



Conscious Life presents

TRAUMA SUPER CONFERENCE

Developing Mindsight

Guest: Dr Daniel Siegel

Disclaimer: The contents of this interview are for informational purposes only and are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. This interview does not provide medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical or psychological condition.

[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson

Hello, welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of the Trauma Super Conference. Today, I'm delighted to be speaking with Dr Daniel Siegel, a clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine and the founding co-director of the Mindful Awareness Research Center at the University of California, Los Angeles.

An award-winning educator, he's a Distinguished Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association and recipient of several honorary fellowships. Dr Siegel is also the executive director of the Mindsight Institute, an educational organization which offers online and in-person seminars for individuals, families, communities and can be enhanced by examining the interface of human relationships and basic biological processes for human development. So, Dr Siegel, thank you so much for being with us today.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Meagen, thanks for having me. It's a pleasure to be here with you.

Meagen Gibson

So we were talking just before we started recording that I had just finished, I think, your newest book, correct me if I'm wrong, but *IntraConnected*, which we'll talk a little bit about. But there's one thing I didn't mention in your intro there is that you've written a lot of books and co-written a lot of books on a variety of subjects.

But I want to start by asking you about this term, 'mindsight', that you created, which I understand to mean the subjective life of our mind and the understanding of others' minds. Did I get that right?

Dr Daniel Siegel

Yeah, you did. The ability to sense that, to perceive it, to have sight for the mindsight. Yes.

Meagen Gibson

So I love this and how it relates to trauma, since this is the Trauma Super Conference and because lots of people who have experienced trauma of various types develop what we kind of call like

spidey sense, or extrasensory kind of perception about their environment and the people in it and things like that. And so how does mindsight play into this sense of self and for those who have developed trauma?

[00:02:06] Dr Daniel Siegel

Well, in a number of ways. The first thing to say is that the ability to sense your own inner experience, and to be able to do that in a way that is with empathy and compassion of positive regard is really sometimes challenged. When we beat ourselves up for painful things that have happened and we take responsibility as if we had caused them. Like if we're children being mistreated, we will say, oh, it's my fault. I'm the one who made this happen.

So mindsight would be the ability to not only sense those feelings, but then have a kind regard for yourself. And that's a part of something we call integration, where you're allowing things to be different and then to make connections across those differences. So kindness is one outcome of integration. Mindsight is basically that way you can have insight into yourself, empathy for others and an integrative kind of stance to one's inner life and the life of other people.

Meagen Gibson

I love the way that you said that too, because that self-compassion piece seems to be the first step, I think, on any trauma healing and trauma growth path.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Yeah, and I think sometimes the inner compassion, is what I would like to call it, where you realize yourself is both inside your body and in your relationships. So we would say there's an inner compassion you can have. There's an inter compassion, relational compassion. But then also realize that sometimes when people have been traumatized, knowing the mind of someone who's intentionally trying to hurt you is actually not so comfortable.

Because when you're perceiving their mind and they're really, with intention, strategically, purposefully trying to inflict harm on you, that's really frightening. So sometimes with trauma, early trauma, we actually shut down our mindsight abilities so that we're not perceiving the negative mental states of people who we're supposed to depend on. So that can be a way where we kind of are protectively, not developing mindsight.

And so sometimes people have been through trauma, either are flooded too much with what's going on inside or they've tried to shut it down in order to not know the inner worlds of their caregivers. So in either case, there's work to do when you've been through trauma, regarding balancing out your mindsight abilities.

Meagen Gibson

And that was one of the things that I love so much about your description of mindsight, and you talked about this integration piece earlier, but it brings together kind of what always felt like a separation for me around mindfulness practices. It felt like this separation from self and not just dissociation, that's the wrong word, but like a bypassing of, right, as a protective measure and can be taken too far, especially as a protective measure, as you just said.

[00:05:23]

And it makes sense if your caregivers hurt you, that that super sensibility of being able to really perceive their intentions and their inability to care for you in the way that you deserved. Cutting yourself off from that would be really difficult, just like you said, yeah.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Yeah exactly, Meagen, and I think it's really an important point you're raising that if you've gone through trauma, then these ways that you're learning to relate to others and to yourself are really going to be impacted from very early on. And the great news about that is that your mind can actually overcome these ways of doing it.

