Summit Welcome and Self-Transcendence

I am so delighted you are here, joining us at The Trauma to Transcendence Summit. Because you could be playing fantasy football. You could be goofing off.

You could be having a beer on your back deck or walking your dog, and instead you are here and by you being here, you are saying, I care about myself enough to show up for me to give me this time to heal and to dig into my issues, to open up the possibility of working with those traumatic events, those imprints that have held me back, that have squelched my potential and release them and then move into these states of bliss.

And once we know that are possible, when you move into those phases of what we call self-transcendence, Abraham Maslow, the great developer of what we know is the hierarchy of needs.

He had at the very top of that hierarchy had self-actualization. But in the last two years of his life, he began to realize there was a stage beyond self-actualization.

He found people were moving far beyond simply actualizing their potential. They were moving into transcending their limitations. And so he called that capstone self-transcendence.

That's why we're here. But in order to be in self-transcendence, you have to also heal all of those habitual wounds that hold you back, that keep you looping on things.

You don't want to think about, those intrusive thoughts that hypervigilance, that looking for the next bad thing that needs to be healed. And then you can really move into these higher states of being higher states of consciousness with clarity.

So I'm so glad you're here. You're participating in this process. You're voting for your own healing and well-being. And I'm thrilled that you are joining us today.

I'm also delighted to be sharing with you the wisdom today. Sarah Close, she's a Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Oregon, and she is with BetterHelp, which you can find at betterhelp.com.

She received her master's of science and clinical mental health counseling and operates as from a relational, trauma informed approach. She is trained in NRM and Dr. Sarah Gently aims to shift the focus of mental health care from struggles and problems that we all face, to the resiliency and the wisdom that's inherent in seeking help.

Sarah, it's wonderful to have you here. Yeah, I'm so grateful to be here. Thank you all for tuning in. I'm so curious about what led you to this career path.

What drew you to devoting your life and making this your your focus? Yeah, I love to say, that I feel really grateful that I get to be a therapist on paper and a therapist at heart.

I think since I was a kid, I was definitely the person asking people about what's going on with their inner world. sometimes at the annoyance of some of the adults in my life.

But I was so curious about everything, and that just continued all throughout my developmental years. And when I kind of found therapy, both in my own experience as being a client and then also being able to see that as an opportunity for myself, I felt like I was coming home to a place that made the most sense for me.

So I feel so grateful that I get to do this. And I'm so humbled and, inspired by my clients. They continue to show me the deep questions, and opening up and being curious is the best way through. So.

wonderful. And what what big personal issue would it therapy help you?

Sarah Closeu2019s Path to Therapy

All of it was there like one really pivotal issue. You remember that it made a huge difference. Yeah. so in my 20s, I was, feeling a sense of, maybe a sense of kind of feeling trapped by my experience of being a, really caring about other people.

And I was in a placement. I was in a place of wondering if my, desire to help was actually, would me kind of basically becoming, my desire to help was, was an invitation to, continue to make my, ego happy on some level.

So I was really kind of stuck in my grad school program, obviously pursuing helping people. But I was also very concerned that this was just a part of me, that I was like, checking the box somehow that I've, you know, made this a part of my identity.

And I was working with a internal family systems practitioner who was wonderful and just was able to kind of help to notice all of the parts that were coming online.

And I was able to notice the, helping professional part of me and see that as this wonderful part of me that I could bring closer to me and not judge for, you know, kind of leading my life in this particular direction.

I've been able to work with that part as this essential component, as opposed to maybe pathologizing it or rejecting it as, you know, this thing that's just making me feel better by helping other people.

Yeah. And accepting and loving and and being willing to, to sit with and look at all your parts is is powerful. there were very kinds of parts work for the last century, and ifs is the current fashionable flavor of it, but it goes back a long, long, long way back goes back to shamanism.

They talked about soul retrieval and finding bits of your soul fragments that have split off and integrating them back into the whole. So it's been around since time immemorial.

And when you do love it, accept all your parts. It makes a huge difference. I want to just have everyone before we move on from that with Sarah. Is it big inside?

What part of you are you not accepting? Grab your journal. You've been journaling all along. Grab your journal right now and just make a note of that part of you that you have been accepting.

Sarah, what was your name for that part? Oh, man. Heidi. Heidi, I. Apologize to all the Heidi's out there. that I. Love her so much. So, yeah. so name yours as well as you're reflecting on which part of you you have trouble accepting, then you can give it a name and, you know, can be a funny name.

It can be an evocative name, and it's just a name that resonates with you. And then you can start to have dialog with it. You can start to have perspective on it.

You can start to take the witness perspective when you're thinking about that part of yourself. So self-compassion begins with just holding that part of yourself and naming it is useful exercise.

