



## **EUDAEMONIA** **Reflection, with Michael Radparvar**

December 2, 2020

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Kim Forrester 0:00

As we head towards the end of 2020, our attention naturally shifts to the future and our hopes for what next year will bring. But as we end the year, it's also a powerful time to mindfully explore, acknowledge and learn from all that we have experienced. You're listening to the Eudaemonia podcast. I'm Kim Forrester, and today it's time to celebrate the value of self reflection.

Intro 0:28

Welcome to Eudaemonia, the podcast that is all about flourishing. Plug in, relax, and get ready for the goodness as we explore the traits and practices that can help you thrive in life ... with your host Kim Forrester.

Kim Forrester 0:48

Michael Radparvar is co-founder of Holstee, a lifestyle company helping conscious people to live a more meaningful life. Together with his brother, David, and inspired by the science of mindfulness, positive psychology, and ancient philosophy, Michael has created a range of well-being enhancing tools and resources, including reflection cards, the Greater Good Toolkit, and the newly launched Reflection app. I'm delighted to be chatting with Michael today to learn about the importance of mindful self-inquisition, and to discuss why journaling and reflection are vital ingredients in a flourishing life. Michael Radparvar, welcome to the Eudaemonia podcast. It's such a delight to have you here finishing off 2020 with me.

Michael Radparvar 1:34

Thank you, it is my pleasure to be here. And I had the chance to listen to a number of your previous guests and I feel grateful and honoured to be in the company of such incredible thinkers. So thank you for having me.

Kim Forrester 1:47

I'm honoured with the guests that I've had in the past. And I'm equally as honoured to have you here today. Michael, when we consider that word 'reflection' there's an obvious connection to a sense of seeing ourselves. Right? Or looking back at ourselves, viewing ourselves from another perspective. How do you define the practice of reflection?

Michael Radparvar 2:10

So, this will get into a little bit of semantics, so allow me just to indulge for a second. It's helpful to look at different forms of writing or journaling. And so if you think about three different types that we're all probably familiar with, in terms of the words 'writing in a diary', 'keeping a journal', and 'doing a reflection practice'- with reflection being probably the least common word used in these

scenarios. There's some slight distinctions that I think are helpful to kind of, like, put out there. A diary is technically a recording of your day's events - I went to a yoga class, I had a coffee, I met up with a friend. Whereas you can imagine journaling is a diary, but adding a layer of your thoughts and your emotional states. When I went to yoga class, I felt great, my stress melted away. And so then a reflection practice can include a diary, can include journaling, but adds the additional layer of looking back at those events - looking back at your thoughts and the emotional states - and learning from them. And in trying to find meaning from those experiences.

Kim Forrester 3:15

Oh wow. So it takes it that one step further. I guess the first question is, though, Michael, we have a million things that go on in our day, every day. We have a million thoughts, and a million actions, and a million choices. How do we choose what is most important, or what is most impactful for us to reflect on, for us to learn from?

Michael Radparvar 3:39

You know, there's a lot of schools of thought on this. And for me, personally, I believe it's important to just let your mind go and explore, especially when you're just writing for the first time. There's an author, a writer who wrote for the New York Times, by the name of Hayley Phelan, and she had this great quote that says, "The mind is a surprising place. You don't know what it may be hiding until you start knocking around in there." And I really subscribe to that. And it kind of is along the similar lines of Julia Cameron's Morning Pages where she just says, "Let it all out. Let the mundane things out; the trivial things out." And then, when you come back to reflect, you start to pull out meaning from your writing. And so I think the initial process is important to keep a very wide funnel and then you can go back and piece, and pull out, the things that are really important for you. And for us, we found that typically, most entries or posts typically fall into six categories - mind, body, soul, work, play, and love.

Kim Forrester 4:36

I read a quote the other day about writing in general and it was "write drunk, edit sober".

Michael Radparvar 4:42

That's exactly what ... that's our philosophy, one hundred percent, is to use your entries as a space to just let everything that's in your mind - with the thoughts that are circulating - to let them out. And allow yourself to come back and reflect on those entries in a way that has a little bit of structure, a little bit of framework, and allows you to really pull meaning out of it.