And I think actually, even though you said it's maybe a little too extreme to call dissociation, one of the things about mindfulness that is a vulnerability is that it allows you to get into kind of a spacious awareness, which, on the one hand, has a lot of potential for healing and on the other, if it's not done with a lot of support, can be a kind of dissociation, meaning a disassociation from your feelings and your memories and your thoughts. Because you kind of retreat into this spacious awareness that if it's done in that way, it is a kind of dissociation.

So we don't want that to happen. But it's one of the vulnerabilities that we have. So to really carefully allow someone to enter an open state of awareness and say, bring it on. I want to feel my feelings. I don't want to become this kind of numbed out human being who doesn't feel things, even though that might have been a strategy when I was younger, so that I could have all these painful things going on but not feel the pain.

What we want to do as the healing process goes on is really allow ourselves to be fully present for all those emotions, and yet at the same time have the skill of being resilient and not flooded by them. So that's why the word integration is kind of the way of seeing through that. You differentiate the feelings from each other and then link them. That's what integration is differentiating and linking. And in that process, you feel them fully, but you're not flooded by them.

Meagen Gibson

Feel them fully, but not flooded by them. Yeah, I really like that distinction. I want to come back to a couple of things that you said, but I also want to speak to what I think you kind of referred to earlier, which is this idea that sometimes people without trauma think that people with trauma, it's a much more voluntary experience than it is. Forget your feelings and move on.

So I want to talk about implicit memory because you talked about it in your latest book and didn't talk about it explicitly as it related to trauma, but that it felt so related in such an obvious way. So if you could talk to us about what implicit memory is, how it develops and how it takes part in our development of trauma?

Dr Daniel Siegel

Yeah. Well, in *IntraConnected*, this last book, there are many layers where implicit memory comes in. And implicit memory basically is, if you think about it this way, memory. That word really means how an experience at one time will be encoded into our nervous system and will influence our future ways of thinking or recalling things, literally bringing back to mind, or behaving even.

[00:09:14]

So it isn't just the simple things that we usually think about, oh, I remembered this morning I took the dog for a walk. That's a kind of memory. But there's other layers of memory that are before that experience. So those layers include the way you're perceiving something, like what you see with your eyes or hear with your ears, the way your body feels, so a kind of bodily sensation. The emotions you have, like anger, sadness, fear or even the behaviors like learning to walk or walking somewhere, walking the dog.

So all those foundations are laid down in the brain during an experience. That's called encoding. You then store them, and that's a change we believe in the connectivity among neurons. And then at a future time you're taking the dog out for a walk again, you would then retrieve something about those foundations of memory so that's the encoding, storage and retrieval part of any memory.

But then you've got this way where the brain summarizes experiences, it's something called schema or mental models and even gets you ready. So if the dog is barking, maybe she knows you're going to take her for a walk. I shouldn't talk too loud because I have my dog here. If I say walk, she'll probably say, let's go, dad. Those things are called implicit. And they're called implicit because number one, they're at this deep level and that's the feeling tone of implicit.

But also when you retrieve them, if they're in their pure form, you don't have the feeling, oh, I'm remembering something now. You're just walking the dog, right? So when I heard that years ago that implicit memory, in its pure form, isn't tagged with a sensation, oh, I am remembering something now, even though you are retrieving a memory. I had been working with people who had been traumatized, and kept on asking my supervisors why do people have flashbacks in posttraumatic states? What's going on with that?

And they said, we don't know. And here were some interesting findings, not from clinical memory research, but just from basic memory research. So I started speaking with those researchers who had made that discovery in the seventies. This was now in the early eighties. And I thought, well, what if the part of the brain that allows implicit memory to be taken to the next step, which is called explicit memory? And what's that next step?

It's where in the right side of the brain you encode what's called episodic memory or autobiographical memory, remembering of yourself and time walking the dog, or on the left side of the brain, that same hippocampus on the left side, is encoding things to factual memory. I know the fact that this dog is walked by this person called Dan at various times. I don't have a feeling myself doing it at a particular time, I just know the fact about it.

So factual explicit memory and autobiographical explicit memory, sometimes called episodic, meaning you're remembering an episode of an experience, when those are mediated through the hippocampus and they're stored and then retrieved.

