CASAT Podcast Network

Hello and welcome to season four of CASAT Conversations.

I am your host, Heather Haslem.

This season we will explore the impact of trauma on those who work in human services you'll hear from researchers, authors and people with lived experience.

We hope you enjoy today's conversation today.

We're excited to have Daniel Maté join us.

Daniel just published a book with his father Gabor Maté.

This September the book is called the myth of normal trauma illness and healing in a toxic culture.

Welcome Daniel, thank you.

It's nice to be here.

It's great to be here with you today.

So as we get started, I'd love for you to just share a little about you A little about me.

Okay, let's boil it down.

I am 47 years old, born in Vancouver British Columbia raised there.

I currently live in Brooklyn New York, which has always felt kind of like my actual home, I don't know, I always felt like I had a bit of an east coast soul um And I am a musical theater writer, which is one of the reasons that New York fits for me.

I have an MFA from NYU in music and lyrics for the stage.

Um and I've been doing that on and off really for the past 15 years.

I also run what I call a mental chiropractic service called walk with Daniel and um I am, I also have a YouTube channel called lyrics to go, which is where I nerd out over song lyrics of every kind from Stephen Sondheim to Jay, Joni Mitchell to Metallica, I mean everything.

Um and then yeah, most most recently and most I guess prominently at the moment, I'm the co author with my dad of this, of this spanking new book, the myth of Normal.

And we also collaborate on a workshop called Hello Again, A fresh start for parents and their adult Children, which will be doing a couple of incarnations of live this fall in various places.

And then we're gonna get started on writing a book and uh we're planning to do a podcast of it um sometime next year.

So all of that, among other things, is who I am, very cool.

How did you come to write this book with your dad?

Um He showed me the book proposal uh that he had written his draft of it, which my mom had told him was just too much too heavy to dance too serious, not fun, I think uh the title was originally going to be toxic culture, how capitalism makes us sick, which sounds like a real party, you know, actually by the time he showed it to me, he had already come up with this better title, the myth of Normal.

We didn't quite have the subtitle yet.

But anyway, he showed it to me because I had, I had done editing for him in the past.

I I on on his last book, in the realm of hungry ghosts.

I was his front line editor where I would take, you know, the chapters he would send me and do some work on them, make some suggestions, but it wasn't that intensive.

Um, he sent this one to me and I was really excited about the concept and the scope of it.

I mean, it's such a huge lens, right?

It's not just looking at everything from the cell to society and how it's all connected.

Um and this really looked like it had the potential to connect with a much broader and more mainstream audience, I would say, um, than he had ever done before, because it wasn't about one particular disease or affliction or issue, it was about connecting the dots between so many different things, which is something my dad does really well.

So I was I was both excited and motivated by the ambition of the thing, but also I could see where it was falling short in the execution.

Um I could just sense that, oh, this, you know, this argument could be tightened, this story could be told differently.

We could build this the ark of the book differently.

I was starting to have structural instincts the same way I do when I'm working on a musical or something, or working on a song, a song is really well, has to be really carefully crafted to tell a particular story or to express a certain character.

And I was finding that I was reading this, I was things were percolating, I'm like, I kind of know what to do with this sort of, and so I just kind of spontaneously said to him, I think I know how to help you with this, but I'm gonna need to be credited because I think the work I would need to do on this would be something more like a co author.

And I know, and I was all kind of, I was a little nervous because I was very aware, like, I'm not a doctor, I'm not a trauma therapist, I don't have his qualifications in that respect, but I I needn't have been that nervous about it.

He said, I was hoping you would say that because I really need I really need help with it because, you know, I'm not those things and at the same time, I know my dad's work inside Out and I know his personality and I know his voice and I have my own and, you know, we set about from their creating some kind of collaboration where we could um you know, obviously the first person in the book is him.

He's the I me mine in the book.

Um but ultiMatély we ended up finding, I think a writing voice that was the, you know, combination of the best of what we both bring to the table and it was a really exciting process, but that was how it started.

And that was about four years ago that we signed the book contract for this book.

And the second book.

Well, I've been reading it and I'm I'm about halfway through it is very dense and I am loving it.

It does really um as you said, connect the dots on so many levels, bringing in, you know, the connection between our physical health and our mental health, that mind, body connection um and how the environments that we live in um and the toxicity of our environment really does play a role on our health and well being.

So just a deep, a deep out of gratitude because it helped um even me and my work, you know, think about things on a broader level.

So it's really awesome.

That's great to hear and I'm excited to see what you think of the second half which contains all the good news.

Yeah, I'm still reading about, you know, how we where we are and that's that can be that is heavy.

It is, it is heavy.

What is the idea hopefully?

