



Conscious Life presents
**HEALING TOXIC
RELATIONSHIPS**

Holistic Healing: Finding Balance & Harmony

Guest: Hania Opienski

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[00:00:09] Jaï Bristow

Hello, and welcome back to this conference. My name is Jaï Bristow and I'm one of your hosts. Today I am very, very pleased to be welcoming the wonderful Hania Opienski. Welcome, Hania.

Hania Opienski

Thank you. Hello.

Jaï Bristow

Hania, you are a woman of many talents. You are the founder of Supernatural Health, and a holistic healer, where you're a naturopathic nutritionist, a TCM acupuncturist, a life alignment healing practitioner and teacher, and a Heart Math coach and mentor.

I'm excited to find out a bit more about what all those are, and how they can be applied to healing toxic relationships. Do you want to get us going by talking a bit about what toxic relationships means to you? What does this theme, or this word of toxicity evoke in you in terms of your line of work?

Hania Opienski

Sure. Thank you. I think at its root, if I think about what a toxic relationship is, it's anything that takes one out of the present, takes one away from homeostasis, from nervous system balance and creates an imbalance. And that can be on any level, so physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. And then that's something that then of course we're going to be coming in and out all the time.

But something that is perpetuating a state of imbalance, or a state of nervous system overactivation, or a continual drive to be making choices in your lifestyle, in how you interact with others, in your food, choices in your self-care, or lack of self-care, that over a period of time are going to have a detrimental effect to any of those aspects of being. And the continuation of that is something that I would say is a toxic relationship with yourself.

[00:02:09] Jai Bristow

That's such a great definition. Because it's not so much looking at the symptoms of, oh, this such and such is a toxic relationship, well, that's a toxic relationship. It's coming into the root cause of toxicity is basically an imbalance, an imbalance within yourself. And that can play out into all these different ways that we've talked about, that I've talked about in this conference with different people.

It can play out in your relationships with others, as well as your relationship with food, your relationship with the environment, your relationships, and all your relationship with yourself.

Do you want to talk a bit about these imbalances? What happens in the nervous system? What are physiological responses? How do we recognize when we're out of balance, and we're having a toxic relationship, or toxicity present in our relationships?

Hania Opienski

Certainly, I think for me, something that really helped me start getting an understanding of this was when I studied Chinese medicine. Before it's like I might have some physiological symptoms, I might have some stress, or some tendency to ways of thinking, or my sleep pattern. I thought of them as all separate things. And then when I learned Chinese medicine, you learned that actually there's a correlation between particular emotions and particular organs of the body. Between particular emotions and particular aspects of personality type, particular mental activities, and then an impact physically on the body.

I started realizing that a lot of the things that I might have thought of as separate symptoms were actually part of these, unified patterns of disharmony they're called in Chinese medicine. I started seeing, ahh actually, it's not that there's like ten different things wrong with me. It's, actually, that I have a pattern of, or I'm displaying a pattern of, say, liver chi stagnation, which could include everything from PMS, being a bit impatient, waking up at three in the morning, tendency to tight muscles, tendency to one sided headaches, being someone who really wants to make progress and has quick ideas and gets frustrated when things don't flow, to someone who gets eye twitches.

All of these things that seem quite disparate, they were actually just part of one pattern that were ways that this was manifesting on a physical, on an emotional, on a mental level.

That understanding of how we're not just a physical body, our mind isn't separate from the body, that all of these things are interconnected. And when you start seeing that, then you can see, actually, I know that when I'm getting eye twitches, or those months when I do have PMS and I have pain, it's like, okay, so this is a sign that actually I'm not managing my stress, or that this is a time when it's, okay, if I know that my liver chi is more stagnated, this is not the time to have lots of processed food, it's not the time for me to have alcohol.

