The Seekers Forum Transcript

Present Perfect: An Interview with Shelly Tygielski

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THE SEEKERS FORUM
Inquire Within

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Mark Matousek: Welcome, Shelly Tygielski. It's really great to meet you, and I'm happy that you could join us for The Seekers Forum.

Shelly Tygielski: I'm so happy to be here. Thank you so much for having me.

Mark: Well, first, congratulations on the book. It's really a good read, and congratulations on Pandemic of Love.

Shelly: Thank you. Thank you so much. I appreciate that.

Mark: Let's start. I want to ask you about meditation. We were just talking about our mutual friend, Sharon Salzberg, and I didn't realize you go back as far as you do with mindfulness meditation. Can you tell me how meditation prepared you to do the work that you're doing now?

Shelly: Certainly. I met Sharon when I was in graduate school in the late 90s. I met her at Tibet House, and it was my first introduction to meditation and also first introduction ever to Metta, to loving-kindness practice. It really blew my mind open, no pun intended, but also my heart center. Having been raised in a very rigid contemplative practice, as an Orthodox Jew, I had a very rote way of speaking to God, or being spiritual, and had a canned approach to it.

The ability to be able to take that, and expand upon it, and really connect in a very different way was really important, I think, to definitely the development of my ability to really be willing to go into the darkest places in my mind, in my heart, and identify the roadblocks. It took me decades to actually- through daily practice. I've been a meditator now for 20 years. It took me a long time to actually come to a place where I really feel like I can say that I have these new default modes that I'm working with, through this practice, especially through the practice of Metta.

Certainly, the last five years, especially since the last election cycle, have been very challenging for many of us. I've noticed in that instance, how differently I respond than my friends, than many people that I've known for a really long time, and I credit that to my meditation practice. My ability to approach certain individuals that most people may have great difficulty with, with a quality of curiosity, and a quality of non-judgment, and a quality of being able to really sit with this comfort is really important as well.

The work that I'm doing today, which is in large part really either philanthropic or working with communities affected by trauma, affected by just essentially their lot in life, where they were born in the world, and what's happening in these challenging times, whether they're refugees or people that are born in communities here in the United States that are affected by gun violence on a daily basis. My practice today has really moved beyond that fight-like fear into the tending for friend zone, into the, I call it, empathy action zone.

The ability to really, yes, label what it is that I'm feeling, which in many cases in the last five years has been outrage. [chuckles] Then immediately be able to move beyond that and say, "And what am I going to do about it?" Then the follow-up question, which really comes from the Metta practice that Sharon gifted me with is, "And how do I come from a place of love?"

Because sometimes the answer of "and what am I going to do about it" is not a very nice answer or kind answer-

Mark: Right.

Shelly: But the follow-up question is really important because then I could start thinking about, "Okay, is this going to be of service? Is it congruent with the intentionality and the way that I want to show up in the world?" Sometimes the answer is yes, and sometimes the answer is I have to go back to the drawing board.

Mark: Right, and deal with your own version.

Shelly: Exactly. Exactly.

Mark: Yes. You say that meditation is not a solitary practice. Could you say more about that? Why do you believe that?

Shelly: I don't really believe that anything's a solitary practice, even the practice of self-care, which is really something that I address deeply as well in my book. I think that when we think of the self, and Dr. Dan Siegel speaks a lot about this in his "we" concept. The self is not just this physical body that is here, like the "I" that I speak about when I talk about myself, but it actually expands way beyond that. It is all of the kind of ripples of energy. I don't mean that in a woo-woo type of a way. I mean that in a very scientific type of a way like so many people have affected my life, whether they're known to me or unknown to me, and so many people are affected by every decision that I make in my life, every action that I take.

When we meditate, we show up differently in the world. We show up with more presence and we show up with a different quality about ourselves. That absolutely affects the people that are in our inner circle, in our community, the people we work with, and the ripples just continue to extend to places, again, that we maybe can see in our lifetime, and sometimes beyond what we'll ever know, how far-reaching they are.