Is that the minute you see things for for what they are, even if you get a little stab in the heart, like at the same time you're like, okay, I get it like that's something clicks and you're no longer fumbling in the dark to connect the dots, like when you can see the connection between things, you're already on your way to empowering yourself to do something about it.

But sometimes it stings the truth hurts.

The truth will set you free.

But first it'll pass you off as the as the old expression goes, yeah, I wholeheartedly believe that, you know, awareness is the key to making change.

And so this really this first part is so much about awareness raising.

Yeah, that's right.

I'd love to hear.

So you said you do mental chiropractic walk with Daniel.

Um and so what is, please tell our listeners what is mental chiropractic?

Good question.

Um I made it up.

Um The moniker of mental chiropractor was given to me by someone who I was working within a certain context where, you know, he might have expected that I was a therapist given the context, but he said to me, kind of incredulously, he's like, you're not a therapist at all.

I said you're right.

So you're not like your father, I said you're really right, that's that's right.

I don't know what I am, but I'm not that.

And he said, well you're kind of more of a mental chiropractor.

I was like, oh yes, I am.

Because what does that bring to mind?

Well, it brings to mind a kind of quick intervention, like a chiropractor is not gonna be the most patient practitioner in the world.

Like obviously they're not gonna be hasty, they want to get it right, but you go into the chiropractor and they want to make the adjustment that day, like during the appointment, as opposed to you go see a therapist where you open up about your childhood and they nod, and then when the time is up there, like, great, I'll see you next week.

And it's sort of an open ended process.

And what I tell my clients is one of the things that makes me not a therapist is I'm not trying to see you next week, which is not to say people can't come back, but I want people to come back with a fresh problem.

Um and the other side of that is that the chiropractor work, chiropractors work on alignment.

They work on human physical spine.

And I do so with the mind, I envision the mind as having a kind of spine as sort of ideal alignment, where our intentions and our values consciously expressed form the organizing principle, and then everything else falls into place around that our thoughts are aligned with, that our emotions are aligned with that our perceptions.

We clear away any um preconceived ideas or any prejudices.

We have the entire mind at our disposal, which also includes all of our talents, all of our gifts, all of our spontaneous faculties When we get stuck in life.

In particular situations, I I envision the mind as being out of alignment.

Something is pinched, something is bent, something is compressed, something is just working against something else, you know, And often it's that we have our conscious intentions, but there's also hidden covert intentions that might be operating.

We have, you know, our intellectual knowledge of what's going on in the present, but we have our perceptions that are coming from the past that are clashing with that.

Um, we might have our beliefs and our principles, but then we have our emotions that are saying something else.

And it can be very hard to see what that is.

It's very hard to lift up our own hood.

It's like, you know, if I asked you to tell me directly without looking in a mirror or a photograph, what color your eyes are, You wouldn't be able to you can only go on secondary evidence and you know, we usually see through our own point of view, we don't see our point of view and what I do with people is they bring to me a specific stuck point in their lives.

So not a big capital I issue if someone says I've got daddy issues, I say, okay good.

You go see a therapist, if someone says I've got an issue with my dad, then we can talk because you know, my dad is this specific person that I'm seeing next week for a holiday or you know, we're having lunch and I know it's gonna go this way and it always goes this way and I wanted to go some other way, but no matter which way I look at it up, down sideways backwards, inside out, I can only see it going this one way.

Well, that means I'm stuck and I need to kind of pop the hood and see what's going on in there.

That has me only see it from one fixed perspective, that is the most stressful and upsetting perspective possible.

Why can't I see it from the perspective of being a capable, gifted, creative, flexible, loving person, which I also am.

One thing I always say to clients is that when when we're stuck, our best faculties are gifts or strengths, the things we most need to get us through those moments go out the window just when we most need them.

So it's it's it's really about recovering a connection to the best in us that can get obscured when we're under that kind of acute stress of dealing with something that's stuck and stuck.

Things can be chronically stuck, that could be there for a long time or it could have just cropped up, it can be kind of mild or very, very severe, but either way it's a sense of a constricted range of options with a particular situation and someone comes to me and we set an intention together and we take a walk.

They're walking where they are.

I'm walking where I am.

We're on the phone usually because most of my clients don't live in New York City.

I walked with a woman in Paris the other day talking to a woman in Los Angeles.

Reykjavik, Montreal Saudi Arabia, I mean it's been all over the place and over the course of that walk, we set the intention and then make the adjustment as needed.

And it's partly improvised and it's partly a kind of method that I've developed just over the course of hundreds of different walks with people.

And I just love doing it.

It's it's fun and as far as I know, I'm the only one, so I like that too, especially unique, although at some, some point it might be nice to, you know, see if it can live outside of my little sphere and I think probably could probably could teach it, but I'm not sure how, not yet, at least.