So in your journal now give your name. I didn't know I'd be saying that one out loud. yeah. Something powerful about naming it. It also that that name usually is shorthand for all of the emotions, all of the energy that's bound up in that part of self.

So it's a really handy tag to use. Totally. And so how did that catalyze your growth once you did that? Yeah. I think being able to accept that this was a like a part of me that both gave me some sense of purpose and was a part of me that I needed to kind of be mindful of.

It felt like I had a new sense of a weakness in my practice as being a therapist and being a human. It gave me a sense of, kind of guidance, and it kept me alert to the possibility of that part and also other parts kind of coming in

and maybe disrupting my access to my core self or my wise part.

Parts Work and Naming Inner Conflicts

so yeah, I feel like I connect to Heidi often, and I kind of it's been helpful just to have a little bit more awareness and expansion into kind of characterizing these different aspects of who I am, instead of experiencing myself as this blended identity, which has not been very serving of me in the past.

Yeah, yeah. And so again, as you're journaling, you might find other aspects of self popping up in your awareness. Go ahead and write those down too. Because we aren't carbs and selves.

We are composite selves. We aren't unitary selves. You have all these different parts of self and they aren't always in agreement. Like one part of yourself wants to go buy a house with security.

The other part says, well, interest rates are high right now. Prices are high right now. I might be left high and dry. So one part of yourself says do it one part.

Even self says don't do it. You can get mired in these conflicts unless you're able to realize that there are all these different aspects of who you are and start to work creatively with them.

So it's powerful to make note of them. And you can go ahead and journal about them as we're going ahead here. And who knows, you may even go to betterhelp.com and take a look and see who wants to help you out.

It's available there to help you work on them. So let's go ahead and take a dive into this whole foundation topic of trauma. And I know I saw it as I had a lot of experience with veterans.

At one point I was working a lot of veterans, and I just found they were they were stuck. Sarah, at that point, this was before the wars in the Middle East.

So they're mostly Vietnam veterans, and they were just looping on, traumatic memories, traumatic events, and they were not able to easily move past them at that point.

There were about 500,000 Vietnam veterans with PTSD in the VA system. Now, there are a lot of them have died. they're very high mortality rates, very high rates of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, other things.

Now they're about half that number left. But, just watching them being unable to free themselves, they wanted to free themselves, but they couldn't. They were just dragged down by these memories involuntarily.

That's why the called intrusive thoughts, because they intrude regardless of of what they wanted. So, what is this thing called? Trauma? How does it affect the mind?

How does it affect the body? How does it affect the brain? Yeah, such a good question. And I love that you started from not necessarily the beginning of trauma.

I think humans have been experiencing trauma forever. Right. But I think our understanding of trauma really did start with PTSD and with shock trauma and with veterans, first responders.

And I think nowadays it's expanded into a much more nuanced kind of understanding. I definitely, interested in seeing the way that research continues to evolve around developmental trauma or complex PTSD.

but after like my one of my maybe the most holistic definitions, it's quite simple. I think of trauma for me is, any moment where our needs are not met, which can be a very extreme moment.

Of course, we're talking about Vietnam veterans coming back and having intrusive thoughts of obviously not being able to have survival needs met in certain situations, let's say, or relational needs met.

And then we also have maybe some attachment wounding that happens, in our family of developed family of origin where we don't get attention in a moment or we don't experience our mother's love or, the love of a system around us.

And then, of course, there's all sorts of other traumatic instances that can occur. So when that happens, our body is still there and present in the moment, and our mind can do all sorts of different things to try to cope, which is a beautiful tool.

It's a wonderful safety mechanism that our brain can do. We can do something called dissociation where we kind of go out of our body. And I think of that as a beautiful tool.

But it's often, you know, not used because it's a beautiful thing happening. And so trauma work is often about kind of slowly finding a way to get back into our bodies and wear a bunch of the wisdom and the memories might exist, and continuously reminding our minds that we're safe now, that we're in a present space of safety and trust and love.

And of course, that's what these techniques like EFT and eMDR do. They keep people in their bodies while re-experiencing rather than dissociating. Dissociating is fine if you're three, four, or five years old and you're being abused and you can't escape, will make sense to be out of your body.

If you're in a foxhole and firefight and you're in imminent danger of death, sure, by all means. You know, have your, have your sense of being fly up there 100ft above your head.

But it isn't so adaptive if you're back home and safe with your family, and that's still happening. So go ahead. Just just share about these these body based therapies and how they help people stay grounded while they process those memories.

Yeah, there's so many different modalities and approaches EFT being one tool and wonderful approach to supporting nervous system regulation, supporting getting back into our body.