Mark: Right, but actually sitting with people you think is a real boon to practice.

Shelly: I do, I fully believe that. Just based on my own personal experience, when I have been even in silent retreats where I'm not necessarily speaking to or looking in the eyes of other individuals, just simply being in a space, sharing a space with individuals, I think can be incredibly important. A good example of that would be – I work a lot of times with individuals that are affected, as I said, by gun violence or mass shootings in this country. Oftentimes you're in a space very soon after they have experienced an incredibly tragic loss that they're still very much in shock from. There are no words that you could say to close that wound, but simply just being there, by being present is in of itself so powerful.

I feel like that same quality, is what's brought to a meditation practice that is done together in Samba, when we could sit together and we can commune just on an energetic level. I think it really elevates us. I also happen to think that it holds us accountable because I think that sometimes we can get lazy with our practice, but when we've got accountability buddies or partners – I'm the type of person at least that would rather disappoint myself than disappoint other people so…

[laughter]

Shelly: …sometimes I have to show up for other people, even though I don't feel like really showing up for myself.

Mark: That really is central to your whole philosophy it seems to me. Let's go a little deeper into this quality of self-care. I have never heard anyone talk about self-care in the radical way that you do. It has nothing to do with wearing better makeup or doing more exercise, right?

Shelly: [laughs] No.

Mark: Well, talk about what it means for you, please.

Shelly: Well, self-care has certainly been hijacked by the industrial wellness complex that we're living in. Like you said, it's not bath bombs, it's not mud masks or chai lattes. It's really a gateway, I think, to ensuring that there is equity in this world and that everybody in our circles of influence has enough. In the book, I talk about my mantra, which is enough is a feast. That simple notion that people, whenever I drop that mantra on people, they're like, "Oh, that's so profound," and I'm like, "Yes, but let's dig in a little bit into how we get there." How do we get there to enough is a feast and making sure that everybody really has enough, because we know intellectually that there is more than enough to go around for everybody on this planet, every sentient being, and yet, we're like hoarders, it's not necessarily always the case.

When we look at where self-care actually came from, the modern notion of self-care, really, it was born out of a struggle for survival. It was born out of the civil rights movement. It was born out of the feminist movement. It was born from communities that literally did not have access to health care, to medical care, to just basic fundamental things that – and still don't, in some cases, by the way. It was born out of this need to survive.

Somewhere along the line in the '80s and then, certainly, in the '90s, it became this notion of, not survival, but thriving. I'm trying to get people back to this point of saying, "Well, wait a minute, I'm not saying that thriving is not important, but you've got to first make sure that everybody is surviving." If you're going to yell at people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, you have to make sure that they have boots. Let's make sure that everybody has boots first and then we can all lift ourselves up by those bootstraps together and collectively.

When I talk about self-care, I also infuse that notion of the self-being larger than we are. This understanding that the practice really has to be formalized in order for it to work. It has to be written down. It has to be something that is shared, that is discussed, that is a communal effort, not an individualistic pursuit, but a communal one, so that we can identify the obstacles that are preventing us from doing certain things on a daily basis for ourselves, for our families, and that we can share what those obstacles are in a way that is free from judgment, in a way that's in a safe space or container that we've created for ourselves.

Individuals within our formalized community of care who each also have their own self-care plans can help us remove those obstacles because what a community of care, the tenets, the principle of a community of care is that every single person in that community has something that they need regardless of their socioeconomic status and every single person has something they can offer. If we start with that premise, then there's this beautiful transference or redistribution of wealth.

When I say wealth, of course, automatically our westernized minds think about capitalism. We think about money. I'm talking about wealth in forms of health and energy, and data, and time, and all of these other things that don't cost money, that we could offer one another. That could really be great gifts and that were, in my own life, great gifts, especially when I was a single mom, newly divorced, going through medical issues. My community came out for me in a really formalized way and I would credit them for saying that they not only saved my life, but they helped me thrive beyond that.

