

Jeremy Lent: The Web of Meaning.mp3

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:00:02] I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which I am recording this podcast, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation and pay my respects to their Elders - past, present and emerging.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:00:21] Hello and welcome to Unstress. My name is Dr Ron Ehrlich. Well, today we're going to take a step back and look at humanity and what has brought us to where we are and look at the meaning of life and some of the existential crises that we are facing. Big topic.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:00:39] Our guest is Jeremy Lent. He's been described as one of the greatest thinkers of our age, and he's an author, a speaker whose work investigates the underlying causes of our civilisation's existential threats and explores pathways towards a life-affirming future. Now, Jeremy received a B.A. in English Literature from Cambridge University, an MBA from the University of Chicago, and was former Internet company CEO. His award-winning book, *The Patterning Instinct: A Cultural History of Humanity's Search for Meaning*, explores the ways humans have made meaning from the cosmos, from hunter-gatherers.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:01:19] Times to the present day. His new book, *The Web of Meaning: Integrating Science and Traditional Wisdom to Find Our Place in the Universe*, offers a coherent and intellectually solid foundation for a worldview based on a connectedness that could lead humanity to a sustainable and flourishing future. I have to say, both of these books are absolutely brilliant, and I was introduced to Jeremy's work through Helena Norberg-Hodge, who we've spoken to on several occasions from *Local Futures*. And what I love about Jeremy's work is that he references ancient wisdom and brings so much together. So many of the themes I have tried to explore on several of our episodes, *Lessons From the Past* and the discussion in a few months ago with Tyson Yunkaporta, his book, *Sand Talk* was about how ancient wisdom can save our modern world, kind of touches on some of the things that Jeremy goes to in incredible detail with his books. I hope you enjoyed this conversation I had with Jeremy Lent.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:02:31] Welcome to the show, Jeremy.

Jeremy Lent [00:02:33] Thank you so much, Ron. I'm looking forward to our conversation.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:02:37] Jeremy, you've written some wonderful, wonderful books there. And the first one that I've read is *The Patterning Instinct: A Cultural History of Humanity's Search for Meaning*. And in it, you talk about a cognitive approach to history and the fact that there's a modernist and a post-modernist view. I wondered if you could just tell us what that cultural approach entails.

Jeremy Lent [00:03:00] Yes, sure. Actually, it's an interesting topic. It sounds all very theoretical, but actually makes a big difference to how we make sense of the world. And basically, the more sort of dominant modern view of history is essentially it sort of sees human beings as the kind of the same all over the world. And so when it looks at sort of how history actually happened, it focuses almost all its attention on things like power and economics. And, you know, who with the Europeans were lucky enough to discover the new world before the Chinese? That's why they started to globalise and became so dominant, sort of things like that.

Jeremy Lent [00:03:41] And the approach to history that I offer in *The Patterning Instinct* takes a somewhat different view. It kind of it recognises a lot of what is there and the dominant view as being valid. But in addition to that, it has this recognition that actually how we make sense of the world culturally as a collective community, actually affects the course of history. There's not just a matter of who got to the new world first, and that's why the Europeans won and the East lost or whatever in modern history, which quite a few serious historians talk about it in that way. But it shows that actually and basically our cultures shape our overall sense of values. And those values actually shape history. So like an example that I... in fact I think I have the book with this example is that very century that Columbus discovered the new world. Decades earlier, there was this Chinese admiral whose name was Admiral Zheng He. He had this massive armada of ships, like hundreds of oceangoing vessels. And you could have fit ten of Columbus's one of Columbus's three little boats that he had. And you could fit ten in one of these boats of Admiral Zheng He. And he commanded the whole Indian Ocean. For decades, his fleet went all over Africa, in Arabia and Sri Lanka like Ceylon, and they were treated as gods there. Sometimes that fleet was more massive than the very town they stopped at. They could have done what Columbus and the followers of Columbus did when they hit the new world. They could have enslaved the populations minded for gold, all that stuff. They didn't do anything like that because it never occurred to them to treat other people in other territories in that way. They had a completely different view of the world and they had the power to do it. But in fact, what they did with that power was establish trade routes and take emissaries back from these other countries from the same African continent that the Europeans thought were these primitive savages. They found that the principal, like the chief's son, whoever it was, taken back to China, meet the Emperor and establish a trading relationship. It shows how the different ways in which we make sense of the world actually have shaped history.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:05:58] And that difference, what drives that difference I know in an in well we already I'll mention your other book because it actually does segway into this to *The Web of Meaning* which is *Integrating Science and Traditional Wisdom to Find Our Place in the Universe*. Because there's something about the background of the traditional wisdom of each of those countries that informed how they approached it. Let's talk about those differences.

