

The Now Effect

Shrink Rap Radio

Episode #306

David Van Nuys interviews Elisha Goldstein, PhD

David: My guest today is psychologist, Dr. Elisha Goldstein, and we'll be discussing his new book, *The Now Effect: How This Moment Can Change the Rest of Your Life*. Elisha Goldstein, PhD, is in private practice in West Los Angeles and he is the author of the 2012 book, *The Now Effect*. He is also the co-author of a mindfulness-based stress reduction workbook with a foreword by Jon Kabat-Zinn. He synthesizes the pearls of traditional psychotherapy with a progressive integration of mindfulness to achieve mental and emotional healing. He contends that we have the power to transform our traumas and habitual patterns that keep us stuck in perpetual cycles of stress, anxiety, depression, or addiction and step into greater freedom and peace. He offers practical strategies to calm our anxious minds, transform negative emotions, and facilitate greater self-acceptance, freedom, and inner peace.

Dr. Goldstein comes from a family of psychologists and he advocates that mental health comes from an approach that looks at all aspects of the self, physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual. As a licensed psychologist, he teaches mindfulness-based programs in his own Los Angeles practice and through InsightLA. To learn more about Dr. Goldstein, please go to our show notes at shrinkrapradio.com. Now, here's the interview. Dr. Elisha Goldstein, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

Elisha: It's great to be here, David. Great to be back.

David: It's hard to believe it's been four years since we spoke about your work on mindfulness-based stress reduction. It seems like it was just yesterday.

Elisha: Wow! It does.

David: I'm really impressed by how productive you've been during the intervening four years with writing, producing CDs, workshops, interviews, now this book, and you tell me that you are working on another one?

Elisha: Yeah. It's all going along the same line of putting work out there that's going to be supportive to others and as well myself, about helping us become more present to our lives. Opening up to more of the choices that are there and living more aligned with our intentions and values.

David: I'm recalling from our previous interview that back in the '70s, you were a very intense go-go professional in the financial services industry before the big financial crash. Now, I have the impression that you are a go-go psychologist

with all that same intensity and drive. My question is, what do you do in your personal life to keep things in balance, to practice what you preach and to reign in what might be your natural type A tendencies? Is that a fair question?

Elisha: Yeah. You added some years to my life, more the '90s maybe than the '70s.

David: I'm sorry. I was way off there. I'm sorry.

Elisha: That's okay. It's interesting that you touched on that, Dave, because that's one of the reasons I got into mindfulness. This idea of helping, a very practical application to life and some way of helping me become more present, more focused, more able to stay in line with my intentions and my value. It's because I'm the kind of guy whose mind is constantly thinking of many different ideas. I'm easily distracted and taken away by something that's exciting or just taking my mind into maybe some of the less exciting places as well. It's become very important for me to find the in-between spaces in life where I can stop and center, become focused, and get back in touch with actually what's here.

Another thing that's helped me walk my talk in some ways is becoming very aware of my emotional state, and understanding, I guess the fact, in some way, that for me, when I can become more aware of what's happening with me emotionally and be able to meet, especially the difficult emotions, be able to meet it with greater mindfulness, greater sense of caring about what's here, I inevitably become more in control of where I'm able to place my attention and I feed myself the message that I'm worth enough to pay attention to, which makes me feel better. When you feel better, your mind is more open or my mind is more open and able to focus on what really matters. It's those little things.

When I say the in-between spaces, I mean there's places all throughout the day that we are unaware of that can be opportunities to tap into becoming more present. That's waiting in line. That's going to the bathroom. That's waking up in the morning. That's being in the shower. All these informal places, waiting on hold on the phone, which can be opportunities to just become more present to our lives. I think that's really what's helped me. It's understanding this in-between spaces that are there. I'd say that's the basis in some ways for writing *The Now Effect*, which was helping all of us really integrate this into our lives rather than being this approach to life where we have to be away somewhere or be in this special place and ground in this longer practice, which are all wonderful things to do too, but what's the practical applications to our lives? That comes out in my personal experience.

David: I can really relate to all of that. I remember at one point when I was so aware of how much my mind drifts. I'm supposed to be a professional listener and I'm aware of that. Often my mind is somewhere else and my head is nodding. I deliberately decided to put myself in a situation, in a life and death situation, where I would have to pay attention. I decided to become a glider pilot, not a hang glider, but the kind of airplane without a motor. I knew that I really need to pay attention to what the instructor was saying because my life would literally depend upon it. I know what you're talking about. Now, when I first saw the title of the book, *The Now Effect*, I thought "Well, we've got Eckhart Tolle's book." I don't

know how to pronounce his name, Toll, Tole, Tolle, *The Power of Now*, which was a very big seller and before that, Ram Dass's *Be Here Now* and even before that. Certainly, a whole raft of Zen Buddhist as well as Gestalt therapy writing about the importance of being in the moment. Why *The Now Effect* now?