This is the time for me to do some stretching. This is the time for me to make sure that I have positive connections with people. That maybe if I'm going to do movement, I don't do something linear that creates more tension and rigidity, but I do some dancing, or some swimming, or some yoga, or something that is actually going to move my chi, and do some cross body movements, which is actually what then gets the liver chi flowing. So it's a way of seeing these connections and then having a tool that then allows you to go, okay, now I know how I can look after myself.

[00:05:46] Jai Bristow

It's really interesting how you're talking about liver chi, or spleen chi, and chi being more the energetic, or the energetics linked to the organ, as opposed to the physical organ itself, but how it is still all interconnected. How do you assess then, when something's out of balance, if it's not looking at the physicality, how do you tell, oh, there's some imbalance? This is what we're going to treat, the imbalance is linked to liver chi, or spleen chi, or whichever other ones there are.

Hania Opienski

It's not that you don't look at the physical, focus on the physical, it's just that you look at that as part of a wider picture. So it's always taking the holistic view. So the physical is important. And of course, if someone comes to see a Chinese medicine practitioner, you want to take into consideration the symptoms that they're actually feeling, and do something to help them feel better.

But it's like if someone is coming in with a very physical symptom, as a Chinese medicine practitioner, you would also then check, it sounds like it's this pattern, let me check. Are there other physical symptoms? Are there mental or emotional symptoms that would generally flesh out this pattern so you can actually see, yes, this is actually what's happening. So you take in that broader picture, you're looking at that holistic view.

And then with treatment, of course, the most obvious and most common Chinese medicine treatment is either acupuncture or herbs. Acupuncture is more working at the chi, at the energy level, and herbs are working more at the organ visceral level. So it'll depend again on what someone's pattern of disharmony is, like what you might choose to use, or often you use a combination.

I think it's also really important, and one of the things that now I apply in a coaching and mentoring capacity, both when I see Chinese medicine clients, but also if I'm working with someone for naturopathy, or health and well-being mentoring, is this aspect of when you understand what the signs are, and the triggers, then the idea is, well, something I really want to do is actually give some power back to the individual.

It's not just come and see me and get acupuncture every week, and keep doing what you're doing, and I will just be resetting the balance, because that person has actually got things going on in their life, or in their mind, or in their food choices, or their movement choices or lack thereof, or their stress levels, that is creating the imbalance.

I think that it's really important to educate people and say, look, when you're getting these signs, look at how much sugar are you eating, how much are you sitting? Are you doing a lot of mental work? Do you have someone that you can share your emotions with? Or are they all just rushing around in your head and you're just stuck in a loop. And so actually getting people to notice, okay, so I'm getting sugar cravings, or I'm getting into these cyclical thoughts.

Then you start going, okay, so this means my spleen chi is out of balance. What can I do to look after myself? So a little bit of something sweet, maybe like root vegetables, that's going to have a nourishing effect on the spleen. But going full out on, oh my God, I'm just going to eat loads of chocolate and drink loads of wine. It feels like you're listening to your body, and you're going with

your impulse, but actually you're then feeding into the imbalance, because too much sugar actually, we know physiologically upsets your pancreas. So we'd say too much sweet stuff, actually perpetuates that spleen chi imbalance, and is then going to make you more stressed, and more emotionally undigested, because you're exacerbating.

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So actually getting some understanding for people so they can actually do some self-care. Or knowing that the spleen is activated by too much thinking, too much stress. So it's like, okay, well, what are the things that I can do at the end of the day to help myself calm down and get out of this mental loop? Do something physical, get a hug, get a massage, go for a walk, do something mindless.

So that's something that I really appreciate about this, and how I can then use it to help people help themselves. Not just be the one that's trying, people are coming at me to fix them, and they're not recognizing that they actually have a lot of power to start helping themselves. That's also part of the toxic relationship, I think when people feel like they're just stuck, they're a victim, they want someone else to fix them.

Actually, the more that you can start learning about, okay, well, what's going on in me? That I can actually start taking responsibility and looking after myself. And that as a way, not of creating blaming yourself, but actually going, oh no, I have some power, I have some agency here to start changing my own health and well-being.

