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Hello, and welcome. Before we dive into the heart of today's show, I have a quick favor to ask you. If you have a moment to leave a review on iTunes, it would mean so much to me, it helps get more ears on this podcast. And it's wonderful to have your feedback as well. If you leave a review before April 15, you'll be automatically entered into a giveaway to win an inner balance sensor from Heart Math Institute. Be sure to check the show notes for more information about this sensor and then also more details about the giveaway. All right, now let's get to the show.

In this episode, we're going to be talking about instant gratification versus enduring satisfaction. This was originally something that I talked about in a blog post in 2020. And it resonated with a lot of people. And so I figured it would be nice to also discuss it in a podcast format, and then also to add any additions that might have come up in the time since I wrote that blog post.

And now, the basic premise for this idea came to me as I was thinking about the fact that we all want to feel more joyful and more fulfilled. And yet fewer of us are classifying ourselves as happy these days than ever before. In this episode, we'll dive in and discuss what's called the dopamine driven feedback loop. And how quick thrills for instance, social media leave our hearts feeling empty and our minds in this constant search for more stimulation. And of course, we'll also discuss solutions to this because that's very important, right? You know, we don't want to just address the problem, we also want to take our understanding of why and be able to apply it to our lives in a way that leads to more fulfillment, more happiness, more joy.

I'd like to share this quote, to get us thinking. So this quote is from Doc Childre. He is actually one of the founders of the Heart Math Institute, which is the same institute that developed the sensor, that inner balance sensor that I talked about are mentioned in the giveaway. So here is the quote from Doc, happiness is a higher vibration that we often pursue from a lower vibrational attitude, and we can't quite catch it by the tail, then we try to fill the void with behaviors that spark moments of feeling good, but have a short and costly shelf life. That quote is so applicable to the conversation that we'll be having today. And it really gets at this predicament that we're in between our desires for happiness, and the means that we use to attempt to gain happiness and bring more joy into our lives.

The first thing we're going to look at is what I like to call the instant gratification loop. The instant gratification loop is predominantly driven by dopamine. If you're not familiar with dopamine, it was originally labeled the pleasure neurotransmitter. And it was always believed to be involved in the pleasure process in the brain, it's now better understood to be the neurotransmitter that's responsible for both desire and seeking. And so it plays into motivation, a lot, it really motivates us to want desire, seek and search dopamine release in the brain is both highly rewarding and incredibly fleeting, which is a tricky predicament that it puts us in. So it's both wonderful and problematic, if that makes sense, depending on how we're using it, or how we're stimulating its release.

To understand what dopamine is and how it functions, it's helpful to understand and recognize how we feel the effects of dopamine in our body. So what does dopamine really feel like, if you've ever noticed the physical sensation, or if you can just take a moment to think about this experience.

So think about the moment right before you're about to check email or social media, maybe you're just sitting down to settle into watch TV, and you're in your mind anticipating watching some juicy reality TV drama, or maybe you're about to go online shopping or shopping person, whatever it might be. Any of those instances are going to sort of set the stage for dopamine release. So as you imagine yourself in one of those scenarios, think about what that feels like. So there's often this sort of zing that you get or a rush of excitement and it's for me, I feel it in my belly. I think that's where a lot of us feel it. It's sort of this like butterfly sensation in the belly where it feels like a rush of excitement and anticipation. That feeling is a result of a dopamine surge in the brain. The odd thing about dopamine though, is that that high of excitement that we feel before we actually do that thing that we're anticipating is typically the peak of its release, and then it goes downhill from there.

So again, this is sort of this odd problematic predicament because we follow through on that behavior sort of expecting more, right, because that initial rush entices us to keep following through. And then that first Rush is actually the high of the peak. So no matter how long we scroll, or tune in, we never feel quite as satisfied, as we anticipated from that initial surge of dopamine, then whatever it is that we were feeling prior to getting that dopamine rush, whether maybe we were feeling apathetic or bored, sad, lonely, maybe we were happy to you can certainly be happy and seek out these instant gratification. Whatever it was, that was there returns to the surface once that dopamine has worn off and faded a bit. And herein lies the beginning of the dopamine driven feedback loop.

