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Magazine



Judith Orloff: Reinforce **YOUR RESILIENCE**

SARK's 6 Powerful Habits 10 | H. Emilie Cady 32 | Biblical Translation With a Twist 28

Listening in With ... Judith Orloff



Judith Orloff, M.D., is a board-certified psychiatrist and an intuitive known for pioneering the field of energy psychiatry, which combines conventional medicine with the healing protocols of intuition, spirituality, and subtle energy. This approach recognizes that we all have energy fields extending beyond our physical bodies that interact with and affect the energy fields of others. Orloff has long believed that the understanding of subtle energy and intuition are the missing pieces in health care. Here, she talks with *Unity Magazine* editor **Katy Koontz** about why we need both empathy and resilience more than ever and how to cultivate those vital qualities.

Reinforce Your Resilience

Katy Koontz: Your newest book, *The Empath's Survival Guide: Life Strategies for Sensitive People*, was published by Sounds True last spring. It seems incredibly timely, considering current events.

Judith Orloff: I so agree. Living in the world now requires empathy more than ever. In fact, the Dalai Lama says empathy is the most precious human quality. It's the medicine the world needs, and there are so many empaths out there.

KK: What percentage of people are empaths?

JO: The old statistics say 20 percent of people are highly sensitive, but I think it's gone way up with all the added stress on the planet these days—including global, political, social, and personal stress. Because empaths don't have the typical filters other people have as natural defenses, they're emotional sponges. They feel everything. For example, they can go into a vintage bookstore and feel the energy of the people who owned the books before.

KK: That's fascinating!

JO: I started a group on Facebook called Dr. Orloff's Empath Support Community that now has almost 9,000 members, and they often talk about experiences like that. Empaths have a deep connection with other people, too, and with nature. They naturally want to help others and better the world. Many empaths go into the clergy or helping professions like animal rescue or something that makes the world a better place because they have very big, loving hearts. The problem is they tend to give too much. They can get burned out by caring too much, not setting

or maintaining good boundaries, and not finding a healthy balance in their lives between helping others and taking care of themselves.

Lately the quote from the Sermon on the Mount that says, "The meek will inherit the earth," has been resonating with me. I don't necessarily like the word *meek*, but another translation of that passage is "the *gentle* will inherit the earth." I so believe that's true and I think the empaths *are* those people. I'm getting chills just talking about it.

KK: Why do stressful times increase the number of empaths?

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JO: When stressors increase, our senses are constantly bombarded by stress hormones. Most people are born with a certain neurological and biological stamina that gives them some protection against such stressors, but when stress is chronic, this protection gets worn down over time. Everything in the body gets beaten down, including immunity. With less protection, people become more sensitive—but many don't know how to deal with this extra sensitivity. They often wake up feeling anxious, depressed, and hopeless because too much is coming at them too fast.

KK: I'm guessing their physicians don't quite understand what's happening.

JO: No, many don't. And empaths can end up being misdiagnosed by conventional health-care practitioners as having agoraphobia, major depression, panic disorder, chronic fatigue, and autoimmune diseases. Although they might have symptoms of one or more of those conditions, that's not their primary diagnosis. They might feel depressed and anxious and don't want to leave the house, for example, but that's because they're absorbing the energy of other people—not because they're clinically depressed and anxious.

**If you're in victim mode
you can't be resilient....
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As a result, many empaths get put on high doses of antidepressants or antianxiety medications, which is the wrong treatment for them. Traditional medicine doesn't believe in energy fields, which is a big problem when diagnosing empaths because empaths sense energy. But using the detailed strategies I outline in the book, empaths can learn to manage their sensitivity and emerge stronger. They're like soldiers of light because they have both sensitivity and strength.

KK: Do you think medicine is changing in this regard, or are we still in the dark ages?

JO: I think more integrative practitioners understand about subtle energy these days, but

the hardcore conventional physicians like the surgeons and the urologists and the fix-it kind of doctors are often the last to join in. Even psychiatry is very physical research-oriented, and psychiatrists generally don't believe in energy fields. Yes, I think we're still in the dark ages, but it's at least better than it was when my first book, *Second Sight*, was published in 1996.

KK: With all the chronic stress you mentioned, do you think these times require us to cultivate more resilience?

JO: Absolutely. Resilience is the ability to bounce back, to be guided by a powerful inner force of love through the most difficult of circumstances. It's the heart that gives us resilience, not our will, and it requires a connection to Source. I believe

there are a lot of dark and very difficult energies on earth, so our own light, sensitivity, and openness must be in fine form to get through it all.

KK: Given its importance, how do we keep our resilience strong?

