

Root Causes of Sugar Addiction with Charles Eisenstein – Insatiable Season 11, Episode 1

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:08] AS: When you're fed up with fighting food and your body, join us here. I'm Ali Shapiro, creator of the Truce with Food Program and your host for Insatiable, where explore the hidden aspects of fighting our food, our weight and our bodies and dive deep into nutrition science and true whole health. Fair warning; this is not your parent's healthcare. This is a big rebel yell to those who crave meaning, hunger for truth and whose lust for life is truly insatiable. Believe me, freedom awaits.

Had you ever had a colleague, a family member or friend who smoked and was agitated close to their smoke break or if they otherwise couldn't grab a cigarette, or you may know someone who struggles with alcohol and has trouble resisting a or many drinks. Perhaps you have similar feelings, but they're directed towards cookies, chips other kind of carbs. We have labeled the staples of the American diet as an addictive substance for many reasons. On one hand, our agricultural policy in food production that revolves genetically altered crops that produce cheap carbohydrates represents a bigger lobby and more electoral laws than tobacco whose powerful lobby allowed cigarettes to be marketed as a healthy way to relax and safe for years including by doctors, despite widespread evidence to the contrary.

In addition to not being regulated, the sugar industry gets an estimated \$4 billion in annual subsidies courtesy of US taxpayers. On the hand, lobbies and food politics aside, food addiction and consequences require a more nuanced approach than abstinence as possible for cigarettes and alcohol. We die if we avoid food completely, and food is much more fundamentally woven



into our culture in earliest memories than alcohol or cigarettes, which in all cultures are generally adulthood indulgences.

Do you remember summers at the pool with Swedish fish, or warm, salty soft pretzels from the snack shack, or holidays with grandma's amazing mac and cheese, or dad's famous mash potatoes, or like me, Friday night Pizza Huts where you cashed in your book reward for reading five books to a free personal pan pizza? Chances are if you scan your memory, some of your best warmest memories involve sugar associating this ingredient with pleasure, celebration, ritual and reward.

For the purposes of this season, by sugar, I mean we think of as traditional sugar, like sodas, candies, cake and added sugar in processed foods, like salad dressing, breads, pretzels and other salty carbs. On the flipside, your most difficult memories probably also involve sugar as a source of refuge. If like me, after another day of being bullied and isolated from "the cool kids at school", you found bagels in the fridge to eat and numbed the pain of being othered, or right before a spin tap to see how far your cancer had spread, your parents took you to the Pancake House to try and bring some sort of comfort during the scariest health scare you've ever had. Who can forget SnackWells? A dieter's low-fat bonanza where we thought we could eat the whole box because it was low-fat, not realizing that all the sugar was making us hungrier and hungrier.

Sugar has comforted most of us when we were isolated, in the midst of chaos, or for many of my clients, it was a lift when being emotionally neglected. Food companies methodically and relentlessly advertised to make us trust sugar and let these processed foods into our lives in a way not only we thought a warning label like cigarettes, but actually in a way we now come to see gout.

As a result, what was only used in a way that we use spices today, a little dab'll do ya is now in the stable of our collective diets. While now it's recommended to limit sugar, food companies



didn't create but can capitalize on our puritan Christian and capitalistic narrative of sacrifice equals reward to ignore the mind-body connection and the need for emotional intelligence and agility.

Adding insult to injury, we as taxpayers are paying to make ourselves and the environment, which is degraded immensely with our monoculture agriculture focused on sugar, corn, soy and wheat that will be processed in sugar and well, or subsidizing ecological collapse in the resulting in the pandemics like coronavirus.

The decline of our personal and environmental bodies has led to an over-taxed healthcare that was never designed for the chronic diseases which in large part driven by our food supply and its consequences.

In this season 11 of Insatiable, we will look at how we as individuals and a collective can go in a sugar rehab physically and emotionally. We will explore how we arrived here, root causes of sugar addiction, if sugar is really addictive and can we eat it moderately and how we can move forward with sugar and its proper pace in our life and what does that look like for you?

