



Conscious Life presents

Post Traumatic Growth

Guest - Dr Edith Shiro

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[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. Today I'm delighted to be speaking with Dr Edith Shiro, a clinical psychologist in private practice in Miami, Florida. She specializes in trauma and post traumatic growth, holding space and guiding her patients to achieve greater potential and higher consciousness.

Dr Shiro is co-founder of the Trauma and Resilience Center, board member of the World Happiness Foundation, and an active member of Kadena International, providing humanitarian aid and disaster prevention worldwide.

She's worked at the Clinic for Survivors of Torture at Bellevue Hospital and the Human Rights Clinical Support Network at Refuge, among others. Using her 5-stage model, she offers a blueprint for all of her patients to develop coping skills and resilience and to achieve post traumatic growth. Dr Edith Shiro, thank you so much for being with us today.

Dr Edith Shiro

So happy to see you and to be with you. Thank you so much for the invitation.

Meagen Gibson

So, Dr Shiro. I want to start by asking you, is it possible to find hope in trauma? And how would you define trauma?

Dr Edith Shiro

I happen to love those questions because one of the intentions that I had in writing this book on *The Unexpected Gift of Trauma* is precisely to give people the message that trauma is not a life sentence. But actually, you can use whatever happens with you - the adversity, the difficulty, the challenges - and really transform it into an opportunity. And that gives a lot of hope to people. So definitely, you can transform trauma into hope. And the second thing is that can you heal from trauma? Did you ask me that? Yes.

[00:01:49] Meagen Gibson

Or what is trauma to you? How would you define trauma?

Dr Edith Shiro

Definitely. So, yes, you can heal from trauma. Absolutely. I can say that from a clinical perspective, from a research perspective, and from a personal perspective. And also the way that I define trauma now that everybody uses the word trauma now. You know that before, maybe 20 years ago, even more people would associate trauma with the soldiers that were coming back from the war or big natural disasters. Wars. Really, you know, the tragedies.

And yes, we used to define trauma in very narrow terms and very specific ways that were associated with PTSD, post traumatic stress disorder. Now, in the way that I use trauma, it's a more expanded way. First of all, trauma is relational. It means that anything that happens to you, that shatters your belief system and that shakes the way you understand yourself, others, and the world for which you don't have resources to cope. That can be trauma.

But that can be big t trauma or small t trauma. That can be because you move countries, you move houses, you got a divorce, you were bullied. You know, your dog died. Your friends didn't invite you to their birthday party, or it can be, you lost all your family, or it can be that you went through 911, or the building collapsed in the middle of your sleep.

You know, so it depends. But in every circumstance, trauma is about the relationships that you have with yourself or with others that get shaken and that you cannot put your understanding of life back together in the ways that you used to understand it. Like something about yourself doesn't quite sit well anymore, or something about your relationship with the other doesn't really function anymore, or the way you understand the world.

For example, the pandemic for some people, the way that the world was working were like, what? What's going? What do I do with this? I don't trust anybody. I don't trust anything. I don't know where to go. People were paralyzed. That can be trauma, too.

And the other thing about trauma is that trauma is subjective, because I cannot tell you what is traumatic for you in the same way that you cannot tell me. Maybe for me, my divorce was not traumatic at all. But for other people, divorce was the worst thing that ever happened in their lives. So it depends. And it's really important to acknowledge and to recognize that. That whatever I experience is my own experience of trauma.

And one of the things that I really love about the definition that comes, actually from Gabor Maté, who's one of the psychiatrists that talks about trauma, is that it's not really just what happens to you. But it's what happens inside of you with what happens to you.

So when you can experience... Children can experience, let's say, sexual abuse. And one child has parents and adults and teachers that are believing that child, that are supporting the child, that is finding the resources to overcome trauma. That's a very different kind of trauma than the child that is sexually abused and that nobody believes them, is invalidated, is invisible, but had the exact same experience. So, you know, all these nuances in the definition.