And so what happens in response to that low, we head back for yet another quick hitting high. And we end up getting caught in the

dopamine driven feedback loop through this process. So we seek stimuli, we feel a rush, we feel a crash, and then we seek more. So social media is particularly interesting. For this reason, because the cycle can repeat so many times within one session, there's always that hope that we'll find another high as we scroll. Of course, most of us are completely unaware that this self sustaining loop is unfolding within our brains. And so we just keep going back for more really, without questioning it. But we're kind of wondering, like, why does this this isn't really fulfilling, it might feel stimulating, but it's not a fulfilling cycle. And it's often very distracting from other more important activities and things that we really want to be doing.

Again, this is particularly true with social media because it was designed algorithmically to keep us locked in a cycle of cheap thrills and constant checking. And so we inevitably forget the letdown when the high is quick and guaranteed, we can almost always get some sort of dopamine hit from going into social media. With algorithms, we now have these personally tailored dopamine hits in which our feeds are designed to spike our dopamine in the most addictive and engaging ways to keep us coming back for more and more and more.

So maybe this doesn't sound all that bad to you. And it's like, okay, whatever, what's a little social media scrolling and a little like online shopping. Hi. But the thing about dopamine is that the more often the brain receives these shallow dopamine hits, the more often it craves them. And this is because prolonged increases in dopamine, or consistent hits and spikes and dopamine end up depleting the number of dopamine receptors in the brain. So this means that it takes more stimulation for us to end up feeling that same dopamine high, or that same pleasure from an experience.

What I find to be particularly troublesome about the dopamine driven feedback loop and its consequences is the fact that once we get to the point where these dopamine receptors are depleted, it becomes really difficult to carry out the tasks that are most important to our souls evolution, our purpose, and the things that we really want to do, and put out into this world. And this is because those things, and those activities and tasks aren't typically very shiny on the outside, they tend to be a bit more dull and boring as you first get into them. But then, as you know, as I'm sure we've all experienced when we get into the process of deep creation and flow, that state is highly enjoyable. It's incredibly fulfilling, and it's very rewarding. But if we're always seeking these constant, instant gratifications and cheap thrills, we're never allowing ourselves to take the chance on feeling a little bit bored, so that we can get into the state of flow and bring forth our creations and our purpose into the world.

This is not to shame instant gratifications, they are certainly fine and small doses. It's really just when we start to build our life around these cheap thrills, that they become problematic, and they

inhibit our ability to do more meaningful things with our lives. The problem is that our time is a precious non renewable resource. And when we're constantly turning towards these fleeting gratifications too often, or when they're distracting us from focusing on the things that bring us true fulfillment, we're left feeling rather joyless and depleted.

This always brings to mind have this concept of the dark playground if you're familiar with Tim urban from Wait, but why he has an amazing he actually has a TED talk on procrastination, but he also has a very long form blog post on it as well. And his description of the dark playground is hilariously accurate and true. It's one of those things you got it and you're like, oh my gosh, it's kind of a kick in the butt and like the most loving, hilarious way. So he describes the dark playground as a place where leisure activities happen at times when they should not be happening. So let's say we're working, and then we're like, Hmm, you know, maybe I should hop over to Twitter and give it a scroll. Or maybe I should go shop for this online or whatever it might be. So because we're doing these things, when we're not supposed to be doing them, and without really sort of earning them in our mind, and not that I feel these things should always be earned. But our mind just inherently wants to earn things in order for them to feel good and truly rewarding. So because of this, the fun that we have in the dark playground isn't actually fun, because the air is filled with guilt and anxiety and doubt. And so we find ourselves swirling in this sort of sea of completely unsatisfying, and yet very addictive dopamine spikes, while we're also avoiding the less overtly stimulating, but far more meaningful endeavors and creative outlets that lead to enduring satisfaction.

So this problem is really multifaceted. When you look at it, at first, you're like, Okay, it's the dopamine driven feedback loop, it seems fairly simple and even a bit harmless at first blush. But as you really get into it, and you start to uncover the way that it impacts our ability to carry out our mission or purpose, whatever you want to call it, or even just the things that really do bring us joy, like being with our family, being with our friends being present in the moment, this is the true problem that underlies this cycle is that it takes us It not only puts us on this roller coaster of highs and lows that are unpredictable, unsustainable, and not at all gratifying in any sort of enduring way. It also robs us of the ability to engage with the things that mean the most to us and would actually bring us joy.

