

Exploring how we can master ourselves by looking at how experts say it is possible with your host Suswati Basu.

Intro music

Welcome to episode 29 of How To Be...with me Suswati as your timid presenter, guiding you through life's tricky skills by taking this learning journey with you.

When bad things happen, it can take a while to get over the pain and feel safe again and everyone faces it. When we lose someone or something we love, or a stressful event breaks apart our sense of security, we can begin to view our environment and those around us as dangerous. Even if a certain event doesn't cause us any physical harm, being in a state of fear can still cause us to become traumatized.

So how do we heal ourselves from terrible life events? I got to attend the Wisdom for Life conference on Mindfulness and Compassion this week, where Sharon Salzberg, one of America's leading spiritual teachers answered my question on healing.

SHARON SALZBERG

Our first book is from Allan Lokos who is the founder and was the GUIDING TEACHER OF THE COMMUNITY MEDITATION CENTER IN NEW YORK CITY up until a month ago. His teachers have included Thich Nhat Hanh, Sharon Salzberg herself, and Stephen Batchelor.

He is also the author of *Patience: The Art of Peaceful Living*, *Pocket Peace: Effective Practices for Enlightened Living*, and *Through the Flames: Overcoming Disaster Through Compassion, Patience, and Determination*. The book recounts his recovery after surviving a horrific plane crash with his wife Susannah in Myanmar on Christmas Day 2012.

I had the honour of speaking to him this week. Here is a small part of it, but find the full interview on www.howtobe247.com.

ALLAN LOKOS

Lokos was severely burned in the accident, and in the days and weeks following the crash, Susanna was told by the many doctors who examined Lokos that he would not survive.

Yet, in this inspiring account of his against-all-odds recovery, Lokos uses his experience as a window through which to examine the challenge of human suffering in general and addresses the question of how we can thrive in the midst of pain and uncertainty.

Lokos refers to "Recovery" as the recuperative process from an illness or injury. While "Healing" is often used for a similar purpose but in a broader sense encompasses the view that we are all healing from something.

He also identifies the two great wings of Buddhist teaching as wisdom and compassion. To practice the latter, we must begin with ourselves. "Compassion," he writes, "is a state of mind that is open and inclusive. It allows us to meet our suffering more directly. We see that we are not alone; everyone goes through difficult, unbearable times. That oneness is the ground of compassion. It is our common humanity."

He talks about the Buddhist term of Dukkha, a term relating to suffering, neither seen as positive or negative but realistic. Buddhists account for events by citing the "law of dependent origination," sometimes called "causes and conditions," or simply "conditionality". It means that nothing just happens. All phenomena are preceded by the causes and conditions that come together to make up each moment in time and space.

The idea of living in the moment and accepting what is, is also mentioned in the 1941 Alcoholics Anonymous Serenity Prayer which says:

Grant me the strength to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to accept the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Lokos also says when it comes to happiness, only we ourselves can find a way to provide this through reflection, determination, and effort. Buddha's enumeration of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, the fourth factor is piti, meaning joy, rapture, or happiness. The same can be said for unhappiness. The resultant feeling of unhappiness exists within ourselves and therefore can be changed only within ourselves.

Whilst he says never to suppress feelings, we can guarantee ourselves suffering when we cling to a desire for things to be different than they are. Fear and anxiety are feelings, and we can experience feelings only in the present.

Lokos then breaks down where to begin. First don't see pain as the enemy by learning about its true nature, not by running from it or constantly medicating ourselves. Patience and determination are important factors in helping achieve this. To develop greater patience, we need to be aware of the presence of impatience and anger as they arise. To do that, we practice mindfulness. While determination is the perseverance to stay the course, even when it feels as if we are drowning in doubt and misgiving. We need to practice determination through the same way by staying in the present moment.

Next is meditation, which can be achieved through focusing on a single point of concentration such as the breath which is constant. Lokos says sometimes people say that when they try to meditate their mind becomes restless and overactive. The truth is that what they are experiencing is what their mind has been doing all along. If our healing process is filled with concerns about the future, it can be unhelpful as healing can only be done in the present. He recommends insight meditation which essentially focuses your concentration and body scans, which brings attention to your body.

Next is of course mindfulness. Mindfulness is about establishing and maintaining a moment-to-moment consciousness of our thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and

surrounding environment without making any judgment. There is no goal but meditation can be thought of as the tool that prepares us to live mindfully. A mindfulness exercise that can be used for example is each week choose at least one meal to eat in silence. Chew each mouthful of food thirty times before swallowing.

Generosity is the ground for developing compassion. Generosity to oneself can take the form of a sincere commitment to our own well-being. Generosity is necessary because no one goes through life without experiencing unpleasantness.

Lokos says the key is often to find joy in the effort, which is the next important factor in healing. The more challenging the task, the greater the need for clear, ethical intentions. Moderation is also necessary, knowing when to work, knowing when to rest is essential to the process. And focus on effort and not the results.

