



Trauma Healing for Empaths & Highly Sensitive People

Guest Dr. Judith Orloff

Alex Howard: Welcome everyone to this session where I am really excited to be talking with Dr. Judith Orloff. Judith, firstly, thank you so much for joining me.

Dr. Judith Orloff: You're very welcome.

Alex Howard: So in this session, we're going to be talking about healing trauma particularly from the perspective of people who are empaths or highly sensitive people, and will come into what that is in a moment.

But just for people that might not be familiar with Dr. Orloff's work, just to give her a professional bio: Dr. Judith Orloff is a New York Times bestselling author of *The Empath Survival Guide*, which is really a classic, the classic in this field, an excellent book I highly recommend. And her most recent book, *Thriving as an Empath*, offers daily self-care tools for sensitive people along with its companion, the *Empaths Empowerment Journal*.

Dr. Orloff is a psychiatrist, an empath, and is on the UCLA psychiatric clinical faculty. She synthesizes the size pearls of traditional medicine with cutting edge knowledge of intuition, energy and spirituality.

Dr. Orloff also specializes in treating empaths and highly sensitive people in her private practice. So, Judith, I think it's a good starting point, I'd love to come into a minute a bit about your story and how you came to do this work.

But just for anyone that's not familiar, when we talk about being an empath or a highly sensitive person, what do we actually mean by that?

Dr. Judith Orloff: Great question. I'm a psychiatrist in Los Angeles, I've gone through all my medical training, 40 years of medical training, and I'm also an empath. So I combine my traditional medical skills with what it means to be an empath, which I didn't always know what it meant. So it's been a process of me finding out throughout the years. But an empath is somebody who's very sensitive, very open, very intuitive, loving, can sense things, but they don't have the ordinary filters and boundaries that other people have. So my body and my system is wide open to the world unless I choose to utilize some self-care techniques to modulate that and regulate that.

But as an empath, I'm very open. I don't have the same filters and empaths tend to be emotional sponges where they sponge up their environment. Whereas somebody's feeling a lot of stress you might feel it in your own body and not know how to interpret that. Or if

you've been brought up in a home where you've had neglect or abuse or trauma, you might have picked up on all that and it's taken on in your system. So even as adults, you're still carrying it around. So empaths have beautiful, creative, intuitive, spiritual, open, loving, giving, healing traits. But at the same time they need to learn how to protect their own energy so they don't take on all the suffering of the world.

Now, which in the case of the world currently, that's a big problem for empaths. Empaths have very open hearts and they want to help. And so part of the self-care techniques that I talk about are how do you help but not codependent? How do you give but not give too much so you sacrifice your life's blood like a martyr? So these are some of the challenges that empaths need to work with.

So with these self-care techniques and I practice these self-care techniques every day, empaths can thrive and shine and contribute. And they love deeply. They're deeply passionate. All the positive, beautiful traits of an empath can come out once you learn how to work with the self-care techniques.

Alex Howard: And that's one of the things that I really, when I first came across your work that I really appreciated that, I think often empaths can feel like it's a curse. Because they can feel like they just get impacted, they're triggered, they find things that affect them, and it's very easy to focus on the negative of that.

One of the things I really appreciated when I came across your work was the emphasis on the fact that there are also gifts. There are also wonderful things that can come from being sensitive.

Dr. Judith Orloff: Well, that's the whole point, is that in this day and time in history, the empaths need to rally. Now, there's a saying in the Bible, "the meek will inherit the earth." I don't like the word meek, it can be interpreted as sensitive. The sensitive will inherit the earth and I believe that is so. And that's why I feel so passionate in helping empaths past their trauma, helping them not absorb the stress of the world or the stress of everyone else around them.

So they could be functional and get out there and be the light that they were intended to be. And so that's extremely important to me. The path to being an awakened empath involves overcoming trauma oftentimes. And the trauma can be minor. It can be major. But, I know we're going to discuss that in this interview, but empaths are on the road to empowerment and that's my goal. And in terms of myself now, as a physician, as an empath, I work with the boundary setting, meditation, visualization, being in nature, all the things that empaths love.

