# A Journey From Fragmentation Into Wholeness When Dealing With Chronic Disease Transcript

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## Introduction and guest welcome

– Hello everyone and welcome to the Microbes and Mental health Summit. I'm your host, Dr. Miles Nichols and I'm here today with Alexander Love Alexander has been an inspiration to me for a while.

He's been a colleague and a teacher and a friend and he does fantastic work with people, his work spans from Chinese medicine to coaching to consciousness and developmental psychology.

He really understands a vast depth of information knowledge and carries a wisdom and and can have this ability to transmit some energetic behind concepts that aren't just conceptual. So we're going to get to some practices, we're going to get to some frameworks and ways of being able to understand illness and being able to understand mental health. So welcome, Alexander, thank you so much for being here.

– Thank you so much Miles, I really appreciate you inviting me and I'm just really glad that we can be here together and dive in. – So do you have any back story of that you'd like to share before we dive into the topic at hand here of wholeness based approach to healing, which it's the fantastic topic that I'm really looking forward to getting into Any of your journey that you'd like to share.

– Sure, so, you know, for me, the sort of, beginning of my journey into understanding wholeness of course, didn't start with understanding wholeness. It started with understanding through directly experiencing a lot of pain.

## Alexander's personal journey through loss and healing

When I was 20, my father was killed violently and you know, I was very young and didn't really have the resources or tools to know how to make sense of what had happened, I did my best, but what it did was create a kind of a sense of fracture in my experience um without an understanding of what to do about that, and fortunately I ended up finding many different teachers over many different years.

It's, I'm sure it's a big part of what took me towards learning medicine and and learning how to help people through coaching, including shadow work, I'm sure it's what sort of moved me in that direction, because I was trying to find help for myself and and over the years, what I started to discover was that pain, whether it's physical pain or or psychological pain, it's like a it's like a portal into greater wholeness, if we have the practices to be able to embrace it. The other option of course, is to not embrace it, which is what we often do, because just like when you touch something that's too hot, the natural tendency is to pull away, and if we pull away from the pain for long enough, sometimes short term we need to, because it's too intense in the, in the acuteness of the moment, but if we do that long term it has it has psychological and physiological consequences.

So I guess that's that's, you know, that's what I'd share in terms of my personal story and learning how to how to embrace the darkness and the hell and the hurt and the confusion and the and all those kinds of things. – And you and I Alexander share a similar backstory with my father, passing on when I was 15, suddenly and unexpectedly, your father being violently murdered at 20. It was for me also a time where it took resources that I didn't have or know how to explain what was happening, and I it sent me on a journey to learn some things.

I immediately sought out teachers and became very, very in a moving in a different mode, in a different direction after that experience, it was a pivotal life transformational experience for me and while painful and challenging and very hard at the time, looking back, I see it as this amazing opportunity for being able to clarify my path, my purpose and as a lesson to understand a bit of the essence that's beneath the form, had to tune into in order to cope myself.

I had defined and connect with the essence of my father that was beyond the physical form, because the physical form had been taken so quickly. Did you have a similar experience?

– Well, you know what, what comes, yes, I have and what sort of comes up for me and listening to what you're saying is what I hear you reflecting is really the heart of what it's the heart of a way in which we can orient to the difficulties that we experience in our lives, whether it's a chronic illness or it's an ex, you know, sort of an abrupt experience that is painful um such as a car accident or the loss of a parent or the loss of a child. You know, when if we can look back upon our lives and we can say, I wouldn't have changed it. If I could have, then to me that means that we've somehow touch the, the essence of what it means to heal. It doesn't like healing to me doesn't always mean that the chronic illness goes away. Sometimes it does.

Certainly in the conversation that you got that you and I are talking about healing doesn't mean that the parent comes back, right. And in both of those situations, be it a chronic illness that's really, it's just hanging on or something that we, you know, we simply, no matter what cannot undo.

There are other options around how we live as a human being, where what is gleaned from the way in which we turn towards the difficulty that what is gleaned becomes the nourishment and it becomes the strength.

And it doesn't always mean that the pain goes away. I mean, anybody that's had grief or a chronic illness, they know that it's, you know, it has phases and cycles to it and it may be the grief lessons or maybe the symptoms kind of the flaring goes down.

But then it comes back? and the question that arises for me is where do I need to be inside of myself to be able to meet the return of the difficulty, where do I need to be so that I can meet the return in such a way that I'm not just exhausted, rolled over loss of hope, those, those kinds of things.

– I love the both turned towards that, that turn towards, I think it's really important because it's so easy to turn away from the pain and that together with a preparation for understanding the cycles, the phases. And a way of, of internally preparing for a return and the way of relating to that return through healing.

So what is the difference between disease based and wholeness based approaches to healing?

## Disease-based vs wholeness-based healing

– Yeah, beautiful. You know, a disease based approach, which is actually the most common and it's not, I want to start off by saying that even though I'm going to offer a comparison here, I'm not, what I'm not trying to do is say that, oh, well disease based approaches are bad and wholeness based approaches are good.

It's not at all what I'm attempting to do here. In fact, there's a lot of Chinese medicine that is a disease based approach to healing. There's a lot of Western medicine that is a disease based approach to healing?

I mean if I fall and I break my arm, I want someone to fix it. I want I want someone to do that. If I'm having a heart attack, I want someone to that that has a view, at least at the very least a view of what's broken and what do we do so that we can fix it? So with that as sort of context, a disease based approach is more focused on identifying what's wrong, what often what's broken, and then applying tools to rectify that to try to fix it.

