



MIND & LIFE

## Mind & Life Podcast Transcript Trauma & Healing Systems

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### Jamie (00:00)

Hello and welcome to the Mind and Life podcast. I'm Jamie Bristow, your guest host for this episode. For the last 15 years, I've been working to bring contemplative practices and other inner transformation approaches into different areas of public life through innovation and policy development. During this time, I've seen a huge amount of change with mainstream politicians, funders and decision makers across sectors really starting to see inner development as a credible or even crucial area to invest in for social and ecological impact.

But as they begin to accept the case for why inner work is important for our to change, other questions come into focus. How do we do it collectively? Which approaches are most effective and do we know they work? Are they ready to implement at scale? And what is most needed now to unlock their future potential? So for this special mini-series of the podcast, we've curated a number of panel discussions with leading experts to explore these urgent questions. In this episode, we turn our inquiry toward a form of inner work that has moved rapidly from the margins to the mainstream in recent years: trauma healing. To give a sense of the cultural moment we're in, Bessel van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps the Score, Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, has now spent over 377 weeks, that's more than seven years, on the New York Times bestselling paperback non-fiction list, where it currently sits at number one. Meanwhile, talks and interviews with figures like Gabor Mate routinely attract millions of viewers online. It seems that something profound is dawning in our collective awareness; That over the course of our lives, our bodies, minds and hearts accumulate the residue of experiences we are unable to fully process at the time, and that this unresolved patterning profoundly shapes who we become and how we show up in the world. We're also beginning to recognize that trauma is not only an individual concern, nor solely held at an individual level, that it has implications for the health of our relationships, our communities and our societies, and that healing too need not be a solitary pursuit; There are emerging ways of working with trauma collectively. So in an era of compounding crises, how societies relate to unprocessed trauma may prove decisive for whether we fragment under pressure or learn to respond with wisdom and care. So to help me explore the current landscape and future potential of trauma healing for collective benefit, I'm excited to be joined by three of the leading pioneers in this field.

So please welcome to the podcast, Laura Caladron de la Barca, PhD, a psychotherapist specialized in collective systemic and intergenerational trauma, as well as a collective healing researcher, educator, consultant, and lead author of *Healing Systems*, the number one read article of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* for 2024. And Kazu Haga, an educator and practitioner with over 25 years of experience in non-violent restorative justice and trauma healing work, and the author of *Fierce Vulnerability, Healing from Trauma, Emerging from*

Collapse. And finally, Thomas Hübl, PhD, who is a renowned teacher, author, and international facilitator who works within the complexity of systems and cultural change by integrating the core insights of the great wisdom traditions and mysticism with the discoveries of science.

Okay, to get us kicked off, I'd love to turn to you, Laura, because people use the word trauma in many different ways. But how best should we understand it, do you think? Is it an experience? Is it a response? Is it a lasting imprint? How would you describe it beyond the kind of framing of pathology?

**Laura (03:46)**

Well, I would say that it is a response from our nervous system. I know, many people think it's an event. It's not an event. An event can actually be traumatizing for some people and not traumatizing for others. What it depends on is the level of resource that you actually have to face the event. If you do not have enough resources, the event can become overwhelming. And so what happens is that our autonomic nervous system steps in to prevent that overwhelm. And how it does that is it disrupts this process of integrating the experience. And instead of having it kind of be woven by our brain into an integrated memory, the input stays fragmented and it's held in our body. And so it's kind of still alive there, waiting, but it just kind of gets frozen in our body. And then when you encounter another situation, where there are similarities to that initial event, then that gets reactivated and it feels as though it were happening in the moment. And so you will feel the fear, you will feel the intensity in your body, and it's very likely that you think that it's about right now. And so you will feel that you're in danger and then you might have different responses.

And here I would suggest people to look up polyvagal theory, which has a really well put together explanation of how this works. And so we have two kinds of survival responses, roughly: One that has to do with mobilization that's connected to our sympathetic nervous system. And there you have the fight response where you're trying to dominate the threat, the flee response where you're trying to get away from it. And then the immobilization response, which is freezing, which is, you know, when your nervous system perceives that the threat is really like a death threat, then you freeze in order to try to maximize the potential for you to survive. So trauma is a reaction that prioritizes survival at the expense of connection, at the expense of, you know, trusting others and trying to resolve.

So what it does, it also disconnects us from our social engagement system, which is the one that we use when we look after each other, when we use our voice to help somebody calm down, you know, that presence of loving presence, that's all in the social engagement system. And we lose that when we're like, okay, now, you know, and you can feel it in the energy of your body. And then there's also different dimensions in which this shows up.

There's the individual dimension for me in this lifetime, but there's also the information that I can carry from the unresolved trauma from my ancestors. Those of us who work in therapy have known this for a very long time, but it's only very recently that we have been able to find the scientific means to describe and identify the mechanisms, the actual mechanisms that transmit this information through the work of the field of epigenetics.

And so we know now that there are mechanisms in our body that register that information and that it's transmitted to the next generation. Now, the good thing is that we also transmit our resources to the next generation. So whatever healing you do will impact the next generations

and what they also receive. There's also a couple of other types of trauma. And I'm sure that Thomas will speak more about collective trauma.