[00:05:33] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And even going further from what you said. Even in adulthood, it can be the accumulation of our experiences up to an event. So two people could be together and experience the exact same thing, and one of them has traumatic after-effects and the other one doesn't.

Because there's epigenetics and genetics and family systems and all of the experiences that we've had leading up to that. And then how we're supported afterward, that is all going to contribute to how it's going to settle in our nervous system and our relationship to ourselves and the world.

Dr Edith Shiro

That's brilliant. Yeah. That's my... I dedicate, actually, one chapter that is called Floating Factors in which I mention all this stuff like genetics, families, resources, education, how chronic the trauma is. Is it in childhood? Is it in adulthood? All of this... The culture.

You know, it's not the same to be a woman, let's say, in Pakistan, than to be a woman in the United States. And how does that affect your healing from trauma? You know, all these things are definitely playing a part in the healing.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And I also want to spend just a moment talking about... Because I don't think we talk enough about what the behaviors of someone who is struggling with trauma or anxiety might look like. Because sometimes we have these kinds of characteristics that we've seen portrayed on film or movies or in books or even just as we're describing people and what they might look and behave like. But there's a wide variety of the ways that people can show up with trauma or anxiety issues.

Dr Edith Shiro

Yes. So for people that are listening to this, I want to say something that will help them identify what it is. First of all, when you're having reactions that are disproportionate to what's happening in the outside world, there's something that is triggering a traumatic experience.

And I'm going to say this again. When you're having disproportionate reactions to what's happening in the moment, that is usually connected to something traumatic that happened to you before. So I had a little girl that used to come to me for sessions, and she said, "Every time I passed by Starbucks and I got the smell of coffee, I began to get anxious. I began to get agitated. I couldn't resist."

And then we later found out that she was experiencing sexual abuse in the past. And then the person that abused her had coffee breath. So that smell of coffee was a trigger. So that's exactly what happens in our bodies when we're traumatized and we experience trauma. Our nervous system is capturing that experience. Our body is keeping the score of what's going on. So either we get agitated or we get paralyzed or we get numb or we dissociate.

These are all trauma responses, and they're all registering in the nervous system. And in some way, Meagen, this is really good because our body knows exactly how to defend itself from

danger. So these are modes of survival. So, you know, the typical ways in which we know trauma response are four. It's fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. I'm sure you've heard of that.

[00:08:39]

This is typical but it's a good way of understanding when something is coming to you that is dangerous, that is... And it can be emotional, it can be psychological, or it can be physical. The response of the body immediately is to either fight back, and that can be the typical person. That it's irritated, that it's fighting with everybody, that it's responding, that it's reacting. That's a trauma response.

Another response is flight. Flee. So it's a typical person that disconnects, dissociates, keeps avoiding. Saying "No, no, no. Don't talk to me about that", or "No, no, no. Tell me later" or "Let me get away from this thing" or "I don't want to talk about anything. I'm avoiding conflict at all costs." That's a flight response.

And then there's the person that is paralyzed, and is freezing. So the frozen response. It's like, "I don't feel anything. I don't know anything. I can't decide. I can't make decisions left or right. I'm postponing decisions." That's a trauma response, too.

And then there's a fourth one that we usually use that it's this complacency. The person that is constantly getting into somebody else's agenda and saying yes to everybody and being very complacent. And avoiding conflict and avoiding creating something difficult because it doesn't have the resources.

These are all trauma responses that we have very well registered in our body. We all have them. Some of us do more than others. Some of us like to fight more than avoid. Some of us... I mean, I'm a big avoider, so I kind of avoid it. Sometimes I fight. Sometimes, you know?

So we all know. I usually ask this question to people, "So, okay, what's your favorite?" So the thing is, it's not that bad to have those trauma responses in the moment. And it's very important to recognize the triggers because your body begins to shake or hyperventilate or you have palpitations.

And this is where people tell me, "I'm having a panic attack" or "My anxiety is so high" or "I'm so sad or so depressed that I just want to hide under the covers" or "I don't have energy to do anything" or "I just want to be left alone" and "I want nothing to do with anybody in the world."