Now, this is like I said, this is a beautiful thing. In Chinese medicine, if someone comes in with a cold, I want to have approaches to be able to release what's causing the cold, right? So that would be a disease more of a disease based focus.

A wholeness based approach doesn't negate the disease based approach because if it's a wholeness based approach, it can't negate anything otherwise. It isn't what it says, it is.

It's just now we have the addition of something, We have this recognition that a human being is fundamentally whole as the ground as the starting point and that their system has the capacity to heal without needing something

added.

And so the wholeness based approaches Now, it's not just saying, okay, your whole and you're fine because that doesn't help anybody with a chronic illness knows that that doesn't help, Oh, you're you know, if you came in to see me and you have some debilitating debilitating chronic illness and I looked at you said, you know, you're just already whole and healthy, deeply, deep within you, you're gonna be like, buddy, like this isn't helping, not if it's done like that, but a wholeness based approach. The idea is that we access the the intrinsic health that is never breakable, it's never you don't run out of it.

And we allow that deeper wholeness to to be brought forward, to have a relationship with the processes of stagnation, the processes of division, the processes of disease, and it allows the disease processes or the pain, the emotional pain, or the physical pain to be transformed to be transmuted, which does get at some of the heart of Chinese medicine and some of the Taoist wisdom that everything is fundamentally key, which means that anything can become something else.

So, hatred can turn into love. Love can turn into curiosity, curiosity can turn into sadness, sadness can turn into hatred and then can turn right back into sadness and then can turn into anger and then can turn into happiness that it's underneath. That there is something that is sort of like a stem cell in that it has the potential to become anything and with a certain kind of relationship where we're orienting from wholeness and then embracing division, We have some capacity for a transmutation or a transformation to occur.

– I love that. And I think the this fundamental level is fascinating because different cultures, different traditions, speak about it differently and and to have a stem cell reference is great because it's it's the stem cell is what differentiates into the different, it becomes a specialized cell.

But the steam stem cell could become an ice l could become a liver cell, there's this sense of this play a more fick nature, this ability to, to morph into many different potential options and how that is translated as you brought up into even emotional experience, mental emotional way of relating to things has this fundamental underlying aspect.

And you spoke also about this sense of there being an unbroken, a fundamental kind of a wholeness or the potential at least for that. And in different traditions, sometimes it's talked about that, that's the default in the Buddhist tradition, there's this default of this brilliant sanity and in some of the Taoist, in Chinese medicine tradition, there's this default of this perfect balance between yin and yang and that through disease. There's this imbalance through perception almost through forgetting of this wholeness is part of how the physical form fragments. But then there are other traditions that might talk about original sin or other things where there's this coming in with challenges. How do you reconcile this underlying fundamental wholeness? Is this universal, is this a culture by culture thing in terms of this sense of this wholeness being fundamental and basic.

– Well, you know what I hear is that, you know, different traditions have different ways of interpreting their experience of division whether it's translated into something like original sin or the loss of original nature or however it's described, I think it's a way that human beings and that sometimes religious structures have tried to handle this and invite individuals into into a solution. And you know, it reminds me of yesterday I was listening to a a talk by Jeremy Johnson who I just I just adore this, this human being. He's so well spoken and has so much to offer. And he was talking about the fold where you have this gesture of the fold. And you when when you look at the fold, it looks like you're looking at from one perspective, it can look like separate separate lines. That is, especially if you're in one of those lines and you're looking and you see that you see this cavernous, this get this gaping space between where you are and where this other thing is.

But if you step back, you see that it's all a continuous line. It's a continuity. It's a wholeness and and so I do think that different traditions are gonna oriented this differently.

Different traditions also will tend to be more, some traditions are more noun oriented, which means that the western mind is like this. Well, there's a thing and there's a thing, there's another thing, there's an apple and there's a carrot and there's a kitten and that these are all now, these are these are all things that are separate from one another.

But when we also look at sort of the eastern way of knowing the eastern way of, of being, we come into this this realm of process, this realm of being a verb or verb ng. And again, it brings us to this this question or this notion of how things can become other things and that we aren't discrete, fixed objects, but we're actually a procession.

There's a there's a there's a process that's unfolding and, you know, this can start to sound really philosophical, but but if we really take it into the ground, it brings up questions for me around Well, what does this mean for chronic illness?

If the fundamental premise is that things can become other things and that we are not just a fixed object captured, taken out of space and time and saying, well, you're this, you're sick.

But instead there's this recognition of, well, you're you're an unfolding gesture, you're a folding your continuity that at sometimes is experienced as fracture.

But that fracture, if we step back is always part of a larger web of connection. – Yeah, that's really profound.

## Wholeness, traditions, and mind-body continuity

I think there's this definite, even just in the mind body dynamic, there's this Western view. If we have a mind, we have a body, they're different things, sometimes it's this sense of of their almost disconnected from each other in a way And I imagine this. I imagine and I feel sometimes, myself and I see other people who feel like there's this like, like head and hands, like thinking and doing some things in a little, like, almost forgetting that there's this physical vehicle and then other times really feeling like there's this physical mental, emotional co arising process.

