

Center for Humane Technology | Your Undivided Attention Podcast

Episode 19: The Fake News of Your Own Mind

- Tristan Harris: What's the right way to be in the world right now, when we have addictively been looking at coronavirus news and how many people died or not, and we've been looping on emails and rereading the old emails and then re-triggered by our spouse or our kids cooped up in an apartment in a major city, and then rereading those emails again and looping again? It's never been easier to be anxious or triggered in a world with this much uncertainty. These are the kinds of inner reactions that if we don't notice it, it controls us.
- Trudy Goodman: We are all grieving and grief gets expressed in such different ways.
- Tristan Harris: That's Trudy Goodman, a meditation expert who's helped thousands of people find a way out of their mental loops by moving deeper into them.
- Trudy Goodman: It can come out in form of anxiety, it can come out in the form of regret, what if, and if only and if only I had done this, and if only I had done that, and all of those forms of almost sideways or crooked expressions of grief, don't help.
- Tristan Harris: We don't have training that we get as children for how to deal with the fake news of our own minds, the anxiety, the fear, the emotions that just come up automatically and noticing these things in our minds is equivalent to gaining agency over them. It doesn't take a long time or strenuous effort to radically alter the course of your thoughts. Trudy and her husband, the legendary meditation expert, Jack Kornfield have seen countless people shift their worldview in the span of a few breaths.
- Trudy Goodman: What helps is to fully feel that feeling in the body, understand the stories that it generates in the mind, and be able to hold all of that with some measure of kindness or at least willingness to be present with it, and then it can move through us.
- Tristan Harris: Today on Your Undivided Attention, we're talking with Jack Kornfield and Trudy Goodman, both are dear friends and meditation teachers who've married each other and spent decades studying and teaching mindfulness meditation practice around the world. Jack was introduced to Buddhism in Thailand in the late 1960s, where he studied as a monk for several years and then returned to the United States. In 1987, he and a group of other teachers began creating Spirit Rock Meditation Center here in Whitaker, California.
- Aza Raskin: Trudy was one of the first teachers of the mindfulness-based stress reduction practice and taught with its creator, Jon Kabat-Zinn for many years. In 1995, she co-founded the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She's also the founding teacher of InsightLA.
- Tristan Harris: What are the lessons that technologists can take and what we can take as users of technology from the Insights of Meditation experts like Jack or Trudy? I mean, why would we have mindfulness experts on a podcast about how technology impacts society? Because if you think about all these technology designers, if I'm a designer at Facebook, and I don't understand how my own mind works, how my own emotions, my own anxiety hijacks myself, how can I possibly design to reduce the anxiety in other people? If I'm a designer of Gmail, and I don't see the ways that email hijacks my breathing or my anxiety or my fear that cause me to go into those loops myself,

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how can I design email products that reduce those kinds of engagement loops with emails and texting and video conferencing?

Tristan Harris: So, only by becoming aware of the mental loops that are built inside of our internal systems, can we start to become aware of how to design them away from our external systems. And humane technology is directly linked to mindfulness because humane technology is about enabling choice by better understanding where we lose choice, where we get hijacked by our emotions, our anxiety. There are many people now reevaluating what a web browser should be or what online video should be in much more aggressive and radical and creative ways because we're trapped in these video conferencing systems for hours a day now if you're an information worker.

Tristan Harris: So, it's actually like almost the best time in the world for humane technology thinking to be happening, because whether it's with our addictions or our overwhelming communication or video that just doesn't feel right, everyone now wants to have a better solution. How can we meet that rare synchronicity of 3 billion people carried by the same situation? So, this is actually kind of exciting in a way that this is the time that we can provide better and better solutions. I'm Tristan Harris.

Aza Raskin: And I'm Aza Raskin.

Tristan Harris: And this is Your Undivided Attention.

Tristan Harris: Welcome to Your Undivided Attention. What are you finding since you've been out there giving these guided meditations for people in these times, and what's been most surprising that people haven't been yearning for that maybe hasn't been kind of top of mind as we look inside ourselves.

Jack Kornfield: First of all, people don't have the training to track their own inner experiences, whether their emotions or reactivity or the thoughts that they're having about things in a very conscious way. Often we just live them out or we try to enact them or get things done. So, the first thing is just helping people with some simple skills, sit quietly, then begin to tune in with some loving awareness to all the labor that your body is carrying through this. That fight, flight, or freeze trauma that gets activated to really let yourself feel that, and as you get quiet or you realize or I realize that there's a lot of grief and sadness more than I'm aware of on a surface and to let all of that be felt and held with compassion rather than be either unconscious or get knotted up in the system.