Jeremy Lent [00:06:25] Yeah. Yeah. Well, basically, so underlying those values, there's what I call a worldview and a worldview basically refers to the sort of the way in which we implicitly make sense of reality around us. Basically, everything that happens around us, is the things we do, the values we hold, the behaviours we see, and the way we relate to other people. They all are something we experience through a lens. But in just the same way that when we look at the world through our eye and our eye is a lens, we need a biologist to tell us that we don't realise that the world is actually not exactly the way we think we're receiving it through our eye. Similarly, we don't realise that we are actually seeing the world through a worldview. We just think that's our reality. But in fact, worldviews can be very different.

Jeremy Lent [00:07:12] So the worldview of the traditional Chinese that that admiral came from was one that was based on harmony, basically saw humans as being sort of enmeshed in this kind of resonant web with heaven and the earth and all other societies around them. And so they saw things as being deeply interconnected. So in their sense, what you are trained to do, whether you're an emperor or a sage or just a regular person, the goal in your life was to try to harmonise with that web, not tear it apart, but actually harmonise so that the ways in which things resonated worked optimally for you.

Jeremy Lent [00:07:52] Now, the Europeans, on the other hand, saw the world totally differently. They saw basically nature more like a machine. They saw humans as being absolutely separate from nature. And they saw other people around the world as essentially similarly being there to exploit as much as possible. So because they had a very different view of the human relationship to nature and human view of each other, they focussed a lot on basic power and using the power that they had developed to basically break things apart if they were able to enable them to get more wealth and more power. A very different way of looking at things.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:08:32] What role do you think religion has played in that?

Jeremy Lent [00:08:36] Religion has played a huge role, but it needs to be understood in a slightly different way. Like when we use the word religion, we generally tend to use that to refer more to the sort of organised religions that are mostly monotheistic you know, whether it's Christianity, Islam or Judaism or we might expand to include Hinduism or something. But it's sort of it's a kind of we see religion in that way, but a worldview is kind of even bigger than religion in a way. But the religion that we might believe in definitely impacts the worldview. But even religion itself actually comes from a deep worldview.

Jeremy Lent [00:09:15] So to give you an example, Christianity, along with the other monotheistic religions, ultimately got their way of thinking. And in fact, from the ancient Greeks, for the most part, the ancient Greeks were the first to see the split in the universe between, for example, the material world and some sort of eternal dimension somewhere out there in the heavens. And they saw a split in the human being between the soul and the body, and they saw the sort of soul as being something less imprisoned in the body. So that's more like we can think of that more as a cosmology, an understanding of the way the cosmos works. And that was that split between some sort of perfection out there and the material world that actually infused the Christian idea of a God up in the heavens and the rest of the world essentially being like decentralised, like other early ways of making sense of the world early cosmologies saw the earth itself and life itself as being filled with spirit, as basically being alive and having intrinsic value. But that idea of something out in the heavens is the source of true value. It kind of led to this notion that everything that happened on Earth was kind of just a stage for the sort of the journey of the soul on its way back to heaven again or whatever. So that led to a very different way of thinking. And so religion fits into that larger notion of cosmology, I think.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:10:43] I mean, you drew that analogy or that event of Columbus and Admiral... How is the pronunciation?