Mark: The essence of self-care is love?

Shelly: Yes. The essence of everything is love. [chuckles]

Mark: Right. For somebody who's feeling isolated, which many people are now, feeling like they don't have enough for themselves, how can they possibly help other people and enrich community? What do you say to that person?

Shelly: I say that because you don't have enough for yourself, you should give more. It's almost like when somebody goes to their teacher and says, "I don't have five minutes to meditate," and the teacher says, "You should meditate for 10." If somebody says to you, if you want more love in your life, you give more love. If you want more kindness in your life, be kind. It's just a simple notion. I think the energy that we put out there is really what is reflected back to us. I've been able to see that play out in real-time with individuals, who during the pandemic –

Earlier you mentioned the Pandemic of Love movement, which is a mutual aid community that we built over nineteen months ago at the beginning or at the onset of the pandemic and we've been able to match over two million people at this point. Amongst those two million people, $60 million has been transacted directly. Pandemic of Love is not a nonprofit. We're a nonprofit disruptor. We don't have a bank account. We don't take money from people. We just basically say, "No, we're going to make," as my mother would say in Yiddish, [Yiddish language], "We're going to make a connection between a person in need and a person who has a need that they can fulfill and have them connect on a very human level and have a conversation."

It's really beautiful because oftentimes the person who's the donor thinks like, "I don't need anything," and yet they're able to be gifted by somebody who thinks, "I have nothing to give." It's mutually beneficial. It's not a one-way transaction. I think oftentimes people come to it thinking it's going to be a one-way transaction like, "I'm the giver," and "I'm the receiver," and really both are the giver and receiver.

Mark: Can you say something more about how Pandemic of Love works for people who don't understand this reciprocity?

Shelly: Yes, sure. Basically, mutual aid is not something that I invented. It's been around for many years, hundreds, hundreds of years, conceptually thousands of years, like going back to clan days. Really it was formalized as a term by a social biologist named Kropotkin, who's very much an anarchist, very disturbed by the notion that people were hijacking Darwinian theory and the notion of survival of the fittest, to justify capitalism, and sort of, "Yes, this survival of the fittest, these people will be left behind and these people will become oligarchs or [crosstalk]"

Mark: That's as it should be because it's the law of the jungle.

Shelly: Yes, exactly. What Kropotkin said is like, "You guys are so wrong because that's one little pillar in Darwinian theory and thought, and the laws of the jungle," because when you look at the jungle, when you look at any ecosystem, whether it's a coral reef system or what have you, there is reciprocity. In order for that ecosystem to exist it has to basically be mutually beneficial. We have to rely on each other, different species, different classifications of sentient beings, and animals and plants have to commune. They have to work together not just to survive, but to thrive.

That's really the premise of mutual aid, is how do we create this human ecosystem where we've eradicated this notion or thought of like, "It's every man for himself. We're on our own," and really get back to this notion that, "No, together, if we work together and we share and we make sure that everybody has this level playing field, that we can actually thrive, not just merely survive," which is what so many people are doing on a daily basis. Pandemic of Love was built on that thought process, really. I, to be honest with you, didn't set out to build a global movement. I really, to use the Buddhist proverb, wanted to tend to the area of the garden that I could reach, which was my own community in south Florida.

I knew that there were many people in our community at the onset of the pandemic that, as we were shutting down would not be able to afford filling up their fridge and making sure that their kids had food because they relied on free lunches and breakfast at school. That's ten meals a week, and when you add that up, it's a lot. I knew that there were going to be a lot of people that would be concerned about making sure that they have enough data or Wi-Fi for their kids to be able to continue to attend school, et cetera.

I also knew that there were people in our community whose lives were not going to really be affected or the quality of their life was not going to change due to the pandemic. I wanted to put those individuals together. I just created two very simple forms. It's still this simple today, when you go to our website, pandemicoflove.com, and the forms are "give help" and "get help." You fall into one of the categories. You click on the form. It's very simple.

