

MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE EDUCATORS

PODCAST TRANSCRIPTION OF

TOBIN HART, PhD

with host

Ba Luvmour

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Meetings with Remarkable Educators

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Ba Luvmour: Welcome to Meetings with Remarkable Educators. Each podcast is a dialogue between me, Ba Luvmour, and an educator who sees the greatness in their students, and touches the whole of their being. These educators defy generalizations. So here is a bit about what they've done, and how I know them. Epistemology is the study of knowledge. It attempts to answer the question how do you know? Few people accept the challenge in that question, and fewer still apply in to nonsectarian spirituality. So Tobin Hart's in rare company, yet it gets rarer still for Tobin inquires into the epistemology of spirituality for education. To be clear, Tobin elucidates the way we can know spirituality, and how we can bring it forth in education. Tobin Hart serves as professor of psychology at the University of West Georgia. He is co-founder of the Child Spirit Institute, a nonprofit, educational and research hub exploring and nurturing the spirituality of children and adults. Find them at www.childspirit.net.

Ba Luvmour: His work explores human consciousness, especially at the nexus of psychology, spirituality, and education. His recent books include *The Four Virtues*, *The Integrative Mind: Transforming Education for a World on Fire*, *From Information to Transformation: Education for the Evolution of Consciousness*, *Transpersonal Knowing: Exploring the Horizons of Consciousness*, and a classic in our field, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*.

What do you mean by spirituality? It's not easy to define. You can't define it. That's its nature in my understanding. But you've really taken this profoundly into our holistic approach. And just anything you could tell us about that, I would really appreciate.

Tobin Hart, PhD: It's so tricky, isn't it? I mean, in a largely secular world to be able to talk about that. I think the thing though that is really common, and that folks can pretty easily get is that we have both moments, and feelings, and also values that are deeply meaningful. So universally, anything that's sort of deeply meaningful or stirring seems to go into that category of, "Okay, it tips the scales. It breaks the threshold that might be spiritual." And particularly when there's a spirituality that's really about things like authenticity, and individuality, and creative expression, and then there's a part of a spirituality that's also about interconnection, and receiving, and surrender and that kind of thing.

Tobin Hart, PhD: So for humans, I think that we've got this sort of dual two feed. One of them is in the world of the individual, and the other in this sort of transcendent realm, and how we bring those together is really the challenge. I think of what we might call embodied spirituality, or finding a way to be most fully human. I even think about the

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Greeks, they talked about the liberal arts, and the liberal arts were these various sort of capacities that were to be developed, and they were to be developed for the ... In order to engender our full humanity. They talk about *humanitas*. And the way that they found or articulated spirituality, I think, is that once you became most fully human, that was how the divine was manifest. Whether we think about it as coming into us, or us being it somehow, it can go both ways.

Ba Luvmour: So then you bring this forward to in your work. And how do you bring it forward? I mean, I understand what you're saying, I live it, I breathe it, it's so meaningful to me. How do you bring it forward though?

Tobin Hart, PhD: Part of my background is as a psychologist, and so for me, I see that things are always what I would call psycho-spiritual in terms of development, so very difficult to do something that's, let's say, spiritual whether it's transcendent, or immanent, without also recognizing what the psychological piece is. And often the question isn't, "Well, how do you become whatever in life?" Whatever, but it's instead, "What is it that's endarkening you?" So what are the things that are sort of in the way of our natural compassion, our natural flow of creativity, our love, and these kinds of things.

Tobin Hart, PhD: So that's one of the ways is not to talk about it as something that's sort of other or out there, but instead that's always bound to the psychological. And sometimes that's really practical. Who in your life is toxic? You got to deal with that in order to sort of be able to really flourish in the midst of this divine current. What parts of us are afraid? And can we go right into the center of that? And so historically, one of the places where folks have dealt with that is to talk about the soul so that the soul is this sort of a personalized packet of spirit... right? Or this-

Ba Luvmour: That's really a fun way to talk about it.

Tobin Hart, PhD: Well, you know it's something, right? So that's another route to say, "Okay, well what is it that really ... What is my soul calling for? What is this very down to earth-ness of the divine?" And so anyway, those are some ways.

Ba Luvmour: I share this with you very deeply in a less formal way perhaps. I've just if spirit is all in everything, which is the easiest way I can live with it, then the psyche's the meeting ground, right? And if the psyche's clear, you don't do anything about spirituality. Doing something about spirituality objectifies that. And I think that's a

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major confusion that people have with it because we live in an objectifying world all too often.