I embrace that in my life so that I can stay centered and grounded and not on sensory overload. Empaths often go on sensory overload and they could be on sensory overload for 10 years, 20 years, their whole life, their experience of living can be sensory overload. And that decreases immunity, it causes all kinds of depression and anxiety. And so one of the first steps to being an empath is learn how to decrease that sensory overload and know that you have the power to do that. And so it's about me working with myself every day and using my intuition, using self-care techniques and living the incredible life that it is to be an empath.

I love to go deep. I love to go deep and I love nature and I love the secrets of the universe. I want to be open, I do not want to shut down and become cynical or bitter or afraid or so traumatized I can't open up so I'm numb, I don't want any of that.

Alex Howard: Yes.

Dr. Judith Orloff: So I consciously work with myself.

Alex Howard: But of course, it wasn't always that way for you. I know that early on in your career it was a struggle. So say a little bit about how that, how your interest and your wisdom in this field, what that was birthed from?

Dr. Judith Orloff: Well, I was an only child brought up in Beverly Hills and I had two physician parents and 25 physicians in my family.

Alex Howard: Wow that's something.

Dr. Judith Orloff: A long lineage of scientific thinkers. And I was this little girl who was intuitive and sensitive and I liked being alone, and I loved the moon, I was very sensitive. But I couldn't go into shopping malls or crowded places without going and feeling fine and walking out exhausted or with some ache or pain I didn't have before.

I didn't know I was an empath then and so I was absorbing the energy of crowded places. And I always like one-on-one contact, I always had one best friend. I loved climbing trees. I didn't like going to large places or parties or noisy places because that's the temperament of an empath. But I've got to say that my parents never really supported me in my sensitivities.

They said, "oh dear, just get a thicker skin. Oh dear, you have to learn how to be stronger." And so I grew up thinking there was something wrong with me. And for me, there was a certain level of trauma to that because I never felt okay enough on my own. I didn't have any grandmothers or sisters or any friends to say, oh, no, honey, you're an empath. This is a wonderful thing, but this is what you need to do and we love you.

We're a circle of women, we're a circle of family helping you, had none of that. And so I grew up believing there was something wrong. And so part of, I would say the trauma in my past was that I got heavily involved with drugs in the 60s and in an attempt to decrease my sensory overload and fit in.

So I always felt like an alien from wanting a spaceship to come and land in my front yard and I never felt like I fit in. And so when I took the drugs back then, the substances, it helped me become less sensitive and more able to process stimulation. And this is not anything that I'm suggesting to anyone. I'm just saying sometimes if you look at the history of empaths and know why they do certain things. This is part of the trauma history that I take with my patients, did you use drugs? Did you use food? Did you use sex early on to escape your sensitivities or try to modulate it?

Alex Howard: It's almost a form of self-medication, right?

Dr. Judith Orloff: Yeah.

Alex Howard: Without knowing what was wrong, you could feel and you did the best you knew at the time to try and self-medicate, even though that course has its own ripples of consequence.

Dr. Judith Orloff: Absolutely. But see, that's the problem when empaths don't have guidance and they're feeling unseen, unheard or traumatized by a chaotic family environment. Now that's really a big factor with many empaths where they have parents who are yelling at each other, or substance abusers, or narcissists who are not seeing the person with a capital S, or chronic talkers or yellers.

Empathic children have a very hard time if they're in their bedroom and they hear their parents yelling outside. It's just like daggers in the body. So you talk about trauma or mini tears in the micro system, all that can happen to empaths early on. And I do link it under the title of trauma because an empath is not traumatized by their childhood. And I've seen many or some they have the support, they have people around them saying, tell me your dreams. Tell me your intuitions. Oh, you feel that way about someone. That's really interesting. Tell me. I didn't have that. I had looks of exasperation from my parents, why do you keep saying negative things about my friends when I share intuitions or my dreams? So what that does, that hurts. That's trauma that goes inward. I'm not okay.

