

**Shrink Rap Radio #370**  
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**“Mindfulness and Loving Relationships”**

**Dr. David Van Nuys Ph.D., aka ‘Dr. Dave’ interviews John Amodeo PhD**  
(Transcribed from <http://www.shrinkrapradio.com> by Gloria Oelman)

**Introduction:**

My guest today is Dr John Amodeo and we’ll be discussing his most recent book exploring mindfulness and loving relationships. Dr John Amodeo has been a licensed marriage and family therapist for over thirty years. He’s the author of the new book *Dancing with Fire: A Mindful Way to Loving Relationships*. His other books include *The Authentic Heart* and *Love & Betrayal*, which have just been translated into Mandarin. He co-authored a chapter with Sue Johnson on EFT, that is, Emotional Focused Therapy and Buddhism in *The Emotionally Focused Casebook* and he is a certified Focusing Trainer. He is a former writer and contributing editor for *Yoga Journal*, an adjunct faculty member of Meridian University, and has conducted workshops internationally on relationships and couples therapy. He has appeared as a featured guest on programs that included CNN, CNBC, Donahue, and New Dimensions Radio.

Now here’s the interview:

**Dr. Dave:** Dr John Amodeo welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

**John Amodeo:** Thank you so much, great to be here.

**Dr. Dave:** Well it’s great to have you here and I believe we have a friend in common – Larry Robinson?

**John Amodeo:** Uh, huh. Yes.

**Dr. Dave:** He had contacted me actually I think two or three years ago, suggesting that I interview you about one of your earlier books and unfortunately I was swamped at the time. But Larry and I have been in a men’s group together for over twenty years and he was actually one of the early guests on this show.

**John Amodeo:** How wonderful.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Well for starters I have to ask you if your last name, if Amodeo, is the name you were born with, or one you adopted because to me it translates as ‘I love God.’

**John Amodeo:** That’s right, you know your Latin. Amadeo means ‘I love God’ and yes, that’s my original name, it’s a Sicilian name, I’m Italian.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow! So I wonder to what extent that name determined your destiny because you've written three books, this is your third book on love and relationships.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, my fourth actually.

**Dr. Dave:** Your fourth – sorry. How is it that this has emerged as a theme in your life?

**John Amodeo:** Well probably because I needed to learn a lot about relationships.

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs) Yeah, we generally teach the stuff that we need to learn, right?

**John Amodeo:** Right. Now to me it's the most fulfilling part of our life, my life. Certainly didn't get much instruction or guidance or help growing up about how to have a rich, deep, connected relationship, so I had to figure it out on my own.

**Dr. Dave:** I love the introduction to your book where you describe how for many years you felt you were straddling two worlds without being fully comfortable in either one. One was the spiritual world and the other was the world of psychotherapy. Now of course your whole book is sort of about that but maybe you can tell us about it.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, well I was very fortunate, when I was in college around age twenty, I got involved in what was called the sensitivity group and for the first time I got introduced to feelings. I didn't know anything about feelings up until then. I mean I'm sure I was having them but I didn't know how to identify them and that was a really helpful group to get connected to what we're feeling and at the same time I was interested in Taoism and Buddhism and Hinduism. I took a class at Hofstra University in comparative Eastern literature. It really awakened me to the depths of the spiritual world. So I found my spiritual friends kind of had an aversion to intimate relationships. They would see those kind of people as relationship junkies and too attached and the people in the psychological world thought the spiritual people were just doing this navel gazing stuff and they were just self absorbed narcissistic people. So I didn't feel comfortable in either world but I knew they each had something really important about life to teach me. So I was on both tracks and gradually over the years I've been finding some way to integrate them.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah and that's really what your book is about and I'm sure you're not alone in that struggle, that other people have pondered the challenges of living in both worlds.

**John Amodeo:** Yes, indeed, yes.

**Dr. Dave:** Early on in the introduction, you share a Chinese story about an old woman who supported a monk for twenty years. Do you remember that story? I hope you do.