Jai Bristow

I think that's so great. I love that you brought that piece in that your role isn't just to fix people. Fix, big quote marks here for anyone who can't see me, but that it's more empowering for people to take responsibility, and find balance for themselves. I guess that's where the holistic approach comes as well, because finding balance is finding balance in all areas. We already talked about physical, emotional, spiritual, all of that kind of thing. But you've talked a lot about food, you've talked about thoughts and patterns, you've talked about going for a walk and exercising. There's so many different ways of finding that balance. And I think it's really important to bring in.

I love what you were saying about a very fundamental toxic trait that we can have is going into the victim cycle. I've touched upon a little bit the drama triangle with a few people, which is the victim, perpetrator, hero roles, and how you can switch and put people in those, and take those on. And that's often a very toxic cycle. I like how you're saying how people can identify as a victim, and want other people to just fix them.

I think that can happen a lot in these events, these conferences. People are looking for the answer, looking for the right practitioner, the person that's going to resolve it, fix them, cure them, the magic pill, the magic wand. And so instead taking time to look at ourselves, and it can be really painful and uncomfortable, but taking time to look at oneself and notice where the imbalances are. Taking responsibility and starting to find more balance in that way, which will hopefully then have a positive impact on all our relationships with ourself. If we start with ourselves, it will have a positive ripple effect outwards with all our relationships.

Once we recognize that we have imbalance, and we recognize that that's a very unhealthy state to be in, and that it can perpetuate itself. Once we start having some imbalance in some areas, that it

will perpetuate, and especially in relationships, seeing as that's what we're talking about here today. If you have an imbalance in yourself, and you start being very irritable or something, it will have a negative ripple effect on all your relationships. So once we've established that, how do we start finding that balance? How do we start healing in a holistic way?

[00:13:04] Hania Opienski

I think if we're looking at toxic relationship with oneself, then I think a really important step is awareness. I think a lot of people are quite unconscious of their patterns, of their thought patterns, of the things that drive their behaviors. And we talked about the victim mode, a lot of that is believing, oh, I'm a victim of my circumstances, oh, this always happens to me, and I knew this was going to happen, and I can't do anything about it, I'm in this difficult situation, I've got a challenging boss, I've got a bullying partner, whatever it is.

It might be objectively true that you're in a challenging situation, or you have an overbearing boss, or a bullying partner, but how you are responding to that, and the beliefs that you have about your capacity, or your victimhood in that situation are a part of that dynamic. So actually starting to recognize, well, how do I think about myself? What are the beliefs I have about myself? What is the voice in my head, this inner critic, also called superego, that is actually reinforcing these ideas of self?

I think a lot of, I know for myself and for a lot of women particularly, but lots of people, there is this internalized belief of, I need to be good, I need to be a nice person, I need to be accommodating, I need to respect authority, I want to avoid conflict, I want to be liked. And these can all seem like things that, yeah, they are going to ease social interactions.

And as a child they were needed, you needed to respect your parents, respect teachers, learn the rules. You didn't want to get punished, you didn't want to get excluded. And it was a survival mechanism then, it was really important for you as a child to learn those rules. And create this internalized parent, is another way of looking at the superego, that this is something that protects you.

You know how to act, you have this little voice in your head that goes, oh, this is appropriate, this is going to keep me safe, this is going to make sure I don't get sent to my room, I don't get punished. And it's really useful, I'm not inviting you to beat yourself up even more about the fact that you have these tendencies. Of course, there are many others, I'm just talking about one version of this. But when we become an adult, those things that kept us safe as a kid are not necessarily helpful for us.

For me I know that from being, having this good girl archetype, found that I kept ending up in situations where I had bosses or managers that were asking too much of me. That were expecting too much, that were piling work on me. And because I had this, and it was so automatic, this thing of, oh, I want to meet expectations, I want to exceed expectations. I don't want to create conflict, I respect authority, I want to be liked, I don't want to put anyone else out. I ended up burning out because I was so much trying to accommodate to what was being asked of me, and didn't have those boundaries to say, actually, no, this is not okay.