But there's also historical trauma that has to do more with systems of oppression where, you know, populations are targeted in order for others to benefit from them through exploitation, through taking away their land and their belongings. And that leaves a deep imprint, you know, in the bodies and the psyches of the people. And so that also needs to be addressed and taken into account, because often trauma is thought of as an individual experience when there are some profoundly systemic conditions that generate the trauma that need to be named and need to be addressed. And I think that in the current situation that our world is in, where so much is breaking down and there's so much of our systems that are very obviously not working, we have an opportunity right now to take a look at how can we make sense of this using this lens that trauma healing gives us, to identify how can we heal ourselves and our systems, our collectives, our families in ways that really transform the way that we relate, to create a much deeper capacity to maintain our connection to each other as we go about living our lives.

**Jamie (08:45)**

Wow, Lara, thank you so much for that overview. Speaking of healing then, Kazu, how do we go about working with patterns of trauma at these different levels? What are the kind of common themes or commonalities between trauma healing approaches?

**Kazu (09:03)**

Yeah, the million dollar question, right? I think one of the first things that I want to acknowledge is that healing is not a destination. It's not a place that you get to and then it's over. It's a commitment to a lifelong journey. And like Laura said, it's oftentimes a journey of generations, right? But my partner once told me that creating safe space is not about creating a space where people don't experience harm. It's about creating a container that feels safe enough where we can re-engage with our harm, right?

That frozen pain, those frozen fear, shame, all those emotions that Laura was just talking about that gets frozen in our body. So for example, you know, I had a pretty traumatizing childhood as many of us did. And part of my healing journey has been about accepting that I went through those scary experiences when I was young and going back and retroactively allowing myself to feel the intense feelings of fear and shame and loneliness, and all of these emotions that I didn't have the resources to allow myself to feel then, which is why it got frozen in my body, right? But now I can go through those experiences again and allow myself to feel those emotions with more slowness, with more grounding, with more support than I had back then.

And in that way, I can allow myself to feel it and release some of those emotions and integrate them and accept that those experiences are part of my life moving forward. For a long time in my early adulthood, I told myself the story that all of these experiences that I went through in my childhood, they were scary, but they happened 20 years ago. I'm over it. I've moved on. Time has healed all those wounds. And then I started going to therapy, and realized that I was carrying this incredible weight in my body because I had never actually processed any of what had happened. I just pretended to forget about it and stuffed it deep down in my body and that's how trauma works. And as we're talking about collective trauma, I wanna name that I think we have the same kind of thing happening to us collectively. Where for example, like I live in the United States of America, collectively as a country, we have this tendency to say: 'Slavery, that was a really terrible thing and it happened hundreds of years ago. We're over it, we moved on.' But in the way that I carried the wounds of my childhood trauma and my ancestral trauma and

that impacted my capacity to have healthy relationships in my life 20 years later, I think the same thing is happening now where we're still carrying around the collective trauma that is the impact of the legacies of enslavement and colonization and genocide, and all of these things. And until we're able to find ways to collectively, retroactively allow ourselves to feel the grief, to feel the fear and to accept that that is a part of our lived experience, even today, I think we'll continue to live out the impact of that trauma. And so, yeah, I'm really excited to have this conversation and deepen in this conversation about how do we respond to colonization and war and injustice as a way to respond to collective trauma and not just to try to shut things down, but actually to try to open things up.

**Jamie (12:22)**

~ And what's the role of the body in trauma healing approaches?

**Kazu (12:27)**

Yeah, so they say that trauma lives in our bodies and not just in our brains. And I've noticed in my own journey, sometimes when I'm going through healing journeys, I want to cry or I want to allow myself to express and release emotions. And oftentimes what happens is my head comes in and says, this story isn't real. This didn't actually happen. You're not actually afraid.

So I have this one story that I oftentimes share, where I was releasing an incredible amount of grief connected to the pain that I've experienced from the legacy of patriarchy. And I was crying and crying and crying. And then I stopped and my brain started thinking about how is Kevin Durant gonna fit in with the Golden State Warriors, the basketball player who just signed with the Golden State Warriors. And then I was like, wait a second, I have more grief I needed to release. So all I did was just try to listen to my body, and I started wailing again. And then my head came in again and said, I wonder what's gonna happen in the next season of Game of Thrones. And I kept doing this back and forth where my body wanted to release and my head wanted to repress. In some ways that is my brain's innate wisdom helping me to titrate and not, like, having my body go into a state of panic, and being able to release a little bit at a time.

But there's also a way in which my head gets in the way of the wisdom of my body that knows that I'm holding all of this traumatic frozen emotions that needs to release. And so I think a lot of the work of healing is about learning to be in our body and trusting the wisdom of our body and letting our bodies wail, letting our body shake and releasing trauma through the movement in our bodies.

**Jamie (14:18)**

Thank you, Kazu. So, Thomas, I'd love to hear from you. In what way should we understand trauma held at a collective level and in what ways can we work at that level?

**Thomas (14:31)**

Yeah, first of all, thank you for having me here in this conversation. And I'm happy to be here with Kazu and Laura. And it was great to listen to both of you before, because many things are already in the space. When we introduce, okay, how trauma works, when we look at, like Laura spoke about the trauma response, and we can say, well, Life learned over a very long time, tens of thousands of years or longer, how to deal with massive adversity. So when today the trauma response kicks in, it's a result of a long chain of evolutionary living process. And, so that's one thing—So there is an intelligence active that I think in the trauma healing, we make our friend versus our enemy. Like I think the trauma healing process is... The more I understand the protective intelligence of the responses, Laura and Kazu said before, the more I don't have the

trauma response as my enemy that I want to get rid of, the more I can begin to integrate the information that's split off.