So part of my own healing process has been, realizing it's more than okay, it's fabulous and it's okay to be an outsider. I've always been an outsider. I've always gone the road less traveled. So relieving some of the trauma I felt as an empathic child has been accepting myself. And coming into my empathic gifts and understanding them, I didn't have the verbiage growing up, so I didn't have anyone to help me. But now, that's why I feel so strongly about writing my books to help awaken empaths so that they don't have to go through what I went through. I had to reinvent the wheel all by myself. That's how it felt anyway.

Alex Howard: And that can be an enormously lonely and challenging experience, right? There's almost the trauma of the things that happen, the events, but there's also the trauma of not being seen and having to go through that pain and that suffering, thinking it's something wrong with oneself rather than something missing in the environment.

Dr. Judith Orloff: Absolutely. And I was an introverted empath. I write about extroverted empaths too. I'm really quiet, I spend a lot of time alone that's why being a writer is so perfect for me. I like being quiet.

I've always been quiet and my mother, who is a physician, was a major extrovert. You know, she had dinners with gatherings of people and I would just sit there being quiet and feeling, let me out of here, and feeling like two inches tall because I didn't feel good about myself.

So I thought I should be like her and everyone who's listening who has been in situations like that, you don't have to be like her. You want to be like anyone. You be yourself and the quietness, the introspection, all of that is something to develop as a gift.

Alex Howard: Yes. One of the things that, as a kind of empath, one of things myself is that I notice my wife and I will go out for dinner with friends or have friends over, and then we'll get home or they'll leave, my wife will go straight to bed.

I will then need one or two hours to be by myself, to listen to music, read, put the telly on. But just to come back into my own space, and my own quietness to settle, to be able to then go in and sleep. That quiet and that space is a necessary thing to recalibrate, in a sense.

Dr. Judith Orloff: That's absolutely so. Empaths need to decompress. Whereas your wife could just come home and go to sleep. Bam! She doesn't need the transition time.

Like many empaths and myself too, I need to meditate. I need to be quiet. I need to just bring it all down again before I can have that low stimulation level of going to sleep. Otherwise, it just seems like I'm too active. I can't sleep yet. So you need that slow time to decompress and if you give yourself that is a gift.

Alex Howard: Yes. You've touched on it already. But I just want to touch a bit more on this relationship between being an empath or highly sensitive person and trauma. Because maybe particularly how traumas can land or impact upon empaths, perhaps differently to others?

Dr. Judith Orloff: Yes, I go through the various ideologies of being an empath, including a hyperactive mirror neurons system, meaning the compassion neurons are firing on overdrive. And also how we process dopamine is a bit different because dopamine is the pleasure hormone and we don't need that big giant hit of dopamine that extroverts need to go to a stadium or a Stones' concert. We get happy reading a book, the little dopamine that comes from reading a book. Oh, that's so perfect. No, we don't need that big blast, so how we process dopamine is different. And then some empaths have had a traumatic childhood that has begun to shape them. And others develop an empath a little bit later, because the trauma happens later. And when you have trauma, if you have physical abuse, sexual abuse, if you see your parents fighting with one another, if you witness violence, if you witness something that is so shocking to your system you shut off. That strips your capacity to have the defenses that non empaths have.

Non empaths have a different energetic defense system around them, so they keep things a little more at a distance. Empaths don't and when you have trauma at such a young age, even if you do have the defense system, the trauma wears it down. And so you become raw and how it hurts, I can't take it. I'm listening to them fighting. I'm listening to them and watching them hurt each other. I can't take it. And that goes into the empath's body and it is processed.

The trauma stays in the body and the energy field until later on it can be worked through. And I want to emphasize this all can be worked through, there's so many wonderful techniques now. But what happens in an empath's body when you have trauma. It can stay with you a long time and it can manifest as physical symptoms that are mystery symptoms that could manifest as anxiety as depression. You don't quite know what's wrong, but you're always uncomfortable or you have post-traumatic stress where, empaths are sensitive to noise anyways. But if you hear a car backfire, everything is like a huge super response, like

the veteran who comes back from war and hears a tiny noise and suddenly he's back in the battlefield again.

