



Episode 290: Braving Dark Night of the Soul and Learning to Own Yourself With Kelly Brogan

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Katie: Hello and welcome to the "Wellness Mama" podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com. And today's episode is a really fascinating one. It goes in a different direction than mainly the physical health that we normally talk about on this podcast. I am here with Dr. Kelly Brogan, MD who you have heard from before. Her first episode will be linked in the show notes here as well. It was fascinating talking about anxiety, depression, mental health, while she no longer prescribes medication and so much more. But Kelly is a holistic women's health psychiatrist, author of the New York times bestselling book, "A Mind of your Own," the children's book, "A Time for Rain" and co-editor of the landmark textbook, "Integrative Therapies for Depression."

She completed her psychiatric training and fellowship at NYU after graduating from Cornell and she has a BS from MIT in systems neuroscience. She's board-certified in psychiatry, psychosomatic medicine and integrative holistic medicine and specialized in root cause resolution as an approach to psychiatric syndromes and symptoms. She's also a KRI certified Kundalini yoga teacher and a teacher and a mother of two. And in this conversation, she and I but definitely her, get really vulnerable about life experiences and changes and something she calls a dark night of the soul that happens a couple times in our lifetime. So I hope that you will give this some chance and listen in with an open mind and enjoy. Here we go, Kelly, welcome and thanks for being here.

Kelly: It's really, really such an honor. Thank you for having me.

Katie: Absolutely. I know I've had you on before and you were very well loved with the audience. I'll make sure that your first episode is linked in the show notes so you guys can find that at wellnessmama.fm if you have not heard round one with Dr. Brogan. But I wanted to have you back because I think, first of all, we could have literally talked for eight hours in that first episode and we weren't able to. But also because I feel like there's just even more to talk about right now. Modern life just gets more intense and more busy and more everything. And I thought it was a perfect time to have you back on. And you also have a book, "A Mind of Your Own. I wanna make sure we talk about that today too. But one thing that you have written about and talked about on your own platform, we call it the dark night of the soul. So I think let's just jump in with the hard stuff, and will you explain what that is and what that means to you?

Kelly: Absolutely. You know, I think it's worth mentioning that I am a very conventionally-trained doctor. I was a hardcore atheist and all of the concepts I'm about to explore were totally anathema to me. Like just eye roll beyond the eye roll and something I would dismiss because there wasn't evidence, there wasn't science and you know, spiritual folks can go to their ashrams and talk their gibberish if they want to. Like that's basically the kind of mindset that I was coming from when I essentially backed into learning about this very spiritually-archetypal journey that can unfold usually at particular times in a given individual's life. And typically, that would be like around adolescence or between like 35 and 45, those tend to be very common windows. And I'm finding that the perimenopausal-menopausal window is potentially a third one.

And it's something I've begun to learn about mostly because I elected to work with women who wanted to pursue another way of interacting with hardship or crisis or challenges than medication. And that means that either they were already on medication and it wasn't "working" or they didn't feel totally themselves or they were dealing with this chronic sense that something was missing or they wanted to avoid medication, but felt like they were really kind of staring down the barrel of a very acute circumstance in their life. You know, whether it was a death or loss or some kind of new diagnosis or something that was bringing out tremendous amount of fear.

And so in working with this population, I began to as I committed to, you know, since I put down my prescription pad, which at this point was amazingly around a decade ago, I never started a patient on prescription medication again. And I have that, you know, it's has a light side and a dark side this trait of my personality, which is that, you know, when I commit to something I commit hardcore. And I decided, you know, that under no circumstances was I going to start someone on a medication. That was really based on what I had learned after I decided to take another look into the literature and, you know, publish that in "A Mind of your Own" in 2016 which I think was around when we spoke last, amazingly.

And since that time, I have of course, had now several more years of experience seeing what it looks like when people choose this path. And it can look a way that is something like childbirth, right? So from the outside in, you're like, why don't you just get a C-section and be done with it? Right. But from the insider's perspective, you know that you have, well, hopefully, you know at this stage in our enfoldment that you have a choice between, you know, going on the journey to see what it's like to explore the energies of labor and transition and, you know, birthing that child through your body. Or you can do the best that you can, but you can opt to

numb, literally and figuratively, the experience through analgesics or epidural, whatever you choose. So the women that I work with have kind of figuratively chosen the unmedicated home birth, right?

So they're saying like, "I'm going in raw and whatever comes of it, I wanna know, I wanna see it. And I understand there are risks and I can't but choose this, right? I'm choosing this." And so what I've had the real privilege of, you know, sort of acting as is something of a spiritual midwife because I really don't do much other than stay strong, calm, and really confident in their capacity to get through it. But what they're getting through is not the birth of a baby. It's typically this birth of their more authentic self. And as kind of poetic as that sounds, I think most of us can relate to this idea that we wear various masks, right? And we go through life kind of constantly switching them depending on the context, especially women are so chameleon-like in this way. We know how to meet the needs and really please those around us in a way that, you know, most men aren't equipped with, right? So we're constantly shuffling these masks and there gets a point at which, you know, some of them start to drop and then you start to become aware that your actual face is never in contact with the world.

So it's something like that where you have this opportunity to understand what you're made of, but that that opportunity asks of you a certain kind of death. And so this has been written about, you know, by mystics and yogis and spoken about for probably millennia, this idea of moving through what is called the dark night of the soul. So this passage through which the false layers of yourself fall away and this tender but very, very real part of you is born, and it's born through, you know, through the fires, through this confrontation with the aspects of your defenses that served you for a while, right? So that can be control, knowing it all, being on top of things, you know, showing up for work and being the good girl, making sure the meal is on the table at 6:00 p.m., like all of the ways in which we have sort of whipped our self into shape so that we can feel like we are lovable really. I mean, that's really what's going on.

