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START OF TRANSCRIPT**[00:00:13]**

Hi, everybody. It's good to be connected with you in this way again. And I want to start today by talking about connection and by noticing just within myself. And maybe you noticed this as well, too. I'm using social media a lot more than I used to, and I used to use it a good clip. And it's not all compulsiveness. It's all not just all because of, you know, the anxiety and uncertainty of this time, although probably some of it, if I'm honest, is compulsiveness, the amount that I'm on social media. But it's something deeper. I'm on social media a lot because of the desire for connection, because all the ways in which we used to be able to connect with each other have changed or been taken away outright. And with social media as imperfect as it is, as honestly destructive as it can be at times as well, too, it still is such a primary mechanism by which I find I get to connect with all of you and people I care about all around the world. And so I kind of really treasure the social media time these days for that opportunity to connect.

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And given my kind of twin professions, ministry and psychotherapy. I get pitched a lot of ads in a specific kind of ad, a lot of books and a lot of trainings. And sometimes I have to restrain myself like that. That well-known meme says, like, you know, like clean all the things. Like it says I have to restrain myself at times. Like, no, I will not sign up for this training. I will not on instinct by this book. Let me read the books I already have. But one book was advertising has been advertised fairly frequently in my news feed on Facebook recently, and it had a title that made me really notice.

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The title was. Be Happy Forever. You have my attention. And then the subtitle goes, Get rid of sadness, fear, anxiety, anger and stress. Get rid of sadness, fear, anxiety, anger and stress. Now, I believe anger, fear, sadness, anxiety and stress can be really destructive forces in our life.

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And so it's important that I think we'd be really skillful by them. Like, I like to believe that they can be in the car. But maybe we don't want to, like, give them the steering wheel. It's important unhooked from these things and use what they tell us skillfully.

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But get rid of them. Kick them out. Never experience them again. I think that's really unwise and unhelpful and actually kind of not fully human. These feelings are here for a reason. They're not accidents of our evolution. They serve a purpose.

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I noticed a couple of months back, I think I was right around the time the pandemic started, that I've just because the number of upsetting, unjust, unfair, sometimes very cruel things in the world that were happening. I was hitting that anger emoji reaction and the sadness emoji reaction. I was hitting those two very frequently. And I wondered, like, am I getting hooked into so-called negative emotions too often? But then I took a step back. And what I put in this post is that actually it's a Q it's an invitation for me when I press that anger emoji reaction or the sadness one that actually it's that it's an invitation.

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Notice that what I'm sad about or angry about are things that I care about.

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That those emotions and feeling them are invitations to deeper love. And as Tom Waits said a long time ago, I think in a song that was released when I was two years old, he said, if I exercise my demons well, my angels, they they may leave, too. And so I think it is important to, you know, take ourselves whole, especially including. These

challenging emotions, and I think right now we are all getting a crash course with all the ways that our lives have changed. The saying goes, you know, we're all in the same storm. We're not all in the same boat. Some people have this time incredibly rough, profound difficulty and financial anxiety. And for some of us, it's about that sense of disconnection or loss or missing people. We can all have different responses to this experience of this pandemic that really has upended pretty much all of our lives. And so we are getting this crash course right now working with challenging feelings and emotions, loss, sadness, grief. And I think it's actually exhausting to want to get rid of those emotions. And I also think it's unwise for what I mentioned before, that when we listen to these emotions, what we will find very often is what we care about and who we care about and what we love and an opportunity to connect into those values and into those people once again. And I think there's an additional cost of spending all this time and energy getting rid of so called negative emotions that do serve a purpose.

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It's that it's a form of. Declaring war on ourselves. And war has casualties. And when we declare war on ourselves, we are one of those casualties. The people who are harmed. And I also think.

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Wanting to get rid of very natural human feelings is also at odds with our Universalist tradition and the sense of largeness, inclusiveness, welcoming love that defines what this tradition is about. And from which the title of this series gets its name. Love the Hell Out of this World. One of the first teachers of universalism was a guy named Origin o r. I n o.

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After member spelled correctly, who lived in the second and third century of this, our common era. C. E. And he was declared a heretic. He was looked down upon by the forming church that declared his teachings not orthodox enough. And one of them most controversial ones in which he played out the logical extension of this belief that God's love could ultimately redeem all creatures, all of creation, nothing and no one left out.