I was picking up the slack for other colleagues who had better boundaries, or didn't have this good girl thing, and were like, no, I'm not doing overtime, it's too much, or, no, I can't do this, it's too difficult. I just felt like no, I'm clever, I'm smart, I want to be liked, I'm going to spend extra time, and

I'm going to expend extra mental energy to learn these things, to do things well, to take on the extra work. I literally burnt myself out.

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At the time, I thought it was because I was in a challenging situation, because there was too much work, because, oh, the business was expanding, and so therefore, there wasn't enough staff. But it was retrospectively, I can see now, that was actually part of my toxic relationship with myself, of the fact that I wasn't able to say, this is my boundary, I need support, this is not okay, this is as much as I can handle.

At that point, I was a naturopath and an acupuncturist. So I was doing the tai chi, and eating the good diet, and trying to get the movement, and doing all the things. And that meant that I could cope for a long time because I had a lot of good habits that supported me. But I didn't have that internal piece, that self-awareness and that compassion towards myself, that actually it's okay to ask for help. It's okay to have some conflict if it is encroaching on my mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

I can see now that that was a toxic relationship, but I was so completely unaware of it. So that first step is starting to get aware. It's like, what's the voice in my head? What are the beliefs that I have about myself that dictate my behavior? That are contributing to situations where, maybe external toxic relationships, in any toxic relationship, you are always at the root of that, and you have a level of responsibility.

So starting to recognize that this is not another way to then say, oh, let me beat myself up more. Oh, I'm in an abusive relationship and it's my fault. No, but it's like if you're in a relationship that's abusive, most people are in an abusive relationship with themselves. If you think about the way that your inner critic talks to you, and the harshness, and the criticism, and the judgment, and the finding fault, it's like recognizing that is the first step. And then getting a bit of distance, and a bit of compassion for this scared little voice that's trying to keep you safe, but is actually really creating quite a lot of stress and toxicity.

Jai Bristow

100%. I think that I was really struck by, that most of us are in an abusive relationship with ourselves, and it's so true. Here we are talking about toxic and abusive relationships with everyone else, but it's like, hold on, most of the time we are our own worst critic. And yes, we can look at where that comes from and stuff.

But first, like you say, we have to be aware of that. So thank you for bringing in that piece, and thank you for sharing some of your own journey, and your own stories, and your own becoming aware of how you, and so many of us, were in a state of blame, and that you were doing all the right things. So that reinforces this idea of, I'm trying to find balance, I'm eating well, I'm doing all those things. And that grows your capacity, which is fantastic.

But if you're still judging yourself, and still in that state of whenever something goes wrong, I'm the victim, other people are to blame, the circumstances are to blame, everyone keeps piling work on me. And that we don't take that responsibility, I think is a really uncomfortable but important area to look at.

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I'm reminded of the conversation I had with Rafaella Fiallo about self-fulfilling prophecies, and the stories we tell all ourselves, and breaking those. I'm reminded of a conversation I had with Dr Betty Martin, who talks about our internal landscape as our right, but also our responsibility. I recommend people check out those talks, amongst other fantastic talks.

Hania, thank you for bringing that in. That recognition that we're at the root of a lot of our toxic relationships, partly because we're often in an abusive relationship with ourselves, and that requires a lot of work and healing primarily. What are some of the other elements that you want to bring in, or some of the other steps?

Hania Opienski

As I said, that awareness and getting conscious of that voice in the head, what you bring into consciousness is a really important first step. Then I mentioned briefly, but I think compassion is really important. I know when I first started doing inner critic work, and getting more conscious of this voice in my head, and how I was judging myself and others, and everything. Then I then got a secondary, we could call it a superego attack, of then telling myself off for having these judgments, for having these negative beliefs. For ending up in the same situation of going, oh, I know that I've given my power away again, I've been too accommodating. So it's very easy once you start becoming aware to then have more self-attack.