Tobin Hart, PhD: Yeah, that's a great way to say it. It's a current, not a commodity, right? And so how can you really tap that current, and feel the current inside? And one of the things for example, where did such a turn ... We had such a kind of ... In psychology they would talk about it as the cognitive revolution, and that rationality is supreme and so forth. And one of the things we've lost as we've become more independent, I think, of the earth, and able to overcome it in so many ways is our embeddedness and our embodiedness, and that part of what the turn to reclaim this is simply through the body.

Tobin Hart, PhD: So something as simple as really attuning our sensitivity to our own inner currents, and the things that are going on around us, and how we know, and listening to those voices inside, and listening to those sort of voices that speak in languages that we don't always acknowledge or honor. A good dream, right? Or, just that sort of itchy feeling, or that discomfort. And so anyway, part of the way back I think culturally and educationally is back into the body. Even in front edge cognitive psychology these days, or theories of cognition, they talk about *Four-E Cognition*. Embedded, embodied, enacted, and extended. So that what we know from a spiritual realm in terms of interdependency and interconnection, and the vitality and the emergent quality is now even making it into the main stream of how we talk about this.

Ba Luvmour: Well, then is that even cognitive psychology anymore? I mean, haven't they blown open their own boundaries?

Tobin Hart, PhD: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And of course this is the turn in the world these days, right? Where we know that we're at the edge of something. It's either a great abyss, or a little bridge made of straw that we're trying to climb cross.

Ba Luvmour: Or really a rope bridge in the abyss.

Tobin Hart, PhD: Yeah, exactly. With half of the planks off. So it's very tricky. So part of that turn folks have talked about, and in a lot of different ways, the rising of the divine feminine for example and so forth. But part of it is, I think, about how we know, and this knowing that we've been so dependent on has been categorical, Aristotelian, rational, linear, time dependent, past oriented in a lot of ways about history. To I think about therapy for example, it's all about the past rather than something that's more dynamic, more emergent, more embodied, more probabilistic as the quantum physicists talk about.

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Ba Luvmour: Yeah. Right. Yeah.

Tobin Hart, PhD: Yeah. So it's a reentry into mystery, but it's an entry into mystery with conscious awareness, to whatever extent we can be, rather than the kind of immersion that we had before where superstition ruled, and we couldn't sort of break out of it. That's why we can't go backwards, we have to bring what was the juicy part of pre-rationality forward into a kind of post-rationality where it is an integrative way of knowing I would say.

Ba Luvmour: I want to know about the connection with the students that you have. And you bring this forth in a very manageable way, I guess. Manageable is not a really good term these days. We left off, we're talking about an emergent paradigm, we can see a cross disciplinary. I think we can agree on that. I haven't had great success bringing that to people who have studied under me. What about you?

Tobin Hart, PhD: Specifically this shift in paradigm...?

Ba Luvmour: Yes, the shift in paradigm such that they can really live it in their practice, especially with children.

Tobin Hart, PhD: Yeah. Well again, I come back to this notion of psycho-spiritual that folks will come in with a particular kind of ... they'll come in with their own, sort of, history of both psychologically and spirituality, and their beliefs about spirituality, and what things are, but I think that the first thing is for them is simply to be honored where they are. And many times, I think folks that have felt sort of at the margins of the mainstream society feel like aliens. And I can't tell you the number of times literally, that I've had students say, "I have felt like an alien, and I feel like I've found the mother ship."

Tobin Hart, PhD: And in coming into our particular program, because I think there certainly are a lot of like-minded folks. I think they also are given the space to be able to voice what it is that is their thing. And once you feel heard, (whether it's an eight-year-old, or and 18-year-old, or and 80-year-old), once you feel heard, you don't have to fight for your position so much. You suddenly can, sort of, open to the possibility of dialogue rather than having to build this fortress around your idea and yourself.

Tobin Hart, PhD: And so for me, that came one time when my first graduate school class in a master's program, and my faculty member, my professor came ... rather I came to his office, sat down, talked about some half-baked idea I had, I sort of got started to stumble over myself, and instead of saying, "Yes, but ... " he said, "Well, yes. Now let me

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see if I understand." And he did a great job as nice a Rogerian trained therapist to hear me. And I said, "Well yes, that's what I mean. But ..." I butted myself. "But then it's this." He drew me out really nicely and honored it, and then what he did was to jump in with me and actually have a dialogue. And it was like a cork being taken out of a bottle that this life for me of having had these burning and stirring ideas bubbling and bubbling, but not really being able to sort of either get them out, or have them received well. He did that, and the rest of that time just felt like a flow to me.