**John Amodeo:** I do. Yes, it's a Zen story. Yes, this woman supported this monk for twenty years, he lived in a hut and she fed him, gave him money, whatever, brought him food and then one day she wanted to kind of test his spiritual development, so she

sent a very young, beautiful woman, rich in desire and instructed her to go to the monk and start to stroke him and then ask him ‘how do you feel?’ That’s every monk’s worst nightmare, right?

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs) I wouldn’t know.

**John Amodeo:** So the woman did, she went to see him, she started stroking him and said ‘how do you feel?’ And he said, ‘I feel like a withering tree on a rock in winter, totally without warmth.’ So to him that was the epitome of spiritual progress, he was totally in his still, absorbed, transcendent meditative state. So the young woman went back to this older woman who was supporting the monk, told her the story and she said ‘that guy is a total fake’ and she quickly evicted him and she burned down his hut, as being a spiritual fake.

**Dr. Dave:** Aah.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, you know the Zen stories they always have dramatic endings, right?

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. So what are we to make of that story?

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, well I think what the older woman was wisely recognising is that this monk had simply replaced one desire with another. He was now so attached to his meditative absorption that he wasn’t available for human relationships, for human connection, for love, for developing that other part of his life that’s relational.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. I love that you sprinkle so many stories throughout your narrative, not only Zen stories but also from your own life and experience and I hope you’ll feel free to do so throughout our conversation. Anything that comes to mind, be sure to share it with us.

**John Amodeo:** Yes, stories are wonderful teachings aren’t they?

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, they are. Now I believe you have commented that you have observed that there’s something in traditional Eastern teachings about attachment and desire that can get in the way of relationships.

**John Amodeo:** Right, right. I think a lot of people interpret the Buddha’s second noble truth, the cause of suffering... you know the first noble truth of course is life is saturated with suffering and anguish and then the second noble truth the cause of suffering, people often think that it’s desire, when actually desire is just part of being alive. It’s more clinging and craving that creates the suffering.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I think you said there’s a mistranslation.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, yeah, it’s Taṇhā – T-a-h-n-a – it’s often translated as desire but a better translation is thirst, or craving. So it opens the door to the possibility that we can allow desire, allow ourselves to have our basic human longings and not caught up in clinging and craving. So to engage with the desire, to engage with the longing, that’s a crucial part of the practice. To engage with our desires, what are they trying

to tell us? Which ones are maybe going to lead us to more suffering, which desires might lead us toward more connection, more joy, more expansion, more openness and then to listen to our bodily felt sense about that, listen to our inner intelligence guiding us forward in terms of what desires are going to lead toward growth and connection and good things and which are likely to lead toward suffering.

**Dr. Dave:** I think the title of your book might be particularly relevant here. The title is *Dancing With Fire*, what is it that you mean to communicate in that title?

**John Amodeo:** Right. yeah, that's a great question. What we need to learn how to do is to engage with the fiery desires and the feelings connected to our desires, engage with them, be with them, hold them in a gentle way. It's like dancing with fire, without getting burnt, so to be with those strong feelings, to work with them, to engage with them, to hear what they're trying to tell us about our life. Feelings often have a message, a meaning, some wisdom, if we can just decipher it, hear what life's trying to tell us through our feelings and then follow that as a way to move forward in our life. So, yeah, dancing with fire, dancing with the intensity.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Sometimes our notions, our ideas, can get in the way. You seem to suggest there's a problem with our notions of spirituality and Buddhism in the West that has created a problem, a divide and that the problem's not so much in the teachings as in what we've done with them. Do I have that right?

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, I think we often misinterpret Buddhism. We misinterpret the teachings, that we're trying to eliminate desire, we're trying to eliminate attachments. And one of the chapters in the book is about 'is suffering created by attachment or non attachments?' And often we're trying to get rid of the attachments instead of realising that healthy bonding, healthy attachment, is a big part of being alive and it's a good thing.

**Dr. Dave:** You quote both Carl Jung and the Dalai Lama as suggesting that it's a mistake for us Westerners to try to swallow Eastern spirituality whole.