Without further ado, let's enter sugar rehab together.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:04:52] AS: Welcome, everybody, to season 11, episode 1 of Insatiable; Root Causes of Sugar Addiction with Charles Eisenstein. I want to welcome everyone back to our first episode in the Sugar Rehab Season. Since our last season, the coronavirus and its side effects have become front and center in our lives. I did a special podcast episode on how you could step into a more empowered place using adult development theory to question the narratives that we've been socialized into mainly about how we've been conditioned to treat this virus in our body through



a war narrative and gave some questions for you to work through so you can see if there's a more self-authoring true story for you. Check that out if you haven't.

While this season is about sugar rehab, the same collective stories that have led to this coronavirus experience are some of the same stories that have led us to normalize really un-normal ideas about sugar, which is what processed foods are largely composed of. Our industrial food supply that generates this sugar is a main driver of the environmental collapse and waning immunity that is the part of the root cause of coronavirus fears and death.

I believe if we can shift our understanding of processed foods and sugar and reduce our dependence on them, we can be better stewards of our individual and collective earth body. As our guest today says, "Create a more beautiful world we know is possible." To do this, we need to understand the stories, the root causes that got us to this highly addictive food supply, and I put "food" in quotes. How do the un-normal become so normal?

To answer this question, I have one of my dream guests on the show today. We are kicking off our season with one of my favorite thinkers, Charles Eisenstein. I came across Charles' work years ago by reading his book *The Ascent of Humanity*, which I now recommend to anyone who wants to understand the guiding stories that we've been socialized into and how we arrived where we are today both with sugar and the coronavirus.

Charles has a deep understanding of how narratives drive what we think is normal even when normal isn't healthy and how agriculture itself is part of and contributed to our deep story of control and separation from the earth. He also understands how dietary transformation comes from becoming your own inner authority and self-trust, which is the foundation of my truce with food process.

His recent essay, *The Coronation*, which will be in the show notes, use the entry point of the coronavirus to highlight root causes of what brought us here to whatever is happening. Many of



those root causes or stories brought us to the need for sugar rehab. So I'm honored and thrilled to have him here today to talk about the root causes of sugar addiction.

Here's a bit about Charles pulled from his bio, which might be my favorite approach to writing a bio ever. He says he was born in 1967 and was a very sensitive intellectual and dreamy child. Always consumed by questions like, "Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?" Of course, embedded as he was in a culture that sees science and reason as a source of truth, he tried to "figure out the answers."

He graduated from Yale University with a degree in mathematics and philosophy, but his development of reason and intellect brought him no closer to any truth he really cared about. He didn't know what he was searching for, but knew that none of the usual options like [inaudible 00:08:03] graduate attracting him. He went to Taiwan, learned Chinese and soon taught himself working as a translator. He spent most of his 20s there educating himself broadly, though not at all rigorously. It was more through osmosis and eastern spiritual traditions.

He had an intensifying crisis in his late 20s when his professional work became intolerable, which delved more deeply into the questions that he'd been asking as a child. At least that's my interpretation of his bio there. During and after an intense rebirthing process that included divorce, bankruptcy and exhaustion, has been living those questions and asking all of us to ask them in his books; *The More Worlds Our Hearts Know is Possible*, *Ascent of Humanity*, *Sacred Economics*, and the podcast, *A New and Ancient World of Podcast*.

Thank you so much for being here, Charles.

[00:08:49] CE: Hi! Hi, Ali. My pleasure.



[00:08:51] AS: Great. Your essay on the coronavirus, Coronation, went viral. How are you doing? I was so pleased to see this kind of media going viral instead of snarky memes.

[00:09:04] CE: Yeah, I'm doing okay. I've been doing a lot of interviews I think as a result of that. Also as a result of everybody's moving everything online, that's webinar, or an online summit, or a conference that got moved online. Here I am looking at people with squares around their heads all the time, which is what we're doing right now.

On the grand scale, the human drama, not such a bad thing, but I'm really missing human contact. I'm here with my wife and one of my sons at least. The others are all at my brother's farm, they're older, and they're actually doing useful labor. Yeah. Anyway, that's what I can share at the moment.