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Is that Origin said it could be. Maybe even it would be that Satan, the devil, quote unquote, would be redeemed as well to ultimately reunited with that source of love from which all created creatures come. And so it's interesting that part of our Universalists teaching, at least this teacher says that it's even possible to love the hell out of hell. Actually, I don't want to aim that high today. And truth is, I don't believe in literal demons or literal devils. But I do believe that we all can experience what we might call demonic, you know, that kind of overpoweringly painful or negative parts of ourselves that we can feel ensnared in. So I don't want to aim that high of promising to love the hell out of hell. What I want to explore today is the invitation that comes when we don't reject the negative feelings. Painful thought that, in fact, it is possible to love the hell out of ourselves. This is part of some of the oldest stories we have in humanity. And leaving aside the really problematic ways that gender is expressed in so many different fairytales. You know, you see this story over and over and over again, a variation on this theme that frogs with love with a kiss turned back into princes or princesses, or that we scratch the surface of every beast.

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There's a human being there waiting for love to help transform them back into the full version of themselves.

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This is the problem for me of wanting to get rid of the negative, perhaps even scary parts of ourselves, is that if we spend most of our lives wanting to get rid of dividing up what we deem about ourselves is acceptable versus unacceptable.

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If we spend most of our lives dividing ourselves up, taking ourselves apart. We spend most of our lives dividing ourselves up. I think we end up cutting ourselves to pieces. Causing ourselves real harm.

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And so instead, learning to love the hell the most difficult parts of ourselves out of ourselves is more a matter not of extinction.

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Or eviction? Certainly not extermination, but of integration. Of allowing loving kindness and compassion. To be turned even towards those parts of ourselves that sometimes are not very kind or even harmful to ourselves and other people, and to recognize that if we really want to transform ourselves from harmful to helpful, even healing, that nothing does this like the integrating power of loving kindness. Bringing our parts back together into a whole relationship with all of us.

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One of the best stories, the best recent stories about this is the Pixar movie Inside Out from 2015. I appreciate it before Miss Carol is, I believe, used it in YouthSpirit. And just to remind you what the story's about, it's about 11 year old Riley who on the outside part of the story, the kind of regular world part of the story that comprises a decent portion of inside out. We see her moving from a small town in the Midwest to San Francisco. And there's a

lot of loss associated with this for her, a lot of sense of dislocation of no longer knowing her people, her tribe, who she belongs to, a place where she was comfortable and loved into a place that is big and scary and in which she does not belong yet.

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So that's the outside part of inside out. But really, where the drama of Inside Out happens is if you remember the movie, it's in Riley's own 11 year old head where we meet five characters, five primary emotions, joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust.

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And the primary tension in inside out within Riley's head is between joy and sadness.

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See, joy wants to kind of rule the roost. Joy wants to be in control and give all the other emotions, their walking papers, because it's understandable. We want to be happy. Right. But here's the thing. Joy ends up being kind of terrible dictator. She's really intolerant of the other emotions, especially sadness. Joy has what we could call and what we learned through the course of the movie is almost a kind of toxic positivity. In the same way, there's toxic negativity, there's toxes, toxic positivity that wants to kind of eliminate the so-called negative emotions and feelings. And we see on the outside of Riley's life, in the real world, at least the animated real world, that when joy will not allow sadness to have its say and rejects it.

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That Riley's process of honoring her losses and her sadness and her grief, which might allow her to integrate into her new location and experience healing. When joy does not allow sadness to have its say, Riley suffers.

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In fact, at one point, even abandoning her new home and running away. This is what happens when we don't allow ourselves to listen to sadness or loss or shame. Like Brene Brown has been preaching right at our hearts for God. No, I think a decade already she's been doing this that well, we won't allow these things to have say. It really does cost us when we divide ourselves up in this way, we do end up cutting ourselves to pieces. And so when I watch inside out for me in my head, it almost feels like there's a sixth character, unnamed. Not explicitly. Almost a sixth sense, if you will, and that, for me, is the integrating power, which is a power of loving kindness, of self acceptance that mediates between all the parts joy, sadness, anger, disgust, fear, invites them all in and gives them a place and lets them know that they are all welcome. Inside out is merely simply a wonderful variation on a very, very old teaching as old as the Persian poet. Rumi's the guest house. As old as a story from the Buddhist tradition that's often is rendered or called inviting Mara to tea, to give you just a little bit of background on this.

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The night when the Buddha sat and achieved his enlightenment and his full awakening, he was assailed by all of these forces of doubt and and lust and temptation by sometimes what is called the demon God, Mara. Within the Buddhist tradition, most modern Buddhists or many at least interpret that not as something external to us, but a part of our own minds that isn't very skillful or isn't very wise or leaps at instant gratification, or believes that we're fully separate from other people and from this life. And so Buddha sits through all of these temptations, all these ways that that Mara is poking at the Buddha with a hand that points down touching the earth and a hand that raises up in a sense of friendliness and welcome. He sits through it all and he awakens. But that's not the end of the story. It's not like he defeats Mara once and for all. Mara keeps coming back. Throughout all the rest of the Buddha's life. And some of the people around the world get very anxious by this.