Uh that's very cool.

I love hearing about multiple healing modalities.

Um I think there's many approaches to mental health and so I love hearing about mental chiropractic sounds like you really work with the person to um realign their thoughts based on what's most meaningful to their life.

Yeah, well, exactly what's most meaningful to their life right now.

And one way of getting that is what's pissing you off the most right now, like what's the most uncomfortable right now, What what can't you stand right now that's meaningful and, you know, it may seem like I'm tackling the superficial, like it's from the inside out, sorry, the outside in rather than going deep into like my dad's compassionate inquiry method for instance, which uses the present moment to then go deep into like, you know, one of the traumas and and dealing with those at the root level.

I just don't have that skill set or that particular temperament for me, what I've noticed for myself is if I can have a superficial victory with something that's been bugging me for a long time, it seems kind of small, but there are no small issues.

You know, if I can have it go a different way, even just once, if I can break the repetitive, predictable syndicated rerun cycle of of of the thing that happens every single time in my life all of a sudden the rest of my system kind of wakes up and it's like, oh well maybe it isn't set in stone entirely, like maybe actually it ain't necessarily so and so in a certain way I do feel like and I can't prove it, but I do have the sense both in observing myself and others that if we can alter our perspective, our mental perspective, our conscious perspective on what's happening now, it does send a signal somehow throughout the rest of the system that maybe loosens things up a bit, maybe soften things, maybe helps with the larger healing aim.

Um it's more harmony throughout the system.

So yeah, I I do consider it and adjunct to healing or a tool of healing, but I don't think of it as deep peeling or you know, I there's a reason I don't call it therapy, it might be therapeutic, but I don't call it therapy.

Yeah, that makes sense to me and I think about, you know, when you're under stress and something's bothering you and you just keep replaying it over and over and over and over again in your mind, right?

Or focus becomes so narrow and it sounds like you help to widen that lens of awareness.

Yes, very much so.

And also yeah, and it's hard to heal when you're in acute pain, you know?

Well in that stress has an impact, right?

That the body as we just as I raise my shoulders, I can think of all the things that raise my shoulders.

Well, this is part of why I have people walk to and I walk where I am, I do my best thinking, when I'm walking, when I'm sitting, you know, my mind can get settled in one way of looking at it or the other.

I just kind of get complacent the minute I get outside and start walking, even if the weather isn't ideal.

You know, both hemispheres are cooking and the body is coordinated and the arms and the legs are working together and you're moving through space literally and your perspective is changing and the light is changing and new things are occurring to you.

I just find that naturally that brings out the best and the most flexible and supple in my own thinking and it does so with people too, so it um it gets us out of that stuck place first physically and then I think that's conducive to the mind getting stuck as well.

That makes a lot of sense with walking in the last eight weeks, I broke my ankle, so I'm currently rehabbing and it's interesting because, you know, walking is usually this much broader perspective for me, where I'm like taking in what's going on and right now for me it's very narrow because I'm so focused on each step and not falling and the movement of it.

And so it's really interesting how how different, right, like a an acute injury which I think is similar to what you're saying um can narrow that focus.

So yeah, just interesting how much more mindful do you have to be when you're learning every, it's really every step.

Yeah, so yeah, it's great, it's such a lovely practice and one that I don't hope to do again in my life.

I don't I don't I don't wish that on anyone as a mindfulness practice.

Yeah, but as a mindfulness practitioner, it's it's been a super interesting, helpful practice um in a lot of ways, lots of learning.

So I'd love to dive in a little bit to the book and talk about it.

Um trauma is such a major aspect of this book.

And so I'd love to hear your definition of trauma.

Sure, I mean, I'm just gonna be cribbing here from the books, it's not my definition, it's our definition, it's really my dad's definition, you know, this is where he, this is his area of expertise and I think he's also, he shares this definition with several other prominent trauma experts like Peter Levine, and think of it this way, trauma is an injury, right?

It comes from the greek word for wound.

Um and it's an injury that sustained when we're speaking.

And you know, there is the physical definition of trauma, like blunt force trauma to the head.

But in the sense of emotional, psychological, spiritual trauma, it's an inner injury that happens as a result of our collision with life experience.

Like that's the crash.

You know, we we crashed into different difficult aspects of being alive, most, especially when we're very young because that's when we're the most woundable, although it can happen any time in life, but but a trauma isn't just a stressful event, a trauma to be a trauma, it has to leave you more constricted or diminished than before.

Somehow, some part of you gets cut off from you, your, your some, you know, your emotional repertoire gets more narrow your ability to have response flexibility, which is the ability to make choices in the moment about how you want to respond gets diminished so that you're locked into reactive patterns, stimulus response, you get triggered.