**John Amodeo:** Right, exactly, yeah. Yeah, Carl Jung, the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh they all talk about how we need to integrate Buddhism into our Western psyche, into our Western world. So, you know, we're Western people, we grow up with romantic interests, love. Pursuing love relationships, is an important part of our psyche, it's deeply ingrained into us.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I would say it's deeply ingrained. Just about every song that you hear on the radio is about love.

**John Amodeo:** Exactly, exactly. So our Western path is integrating the path of love and intimacy into our spiritual practice. I think people who use spirituality as a path of transcendence to get beyond things, get beyond our attachments, are missing the boat.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, related to that, I love the title of your first chapter, 'Off the Cushion and Into Life.' That's somewhat self explanatory but tell us about what you're getting at there, nevertheless.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, you know often when there's a conflict in relationships... 'cause I've been working as a psychotherapist now for over thirty years and people often come who have a spiritual practice and they're very uncomfortable, have an aversion toward, feelings that come up in their relationships and whenever an uncomfortable feeling comes up, or a conflict comes up in their relationship, they might flee to their other lover, the meditation cushion. It just drives their partner crazy because what they're really doing is their stonewalling, they're avoiding the engagement, they're not dancing with fire, they're shutting down. They're not engaging with the other person in an intimate way and it just creates a bad cycle in their relationship where their partner feels like they're not interested, they don't care. So, yeah to get off the cushion and get into life, engage with your feelings, engage with your desires, engage with other people.

**Dr. Dave:** I love your courageous confession, I think it's in the first chapter, that you're not, quotes, 'not a great meditator.' It certainly reassured me. Tell us if you will about what it means to not be a great meditator? (both laugh)

**John Amodeo:** Well, I tell the story, maybe it's a humorous story in the beginning, of I was on a meditation retreat, two week retreat and toward the end of the retreat I was having this desire for a pizza and my friend and I decided that we were going to leave the sanctuary of the retreat setting, we went out to have a pizza together and we engaged in an intimate, not intimate but just in a nice deep conversation and there was something missing for me on that retreat, which was engaging with other human beings. And I know the retreat setting's supposed to be a retreat from everything and you just go inside and you just be with your experience but I really need to integrate that with human relating, it just makes everything go a lot better. There's a longing in us for the connection and I think what we need to do is integrate our meditation practice with intimate connections and friendships.

**Dr. Dave:** And pizza.

**John Amodeo:** And pizza, yeah. I mean I do meditate and don't get me wrong I think it's really valuable, usually every night I spend a little time meditating and having a meditation practice makes having connections richer because the meditation is so helpful in getting some stillness inside, some inner quiet, it's great for self soothing and then from that deeper, still, quiet place the connections with others can become so much richer and deeper.

**Dr. Dave:** Hm, hm. Now you say 'spirituality' is a hazardous word. What's your definition or understanding of spirituality?

**John Amodeo:** The word spirit comes from the word breath. To me spirituality means being alive, being connected to what is, in the aliveness of being connected to life. So it's not a spirituality where you're just developing this serene disconnect... this kind of serenity, this inner quiet that's disconnected from relating. To me spirituality's about connection, connecting with something beyond our ego, connecting with something larger than our self.

**Dr. Dave:** I must say I feel a lot of kinship with what you're writing about here. Around forty years ago I published a brief article on anger, raising the question of how to deal with it and the whole issue of detachment versus denial and it was stimulated by my observation at that time that some spiritual seekers in the name of detachment were actually denying their anger. I concluded that the way you can tell whether or not you're engaging in detachment or denial, is by listening to your body. So I think I was wrestling with the question closely related to the issues that you're raising here in your book.

**John Amodeo:** Hm, hm, yeah, exactly and I do talk about focusing in the book that Eugene Gendlin developed and did a lot of research on what helps people grow when they're in psychotherapy and he found people were connecting to their bodies. People were really dropping down into their bodily felt experience of what is, instead of living in their heads and in their ideas about things.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I picked up on that earlier, you said something about the felt sense and a little tick mark went off in my head 'Ah, Eugene Gendling – focusing.'