Tobin Hart, PhD: I don't know how intentional or conscious it is, but it is intentional when I unpack the most basic thing of my pedagogy, and that is to really try to hear and meet folks where they are initially, and then they're willing to come on over and say, "Well, where are you?" Because you really don't want the student who is just going to interject whatever it is that the idea is in the book or your idea, you want them to be able to dialogue with it. And if you're not ... If you're too insecure, you're just going to interject it. Just swallow it whole. If you're too defended, you're not going to take anything in except as it supports your own argument. So firstly, it is that simply trying to meet folks. It's so simple, right?

Ba Luvmour: And just to be clear, you're dealing with undergraduates, graduate students?

Tobin Hart, PhD: Graduate, undergrad, master's, and doctoral students. But of course the same principle is true with Bowlby and Ainsworth Early Attachment Theory, right? So as soon as you're really bonded, when you really feel felt for example, all those psychological and neurological kind of things that help us feel grounded come to the fore. As soon as you feel heard, seen, felt, those kind of things, then you can be in the room.

Ba Luvmour: And then... are they in education, or psychology, or both?

Tobin Hart, PhD: Some of both. The students I work with are housed in a psychology department, although sometimes we get folks from across campus, and it isn't unusual for my folks to go on and do other work, or become faculty members in psychology, or to do work and become teachers in education, or to go into business, that kind of thing.

Ba Luvmour: It's teaching story time. Briefly, teaching stories invite us to see the world with a new perspective. Often featuring a wise person, a wise fool, or a trickster animal, they can be humorous and always have many shades of meaning shining throughout the story. Today, I'm going to tell two teaching stories. There are teaching stories that transcend culture that can be found in almost every culture in

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which teaching stories are in oral tradition. And even though these two stories may seem ... Well, you might question how do they go together? I invite you to listen to each of them, and then to think about how they may apply to education. The first story is called The Eagle.

Ba Luvmour: Once, a farmer found an abandoned eagle's nest, and in it, was an egg still warm. He took the egg back to his farm, and laid it in the nest of one of his hens. The egg hatched, and the baby eagle grew up along with the other chickens. It pecked about the farmyard, scrabbling for grain. It spent its life within the yard, and rarely looked up. When it was very old, one day it lifted up its head and saw above it a wonderful sight. An eagle soaring high above it in the sky. Looking at it, the old creature sighed and said to itself, "If only I'd been born and eagle."

Ba Luvmour: And the second story is called *Under the Lamp*. One evening the wise fool was walking along, and he saw his friend under a street lamp down on his hands and knees searching. And he went up to his friend and he said, "What are you looking for?" And the friend said, "I lost my key." And so the wise fool said, "Well, would you like some help trying to find it?" "Sure," said the friend. And so the wise fool got down on his hands and knees and searched and searched with his friend. And there was no key. And the wise fool said, "We can't find the key. Are you sure that you lost it here?" And his friend said, "Oh, no. I lost it up in that dark alley." "Well, why are we looking for it here," said the wise fool. "Well, this is where the streetlight is.

Ba Luvmour: Can you find meanings in this story about education? If so, send your insights to ba@luvmourconsulting.com. A three person panel will select the most relevant stories, and they will be read at the end of a subsequent podcast. Again, that's B-A-@-L-U-V-M-O-U-R-C-O-N-S-U-L-T-I-N-G.com. I look forward to your insights, and to learning from you. Those insights selected will receive a copy of the award-winning book so valuable for parents and educators. *Grow Together: Parenting as a Path to Well-Being, Wisdom, and Joy* by Dr. Josette Luvmour.

Yes, we have the same last name, and we are married, and we have been working together in holistic education for more than 30 years. But that's not the reason I offer this book. Check out her many accolades and the book reviews on our website luvmourconsulting.com.

You're here at a holistic education conference. How does that happen for you?