And that's true individually... And the second thing, I think it's important to let this sink in a little bit: All of us have been born into the pre-traumatized world. It didn't start with us. It's a long chain of events. Many historic trauma layers compose this moment. And Kasu said something interesting before, he said, 'time will heal our wounds', you know, many people say, 'okay, we just wait long enough'. But time, that time is actually a product of our wounds, because trauma splits past and present and future apart. So we cannot be really in the present moment, like many contemplative traditions teach, because there's frozen past and that's why we live a lot in the future assumptions of how things are going to be, versus being able to relate to the present moment and include the emergence as future.

But we have been born into a world where that's kind of normal because, you know, you look in so many countries, you look in so many cultures, and so many ancestries, are simply hurt. Some more, some less. But trauma is like an ecosystemic reality. And as long as we don't take in account something that contemplative traditions do, which is to subject-object transcend the perspective of the one who is practicing. But, you know, when you look at collective trauma, you could say when a person looks exactly like the background. So if I look exactly like this wall, what will you see? You won't see me. You will see just the wall. Because I look exactly like the wall. So when we are completely identified with something, it's like 'this is life'. And so the whole, first step of the work of collective trauma is, 'Let's first create an awareness, that not only some individuals hold, but that the collective starts to generate, that we can see what we are dealing with. Because we are not there if we are still *in it*, like as if it was normal that the world is like that. And I would say, 'no, wait a moment. That's not all normal.' Like some parts of our society are emergent processes have a future, they are relational, they are warm, they are connected, they can problem solve together, we can collaborate together. But part of our societal process is non-emergent, which means it's stuck in the past and it's repeating itself all the time. And look at the global situation, many things repeat themselves. And so this is not contemporary society, these are partly unconscious processes that happen through us where the choice is in the past, not now. In any kind of unconscious pattern, the choice is in the past, not in the present moment.

And that's why it seems like it's happening. Oh, my throat gets tight. My heart gets tight. My, all these symptoms or my behavior is this, or my addiction is stronger than my understanding of my health. So it seems like there is no control, no real control over the process, which means I have no choice. And so once we understand, wow, we need to really, an awareness process to see that we are, kind of, able to differentiate ourselves from the identification with something that has been normal for thousands of years. We say, 'oh that's how life is versus'. ~ Part of what we see is 'that's how life is when it's hurt'. That's important to say because if somebody has a severe inflammation in the body and doesn't go to a hospital, the person can die.

**Jamie (19:30)**

Mmm.

**Thomas (19:49)**

And then we don't say, 'this is how it is'. You say, 'yeah, this is how it is when you're hurt, go to the doctor'. And some of those life threatening wounds, I believe we are seeing right now. And if we don't go to the doctor, it might have severe consequences for our global ecosystem, for our global political system, for our global living together on this planet. That can be quite severe, but

we call it, 'oh that's life'. And I would say, no, no, no, let's say this is life when it's hurt, at least part of it. And if we take care of it as citizens responsibilities, as organizations, as architectures in our societies that are government sponsored, and then, then, then— we can talk about this more—then we have a real response, which is a mature relationship to an issue that we have.

I think the more mature response to collective trauma we can generate globally, up to the moment that we see, 'wow, this is actually what democracies are calling for'. Democracy 2.0, democracy wants to detox something. And we see all the effects of that process. I think if we can facilitate that as collectives into a new dimension, then we generate much more resilience, we accelerate healing. We accelerate global flourishing. We settle some of the political symptoms that we see. I mean, many, many symptoms we can speak about later. I don't want to make this too long, but it's a complex topic, as you can see. We are just touching the surface. But that's, I think, a really, really important development at the moment: to treat systems and the interdependence of every kind of living system is a base for this work.

**Jamie (21:45)**

Yeah, it's really resonated with me before the phrase you've used in the past that that trauma is karma or unconscious energy is destiny. And in the business of social transformation, and you see these repetitive patterns, and you think, ~ it is intractable, and this is hopeless, etc. until you have a way of seeing that gives you some explanatory power about why the repetitive nature of some of these things. And this reminds me, Laura, of the Healing Systems paper that you did for the Stanford Review. Why do you think that paper was as popular as it was? And I know we got in touch when I read it and I was just like, 'this is so clear and so helpful'. And putting this language of trauma healing into a kind of sort of policy or technical—well, it's very engaging—but you know, a language that can be heard by mainstream power, basically.

**Laura (22:44)**

I think that was one of the main things. Many people wrote to us saying, 'thank you for giving words to my experience and articulating it in a way that I can bring this to my board'. So it really translated, I think, the lived experience of many people who are in the practicing side of the social system, you know, the front, where—there's the people who are creating the strategies and who are setting the goals and what gets to happen—But then there's those who are really in the trenches, you know, every day and they're experiencing the presence of trauma. But if those who are making decisions are not really seeing that and that's not part of their lived experience, it's harder for them to really see this. So I think that giving it language was one thing. I also feel though, Jamie, that, you know—and talking about contemplative practices—awareness, consciousness has been increasing about the presence of trauma amongst us. And also understanding that, you know, we all carry trauma. We don't all have PTSD, you know, we don't all have post-traumatic stress disorder, which is a much more acute condition where, you know, daily life is way more disrupted. You know, we have intrusive memories, we have hypervigilance, like it really disrupts our capacity to engage in life much more so. But every single one of us sitting here carries some trauma, and we're able to engage without that being in our face all the time. So that awareness that we all have trauma and that it becomes an issue, particularly Jamie, when we're trying to collaborate.