**John Amodeo:** Aha! Yeah, you're familiar with that?

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, it's very helpful, very helpful integration with spiritual practice to open to our life of feelings

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, well, I think we share a number of things in common, at least a couple of things in common. One is a long standing interest in Eastern spirituality and another is one you referred to earlier, past experience with sensitivity training groups, or encounter groups, which I was very involved with in graduate school. In what way did these two sets of experiences or interests support one another and clash with one another for you?

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, well you know a story comes to mind where I went to the leader of the sensitivity group, which I was really loving, and I said 'what about meditation and spiritual practice, isn't that an important part of life too?' And he said something like 'well, I don't know about that, I think that's just avoiding feelings when people get involved in that kind of path.' And that was not wholly satisfying. Then when I would ask the meditation teachers 'what about feelings, isn't it important to honour our feelings?' And often they would say 'well, that's just going to feed the feelings, that's going to make you get attached to the feelings and that's not really part of the spiritual practice.' That's changed a lot over the years fortunately, we're talking about the mid 1970s when I first got introduced, so the spiritual teachers have become more sophisticated now, the meditation teachers. Like I really like Jack Kornfield for example, I like his teaching. He's aware of feelings and the importance of them but yeah, when I grew up with this, it was hard to find common ground, how they intersected with each other. It's a lot clearer to me now, that's why I wrote this book, how to integrate them.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I like the distinction you make between vertical spirituality and horizontal spirituality. Tell us about that.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, vertical spirituality is like the path of transcendence, maybe people are trying to get absorbed in the what's called the jnamic states, it's really beyond, almost trying to get beyond experiencing and it's probably very blissful and very enjoyable in many ways and I think there's value in it to a certain extent but there's a danger of getting so absorbed in that transcended vertical state, that you lose your sense of the horizontal spirituality which is connecting to other people, connecting to nature, connecting to life. So, yeah, to me horizontal spirituality's where we're in the world, you know, Martin Buber's really famous for that, he wrote the book *I and Thou*. For him spiritual practice was all about connecting with people.

**Dr. Dave:** Why is it that achieving intimacy with another at times can seem as elusive as achieving enlightenment?

**John Amodeo:** (both laugh) Yeah, that's a good point. There's a lot of growth... for intimacy to really be beautifully deep and stable and rich and alive for us, there's a lot of inner growth that's required for that, really knowing what we're experiencing, be really curious about what's really happening deep down. We often get hijacked by our amygdala, the part of our brain that goes into the flight, fright, freeze mode, so in relationships we're very quick to blame and accuse and attack and judge other people. We analyse other people, 'you're self-centred, you're selfish, everything's about you,' instead of just slowing down, getting connected to what we're really feeling inside. You know 'I feel sad when we don't spend time together. I'm feeling a disconnection lately. I'm really missing you, I really enjoy our time together.' To vulnerably express from your heart, what you're feeling, what you're wanting. It's much more likely to bring the other person toward you and create a safe climate for the intimacy you're longing for, rather than saying 'you're never home, you're always coming home late, your work is much more important than me, why don't you just spend the night at the office?' You know, those kind of blaming, attacking, statements, they're not creating a safe climate for intimacy.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, longing – you talk about our longing for connection and you raise an interesting question. Is our longing a destructive force, or is it a gift?

**John Amodeo:** Right.

**Dr. Dave:** So tell us about the two poles there.

**John Amodeo:** Longing just simply is, so we might as well accept it, embrace it, I mean longing is life speaking through us, life longs for more of itself in a way. Yeah, so to honour the longing, to hear what it's trying to tell us, I think it's a gift, it connects us. You know the first noble truth of the Buddha actually, 'life is suffering,' we might also understand that as disconnection. Disconnection is really what creates suffering, feeling isolated, feeling so alone, is what creates suffering. So longing is the longing to get beyond our isolated self, it's longing to connect, it's a longing for something that's rich and beautiful and it's important to listen to it, hear where it's trying to guide us. It's a sacred longing, I call it a sacred longing in the book.