Jeremy Lent [00:10:51] Zheng He.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:10:53] Zheng He. And one can only imagine what would have happened if the Chinese approach to globalisation if you like, had prevailed.

Jeremy Lent [00:11:02] Right. Well, that's the thing. That's what there are some people who say, well if Zhang He, in fact, some people there's a theory that Zhang He did get to North America, but that's even though some people follow that, that's basically been disparage. I wouldn't rely on that theory. But if he had, I think we can virtually guarantee that he would not have done exactly what the Europeans did. He would have just done what he did elsewhere and found emissaries and brought them back to China. And in fact, there are examples of that in Southeast Asia, for example, for many centuries there was the area in Southeast Asia that was closest to India was essentially that part of what has

been called like The Great Indian Empire or whatever. The Indian subcontinent had far more power and technology force. And they again, sort of put inroads into all the different areas of Southeast Asia. But what is so interesting is what we see is, again, they did not try to like slave populations. They didn't try to sort of own and colonise and say, "Oh, great, we can use this raw material that's like right minute till it's all gone." They again saw things mostly from the point of view of trading and sure, I'm sure they would at times take advantage of their power to kind of, you know, persuade whoever they were trading with to give them better terms, whatever, but a completely different way of they never just assumed they there was any intrinsic value or right to go and totally subvert and disrupt what they came across.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:12:37] You also talk about, well, the book, The Patterning Instinct, and the importance of that on a most basic level, I guess birds use constellations to pattern how they navigate around the world. And you also mention infants are very good at patterning language development, but we as humans have taken that to another level, haven't we? Would you talk to us about the effect that some of these patterns have had on our development?

Jeremy Lent [00:13:06] Yeah, sure. Yeah. And of course, I call the book The Patterning Instinct, because ultimately that seemed to me to be what was truly what was essentially different about humans versus other mammals. Not that. And as you point out, that's essentially every mammal. In fact, it can be probably said almost every living organism has a certain patterning ability to make sense of the information that comes to it. Determine what is important and what's not. And amongst other high-functioning mammals, of course, that's can be a highly developed instinct, such as we see in chimpanzees.

Jeremy Lent [00:13:47] But humans developed because we have a more evolved prefrontal cortex than other primates or other mammals. And in over millions of years, we basically developed what started out really from the sort of like a social brain. We developed the ability to deal with a lot of complexity within our society. But that same skill used an evolutionary part of the brain to pattern meaning into things around us. The behaviour that things that happened or like do you say the example of an infant that learns language. Nobody says to this little baby, "Oh, you need to learn that language because otherwise, you wouldn't be able to communicate." And that infant basically hears the voice, the sounds around her, and she relates that to the actions that take place. And before too long, she begins to use that patterning instinct to say, "Oh, there's some way of making sense of this." And just trying out language herself for whatever. That's the patterning instinct of work. And if you go back to when humans first evolved as humans, they used that same instinct to try to make sense of the universe. So it's like a human drive. We almost have to make meaning out of things around us. That's the evolved instinct part of that. And when early cultures looked at things like the stars they found, they put constellations there in the stars and stars and it's like basically patterns that and then they started to try to make sense of the universe based on almost like a scaffolding of their physical reality.

Jeremy Lent [00:15:20] There's an author called George Lakoff, who is an expert in what's called Cognitive Linguistics, which sounds very kind of abstract and theoretical. But basically what he showed some decades ago is that all of our symbolic ways of thinking, all our abstractions are based ultimately on a physical scaffolding. So if I say something like if I told you about somebody I was meeting yesterday and say she gave me a warm smile. Well, she didn't really give me that smile and she didn't it wasn't really warm. It didn't raise the temperature. And yet, you know what I mean? Because we use these metaphors,

says similarly, the earliest cultures used metaphors for their relationship with each other and with the rest of the world to make sense of the world.

