



The Athena Wellness Podcast

Episode 053 – Book Commentary: *Trusting the Gold, Uncovering Your Natural*

Goodness by Tara Brach

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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 53. Thanks so much for joining me.

Have you ever been in the presence of a teacher and felt their message connect so deeply that you knew your paths crossed at this point in your life because that wisdom was exactly what you needed to hear? A number of years back, I had such an experience with Tara Brach.

For those unfamiliar with Tara's work, she's a best-selling author of books such as *Radical Acceptance*, *Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha* and *True Refuge*, *Finding Peace and Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart*. Tara is a psychologist and meditation teacher who focuses on helping others overcome the feeling of not being enough, or as she calls it, the Trance of Unworthiness.



In 1998, Tara founded the Insight Meditation community in Washington DC, where she shares her teachings and meditations with her students. She also teaches online and through workshops, which is where I met her seven years ago.

Last month, Tara's latest book, *Trusting the Gold, Uncovering Your Natural Goodness*, was published. I was delighted that the book opened with a story that I had heard years ago and even shared on this podcast in Episode 43. It's a story of a golden buddha that was hidden in plain sight for centuries, covered in plaster to deter thieves. But the gold remained, hence the title and theme of Tara's book, which is about our true nature, the gold, and how, even when we cover that gold for protection from society, culture and ourselves, the gold never fades.

As has been my practice these days, I listened to the book while walking and then reviewed certain passages and reflections in the hardcover version in the evening. I loved hearing Tara narrate in her soothing voice - she has such a lovely style. And I enjoyed the physical book just as much.

It's a small hardcover book that's filled with beautiful watercolor illustrations by Vicky Alvarez. Leafing through the book feels like flipping through an oracle deck - it has that kind of calming energy. I also love that it's the kind of book that you don't have to listen to or read from start to finish, you can approach it randomly, getting the story or insight that you may need at that time.

I found *Trusting the Gold* to be an uplifting reminder of what matters most in life. So much so that I'd like to share some of the main concepts because I think you'd enjoy it as well. And I'll put links to Tara's books and website in the show notes, so you can check out her work.



But now I invite you to sit back, take a nice long breath to ground yourself in presence and let's get started.

My introduction to Tara: Walking into a large lecture hall fills me with different emotions – the apprehension of being with a few hundred strangers, the anticipation of learning something new, and the anxiety of hearing those inevitable words: “Turn to the person next to you and...” fill in the blank on whatever experiential exercise the speaker thinks will bring their point home.

But entering the Lake Theater at the Omega Institute in 2014, I felt a palpable sense of presence. It was quiet. Tara was sitting at the front of the auditorium facing the audience, eyes closed – a gentle, unspoken invitation to find a place either on a chair or cushion and settle in.

I was in a bewildered place – at the start of a new job, at the end of an intimate relationship, and I had a head full of dreams that didn't have anything to do with either one. I was in need of some anchoring.

05:01

Tara held the kind of space that allowed just that, welcoming all of these diverging thoughts and feelings and giving permission to let them just be. What a relief. But make no mistake, holding space with kindness, as she aptly does, does not come with a “Get Out of Jail Free” card. Quite the contrary.

Tara has a way of honing in on the irritant, whatever that might be for you, by welcoming it – and then dealing with it. She does it with humor, with shared story, and



yes, with the inevitable exercises where she instructs her students to find someone in the room that they don't know. And you can feel the introverts, like me, looking for the nearest door.

But what has stayed with me all these years is her unique ability to bring Eastern practices to my Western lifestyle. Before reading her first book in the early 2000s, I was aware of my inner life, but I didn't know how to engage with it.

Tara's work has helped me explore my spiritual side in a healthy way and she also has helped me take the practices she offers into the world or "Off the Cushion," as I like to say. She does it by sharing real experiences in her calm, wise and vulnerable way. She reminds us of the importance of having unconditional love for ourselves and how that practice alone overflows and informs our outer world.

Trusting the Gold. In June, *Lion's Roar*, which is a Buddhist magazine, published the first few pages of Tara's newest book, *Trusting the Gold*, and I'll put a link to that in the show notes so you can check it out. Here's the first few paragraphs of the excerpt to give you a flavor. Tara writes:

"For decades, a prayer has circulated in the background of my daily life: "May I trust my own goodness, may I see the goodness in others."

This longing emerged from a deep place of suffering I went through as a young adult. During that dark time, I felt anxious and depressed, separate from the world around me. I was continually judging myself as falling short, not good enough, doubting my basic worth. That of course, kept me from feeling close



and connected to others and to the world. It blocked me from feeling creative, stopped me from being fully alive.

It feels like grace that this Trance of Unworthiness led me on to a spiritual path that showed me how to hold myself with compassion. This allowed me to see through the layers of judgment and doubt and to discover beneath them, clarity, openness, presence, and love. Increasingly, over the years, my trust in this loving awareness as the essence of who we all are has become a guiding light.

