



Essential Alchemy

The Ancient Art of Healing Naturally

Season 2, Episode 10: Shifting Out of Trauma with Debi Silber, PhD

Jodi: Hi, I'm Jody Cohen, your host, and I'm so excited to share one of my favorite people today. One of my really good friends, actually. Doctor Debi Silber, is the Founder of the Post Betrayal Transformation Institute and a holistic psychologist, a health mindset and personal development expert. The author of the number one bestselling book, *The Unshakable Woman: 4 Steps to Rebuilding Your Body, Mind and Life After a Crisis*. And her newest book, which I highly recommend, and we're going to talk more about this, *Trust Again: Overcoming Betrayal and Regaining Health, Confidence, and Happiness*. Debi, welcome.

Dr. Silber: Hello my friend. So great to be here with you.

Jodi: My God. You know, I love you. So my first question that I ask everyone is how do you define resilience?

Dr. Silber: Resilience is getting back up there every single time you get knocked down. It's just showing your fears, your doubts, your insecurities, who's in charge.

Jodi: That's a great definition. I love that. And the other thing that I love, you talk a lot about resilience, but I want to talk about what situations in life require resilience. Those crises that we bump into and how it shakes us up and wakes us up and allows for us to rebuild something better. Can you speak to that?

Dr. Silber: Yeah. And that's the benefit of a crisis. And I know people say benefit? She's crazy. No, because here's the thing. So often we walk around numb and we're just sleepwalking through life, we're just getting by, we're just surviving. When a crisis happens, it gives us that opportunity to reevaluate and say, wait a second. How am I living? What am I doing? What am I not doing? What am I ready for? And it allows us to just then create a life based on that. And that's where it's a great opportunity.

I always look at it like it's a pendulum, if you imagine. The pendulum swings like this, and this is where most of us live before crisis, before trauma, not so good, not so bad. And then what happens is, you have whatever the crisis is, death of a loved one, disease, natural disaster, betrayal, whatever. And it sends you like this. Then here's the challenge. We're not supposed to stay here. Here's where you get your ideas together. You lick your wounds. You come up with a plan so that you have all the motivation and incentive you need to then do this, swing to greatness.

Dr. Silber: When you think of any thought leader of our time, they're not teaching us anything from here and they're in too much pain to teach us from here. They've done this and this is what they're teaching us how to do.

Jodi: My God. I completely love that. And you have a process and you talk about the stages. Can you share how you get from here to here?

Dr. Silber: Yeah. And that was in a study that I did. It was on betrayal. What holds us back? What helps us heal? What happens to us physically, mentally, and emotionally when the people closest to us lie, cheat and deceive? So I did a study. Of course you don't study something like betrayal unless you have to. So I had two horrific betrayals and it led to three discoveries. One of them was, while we can stay stuck for years, decades, a lifetime and so many of us do. If we're going to fully heal, we're going to move through five, now proven, predictable stages.

And what's really exciting about that is, now we know what happens physically, mentally and emotionally at each one of those stages and we know what it takes to move from one stage to the next. So the beauty of that is, now we know healing is predictable.

Jodi: I love that. Do you want to share a little bit about your own betrayals?

Dr. Silber: Sure. So I had a, a family betrayal that was just so painful and I thought I did everything I needed to do to heal and apparently there was more work to do. And then a couple of years later it was my husband. Like anybody who's been through it, you're devastated, blindsided. And I was just like anybody else. So I got him out of the house and I said, okay, well, here I am. I have four kids and six dogs and a business. And I don't know what the heck to do, but I have to figure this out.

And I like to learn. To me, that's how I figure stuff out. And I needed to learn this one at the PhD level. So that's what I did and I enrolled in a PhD program in transpersonal psychology, which is the psychology of transformation and human potential because I was changing so much and I didn't quite understand it. He was too on his own. That was nice and all. I wasn't really ready to look at that. But I was just so determined to move through this. And I remember saying, if I can find a way through this and heal, I'm taking everybody with me.