That hyperresponsivity is very common to empaths that have been traumatized.

Alex Howard: And we start to just begin to touch on in a minute some of the ways that people can start to manage and deal with this. One of the things that I particularly appreciate about your approach is that you're integrating a traditional, as a practicing psychiatrist, as a traditional approach, with many other methodologies and ways of working.

I'm always curious about people that have managed to have a foot in both worlds in a sense and pull those together. And I think particularly with some of these things we're talking about, that can be really important. So just say a little bit about how you bring together those pieces.

Dr. Judith Orloff: It's important to me, it always has been, to integrate all my conventional medical knowledge, which I value so much. I cannot tell you how much I value that. And I think that's been in part behind some of my success and acceptance with the medical community, because I just value my colleagues so much. They don't need to agree with me, I don't have to have them agree with me. But I know some, many, many, many flock to this type of work and others are like, no, don't get it, doesn't make sense. But I like you.

It goes a long way because I've seen many practitioners get hostile, angry, rebellious against the medical profession. I don't think that's helpful. I mean, I think there's a lot of problems with the medical profession. But still, the basis is the relationships between you and your colleagues, whether they agree with you or not. It's never been my mission to get people to agree with me. But what it has been my mission is to put information out and if you resonate with it, you go for it. That's fine.

So I take a traditional history and I'm also listening with my empathic gifts and my intuition when a patient comes in, I'm listening to how my body is responding to them. I'm listening to my gut feelings or the flashes that come in and I integrate that with the traditional linear information that comes in. And also what's very helpful about me being an empath as a psychiatrist and a physician, is that I can read their bodies. I can read their energy field. And with empaths, empaths speak the language of energy, the subtle energy in the body, the chi that Chinese medical practitioners call chi, the shakti, the prana, that's very palpable to intuition. And so I can see where the wounding happens on a person's body and the healing of trauma has to be an embodied healing. It can't just be an intellectual healing, though.

The intellect is an important tool, it's very important to clear the trauma in your body. And so I can look at my patients and see, oh, you know, it's in their solar plexus or it's in their first chakra, which is the sexual area. Okay I see. And so it gives me a really wide perspective and I could integrate that with all of my traditional knowledge, it doesn't conflict at all. And all these people who think it's either this or either that, I use wisdom from everything, not just traditional medicine, but I've used wisdom from nature. I use the wisdom from everyone I talk to if it resonates. Wisdom is out there if you're open to it.

Alex Howard: And it's a great example as well of using the gifts of being an empath in terms of using those skills and those abilities within that work. I want to make a bit of a delineation here between the more classical PTSD, like big single events or might be multiple event trauma, from the more subtle micro traumas that people can experience. And perhaps starting with some of those big single events, sort of PTSD traumas.

How can empaths or sensitive people process and digest those? Because as you touched on earlier, one of the things that happens is that there's a system overload that happens, where it's just too overwhelming and it's too much.

So how can people start to work with that?

Dr. Judith Orloff: Very compassionately. When they're ready, I work a lot with people and their dreams. And so this trauma information really comes through in dreams, it's very clear. You can have a dream that you're being chased by a pursuer and you're running, running, running, but can't get away and then he pins you down.

Your dreams go right to the heart of trauma and a lot of times I asked the person if they're ready to deal with that, and if they're not, there's no point in dealing with it. You have to go in at the proper time. And so if a person is ready and at times they say, I am ready to deal with this, then you need to go back and layer by layer, gently, very, very, very gently and energetically see what the trauma was, because sometimes you don't remember it. If you do remember it, that's easier.

Alex Howard: Yes.

Dr. Judith Orloff: But it's a shock that you have to heal. It's a shock, major shock to the system that needs to be kind of loved out of you.

Alex Howard: Yes. There's a sort of metabolizing and digesting of it.