Jeremy Lent [00:16:05] So, early hunter-gatherers, patterned meaning into the world of being basically like a gigantic family. And so they saw spirits around them as being like sort of parents, and they saw essentially nature as a giving parent, and they saw all spirits as being therefore part of the family. So imagine if you see every living being around you, even the stones and inanimate objects as being part of a family, you probably treat them differently than if you saw them as an inert mass of mechanistic things there for you to exploit. And so that's how this kind of patterning instinct leads to those worldviews, which then leads to actually how we live in the world.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:16:48] And this is where this traditional wisdom is so powerful. I mean, I know that I've recently and I think you've recently spoken to Tyson Yunkaporta.

Jeremy Lent [00:16:57] Right. Exactly.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:16:58] The centaur. And I thought one of the most profound things that I got from his book and talking to him was that there was a protocol for engaging with decisions, a very definite protocol. It starts with respect, then you connect, then you reflect, and then you direct. And he made the point that actually our Western approach or perhaps our approach, well, maybe before even Columbus, I'm sure. But is the exact opposite. It's direct. It doesn't work out well. Oh, we should reflect or maybe we should have connected with what we're doing. Oh, we should have much more respect for it. We have so much to learn from that traditional connection wisdom, isn't it?

Jeremy Lent [00:17:44] That is so true. And that's why it's so important to actually really begin to recognise that we are looking at the world through this lens, this kind of cognitive lens or this worldview because it's only once we actually realise that we can begin to explore other ways to make sense of things. Because of course once you realise you're seeing something through a lens, you might be curious to say, "Oh, what would everything look like if I look through another lens?" And of course, you'll see things in different ways, you'll see things you didn't see before, and you may make sense of things in a way that you didn't make sense of before. That's where the indigenous values and indigenous ways of being that still remain, even after these centuries of Western and European-based destruction and devastation of these cultures. And it still remains all around the world. And there's so much that the modern people in the modern world today can learn from that. As well as other great cultures. They also continue to be strong today, whether it's like East Asian ideas, whether it's Daoism, Buddhism or other, these great traditions. There's so much that we in the West can learn by opening our minds to these other possibilities.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:19:01] The thing that always intrigues me is we as Homo Sapiens have been around for two or 300,000 years, and we were in these hunter-gatherer groups connecting with nature. And then something happened, something changed, which brought more than 150 people together. What was the patterning that changed then?

Jeremy Lent [00:19:22] Yes. Well, that is probably more than anything to do with what's known as sedentism. Which basically means humans learning, well, in certain parts of the world, humans starting to settle down rather than being nomadic. And other times that we see really the rise of agriculture as being the sort of big change from when we were nomadic hunter-gatherers, which, like you say, is really was true for 95% or more of human history. But what you actually do see is that in some parts of the world where there

was enough say fish around or enough foodstuff that people really didn't have to move. Something began to change. Hierarchies began to develop, possessions began to become part of the normal society.

Jeremy Lent [00:20:07] Like imagine if you are a nomadic hunter-gatherer, you don't want to collect possessions. It just will weigh you down as you walk to the next place. And so there's very much this notion of living in the present. And there's a great quote, an anthropologist once heard from a nomadic hunter-gatherer. And he said, "What you do about if you kill meat? Don't you want to smoke it and store it so you can eat it later?" And Preston said, "I store my meat in the belly of my brother." And so that's just amazing. It's the relationships between people that were important. But then along with sedentism and agriculture became... it was really then the driver of a lot of that settling down that took place.

Jeremy Lent [00:20:50] And then all of a sudden there was the separation. There were the fields that you cultivate versus the nature out there in the wild. And some farmer who was lucky enough to get more grain wanted to store that grain and then would put up fences to keep other people out and then would start to be able to employ others. So all these bigger and bigger distinctions in wealth began to arise. And that was probably the single biggest shift that happened in the human experience until you could argue, until a few hundred years ago with the scientific revolution, that then shifted us into a whole other dimension.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:21:24] And what... Well, let's go. Let's go. You know, what was that? That journey, you know, that shift? Because we kind of had this beginning of wealth creation and hierarchy within societies that didn't occur in the hunter-gatherer times. But the scientific revolution, almost like the technological revolution we've just had, has taken wealth to another level, hasn't it?