That was the pledge and that was the promise. And sure enough, as I was healing, he was doing his own thing. And I was like, what if there's a bigger reason for this? What if I can heal from something like this and then learn something so profound? And one of the things I did learn was, rebuilding is always a choice. Whether you rebuild yourself and move on, and that's what I did with my family. Certainly it just wasn't an option to rebuild with them.

Dr. Silber: Or if the situation lends itself, if you're willing, if you want to, you can rebuild an entirely new relationship with that person who hurt you. And that's what I did with my husband. So not long ago, was two totally different people, we married each other again.

Jodi: I so love that and I love taking people with you. And I think that's where we're aligned, is somehow staying stuck was not an option. Can you talk about why some people stay stuck?

Dr. Silber: It's what we see out of the five stages of betrayal and I'm happy to go through the stages.

Jodi: Yes, I want you to.

Dr. Silber: That is a classic stage three. You know what? When I go through it, you will see. Everyone will know exactly why they're staying stuck there. So let's go through the five stages. So the first was like a setup stage, and I saw this with every single study participant, me too. And if you imagine four legs of a table, the four legs being physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual, it was a real heavy lean on the physical and the mental and neglecting the emotional and the spiritual. So what does that look like? Looks like we're really good at thinking and doing, not really prioritizing the feeling and being right.

But that's where our intuition lies and it would have served us. Anyway, if we only have two legs of a table strengthened, easy for that table to topple over. Stage two by far the scariest stage. And this is the breakdown of the body, the mind, the worldview. This is D-day, discovery day. It's as if the person just takes the mask off, saying, no, this is who I've been this whole time. It's a shock to the body, to the mind. So you've ignited the stress response. Now you're headed for every single stress-related symptom, illness, condition, disease.

You cannot wrap your mind around what you just learned. This makes no sense. And your worldview is shattered, your mental model. These are the rules, this person's safe. Don't go there. This is how it all works. And in a moment, everything you've known to be real and true is no longer. It's terrifying. The bottom has bottomed down on you. But think about it. If you were walking down the street and the bottom were to bottom out on you, what would you do? You would grab hold of anything and everything you could to stay safe and stay alive. That's stage three. Survival instincts emerge.

It's by far the most practical of all the stages. If you can't help me, get out of my way. How can I survive this experience? Where do I go? Who can I trust? Where do I live? What do I do? But here's the trap.

Dr. Silber: Once you've figured out how to survive, because it feels so much better than the shock and trauma of where you just came from, you're like, whew, okay, I'm good. And you start planting roots there. You have no idea there's a stage four and stage five, but a few things happen. The first thing is, you start getting these small self-benefits from being there.

You get to be right. You get someone to blame. You get a target for your anger. You get your story. If you tell your story to anybody, you get sympathy from everybody you tell your story to you. Don't have to do the hard work of trusting again. Do I trust you? Forget it. I just won't trust anybody. So you justify your space. You start planting deeper roots because that's where you are. Now the mind starts doing things like, maybe you're not all that great. Maybe you deserved it, whatever. Deeper roots. Because you're here, you're here a while and now you're talking this way about yourself.

Like energy attracts like energy. So now you're calling situations and circumstances and people towards you that confirm that's where you belong. It gets worse. I'll get you out of it though, because you don't like it, but you don't know it gets any better, you're resigning yourself to thinking, this stinks, but it's where I am. So the only way you deal with it is, now you use things like food, drugs, alcohol, work, TV, keeping busy, anything to numb, avoid, distract yourself.

So now think about it. You do that for a day, a week, a month, a year, 10 years, 20 years. If I see some 20 years out, and I say that drinking or that emotional eating, do you think that has anything to do with that painful betrayal? They say, my gosh, that happened 20 years ago. But do you see, they were in a perpetual holding pattern that whole time. That's the stage we get stuck in, that stage three. So common. If we're willing to let go of the story and everything that goes along with it, more than the loss you grieve. It's a real thing.