When you put in your zip code, it actually connects you to the most local chapter to you. If you're in New York City, if you're in Manhattan, it'll connect you to the Manhattan chapter. If you're in Brooklyn, it connects you to the Brooklyn chapter. If you're somewhere where there is no chapter, it connects you to the one that's closest in your state or sends you to the national chapter where we have what we call anywhere donors, people who are willing to give to anyone.

Basically what happens is that we – our volunteers – we have thousands of volunteers at this point. We have a vetting system, where we vet the individual that's in need because we recognize that we have a fiduciary responsibility to the donor. Once we do that, then we look to see, "Okay, these are the things that they've asked for. This donor or donors have said that they can fulfill those needs," and so we're going to connect them using the method that they checked off by email, by text message, et cetera. Then really the donor drives the bus initially, in terms of the relationship, where they want that relationship to go.

There are many different types of donors. Some donors are just sort of, "What's your Venmo? What's your PayPal?" or, "Send me that bill. I'll pay for it," and that's the end of the transaction. Some who decide to have conversations and one-time conversation with that individual before to help them feel seen and heard, and to learn more. There are so many

stories of connection that have moved beyond that, where people have really just, man, they just every day restore your faith in humanity and what is possible in terms of the friendships that have developed, not just across cultures, and across casts, and across generations, but even across political divides that seem so unbridgeable sometimes, and yet, and yet when people come together in a point of vulnerability or empathy, they actually are able to connect on a really human level. It's so beautiful to see the outcome of that and the capability that if we can just like, "How do we replicate that?" If we can hone in on that, there's the secret sauce that can help to repair this world.

Mark: That's absolutely true. Can you tell me one story of people who have reached across a political or religious or socioeconomic divide?

Shelly: I actually include the letter that I got from this donor in the book itself. It's a letter from a woman named Eileen and she self describes herself as a liberal, hippy New York Jew.

[laughter]

Mark: Okay. All right.

Shelly: That just frames it for you. She was matched with a person – she decided to be an anywhere donor. She was like, "I don't care. Just match with anyone." She was matched with a woman named Christine in Mobile, Alabama. Eileen was not happy about this. She actually sent us a scathing letter to say, "How dare you match me with somebody who voted for somebody that wants to harm me and who wants to dismantle everything that I have worked for as a social worker, as an activist my entire life?" She was very upset. She included her phone number. This letter got forwarded to me and I decided I'm going to call her and I'm going to have a discussion with her, and I did.

The main point of the conversation, it lasts for a while, I got a chance to hear her out, is I asked her to just pause for a moment and think about what would happen if she didn't transact with Christine, who at that point she already had had a conversation with and then told her, "I'm going to think about this and I'll call you back." I said, "If you don't transact with her, there's the potential that you're going to reaffirm for her everything she thinks about a New York hippy liberal Jew," right?

Mark: Jew, right.

Shelly: "A snowflake like you."

Mark: Right, right, right.

Shelly: You may be the only gateway for her to change her mind about all of those narratives, all of that conditioning that she might have as a person that probably has never left that place, has never been to New York City. This woman's a single mom. She's got two children, eight and ten years old. That conditioning is being passed on, but maybe there's an opportunity there to also change that narrative. She said, "Thank you for speaking to me. I'm going to think about it and I'll get back to you guys." I didn't hear from her for months.

Mark: Really?

Shelly: I didn't even know. I thought she – no, didn't hear from her, like there was a lot going on, of course. I didn't follow up. I wanted to give it the space. About a month before

the November election, I get another email from Eileen, which I include in the book with her permission. It's such a beautiful email because it talks about how she did wind up transacting with Christine and how she continues to transact with her. On a bi-weekly basis, she sends her a Walmart gift card in an e-card so that she could supplement what she's getting from unemployment at that time and she could help to feed her children. She says, "Dare I say it we're even friends at this point."