Boom.

I mean, in fact, just to talk about being triggered, what is being triggered.

What's being triggered is trauma some kind of trauma response or reaction.

Right?

So trauma is anything that results in that kind of diminishment of self, um, a narrower, more constrained experience of ourselves, a fracturing of the self.

And so by that, by its nature, trauma is not what happens to us, but what happens inside of us as a response as a result of or in reaction to what happens to us.

So, the trauma isn't the same as the traumatic event.

So, a sexual assault is a traumatic event often for for many people and especially very early in life, almost, almost certainly.

But the trauma is not that event.

The trauma is the inner injury that happens as a result to that person's sense of dignity, self safety, self respect, trust in the world, whatever else.

And then on top of that wound, there are coping mechanisms that the system has to put in place to try and overcome it, um, to try and band aid it to try and stitch up the wound or to try and scar over it so that, you know, it doesn't get wounded over and over again.

And then we're left with these traumatic imprints in terms of these coping patterns, whether it's seeming personality strengths, like, you know, you can't hurt me, I'm a self reliant, you know, I don't need anybody.

Well, at some point I did, so why don't I need anybody?

Well, probably because needing people hurt too much at a certain point, my needs weren't met.

So then, okay, that's the wound.

And then on top of that wound, there's some kind of band aid or a scar or a solution of some kind, right, that protects the wound, but it doesn't really address the core trauma, which is a fracturing of the self, of my ability to trust my ability to be vulnerable, my ability to let go and receive, which is a major constraint not being able to do that.

And so there's a million and one different ways that the personality and the body and the emotions cope and adapt to trauma, but that's the basic definition, I would say.

And I was really struck in the book when you talked about, you know, this response of um sometimes not all, not just women, but it happens with women, particularly the people pleasing.

Um and I could identify with some of that in my own life.

And so uh that connection also between um these personality traits that are revered and their connection to illness.

Can you shine some light on that?

Yeah, it's it's really interesting, isn't it?

That, I mean, so the whole frame of the book is the myth of normal and there's many meanings to that title as you go through the book.

Like probably each chapter you can see that it it means something slightly different or it applies to something slightly different in the case of these coping patterns, these traits.

The idea is that we're living in a society that wounds people kind of as a matter of course not on purpose, but almost by design, not intentional design, but inevitable design.

If that makes sense, that if you're living in a world that stresses parents and that then tells them that the way to raise your Children is to make them good and obedient by suppressing their emotions in order.

You know, so, you know, don't pick up your baby when they're crying or don't let your child misbehaved, give them a time out.

All of these sort of quote unquote common sense approaches to parenting, which are actually very demonically, uh, misguided.

Um, they just they just go against what Children actually need and what's good for human development.

But, you know, so a society that focuses on behavior modification rather than emotional nurturance and that makes it very difficult for parents to be there for their kids period because of socio economic stresses.

And you put on top of that intersection, intersecting lines of gender and race and class divisions and stuff like that inequalities.

But it's true for across the board.

Well then you're creating a situation where it's just gonna be normalized that kids are growing up with certain kinds of deep wounds to the self, they're getting the message who I am is not good enough if I am fully who I am, I won't get the love that I non negotiable e need in order to survive and that I will not live without.

And so my only option is to make some kind of accommodation something's gotta give and what's gonna give is my sense of authenticity.

So I trade in my authenticity, I bargain one piece of it in order to keep some semblance of safety, right?

So if anger is not acceptable in my home, if I'm told that good Children don't get angry, well what I'm really gonna internalize is that angry Children don't get love, They don't get fed, they don't get nourished, They don't they're not safe.

Okay, great cool anger goes out the window.

And if I really want my anger to go out the window, it's not very efficient to just say, okay, every time I get angry for the rest of my life, I'm gonna consciously pretend I'm not angry, I'm gonna stuff it down on purpose because if I have to stuff it down on purpose, that's too much effort.

So instead what I do is I forget that I ever decided that and I just become a nice person.

So I don't even feel the thing, never mind having to push it down it.

The body just learns to put it else somewhere else because it doesn't go anywhere, it just goes internally and now I'm full of self loathing or now I'm getting headaches or migraines or hormonal issues or autoimmune disease or whatever.

And so that's one example of that.

If if my, you know, if my openhearted, vulnerable, full emotional repertoire isn't, um accepted and embraced, then I might become very nice and all of these things are actually distortions, kind of bastardizations of genuine, authentic human qualities.

So kindness is one thing like being kind being there for people being empathetic, it's great, there's nothing self damaging about that, but having to be nice all the time compulsively.

That's a cope.

That's a compensation that hurts.

And that's an expression of hurt and it just keeps reinforcing the disconnection from self because it says other people's needs come before mine.