Also eMDR is sort of body based. It's also, you know, kind of has a blending of other things. but definitely kind of any sort of modality that shifts our focus from the mental space and into our body's inherent wisdom.

somatic psychology is one such way. There's, a definitely a myriad of different things. I personally practice yoga, and although that's not technically therapy, I think of it as therapy when I practice yoga, because I'm really mindfully going into my body and connecting in a beautiful way.

before I got on this call, I got to do your eco eco meditation, which I love, your eco meditation. So grateful for that. And I think of that also any sort of mindfulness practice.

I love guided meditations personally, the ones that kind of help me imagine and feel into my body space and connect to something, and reminding myself that I can feel safe in my body again.

And that, of course, is the ultimate purpose of therapy. Being safe in your body again and not having to to go out there, go and share with us a couple of cases with the people you've worked with who learned to be safe in their bodies.

Understanding Trauma and Its Effects

Again. Yeah. one person stands out and I was using the visual with her, that we were kind of walking through a house together when we were working on her trauma story, and we both have flashlights, but hers is the one that's on.

Mine's only there for if it's needed. And we're kind of navigating this house, and she gets to guide us to whichever room makes the most sense to focus in on.

And we also, of course, have a safety room that we can go to in emergencies and escape hatches and all of that wonderful stuff. and throughout this process of kind of maybe exploring each of the rooms and opening up different aspects of her trauma story.

I noticed her shifting into this more embodied presence, and it was kind of challenging to maybe describe. But throughout the course of working with her, I noticed her just lighting up internally, and you could feel it in the room with her, like we might be going through some difficult stuff, but I could feel the capacity that she was opening up within herself in order to kind of go into these places.

And I was noticing that, you know, sometimes joy is not a very safe emotion to be experiencing. It can feel quite vulnerable. But she was opening up her capacity to experience joy in life, even though we were going through this house and it was difficult and some dark memories were coming through, I could just feel her, her presence opening up, and eventually that felt comfortable enough to kind of explore together.

And she happily told me that she had gotten back into what she really love to do dance. And she had stopped dancing for many years, and she had recently gotten back into dancing, and she said she was enjoying being in her body in a space with other people around, and that was used to feel really vulnerable.

And she said she was able to experience it as freedom again. It was. It's quite overwhelming. I'm curious when you felt that she was shifting and becoming more comfortable, was this a virtual session or in-person session?

It was in person. In person. Okay, yeah. And so I know sometimes when I work with people in person, I'm, I'm picking up hues like that and signals like that.

I pick them up a little bit and in zoom sessions or online sessions, but when they're in front of me, I really can can feel that sometimes. Yeah, yeah.

I think sometimes with a virtual session, it's like a posture experience that I can notice first, just a sense of maybe they have a little bit more command in their body in the way that they're kind of showing up in the virtual space, and sometimes it can be an effect that's a little bit more shut down, which makes a lot of sense when we're carrying some pretty intense trauma.

But over time, it can almost be just this, like slow kind of waking up. It's really cool to watch people tell their story before and after treatment. And I remember one video I watched of a woman who was telling you about an auto accident, and she was sitting there rigid.

She was her head was moving, her hands were clasped in her lap, and she'd moved her head very little, and she spoke in a flat voice after a tapping session.

And this therapist was using a combination of eMDR and TFT. After that tapping session, she was telling the story again and she was moving your hands around.

She had much more range of motion in her neck and shoulders, and she was telling the story and paradoxically, she was expressing quite a bit of emotion around it.

But it wasn't an emotion. It was flowing emotion and discharging emotion and just, just the the difference in posture was so profound. And that is a big cue we have that people are able to move their bodies around that telling the same story.

But now there's dynamic energy flow there. It isn't just this frozen recounting of some old story. Yes, yes. That reminds me, I had when one person I worked with that was a first responder and he couldn't stop yawning after an eMDR session.

And he was so kind of embarrassed about it. But I was you could tell it was something like just opening up so much more space within him, just being able to process certain memories.

Yeah. Yawning. movement, breathing, watching people breathe more deeply, watching their shoulders go from like this, to like that. And so for all of you listening and watching now, notice when you're tense, that is when you're contracted.

Notice when you're rigid, when are you telling the story? And you can feel your muscles getting rigid when is your neck getting rigid? When is your chest getting contracted?

Often. Wilhelm Reich, when one of the greats like height was 100 years ago, one of his, statements that really struck me was he said, no neurotic can take a deep breath.

They observe these patients of is a century ago in the 1920s. And he said, no neurotic can take a deep breath. They couldn't breathe fully. And usually in meditation research, we actually measure respiration depth and rate as a measure of how deep the meditation is.

As meditators go deeper and deeper and deeper, as they transcend movement from that self-actualization to self-transcendence, their respiration rate gets much, much, much slower.