And for me, this is a crucial aspect because what trauma does is it derails our capacity to trust. Why? Because all that, the past, the frozen path of danger, the experience of danger that is held in our body, that gets reactivated by a trigger. So the trigger is current, but the trauma and the danger is not. But then we look at each other through that lens, and then I mistrust you. And so then that derails collaboration. So unless we really deal with the presence of trauma in us and in

our systems, then collaboration is not going to be possible at the scale that we're going to require it for us to really address the challenges that we have at the, you know, at the civilizational level that we're having them right now. So being able to see that more clearly, I think, is one of the, you know, biggest changes.

And in terms of collective trauma, I think that the pandemic, you know, it brought some horrific things to our experience, but it also really opened up opportunities also. And one of them was that a lot of people now are aware of what collective trauma looks like. You know, before when I would tell people, because I've been working on collective trauma already for a couple of decades, and I would tell people that's what I do, they would say, 'what is that?' And now I say, 'you know the pandemic?' and they're like, 'oh, yeah!'. So, you know, people like, it's in their experience, in their conscious experience now. Because before it used to be in their unconscious experience.

And then people wanting to have conversations about this, I think it's also what led people to share the article with other people. So I really feel that the field is ripe for this conversation to move really from the margins to the mainstream.

**Jamie (26:17)**

That's very interesting to hear. The pandemic taught us lots collectively about interdependence and many things that we need in order to create a life regenerating society. And interesting to hear that, yes, the impact of that collective event was one of the learnings, right?

**Laura (26:32)**

Right, a friend of mine says that in the wound is also the medicine. I think this is one of those examples.

**Jamie (26:39)**

Right, yeah, fascinating. Kazu, within systems there are obviously people. There are those who have more power than others, and there are those who work very hard to change the system. Your work in social change and nonviolent action is both trying to, I guess, influence people in power and also bring power to people who would see change happen. Could you say a little bit about how trauma shows up in the world of activism? And in the world of, I guess, the powerful.

**Kazu (27:12)**

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, activism in so many ways is an attempt to respond to those in power who abuse that power, right. And I've had the great privilege in my life to work with a lot of incarcerated people, in California, who have lived through some of the most traumatizing experiences I've ever heard and have inflicted a lot of violence as a response to that trauma.

And I really come to understand that when people abuse power and use violence against other people, that that in and of itself is traumatic. And not only is it traumatic for us to inflict harm on another human being, it is also a response to trauma. It is a manifestation of trauma. There's a beautiful book called *Power Under* by Steve Weinman, who says that oftentimes when one person inflicts violence on another person, we think that that person is having power over the person that they are harming. But in reality, what is happening is that the person that is using the violence is overtaken by their trauma and their trauma actually has power over them. And it takes away a person's agency to respond to whatever situation they're responding to in a way that is connected with our most evolved selves.

Steve Wyman says the most dangerous person may be a person with objective power, but a subjective sense of powerlessness. And trauma rips that sense of powerfulness from us. And so when people exercise violence, they're not exercising power, they're exercising abuse, which is very different, right? And I think violence requires us to live in the delusion that we are separate from one another, that we don't belong to each other, that I can somehow become more healed or more free or more liberated when I beat you all over there. And I think that's oftentimes the worldview that activists actually lead with, even though we're trying to create a more healed world, a world where more more people can belong.

We oftentimes lead with that us-versus-them worldview, where we're the good people and they're the bad people. And I really have become convinced that that worldview, that delusion of individualism and fracture and separation is at the heart of what is destroying our planet. And so I think in the work that I do, we're trying to build movements that can understand that injustice and state violence are not political issues, they're manifestations of our collective trauma in the same way that if I have unintegrated trauma, I might lash out and harm somebody else. If our collective bodies have unintegrated trauma, we lash out and hurt people within that community or hurt other communities. And so, in activism, you know, as I was sharing earlier, in a lot of civil disobedience and non-violent direct action, we lead with this energy of we're here to shut things down, right? We're here to shut down injustice. And we may need to, shut down the construction of an oil pipeline or shut down a migrant detention center. But when you're responding to someone who is acting out of their trauma, it's not effective to shut that person down, to wave our fingers and say, you're a bad person, you need to stop doing that. But oftentimes in activism, we inevitably lead with this energy of we're here to shut things down. So I think part of our experiments in my work has been, can we use our bodies to shut down a migrant detention center, but actually lead with an energy of we're here to open things up. Because if you want to respond to someone who is acting out of their trauma, what you need to do is to create a sense of slowness and enough safety that we can actually open up and see what's actually happening, what's actually present. What are the pains, the fear, the shame that is actually being acted out in this moment? What is the history, what is the karma of this traumatic response? And to try to be in that field. And so I think a lot of my work in collective healing is experimenting with how can we bring that understanding even into nonviolent direct action spaces, and the ways in which we respond to systemic forms of injustice.

**Jamie (32:20)**

And is this becoming a common lens or approach to support activism?

**Kazu (32:26)**

Yeah, yes and no. I think a lot of it is happening unconsciously. Like when I started getting involved in activism in the late 1990s, there was no talk of slowing down. There was no talk of building relationship. We didn't sing songs. There were certainly no contemplative practices or prayer. And these days, more and more movements are singing songs. More and more movements are bringing ritual into our direct actions. And so we are seeing that. But I do want to see more and more explicit understanding that when we engage in nonviolent direct action, we're actually engaging in a collective healing modality. And if we understood resistance work and public actions and protest as an attempt, not just to pass legislation, but as an attempt to help heal our collective wounds, then how might we design our actions differently? How might we prepare ourselves differently? How might we understand the importance of all of us as activists committing to our own trauma healing journey as a way to train ourselves and to prepare ourselves to show up in a way that can bring more of a healing field into these spaces?

