Why Can’t I Relax?! The Inner Conflict That Keeps You Stressed ALL THE TIME Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Background

Welcome to the bio optimized summit where we are exploring the next level of health you can reach through targeted and intentional optimization. I am your host Dr Amy and today we have with us Dr Ariel Schwartz and I'm very excited that she has joined us today and she's going to be bringing a lot of the what has traditionally been seen as just psychology and trauma work into our talk today because this is essential for helping bring that level of vitality to our health, whether physical health, mental health, because so all of this really is our biology and our nervous system.

So Dr Schwartz is a licensed clinical psychologist, e M D R therapy consultant, somatic psychotherapist and a certified yoga instructor. She lives in Boulder colorado and she has her doctorate in clinical psychology from Fielding Graduate University and then a Master's degree in Somatic psychology.

She has authored a number of books, all on complex PTSD MDR somatic psychology and then a practical guide to what to do if you identify with having complex PTSD and her mission in life is to really bring digestible information to help improve as many lives as she can. So she does many platforms and getting this information on mental health and wellness to as many people as possible.

Thank you Dr Schwartz for joining us today. Thank you so much for having me, it's a pleasure. Yes, and I first of all, I absolutely love your work obviously because of my background and my different trainings, I very much aligned with your approach and your perspective somatic psychology and all that that really entails is something that has made such a difference in my life and in my health and I never would have been able to optimize my health, my physical health, even, let alone my mental health if I hadn't have incorporated this somatic psychology piece.

And so where I'd like to start today is asking you a question that is hard for many people, especially many people who are focused on um you know, getting their life to to a level of wellness and productivity and yet they find themselves struggling with they don't know what like they don't know what that struggle is.

So from your understanding from your background and training and experience, talk to us about why someone would not be achieving their goals in life, why why would they be hitting a wall? Why would they be experiencing some level of intercom conflict, inner tension or even recognizing self sabotaging behaviors in certain aspects of their life? What is that about?

Well, you really said the keywords in there, which is that when we're self sabotaging, it's usually a sign that we have some form of conflict between different experiences, different sets of needs within ourself and that we might have a need for wellness or for physical fitness, we might have a need to be productive at work, but there might be other less on the forefront, less conscious parts of ourselves, less conscious needs that are um sabotaging those efforts, right? So we might have that part of ourselves that wants to um, you know, set goals around running, right?

I'll just use that as an example and then when the morning comes and it's time for you to do your run. This other voice comes in. Oh, I don't want to, I don't know if I can, that feels too long today, boy, those cookies look really good instead. Like whatever it is, right or I want to run, but I ate too much yesterday and I'm not gonna feel good.

So all of these different, complex inner dynamics start to show up right as we face our goals. Now, I don't think any of that is that new information. But what we want to look at is where did those complex inner dynamics come from?

Why We Self-Sabotage

Because I think that we can take them at face value and we can get stuck within this polarity or within this fighting

against ourselves and we make the part of ourselves that doesn't want to be productive or go for the run or whatever it is wrong and what we want to do instead is use what I think is a very important word in this whole process, which is the word curiosity that when we are struggling with some kind of conflict that's that's interfering with us meeting our goals, health goals, work goals that we want to bring curiosity to what's really going on there and what is the voice of the part that is not wanting to do this and when we start to listen, what happens. And as we understand, we're speaking here about parts work that we all have parts within us, we all do every single one of us and that what we start to hear is that those parts are reflective of our early life experiences. There's a body of work out there called internal family systems, which I know you're familiar with, developed by Richard Schwartz who's not related to me.

And and but what he looked at is that when individuals were suffering, for example, with eating disorders, that that there would be these cycles, especially with binge eating disorder, bulimia that someone might um you know, have this weight loss goal, but then they binge then they feel bad about themselves and they have this very critical voice comes in and so then they purge and then they feel bad about themselves that way. And the critical voice comes in and it becomes this cycle. Now that cycle is very extreme in something like bulimia, but we all have versions of those cycles within us.

What he also discovered is that having worked with families that the voices that individuals have within ourselves mimic what we learned externally. So suddenly we might hear ourselves speaking in this very self critical voice and come to realize that that self critical voice is mimicking what we learned from perhaps a critical parent or a parent who was well meaning, but really urged us to be performance based, right? And so then when we're performance based and were compliant and were a good kid and we work really hard and we get good grades and we get good feedback for doing so well in school and being that good kid at home sometimes, what can happen is that the inner rebel or the part of self that feels like, well, how come I'm not just love for who I am?