The next thing that's really important is to actually really learn compassion. And you've really got to point that towards yourself. Yes, if you're very judgmental of other people, and you find yourself being really irritable and critical. Then that's also really useful to notice, because you can see, actually I'm not being compassionate to them, and the criticism and the judgment I have of them is often something in myself that I don't like, that I'm projecting out.

That's really useful, but then also, again, when you notice that, it's not an invitation to then beat yourself up about that too. This is awareness, learning, and bringing compassion in. That's the next step.

There's a couple of tools that I found really helpful once you have the awareness. Once you're familiar with these patterns, and just getting familiar is a great step, and it gives you a little bit of distance. But you will find that these things run on automatic, and it takes a lot of willpower, and concentration, and effort to not just follow that snowballing effect.

A couple of things I find are really helpful for interrupting that process, or actually starting, or continuing the healing process. One is a process of inquiry, and this is a spiritual practice inquiry. It's normally done with one, or sometimes two, or a group of people, and it's a process where you are really checking in with your reactions, to what's going on in the moment. It can be an opportunity to actually explore something.

If you're with a partner, or partners, it's very different than being with a counselor, or being with a friend, because the setup with this is that anyone who is a partner is just holding space. They are observing themselves, they are just giving you space to explore without actually trying to give you advice, or having their own reactions. Ideally your partners would not be nodding, or smiling, or making facial expressions because that's all their own reactions. But to just really be holding space

for you, and you get the opportunity to explore something with other people there. So it's not just a little voice in your head.

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Initially I was like, isn't this just a mental exercise? But then I realized, no, it's important on a number of different levels because when you really can engage with it, it's an opportunity to actually check in with what is my physical response to what I'm talking about, sensing your body. And that's been a huge practice for me with supporting, healing my toxic relationship with myself. Inquiry is an opportunity to be exploring something, checking in with what is my body's reaction to this.

It's also voicing stuff that is probably stuff that you have self-criticism about, and it's voicing it in front of other people, so all of the shame and the embarrassment. Wanting to hide these parts of oneself that you think, that you judge, and therefore you fear that other people are going to judge. Actually the process of doing that with a witness who is not reacting, and is not either rejecting you, or trying to make you feel better, that's very liberating.

For me, I find that just that process of having that space, that held space to explore something, it shifts something. I realize I can share this and I don't die from shame. I can share this and the other person doesn't reject me, or the other person doesn't try to shut me down by trying to make everything better. And then you swap.

So then you actually hear other people's inner world and you start realizing, oh my God, I'm not the only one who thinks this way. I'm not the only one that has all of these beliefs, or these self-judgments, or has all of this inner crap, that just feels, when it's all in your head, it just feels like, oh my God, I'm the only one, I'm a horrible person, or a weak person, or whatever the message is to yourself.

And actually having someone hold that for you, and hold yourself, and then hearing other people's, and having the opportunity to be with that, and to be checking in with yourself, like, how am I responding? What are my judgments? What does that do to my body while I'm listening? And I just find it such a, it's one of the practices that I find really helps me become really present. When I'm really taking that opportunity to be checking in on all these different levels, either whether I'm the one sharing, or I'm the one holding space.

I'd say that's the first practice that I really appreciate, and then the second thing, which is something that I also can do for myself, thankfully, but that I work more with clients, would be Life Alignment. This is a healing modality, it's one of the things that has really had some sort of pivotal healing moments for me in my life. It's a modality that brings in, again, it's a holistic healing method.

There is a cognitive... Working with understanding from a mental level, but the healing happens through then connecting that mental understanding with a felt sense experience, and with the emotions that are held in the body. We've talked a lot about there is a connection between the physical and the mental emotional, but that we're looking at them as separate parts of a pattern. But actually when we have mental emotional experiences, they actually get locked in the body, and that then has an impact on the physiology. Life Alignment as a healing system is actually bringing those things together, and actually finding, okay, so you've identified a belief about yourself,

you've identified a story that puts you in victim mode, that takes you out of connection with yourself. But then it's like, okay, well, what's the feeling?