JO: First of all, you can cultivate resilience with your positive attitude, with your ability to set limits, and by developing kind yet firm strategies for dealing with narcissists and other energy vampires. They can suck your physical and emotional energy right out of you. I have a whole chapter about them in my book. These people have what's called an *empathy deficient disorder*. Empaths who fall in love with a narcissist

often feel they can change the narcissist because they're so loving. But it's just not so. They can't. Being in a relationship with a narcissist can be dangerous for the empath because the narcissist chips away at the empath's self-esteem until they have very little left—and then they get depressed and sometimes even physically ill.

KK: What are some of the strategies you mention for protecting yourself?

JO: Saying no, visualizing a shield of beautiful light around yourself, and practicing deep prayer and meditation. You have to set really strong limits and boundaries—and then be okay with them. Remember that “No” is a complete sentence—you don't have to keep defending it. Don't let other people's opinions stop you from this practice. If an energy vampire triggers self-esteem issues for you, recognize what's happening and turn it around. The more secure you feel, the more resilient you'll be.

KK: How do you deal with anger, frustration, and other negative emotions in what seems like an impossible situation?

JO: I recommend a simple, three-minute heart meditation that I describe in the book. First, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and relax. Then envision something really beautiful like a sunset, a flower, or a waterfall. I use the night sky. Really concentrate on that beauty. Put your hand over your heart chakra in the middle of your chest and focus on how much you love whatever you've chosen to envision, and then feel your heart open. Practice this at least once a day for three minutes.

This meditation opens you up to loving-kindness, which then floods the body. Not only will you calm down, but the loving-kindness vibes you generate will then also flow into whatever room you're in. I use this heart meditation in my psychiatry practice before patients come in to fill the room with loving energy.

KK: That feels good just listening to you describe it.

JO: Opening the heart is a wonderful tool. Unbelievably, most people don't know how to do it. But if they practice the meditation daily, sooner or later they'll begin to feel this warm, blissful energy coming from their heart chakra.

My spiritual practice for the past 20 or 30 years has been Taoism, and Taoists believe the most important thing we can do is open the heart. It

cycles of nature to connect to their beauty and to the forces of the heart and of life.

KK: Who in the public arena do you think does a really good job of exemplifying resilience?

JO: Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama because they've gone through terrible suffering and they've arisen as calm, steadfast beings of both heart and might. They demonstrate leadership with love. Thinking about them gives me strength. They inspire me.

KK: They both, of course, preach forgiveness a lot. Is forgiveness part of resilience?

JO: I think it is, but forgiveness is a tricky thing. For example, you don't forgive the rapist for raping. You forgive the rapist for the suffering behind the action that caused the rapist to commit the crime. Forgiveness is grace. You have to work your way to forgiveness.

KK: How about the relationship between resilience and hope. If

you're strong in one of those, are you necessarily strong in the other?

JO: That's a good question. I think they're both integrally related because if you don't have hope it's hard to be resilient. If you believe that your life is going to fall apart, those negative beliefs create stress hormones, which wear your energy level down. I'm sure there are exceptions, but I think it's generally true that having one helps you have the other.

KK: Are there some situations you can't truly be expected to bounce back from, like maybe the death of a child? That's the worst experience I can imagine.

JO: I don't believe anything is impossible to bounce back from. It can be a long path back, of course, but I believe that people who go through very difficult experiences make their hearts stronger and they spread more love as a result of what they went through.

I look at everything as a spiritual challenge. If you have a strong belief in love, then that will help you overcome even the most difficult situations. A parent who loses a child may never completely eliminate their grief, but that grief will eventually soften and they'll be able to keep going and fulfill their own purpose in life.

KK: So reframing adversity as a spiritual challenge is key?

JO: Absolutely. If you're in victim mode you can't be resilient. It's not helpful to look at everything as unfair, wondering, *Why is this happening to me?* or *Why is everyone so mean?* or thinking, *This situation will never get better.* When you're a victim, you lose both your power and your energy.

That's not to say that things aren't unfair sometimes because they are, and most people are in the right with what they're complaining about. The larger and more important issue is this: Even if you're right, how can you look at the situation differently so you can learn and grow from it? That's what our purpose is in life—to use what we're given to develop our hearts and grow stronger. 🌍

**Forgiveness is
grace. You have to
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connects you to what's most valuable. That's why I teach this to empaths, who are often not very resilient without such tools.

KK: What tools do you personally use?

JO: My meditation practice is the most powerful practice I use to stay centered. I have a sacred space where I keep a statue of Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Compassion and Mercy. I offer flowers and fruit to her. I also honor the new moon and the full moon and all the