



## Conscious Life presents

### Energy for Empathy Through Boundaries

Guest - Dr Judith Orloff

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#### **[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson**

Hello, everybody. Well, as everybody shuffles in and lets us know where they're tuning in from and says, "Hello", I'd love to start with the question of... I'm an empath, and I love this book.... As we were talking before we came on live... And found it to be exactly as you described it, which was "effective, actionable, and applicable to real life." I feel like the self-help and personal growth world is sometimes filled with a lot of empaths. Would that be fair to say in your assessment as well?

#### **Dr Judith Orloff**

With a lot of what? I'm sorry.

#### **Meagen Gibson**

Empaths in general.

#### **Dr Judith Orloff**

Oh, my God. There's so many empaths, especially... When I first started, I wrote my first book about empaths, *The Empath's Survival Guide*, people were just not... They were so afraid to come out, and it wasn't a collective word. Now it's been embraced in the collective consciousness.

And there's so many empaths that contact me and say, "I'm just awakening now. What can I do? How can I apply empathy? How can I make my relationships better? How can I stop from being so drained from all of this energy coming at me from the world and everywhere else?"

So you're all in the right place in terms of learning the skills on how to be a healthy, empowered empath or just to have healthy empathy, without being overwhelmed or drained or feeling like you're not doing enough. All of that, you have to address that. We'll address that together.

### **[00:01:39] Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely fantastic because you're right. Empathy is fantastic and also can be a detriment to you if you don't know how to boundary yourself. We'll get into that in just a little bit. I'd love it if you could start by helping everybody understand the difference between compassion and empathy.

### **Dr Judith Orloff**

Empathy is the ability to connect to somebody and attune with them to actually feel what they're feeling. It's like you're a tuning rod, like in sound vibrations. You're attuning and connecting with them. And in the best of all circumstances, it's not absorbing, but just feeling where they're at so your heart can open and you can be there with another person.

There's so much isolation going on in the world today, and so many times where people don't feel listened to or given the time to be listened to. And what empathy does, it makes you feel seen, it makes you feel heard, makes you feel important. And that's what people need, and that's what people want. So if you start on a very basic level, which is all from the heart, you want to offer that to people. I know everybody's busy, and they don't have enough time to do all this, but we must.

We must change the pattern so that our humanity can survive. But compassion, on the other hand, is a little... One step further back. It's more action-oriented. You see a problem. This person is not eating enough food, and so you want to go out and buy a big bag full of wonderful food and bring it to them.

Compassion is action-oriented. Empathy is more about vibrating and feeling with, without absorbing. But that's the skill that one develops. And that's why I wrote *The Genius of Empathy* to show people how not to absorb, yet embody this gorgeous trait of empathy for yourself, for your self-empathy. Number one. Start with this. You don't start with that. A lot of people are lopsided.

They start with all those other people who need help rather than starting with yourself. And so you start with yourself, you enlarge it to your relationships. Your brothers, your sisters, your friends, the difficult mother-in-law, whoever, the general crew of people who are in people's lives.

There's so many different ones, and how to have empathy with them, even if you don't agree with them. And we can talk about that. So compassion is more action-oriented. "I'm going to go to the store and get you something." And empathy is, "Wow, I feel what you're feeling. I'm with you. You're not alone."

### **Meagen Gibson**

And we need both, don't we? There's a time when you see a person who's hungry and it doesn't really do any good to just have empathy for them. You also need to have compassion and be able to sense that there's an action that might be helpful in that situation as well, right?

### **Dr Judith Orloff**

Yes. Sometimes the actions are appropriate, but not always. I'm a big believer. I'm a psychiatrist and an empath, and I'm a big believer in taking each person individually. You can't lump people

together in terms of what they need. Like, one person could be depressed, another person is depressed. Totally different story. No. So you have to...

**[00:05:13]**

Part of having empathy is also learning to tune in to what's appropriate action and when to help and when to not help. And so I love all this, and certainly with my patients, I'm able to integrate this with my traditional medical training, which I love so much. And then this sense of fluid empathy that comes from the heart and how to give, but not too much.

Some people don't want too much. It's overwhelming. And some people, you just give a little bit or a little drop. So you have to tune in to people. And that's why I wanted to share this book. It just came out. It's so exciting to have a book come out. But this is a how-to book. This is... how do you show empathy?

Well, if you're arguing with someone, how do you show empathy if you feel someone was thoughtless with you? Why would you want to do that? How do you show empathy if you were hurt? How do you show empathy if you want to show love and you want to just really expand how you show your love towards someone?

It has all kinds of really practical purposes, and it has the power to turn around the pattern our world is going in towards trauma, war. Hurting each other, hurting oneself. All of that. That has to be turned around. And empathy is a step to doing that. It makes a U-turn from that pattern. It just makes you stop and do something that may seem counter-intuitive.