Jack Kornfield: So, the first thing is just giving people tools to be present, but of course the suffering isn't the end of the story. People also need sense of possibility and hope, not just in a naive way, but we know we need to make something meaningful out of this to change our society, and we see the injustice and the misuse of the resources and climate technology, but it speaks to a social and moral dilemma of our time. Maybe you could say a spiritual dilemma of the society that we've organized ourselves in ways that cause suffering to so many people and the kind of injustice and racism and so forth that have been perpetuated and we've lost our moral compass. So there's a longing for vision as well.

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- Tristan Harris: I think on the first point that you're bringing up, what's most striking to me is the way that we don't know that we're actually grieving, you would think that, if we're feeling those feelings, it would be obvious to us, that in our conscious awareness we would say, "Oh yeah, I'm really grieving right now." It kind of reminds me of, if you make the parallels to technology, when we can be looping in addictive pattern and scrolling to something, I mean, we're doing it, but we don't actually notice it.
- Tristan Harris: I remember in my own meditation practice, how useful it was to realize, "Am I resisting something right now and what would happen for whatever it is that I'm resisting to accept it?" And I actually notice what a huge shift that made in my own practice. The first point being that I didn't notice what was actually underneath the hood, and second, I didn't notice that I was resisting what was underneath the hood. Do you want to say more about that? Because I think it's this optical illusion that we think we do see what's happening inside ourselves.
- Trudy Goodman: Well, I've been, maybe, a little bit surprised by, but not entirely because we've worked with so many thousands of people over so many years, is how much people need reassurance that what they're going through is what human beings go through. That they are not going crazy, that they are not specially defective in any way. That also speaks to what you're talking about, having awareness that extends past just my individual me, what I'm cycling through, and this long stay at home is really like a long enforced retreat for people, like you were saying, people are encountering their unhealthy patterns with each other or with their kids and people who are with their families and with others, roommates, whoever, and people are discovering that all these things that they thought they had dealt with or they thought they could set aside are just suddenly front and center.
- Trudy Goodman: So, the capacity to develop more awareness so that these things are not invisible. I think what's been really helpful about people gathering on Zoom and listening to each other and chatting with each other during the classes and things we're doing is people realizing, "Oh yeah, I feel that way too, thank you. Thank you for talking about that. Thank you for your honesty." It's been actually beautiful to witness, but it's also just an illustration of what Jack was talking about and what you're talking about and what we talk about in these teachings of mindfulness and loving awareness and compassion, which is how do we know ourselves better?
- Aza Raskin: One of the things I am struggling with now is I'm awash in information outside of my control. Everything from the way that states are opening up before I think it's safe to do so to relationships between nations. What are the practices, the tools for seeing a frame which is bigger than one that you have influenced to act upon.
- Jack Kornfield: It's a beautiful question that fits with the fact that the virus has actually stopped us in our tracks, made us go to our rooms, so to speak as people will say, but then what you do in that room, and it turns out you can be sequestered and still go on automatic and just live your life and try to keep it going however you can. But it's also possible to take some time to actually close your eyes, quiet your mind, and begin to listen to your body and your heart and all those things that you're carrying. The example I love is of Mahatma Gandhi during his effort to bring down or take apart the entire British colonial empire, he would take one day a week in silence to meditate, and it didn't matter if there were hundreds of thousands of people on the

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street and people getting angry, people getting killed and they'd say, "Gandhi needs you, we need you, you must come out." And he said, "I'm sorry, it's my silent day."

Jack Kornfield: He would take the silence in a deliberate way to stop and listen more deeply to what do I most care about? What are my deepest intentions? What are all the wash of feelings that get brought up and to become quiet? Not in the quietist removal from the world, but somehow to become more spacious or ask, "How do I respond from the most compassionate place to myself and others?" When we do that, first we encounter the things that we haven't paid attention to, but that's the beginning of the journey underneath that is a whole vast opening to intuitive wisdom, to a deeper values, to a perspective of consciousness and awareness that brings a kind of freedom around it all, where we can make new choices.

Jack Kornfield: This is true for people now who are sequestered at home, and it's the same thing of stepping back from technology for a bit and saying, "Well, how do I actually want to use this? What's the value, what's not, how am I to make this into something that serves."

Tristan Harris: It's interesting Aza when you brought up the problem of spheres of agency, I mean, Buddhism talked about this thousands and thousands of years ago that our minds can actually pay attention to things that might be beyond our sphere of agency, and what is it the serenity prayer of having the grace to-

Trudy Goodman: The courage to change the things they can and the wisdom to know the difference.