[00:09:48] AS: Yeah. I had a friend have a virtual 40th birthday, like dance party, and I thought I was doing fine, and I then I just like started crying in the middle of it. I'm like, "I miss being with people." I think we're all feeling that on some level for sure.

I want to first start with and kind of switching gears to food, is that you have a course on food that is similar to the premise of my Truce With Food work about becoming our own authorities and I'm curious how you see food as an entry point into examining the questions that we are hopefully asking during this coronavirus experience, which you laid out in your essay.

[00:10:23] CE: I mean, I wish people would use food as an entry point more they there. It seems like in general people have fled back to the most conventional or orthodox view of health and illness where it's about this attacker and if you come into contact with it, then you get sick and there is a certain percentage chance that you could get seriously ill and a certain percentage chance you're going to die, which kind of strips us of any agency or power to affect it. It's like this random thing that either strikes you or doesn't.



Left out of the narrative is anything – I mean, you hear a little bit about those with weak immunity or something, but you don't hear a lot about what causes weak immunity. You don't hear a lot about nonconventional ways of boosting your immunity. You're certainly not hearing anything about how sugar or vitamin D deficiency or anything like that could – Or zinc deficiency or whatever could make you more susceptible to a respiratory crisis. You're not hearing anything about immune boosting supplements. It's like all – You're not even allowed to go see an acupuncturist or a chiropractor in most states right now. Everything good and all of the progress toward a more holistic view is like swept aside now by this tsunami of orthodoxy that is following the COVID virus.

Yeah, I hope and wish and hold that it does take us to a place of, "Wow!" the whole way that been understanding health hasn't worked and maybe we need to look into what the critics and the marginalized people and those who we've labeled as alternative have been saying. That's one reason why I was happy to accept your invitation to be on your show.

[00:12:19] AS: Yeah, I love that, because that's one of the things. I mean, I know very polarized about like the vaccine and all these stuff. I'm like, "If people think that's just the solution without really examining, to your point, what causes weakened immunity." What I'm saying, I mean, I follow a range of people and read a range of sources, but it's food is only being talked about in terms of like people laughing about how they're just like snacking all day, and I get it, right? How like you to be gentle with yourself during this time, and healing your relationship with food there is definitely that there's a time and place for that in the healing process and we also have to have I think a come to Jesus moment of the power of food and how most of us aren't eating real food. I wish that was a bigger conversation and how you're saying that as well.

[00:13:10] CE: Yeah. I would just add that even the paradigm of strengthened immunity or weaker immunity and how food has been a neglected aspect of that. I think that it's still not a big enough paradigm, because it still buys into the idea that we are at war with life and that



viruses are these predators. I'm not saying that they never are or that they can't be dangerous and that they can't kill you. That is an extreme position that some people do take actually and have arguments for that.

What I would say is that maybe there's a continuum and that sometimes it is more illuminating to understand viruses as symptoms of a condition that allows them to proliferate and that they might even serve a purpose. They might help to – In some cases, I've heard and I can't really back this up with research, because it's just people who I trust are saying. Maybe they have the research, but have I really looked into? How maybe certain viruses, Epstein-Barr, for example binds to heavy metals and maybe many people have had the experience of getting the flu and feeling better after the flu than you did before, because maybe it helped you clean out some junk. It burned it off with fever or all the not coming out like is helping you excrete something. Maybe viruses and bacteria and other things that we see as attackers, maybe they aren't or aren't always attackers. Maybe they are our helpers.

In some people or most people, maybe they get out of control and some people, but maybe they can be helpers that help us actually cope with circumstances that are not ideal including the dietary circumstances. Maybe if you eat a lot of sugar, you need to get a cold sometimes.

In Chinese medicine, they might say the cold helps to clear out the damp cold energy that the sugar brings in. Maybe our bodies are wise and the world provides us what we need to heal. I'm not saying that's the truth, but it is something I would like us to look at took to really put on the table the whole lens of us versus them when it comes to disease.