Dr. Judith Orloff: Right. I mean, some people I work with who have experienced trauma just present with G.I. symptoms. They don't have any memory of the trauma necessarily, but they have terrible G.I. symptoms. They've gone to every doctor and nothing works, and so that sometimes is a front for trauma. They go deeper, what's in there? And the beauty of the body and the way I work with people in terms of trauma or anything else is to go into the organ itself that's talking to you, and to energetically close your eyes, meditate, feel into that organ just on a sensory level. And if you go in on a sensory level, you suddenly get flashes, but you've got to go in.

You can't just hate it or stay away from the place that's hurting. You have to go into it and then be open to, oh, you know, I'm running down a beach. What's on that beach? Oh, I see a flash of my grandmother. I don't feel good around my grandmother. So you have to follow the little trail here with the person. So I work very closely with the person as to where they're going or if it's too much. If it gets to be too much, we stop. This isn't anything you can push yourself through, no pushing this is about you being supported and loved, I am here with you. We go as fast or as slow as you want.

Alex Howard: And it often takes a lot of holding and support for someone to be able to go to those places.

Dr. Judith Orloff: It really does. And the intuitive readiness, that's if the person isn't ready but they think, oh, it's a good idea. I don't want to go there with them because it's not going to be helpful, people know when it's time.

There are a lot of empaths that I've worked with who've come from very traumatic backgrounds generationally, where they've come from, their great grandparents were abusers, or grandparents were abusers, or parents were abusers and the empath is ready to shift that generational pattern. Whoa, they are the chosen ones whether they want it or not, they're ready. So you find somebody like that you know, that's a major change because they're healing work can then affect generations to come so that the trauma has dissipated in the generational line.

Now, that's really powerful work, but again, I emphasize the readiness to do this. You cannot force yourself to do this, it has nothing to do with that. It has to do with an intuitive knowing this is my path.

Alex Howard: Yes. And there's something about, I think part of what you're speaking to, the something about timing that at some point the time is right. And part of using the gifts of the empath is to be able to have that intuition, to be able to listen to that and to honor that. And if what one meets is a no, to honor that no, and not re-traumatize by pushing through.

Dr. Judith Orloff: Exactly. Honor the no. Believe me, the time will come when you will know, maybe now is not the time. I give workshops for health care practitioners and the general public, and sometimes they share dreams in the workshop. And someone might share the most trying dream, the most stressful dream that pointed to abuse and they're shaking like this, are you ready to get into it? No, no. This is too much pain. No problem. Go back. Find a place where you're comfortable in yourself and revisit it another time. As the dreams bypass the ego.

So I know sometimes people who are just in their linear minds say, oh, you know, dreams don't mean anything or they're just weird. They're just weird, I can't interpret them. From my point of view no dreams are weird in that sense. They're all offering you wisdom and knowledge and whether you're ready to work with it or not is another story. You might not want to and believe me, that's fine. I have people from all ages of life who are just awakening as empaths and there's no timeline for awakening.

It's not like a 22 you should awaken, or at 40 you should awaken. I have a woman who is 90 years old, who came in, who is awakening. It was her time. You know how beautiful that is? As an empath you can sense timing, that's part of intuition. It's learning the sense when the timing's right for you in your body. But if you've had trauma, it may be hard to be in your body.

Alex Howard: Right.

Dr. Judith Orloff: You may be floating outside of your body or your body may be numb. And so that's a bit of a different story, but if you feel intuitively this is time to work with this, I don't even know where it's going to lead and maybe it's too much, then I'll make that decision. But if I'm ready, just take a breath, put your hand on your heart and begin to settle within the confines of your body and not just outside of it. That's the first step.

Alex Howard: I think that coming into the body is something that often also happens in stages, right? That there's a wisdom of I can take this much, but that's my limit. And it's learning for people to feel safe and ground there before going through it. And there's again, it sounds like what you're saying is that really trusting the gift of the empath in terms of that inner wisdom and guidance. That for someone that's not highly sensitive might be quite hard, actually, to get that guidance and that information.