Jeremy Lent [00:21:49] Right, exactly. So basically, I mean, you can sort of look at the history of humankind from the first agriculture like 10 to 12000 years ago to this the last few hundred years as being this kind of unfolding of rise and rise and rise by ratcheting up in hierarchies. So you had, say, villages that were more warlike that then got to attack and steal the possessions of the other villages. So things like the warrior spirit and the patriarchy began to take hold in many societies all around the world. And that just kind of went on, ultimately became these gigantic civilisations of the ancient civilisations that you see all around the world.

Jeremy Lent [00:22:32] And then the big shift in Europe around the 17th century, which had this prehistory to it we just talked about earlier, there was this notion, this dualistic split in the western way of thinking all the way back from the ancient Greeks. So there was plenty of time for this different way of thinking to kind of get incubated. But it really took off with the scientific revolution when this new way of making sense of the world began to show it had tremendous power. And what's ironic, actually, is those people who were the founders of the scientific revolution, people like Galileo, Descartes, Francis Bacon, whatever, they were profoundly Christian. They felt that they were doing God's work by understanding the language of God, which was, in their view, mathematics. And so what the scientific revolution did is it was based on this notion of the rest of life, the non-human life, as being really like a machine.

Jeremy Lent [00:23:30] And so Descartes was actually the first person to come up with this practise of what is now known as reductionism. Was the idea like, well, if things are

like a machine, then if you break them down into the tiniest parts, you can figure out how they work, and then you can control them and dominate them. And along with that, Francis Bacon at the time had this notion of conquering nature. So he put out this clarion call like we can, you know, we can conquer nature, like torture her secrets out of her. I mean, he actually used those words. And then we can figure out how to we can sort of make nature do what we want. And it was an incredibly powerful idea. And it worked to a very large extent. Reductionism is the underpinning of much of what we now know as science. Not all of science, but much of science in the last few hundred years. It's because of that way of thinking that I can talk to you from halfway around the world right now in real time. There are incredible benefits that came from that.

Jeremy Lent [00:24:24] So I'm not disparaging the power. And the efficacy of science really is kind of in some ways one of the greatest human projects undertaking we've ever done. But that power led people to begin to make the mistake, that thinking that breaking things down was the only way to make sense of the universe. And it explained everything about the universe. And this kind of reductionist worldview that we're sort of stuck in right now. So it led both to this and destructive quality of like extraction and exploitation because that sense of humans being separate from others and white European Christian males, in particular, being superior to all other kinds of races anywhere else that led to this unfolding of colonialism, imperialism, and the rise of global capitalism that has led to the destructive place we're at right now, where we're potentially even heading towards a civilizational collapse because we're so out of balance with the world. But it also led to this ontological kind of mistake, in a way, thinking that the only reality arises from understanding the rest of nature as being basically lifeless and like a machine. Whereas in fact, that is now been shown to be not just dangerous but scientifically wrong. So these ideas that developed in the 17th century, not surprisingly, since it is 400 years ago, have now been shown to be actually outdated. The very foundational ideas have been shown to be wrong scientifically.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:26:02] Hmm. Well, I know that Descartes has a profound impact on the way medicine, and health care is practised to this very day. And reductionist. I mean, it's why the pharmaceutical industry is as successful as it is because it's a very reductionist way of approaching care. But globalisation is an interesting one. And actually interestingly, Jeremy, I came to you through Helena Norberg Hodge.

Jeremy Lent [00:26:32] Oh. Right.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:26:32] ...Who is a champion of localisation. So tell me, how are you viewing the how, you know, given everything you've written, how are you seeing... You've touched on it a little bit. How are you seeing the world as we are today? Big question. I know you. But an important one.