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But Buddha actually does something different. The Buddha invites Mara to tea. As an honored guest pouring Marty. Letting Mara that Mara is welcome here too.

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I love this kind of strength that is kindness that really disarms this capacity for rejecting ourselves or dividing ourselves up. I think that the ways that we can do this when we recognize that when we get triggered by our own difficult emotions or delusions.

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The feelings that we don't know if we can allow ourselves to feel. Or the difficult thoughts that hook us. I think that sometimes it is as simple for many of us just closing the eyes. Taking the breath. Feeling the body connected to the ground. Feeling yourself solid upon this earth. And maybe just even speaking to ourselves in kind ways. What is here is here inviting ourselves to face it.

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And there's a particular way I want to share with you that I find really skillful and kind of creative. And so I'm going to ask you for a moment if you would maybe just to close your eyes wherever you are, if it's safe for you to do so. I close my eyes, I'm going to ask us to think of someone, some creature, some being who maybe the tone of their voice, but maybe they don't even have a human voice. It could be a character from a movie or from a TV show.

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But someone some creature who, when we think of them and maybe particularly the tone of their voice. It has a tone or a sense of presence, of warmth. And accepting kindness. The sense that we really are acceptable to them. And I'm just gonna ask you to pause with that for a moment. Notice what comes up for you. If you can invite this creature, this being this person here into your mind's eye and hear their voice. In your head. Soothing, warm.

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Kind.

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Just notice the effect that that has on you.

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And the practice here is to utilize this sense of voice directed towards ourselves when we feel really triggered by difficult thoughts or feelings. And to learn to talk to ourselves in this kind of kind way.

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One of the people who regularly shows up for four folks when they do this exercise is Mr. Rogers, most frequent person named When I Work with people and they name who's kind voice that is. And I think of Mr. Rogers most favorite song. Most famous song. I like you as you are. Imagine saying that to ourselves. Maybe some of you already have that practice when we're triggered and when we're tripped up and we're we're judging ourselves or when the harsh critic or the imposter syndrome voice shows up and we're calling ourselves a fraud and we want to divide ourselves up. What's acceptable, what's rejected? And instead of taking ourselves to pieces, might be able to say to ourselves, as Mr. Rogers did with his tone of voice, maybe even if that works for you. I like you as you are. We might connect with what the great psychologists Carl Rogers said when he said the paradox is that when I fully accept myself, then I can change. And so I want to end with a story, a story today that I don't even remember where it came from, I don't even remember the first time I heard it. I think it comes from a Middle Eastern tradition, but I don't really know which one. But it's the story of a man who has been unjustly accused and imprisoned for a crime that he did not commit, and he spends most of the first days, weeks, months, years in prison, raging, by the way, justified because he is in prison.

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Unjustly raging against his situation, he finds that although it's justified, it is also making him miserable and deeply, deeply feeling badly about himself and raising his stress. And at one point, he has a friend who sends him a gift and the gift is a prayer rug. And the man who's been imprisoned really says, what the hell am I going to do with a prayer rug?

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And he kind of puts it into the corner angrily and he goes on feeling miserable about all these unfair, unjust things that have happened to him.

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Until one day, out of a sense of desperation, more than anything else, he lays out that prayer rug and he lays down on it and he sobs and he feels a small sense of release and relief by giving voice to these painful emotions.

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And he starts to make it his practice, bowing, prostrating himself on this prayer rug day after day. And they become weeks and then months and then years. And what he finds is that as he lays himself down on this prayer rug, sometimes saying no prayer at all other than just feeling his body. He reconnects with what he misses and he reconnects with what he loves. And he remembers who he was before he was imprisoned. And he connects back into his own heart until after these years pass by. And the prayer rug is starting to be worn down in places.

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And he notices something woven into the fabric of the prayer rug that he did not notice when it first arrived that there is this copper wire woven into the fabric of this prayer rug, this place where he lays his sadness, his anger, his fear, his love. And he finds that he can pull the copper wire out. And fashion it into a key. And he unlocks his cell.

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And he is free.

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So many of us have struggles these days. I know I do. I know you do. I hope that in the midst of all this difficulty that we will give ourselves the invitation to look deeply. At our own hearts. And our own pain.

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To look deeply enough to reconnect with what we love. Not in spite of the difficulty. The sadness, loss, anger, grief. But seeing that we only have these emotions in the first place because we have hearts capable of love.

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Amen. And may you live in blessing.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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