Dr. Judith Orloff: Yes, that's the gift of being an empath is that you have that beautiful guidance along with the lifting of the trauma. You see there's the healing of the trauma and then there's the awakening of the empath. So both are happening at the same time. That's why to me, it's so exciting. I know it's painful, I wish it was more comfortable for you, it's a very painful process at times. That's why you need a guide to be there with you. It's too much to do on your own.

Alex Howard: Yes.

Dr. Judith Orloff: It's just too much. You need to feel the love of somebody who is not afraid of your process.

Alex Howard: Yeah. And that's part of what I think provides the holding and the trust that you have got what it takes to bear and to face it.

So we've talked a little bit about those kinds of big T trauma events. But one of the things that can sometimes be almost more tricky is the much more subtle micro traumas of small life events that we almost get so normalized to that we don't really realize the impact. So perhaps say a little bit about that as well.

Dr. Judith Orloff: Yes, that's a good point. For empaths one of the biggest traumas, childhood and infant trauma is not being seen, not being held properly, not being spoken to properly, not being given the right amount of stimulation that would be supportive to your being. Not being seen making you fit into a mold, which is what happened to me.

This was very, very traumatic for me because it was the road less traveled. I was not the center of the mainstream and my parents were, and so they would take me and force me to go to these country clubs, forcing me to go here, you need to. Force me to dress in a certain way. I remember my mother took me to Neiman Marcus and got me all these three piece suits when I opened up my practice in psychiatry and said "this is how a doctor should look like." All right and I did it, and I felt uncomfortable. And so these are the more of them if you want to call them micro traumas.

In no way does it approach physical or sexual abuse in terms of trauma. But in terms of who you are as an empath, if somebody keeps telling you you're not okay and you need to be this

and not that, that can traumatize your system ongoing because it makes you feel like you're not okay with who you are. And that is something that I grew up believing and I was very lonely. But I always had nature and this is true of empaths that even if their external environment isn't exactly supportive, there's always the moon, there's always the wind, there's always the trees, and the water, and fire, and the sky, it's always there. So empaths instinctively go to those places to find solace.

Alex Howard: Yes.

Dr. Judith Orloff: No matter what's happening in their childhood, they look up, you know, go, wow. So that's a big plus.

Alex Howard: Yes. And one of the things that also strikes me about the story you just shared about your mom wanting to buy you the right clothes and get you in the right. I think part of what's also quite difficult with those experiences that in a sense, in her own way, your mom was doing that because she loved you and she wanted to set you up with the best possible start in your career. And sometimes I think when people are mis-attuned to us, but they're doing it with a good intention, with an unhelpful behavior, it's almost more difficult to be able to own the impact and how that's actually wounding for someone.

Dr. Judith Orloff: Well, she didn't really own it because she had a certain belief system about what would be good for me. And it was all the drugs, I was on a destructive path and so it was her job. She was very controlling and part of my healing path, and very loving, I mean, I was so important to her. You know, I was her only child, it was like too much as an empath.

It was totally suffocating for me, as her attention was always on me and she was very anxious. And so what happens, and this is a form of trauma too, with empathic children who have anxious mothers, I took that anxiety on as an adult and so I've had to work with that when that comes up and realize that's my mother's anxiety. Good part of it. It's not mine. So, you know, the mother has a way. I mean, my mother's been on the other side since 1991 and sometimes I still work with that energy when it comes in, because it's very powerful mother daughter stuff when you're young like that. And she and I would fight. You know, I don't really fight, I'm not a fighter.

But my mother and I would have these knockdown drag out fights because we were so in love/hate and it was just really an intense relationship for me. And she loved me madly, I loved her madly. I helped her die. You know, I helped my father die. And so really, really powerful, intimate, complex relationships, but the trauma can happen from well-meaning parents. You don't have to be a monster parent. You can be a very loving parent and not get it right when it comes to empathy.

Alex Howard: Yeah. And I think that that's a really important piece for people that feel confused by the fact that they feel trauma in their body or in their emotional body, if not their physical body. But my parents loved me and they did loving things for me.

But it's often that mis-attunement and it's that fact that the way that they're trying to be loving is actually having the opposite impact. Something that also I want to cover, some of the practical things in a moment.