Elisha: We also have a very wide amount of books that have come out on mindfulness in particular.

David: I'm sure you have.

Elisha: *The Now Effect*, what I wanted to get at was, this even goes beyond just the label of terms like mindfulness. It's about what's happening right now. *The Power of Now*, which is a wonderful book, and obviously *Be Here Now*, sold over a million copies. That had tremendous influence on our culture, especially in the field of psychotherapy. *The Power of Now* also, a very powerful book that talks about the philosophy, a question and answer book that talks about the philosophy as I actually learned later after I thought of the title, *The Now Effect*. The philosophy of what it's like to actually be here, how the past and the future is all happening right now and how we don't have to believe everything we think, in other words. At least that's what I think the essence of it is.

This book is about taking, I guess, that idea of being here now and applying it very practically in our lives. The essence of this book is to take practices all throughout the book, the concepts and practices, and find ways that they apply at work, in our relationships or when it comes to interaction with our diet or a variety of different things. I see it as more of a practical *Power of Now*, but it's really embracing the idea of mindfulness, which isn't really discussed as much in that book.

David: Practical, certainly, is the right word. Actually, the book begins with something about your own story. Let me have you take us through the highlights of your personal journey and how this book, *The Now Effect*, is both a reflection of that journey and has grown out of it.

Elisha: It's interesting in writing that short piece, I was reluctant to write it because it was such a personal part of my life. As a psychologist, we rarely share some of our most personal pieces of our history. As I was reflecting on what to write as far as relaying to the public and everyone, what would be most helpful for them, I decided that this piece was it. It was about probably the most intense moment of my life. The moment where I was washed over with a state of awareness. That's that moment, the now effect. It's a moment of clarity, that "ah-ha" moment where we recognize what really matters to us. You can call it the moment of mindfulness.

This was a time when I was, as you were mentioning before, I was in the corporate world and I was working hard and playing a whole lot harder. As long as I was successful in what I was doing, I figured everything was okay. I could be found in the back streets of South of Market street in San Francisco in the various bars and clubs, out to all different hours of the night and even up for days at times. I used to see this man that was there and I relay the story. I see this

man who looked like he was up for days. He was a shadow of a human being it seemed like. I used to tell my friends who I was with that if I was ever caught with this man, you know I've hit rock bottom.

It was only a few weeks later after I made that comment that I was in a broken-down limousine with this same man and what looked like, maybe, a beaten-up prostitute. I was looking for a way just to even stay up for the following day at work. In that moment, when I was with him, something really kind of washed over me, which was a voice inside. I was taking a pause from this entire experience and a voice inside rose up in me and said, "You are worth more than this. You don't have to do this. This doesn't have to be your life. This doesn't have to be your future." In that moment, that was this "ah-ha" moment of clarity. That's what I called the now effect. It's when we come to our truth in some way.

I took the next step and opened the door and walked outside and walked back home. You could do that in San Francisco because it's a small place. That started my journey into the rest of my life, which is where I am today. When we are talking about making change in our lives whether it has to do with stress, anxiety, depression, addiction, trauma, working with trauma. or whether it has to do with just being more successful in what we are doing, it doesn't happen to easily. It's not as if you can make a single decision and all of a sudden things start to just unfold from there. For me, I found myself relapsing into that same lifestyle a couple of times while still working on that kind of change.

David: It doesn't happen immediately and it does take attention and repeated ongoing work.

Elisha: And intention.

David: Intention, which we'll talk about a bit about down the line here. I'm so glad that you did include that story. I've always looking for some kind of self-revelation by authors because it's the stories really that I know that pull me in. One of the things that I love about your book is that most chapters, if not every chapter, begins with a little story. I hope you'll feel free to throw in as many stories as come to mind in our discussion here. Tell us a bit about the structure of the book. It's got a very interesting structure.

Elisha: I made it specifically for people like myself who don't have naturally the longest attention spans.

David: I like that too.

Elisha: Each chapter is kind of a short chapter, like two or three pages long with what's called the now moment at the end, which is meant to pop someone into that space of clarity so they can experience that moment, either a practice or a reflection, to experience the content of that chapter. One thing that I know and that's been taught by many teachers in the past is that you can read a book or you can listen to an expert or whatever it is and you might have some kind of insight or some connection, but real change happens from our own experience.

That's what becomes most motivating and that's what actually creates the integration of that work. I created these “now” moments to give people the experience of the content of that chapter.

I've also included fourteen video links throughout the book and these come in the form of what I call Microsoft Tags. If people have smartphones, they can point the smartphone over this tag and it will pop up with a two- or three-minute video of me guiding them through a particular practice, which is very different than any book that I've really seen out there. The purpose of it is to give someone access, like you reach into their life and support them with this practice. Now, eventually, you can get rid of the tool of the technology and be able to just use these practices as they start becoming more automatic. By the way, all those videos immediately as you point the phone at them will be stored on your phone as a link. You won't actually need to point them at the book anymore if you want to use them just in your daily life.