Jeremy Lent [00:26:50] And I see it the way the world as it is today and where it's headed as really being a very desperate place that we're in. And we're really facing a massive existential crisis, which some people call a meta crisis because essentially the root cause of it is the very thing we've been describing, this kind of global capitalist system of extraction and exploitation, which has now become so powerful. It's like almost like an AI. Like some sort of system that has been designed that has gone out of control. So it's consuming the Earth at a far more rapid pace than is sustainable. It was not just climate breakdown that we have to be terrified of as we look at in the decades ahead. But the climate itself is really just a symptom of deeper devastation, which is an ecological break to the very life support system on which our civilisation is based is being destroyed by our

activities. It's a totally unsustainable path that we're on and if we don't change it within the next really few decades at the most is what we have to turn it around. We are likely to end up with some catastrophic shift in where our civilisation goes. Could be a civilisation collapse. There are other potential alternatives, but whatever it is, it's not sustainable the way it is right now.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:28:14] Hmm. And you mentioned AI, and I think we've also reached a point, not just ecologically, but we've reached a point where arguably our devices, the artificial intelligence know us better than we know ourselves. Certainly, they have a memory of everything we've bought and been to and seen and interested in. I know your focus is on deep transformation for us as individuals, right? Why is that? Why is that even more important now than ever before?

Jeremy Lent [00:28:45] Deep transformation? Well, it's I think it's really the only I mean, when we think of deep transformation for society rather than on an individual basis, the only chance I really think that we have to look at a true long-term flourishing future for humanity, the unhealthy planet is if we don't just try to do a few fixes. It's not a matter of like, "Oh, let's invest in renewables." Or even something like degrowth, which is a powerful idea, like the recognising we need to stop growing our society. That's a huge shift. But even then we have to go to a deeper layer. We actually have to transform that very way in which we make sense of things and in which we live our lives in society to really move our direction, our civilisation in a different direction. That's why it's it's not just a matter of transforming something. It's a deep transformation, almost like transforming the very foundations of the way we make sense of life and how we live our lives. And that then is something we can do internally. We can do that through understanding this notion of worldviews, through understanding that many of the things that we take for granted, many of the things that we just hear about on TV or on social media or whatever are actually are based on wrong foundations. And of course, what social media will do well will distract us because it's designed to do that, because that makes more money for the massive corporations that own these incredible networks. And so it distracts us and takes us away from our own well-being.

Jeremy Lent [00:30:22] So part of this deep transformation for ourselves is actually recognising that our society itself is designed not to enhance our well-being, but actually to reduce our well-being. It's designed to make us need more and want more and always be dissatisfied and always need that extra thumbs up on social media. And to addict us to those things and to addict us to consumer goods and addict us to status. And that's a very cynically worked out approach that has been developed over more than 100 years by basically corporate capitalism, which is finding ways to keep us always dissatisfied so that we'll spend more money, work harder to earn more, spend more, that there are other ways that are available to us to actually live a truly far more flourishing life. Once we realise that there are other parts of ourselves that are available to kind of develop, indulge in place of, of those.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:31:19] So given all of that, how do you reflect on the last two years of the pandemic? I mean, yeah. I'm just intrigued to know what impact you think that's had on that trajectory.

Jeremy Lent [00:31:29] Yeah. Well, you know, there's a sense in which because the pandemic has been so recent, we're still in a kind of experiencing it, of course, as it unfolds. And because it did feel very disruptive, there's a sense in which we are feeling right. Wow, there is this huge impact. But actually, I think we look back and from the bigger