They have the feeling to them, I call an ephoric sensation. Ephory is the process where a trigger connects with an encoded memory, that's storage, so that you now retrieve it. So Ephory is that matching of the trigger to the stored memory. And that sensation, we don't have a name for it, but I call it an ephoric sensation, meaning you're going, oh yeah this morning I walked the dog around

the corner and I ran into the squirrel and my dog tried to chase it and almost pulled my arm out of my socket.

[00:13:15]

So that's an experience I remember because it was raining or all these things. So self and time has a quality of oh, yeah, I was there, or factual is, I don't remember when I was there, but I know the fact the dog was walked by me. I don't remember it explicitly, from an autobiographical point, I remember it explicitly from a factual point.

So in working with patients, what was really interesting was to notice that sometimes people would only have implicit memory for an experience, and that would come up as a flashback in a post-traumatic condition, or it could come out just as like I don't know why, but there's a feeling of familiarity, but I'm not sure. Well, you actually walked the dog, Dan, this morning. Oh, yeah, that's it, that's it. And the squirrel, there's something about a squirrel, I don't know what it is.

So the hippocampus, this is my hypothesis, the hippocampus during trauma is flooded by the stress hormone, cortisol, and there are lots of cortisol receptors on the hippocampus, and it temporarily shuts down. So if you block explicit encoding and have pure implicit encoding, it basically explains much of post-traumatic stress disorder. And then what became really important about that was that the clinical interventions could use that model and do directed work to retrieve implicit memory from its stored place. So now it's in consciousness.

So this is not the same as non-conscious memory, because any memory that's only in storage and hasn't been retrieved yet is not conscious. So this is not the same as unconscious memory. Even though a lot of my colleagues will say, oh, implicit memory is unconscious memory. I go, no, that's just not true. Implicit memory, when it's stored, is unconscious, just like explicit memory, when it's stored, is unconscious.

What's different is that when it's in consciousness, pure implicit memory doesn't have the tagging of I'm remembering something from the past, but it's fully in your awareness as an emotion, as a bodily sensation, as a behavioral action and even mental models. That I believe all dogs should be walked. And you go, damn, why do you believe that? And you go, I don't know. It's a feeling I have. All dogs should be walked. And I will develop a whole edifice and organization around that belief, all dogs should be walked. And all the people who believe dogs should be walked.

Meagen Gibson

I'm just sitting here thinking about your poor dog.

Dr Daniel Siegel

She's taking a big nap.

Meagen Gibson

She's like ah, he does this all day.

[00:16:07] Dr Daniel Siegel

He uses me, that's all he wants from me. Uses me as an example. She's so cute, you wouldn't believe it. She's a rescue pup. Anyway, yeah, so the first time this became really clear, besides my patients, but in everyday life was a colleague of mine had been yelled at by her therapist. She was leaving town because she was transferring to another job, and she said, oh, you know, this is our last session, I need to tell you about all this trauma I had as a child.

And he goes, what's wrong with you that you leave this important fact out for the last day of your therapy? You're really not a good patient or whatever. And she was so upset. She said, all this time, I had just a feeling about these memories. Nothing clear. So then I explained to her about implicit versus explicit memory. She started crying. She said that just explains my whole life. And so the good news about it is you, at any age, can start integrating this implicit layer of memory into explicit.

And then the next layer would be to move from just explicit facts and explicit autobiographical memory, into what's called an integrated narrative, where now you find meaning in the memory. And that's this whole journey of integration that I think therapy is really all about, to go through these different domains. But anyway, yeah. So that's a long answer to a short question, Meagen.

Meagen Gibson

It wasn't at all. And in fact, you teed me up to my next question perfectly.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Oh, okay. Good teamwork.

Meagen Gibson

I couldn't have done it better myself. Yeah. So I came to your work originally through your parenting books, kind of co-written, or not kind of co-written, very much co-written by Tina Payne Bryson. I've interviewed her for our relationship conference as well.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Oh, great.

Meagen Gibson

And I have to tell you, as someone on a long path to healing my own trauma and extremely determined not to pass it on to my children, your work, and Tina's for that matter, has made the biggest difference in my life. And first, I didn't anticipate this, but by reading your books, I was able to first use it all on myself. And I think this is by design, it was no accident.

Dr Daniel Siegel

As it should be. As it should be.