If you don't have one of these phones, that's okay. It has a link on where the video is stored and you can do that. That's kind of the content of the book. I bring people through a training ground on how to start to notice these choice points, these spaces of awareness, start to realize and experience this “now” effect of mindful moments in their lives. Then, I help them become more aware of their mind and get space in between their awareness and their mind themselves. Again, they can experience that perspective and choice from the thoughts that they're thinking. After that, we are working with helping people prime their minds for good and the purpose of that, David, that we have naturally an automatic negativity bias in our brains and that's evolutionary—for a reason that's evolutionary, if anyone has ever heard—

David: Sure.

Elisha: Rick Hanson talks a lot about this. He touches on some of the psychology out there.

David: Yes, I interviewed him.

Elisha: Which is this idea that for those of us, our ancestors in the past who were hunters and gatherers, those of them that were sitting there mindful of the blades of grass that were there, saying things like, "What a wonderful blade of grass this is. I love the greenness of it. Wow! The crispness of this blade of grass," and weren't looking for the dangers around them, were most likely lunch. They didn't get to pass along their genes to us. It's the ones that were more anxious, almost, that were looking for the dangers out there, which were perhaps the safer ones, which passed along their genes to who we are today. In some ways, we are a refinement of thousands of years of refining and brain architecture that has our minds naturally defaulting towards the negative or to something that's more anticipatory in some way.

Priming our minds for good has to be intentionally becoming aware of more of the good in our lives and cultivating this within us and that cultivates a greater sense of resiliency. There's a number of different neuroscience studies that attest

to the benefits of this. Then, after that, we talk about some of the neuroscience and some of what's going on in the actual brain itself during different parts of experience. Then, we move on to working with difficult emotions because all of this leads up to that. It's this great cartoon that's out there that says, it's a woman standing behind another woman who is holding the hand of a screaming child and says, "I want to live in this moment—I want to live in the moment, just not this moment. More like a moment on the beach."

That's the crux of the experience, it's like, "I'd like to be anywhere else but here right now." The problem is we are here. So that dissonance itself, that resistance, that moving away creates this sense of stress, anxiety, amplifies depression, makes us move more into our addictive behaviors. Whether it has to do with our phones or checking out, or drugs, alcohol, whatever it is and also exacerbates our experience of trauma.

David: Yeah, you just covered a lot of ground here.

Elisha: I'm sorry about that.

David: We are all survivors. That's one thing that strikes me is when you think about it genetically as you say. You think back to all the ancestors that each one of us has had. All the people that didn't make it and somehow for each one of us that's alive now, we are in a chain of people that made it, that survived. I'm a technophile. I was really intrigued by those Microsoft Tags or QR codes or sometimes they're called two-dimensional bar codes. I got out my iPhone. I was really struck by how the iPhone automatically focus on that thing and, boom, it brought up you and a little YouTube video. Also, there was a link to a supplementary related kind of video on YouTube, something related to mindfulness or meditation or something like that. I was curious why you went with Microsoft Tags rather than the QR tags I see in my newspaper and magazines that seem, to me, more widespread.

Elisha: That was a good question. That was my publisher who decided that, Simon & Schuster. The reason they did that is because the Microsoft Tags are for just aesthetic reasons. They are a lot prettier.

David: It's true.

Elisha: The QR codes are like rough in some way. Microsoft Tags are a little prettier. I guess that's a subjective call, but also apparently, the Microsoft Tags pick up quicker than the QR codes. You don't have to actually line it up so much with the actual code itself. You just need to throw it over it and immediately pop up the video. I think the reason they went with it is because it's quicker. It grabs the actual code quicker so you have quicker access to the actual video itself and having to work on lining it up.

David: Yeah, it was very quick. I was struck by that and you do tell people where to find the app for their smartphone. For me, it was just a matter of going to Apple's iTunes app store and downloading the app. I already had a couple of QR code

readers, so I thought, "Oh, no. Now, I need another one." The great thing about this one though is that it reads not only the Microsoft Tags, but also the other kinds so one could probably get along with just this one QR code reader, which is a nice feature.

Elisha: Let me just touch on that for a second because I love what you said how you can get access to ... When you are interacting with these videos, you get access to not just me and *The Now Effect*, which is a wonderful supplement and resource in itself. It introduces you to so many different areas of mindfulness just even being able to contact that. Again, you don't need the QR reader even though it's a universal reader, the Microsoft Tag reader, you can just go to the site where the link is itself and it will do that for you.

David: Sure. As I mentioned, I'm a big technophile myself so I'm interested in this aspect of what you've done. Some people would maintain that technology is a big part of the problem in our distracted society. What's your thinking on this?