**Dr. Dave:** Uh, huh, that makes me think of the poetry of Rumi.

**John Amodeo:** Hm, hm, right, yes, exactly. Yeah, Rumi writes really beautifully about that sweet longing. There's a fire in it, there's a sweetness in it, there's a depth in it.

**Dr. Dave:** Earlier you made a distinction between desire and what you talk about as craving, grasping, clinging, so what do you know about craving, grasping and clinging?

**John Amodeo:** I'm glad you asked that because I think what we need to do, is to realise that we need to be less attached to some things, we can be more connected to other things. We often cling and crave to things in a way that doesn't allow us to connect in a deeper way. Let me give you an example, 'cause it probably sounds pretty vague. You know often we're not aware of what exactly we're clinging to. The problem isn't that we're clinging to other people, the problem is we're clinging to things that disconnect us from other people. We're clinging to being right, wanting to be right all the time, for example. We're clinging to our interpretations of what's wrong with the other person, instead of looking at our own part in the conflict. We cling and we get attached to our ideology, our belief system, instead of opening to our feelings, our sadness, our hurts, our fears and sharing that with each other. Ideologies really often disconnect us from each other. We cling to our religious beliefs, our political ideology, make other people wrong, so that creates a lot of suffering, a lot of disconnection, we're not available then to listen, to really hear what's happening with the other person when our mind is so filled with our own ideas and our interpretations of what's happening. There's an old saying that God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason; because listening is much harder than speaking so we need two ears and we should spend more time listening than speaking, being receptive to what's happening in the world of the other person helps create that safe, intimate climate.

**Dr. Dave:** Hm, hm. You suggest we can make friends with clinging and craving. That sounds paradoxical a little bit. How are we to do that?

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, because in Eastern teachings, the way people often interpret it, is we have to get rid of clinging. You know since clinging and craving are the cause of suffering, 'Okay I'm on it, I'm gonna get rid of clinging and craving' but then that just becomes another thing we're clinging to. Now we're desiring getting rid of clinging and craving, like that Zen monk that we talked about earlier, who was into meditative absorption. So, yeah, the idea is not to get rid of anything but just to notice exactly what is, so if we feel a desire, we connect with our body, we notice we're clinging to something, clinging to being right, whatever it is. Just notice it and work with it 'Well, maybe I'm not right, you know, maybe I'm just feeling hurt in this relationship and I need to express that. I'm feeling some loneliness, feeling some sadness, feeling some fear.' And just softening, having a kind of a courageous vulnerability where we're honouring what we're feeling and just being really honest with ourselves about what we're experiencing and sharing our felt experience. That's really the key, sharing our felt experience; that is the path to working with clinging and craving and allowing the clinging and craving to soften. You know part of it too is... there's a story about the Dalai Lama that comes to mind. You know often people on spiritual paths – have you noticed this Dave – people on spiritual paths, often they think they're supposed to get beyond their uncomfortable, unpleasant feelings.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, yes.

**John Amodeo:** And there's a story about the Dalai Lama, where a psychiatrist was interviewing him and he asked him 'Is there anything about your life that you regret?' And he thought about it for a long time and he said 'Yeah' and he told the story of an older man who came to him, he wanted to do this advanced esoteric practice and the Dalai Lama said 'you know that practice is very rigorous, it's really more for younger people. I'd recommend this other practice.' So the old man went off and he killed himself.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, gee.

**John Amodeo:** I know. So he could be reincarnated as a younger man who could then do this practice that he wanted to do.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, my goodness.

**John Amodeo:** Not recommended.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, really.

**John Amodeo:** So the psychiatrist asked him 'how did you get over that regret?' And the Dalai Lama paused for a long time before he answered and what I think he was doing, the Dalai Lama, he was kind of focusing. He didn't give a quick answer, he paused, he kind of went inside and what do you think the Dalai Lama said in response? He said 'I didn't get over it. I haven't gotten over it. It's still there.' He says it doesn't hold him back in his life but that feeling is still there. And to me that's a wonderful story because especially for what the Dalai Lama didn't say, he didn't say, 'well, he created his own reality for himself.' I don't know about you but that kind of drives me crazy when people use expressions like that.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah (laughs).