[00:18:27] Meagen Gibson

It's no accident to you, but it was a surprise to me. I was like, oh, I have to do this first, and then I can apply it outside. But it helped me heal old wounds and integrate experiences and rewrite those narratives, as you were saying. And then I could turn it outward to the way that I relate to my children, not try to change them and their behavior, but just how I relate to them.

So I'm hoping that you can describe what I found so hopeful about not having to be a perfect parent, in order to be a good parent, and how that relates to the four S's that you describe that are essential to healthy, secure attachment?

Dr Daniel Siegel

Absolutely. Yeah. Well, first of all, I love Tina, and I'm so happy that the books that Tina and I wrote are helpful for you. Tina and I never would have written a parenting book, had I not written a book with Mary Hartzell called *Parenting From the Inside Out*, which really took the research finding that's, just like what you're saying, Meagen, first, know yourself. If you really want to help your kid, take the time to reflect on what happened to you when you were a child. And that's the book, *Parenting From the Inside Out*, with Mary Hartzell.

And once Tina knew that book, and was studying my other work on a more professional, academic level, she started having kids. And then we said, hey, you know, let's do this project together. So that project turned into four books, which we're very excited about. So in *Parenting From the Inside Out*, though, what you do is you get a summary of what the inner work would be about knowing yourself and where you've been.

And then what Tina and I did, this was after Mary passed, but we wrote a book called *The Power of Showing Up*, which kind of, in some ways, is a direct extension of *Parenting From the Inside Out*. As you've done the *Parenting From the Inside Out* work of showing up for yourself, now, how do you show up for your kid? But the research is really clear. If you haven't shown up for yourself, it's going to be really hard to show up for your kid.

So what does showing up mean? Well, showing up means these four S's you're talking about. The next book I'm writing is a book on how temperament leads into personality, temperament in childhood leads into adult personality. And these S's are actually relevant there, but that could be for another talk.

Meagen Gibson

I can see how they'd be relevant, though, because depending on how your temperament was incorporated into your family system by the adult caretaker in your life, that can determine a lot about how you turn out as an adult.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Exactly. Well, exactly. I'm so immersed in that book.

[00:21:17] Meagen Gibson

I bet.

Dr Daniel Siegel

I'm writing it with several colleagues and it's been taking about 17 years to have it finally be completed and we're like in the very last couple of weeks. So it's a very exciting time. But anyway, I don't want to get flooded with that.

But in terms of the S's, what the S's are is being safe, being seen, being soothed and being secure. So let's go through each one of them, remembering that, especially as we go through them, there's no such thing, as you're pointing out, of perfect parenting. And I think one of the biggest, personal challenges I had ever, writing a book for parents was the fact that there is no such thing as perfect parenting. That I knew myself as a dad, there are all sorts of ways I messed up.

So the way I took that on directly as a therapist, as an educator, and as a writer, was to really start with what I'm about to say, which is that it isn't about being perfect as a parent, it's about being present. And by being fully present, by showing up in that way, you realize you're only human. So that mistakes and flub ups and miscommunications and disconnections, all those things, they are going to happen.

I've met one person where it kind of didn't happen, and that had its own problems, actually. That everything was always controlled like this. When you're spontaneously, fully there, stuff is going to happen. You miss an opportunity to understand what's going on, or you're too enthusiastic and you missed a subtle clue, or you had something in mind that was so important to you, that you were so devoted to what you wanted to say that you didn't really listen well, and all these things.

In all my books, I write about the mess ups I've done when my kids were younger, and they were old enough to read what I wrote, and I gave it to them before I published it. And I said, is this accurate? And they say, yeah, this is accurate, but why would you want to share with the world what a jerk you can be? Good. I mean, that's exactly what I want to convey, is that you can actually be a writer of these books and mess up so fully your kids think you're a jerk. And read the part where I said, and once you've shown your jerk capacity, you then come back and reconnect.

So even though we're going to go through these S's, it's super important to say you can have a direction you're aiming for, but realize, since you're human, which is a good thing to be, and since you're role modeling for your kids, which is really good, that you can make flub ups and course correct. You can always begin again. And the worst thing is to act like the flub up didn't happen and just pretend like it didn't happen or assert that, oh, it happened on purpose because it was good for your kids that you acted like such a jerk or whatever. No. Just say whoops. Wow. That was not right, what I did. I'm so sorry. What was that like for you? Oh, it was so scary. You did this.