Elisha: It's interesting. I just wrote a blog on—There's an article that came in *The Atlantic* that was titled, "Is Facebook making us lonelier?" I've had some thoughts on this for a while, the idea of technology, because I came out with an app, Mindful Solutions at Work. Some people wrote to me and said—It's been helpful to an enormous amount of people, but some people wrote to me and said, "How dare you use technology to ... because that's the problem. You're just putting out another problem out there in some way. Isn't this just distracting in some way?" I see technology as a little bit different and here is my thoughts on it, and this is what I wrote in the blog, is that technology is not the issue; Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest. All these different things, our phones, texting. None of that is a problem. These are all, in some ways, fantastic mediums that if we can harness the power of them, they can really help us in our daily lives in a lot of ways.

It's just that as a culture individually for the most part, for the most of us, we are not mature enough to handle these different mediums. What I mean by that is they're so new. We might say for a lot of people, especially a lot of people right now in their 20s, even early 30s. They didn't ever even know a world without the Internet or these phones. Even for a lot of us who did know the world without the Internet or computer interaction, we are kind of absorbed at this point. We almost can't imagine a world without it. It's kind of the idea like when you forget cell phone at home and you feel naked in some way or vulnerable in some way because you don't have this phone. Again, it's not the phone or the technology. It's the way we interact with it. Again, that's the importance of bringing mindfulness to even technology and what I wrote in that blog was, let's use this as a great experiment in some way. As we are relating to it, let's see what's helpful to us about it and maybe what's a hindrance to us about it.

For example, if I'm constantly being pulled by my phone in some way at the expense of paying attention to my kids or doing my work. I find myself getting more stressed and overwhelmed because I'm practicing what Linda Stone calls a continuous partial attention. A continuous partial attention, as if our attention is continuously put out into a couple of different areas, which taxes our brain, and I know that's not really working for me. I don't need to judge myself for it

necessarily because implicit in mindfulness, this idea of a nonjudgmental awareness. In other words, putting aside our biases for the moment and treating this as something new, fresh, and then getting our insights on it. What works for us? What doesn't work for us?

The technology itself, again, I get the things from ... I'll just say this. I have this new online community that I created to support people with *The Now Effect* that gives them daily "now" moments into their e-mail box. It's just short little insights that pop them into a space of awareness that give them things to reflect on or integrate into their day. When people sign up for it, it lands them on my Facebook page, which is just a general pool page that people are writing on and connecting around and whatever. It's just a good medium to do that with. I get a couple of e-mails from people that say, "How dare you use Facebook!" By the way, most people don't say this, but there's a few people who say, "I was going to subscribe to your community, but because there's Facebook involved, I'm not going to do this" or something like that. I think, "Okay." That's their prerogative.

But I think they are misunderstanding the use of that medium. The use of that medium, it's not Facebook. This is a way that people have found that they can connect and share things around. There's other mediums they can do that like Google+ and these different things. It's just one medium and it's just the way we are relating to it that matters. It's not the medium that's the problem. I think that's the big take-home point.

David: I was going to ask you if there were other ways you find technology useful for being in the now. Do you want to comment on that or there are other ways or other apps that you find useful?

Elisha: I do find some apps useful, actually. I use one of them myself, but this is just particularly for taking time out to practice just being with yourself, either with your breath doing a mindfulness practice or being with your body or whatever. You start training in some ways, even if it's just for five or ten minutes or three minutes or whatever, to just be here now, in other words. I use this thing called Meditation Helper, which is an app that's free. It allows me to just remind me when to practice. I can set it for that and then it also tells me a time. I can put in a time, three, five, ten, twenty, thirty, whatever minutes that's going to do that. At the end, it has a very nice bell that alerts me that it's over and I love that.

Now, I often recommend to people that they take, let's say, practices that I talk about or just other practices like a STOP practice, which is about stopping, taking a breath, observing your experience and proceeding. It's an acronym. It's in *The Now Effect*, or an ACE practice, which is getting an awareness of your experience, your body, your emotions, your thoughts and then collecting your attention onto your breath and expanding your awareness throughout the body. That's like a three-minute practice. I asked people to take those practices. By the way, those practices are all in *The Now Effect*. The STOP practice is also freely available on YouTube online so you can check that out. You just Google my name and STOP and number of things will come up.

I tell people to put that in their calendars because a lot of people, again, use this phones, so this is the digital world, as reminders, the pop up, as a time to practice. Now, the way our brains work is that we habituate to that kind of stuff. We have to have an awareness of it. You might put these things in your calendar and eventually and all of these experiences, eventually it doesn't really mean anything anymore. It's like art on our walls. That's why the idea is to move around the different things in our houses from time to time to keep a freshness there. We stop seeing it. You might experiment with and, again, this is all an experiment in some way, allowing our experience to be our best teacher, putting in different times during the day.