And I one of the things I like to to to speak to to explain to to to patients in part of the healing process that rather than segmenting into, you know, that it's all caused physiologically. Because in this summit we're speaking about microbes and mental health and we're talking about how in some of the discussions how these microbial infections that we know that certain bacteria, certain viruses, certain gut microbiota imbalances can act will send signals to the brain cause brain neurochemistry changes, can cause the immune system to trigger an auto antibody response against brain structure and change the way the brain is able to process information and produce the neurochemicals that are the basis for emotional experience from one perspective, and that's one perspective and it's a valid perspective and there's also another perspective of the mental emotional, the way that we relate to the thoughts, the way that we relate to disease. The way that we relate to our emotional experience, how we're perceiving and the meaning that we're making and the stories that we're making and the underlying assumptions or the presuppositions that we don't even necessarily think about that are the basis for the constructs of which we're relating to our experience may actually impact the physiology too. And we know that too.

We know from research that doing meditation practices, doing certain things where their perceptual in nature can change, the immune function can change whether the body is more likely to contract an infection or be able to resolve an infection in the microbial issue.

So, I love this conversation because it's adding this element of that, that there's a co arising mind body process and and yeah, please. – You know the way I like to look at it in Chinese medicine, We have two different ways, at least two different ways of talking about inside and outside. And one way of talking about it the characters, they can also mean foreign and domestic. And so that inside and outside is like being on the inside of a fence or being on the outside of a fence, right? There's more like delineation, but then we have this other kind of inside and outside which is basically talking about the inner and outer lining like that. If you if you look at like a coat, it's like the outside and the inside of the same cloth and and to me that beautifully speaks to the mind body or the psyche and Soma marriage that we know first of all that the body we can say is distributed in that you wouldn't point to your elbow and be like, well that's my that's that's my body would say your body is everywhere that you call a body. So that's kind of obvious.

Some people also will talk about the brain as being distributed and they'll talk about this in different ways that, you know, it's not just this here.

Of course, some some people will talk about, there's different centers that have intelligences that are connecting with with the brain. But then also some folks will talk about how the brain itself is really a distributed organ throughout the entire body. We can say at the same time that the mind is also distributed throughout the entire body.

That we make a distinction between the brain that's in the head. Even if we might say the brain is distributed, we make a distinction distinction between the brain that's sort of the white matter and gray matter that's floating in our cranium and the mind which is not just located in the cranium.

And if we look at the meridian system, the meridian system and the and the 365 plus acupuncture points, we can look at that as a mapping for how the mind is distributed throughout the body and how when we are taking a step and grounding our heel on the on the, on the earth and then rolling forward and then lifting off.

that's not just a physiological movement of our anatomy. That's not just motion of foot, it's also motion of mind to be able to ground transition and leap and that those those arise together.

And so when we understand that the body and the mind are have this inside and outside of the same cloth relationship, it starts to become. For me much easier to understand how well we don't have to take sides and say, oh well, you know, some traditions will be like oh it's all in your mind and so you got and then the other traditions, like it's the freaking microbes and we don't have to say it's this or it's that what we know is that if you affect either a side of the cloth, the whole cloth moves just like there's some traditions that one of their approaches to sort of an infestation of complex microbial dynamics is to use internal. There's a in Chinese medicine, they'll there's a they'll they'll like throw lightning imaginable, they'll throw lightning at these sort of microbes and it can sound ridiculous, but it actually helps.

Is it gonna fumigate the physical structure of the microbe? I think we probably would want some other additions. But people that do these practices, they do feel an increase in health.

## Microbes, mind-body interplay, and the purpose of pain

And that's where we might want a marriage of modalities where we're doing interior oriented practices coupled with, you know, some some herbal herbal medicine that's gonna come in and it's gonna, you know, break down the whatever the, you know, the words, the little exoskeleton film and biofilm and fumigate thesethings so that, you know, so that we're coming at it from, it's like making sure that we're not just fumigating the outside of the coat, but we have other things to go on the inside and fumigate on the inside and those might be different modalities.

– Absolutely. I think that's really important and it starts to get muddled too. And we look at the microbiome and we see how many bacterial cells versus what we call human cells there are, it's actually more, we may be more more bacteria than we are, what we consider to be human cells in a lot of ways.

When we look at the research on that. And so there's there's this very intricate and intimate connection and when we're talking about pain, when we're talking about illness, when we're talking about the the breakdown or the the disconnect between what we would consider to be physical health, mental health, emotional health. What's the deeper purpose of pain of illness?

– Yeah, I mean, you know, I think we've been we've been starting to touch on this. I think for me the purpose in pain and illness is that it is a catalyst.

It's not just something to get rid of, but it's something that that awakens a journey if we look at any uh hero's journey, Joseph Campbell has, you know, you can google this hero's journey and it shows that it's basically any good story you've ever heard, usually has some version of a hero's journey and you know, it starts with a stable good world, usually everything is good, and then all of a sudden there is a call, there's something that, that it creates a break in that sort of wholeness of innocence.

For some of us, it happens earlier than others, for some of us, it happens as soon as we're born and so, but but we

have this, this archetypal sort of progression of things are good, and then all of a sudden things are not good, there's a disruption and then I'm called on a journey and on that journey I usually need helpers.

Usually the hero is not the smartest one in the, in the movie or in the story, they may be courageous, but also require wise counsel and they go along their journey and and it's, it's an unfolding of discovery, it's not a journey of elimination of the initial disruption.