[00:15:40] AS: I love that you said that. That's what I talked about in this special podcast episode I did about how the battle narrative makes germ theory really work, right? If you believe that we are at war with life in our bodies and these viruses, then of course you will believe germ theory, which says like if you literally look up in Wikipedia germ theory, it says like these bacteria and viruses invade the body, right? They're using war versus terrain theory germ



terrain theory has a much different narrative guiding what the same people are saying the same things, right? But narrative really guides how we make meaning.

That's what I wanted to ask you, is why you work at the story level? I mean, you're using the word paradigm or this completely different spec perspective at viruses. I'm curious why so much of your work is devoted to unearthing these narratives and stories that are guiding us?

[00:16:37] CE: Yeah, it's because the social world, the political world, the economic world is generated or undergirded by the meanings and stories and narratives that we believe live. These are not real, like corporations, governments, laws, money, property these are not real except for the agreements that we hold about them, and those agreements are embedded in the stories we tell about the world and about ourselves. They create so much of what we experience is real. Also, there will be used to make meaning of the world, to make sense of the world. Then once we inhabit a certain narrative or a certain worldview or you could use many word, a paradigm or a set of beliefs, they reinforce themselves, because if you come across a data point or have an experience or hear something from somebody that doesn't fit the story that you inhabit, that you've constructed or has been constructed for you. I mean, this is a co-creation among of humans in a culture, then you're not going to really – Even, likely you'll reject that data point. You'll be highly skeptical of it.

These stories have an immune system of their own basically that keeps out anything that would disrupt them including perhaps the truth. So they can be – Maybe the story works really well at a certain time and place or in a certain phase of your development, certain phase of your life. The story can be personal. Here is who I am. Here's what I do. Here's why. Here's what's important. These are not bad to have the stories. They told us and they carry us, but then at some point they begin to break down. They have served their purpose and they become restrictive and blinding and they keep out important truths that are necessary for us to expand into the next step.



I think that this is happening today with COVID-19 that the story that you mentioned, the germ theory, and including the story of what to do about germs and what they are and how they work, like all of this is excluding what we really need to know.

It's baffling to me. Well, it's not baffling, but it's significant that, for example, I just came across like the Canadian health authority. I can't remember what it's called. On the official website they have paragraphs debunking "that vitamin D is anything to do with immunity. That vitamin C has anything to do with –" Their recommendations are 400, whatever, I used per day or something like that, that this is like unscientific. Vitamin C, like there's plenty of mainstream debunking of that.

In fact, I think YouTube announced that they will take down any video that promotes unscientific concepts like that which could harm us because it's disinformation, but there's the luminous scientific research that supports these things. It's not like the unscientific realm is valid too. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying like within the corpus of science itself, there's a narrow domain that is orthodox and then there's all the stuff that somehow isn't being let in.

That's the power of a story. It can keep out what we need the most, and that's why I am interested in the stories that we tell us and why we tell those stories. Otherwise, I could provide all the data points to somebody to try to convince them that I'm right. But if I'm not aware of the story that they're holding, then I'm just going to seem like a raving lunatic because I'm rejecting reality itself it seems. I must be crazy to, "Don't you understand science. Don't you know that the CDC website says that –" Part of the story is that the authorities are trustworthy. That's a story too. If you hold that story, then anybody who contradicts them is going to seem like an idiot. That's a bit of why I've gone into the world of story and just layer after layer, like the story that medical authorities, trustworthy, why do people take that story on. What is that resting on? There are deeper stories at play here are that go to the level of what I would call mythology, the mythology of modern civilization.



[00:21:40] AS: I love that there are so much that you said. One of the theories that influences my work is immunity to change, and Dr. Robert Kegan and Dr. Lisa Lahey, they're in the adult development scope, but they literally describe our stories as an emotional psychological immune system, and you just explained such great concrete terms of how it keeps out the very information we may need and also what we're going to need I think to do to actually come together and make substantial meaningful change from this.