How can I can't just be fully accepted for the person that I am in the world that doesn't depend upon being a good athlete, being a good, you know, getting good grades in school, you know, doing all my chores right?

Like, so we have those other parts of us, but because we've been trained not to act out or not to to let that lazy part um show up when it does show up at some point in our adulthood, we hear those same critical voices.

I would add to that, that there's so much from our experiences, tells us which parts of us are bad and which parts of us are good and I remember this so much in my life and now that I work with other clients.

This continually comes up where it's like, well, that's the bad part of me, that's the that's the part of me that that I don't want there, I don't want that to be a part of me. There's many times where I actually hate that part of me and I don't want to get to know that part of me.

I don't want to have anything to do that part of me. This is who I want to be. I want to always be the productive. I always want to be the one who gets up early in the morning and goes for the run.

I don't want these other parts that I hear their voices and this is so emotionally draining. It's it's an energy drain to constantly have these parts of us that show up whether in our body is different sensations or as actual voices in our head that we may recognize and to not want them there to actually be trying to override them, numb them, avoid them whatever it is, but not not take their their input into consideration at all.

It's such an energy drain. Yes. And I think the other ways that these can show up is in our emotions and in the early messages that we got about emotions that if we were crying, maybe that meant that we were a crybaby right?

Or if we were angry, then we were being selfish or we were taking up too much energy in the household. And so then we quarantine, you know, here we are in a time of Covid we quarantine off these parts of ourselves and we exile them to borrow from Richard's language, right? They they aren't welcome in our awareness and the consequence of that is that we start to feel like we're just going through the motions in our lives. We start to feel robotic or cut off or not authentic and that I think it speaks to that drain that you just that you just named that.

And then the other thing that that happens is those parts that are exiled eventually just rebel as you use that word and act out. And it's in a way that we can no longer manage and control them and continue to try to stuff them.

And so that's where they can get really messy. They can, they can make big messes in our lives and we, we regret it, we hate them even more afterwards. And so it's this constant battle and intention, inner tension in trying to keep them, keep them quiet, keep them exiled.

Parts Work and Exiled Emotions

And uh, and then when they do show up, we, we hate them even more because we don't understand that. We don't understand why they would do that. And I don't know what to do about it, right? I think a good example of that is, you know, that we've found everything in and then all of a sudden we have a fight with a spouse or we have, you know, we don't get get uh, you know, feel um like we did a good job with a project at work or uh, you know, a kid trigger something, There are all these triggers that can happen and then all of a sudden it's like everything comes out of the container and it's a big mess like you said.

And then it's like really quickly want to put it all back down and I'm fine and I've got this. But ultimately, you know, if we think about all of those emotions held in a beach ball, that's kind of being pushed down under the water, that beach ball wants to come to this surface and all that's in it. All of our own vulnerability of sadness and fear and shame and anger, right? It needs to come to the surface.

Burn A brown speaks so much about how when we can turn towards vulnerability and shame, it enhances our creativity and enhances our interpersonal relationships and our productivity. But the energy that it takes to push those authentic parts of ourselves down um cause is a cost to all of those other arenas of our lives.

And this ties in a lot with the somatic psychology stuff, right? Because this is like that interface then between the vagus nerve and what's happening there with the survival system and the freeze response when a person goes into a place of shame.

And so we have these parts of us that feel sensitive that feel young that can go to a very hurt and dark place when triggered. And then that's when we can also look at it from the angle of what's happening in our vagus nerve and in the different survival states of our nervous system.

So how do how do you integrate that into this bigger picture? What a fantastic question. So I have a um kind of a a nerdy love affair with the vagus nerve. Have been studying it for about 12 years and have worked with dr Stephen Porges to really understand his poly vagal theory.

And just in short for those of you that are listening and the vagus nerve is way are we talking about las Vegas? No, the vagus nerve is the 10th cranial nerve that is a major mind body connector and that um 80% of the communications from the vagus nerve are from the body back up to the brain.

And what that means is that we are constantly getting information from our sensory experience. And that information is often coming up to the brain below conscious awareness.

So Stephen Porges has a word called your assumption and your assumption is basically the ways in which our nervous system is constantly tuning into our environment and our inner experience in the body for signals of threat or danger.