Mark: Wow.

Shelly: Yes, amazing. She said that she talked to Christine about things that Christine really didn't know a lot about like Eileen's parents were survivors of the Holocaust and she was able to have conversations with her about the Holocaust and talk to her about that and talk to her about how a lot of the programs that Christine is relying on really comes from some liberal philosophies. It became this really interesting friendship that wasn't always a political discussion; they would also talk about children and they would talk about what her daughter liked.

Christine's daughter loves to read. Eileen used that as an opportunity. She says, "This was my Trojan horse." I basically asked her if it was okay for me to send her books and she said, "Yes, of course," and so I sent a huge box of books to her, books that I included about diversity and about –

Mark: Right. Right, right.

Shelly: – things that she would never have the opportunity probably to read in her local library or at her local schools, certainly not things that her mother would, say, purchase for her. It became this beautiful sort of exchange. It was really interesting because at the end of the letter, Eileen writes, "How many Christines have I avoided my entire life?" It begets the question of how many Christines did I avoid my entire life because I didn't want to feel uncomfortable, and is this why we're in this situation because we shy away from this discomfort and to bring it back full circle to meditation, in general.

I think so many people have this notion that meditation is supposed to make us more comfortable, and actually, I think it's about being more comfortable with discomfort, being able to actually sit with discomfort and not run away from it. It's just such a beautiful letter that I think just spoke so many volumes to recognize where we've gone wrong as a species, but also how we can rectify the situation.

Mark: Yes. It's a microcosm of what's possible when –

Shelly: Yes, it is.

Mark: Yes. I'd like to talk to you –

Shelly: It's replicated two million times, right?

Mark: Amazing. It's so amazing. Did Christine have to wait for Eileen to come around before she got any aid?

Shelly: Well, I would say that probably not because there was a chapter in Alabama at the time that was in her area and so it was being run by a bunch of individuals who probably went through and looked at all of her needs. I doubt that her only need was just groceries. She

probably also needed help with things like utility bills, et cetera. A lot of times people get matched with more than one donor.

Sometimes we have mega-donors, sometimes we have donors that are willing to create, we call them giving circles. In other words, if you can't afford to help somebody pay the rent that month, but you have ten friends who are willing to chip in to do that, and you're organizing that and they all kind of Venmo, you are PayPal, and then you pay the rent, it becomes this beautiful exchange again that has rippled out.

Mark: Right, got it. I got it. I'd like to talk to you a little bit about wholeness and brokenness. You have a different take on that as well from the common, spiritual idea that we need to be whole before we can give. On the contrary, you said, "We're all broken and others have the pieces that I'm missing." Can you say something more about that?

Shelly: I think that a lot of us are at this precipice. We think that we need to – I see this all the time in this space that I work in, in the health and wellness space. I see the same people, and I don't mean proverbial, I mean, literally the same people who come to these events, these conferences, and these retreats that I lead or that I attend. When you talk to them, and this could be decades-long of conversations, they're like, "Yes, I just got this certification, that certification. I just did this and –" It's like this constant pursuit of self-improvement and certifications.

My question to them is always like, "What are you doing with that? What is the intention? Why are you doing this? Just for the pursuit of self-improvement or because there's this intention of actually taking it out into the world and making a difference?" I feel like we need to just all understand that in many ways we are all broken, we're all broken, and yet there's a wholeness in that. Knowing that everybody is broken can make us all feel whole. There's not one human being on this planet that doesn't have trauma, that doesn't have –

Again, as my mother would say, [Yiddish language]. It's like some stuff that's happening is swirling about in her head. When we can actually recognize that and recognize that the only way that we're going to be able to fill in those gaps is by allowing other people to be the salve to our wounds and understand that we ourselves hold the salve to other people's wounds and that we've got to connect in order to collectively be whole because that is the only way we're ever going to be whole.

