



## The Athena Wellness Podcast

Episode 049 – Why Shifting Your Perspective is a Useful Wellness Strategy

June 27, 2021

00:05

Welcome to the Athena Wellness podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

00:30

Hello and welcome to Episode 49. Thanks so much for joining me.

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Today I want to tell you about star trails and ocean tides and how to use the natural world to shift your perspective whenever you're feeling stuck, anxious or unsure.

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But before I do, I invite you to try this little exercise, assuming you're in a place where you can welcome an image in your mind's eye.

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Take a look at your current surroundings, your everyday life. Now zoom all the way out. Imagine looking at an endless sky and consider this.



01:14

The sun is one of 100 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy. The Milky Way is one of several 100 billion galaxies in the Universe. The Universe is 13 billion years old, ever expanding since the Big Bang, and made of matter and energy. But only 5% of the Universe is made of atoms, meaning stars and galaxies. The rest is dark matter and dark energy. It's a mystery.

01:50

Now zoom all the way in. Imagine you're on an endless beach. Consider this. Everything is made of tiny atoms. One grain of sand contains 1 million trillion atoms. Atoms are made of subatomic particles, tiny bits of energy that behave unpredictably. They're here. And then they're not. This is the realm of quantum physics. And that tells us that what appears to be solid is not. It's a mystery.

02:29

From the Milky Way to a grain of sand, there's so much awe, so much we don't know. Yet we tend to forget this and its impact as we live our day to day in between this wonder.

02:45

I was reminded of this when I came across two short memoir pieces that I wrote years ago, which I'll share with you. One was about an experience I had looking at the night sky. And the second was about walking on a beach at sunrise.

03:04

Back then, that sense of wonder I felt was something I could only tap into in times like that - miles away from my everyday life. But I've come to learn that we can tap into this place of awe and curiosity if we're open to it whenever we'd like. And it can change our



whole perspective. So much so that this practice can become a useful wellness strategy.

And that's what we'll be exploring today. I'll read those pieces about how those two experiences in the natural world helped me see my world differently. I'll tell you a bit about what I learned as a result. And then we'll end the episode with some practical ways that you can invite these types of experiences into your daily life.

So sit back, take a nice long breath to ground yourself in presence, and let's get started.

04:01

Here's the first piece on zooming out - the night sky...

04:08

It gets cold at night, even in May, at 7300 feet in the high desert of southern New Mexico. It's quite a contrast from the 85 degree day and my slightly burned skin is sensitive to the temperature change. I'm 100 miles away from the nearest city in the Sacramento mountains surrounded by a half million acres of pine scented wilderness.

04:35

During the day, I explored the dusty rugged trails and photographed hummingbirds darting from Pinyon to sugar water feeder and back.

04:45

As night falls I hear a mountain lion screeching in the canyon. The encampment is awakening in a different way, as professional and amateur astronomers from around the world settle in for a night of stargazing.



05:00

I bundle up, grab my camera and pack, and head down to the trail to the observation field. It's so quiet each gravel footstep sounds like an explosion that reverberates in the darkness. Something stirs in the surrounding dry grass and the creature, however small, looms large in my imagination. As I near my destination, I start to see the outline of telescopes and hear the whir of the domes opening, remotely operated by astronomers in far off places charting the sky. Thousands of galaxies and stars dialed up and studied in a way that Galileo, the father of observational astronomy, could have never conceived.

05:47

I set up my gear: a sturdy tripod, a cable release and the camera pointed toward the sky. Trying to frame the shot in the dark is just that - an educated guess at best. This is an evening of trial and error photography, trying different combinations of angles and exposures.

06:10

My goal is to capture star trails, which are created through long exposures that capture the motion of the Earth's rotation, resulting in arced lines that streak across the photograph's sky.

06:26

Most of my compositions include Polaris, the brightest star within a degree of the pole. The digital images give the illusion that Polaris is stationary with the other stars rotating around it. I always knew that Polaris was a navigational tool, but I've since learned that the pole moves over time due to magnetic changes in the earth's core. This reliable star



will not be as accurate in a thousand years, and another navigational star will take its place.

07:00

I spent the night monitoring long exposures, getting lost in the night sky, feeling the Universe revolving around me, even though I understood I was spinning on this blue planet hurtling through space.

07:15

I thought about how my deepest beliefs, much like the earth's magnetic core, shifted over time. I thought about how this vast sky I was observing was only a small slice from one planet in a huge galaxy among millions that shaped our Universe. I thought about my preference for light over dark. And although I enjoyed the evening under the stars, I was elated when the first rays of dawn lit the horizon.

07:47

After photographing the sunrise, I packed up my gear and headed back to the cabin, the lessons of the dark burned into my camera's memory card, reminders in the form of concentric circles of light, like blessings from an infinite Universe.