And so to me, pain and illness there, it's often a disruption that requires us to explore. We go see, I mean, I can't tell you how many times clients have come to see me to support them with a particular physical or emotional issue that seems like I want to get rid of this, that then opened us up into a whole other territories of their own awakening and and their own learning journey.

So, to me that's that's the purpose. And coming back to what you said earlier on, if we look back at our lives, or if we look at our illness and our current perspective is if I could do this differently, if I had a magic wand, I would make it all go away immediately.

There's probably some work to be done around how to embrace the sensations which cause us agony and cause us, you know, create suffering in our lives.

– Yeah, absolutely. There's this capacity for pain and illness to be a catalyst. And sometimes that hero's journey will lead to the resolution of a certain illness and other times it leads to wisdom and purpose and clarity and an understanding of life in a way of being able to open the heart and to get closer to other people without changing the illness or the pain.

And sometimes that pain can become a teacher, that illness can become a teacher in a way that might not have occurred without it. And there can be this gratitude was just talking to a patient who said he was grateful for falling down the stairs because it opened something in him and it helped him to understand the pain really sent him on a journey. And so this is when we can come to this, there's there's immense healing that can occur. And whether that healing is physical or emotional or mental or spiritual might depend and and there's not a right or wrong, good or bad necessarily of the outcome. The process is sometimes more valuable than the outcome and other times the outcome and the destination is really the focus and, and people do. He'll actually physically and emotionally and spirit. – Yeah, sometimes it's both.

And you know, what comes up for me is I'm, you know, hearing you, is that what can ultimately arise in what I'm inviting here is deep hope that doesn't require the illness to go away or not.

Of course, what we hope for is that the client awakens to deep wisdom has an incredible journey and then all of the chronic illnesses and pain, they have resolves like that, that's the ideal situation sometimes that is what's happening and they are healing and they, it's resolving. I'm thinking of, you know, patients I've had with brain injuries where it's resolving its healing, but it's slow, but it's happening and they're gaining wisdom and like that's fantastic.

And what is the impact of hope inside of our inside of our being as a living human being, in contrast with what is the impact. I mean, this is the way we could put it like this.

I have a chronic illness that's debilitating what's the impact of, of having authentic hope at the same time that is not connected to whether the disease goes away or not, It's just an experience of hope of, of, of gratitude for being alive and conversely, what's the impact of having that same very illness and feeling deflated and hopeless. These are this is a radically different experience of being human. – It is, and it brings me to this sense of there's the journey and there's the destination and a lot of people are so focused on the destination.

## Hope, healing journeys, and the avocado layers model

I have this conversation, a lot of people who are coming into the clinic who are start starting care and I say, I say, you know, I've worked with a lot of people with similar things of you and you know, we may be able to get to the

destination you're looking for, we may only get 80% there, We may not get there at all.

And the journey itself can actually be tremendously healing in a way that if you're less, if you hold the outcome loosely, if you hold the destination loosely that it's an interest in that we are moving towards it were being active, we're not passively resigning to that, this is what it is and it's never going to change if there is depression, if there is anxiety, if there is chronic fatigue, if there is chronic pain that there is, there is hope that that can shift and there's also a way of accepting, embracing leaning into and uncovering an aspect of an opening that can occur through the journey of working with that experience, not against it, not pushing it away, but working with that experience that may be even more valuable than the shift in the outcome that you're looking for. So, you speak about Alexander layers in your approach to working with people working with human beings, and I found this to be very valuable in in understanding this healing process that we're talking about here. What are the layers for of the human being and what does this have to do with this? This wholeness based approach to healing?

– Yeah, so, we're basically, we're from a Chinese medical perspective, we're kind of built like an avocado. You know, basically there's a skin layer, there's a mushy layer, and there's a seed layer, and there's a 4th layer that we may or may not get to in this conversation. But in terms of your question, the road to wholeness is an ability to get a little bit closer to that seed to that, that core essence of who we are to be able to relate to our illness, to relate to our pain, To relate to the joys of our lives.

To relate to everything from this deeper place of wholeness. And so, having an understanding of, sort of what are the contours and content of these three or four layers can help us differentiate when we start looking towards a practice saying, okay, well, am I in wholeness in relationship to my my chronic illness right now, there's some very simple ways of of answering that, and and but having these layers layer distinctions can really help us get clear on that.

– Well, Holy guacamole here, with the avocado metaphors, so homeless and avocados, that makes me think of holy guacamole. So the first layer, so when you're differentiating, so we have the skin layer, we have the mushy layer, we have the the speed, and then there's 4th So, with this skin layer, with this, first of the layers, can you say more about what that is and any ways to work with that layer practices or what what what what can people know about that?

– Yeah, so that the most outer layer is it's really autonomic, which means automatic, it's just like if somebody throws a ball at you, you know, your nerve, your autonomic nervous system moves you out of the way, or catches it, or something like that. And this layer is fairly in health, it's spontaneous, like I said, like somebody throws something and you just catch it and you're kind of smooth and dancing around, and you know, you'll see athletes engaged in this layer all the time, but when it goes off, it can also become habituated, and we see this in many ways, we can see this, for example, in the context of pain, physical pain, where the nervous system will actually create a loop that you're not actually hurt. You're not actually injured anymore, but your nervous system has now wired itself in such a way that you keep feeling the pain sensation. And so, you know, the the large sort of the large kind of category, or the takeaways for the surface layer is it's unconscious, it's autonomic.