And then when we go through this passage, we really don't have access to those parts of ourselves necessarily. And instead we get to look at all of the parts of ourselves we didn't even wanna know existed, let alone develop like real-time intimacy with. And so often in the dark night of the soul, you're confronted with tons of fear, sometimes rage, sometimes grief, right? And almost always shame. And it's this panoply of these emotions that literally can feel like it's going to kill us. They're just feelings, right? They're just emotional states and energies moving through. But it literally can feel like either it's going to kill us or maybe we'd rather be dead than feel this much inside us, right? Because we have no cultural context for having these dark parts, right, that we label as negative, having these dark parts and also being a good person. So it's like a way of really adultifying so that in the adult consciousness you develop the capacity to be both good and bad, right? But then you also allow others to be that, right? So no longer do you see somebody as being totally wrong and you're totally right or you're totally wrong and somebody else is totally perfect, right? That kind of splitting that black and white thinking is really a childlike mechanism that begins to be really remedied through this chemical process. And you learn to hold all of these energies the same way when you're birthing, you know, a baby without medical assistance, you learn that you're just the cauldron, you know, that the energies are moving through.

You're not really, you're not growing that baby intentionally. You're not making that baby move to the right or the left or forward or back here, you know. It's happening. There is something moving through you and you're just the container, right? You're holding that space and you're allowing this magic to happen within you to

great yields, obviously. But on an emotional level, we really don't have a lot of exposure to what this looks like as a society because we're so busy chasing that oasis on the horizon, right? Finally, I'm gonna have this day I wake up and I have no problems and I'm finally gonna feel happy, right? And that's what drives consumerism and all of the money we spend to just finally feel okay. And, of course, at a certain point in life we see the bankruptcy of that. So it's really this opportunity, but it's not for everyone, but you'll kind of know if you're being called to it. And I think more and more of us are being called to level up in this way.

Katie: I'm curious how someone, how do we know if that...because some of the things you just said really actually resonated with where I am right now. And I'm curious, it's mainly women who are called to this. Can men have this kind of thing too in a different way? And how do you know if that's the thing that's happening for you versus just you're going through anxiety or you're going through something else that might be different?

Kelly: Yeah. So you know, I've come to the perspective because I've seen the yield, right? So I had to see literally hundreds of women go through this process to see that it has stages to be able to hold that vision for them of what's on the other side, right? So it's like, again, the midwife in the room is holding the vision of that healthy baby in your arms as you're saying, when is it gonna be over, right? Like I can't do it another second, right? She's holding that energy for you. And so I had to see that on the other side of this process. The women that I work with it, you know, in my practice, you know, they became in touch with their gifts. And there are many, many poets who have spoken to this concept that, you know, the wound is where the light comes in or that there's the gem in the dragon's mouth. You know, this is an ancient reality. It's just one we've been running from, right?

So I'm of the perspective now since I've seen them come out and become, you know, the artists they've always been, or to set up, you know, some beautiful service and philanthropic-based, you know, conscious business or to become a healer and, you know, all one after another, after another inviting prosperity into their life just because they chose to really go through this refining process. And, you know, sometimes what comes with it is a rearrangement of relationships or, you know, having the courage to quit a job or to move out of their state or whatever it is. There's natural changes that come with the reclamation of this kind of power. But it's led me to believe that actually any symptom has in it a little invitation.

So it could be a big invitation or a small invitation, right? Like if it's a tumor sticking out of your breast, that's going to be a big invitation. Why? Because it's gonna bring up a tremendous amount of fear and the potential for you to really abandon your own body and to see it as something to be managed that something that makes mistakes rather than the expression of something going on inside that's actually meaningful, right? So if it's a small invitation, it could be that you have some insomnia or you're getting headaches, you know, before the onset of your period, or maybe even you stubbed your toe and now you can't go to, you know, dance class or whatever it is.

If we can orient towards these experiences of discomfort, fear, or suffering, when it has to do with our body and our mind, our emotional, you know, sort of the emotional realm within, if we can orient really towards ourselves with curiosity first as a first reflex rather than control as a first reflex, then we will often be guided towards something that will help us understand ourselves better. But this concept of self-discovery really isn't

relevant to allopathic medicine, right? Like when I was in medical school or my, you know, extensive training that idea, even in psychiatry, and believe it or not, it's just not a concept that seems to hold any water.

And so what's interesting is that I think it's what's most important to us, right? That's why there are quizzes all over the internet and have been, you know, since "Cosmo" magazine when I was in high school. We want to know more about ourselves. Like we want to tap into that mystery and it's just that I think we were taught that the way to know more about yourself is to get it together and to feel more in control. But something is shifting where I think as a collective we're beginning to say no, that's not actually what self-ownership is about, right? That's self-ownership actually is about owning all of your stuff, right? All of it, from the bad to the good to the in between. And it's kind of like if you have two people in front of you and one is like pretending to have everything together and to be in control and the other is just kind of owning the fact that they don't, like who are you gonna feel more comfortable around? It's that authenticity meter that is extremely sensitive, I think in all of us right now.