These are all typical things that happen, and sometimes we need that. The problem here is that when these responses become chronic over time, then it is really when you develop all these diagnoses. PTSD, illnesses, chronic illnesses, long-term depression, anxiety disorders.

Because it's like you keep defending yourself for nothing because the danger went past already. Or you're not dealing with the real issues that are coming up for real. And you're not preparing yourself to actually face the trauma, which is actually why...

That's another reason why I really wrote this book, because it's like there is a process in how to get out of this. You don't have to stay stuck in this cycle over and over and over, which we do. We end

up developing addictive behaviors. We keep dating the same people over and over. We keep fighting with our spouses in the same way, or we keep getting triggered with the same kind of things over and over. So there's a way out. There is a way out.

[00:11:57] Meagen Gibson

Fantastic. And there is. And we're going to talk about that more, too. I appreciate you giving that frame and especially the frame of the context of what people are saying when they come to you for help. They're not coming to you saying, "Well, I have an avoidant attachment and I think it stems from..."

No. They come to you and they say, "I keep overreacting every time my boss gives me new work to do." Or they say, "I keep dating the same person." That's what it looks like and sounds like. Not "I have trauma." Most people that have some trauma to heal and grow from don't actually identify with it unless it was some sort of big acute event that they can point to.

Dr Edith Shiro

That's exactly right. And that's very important because most of the people that come with some of those symptoms have no idea and don't associate some of the experiences with the responses that they're having now. And it really takes not that much for either therapy sessions or a friend or a family or a retreat or a book to begin to make those connections. Or a psychedelic experience.

That's really what's so powerful that when we start making those associations and say, "Ah, this is where it's coming from. Now I understand why I'm reacting to this person in this way so much. Because it reminds me of my mother when she was telling me certain things when I was a child, and it really hurt me so much. And now when I have this other person in front of me, it keeps triggering that experience and I can't get over it. And it's an open wound." So just really by making associations is already an amazing first step into the healing process.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And just a word of warning for people in the growth sphere that we get to this part... And I'm speaking for a friend. This definitely didn't happen to me. But when you start to get that identification and you're making connections and then you're going to the people associated with those connections. And perhaps trying to get your trauma or your anxiety or your hurt resolved there. That's maybe not the place to resolve the hurt and do the healing and do the growing. The growing. That's an inside job, right?

Dr Edith Shiro

Yeah, but. Yeah, and.... I do send people to go back to those early experiences and people that were part of the situation prepared to deal with it in some way. If they want to and if they have the courage. And if there's some possibility that they're not going to be retraumatized. If not, of course not.

[00:14:33]

But there's something very special in that opportunity to heal with the person that actually hurt you. And sometimes we do it in person. Sometimes we do it with a letter. Sometimes we do it in the world of fantasy with our creativity and our imagination. And that works perfectly well, too.

So, yeah, but I agree. You have to be prepared. You have to do the work beforehand. You have to... It's a process. You don't just go pick up the phone and say, "Hi, dad. I just remember that you abused me when I was five years old and...". No.

Meagen Gibson

"You owe me an apology."

Dr Edith Shiro

Yes. "You owe me an apology." Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

It should be entered safely and with support and preparation, as you said.

Dr Edith Shiro

Yes. Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

And so one of the parts of your book that I loved when we're talking about types of trauma and anxieties that come up was around ambiguous loss. And so I would love it if you could talk about that. Because some things are really clear and really acute or we've very clearly experienced something. And then there's this ambiguous loss thing that can look like a lot of things and can give people a lot of grief and anxiety. So I'd love it if you could tell us about that.

Dr Edith Shiro

I'm going to tell you a story about that because I had the privilege to actually learn about ambiguous loss with the person that invented the term. She's an amazing woman. Her name is Pauline Boss. And here I am, 911 in the middle of Manhattan, running away from the big cloud that happened after the Twin Towers fell. And because I couldn't get home, I was also called by the Red Cross at the same time.