picture, the historians assuming hopefully we do have historians in the distant future, but they would look back at, I think, the pandemic and see it as a kind of a little blip, maybe at most a little bit of rehearsal for the massive disruptions that were coming down the line. And that's a terrifying idea, and it doesn't give me any pleasure in saying that. But this is what we need to understand, that just from climate breakdown alone, the devastating impact we need to recognise is going to be happening in the next 10, 20, 30 years, is going to just totally squelch any amounts of the impact we think the COVID has had. And then even along with the climate breakdown, just this ecological destruction we're looking at is getting us to a place where we are at risk of seeing the very fabric of society start to unravel. And in fact, when we are looking at the political breakdown, we're seeing that in the United States where I live, but all around the world, we're seeing this rise in extremist political parties and really the loss of any semblance of democracy, even in countries that we thought we could rely on for democracy. Those are, I think, again, early indicators of a fairly, of a difficult dark time that our civilisation is entering into.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:33:13] But it's so interesting. I mean, I've looked at this in the last two years and felt that if there were trends going, I mean, for example, polarisation is an interesting example of how polarised we become in our perceptions of what is real or not. How do we move? How do we resolve that?

Jeremy Lent [00:33:35] Yes, I think that that is obviously one of the issues that people are really struggling with right now is even though the very notion of reality is has been fragmented. So at least some decades back, most people would agree. And the basic underlying reality, even if they differed as to how to make sense of it between right wing and left wing, whatever. But now that that very notion itself has begun to get fragmented, and I think that I mean, on one level, individually, I think we deal with that by actually just taking a very conscious and careful approach to our own intake of news items. And when we see things that look surprising or they're also things that may reinforce our own prejudices strongly, it really behoves us to check out other sources, look for counterarguments, and try to really come to consider judgements about things ourselves.

Jeremy Lent [00:34:36] But I think from a larger perspective, as we look at where this is unfolding and we have to realise that oftentimes people on the more progressive side of the political sphere are increasingly seeing people who are the well, they call themselves the Conservatives. But nowadays that only seems like a misnomer because they're actually not interested in conserving things. They're interested in destroying what has been there before. But the point is it's very easy, as you can see from the way I'm describing it, to sort of see these people as being other or being somehow wrong or whatever it might be. And I think one of the hardest challenges that we all have is to actually come back to these core values of our human evolved way of being, values around senses like shared community, values around a sense of like wanting to connect and actually work together with others.

Jeremy Lent [00:35:35] So I feel that we have to and when I'm saying that, I'm not saying that we should compromise with somebody from an extreme political standpoint and try to find come to some sort of modus vivendi that actually undoes or undermines our own belief system. It means sticking true to core values of loving others, actually caring about a flourishing society, and making sure that the decisions we do, the ways in which we show up in the world, stay really focussed on that. And I think that that's is... The way that we can, I think, see a future being directed in a more positive light is when enough people are actually really dedicated to actually acting for the benefit of that future flourishing rather

than in reaction to some horrendous thing we might have read about in the news headlines that morning or whatever.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:36:33] I think one of the things this time of social isolation has taught us is that while we have access, as we do right now, talking across the world, there was there's something very important and fundamental about human connection. It's reminded us of the importance of human connection, hasn't it?

Jeremy Lent [00:36:51] There is. And at the same time, one of the benefits actually, of what came out from COVID is that this increase in this kind of Zoom meetings or these ways in which people started to find themselves connecting because they had no choice with groups way outside of their own community. So it has led to an even greater sense of our sort of shared humanity. So sometimes people talk about humanity itself as like a global super organism, like a sort of planetary consciousness, basically, that's arising. And while I've been talking a lot of doom and gloom about the unfolding events that we see in the world right now. There are also some equally positive developments that we see. And that's, I think, one of the biggest ones, that there's an increased recognition amongst pretty much everybody who just becomes part of this sort of Internet-enhanced local sort of global communication system, that we are a bigger entity, that we are. What happens somewhere else in the world matters to us. And when we see somebody who is just a victim of oppression, millions of people from around the world care about that and want to step up and change it. That's a lot of where I feel we can see hope for the kind of track that deep transformation that I talk about.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:38:12] Hmm. You also talk about an ecological civilisation. And I wondered if you... What does that look like?