And so, you know, you asked, is it just women who go through this? You know, I can obviously only speak from my experience as a woman in a practice of women. But what's interesting is that since bringing my offerings online and scaling them to men and women, I've seen that this is actually a very human process. And it's a kind of self-initiation. And, you know, if you look to indigenous cultures, you'll see that whether it's prizing, you know, childbirth and the ritual of that or whether it's, you know, a vision quest where, you know, you're left out in the woods for three days without food or water, this concept of bringing you to the brink of what you thought were your limitations and experientially, showing yourself that you can move through them is a part of how you become an adult. And I think that's kind of what we're all contending with is that we are like in ways emotional children, like running around in adult clothing. And then we wonder why we don't feel authentic and we wonder why we're struggling with imposter syndrome and why we can't ever find that that experience of peace. And as so many that I work with describe, it's like a feeling of just like finally being themselves, right? Like finally feeling comfortable in their own skin.

So it strikes me that, you know, this is the portal. It's moving through what you might otherwise want to run away from. And again, that could be a small little thing or a very big thing that takes tremendous courage to face. But, you know, it's only in exploring these things and coming to them with some curiosity and understanding their meaning that you can sort of find the gem and the, you know, what I often say is like this idea that suffering ends where meaning begins. And I really have found it to be true that that suffering can dissolve in a moment if you tell yourself a different story. And so in my new book, in "Own Your Self," that's pretty much what I am trying to teach is like how do you tell yourself a different story when society and the dominant American culture that's, you know, invaded the world, is telling a different story about your experience of your, you know, emotional realms. Again, whether that's, you know, having tremendous fears that have been labeled as OCD or visions that have been labeled as schizophrenia or a suicidal depression or, you know, tremendous energy that's labeled as mania. Whatever it is, society is telling you, this is a problem. It doesn't work. It's not controllable through your own choices.

And so the only way for you to manage this is through medication because something's wrong with you. And can we tell a different story? And what happens when we do? And what I found is when we tell a different story about what's happening and we see it as an invitation to personal empowerment, growth and development, then incredible things can emerge, right? But we have to start to grow this field, you know, so

to speak as a collective because there's only very few people the world over who are walking this path right now. But I do have faith that it's more and more. And that's obviously why I'm so pleased to be having this conversation, you know, to begin to grow that field bigger and bigger so that it can hold each and every one of us as we make our choices.

Katie: I really love that quote that you just said, that "suffering ends where meaning begins." And I think that's also a perfect corollary to childbirth because that suffering that you feel that like seems so intense and impossible is like and you have your baby at all, has meaning and you almost forget. And I think that's a beautiful analogy to use there. And I'm curious because like I said, so much of what you're saying really resonated to me and so much of what's in your new book really resonated with me. And I have my own process the last couple of years has been realizing that you can have diet dialed in and lifestyle dialed in and do the exercise and the sleep and all the things perfectly. And if you don't deal with your emotions, you still will have roadblocks. It could be big ones.

But yet I feel like I've run on that struggle. But how do you actually find the path forward? Because it seems very different for everyone. And I know at least in my case, there were all these expectations and guilt and things I was supposed to do and how you mentioned like always needing to be there for everyone else and to do all of the things everyone else. So I guess, the two-part question will be, if you're comfortable sharing a little of what your own journey through that process and then how do you find a starting point?

Kelly: I love this. And you know what? I think we're all in it. We're all in it in our own way and certainly, some of us are in way deeper than others, right? So some of the women that I work with clinically, you know, what they go through, especially coming off of these medications. I mean, is all I can do to reflect to them that they are the heroines of our time. You know, the amount of courage that it takes to go into the darkness that comes up when you have sometimes 30 years of unexplored emotional territory, you know, that you're slammed with like a title wave when you come off of an antidepressant after all that time, right? Because I do believe in what the science of psychoneuroimmunology is showing us, which is that emotions, you know, do get coated as peptides. And this was Candace Pert's work, you know, from decades ago, and they get stored in our body, right?

So you can believe, you know, on a spiritual level that it's energy that gets stuck somewhere. Or you can just honestly default in neuroscience and understand that there's a reality to this. And so it's in there, right? And it could be in there for decades. So how are you going to move it? Right? How are you going to liberate that? How are you gonna keep that from expressing as cancer? And you know, it's what's interesting based on what you're describing that I can still relate to is that, you know, I've had about like five or so years of very unexpected challenges come to my life whether it was, you know, falling madly in love with my current partner, Sayer, you know, when I was happily married, whether it was what it is to dissolve a family as somebody who was very invested in her, you know, postcard sort of, you know, life and the role that I played in my own family, you know, with my parents and my brother and all of the challenges that came up when I stopped playing the part I had unconsciously agreed to play. You know, and then of course, you know, as an activist, all of what has come up in terms of really beginning to see the truth of Nietzsche's quote, which is, you know, basically about becoming the monster you're fighting.

You know, I began, that happened and I not only happened to me, but I began to see it happening to many other activists who, particularly in the sort of like pharmaceutical awareness realm who really were suffering and struggling. And, you know, I was like crying myself to sleep. And it took a while for me to say, "You know what, this can't be the way out." You know, that it's, we're fighting war with more and, you know, hate with hate and how, how is this going to ever get us anywhere? It's very hopelessness inducing. And so, you know, finally I got to the point where I decided to design my own life and actually understand what my desires were and my needs were, and to stop acting as if, you know, I was living a life based on what I, like, "had to do" right on a professional level or a familial level or whatever, even for my children to be honest.

So I decided to make choices, right? Make bold choices. And I, you know, I relocated to Florida to be closer to my partner and brought my kids. And then my ex husband chose to come and my parents chose to come and things started to kind of flow once I asserted my own desire. And what was interesting is, you know, here I designed my perfect life. I'm exactly where I wanna be in the world. And wherever you go, there you are, right? So I have this like beautiful schedule, I'm in this beautiful place, my body feels like in heaven and, you know, Marie Kondo my house and it's like, feels so wonderful. And, here I am in a constant state of like vigilance and worry and detachment and feeling like I'm living my life behind the glass, you know, and all of these moments that seem like they should feel so good, I can't access that range of feeling.