Do a few things, you can move to stage four. Stage four is finding and adjusting to a new normal. Here's where you accept and acknowledge, I cannot undo that experience, but I can change what I do with it. And here's, where if you've ever moved to a house office, condo apartment, it's not quite cozy yet. Your stuff isn't there, but it's going to be okay. So you're turning down the stress response. You're not physically healing just yet, but now you've stopped the massive damage you are causing in stage two and stage three. I found this so interesting too. If you were to move, you don't necessarily take everything with you.

You don't take the stuff that don't represent who you want to be in that new space. Same thing here. If your friends weren't there for you, here's where you've outgrown them. You don't take them with you from stage three to stage four. You are changing right here. When you've settled into that stage four, you're making it okay. You're making it home.

Dr. Silber: You could settle into and move into stage five, most beautiful stage healing, rebirth, and a new worldview. The body starts to heal. You didn't have the bandwidth for eating well, exercise, self-love, self-care. You were surviving. Now you do.

Your mind is now making new rules, new boundaries, all new stuff based on where you've been. And you have a new worldview based on your entire experience. And the four legs of that table, in the beginning it was just all about the physical and the mental, were solidly grounded by this point, because we're focused on the emotional and the spiritual too. Those are the five stages.

Jodi: I love that. And one of the things like the people, losing people, realizing you can't bring people with you, I think a lot of us struggle with that, you know, the lifelong friends. Can you speak to that?

Dr. Silber: It's so it's so scary when you don't understand it and when you don't know it, and that's why I write about it and trust again, as a warning. It is so common because you can have your friends, it doesn't matter, 10, 20, 30 years. And then you say, what the heck is happening? Is it me? Yes, it is. You're changing and you see things differently. You are not okay with gossip anymore or low-energy conversations or a one-sided friendship. You're making different rules. See, that's the thing too.

After a trauma and when it's about that resilience about that really profound change, you're creating a new identity. You're bringing the parts you like, you're leaving behind the parts that don't serve. So we're very aware of what we were tolerating that we're no longer willing to tolerate. And I see this in our community all the time. You realize, I was settling. Why was it okay that I just had that one friend who would always just dump on me? I was always there for her and it was never reciprocal. Here's where you realize, I don't want that anymore and we're really growing.

What happens so often, I'll give you a little diagram. This explains so much right here. We're here before our experience, and then there's the crash, whatever it is. And then we decide, should we choose, to do the work. We're helping ourselves. We're making changes physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually. But those other people are right here. So you know what we do at first, we feel very uncomfortable. We don't want to outgrow them. So we keep doing this. We like it here, but we keep doing this. We like it here, but we keep doing this.

And then we're like, I like it here and we want them to do this. But they may not be able, ready. You know what happens eventually? You get that. And we're like, we see you clearly. And they're like, what happened to you? So here's the thing, we need to be so rock solid here that this either doesn't bother us. We love that for who they are or this.

Dr. Silber: But here's the thing too, when you are so committed to being right here and you're unwilling to do that anymore, this can't help, but show up. It just can't.

Like in the case that with my husband, I was doing this on my own. And he was like, what the heck? I better step up. But it doesn't always work that way.

Jodi: I've had a variety of things. Like my mom actually really showed up in a way that I'm very grateful for and there were a couple of friends that really couldn't.

Dr. Silber: And that's not where they are. They're either not capable, not willing and then you're here. And then you can love them for who they are and that's okay. You're not really affected by it, but you're not doing this and you're not expecting this. This is suffering when you're expecting this. But when you're like, it's okay. I just love you. And let's see each other and I have no expectations and we're good, that can work too. But this is where you're supposed to be.

Jodi: This gets into the idea of trusting yourself and feeling like you deserve this. Can you speak to that a little bit?

Dr. Silber: Yeah. I teach a four-step trust rebuilding process. I'm happy to go through that too if it would serve.