And so I think it is happening more and more and we desperately need more and more of it to happen.

**Jamie (33:44)**

Mm-hmm. Yeah. And speaking of making more and more of it happen, Thomas, your work with Collective Trauma Integration and the Pocket Project has been bringing collective healing processes to thousands now. Could you tell us a little bit about where this work has got to? Like, what does that involve? And yeah, how widely has this been offered?

**Thomas (34:08)**

Yeah, first of all, that's beautiful to listen to your both voices, Laura and Kazu. Yeah, so we did a lot. I think we started, I think in 2017. In 2019, we started with the Collective Trauma Summit and we reached by now more than half a million people that participated in the annual summit. And so there is definitely like a high interest and there is a resonance. So that's for sure true. The second is that we are working now already through two NGOs. The Pocket Project is one. So there is a lot of work happening, like it's kind of our grassroots NGO, where we support lots of people in crisis areas. For example, in Ukraine or Ukrainian refugees in Europe or also in the Middle East, or other areas, where we activate the communities and we use also basically people's capacity, like volunteers' capacity to help other people. Like people that have been trained that are willing to invest their time as volunteers and give back and train other people. So we have resilience circle trainings for Ukraine that facilitators can hold their own spaces and create social resilience. And there are hundreds of people being trained.

So there's definitely a reach, but then we have professional trainings. Like, we have a five year training for collective trauma facilitation that goes through different stages. And this is more for people that want to work with that professionally in the world as their way of, like, contributing to society. We have academic accreditation for those programs. So that's in our academy.

And then we have a new NGO, a relatively new NGO. It's, kind of, three years now in the making and it's in Washington DC based and it's with my colleague, the co-founder, was in the US government before for eight years as a senior diplomat, and also is a senior conflict resolution or mediator in the world, and has mediated many processes or conflicts. And so, together we are bringing the conflict resolution world and the collective trauma healing world together. And so we are training senior diplomats that work in crisis regions. I just came back from Rwanda and I am working now, or we are working through GRI, with the justice ministry in Rwanda to develop a collective trauma healing process for the country. And with training a core group of senior people from various ministries. And then to support what happened after the truth and reconciliation process ended, so now that we can move from that process into collective healing, for example. And so there are other initiatives, some of them that I can talk about and some of them not, but there is a lot happening. And I think there is a ripeness in the world. It's not at all. My experience is actually the opposite. It's like there is a lot of openness, not everybody obviously, but there is a lot of openness to—in the science world and research is more and more open—then also even political systems, because people see that something's not working. If we don't address this, certain there will always be sand in the engine. And so, yeah, I think that there is a big potential of social transformation and also even in the contemplative practices.

Contemplative practices can be such a resource. It can also be a bypass to heal trauma, but it can be an amazing resource, and so combining contemplative knowledge or wisdom traditions with the scientific insights, with the collective social impact work, with activism, like trauma-

informed activism, all of this, I think, is so powerful, and the world's calling us. I mean, we see so many symptoms. So it's like in your body, when there's a pain somewhere, the body is calling you and it needs attention. And so I think the world's calling us. And yeah, I find there's a lot of openness to move on.

**Jamie (38:24)**

Great to hear. We'll come a little bit later to where this is all going and what is required in order to step through the door that's now opening. But before we do, I'd love to get a clearer sense of exactly where we are now. Thomas, could you speak a little bit to the empirical evidence supporting this work? I mean, you mentioned in one of your books about an ongoing research program. Have you got any results to talk about at this point?

**Thomas (38:52)**

Yeah, partly. I mean, there's a lot of research, let's say, about trauma, attachment trauma, ACEs—adverse childhood experiences—positive childhood experiences as resources, because trauma lives always, as Laura said before, in relationship to relationship and relational resourcing. So that this interdependence decides how severe trauma symptoms are going to be and also how much health impact people are gonna experience. So there's tons of research about this and I think it's growing every minute because people really put a lot of energy into understanding this. But as Laura also said before, we collaborated with an epigenetic scientist at the Zurich University that shows like in her research with mice and epigenetic transmission of trauma. So there are experiments like this, there are more by now. And we did also like a study, an epigenetic study, in one of our two-year training programs where we tested people at the beginning and at the end and looked at the markers. And it's a very complex study because first of all, it's a territory that's not yet fully researched. So it takes a long time to evaluate the data.

But one data point that is really interesting, I mean, there were many significant changes—It's a question how they are being understood—But the one thing that was really interesting, like a by-product actually of the study, was when you calculate the epigenetic aging, we had our group and the control group. And when you see the epigenetic aging, then you could see that like in our group, people aged in two years epigenetically 1.3 and in the control group, 2.7 or 8. So basically there's a significant impact on the aging process and some of the epigenetic data also hints to that, like besides the epigenetic aging, some of the locations we found actually relating to kind of rejuvenation in the body and how we become actually more vital and more like healthy and young, which also our, because we take always photos of the participants at the beginning and at the end. And you can really see by, by far the majority of people look so different after two years of doing intense inner work, including also contemplative work, individual, ancestral, collective trauma work.