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That's the next step we look at, well, what's the feeling that this story, this belief creates in you? And then to actually really feel what that does. And then through the process of the healing process, you're then actually releasing, not just the belief, but also the emotion, where that's trapped in your cellular memory. And allowing that to be digested, to be dissolved from the body, so that then you can then think about the same experience, or check in with that same belief, but there isn't that same visceral emotional response in the body.

That for me has been something that is so healing. It's not just an understanding level, it's a connecting with the emotion, connecting with the physical sensations, and then allowing that release from the body. And that then creates again a shift out of that reactive state, into a real state of presence and release.

Jai Bristow

Incredible, thank you so much. I really appreciate what you were sharing around, as we become aware of these judgmental voices, and our abusive relationship with ourselves, and this inner critic or superego, or all these different names that can be used for it. That sometimes, actually the first step of becoming aware of it isn't necessarily feeling freedom from it, it's actually having more voices suddenly telling us that we're bad for having these bad thoughts.

There's an extra layer of judgment of criticism towards ourselves. And that sometimes that voice can be turned inward towards ourselves, or it can be turned outward towards blame, towards defensiveness, towards judgment, towards criticism of other people, to try and inflate our sense of self, or towards ourselves. That element of compassion that you started bringing in is really important.

I also really love that you brought in two very concrete practices that people can use either with an inquiry peer, or in their own life, or with a coach, a facilitator, a Life Alignment practitioner, for example. To help with some of the freeing from these painful self-beliefs, of these painful feelings. Because there's a lot of talk on these conferences, and in general, of that importance of awareness, and it's so true. But sometimes we get to the point where we're like, okay, I'm aware, now what? How do I actually break these toxic cycles? How do I actually free myself of these patterns and not just keep repeating these same unhealthy loops in my life? How do I notice all these areas of imbalance and actually find balance again?

I think it's great that you've brought in some very practical tools. And that whilst those tools are useful to start off with a coach, a teacher, a guide, a mentor, a facilitator, a practitioner, that there's also a lot there that can be done on oneself, or on one's own, or with a peer, or a friend, a partner, whoever it may be.

I think that's fantastic work, and it's really great to hear more about this Life Alignment practice, which I knew a little bit less about than the Inquiry practice. And the ways that you can work with other people, and can work on yourself to really release both the feeling and the belief together. And understand where they came from, and then let them go. So for people who are interested in doing some of that work, and in finding out more about you and your work, how can they do that?

[00:31:20] Hania Opienski

You can contact me at [Supernatural Health](#). On the website there is a sign up form, where you can watch a little video that goes into a little bit more detail about what I do, or you can email me there, or of course you can connect with me on [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#).

I'm actually launching a group program in the New year which actually will be for women, but really exploring these issues of toxic relationship with oneself, and finding how you can find balance, and harmony, and manage your stress, and your self-care.

I am going to be offering some workshops. I'm offering a retreat next year in Bali at a wellness resort with a friend of mine who's also a naturopath, and do some one-to-one work. So yeah, I welcome you.

I also work with medicinal mushrooms, so there's a [YouTube video on Microtherapy that I did with CNM College of Natural Medicine](#), and that's a good place to learn more about medicinal mushrooms, which is also something that I incorporate as part of self-care. Because they can be amazing for helping balance the nervous system, balancing hormones, stress management, sleep management, inflammation, all things that are core factors of when we are trying to find harmony in ourselves.

Jai Bristow

Absolutely. And we'll be talking more about medicinal mushrooms together at the next Trauma Super conference. I recommend people sign up to that as well. Hania, thank you so much for your time today. It's been a fantastic conversation.

Hania Opienski

Thank you so much Jai, great to do this with you.