You can also, what I think is wonderful ... I don't really use Google+ too much, but what I think is really interesting about it is this idea that they have all these video windows that can pop up with six people at a time or maybe more. I'm not really quite sure. That's a medium where maybe people can create a group around a mindfulness group or a group around *The Now Effect* or whatever they want to be working on. They can connect around and all sit and integrate a practice at the time and discuss their experience with that practice. That's another wonderful way of connection. Nowadays, if people can meet in person and do that, that's wonderful. If they can't meet in person, not allowing that to be an obstacle to actually connecting with people, which is so supportive with practice.

One of the things that I didn't relay on my story, Dave, is that ... One of the things that was so helpful to me in addition to integrating more of this work into my life when it came to making that really significant change was finding a community of people who are supportive to me in that change. I mean, that's why we see AA, NA, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous. These types of things that are so supportive to people. That wasn't my community that I found, but I connected with a community of people in the mindfulness world that were supportive to me. Becoming more present to my life, having more compassion for myself, being more focused and embracing a sense of being productive and successful.

David: There are all these choice points coming up from what you've said. What I want to ask you about still on ... You mentioned Google+. I'm just now getting into Google+. I'm giving a presentation at a conference in October. I'm really trying to learn the ins and outs of it and get it under my belt. I'd love to get into each other's circle and we might be able to share one of those video times together with other people that you are involved with. Look for me on Google+. I'll look for you there.

Elisha: Yeah.

David: You mentioned a name that I'm not familiar with, Linda Stone. What can you tell us about Linda Stone? Who is she?

Elisha: Linda Stone. She just created that term continuous partial attention. That's, I would say, just a phrase that means a lot to me because it's something that I have experienced in my life. It's this idea of splitting our awareness constantly.

It's the idea that you're at the breakfast table and you are listening to your partner or whoever is with you at the same time and you're checking your phone. The person says, "Are you listening to me?" You said, "Yeah, I'm listening to you. I hear what you just said." You said this, that, and the other, but you're not really paying attention.

Even when I'm training psychotherapists in mindfulness and psychotherapy, one of the basic things that I bring people through is this idea of mindful listening. Mindful listening, and this is just for anybody, for all of us, is this idea of really intentionally paying attention to what the other person is saying with an attitude of curiosity. That doesn't happen when we are paying attention to multiple things at once. That's what we are losing out on it, I would say, more on our lives.

David: One more thing on technology and then I'll move on.

Elisha: I love technology.

David: What about the software with binaural beats that supposed to enhance, intensify meditation? Are you familiar with those sorts of applications that are out there?

Elisha: No. I don't know that one, Dave.

David: Okay. We can talk about that when we get together on Google+.

Elisha: Okay, all right. Great. I'd like to know more.

David: Discipline is something that many of us struggle with. Meditation is a great idea, but who has the time? I love your golf ball story in this regard. I'm hoping you remember it and that you can share it with us now.

Elisha: Sure. This is a popular story that's actually made its way around the Web a number of times. This is the idea of a professor who stands in front of a classroom and she has a big jar. She is trying to relate to the class like the idea of being able to pay attention to what really matters in life first. What she does is she takes the jar and one of the things she puts in it to begin with is she puts a bunch of golf balls in there. She asked the class, "Is this jar full?" She fills the golf balls at the top and the class said, "Yes, it's full." Then, she takes pebbles and she puts those in the jar and those have fall inbetween the cracks of the golf balls and she says, "Is this full now?" They said, "Yeah. Now, it's definitely full." Then, she takes sand and she puts the sand in there. That fills the holes in between the pebbles. "Is it full now?" "Yes, it's full now." Then, she takes her coffee and she dumps the coffee and it fills inbetween the sand.

Everyone is like, "uh-huh" and everyone has a good laugh. "Yeah, it's now full." She asked in the class, "What does this mean?" One of the classmates says, this is kind of my little twist on it, "There's always a moment for a cup of coffee." Everyone there has a good laugh. What she is basically getting at there is that in order to live in line with our values, one thing that we know is that when we are living in our values, we tend to be happy in life. It just makes us feel good when

we are doing things that we intend to do in life or doing things that are most meaningful to us or doing things that matter. When we pay attention to the small stuff in life, it doesn't matter. That's like putting the sand in first. If you put the sand in first and then the pebbles, there's not going to be room for all the golf balls. There's not going to be a room for even the pebbles, maybe. We have to bring our attention to what matters first. Pay attention to that and then the rest will follow.

The golf balls are things like our health, our family, our friends. These types of things. The pebbles are more things maybe like our job. The material things that we have or whatever. The sand is, maybe, all of the various small things that take our attention. Maybe we are overly paying attention to Twitter or Facebook or these types of things that, again, if we harness the power of them, we pay attention to them in ways that support us and then leave out the rest, that would be great. That's what that is. I guess after the introduction I start it with that story because I want people to start priming their minds towards paying attention to what matters. Why are they even picking up this book at all?