And that also can actually tune into signals of safety and connection. But if there is a perception that maybe we see the look on someone's face and we think they're critical of us. Or maybe we see the um you know the body language of another person and we think they must be angry even if we're not consciously registering it. Our nervous system is still perceiving and taking in this information. And so what can start to have is that we might be responding to cues of threat but not know why or responding to little feelings of rejection and abandonment um that are touching off a feeling of shame perhaps or sadness or loneliness, rejection and that those feelings kind of build up the stack and if we're not paying attention to the body then we're not understanding all of that subtle build up.

And then all of a sudden it's like that beach ball has popped through the water and we don't know how we got there.

How all of a sudden are we sitting there in the bathroom floor crying right? Like what happened? But what the goal of somatic psychology is is to increase awareness of the body so that we can track and use conscious neurosurgeon option or the perception of our nervous system experience.

And then we can actually discern what's happening. Oh, I feel a little grip in my belly or a tightness in my chest or a catch in my throat, right? And that all of these somatic signals are information about how in processing the world from a sensitive and emotional based experience. And then when we pay attention to that, we have greater choice about how to respond and what I love about the nervous system and the vagus nerve is that it is really so predictable right?

Like because this is a biological system it has and operates under rules of science and so we can nerd out over it and really get to understand it and then how it shows up in our body and the more that we can sense and actually be aware of the more subtle shifts that happen early on then the more we can work with our nervous system to avoid the bigger messes and the bigger explosion that can happen as things build and accumulate without our awareness without our conscious awareness.

And we can also work with our nervous system so that we can actually turn toward signals or cues that help us to feel safe and connect. When we look at the poly vagal system, we see that the most evolved or most most recently evolved part of the vagus nerve and part of the nervous system is that which has basically built in our social connectedness, our capacity to love and be loved, our capacity to feel safe and to rest into the intimacy and closeness with another person that is where we're biologically wired and have evolved into that direction.

However, when we feel abandoned or threatened in any way that system starts to shut down and we go into an evolutionarily older response which is you know basically a fight flight response right? Like we go into the oh no no you're not safe.

I have to defend myself. Um, and then the more that one person is defending themselves, the other person starts to defending them, defend themselves and it rolls over and or you know, we start to shut down.

The Vagus Nerve and Nervous System States

We retreat, we retreat from connections. So we're either, you know, in some way asserting our power over or we're running away from connection, you know, in an ideal world when we can catch those responses, they can be used in service of reconnecting.

For example, if you think about a young child who's being dropped off at daycare, just a simple basic life example and you know, the first thing they're gonna do is they're gonna grab, you know, the parents hand and say, let me show you my art on the wall and let me show you the thing I can build with the blocks, right?

Social connection for the sake of I don't want to lose you, mommy, I don't want you to go to work. Of course, Covid, that's not happening, but we won't go there.

But then if mom then says, or dad says, hey, I really gotta go, what happens next? I'm gonna fight you, I'm gonna cling onto your skirt. I'm not gonna let you go or they run away.

And so we see how the child goes into fight flight. But the purpose is to get your attention in hopes that you won't go. Now, this is not a trauma story. And of course sometimes parents have to go to work that's real life. And and, you know, Children can cope with those kinds of normal life stressors, but in a state of child childhood trauma, right? When a child is being, you know, severely neglected or abused, a third layer of defense structure kicks in through the vagus nerve, and I just want to name it here, because even though we might be speaking to people who don't identify you, you as a listener, you might not identify yourself as having childhood trauma. But I think that in in certain ways we all can relate to the response where we feel powerless, we feel helpless.

Like nothing we do is going to make a difference. I've tried everything, nothing works. Yes. And at that point, the vagus nerve kicks in a protective mechanism that basically says, I don't need you if we want to give words to it, although it's that's way below the level of words. I'm either just gonna, you know, kind of lick my wounds and be self reliant and just take care of me, or on the other hand, I'm going to um collapse and feel like what's the point? It's all futile and trust me.

Every single person that I've talked to has touched that place at some point in our lives. It's just universal. It's it's built into our biology, it is built into our biology and and it's and while it can feel like a giving up and giving in, it's actually like that last survival attempt of the body to actually get through that experience. So that's not what you're gonna be feeling, you're gonna be feeling like like the over has just shut you down, but it's your body shutting down in order to survive that situation.