In health, it's spontaneous and when it goes off it becomes habituated. This can include habituated responses, immune responses. So, you know, as well as habituated nervous system responses, which is really basically saying the way in which I'm interfacing with the surface of the world is occurring in habituated ways now. In terms of practices, there's a really great practice for anybody who's interested in learning more about this, I would suggest a book called away out by Alan Gordon.

Just as a little side a little footnote there, but basically what you do, let's say, you've got a symptom could be brain fatigue, it could be some sort of a physical pain. I approach fatigue the same in this practice, the same way. I would approach pain.

They're both sensations that are being produced by the nervous system. Okay, if we want to look at it that way, we could we could say it's we could look at it from so many different ways, but from this particular narrow view, we can say that those sensations are produced by the nervous system, and what we do is we just go into your body and you notice the edges of the sensation.

So you know, for me when I get tired sometimes I think I'll say, oh I'm so tired and I somehow unconsciously think that my whole body is tired. But if I actually check, I'm like, oh no, you know, it's just my head that feels tired or oh I just feel fatigue in my chest.

So you'll notice if you suffer from chronic fatigue or you work with people that suffer from chronic fatigue, the fatigue is actually often in specific places.

Yes, it can be everywhere, but when we actually check it out, sometimes you can actually locate it. Or if there's a sensation of pain, whatever it is, you want to find the edges. Why?

Because if you go into the sensation that will tend to intensify it, which is okay if that's what we want to do and we have a practitioner supporting us through that process and know why we want to do that.

## Working with the surface layer and nervous system loops

But if we're just trying to help ourselves day to day and we're doing it on our own and this is the first time you're hearing of this, we want to stay with the edges because that will be more likely to, it will be less likely to activate the nervous system more.

Okay, it's just like when somebody gets too close to your in your space, it gets agitating. We don't wanna do that to the pain or the other sensations that you're working with. So you find the edges of the pain and just imagine that you're holding this pain or this sensation the way that you would hold a little kitten that was sleeping or a little baby that is needing your care. Because what happens is the nervous system will translate. Often it translates that were unsafe.

And it will express that lack of safety to us in the form of pain or in the form of fatigue or in the form of other symptoms. And so by you holding it gently lovingly with curiosity, just gentleness.

And if it's hard for you to get there, you're like, I'm not a gentle person. Just think about some little animal that you just can't help yourself and it kind of melts you a little bit. You think of that.

You think of the feeling associated with that and then you bring that to the edges of your own sensation and then you just hang out there maybe for eight seconds.

Sometimes it can be helpful to count if you're not used to being in your body counting can help you stay focused and you want to find a number that feels manageable.

And what I mean by that is if you're there for four seconds and it feels too intense because it's a lot of pain, choose three seconds. If you can stay there for eight seconds or 10 seconds, go for it. You don't have to choose the number.

I'm saying you want to choose the number that you can stay present. Stay loving, stay holding with gentleness without it feeling like either you space out or things get too intense.

Whatever that number is, let's say it's four seconds, you count 1234 and then you bring your awareness somewhere else. Maybe you can feel the your face or you can feel a shirt or you can feel a soft blanket and if you're in a lot of pain or the sensations really intense. Double it.

So if I do four seconds while I'm embracing the pain, then I'll do eight seconds touching the other. The other thing that's just soft and nice. And then you come back to the sensation of pain holding it lovingly and then back and you go back and forth. And what this will do is this will start to help unravel some of the loops that your nervous system is in and help it learn that it's actually safe. And this can I mean, I've seen for some people, I'll see that it will give them a way to be with pain that feels way better.

But on the other hand, I've heard people say I'm scared to tell you this because I hope it won't like go back. But

somehow, like eight years of fibromyalgia pain just disappeared in like 10 minutes, right? So you have the I gave you the this sort of less exciting uh sort of scenario first where you just have a better relationship with the sensations and maybe they get a little better, but not a lot.

And then I've also seen sort of radical things happen, where it's just like they're just like, how did that pain just disappear and not come back? Okay, so that's a practice for that first, that first layer.

– Yeah, I love this practice because the cycles that you're speaking to, the spiraling that that that I see so often and when when not intentionally doing this kind of practice can be that the fatigue occurs. And then there's frustration about the fatigue occurring. And then there's this sense of this inner critic that comes why me and I'm trying so hard. There's this all these other people around me, they're drinking, they're staying up late, they're not getting enough sleep, I'm not drinking, I'm paying attention to my diet.

I'm getting enough sleep and I'm tired. Why me? And then these comparisons create this inner tension and then that tension drives the stake deeper. And then there's this sense of almost sometimes hopelessness about that it will ever change and that maybe I should just passively resigned to it. And that's different than acceptance that becomes driving it deeper. And so sometimes and then sometimes there's anger about the other people and it's different and the frustration and then you get this layering and layering and layering and layering and how much it's a it's an open question that I have for myself and a lot of people, how much of the pain comes from the actual pain and how much of it comes from the layering on top of the pain of these different things that are occurring.

– So I'd love to speak a little bit. Yeah, so we then I'm gonna just briefly go over the second layer and the third layer. So then I and then I'll circle back to what you were just talking about um for the listeners, you know, Miles was just talking about all these parts of the south and how we we have something happen, and then all of these parts of the self have different perspectives that start taking over, and I'm gonna I'm gonna remember that, and I'm gonna come back to that.