I do want to note again, that there's absolutely nothing wrong with rewarding yourself with instant gratification. I am not trying to put those in like a bad category in any way. I certainly enjoy my time scrolling, online shopping, whatever it might be. It's only when we build our days around these things that they become problematic, and they pose as barriers to lasting fulfillment. So it's when we fall

into this instant gratification loop day after day, week, after week, month after month that we end up feeling fairly lousy, and maybe even a little bit lost, we can end up sort of lost in this like swirling sea of of highs and lows, it is totally okay to feel lost. I said this in my blog post. And I will say it again, I have been lost many times before. And it's through losing ourselves that we find ourselves in deeper and more meaningful ways. So it's really just a matter of recognizing when you're feeling lost to this cycle and taking steps to rectify it.

One way to break this cycle is to essentially say no to confetti. Confetti is fine, right? So as glitter, I mean for about a minute, and then you're left to contend with this massive mess, it's left behind, and you have to pick up all the pieces. So these dopamine spiking instant gratifications are essentially confetti. They're fun for a short while, but the excitement burns out fast. And then we're left to contend with that same empty hall or empty feeling that we'd hoped to fill in in the first place. The moral of the story here is that building our lives around confetti is merely a colorful route to disappointment.

We've all heard the phrase Slow and steady wins the race. And the same is true here. So when it comes to our energy, and our well being that high vibe, and during joy that we're really seeking isn't found when we follow this up and down roller coaster of instant gratification, we're just chasing dopamine by its tail. Essentially, it's found when we reach for the small, good for us habits day after day. The tricky part is that these habits are not necessarily very enticing at the start. So they tend to be a bit more boring, or at least when we first get going with them. And so the brain will try and trick us into those shiny or objects on the side, the social media, the shopping, the reality TV, whatever it might be, it glimmers and dazzles them in front of us and tries to get us to move in their direction versus staying the steady course on this rather boring path at the beginning. But I promise you and you know this well being and fulfillment are rewards of the long game. So that long game does not shine or shimmer, right? It's not over there yelling for us. It's not calling our name or screaming out to us. It's really this whisper that draws us in. But we have to still ourselves and quiet ourselves long enough to hear the Whisper. Right. And if we're always seeking those instant gratifications, we'll never hear it because we're not building enough space. We're creating enough space in our mind to hear what's really calling us forward at the level of the Soul.

It's this idea of creating space to create a life We love and so we can find the hearts gentle directives by taking intentional action instead of allowing ourselves to be sort of yanked back and forth by the pull of the minds instantaneous desires. The tricky part about this inner stillness and this sort of slow path to joy is that that boredom that we feel at the gecko is often enough to scare most of us

away. I mean, boredom seems somewhat innocent, right? It's, it doesn't really seem like that scary of an emotion. But so many of us are scared of boredom. And that is completely normal. I just think that we don't often acknowledge how scary an emotion boredom is. And because we don't acknowledge it, we don't realize how often we try and avoid it. And in avoiding it, we end up taking these detours when we're trying to do something that would really bring us a lot more meaning had we just stayed with the boredom and sat with it rather than trying to run away from it. And this is because it's easier to allow the brain to hop from one mode of instant gratification to the next than it is to just sit with that uncharted terrain of our own boredom, because we don't know what we're going to find in there. Is there something else in boredom? Is there fear? Is there anxiety? Is there worry? What might we find in that stillness, and that sort of edgy feeling that we get when we're bored. It's that sort of knowing discomfort that isn't overtly uncomfortable, but it urges us to distract.

When I'm feeling caught in one of these cycles. One of my favorite methods to work my way out of it is to find what feels good on the flip side.

So there's a really easy way to differentiate between instant gratification and adoring satisfactions. Instant gratification reward us at the outset or the beginning. Again, they are those shiny, shimmery objects or tasks. So those feel good vibes hit hard, and they fade fast. And then they leave behind this residue of guilt and a thirst for more right?