Kim Forrester 5:01

Beautiful. The alternative quote was "write like a dog, edit like a cat". So Michael, it seems to me that reflection is not the end game. Right? That the point is not to reflect for the sake of reflection, but there's a means to an end. What is the purpose of reflection? How can it enhance our experience of life?

Michael Radparvar 5:23

So what is the purpose of reflection? I don't believe that it's a cure-all for all of our issues. But I do believe that it's an incredibly powerful tool, and one that is available to everyone. It allows us to see the forest for the trees, to use a very common cliché. When we're writing and we're in the weeds, it's hard to see the bigger picture sometimes. But that process is so important. It's so important to acknowledge the thoughts and feelings that are going on in our mind, and around our lives, and to acknowledge those experiences. But when you have the opportunity to come back and look at what you wrote, the powerful thing is that we start to see patterns and we start to understand what are the behaviours that are really bringing us joy? And what are the common issues that we're running into, or setbacks or challenges that we might want to start figuring out how better to deal with them? And the thing that that really strikes me is, that it helps us to shift our experiences from, like, a first-person "I" lens to a third-person "it", and we can then become the observer, have these experiences, and kind of understand them in a more detached way.

Kim Forrester 6:37

You encourage us to reflect on the lowlights of our life as well as the highlights. How do we reflect on the lowlights of our lives in a really healthy and helpful way? We all have a negativity bias, and we all can tend to ruminate and get stuck in this sense of turmoil and and negativity. So how do we reflect on these lowlights without falling into rumination or self-recrimination?

Michael Radparvar 7:04

I am so glad you asked this, because I think this is one of the really big things that comes up in the space of journaling or just dealing with challenging thoughts that continuously kind of, like, come around and stick around in a rather unwelcome way. And so I think, first, it's important to distinguish between rumination from productive processing. Because there is one side of the coin that says, like, "Okay, well, this is something that is obviously on my mind. Allow me to think about ways to address this issue." But rumination, you know, you're ruminating when you're thinking about something for a very long period of time, and it just doesn't generate any new way of thinking, or a new possibility, or a new direction for you to take. And there's a growing amount of research that shows that journaling can help to tame those types of obsessive thinking that causes those negative behaviours; that, like, seemingly endless cycle of thinking about a negative experience. At the end of the day, those negative thoughts, they really just want to be heard and acknowledged. And what a journal does is allows you to do that; allows you to put them down on paper and get them out of your mind. And I believe that when we are able to create a little bit of space from that process of journaling, and come back to an entry, we're able to see it through a more objective lens, and it kind of puts an end to that rumination to some degree.

Kim Forrester 8:37

Now, to help facilitate this process of self reflection, you actually offer some really deep questions to ponder. You have all sorts of wonderful resources, including the Reflection Cards and your Reflection app. Not everyone, Michael, is a natural deep-thinker. Now I can self-reflect to the depths of my soul. "Take me deeper!" I really enjoy that. But it can be really uncomfortable, or frightening, for some people to, sort of, delve that deeply into their psyche. What's your advice for people who are hesitant to delve inside that deeply? Is self reflection a practice that perhaps you can ease yourself into?

Michael Radparvar 9:19

My personal take on this is, if you come across a question and you feel resistance to that question, it's probably a great question to attempt to answer. And I think that it's important to do it in a way where it's a secure and safe environment - whether you're answering that question with a group of people, a group that you really trust - that is a prerequisite for being able to tackle those types of questions. Or if it's in a journal, to know that ... to not have to worry, like, "Is someone else gonna see or come across this?" Because when you do that you you start to give yourself the permission and capability to really open up.

Kim Forrester 9:56

So earlier on we were talking about lowlights and, as I was researching for this interview, one of the interesting things I found was how often you encourage people to reflect on death. So you have a couple of questions, for instance, in your Reflection Cards that ask us to reflect on how we would feel about life if we were aware of when we were going to die. That can feel really uncomfortable, Michael. But do you think it actually helps us live if we reflect on what death means to us?