And so it really was like in the past year or so that I've developed a lot of the skills that I knew about from my patients, right, were necessary, but I didn't necessarily have a lived experience of. And you know, so I'll tell you what I think a couple of the tips are, although this is largely what I, you know, I put in this book "Own Your Self" was like, I'm very like, pragmatic person, right? So if something's challenging, I wanna know like, what are the best, give me some road signs, right? Like, give me some navigational tools.

And so I've tried to include as many of those as possible, but one of the things that I find is something important to commit to and begin to practice, like mental hygiene around is, where are you telling what I call victim's stories, right? So where is there a narrative in your life? And usually this is relational, like in a dynamic with a spouse or parent or sometimes a kid or a boss, where are you holding a narrative that features you as the one who's right about being wronged? Right? So we all have these, no shame in the game and we all have them. Some of us hide them better than others. Like I would be in that camp. But there are gonna be places where you're telling yourself a story about your life that features you as being dependent and without power. And anytime you have that kind of story, there is a little piece of you that is constantly turning that, you know, constantly maintaining that and it's like an incredible energy drain, right?

And so one of the antidotes to that is to begin to see where you have participated willfully. Like where have you made a choice to participate in a dynamic that you are feeling victimized by? Right? And so, you know, when it comes to taking medications, right, it's really important for the women I work with to be able to say, "I chose that. I chose that because it was the best I could do with the information I had at the time and now I'm gonna choose something different." Right. But it can even be like, you know, an interaction where you feel, you know, like a fronted. Like I, you know, I had this interaction with my mom, for example, and every part of me was like, "Oh, I'm over it. It's fine." And it took me basically understanding how I didn't show her in any way the compassion that I expected her to show me, right? For me, it's, like, almost feels like blaming the victim, but it's actually a strategy to begin to take back control.

It's hard. It's hard work because you feel vulnerable and that's why you have that story to defend yourself, right? But it's a method of regaining control and this surprisingly liberating. It's kind of like when you engage in service or volunteering or philanthropy, it's like, why would that feel good? Because if you give money, let's say, to somebody else, well then you have less. But we all know that's not how it works, right? There's something around resolving these little points of victimhood that is extraordinarily liberating.

And then I would say another one is to just begin to engage relating to your triggers from a different angle, right? So I think this concept of triggers is like entering in the zeitgeists and all that that means is like there are things that really like get you going. Like they'd charge you up and not in a good way. All right. So like you and I can both be online at the bank and the teller can step away and put her little sign up that says she's going for lunch and you may be like, all right, it'll come back later and I could literally have like an adult temper tantrum about it, right? And make a big scene. So there are different things that trip our wires and there are good reasons for that based on our childhood programming and particular traumas, etc. But you can relate to it by championing that as your, you know, kind of battle cry that you're gonna get behind it. You're gonna tell your friends to try and garner more support for that. Or you can understand, okay, this is like my, what I call the child-self, right? This is my child-self behind the curtain at Oz pulling all the strings and making some big, you know, spooky wizard sounds. But the truth is, is just a little kid behind that curtain.

So there's, you know, a visualization that I practice with my patients and online participants where it's basically you just kind of turn toward it as if it's like a little kid. So hopefully, same gendered kid you can relate to, right? So it's like, you know, I have two daughters, so this is a decently easy exercise for me, where I basically can imagine that I'm turning towards someone inside me who is a little girl who is the one having the tantrum. And you just kinda like practice soothing that little thing, right? You practice soothing that little kid and it's very simple. You're not fixing it for her, you're not making it better. You're just saying, wow, so angry right now. That seems really intense. I'm so sorry. Something like that, right?

And it sounds really ridiculous. This is what I do in my crisis moments. This is literally the exercise that I do when I am pushed to the brink. You know, again, whether it's by my partner or by some piece of legislation that's come across, you know, state lines. This is how I am learning to relate to myself from an adult consciousness. And it's just kind of a way to develop the witness mind, right? And neurobiologically, this has a correlate. When you have the develop the capacity to watch yourself have an experience, the way that that impacts your nervous system is totally different than if you are totally fused with the experience and you are flailing around in fight or flight.

So there are these kind of little ways to begin to interact with yourself so that you're no longer trying to arrange all of the furniture in the room perfectly. You know, turn on the music, make sure the candles are lit, but then you have like that screaming, tantruming toddler inside of you. You know, it's like locked in a room, bolted doors and screaming and you're like, well, why doesn't it feel comfortable in here? That's so strange. I made everything look so nice. That's kind of where we're all at. And so I think we need to develop, you know, these practices of relating to ourselves through our stories that we tell ourselves. And one of them is that feeling upset is something to fix, you know, rather than something to explore or even soothe. And so, you know, we can start with this very basic premise that we're all, we're all kind of doing this work. Like we're all kind of beginning to understand that there is an inside job being asked of us.

Katie: And why do you think right now they're so, it seems like, because so much of what you're saying I see in myself, I see in my friends, I just think society. Why do you think we're seeing this so much right now?

Kelly: Yeah, it's a great question. You know, at the risk of sounding kind of metaphysical, I believe that we are alive at a really, really, really fascinating time in human history. And remember, I used to cry myself to sleep about having brought children into this world, because I was focused on the fluoride in the water and the glyphosate and the pharmaceuticals and everything, you name it, the greenwashing products and all the things I know that you are passionate about as well. And I just couldn't see how we were ever gonna fix it, right? And so I thought, well, this is a life bereft of anything beautiful and why did I have children? That's literally how I felt for several years.