Tristan Harris: Yes, exactly. Yeah, and that prayer and also ... I mean, just the kind of practices and Buddhist to notice, the ways that our minds can go into loops on things that we may not have agency over and to put them on the movie screen of our minds over and over and over again and already that being a challenge. But now with technology, lets us think about a global and full time, 24/7 view of all the suffering in the world that we have no agency over. We have the kind of Buddhist practices of how to do this in our own minds, but then we need a kind of exponential version of that now, because the degree of things that we can be made aware of that we have no control over has just gone up exponentially.

Tristan Harris: And I just wonder how you think about that because my sense is, just that all of the things that you would teach in a week long meditation course, we would need those exponentiated, each one of those tools built into the ways that we obviously navigate our own minds, but also maybe some lessons for people who are making technology, who are some of our audience.

Trudy Goodman: Yeah. I mean, there's two pieces, one is just the overwhelming awareness of so much suffering that we're not in a position to help or to change or determine a different outcome for that. We know that when we can incline our hearts and turn our minds toward the goodness of life and the beauty of what's possible for us going forward, when we can do that, when we can make that shift, it's actually good for us physically, mentally, emotionally in every way, it's just that we need to have some respite from that suffering. We need to also learn ways of being with the unknown and with that which is completely uncertain.

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Trudy Goodman: The reality is that things have always been like this, but we didn't need to be aware of it in that way, we just were not, it wasn't in our face that we truly don't know the future, that no one guarantees our life, that we don't know who's going to survive through whatever period of time. We have never known, but now our not knowing is so intense and human tendency is to fill in the blanks with your fears, but learning to be with the unknown, "the don't know mind"- about my first teacher, the Korean master used to ask us to meditate with the mind that really doesn't know experience, and that means the mind that doesn't overlay experience with all of its expectations and various biases and lenses based on early conditioning that we all go through in our childhood.

Tristan Harris: Could you dig into that? Actually why is it that when we don't know we can project all of our worst fears into that? I mean, I am stocked full of an encyclopedia of fearful outcomes that I can project into the void of my uncertainty, like my mind is just doing this without even noticing it. What is it about our minds that does that? I think you can speak to some subtler deeper levels there.

Trudy Goodman: Well, I'm sure Jack can add to this, but just briefly, the neuroscientists have identified what is called the negativity bias of the brain and it's a survival mechanism to look for all the possible dangers, that tiger, that could be in the bush over there or to look for the predators, to look for the possible negative outcomes and protect ourselves from them. So we need to actually actively work with, because the default, it's as you said, you're not even trying to do that, it's just happening because the brain is wired to help us survive, but these are not individual predators, these are massive.

Trudy Goodman: But to understand that this is the brain's effort to take care of us is actually the activity of compassion, it's just that it doesn't work, not really powerful. So thank our brains for thinking of all these possible terrifying scenarios or dystopian futures you know, to thank the brain for being willing to protect us...

Tristan Harris: To try to keep us safe.

Trudy Goodman: Yes, exactly. That's what protection is exactly.

Aza Raskin: Why does that work? Why is that so powerful? It seems so simple.

Jack Kornfield: It's because it's a shift of identity, at first you're caught in the middle of it and you believe it and you believe that's who you are the way things are. The moment you say, "Thank you." You become a loving witness of it, and you say ... Or the compassionate witness and you say, "Yeah, I understand, I appreciate what my brain and mind are doing, but that's not who I am or all of who I am." They say in Zen, that there are only two things, you sit, and you sweep the garden, that is that you quiet the mind and tend the heart and make conscious the things that are happening so that there's the sense of spaciousness or compassion that grows inner freedom, then you get up and you tend the garden of the world.

Jack Kornfield: Part of what's the existential impact of this pandemic is that we're seeing the human condition writ large, we're seeing the Buddha describe these in his four noble truths. We're seeing that human life entails suffering, and no matter how much we try to protect ourself, whether it's with technology or the wealth that we accumulate or

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other such things that no one is exempt. And that we're the traumas that we carry and the world carries and it's not that life is suffering, but that existence has suffering. So, either we can run away or hide ourselves or get lost in our technology or lost in our fantasies or lost in our habits, or we can take a breath and hold the trauma or the grief that we carry, or the kinds of suffering, people we love, the world at large experience and bear witness to it.

Jack Kornfield: When we do, then a different freedom comes because the suffering is not the end of the story. We start to see more deeply that individually and collectively the suffering grows when there's more greed and more ignorance and more hatred. And the opposite of that, when there's more love and more clarity of wisdom and more mutual care and generosity, then suffering diminishes, and then you come to a sense where we can live our lives together with the measure of birth and death and joy and sorrow, illness and health that come with human incarnation, with a free and a loving heart, we can make a very different world in this.

