

The Art of Enough

Episode 4 - Tea with Demons

Announcer:	00:06	The Art of Enough, with artist Jay Sullivan. Episode four, Tea With Demons. (singing)
Jay Sullivan:	00:37	<p>Welcome to The Art of Enough, a podcast series that can help you understand the causes of not feeling enough, and provide some guidance on how psychology, neuroscience and creative process can help you transcend this and other problematic emotions.</p> <p>Hi, I'm artist Jay Sullivan. In the past three podcasts, we explored how to become aware of the childhood experiences and emotions that are buried deep in our subconscious, and understand how they affect our current behaviors and emotions. Specifically, in my case, my feelings of not being enough, or not being good enough, started when I was a young child.</p> <p>My father had a series of bipolar episodes, that caused him to leave the home. As a five year old, I thought it was my fault and I tried to be better. To be the good boy, to be the perfect kid to avoid it from happening again. In this podcast, we're going to go one step beyond awareness, and on to how to use creative process to transcend the feelings. We will discuss how this works in my art making practice in two steps.</p> <p>Number one, making peace with past emotions and memories. I'll refer to these emotions and memories as the inner voices. And then two, creating new, more empowering voices. These two steps were integral to my art making process during The Art of Enough, helping me let go of the past, feel more enough, and reduce my need to always climb the highest mountains. So, let's start with those inner voices.</p>
Inner voices:	02:09	[crosstalk 00:02:09] You're a fool. You're a fool. [crosstalk 00:02:10] You should try something else, do something else. No matter what I do, it'll never be enough. No matter what I do, it'll never be enough.

Jay Sullivan: [02:16](#) You have these voices in your head, you say? (laughs) Well, congratulations, we all do. And, depending on what is going on in our lives at any given time, they can either be very quiet and placid, or they can be very loud and annoying. Creative or emotional experiences have a tendency to turn up their volume.

So, if you're exploring your past or creating art or both, there's a good chance that you'll get the loud and annoying version. Jean Claude van Itallie is a long time meditator, self-identified habitual self-improver, playwright of over 30 plays, and author of the book Tea With Demons.

Jean Claude: [03:00](#) The demons are the voices inside one's self, that often appear when one does something really creative; when you step outside the envelope of what was allowed to you as a child. At that point, your demons turn up and shout at you that you can't, you're not good enough.

Jay Sullivan: [03:22](#) When your demons appear and say you're not good enough, they most likely will trigger childhood emotions related to past experiences that are stored in your subconscious. Past experiences where you think you failed, where you were rejected, where you thought you were not good enough.

Your impulse will probably be to ignore them or push them away. However, this tends to make it worse. Because, the more you try to push them away, the more energy or attention you give them, the more they seem to push back. The key is, to slowly approach these demons, calmly and with acceptance. Jean Claude van Itallie calls this, "Having tea with demons."

Jean Claude: [04:07](#) It comes from when the great hermit Saint Milarepa, who uh, i- in, in Tibet 1,000 years ago, when he sat down to meditate, all of his demons flew in at that moment and said, "You can't, you're, who do you think you are?" The only way that he was able to deal with them was to make them some nettle tea. Nettle was growing outside his cave.

He said, "Okay, I realize you're going to be here. You're no- I'm not going to be able to get, get rid of you. But let's make an agreement, that I'm going to be here too."

- Jay Sullivan: [04:46](#) Over several years, I spent many workshops with John Claude, as he led me and others through acting exercises and theater exercises, that were designed to gain awareness and acceptance of our inner demons. Jean Claude gives one example from his book, *Tea With Demons*, of how these exercises work.
- Jean Claude: [05:05](#) The exercise that I give in the book, is a theatrical thing. You set out place cards for your demons, so you have to label the demons. So, the demons might speak in the voices of w-when people were putting you down when you were young, and somebody said, "You're, you're too young to do that." Or, "You're too stupid to do that." Or, "Not you, you'll never be able to do that."
- So, you label your place card, so to speak, around the table that you're going to offer tea to the demons. You're labeling that, that, that negative force, that force that makes you feel so bad. And you go through the whole ritual of making tea, and offering tea to the demons.
- Jay Sullivan: [05:52](#) Making tea for the demons on a psychological level, is slowly getting used to them, accepting them and feeling safe to be around them. Until they no longer have such huge emotional power over you. In psychological terms, this is called desensitization. Desensitization is a way to make these emotions and voices less problematic, by careful and repeated exposure to whatever is causing them to rise to the surface.
- Therapist Bob Szita, who has spent 30 years counseling individuals and families, explains.
- Bob Szita: [06:26](#) Desensitization, uh, in- involves being introduced to something that we are uncomfortable with, or scared of, or disturbed by. It could be an animal, it could be a uh, a, a situation, could even be a, a memory. Being introduced to it in smaller degrees, that doesn't overwhelm us, and accept them and be okay with them.
- Jay Sullivan: [07:00](#) Much of my art practice is a desensitization process. From the very beginning of a project, where I become aware of the emotion or inner voice I would like to change. To researching and obtaining objects related to the inner voice, usually from my childhood. To photographing, printing and exhibiting the work, it's one long desensitization process.

