Matthew Sanford - July 1 2021

**SPEAKERS**

Molly Joyce, Matthew Sanford

**Molly Joyce** 00:03

The first question is, what is resilience for you?

**Matthew Sanford** 00:12

Um, what is resilience? Well, this is actually influenced by Kevin Kling, I just did a whole talk on resilience. So Kevin talks about it in terms of the ability to regain your shape. And I think there's something really to that. However, one of the ways that might work goes with the mind-body relationship is and I think that it's really important to distinguish between inner and outer resilience. So inner resilience. Outer resilience is kind of obvious. I mean, when you live with a disability or to navigate your life, you know, there's like, your ability to keep showing up, you know, what, you know, one thing about about living with a disability is that it's, it's, um, it's relentless, there's never a vacation, right. And so you develop a level of not only endurance, but resilience because life living in this culture with a disability in general, and in my situation, I'm in a wheelchair and paralyzed from the chest down. It there's a lot like I like to say about people disability, we're, we're experts in disappointment. We're experts in being excluded. We're experts in patience, right? We're experts and having to deal with, with a culture that projects all sorts of bizarre, crazy things that are so outer resilience, in my opinion, is ability to navigate the world. Inner resilience, I think, is, is equally important. And I think our culture unfortunately, thinks of inner resilience as psychological. And my whole thing is that inner resilience has to do with the ability to stay connected to your body live within the body, the only body you'll ever have the ability to deepen and expand from inside out. So instead of resilience, always being out in the world trying to prove yourself or you're trying to prove that you're okay, or whatever fit in or whatever the inner resilience is the ability to stay expanded and grounded within the mind-body relationship, as you're doing these things. And they feed off each other. They're They're, they're, they're very intertwined, the more that I am grounded in my own sense of presence, and I don't just mean mindful, I mean, as a mind body sensation, right, the ability to inhabit the only body I'll ever have, that will change and transform, the things I do as I live in my world, out in the world out in the culture. So for me resilience, it's really important to point out the ability to maintain your shape. And literally, your shape includes your body, like literally, and so instead of always gonna say, oh, because I'm just black, do this, this and this out in the world, it's like, I want there to be a level of resilience that is like, here's my shape, here's what I can come back to, and then have that be part of what I am, and then navigate the world. So to me, resilience is the ability to maintain your shape, in a way that that that includes mind and body. And inner resilience is not defined, purely psychologically, but in fact, includes the body in an integral way. Because there are truths that the body knows that the mind can only learn from the body. So there's, there's insight that goes from body to mind, and from mind to body, but resilience has a crucial component of the truth that the body already has, has mastered that the mind has to learn from.

**Molly Joyce** 03:58

Next question is what is isolation for you?

**Matthew Sanford** 04:04

Well, obviously, there's, there's, you know, in COVID, you know, as we've gone through, then there's literal social isolation, and being separate. But there's also one of the things like I was injured I was 13. Here's an example. And I went have gone through, I came back to school and in eighth grade, I missed two, three, first to seventh grade. And I had gone through a series of experiences that we're literally untranslatable, not only to anyone in my life, but especially to my peers. And so, isolation is also living experiences that have no way to connect to the people around you, or even to the world around you. And, and I think that in some ways, isolation, that puts it in kind of a heavy way. It's also a strength, my work as as a philosopher and writer It has been, because I do feel separated from everybody. Also, right. And that energy of being isolated, separated, whatever you want to call it, is also itself transformative. Right? So it's part of the energy of creation. Right? And so, so, isolation for me, is, is knowing, like, for example, within the disability thing, this idea of inclusivity, and wanting to include everybody, quite frankly, I'm totally okay, not being included in this mainstream culture as it exists now. Right, like, don't assume I want to be included. So what seems on isolation, on one hand, is also for me a form of empowerment, I don't mind on certain ways living on the margin, I don't want to be included, don't assume I want to be like a traditional able bodied person, because there's a lot of things I think, "Wow, I'm glad I live on the margins." So to me, isolation also has been separate also has an ability to create and reflect and think about our culture, in a way that's that, that that is also effective. So although isolation can be lonely, and and, and you don't know what you feel like, you're not always understood, um, it's also powerful. And again, the energy of social isolation, the emptiness of it, is also grounded by the body within the mind body relationship. And so one of the best strategies with isolation is presence in your body.

**Molly Joyce** 06:49

Definitely, no, I love that I think about the emptiness of the two. Next question, the opposite of that, or what is connection for you?