Mark: That goes so against the American ethos of individualism and "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" and then the mommy state that's going to support you. [crosstalk]

Shelly: Yes. [chuckles]

Mark: Yes, go ahead. Sorry.

Shelly: No, I was going to say, in the book I talk about a magical time that our grandparents used to tell us about called *back in the day*. Back in the day, it's like when unicorns lived. "Back in the day, we knew our neighbors. We didn't just know that Bob has a new John Deere. We knew that Bob's wife has a mental illness and that that the daughter has a learning disability and that the son just lost his job. We knew our neighbors."

In that sense, we also felt a moral obligation to take care of somebody when something happened. To show up. "Oh, you're sick." You don't need to ask for chicken soup, "Here's

chicken soup." "Oh, you lost your job. I know somebody who's hiring. Let me tell you about it." I think through the industrial age, certainly, through the technological evolution, we've gotten further and further away from that and this book is, I think, in some ways, for me, it's a hearkening, it's a love letter to sort of say, "Hey, can we just go back to that magical time period where we really felt responsible for our neighbors and we felt like there was this moral obligation to make sure that everybody is okay?"

Mark: We don't have to be completely evolved before we can give with an open heart, right?

Shelly: Correct. Right, absolutely. I think sometimes when our hearts are cracked open, when we're in our most vulnerable states, those are the times that we can give the most lovingly, the most lovingly.

Mark: It doesn't have the same one up, one down quality.

Shelly: No, not at all.

Mark: A lot of people who get into a heroic mentality, it's really ego heroism as opposed to authentic heroism.

Shelly: Correct. Absolutely. It is.

Mark: Can you talk about Henry James' idea of being twice-born? It's such a wonderful concept and how that applies to you.

Shelly: Well, it's really interesting because as a Jew, I was like, "Wow, I learned something new. I learned about what it means to be born again and where that came from." I love the quote and I hope that I get this right because I haven't used this quote in a long time. The notion that every person lives twice, that everybody has two lives, the first life is the life that we know and the second life is when we realize we only have one life. I think I botched it, but you get the gist of it.

For me, being twice-born, if you will, was the fact that I was handed a diagnosis at the age of 27. I was told that I would be blind most likely by the time I was 40. When somebody tells you something like that, you realize, "Wait a minute, there's a timer here. I have a timeline. The sand is going to run out," so to speak. It's so funny to think about it that way because we're all going to die. None of us are getting out of this life alive, but we don't think about it in those terms until we're handed a diagnosis, until there's something that happens and then we're like, "Oh my God, I have this condition or this terminal illness or somebody that I love and that was near to me just lost their life in a moment." We wake up to this idea that like, "Wow, I really need to make the most of every single day and not defer my happiness, or defer my fulfillment, or defer saying the things that I want to say to certain individuals."

The way that it really is manifested in my life is that – now I'm 44, by the way, I am visually impaired in my left eye. I am still struggling with vision in my right eye and I've had many procedures and well actually I'm having one in another two weeks again, but it hasn't stopped me from living my life. It hasn't created this "woe is me" mentality when we talk about being twice-born. It's created this "wisdom is me" way that I think about it. It's how do I share this experience with other people that I've been going through, that I've been struggling with and then make the most of it, and recognize that because of this darkness, because of this gift of darkness that I've gotten – as Mary Oliver says, "It's a gift of

darkness," – I have realized so many things that I wouldn't have realized if this didn't actually happen to me.

Mark: People are always asking me, "Well, can I wake up through joy?" and I say I have never known anyone who's had a major wake-up and awakening experience because they're feeling terrific. It always comes from being cracked, being broke, or losing and your life is such a beautiful example of that.

Shelly: Thank you for that. Yes, absolutely. I totally agree with you. You can't have light without darkness. We know this. You can't appreciate that light until, I think, you really are willing to go in and investigate the darkness. We all have darkness and I think we have to be willing to go there.

