Judd: Yale Podcast Network.

Speaker 2: Welcome to the podcast, a Yale Divinity School podcast series focusing on issues related to religion, culture, and politics. In this episode on emotional intelligence, YDS alum, Emily Judd interviews Dr. Robin Stern, who is co-founder of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. Dr. Stern discusses the risk of ignoring and suppressing emotions. If

Stern: You don't understand and manage your emotions, then your risk for your emotions managing you.

Speaker 2: She weighs in on how religion and spirituality can nurture emotional intelligence.

Stern: Spirituality can encourage the feeling, the practice of gratitude and acknowledging one's blessings. And these are all powerful shapers for better regulating emotions.

Speaker 2: And Dr. Stern argues for the importance of anger.

Stern: Anger is very useful. It's very useful because it's important to fight against injustice.

Judd: Dr. Stern, you are co-founder of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. How would you define emotional intelligence and why is it critical to work on?

Stern: There are several ways to define it. I'll define it in a more scholarly way. First, using a quote from Peter Salve and John Mayer, who coined the term in 1990 as a set of skills contributing to the accurate appraisal of emotions in self and others and the effective regulation of emotion in self and others. What does that mean? It means that emotional intelligence is about understanding and managing, regulating your emotions and labeling emotions. Importantly, what's the difference between jealousy and envy? What's the difference between frustration and anger? If you come to me and you say, Robin, I was really frustrated yesterday, what I'm going to say to you, or I'm really frustrated right now, what I'm going to say to you, Emily is going to be different than if you came to me and said, I'm really angry. And why is that? Because each emotion has a psychological theme that underlies it, that causes you to have that feeling.

Stern: So when you are frustrated, it's because some goal that you're pursuing is blocked. When you're angry, it's because there's a perceived injustice, and I'm sure you'd agree that what you would do about each one of those emotions is different. And so there's recognizing, understanding labeling as the foundation of emotional intelligence, and we call that the experiencing part of emotional intelligence. And then there's the action part, expressing in the right way at the right time to the right degree to the right person, and regulating emotions or co-regulating emotions. So regulating your and helping others to regulate their emotions.

Judd: I like how you differentiated between the wide range of emotions because I do remember myself, what stuck out to me when I was taking a pilot program at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence was there was a difference between fear and anxiety. And I think our culture now and many people suffer from anxiety and is it anxiety or could it be some other type of emotion? So yeah, I think like you said, labeling correctly and recognizing, identifying the emotions that emotions are important.

Stern: And I'm glad you brought that example up. Do you happen to remember what the difference was?

Judd: I think anxiety, it's like a worry about a future maybe event and fear. It's more imminent or can you explain

Stern: Exactly. So you were a quick study and you

Judd: Learned Good. I'm happy

Stern: For that. So fear is about impending danger and anxiety is what we're all living with, which is uncertainty and uncertain future. We don't know what's going to happen. And that is a lot of what's happening today in our world and has been certainly very deeply since Covid, beginning of Covid. We all lived with that kind of out of control, uncertainty, unpredictability.

Judd: Yeah, and I mentioned the pilot program at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. That program really helped me understand the values of emotion and reframe the perspective that I had before, which was that emotions are a sign of weakness and it's better just to ignore them because they're not rational. And logic is much better. Why is knowing, recognizing labeling emotions, emotional intelligence in general, why is that important? Not just for an individual, but for society as a whole

Stern: Without knowing your emotions and being able therefore to manage them in the service of your goals? It's like flying blind because we know from decades of research is that people are having emotions all day long, every day. And if you don't understand and manage your emotions, then you are at risk for your emotions managing you. I mean, if you think about first of all, if you just open the newspaper, turn on your computer, think about your last day at work, for the most part, it's easy to see where people are out of control, dysregulated or cut off from their emotions. So with the teaching and learning of emotional intelligence, which hopefully is happening all over world much of the time now, certainly we are making that effort. And right now with the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, we're in over 5,000 schools around the world in 27 countries.