Jeremy Lent [00:38:21] Yeah, well, the notion about an ecological civilisation is it posits the idea of this possibility of an actual global civilisation that was based on a different foundation. So if we think of a dominant civilisation right now, basically it's being built on the foundation of global capitalism, as we've described, essentially the foundation of wealth accumulation. An ecological civilisation would be based on the foundations of what can enable flourishing for life itself. So a life-affirming foundation. And it would be based on the simple principles of how could we set the conditions for all humans to be able to flourish on a regenerated earth. The simple idea but profound in the way it would affect everything because we it helps us to recognise that our current civilisation has not been based on those precepts and actually been based on essentially allowing a small elite to take most of the wealth and benefits of whatever technologies produce for themselves at the expense of the vast majority of people in the world. An ecological civilisation would look at things like the power of corporations or look at the ways in which technology develops and is used. Look at the ways we think about economics itself and look at different foundational structures for allowing that kind of flourishing.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:39:48] Hmm. And are you optimistic?

Jeremy Lent [00:39:51] Well, to me, it's not a matter of optimism or pessimism because in a way it's something that actually the author, Rebecca Solnit, said really well in a book she once wrote called like I think it was called A Light in the Darkness. Basically, if you're optimistic about where things are going, it's kind of an excuse for, "Oh, I don't really need to do much about it myself because somebody else will take care of it." And if you're pessimistic, similarly, it's kind of a cop-out like, "It's all going to go to hell. Nothing I can do." So, I mean, when I look at how things are unfolding, there is there's a lot of reasons

why we can feel very pessimistic about the likely trajectory of where we see things headed.

Jeremy Lent [00:40:34] But where I come at this whole question of optimism or pessimism is not even about and I have similar issues with the word hope itself, which there's a whole lot of controversy that arises. It's more like this recognition that each of us is part of creating that future and that actually what each of us does makes a difference. We don't know the difference it makes because one of the things that we find when we look at the complexity of our current society or the way it interacts with the rest of the living earth in all these things is that these multiple complex systems are very non-linear. And what nonlinear means is kind of a geeky word in a way which says you can't really know exactly where it's going to head. Something that seems very small can have a massive outside impact just because of the way it's there in the system that it catalyses a whole set of things that you wouldn't expect. So somebody like a gratitude bag can be sitting there for weeks on end like a young 15-year-old girl sitting all alone in front of the Swedish parliament. Nobody could have dreamed that that could catalyse this movement of millions of schoolchildren around the world inspired and taking action. These are the things that we can't know, which is why I can look at where I see things going. And oftentimes I feel a sense of despair in my heart. Absolutely. But I also feel more than anything that life is calling on each of us right now to take part in creating a flourishing future that as long as life exists, as long as we're all around, that is a possibility. And that's what if enough of us actually realise that that actually can have the most massive impact that none of us can even begin to even imagine?

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:42:26] Well, Jeremy, I think that's a great message for us to finish on. And I cannot recommend both your books more highly because they are so thought-provoking, so stimulating, so informative and transformative, I have to say. So thank you so much for joining me today.

Jeremy Lent [00:42:42] Thank you, Ron. It's been a pleasure talking with you today. Thank you.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:42:45] Thank you. Well, look, there is just so much in both of Jeremy's books. It is quite mind-boggling. Some of you know, what he draws together in terms of ancient wisdom and how this relates to our own journey through from hunter-gatherer times to the present day. I mean, there is so much in both of these books. But interestingly, he's also got an online programme which brings together concepts of both of these books, which are both absolute tomes and brilliant in their content. The course is an online programme called the Principles and Practise of Deep Transformation, laying the foundation for a New Regenerative World. And who doesn't want to be part of that? We will have links to that and to Jeremy's book and website, all of which has links to all of the things that he does. I hope you have this finds you well. Until next time. This is Dr Ron Ehrlich. Be well.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:43:48] This podcast provides general information and discussion about medicine, health and related subjects. The content is not intended and should not be construed as medical advice or as a substitute for care by a qualified medical practitioner. If you or any other person has a medical concern, he or she should consult with an appropriately qualified medical practitioner. Guests who speak in this podcast express their own opinions, experiences and conclusions.