I start the book with a quote, "Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing, there is a field. Let me meet you there." A Rumi quote. And that's what this book is about... I want this book to be that. The field. It's not what's right or wrong. It's about starting over in a beautiful field together and reimagining our relationships.

### **Meagen Gibson**

That's beautiful. I love that that's the intention with which everything you say in the book is held. As a psychiatrist, when people come into your office or you have a book signing or something and you see people and they tell you their stories, what are the signs and what are the things that people might say when you can tell that they have an unhealthy relationship with empathy and don't have enough self-empathy?

### **Dr Judith Orloff**

They'll usually tell me. They'll usually say, "No, it's so hard for me. I beat myself up." It's the human condition. In general... If you can generalize, people beat themselves up. So no matter how put together they are on the outside, if you were to sit with them or have insight into where their thoughts are, they would not be saying nice things to themselves, mostly.

But there are people who are saying nice things to themselves, and that's what empathy is about. But the reason somebody might have such negative self-talk is because they weren't given the

proper directions on how to shift that. Because all that negative self-talk comes from the mind. The linear mind.

**[00:08:29]**

It does not come from the heart. It's not true. It's the mind. The chattering mind. The monkey mind that goes on forever with all the things you didn't do right. No. And it's just relentless. So you want to learn. The skill in empathy is learning how to shift from that monkey mind, "My God", to breathe it down to the heart. And when you feel empathy... If you say, "I feel empathy for my friend. She feels lonely today. I feel empathy for her", your heart opens.

And when your heart opens, you naturally want to say nicer things to yourself because you're practicing opening up an energy center in your body through an action. Empathy. Then your heart opens and then, "Oh, you had a bad day. Oh, honey, I'm sorry. Let's go take a bath." Or something sweet you could say to yourself.

So just know the mind is what is the trap. And the mind often doesn't want to show no empathy at all. The mind wants to be right. And if you stick to that, you're not going to get anywhere but the same old, same old.

But if you're willing to say, "I'm right, and still, I'm going to try and have empathy for your shortcomings. Not the part of you that abused me. Not the part that hurt me. I'm not having empathy for that. Forget it. But I'm having empathy for your wounds that made you into such a violent, horrible person. I can feel for that."

And as a result, they're going to drift away from you so you don't think about them as much. They're not going to attach. Resentments and pain. Old pain gloms on. It's not like it goes away. And so you have to take certain actions to help it move along. And empathy is one of those actions.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I love that. Let's send it along, all of us. Before I ask my next question, I just wanted to remind people. I do have to let Judith go at the top of the hour. If you've got questions for her, please put them in the Q&A box.

If for some reason that's not working, you can go ahead and put them in the chat. Send them directly to me. If you don't want other people to see them, that's fine. Make sure to then ask any questions that you've got.

Then I definitely wanted to talk about some specific points in the book, especially around... Assuming people have empathy. We're not talking about the people that are incapable, like narcissists or sociopaths or psychopaths.

But one of the things that I thought was so interesting in the book is the four styles of empathy, because I think oftentimes we assume people lack empathy when maybe we just stylistically are mismatched and we're not correctly assessing the way that their empathy shows up. So I'd love it if you could tell us about those four styles.

**[00:11:20] Dr Judith Orloff**

It'll be interesting for everyone to observe others and see how their empathy manifests just in the real world. Now, I love to observe people and see what they do naturally in their habitat. I'm a scientist studying everybody in a way because humanity interests me intensely. You have different kinds of empathy. There's cognitive empathy. This is an empathy that comes through the mind.

Where some people are attorneys or engineers or very linear thinkers, they can feel... Not necessarily feel, but think for you in a nice way by saying, "I'm so sorry you went through this." They're not necessarily feeling it with their heart, but they do mean it from their minds. So never devalue cognitive empathy. Very important. I get the mate of someone who has cognitive empathy. "Why don't they feel more? Why don't they express their emotions more?"

The first step is to accept that it's a good thing what they're doing. Just because they're not doing it the way you do it, doesn't mean it doesn't have value. People may put down people with cognitive empathy, and I support you. The cognitive empaths out there. Then there's the emotional empathy where you feel from your heart, everything you have goes out to somebody.

They lose a child or something, and your heart just opens for them. However, the downside of that is you might take on all the grief because your heart is so open. The doors are open when you go in and tune in with them. So it comes into you as opposed to setting a boundary. Not going quite that far into somebody. And you just have to experiment so that it stops you from absorbing, but yet you can give.

You want to be giving from your heart, an emotional empath, rather than absorbing. So a theme of the book is "Observe, don't absorb. Observe, don't absorb." Something you want to keep repeating like a mantra.