Some of them are taking only one breath. minute. That's 30s in 30s, very, very slow respiration. And then the opposite is tension. So when when are you when are you getting tense?

This is a wonderful mindfulness tool that Sarah is giving you here. just noticing, observing. When. What story do you tell yourself in your life that makes you freeze up, makes you rigid?

What stories do you tell where you're fluid and you're moving? When are you dancing? the way Sarah's Sarah's client, was. And also, the other question to ask yourself is, what fluidity, what fluid practice in your life have you given up?

I was talking to someone a couple of days ago and she said, oh, yeah, my my husband just gave up soccer. And, you know, he's been playing soccer since high school.

That was 50 years old. His just decided to stop, start playing. So have you stopped dancing? Have you stopped skiing?

Body-Based Therapies and Grounding

Have you stopped bicycling? Have you stopped rowing? Have you stopped yoga? Is it something you used to give yourself some way of being fluidly with your body that now has been released in favor of rigidity, where you're just rigid?

It is part of of your life. Even Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras, if you read the yoga scriptures carefully, you'll find that these 195 verses they have people begin with us.

That is breathing analysis. So you're doing body flexibility. You're doing yama breathing exercises. Only then do you get to meditation. And so in what areas of your life have you become rigid?

Use Sarah's test over their rigidity, giving up something that you float with and then how might you reclaim that? Let's make that note in your journal right now.

You can pursue that later on as you do more self-inquiry, but that's a really powerful example of a movement of watching the client's movement. And then, the places in our lives where we, we maybe need to just introduce movement or reintroduce movement to help free up the mind the way those ancient yoga tutors advocate.

Yeah, yeah, that that was a beautiful example. And so, yeah, traumatized people often are telling this story very rigidly. And then you see them then shift.

What are their ways do you recommend people use to notice stories in their lives that had that, emotional impact that's holding them back? Yeah, yeah.

with with trauma work, I think my assumption when I'm going into I try to apply this to other people too, but I start with my clients that the assumption is that trauma is present.

And I think that's not meant to be pathologizing or kind of diagnosing. But I think assuming that there may be some story that we're all holding that causes tension, causes rigidity, causes pain, or generally causes defense mechanisms to come up.

I'm trained in a, in a type of therapy called neuro affective relational model or norm. And that. The. The kind of bones of that or that we all have an impulse toward healing.

And as we approach that healing impulse within us, our defensive strategies come up and they can look very different. Some of them might look like Heidi or different parts of our psyche, right, that are coming in to say, no, no, no, this is a beautiful, vulnerable part of us and we need to protect it, which has so much wisdom to it.

and because of that, as we have as if maybe a practice could be if you check in with yourself and try to imagine moving toward the most tender, vulnerable and safe, wonderful life force part of ourselves, if you if you let yourself do that and notice these these strategies coming online, those might be your own flavors of what your trauma story or what these difficult stories you might be dealing with are holding what they're trying to protect you from.

So I know for myself, if I try to approach that I can have a media kind of a stonewalling part of me that tries to become quite avoidant and that's, you know, based on lots of lots of things in my own life.

And if I notice that avoidant part coming in, that can be a really good example that I'm approaching something really tender and important, and my avoidant part might need a little bit of attention, or I might need to say something, or I might be integrated, or tell it to a pause for a little while.

So I think my answer to that is it's going to vary everyone's kind of maybe presentation of the different parts that come in to protect us, to protect our core self are going to look quite different.

And sometimes they can look avoidant like I just described. Maybe the rigidity can come up, maybe a reaction generally, and some of these other things that in psychology we can call symptoms can also just be these protective factors that are coming in to try to preserve the core self that is all and healed.

So again, to turn this into an exercise, what Sarah began by saying was, as we approach healing, our defensive strategies arise. Now that's really interesting because when your defensive strategies do arise and you probably know what they are to frame that moment as the moment were approaching, healing is so powerful to say, well, I'm getting defensive here.

I'm getting defensive in whatever way my favorite ways of getting defensive. And that means I'm on the verge of healing. Whoa. Now you flip this around from being something that's an obstacle to being something that's leading you toward an understanding of what's behind below belief, or part of you.

That's so incredibly useful as a way to see those, those, those reactions. So first of all, write down in your journal what's your favorite way of being defensive.

And there are a million ways. Well, what are some of the ways. So things to look for Sarah, as symptoms of that defensiveness. Yeah. like making it kind of no big deal or trying to kind of claim that, oh, no, I don't it's it's not a big deal.

It's just kind of like take away the attention, distraction. There's often things like addiction or, strategies that we can get into to try to kind of avoid thinking about things.

we are very good at distracting ourselves from even things that are quite healthy for us. and that strategy that comes up for me can be shutting down or avoiding that can also come up very often, removing ourselves from people, kind of taking ourselves away from things and places and people that, build us up or make us feel good.