And and so there is there is that freeze response that is wired into us as the ultimate, you know, attempt to survive. Yes. Yes. Absolutely. So you know, one of the ways I'm gonna tie in my background as a yoga teacher for a moment here. So one of the things that I love about yoga in service of the vagus nerve and I really integrate these two together.

I teach Vegas applied vagal theory to to to therapeutic yoga. And one of the things that I love here is that our goal is to basically reclaim the health of our ability to move through the world and our ability to rest.

And when we have had experiences of either being stuck in fight flight or stuck in high arousal and feeling anxious and not able to sleep, our mobilization system, the part of us that moves us through the world is actually being inhibited by that energy that hasn't found its way back to um to play into the ability to feel safe and mobilize, right? So anxiety is a sign that we actually need to um to understand if we go back two parts the part of us that learned that um to move ourselves through the world is somehow associated with an experience of threat, right? And that if on the other hand, we feel like we can't get out of bed, We can't um uh you know, we can't really be nourished and you know, rest and digest that health of the parasympathetic nervous system at some point or another, we learned that um that feeling of collapse um and powerlessness, that there's nothing that we can do about it and that that has been hooked into an experience of threat. So in yoga we learn to move the body and we learn to rest in both healthy ways.

And when we move the body in this way, that's one way in which we can work directly with the nervous system because it's the nerves that innovate the muscles, we can't move our muscles without activating our nervous system.

And so when they're has been a nervous system that's been stuck in imbalance in one of the survival states general and basic movement, especially with yoga can be so helpful just to start to loosen up and bring some flexibility, bring some life into a nervous system that's been stuck.

You know what I think that can be so misunderstood about yoga in our Western culture if I want to put it that way is that we think of yoga as these external shapes that we take.

And unfortunately if you're a driven person and if you're a performance based that same mindset can come right onto the yoga mat. And so when we're coming at this as a healing practice, we want to undo those kinds of expectations.

Because what we're, what we're aiming to do is actually reclaim a listening relationship to the body rather than a a performance relationship with the body so that we're allowing sensation to guide movement. And we're really tending that if we're pushing yourself into a pose and your body is like the last thing I want to do right now, aren't we recapitulating the same parts that can backfire out in our lives.

And one of the things that I noticed among um professionals, uh those focused on performance is that they have that part of themselves that is compensating for not wanting to feel the more young and sensitive parts that if they feel that they were to open up that box, it would be like opening up something that they could not contain.

And so it's it's best just to again lock it up, shut it away, not even open that box, not pay attention to that. And that then even comes into their ability to relax because they feel like they need to be a little in the sympathetic state, a little on the adrenaline in order to to not relax because when they relax, that stuff that they're trying to not feel, seems to surface and it's so uncomfortable for them And so can you, can you speak on on this, on these two differing parts, right?

Yoga, Movement, and Somatic Healing

Like this, this part that that is very hard working, very driven, maybe even perfectionistic and it's trying to actually protect a different part. And then also how how do you uh talk about this from a somatic psychology perspective? Yes, in somatic psychology and in general and trauma treatment we speak about is that we're building tolerance for our emotions and for our sensations and what that means is that we're basically allowing ourselves to turn toward more of our feeling body and um and feeling less threatened by it at the same time. So that rather than labeling as you said earlier, labeling a part of ourselves or a sensation as bad.

We bring in instead mindful curiosity so that we can go toward a sensation and say, ah I don't like it when this part of myself gets tight or is cramping or here I am trying to run a marathon and I feel like there's this chronic lower back pain that's always holding me back, right? So we can even work with areas in the body that are holding. But when we can come with that with curiosity, we can hear, well, you know, maybe this is the part that didn't want to run the marathon now, having worked with elite athletes, the outcome isn't, you know, I think the fear is sometimes all of a sudden I won't be able to do my sport anymore because that other part's gonna take over. But in actuality, that's not the goal either. It's not that the, you know, the the part that feels uh sabbath, you know, that sabotaging needs to shut down the whole system.

In fact, one woman that I had worked with who was an elite athlete realized that she had just been over containing those younger parts of herself and her vulnerable emotions, but once she was able to to understand herself better in her own depth than her own his, she could have a conscious agreement because she would really like that was part of her that loved to do these ultra marathons right? Like that was her thing and those are really hard, we're talking 100 miles and but but part of her loved it and part of her didn't, but she could actually make agreements with those parts to a place where she felt at peace and she was no longer fighting against herself, which frees up energy for her running.