Enduring satisfactions, on the other hand, reward us on the flip side. So at the outset, they're not immediately enticing. And yet, as we continue to engage in them, they build this steady sense of fulfillment that endures over time, not only does it endure over time, but it also lasts beyond the activities that support it, if that makes sense. So let's say we engage in a state or we find ourselves in a really amazing state of flow with work. And we're really doing something that we love we're creating, we just feel so aligned with the work and the purpose that we're bringing forth. When we stop that work, we continue to sense that fulfillment, even after we're not actively engaged with it.

If you find yourself in a particularly sticky or enduring dopamine seeking cycle, you can take measures a step further, and you can engage in what's called dopamine reset days. So the premise behind dopamine reset days is to completely remove all stimulation or external stimulation, so that your brain has a chance to reset and replete these dopamine receptors. In very simple terms, you're just going to allow yourself to be incredibly bored for a day or even a handful of hours like you, it doesn't have to be a full day that you commit to there. Some people go longer, you might do a dopamine reset

week and have certain things that are off limits. A full day is ideal, but even just a few hours can be extremely effective and beneficial to this.

So the rules of a dopamine reset day are to essentially put down your phone, close your laptop, shut off the TV. So this means avoiding all social media apps, television news, recreational drugs, alcohol, if it's capable of stimulating or numbing you, then it is off limits. What do you do instead? Right, so it's like I've removed everything. Now what do I do, instead of you're going to use the day to engage in more restorative practices. So things like meditation, breath, work, cooking, cleaning, organizing, getting out in nature, watching paint dry, totally kidding. But also not I mean, that would be a really great dopamine reset, let's be honest. Or you can simply just be present with yourself, your friends, your family, your loved ones, whoever it might be.

So while the day itself might feel a little bit dull and boring, this is a promising sign that it will yield the desired effect. So you want to feel bored. And this is actually a wonderful thing. So the entire point of a dopamine reset day is to feel bored, and to do absolutely nothing at all about that boredom. Don't seek to fill in the space where boredom resides. It's okay to be bored. Let it be and in doing nothing your brains dopamine receptors will begin to rebuild and regenerate.

You can do this once a week, once a month, once a year. Whatever serves you best only you can determine what is the appropriate amount of dopamine reset for you.

If you find that a whole day or even a few consecutive hours just does not work with your career or profession or just your personality. That's understandable. So another way to incorporate some level of dopamine reset is to be very intentional about your mission. And to make a hard rule about no checking your phone before a certain time in the day. So when we allow ourselves to check our phone and receive all these external inputs first thing in the morning, we're really allowing these external sources to dictate our internal emotions. And that can take us on a whole ride. So beyond the dopamine cycle that ensues because of that, we're also really outsourcing our emotions to the hands of others, and to the events that occur around us. And that can be a really disempowering way to start our day.

A principle that I find applicable here and is so important in other situations, too, is that what we say no to is often even more powerful than what we say yes to so saying no to certain things in the morning, if they're not supporting your emotional well being, or your livelihood or your joy. Those are important things to say no to, don't be afraid to shut it off and let it be.

Keeping all of this in mind start to think about the actions, habits and endeavors that ultimately feel the most satisfying on the flip side for you. Yet, these are the things that you also resist at the starting gate because they're less appealing than these other more sparkly glimmery activities or endeavors. So whatever comes to mind for you, those are your building blocks to enduring satisfaction. And going back to the previous episode, where we talked about fear. Oftentimes, our building blocks to enduring satisfaction are not only boring, but they also scare us a bit sort of combining these two efforts, we really start to piece together a better roadmap for finding our purpose, our fulfillment and our joy in life.

Thank you so much for listening. Your time is precious. And as always, I'm so grateful that you've chosen to spend some of yours with me today.

In the next episode, we're talking all about the ego, a sort of ego 101, if you will, what it is, what it isn't, and all things in between. If you're interested in that topic, be sure to give it a listen. And if you've enjoyed what you've heard today, remember to subscribe to the soul horizon on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, wherever you enjoy listening, read and learn more and Ashley melillo.com Or follow along on Instagram. Thanks for being here. Sweet soul