It was like, "Okay, what am I going to do with my life?" And at that moment, the Red Cross was calling me. Another psychologist who was in the trauma field to really work with the survivors, with the communities. So I stayed a whole week just in ground zero working.

One of the things that happened is that we had a group of wives and spouses that were coming from outside of the country that had their husbands work at Windows of the World. And these

were mostly men that were immigrants from Central and South America that spoke Spanish. And because I speak Spanish, they called me and said, "Can you help?"

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And really, the person that I was doing this with was Pauline Boss, and this is an amazing psychologist who specializes in ambiguous loss. We were making circles of women and actually families. Women, children, some of the men, to begin to talk about what it was like to come from another country to find that your spouse is nowhere to be found. There's no body, there's no evidence. There's no registration of any kind. Some of them were not even legal immigrants.

And you're dealing with a loss that is so deep, so profound and so sudden, and there's nothing that you can hold on to, to begin the grieving process or the mourning. I mean, can you imagine that? That's really, really hard to do. And that's why sometimes I say that's the hardest kind of loss. Because it's when either you have the body present but emotionally absent, which can be, for example, Alzheimer's, dementia.

It's like the person is there, but it's not really there psychologically. Or when, or when the person is in a coma. These are extreme examples or the opposite. It's when the person is emotionally there and psychologically there, but the body is nowhere to be found. And that happened in this example that I'm telling you of September 11th.

And then it happened again when I was working here in Miami when the Surfside building collapsed. And there were 98 people that died and they were in the rubble, and they couldn't find those bodies. And people didn't know if they were alive. If they were dead. And we were like that for six weeks. Six weeks holding that space of ambiguous loss.

And I'm telling you it's really, really, really hard, because you cannot grieve and you cannot be happy. You don't know. It's this place of uncertainty that is suspended in limbo, and it really doesn't allow people to move forward. Until something gets resolved, people are held in this space. And for some people it's years and years and years. For other people it eventually gets resolved.

But I wanted to mention that because most people don't know about ambiguous loss. And when I had the experience and learned about it, it really requires that recognition of what it's like to help people go through this process and understand what that is.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely.

Dr Edith Shiro

Thank you for mentioning.

[00:19:30] Meagen Gibson

There are so many situations in which... And I can imagine, especially both of those situations that you mentioned, just the anxiety in-between. And it brings up a really interesting point around healing and growth, which we're going to talk about in a second, but...

Around how difficult that can be when a situation isn't resolved. Or if you're in a situation where you're still being harmed or harm is still happening and you're not safe. You're not fundamentally safe. And that one ambiguous situation is also a situation where you can't... There's no resolution and there's no safety. And so it can be so hard to move forward.

Dr Edith Shiro

That's exactly right. And that's why even for people that go through this ambiguity, there has to come some way of holding on to either a ceremony, a ritual. Some way to begin to do the grieving process and to begin to do the mourning, so you can move forward and not be suspended in time. And this is usually what we do.

And it really helps a lot, not just for the ambiguous loss, but for any kind of loss to really make it move forward. Because otherwise you stay stuck in that state of pain and of sadness and of longing and of denial that sometimes happens and doesn't allow you for the healing. So safety and protection and taking care of those feelings is a way to heal grief.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. Okay. So now I definitely want to start talking to people about the five stages of post traumatic growth. So I'd love it if you could explain those to us.

Dr Edith Shiro

So let me just say what post traumatic growth is, because that's... I tell most people, "Okay, do you know what PTSD is?" And everybody knows. But when I say, "What is PTG?" And nobody knows. And that's another intention of the book to say, "Hey, there's something called post traumatic growth. And what it means is that, this is what happens after trauma."

So after trauma, you don't have to stay in the symptoms of sadness and depression. You can actually develop this and transcend it and transform it. So the five stages that I offer are stages that I've seen in my patients, that I've seen in the communities that I work with. And that are so beautiful to see. Because what I'm seeing is this transformation that people go through.