Jack Kornfield: So, we're getting the deep spiritual lessons, and I'm speaking about this in a broader way, but in some way, we have to come to terms with how we hold this, the suffering of life and it's magnificence, it's unbearable beauty as well as the ocean of tears and to become present for it and become the loving, compassionate witness of it, opens the door to freedom for us individually and for us to set a new intention to visualize what's possible.

Tristan Harris: What's striking ... you've wrote or I think you said in a different interview, when you do that move that shift in identity and move from being inside of the fear and dystopian visions that are projected on the movie screen of your mind too, and say thank you to your mind for putting those up on the movie screen so that I can protect myself and how quickly that shift can take place. You say it can take just 10 seconds to reset our consciousness, and I think this is part of what's so interesting, it's optical illusions all the way down, when we're in one of those states and I know any of us from this moment, that space intimately, I'm very sensitive and I see these pictures of what's happening in the world and I can get really hijacked for a while and it feels when I'm in that space, that I'm very distant from an alternative perspective, from a place where I'm feeling calm.

Tristan Harris: I think to speak to how close that actually is, it's like the mirrors that say objects in mirror are closer than they appear, that a shift to a more loving state is actually closer than it might feel. I was just wondering how we can do that, because I think this is all about, like you said, this is a forced meditation practice for how we navigate to a different space. I'm just curious how you see that.

Trudy Goodman: Yeah. This idea of being distant or far away from ourselves, the source of our nature actually, and how do you get closer and closer, that sense of closeness or unity to all life actually is a huge antidote to the dystopian futures or presence that we're perceiving that shift of identity to something that is not a centralized egoic focus of what do I love? What do I want more of? What threatens me, what do I want to get away from? The shift from that into just willingness to slow into experience enough to be with it, and doesn't have to take long, like you said, it can be 10 seconds that shift, it can be less, but that willingness to step back, Zen master in the 13th century, Dogen called it, taking the backward step, letting things reveal themselves to us

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instead of constantly approaching everything with our agendas for them or our reactions to them.

Trudy Goodman: But just willingness to receive reality, which only can happen in the present moment, and that's the other reason that we focus so much on being present and we use that language of presence because our liveliness only happens in this moment right now. That reality and immersing yourself 100% wholeheartedly in that reality is a way to get really close to experience.

Tristan Harris: It's amazing, just these subtle reframes that I hear throughout, a lot of your teachings and guided meditations. I remember an early mentor to me when I was working on persuasive technology, and we're talking about some of these themes back in 2012 or so, she said the power of a therapist to say to someone, "You're not alone, it's okay and there's a way out." But the feeling that ... we have this optical illusion of feeling like we're alone, you're the only one who's feeling the thing that we're currently feeling and just that reframe of like, "Would anybody else in the situation feel the same thing?" And there's this huge breath of fresh air that comes with realizing, of course, some other people experienced this or this has happened before.

Tristan Harris: I was curious if you would speak to some of that because I think buried inside of all of this are these very easy to do but seemingly hard to remember, I don't want to call them psychological tricks because it makes them feel smaller than they actually are but these profound shifts that can come from certain ways of pointing our attention or communicating like in stories as opposed to as techniques.

Jack Kornfield: They are not that complicated, they're simply ways to step back as Trudy was talking about, just little techniques that let us take a breath and step out of being caught and things to seeing them with a compassionate awareness.

Trudy Goodman: Those three points that your friend was sharing with you, I think that's exactly what I was talking about when I was saying, I'm noticing how much people need to hear those things. You're not alone, you're not the only one going through this and it doesn't mean you're not okay, you are okay. The other piece of the way out, we have such an individual focus in our culture just to be able to say when you're in the middle, just feeling stricken by fear, paralyzed in some way or any kind of intense emotion that's arising in this time to be able to feel it fully and then to say, "Okay, this is what fear, this is what terror feels like. It looks like this, it feels like my tight chest, it feels like my sweaty palms. This is what it feels like." This is what it feels like to be a human being who is terrified.

Trudy Goodman: And right in that shift from just me to my humanness, I'm joined suddenly with the rest of humanity, with everybody who has ever felt fear or intense anger or intense ... whatever it is, rage, sorrow, whatever it may be. So that linking back to our common shared humanity is also really important because in this time of othering and it seems like the forces of bias and prejudice are just rising in the world, anything that reminds us yes to be present but also to remember we aren't alone. I mean, in the vaster sense of not being alone of being connected to all life and each other.

Aza Raskin: It seems a lot of these practices are being able, as you're saying, to step back saying, I'm separate from a little bit my emotions, I am not my fear, I am not my grief. That

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awareness gives me the ability to have choice and our technology in many ways it ossifies us because we're on social media, Facebook, Twitter, it learns our preferences and then it reflects those preferences or perceived preferences, the things we click on, they're not our true selves, it's showing us what we think is a mirror and we actually see this fun house mirror. Then we're surrounded by that image of who we were and it keeps us both individually and societally from becoming who we could be that Emersonian obtainable, but as of yet unobtained self.