And now I have a different perspective because as I commit more and more to this notion that there is a design and there is an order and there is an intelligence to all that is as I begin to explore more deeply this idea that everything has an energetic signature interacting with everything else and that there is this whole of fractal expression, like from the littlest, littlest thing to the biggest, biggest system that the complexity is maintained, right? And it's an incredible reality to begin to inhabit. I think that we are actually on the brink of, like, a dimensional upgrade, you know, on this planet. And we're in this phase of transition and I think that's why so many of us who are very sensitive are being called to level up our strengths and being called almost like a kind of deeper spiritual training camp or something to begin to grow our capacity to allow this storm that is brewing to just exist and then turn it into something beautiful. Like it's real alchemy, right?

And so how do we know that we're in this transition? Well, one of the signs is that the system that has served our expansion and development for many centuries, which could be called a system of control or a system of force, right? So you see that through our, you know, our legal system, our educational system, our agricultural system, our medical system, our political systems, they're all based on this notion that wherever there is aberrance or unruliness or anything that is outside of the lines, it should be met with increasing amounts of force, right? That's why you go from, you know, six vaccines to 72 vaccines. That's why we have go from 1 chemical pesticide to 12 in a concoction or it's this always neglect of the source and root of the problem with the increasing application of more of the same in an effort to finally subdue it, right?

And, of course, we have this in our, our school systems as well educational systems. How do we, you know, finally subdue every last child and we're seeing that it's just not working. It's no longer working and it did for a while and now it's not. And so this bankruptcy, you know, of the system is something that we all feel. And even if we pretend to defend the status quo, like on some level, we're all kind of winking to each other and being like, we know there's gotta be a sea change coming, right? Like we know we have to do things differently. We all feel it. And that sense of what wasn't...you know, what was working now isn't, we're all feeling on an individual level as well because that's how it works, right? These systems are expressions of our individual consciousness and the level of consciousness at which we're all operating.

So it's like what we're feeling as individuals is exactly that. Well, my defense has worked for a good long time, right? I just make sure I show up on time and I do what I'm told and I'm polite and I respond to emails in a timely fashion and I make a lot of money and I get this award, whatever it is. And that kind of works for awhile until you start to feel the rattling of the cage and you're like, "Uh-oh, it's not working anymore, right?" And so I

think that's really where we find ourselves is in this transition to this new territory, this new never before existent way of being that is going to come from the rubble of our current, you know, dominant paradigm. And it's happening, like it's happening at a tremendous rate where levels of awareness and totally creative novel solutions are emerging.

You know, I mean, even when it comes to, you know, censorship or, you know, what's happening to many of us in Google, right? So like this idea that they have, that they know what's true and right, and they're going to limit and control our access to what they believe is bad, which happens to include anything from natural health to right-wing politics to pedophilia. So it's like this bucket where all the bad stuff goes and they're just gonna control, you know, exposure to the bad stuff, right? So they're gonna censor out all of those who don't meet their criteria. Well, what's already happening is that something really new and interesting is going to be born from that, right? Because you cannot live in a world where the bad is fully controlled. And I think that's what on an individual and of course, in my work, what I'm seeking, you know, to support is this idea that we move beyond the bad and the good, right? That we begin to understand that it's all everything, right?

So I've had to sit with people who I've deemed as, you know, seeming enemies, whether it's in the pharmaceutical industry or wherever else. And I've had to, for my own, for my own benefit, really ask the question, you know what, like what would I do if I were them? I would probably do the same thing they're doing. Right. If I had the totality of their experience, if I had all of their exposures and all of their indoctrinations and all of their choices, I would probably be making the same exact decision that they're making. So how can we begin to, on a small level and a big level say, I accept what is, you know, I have compassion for how we've gotten ourselves here and let's create something more beautiful. And so that's been, you know, a part of the shift in my rallying cry, which is to no longer be like fighting, right? What I don't want to be and certainly not unless I have something more beautiful to offer.

Katie: I love that so much and I think it's good perspective. And for anybody who's not familiar, I'll just give you a little bit of background about what Kelly, what you're talking about with Google, which is that over the last year, but especially in the last few months, there have been a series of updates that have essentially like removed all visibility and traffic to sites that don't agree with certain positions in Google. And on the one hand, Google is a private company or that they're a company and they can choose to do that. They're not a public utility. We have no right to rank there, but it is incredibly frustrating. And not just for those of us who, that's our income and our livelihood, but a friend of mine put it the other day, she's like, if this had happened five years ago, I would be dead because I wouldn't have found the information that let me figure out how to save my own life when I was sick.

And so that's kind of what we're dealing with. But I love, love, love your perspective on this because that's one thing I've said so much in the last two years, is that we as a society have to get to a point where we can start conversations with that basis of, I might totally disagree with you, but I still can love you and respect you and let's have a constructive conversation. Because if not, if we're just escalating the anger, we are leaving a terrible legacy for our kids of just anger and fighting. So I love that. Do you have any strategies for like helping people to bridge that gap and to start those conversations?

Kelly: I think, you know, somebody who's helped me so much in this regard is Byron Katie and she is anyway, I guess, I don't know how she would characterize herself, but she's a teacher. And on the global scene and has been for many decades. And she has this kind of like set of four questions that you apply to any statement or belief that's causing you distress, right? So, you know, so it might be Google should let me be who I am or just to be like, whatever, put something out there. And one of the strategies that she offers to resolve judgment because it's the judgment and the fighting with what is that causes suffering. That's it. It's not the reality. It's the story that we are telling about the reality that causes suffering and it's co-misery, right? That means suffer together. We are always seeking that connection. So we'll connect through suffering, right? So that's how you spread it, right? You kind of pass the buck.