As they are going through the book and being able to separate that space between stimulus and response, find that space of awareness, they can then reconnect to what really matters in their life or reconnect to what matters in that moment. First, they have to have an awareness of it. Hopefully with that, then there's a "now" moment after that, which has people actually create either on a piece of paper or actually physically in their life that jar. What do those golf balls mean to them? What do those pebbles mean to them? What's the sand in their life, and be able to mark, maybe, what the golf balls are and put it in a prominent place. So that it can be, again, a reminder to them of what really matters and to hopefully guide their attention towards that over and over again.

David: I took a little bit of a different point from the story, which was to ... For me, it brought the awareness that there was room for the sand and I think maybe even water at the end. I don't remember. We think we don't have time to meditate, but that there are actually these little interceded between the various things that we are doing throughout the day that we could bring mindfulness to.

Elisha: I like that too. That point that you make right there is woven throughout *The Now Effect*. This idea of noticing where those in-between spaces are in our lives that are normally moments of frustration or moments of waiting or something like that. We can then shift our attention and recognize that this is a space of awareness that I can bring mindfulness to and start to train my brain to have this happen more automatically.

David: You've got a short chapter titled, "Say Yes." That's just a simple yet powerful idea. Just yesterday, I was reading about a speech that the Apple computer evangelist, Guy Kawasaki, gave about developing engagement through social networking. Actually, I read this as a result of something he posted on Google+. He underscores how being critical of ideas tends to put people off, and saying yes draws them in. This is something I continually need to remind myself of because a big part of my training as a psychologist is not to accept ideas uncritically. What's your take on this?

Elisha: Those people who, I would say, have more of that “yes” in their life, have more of that openness, have more of that sense of curiosity are attractive socially. There is something about that. Those of us who are able to or practice being aware of even those thoughts or the emotions that are here and being open to them are able to work with them a little more effectively. There's a wonderful story in this chapter, just because you asked me to relate some of the stories, which is a children story. The children story, this guy Jack Kent who is a British author. He wrote a story about a little boy and a dragon. The little boy was sitting in his house and there was a dragon. It's a small little dragon and he went to his parents and said, "Mommy, daddy, there's a dragon here. A dragon in our house." They said, "No, no, no. There's no such thing as dragons." He said, "Okay."

As kids, we believe what our parents say for the most part and absorb that and we absorb beliefs and the way we see life from our parents and also our culture and what not. He decided that, "Yeah, there's no such thing as dragons." Then, the dragon got a little bigger. He looked at the dragon and he said, "Well, there's really no such thing as dragons so I'm going to continue on." It got a little bigger, a little bigger. Finally, it got so big that its limbs were outside of the house. It actually moved the house and the parents noticed that the house moved. They said, "What happened?" He said, "I'm telling you there's a dragon here." They said, "There's no such thing as dragons." He said, "There is such things as dragons. The dragon is right here", and they saw the dragon in that moment. In the moment that they saw and they acknowledged that the dragon was here, it shrunk back to its small size.

That's such a great metaphor for life when it comes to working with our difficult thoughts or difficult emotions or even the wonderful feelings that we have in life. This idea of saying yes, which is just a gentle acknowledgement of what's here and a leaning toward in some way instead of a moving away, allows those difficulties that we have in life to actually shrink. There's a wonderful research study that I mentioned in the book. Matthew Lieberman and Naomi Eisenberger at UCLA that did a research study on naming, what the effects are in the brain of being able to recognize emotions. They had two different groups looking at a picture of a man and a woman who have an angry face and a fearful face.

Under one group of pictures, it said Dick and Jane and under the other group of pictures anger and fear. When they hook them up to brain scanning machines, what they found was that the group that saw Dick and Jane had an increased firing in the area of the brain, the fear circuit called the amygdala. The group that saw the one that said anger and fear had a reduction in activity in the amygdala, that fear circuit. It also fires up with other different emotions. And an increased activity in the prefrontal cortex, which is more of the rational brain. What's so interesting about that is when you are able to label and notice a feeling that's here, it seems to me that we feel now that there's a space in between our awareness and the feeling itself. There's some room for perspective. There's also a sense that “I can handle this. It's going to be okay. This isn't something that enveloping me. This is something I'm relating to now instead of from.”

The say yes idea is so important. It's just a simple practice. Again, at the end, the now moment of that Say Yes chapter is just to notice what your dragons are in your life. What are the things you are saying no to, the feelings or experiences, and see what it is. Again, just as an experiment throughout the day when you notice a difficult feeling or something like that. Just say yes to it, a sense of welcoming, a sensing of allowing, a sensing of letting be in some way and see what happens to it when you do that. That's the idea.