One warning, going slowly and carefully is critical if you're attempting to open up to the past. If you go too quickly, you can become overwhelmed.

In one of my earliest art making projects, I reconciled my relationship with my long estranged and deceased father, by imagining he lived with me and photographing objects around my house that I remember him owning when I was a child. Because my father was bipolar, and his disorder created chaos during my childhood, many of the objects held strong, chaotic, negative associations for me.

I was about a year into the project, when I started to have heart palpitations. It didn't seem like a big deal at the time, but it was something new for me, so I noticed it. A few weeks later, I started to enlarge some of the photographs to four by five feet; the anxiety increased. And since my life was generally fine, I didn't understand where the anxiety was coming from.

I hadn't yet made the connection, between the art making and the anxiety. So, I didn't know how to deal with it. With normal stress, there's usually an understandable cause or problem, that you think that if you can just solve the stress will subside. With this experience, there was no identifiable cause and I started to have anxiety about the anxiety.

So much so, that I thought I was going to have a heart attack. I learned later, that I was having a panic attack. And if you haven't experienced one of these, it's like you're about to jump out of your skin, but you just don't know why. Nor can you stop it.

I've learned a lot since that early project, and I strongly advise you, if you're working on an artistic project or any project that's bringing up intense feelings, please proceed with caution. And work with a therapist, or coach, or a psychologist, someone that can help you process the emotions as they come up. I started working with my therapist, after the panic attacks; that was a little late.

So now, whenever I start a new project, I reengage with him so he can help me monitor my emotional health. He's another tool in my toolbox. One that helps me become aware of the demons, desensitize myself to they're powerful and controlling emotions, and enable me to live a happier and freer.

(singing)

So that's part one of this podcast, making tea with the demons, those problematic inner voices that reside in your subconscious. The second half of this podcast, is about creating more empowering voices.

When you become aware of your inner voices and start to accept them, you also start to become aware of how they can control you. Many of these voices are beliefs you picked up, and assimilated as a child. And whether you're conscious of it or not, they control many aspects of your behavior and emotions.

Because of my childhood experiences, my inner voices were always pushing me to do more, to be better, to climb the highest mountains. But of course doing, doing and doing reinforces the behavior, and leads to more doing. How do I stop this cycle?

First, I needed to become aware of those inner voices, or demons. Two, make peace with them or have tea with them. And then three, I needed to create some new voices in my head, to outweigh, or at least balance the old ones. I've attended many, many seminars with US space life coach and author of self help books, Tony Robbins.

Tony Robbins: [11:07](#)

Hey, it's Tony Robbins. I've always been fascinated by that force that shapes human beings.

Jay Sullivan: [11:13](#)

One of the most important things Tony teaches, is that if you want to change behavior, you need to change the underlying belief, those old voices in your head. Now, I've found that it's very likely the old voices will remain, at some level of intensity or volume. But in time, the new voices become more dominant, and support the changes that you want to make in your life.

Let's take a simple example, money. We all have some voices in our heads, some beliefs that we've picked up along the way about money. So, if I said to you, "Money is what? You fill in the blank," what would you say? Would you say, "Money is necessary? Money is great? Money is everything?" Or, maybe you would say, "Money is the root of all evil."

Your response to this question, will dictate a lot of what you will do to either get money or push it away. If you believe money is everything, well then you'll probably spend a lot of your time

trying to accumulate it. If you think money is the root of all evil, you'll most likely try to avoid having a lot of it. My belief was, money is not that important. And certainly not as important as climbing the highest mountains. What was the result?

My wife and I were partners in a company, where we, surprise surprise, undercharged for our services, even though we had a great product; making the clients very, very happy, We overpaid some of our employees, some of who made more than we did. And we made just enough for ourselves, to live a middle class lifestyle. But we had the very little, or no retirement savings.

This was not the worst situation in the world. But considering we were both college educated, and we had 20 plus years experience working with 500 companies, we should have been in better financial shape. Especially, considering the risk, and the time, and the stress and the uncertainty involved in running a business.

Why weren't we in better financial shape? Because we believed, that money was not that important. And that inner voice was, driving our behavior and our choices. So what happens during the Tony Robbins Workshop to address this? First he helps you become aware of the old controlling beliefs, and then he has you developed a series of new beliefs, new inner voices.

Now, Tony does this over a series of 14 hour days. And yes, Tony is an obsessive mountain climber also. So, you'll have to go to the seminar, if you want to know exactly how he does this. But, when we were at the seminar, I created a new belief around money that stayed with me ever since. Instead of money's not that important, my new belief is: Money is an incredible tool, that allows me to give to myself and others.

Money is an incredible tool, that allows me to give to myself and others. With this new belief in hand, my wife and I came back from the seminar, and immediately raise prices 25%. In the past, we'd be afraid that the clients would be upset, but none of the clients complained. Within a year, we had doubled our personal income, more in line with owning a business. 10 years later, we no longer needed to work.