So one of the, the strategies that she offers I find extraordinarily helpful is called it's, so there's these four questions you go through, you ask if that statement is really true, right? And then you take a look at how you feel when you believe this statement versus when you don't. And you can see that it's the statement that's actually causing the suffering, not the reality. And then the one that's most helpful, I think is called the turnaround, which is you literally 180 degree the sentence. And so like in this case it would be, I should let Google be who they are, right? And isn't that kind of true? It's always kind of a stunning thing that you see, you know, whether it's, you know, my boyfriend should do the dishes and then you're like, well my boyfriend shouldn't do the dishes, right? How do you know? Because he's not doing the dishes so he shouldn't do them, right? You know, or maybe I should do the dishes. And that makes a lot of sense because I'm the one who wants them done. Maybe I should do the dishes, right?

So it's like you get to this place of access to what is and you feel melt away the part of you that was really working to uphold your story of suffering. And I find that to be like very, very helpful strategies. So just kinda like flip it, you know, and see is there any truth in that? Maybe there's not in some cases, but I found almost every time I feel a judgment about something that I don't like how something is, which trust me is like 80% of my day sometimes, right? But if I can apply that mindset and say, well, you know, maybe I'm the one who needs my own advice, it's almost always true. There's almost always some truth in it and it helps me to see, wow, I'm just treating that person or you know, that issue exactly the way I would prefer not to be treated. How is that fair? Right. And so it's just a way to calibrate around kind of being, you know, being the change that you wanna see.

Katie: I love that. I would never have thought to turn it on its head like that, but it makes so much sense.

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This episode is brought to you by Four Sigmatic... my source for superfood coffees, teas and elixirs that contain powerhouse mushrooms for better performance, sleep and health. I've been asked several times what the name means... and it's a cool story... Basically, if you put all the foods in the world on a scale from bad to good, many would fall in the middle as average. The farther you get away from the average, the more rare it is, and the more "sigmas" it has. Only 50 superfoods in the world qualify as four Sigmas away from the average... these are the best of the best, the highest quality, and the products Four Sigmatic uses in their products. My favorites are the coffee with lions mane in the morning, reishi elixer or reishi cocoa at night to wind down, and any of their other products in between. I highly recommend all of it – I haven't tried anything that I didn't love. My kids love their chai and superfood hot cocoa but I'd recommend all of their products. Save 15% on any order with the code [wellnessmama](https://www.foursigmatic.com/wellnessmama) at [foursigmatic.com/wellnessmama](https://www.foursigmatic.com/wellnessmama)

Katie: What about with kids, because I know you have children as well and obviously as moms we all want to do the best for our kids and leave the best for our kids that we can. With these shifts happening in you, has that changed your parenting or do you have any tools that can be useful for parents in helping kids walk through? Because you mentioned this also sometimes happens at puberty. So as a mom who's about to have a teenager, I'm curious, are there tools that we use with our children?

Kelly: Oh, yes. Thank you for asking. This has been a huge, huge part of right, because I used to think that I was like, you know, fighting all the demons out there for my kids. And meanwhile, I was like traveling constantly, never around for them. Even when I was around, I wasn't present and I wasn't there in my feminine power. And as I've begun this process of healing that I've also, you know, witnessed so many have and I've witnessed, you know, all of these hundreds of individuals move through of really coming in contact with my softer, more vulnerable parts and exploring aspects of myself that I had, you know, thought I'd be stronger without, I have seen my children transformed, right? And so I'm a big believer that our children express our unconscious or semi-conscious conflicts and issues as parents. I know that's not a very popular perspective, but it's one that keeps me sort of in integrity without seeing my kids as having like very own weird problems that have nothing to do with me.

And I've seen that from anything from funny little health things like a frequent peeing or something, I've started to see that that is responsive to my shifts in energetic commitment. And part of what I have dedicated myself to offering them is to no longer, or is the same thing I offer my patients. Right? So to just orient around them as if their feelings matter and as if their feelings, you know, deserve air time and are not an inconvenience or worse or something scary to me. And it has transformed our family.

And so, you know, I'll give you a quick example. So when we moved, right, it was just extremely challenging window for me on a million levels. Not to mention just logistically. So we get here and we're, I don't know what, two, three months into to being here. And I have my kids set up at this extraordinary Waldorf school and it just feels like so many things are coming into alignment. And my little one who was seven at the time, we're going to bed. And every mother knows that that is the time, right, where the veil is thin. And so we're laying in the dark and she just starts crying like pretty much out of nowhere, right? And she's like, "I wanna go back home," meaning up North, right? "I wanna go back home. I don't like it here. I don't like school. I don't like my friends and I don't wanna be here. And you never asked my opinion about whether we could come here." And meanwhile my blood is like literally boiling, because not only is my inner lawyer like that is

inaccurate. And you do have friends here and you do like it here. I saw you laughing the other day, you know, like not only is that going on, but then it's also my inner child, right?

So my child's health is having her own tantrum because she's like, "But I worked so hard and I'm trying to keep it together. And how dare you, you know, not appreciate what I'm doing." Like all, there's like there's like multiple kids in the room. And so in that moment, because of this commitment to growing big enough to simply allow emotions some air time, okay, because I am an adult now and I'm gonna choose to act like an adult, which is not to say that I'm gonna act like I have it altogether. It's simply to say that I'm gonna trust that I can handle this emotionally, right? And so in that moment, something inside me recommitted and even though I literally almost had to lift my arm up to put it on her back, I put my hand on her back and I just kind of rubbed her back and I let her cry and I didn't say anything for a long time.