Michael Radparvar 10:31

Yeah, there's definitely some different schools of thought on this. And we can go back to the Stoics, who had a phrase "memento mori", which is essentially remembering that death is around the corner and that could impact your life in many different ways. Whether you're a revered general in the army and you've just come back victoriously - to not get overly arrogant, but also to remember to live each day like it's your last. And I think, what happens when we reflect on the end of our life, it makes us really grateful for the present moment. And one of the first things that we wrote as our company, at Holstee, was a definition for success in non-financial terms. And in this manifesto, we wrote down that life is short and that coming to grips with that allows us to live life more fully. You know, what we often hear is that near-death experiences are known to help people make these profoundly positive changes in their lives. And these are changes that they knew existed, but were maybe buried under more urgent things. And not all of us are lucky enough to have this type of near death ... "lucky", in quotes, to have such a near death experience. Though, at least, we can simulate it by putting that question in a very real way and seeing what that does for us and how that might alter our outlook.

Kim Forrester 11:53

Obviously, Michael, there is a huge benefit in self reflection. Is it equally as helpful to try and reflect on others actions, on others behaviours, or others perceived intentions?

Michael Radparvar 12:07

I believe so. I think that, you know, going back to what I mentioned earlier about how the journal should be your space to just put down everything that's on your mind. Just, don't put up any guardrails. I think that's so important for getting beneath the surface-level thoughts and getting deeper, to start identifying ideas and thoughts and feelings that you didn't know were there, or that are hard to feel at a surface level. And so by doing that, by allowing yourself to write about other people's actions, behaviours and intentions, it's not necessarily because you want to change who they are or are trying to take control of things that are not within our control. It's just the power of acknowledging that that is something that's on your mind. And then you can go back and identify

like, what are the things here that you really want to focus on, or that you can find meaning in, or that can help you personally grow? A great litmus test for how to conduct your reflection, specifically speaking to lowlights, is to ask yourself first, you know, "Is this within my control?" And if yes, then, "What can I do differently?" And if it's not within your control, then how do you find peace with it?

Kim Forrester 13:22

That is so cool. And I think, too, that many of us can go through life believing that somehow we can control other people's choices and behaviours and intentions. And so a bit of self reflection, particularly around that question, I think would go an awful long way to alleviating a lot of the unnecessary stress in our lives. Sort of bringing us back to what we're in charge of, and how we can maintain our own well-being. You keep mentioning this personal journaling, and the written reflection is obviously deeply important to you and to the work that you share. Is there also value in reflecting verbally and collectively, Michael? Is it equally as important to sort of have a conversation with trusted friends or loved ones? And at the moment, I think it's important to ask, is it important and valuable for us as a society to get together and start reflecting?

Michael Radparvar 14:19

So, I don't believe that there's necessarily one that's better than the other in this scenario. Just like there's no diet that's best for everybody. I think that for some people, taking the opportunity to write down their thoughts first helps to clarify what you're thinking - especially if it's very emotionally charged - and then using that process to help address that issue with someone else. But there's other people who are just very drawn to verbally expressing themselves and that helps to clarify their thoughts. So, in my personal experience, I have found that it's helpful to first write down what I'm thinking and then approach it in conversation with others. But I'm sure there are others that find the process of having a conversation with trusted friends or loved ones is a great first step. So I'm not sure that there's a best way forward there, though I will say there's a quote by Anne Frank that always kind of stuck with me. Anne Frank was a very famous journaler, obviously, and she said that "paper has more patience than people". And I thought that to be a very insightful way to think about journaling.

Kim Forrester 15:25

We've spoken about, you know, the dangers of rumination. Are there any other pitfalls that we should look out for when we're practising reflection? Are there unhealthy behaviours or bad habits that will actually undermine our sense of happiness, fulfilment well being?

Michael Radparvar 15:43

I think that when we put pressure on the outcome of journaling, that can be a pitfall; expecting some beautiful prose or a brilliant idea to come out, just because you sat down to journal. I think that does happen and it happens often. Great ideas tend to come out when you just let your stream of conscious go, and write, or when you start writing about a topic it usually leads to another area, and that starts connecting dots. But I don't think it's fair to expect that to happen every time that you write; that you sit down and journal. And I do believe that, you know, the most important part of journaling is to simply do it; to just sit down and write down something each day. And in that helps to open the floodgates over time.

