A Network for Grateful Living).

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 people. 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 that starts with making a distinction. And the distinction is the distinction between the "I" and the "self".

***Editor's Note:** In the passage that followed, there was some language-related confusion. To create more clarity and continuity, we'll now jump ahead to Raphael's reflective summary of Brother David's perspective.*

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.

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

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 through 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)

TARA BRACH



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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, wherever 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 it’s 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 oceanness 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 oceanness 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 oceanness.

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, it's 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!

BRUCE TIFT



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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.

CAROLINE CASEY



Caroline W. Casey, based in Washington DC, is a Visionary Activist Astrologer devoted to the principle that Imagination lays the tracks for the Reality Train to follow. Caroline has been a student of astrology since 1970, is the 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. 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." Its 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?

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.

3. 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, its 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 with in 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."

4. 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 demagogues 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 demagogues 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 13th, 3114 B.C. and the end of one cycle -- not the calendar, the end of one cycle on December 21st 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 etymologically 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.

DANIEL SIEGEL



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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 chipperness, 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.

2. 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.

3. 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 its 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.

DEVAA HALEY MITCHELL



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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

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 Richman 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!

TAMA KIEVES



Tama Kieves is an honors graduate of Harvard Law School who left her law practice to write and help others live their calling. She is the bestselling author of *This Time I Dance! Creating the Work You Love* and the upcoming *Inspired and Unstoppable: Wildly Succeeding in Your Life's Work* (Tarcher/Penguin). She is a sought-after speaker and career and success coach and is on the faculty of the Omega Institute and the Kripalu Center for Yoga, as well as a presenter at TEDx and at Canyon Ranch. She was put on this earth to champion visionary minds, creative souls, and purpose-driven change-agents. www.tamakieves.com

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 unmet 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!

DAPHNE ROSE KINGMA



Daphne Rose Kingma is an emotional healer and teacher of relationships as a spiritual art form and the creative process as a living expression of the human spirit. She has taught for many years throughout the U.S. and in Europe working with both individuals and groups. Daphne has authored a dozen books about love and relationships, among them the best-sellers, “Coming Apart,” “The Future of Love,” “The Men We Never Knew,” and the prize-winning “The Ten Things to do When Your Life Falls Apart.” She conducts workshops at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, the Recreer Foundation in France, and The Hollyhock Center in British Columbia. She lives in Santa Barbara, California. www.daphnekingma.com

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. 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.