It must have been a dream I had the other day, because I have a chapter in one of my books called 'The Crepes of Wrath', where I got really wrathful at a crepe store. And I think it was a dream I had last night, actually maybe getting ready for this talk with you, with this conversation. It was like, oh, look, someone actually did some kind of jar that said 'Crepes of Wrath' or something like that. Now I'm realizing it was a dream, it wasn't a reality.

[00:25:06]

Okay, so what is the S's? The first S is safety. And that's literally what attachment is all about, your child is going to be protected from harm by you. And sometimes, something's not going to go right, and you missed an opportunity to protect them, or you might have even been the source of terror for them. Now, mistreating children is not good, and it's better to recognize that you're doing it and then stop it and make a repair and then do your inner work so you don't do that again. It's much better to do that than just pretend like what you just did didn't happen.

Now, that can be physical, of course. It can be other ways, where you're yelling and screaming and scaring your child. So safety is really, really important because if a child is terrified of their parent, and I don't mean frustrated with you because you didn't let them have ice cream before dinner, I mean terrified of you because of what you did, even if it wasn't what you were doing to them.

You might have been yelling at the TV because of some political issue, or you might have come home drunk or you might have dissociated yourself because you have unresolved traumatic issues. So not even abuse, direct abuse, but actually just terrifying behavior. That needs to be repaired. So safety is number one.

Number two is seen. And being seen means that the inner life of the child is focused upon by the parents. And it's sensed and respected and responded to in a timely and effective manner. And as one of my first patients ever said this to me, it's the best phrase, and I'd like to quote her, but I'm not allowed to give her name because she's my patient.

I can see her right now as we're speaking. She said at the end of therapy when she got better, and I didn't know why she got better because I didn't do anything my supervisors told me to do. So I said, yeah. And she said, yeah, oh, I got better. It's obvious why I got better. So I said, I know it's obvious, but how would you put words to this obvious thing? She said, 'Never before in my life have I ever had the experience of feeling felt by someone'.

I went, wow. And she was my first teacher, really, of how therapy works, because all these theories and all these approaches, they just never made sense to me. But she really taught me this importance of your inner life was really felt by another human being. And that's what mindsight allows you to do. That's what being seen for a child is, they're no longer alone in the world and they're a part of a 'we' without losing the 'me'. So that's what seen is.

And of course, ruptures to that happen all the time. And we make a repair. We make a repair. And it isn't that repair means you're a bad parent. The repair means one thing. It means you're a human and you're role modeling for your child that you can have a direction you're trying to go in a relationship, and it doesn't always go that way. And you become aware of it. You reflect on that disconnection from what you're intending, and then you make a reconnection, a repair and you rejoin. No big deal.

You can make a big deal and beat yourself up, but then you're missing the reality that you're human and you want to teach your child, hey, humans do this but they don't just let bad things happen. They recognize, wow, that was bad. Now I'm going to correct it. It doesn't mean I'm a bad person. It means the action was harmful, was not respectful, wasn't kind, whatever it was. So that's the seen experience.

[00:29:12]

The soothed is really the fact that when we're in a state of distress and we don't feel good, connecting with someone who we really trust can make us feel better. So soothed means, I felt bad and now I feel better. That's what it really means. And I was just writing an article with one of my colleagues at the Mindsight Institute, and when you really get down to the simple things, this soothed thing is actually quite simple. It's really an integrated connection.

So honoring differences and promoting linkages, for really interesting reasons, allows the system of the 'we' to take a distressed state and bring it into a state of harmony. So there's a whole physiology of that, but we don't need to talk about that now. But it's really important that it's the subjective experience that you're tuning into that being seen. The child feels safe, so these all go together. And now within that sense of trust, they can really connect with you, even in a space of distress, so that they feel joined and now they feel better and they don't feel alone.

And when they have those three S's and when they're not there, the repair is made of the rupture. Then you get the fourth S, which is secure. So ideally we all would have something in our lives like that. Unfortunately, for about a third or even more people these days, they don't get that on a reliable basis with their primary caregiver. And the way the brain develops to try to get along day-to-day, to survive that kind of suboptimal attachment is a part of what is the legacy of what's called insecure attachment.

I call it nonsecure because it isn't that you are insecure, it's just that your experiences were not optimal and you adapted the best way you could. So that's my problem with the word in the research literature of insecure is that people think, oh, that's an insecure person. No, that's not what that means. It means that person adapted the best they could to a very non-optimal situation. So that's the story of the four S's.