And then there's intuitive empathy, where some people respond first and foremost with their intuition. They get a gut feeling. They have a sense of energy. They get a flash. They get a knowing. They might have too much information coming in about the whole business of life.

You don't want that. It's too much. You don't want to download any of that. Really, it's just too much information. But the challenge for you is how to set your boundaries with that. How to say, "This is coming in too fast. I'm going to take a breath. I'm going to take a few steps back. I'm going to maybe go to the bathroom to regroup, but I'm not going to take all this in." So that's important to learn how to do.

And then there's spiritual empathy, where people see the best in others. They look at you and they see your white light. They see your connection to spirit. They see all the good that you've done. They see how compassionate you are. And the downside is they may not see your darker aspects, which everybody has, so they don't see the full person with their empathy.

So there's pluses and minuses to each kind of empathy, but you can work with them, and you can develop different kinds of empathy. Now, just read through that section of the book, and you can experiment. One form of empathy isn't better than another. It's just different. People have different styles, so you want to honor it.

### **[00:15:03] Meagen Gibson**

And I can also imagine that depending on the situation you're in and your different roles in life, I could see how in my work life, I can be a very cognitive, empathy-leading sort of person. In my romantic life, I'm more of the heart-centered empath and the feelings center of my house. Especially with a husband and two boys, I'm the heart center.

So I can see how that might change depending on your role and also just where you are... Emotionally, stress-load in your life, how you're going to respond to situations and people.

### **Dr Judith Orloff**

That's so true. You could experiment with different kinds of empathy. Let's say you're heart empathy, but you want to have a little more distance. So you want cognitive. You want to be there, but you don't want to give of your whole heart. So practice just coming from your head. It's just a matter of shifting your awareness up to the linear mind. It's not this, "Aah". But it's more, "Hmm... yeah, I want to just give you this."

So there's different ways of being that you can practice in different situations. Because if somebody is sharing too much information with you and you don't know what to do about it, what you don't want to do is open the door and absorb it. You want to close the door down and get some distance.

And that's perfectly okay to do that. Just because somebody's emoting or sharing doesn't mean you have to be absorbing. You're not just by virtue of being there. It doesn't mean you have to absorb. But you can put a shield in front of yourself, too. Visualize a beautiful shield of sparkling light all around you. Just beautiful, like Christmas lights or something beautiful, all protecting you.

So the person is going like this and you're standing there, but it's not coming through. So it's okay in certain situations to put the shield up. If it's just too much, too fast, and you don't know how to regroup or... Put the shield up.

And that's a visualization technique that keeps out the difficult energy. And it's really useful to learn at the proper times. I don't use it a lot, but sometimes I do use it. If I'm tired or I'm not feeling well and I feel energy coming in that's not good, the shield goes up. That was an extra helper.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I love that exercise, and I also love that I get to use my imagination and design my own shield. You were speaking and my shield looked like the invisible jet from Wonder Woman from the '80s.

I don't know why, but that was just where my mind went. You get to choose your own shield, you all. I think that would be a great exercise for people to do today. Pre-design your own shield so that when you need it, it's at the ready. One of the things that you... Oh, go ahead, yeah.

### **Dr Judith Orloff**

I like that. Have it waiting at home for you. It could be an energetic shield, and you know what it looks like, but it's invisible. Other people won't see it, but I like storing it. I like that idea. I've never

heard that before. Now, store it at home and then call on it. Even if you're not at home, you could still call on it, and it will come to you on an energetic level. But I like that, to keep your shield at home.

**[00:18:28] Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. Or even bring it. You can carry it in your Mary Poppins bag or in your Mary Poppins pocket if you don't carry a bag. If we're imagining a magic shield, then we might as well have magic pockets to go with it. I think one of the best things that you reminded me of in this book is that... And we're talking about disagreements and conversations with difficult people, maybe...

You reminded me that being empathetic, being a good listener, does not imply agreement. I think most people forget that. I know I forgot it for a very long time. I'd love it if you could share just a little bit more about that.

**Dr Judith Orloff**

Yes. Empathy is a way of reclaiming your humanity. That's how I see it. I see it as having a huge role. All right. And part of that reclaiming your humanity is being tolerant of people who don't agree with you, or you may ferociously disagree with, or they might even insult you with their beliefs, or you might...

Apart from abuse or anything like that, you don't want to tolerate that at all or give that any leeway. Abusive behavior. No, no, no. You want out. Deal with it later. Deal with it anyways, if you can't get out. But when you have a disagreement with somebody, you're standing there listening to them, and probably you're seething or you're reacting or you're triggered in some way if they're saying offensive things.