But before we do, I think an important piece as well, is that part of this journey, part of the empath journey is coming back into their power and owning that power. What helps, what do you find helps people to do that?

Dr. Judith Orloff: First of all, the desire to want to become an awakened empath. Now, if you're feeling like when I'm talking, that something in you is moving and stirring and being ignited, then you're ready. It's really as simple as that on some level or if you're hearing something and you respond to it, don't go forward with any path or any treatment for trauma that doesn't resonate with you. Don't do it.

Your body knows what will be right. And so if you're listening to this, you go, wow, maybe I'm feeling a little more alive in my body. Maybe I'm feeling like I can breathe a bit easier. Maybe I'm a little less numb. That's where you start and if you want to develop your gifts, it's waiting for you at any moment. Just taking a breath, coming into your body, putting a beautiful shield around your body, which is a protective technique for empaths when you get around energy vampires or people who are traumatizing you, or people who don't know, or if you're in a chaotic environment and you want protection.

Now just the visualization technique of putting a beautiful shield around the whole body, you can summon your visualization powers to rearrange the energy around your body to be protective in a different way than it ordinarily is. So just that one simple act knowing that you could, I guess defend yourself, is a right. Protect yourself.

Alex Howard: Yes.

Dr. Judith Orloff: No, it's not so much to defend, but protect yourself. That you as an empath have the skills to deal with anything out there, including massive suffering. But this gets on a little bit more in terms of being an empath is how not to absorb the suffering of the world, and how to deal with your codependent patterns of wanting to over help and become a martyr. That too, is a pattern for empaths to look at. But what I'm saying is that this is part of the path of awakening.

This is what all empaths go through and you have to learn these things but it's step by step. The great news is that you can learn all this and the great news is that you can slowly release that trauma. And if you still have remnants of it at times throughout your life, you can work with the various levels of it as it comes back. And that's all fine. Rhonda's talks about how he was in therapy for so many years, worked with so many people and then when fear comes back, he goes, oh fear my friend, my old friend. Hello. Instead of, oh, my God is back again, you know.

Alex Howard: How about also, empaths putting in place boundaries and being okay to say these are my limits. This is not okay for me. These are the people that I am good to be around. The whole piece around self-care and self-protection. How important is that?

Dr. Judith Orloff: Well, that's why I wrote Thriving as an Empath, which is a different self-care technique each day of the year, starting January 1st and ending December 31st, one cycle around the sun.

Each day a different technique and I read that book, I love that book, I need that book as I practice what I write about. So I need it. I can't tell you how important if you're recovering from trauma, if you're being empowered as an empath, you need these techniques to work with the energy of the world so that you have a tool kit and know what to do. And you're not just overwhelmed by, oh my God, no, I encountered this narcissist today it was bla bla bla and then you start swirling. You don't want to do that. You want to come back, you want to say, I can deal with this. I can deal with anything. And so the self-care and the setting boundaries that you set is a key tool.

Key part of the empath's tool kit is you have to know that no is a complete sentence.

Alex Howard: That's great.

Dr. Judith Orloff: Yeah. No, I'm sorry I can't go out today. No, I'm sorry I can't take on that project right now because I'm fully committed. No, I'm sorry I can't listen to you talk for an hour because it's just too tiring for me and I'm practicing self-care right now, but we can talk for three minutes.

Before this whole shelter in place thing, I didn't like shaking hands with people even then, except for certain people. But energy is transferred through the hands. So people would come right at me with their hand, I would see them coming. They wanted to shake hands, and I would say, no I don't really shake hands, but thank you and at that time, people would go, okay all right I get it.

Alex Howard: You were just ahead of your time, right?

Dr. Judith Orloff: I was definitely. But you have to say it, it sounds weird and awkward, but it's how you set the boundary. If you say it, if you notice how I said it, I was smiling, I was friendly, I was just, no sorry, I don't do that. I wasn't like: stay away from me you energy sucker.

Alex Howard: And also, I think there's something about, just taking that example, with the empath's sensitivity towards others reactions of staying in your own body. And if someone is triggered by that or having a reaction about that, that's sort of their business. That's not something that you need to merge into and take on.

