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## Context to the nugget conversation

Rajiv speaks about why we need to be non-judgmental when it comes to reflection and journaling. He speaks about why self-acceptance is a prerequisite to self-improvement.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving to a related theme, journaling is one thing that you talk about, and you make an interesting point in the book, you say that while journaling, we should not be judging ourselves or thoughts or feelings. What exactly do you mean by that and what is the nuance here?

Rajiv Vij (RV): Yeah, great point. I am glad you picked this nuance here; it is a little sort of tricky space. So here is the thing. I mean there are various techniques to reflect, meditation, journaling, positive affirmations, visualization, bunch of different ideas, but when we look at journaling, and it is quite true for meditation as well, but let us stick on journaling, the idea is that what we need to develop when we talk of developing self-awareness, we need to develop non-judgmental self-awareness and why I say that? So, for example, you recognize, you know, let us say you are journaling and you are recognizing routinely that you are, you know, lately you have been very irritable or lately, you have been feeling a bit down or lately, you have been a bit envious, whatever that feeling maybe, so that is a feeling that we want to become aware of. But what is your natural tendency though, you know, we all tend to judge ourselves, and I will come back to the point, we judge ourselves because there is a sense of incompleteness, inadequacy within us. And we are constantly trying to fill that void and that is why we are judging, are we on track, are we not on track and so forth, and it is that judgmental nature which forces us automatically to judge others as well, which we do all the time, including our loved ones, our kids and so forth. And that makes things worse. So, when we are talking about journaling or meditation and non-judgmental awareness, the idea is, so let us say you recognize that envy and the sadness and the irritability. If we judge it and we say, oh, you know, why do I feel like that, what is wrong with me, I am not a good person, how could I be envious or I am, you know, I talk about being a coach, how could I be feeling sad, I thought I was in the business of happiness, etc., etc., what do you think is going to happen to you? Do you think you are going to feel better or worse? Clearly, you are going to feel worse. So, what you are doing is, you know, it is like your child, Deepak, who walks in and says, you know, hypothetically, oh, I am in middle school and you know, these two kids in my class, they are such bullies and they are so rude and you know kids do not like me and all that kind of stuff. Now, what are you going to do? You want to reassure your child, you want to sit them down and say no, it is okay, it is totally fine, you know, kids are kids and they do different things but you are a wonderful person and you are so good in so many ways and so on and so forth. But when we are thinking that, oh, I have been sad, we are not reassuring ourselves, we are actually making it worse. It is like telling the child that, oh, yeah, how could you do that, how could people not like you, what is wrong with you. That is just making it

worse. So, the starting point of all meditation and journaling and things like that is to create a non-judgmental space because that is what is going to create greater self-acceptance, greater self-love, and all of that is actually automatically going to heal us from that void of the sense of inadequacy and incompleteness because we start to then accept ourselves for who we are. And it is okay, and that does not also mean, Deepak, because the other typical challenge there is, oh, if I am being like that and everything is fine then will I become complacent. And it is not that, we all have the drive to get better and we will keep getting better, but it is just that often times, we are trying to get better from a place of inadequacy, that only if I get better, will I be complete. And my point is, no, you are already whole complete and enough the way you are and where you are right now at this very instant, every single human being, and we want to get better. So that is the reason why this non-judgmental self-awareness is crucial because the judgmental part is the thinking mind which makes things worse. If we can subdue that, then slowly, we become aware, yeah, I have been sad last few days and that is okay, that sadness is going to pass. It will pass like every feeling. The excitement and the joy will also pass and so will the sadness and the irritability, both will pass, if we do not engage with it. If we engage with it, it will grow. Did I answer your question?

DJ: Makes a lot of sense, Rajiv. I was just processing it. You know, one of the people I spoke to other podcast was a lady called Tasha Eurich who has done a lot of work around this notion of self-awareness, on the internal and the external self-awareness in terms of how others see us, and she actually says, you know, while journaling, she suggests that we use the What question rather than the Why question. She says the What keeps us grounded on the facts, you know, what happened. The Why often takes us to a place of judgment, I am just connecting it with what you just said. But it is interesting that you also link it to this notion of adequacy, and growth from a place of contentment and adequacy rather than a place of fear and insecurity and inadequacy, that is an interesting nuance.