If I get the message that I'm not lovable or beautiful as I am, you know, if I'm being compared constantly to other people's bodies or looks or whatever else, I might put the emphasis on being attractive and charming and um, or in my case, you know, if I get the message that um if I learn through experience that I can't be caught flat footed, that if I'm, if I'm surprised it's going to be a bad surprise that the world can change at any moment and it's going to change for the worst and I gotta be real clever.

Now I was born with the capacity for smarts, like I was born very bright and probably with verbal gifts, I think I don't think it's an accident that I ended up writing lyrics or writing books.

But the particular way that my intelligence and my intellect got recruited to save and protect me early in life.

That is the cope and the compensation and that's caused me all kinds of problems because I can't stop being smart and clever all the time.

And I, and it shuts me off from, you know, so imagine, you know, now you're in an adult intiMaté relationship, you're trying to open your heart to somebody, but your mind is just constantly, you know, pouncing on the next thing.

The person says all kinds of examples right?

In social situations.

So, you know, or my dad used to rage a lot when I was a kid.

And so I became very like reasonable and, and, and like, uh what can I say earnestly communicative instead of just allowing myself to just get frustrated because me getting frustrated was scary because there was someone who could overpower me and then I end up depressed in adulthood because I've been depressing this part of me.

So all of these things and it's, you know, there's as many varieties of this as there are colors in the Crayola box, but we all come out of childhood in this society especially rather than having grown up to learn our own self and express it in the world in a safe way we've learned which parts of ourselves to emphasize which parts of ourselves to suppress or repress.

And we end up with these things, we think are us.

But really it's just our personalities.

It's like this arsenal of tools and molded coping patterns that are custom made that were custom made to help us survive an adverse childhood, adverse in to various degrees and in various ways.

And then they harden into the shape that we think is us.

And that's the personality.

And the idea is, you can't get rid of your personality.

We're not saying to anyone, okay, go get your mind wiped like a hard drive or something, although you can do psychedelics in a way that will give you a glimpse of that, you know, like the ego goes away, but it'll it'll just reform.

That's what it does.

It's more about loosening it, loosening its hold on you.

Um and this is where we move into more what healing is, it's moving in the direction away from being trapped and fixed and held in these um, these predetermined patterns and having more flexibility and more access to all the parts of ourselves.

Yeah.

And I think of more space to respond in a way that you want, you know, that is authentic with how you want to be versus falling into these old habitual patterns that are coping mechanisms from throughout our life.

And that is not easy work.

I find it's not, but it's inherently rewarding when we get a flavor for it because having more flexibility to respond means more variety, more creativity, more agency.

It means that, oh, The last 50,000 times this thing happened, I responded this way, but now I actually could, I've got four or five choices.

That's cool, you know, like once you get a flavor for it, you start to it, you know, it's a little corny as a pop culture metaphor.

But the Matrix is a great, it's got a lot of great lessons for in a lot of different ways that someone who was living in a reality that was perfectly normal to him and the normality was reinforced and he got a lot of perks and goodies for staying in that reality was comfortable, you know, had a good job, apartment, you know, um all this kind of stuff, but something wasn't computing, so to speak and he wakes up and he realizes that he's living in a much more flexible universe than he thought he was.

It's also very scary because there's a lot more danger than he thought.

But he actually starts to develop superpowers to like bend time and you know dodge bullets and stuff and slow things down and just realizes he's a lot less limited than he was in his comfortable normal existence in the book.

Um you know, your dad shares his experience with psychedelics and really being fired from a retreat and some of the insights that he had from that.

Can you share that story with us?

Yeah, I'd be happy to, so the story of uh my dad getting fired from his own retreat.

Um I don't wanna give too much of it away because it's I think it's a really good story and it's uh it's pretty well written if I do say so ourselves.

Uh but basically my dad was co leading a, but he was the main, he was the marquee draw on a healing retreat for healers.

So therapists, doctors, psychiatrists, you know, high status people in the, in the health services field from all over the world who came to Peru to work with my dad in this ceremonial shamanic context with the plant brew.

Ayahuasca, which my dad had by this point garnered a lot of experience with working with people on and at these retreats.

He tends to, you know, the, he leaves the shaman into the shamans where they pour the the brew, they lead the ceremony as they chant, he sits in on it.

But then during the day his job starts where he works with people to interpret their experiences to set their intentions and to use the plant as a tool and a teacher um uh you know, to bring them closer to whatever their intentions were in healing in, in, in getting there and I've attended these retreats that he's done and for a while there was a little while and I was sort of apprenticing with him and actually that's when I got the mental chiropractor name.

Um and I've seen him do it, he's very, very good at it.