Exactly, exactly. So she actually found that it amplified her performance in the end to do that deeper work. But you said something earlier that was really important, I think, even in just just kind of speaking about your own background, which is that it also can optimize our physical health because what happens when we have disowned parts of our psyche, but also disowned parts of our somatic experience and our nervous system experience is that it can sabotage our health in a variety of ways we might um have difficulty sleeping as we spoke about before.

Or perhaps we have experiences where we're reacting two in threat and we can even react to foods, right? It can lead to food sensitivities. It can exacerbate um, sensitivities to our environment, right?

Chemical sensitivities and so forth. And so I find that individuals who have those kinds of symptoms have a much greater likelihood of unrealized trauma in their history. Mhm. And I can very much relate to that because there have been many, many times where different physical conditions, symptoms will happen, and it will be very much related to a part of me that got triggered or, you know, a part that um is struggling and I'm not at peace with that part and that's how it shows up. I remember specifically, um I'm I like to bike and I started having this pain only in my right knee when I would bike a certain distance and it was never consistent. And so that's why I thought, you know, I'm not sure that this is actually a physical injury.

I'm wondering if this is if this has some other message for me. And at that point I had started my work with somatic experiencing and the parts work. And so I started exploring that on my own. And what I realized was, yes, like that is the part of me that feels insecure, that feels like it doesn't have enough to meet the situation.

And I found that once I felt that pain now when I was on my bike and all I needed to do was acknowledge it was I got your message. I get that you are feeling under resource that you're feeling like you don't have enough. I got it

and I'm gonna I'm gonna find a way to support you and bring in more resources, that's all it needed to hear.

And it would go away immediately. Like that's how amazing, that's how amazing our bodies are in this relationship that we can start to develop with our bodies. That's right.

And you just name something. It's such a simple tool. But most of us don't realize that we can talk to our bodies and our bodies respond. And it's so beautiful. It might respond by an image.

It might respond through a sensation. It might respond through a dream that we have or just a memory that we have a clarity about what what a part is holding.

And there is so much wisdom and intelligence in our body. When we look at the science, if we just go back there, the science shows us that there are as many neurotransmitters that we you know, we think of our neurotransmitters and the intelligence neurons, the cells that communicate information is just existing in our brain. But they, those exist in our bellies and our gut and our intestines, they exist up and down our spine.

They exist in our hearts, right? So there is wisdom and intelligence all throughout the body. And I spent most of my life especially having been trained in conventional medicine to not at all be paying attention to that, but more be paying attention just to the the neurochemistry, the actual uh you know, neurotransmitters and their receptors.

And how do we need to change those and what is the physical cause of these types of symptoms? And so it was such a paradigm shift for me to first of all have to recognize that you know, there's something much bigger here. There is there there is like there's a whole another element and of course that's a different story for how I got into it.

But then once I started paying attention to my body and actually seeing how much more efficient I could get at making decisions at knowing what to do when I paid attention to how my body was reacting to the situation or to the different options that were before me.

It has really helped Be a guide for me rather than being the Hindrance that I thought it would be. Yes. Yes. You're reminding me of something that I learned when I was studying somatic psychology.

Building Tolerance and Listening to the Body

I don't know 24 years ago or so and I remember reading that the body loves when we're in sync right, that experience of feeling our sensations and one of the the ways that the body naturally responds is through our endogenous endorphins right? Like when we're listening and you know, for those of you that are runners or bikers or athletes, we get that we get endorphins when we push ourselves and and and so forth, but actually we get those same endorphins when we simply are in tune and in sync with our felt experience.

And yet that does take time, right dr Schwartz, like it's it's that was a hard transition for me at first because I didn't want to spend time on just paying attention to my body, I wanted to just go, go, go and I just needed to figure out how to quiet this body of mine so that I could continue to go. And obviously my work has has opened up my eyes in terms of, know when I can be in sync with my body, then it allows me to go so much further and so so much more um aligned and I'm actually in the present moment as I go there, I'm able to get more done because I'm in sync and not having to use energy to shut it down. Um but it does it does take time and practice and effort to take those pauses and see like what is happening in my body.

Like I just felt something and what is that taking the time to have that communication to learn how to even communicate with our body? Because for each person I imagine it's going to be different. Um in terms of, you know, do they tend to have more images that come up or thoughts or sensations?