**Matthew Sanford** 06:58

Um, I mean, obviously, there's so many layers to your questions here, um, connection, is, is all sorts of things. And there's so many ways I could talk about this. But, um, so, so there's obviously all the ones we social connection and in relationship with people and things and the earth and all those things. But to me, um, connection, there's an okay, in every connection, let me talk about this in terms of yoga pose, I'm a yoga teacher. So in a base of oppose, like, when your hands on the table, or you're standing on a, you know, standing, there's the part of you that's connected, or my hands on the table that's pushing down, and I can feel the table. But there's also the part of connection that has to do with the empty spaces between my muscles in my bones and within my experience. And that connection, is the ability to true connection. And once it's actually felt, is is, to me includes both my literal physical dimension, but also the empty spaces that exist within me. Like for example, here's a real simple, simple example. We've all been hugged. Right. And we have, we have those ones that are the fake hugs, the light hugs that are polite, and then you have the ones where someone's trying to make a big connection, they squeeze you too hard, you feel like you're stopping is going to come out. And then every once in a while, when you have like someone that you all sudden connect with like synchronizes with all sudden, there's that connection that makes you go, Oh, right. That hug includes more of me than the other two hugs. Or, for example, being very tired at the end of a long day, and finally getting to bed, instead of thinking and then you have that like gonna go. Where it's like the metaphorical shares let down, we're all of a sudden you receive. So connection has a lot to do with, with being able to receive enough to authentically give. Right and so there's a and again, like everything else I think about I think there's a mind-body component to to connection, and a component that includes both the emptiness that I carry, and, and the the more overt structure I carry. So, so it does have to do with isolation, too. I mean, you know, when you've been have been away from people for a long time or haven't seen someone for a long time, and you finally connect again, all of you get swept up with your emptiness and your fullness gets up swept up into connection. So connection would be emptiness and fullness at the same time. In relationship to something else in the universe. Definitely.

**Molly Joyce** 10:06

And last question is, what is darkness for you?

**Matthew Sanford** 10:12

I have a book that setting on my computer, that's all about the idea that that, that healing isn't, isn't going towards the light healing is being able to acknowledge and let in both your light and your dark. And so, darkness for me is? Well, it's all sorts of things, obviously, it's literal. It darkness also, there's a couple different things, darkness also has more unknown and uncertainty in it. Right, so. So when you're in a dark room, once you start thinking about what's in the room with you, little monsters under the bed, right, you're in trouble. So that's one level of darkness. But there's also the part of you that you know, is imperfect and has not always done all the things you want to do. And darkness has a relationship to meet with self-destruction. So when when the energy of isolation, for example, is not processed in a way, that that includes connection, the energy of darkness, or the energy of isolation or disconnection can turn self destructive. So for me, self-destruction is a form of darkness. I also think that people like like, here's, here's okay, so here's a weird example, when I was first starting yoga, I'd go to it, my yoga teacher didn't live in the same town as me. And I'd go in and have these like four or five days where I'd hang out with both her husband and her and we just would, it'd be so intense, and there'd be so many things happening. And almost always, there was a ricochet effect. So after I left this intensive yoga, I'd go through, not depression, but like a ricochet darkness where almost always I'd get self destructive. After having been so illuminated from inside out, there would be a counterbalancing, you know, boomerang effect, that I'm I would almost always get sick, I would almost always get a bladder infection, it'd be all these things that would happen, because they both traveled together. And so darkness is also an energy. Like, one of the ways that I explain. Like, if you go into a dark room, instead of trying to, like get through across the room, as if the light were still on. This is an image in my book waking. Sometimes you need to sit in the darkness and see if your eyes can adjust. So again, darkness is not something in us that we should necessarily run away from, especially if you're involved in the creative process. That I think you have to allow and not be afraid of the darkness. And as I say, in waking, when you sit there, your eyes adjust and maybe the sounds gain texture. Right. And and, and suddenly, there's enough light in there maybe to get across the room, and you don't have to be so afraid of it. At the same time. I don't want to pursue and put my face into into darkness either. It's very easy to to confuse the emptiness that we carry with darkness. So the mind tends to process uncertain energy darkly. Like, I think you see that in our culture right now, with all the conspiracy theories. And it's us encountering a level of us that's created by uncertainty that are latching on to darker stories of suspicion in order to process the underlying energy. Right. And so you have to be careful how you process darkness. And the idea that we could be without darkness within us will lead to incredible violence. Right? It's part of the human condition.