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Context to the nugget

Venerable Tenzin Priyadarshi speaks about how he took the call to walk out his home into the unknown when he was 10. He speaks about the limitations of the rational mind and how we all tend to take actions and then often subsequently justify our decision using logic. He also speaks about the criticality of parents getting out of the way while bringing up children.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Venerable, I would love to go back in time. In the book you talk about leaving your home when you were just 10 and heading out into the unknown, walking out based on a dream or a vision that you saw and you say that the episode was neither rational nor irrational, it's just that you needed to undertake that journey. Could you speak about this episode and more specifically about this notion of neither being rational nor irrational? What does that mean?

Tenzin Priyadarshi (TP): Certainly. I mean, so firstly, it wasn't one dream, it wasn't one episode, it was a set of recurring dreams and I think it just intensified over the years, which prompted me to run away from the school. I think the challenge with humans is that we want to find reasons or explanations for all our experiences, right? And the thing is that often times such reasoning happens in the aftermath, you know, my friends in neuroscience tell me that the way human brain functions is that it takes a decision and then it tries to tell itself of a story of why it took that decision meaning the neurons that fire around choices there is a delay mechanism in terms of when we actually do something versus when the neurons actually fire. So, you know, and that's at a microscopic level what's happening in human behaviour in terms of choices and decision making. Now on a macroscopic thing again the idea is that people want to know what was the rationale. Now, I was 10-years-old, I cannot tell them that I had thought about it; I cannot tell them that I reasoned with it and so on, but I also know very clearly even reflecting retrospectively that it wasn't an irrational impulsive decision that there was a sense of conviction that was rooted in a kind of clarity, it wasn't clarity on my terms, but it was a certain kind of clarity that prompted this decision. And so I used it as an example to also encourage individuals to leave some room for non-rational experiences meaning that we don't need to reduce the set of human experiences into binary mode of rational and irrational, that there are non-rational and non-rational simply implies that it is yet to be explored, there's no convincing story line on a narrative around it, and we may never find the right story line, but it is a class of its own.

DJ: And how do you discern that non-rational part? Rational, of course, a lot of formal education is around, you know, making sense within the limitations of the human mind. But how does one discern the non-rational elements in the context of choices?

TP: That's a great question. I think non-rational simply implies that we are pushing the boundaries of reasoning as we know at that particular moment in time. We are pushing the boundaries of the known. So, whatever data, whatever knowledge, whatever understanding I have at that time, whatever conditioning that I have at that particular moment in time that I am pushing it not necessarily knowing what the outcome is going to be or where it's going to lead me to. And it may be a complete disconnect between this set of historical experiences that I may have had meaning that I cannot see a straightforward causation that is leading to this thing. But it's also, you know, it's not irrational in the sense that it's not just a result of an emotional outburst, it's not a result of awareness, it's not a result of some kind of reactive mindset.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The point that Venerable makes around leaving room for our non-rational experiences was underscored in an earlier conversation with Jennifer Garvey Berger (JGB), a leading Executive Coach who has written a book around the traps we fall into while dealing with a complex world. She speaks about how our body and our senses often get to an answer before our brain gets there.

JGB: "In a brain scan we see that the arrival of the emotion of certainty comes before, not hours before but milliseconds before the cognitive part of our decision-making actually comes online. And so this shows that we feel certain and then we figure out why as opposed to we feel like we don't know and then we figure out what we believe. Now, of course sometimes we absolutely do it the other way, but by and large we don't."

DJ: Is this related to the point around having a gut instinct or are these two different things?

JGB: No, they are two similar things and it's one of the questions that people often ask me is like what do we do with our instincts? And I think the thing is we want to understand our instincts particularly if they come from a non-cognitive part of us, our bellies, our bodies, we want to understand them pay attention to them because there's really important data there."

DJ: Widening our understanding of listening to include paying attention to our various senses is valuable in the context of us experiencing moments and getting to a decision.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Jennifer Garvey Berger that is referenced: [Trap 2 - Feeling right doesn't mean it is right](#).

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Tenzin Priyadarshi - Nuggets

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- 68.02 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Limitations of the rational mind
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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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