Jodi: That'd be a wonderful.

Dr. Silber: Because here's the thing. I look at trust as a brick wall. Here's my fake brick wall, your brick wall, where it's like, how is trust built? Brick by brick. Each opportunity that person had to prove that they were trustworthy, represents a brick in that wall. And then a mind-blowingly painful moment, the entire wall can come tumbling down. But here's the thing, how can it be built again? That's what people ask me all the time. Can trust be repaired? I don't believe so. Could it be rebuilt? Yes. But what does it take? The same way it was built the first time, brick by brick.

So the person where the trust was shattered has to be willing to watch that brick wall be rebuilt. And the person who broke the trust has to be a really good brick layer. And again, each opportunity to show that they're trustworthy represents a brick in that wall. But one of the most common things that happens is, we lose trust in ourselves because we say, I'm a bright person. How did they not see? How did I not know? So to rebuild it, we have to start at the very foundation because that's where it was shattered. Trust is foundational.

Dr. Silber: The person who gave us that sense of safety and security is the very one to take it away, so it needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. So you start with, you know, level one, which is rebuilding that very foundation. And I'm talking as basic as, will the sunrise? I don't even know. So you test it. Sure enough, there it is. And you do that a couple of days till you're like, you know what? I can count on the sun's going to rise. I'm good. There's your foundation. Once you're truly okay with that, and that may take a while, the next level is, you have to trust in your gut, your wise inner guide, your intuition, which we turned down so often.

And think about it. You ever hear someone who, they're saying one thing, but the body language, the mannerisms are off? Busted. It's not congruent. The head, the heart, the everything, everything has to speak the same way and if they don't, we have to trust that and strengthen that. You'll see, let's say, two babies giggling. Trust that. It feels good. Know how your body responds when you feel trust, know how it responds when you do not feel trust.

And from there, you have a bit of safety because now you trust, you know what? My intuition is telling me this, my intuition is telling me that. From there, you have to start rebuilding trust in yourself because that was equally shattered. You don't trust your judgment. You don't trust anything. So the way to do that is, you give yourself little tasks and then you do them. I'm going to drink that glass of water, and then you do. I'm going to make that phone call, and then you do. I'm not going to call my ex and then you don't, whatever it is. And now, what you're doing is, you're showing yourself, my word is law. I'm trustworthy.

So you can imagine you've built that foundation, you trust that wise inner guide, your intuition, your gut, whatever you want to call it. Now you trust yourself. You can feel that sense of safety and security. Only from that space do you now carefully and cautiously start to trust in others. What we do so often is because it's so awkward or uncomfortable and we don't like the feeling, we bypass all the other stuff and we're like, okay, I'll just trust you again. It doesn't work.

Jodi: Or if a relationship ends in an unraveling, being open to dating new people.

Dr. Silber: Right. But that's why we have to rebuild trust in ourselves first. It never works when we try to bypass it because that's foundational. I can't stand that whole, you complete me thing. I hate that. So what does that mean? Best case scenario, I'm a half and the only way I'm whole is if I *&^% someone else? Why is my wholeness contingent on someone else? Because what happens if something happens to them?

So the whole idea is, this is your opportunity to just become your physical, mental, emotional, psychological, spiritual best. You're a whole and from that space, that's when you can meet another whole there, a power couple. It's a whole different opportunity.

Jodi: You talk a little bit about resilience versus transformation. But can you share the story of when the house gets destroyed? I love that analogy.

Dr. Silber: Okay. So here's the difference between resilience and transformation and my view of it. Resilience is bringing back, restoring. You need that for your everyday.

Transformation is a whole different thing. So using that analogy of a house. Let's say the house needs a boiler, and you get that boiler. That would be resilience. You are restoring it. Let's say it needs a roof and get a roof, that would be resilience. You're restoring it. Here's trauma and transformation. A tornado comes by, levels the house.