Signs of Healing and Movement

You know, those. So those are some of the, the, the possibilities look for in your own behavior. Are you doing any of those things? Are you habitually employing any of those strategies to be defensive and to not grow?

And then, of course, as Sarah is saying here, that is a signal. We're on the threshold of healing. yeah. It's a beautiful opportunity to harness potentially, very similar to maybe if you talk about things like an ego death or, kind of having a moment of transcendence, let's say, often it can take a lot of effort to switch from thinking that this could be terrible to kind of relaxing into the reality that there's so much abundance and love on the other side.

what are some of your key experiences? Are that abundance and love? And as you have broken through to the other side? Yeah. quite a few, I would say one that stands out, is I remember being really stuck in a kind of trauma narrative, in my own personal life, that, I was not enough was kind of the, the base thoughts, which is definitely something that I can relate to many of my clients with when they share.

So my base of negative belief would be that I'm not enough. And I was kind of looping in this process and maybe throwing myself into situations that were kind of maybe in a sense of desperation, trying to maybe prove somehow that I am enough.

But I was undermining that progress by putting myself, setting myself up to fail. And, I had an experience with a really good friend to asked me in a moment of what felt like very like what just felt like clarity and connection.

Ask me in a very heart open way, am I okay? And I felt this oh wait, like this opening up in my chest felt like I was seen and I was reflected back. And you know, this person felt like they were kind of an extension of myself looking back at me and just saying, hey, I see you.

What's going on? And I felt that moment of letting go of my own experience of, fighting and maybe forcing myself to prove that I'm enough, but also undermining or sabotaging.

I kind of let go of those defenses. And I was able to to see myself as abundant or everything that I needed to be in that moment. And just as somebody else asking you a question and holding you in that space.

Yes, I was I think I was right there at the edge. I could really feel that inner sense of I pushed myself right to the very edge, and all that was holding me in was this very thin, maybe hair care, with of, tension.

And then I finally burst through that. that's feel so wonderful to do that. Have those epiphanies and move through to that that new level of growth. It's just, such a privilege to be able to grow in that way and then expand.

And then, of course, there's the next journey going on right up there. You know, one of the things that we, are careful when we're doing training of, our coaches, our therapists that we train is the whole contextualized version of of of the, the, the process of of starting to to deal with trauma.

we through a nonprofit, we worked it's called the Veteran Stress Solution. And we've offered free treatment to over 20,000 veterans over the last decade. And, it's it's a tricky thing to do.

one of our analysis found that of all the people veterans refer to us, only 1 in 12. That was treatment. The other 11, 11 or 12 say no, thank you. It's just we're just, you know, tragic.

But it's it's been the, the number we found. And, there are all kinds of reasons why people want won't go there. They don't believe they can heal. They had unsuccessful treatments and the VA, the the the numbers are really, just stunning that that nine out of ten vets who enter a PTSD treatment program drop out, nine out of ten drop out.

Only one completes it. then it always drop out after the first session, but they they drop out of the course of the treatment. So, what do you do to at the very beginning, when you work with someone who's traumatized and again, they're about to start work with material that's been too scary, too terrifying for them to touch for a long time.

What do you what do you do? Yeah, those are staggering statistics to hear. well, yeah. I think a beautiful kind of introduction to such an important question, then the beginning is really critical to ensure that their safety and trust and also for myself, maybe it's really essential to be mindful of the way that I'm presenting to the person that I'm working with.

And especially if we're approaching trauma and I'm coming from, let's say, I tend to have maybe a gentle presence. And so that gentleness can be a trigger if maybe I'm working with, let's say, a veteran who their inner world does not talk to themselves with that gentleness, maybe they reject it because their system that they've been a part of in the military, there's not a lot of space for the gentleness because they have to act and they have to be, you know, focused.

So being mindful of the kind of context that surrounds the people I'm working with and doing my best to meet them where they're at, as well as to take time initially to provide some psychoeducation.

So to provide some context and information that can support the normalization of what the people are experiencing.

Defensive Strategies as Healing Signals

Because despite the fact that there are some maybe buzzwords and some ways that people tend to know about some of these issues, like PTSD or trauma, I think it can be really essential to lead with talking about them, talking about what's happening in people's bodies and their brains, to create a little bit of room for not making it be this isolated instance that only you are experiencing.

Because I think with trauma, we can experience it as this is just me, nobody else is validating my experience. It's only up to me to deal with this. And so to kind of start with contextualizing this person, figuring out what approach might make the most sense and then providing some a little bit of psychoeducation to get started and be really helpful.