And I'm telling you, every time it happens, it gets teary in my eyes. I share it with people and say, "This is beautiful to see the cycle of how you get from trauma to growth. And that doesn't mean it's not going to happen again. But you're actually having the resources and developing the resilience to do it again."

So the five stages, briefly, are: 1) radical acceptance, 2) safety and protection, 3) new narratives, 4) integration, and 5) wisdom and growth. I also call it in other ways, which is awareness, awakening, becoming, being, and transforming.

So you choose the language. The important thing is that you go through it. And each has a stage, a step, exercises, ways of understanding it. You can go back and forth. It's not really linear. You can move forward and then go back and go around, and it's more like a spiral. And then you go through it again, and it's a wonderful thing to go through. Painful but worth it.

[00:23:02] Meagen Gibson

And I also want to talk to you about the idea of trauma versus adversity. Because often I think people can see trauma and trauma recovery as resiliency. People love to talk about resiliency. And they point toward adversity as being something that creates resiliency. And that's not automatic, right?

We don't become resilient just by facing hard things. And facing hard things is a universal experience. Lots of people face hard things. But we don't automatically become resilient. And we don't automatically become resilient and grow after facing trauma just out of necessity. There's things that have to happen to connect those experiences and growth, right?

Dr Edith Shiro

Totally. Totally. I talk about the myths of trauma, and that's one of them. It's like when people say, Meagen. They say, "Oh, time heals all wounds." I'm like, "Listen. You need the time. Yes, but to work on the wounds in order to heal." It's not like just because time goes by, you're going to heal the wounds.

But it's interesting how it's in the collective unconscious, this kind of message. In the same way that this positivity of... It's almost like the spiritual bypassing, or the positivity bypassing. It's like, "Let me say everything's positive. Let me just pretend." You know, say, "Okay, I'm good, I'm good, everything's fine. Okay. I had this horrible thing happen, but I'm great."

I think it's because our society sometimes, and a lot of the times, is not giving us permission to stop. To pause and to really sit with your feelings that are not necessarily so comfortable to deal with. And I don't mean to say that everything has to be negative. You know, you can actually savor happiness as well. But you have to stop for a little bit and you have to sit with yourself for a little bit and you have to allow for these feelings to come up.

You can be crying about something that is sad and actually enjoy it and say, "Ah, what a relief it is to cry." Do you know the amount of people that come to me and tell me they cannot cry? I don't know if you've heard this but crying is one of the most magical healing things that our body does to detox. I recently found out that the chemical components of tears... Did you hear about that?

Meagen Gibson

Yeah.

Dr Edith Shiro

... has special ways in which it heals our body. So these are things, processes that are important. The same with grieving. So adversity doesn't mean that you're going to be traumatized. It might be

like, okay, something happens to you. You lose a loved member. You know, like a loved one and... A member of your family, a friend, a pet. And you can cry and you can be sad and you can be sad for six months, or you can be sad for a year. And that's okay.

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That doesn't mean you're traumatized. That means that you're grieving. And let's make the distinction, right? Let's make the distinction about that. But because that doesn't mean like, "Yes, I'm so resilient because I didn't cry" and "Yes, I'm so resilient because I didn't feel any of the pain." No, that's really, I think, a distortion that we're going through in our society that I think it's important to recognize.

And that's why talking about this is so crucial. Because it puts so much pressure on people and on our children and adolescents and teenagers that are looking at these TikToks and YouTubes and all that and saying, "Oh, no, everybody looks great. Everybody's amazing. Everybody's having fun. Nobody is vulnerable. Nobody's complaining about anything. So there might be something wrong with me. I'm not gonna cry. If somebody dies in my family, then the next day I go to work, and I'm great. I'm the best. I'm a superhero."

And I think, you know... Being in my world, I think a superhero is the person that can sit with feelings, and that requires a lot of courage. Being able to sit with your feelings. To feel your feelings. To look at them in the face and to embrace them. That really requires strength and courage.

So I think that if you allow yourself to go through post traumatic growth, that process, you really get to that place of wisdom and maybe spirituality and more meaningful relationships in your life. And sometimes I even say that people are very resilient... Which is fine, I'm all for resiliency.