Jack Kornfield: So what would be the equivalent of taking that backward step that Trudy talked about of becoming the consciousness, the loving or compassionate awareness rather than being lost in the avatar and the creatives of technology, what would be the equivalent for people to learn in relation to technology?

Tristan Harris: Yeah. It's interesting, this feeling of stepping back and saying you are not your thoughts and the thoughts are not reality in the same way that a story in a Facebook newsfeed can go viral, fear inside of your brain can go viral. As you were talking and asking that, Jack, I was just thinking, imagine at the top of your Facebook newsfeed, it said something like this set of snooze feed stories and posts are not reality. Something that like it maintained the metacognitive perch sitting above, I don't mean to be so rational about it, but it enabled and presented visually access to, you can stand above this very specific set of things here.

Tristan Harris: Of course, we wouldn't want it just to keep showing you the fear feed, because in a way my brain is a fear newsfeed. I mean, it's an anxiety newsfeed, and we should also name the profit motive, Facebook is the Exxon of human anxiety, it extracts and pumps itself off of some of the worst parts of ourselves and the inability to distinguish between anxiety and love or preference. According to Facebook, if I am driving down a freeway and my eyes keep looking at car crashes, then it thinks that I want more car crashes and starts looping, but your brain does the same thing. Your brain is a self-learning newsfeed that says, "Oh, you tend to have this thought pattern where you keep looking at the fear and the dystopia, so I'm going to give you more of that."

Tristan Harris: So the things that are wrong with the newsfeed and that algorithm reinforcing based on what our patterns are and what we repeat is the same pattern that we have to face, it seems in our own mind and what are the lessons for how we would design technology that let us see more clearly, this newsfeed is not a picture of reality at all, just like our mind is not.

Jack Kornfield: An image that came to me when you talked about Facebook, I can imagine on the computer screen, just playing with it. That actually you have a proscenium arch and it looks like a theater and that everything that's presented is within that, and then at the top of it, it would say the theater of human incarnation or human drama. Then there would be several different things that would light up the drama of fear or the drama of tragedy or the drama of duty or art or love, and you get to see, "Oh yeah, today the channel is providing us romantic love or something like that.

Jack Kornfield: Again, this isn't real, but what it's doing in my mind is envisioning what you're saying somehow that we take the inner tools that are the birthright of humanity that we've learned as cultures over thousands of years to bring an inner freedom to ourselves.

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We somehow embed them in the way that technology presents itself so that instead of putting us to sleep, it actually awakens us.

Trudy Goodman: Yeah, it's a really apt image. Another image that's used a lot is the dreamlike nature of existence, that you go to sleep and you have a really vivid dream and as soon as you wake up you know, "Oh that was a dream." But then really yesterday is like that too, I'm here today and when I reflect back on yesterday, it's sort of a dream. I wanted to just come back to something that you said earlier is about the silos that are created by the algorithms feeding us more of what we already know, of learning which would be learning what we don't yet know.

Tristan Harris: Right.

Trudy Goodman: What you're describing is a reality where we only get to have the life we already know. We don't get to have a new life that we haven't explored yet and we don't even know what it would look like. There's something about that, that it's also very infantilizing and protecting like little kids, we don't want them to know too much because they're not ready and they actually don't have the capacity yet, but we do. We were talking about micro and macro, but there's something in between, which is the family. The family provides usually the same function they see you as you were, and if you begin to change, they will usually, sometimes in kind ways sometimes not so kind ways, they will usually either encourage or provoke you into behaving the same way you used to. Call it family homeostasis. I used to do a lot of family therapy.

Trudy Goodman: So there too, we're drawn to the comfort of what we know, but it's paradoxical, it's not real comfort because it's ... again, then we only get to have the life that we already know. The other thing I wanted to say, I loved your phrase, Tristan, maintaining the metacognitive perch, that could be a definition of mindfulness really.

Tristan Harris: Right.

Trudy Goodman: Yeah, that's beautiful and it's difficult. It's difficult to do and it doesn't matter if we fall off that perch. As long as we remember, there is a perch, there is a way out. So that's the tricky part, because the forgetting and the remembering is like the rhythm of life expansion-

Tristan Harris: It's natural.

Trudy Goodman: Contraction, breath in, breath out. Exactly, it's natural.