Kim Forrester 16:26

Reflection is obviously a lot about, not just expressing and acknowledging what's on the inside, but asking questions about that. Asking questions about what's going on in our life, the way that we've reacted to those situations. And it made me wonder, how important is curiosity in the practice of self reflection? And are there other traits like determination or discipline that can help us develop a really healthy and effective reflection practice?

Michael Radparvar 16:56

I would say that from the get-go, this practice overall requires a lot of determination. I think that's kind of a requirement for building a consistent reflection practice. The notion of putting what's in your head onto paper or into a journal is simple, but that doesn't mean that it's easy. However, I will say that curiosity, self compassion, playfulness, are all things that are nurtured through the practice of journaling, or reflection. And just the realisation that there are many layers to our thinking, and that the more you allow yourself to kind of poke around in your mind, the more you'll see how there are layers that we don't even know exist within our own mind.

Kim Forrester 17:42

Interesting, there, that you say determination for you is paramount. What is that determination anchored into? What does it look like? Is it that we ought to be determined to express ourselves? Or is it that we are determined to heal? Or is it that we are determined to grow? What does that determination look like?

Michael Radparvar 18:04

I think that for when I was saying determination, I really meant the simple act of writing; making a consistent practice. And it's just it's something that I've found even personally, as I want to establish my own journaling and reflection practice, I have realised that being able to crack that part opens up everything else. If I can make sure that it's a consistent practice, that makes the whole process so much more fluid and possible. You know, they say that people focus on the areas that they really want to improve themselves. And I have many friends, and I've known many people, who they seem to be just, like, naturals at reflection and coming back and, like, on a monthly basis, reviewing their month or an annual basis. And that, for me, was never a very natural thing to do. And I as I talked to many people, I realised that my feeling was not an outlier, but it's a common trait. And those people who seem naturally inclined to reflect, they seem to be the outlier. So that's good news for those of us who find it difficult to find the time every day to journal and reflect. But it's definitely one of those things, that it's a habit that can be nurtured and become a practice I think for anyone.

Kim Forrester 19:21

I'm actually sitting here nodding vigorously. I'm going "It doesn't matter how committed I am at the beginning of a practice, you know, I always hit that wall. I always find that difficult to, sort of, continue on beyond those first days, weeks, months." So it's great to hear that I'm not alone in that. Let's go back to talking about your personal reflection practice. The Eudaemonia podcast is all about flourishing. What is your personal reflection look like and how has it helped you flourish in life?

Michael Radparvar 19:55

So my personal reflection practice basically follows the structure of what we've created, which is at Reflection.app. And essentially, all the entries or journal entries that I create are split into three buckets. It's ... we have ... I'll either write a highlight, which is essentially like a gratitude journal, or a post that describes something that I'm grateful for, or I'm happy, or that brought me joy. Then I also have lowlights, which are any of the setbacks that I've had, a challenge, or something that I'm currently working through. And then everything else falls into a free write. My goal is to every day, write something, whatever it might be. And usually, you know, hopefully, and usually it's like mostly highlights with a lot of free write sprinkled in, and the occasional lowlight. And then what I like to do is, I like to give it a little bit of time from when I write those posts to when I come back, just to give just a little bit of space. And this is my own personal practice. Other people may like to come back to those posts sooner. But usually around the end of the month, I'll come back to all those posts and I'll look at the highlights, and I'll say, "Okay, well, what are the patterns here? Who were the people that I was with? What are the things that I was doing that really made me happy?" And I'll summarise those. And then I'll look at the lowlights. And I'll ask myself two questions. And the first one is "Was this within my control?" And if I say yes, the next question is, "Well, what is the lesson or takeaway that I have here?" Like, what will I do the next time I experienced one of these situations, and I'll I'll draft that. And if it's not within my control, then the only real option I have is to identify how I'll find peace with it. And that practice, over time, has allowed me to identify very clearly what are the things that bring me joy. And over time, it's given me the ability to have a list of lessons, basically, life lessons that I've experienced, and I can refer back to. And the beauty of what we're building in the Reflection app is that it helps to automate that process to some degree, in that it just resurfaces your highlights and your lowlights in a way that makes it very easy to address them on a monthly basis. And then at the end of the year, because you've already done these monthly reviews, it makes doing an annual reflection practice much easier. And anyone who's ever tried to do an annual review without having these kind of monthly reviews along the way knows how difficult it is to remember at the end of the year, what you did in September, or even in May, or at any point in the past year. So that has been the process that I've used personally. And it's what we've kind of built this whole ecosystem around in terms of what we've been creating to address something that we saw as a challenge in our own personal lives; in terms of wanting to have a reflection practice, but not being able to have the structure or framework that made it possible for us.