But because they're so resilient, they might not get to post traumatic growth. Because for that growth to happen, there needs to be some brokenness. Like it's some kind of death inside of you that breaks. That gets you to that rock-bottom place from which you then are gonna be reborn. From which you're gonna come out from the ashes, you know, like a phoenix.

There's something there that needs to be reorganized. It's like that butterfly example of something in the undoing of the whole worm that gets dying before the butterfly can come up. And it's a completely different being that is coming out.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, the liquefaction.

Dr Edith Shiro

Exactly, exactly.

[00:28:28] Meagen Gibson

And then you reform stronger and more beautiful and in a different shape. It's funny because as you were talking, I was just thinking about... Our society over-glorifies this high-functioning and resiliency. And I think about anxiety specifically and how rewarded high-functioning anxiety can be in the work world, as parents, household managers, things like that.

And the price for me, of incredibly high-functioning anxiety, that I was unaware was that, and unresolved trauma and an inability to feel and stop was that I didn't have any access to joy or play or curiosity or creativity. Like, it had flattened everything out into just functionality and purpose instead of actually joy and embodiment and creativity and curiosity and all the things that come with actual, true inner safety.

Dr Edith Shiro

I'm gonna even... I appreciate you saying that, because it really rings so true. And I'm even gonna say more. I think when you're in that state of anxiety and constant moving, which is so rewarded by society, you're missing out on the intimacy of relationships.

You cannot really connect with another one when you're in that state. Because part of that anxiety is looking out for what's going on around, and you're going so fast. We are going so fast, that savoring that connection, that requires more like really looking at the other one in the eyes and getting to know the other person or sharing from a more vulnerable place, more emotional place. There's no access to that.

And then we miss out on the very thing that defines who we are as human beings, which is connection. This is who we are. Human beings are... We are social beings. We are relational beings. When we are in those states of anxiety, people... Yes, they might be very efficient and very productive in what they do, because for a while... But they're lonely, I don't know if this happened to you. The feeling of loneliness, of disconnection from yourself and from others.

There's the loss of meaning in life. Why am I doing what I'm doing? And the loss of having a purpose. It's almost like you forget what's your higher purpose, and you lose connection with yourself. And you lose connection with a higher being in some ways, you know, whatever you want to call that. And that's really... Then you become... Your life becomes meaningless.

And that's when we see all of us that have gone through in that race, at some point stop. Because they cannot do it any longer and then come back to this, reinventing themselves. And that's, you know, there's so many people in the community that become spiritual leaders and healers and yoga teachers and things like that.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, absolutely. I don't know why you had to attack me like that. I'm joking. I was like, "Golly, she just popped open the top of my head." But it's true. And I really want people to hear that is, because when you're holding on so tight... When your grip is so tight, you can just keep it all together. I think nobody really understands until they've stopped doing that and they've released what a giant wedge it creates between you and everyone.

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And so you can be surrounded by people that you love and that love you and feel completely alone. And doing the healing work is hard. I always do the comparison of, if you've got a closet or even a drawer or a garage or something that you want to clean out. And first you have to make a much bigger mess. And then you get to choose how to reorganize and what you keep and what you discard. You get to make decisions about what goes back in and how, in what order so you can see everything but...

Dr Edith Shiro

I love that example. That's a great example.

Meagen Gibson

But it gets a little harder and a little messier first. And that's the part that we're all trying to avoid. But the energy you reclaim and the perspective you reclaim and the connectivity to not only yourself, but your relationships and your world. And I know that you also talked in your book about healing, being not just individual. Being in the collective and also in society and in our cultures as well. So I would love if you would touch on that just a little bit.

Dr Edith Shiro

Yeah, yeah. And thank you for letting me talk about this, because I think we've all experienced this. Or a lot of us have experienced that, and that's where we come from. You know, this is the example that... How come the people that have experienced the most difficult things? This is what I've seen in my practice also.