Tristan Harris: I love what you're saying especially on the Beginner's Mind. I mean, that the famous friend Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind and any notion of looping, what is the definition of crazy? It's doing the same thing you've done many times before and expecting different results. I think of it as, if you go out, if you zoom out enough, I think in a meditation retreat, that's one of the things you actually notice. You didn't see that if you zoom out enough, there's actually kind of a ... even though you're not repeating the exact same thought, the pattern of the thought at the highest level, like jumping from this dystopia to, "Oh, the whole world is going to melt down." That higher level thought might be a pattern that in quarantine keeps coming up.

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Tristan Harris: When you're looping there, you're not actually being or thinking because you're actually hijacked by something, and it's almost like how many layers of the matrix do I have to punch a hole through to get out of that one to a higher level one and I might even see higher and higher level loops, but any definition of freedom and awakening would require not being in a loop. That's what I think of the word hijack, we'd say technology hijacks your mind. Hijacking is a narrowing and a repetition and a non-freedom, and the ability to name or see the hijack even if you fall off that multiple times is the ability to temporarily go back up into creativity, into something fresh, into something awakened and new and creating new choice on life's menu, where there were no choices before, where there was a false choice, you kept feeding yourself the same menu.

Tristan Harris: I find that fascinating thinking about lessons for how do you design technology to avoid loops, I think of Slack, I think of email, I think of text messages, and this is happening all the time.

Trudy Goodman: Yes, it is. Yes, it is. What you're saying about that looping and repetition, it also reminds me psychologically looking from a psychoanalytic tradition, there's something called the repetition compulsion, where you keep looping around the same behaviors or the same patterns of bad relationships and unhealthy things, maybe self-destructive things looping around and around these patterns and the looping in those patterns, you can't get out because the mechanism is something that is rooted in earlier behavior and the repetition is an unconscious search for a better outcome. But because it's unconscious, it just keeps going. It figures like, "Okay, I'll try it again." Or maybe this time I'll reread that email, maybe this time I'll see the way to respond.

Tristan Harris: Right.

Trudy Goodman: And that the mechanistic nature of that looping and the revisiting of patterns in us, there's something innocent about it. Somebody used a phrase that I loved the other day, the innocence of karma, which was referring to the fact that we don't choose the thoughts that we're having. We don't choose the emotions that we're having. I mean, nobody announces to us, "Hey, anxiety barreling towards you on track nine." So much of this is actually already ungovernable and out of our control. If we could control them, we wouldn't be having these feelings. I guess the point of that innocence of karma is that, when we can positively connote what's happening and I'm talking about what's happening within not how it's getting projected out into the tech world, that's really your department.

Trudy Goodman: But when we can positively connote these things, we can change them and let them go. It's completely counter intuitive. You would think that the things we hate about ourselves would be the easiest to let go of and to change, but it doesn't work that way. This is where the essential role of kindness and compassion and loving awareness comes in, because when we say, "Well, that was the best I could do at that time, or this was the only way that the mind knew how to approach this thing." It's the tender understanding that we all wish we could have had all the time growing up, but life isn't like that..

Tristan Harris: Totally.

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Trudy Goodman: Like that, right?

Tristan Harris: It really reminds me of ... I learned in my training in Neural-Linguistic Programming and it's used in counseling all the time, as you were saying, Trudy, there's that, when you go back to seeing the earlier childhood memory of where that pattern might've come from, the response to a fearful situation or to betrayal or trust or whatever it was, you know that you have to go back and see that little boy who experienced that and say, "Oh my gosh, could he have been expected to do anything other than what he did to find that strategy at that time."

Trudy Goodman: Exactly.

Tristan Harris: To thank that little boy for how he responded and say, "Oh, that was so understandable, and we're so sorry, we couldn't be there for him when he needed more support." Then that compassionate allowing something new to exist on top of that. But if that little boy being traumatized is still running in the autopilot, homunculus little version cockpit of your mind, running the controls without seeing that that little boy is running the cockpit. Well, of course, you've narrowed that agency. Another thing that this brings up from reading some of your both earlier interviews, I think Jack talked once about the compulsion towards suicide or the feeling that I need to die, I need to not be here.

Tristan Harris: In fact, that might be actually a part of ourselves, like an older innocent part of ourselves that actually it's not the body that needs to die. It's that there's a more innocent earlier part of ourselves that we might be needing to let go of, that's the thing that's being traumatized and needs to be lost, but it's not the body. The mind again, being so fragile and not having these kinds of Jedi-level understandings of ourselves is the difference between taking an action like suicide versus allowing that different understanding, which allows us to transcend and grow and alchemize into a new version of ourselves.

Aza Raskin: I think there's a really critical nuance in there, which is ... and I've noticed this in myself that if I can name, say a childhood reason for why I'm the way that I am and not distinguish it from the pattern that I'm exhibiting now, then that reason can become my identity and it fixes me, and there's this way which you have to acknowledge and then let go of the reason so that you can address directly the pattern.