A boiler's not going to fix it. Roof's not going to fix it. Both of those won't fix it. And here's the thing. You truly have every right to stand there at the lot where your house was, and say, this is the worst thing that's ever happened, and you'd be 100% right. And then you can call over everybody you know, and say, look at this. Isn't this the most horrible thing you've ever seen? And everyone around you would agree. And you truly have the right to mourn and kick and scream the loss of your house until your last breath.

However, if you choose to rebuild the house, you don't have to, but if you choose to, there's nothing there. Why would you build the same one? Why not build a bigger, better, more beautiful. That's the opportunity. Trauma is the setup for transformation. And this is what most people do, that's why they stay stuck in that stage three. They are refusing to accept and acknowledge that wasn't their house. But then there are others who say, all right, it's gone and I'm going to build the best house possible. That's the opportunity. Totally up to us.

Jodi: I love how you reframe crisis as an opportunity for change, a catalyst.

Dr. Silber: It's so easy to get stuck because we have a great story. It's hurts, it's painful and I'm not minimizing any of that. It stinks. You know. It's awful. However, staying stuck isn't fair to us, it's just not. However it is that you move through when it comes to betrayal, the five stages, really when it comes to any crisis, how do you move through it? You owe it to yourself.

Remember I started with this, that experience landed you here, but that doesn't mean that's where you plant roots. No. That means you look at the incentive. You can't do this from here. And so, why would you stay here? Yes, great love songs come from here. Great poem, but really nothing else good that I could think of?

Jodi: We're very aligned. My whole intention with Resilience Roadmap is to give people a roadmap, to give them actionable strategies. I know you have a course as well. I love that you figured it out and you're taking people with you. And I'm hoping that a lot of the listeners will follow you. So share more about how they can work with you.

Dr. Silber: Thank you. The best thing they could do is, we have the Post Betrayal Syndrome quiz, and that's thebptinstitute.com/quiz. We have programs, we have certified coaches teaching daily classes. We have masterclasses with experts. We have my open Q&A and we have just the most amazing groups and clubs and forums of people who get it, but they're all there to lift and inspire.

Jodi: We didn't even talk about that. The support groups. Like I avoided the grief groups because everyone was stuck.

Dr. Silber: Yes, and that's the thing. I looked at it and I said, I want to create a community first of all, what I desperately needed back when I had my own experience. And then based on the research, and then based on what the 17, 18,000 people have said they wanted. And then I looked at what didn't work. And clearly what didn't work is, if someone just goes to a therapist who is not highly skilled in how to move someone through betrayal, that does more harm than good. If someone is numbing, avoiding, distracting, that's not helping them either.

Or if they're in some sort of support group where it's like the, ain't-it-awful club, and when you you're healing, you don't belong. What the heck is that? So everything that didn't work, I'm like we're not having met in our community. And everything that does work is included. So support is crucial and even everybody in the study said how much they would have benefited from support. But the right kind of support, that makes all the difference in the world.

Jodi: I had a lot of, ain't-it-awful people in my life.

Dr. Silber: It keeps you stuck. In just our forums and in our community, it's the kind of thing where someone's sharing and then they are met with, oh, wow, good for you. How did that work? That's great. So it's inspiring, it's supporting, it's uplifting. And the idea is, we're looking at the community, it's like training wheels. You need it until you don't, period. You're not supposed to stay there forever.

Jodi: You have that great story about the Kleenex holders. Can you share that?

Dr. Silber: Yeah. That's really funny because I used to have this women's empowerment group and I thought it was great. And I had one friend who just kept sending people to my group. I think this is a story time. Kept sending people to my group and then they would never come back. And one day he said, "What the heck are you doing there? I keep sending people in and they're not coming back."

I said, "Well, the whole idea is, it's not just to sit and marinate on your issues. I've been coaching for 30 years. If I'm going to find out what's going on, it's so that I can extract what I need to know, so we do something with it." I don't attract a lot of people who just want to rehash their story over and over. They may want to, that's not my people.