I think what's interesting that you said is the deep mythological stories, right? Why do we trust authority? Why do we think science is monolithic? All of these things I think come back to one of the deep stories that you really I think laid out so well in the Coronation and Ascent of Humanity is this need for control, because we don't have great capacity for uncertainty, and I see to your point about science, I see that people – If we take two polarized extremes of like people who are like fundamentally religious and think the Bible should be taken verbatim rather than it was an allegory that invites the believer into a relationship of mystery, and then in reaction to that, you have people who are like – Well, they're anti-science. Everyone who questions anything scientific is like – Because science, you see this snarky like tweets and memes and I'm like – But they're both sides if they are real sides, but at the extreme can't hold the capacity for uncertainty and mystery because science by definition is a continuing quest for knowledge.

To think there is an authority of science or an authority on either side, whether it'd be the religion you believe in or science, we have lost increasingly over I think the centuries lost the capacity for uncertainty, which then enables the story of control to almost cannibalize itself.

[00:23:35] CE: Yeah. I mean, I don't know if we've lost the capacity to hold uncertainty.

[00:23:39] AS: Well, decreased it.

[00:23:40] CE: Maybe never had it.



[00:23:42] AS: Okay. Maybe we never had. I think we've decreased it.

[00:23:47] CE: Yeah. It seems to be on the increase today, the craving for certainty and the strong identification with being right or being on the side that is right of casting one's enemies into the realm of ignorance and wickedness. That's what we call polarization. It just seems it's so obvious which side is right, which side is wrong, which side is good, which side is evil. I think that both sides are wrong and in their diagnosis of the other side.

[00:24:22] AS: I would agree. That's a great – Yeah.

[00:24:25] CE: If you know that you're right, if it's just so abundantly obvious that you're right, then there must be something wrong with people who disagree with you. They've been duped. They're fools. They are maybe liars. They're frauds. You set up a war situation, because you're fighting opponents of lower moral worth than you are. So it's good versus evil, and that is the same vibration as the conquest of nature or the agricultural practices of killing things to make so that your plants can grow more safely, or of the allopathic medicine. You find something to control. Find something to kill. Find something to dominate. Find something to cut out and remove. Find something to isolate. That's all part of the same mentality. So we see it. That's another reason why I think it's necessary to go to the very depths of our worldview, because even control – Again, I'm not saying that control is always bad, or that antibiotics are always bad for, or that fighting is always bad, or running away. These are all forms of control.

But when we inhabit a worldview that casts everything into us versus them, good versus evil terms, then we over apply control and fighting and domination to situations where there are other ways that might be much more effective to handle this duration. I asked where, and I'm not sure how philosophical you want me to go here, but I do ask where does the impulse to control come from?



At bottom I think it comes from an understanding of oneself that's separate from the world and to see the world outside of humans as not really being in possession of the qualities of being. Like the world outside of ourselves being seen as just this random melee of force and particles. This mathematical automaton that is completely indifferent to human beings to life that has no intelligence or consciousness or purpose or sacredness of its own.

Therefore, to make the world better, we have to impose intelligence and order on to a world that has none on its own. Progress becomes a matter of humans growing into greater and greater power over the world. Then you can insulate yourself from the forces of nature and you can overcome the other separate selves in the world that are also seeking to maximize their self-interest at your expense. Progress means progress in controlling the world, in dominating. It's baked into the cake when you understand self as separate, and this understanding of self is breaking down in many, many realms including medicine where just like the most basic example is that we now understand or should understand that ourselves are composed of a lot more than human cells, but 10 times more bacterial and fungal cells, and Lord knows how many viruses that are zipping around between the bacteria and the fungi and the human cells transmitting information. All these little exosomes and vesicles and like all these little packets of DNA that are buzzing around all there. It's like this seething community of life that is contained within our bodies and outside of our bodies too in constant communication.

We're not these separate individuals even in a biological sense and we cannot achieve health by imagining ourselves to be separate and trying to cut ourselves off from the world of life, which is one reason why I'm pretty skeptical about all this handwashing and social distancing. What's that going to do when our immune systems no longer suffer a challenge and what's it going to do when we're not in constant interchange with the genetic world and the chemical world and the bacteriological world and the living world? This conceit that we can be separate in isolation – I mean, that we can be healthy in isolation, in separation, is not going to lead to health. It's going to lead to a more precarious semblance of health. Yeah, that's – I think I'll let you talk.