But you see, I look all at this as an experiment. I have a witness state going on. I'm going, "Hmm, this person is really impossible. How do I want to apply empathy here?" So I'm talking to myself as they're going on and on. I'll listen to them maybe for a few minutes and I'll go, "You know, that's really interesting. I'm going to give it some consideration. Thank you. I got to go, bye. Thanks for sharing that."

But that's all I say, and that's five seconds. But I say it in such a nice way. You see, this is what throws people off because they're ready for a fight. A lot of people are ready for a fight or ready to come down on you. And if you don't do that... It's like, don't feed the narcissist's supply. Don't feed it. And the way of not feeding it is to communicate.

You be the bigger person, and you have to be the one to change the tone of the conversation rather than... It'll get into this and finger-pointing and blaming and shaming. You don't want to go there. You want to be the one... In the book, I teach you how to take control of the situation. You make a choice about how you want to respond, and you practice before you go into the situation.

I strongly suggest you practice with a friend or my patients practice with me, or sometimes just getting out, setting a boundary for a sensitive, loving empath. They can't even get it out. They're sitting there, and they're about to... I'm the one that they don't agree with, and they're trying to get out what they're trying to say.

**[00:21:50]**

Sometimes they can't even... They choke, and they can't get it out. The loving kindness of... I hold their hands through all that so they could find their voice and practice with me and then go out in the world so that they have a little bit of experience. That helps. So you might want to try that with a friend and role-play.

So you're not just, "I don't know what to do." Reinventing the wheel when somebody gets on their high horse about their belief systems and you're right there, what do you do? But you can have empathy, the part of them that is rigid or the part of them that isn't coming from their heart or the part of them that is empathy-deficient disorder, as I talk about in the book. The narcissist, the sociopath, the psychopath.

Just start to vibe with that instead of all the horrible things they're saying. And why you want to do that is that that begins to shift the relationship and shift the energy pattern of how we deal with the collective issue of how do we deal with someone who we disagree with horribly without killing them or without going to war or without these horrible, dramatic, primitive ways of dealing with dissent. It's just really empowering to do this.

You become the decider in the situation, in the abusive situation, or in the uncomfortable situation. If someone's just a loudmouth and they won't stop spouting their beliefs. Whatever it is, you have a chance to shorten it. To say thank you, of letting them know you hear them, because that's half the battle. That's what people want. They want to be heard.

That's what's underneath all this opinion, all the opinions they have. They just want to be heard. And if you say, "I hear you, and thank you for sharing, and I'll give it some thought. Bye." And they're like, "What just happened?" And so you want to be surprising like that. I always try to think of empathic responses that I can give to people that will throw them off.

I get a lot of joy out of that because I know that it will throw them off. They're not used to that. They want to fight. Most people, if you get really practical in your family. Let's say you have an abusive mother or a narcissistic mother. You know what she wants. She wants to fight. She wants to be right. She wants to shame and blame you.

Same old, same old that you've had all your life. And I don't mean that that's not painful. I don't mean to lighten it up too much. But if you learn the genius of empathy, learn these practical skills to heal your sensitive self, your relationships in the world, you practice with her.

Say, "Mom, I hear what you say. And I'll think about it. All right, see you later. Bye-bye." And she's like, "What?" If they try to reel you in again, which sometimes they do, then say, "You have a good point. I'm going to think about it. Bye."

Sometimes you do have to repeat yourself a little bit, like very repetitively. People learn through repetition, and sometimes they don't hear it the first time. If you make an empathic statement, they just can't hear it. They can't absorb it. It's just beyond them. And so you have to decide whether it's just saying, "Yeah, I heard you. Thank you."



**[00:25:40]**

And you have your eye contact part of... In the book, I talk about empathic communication as opposed to hostile communication or passive-aggressive communication, where you're smiling, but you're getting the person. So you don't want that either.

But empathic communication is short and sweet and limited to one topic only. You don't want to go into 10 different topics when you're communicating. You set a time limit. You have an agreement, let's talk for 10 minutes and see how it goes. Or listen for 10 minutes. And talking is the next phase. But listening is a high art.

It's what I named the chapter, The High Art of Empathic Listening. How to listen to somebody. Even if you disagree with them, even if they're going through a terrible time and crying and sobbing and heaving and you're a sensitive empath, you don't want to pick it all up. So you can put up your shield, which is fine, or breathe it out if you notice you're being triggered.

Because one of the obstacles to empathy is if you're triggered, if the person who's sharing triggers you with either dumping anger or blaming you or... Well, actually, that's one of the rules of empathic communication. There's no blaming and shaming. You have to have some rules. It's not just open-ended. I'm going to express whatever I want. You can't blame and shame, and it has to be respectful, not abusive.