Beginning approaches to creating a little bit of safety and trust. Yeah. Knowing that you aren't the first person to have these experiences, that people have them and that they can heal from them, that is really, powerful context to give that that first, that first session.

I'm thinking back to that, that the the findings. So I've, I've read a lot of eMDR research, I've done a lot of EMT research and quite a lot of meditation research now at this point as well.

And, the numbers in, in all three are somewhere between 80 and 90% of veterans, dropped below the clinical cutoff for PTSD when we give them those, those courses of treatment.

So it's, you know, on the face of it, it's being successful that depending on the others on the study, 8 or 9 out of ten veterans are going to drop below that clinical cutoff.

So they'll they're going to see that their symptoms, like flashbacks and nightmares and intrusive thoughts are going to diminish. And they're going to be feel much better after that course of treatment.

What I really wondering about, though, and maybe you have some ideas as well, Sarah, it haunts me that it's not 100%. Why is there that 1 or 2 veterans out of ten, 1 or 2 traumatized people out of ten where this work has no impact on them?

So we've seen these amazing results. I mean, look at the MDR research, over 200 clinical trials and a lot of studies on PTSD. You have about 120 studies in and English language journals, another 100 in other languages.

And a lot of work on PTSD. again, fabulous results. And there's that 10 or 20% of people and they're getting all the same treatment modalities and they aren't budging.

What's going on there? Yeah, I'm reminded of before, we started recording this when you were describing, we were talking a bit about just maybe only like bilateral stimulation or using both at the same time.

with tapping in these techniques, typically a lot of the research is done maybe bilaterally, but every so often that one person will come along where you notice that it actually regulates them, or two taps at the same time.

So I think it's that's my first theory is just that, don't lose heart if these practices aren't working for you, even though maybe research suggests that things like eMDR, tapping work for majority of people think we're all wired slightly differently, and we all come from slightly different cultural context.

We all carry our trauma slightly differently, and there's beautiful, wonderful opportunities to explore all of the different healing opportunities that are exist out there in the world, and they get to change over time.

One thing that was effective for me when I was in my like a teenager in my current environment at the time, it's not going to be helpful for me anymore.

My current lifestyle and I think that gets to kind of continuously evolve as I learn and grow more. And so I would hope that people who maybe aren't able to experience the healing that other people experience in these modalities, keep searching and see if there's one way that it can be done, or some practice that they can integrate into their lives, that can give them a little sense of relief.

Yeah. And what are the ways that shows up is different styles of meditation. And for example, my wife loves yoga, goes to yoga classes every week, and yoga just totally works for me.

Not so much, but I really enjoy qigong, so I'd rather do Trigun. I'd rather do inspirational reading, and I love studying meditation as well. She does any meditation, but it's secondary to yoga.

I just read a study recently about the number of people who, have anomalous experiences, go to mystical states from doing yoga, and it's a high percentage of people they're doing physical asanas.

And yet they're catapulting into these elevated self transcendent states through through a movement. So, really take Sarah's words to heart here. There are many different modalities, and you may have tried one and it hasn't worked for you.

If that's worked for other people, then try another. In my book, Bliss Brain, I cover the seven different kinds of meditation, and the styles are radically different from each other, so one style might work for you.

One style might work for your next door neighbor, another family member. But there are lots of different things, lots of different possibilities, lots of ways in to healing trauma.

One thing I would say to pick up on something she said earlier, is that the commonality is the body based there? Physically based yoga is physically based meditation, where you sit on a couch and or a pillow and you're focused on your breathing.

That's physically based. You're focused on your breathing. The great transcendent master Ramana maharshi said he was asked about mind wandering, said, you know what?

If someone came to him? Said, Bhagavan, what do I do? My mind always wanders. I've been a Yogi for the last 40 years. I can't stop mind wandering. And he said, just return to the breath.

And the question said, yeah, but back up on my mind. Wander is still and and and Rahman Maharishi said, return to the breath again and just keep returning to the breath.

So the breath is a physiological anchor for some people. So find a style of meditation that works for you. One size does not fit all. Some people are far more inclined to use moving meditations.

Others it's the mind.

Starting Trauma Work with Safety

It's a mental focus, for example, on a, the writing of a saint that's going to really bring you into that sense of being present fully in your body and then replicating those states in your here and now.

So just because some method hasn't worked for you does not mean that no method will work for you. and exercises here. Keep on trying. What other advice could you give people who are struggling with their current treatment regimen?

Good question. yeah. I mean, if you're noticing some edges of your current care plan or your healing journey that aren't quite working out, first of all, it's wonderful to be able to notice that I think sometimes trauma can really have this experience of limiting our sense of what's good and what's bad for us, and we can become almost myopic.