Meagen Gibson

I always like to also give the caveat that it doesn't have to be with any malicious intent from the parent either, right? Like this happens a ton from people who just cannot, because of their own limited capacity, for whatever reason, meet the needs of their children in one of these ways. For me personally, I had a chronically ill parent, right? And that wasn't her fault that she was chronically ill through my childhood. But that meant a lot of the time I wasn't seen, I wasn't soothed and led to a feeling of a lack of safety, right?

Dr Daniel Siegel

Absolutely.

Meagen Gibson

Doesn't mean that I had a bad mom. It means I had a bad situation that led to a lot of this stuff. Yeah.

Dr Daniel Siegel

What's been the most helpful for your journey towards healing and integration?

[00:32:23] Meagen Gibson

He's turning the tables on me. He's good, y'all.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Uh oh.

Meagen Gibson

I would say realizing that creating safety and feeling seen and feeling soothed is first and foremost an inside job, and has to be done by me, for me. And maybe people with trauma can relate to this, but there's a tendency, there's a voice inside people who are recovering from trauma who's, I can't trust anyone. It's always going to be me, right? So at the beginning, that felt scary of that kind of inside out job, of the, I need to do this from the inside out.

I can't depend on anybody else because that activates that voice of, like, I can't depend on anyone, no one will ever take care of me, blah, blah, blah. But it's not that, it's from a truer place of self. It's from a deeper soul, connected. This is the care I deserve to give myself. It's the care I deserve to get. And so I'm going to figure out how to meet those needs in that way. And then what ends up happening is that everyone around me wants to see me and soothe me as much as I do for myself.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Yeah. Beautiful.

Meagen Gibson

If that makes sense.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Yeah, it totally makes sense, and, yeah, that's really inspirational.

Meagen Gibson

Thanks, Dan.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Thank you, Meagen.

Meagen Gibson

I'm happy to be at your conference now. Turn the tables back around on you. So we're not running short on time, but we're going to have to wrap up soon. And I cannot let you go before I talk to you about the story that you shared, and I'm not sure, so let me know. I think it's the first time you shared the story, but in *IntraConnected* about your fall from the horse. Is that the first time that you shared it?

[00:34:06] Dr Daniel Siegel

Well, it's the first time I've shared it in that much detail. Absolutely, yeah.

Meagen Gibson

And so if you could tell us about it, only because it's not only like that is technically, in clinical speak, a trauma that you suffered, but it also gave you a perspective that shaped your work for many years to come that I find both fascinating and yeah. I would just love it if you would share whatever you're comfortable sharing.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Sure. Well, I mean, the literal thing, Meagen, you're asking me about is when just before I turned 20, I was working down in Mexico for the World Health Organization, and in one of the projects, I was studying curanderos, folk healers. I was going up to a small town called Waula and I was going to interview the queen of the mushrooms. And it was very exciting and I didn't have any experience with that. And I was really looking forward to deepening my learning of folk healing.

But I was going with two colleagues, actually. One was a colleague and one was a boy who lived in the house we were staying in. And we had three horses, and on the full gallop we were going. And I love riding horses. My young horse had inflated his belly enough so that at the gallop, the air escaped his lungs and his belly and everything like that, and so the saddle got loose and unfortunately the saddle turned to his belly. My feet stayed in the stirrups and then I was dragged for a long time, 100 yards, my colleague told me.

And besides damaging my face in a very serious way, I lost my identity. I had no idea who I was. So for about a day, for about 24 hours, I didn't have much language and didn't have, like you might call it, a narrative identity. So everything was like new and fresh and kind of hilarious, actually. I was laughing a lot even though I had all these broken bones, and it was just magical. Things were shimmering and colors were like glowing and it was just wild.

And then after about a day, my name came back and my identity came back and my explicit memory of who I was, what was the fact of this person called Dan and what were the facts involved in him getting here and where was I, and all this stuff. And I never understood until years and years, decades later, what significance that had. But it really shifted my relationship with my identity.

That I never took it really quite as seriously, or when people call me Dan, which is my given name, or Daniel, part of me inside of myself would be laughing. That can't really be something that's solid, a narrative identity, an identity of the story who you tell yourself to be, if it could get knocked out by a horse accident like that.