**John Amodeo:** Or 'I'm not responsible for him and that was his choice.'

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, yeah.

**John Amodeo:** I hate that. That's another New Age rationalisation.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, kind of an unfortunate, I'm blocking on the right word here, an unfortunate gift of a certain approach to Gestalt Therapy.

**John Amodeo:** Yes, right. 'I'm not here to live up to the Gestalt (unclear), I'm here to live up to your expectations and (unclear) it's beautiful, if not, it's okay, it can't be helped.' It's a very kind of self-centred philosophy in many ways, right?

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, so the Dalai Lama said yeah, he didn't get over it and that's a great teaching for all of us – it's okay to have feelings, it's okay to be a little

uncomfortable about things sometimes. It's just part of being human, we have different feelings; fears, regret, sadness and embracing our humanity is a crucial part of the spiritual path. That's like one of the core reasons I wrote the book, to convey that message – the spiritual path's about embracing our humanity not trying to transcend it and that's a beautiful story for not trying to transcend our human limitations and vulnerabilities.

**Dr. Dave:** You know thinking about spirituality on one hand and psychology on the other, I'm freshly struck by the irony that in spirituality we're talking about not becoming attached and in psychology the really hot topic these days is attachment theory (laughs) and you ask the question, you actually write about that in your book and you ask the question 'Is suffering caused by attachment or non-attachment?' So maybe you can take us through some of the highlights in relation to those issues.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, I think that's one of the real key chapters in the book that people often think suffering is created by attachment which is simply what we're learning now from neuroscience and how we're wired is that we're wired for connection. We don't do well without loving, caring human connections. Our immune system suffers, our immune system doesn't do as well, we're not as happy. So, yeah, we're wired for connection and a lot of suffering comes because we're not attached in a healthy way to other people. Maybe the word we need to use here is 'connected.' Spiritual people tend to not like the word attached but what it really is, is connected. Suffering is caused by non-connection. It's not caused by connection, it's caused by non-connection, or non-attachment if you prefer that word. You know it's a way to be healthily attached, healthily connected to other people, that's beautiful and that's a legitimate human desire. Not to be transcended but to be engaged with, to work with it, or I prefer to say, engage with it.

**Dr. Dave:** You take up a very difficult topic in the book about the disappointment that many spiritual seekers have experienced in relation to their spiritual teacher, their guru, their Zen master, whatever and I would love to hear you rhapsodize on that a bit.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, I think that chapter's called 'Trust Your Guru or Trust Yourself?' And often we give the responsibility to another teacher and look to them for guidance in such a way that we lose connection with our own sense of inner guidance. I mean my teachers and the Buddha also taught me to 'listen to your own experience.' Listen to the teachings but see what resonates in your own experience and use that and if it doesn't resonate, you know, explore that but it's most important to listen to yourself, rather than listen to what somebody else is telling you how you should live your life. And that's why many people get disenfranchised when they're in spiritual communities because they realise they were getting too attached to listening to the teacher. Spiritual teachers can be wonderful, we have a lot to learn, we need teachers but they're human too. We often lose sight of how they're human also.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah and you touch upon the fact that there have been some fairly visible incidents have come to light where spiritual teachers have gotten sexually involved with their students with various bad results and I actually had the opportunity or the experience of interviewing somebody who was on the other side of that, somebody

who was a Zen teacher and I put to him some fairly difficult questions and it seems like he's still in the process of working those issues through.

**John Amodeo:** Hm, hm. Yeah, I think especially when Eastern teachers come over here in the West, they haven't had a lot of experience with intimate relationships. Suddenly this whole world of desire opens up that they're not familiar with and it might be overwhelming for some of them. They don't know how to deal with it maybe, or work with it, so they might act out in some way 'cause they haven't had experience with feelings, that feelings often is not part of the spiritual path for Eastern people and working with your desires. So yeah, it could be that, it could be lots of other things spiritual teachers can do that are harmful or unhelpful to their students.