If it turns abusive, it's got to stop. You don't want to ever continue that. But you can talk about one topic. You can arrange 10 minutes to just listen. For you to sit there. If you were sitting in front of me and I was the empathic listener, you would be saying whatever your issue is, you would be expressing it. And I would, on the whole, be quiet.

I wouldn't interrupt you. I wouldn't be looking at my cell phone. I wouldn't be thinking about other things or things I had to do. I would summon all my attention and be there with you. You will be my universe for 5 minutes or 10 minutes. And it's not intrusive. I have eye contact that's gentle and supportive.

My tone is gentle and supportive. And I don't add things to your story. If you say, "Oh, I had this horrible experience with A, B, or C." And what people do that is the most wrong in these situations is say, "Oh, my God. I've had that experience, too. It was so much worse than yours." And then you get off on your thing. And that's a big mistake.

This is about them. When you listen to somebody empathically, you're sending out heart energy and caring to them as they're sharing. That's your main role. So it's different. Our speed in life has gone so much faster. Everybody's moving so fast. And with this book, what I'm suggesting is that people go slower.

They slow everything down so that you can really get what's happening and life just doesn't pass you by in one big flit and you wonder what happened. You want to take more of a presence attitude and come from your heart and give rather than absorb. Somebody is sharing with you, you're sending heart energy out to them.

**[00:29:25]**

You're not absorbing. You're giving, but then it doesn't drain you. It's a wonderful technique to practice. It's empathic listening. Practice it with your mate, practice it with your children, practice it with co-workers.

I've given empathy training to big businesses, and just one... Hand by hand, I just hold their hands, and this is what you do in this situation. Let's try it out. To give people a voice and some guidance about this, I think empathy training is key in the government, in medical settings.

I mean, everywhere where you're dealing with people, you have to learn how to deal with them, and you have to be okay inside yourself as you deal with them. And the book offers tons of tools to do that.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. Lots of tools. Great tools, in fact. And the word that I keep hearing you say is "limits", which is a good way for us to transition into boundary setting. Because I don't think most people, especially empaths, at the beginning of their self-discovery journey around being an empath and trying to find ways to have that self-agency and self-empathy, understand that they're even allowed to have boundaries.

They think that being a true empath means being limitless in our capacity to hold other people's hearts. I'd love it if you could talk about boundaries. You've already talked about time.

Time is a boundary of how long I have to receive everything that you're going through. I've got my invisible shield you don't know about. What are some of the other ways that we can set boundaries? And are there any limitations in the types of relationships in which we can set boundaries?

### **Dr Judith Orloff**

Yes, each relationship is different, and you have to decide what boundary you want to set. But as a general rule, you set one boundary at a time. You don't set three. You don't go on to 10 subjects. If you're dealing with one subject... You're talking to your spouse. "I don't feel you're listening to me. You're always distracted. It would make me feel so good if you could listen to me."

You want to stay with that. You don't want to go, "And then you invited your mother and you didn't check with me, and then you didn't go and pick up the kids." That will destroy the integrity of the conversation if you do that. And I like everybody who's listening to think honestly, non-judgmentally, to see if you do that, because you get excited. Somebody's finally listening. It's true.

### **Meagen Gibson**

We've all done it.

**[00:32:14] Dr Judith Orloff**

We've all done it. We've all done it. But it won't work. It won't work. It'll just... The other person will tune out and they won't know how to deal with so many requests at once. So you make one request at a time when you set a boundary. And the way you set a boundary is short. It's sweet. It's with a nice tone of voice. Kind but firm, and nice eye contact.

You don't want to be giving non-verbal messages that don't go along with your verbal message. You want to be very soft and flowing. But at the same time, you say to them, "I'm sorry that I'm not going to be able to help you with this project because I'm way too overcommitted right now, but I wish you all the best in it." And that's what you say. That's what you say. That's what?

Five seconds, 10 seconds when you set a boundary. "I'm not able to do..." One of the boundaries that you have to get used to is when you can't do something for someone. That's one of the categories of boundaries. Inevitably, if you're a mature empath, you're going to come to the point where you can't do certain things for certain people at certain times.

But this is what you have to get used to. You've got to wrap your mind around this. And yes, you will disappoint people. True. Empaths have a hard time with that. That's why I like to talk about it. It's part of growing up. It's disappointing people. But you can let them down easily. You don't want to be mean or snippy or "You're always asking me too much. I can't fulfill what you're saying", with a real snippy attitude. You don't want to do that.

You want to give them heart while you're saying no. It's a skill. Then they don't feel terrible. They feel good because they're feeling the heart energy, and yet they get the no. If they come back and say, "Well, what kind of friend are you that you can't help me with this?" You say, "I'm a great friend. I love you. I just don't have the time right now."