[00:29:25] AS: Yeah. No. I had so many like light bulb moments about how this separation story translates into the micro decisions that people then feel like they have to make, right? Which is interesting, because then when you feel like you have to make them, you also then feel like you have less choice, and if you have less choice, you then feel more need for control. What we're talking about earlier kind of creates this self-fulfilling prophecy of what ends up as precarious health, right? I mean, you mentioned antibiotics. It's like, "Well—" Okay, first we're like, "Just controlled bacteria," and then we're like, "Oh! There happens to be microbiome with a bunch of really good bacteria." We can't just use antibiotics without – Which I think Chinese medicine and ayurvedic as well without context, right? Without looking at the context that we're using it in and their consequences. Yeah, I totally know what you mean. I'm kind of like processing some new insights.

How do you think this story of separation has led us to the food supply that we had today? I mean, you mention chemicals, right? That we have to then control the plants, but what are other ways that have led us to what I would say is a precarious food supply?

[00:30:42] CE: Yeah. I mean, that's very long story that goes back centuries, even longer. But I would say this goes back to the Industrial Revolution and the conversion of the world into commodities, the standardization of processes, the delocalization of economies. I mean, all of these historical threads are woven together to create the food supply that we have today. The reduction of – Partly, there is the doctrine of reductionism, which asks what is food and answers – Michael Pang calls it nutrition, that says that what a food is can be reduced to a finite set of components. That what nutrition is, is you got to get your vitamin B and you got to get your this and you get your that, and if you get all of those things, which we can list, then you'll be healthy and you'll be nourished, the macro and micro nutrients.

Anything else in the food you could take out and you could add those things to any food and you get breakfast cereal, which is highly processed. Then you spray the vitamins on to it and it



has everything you need, right? That seems quite natural to somebody, quite reasonable if you look at the world through a reductionistic lens, and we can extract the good stuff and leave out the troughs. Basically it's saying that we can and do. Maybe there're a few things we don't understand yet, but this way of thinking says we pretty much understand the world right now and therefore we can control it. Here's what you need. It's this list of abstracted substances.

From that mindset, people will say, "Well, there's nothing wrong with a modern diet. Look, it has plenty of these nutrients. Here's the list and it checks off all the boxes. If it doesn't, well here's a vitamin pill. You should be fine." That perception rests well at home in a deeper paradigm of reductionism. Many, many things feed into the current food system. Not just one.

[00:33:04] AS: Yeah. I was even thinking while you were about vitamin D is – I mean, this has been a huge awakening over for me the past couple of years, because I used to take vitamin D supplements and then I was learning, "Whoa! The sun has so many more benefits than just D3." That concrete example, like totally started to unravel more of how I had been reducing food and nutrition and it was – Yeah, I think reductionism is a huge story guiding how we got here, because then also if you reduce, you start measuring different things then, right? You start measuring – Like you start measuring the amount of food you produce versus looking actually at what are you producing? I think about one of my friends here, she started, it's called – The area code here is 412. 412 Food Rescue, and there is this big argument, "Well, you need GMOs, because we're running out of food for people."

Her nonprofit, they literally have volunteers go pick up what would be otherwise tossed into the trash and has these statistics that 40% of food goes to waste. We actually don't have a shortage of food problem, but I think when you have that reduction as narrative, you start measuring vitamins and quantity instead of how else does food help us, whether it's immunity, pleasure, right? It could be many, many stories.



[00:34:29] CE: When I was 10 or 11, already was interested in nutrition, and I got a book, a little book that at the supermarket called Count Your Calories, and it was very satisfying to my preadolescent mind, very rational and it held vitamins and everything listed in it. I was like, “Oh! Now I know how to do it. It's a matter of arithmetic, and I can be healthy.” It just seems so – There's a certain stage of cognitive development that really gloms on to that and I think collectively we're kind of at that stage of cognitive development.