08:04

So let me tell you a little bit about this piece. It was written about a road trip to New Mexico during my Wall Street days almost 20 years ago. I grew up right outside of New York City, so I had never seen the Milky Way or the night sky like that before. I caught glimpses and those brief glances filled me with wonder and curiosity, but then the impact would fade as I returned to life in the big city.



This trip gave me visual evidence in the pictures that I took. Pictures that hung in my office for years. Pictures that helped put my daily existence into perspective. Pictures that reminded me of the power of the mystery of the night sky.

08:51

So here's the second piece. This is about zooming in and taking in every grain of sand...

09:00

Stepping onto the deck at night, I watched a lightning storm to the north. The intermittent bursts briefly illuminated shapes in the clouds and on the sea. Bolts of electricity cracked and twisted across the sky in vertical arcs that look like writing – secret messages momentarily inscribed in the sky.

09:24

As I stared into the distance, I felt my body relax from a concoction of cucumber, mint and vodka. For the first time in a long time, there was nothing to do but be in place.

09:37

I was on the beach at sunrise the next morning with my cup of coffee on the expansive shoreline, gently waking up with the world. The moody sky hid the sun, creating a kaleidoscope canopy of light rays. As I walked, I thought about how I love to spend time along the edges of the world where land meets sea. The ocean is a rhythmic reminder of the earth spinning and time passing.

10:06



I felt little difference between the warmth of the morning sand and the surf on my bare feet, as the temperature hadn't dipped below 80 degrees in days. Wandering until I could go no further, I reached a high jetty. Two men were fishing off the jagged rocks.

10:25

I could tell I was facing the outlet from the Intercoastal Waterway. Huge freighters, as large as cities, effortlessly floated by carrying enough cargo for 100 eighteen wheelers. The pelicans and gulls swirled above my head and occasionally dipped into the chop to find breakfast.

10:47

I watched the commercial fishing vessels and tankers charge into the open waters, fearlessly heading into the storms that were gathering on the horizon. I wondered how the crew felt descending into the turbulent weather. I could see them in their rain gear, the smell of diesel and fish weighing in the air. A landscape of slippery steel against a backdrop where it's hard to discern sky from water, and nowhere to escape should there be a bad day at work.

11:18

It made me think of the last year with life events so unanticipated and varied, that intense focus was required just to keep all the balls in the air. It felt like I was experiencing some odd initiation or rite of passage. But to what?

11:37

At first, I struggled to meet each challenge using my tried and true methods, ones that never failed me before. I crafted meticulous game plans that when executed in the past



resulted in the intended outcome. But these are new puzzles and appropriate approaches are not evident. There's so much I don't know.

Here's what I do know. There's no going back. Those little boxes I once hid myself in have been ripped open and flung to the side, litter along the road. I have no intention of reverting to ways that neatly categorize and hold my experiences and myself.

Yes, there's been plenty of grief this past year. At times, it gripped me in its clutches and felt like it would never let go. Other times it felt like a Band-Aid that was slowly peeled off, a long hurt with the anticipation worse than the actual event.

12:39

I've stared down deadlines and disappointments and unmet expectations and it gets easier to hold your ground. That bit of hard won real estate becomes more and more precious and worth the fight. In a way I feel a lot like those fishing boats, abandoning my safe harbor and heading out into open sea. I'm finding a new way forward, and at the same time, I'm welcoming myself home.

13:07

As I skirted the coastline this morning, I thought about Lands End, the westernmost point of mainland England. I listened to the rumble of the Floridian waves while imagining the ocean slamming against the 200 foot cliffs that comprise the British granite headland.

13:26

I feel drawn to such power, the pulsing, the passion, in ways I never thought. It's as if I'm captivated by the surge of life.





And I can feel the energetic swell of a new wave forming beneath me. And after almost five decades, I can finally say I'm ready to welcome the unknown and just ride.

13:50

This second piece was written about a trip to Florida, reflecting on the growth from an earlier visit. Looking down the long stretch of beach, I tried to recall how it felt a few years prior and I noticed the absence of overload, what used to be an ever present humming in my head, the emotional turmoil, that hollow feeling of emptiness and loss. I was starting to learn how to connect with the passion that I knew was inside and how to constructively help it to find its way.

14:26

I recalled watching the incoming surf at high tide, a metaphor for the waves of challenge that were battering me at the time. And by the time I wrote this piece, I surrendered to it all, determining the best way forward was to ride the waves rather than try to control them. By the end of the second trip I refocused my energy toward trusting the intuitive way forward, finding new ways to bridge and utilize the earth and water energies to be grounded yet flow at the same time.

15:02

I share these pieces and experiences as examples of ways you can shift your perspective. I suggest exploring the concept of zooming out and zooming in as a powerful way to reframe. In photography, when we zoom out, we make our subjects smaller or farther away. And when we zoom in, we make it larger or closer without moving ourselves. We do this optically by moving the barrel of the lens which manipulates the light coming into the camera. And that shifts the perspective of the composition and of the viewer.