Trudy Goodman: Yeah, that sounds right. There's another critical nuance to pick up your phrase Aza, in what you said earlier Tristan, which is that part saying the little boy in your example, that part doesn't have to die or even get lost, like get lost kid.

Tristan Harris: Right, right, right.

Trudy Goodman: That part actually just needs to not be in charge of your behavior. It can be there, it can be part of a family, but it can't be in charge.

Tristan Harris: Yeah. It reminds me of in Neuro-Linguistic Programming and I guess it's part of Internal Family Systems, there's a practice called the parts auditorium, where you

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invite all of the little parts of yourselves into an auditorium. To notice who's getting the joystick and to have each part of ourselves feel included and respected and part of the broader society of the self, because we do regress and shift between these little parts of ourselves and that acceptance and welcoming and love for all those different parts is critical for integration.

Aza Raskin: One of my favorite examples of this is the movie, *Inside Out*, Dacher Keltner's work, which, if you think of *Inside Out* as an ultimate in understanding technology, it gave a roadmap, a visual roadmap, a metaphor for six, seven, eight, nine, 10 year olds to understand this many versions of ourselves, all voting for what we do as a mental model and being there to be present with all of them.

Trudy Goodman: Yes. Years ago, my friend Spencer was trying to stop smoking and I asked him how it was going, at one point he said, "Well, some of us have stopped, but others ..."

Tristan Harris: Right.

Trudy Goodman: And I loved that because yes, that's actually ... will the real Spencer please stand up? There isn't one, it's real-

Tristan Harris: Right.

Trudy Goodman: Yeah. We're made of all these, all these different parts, and if people could understand and have ... maybe it doesn't have to be Jedi-level, but a little more understanding, they wouldn't have to hate so much, they wouldn't have to project onto an other. There's a beautiful Zen story, really simple one where the abbot of the monastery, the Zen master, he has a practice that he does to maintain awareness, to sustain his cognitive perch and he called out to himself and he says, "Hey, are you awake?" And then he answers himself and says, "Yes." And then he says, "Are you staying here, are you here?" And he answers himself. He says, "Yeah, I'm present, I'm here." And then he says, "Do not be deceived by others."

Trudy Goodman: That's the call on, like that's the poem, we make things an other, we make them because there is that separation of becoming the witness and not believing our thoughts and being able to have that space. But then there's also the unity of being able to merge and sense our connection in a visceral way, our innate connection to all life. Right? And yet we make an object, we reify things and we make them other, and we do that to each other, and that to me is the source of just so much of the problems in our world.

Aza Raskin: Yeah. What a deeply enlivening conversation's this is.

Trudy Goodman: Oh, it's my pleasure, anytime. Really our pleasure. We love you guys.

Tristan Harris: Our friend, Linda Stone coined the phrase, email apnea, just like with sleep apnea, when we read our email, we actually hold our breath because it's stressful. If you watch closely, when you read your email, you'll watch that you do that and when you hold your breath, you're suppressing the parasympathetic nervous system and you're increasing the amount of stress in your body, which makes you more vulnerable to

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anxiety-driven juicy dopamine type of things that are going to help us run away from that stress even faster. Something as simple as our breathing can sound like some new age woo woo introduction of something irrelevant to the conversation, especially talking to meditation teachers. I think a lot of people naturally have that reaction to when people say, just focus on your breath, but how much is our breath and our breathing affected by technology?

Aza Raskin: Blue light is another great example where, if you shine blue light into a human being's eyes, especially late at night, it keeps them up, it disrupts the sleep cycle, but it's a subtle shift, it's not like you just snap your fingers and stop sleeping. It's that the quality of life changes and to detect that change in the quality of life requires a kind of internal practice of slowing down of noticing. I think technologists don't generally take responsibility for small design decisions that end up having profound effects on our physiology. It can really alter our physiological states in very surprising ways.

Tristan Harris: When we talk about humane technology and how do we design for people's broader wellbeing, people often think, well, then we need the technology to make us happy, as opposed to what if it uncluttered the background to make space for wellbeing to emerge naturally as part of a complex system. For example, let's say you're trying to build humane technology that increases my daily sense of unconditional love and delight in the world. Oh my God, okay, how would we do that? You can imagine...

Aza Raskin: Notifications.

Tristan Harris: Notifications or the computer points a camera at my face, and it sees what my micro expressions are and says, "Oh my God, he's not happy. Let's start dosing him with puppy photos until his micro expressions start squinching in a way that go up to the full facial smile and then now we know his eyes are smiling, that's when we get a real smile." Okay, the computer is making us happy, it's optimizing for wellbeing. I think there's a real fallacy here. One of the principles of humane technology is actually finding and strengthening existing human brilliance with regard to a human value we're trying to fulfill. So let's say it's wellbeing or unconditional love.