And leave it at that. That's how long? I mean, if we timed it, a few seconds. But what you don't want to do... And the mistakes people make with boundaries, is that they give too much information, talk too long. They try to convince the person why they're setting boundaries as a kind boundary rather than keeping it short and sweet and out of there.

You don't want to over-share when it comes to setting a boundary. You want it to be short. You can practice, again, with friends or people who can practice with you so you can get used to saying things in sound bites when you set boundaries. Very important that you learn that. You don't want these long boundaries where people are having to go, "What's she saying?"

You want someone to get it, like short and sweet. It's like, sorry, you can't do it. Or let's say you made a plan with somebody and you're just too tired. You're tired. You want to stay home. And you try to keep all your commitments, but sometimes it's just too much. You have to just stay home and practice self-care.

You're just really sweet with your friend saying, "I hate to cancel. It's not a pattern of mine to do that at the last moment. I'm so sorry. I just have to take care of myself at home tonight. Please forgive me." They might feel bad because they're looking forward to seeing you, but they'll understand. If you, I would say it that way. In the book, I talk about feeling guilty when you set a boundary.

**[00:36:07] Meagen Gibson**

I'm so glad. That was literally going to be my next question. I was like, "Oh, gosh." I'm so glad you brought it up because it's the part nobody tells you is that everybody wants to talk about boundaries. They're very popular now, but nobody talks about the gut-wrenching, seething guilt that you feel after you set one and try to hold it.

**Dr Judith Orloff**

Yeah, that's true. And that guilt comes from your upbringing. Now, if you had, let's say, parents who set healthy boundaries and were able to model that for you, you wouldn't have any guilt at all. It was a matter of training. But if you were brought up in the kind of family that says you're only compassionate if you keep giving and giving and giving to the detriment of your own health.

The martyr complex. If you become a martyr, then you're compassionate, then you're going to feel guilty. If you give, you have to heal that. That's one of the blocks to empathy, is guilt. And you have to heal your early conditioning, either through therapy or coaching or doing some reading on it to really and intuitively get that in order to be loving and empathic, you have to set a boundary.

There is no way you can survive as an empathic person, let alone an empath, unless you learn how to do this. You can't get away with not doing this. It won't work, as then the empathy might become a misery, and you don't want that. But I encourage everyone, you have the power to do it.

And if you feel guilty about it, do some journaling after you feel guilty. I'm guilty because I feel like I'm not a good enough person that I can't give her what she wants. I'm guilty because I feel like I need to give everyone what they want all the time.

These beliefs come up, which is not healthy empathy. But it's healthy to dredge them up so you can work with them and realize they're not true. These are untrue beliefs about giving. I would go right to the chapter on healthy giving versus co-dependent giving, which really puts...

**Meagen Gibson**

Which also helps the people-pleasers in the group. I think we had a chat comment about people-pleasing. I think they're all related, aren't they? People-pleasing and codependency, and all of these are shades of the same color to me.

**Dr Judith Orloff**

Yes. If you've been traumatized by a parent, if they were abusive or narcissistic, you were too afraid to do what I'm talking about. You must realize that you don't practice this with narcissists. You practice... When you start practicing boundaries, and this is really important, you start with the easiest people.

You just start with the easiest ones who are going to go, "Oh, okay" or "Thanks for telling me." It's so great when you set a boundary and someone goes, "Wow, thanks for letting me know that." That's a healthy relationship. Or, "I feel bad, but I understand." That's another healthy relationship.

**[00:39:13]**

But you have to get... You get used to the idea that sometimes people will be disappointed when you set a boundary, that they might feel a little bad, but you build them up with how much you love them. It's not to do with that you don't love them. It's just that you're so tired, you can't function right now, so you have to sleep. Something like that, whatever your situation is. And...

**Meagen Gibson**

Go ahead. Sorry.

**Dr Judith Orloff**

If they don't understand... It happens sometimes. You let them be. Let them be for a while, and then you'll check in with each other. You'll work it out. Sometimes it's a bit of a process. If they're hurt by boundary setting, then their trauma is ignited, and your trauma is ignited because you're guilty. The trauma response is feeling guilty. You work it out.

Sometimes you need to work it out with friends, especially the friends who call who are in victim mentality, and they just want to talk about all the things that have gone wrong. Their mother doesn't understand them, and their boss didn't promote them, and their boyfriend is nowhere to be found, and on and on and on. They go, "Urrr" and you're getting limp and exhausted.

The boundary would be, "You know, I love you, and I could listen for five minutes to this, but when you want to get into solutions, we could talk for a longer amount of time." Just say it like I said it to try and mimic my tone of voice. It's just that. It's just, "But, but, but." You go, "Nah, no but's. I've got to go. I have to take care of myself now, or I have to eat dinner with my family."