Dr. Judith Orloff: It's true. But there is a way to express boundaries that is optimal. And that is short and sweet, saying it with a smile, but firm. If they keep repeating it, maybe you repeat once or twice and say, I'm not going to go there. So you end it, you don't get into a confrontation when you set a boundary. If somebody is triggered and said, what kind of friend are you that you want to limit the conversation we're having together?

Take a breath, center yourself and you say, I'm a really good friend, I love you but I can only do it this much. And I love you, I am a good friend. It takes time for people to reorient patterns. So you have to be prepared for a little of that up and down with people. No, it's not just going to be, oh, I understand. No, it's, well, what do you mean?

So you have to be prepared to keep your center and be very confident about, no, I can only do this for three minutes. In thriving as an Empath there's a section called the three minute phone call, which is so essential for people to learn how to limit the time they talk on the phone.

Yes empaths often over give and they're listening for an hour, two hours after a long day at work to their friend who's in victim mode and not coming up with solutions, but just going round and round and round, which is the most exhausting kind of conversation you could have. And I've said this to friends, I'm really happy to be with you and the solutions, but if you want to just vent, you know, three minutes, I gotta get up.

Alex Howard: I think it's great and I think that it's also, in a sense, what I'm really hearing you say is it's teaching people how to treat you as well. It's like as much as it's a no to them, it's a yes to you. It's a form of self-love and self-advocacy.

Dr. Judith Orloff: It's true because if I don't do this, I get exhausted, I go on sensory overload, I'm not good for my mate, my friends, my work. I don't have clarity, I'm just drained because empaths are prone to fatigue and exhaustion and so I look at energy as an exchange. I mean, I have very positive support systems around me. But also sometimes I make a decision to sacrifice my energy in service of the other person.

That sometimes happens where you give a little bit too much and you're conscious of it. But then you want to come back and meditate or replenish yourself and have extra self-care, you see. So it takes a level of discernment and thinking about it. Do I want to do it versus I'm just giving everything to everybody because I'm such a giver and I want to help the world. Now, if you do that, you'll never survive as an empath. You've got to learn how to set boundaries and give with discernment.

Alex Howard: Talking of boundaries and time I'm mindful we're out of time. For people that want to find out more, Judith, about you and your work. Obviously, as you mentioned, the books and I mentioned at the start the *Empath Survival Guide*, you also mentioned several others. I know you've also got a new online course. So just say a bit about how people can find out more.

Dr. Judith Orloff: Well, the self-care book is called *Thriving as an Empath, 365 Days of Self Care for Sensitive People*. And I also have an online course, The Empath's Survival Guide Online Course, 9 videos that you could download at your convenience on my website. DrJudithOrloff.com and so you could find all those resources and I have a YouTube channel. I have an empath support community on Facebook that you can join.

The online course and all of the books are on Audible if you are an audio type person, and there's an empath's empowerment journal for those who love to write. It takes you through what are my fears of being an empath? How can I release these fears? How can I set

boundaries? One, two, three, four, five. And it's a fun journal, pretty colors and it's fun. Empaths tend to get a little bit overly serious. That's something to watch. And so it's important to have that fun and I wanted to make this journal of fun, beautiful childlike experience for you rather than this heavy duty inquiry.

So that's the tone of the journal, *The Empaths Empowerment Journal* website is DrJudithOrloff.com and I give all kinds of workshops, give workshops for health care practitioners, the general public, how to ignite your intuition and empathy. I'm giving an empath retreat in November in Los Angeles. So just check it out on my website and I'm just so excited to talk about this topic of trauma and being an empath and being part of this amazing summit. So thank you for inviting me.

Alex Howard: Thank you, Dr. Judith Orloff, I think this has been a really important piece of the jigsaw. And I've got a feeling there'll be people that are watching this that have perhaps found other stuff helpful, but finally gone, that's why I'm sensitive in this way. So thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

Dr. Judith Orloff: You're very welcome.