Stern: So it really is a significant effort and hopefully will continue to do that and the world will allow us to. The hope is that with greater awareness, with greater ability to manage emotions and to express them, there'll be less violence there. We know there is less anxiety, less depression, greater ability to perform, greater ability to work at your fullest potential healthier relationships, the greater ability to make good decisions. We know that emotions impact five areas of life, attention, memory, learning decision-making and judgment, relationships, physical and mental health and creativity and everyday functioning like getting through disappointment. So think about that. If all of those areas of life are enhanced and more positive and more people are more capable in those areas because they are skilled in emotional intelligence.

Judd: You mentioned managing emotions and I think some people would say, okay, I am managing them if I'm suppressing them. What would you say to that?

Stern: I would say it's not a great idea. The truth is you can't really make your emotions go away. They will leak as we say.

Judd: Now, how can spirituality where the Yale Religion podcast, so I have to ask about spirituality and emotional intelligence. How can someone's level of spirituality impact their emotional intelligence? Can it help, can it harm? Have you seen any correlation between spirituality and emotional intelligence?

Stern: So I'm not speaking from data now because we haven't been studying spirituality, although there may be people in the center that, not to my knowledge or because I haven't read it yet, are studying spirituality and emotional intelligence. But it just makes sense if you think about it, the many, the practices of spirituality from many faiths encourage connection, wellbeing, mindfulness, all religions that I know, all spiritual practice. Gratitude is a piece of that as well. So spirituality can encourage the feeling, the practice of gratitude and acknowledging one's blessings. And these are all powerful shapers for better regulating emotions at the same time. So not only does the practice lead to positive emotions, but it also all these various practices. But they also can be good ways to bring and gather yourself in a moment where you are dysregulated.

Judd: Thinking about specific religions in particular Christianity, there is a tendency in Christianity to portray Jesus as this figure who is above human emotions. Certain Christian schools of thought would assert that. But we see in the Bible that Jesus, he clearly expresses emotions, whether it's love, anger, irritation, sadness, grief. There are many more. How can Christians and those people of other faiths recover a spirituality that incorporates rather than suppresses emotions?

Stern: One of my friends who I talked to about this question shared a story that she said was a prominent example, a common example from the Bible where Jesus flipped a table out of anger in the house of prayer when the house of prayer was being used for trading, I believe, and then went on to throw people out and then heal people who came to him in that same place. So he was on what we would say is a rollercoaster of emotions. He actually had anger and acted on it. If Christians are looking to be in Jesus' image, if that is a practice or that is a belief that we are in God's image, then we also have emotions.

Judd: I definitely like the example of Jesus, his outburst in the house of worship as you said, and how he went through that emotion and then managed it and was able to transform it into something else to move on with the work that he felt he needed to do.

Stern: There is no such thing as a bad emotion in that all emotions have information. And as I said earlier, all emotions have a psychological theme underlying them. So that when he was furious in that moment or we didn't ask him what he was feeling, but we're assuming he was very angry, some injustice had been done to the faith of people or the spirit of the sacred place that they were in. And so he acted in what we would say was not a well-managed way, but was an expression. He expressed his emotion by turning the table over and then he obviously let it go and went on

Judd: And following up on the anger, anger as an emotion Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, the current Dalai Lama, he wrote in a tweet actually, anger is really unhelpful. It is only destructive. However, he then wrote in 2011 in a book that he authored, that compassionate anger about an injustice can actually motivate change. So you spoke a little bit about anger following your decades of research on emotional intelligence. Is anger useful?

Stern: So anger is very useful. It's very useful because it's important to fight against injustice mean on a podcast that has spirituality and religion as its base. I think if we are feeling kind of chill with injustice, we're not going to be motivated to stand up to oppression and violence and to actualize a world of love and peace and compassion. So the compassionate use of the compassionate service that you might go into or the compassionate stance that you might take or hopefully would take when you see a perceived injustice, feel it for yourself, I think is very in line with spirit. With a spiritual calling. There are no bad emotions. Anger is not a bad emotion. It's bad when anger is not regulated and it's used for destructive means. As a therapist, I think anger is often a very helpful emotion because it helps people to define boundaries. It helps people to say, this is not okay, I don't like that. And to help people understand where they bump up against each other can be very helpful in promoting peaceful coexistence and intimacy. Anger, it's important not to suppress it, but to address it through strategies of emotional intelligence, like recognizing when you're angry, what makes you angry, what your triggers are, what are your partner's triggers are your bosses, your mothers, your brothers, and unpacking all of that so that you can understand how to and come to agreement about if it's relational with someone else about how to handle that situation differently.