But but developing that relationship just like a person would with any other relationship in their life that that time and investment in their body and understanding their body and how that communication can go back and forth has been Yeah, huge for shifting so many people. Yes. So often when I have conversations with people who are reticent to practice yoga, the very first thing that they say is, oh I don't want to slow down that much. Like, you

know, like get me on the bike, get me on the trail. But no, not that. And I think that the key piece, it's not just that it takes time, but it requires time. It requires that we slow down and when we can tolerate the sensations or the emotions that might bubble up, the vulnerability that bubbles up when we slow down.

The benefits are outstanding. I did my early research on stress and burnout and I think that burnout is one of the biggest costs of our professional world that if we stay in, go, go go. It's almost the inevitable cliff that we're walking towards because the body naturally needs to reset with that slowing down.

So how do you help encourage someone to find those rhythms of their life where they're they're going at the pace that they can live well and be in alignment with their body well, you know, I'm always gonna meet, as you said before, it's it's very individual, right? So if I'm working one on one with someone, I'm gonna understand their inner, their inner world, right?

Like what is the the go go go about for them? And what happens when they slow down? Right? What happens when, when what bubbles up for that person? What's the messages that they got about rest?

Yeah. And if I'm, you know, working more globally, if I had a general statement around it, it's too um kind of ask yourself what arises, you know, you the listener out there, right? Like ask yourself what arises for you when you simply attend to your breath and, you know, even just to hand over the heart and hand over the belly, right in my zoom screen. We're living in these boxes nowadays, but, you know, just, just a little bit of breath right there.

And then what do you notice, What do you notice that you're drawn to go toward? And what are the aversions that arise where you say? I don't want to go there? And then when you meet an aversion, if you can bring curiosity in, that's that's the wisdom curiosity rather than judgment, right? Rather than hating it, or disliking it, being able to almost see it as a third person if that helps and just be really curious about it. Like, I wonder, I wonder why my body would have that sensation. Why there, why now, why that intense and be able to get really curious about it. Yes. Yes. And I think as a general statement about our world, we struggle with that kind of curiosity even in relationship to another person, right? It requires that we slow down and listen.

This morning. I was actually in my neuro effective training that I'm doing with dr LaPierre and we were doing an exercise where we were exploring some of the facial expressions that happened with early development, the eyes, the ears, the century things that bring in all of the information from our environment that informs us whether it's safe or not safe.

And and then how that takes us either to the past and then predicts our future based on what has happened in the past with similar sensory experiences.

And for many people is it was a bit uh you know, unsettling, dis organizing in order, bringing up some of this stuff in the body. And for me, this hand over my heart and yes, hand over my, you know, my belly. I call it my my window right there at the top of my belly, right where kind of like my ribs are coming together.

That for me has been such a quick and effective way to like bringing everything that feels like it's getting out of control. Like bring it in and provide a safe safe container, safe cocoon, safe nest for it to reorganize and then almost be able to bring the level of intensity down that I can work with it, that I can get curious about it.

And I think we all need to know that we have a predictable route to safety and connection going back to the vagus nerve and you've just described yours right?

Like it's like oh I can go right here and and it's predictably brings me back for me. My yoga practice does it every time, right? Like oh thank goodness I got on the mat, I feel so much better or being out in nature is another one.

And so for the listener to to start to discover what takes you out of feeling grounded, centered, safe, whatever word you want to use that helps you feel connected to yourself, right? And what brings you back.

So between parts work and understanding that there are these different parts of us and even this part of us that

can drive us can actually be a coping mechanism, a coping part for other parts that we are not as comfortable feeling.

And then even just this concept of the somatic psychology and what what does surface when we allow ourselves to relax and what messages come up? What are the images that come up for someone who would be new to this but understands the value of incorporating this into their life. Where would they start, what would be a safe way for them to start to explore this, that wouldn't, that wouldn't overwhelm them at first.

Yeah. Well, you know, I think that even just starting with some of the tools that we've already named here of seeing what happens when you slow down, when you check in with your body, when you check in with your breath.

Um, and you know, we've, we've tossed the word trauma out here, but we really didn't define trauma. And I think I want to backtrack there for just a moment because I think a lot of folks can hear that word and go, well that doesn't apply to me. I had a great childhood, but if we break down what we're really speaking about, it's any time in our lives when we experience something from our senses that we were not able to process at the time.

Trauma, Stress, and Finding Safety

And so from, you know, it doesn't have to be the car accident or the loss of a loved one or um, you know, or hurricane, it doesn't have to be something that we external define it can be anything that at the time that it happened was overwhelming to you.