I mean it's, it's kind of, it's kind of amazing, it can be awe inspiring to be in because he just has this laser like ability to hear where people's pain is, where they don't know it's there or they don't want to go there and then he has this ability to sit with people and just patiently bring it out in them or or help them bring it out of themselves.

So his, his reputation is well earned in that space.

So all these people had come and after the first ceremony where he had had his usual experience of nothing much happening except some nausea, other, other people were having huge breakthroughs and purging and all this kind of stuff and he was just sitting there kind of grumpy.

The funny thing about that is, you know, he's this guy who brings other people to the light constantly and just for himself in these ceremonies, his expectation as well.

Okay, fine, good luck trying to get through this, This psyche just kind of sits there and then the next day he turns on the jets of Mr healer guy and and does the thing and it's it's always very powerful.

So the day after the first ceremony, the shamans pulled him aside through a spokesperson through a translator and they said we need to talk to you and they said we can't have you in the ceremonies anymore because your energy is too dark, You're carrying a deep, deep deep shock, a deep wound from very early in your life that you haven't fully dealt with.

But even more than that you're carrying all the trauma from all of the people.

You've taken care of all of the people that you've worked with and you have not done the work to clean that from you from your system.

We do that all the time.

We, we deal with damaged people, but we have practices to clear that out of our system.

So we're not carrying it.

But your energy is so dark and dense, it's like a black hole and it's interfering actually with our chance they can't penetrate.

And my dad's like, okay, so uh what are we gonna do about this?

And they said, well you're gonna have to not be with the rest of the group for the rest of the time, not even during the day, we can't have you in the ceremonies and you can't work with the group.

You're actually harming them more than you're helping them.

And so that was the, that was the incident.

Uh and I won't spoil the ending.

There is kind of a transcendent ending to it.

But you know, one of the things my dad learned even before the kind of happy ending was that there's a kind of grace in letting go of control because he actually, he, he agreed, you know, he, his ego didn't like it, but some part of him knew that they were right.

He had been traveling like crazy all over the world, you know, and was very caught up in these people need me.

They came all the way to work with me, you know, and I remember when I heard about it through my mom that it was happening, I just knew it was the right thing.

I was so happy to hear that he'd been fired from his own retreat because I just knew that without that he would never have stopped.

You know, it's just got there too many perks to keep going and it's too hard to stop.

And I know this for myself, you know, you just kind of go until you drive yourself into the ground.

So he had the opportunity to learn some things firsthand about healing that he had been teaching people, uh, you know, for a long time, which is that you have to realize that there's something working that's bigger than you and that what you, what your personality, what your mind, your ego might prefer.

It doesn't necessarily have anything to do with what's needed.

And it ended up showing him that he too is capable of transformation and healing and grace.

Um, he got, you know, at least one very clear beautiful moment of that, which has always stayed with him.

I don't think it changed him overnight as a person.

I don't think he'd say that, but when you have these, like I said, these small victories, these openings, we experienced something, you can never un experience it, it's there forever, you know, So it's that, that chapter, It's partly about the possibilities inherent in responsible, um, respectful use of psychedelics, but it's also more more broadly about the principles of healing and the way spirit, um, the conditions that spirit needs to break through the, the, you know, the minds, I'm thinking, what is this called?

You know, in museums where they have those laser traps for can't get through.

That's that's what the mind is.

It's got all these these alarms and stuff, you know, it kind of has, yeah.

Um, so yeah, he, he learned some, he learned some hard learned experiential lessons that day that went beyond his intellect and in my experience for myself, that's the only kind of lesson that really sticks in my case too.

It had to happen through very humbling catastrophes.

And you know, I think the, the other lesson that I got from that was um, I think it was really from the message from the shamans saying, you know, this group of healers, um, this is a really dense energy that's even here on this retreat and as shamans, we have a way to um, whatever their processes of letting that go.

But um, in our world we don't necessarily, maybe some do and some don't, but it's something really important to be aware of.

Like how are you letting go of the trauma that you're taking in on a daily basis as a helper healer therapist.

Yeah, well they call it, you know, Olympia cleaning.

I mean they just do a regular hygiene.

Like why wouldn't you?

It's like if you were using some instruments, some high powered vacuum suction machine to suck out a whole lot of like dark sludge or black mold or something, you would clean it between jobs, you know, And that's what these guys realize they're doing.

They're so they're they're cleaning out dark energy.

And yes, all healers everywhere should be doing it.

But this points to another normalized myth or mythical norm in our society, which is that, you know, that healers don't need to do their own work.

That healers, you know, doctors are just practitioners practitioners of science and they just that it's got nothing to do with them, that they can be objective and removed and they can separate the patient's mind from the patient's body and they can separate their own body minds from the patient's body minds and that they themselves are not traumatized.