As for vitamin D, yeah, I don't take vitamin D supplements. The stuff I was saying about vitamin D and immunity, I mean, I know of doctors, kind of renegade doctors who use massive doses of vitamin D and they carefully monitor serum levels to make sure that you're not getting toxicity, like don't do this at home, but they're doing it for people with autoimmune disorders and things like that and with tremendous results.

I don't want to like encourage or discourage people to take a vitamin D supplement. I would say to use your body as a gauge and how do you feel and stuff like isolated substances that are taken out of their natural matrix are medicines and should not be used indiscriminately. Vitamin D in a pill is maybe chemically identical to vitamin D that you could extract from butter or an egg or something like that, but is it the same when it is extracted and not in the relationships that it is always in in a food? When you eat of vitamin D rich food, you're also invariably going to be eating vitamin A. Pretty much every food that is vitamin D is vitamin A in it as well, and the Lord knows what else. Out of the thousands and millions of biochemicals in a living organism, how many of them do we really understand?

[00:36:40] AS: Or have even identified.

[00:36:42] CE: Yeah, or even have identified. We take the ones that we do understand out and we say that those are all we need. That's pretty arrogant. Yeah. This is a whole rabbit hole. You could say, “Okay, therefore only eat whole foods,” but then a lot of them have been depleted. They're growing mineral depleted soil. So you do need supplements and you don't, and you do,



and you don't. You can go down many rabbit holes even to the point of biological transmutation of elements. Maybe you can make your own selenium or zinc or calcium. I don't want to undermine my own credibility by broaching such radically unscientific ideas. They're not actually unscientific, but they are very marginalized science.

Anyway, this is where my work in food and eating came from, this perplexity at the diverse array of authorities each telling me what's good for me. I'm like, "Who do I believe? How do I know for sure? What other source of information can I listen to?" I eventually just came back to my own body and looking at nature and seeing how a deer or a rabbit if it's sick will be attracted to certain herbs. How do they know that? How do they sniff it down? Do we have the capacity too?

Sometimes animals eat stuff that's poisonous to them, rarely, and usually domestic animals and the ones who do that. But I do think that we have tremendous untapped potential in the body to orient us to what serves our health and what doesn't. Not that we always listen to that, but that's where I came to resolve all of these thorny paradoxes.

[00:38:33] AS: Yeah. I love that, because our body does no more than – because it is so individualized, but also there's universal themes. I'm curious, what is your history with sugar been or processed foods? I mean, do you think you just had a natural interest at them or what do you think gravitated you towards that? Because the reason I like food is I feel like it's this invitation into all these other bigger issues and questions, because it relates to the body and the relationship and how we eat I think is a metaphor for how we live. But I'm curious what got you into –

[00:39:09] CE: Yeah. I don't know what got me into it. I was just – Maybe it was kind of autism spectrum mind at age 10 that loved numbers and counting things. Who knows why we walk the paths that we do? I really don't know the answer to that. Maybe there's a little bit of the – It was a realm as I got older that I could control. I could control what I put into my body, and this



is what happens a lot in the kind of nutrition food world. We tend to think that we could solve all of our problems by changing our diet, by making our diet better. You know the story of the man looking for his lost key?

[00:40:03] AS: No.

[00:40:05] CE: He's looking around, walking back and forth, and a passerby comes and says, "Hey! Did you lose something? Are you looking for something?" He said, "Yeah, I lost my house. Can't get in." He's like, "Oh! I'll help you look for it. Where were you when you last had it?" He's like, "Well, I was right over there under those trees," and he says, "Well, why aren't you looking over there under the trees?" He says, "Well, it's much too dark over there. I'm going to look here under the streetlight."

For me, figuring out what was wrong with my diet, that was looking under the streetlight. Thinking that the answer to my problems would be found by eating a better diet, eating a different diet, "Oh! Maybe it's raw foods. Oh! Maybe it's macrobiotic. Oh! Maybe it's nourishing traditions. Maybe it's paleo." It might be one of those things, but it might not be. That might be a total diversion.