Mark: Absolutely. Just one last question. I'm interested in what you say about approval killing freedom. So many people are addicted to approval, addicted to the perception that they're okay reflected back at them by other people. Can you talk about how approval kills freedom and stunts growth? The need for approval.

Shelly: Sure. I am somebody who my whole life has struggled with self-worth. Believe it or not, even now I still suffer, I find myself defaulting in, but now I can identify, "Hey, what am I doing? Why am I thinking this way?" I have the tools to deal with it, but I definitely still suffer from imposter syndrome on a daily basis and I talk about it though. I talk about my struggles with it. I think having those conditions, if you will, I've always needed to feel validated by other people, by pedigrees, by goals, by accolades, et cetera.

It does, I think it actually has been counteractive. It has been counterintuitive. It has actually done more harm needing that because the goalpost and the goal line always keeps getting moved, and then the void just gets bigger and bigger because it's never enough. What I've learned is that I actually was a slave to it and a slave to reaching these goals. When I finally did reach some of the largest goals that I had, to be the CEO of a company before the age of forty – and I was one at the age of thirty-six, I headed a company with 2,400 employees in fourteen markets, I was the most miserable human being I'd ever been in my life, at the age of thirty-six.

I looked around one day, one evening, everybody had left the office, I was still there, a slave to my work, and I thought, "Is this as good as it gets? I can't believe this is what my life is going to be like for the next forty years of my life." I had to extrapolate from that, that I was doing all this not for me, but really for the label, the title, the validation, the way that people would look at me, or the way I could introduce myself to people at a cocktail party when they say, "Who are you? What do you do?" I can, "Oh, [crosstalk]"

Mark: What do you do? Right? [laughs]

Shelly: Yes, exactly. There are two things from that. I realize that when I talk about feeling validated by people, I used to not include myself as a person in that thought process. Now I most definitely include myself first and again, sometimes it's very difficult and challenging to do so, but what do I feel? How do I feel about this moment? Am I proud of myself? It's so hard for me to say, but I actually – even just the other day, one of my girlfriends who have known me for a long time, she said, "How do you feel?" and I said, "I'm really proud of myself." She said, "I'm so proud of you for saying that you're proud of yourself," because that took a lot out of me.

The other thing that I realized is that question of, “What do you do? What do you do for a living?” It harkens back, it comes from a place of what we used to be asked as children and what people still ask our children and grandchildren, which is, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” That’s the central question. “What do you want to be when you grow up?” and that question is so archaic it needs to be retired. When somebody would ask my son that question, I would say, “Stop right there.” That’s the wrong question to ask.

The question that we need to ask is, who do you want to be when you grow up? Who? I want to be a kind person. I want to be a person that’s in service to others. I want to be a person that has a lot of love in my life and has a lot of love to give. When you answer those questions if you’re trained to answer those questions as a child, then, suddenly, you can really start centering your life and building your life around not needing that approval, not needing validation because you’re – regardless of your title, regardless of what you wind up doing for a living, you could still center your life around those intentions. Those are some of the lessons that I’ve learned around the need, the desperate need for validation.

Mark: That’s wonderful. You’re honest about still needing it or still having – it’s like a phantom limb. It’s still there. [chuckles] You can feel it but you don’t need it as much as you used to.

Shelly: No, and again with the ability to be more self-aware I know it’s coming. Sometimes, I know it’s coming from a mile away and I’m like, “Oh, here it comes.” I could prepare tea for it and I already know it’s coming. I’m just like, “Here it goes so I’m just going to allow myself to go down this rabbit hole,” but guess what? I know where the stairs are and I can climb my way out.

Mark: Beautiful. Thank you so much. What a fantastic conversation. I really enjoyed it. I just want to wish you so much luck with the book and with that fantastic Pandemic of Love work you’re doing.

Shelly: Thank you. Thank you so much. I appreciate it. This was very fun.

Mark: Thank you. My pleasure.