David: I think there's a meditative technique that relates to what you've been saying of noticing without judging, labeling without judging. Worrying about work, noticing that and then letting go of it. Thinking about tomorrow. Noticing that, letting go of it and so on.

Elisha: You're labeling the certain types of thoughts that are happening there.

David: Yeah.

Elisha: By doing that, again, you are stepping out of the autopilot of it. You are getting a space. This whole book is around recognizing spaces. It's noticing that space between your awareness and the thoughts themselves. Once you do that, that space is a choice point. That choice point might be to try and just let it go in some way or let it be in some way. If you let it be, it naturally starts to come and go as all things do.

David: It helps you to detach from it.

Elisha: Yeah, it's a detachment.

David: Instead of getting wrapped in it and going round and round and round and thinking about work or thinking about tomorrow. You just notice that and then let go of it.

Elisha: The important piece of this Dave is that ... Again, this is based on basic learning theory. Once you intentionally practice and repeat something over time, it starts to become automatic. The more you are able to get these spaces, the space between your awareness and your experience and step into what's called these choice points that are here, the more likely that is starting to become automatic. You shift that rapid cognition, that subconscious thinking that's there, that we're not necessarily aware of, in favor of the way that you want to go. That's the whole purpose behind the now effect. That's the purpose behind mindfulness in general in some ways is to be able to retrain your brain through intentional practice and repetition over time to incline it in a direction that is more supportive to you over time.

David: A lot of people are concerned about their weight and I gather you have some ideas about how being in the now might help them achieve their weight goals.

Elisha: There's a chapter in here called "Now on Your Diet." In that chapter, we are talking about our relationship to food. It's not about creating a particular diet.

There's no diet prescription at all. It's more about taking a step back and seeing what happens when you engage mindfulness with eating. There's been a lot around mindful eating lately. I actually wrote a blog recently called the slow eating diet, which is based a bit on Thích Nhất Hạnh who is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk. A wonderful mindfulness teacher and peace activist. He has written a ton of good books and just a very gentle man. He has this kind of practice where he says, "Try chewing thirty times."

I had a client who was having terrible stomach issues. When I told him to do this, I said, "Why don't you bring mindfulness to this? Why don't you try chewing ..." and this is really hard. A lot of people have a reaction to the chewing thirty times. That sounds crazy, but try and see if you can slide underneath the judgment of that and just treat this as an experiment. As he started doing this more often, not only did he realize that after a while he stopped counting, he actually tasted more the food that was there. But his stomach issue started going away. His stomach issues were mainly attributed to, could have been stress, but also the fact that he was just eating so quickly his body was having difficulty actually digesting the food that was there. When it's broken down in your mouth, the more the body has an easier time digesting it.

There was another woman that I was working with who had a problem with her weight. She also was a binge eater. She would go by, like, a bakery almost every day and come home with a cake and eat the cake and have real feelings of remorse and shame afterwards. She'd go through this whole process. What we had her do was shift her perspective in some way of that urge, that feeling, that physical impulse that comes up in relationship to food sometimes. Not when we are really hungry, but we are using it as a way to distract or avoid some difficult feeling that's there, and use that as something that was reaching up and becoming a reminder that right now is a choice point. Right now is a moment I can choose. It's almost that feeling, that impulse, the constriction of the chest, the watering in the mouth was now conditioned in her mind to bring up at the same time this idea that this is a choice point right now.

What she did was work with ... a lot of what we work with in the difficult emotion section in the now effect, which was how to learn how to relate to this feeling differently, inclining towards it and creating space around it. Eventually getting to the place where this thought comes up in the mind, "It's going to be okay." She came to a place where she was able to relate to food differently. She actually started losing weight. Again, change didn't happen in this just very linear fashion. She worked with it. She slipped at times back and forth.

What she did more than anything was just by starting to bring mindfulness to her diet, to the way she was relating to food, it started having ripple effects in other areas of her life including relationships, including her own stress, including how she focused at work. That's what the gift of this really is. It's the effect of it. That's why I titled this book *The Now Effect*, because it's not so much about let's give this general theory of mindfulness. It's about what's the effect of this and how can we recognize more of the effects more often so they start becoming more automatic in our lives. That's the key.

David: You talked about working with difficult emotions. What about anger? Where does that fit in?

Elisha: Anger is often at times a confusing emotion. What I mean by that is there are some people who say that anger is like a bad emotion in some way or emotion that's not helpful or we need to get rid of it or whatever it is. Anger itself, there's nothing wrong with anger. Again, we are bringing this kind of ... We are stripping aside our biases of whether something is good or bad or right or wrong. Instead we are looking at the feeling that's there and it could be something that's actually constructive. Maybe we've been a doormat all our lives, being walked over by people because we are afraid of conflict. We have this real inner anger and frustration that's trying to tell us to stand up and be assertive in our lives and it's important to pay attention to that. However, the way we want to relate to it, where it becomes destructive, is where we are really aggressive. Like we are shouting at people or we are calling people names or being condescending or being passive-aggressive in some way. Actually, if there's any kind of physical abuse, of course, that's very overtly dangerous.