So we have the second layer, Oh, did you want to say something? No, so we have the second layer, which is like the mushy layer of the avocado, and this also is a layer. Well, so this layer has to do with how we receive the world and take it in in a nutritive way, and the takeaway for now there's we could talk about these layers for hours and hours and hours, but the takeaway for now is that this layer is a place through which we create meaning largely based on the interactions that we have with other people.

Okay, so if your parents were the kind of parents that had a positive outlook, you probably digested that and that's going to be in this mushy part of your human avocado, if your parents were fearful people, um if they were hypercritical people, if they were people who avoided their pain, avoided difficult conversations.

That's also something that you likely took in to this second layer. So on the one hand, we have that surface layer which has all these habituated responses that are automatic. We don't think about it.

And then we have the second layer which is filled with all these different things that we've internalized and made in terms of the meaning that others have sort of told us is meaningful or that we have decided together is meaningful.

Now, a lot of these parts of the self that Miles was speaking to exist either in the 1st and 2nd layer, these are the parts that are the critic. These are the protectors that get really tight and they say, oh well we don't want you to go out in the world because you've been you've been chronically ill and we're afraid that if you go out and have fun that you're gonna get sicker and so we're going to contract and then the critic, you shouldn't go out, you know better, all that kind of stuff. These are all in the 1st and 2nd layer, which brings us to the third layer.

And this is the important important distinction here is that this third layer is our deeper essence and it is whole. It doesn't. The the deepest aspect of this third layer doesn't have a problem.

It's it has qualities such as interests, curiosity, infinite wonder, compassion, love. And these are not things that this dimension of our being. It doesn't we don't we don't have to cultivate. I want to be a more loving person from here.

This place seems to be in everybody I've ever met. It seems to be intrinsic to the individual. And so here's what starts to happen. And this comes back to what Miles was speaking about, where I felt like you really beautifully illustrated the kind of complexity of what occurs in a human being's life where one part comes on and then another part comes on and now you have all of these parts that are yelling at each other, oh, just forget it, just go to the party, let it go have fun.

And then the other part comes and says, no, we know what happened the last time you did that and it went really badly and and everybody is feuding. And what happens is these parts take over and we lose contact with curiosity, compassion for self or other love and courage because these parts take over. And now the difference between these parts of the self and this deeper essential wholeness. is this the deeper place of essential wholeness can see multiple perspectives, it can see many sides to a situation and it's also comfortable in the unknown.

## The middle layer, parts, and accessing deeper wholeness

Whereas these parts these fragments, they usually look from one perspective, it's either a terrible idea to go to the party, or you should just say effort and just go and have fun.

And those two parts are going to hold their position and have a difficult time without facilitation. They're gonna have a difficult time being able to see each other's perspective.

And so, in light of this, the invitation which can lead us then into a practice, is how do we go about recognizing when we are orienting to our lives orienting to our illnesses, orienting to our experiences from wholeness or when are we doing that from fragmentation?

And once we can recognize that it brings the next question. Well, if I'm coming from fragmentation, if apart has taken over what do I do about it, – That's beautiful. And there's are two elements here.

There's the one element of this deeper layer where this sense of wholeness is intrinsic. There's there's a sense of love and peace and courage and wholeness that and I believe that this is intrinsic to that that everyone has and maybe forgets it, maybe doesn't think about it, maybe hasn't access it in a while maybe, but that that most people when I almost everyone when I talk to them and when I work together in conversation and dialogue about you know, do you believe on some level that you have a part of yourself that is completely unbroken and untouched by any of this. That might take a little while.

It might take some slowing down. But that people usually say, yeah, I do, I do. And I've touched it before and maybe it's not often touched and but it can be cultivated.

I feel there's this sense of this ability to drop into sense into be able to and it it coexists always like I get this sense that with ever every fragmented emotional experience in parts that are combative and dialoguing in these ways and being resisted or pushed away that simultaneously there's a coexisting of this underlying wholeness that permeates through it all and that there's this capacity to connect with that it's always available and it's always accessible whether it's accessed and the awareness is is with it and that from that place, there's this relating to the fragmentation of the experience.

That's another question altogether. And I think that's really right for people, I think people really are probably hearing this conversation resin. Oh yeah, I can I can see that and there's this also I think this concept in in in gratitude of there's this all these studies show gratitude is beneficial for health for happiness and and and I'm curious your thoughts on gratitude because there's this sometimes with gratitude, there's this I'm so grateful that I have shelter over my head.

And what that does is that's actually in a sense, creating a comparison to a lack of having shelter or to other people not having shelter. How does that fit in? Does that fit in the second layers that fit the deeper layer? – It can be, it can be either, and I think that's why the question is so important. It's and so I would probably take it even beyond one thing like gratitude, but, you know, even the realm of affirmation, which gratitude can some people can go towards gratitude as an affirmation, like, oh, I'm so grateful. You know, I'm so beautiful now, the problem is or not

the problem. The question is, which part of the self is saying that, is it a part of the self that wants to keep everything together? Oh, I'm so grateful for this, and I'm grateful for that? And I'm being really good by saying I'm grateful that I have a shelter over my head and then I'm this this or is it coming from a place that is a genuine wholeness, which could only ever be grateful.

And so again, it brings, the question has parts have parts taken over and are they the ones doing the affirmation? Because if they are parts have a hard time helping us heal because they take a position and they hold their position.