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Tobin Hart, PhD: Yeah, so that's a good question. I guess my interest, I was trained originally as a therapist. And so I'm really interested ... But therapy has its wonderful uses, and wonderful limits, and one of the measures of the limits for me is whenever anyone asks me for a recommendation for a therapist in my town, it's very difficult for me to come up with folks that I really deeply trust. And so therapy is very tricky a business. And education is equally tricky I think. So I'm interested in especially where education can be therapeutic, and where therapy can be educational. And so it's that nexus of therapy and education that I'm really, really intrigued with. And that's part of what holistic education does. It really embraces the whole person, and I think that includes some of those things that we deal with in therapy without it having to be therapy in many ways.

Ba Luvmour: So in other words, that's like what Roger's said when he said that teachers in the future will actually be counselors. He didn't use the term therapist, but would actually be counselors to students.

Tobin Hart, PhD: Absolutely. And of course this trend towards things like social emotional learning, which has really gotten lots of traction in North America and elsewhere I think, contemplative education, or contemplative teaching and learning, and of course, all the things that have been around. Holistic education, humanistic education, those kinds of things. Those are all about allowing the full human being in the room, and you can't do that without being a counselor of sorts, right? And again, I do think it comes back to really trying to be ... trying to see who this person is so that you can then mirror them so that they can see and honor who they are in many ways.

Ba Luvmour: Yeah, that's been the challenge I've had with educators because even today, almost all of them come through a teacher training program that doesn't do the greatness that you're referring to here. And so there's hearing them, and then there's the unlearning, and then there's the newness of what might occur. And it's overwhelming. I mean, even in the holistic education world, we have a hard time with getting really good teachers. By good, I don't mean good people. They're all good people. But good in the sense that they are going to take the time that you're suggesting to really know a child.

Tobin Hart, PhD: Absolutely. Well of course, there are two huge pieces to this at least, right? One of them is to what extent do we do our own work? To what extent do we know our-self, and really hear our-self deeply, and find our own voice, and our calling, and so forth? And of course, anybody who's going into teaching, this is almost anybody. This is a calling in some way. The trouble is that there often isn't enough space for them to really do a nice archeology of their own

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psyche, right? And then this development of real presence is so critical. I think it was Carl Jung who said, "We teach mostly who we are." And so it's your being in the room, your being-ness in the room that really is the primary factor. It doesn't matter what the curriculum is, it doesn't matter what else is going on, it's who you are in the room. And so that's so preeminent and of course, so often gets subsumed by demands of curriculum, and demands of-

Ba Luvmour: Oh, and parent's fear, and teacher's fear, and ... I know in our school kids have come up and said, "You're not like any other principal I ever met." I said, "It's because I'm not a principal. I'm just here with you." And the teachers as well; they expected me to come in with my little pad and mark them. Did they do this right, did they do that right? And I said, "You know whether you're doing it right. You don't need me to tell you that." But it's very hard, and really, it's really hard for them.

Tobin Hart, PhD: Well, and that's the other big issue, right? Is that the zeitgeist, the climate, the society, and the culture are so fixed in a particular way of being that it's so ... It's like trying to leave the gravitational pull of the sun. You can't do it without incredible support, and incredible integrity, and incredible sort of hand holds too.

Ba Luvmour: So do you feel that the students that you've dealt with that they would be able to do this?

Tobin Hart, PhD: Well, I think it varies from person to person, right? And it's developmental, and I think that I see a lot of our folks really being able to own their calling. And one of the things of course that you're supposed to develop in schooling at every level is their ability to articulate what is their ... What's going on the inside. So for them to be able to do this in writing, or do this in practice, or do this in speaking is really, really an important element. One of the ways I think about it I guess, is that what are the capacities needed for folks to be able to live in this world, and be a real change-agent, a spiritual change-agent?

Ba Luvmour: Well, wouldn't that cycle back to what you were saying earlier about the blocks, or the endarkment? Was that your cool term? Wouldn't that cycle right back there?

Tobin Hart, PhD: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Absolutely. Well, and for me, I've actually tried to ... We don't have to get into it, but I've tried to think, "Well, what are those capacities, and how might they be pieces that are even operationalized in some way?"