It's important to note, that this change did not happen only through the time spent at the workshop. Every day for several months, I spent time each day repeating the phrases in my head and out loud, "Money is an incredible tool, that helps me give to

myself and others. Money is an incredible tool, that helps me get to myself and others."

This process goes back, to one of my process guidelines from an earlier podcast. Repetition is necessary for the longterm change. Repetition is necessary, since the original beliefs have been instilled and reinforced, through countless experiences over the course of a lifetime.

That's one of the reasons, I think an art process is ideal for personal change. It can be designed as a series of repetitions. Repetitions that over time, change old beliefs to new ones.

So, if we have the belief that we're not enough, we're not good enough, how do we change that belief? During a previous podcast, I described that, as I gained more awareness during this process, I realized that I was living my life through two intertwined beliefs. One, that if I wasn't better, didn't do more, then something bad will happen.

But number two was, no matter what I did, it wouldn't be enough. Understandable, since I grew up in a household that was thrown into chaos by my father's bipolar disorder. In my adult life, it led to some pretty frustrating experiences. As I tried to keep bad things from happening, but at the same time, always believing in that it would never be enough.

In order to change that, in the Tony Robbins world, we have to come up with a more empowering belief; one that serves us better. This is where it got interesting, at least it did for me. For many months, I couldn't come up with a new belief; it should have been fairly simple.

But now when I look back on it, I realize I was just avoiding it. I didn't want to go there. I had lived my life with this other belief, and it was so ingrained. In so many ways, it was part of who I was, and made my life what it was, that I was afraid to think about what it would become if I didn't live by that belief. This avoidance persisted, into the writing and recording of this podcast.

I literally got to this point in the script, and realized there was a hole, a piece was missing, and I finally needed to confront it. Why did it take so long? Because it meant I had to let go of the old voices, the old beliefs. And you would think that would be easy, once I became aware of them. But much of my life success

was connected to these beliefs and voices. If I let them go, what would happen?

It was a very similar experience for me, when I reconciled my a strange relationship with my father. At some point, I had to confront the question. If I let go these painful memories, what would replace them? Would anything replace them? But, over the last 10 years of doing this work, I realize that it's only when I'm able to accept the past, am I able to let go of the pain and make room for something new.

So, if the belief I want to change is this self-defeating notion that, no matter what I do, it'll never be enough, what is the opposite of that? What is something more empowering? Right around the time, where I'm dealing with this hole in this podcast script, I had an experience on a basketball court.

I was on offense, and setting a pick. And for you non basketball types, it means standing stationary on the court, so you can prevent a defender from getting close to your teammate who has the ball. So, I'm standing stationary, my teammate with the basketball dribbles past me, and the defenders sees me.

And, instead of running around me, which would be expected if he was playing by the rules, he ran right over me. I was furious, angry. I started yelling at him. He was wrong, but my reaction was overboard. It was way too extreme for the situation.

Luckily, it ended at the yelling, and the game went on. But if you'd look at this situation, what happened? Why did I react this way? And how does it relate to, no matter what I do, it'll never be enough? Well, I set a pick within the rules, and I got run over anyway. It goes back to, no matter what I do, it still won't be enough. And old feeling, from an old belief.

This experience on the basketball court was an indication, that the process of creating the art of enough was amping up the volume on some of the inner voices, those demons. Since I was aware of what was going on, I was able to process these feelings, and be okay with them. This experience was a major step in letting go of an old unwanted belief, and integrating a new one.

Then a day or two later, without thinking too much about it, without trying to come up with an answer. On a day and a time, that I don't remember when, I don't remember where the

alternate belief popped into my head. Instead of, no matter what I do, it'll never be enough. The new belief is, no matter what I do, I will always be loved. No matter what I do, I will always be loved.

The development of this new belief, was a major step in letting go of an old, unwanted belief. Since that time, my meditation, my daily intent has been to repeat this phrase. Much in the way I repeated, money's an incredible tool, that allows me to give to myself and others. I write down in my journal, no matter what I do, I will always be loved, over and over again. I list moments in my life when I have felt loved, when I have loved, and when I see others in love.

And of course, I've started to research the neuroscience of love. Envisioning artworks about love, and experimenting with creative art process about love, to see how it changes me and my relationships with those around me. It is a project of and about a lifetime.

Inner voices: [21:10](#) No matter what I do, I will always be loved no matter what. No matter what I do always- [crosstalk 00:21:18] no matter what I do, I will always be loved. No matter what I do, I will always speed loved.

Jay Sullivan: [21:29](#) This concludes the full podcast of The Art of Enough. The next podcast, Directions to Enough, is an audio appendix of sorts: detailing the lessons learned, and processes implemented during the course of the art of enough. Including the t-framework of the Tony Robbins process, for replacing old limiting beliefs with new empowering ones.

(singing)

This has been the art of enough. Thank you for listening. I'm artist, Jay Sullivan, and may you always be loved.

(singing)