Whereas wholeness has a much better time helping us heal because it's naturally and arising of all these things, gratitude, gratefulness, joyousness even in the face of really difficult experiences. So maybe maybe I offer a little how a little practice here.

So I'm I'm borrowing some of this from what's called I. F. S. Or internal family systems, which is an incredible modality. I my work is informed by it.

And it's a very nuanced system for how to work with parts. The beginning is the practice is as simple as this. You can you can just write down some of these characteristics of of wholeness which is curious, naturally grateful. It is not exhausted.

It is not overwhelmed. It's not ever it's never overwhelmed. It's interested, curious, loving, compassionate, grateful, all of those kinds of things. So let's say I'm walking down the street or I'm sitting on my couch and I start to contemplate my illness or I start to contemplate pain or I start to contemplate what I should do for the if I'm going to go to the party or not, I can ask myself, okay, is this wholeness or is this a voice of fragmentation?

If it's a voice of fragmentation and they'll be like oh no we have to go to the party because we told them we would oh we should never go to this party because no one will like us, oh we can't go to this party because they're going to have all this perfume and we know that we react to that. Oh no, it's all of the figuring.

Oh you should go, you, you shouldn't go that whatever the critic is saying. So what we do is this if you notice that you're speaking a piece of fragmented part of the self has taken over.

We just pause for a minute and we just gently asked them, Hey, I noticed that you just took over. I really want to know what you have to say. But I'm wondering if you can unblessed and and just step next to me so that we can be in relationship and see what they say?

Maybe they'll say yes. Maybe they'll say no, let's say they say yes. They step aside. Then you ask yourself. How do I feel towards this whole scenario now?

Oh well I was, I did feel exhausted about it now. I feel sad about it. Okay. Hey, sad part. Would you do me a favor? I'm wondering if you'd be willing to just blend Step aside be with me.

I don't want you to go away. I want you to be here. But can you blend so I can have access to my deeper wholeness. Okay, now how do I feel now? I'm pissed?

Can the angry part step aside and just be here with me and what you'll start to notice is you have all of these different shifts in how you feel towards whatever it is towards apart.

You know, I'm so exhausted with my pain. Can the exhausted part just step aside for a minute now, how now, how do I feel towards my face pain? I feel a little, I feel like sort of loving towards it.

I feel a little bit curious about it. Okay, now you have anchored or you have uncovered a flavor of wholeness from here. You can begin making friends with all these different parts of the self.

Now, this doesn't mean you have multiple personality disorder. Everybody has multiplicity of self. Okay. And so

then you just start making friends and you the key here is acknowledging each part because a lot of the parts you're gonna counter not all of them, a lot of the parts you're going to encounter, they're protecting you. They may do it in weird ways like by giving you brain fog, but they're protecting you and if you can acknowledge them from wholeness and you can even ask them, hey, instead of giving me brain fog to communicate with me, would you be willing to communicate with me in a different way or now that you have my attention, Could you turn the brain fog down a little bit because I would love to just be here and be present with you and hear what's happening for you and find out what you need and it's harder for me to do that when I have so much brain fog And so the point is step one you recognize, am I coming from wholeness or fragmentation?

Step two. If the answer is fragmentation, you can ask the parts to step aside. Don't try to get rid of them. That won't go well, invite them to step aside for step three to become friends with them and to honor them and to be curious about them. And that would be sort of a first easy practice for how to begin navigating your life. So for me, if I'm walking down the street and all of a sudden I hear a voice in my head, Oh man, I'm so tired. Like I'm just done.

My next step while I'm walking is hey, tired part, would you be willing to just be in relationship with me so I can stay in wholeness? Not only does this make us better people because it gives us a practice for how to show up with integrity, compassion, love and curiosity, gratitude, but it also is a way to begin working with our not only our inner dialogue that I can create a lot of physical pain, but also as I mentioned or alluded to.

Sometimes parts, they're not the only thing involved here, but sometimes parts are creating headaches, they're creating brain fog. They're creating pain because they're trying to protect you.

If this person is in pain enough, they won't go out and get hurt And if you can begin to engage with them in dialogue with them from wholeness, that's the key.

If you engage with a part from another part, it often won't work. If you engage from wholeness to the part and you say, hey, could you please turn the headache off or any parts just speak into your system?

Any parts that have have anything to do with my headache? If you have anything to do with the headache, will you just show up? So I can just be with you right now. Can you turn it down and you'll be surprised?

It may not reduce it to zero, but it may reduce it quite a bit. – And what I love about this is that it's not it's not what the choices. I mean we started with going to the party.

It's not whether you go or whether you don't go even, it's not like no you didn't go. So you took care of yourself. So your headache isn't there? It's an inner process. It's not the outer and so the same decision could be made, going to the party could be made the same external decision.

But from a completely different inner processing can shift the whole experience of the symptom Atala ji so the brain fog headaches, These inner experience that may be part of this inner conflict that's occurring and it may not be and it may not go away and that's okay and there can still be a wholeness together with a headache, together with brain fog.

## Gratitude, inner dialogue, and practical parts work

If it doesn't, if you arrive at that wholeness, there's this sense of of of a Peacefulness about what is and it may or may not subside or it may turn down a little and that's different than the actual decision or the behavior. And that's really interesting because a lot of so in functional medicine, it's labs, It supplements its behavior design and behavior design. It is really important.