But anger can be constructive. The way we want to work with it is by taming it in some way. Dan Siegel has this quote that's been attributed to him, which is "Name It to Tame It," which is the idea that when you can name the anger that's there, then you can feel into it. The actual feeling as it is physically in the body and learn to incline into it with a sense of understanding that you are the one who is suffering right now. You are the one who is in pain and is there a way to relate to it with more of a kind, friendly type of attention. This seems so strange until you start actually practicing this. Maybe then what comes up is this belief that you have that, "The world is out to get me" or "I've always been oppressed" or something like that. "I'm a victim in some way." You can begin working with that belief because that's a deep thought that seems very convincing. There are times that we are victims in life. At times, having that mentality can really hold us back. That's a talk for an entire other hour.

David: Yes, right. As I was going through the book, I got the impression that you've been following developments in positive psychology in the study of happiness, as have I. What impact is positive psychology having on your thinking and teaching?

Elisha: It's interesting because in the field of mindfulness, which kind of precluded positive psychology, which came out in the early part of the century, which is kind of fun to say that now.

David: I know.

Elisha: Early part of the century. Which is focusing on not just the psychology of people as a disease model. Which is let's see what's wrong with us and get us this status quo, but more seeing if we can embrace and deepen with the feelings of goodness that's there. You see that in the section Priming Your Mind for Good. For me, it set the seeds for resiliency. If we are feeling a sense of joy, gratitude, sense of altruism, we are feeling these feelings more often in our life and something difficult comes to get us or comes at us, it's going to hit us more in a way where it's going to bounce off us more easily.

One wonderful study that was probably one of the earliest studies in the field of neuroscience that came out was Richie Davidson's study in 1993, or 2003, sorry, that showed people went through a mindfulness training and those that didn't go through a mindfulness training and showed the shift into the left prefrontal cortex with those that actually did the mindfulness training, which is more associated with positive emotions. What they also found was the group that did that had a greater resistance to the flu antibodies that were there. It showed that maybe they had a greater sense of physical health, showing that sense of resiliency.

This is easy to see. If you are feeling good and someone walks by you and gives you a snide look, you might think, "What's wrong with them?" If you are feeling like anxious or depressed and someone walks by and gives you a snide look, you might think, "What's wrong with me?" The thoughts themselves aren't facts. The event is exactly the same. When we are able to cultivate more joy, more goodness in our life, if we can get rid of the judgments around it; that that's some kind of a Pollyanna approach towards things. But these are real innate qualities within us. When we can start to nurture those, we start to become more resilient towards the difficulties that are there. Also, have greater sense of compassion when difficulties are there, which helps them pass and even become more meaningful at times and pass sooner.

Just a very quick story about that. Years ago, I was living in Mountain View and I was walking this place called Shoreline Park. I had just learned that someone close to me had passed away. I felt this great sadness that was there, a lot of grief. I was really resistant to it. I was suffering a lot in that moment. I went along and walked along this park. This park has a lake and I chose to sit down and bring my attention to the actual feeling, the sadness that was there. I put my hand to my heart as if I was putting my arm around myself in some way. What I felt was a sense of peace in that moment. It could have something that do with the environment in the lake that was there, a sense of peace though. It turned from a sadness into a sweet sadness. That was the effect of learning how to relate to myself with greater compassion. When we are talking about positive psychology, it's talking about integrating some of the good in life, and compassion is one of those things.

David: Yes. We've covered so much ground here and there's so much more that we could cover and that you do cover in your book, but it's about time for us to wrap it up. I'm wondering if there's any last point you'd like to leave our listeners with.

Elisha: I would just leave them with this last point. Some of you might have heard this quote before because I've said it a lot in my life, but it's really the foundation for the now effect. The now effect is a great exploration in a lot of ways and practical application of this in our daily lives, which is Viktor Frankl's quote. He was a psychiatrist, a Holocaust survivor, who was able to change his relationship to the difficulties in his life to find greater meaning and live a very meaningful life. "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space lies our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

This work is about finding those spaces, being able to tune into those spaces in our lives, where those choice points lie, where the opportunities and possibilities

and a greater sense of freedom lies in our life. The purpose is to elongate those spaces, to widen those spaces of awareness. Just in the way that we start to intentionally pay attention to them, we naturally start to widen them and recognize that we do have more opportunities, there is more possibility, and there is a greater sense of growth and power and freedom that's actually here right now and we can tap into it. It just has to do with training our brains to do that. It's good to do in kind of short and small ways in our lives.

David: That's a great way to wrap it up. Dr. Elisha Goldstein, it's great to talk to you again. I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Elisha: Thank you, Dave.