Another effective form of introspective practice that he uses daily is called metta, or Loving kindness Meditation which we mentioned last week. The practice includes saying to yourself: may I be happy, may I be safe, may I be healthy, may I be at peace. Then express this to someone you love or are fond of, someone who you have a more difficult relationship with, and then the rest of the world. Metta is uplifting, loving, and compassionate and trains the mind to be more kind and generous of spirit.

Lokos says something tremendous when talking about the accident. He was asked "Do you ever think why me?" And he paused and responded "why not me?". When we look closely and fully grasp the law of dependent origination, we see that our lives are not a series of arbitrary events. Conditions are continuously unfolding, bringing about the events of each specific moment. Sometimes things happen because it just does.

While anger is a normal emotion, it is rarely beneficial, usually feels uncomfortable, and often lays the ground for unskillful and even dangerous actions. Don't deny its presence, but developing greater insight into the destructive facets of this potentially dangerous emotion and then mindfully releasing its hold on us, after all it isn't helpful in the physical healing process because of stress. The exercise he recommends is when anger arises, bring awareness to what you are feeling as you think, There is anger arising, then say (your name) is experiencing anger to distance yourself. Look at what that anger looks like? Can it be described as a colour? Suppressing anger can at times lead to psychological issues.

Courage is the next step. It is not fearlessness. It is being willing to acknowledge and face our fears and uncertainties even if they are daunting. Because it is a mental factor, it also requires training. "Rehearsing" courage allows us to practice it in a safe environment. Familiarity with a situation helps us to feel more comfortable.

Faith develops as we see things more clearly, and that clarity, or the ability to see things as they really are, is wisdom. So we see that there is a deep connection between faith and wisdom which means not being blindly led but to examine what we so readily accept as truth, or what we believe because we have always believed it, or what we "know is true" because it is what we

were taught. A serious loss or illness can shake our beliefs unless well grounded. No one goes through life without adversity.

It is also important to stay active to the best of your ability. Since Tai Chi involves slow movements, and complete concentration, it could be an ideal practice for someone recovering from an illness or injury (depending, of course, on any physical limitations involved and speak to a medical professional).

Gratitude is one of the fastest-acting remedies available to us apparently. Daily life presents us with ample opportunities to practice gratitude, most of which we tend to view as annoyances. Why is it important? Dr Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin–Madison says the amygdala, which is the brain's emotional centre, drives a part of the prefrontal cortex when we are caught up in negative emotions. When these emotions dominate, our thinking, perceptions, and memories are distorted and can have a streaming effect. Fear breeds fear, anger breeds anger. So gratitude can help push the path away from the negative.

Modern-day research has served to reiterate what most of us already knew: Laughter has a sense of relaxation about it, therefore, a corresponding feeling of less stress. Laughing out loud, or even a gentle smile, can neutralize negative feelings temporarily.

Lokos also says it's important to feel joy for others no matter how you feel or what your circumstances are. It is obviously easier to practice this if you are doing well and the other person's good fortune does not feel like a threat. However, we can increase our own happiness by diminishing our own craving and greed.

Then we need to think about equanimity, which is the calm that exists when we see into the nature of phenomena without being caught up in what we see ie. Observing without judging. Thus equanimity, when well developed, can lead to a sense of ease and inner peace, even in times of disruption. It also helps us see the bigger picture and accept that it is.

The most basic of all laws of the universe is—that which is born will die. It is the true nature of all things even though we've been conditioned to not think about it. Which may be why at the time of dying, many feel unprepared, confused, and frightened. The reason why it's essential to think about having a good death, is that it can help us to lead a good life, and create the circumstances to do so.

He suggests reflecting regularly on these five subjects for contemplation:

- I am of the nature to grow old; I cannot avoid aging.
- I am of the nature to be ill; I cannot avoid illness.
- I am of the nature to die; I cannot avoid death.
- All that is dear to me, and everyone I love, are of the nature to change.
- I will be separated from all that is dear and loved by me.
- I am the owner of my actions. My actions are my only true belongings. My actions are the ground on which I stand."

And in the end it's all about wisdom. Wisdom is developed through wise thinking and wise actions. Knowledge, intellect, and success are not wisdom, although they can be contributing factors. Only personal experience leads to wisdom. The development of wisdom requires living truthfully and peacefully, with kindness, compassion, and generosity.

Our next book is by motivational speaker, author, and publisher Louise Hay with *You Can Heal Your Life*. Written in 1984, the book is a classic in self-realisation and healing. Here she is in an interview before she passed away in 2017.

LOUISE HAY

According to Hay, our minds – and our long-held beliefs about ourselves – are the source of all our physical and emotional ailments. So, she says, we can overcome these problems simply by changing our thinking.

The first step in Hay's self-healing method is to understand that you're responsible for everything in your life in terms of how you feel about it. If you tend to react with this always happens to me. This is because each one of your thoughts – the things you're thinking right now – form your reality.

Whilst I'm less of a believer of the universe or higher power per se, Hay says it supports you in whatever you want to do, helping you manifest whatever you want to achieve. And while it supports you, it never judges you even though you may be constantly judging yourself.

She says this isn't your fault. You picked up these ideas when you were little – from careless adults who made offhand remarks, which got buried deep in your heart. Then, as you grew older, you continued to carry these beliefs around, which is why they continue to manifest themselves. Because you manifest what you think.