Those behaviors can impact health. The inner process of how one comes to even the same behavior can actually impact things significantly, how one relates to the same illness can impact things significantly.

So there is this inner cloth that we're speaking about the inner cloth and that's very, very different. And in the bigger context, the personality structures we edit ourselves. I think all of us, we grew up in a culture and a family and

religion and whatever we grew up in that told us this part's good. This part is bad.

We need to, you know, have these kinds of this behavior is good, this behavior is bad, you need to behave yourself, this is appropriate. This is not appropriate. And it's continual fragmentation and creation of this complex, not even that it's bad. It may protect it may, it may keep you safe in in circumstances and situations, once the organism has developed and grown enough to understand a little bit more about the consequences of actions.

Now this inter process can become really really useful and really amazing. – Yeah. And you know what can start to happen is that we decide to go to the party based on that deeper from deeper wholeness.

That becomes our decision maker. Because the parts they always want to be the decision maker. There's the part that says ah screw the doctor, I'm not gonna do what they say, I'm going to go and then there's the other part that wants to please and say, oh no like keep your life together, listen to everything the doctor says.

And actually what I would invite is that we learn how to differentiate between those parts that are in protector roles and this deeper wholeness which is gonna give us a much better set of choices. And like you said, it may look the same like we don't go to the party but it's not because we're trying to please the doctor or we're trying to keep it all together. That's that's it looks like the same behavior.

But it's it's coming from a different place. And if we prioritize our choice making to be rooted in wholeness, it really transforms our entire life. And allows a lot of this stuff whether we're having a relationship to a new food pattern, new dietary patterns, supplemental patterns, other behavioral patterns.

It really helps keep our interior healthy because we're not engaging in the parts that are really trying to protect us by either controlling everything or saying, screw it to everything. – I wrote this this article that I give to people and it's about how to take supplements, not what supplements to take, but how to take supplements. And it talks about accessing an inner wholeness and utilizing that in the process of doing it and it makes a big difference.

So we're just down to a few minutes here. What what else do you wanna do? You wanna touch on the fourth layer? Do you want to deepen this? Do you want to summarize or review? Where where do you want to go here?

– I think for now I'd like to just summarize a little bit. – Yeah. – Which is that we are intrinsically hole and for wholeness to be real, it has to include separation, it has to include pain.

It has to include suffering because we're looking at this this fold, that Jeremy Johnson was talking about this, the gesture of the fold which has separation.

And that separation is part of one threat. It's one whole it's a continuity. And that if we can orient to our experience from a perspective of wholeness from an embodied experiential dimension of wholeness, then it changes what it means to be sick and in pain and what it means to be a human being who suffers in moments of agony in moments that feel too much and through a shift in how we are orienting. It gives us a completely different, it gives us access to our our experiences of illness and suffering as a means to discovering deeper, more nuanced dimensions of wholeness.

That a perspective. It's why I corrected how I said it, a perspective of wholeness is fine, but if it's just a fragment and part of the self that's holding a perspective of wholeness, I swear I'm whole, he said, I'm whole, I like that's still separation and suffering.

And if but if we can use the practice to help things step aside the parts of ourselves to step aside to really get a felt sense experience of the wholeness.

## Summary, resources, and closing remarks

That's where we naturally feel grateful for all the hell we've been through without trying to force it to sound like, oh, we're so good and noble, but because it's it's authentic and that's when we can say if I could change this with a

magic wand, I wouldn't because I see how this has been a help in creating the path, the helpers that usually look like the sage or some sort of being along the road ends up being, oh, well, the illness itself was a catalyst that helped me find some of the necessary helpers to be able to transform my experience into something that now I can't go back because I've learned too much. And if I erase this, I'd erase all of it and I don't want to get rid of all of the fruit, – It's beautiful and I want to highlight that there's this intrinsic nous to that wholeness that it's not that you have to find it as something that you've never had.

It's more like it's there, it's underneath it all. It's foundational, it's fundamental. It's basic and that by moving aside or asking or inviting for the parts still be with you.

But to be in conversation with this deeper part that is already there, it doesn't need to be found in a sense, it's it's it needs to be remembered. It's there already. So, I love this and I love this practice.

I think this will be very, very useful to people starting to have this sense that no matter what the outer, there's the thinner work. And while doing the outer work, this inner work can be so enriching and so fulfilling.

It's not, it's not an either or with the outer and the inner work, but it is this immense, rich and deep potential for this inner work that I really hope that people take seriously and take to heart and begin to work with. And I know some will want to work with you.

Someone want to find out more. How can they find out more Alexander about your work. – Yeah, So there's a couple of different ways. 1 website is eoswellnesscenter.com com, that's if you're interested in working with me directly.

I have some some free stuff courses and things on its eoslearningcollective.com. And then finally, I do a lot of work with the new Field Network, which is an amazing organization and that's a newfieldnetwork.com.

And so those are some places. I also I have a podcast called Dialogues at the Living Edge. You can look around for that, you can also find that at the EOS Learning Collective website as well.

So those are some different ways. People can learn more connect with me directly and stuff like that. – Thank you so much, Alexander. Thank you everyone for watching and participating in this dialogue, which has truly been a journey from fragmentation into wholeness and an invitation to connect with a part of yourself that is already in this peaceful, whole. Content kind of a place.

This has been an episode of microbes in mental health. I'm your host, Dr. Miles, Take care and have a wonderful day.