And at the proper moment, you can say, "Here's a great therapist who knows how to work with this and can really help you." If you have the strength to say that, that's always... I do, because I can't listen that long to people. It's just exhausting to me. I don't listen that long. I zone out. I can't. I mean, unless it's a crisis or something, I'm there 100% listening.

But if it's someone going around in circles, I don't have a lot of tolerance for that. And that's fine. And you don't have to have tolerance for it, but you can be nice about not being able to listen. You don't have to be, "How come you're just going on and on like this? Don't you realize how overwhelming it is for me?"

You don't want to get that honest. You just want to say, "I can do this, and this is what I..." You have to be the one to take this step. I want to say that I'm honored that the Dalai Lama wrote the foreword to this book because this is a person who embodies the kind of empathy that interests me. The way he treats people. The way he deals with tragedy. The way he has his sense of humor, and at the same time is able to deal with deep, very painful topics, it's a role-model.

The preface is in the beginning. It's one page. It's very simple, and it's beautiful. It's about immediacy. We need to develop empathy immediately. This needs to be something that we come together with as a human race and start to do it. I want to say in the book, I really, really feel that

the power of the individual is outstanding. And that the individual has much more power than you think.

#### **[00:43:04]**

That when you make a change and you set a boundary or you heal an aspect of trauma that you've been through with self-empathy, which is the healing bomb to trauma. When you begin to do that, you're changing things. You're changing the order of the universe. I'm telling you, it's not a minor act.

The order of the universe is shifting towards a higher vibration, basically, when you do it. And when I do it and you do it, and then we have five people doing it, you're moving mountains with that. It's incredibly powerful. And I want to get across to you, even though sometimes empathy might seem counter-intuitive, and you might say, "I'm never going to have empathy for that person. They just went over my limit."

And what I say to that is, "Fine. You don't have to. Don't force it." But if ever you might... This isn't about forcing anything. If you can't, you can't. What can you do? But if you find you might be a little interested in trying to do this with certain people, then you might want to try it just for yourself. But if not, don't do it. I mean, some people, you can't forgive and just accept it. It's fine.

I would say in general, though, it's better for the human spirit and energy field to let go of as many resentments as you can so they don't bog you down. And there's a chapter on letting go of resentments and empathy and how sometimes you do counterintuitive things by having empathy for this horrible person.

And you have empathy for their shortcomings and their wounds. And then you feel they're not on your back anymore when you do that. It's a way to release yourself. Empathy is a key to send them on their way. I strongly recommend it.

#### **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. It's interesting because we're in the Q&A, and I know I only have a little bit of time left with you, so I want to acknowledge everybody in the Q&A. But a theme that I'm sensing in the questions, because we don't have time to answer them all individually, is around... Because you talked about emergency situations or critical situations.

What do you say to people who are dealing with somebody who has severe mental health issues or addiction issues or chronic illness, where we can, especially over a long period of time in that relationship, feel a deep burden in that relationship that turns into boundaryless codependency, but we're doing it from a place of concern, right?

And so how do we gain back some boundaries? How do we practice self-empathy? Just increment by increment in those relationships where we're so scared.

#### **Dr Judith Orloff**

That's real life... Oh, I turned right to it. Meditation for Caregivers. It's on page 159.

**[00:46:14] Meagen Gibson**

How funny is that that you got right there. You just turned right to the page.

**Dr Judith Orloff**

I just spontaneously turned to that page. I didn't have it earmarked or anything. If you're a caregiver, it asks more of you than you ever think you have to give. I was there for both my parents when they became quite ill and then passed on. And so the death and the illness were wrenching.

I understand what being a caregiver is and what it asks of you, and it asks more than you ever think you have to give. And so it's important to practice self-empathy as you're going through it. Delegate if you at all have some resources to get some helpers. That's what saved me as I was lucky enough to have some resources to get this beautiful couple to help me. Or it's too much.

And you have to have empathy for yourself instead of saying, "I'm not doing enough. I'm not showing up enough, but I can't bear to go over there one more day. I need a rest." You say, "Fine, honey. Take a rest. Don't make a big deal out of it. You need a rest." And the caregiver needs to practice self-empathy as well as having empathy for the one who is going through the suffering.

You need to take breaks, and you can't just sit there all the time or obsess about the person, and that it's possible to have a very good day even if they're not feeling well. And to be able to keep your identity separate from them. Because what happens is that you merge with them and you sacrifice your energy.

And there's a section in the book on when caregiving ends and how to adjust to that. Because sometimes if the person passes on or the person gets better, they don't need it anymore. But I noticed when I was in the caregiving position, I had to consciously do a meditation to bring back 25% of my energy because it was with the person.