According to Hay's method, healing begins by changing your attitude toward the past. And you can do this by practicing forgiveness – forgiveness of all those people that hurt you, all those adults that made offhanded comments. And let's not forget your parents, because even if they were the worst parents ever, carrying around that anger only bogs you down. Forgiveness, in contrast, allows you to drop that burdensome anger, freeing yourself to take responsibility for your own happiness.

Hay also believes that the best way to begin your journey in loving yourself is to clear away limiting beliefs. You may have a list of "shoulds" – a list of things you think you're supposed to be doing. Or things you think you're supposed to be doing. But understand that by saying you should be doing these things, you're actually saying you're wrong for not doing them.

Perhaps it's better to ask yourself what you could be doing? Because could opens up possibilities. The question to ask yourself then is: Why haven't I done all the things I could do? Hay thinks that our lack of self-worth stops us doing the things you want to do.

While it may be painful to examine your actions, it's vitally important. Examining your actions isn't merely to count regrets; rather, it's a kind of mental housecleaning, throwing out memories that no longer serve you. Most importantly, this exercise helps you get familiar with all your limiting beliefs and find your way back to the present.

Negative thinking and attitudes can stop you from living in moment. But these are simply thought patterns – and you're here to change them.

You have to be willing to change though. Instead of wallowing in hopelessness or getting angry at others, you have to recognize that the only way to create a difference in your life is to change your own thoughts and behaviors. Hay recommends beginning this process by repeating to yourself in front of a mirror: I am willing to change. Whatever you're feeling, just let it wash over you without judgment. Simply notice it for what it is.

When it comes to emotional recovery, mirror work is a very powerful tool. That's because it reflects all the negative thoughts you have about yourself, hence delivering your positive message is an act of bravery. From now on, try to say something positive to yourself every time you pass a mirror.

Lastly, remember that even though you're now willing to change, quite often you still may not want to. Be on the lookout for these moments of resistance, because they're growth opportunities in disguise.

You may find this a bit kooky, the author encourages you to try to stay positive and have an open mind. Because the Universe supports you – it wants you to be healthy and happy – and you can want the same thing for yourself.

The author suggests that all your problems stem from long-held patterns and beliefs. They've been with you so long that you hardly notice they're there. So to overcome them, you need to become aware of them, and that's why resistance is so useful.

For instance, have you ever been presented with an idea and then found yourself thinking: What difference would it make? My situation's different. That doesn't sound like it's for me. Those are all assumptions and limiting beliefs. It can also manifest as delaying change, blaming someone else, or impatience. Just as resistance points the way to your problems, your repeated problems point the way to your needs.

To begin healing from this, the author recommends you throw aside self-criticism and start practicing positive affirmations.

As you begin to heal and release the need for your toxic behaviors, you'll probably experience some discomfort. To cope with this, it might help to picture your inner child as undisciplined, so setting boundaries but being kind and showing love. And as this process unfolds, watch for discomfort.

Having just given up a bad habit or thought pattern, you're now seeing your life with more clarity and the discomfort is a good indicator of what's no longer working for you. And as you become willing to release the need to do things that harm you, you'll find that it's becoming easier to let go of the past. The only thing you control is what you're thinking right at this moment.

The secret to loving yourself is learning to think in positive affirmations, so turning all negative statements into positive ones. But it's important to remember: always state your affirmations in the present tense. As you continue to feel better, the author recommends practicing more awareness, and you'll find you'll start gravitating towards joy.

There are many other things you can do to support your process, too. Daily gratitude lists to remind yourself that your life is abundant. Or practice meditation and exercise to strengthen mind and body. And at night, skip the doom and gloom of checking the news on your phone. Instead, bless the day and sleep in peace.

So to sum up:

In *Through the Flames* Lokos uses his experience as a window through which to examine the challenge of human suffering in general and addresses the question of how we can thrive in the midst of pain and uncertainty. By practicing patience, determination, befriending pain, using meditation, mindfulness, generosity, effort, loving kindness, understanding anger as well as cause and effect, courage, faith, staying fit, gratitude, using humour, joy, and compassion, wisdom, equanimity, and embracing life by accepting death we are able to accept the potential of today and live each day with dignity and grace.

While Hay says in *You Can Heal Your Life* that peace and happiness are your birthrights – this is what the Universe wants for you. If this kind of serenity seems out of reach, you're simply not in tune with yourself. Start by replacing negative thoughts with positive affirmations – and as you slowly learn to love yourself, the Universe will lay a bounty of happiness at your feet.

Pick a small number of your positive affirmations to concentrate on for the day. Write and read them out from a piece of paper 20 times.

While Hay's book may not be for everyone, some of the key tenets resonate all the same. We may not look the same as before, sometimes it's about evolving rather than returning to our former state.

To end, here's Business Life Coach and Rapid Transformational Therapy Practitioner Chris Melville, Intuitive coach, business mentor and Wellbeing Radio Host Natalie Farrell, and life coach specialising in chronic illnesses Sarah Wells on healing. And if you enjoyed this please hit subscribe!

CHRIS MELVILLE
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