Judd: Now, one thing that can definitely make people angry is gaslighting. And the word gaslighting is always used. I would say it's becoming very frequently used in our popular culture these days. Even Merriam-Webster selected gaslighting as the word of the year back in 2022. But long before it became a familiar term, you were researching gaslighting and you authored, sorry, you authored the 2007 book, the Gaslight Effect, providing guidance on how to handle emotional abuse and how to survive manipulation. What is your definition of gaslighting and how do you see it being misrepresented in popular culture today?

Stern: Thank you for that question. So gaslighting is an insidious and often covert form of emotional abuse repeated over time. And that's important because it's not a one-off where the gaslight leads the target of the gaslighting to question their judgment, their perception, their memory, their character, and ultimately their sanity as time goes on, it is not disagreeing with someone because people disagree all the time, and that's healthy. If you're putting out your ideas as your opinion. It is not trying to influence, oh, I like this movie. Let's go to this movie, please, we'll buy you ice cream after. That's not maybe a little bit of manipulation, but it's not an influence, but it is not abuse. Gaslighting has a particular feature of attempting to destabilize you, to insist in the certainty of the gaslight's insistence that his reality is the reality there is then that demand for the gaslight to join him in his or their reality and give up their own.

Judd: So what I'm hearing you say is that the Gaslight tea has kind of this doubt sowed in them doubting themselves, and it's some technique for the one who is gaslighting to control and manipulate that person. Is that right?

Stern: That's correct. That the gaslight seeks to sow seeds of doubt in the gaslight such that they second guess their memory, their perception, their character, and ultimately their sanity. It is not like narcissistic personality disorder, which is a DSM diagnosis. It is not a diagnosis, it is a strategy. It is a behavior or a collection of behaviors and it is learned. And so sometimes it's learned because you were gaslighted as a child, sadly, or you learned it as a teenager. I mean, girl gaslighting is something that Rachel Simmons who writes, who does a lot of coaching where gender is concerned and wrote about girl gaslighting and girls for many years, and when I wrote my book early on, she said, well, that's very common between girls. And even in the movie that was made from her book Odd Girl Out, there was this moment that's so familiar, I'll just repeat it now, where somebody said to her friend, Hey, you haven't saved me a seat at the lunch table for so long, and are you mad at me?

Stern: I'm paraphrasing. And the friend who was the popular girl trying to alienate herself from the no longer popular girl said to her, whatever, you're so sensitive. So it may be true that this young girl or any one of us or sensitive when we hear that from the Gaslight, but that has nothing to do with the fact that they still didn't save you a seat at the table. So a gaslight can be manipulative and deflect attention and put the blame on you or put the attention on you, pivot the conversation to you so that you are now on the hot seat.

Judd: My final question, as we discussed emotional intelligence, different emotional behaviors, gaslighting, but how can someone develop emotional intelligence without a therapist? What resources are out there for them?

Stern: So there are so many courses and there are lectures and there are, if you are a parent looking to help your children develop emotional intelligence, there are schools all over the world that have implemented and integrated the ruler approach and there are other social and emotional learning programs. And importantly, there is this wonderful app that anyone in the world can get on their phone. The former head of Pinterest, Ben Silverman and his team through a generous grant that they gave the Center for Emotional Intelligence Mark Bracket, and Ana Pringle and I have worked on this app with them and it is now called How We Feel. Ben heard about our work read Mark's book and invested in the center to work us so that we could build an app that anyone can use for free in perpetuity, to track their feelings, to build their vocabulary, to learn the skills of emotional intelligence and to see the patterns of their emotions over time. I recommended highly the creativity and innovation and design work that went into the app is fantastic and it's beautiful and fun to use. It's interactive. You learn a lot about yourself just in going through, checking in with your feelings. So I would say number one way to begin to teach yourself and learn emotional intelligence is to check in with your feelings multiple times a day, to listen well to others, to practice empathy, to learn strategies, and you can do it through the app very easily. I'm

Judd: Downloading now. Well, thank you so much Dr. Stern, for joining us for this podcast episode. It was really a pleasure to have you.