We can do this with our own life experience in two ways. First zooming out, which is about broadening our focus to include life outside of our current field of view, like a wide angle lens, or like staring at the night sky. It helps us open our awareness to possibility and invites innovation.

This is foresight at its best. Being in this space of Big Mind is the opposite of focusing or concentrating. It's about giving ourselves permission to be in open mental space, to relax in the abstract, the metaphorical, the unknown. To have unstructured time to do nothing, even for brief periods of time, much like hiking up a mountain and taking in the panoramic view. It's about celebrating the journey. How did we get here? What have we learned? How can we celebrate? How can we dream bigger? All while soaking it in and absorbing the bigger picture. This is a great technique when you're mired in the details of your daily routine.

17:02

The second is zooming in. And this is about narrowing our focus to include everything that comprises the present moment, including the inspiration we get from Big Mind moments, like the night sky and walks along the ocean. It puts our current state of life in perspective by seeing our daily routine as the result of life decisions we've made to this point. Zooming in gives us more clarity on practical next steps and it's a great technique for those who feel scattered or paralyzed by choice.

17:42

So now that we have two techniques to choose from, let's put it into practice. Here are three suggestions for shifting perspective. All three invite wellness micro shifts, or small actions that are designed to boost: 1) curiosity, 2) mood and 3) alignment. First, curiosity.



18:08

Curiosity is the energy that moves us forward into new territory and expands our empathy. Albert Einstein once said, "A mind that opens to a new idea never returns to its original size." When we're curious, we become engaged. And when we're engaged, we tend to do well and achieve more.

18:33

Curiosity opens us to people with different life experiences, worldviews, and yes, perspectives, making us more empathetic and understanding. Being curious is also a great wellness practice because we're exposed to novelty and we learn new things. And when we do that, our dopamine levels elevate and our overall well-being increases.

Which leads us to the second one which is mood. And mood is a temporary state of mind or feeling - with an emphasis on temporary. A great way to shift your mood is to write about the situation from different angles. Try different narratives or outcomes on for size. And if you're stuck in a glass half empty mindset, identify the positive or the beneficial in the situation, no matter how small or insignificant it may be. Finding the good is a great first step forward. You can also implement a change to shake up your routine: new music, new food, activity, a person or a new place. Or you can let go of something and feel the physical shift, a lightness in your body.

19:57

The third suggestion for shifting perspective is alignment and that's when your actions and your values and desires are in harmony. Where are you spending your most valuable resource, your time and energy and is it in harmony with what matters most to you? What could be adjusted in mind, body and spirit? How can you counter negative



talk tracks? What's really true for you? And what new habits would support you? Where could you trust more? Focus on what you can and are willing to change.

20:39

And lastly, here are some suggestions for combining curiosity, mood and alignment with zooming in and zooming out.

20:48

Zooming out. You can seek out new experiences and possibilities. You can connect with Universal forces, such as the power of the elements like the ocean. You can work with your learning edge, pushing yourself out of your comfort zone in some way. You can see your situation from a zoomed out vantage point - will it matter in 10 or 20 years? You can write about a prior situation that felt insurmountable. How did you resolve it? How did that experience add to the strength and outlook you have today? You can make time for mental breaks - walks, cloud watching, gardening, napping, driving - let your right brain roam. And you can also look for when you feel most at ease. That's a good sign that you're in alignment with your truth and intention.

21:49

And now zooming in. You can hold and work with a series of meaningful questions to gain insight. Challenge your own worldview. Lift your spirit with music, exercise, laughter or human connection. Clear out the old (which is usually stuff) or get it off your chest (which is usually emotional). You can celebrate and give yourself credit for a job well done. Or you can review where you're spending your most valuable resources - your time and energy - and make sure they align with your values and desires.

22:32



The outcome to any of these practices can be more presence, less emotional tumble, and progress, one small step at a time. Take small steps and be empowered by the knowledge that you can change what you need and let go of what you can't.

However you choose to implement these strategies, it's my hope that since everything is connected and in relationship, you'll find a way that works for you to incorporate the infinite vastness of the sky and the nanoscopic components of matter and energy that make up our world.

23:11

This will give you options when you find yourself vulnerable to the changing weather and relentless waves of life. Perspective shifts help us improve our mental outlook, ourselves and our lives. As situations shift and improve, self empowerment increases.

23:31

I'd like to leave you with two quotes today. The first is from Stephen Hawking. He said, "I believe everyone should have a broad picture of how the universe operates and our place in it. It's a basic human desire. And it also puts our worries in perspective."

And the second is from Wayne Dyer. He said, "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."

24:07

Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.



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Until next time, be well!