It was not with me. I was just spent. But I realized it was still with the person. And so I did a meditation requesting that it reenter myself. And so I can have my full access to my energy again. And you have to shift out of the caregiving role gently and go on with your life into the next phase. And it's a lot to ask because it seems like it's everything, and it'll never be anything else.

But the truth is, the river is moving in life, and you want to keep moving with it with as much respect as you can for what happened to the person who was suffering. And people get better, too.

And then you've got to accept that without over-doting on people or "How are you? Are you feeling alright? How did you sleep? Oh, did you really sleep well? Oh, I can understand that if you don't..." You don't want to become that person who's overbearing when someone is sick.

And just as a general rule, the way you want to treat somebody who's sick is you want to mirror back their strengths and deal with their challenges, but have the strengths, the higher up. Always look at them like who they are, who their spirit actually is. "You know, I'm so into you. I just love you."

**[00:49:52]**

And you just want to talk to people in that way rather than, "Oh, my God. Are you alright? Really? Is that you telling me the truth?" It's all kinds of things. You don't want to do that with people. You want to make them reflect their strength.

**Meagen Gibson**

That's such a beautiful framing. I love that. To focus on their strengths. Because anybody, it doesn't matter what a crisis you're in, whether it's mental or emotional or physical. You are more than that, regardless of your current status.

And to be reminded of that, regardless of your current status, and be reminded of what your relationships and your world existed like before it, and hopefully... Well, after it, it is really important and probably the best service of an empath, right?

**Dr Judith Orloff**

Yes, and get support. I know, the support of my friends was so helpful for me. Somebody with a listening ear and just, someone who's with me through it. That made a big difference, so I didn't feel alone through it. Also, if you have animals, they can help you through it. I just want to say, if you want to practice self-empathy, caregiving is a wonderful place. It's intense. It's more intense than your everyday life.

But if you're caregiving, you want to practice self-empathy as much as you can and stop beating yourself up by consciously shifting out of your mind into your heart, all right? And you want to just become aware of that.

Self-empathy is the most important beginning place when you're going through a difficult situation because people always think of having empathy for others, and you will. You'll have plenty of empathy for others, but you need to have it for you. That's part of the spiritual lesson here, the genius of empathy.

**Meagen Gibson**

And one last thing before I let you go is just, if people are out there today, and regardless of what their situation is. They're watching this and they're thinking about empathy, and they've heard you talk about it, and they're just really struggling. What is the one way in which they can cultivate their self-empathy today, right now?

Other than the... Everybody's designed their shield. We've all got our shields. So that's one. What's one more way that we can begin with self-empathy today?

**Dr Judith Orloff**

Well, if you have an animal that you love, look at the way your animal is looking at you. And those eyes that they're looking at you with, that's how you want to look at yourself. And if you don't have an animal...



**[00:52:45] Meagen Gibson**

I use birds. I don't have pets, and I use birds for that.

**Dr Judith Orloff**

It's whatever. But you want to have a loving creature, and you want to see... Especially with the eyes, when they love you so much. Those animals love you so much, unconditionally. No, they just give it right to you, whether it's a kitty, or it's a dog, or a parrot, or a hamster, or rabbit. It could be anything. It's helpful.

If you don't have any animals, then you look up at the sky. You look at a flower. You look at nature to begin to embody the flower in nature and treat yourselves like that instead of taking out the whip and just whip, whip, whip. That's what needs to change in all of us. Everybody does it to some extent or another. And the more you can heal, the less you do it.

And you could learn how to shift out of it. So that's part of having empathy for yourself that I teach in the book. How do you shift out of that and how do you come into this other place and keep practicing it? It's just practicing shifting energy and taking control of your biochemistry and your body's well-being.

It's about you taking an active stand in terms of being empathic toward yourself. But it requires an active stand as opposed to passive or waiting for somebody else to do it or change because they're not. They're not going to do it. You have to be the one.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely.

**Dr Judith Orloff**

It inspires everyone, and it's *The Genius of Empathy*. I just want to say that I have an offer on my website, [drjudithorloff.com](http://drjudithorloff.com), that with the book, you get a free e-book and you get free empathy videos. And so if you're interested in that, you could go to my website, [drjudithorloff.com](http://drjudithorloff.com), and the instructions are clear if you want to get those goodies.

**Meagen Gibson**

Fantastic. I was just going to ask you, how can people get the book and find out more about you? And you did the work for me. You saw my question coming. Dr. Judith Orloff, thank you so much for being with us today. I appreciate you so much.

**Dr Judith Orloff**

You're very welcome. It was a delight.

**[00:55:01] Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. And I will let you go because I know you've got to go, and I'm going to stick on for just a moment and see if anybody's got any other questions. We'll see you later. Thank you so much. Okay.

**Dr Judith Orloff**

Bye, everybody. Bye. It was nice being with you.