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## Context to the nugget conversation

Ethan defines the term Chatter. He uses Chatter as a term to capture the breadth of the different experiences all of which the common feature is looping over the negative thoughts, going down the rabbit hole, sucked into a vortex of negativity that won't let you free.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): The other thing is the last podcast conversation I had was with a gentleman who studied the Mahabharata of which Bhagavad Gita is sort of a subset. So, we spoke at length about sort of the right versus right kind of dilemmas that the Bhagavad Gita often touches on, got it. Let's dive into the book, Ethan, you say that chatter consists of cyclical negative thoughts and emotions that turn our singular capacity for introspection into a curse rather than a blessing. Can you sort of expand on that for us and define what you mean by chatter?

Ethan Kross (EK): Sure. So, we have this remarkable tool, we can use language to work through our problems, and we could do it silently. We call that capacity our inner voice. So, you turn your attention, we try to verbally work through a problem, you may think about rehearsing a speech or what you might say to someone else, trying to motivate yourself, trying to create a story to explain your circumstances. This all involves turning your attention inward and using language to work through a problem. It's an incredible tool, a very valuable asset. Yet sometimes we try to activate this tool when we are struggling, we have big, big problems and it doesn't work well for us instead it in a certain sense jam up. So, we have got a problem, let's say we were just rejected or insulted by someone and we are, why did this happen? We try to think through that problem often because we want to learn from our experiences and move on, but instead of coming up with that solution we start stumbling, we just keep on rehearsing what happened to us and why we felt in ways that keep our negative emotions alive. And so that cycling over what happened to me, why do I feel this way and that inability to work through and resolve the experience, that is what I call chatter. And I think it's one of the big problems that we face as a species.

DJ: One of the people I spoke to on this podcast was a lady called Tasha Eurich who has done some work on self-awareness and she uses a phrase "rabbit hole of rumination" and she says, sometimes introspection if we don't do it well, we can end up going that rabbit hole and it can be counterproductive.

EK: That is exactly right. That's... so chatter, you know, chatter is a term that encompasses rumination. So, in case you haven't figured this out yet, I am sure you have and many of your listeners have as well. Scientists are really good at creating distinctions between slightly different things and coming up with different phrases to describe them. So, rumination, perseveration, worry

and there is a whole host of additional terms that are often used to refer to this process of getting stuck in a negative thought. And so, I use the term chatter to capture the breadth of those different experiences all of which the common feature is looping over the negative thoughts, going down the rabbit hole, sucked into that vortex of negativity that won't let you free.

DJ: And you say that while the inner voice functions well most of the time, it often leads to chatter precisely when we need it the most, when our stress levels are high, when the stakes are high and when we encounter difficult emotions that call for the utmost poise. So, can you talk a little bit about that paradox in terms of when we need it most and when it lets us down the most?

EK: Yeah, so we often need the tool the most when we are struggling with big emotions that command our attention and don't let us focus on anything else until those emotions are essentially resolved and subside. The problem is that experiencing stress often engages many of the brain networks that we use to manage the stress. So, if you think of the frontal cortex, which plays a key role in helping us down regulate negative emotions, it also plays a role in keeping those negative emotions active. So, it's as though the very resource that we possess that is useful for helping us manage the mind is depleted when we most need it. And that is where I think it's so valuable to understand what tools exist for helping people navigate this impasse so that they can in fact regain control of their mind so to speak when they find themselves slipping down this rabbit hole.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Here is the clip from my conversation with Tasha Eurich (TE) where she speaks about the Rabbit Hole of Rumination. She talks about the language we use for introspection and suggests that we use the "WHAT" question rather than the "WHY" question. She refers to some of the practices of what she calls Self-Awareness Unicorns – individuals who have taken really applied deliberate practice to enhancing their self-awareness.

TE: *"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 right 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."*

DJ: As Ethan says, the challenge is that the same leg that is supposed to press the brakes in the car is busy pushing down on the accelerator.

## End of nugget transcription

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

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### Ethan Kross - Nuggets

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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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