So to notice that something isn't quite working, I find, is just a beautiful example of how much capacity we might be growing to know, to be able to discern what's working, what's not working for us.

So pause to celebrate, because that's wonderful news, and then use that as an invitation to be curious. So I think there can be a reaction to maybe not feeling like we're getting our needs met.

That can reinforce a trauma narrative of maybe really wanting to race to the next thing and throw ourselves at things. I can be that way. When I mentioned being desperate and throwing myself at different things can very much relate, and I think the practice would be to settle a little bit and allow ourselves to be gently curious about what could possibly be there for us.

What else could what else could bring us some healing? often going back to, like you mentioned earlier, Dawson, like going back to these kind of gentle movement practices, things that have been, ways that you've been able to get in touch with your body in the past or trying new things.

and then I think also just finding ways to access a little bit of joy and give ourselves a little bit of a break in order to find, space for other emotions along the continuum and be really healthy and, and help us kind of get into a mindset of curiosity.

And from that place, asking questions maybe to a provider, if you're working with a practitioner saying mentioning what you think is not working, what you feel like might be might be feeling stuck within you and maybe exploring within your support network.

Other things that people have found useful, and attempting to maintain a sense of curiosity throughout that process. Not that it has to be the thing or it has to.

You have to get it right. Because, as we've talked about, this gets to shift over time. A lot of trauma work is about giving ourselves permission to evolve over time, allowing ourselves to be curious and allow that to change.

And it doesn't have to be that one thing worked once and it's going to work forever. And that curiosity is powerful because that puts us in the witness perspective.

We're looking at our local experience and saying, that's interesting what's going on there? And that by itself opens up space between us and our thoughts and our immediate experience.

So curiosity is a powerful perspective from which to view things. Sarah, how can family members help traumatized people? Great question. It's definitely about support systems.

A lot of time when it comes to trauma work. so if we are if we are in a circle with a traumatized person or someone who's carrying trauma within us, and we're aware that they are working on their trauma, offering support in whatever way makes the most sense to the person is really supportive and essential.

reflecting back any evidence of resilience because it's there, I promise you evidence of light and joy and sharing and positive memories and experiences together as much as possible.

And then I think maybe most essential would be to ask how we can support so it doesn't have to be that the person we're talking to has an answer for us.

But to allow that question to be a living question is really essential, because throughout trauma work, if you have, you listening might have experienced this.

A lot of times our voice comes back, right, we have a little bit more confidence, and we have the ability to name what it is that we most want for ourselves.

And so maybe initially, we might not be able to say, hey, partner or friend or sibling, this is what I want in support of my trauma work. But throughout the process, we might be able to say, you know what?

I think once a month, if you want to connect with me and we can share memories of our childhood, that will help me practice talking about things in a space that isn't my therapeutic space, but allowing that conversation about what it is that this person maybe needs from us to kind of grow over time and and making sure that you give them space to be able to answer that question for them.

Yeah. Listening. Just listening. I know I have such a, hard time stopping myself from helping. In the 60s, I think about therapist wrote a book about this, that he had this triangle and was the victim, perpetrator and rescuer triangle.

And how we can bounce around in one of those three roles forever. And I was always the rescuer. And so, what I've learned to do, especially with veterans, but especially with and family members as well, is just listen, like when my wife tells me about something going on that is difficult for her.

She actually does not want my advice. She wants to be heard. So I just sit there and I breathe and I, I just yeah, he's large. Piece of duct tape. Put it over my lips, in my imagination.

And I don't help. And just sitting there and I have I have some family members like this as well. I like to help them, but I'm not their coach. It's not my role.

And so I find that just listening is powerful. They can certainly ask questions.

Why Some Treatments Donu2019t Work for Everyone

And that can be a way of, inviting them to say, move into that witness perspective. And so that can be one thing you can do. But just listening, this being present is, is such a a powerful exercise we do in the trainings that I do, I offer, we have many different, exercises.

We have people do, but in one of them you sit with another person and they say things, and then you have to repeat back what they said verbatim their exact words.

If you memorize their exact words, memorize a sentence and then say back to them, and hardly anyone can do this. Yes. it's such a powerful practice. Yeah. So think about think about doing that.

Just really deeply listening, coming to the present moment. Listen to that person and just reflect back to them what they just said. We're so used to coaching, evaluating, judging, process, saying that we don't usually sit there and just listen.

So just listening is a powerful gift. And again, you can ask questions, but then that really shows the person that are saying you are fully present and there for them.

One thing to I think we'll we'll wind up with here is I love to hear about your recommendations for self-care. You mentioned that you do yoga. You have other practices and what which ones that really work for you and which ones that you recommend that everybody experiment with.