And then the only thing I said was, "this is really hard." That's it, right? Like the way you talk to somebody who's in distress, it's simple like monosyllabic, two-words, three-words sentences. And she cried probably for another, I don't know, three minutes. Then she got up, she got a tissue and she blew her nose and like made a joke about how she sounded like an elephant, got back into bed and went to sleep. So that to me was like a felt experience of these teachings where if you simply are co-present and open to allowing your child agency in their own emotional life, where you don't tell them how to feel, you don't try to control their experience and you certainly don't attend to your inner child over them, right, where you give her air time and let her try to be right. You know, as we all are want to do, that there is an arc to these emotions and it's like this audacious act of courageous parenting to simply allow for your child's experience to have air time, right?

And so obviously in adolescence the tumult that can pass through the power that they are learning how to wield because these emotions are also the same as our gifts, as our power. They are at the root, right? It's again that becoming these alchemists, like how do you turn pain into joy? How do you turn grief into, you know, ecstasy? This is something we're all capable of and no one necessarily can teach that, but we can give their, you know, experience wide birth while also showing that we can handle it. Because I used to think as a parent, like, you know, I'm breaking, you know, cycles of yelling and that kind of thing in many, many generations of my families. I never yelled at my kids, but what I would do when I couldn't handle it was just kinda like walk out of the room, right? So if they were like expressing something I didn't wanna hear or they were crying about something I didn't want to deal with, like I would just kinda like walk out. But that's, I now understand just another way of telling them and showing them like, what you're experiencing, I don't like, I don't approve of and I can't handle it moreover, right? So what is it to be in the presence of an adult who can't handle your emotions? Right. What does that tell you about your emotions? That they induce abandonment, right? They induce detachment. They make you isolated.

So that's kinda how the messaging starts. Like it's like stop crying little Jimmy, you know, it starts early and is perpetuated. And then of course taken on culturally where we make no room as a society for people to, you know, even grieve. I mean, now it's literally been edited in the diagnostic and statistical manual, the fifth iteration of it where the bereavement clause has been lifted so that if you're experiencing the symptoms of depression, two weeks after a loved one has passed, you are now a candidate for a mental illness, diagnosis and chemical treatment. This is the direction that we're moving in where we literally have no capacity to allow people to move through their process, however that might look and to simply, you know, support them to show them, you know, we're not gonna flee as a society or as a parent.

Katie: Wow, that's amazing. The only like two weeks later that would be, and I know that you don't prescribe at all anymore, but I feel like it maybe is a symptom of this or just with everything going on in modern life, anxiety and depression still are so much on the rise and especially for women. Like those are just two things I hear so often from readers. So I'm curious, in light of all of this information in your new book do you have any updated advice or starting point that you would give to someone working through anxiety or depression right now?

Kelly: Yeah, so again, we wanna contextualize it, right? So Krishna Marie said, "It's no sign of health to be well adapted to a profoundly sick society." Right. So when we talked earlier, I talked earlier about this bankruptcy, we're all feeling right. We are out of our greatest expression, we are out of alignment and there are going to be many of us, I call them the canaries in the coal mine who feel that, right? And we label it anxiety or depression. And of course, then the individual gets the message, something is wrong with them, and they have this chemical imbalance and they're gonna have it for life. And of course they need to be treated, right? Their sickness needs to be treatable. I'd like to throw that on its head, right? And to say, no. Actually, these are the individuals who are sensing what is really amiss, right?

So whether that's, you know what it is to live a diet of processed food, what it is to have toxicant exposure. You know what it is to live a purposeless life where you show up to some stupid job that offers your soul, not a modicum of connection to what it is that you're here for, right? Or what it is to be in a toxic relationship, right? So if you're someone who is sensitive to those things, then you need help getting into alignment so that you feel well again, but it doesn't mean anything was ever wrong with you, right? That's like saying like the, the fire alarm is too noisy or something. It should be quieter. No, it's detecting something real and how you attend to it and with what energy you attend to it, that's where your choice lies. So I am passionate about, you know, getting, it's like I see myself as a gatekeeper, right? Like getting in between those who are on the precipice of labeling themselves as sick or broken and offering this other framework, right?

And so, you know, in the book I lay out in three parts, it's get real, get well, get free and the get real part is a kind of re-brainwashing, right? So we've been told this certain story about suffering and sadness and struggle and is there another one? Right? Can we tell a different story? Right? And then it's sort of, you know, how do we begin to enter? Is there an order of operations? And from my perspective, and I know there are many different ways to heal, of course, but from my perspective, it's worked in ways that have been literally history making in my clinical experience to start with kind of the lowest hanging fruit.

So you start with a month of sending your nervous system a very different signal of safety than you had previously been, even through your best efforts to be well, right? So you dedicate yourself to, it's about like two and a half hours of self-care a day. That is basically, you know, diet. So it's cleaning up your diet, it's detox in the form of coffee enemas that my mentor taught me about. And then it's sending this relaxation response activating signal through big, very basic meditation, but every single day. So the commitment is the most important part is like a no nonsense, no excuses like go big or go home 30 days. And I've found that this is almost like a portal. Like you go through this portal and then your magic carpet ride begins. And I've seen this literally hundreds of times. So I know it has a certain, you know, way of unfolding.