And of course much medical training re traumatizes people.

There's an example of a trauma traumatizing thing in adulthood.

I mean, it deliberately does it because you've got to break yourself, it's like the army, right breaks you down, You got to turn off your emotions.

There's incredible stories in the book about just horror stories from medical school that really surprised me.

You know, doctors psychiatrists talking about what they had to go through to be to become certified professionals in this society and that says everything about what we consider normal and then of course that hugely influences the care that patients do or don't receive.

Doctors don't get trained to ask about trauma at all.

Patients almost never have a doctor ask them what's going on in your life.

You know, if you come like what are the stresses in your life, especially if they present what just seems like a physical symptom.

So these healers who are practicing a medical system that's much more ancient and actually well founded in a lot of ways, although not as technologically impressive.

Um they understand something about what it takes to be a healer, what what what that obliges a person to do, which includes being responsible for what they're carrying and cleaning out what needs to be cleaned out and working on oneself.

You can be the clearest channel well.

And I think in some ways, like I think about how, you know, for example, a marriage and family therapist is trained and often times they do work right in the beginning, but then the ongoing work because life continues to happen and in my opinion, like we think of health and well being is this like destination.

Whereas it's something that we are continually working on, depending on what's happening in our environment and our life throughout our lifespan until our last breath.

But we tend to think of it as like I'm just going to get there and I'm good.

I'm going to get well.

But yeah, so healing comes from the word wholeness.

So it's a movement we, we in the book we say it's not a it's not a point on a map.

It's a it's a it's not a destination.

It's a um, it's a direction, you know, it's a direction on a compass.

You're moving towards wholeness.

And look, the world is constantly moving towards wholeness.

Nothing ever gets.

They're fully, it's just the question are we engaging, are we engaging in the natural process of harmonizing and coming together, including ourselves?

Or are we trying to stay rooted in the familiar, which is a lot less scary, but a lot less rich too.

I'm curious like, where do you think we are as a society in that vein?

I can't answer that.

I mean, there's plenty of encouraging signs.

If you just look at the response to this book, This book would not have been received this way five years ago.

Even, Never mind 10 years ago when my dad first started working on it.

Um, so there's a hunger and more and more people, even within the health care system, are realizing there's something missing.

People are looking for more and more and Covid not just the Covid itself, but the responses to it.

The policy is the economic devastation of it, you know, has exposed for a lot of people just how much we need each other and how unequally distributed the traumatizing impacts of the way we live our but also how interconnected we all are and how it doesn't spare anybody.

So on the one hand, yes, there's there's signs that people are waking up.

On the other hand, you look at the whole system and who runs it and the mentalities that still govern it, and I think it would be a mistake to engage in the pipe dream that, oh, you know, one day, if enough people buy the myth of normal capitalism and, you know, neoliberalism and colonialism and uh all these systems that oppress people, whatever you wanna call them.

I don't I'm not trying to be ideological here.

I'm just, you know, but, you know, the rigid Western mind, body separation and all this kind of stuff.

And all the institutions that basically fundamentally benefit from the way it is, that they're gonna wake up one day and be like, oh my goodness, we got it wrong all this time.

Well, it's time to overthrow ourselves, right?

The ego doesn't like all those egos do not like that.

No.

And the collective ego doesn't like it too.

We are very invested collectively in identifying with the way it is.

And this is the sort of the rub of our title, the myth of normal.

It's it's actually scary for all of us at a certain point to to to dig under the surface of what we think is normal, even if we're the most radical person in the world, It's there are things we, there are truths we think are self evident and that we hold dear and that we would really rather not examine.

We'd rather not be disillusioned.

And my dad always says, you know, would you rather be illusion or disillusioned?

Which, you know, when you put it like that, of course.

But as Axl Rose said in Guns n Roses song, I've worked too hard for my illusions just to throw them all away.

And I think that's how a lot of us feel, you know, that there's there are warm little blanket and they've they've gotten us this far.

So it's a constant dialectic, it's a constant push and pull between the desire, the intention to wake up and this is why it takes so much intention and all of the inertia that pulls us down.

So I can't I can't assess things and I wouldn't want to be too gloomy about it.

I wouldn't want to be too naive about it either.

I think it's like, it's like someone I don't know the rapper most def has this great thing on his on his on one of his albums.

He says, people ask me, hey most house House hip hop doing, he says, you wanna know how hip hop's doing, ask how you're doing, you know, and it's like, it's kind of like that with like how society then well, how are you doing today?

House, you know, we are in a sense, it's just the sum total of how we're all doing.

So yeah, we are reflections of that, we are reflections of it and we are generators of it too.