So later we learn, the regions of the brain that probably got temporarily, for 24 hours, disabled from the head hitting on the stones, that we could understand that was kind of knocked out of commission for a short period of time. So I had no identity, no narrative identity. But I had full awareness. And this was the fascinating thing, is you can be completely aware. And awareness was different from the narrator, very different.

[00:37:47]

And now we know that in various mindfulness practices, we were just talking about that when we got started. Or even in psychedelic uses in medical research. They're finding that the ability to loosen up this narrative identity of a separate self is actually, probably the key feature to treating all sorts of very serious conditions like depression or anxiety disorders, certain aspects of trauma or even people facing a terminal illness and facing death.

Meagen Gibson

OCD as well. Aspects of obsessive compulsive disorder and things I heard.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Exactly, yeah. So there's a practice called the 'Wheel of Awareness' that I talk about in the *IntraConnected* book, where the states of awe that you get in the center of the wheel, this hub of the wheel, pure awareness, are very much like the experience of awe in these different interventions that expand the sense of who you are.

And the reason I wrote the book, *Intraconnected*, and the reason I start with that story of the horse accident is that the book is really all about who are we really and what does culture tell us that we are, and that maybe the message from the larger modern culture is actually a trauma-inducing message. What I mean by that is there's something that we call epistemic trust, which is when people who we're supposed to rely on are telling us trustworthy things, consistent with reality. We call it epistemic, which is how we come to know what we know.

Trust where you can rely on somebody. So it's a violation of epistemic trust to be told that the self is separate. So this is where the intraconnected word comes in, where, okay, well, you are a separate body and you are connected to other bodies in nature. So we're interconnected, but actually there's a larger self that is intraconnected as a part of the woven system of the whole. And what if we could actually have both the inner 'me' and this relational 'we' and the intraconnected experience would be 'MWe'.

So the feeling of this body Dan, is that any opportunity we can have, like Meagen here, speaking with you and everyone listening, to identify this lie of the separate self and its trauma-inducing repercussions and liberate ourselves from that so that we realize that as a human family, we're all woven with each other. But as a family of all of nature, we're all woven with each other.

So I think that's the big trauma of modern times that's leading to racism and social injustice, it's leading to polarization and even leading to environmental destruction. So all these things are very traumatizing, and we can actually identify the kind of splinter that's in the soul of the psyche of modern society, and take it out by realizing the self is not just in the body. You are a 'me' and you are a 'we', and together you're a 'MWe'.

Meagen Gibson

And I know you touched on it just a minute ago, but part of that, that's the reason you developed the 'Wheel of Awareness' practice, right, was to help people cultivate that sense of 'MWe' and the sense of intraconnectedness. Am I correct in that?

[00:41:16] Dr Daniel Siegel

Well, it was sort of the reverse. You know, the two ideas were that integration was the base of health and consciousness that was needed for change. And then with my patients years ago, I had them try out integrating consciousness, which was putting the knowing of consciousness in the hub of a wheel, putting the knowns on the rim, and then moving a spoke around to link them. And in the course of doing that, one of my patients came up with the idea to bend the spoke around and just aim attention right into pure awareness.

And their whole sense of self expanded. They felt connected to everything and everyone. Their sense of love emerged. And then I did it with other patients. They started having similar experiences. With my colleagues and students, therapists. I started doing workshops. I did it before the viral pandemic, 50,000 people in person. And this was a really common experience. And that's kind of where 'MWe' came from, was actually it came from just the practical experience of trying to help people integrate consciousness that was helping them in all these ways, that then this larger sense of self was liberated.

Meagen Gibson

Beautiful. Wow. Where can people find out more about you and your work and the 'Wheel of Awareness'?

Dr Daniel Siegel

Yeah, well, come to our website and we have two linked websites, but the one to come to for the wheel is drdansiegel.com. And there we do the 'Wheel of Awareness'. There's all sorts of free videos and stuff. If you want to take courses, I get a real deep immersion. There'll be a link when it'll say courses, it will link you over to the Mindsight Institute website. And there's a whole online program that you can dive into, and welcome.

Meagen Gibson

Wonderful. Dr Dan Siegel, thank you for being with us today.

Dr Daniel Siegel

Meagen, thanks for having me. It's been a real pleasure.