RV: Yeah, the thing is that no amount of self-improvement is going to help unless we develop self-acceptance. Because you will improve but as you know and I know from our lives and our constant pursuit of growth, is that you climb the next hill and then before you settle down, you are looking at the next one, we can always keep growing, in whatever field. Maybe earlier, we were trying to do it in a corporate ladder and financial and other ways, now, it may be the ladder of self-growth, but still, we can get caught up in the same vicious cycle that it is never enough.

DJ: That is an interesting paradigm because if I link it back to a term that was used when I was in McKinsey, you know, there was this phrase, insecure overachievers to a lot of the consultants, and what you are actually saying is, let us decouple the two, insecurity is not a prerequisite for achievement of growth, it is actually maybe counterproductive to the other side.

RV: Yeah, exactly. Because then we follow what we deeply, you know, what our heart and soul desire. So, we are able to express ourselves more fully when we are in that state.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Something similar came up in my conversation with Tasha Eurich (TE), a leading Self Awareness Researcher who has written the book Insight. She has spoken to 100s of people on their Self-awareness practices. She speaks about the risk of us falling down the rabbit hole of rumination and discusses it here.

TE: *"I knew that we would find that the more people introspected the better off they be and that was the opposite of what our data showed so we found that people who self-reflected often were more*

*anxious, more stressed, more depressed, less satisfied with their jobs and their relationship there were even less in control of their lives and we are just thinking maybe self-awareness is bad may be delusion is actually what we wanted to be fostering because it doesn't seem like it make sense and as we started to dig into some of the data we started to discover that thankfully it's not that the introspection in into a self is bad it's just that the way most of us introspect is completely wrong and the best way to illustrate this you know it gone without having two hours to delve into it is to think about probably what the common introspective question is for most people which is the question "Why". So we might be trying to understand why we are in a bad mood you know you could say why am I so upset after that conversation with my co-worker or we might be trying to understand a bad outcome you know like why didn't I get that promotion or we might be even trying to understand why be believe what we believe you know why do I want that promotion but as it turns out those questions not only the do lead us away from true insight about ourselves they give us a false sense of confidence about our knowledge so for example Sigmund Freud was wrong he believed in his work that people could access their unconscious right so like really why am I upset if I just excavate if I just think long and hard and ask that why question I can find the answer. But what has research has shown for decades actually is that no matter how hard we try we can't access so many of those things it's what I mentioned earlier about the behaviour and emotion and knowledge blindness. So, what happens is we find an answer that feels true even its wrong so that an example of where I can lead us away from the truth rather than towards it. Another reason why a really dangerous question is introspectively is it has been shown over and over and over to depress us you know you think about like why I didn't get that promotion. If you are not careful you can start asking question where the answers are well because I'm just a fundamentally bad person and who would want to promote me and you can kind of get stuck in I call it the rabbit hole of rumination and so what we wanted to do in our study was understand if why is the wrong question what is the write question you know what are these unicorns doing differently than the rest of us and it took us a little while to find this pattern but we discovered that when unicorns introspected they almost never asked why question they asked what questions and at first sight I thought ohh that just a weird sort of fluke or weird nuance but as we started to look into it started to make a huge amount of sense. So, one example would be you are going back to the question why I didn't get that promotion unicorns if they were in that situation wouldn't ask themselves that question. Here is some question they might have asked instead. What did I learnt that can help me be better positioned in the future? Or what can I do to close the gap between you know where I thought I was and where I need to be? Or what support can I enlist from the people around me to help me you know to achieve this goal the next time I set it? Or they are going back to why am I so upset about that conversation with my co-worker they might instead ask what part of that situation did I own or what can I do differently in the future to avoid that kind of conversation with that person and so what we found was asking "What" instead of "Why" really helps us avoid so many of the pit falls of introspection where we you know what excavating for the truth that we are never gone find and we are focusing on our problem and feeling victimized and disempowered. So, I think what I have loved about that is a really tangible tool that I think we can take away it seems subtle but the difference is huge and I am speaking from personal experience. I have started to use that as well."*

DJ: Back to what Rajiv Vij says, focusing on the What ensures that we stay focused on the facts rather than getting too judgmental and going down the rabbit hole of rumination.

## **End of nugget transcription**

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Podcast Transcript [84.06 Rajiv Vij - Self acceptance before Self Improvement](#)

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Nugget from Tasha Eurich that is referenced: [Limitations of introspection](#).

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- 84.04 Rajiv Vij - Working with the leader as a whole
- 84.05 Rajiv Vij - Building the Spiritual Quotient
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## About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the 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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