

Ep.45 Mental Wellness & Your Spirit!

[00:00:00] Welcome to season three of the Inner Challenge podcast, where we take the mystery out of cultivating mental wellness. The purpose of this podcast is to give you simple tools so you feel better. Whether you're a new listener or a regular, I am glad to have you. I'm so grateful for all of you have sent me emails to MJ Murray Vachon .com. Keep them coming and I would love to have you on as a guest. We have lots of great topics this season. From learning to potty train our emotions to a fact finding mission where I interview expert in compassion to see if compassion can really help us feel better or if it just drains our tank. Okay. So the expert is really my husband, but trust me, he will have a few good ideas for us.

We feel mentally well when we are able to develop and use our gifts for the benefit, not only of ourselves, but for our families, schools, workplaces, and communities. There is a paradox in cultivating mental wellness. We need to be self-aware but not self-absorbed. [00:01:00] As usual we will use Dr. Siegel's model, to help us become aware of when our mind goes from being peaceful, alert and happy, onto the banks of rigidity, where we try to impose control or chaos, where we feel out of control. As we all know, we can wake up feeling pretty good and whammo. Out of no where we find ourselves worried, frustrated, and our mind has run amok. We cultivate mental wellness. When we have the skills, no matter what is happening outside of us, to calm and regulate our reaction to life's events. In today's episode, I'm going to focus on the role our spirit has when it comes to mental wellness. I have gotten really good feedback on how we typically end the episode with my Inner Challenge Insights. So, today I'm going to share with you my Inner Challenge Insights, on the role our spirit has in helping us feel happy, peaceful, alert, content, energized ,stable and [00:02:00] passionate about our life. Here goes:

Inner Challenge Insight number one:

Let me begin by admitting talking about the role our spirit plays in our mental wellness is at once obvious and at the same time, incredibly loaded. First, our spirit is invisible. We know it, when we feel it, but since we cannot see it, It is easy to doubt and minimize its usefulness, especially when it comes to mental wellness. I often say we have a spiritual part of self. Of course that can be challenged by someone who says, show me. I cannot. But the role of the spirit is obvious because when someone suffers from depression, We know that their spirit feels down ,alone, and at times despairing and hopeless. Anxiousness is

one spirit filled with fear. When we learn a piece of music study for an exam, plan a party, our spirit is filled with purpose and commitment. When we're watching young children play or puppies run around, [00:03:00] our spirit is filled with joy and happiness. When we fall in love, our spirit soars, and we have the neuroscience that shows that falling in love increases our neurochemicals that help us feel positive and hopeful. As I've said to many of my clients over the years, Your spirit is suffering or your spirit is soaring, take notice and let yourself reflect on why this is so. When we look at mental wellness through the lens of our spirit, we often get some interesting information and tools that when taken seriously can be very helpful. So, how has your spirit? Think about it. Notice it.

Insight number two.

The second reason talking about the spirit is difficult is because most people connect their spirit with God or religion. For many people, religion is a resource. That's very helpful informing and harnessing their spirit. Yet, today's data shows that for many people, [00:04:00] church is not a part of their life. Since often the spiritual is closely tied to religion people can be mistaken, but if they are not into religion, they don't really have to tend to their spirit. But if you've been at the birth of a child or accompanied a person at the moment of their death, You know that our spirit is innate. The Latin word for spirit is breath. Our spirit comes when we take our first breath and goes when we breathe our last. How we tend to our spirit in between is one of the most beautiful parts of being human. I've learned from my clients that connecting with one spirit goes beyond religion. This is not to undermine religious practices but to promote the many other ways to connect to our spirit that can help us feel better. From my work. I've seen those who tend to their spirit often heal and live more meaningfully. This season, I'm going to pay a bit more attention to this [00:05:00] invisible, but boundless source.

Insight number three:

I define spirit as our unique life giving energy that resides within us and nudges us as towards virtuous and life-giving connection with ourselves, others, and the world. The human spirit naturally yearns for connection through relationships, creativity, nature, prayer, meditation, and just those things that bring a sheer delight, fun and joy. I have certainly worked with people who have had big moments when their spirits gave them what I call a boom experience. Kind of like a Taylor swift concert. Hey, I saw Taylor four years ago and I can still connect to that amazing feeling of fun, love and community she creates. Thanks to social media we see many boom experiences, and I think it leads us to look