Yeah. important question as well. I think especially when we're talking about approaching trauma, it can be really important to spend some time connecting more to our self self-love and bringing in our self-care practices, clothes.

We don't have to keep them all super close the whole time, but making sure that they're nearby in case we need them. so yes, I have a pretty dedicated yoga practice, and I definitely can tell if I've allowed that to fall to the wayside.

That's a good indication that maybe I need to kind of dedicate a little bit more attention to what's going on in my heart, what's happening in my life that, maybe I don't want to pull that as close.

I spend a lot of time outside. I think, my job currently is quite virtual. I don't know if you're similar, Dawson, but because I'm not around as many people as often, I don't get out of the house as often.

And so between sessions, I really stay disciplined and try to just even go stand outside, take a breath of air, feel the sunshine on my skin, and I try to do that outside of the after work hours as well.

So outside time, a yoga practice and I'm engaging in some meditation to start the day very essential for me. if you're not sure about what self-care would mean for you, I love to do a practice every so often.

I call it the Joy list, and you just take a moment and maybe close your eyes if it's helpful, and just allow your hand to not stop hitting the paper and writing down all of the things that bring you joy to take a moment to connect to joy and then just right, right, right, right for maybe a minute, three minutes, maybe as long as you can.

And then you can reflect back on this list and notice, is there any sort of trend in the things that you've listed that maybe could point to something that you could do as a self-care practice?

So if you notice that you write a lot of things that have to do with nature, maybe gardening or trying out something that involves being outside more, maybe an activity, maybe just going for a walk, maybe doing a movement meditation outside.

so noticing the trends in their joy list. And again, that permission to change, like my joy list changed over time, of course, changes over time, and I get to add new things all the time.

So finding things that bring you joy and making them a dedicated, essential part of your routine is crucial, especially with trauma work. But I think generally as humans nowadays, I think we need to be able to rely on a self-care practice to sustain us, that connect us to joy in order to keep showing up in a world that maybe is providing us reasons to be afraid, or to retraumatize ourselves.

And so make your joy list. Add that to your journal. Make my joy list. I want to pick up something that Sarah said in passing, but I want you to write this down in your journal, and I'm not going to give up until you've written down every word here.

Okay, so. When you're feeling resistant, you do it anyway.

Curiosity, Support, and Self-Care Practices

What Sarah said was, even when I'm busy, I'm caught up with all this work. I'm indoors, working virtually. I make myself go outside and stand there and feel the sunlight on my skin.

Okay? She does this not because she feels like it. She may be totally immersed in her work. She makes herself go do that. And I want you to have that same approach that there is that piece of self-care that's non-negotiable.

You do not talk yourself out of it. For me, it's taking a week off every month and going and meditating, writing and spending a whole seven days in samadhi in the state of elevated bliss.

Now I work like, you know, I've got three hours, the other three weeks of of the of the month that I get my, my, my one week of solid samadhi where I go off into the wilderness and I don't talk to anybody, I just meditate, I write, I read, and I get into these elevated states and stay there without interruption.

No, that that's extreme. I'm not saying take a week off every, every month, but it might be just that five minutes of walking out of the office, walk out of the house and standing in the sunlight.

Don't talk yourself out of it. Go do that. If you have the ability to, say two exercise periods a day, I'm going to take two half hour periods every day, and I'm going to go out and take a run, take a walk, bicycle, do whatever it is you want to do.

Then if you made that commitment to yourself, treat it with as much seriousness as you would treat, a visit to your doctor, a doctor's appointment or a court date, something you can't get out of.

Make that commitment to yourself for your own self-care non-negotiable. So I want you to write down which item of self-care you will make non-negotiable that you'll stick with.

You'll make a commitment to, and you'll stick with it. So I'll give you just a couple of minutes to do that while Sarah and I take some nice deep breaths.

and visualize you being truly in touch with what you will commit to writing it down. And sticking with it. Well, thank you so much for hearing me by journaling.

letting me interrupt Sarah like, ten times to make you do things and, write things in your journal. But as your doctor would say, it's for your own good. So, Prescription for both trauma release and prescription for Transcendence.

Sarah, I'm so moved. Having had the privilege of sharing with you for the last hour and so grateful that you're bringing your wisdom, your insight, your love to the people you serve and to us.

Thank you. Thank you. And right back at you. Wonderful to spend the time with you. and so thank you all for spending your hour with Sarah and I. There's lots more learning, there's lots more discovery.

There's lots more journaling. There's lots more action. And just know, as she's emphasized, that there's always a great a possibility if what you're doing now isn't working, there's something else.

Keep on being curious. As she said, find those things that really work for you. When you practice them, they have the ability to elevate your life, bring you up the vibrational scale to that point of self transcendence.

Every blessing. I'll connect with you on the next episode.