It's both, we're creating it and were created by it and it's, it's just, you know, it's always in flux and we'll see what happens when, when, when, whenever in interviews, when my dad and I are present in the same interview and someone asks us, uh, do you think human beings are gonna make it in the end?

My dad says, well, you know, it's gonna be really hard, but ultiMatély I believe in people, I believe in human beings and I have to believe and I'm usually like, well maybe like, I think the universe will be fine, human beings, I don't know the planet probably, but even if, but what I do think like I just don't have any evidence to say that in the end there'll be a happy ending, like who knows, and what is a happy ending anyway, what I do think what I do hold fast to and what I get some joy in is imagining that even at the last moment human beings have the ability to wake up.

So even as the asteroid hits or even as the sun explodes or even as the last gasp of oxygen is breathable or the last tree is, you know, a human being could be like, oh okay, I get it now and then the lights go out and to me, you know what, That wouldn't be the worst ending in the world, as long as we're willing to wake up even at the last moment, what else can we do?

I don't want to come people out, but I get a kick out of that personally.

I enjoy that also.

Well, it kind of takes the it takes the precious pressure off.

You know, it's like, who knows what we can save or salvage at this point, but what do we want to create?

And there's so much more possibility in that?

I think so, and there's multiple roads versus just like this road is, yep, we're gonna make it that road.

No, we're not gonna make it right, but that's not how the world works as we know to.

Yeah, exactly.

And there's also something kind of trauma constricted about, like we have to save it.

Like now we're locked into like saving our past or something like, like as opposed to you just get that.

It is how it is.

Here we are, you look around and some things are just not acceptable or they're not tolerable.

I'm not talking about complacency here.

There are things that any species that respects itself and gets who it really is would want to overhaul yesterday, including all kinds of oppression and injustice and we should absolutely dedicate ourselves to that, but we should dedicate ourselves to that in the sense of OK, let's create more love in the world.

Let's create more connection, let's create more of what we need, rather than necessarily raging against machines that have that that don't have ears.

You know, I love the band Rage against the Machine, but if you think of that, that image, what does Rage against the Machine really get Yeah, it's like banging your head against the wall.

Uh so as we wrap up, I'd love to hear what was your biggest takeaway um from co authoring this book?

Um well, in terms of the content of the book, my biggest takeaway was that there are a lot of people who are waking up really, I mean, there's a lot of just my dad interviewed like 300 people for this book.

Maybe more.

We didn't even use all of them.

The original manuscript was twice the length of this 500 page beast that, you know, have.

Um and just so many people doing such good work and coming to their own realizations through all kinds of calamities and misadventures and just spontaneous awakenings.

And it's very inspiring.

And so that actually though we feel very atomized and and alone and isolated, which is, again by design.

That's what normal is in this society.

Uh we're not and that we could use the technologies that we have available to us like you and I are doing right now to to create something in the opposite direction.

um that's the sort of takeaway in the sense of what I learned from the content of the book, but you know, personally the book is very close to my heart in a personal sense too, and what I took away from it was that I kind of in some ways became, I'm not gonna say I became a man in writing this book, but there's something about writing a book with your expert father who really needed you in order to get this book written, and I've never done anything like this before, I've written musicals that were never gonna that there's no guarantee they'll ever see the light of day, but with this from the beginning, the minute I signed the book contract, okay, now I'm on the hook to get help, get this thing done and it's gonna be out there in the world and in doing so, and I'm working through all of the relational ups and downs and kinks in, in, in the, in the fabric of my relationship with my father and my self concept.

I came to, you know, feel better about myself, realize sort of these are my gifts, these are his gifts, and I'm not just an appendage of his, like I actually have my own strengths that I'm bringing and I maybe I knew this intellectually, but it was a real experiential learning and now here I am out in the world and I seem to have some sort of platform to speak to people about it and they want to hear what I have to say.

And so I'm taking that away, like I'm actually, I'm taking away from the project that even if this isn't my main area professionally that I have something to contribute to the larger conversation and that it's fun and worthwhile to do so.

So, you know, there's the selfish and the selfless, but ultimately it's been very meaningful to me on a whole lot of different levels.

And I'm also taking away a deeper appreciation of my father, um both as a public figure, but also just as my dad and I'm proud of him, I'm proud of him for this book and I'm, I'm excited for him that he's getting the attention that he's getting for this.

You know, he's always been well respected, but he's never had a reception like this book is getting him and I think he 100% deserves it and I'm just really proud to have been a part of it.

That's so cool.

Well, I just want to thank you for your time and for um I really love your language and the way that you frame things and that comes through in this book.

So I just want to thank you for your work and your contributions because it's really important and I encourage our listeners to check out this book.

It's hugely important for the work that for behavioral health professionals.

So thank you my total pleasure.

Thanks so much for having me on.

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