Tristan Harris: I remember when we went into the coronavirus, I actually posted on Facebook, "Now would be a great time to adopt or rescue animal because pets are one of the few things that actually just give you unconditional love and just look at you with that little smile." So we need to think about, "Okay, well, imagine technology knows those of us that are feeling at home and are depressed and are actually by ourselves, like we're actually on quarantine, not with someone else we're just by ourselves." That we're given rich and empowering menus of ways that might help us. So that could be finding a supportive community or a book club or a reading club on Zoom, but it could also be, here are animals, you can rescue right now. That's kind of thing you want to optimize for, not the kind of moment to moment smiling and happiness and joy.

Tristan Harris: So we're not ranking newsfeeds by puppy videos that just make your smile curvature go up by five degrees, we're designing for the resilience and grounded-ness of each human being increasing their deeper sense of sovereignty and capacity as a human being in the world. I also wanted to bring it back to ... if you think about what specifically technology could do, one of the things we've talked about in this

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interview is the identifying of looping patterns, watching when my mind is looping on a specific anxiety. Humane technology might help us by identifying looping patterns. I mean, I'm just riffing in real time here, but what if I could hit a checkbox on my operating system that said, "Hey, could you actually identify when I'm looping?" Email could actually identify when I'm looping on those same emails and I'm not actually answering them.

- Tristan Harris: Browsers could identify when I'm just switching back and forth rotating between three or four tabs without actually getting anything done. Here is a mindfulness tool, which says, "Notice a looping pattern of thought and then name it, compassionately lean into it and accept it instead of pushing it away, and then where do I want to go with it once I see even more choices on life menu, once I've integrated that part of myself that was coming from a place of anxiety and looping."
- Aza Raskin: It's a really interesting design prompt, because there's the naive way of dealing with it.
- Tristan Harris: Right.
- Aza Raskin: A notification to say like, "Hey, you're looping, that's probably not the way to go."
- Tristan Harris: Now you're feeding the problem even worse because you're just letting people know all at once. Here's all the places, obviously that's not the right thing.
- Aza Raskin: Or maybe we should get them like bars and charts so that they can feel shame at the end of the week, about how much they've looped.
- Tristan Harris: That's actually a really important point, there's something in willpower theory, which has some contestation, but if you show people evidence of how they're breaking their own set limits, they actually feel even worse about it, and they're more likely to engage in the destructive behavior. So if this is the sixth time that I went for the candy and the candy jar, and now you're showing me this the sixth time and I was only supposed to do it twice in a day, now I just feel even worse, and what's the fastest way to run away from that feeling worseness and that anxiety, I'm going to go for even more of those damn m&ms.
- Aza Raskin: I've already broken it
- Tristan Harris: I've already broken it, and the already broken it effects, is like what I call the what the hell effects. So it's the once I set a boundary and then once I go past that boundary, notice that we don't stay close to that boundary, we just like, all bets are off. Now we're just down the rabbit hole of our anxieties and fears and addictions.
- Aza Raskin: So besides putting the cookies or the sweets even further away, what are other good design patterns for overcoming that?
- Tristan Harris: I think it's important to say, "How do I reset the nervous system and remove the cobwebs like one day in nature, a digital Sabbath." I think technology is so integrated into our lives, it's hard to do that when it's literally an extension of you, especially in a post coronavirus world. So how do you have a Sabbath from your arm when your

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arm is fundamental to the way that we live? I think this is kind of maybe an optimistic way to see things like Apple Watch or the Light Phone, where you have smaller, more minimalistic arms that you get to put on, you get a choice, you get to put on the fully featured arm that connects you 24/7 to all the world's suffering and real time and beams, all that knowledge down into your brain by putting that arm on, AKA the iPhone and like the computer and the web browser, versus I can put on this calmer arm, the arm that's more limited in its constraints that only lets me make phone calls and maybe it makes me aware of some basic things like my calendar, but mostly is really about turning off.

Tristan Harris: How do we get more agency back? So we're not just given this all or nothing choice, which is back to my first TED Talk, between being 100% connected to everything all the time and having that be the choice or completely disconnecting. There's got to be, as they say in Buddhism, a middle way.

Aza Raskin: Your Undivided Attention is produced by the Center for Humane Technology. Our executive producer is Dan Kedmey and our associate producer is Natalie Jones. Noor Al-Samarrai helped with the fact-checking. Original music and sound designed by Ryan and Hays Holladay, and a special thanks to the whole Center for Humane Technology team for making this podcast possible.

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