**Dr. Dave:** Not just Eastern teachers by the way, there's some pretty prominent examples of Western teachers. So what's your advice to somebody who's felt burned in that way?

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, yeah and there sure are a lot of people who have got really hurt being in spiritual community. Well it's important to learn whatever lessons you can, maybe there was a way you gave your power away and you may then get your own power back and learn what you can from that experience and move forward. It's a healing process and maybe you also take responsibility for how you looked a bit too much to somebody else for guidance, instead of listening to yourself and it's a sober learning. The most important thing is listen to your own experience and trust what feels right for you. You know for a while we want a father figure or a mother figure and sometimes it's helpful to have that for a while, right? You know it's good to keep evolving and moving on and realising that that inner authority is in our self ultimately. We have to really trust our self and not give our power away to somebody else.

**Dr. Dave:** I agree with you totally. How are the sorts of things that we've been discussing here impacted your work as a psychotherapist?

**John Amodeo:** Well, often people will come to me who have a spiritual practice 'cause people know that I'm interested in all that and I have a meditation practice myself so often they'll come and I can see pretty quickly that they have an aversion toward feelings, or desires, they think it's something to transcend. So I try to work with them and gently encourage them to embrace their feelings, that that's part of the spiritual path. And I think spiritual practice too has helped me just to be more empathic, more connected to myself, more compassionate for the people, I think creating a safe, compassionate place for clients is really crucial. A lot of the healing is simply in the connection with the client, so the more I'm connected to myself the more I can make that nice connection with the other person.

**Dr. Dave:** Hm, hm. So do you feel like you're mediation practice helps you do that?

**John Amodeo:** Definitely, definitely, yes, yeah. And not just sitting meditation but just as a mindfulness practice throughout the day, just meditating throughout the day or being mindful of what is as best I can, staying in my body as best I can. It's a lifetime process, that's why they call it a practice, we don't have to be perfect at it, it's a practice.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, right (laughing). Right, that's a good point. I was struck in your bio that you've also used EFT, Emotional Freedom Technique, in your therapy.

**John Amodeo:** No, no. Actually it's Emotionally Focused Therapy for couples.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, okay I was going to go down a completely different track.

**John Amodeo:** No, I'm not familiar with the Emotional Freedom Technique very much, although I hear good things about it but this is Sue Johnson's work. She wrote that book called *Hold Me Tight*, which is great.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I'm not familiar with that book or, emo... what did you say it stands for?

**John Amodeo:** Emotionally Focused Therapy for couples.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. Tell us a bit about that.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, it's very compatible with my work, as I do reference her in the book and it's working with couples where we really help each of them connect with what they're actually feeling and try to steer them away from attacks and judgments and blaming the other person and really help them find words that express what they're really feeling, what they're wanting, they're longing for. And when two people can learn to do that with each other, it's very powerful, it's very connecting. So it's a spiritual... I mean it's a mindfulness practice really, focusing is a like mindfulness practice, being mindful of our feelings and Emotionally Focused Therapy is kind of like a mindfulness practice too, it's being mindful of what you're really feeling inside, what you're really wanting. And the therapist who's trained in that has particular skills and tools to help clients move in that direction. There's a lot more to it of course but that's one part of it.

**Dr. Dave:** Sounds like maybe I should seek out Sue Johnson as well, maybe as somebody to talk to.

**John Amodeo:** Yeah, she lives in Canada but sure, yeah, I would love for you to interview her and she has a new book out too.

**Dr. Dave:** O.K. Well, you know we're at the place where we should probably begin to wrap it up. I wonder if there's anything that you were hoping to talk about that we didn't get to, or any final thoughts that you'd like to leave our listeners with?