The communities and the people, the families that have gone through the most difficult things and do the work and do the healing process, come out of it. Not just more healed and more grown and more wise and more connected with themselves, but these are the very people that then become the activists in the community, to then transform the community itself.

And I love seeing that. It's really... It moves me so much. I mean, I have so many examples of this. I had a boy that was in a school shooting, and I don't know if you remember that example from the book. And he really... I mean, he survived. I don't know how he survived. Nobody can explain how he survived because he had bullets in different parts of his body, and he was on the floor about to die. Bleeding.

Somehow he survived. It's a miracle. And as he was healing spiritually also and emotionally, he began to understand that he had a higher purpose in his life. And he began to say, "You know, maybe before this school shooting, before my healing, I used to think that I wanted to be a sportsperson and be all about sports and what I want. But now I know that I have a bigger purpose, and all I want to do..."

And his family was like that, too. "All I want to do is go back to schools, talk to my peers, tell them that there's something beyond that. That people have to connect more spiritually with themselves, that you have to find a purpose in life."

[00:34:44]

And the parents of this kid. They wanted to go and talk to other parents and do the healing because they wanted to minimize the level of violence in our societies, in our community. Imagine that. For somebody to come and make that their life purpose is because they had to go through something so big and get to the other side and understand that from a completely different place.

And I think each and every one of us that can do this gets something that gets very clear. Like when you're cleaning the closet, you become very clear in knowing what is a priority. What is good for you, what is not. Where are you going? What are your bigger goals in life? What is your life purpose? You have a different perspective and that really allows you to wake up every morning and say, "I know why I'm existing. I know where I'm going. I know what I'm doing."

And sometimes you have to revisit that. I'm not saying that everything is perfect. But it really pushes you sometimes, because it's not something that you choose, but it pushes you to get to that place of saying, "I know. I know why I'm here. I know what I'm doing, and it gives me so much joy to give back to the community."

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And I think so many of us go through our childhood into early adulthood just putting on the costume of purpose that we were modeled after. And for so many people, once you face adversity, you're like, "Wait a minute, does this costume suit me? And is this the uniform I want to wear for the rest of my life?"

It causes the reevaluation and we never hope anybody faces traumatic experiences and faces big adversities. But I don't think any of us get out of this life without a little bit of struggle, do we?

Dr Edith Shiro

Yes. No. No. Yeah. The thing is that some people choose to look at it and do something with it and some people don't. And it's really a choice. And not everybody has to go through a post traumatic growth process. But one thing that I can tell you is that every person that gets to this stage of post traumatic growth tells me something like this...

They tell me, "Dr Shiro, you know, I don't wish this on anybody. But what happened to me, I would not change it for anything in the world. And I would do it all over again because it made me the person that I am today."

I'm telling you, these are people that have gone through horrible things. And this is what they say. I mean, there's some exceptions. There's a famous rabbi that said, "My son died. And yes, of course. I have become somebody else. I'm wiser and bigger. I'm a better human being because of that experience, and I'm a better rabbi and I'm a better leader and a better healer because of that. If they tell me, 'You want your son back?' Of course I would go back to, yes, having my son. But I would not be the person that I am today."

So imagine the kind of consequences that we're talking about. And this happens every time. I hear these words. It's amazing. And I've checked with my colleagues also, and they have that experience, too, when people go through growth.

[00:37:56] Meagen Gibson

I want to ask you one last question before I let you go. And that's in regard to healing being relational and trauma being relational. And how do we go about bringing our loved ones into our healing process? How do we get support for that? How do we know who's safe? When? Because it can be such a vulnerable and delicate process.

Dr Edith Shiro

Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

Bringing our relationships back into our healing and growing process.

Dr Edith Shiro

Absolutely. And I think there's something that this is related to. A question that usually people ask me and say, "Okay, but how do you start this? Okay, I want to go through the process of post traumatic growth. How do you start?"

So, really, the first step is with yourself and really being in a place of radical acceptance and radical honesty and saying, "Okay, this is it. This is what's happening to me. I have addictive behavior, or I am depressed, or I am anxious to levels that I can't handle, or my work is making me feel bad, or this relationship is not working for me anymore."