Kim Forrester 22:56

I'd really love to know how this reflection practice - that sounds so simple and so powerful, Michael - how has it helped you? And I'm going to frame it in this way. 2020 has been a shocking year for just about every human on the planet. Do you feel that your daily practice, your monthly reflection, do you feel that that has helped you through the challenges of the last 12 months?

Michael Radparvar 23:23

Oh my god, yes. Literally, this tool just came out this year - the web app earlier in the year and it became available on Android and iOS over the summer. And the timing was literally perfect for me and many people in our community. Because it's been a very challenging year. But there's also been these slivers of wonderfulness that we've all experienced in different ways, and it's just easy to lose sight of those things. And so for me personally, having this practice in this past year has allowed me to find the gratitude in a lot of the things that I've overlooked in the past. And it's allowed me to work through some very heavy challenges that I probably would have ended up, you know, going back to ruminating on; that I would have just like allowed to circle in my mind for longer than they needed to be there. But by acknowledging them and addressing them and learning how to let

go to some of those issues, I just know that there's nothing I can do about it. I mean, I'm not going to allow it to dictate my behaviour or my emotions. And that has been a hard journey, but it's been a really powerful one.

Kim Forrester 24:40

That sounds amazing. Michael, my final question is one that I ask every guest on the Eudaemonia podcast. Obviously you offer a huge range of tools that can help my listeners learn to reflect in really beneficial ways. But other than download the app, what's one simple exercise, mantra, affirmation that can help my listeners integrate healthy reflection into their daily lives?

Michael Radparvar 25:07

I would say, don't worry about how you write or where you write, but just allow it ... and how much you write ... but just allow yourself to write at least one sentence every day, and see how it feels at the end of the month. And I think that reducing those barriers - you don't need a fancy notebook. I mean I'm partial to the app we created, but you don't need a fancy app. I think that just the act of doing it, and writing down one sentence every day is enough to see an impact. And by keeping the barrier low, it just makes it so much more possible to do. And what I believe many people will find is that you write that first sentence, and just the act of writing that first sentence makes the second sentence so much easier to write, and so on and so forth. So it's just breaking the barrier everyday of writing that first sentence.

Kim Forrester 26:00

That's really cool. Very early on in the interview you were saying how a lot of those thoughts just want to be acknowledged. Right? They just want to be seen. And so you're saying write the first sentence and see what comes.

Michael Radparvar 26:09

Mm hmm.

Kim Forrester 26:10

Incredible app, Reflection.app. You've also got Reflection Cards and all sorts of resources, a community. Michael Radparvar, where can people find out more about you?

Michael Radparvar 26:20

I'm personally active on Twitter @michaelrad. But you can learn more about the work that we're doing at Holstee, that is the company that created the Reflection app, and that's @holstee.

Kim Forrester 26:35

That is awesome. And that's with your brother David. So it sounds like a wonderful resource for anyone who really wants to, not just sort of live life or think about life or react to life, but actually learn and grow and understand more deeply what life is all about. Michael Radparvar, it's been a



delight having you here on the final Eudaemonia podcast for 2020. Thank you so much for sharing your time and your wisdom with me today.

Michael Radparvar 27:01

It's my greatest honour. Thank you so much.

Kim Forrester 27:04

As the American businessman Peter Drucker once remarked, "Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action." You've been listening to the final Eudaemonia podcast for the year. If you'd like to learn more about how to live a truly flourishing life, please subscribe, check out [www.eudaemoniapod.com](http://www.eudaemoniapod.com) for more inspiring episodes, and follow me on Instagram, @iamkimforrester. I'm Kim Forrester, and that's a wrap for 2020. As we prepare to step into a new year, remember to be well, be kind to yourself and take a moment to reflect on just how far you've come.