Like how much revitalization happens, how much integration and most of all, you can see the level of embodiment, like how people are more in their body because we assume because we all walk around in bodies that we are really aware of that body, but that's far from true. So we really need to, as Kazu said before, we really need to do work to re-embodied ourselves and kind of reincarnate into our body.

And so the data that we have, like from this one research, we haven't made other research, but also on meditation and so, but that was really interesting. And so we will follow on and do more research now, but yeah, that's very interesting.

**Jamie (42:27)**

I know it's tricky to move from individual measures to societal impact. So that could do with a podcast of its own, like with all of these approaches to inner outer change, how we explore their efficacy. Laura, when you look across the field today, what kinds of trauma healing work do you see? Thomas mentioned some great work there in Rwanda. I know you've done some in Colombia and in conflict zones, could you help sort sketch the view from where you are of the landscape?

**Laura (43:01)**

For sure, Jamie, and actually I think that would be one piece of research that is actually needed to map all the different versions of collective healing with more precision, because there's a lot happening at different levels. There is, you know, at a very grassroots level with people getting together, you know, a lot of it is talking circles, people being able to come together to listen to each other. Listening is such a crucial aspect.

You know, and thinking again of the work of the Mind Life Institute around contemplative practices, being able to stay present as you listen to others and share with others, you know, is such an important aspect. You know, I love also what Kasu brought about dancing and, you know, a lot of it has to do also with embodiment. So having people come together to move together, to sing together, to do rituals together, that's also another dimension of it.

Now, in some of the most powerful work that I have seen happening, for example, in Colombia, where I think it's really a hotbed of collective trauma healing modalities, you know, in the case of the Fundación Duna, who has worked in peace, you know, working with the conflict and how after the conflict happened in Colombia, how do you reconstruct peace with people? And in this particular place called Viotá, the people who were part of the guerrilla decided to stay in the place. And so, you know, the members of the community would see them walking knowing that these people had kidnapped or killed their family members. So you can imagine the level of tension that was there. So they invited DUNA to do this work. And so to heal the system, you have to bring the system into the room. So they managed to invite and have people agree to come together, from some of the victims, some of the people from the guerrilla, some of the people from the police, from the army, and from the municipality. And together they went through a whole year of a process where they started out in a scaffolded way, first teaching them how to work with their nervous systems to be able to digest the tremendously intense experience of sitting in the same room with the people who killed your family, and starting to then do other kinds of works also to start to rehumanize the gaze that they each had of the other. And once there was enough of that, then they started to do talking circles so that people could actually hear each other and find out the victims, what kind of a life did the people who were members of the guerrilla had that led them to make that choice.

And very importantly, for the people who were part of the guerrilla to be able to hear what was the impact from what they did. And then once that got rehumanized and they could look at each other again, you know, human to human, then they did the third part of the scaffolding, which is how do we create a new future for this community? And how can we look at the land as Mother Earth, as one of the victims of what happened here? How can we together do some repair to her?

And so they created productive projects out of that, that are still four years after this happened, those projects are still going. And I know, because we are filming a documentary, because I really feel that it's so important that people actually see how this happens so that they can get

behind, participate and fund this, and invite people who doing this kind of work to really come into spaces where this kind of work could make a big difference.

**Jamie (46:43)**

Kazu, what do you think it will take to support these capacities in leaders and change agents, activists? What kind of structures, frameworks, funding, like how do we realize the potential here?

**Kazu (46:58)**

Yeah, I mean, think funding is certainly a part of it. And at the same time, I do want to acknowledge that there's something about funding being a key answer to this that scares me a little bit, because I feel like it keeps us in this perpetual worldview that we actually need the exploits of capitalism, which is the system that has created so much of the trauma to fix the manifestations of that collective trauma. And so there is a need for funding and financial resources. But I think a part of it is about owning and acknowledging the resources that we already have, that we already have access to that is infinite. I know, Laura just started naming a connection to earth and connection to spirit and connection to our ancestors and their wisdom and ancestral practices and cultural practices. So I think a lot of this is, you know, especially in the United States, a lot of social change work happens within the context of a 501c3 nonprofit.

And the 501c3 nonprofit structure is a model that was taken from for-profit corporations and just dropped and imposed on social change movements. And I think there's a lot of harm that came with that. I think it prevented us from relating to each other in some more of the traditional ancestral ways. I think it locked us into a worldview that helped to create a lot of the crises that we are facing in our society.

And so I think a lot of the work that we can do is for all of us to look at our own ancestral practices and ancestral ways and remember how our ancestors did this work and to try to infuse, even if you're within the bounds of a 501c3 nonprofit, there's so many different ways that we can relate to each other and relate to the earth. I think earth practice and bringing that back into our work and back into activism or our nonprofit work, whatever it is, is so important because, yeah, I think like one of the root sources of our collective trauma is our fracture with the earth, right? Is this idea that we are somehow separate from nature. And so I think bringing those practices is really important. And, you know, over the last 15, 20, 30 years, we've learned so much about how to heal our wounds individually and interpersonally. And I think a lot of the work that we're all doing is to try to understand how we scale that up, and how we take those lessons and apply them to larger and larger scales of work. And remember that we actually know how to heal, right? Like our ancestors have been healing for thousands of years. And it's just about remembering that as we scale that work up and begin to do collective healing work or systemic healing work, it's the same work. We're just doing it in different spaces and at different scales. And so to remember the ancestral wisdom that lies in our DNA, that lies in our bodies, and figure out how to bring that into our work collectively.