**John Amodeo:** So just to summarise it, another way to say it, is we need to learn to work with accepting our experience instead of trying to finesse our experience. You know, it's like a path of radical acceptance, if I can use Tara Brach's term. She's a Buddhist teacher and is also a psychologist. That's a nice term for all this, radical acceptance, just simply accepting ourselves just as we are, accepting our experience just as it is and I really encourage people to learn more about focusing. I have a whole chapter on focusing as a practice of loving kindness toward ourselves. That's really a key there, to really be gentle with our self. It's something I always tell my clients, in a way just to be more gentle with that, a way to be more friendly with that

inside yourself and if we can kind of hold ourselves with gentleness and loving kindness and make room for the full range of our feelings, what we're longing for, brings a lot more peace to our being and it opens life to connection, it opens us more to connecting with other people, with nature and with life itself. So connecting with our self, connecting with others, connecting with life, those are three sides of the same coin really. The way I say it sometimes is connecting in intimate relationships and spiritual development are two sides of the same coin of awakening. We can awaken through relationship and relationship can become a spiritual practice if we use it for that purpose.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay, well that really does sum it up and so Dr. John Amodeo, my fellow Sonoma County resident, it was nice to meet you and I want to thank you for being my guest on Shrink Rap Radio.

**John Amodeo:** Ah, my pleasure to be here. I really appreciate you having me on.

### **WRAP UP:**

I really appreciate Dr. John Amodeo's down to earth approach to spirituality and relationships. This was especially true for me in the section of his book where he deals with the difficult topic you heard me raise with him, namely that of gurus or other spiritual teachers, who have abused their students sexually or in other ways. I very much agree with his guidance that spiritual seekers avoid becoming overly attached to their particular notions of spirituality or to their teachers. They need to realise that their teachers too are human. People who, so to speak, put on their pants one leg at a time, just like the rest of us. As human beings they will have their own flaws. This can be difficult for us to accept. There's a part of us that's still seeking the ultimate perfect mummy or daddy. For myself, I'm sceptical of the concept of enlightened beings who are at all times and all places permanently enlightened. I think it's much more like romantic relationships in which we go through a period of being blind to the beloved's flaws, eventually as a result usually of living together, the rough spots will emerge, infatuation eventually fades and a different sort of love, one that is not blind can emerge. I can understand becoming infatuated with a teacher, a leader, a political figure, a friend, an idea, or an ideology. It's very human but ultimately I believe we need to transcend that attachment and bring our critical faculties to bear and not feel guilty when a little voice inside has doubts, questions and so on. Seeing and accepting the feet of clay of our earthly gods is a sign of maturity I think. I share Dr. Amodeo's emphasis upon developing a deep capacity for checking in with what he and others have called the felt sense. I believe it's one of our truest guides. And I also share his commitment to radical self acceptance. By the way, I mentioned that John Amodeo is fellow resident of Sonoma County and that we know people in common. So far however we've never met in person. Sooner or later it's likely that our paths will cross and I look forward to that. I'd like to give you a sense of his writing by reading a short passage at the end of the book. On page 249, he writes:

*With each passing year I notice a more tender appreciation for the precious gift of being alive. I sense a growing longing to live and love more fully and leave this earth awash in rich relationship and with minimal regrets. I recognise that embracing the nuanced feelings and longings that arise from*

*being alive is an essential part of any spiritual path. Diverse religions have the common aim of opening our hearts to love but in practice religious life has often been lived 'above the neck.' However compelling our beliefs about love, God or truth might be, they are limited to lofty ideas in our mind if we don't take the elevator down to the ground floor of our body and hear what it knows and needs in order to live an emotionally healthy spiritual life. A vibrant spirituality invites us to embrace all parts of our being. Wars and conflicts throughout the world are external reflections of our internal emotional war. Creating a world where peace and justice prevail, requires building a critical mass of people who are cultivating equanimity within themselves and developing loving kindness toward their own vulnerabilities. This gentle attentiveness to our inner life creates the foundation for being responsive to the needs and sensitivities of our partner, friends and community and beyond that, our world.*

So if this kind of thinking and writing speaks to you, as always I would encourage you to use the <http://www.amazon.com> widget on our site if you decide to purchase Dr. Amodeo's book. With the holiday season coming up it might make a good gift for someone in your life.

Thanks to today's guest Dr. John Amodeo for sharing his insights into mindfulness and loving relationships.