And I think it has to do with re-centering the locus of control within you. And that the simple, you know, 30-day ritual is just a way to do that. Because when you feel that you have this creative power, when you feel that the control is within you, right, to make choices because we always have, it's our, like our secret weapon. We always have the capacity to make choices. No one can take that from us. Even, you know, in the health freedom realms where we're, so I'll speak for myself, I'm so worried about these choices being taken from us, right? In the end, we always retain choices. Even as Viktor Frankl said, who was in the Holocaust, you know, it's our choice to respond. You know, how are we gonna respond? We always have that choice, right?

So as you localize that within you neurobiologically, something shifts, something different begins to happen because when you're in a helpless dependent state, there's a certain neuro-biological signature that is attuned with fight or flight and not regeneration. So as you shift that, your mindset shifts, you're more able to engage curiosity, you're able to look at the parts and aspects of your life that are not working with a renewed sense of, okay, so how am I gonna take one small step in another direction? Right? And things begin to unfold where you feel empowered. So that's like a big, big part of what I tried to help people with is again, how do we re-frame even down to our language? How do we re-frame we're expressing through a lens of personal empowerment and responsibility instead of through, you know, the lens of the hapless victim.

And then, you know, in the last part of the book, I'd present strategies for, you know, deeper awakening to self and to, you know, sort of other mystical realms, etc., if that is relevant. And interestingly, it seems to become at some point to most people on the path where they at least wanna know, you know, what's the deal with these tools? You know, what's the deal with psychedelics? What's the deal with, you know, silent meditation or deep practices of these kinds. And it becomes this incredible, mysterious journey, you know, that you finally awakened to the fact that you've been on the whole time.

Katie: That's beautiful. And I think, I can't believe our time again, it has won. So by just blown by, but I think that's a perfect place to start to wrap up. And I would love to know, I think I might've asked you this on our first episode, but other than your own, which of course will be linked in the show notes, if there's a book or books that have really impacted your life and if so what they are and why.

Kelly: Oh yeah. Gosh, there's so many. So I'm a huge bibliophile. And I've had this experience where I get the exact book I need at the exact moment I need it. You know, sometimes I'll even like read a page of a book that I absolutely needed to read before the patient I had at 11:30. You know, so I've had this very open channel of taking in the teachings of many wise people who have walked before me. And so I would certainly say that "Anatomy of an Epidemic," I probably mentioned that last time too, but it changed my life. You know, I read it in 2010 it's written by investigative journalist Robert Whitaker, and I never wrote a prescription again. So, you know, I think it qualifies as a life changing book and it's because I came to all of this through the portal of science. So I couldn't have been convinced otherwise.

I needed to know that there was a path paved with research to lead me away from this specialty that I had invested blood, sweat, tears and \$200,000 of debt, you know, into. I needed to know that I was, you know, walking the path of scientific integrity. So certainly that one. I would say another one is my friend Charles Eisenstein's book, "The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible." And a patient actually told me about that book and he's since become, you know, a dear friend of mine. But that book helped me to shift as

an activist. But it's not just for activists, it's for anyone who wants to change, right? Who wants to see change on this planet. It's an incredible example of, not an example, it's like an incredible, almost like offering, you know, to inspire that shift from fighting, right, from the warfare that can underpin even the most sacred intentions to shifting into acceptance and a different way of contributing your signature to the change making that has to do with connecting, you know, in your heart literally to what it is that you want more of on this planet, right? And then embodying that as a very different way of relating to change making than I had ever heard of. And so I think that that's another really powerful one.

And then, actually I only read this book like somewhat recently in my life, but actually I listened to it. It's many, many, many hours. "Conversations With God" by Neil Donald Walsh would probably be another one. And you know, for most of my life, I never would have picked up a book that had the word God in it, literally. So, close I was to this concept and for those, I think it's very well known at this point, but for those who hadn't heard of it this is literally a transcribed conversation that this totally normal guy had in this like quasi-altered state, not induced by anything in particular in his house where he got to ask any questions he wanted. And what is transcribed explains everything from health to politics to how do we relate to how hard it is to be a human being. And I always thought, wow, I'd love for my children to listen to this, because it's actually incredible audible. It's almost like a theatrical thing. And just sort of, you know, have that template offered to them of like this incredible meaningful design. And it's not a denominational thing at all. It's not like a, you know, Catholic thing or Jewish thing. It's just sort of like, it all makes sense. Wow. You know, that feeling is invaluable. It can all make sense, you know.

Katie: Those are all awesome suggestions. I'll make sure those are linked in the show notes as well. And again, as last time as well. Thank you so much for sharing today your story, your vulnerability and your new mission. I, of course, would encourage anyone listening, especially if anything resonated with you in this episode to grab a copy of your book that will be linked in the show notes, but of course also available anywhere books are sold. Any parting advice for the audience and listeners today?

Kelly: Just if there is that little rustle inside of a yes to anything that we've discussed that you honor that and you move towards it because there's never been more support for that courageous journey or they call it the hero's journey or the heroine's journey and that we all need you, I need you to move in that direction that I know this is like this paradoxical experience where we each have our own work to do and we get to do it together if we want to. You know, we get to be held in this ever-growing, you know, kind of socio-cultural milieu where it's okay to want to grow and expand and it's okay if it looks kind of funky sometimes and maybe, you know, worse than that, we make space for each other to take ownership and to take personal responsibility and to really each step into a kind of power that can only come from owning all of our vulnerable parts. So thank you so much for trusting me, you know, to have me on and have these kinds of conversations. I'm such an admirer and I'm so grateful, you know, to be in this space with you.

Katie: Thank you for sharing and thanks to all of you for listening and sharing one of your most valuable assets, your time with us today. We're so glad that you did and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of the "Wellness Mama" podcast.

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