**Jamie (50:01)**

Yeah. Thomas, you spoke earlier about an openness amongst politicians, decision makers. What do you think is needed then to meet that openness? Because I was struck reading your book on collective trauma about quite the level of skill needed to work in the way that you're describing. And you're going to have this tension between integrity and depth of skill of the facilitator and the scale at which, you know, if we really are going to address these repeating

patterns that are stuck in our systems, are we going to need to have lots of facilitators? And how do we get there? What are the tensions?

**Thomas (50:39)**

Of course we need to train facilitators, there are different levels of skill that are needed. There are some things that create local resilience in crisis areas. And there are some people that are very trained to hold very large events that, with maybe big teams as we do it, we have large teams and then we can have 1000 or 5000 people and deal with the group process.

But, it depends on building the right architecture and that needs skill. And I think it also is complex because it includes the individual dimension, the ancestral dimension, the collective, the historical trauma. So we need to be really in tune and go step by step in order to be able to hold such a process. I think, you know, there are more and more people interested and once the need is apparent, also on government levels and so on, and there are enough resources being put into it, it will be much easier to do this at scale.

**Jamie (51:32)**

Yes. What is enough resources and what are the most urgent things? Is it about research and understanding? Is it about that pathway for facilitators?

**Thomas (51:43)**

Yeah, it's all of this. It's put more money into research so that we have more profound data because once that's solid, then it's kind of it opens many doors. And the second thing is, yes, for example, we have a program, a five year program with academic accreditation. If multiple universities teach like people to be trained into collective trauma facilitators in social sciences, psychology, other sciences. So like it becomes something that can multiply pretty quickly.

Because there are people that have the basic skills. There are many trauma trained therapists. So it's very easy to add something to that training and have like a more powerful container to hold this large scale group processes. And this large scale group processes have a much higher transformational rate. So building, not thinking healing as individuals, but as collectives and creating the right architecture in nations.

What's the US? It's specific. It has a collective signature, so it's the principles that are true all over and there are specific applications. So the US needs its specificity. Rwanda needs its specificity, and Columbia and Latin America needs their specificity. But there are principles that are true all over. And so if we get this correlation right and governments are coming more and more on board and that's why we do this in Rwanda because the pilot project that we show somewhere it's working and then it will pop, you know, and so I am very hopeful, even if it looks sometimes very dire at the moment, but I'm hopeful there's a lot on the way that can accelerate healing tremendously.

**Jamie (53:26)**

Yeah, I mean, particularly if you're doing group sizes of a thousand, if you have many facilitators who can do that kind of work at that level, then yeah. And just in case we have some researchers out there listening to this podcast who are looking for their next research project off the top of your head, can you think of any gaps that urgently need filling in terms of our scientific understanding?

**Thomas (53:47)**

Yeah, no, I think we need multiple things. I think it needs a research bridge to what you mentioned, Jamie, before. It's like we know how to research maybe the individual part. This we know well and the ancestral part, we are getting there. What's harder to do is to develop research frameworks that can really track collective changes that happen when you do large scale collective process work in the participants, but also in the social system, that those participants are a fractal of. You know, like a small hub that spreads information into the big system, and to work with the interdependence. And because, when you look at it, every defense mechanism in the human psyche or body is an ecosystemic necessity where it arose and it's an invisible ecosystemic design factor today. Which means, the childhood trauma, the child needed to develop an internal defense mechanism: It's a necessity in that ecosystem. If it's unhealed, it becomes a social design factor in the ecosystem that that person will work within—in the organization. Let's say that person is now a leader of a team or an organization, it will spread and it will impact that organization's dynamic. The same is true: collective defense mechanism to suppress in millions of people the pain of a war is an ecosystemic necessity.

**Jamie (55:16)**

Yeah.

**Thomas (55:17)**

Now, if it's unhealed, it becomes a massive ecosystemic design factor. And I think to be able to research more how that works and how we get the data of the collective, this needs a lot of research framework development. And this would be, for example, an amazing bridge to develop those frameworks, because then we could do these processes and have a very good scientific research model that can help us identify. And I think now with AI and this massive, you know, digital net around the world, I think we have what we need, but it needs a lot of work.

**Jamie (56:00)**

Laura, what do you think is now required to create deep systems change at the level that your healing systems paper points towards?

**Laura (56:09)**

I think that there's different levels of healing that can happen that need to be supported. One is, you know, getting people trauma informed.

There are several things that I believe are necessary, and that kind of mimics this scaffolded approach of first supporting people in learning about trauma so that they can have an initial capacity to regulate their nervous systems, so that they can not just do that for themselves individually, but that they can do that for each other and that they can start to bring that into their collectives.

When you have an environment that has the capacity to regulate itself, then you can move on to the next level, which is starting to look at how do we integrate the trauma that is already present within us together? And that's a higher lift, that's a heavier lift that does require more time, and a certain capacity and a certain calling. I don't think everybody has the same level of calling to this. I think the first layer that I spoke of, that could be like, you know, that's for anybody.

And then the third level is when you have the people who have enough knowledge to support the development of the other two levels, you know, the training the trainers kind of thing. Those are the three different aspects that I feel we need to be developing.

**Jamie (57:35)**

Yeah.

**Laura (57:36)**

There is the equivalent of the hygiene, which is learning how to have kind of emotional hygiene, trauma hygiene, if you like, where we learn what is like the basic care that we need? And then we can maybe also learn, OK, what is first aid for this? Like, you know, a higher degree of capacity. And then, OK, this is really severe, and we really need now a specialist. Right. So those are the three levels of development that I feel are needed and that it would be great to have more resources come to those people who already doing that. And part of what I was saying with the research, it's important to have a bigger map, a more accurate map of who's doing what where.