Jodi: No. It was the people who wanted credit for giving you the Kleenex.

Dr. Silber: So that was in that group. I had a bunch of rules that I would start with and one of them was no tissue issue. And they would say, what the heck is a tissue issue? Tissue issue is this. We would have a big round circle and there'd be a box of tissues because we're bringing up some deep stuff. And inevitably someone would have a crisis. Not a crisis, just something would-

Jodi: A release.

Dr. Silber: A release. And so I made sure told them beforehand, no tissue issue. What that is is, when someone has that release, there's always that someone who wants to run over with the tissues and two things happen right then. It stops that person from fully experiencing what may have been buried for so long. And number two, it makes it all about the person who brought the tissues over.

Jodi: I had a lot of tissue issue people.

Dr. Silber: That's it. And so I set the scene in the context by letting them know, we know you're all wonderful. That's not it. You don't have to share this here. Of course, if you're sitting right next to that person, give them a little gentle rub, whatever, but you don't want to break that by racing over with the tissues and it's their moment, not yours.

Jodi: One friend who actually lived locally, I had people flying from different continents and they're like, my God, I'm such a good friend because I was here and I have kids. And we're all like, if that's how you feel, go home.

Dr. Silber: That's a different kind of tissue issue, but it's the same thing. It's like when that person is going through their most painful experience, be there. And one thing I learned too, I learned this years ago when my mom passed, that some friends just absolutely didn't know what to say. And I'm sure you've experienced this too and so, they didn't. And I remember how bad that felt. So going forward, so often if someone would lose someone they loved, I would say, I don't know what the heck to say to you, but I'm just here. I love you.

Jodi: And that's actually the perfect thing to say or a couple of people tried to validate. They just said, I just want to acknowledge. I'm really sorry.

Dr. Silber: Yeah. Because really, you just want to know you're not alone, someone's there, but I couldn't pretend to understand what you've been through. So why would I? I just want you to know I'm there.

Jodi: But that also opens the door and gives them permission to say what they're really feeling when you're not projecting what you expect them to feel on them.

Dr. Silber: Yeah. I feel like that's one of the biggest things. People you love will go through so much, just show up. It doesn't matter if you're flubbing all over yourself, doesn't matter. Just show up.

Jodi: No one escapes, sadly.

Dr. Silber: That's it. And I remember even with my betrayal, there were friends who they stayed away because maybe they thought it was contagious. I don't know. You remember stuff like that. And it just doesn't feel good. It's easy to look

Jodi: Or they vilify you because if you're a good person and this happened to you, it means it could happen to them. So they have to somehow [inaudible] you.

Dr. Silber: And I get it and I understand people are uncomfortable and it's awkward, but that's when you see who your friends are and that's why it's so common to outgrow friends. When you're moving from that stage three to stage four, you're just not tolerating it. I just love the whole idea of the caterpillar. The caterpillar, there's that one day it's just done being a caterpillar. Hangs itself from a branch in order to die to the life it's known. Spins the cocoon around itself and think about it.

Dr. Silber: Go through something where it's unrecognizable, from anything it once was. And because of that discomfort, I imagined, just because of that change, it emerges as one of the most beautiful creatures on our planet, the butterfly. The caterpillar cannot become the butterfly if it doesn't undergo that experience. Just as we can't get to the other side of our crisis, trauma, if we're unwilling to get a little messy and uncomfortable.

Jodi: I love this. You've shared so many amazing valuable tools. Is there anything else we didn't touch on that you'd like share?

Dr. Silber: I would really just say that, the most important lesson I've learned through this and just in any crisis and I've had a few in my day, between disease, death of a loved one, betrayal, is just because it happened to you, it's not about you. And whatever it is that you need to do to find your way over, through, whatever, do something good with something bad. Otherwise, it's just like a bad game of hot potato.

Jodi: Don't let it define you. I love that. Thank you so much, Debi. You're the best.

Dr. Silber: Thank you my friend.