Even if you don't have the solution. Just the fact that you can accept that, is very important. And then either coming to your loved ones and sharing that with them and saying, "Listen, this is what I found out about myself, and these are three things that I need from you." And this is a little bit of a trick that I give you. It's VAR. It's validation, acceptance, and recognition.

So this is the thing that we need when we're going through this process of healing. And you can get that from your loved ones. You can get that from your therapist. You can get that from your mentors, from your teachers, from your yoga teachers, from your... You know, wherever you want to go. But you can request this.

You say, "I need validation, I need recognition, and I need acceptance. That means that if I come to you and I say, I feel like I had a very bad relationship with my parents growing up. And it made me be a person that is very anxious all my life. And I react to things that I don't like to react to. And I'm irritable and reactive and very not social sometimes."

And for the other person to say to you. Instead of like, "Aye, that's nothing. I know, get over it. Oh, please. Just go drink a glass of wine, and you'll get over it."

Instead of that, you ask the person to say, "I hear you. I understand what you're saying, or maybe I don't understand, but I'm here with you. I see you. Tell me more about it. I hear that this is important for you or that you're suffering because of that."

[00:40:42]

These are keywords that we can give others or that we can get from others that will make all the difference in the world, and we can do the same with our children. When we say, "I hear you, I validate you. I recognize what you're going through. I might not agree. I'm not even agreeing with what you're saying, but I'm listening to what you're saying, and I'm holding what you're saying to be true." You know, and these are those moments that really can shift the relationship and can actually help with the healing process.

Meagen Gibson

I'm so glad that you said that part about agreement. Because so many people, their own defenses come up when someone says something they don't agree with. And they don't feel like they can validate or accept or recognize somebody else's experience that's different from them, or that might not be true for them. We're talking about, like, "truth." And so they can't... It's not within them because they think that all of those things imply agreement when it fundamentally does not, does it?

Dr Edith Shiro

Exactly. And, you know, if you take that... We can apply that to a couple. The couples constantly can have conflict about things that they don't agree with, but they can validate each other's feelings. And we can take that, Meagen, to... Usually something that I love talking about, which is conflicts between communities and cultures.

But imagine what it requires for one culture to validate another culture. You know, and typical examples are how people in the United States can validate the experience of indigenous people, and what they've lost and what they suffered. Or the oppression of racism that comes. Or the conflict in the Middle East and how they can... You know, Jews and Palestinians can validate each other's experiences.

I mean, it does require that validation in order to begin the healing process. But can you imagine the level of tolerance, consciousness and growth that has to happen for that validation to go through? You know, and that's also my invitation to say, "How can we as a society begin to practice more of that?"

It's not easy. It's not easy to do it in the relationship with a couple, with a friend. Imagine doing it as a community. But that's the invitation, I think, and that's something to really look forward to and to say, "Do we want to grow? Do we want to move forward? Do we have more consciousness like you?" Like the name of your program. We need to do this. Tolerance and validation and recognition.

Meagen Gibson

Fantastic. That's a great place for us to wrap up. I'm so pleased and grateful for you being here. Where can people find out more about you and your work?

[00:43:29] Dr Edith Shiro

Absolutely. I have my website, which is www.dredithshiro.com. My book, *The Unexpected Gift of Trauma* can be found anywhere in bookstores, on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com). It's translated into ten languages. The Spanish version is coming out soon, in a couple months which I'm very excited about.

And Instagram [@dredithshiro](https://www.instagram.com/dredithshiro), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/dredithshiro). I'm super-open to hear your comments, your feedback, be open in dialog and in conversation, and really more to come. I'm looking to do a training program for people to be more trained on trauma and post traumatic growth and to go through some learning experience. So we'll probably, you and I will talk more about that when that happens.

Meagen Gibson

I'm looking forward to it. Thank you again so much for being with us.

Dr Edith Shiro

Thank you. Thank you for the invitation. I loved it.