**Jamie (58:21)**

And so is there a mapping project that really needs to take place? Is that one of the ways you would channel resources?

**Laura (58:27)**

I think there's a mapping project that really needs to take place. Yes, absolutely. And where we can learn about where things are happening, what has worked for each place, so that we can then have the dialogues between people who are doing this. I think that's also another thing that would require some support, to getting people together so that the ecosystem can look at itself and grow and deepen its own capacity.

**Jamie (58:54)**

And what kind of scale of funding do you think does the sector really need right now?

**Laura (58:59)**

I would say all hands on deck. We need as much support as we can to really get this to the mainstream and transform this tremendously painful but incredibly powerful opportunity to transform ourselves and really have the best part of us really show up. Because know, Jamie, thinking of myself, I could not speak in public when I was younger from the trauma I carried. And I know when I work with my clients, with the groups, all that would not have been possible if I had not had the support to do this. How many more people have tremendously talented contributions to make that we're missing out on because we don't have the right scaffolding to get this kind of support to them? Let's get on board behind this and let's make sure that we bring this to as many people as possible. There's many of us already here and if anybody's interested, know, any of us could be a good contact for how do we make a difference together.

**Jamie (1:00:00)**

Thank you, Laura. So we're unfortunately coming to time. I could spend a good another hour on this subject, but folks, Kazu, Thomas, Laura, do you have any final thoughts for us?

**Kazu (1:00:14)**

Yeah, I think, you know, when we look out at the world today, there is so much chaos and fracture and destruction. And at the same time, as Thomas was just hinting to, there is a surge of activity and interest and so many people joining forces together to do healing work. And so think when we look up at the world, when we look out at social media because of algorithms, we only see one aspect of what is growing in our world. But if we look down to the earth, and if we

look around in the communities that we are in, I think we are seeing a surge of so many life affirming systems and healing modalities happen. And so to really have faith that life has always known how to take care of itself. And I think we are in this moment of the history of our species where life is remembering what it means to create beauty and to affirm itself. And so to really take heart in that, I think this is a beautiful time that we live in.

**Jamie (1:01:09)**

Yeah, well said thank you. Laura, any last words to leave us with?

**Laura (1:01:15)**

Yes, I love what Kasu said. You know, what I'd say is there are already a lot of organizations, communities doing this kind of work. And what I feel is needed is we need to get behind them. We need to get behind initiatives that are already happening. We need to make them visible. We need to continue to learn from them. Because as Thomas was saying, what works in one place, it might be the worst thing that you could do in another.

You know, although there's the principles, we really need to deepen our understanding of what the different sites need. So I think researchers have some work to do there. But also, the other thing is I would love to invite everybody to get involved, because if we start to work with our own trauma, we start to become part of the solution. We start to become capable of seeing where trauma is showing up and we can start to become a resource for others as well - for our systems, for our communities, for our families. This is something that no single person, no matter how capable they are, can ever heal on their own. We're gonna have to do this together. And the more capacity we develop, the more capable of being embodied, of being compassionate we become, the better humanity will be capable of facing these profound challenges and transform them into the opportunity for a true awakening at this level of the whole of humanity.

**Jamie (1:02:43)**

Thank you, Lara. And the final word, Thomas.

**Thomas (1:02:48)**

Yeah, I want to echo what both of you said. That's beautiful. I see it exactly the same. I am very hopeful because of two reasons. One is we said before, trauma and relationship are an interdependent couple. So we actually carry the main remedy is given to us and we are using this. We are social animals, basically. We are very social in nature. So relating is our superpower. So presencing and relating are the two superpowers to integrate trauma. And if we apply this on a community level, then like we all can contribute to this. So every citizen can contribute to a certain kind of improvement of where we are now. So that's very hopeful. We carry the remedy inside. And not only that, the trauma that we heal will become even more remedy because of the integration. We radiate our integration.

Right. And the other thing is that when you look at trauma, what is trauma? It's frozen past, it's frozen life energy. So when it's frozen, there's information stuck in the past, but it's not frozen. It's like our freezer. It's freezing the food every moment and we pay electricity bills. So we can say, wow, it's frozen, but it's being kept frozen. When you heal it, you stop paying this electricity bill and you get all the energy back. So you actually have a 200 % return on investment. That's an amazing amount of information and energy and creativity and whatsoever that is being liberated. And the last thing is, I think we need to ask, because trauma is taking a loan from the

future. If we don't heal our trauma, we live non-sustainably. We take resources from the future generations.

That's important. So we need to ask the questions to leaders and politicians and whomever. What's the cost of not doing it? And so then it becomes a very interesting conversation, not just to convince somebody to do it. Okay, don't do it. Look, let's have a realistic look at the costs. What kind of symptoms do you keep repeating by not engaging? And then it becomes a matter of responsibility to say, all carry a citizen's responsibility to take care of our common living room. And so I think if we put all of this together, then we have a lot of power, we have what we need, we can step by step learn more. And so I think we're on a good way.

**Jamie (1:05:24)**

I love that analogy of the refrigerator - stop paying those electricity bills, folks. Okay, that's all we have time for. As ever, we'll put links to all of the resources and organizations that have been mentioned along with some others that the panelists are going to recommend for us for finding out more about all of this work and how you can get involved in it. So thank you to all of our panelists. I've really appreciated your time.

And thanks everybody for listening. Take care.