And if you don't want to call it trauma fine, right? We can just call it any outlying experience that ultimately when we can kind of catch those, those moments in our lives, those memories and those somatic experiences.

We can integrate those and fold them back into the overall sense of self. And so I love therapy for that I think that having a container where we have another person that can see us and hear us and be invested in our well being.

You know, so that's my go to, of course I've become a therapist, so that's, you know, it speaks to my bias. But um you know, we can do that through meditation, we can do that on a yoga mat, we can do that in a walk in nature. There are many different routes to Rome right roads to Rome, but ultimately anything that helps you find those, you know, pockets of life experiences and moments that were overwhelming at the time and turn towards them with more capacity now.

And what this makes me think of. And I'm so glad you're bringing this Thank you. Is there is a continuum between stress and trauma and many of us experience stress frequently, right? Like that seems to be just a normal part of life where there is stress. But at what point does that stress become trauma? Right?

Like at what point does that stress become overwhelming where our biology, our nervous system, our vagus nerve is no longer able to process what's happening.

And there's a part of it that just kind of shuts down and collapses and it has to find a way to just keep going uh functioning in order to just get through.

But then how much more important it is then to take these pauses to take this time to allow our bodies to process stuff and the more that we can do that along the way and build into our daily routine and schedule these times to just pause and see what surfaces in our body.

Then we can prevent the accumulation of stress which leads to the burnout, leads to the overwhelmed leads to the trauma because it's been too much too fast or we've had too little resources for too long and our system cannot process that cannot keep up with that anymore. And so yeah, just this, this need for time and that's not what our society has has, you know, created is created a very fast paced uh system.

And it it is only contributing to more stress actually becoming trauma in our lives without us even realizing that it's actually trauma. I would say that two things come to mind as I listen to you.

One is that here we are in a time of covid and we have been all been, we've all been presented with this forced slowdown, the shutdown. Right? And this great pause if you want to think about that. But for so many people, this process of slowing down has been really uncomfortable.

It's been wonderful. They're like, I've been waiting for this. I needed a vacation, right? But for some people, it's really uncomfortable because in that slowing down, all of that other stuff is coming up and but it's purposeful in a way, it's purposeful. It's good if you have feelings that are coming up when you slow down, that's a good sign you're doing something right?

However, we don't want that to be overwhelming either. So we always remember that we want to pace ourselves and that we want to touch into vulnerable feelings at a pace that we can handle.

So that that doesn't become re traumatizing and have these tools and have these resources and have multiple resources, right? Like not just have one that you're relying on because if you're relying on that one, a pandemic can take that away in an instant and then your left spinning and and feeling you know out of control and lost without without that one tool that you had and so being able to, you know have the yoga mat for you have nature have many different tools, the somatic practice, you know, for me having that as a tool in order to be able to have multiple resources where your body can, can feel like I'm well resourced.

I'm not running on low or even empty. Yes. Yes. The the one other thing I was going to say in response to what you shared before is that the the tipping point between stresses and trauma is when we start to feel out of control when we feel like we don't have choice in our ability to respond to our world in the most effective way, we start to feel stuck by our nervous system reactivity or by our emotions.

It's like they're driving the bus instead of we're driving the bus. Mhm. Yeah. That out of control overwhelm there is that line and for many people, they don't notice this more subtle signs that happen leading up to that there it doesn't come into their conscious awareness and tell it's the big explosion of oh my goodness, I'm so out of control.

And how did I land here again? And it's this practice of being able to, to be in your body more so that you can start to notice what are the more subtle earlier signs that you can notice that your nervous system is shifting in that direction of hey, this is too much, I'm losing control so that you can then reroute it, redirect it, rewire that to go down a different path than what has always been your pattern.

Lovely. Good doctor, thank you so much for sharing your expertise with us your knowledge. I really appreciate this time, appreciate your your care, appreciate your work and all that you do for others and bringing this information to help so many people.

It's such a pleasure as I said. And you know, I do a lot of these interviews, but I have to say, I've really enjoyed this with you. It's so interactive and your wisdom and intelligence just helps this whole conversation flow. So thank you.

Thank you. And right back at you, my my soul and my heart are loving you right now. Likewise, we're in our social nervous system, Are we not? Yes, I am very eventual bagel right now.

Good. And thank you for joining us today. I'm dr AMY. And together, let's find that next level of health and aliveness.