No matter how wrong or lacking we may feel, how caught in separation or how trapped by the messages, violations and inequities of the society we live in, this basic goodness remains the essence of our being.”

The rest of the book is about how to break out of the Trance of Unworthiness, uncover the gold inside us, and learn to trust in the basic goodness that is our very essence.

The book is constructed into three pathways of: Truth, Love and Freedom, which are the basic teachings of the Buddha to awaken us to our true nature.

- Truth is about being present in our experience by opening to life just as it is instead of what we want it to be;
- Love is about tapping into our capacity to meet any circumstance with tenderness and understanding; and
- Freedom is the byproduct of the other two pathways - once we can stand in truth and respond with love, we find freedom in our true nature.

09:45

I found so many things to love about this book. Here are three:



- The Stories:** Tara generously shares her stories of challenge and discovery with the hope that these insights will inform your own journey. And what's interesting to me is how open she is, both in this book and in her teaching, to share stories that are very personal, but not in a way that makes you cringe. She strikes the right balance between offering just enough of a glimpse to share the honesty about her own experiences and what she's learned from them. By getting to witness the times she didn't show up in a way she had hoped, you recognize yourself and the ways you've fallen short of your own expectations. But here's the gift. Once we become aware of these instances, the practice is not to look away or feel shame or punish ourselves. The practice is to do what we would do to help a good friend: to acknowledge, forgive and learn from it so we can continue down our path, lighter in the knowing and wiser as a result of the experience.
- The Reflections:** There are invitations to pause after certain passages and those pauses act like mini-retreats throughout the book. This space to reflect allows for our own insight to be absorbed and for us to awaken. I found myself pausing the audio track throughout and walking in silence, letting the understanding settle and take root as I wandered in the woods.
- The Design:** Above all, it's the combination of short stories, illustrations and reflection pauses that creates the environment for deep contemplation, which can sometimes feel elusive. There are times when we want to drop deep, but we're not in the headspace to do so. But this book provides numerous onramps. For example, I just opened the book randomly to page 103, with a heading "Loving Life No Matter What." On the left side of the page is a beautiful rendering of a figure sitting quietly by a stream. The story that accompanies it is two pages long. And after reading the story, I'm mentally transported to the tranquil spot depicted in the picture. I find myself relaxing, feeling a bit of ease. I stop wrestling



with my thoughts. And I soften. It's from this place that inner transformation happens. And once our inner realm is transformed, we can bring this understanding of kindness and compassion to our outer world.

As I share some final thoughts, I'd like to stay on this theme of aligning our inner and outer realms, because it continues to fascinate and challenge me. And I know I'm not alone in this fundamental search.

13:14

Tara has said she's held to questions that have shaped her spiritual path. And they are:

1. How can we learn to trust the pure awareness and love, the basic goodness that is our very essence? and
2. How can we learn to see the same sacred presence in all beings and in all life?

We need to work on both levels to make an impact in the world. We need to love and care for ourselves so we can do the same for all life in a healthy and sustainable way. And that means we need to allow our own gold to shine, to take the protective coverings off and dare to be ourselves in this world. It means we need to turn a deaf ear to what feels like pervasive divisiveness and believe that our collective innate goodness will prevail. Mostly, it means breaking the trance of judgment, avoidance and disconnect and practicing non-judgment, self-compassion and connection.

As we begin to trust the gold by connecting with our truth, we express who we are more fully and invite others to do the same. This is what it means to take our practice "off the cushion" and into the world. When we put these teachings into practice, our lives change.



This is the real work, for ourselves and for the world. To see beyond ourselves into presence where we can connect with our true essence. The essence that lives deep in our being that's limitless and fearless and can be accessed by the three pathways of Truth and Love and Freedom, bringing us right back home to that tender place deep in our own heart.

And if there's one thing that stays with you from this podcast, I hope it's this: You already have this essence and the only thing you need to access it is presence.

Tara shares a story from ancient India to remind us of this important lesson. The story is about a musk deer and I have to admit, I had to do some research because I had never heard of a musk deer before. But what I learned is that musk deer are animals that live mostly in the Himalayas. They have tusk-like teeth and the males have a musk sack in their underbelly and that scent is what attracts mates. Because of the value of the musk, the species is endangered due to poaching.

With that as a backdrop, the parable is of a musk deer who noticed a beautiful scent in the air and went on a search to find the intoxicating aroma. He smelled it everywhere, but its source was elusive. The deer devoted his entire life to this search until he fell into exhaustion. And in doing so, one of his tusks pierced his belly and the air filled with the fragrance he had been searching for his entire life. In his final moments, he realized he was the source of the precious scent.

I'd like to leave you with a quote from the book, *Trusting the Gold*: "What a joy to pause and behold our basic goodness and to see how it shines through each of us. Seeing that secret beauty, we fall in love with all of life."



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.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

If you'd like to access the show notes, have a question you'd like addressed on a future episode, or would like a transcript of this episode, visit www.AthenaWellness.com/podcast.

Until next time, be well!