for the boom in life and minimize and possibly ignore this [00:06:00] quiet, steady drum beats of the spirit that I have learned are incredibly valuable in cultivating mental wellness. You know what I mean? Those moments of peace, contentment, gratitude, joy. When we look at our garden. Have a sense of art the night sky. Sit a funeral that celebrates a person who truly lived a beautiful and ordinary life. Our spirit does not need boom moments to help us feel good and aligned with purpose and meaning in our life. What our spirit does need is a bit of attention and intention. When I worked in a junior high, I would have a month where the sixth graders paid attention to their spirit. That little something inside of them. A bit of inner knowing. Their inner voice that nudged them to do the right thing. For one week, their homework was to listen to this inner voice and do their best to follow it. Then write a few [00:07:00] paragraphs on the experience. It was amazing. Very few boom moments in 20 years of those essays, but lots of steady drum beats. They would write things like this: "I was playing my video game and I felt a gnawing sense to shut it down and do my homework. I was so relieved and happy when I completed my homework, knowing I would be ready for school the next day." Boom. "I was in a fight with my sister about the remote, and I got a deep sense in my gut to not hit her. I stopped myself and both of us were speechless. And then we started to laugh. Really laugh. Who could imagine that not hitting could be so fun." Boom. "I was feeling so lonely and something in me said go for a bike ride and I ran into some friends and we all started to sing, Shake it Off. It was so fun that I was so happy. I listened to myself. Boom. Another student wrote, "I've [00:08:00] always wanted to read poems, but my friends think they're stupid. But my heart just wanted to do it. So I checked out a Mary Oliver book. I loved it. Following my own interests, not those of the group, made me feel better, but also made me feel a bit older. Boom. Without fail, each student would listen to their inner voice, conscience, inner knowing, or authentic self, whatever you want to call it. In doing so they felt more connected to their spirit. One thing I've learned in working with teens is when they do the wrong thing, their spirits ache. When they do the right thing, their spirits soar. No different from adults, to be honest. That's why our spirit is rooted in that, which is virtuous. That, which is life-giving that, which is good. We want our spirits to soar not to ache.

Insight number four:

The [00:09:00] trickiest part of connecting to our spirit is our ego. Don't get me wrong. We need our ego. When our ego is taking itself too seriously, I think of it as a capital I. Can you see that in your head? The capital letter I. When our ego is in a healthy place, I think of it as a lower case italicized i, can you see that? Let me explain this metaphor. A capital I is big and rigid. It's all about me. It is overly self-focused. It could be self aggrandizing, arrogant, and brutally

blaming self or others. When we are in a capital I mindset, we are closed minded. And italicized lowercase *i* definitely has a self. But that self is what I call right-sized and it is open to connection with others and the world around us. It is open-minded. It has life giving energy and [00:10:00] purpose. The lower case italicized *i* is my example of when our ego is in a healthy place. Like the weather, the shape of our ego can change from day to day. And it is often affected by our interpretation of events. When our ego takes over, meaning our I gets too big, we can find ourselves on one of Dr. Siegel's banks, trying to impose control through rigidity or spinning out of control with chaos as a reaction to something that has happened. In these very human moments, which we will all have. We are often flooded by emotions, which usually douse our spirits. When our ego goes unchecked, we can act in ways that are not aligned with our values. Cultivating mental wellness asks us to get skilled at noticing when our ego gets out of check, as will happen to all of us. When we realize our ego is running a mok, we don't beat ourselves up. Actually we do the [00:11:00] opposite. We offer ourselves some self-care. Most of the time when our I becomes too big, we are hurting. We did not get what we wanted. We don't feel that we're good enough. We're afraid. Maybe someone had a win and it made us feel bad. At times something tragic happens and we're filled with rage. We need to tend and befriend these emotions that make us feel vulnerable. We need to understand that when we feel hurt, disappointed, shamed, small and out of control, we need to have skills that help us sit with ourselves. So we can right size our *i* by allowing ourselves to feel hurt, offer comfort, and to look for a new perspective than our original reaction. Many relationships have been damaged when someone did not do their inner work and let their ego act out. Even the greatest sports stars work on checking their ego as they [00:12:00] give credit to all those around them who made their greatness possible. So befriend your ego. You know what they say? Keep your enemies close.

Insight number five:

I can't mention ego without talking about the word of our time: narcissist. In simple terms, a narcissist is a person whose ego is a capital I, most of the time. They can be socially charming, intelligent, successful at work, Church or in the community groups, they suffer from not being able to see things from any other perspective than their own. Their perspectives and beliefs are rigid. Over time, people who work or in relationships with the narcissist begin to realize they are selfish and want all things on their terms. They are willing to lie, shame and break commitments. For those in relationships with narcissists. It is exhausting and very dangerous for their mental [00:13:00] health. From my clinical work with narcissists, they have taught me that they do not understand why anyone would have a lower case *i*, that is flexible, mutual, open-minded and connecting.

Their spirit is not life-giving and it can be very dangerous for the mental wellness of others around them. Or their country.

Insight number six:

our spirit can be a wonderful messenger if we are brave enough to listen to it. It will help us know when we are out of balance, not in line with our values or need some lightness and fun. To stay connected to our spirit we have to notice when our spirit is sagging and what exactly that means for us. I had one of these spiritual experiences this summer. When I started this podcast, it was going to be one season long with 13 episodes. Then I had a chance to do another season with weekly coaching episodes that we play on various platforms, as well as a radio station. So [00:14:00] basically in 12 months time, I did 45 episodes. Learning to record, edit the pod all by myself, with a bit of troubleshooting from Grace, Peter and Laurie was incredible. It was really fun. The learning curve was huge. It was such a challenge to feel so bad at so many aspects involved in creating a podcast and slowly over time learn to get better and better. Most importantly, I was so happy to share the mental wellness information I had been teaching for 30 years to a wider audience. It was great for my spirit. Yet, I basically added a full-time job on top of my private practice and home duties. Yet, at 40 episodes in important things were falling through the cracks. Some not such a big deal, like cleaning my kitchen floors or keeping my car clean. But some were big deals. I forgot one of my lifelong friends birthdays, and then I got the time wrong for her daughter's graduation party from social work school. The only other time, I [00:15:00] completely spaced fun events of people I cared about was when I was in a car accident. These two friendship misses slapped me in the face and I had to stop and reevaluate. Trust me, this was not a spiritual boom, but a drum beat where I felt embarrassed for missing these important life events of people I care about. No boom. Just an internal ugh Ugh Ugh, of my spirit. When I stopped and got really honest with myself, I could admit I was worn out. Even if it was a good worn out. My spirit was depleted and I knew the only way to resurrect for me was to do less. So I took a hiatus from podcasting this summer, and now I feel replenished again. I've reconfigured my podcasting release schedule, so it stays within my work week, which meant just this morning I had a chance to drop a care package off at the same friend's house, whose husband was having surgery. So trust your spirit. What is it telling you? [00:16:00] It might be a minor tweak or maybe something major. Our spirit doesn't always have something to say to us, but when it does, we are wise to listen.

Insight number seven:

I think people would be surprised at how often therapists tell their clients to go out and do something that will lift their spirits. I asked many people I work with to create a shimmer list. What is a shimmer list? Five things that raise your spirits. It can be a playlist, a walk in the woods, watching Ted Lasso, a latte., Phone a friend, meditate, making cookies for a loved one, pickleball, book club, taking a dog on a walk, going to target, knitting, Friday night dinner with friends, cuddling with your pet, an art project, reading, playing an instrument, Attending church services and the list goes on and on and on. No have tos. Just something that is enjoyable and raises your spirits. I usually [00:17:00] ask people to have only one idea on their shimmer list that's connected to technology. What people find is these small acts of shimmering, as I like to call them, connect us to beauty, creativity, knowledge, kindness, and fun. They are often free of serious competition and help people connect to their spirits in an uplifting way. As I watch people develop this part of themselves there seems to be a lovely balance of connecting to one spirit individually and connecting to others through acts of generosity and friendship. So make your list and help your spirit go from dimmer to shimmer.

Insight number eight:

I am a big believer that we need to protect our spirits. Now, this is actually harder than it seems. In our culture, we're enticed by lots of false spirits. We get thousands of false messages encouraging us to buy or do things promising we will feel better when in [00:18:00] actuality, nothing could be further from the truth. We need to be a bit wiser and understand how these messages often get us off track and lead us to prioritize the wrong things and can harm our spirits in the long run. One of my all time favorite workshops I gave was entitled the good life or the abundant life. It helped people think about the effect unchecked consumerism was having on their life. This is a tricky subject, but to say the obvious spending more money than we have is tough on our spirit. To protect our spirit we are wise to wrestle with the consumer world so we are not led astray by its seductive messages. We also need to protect our spirits from spirits. You know what I mean? Alcohol pot and drugs. No one sees the irony of alcohol being called a spirit, quite like a therapist. In my work with people who struggle with alcohol or other substances, like pot, I have learned that they [00:19:00] often went from use to abuse and sometimes to addiction because they were desperately trying to not feel so bad. Their spirit was suffering and they found a solution. Maybe they were suffering from depression, anxiety the loneliness of not belonging or trauma and they found a spirit that gave them some relief. Before they knew it, they were no longer using, but abusing and for the unluckiest they ended up addicted. Addiction makes me incredibly sad. Because I know in most cases it began as a sincere attempt to feel better. To once again, say the obvious when our spirits are hurting, due to depression,

anxiety, loneliness, or trauma, we need therapy, not alcohol, pot, or Amazon deliveries. Our spirit can be one of the first parts of us that lets us know we need professional help. Let's take protecting our spirits seriously [00:20:00] and really pay attention to when we treat our spirits with using false spirits. They may work in the short run, but fail miserably in the long run.

Insight number nine:

In episode, number eight, I talk about self-care using the acronym NESTS. Nutrition exercise, sleep technology and stress management. It is impossible to have a healthy spirit, if our self care is out of balance. Blah, blah, blah. I know, but it is the truth.

Insight number 10:

The spirit can handle only so much competition and self-actualization. All this emphasis on the self is not good for our spirits. Our spirits thrive when we are being cooperative, mutual and connecting. The spirit is relational. The beauty of a sports team is the joy that comes from the team. As they [00:21:00] say, there is no I in team. And as I say, there are two i i in spirit: one for you and one for me. When we take on our days with looking to use our gifts and abilities to not only help ourselves but to connect and be there for others, our spirits soars. When we look for good, give others the benefit of the doubt and do a few spiritual practices like going for a hike, singing a song or whatever helps your spirits soar we feel better. We are cultivating mental wellness. I hope my Inner Challenge insights have gotten your wheels spinning on how you can connect and nurture your own spirit.

Thanks for listening. Now. Go make your shimmer list and let your light shine.[00:22:00]