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- Ba Luvmour: I think about that all the time as well. I ask everybody. It's my one question, and nobody really knows. It's very hard to understand that. To me, and I guess one of the things I've come up with is can you participate in your own suffering, or do you objectify it? Did somebody do it to you? Now that's not to say that we all haven't been hurt in different ways by all sorts of authoritarian people and institutions because we certainly have been impacted by that. But do we take responsibility? "Okay, that happened to me. I'm in that right now. Who do I have to be in that?" Because at least just inside me, Tobin, it's open me to the suffering of all. And it's something I live with. And it's just well, that we've been impacted. There's this natural greatness, this spirituality, and we have been impacted. Okay, let's take it on like we take on going to the moon. Let's just take it on.
- Tobin Hart, PhD: Absolutely.
- Ba Luvmour: That's from me anyway.
- Tobin Hart, PhD: No, I absolutely ... In its most kind of distilled form for me, I think gee, all of the spiritual traditions talk about two things for sure. And one is love, or described as compassion, and the other is wisdom. And those are sort of the bookends. To those I like to think practically about two others, and those are presence and creation or creativity. And so for part of what you're describing, the capacity to be present to our suffering, present to another's suffering, and to be able to have compassion for ourselves in that way is part of ground out of which this incredible drive we have to be able to understand somebody else's, and then to do something about it in the world. And so those things, love and wisdom, presence and creation or creativity are for me just four points on the compass as we might find in indigenous traditions, right?
- Ba Luvmour: Thank you for that. And I've done a lot of internal and investigation into the nature of creativity. And one of the things I've noticed is that people often confuse talent with creativity. And of course if your talent somehow meets the current cultural expectations, then there's a reward for that. And then we get hooked into the reward, and we confuse talent with creativity. So I ask about that, but do you agree with that? Is that something that you see as well?
- Tobin Hart, PhD: Oh, sure. Absolutely. Yeah, yeah. So some wonderful things written about it, of course, over the years, I think we can take it in a bunch of different ways. So at a spiritual sense, when we actually look at folk's lived experience of creative inspiration or breakthrough, ah-ha moments, which often are the seed then out of which the great work comes, folks would translate that vision into something that

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they would need to revise, and revise, and revise, right? That the phenomenology of that, the lived experience, is often, "Oh my gosh it came to me. I had that breakthrough," right?

Tobin Hart, PhD: And very interesting for example, neurophenomenologically when folks have an ah-ha experience, they're often in this what's called theta band wave. So it's somewhere between four and eight hertz, cycles per second in the brain. And so it's fascinating to see something like our neural substrate of when creativity sort of, or at least insight comes to us. And that opens the possibility to saying, "Well boy, we can induce that to some extent. Or at least invite it." In that sense, we can't will creativity ever, but we can woo it in things like contemplative practice, and so forth actually lead us into an alpha state that can lead us into this threshold of theta.

Tobin Hart, PhD: And so that's one thing. Where does the vision come from? And often, it comes from that opening, it can also come from our deep suffering, and then the challenge is to say, "How do you bring that into form?" And that then is something else. That's an issue of sometimes developing capacities, developing voice, overcoming the fear of what this is going to look like, and being judged. And so I don't think of creativity as a pure product, I think of it as this sort of activity. Can you live a creative life? Can you think creatively beyond the habitual patterns that we have now? Yeah.

Ba Luvmour: Although we only have time for one more question, but it has still to do with creativity. For me, if I tried ... We talked about living presence, and then in that, I admit that I tried to listen to what's needed. And when I do that, it seems that creativity ... Or maybe as you said, maybe it's just the expression of the creativity. I'm not really sure because I'm just describing a process, but that kind of surrender to what's needed. And oftentimes, it's led me to very unusual activities, which I heretofore wouldn't have suspected, so I just want to hear what do you think of that?

Tobin Hart, PhD: Oh, absolutely. I think that ultimately, we're just trying to tap a current, and the current we're already in it. Huxley talked about the brain and the mind as a reducing valve, not a generator of consciousness, but a reducing valve. And so the challenges in many ways, what are the ways in which we can sort of crack open that aperture of consciousness so that we can be attuned to our own depths, we can be attuned to those in the world, we can be attuned to those in the classroom. And you know that magic sometimes when everybody gets in that current, or you get in the current and you do just as you said about that.

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Tobin Hart, PhD: And that is you speak what's needed, and you didn't even know where that came from. And the person says, "It's funny you should say that," and then often there's a synchronicity involved, right? So we're just ... I don't know. I think the Taoist had a big piece of this understood, right? And we're just trying to sort of find our way back to that current, and it runs through us. John Muir says, "The river the shines not on ... Or rather the sun shines not on us but in us, the river runs not past us but through us." And that's the place that we're looking for.

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This is Ba Luvmour reminding you that, holistic relationships with children leads to joy and self-knowledge with the adults in their lives. With respect for you, and for children everywhere, see you next time.

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