I think to just answer your question, there was a certain comfort zone for me in making it all about what I ate, when in fact like my diet has been always quite healthy. I mean, there is a phase where I probably ate too much sugar and didn't listen to my body in other ways. But for me, to think too much about diet right now is a little bit of a –It's a little bit narcissistic. It's a little bit like – I mean, how healthy do you want to be? What's health for anyway? I think if you're healthy enough to do what you're here to do, then you should be putting your attention on something else.

[00:41:38] AS: Yeah. Yeah. I think some people struggle with the disordered eating and it feels like they have to get that done first before they can get – They have to "fix the food". At least in



my work it's like, "No. We have to figure out why you want to be healthy for." I always say it's like, "Okay, that's the car, but where are we going?" I totally get that. But I think it's similar to when we're talking about who's the authority. Why do we trust authorities?

I see – At least in my work, I try to get people to unlearn what the authorities have told them and to come back to this is actually like a boot camp and to being your own authority. I think even boot camp is like a war metaphor, but this is an imitation into kind of reclaiming that innate wisdom that I think we had before food companies marketed to us, before our food supply became so addictive. Before we were introduced into that story of separation that obviously no one was saying this is a story of separation. They were saying eat you coco puffs.

[00:42:41] CE: Yeah. There's a kind of an innocence back then, and I remember when I was a kid there's a bit of this, "Wow! What amazing product are they going to think of next?" If it was on the supermarket shelves, it must be finite.

[00:42:55] AS: Yeah.

[00:42:57] CE: Yeah. There's this innocence, this naïve trust that civilization is on a good track, that things are getting better and better. Therefore if it's some new thing, it must be a good thing. Wow! Diet Coke. Wow! Bright blue ketchup. Wow!

[00:43:22] AS: It's amazing. Look what you do.

[00:43:25] CE: Yeah, and this trust in progress, this trust in technology and this trust that the government is going to protect us from bad things. The integrity of government, the integrity of medicine, the integrity of the food industry. This innocence has eroded over my lifetime. Maybe some people still basically trust whatever they can buy in the supermarket, but certainly a large segment of the population across the entire political spectrum reverses. I mean, there's as many right-wingers who eat organic food as there are left-wing people.



[00:44:01] AS: My parents are friends. They were – Well, [inaudible 00:44:04] unfortunately passed away, but they were “very liberal and into GMOs.” I was like, “I don’t understand that.”

[00:44:11] CE: Well, there’s a certain kind of liberalism now that basically is quite orthodox and basically science is on our side against the religious fundamentalists and the creationists and the antiabortionists and those who think that God says that women belong barefoot and pregnant, and so we’re on the side of science, which is progress, and that’s liberal and they’re conservative. There is a certain part of liberalism that is like that, which is very different from like the hippie rejecting authority, question authority, and those are the ones who eat organic food. Originally, it was the hippies. It was left-wing dropouts who reject –

[00:44:54] AS: Who were actively conservative. To go back to the land was actually conservative, but they were the radical lefties. I mean, this is where all these like where does the continuum start?

[00:45:06] CE: Right. Yeah, everything is upside down now.

[00:45:08] AS: Yeah. Yeah. Well, we’re going to take a word from our sponsor and then we’re going to be back because I want to figure what story we need to start telling so that we can fix this. We’ll be right back.

[SPONSOR MESSAGE]

[00:45:21] AS: Are you ready to take action from this insatiable season and experience what it’s like to be free of sugar craving? Enter Freedom From Cravings, a five-week live group coaching program that starts right after Memorial Day. If you’ve wondered why you can eat healthfully but still having 3PM crash that sends you even more in our quarantine times to your cabinet for chips or peanut M&Ms or why you can be good all day and then overeat popcorn or coconut ice



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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:47:12] AS: All right. I am back here with Charles Eisenstein, and we were talking about this story of progress and blue ketchup that just had me laughing hysterically. It makes me think of when I lived in Philadelphia I did like this morning segment on NBC and I brought on a green



smoothie. This is when I was first starting my career. The woman kind of make fun of the color, and I was like, “But we think electric blue Gatorade is normal?” and like she just didn't like respond because I was like – As we were saying even how we described conservative, well everything is upside down. We've normalized electric blue Gatorade, but a green vegetable drink is crazy.

We were talking about also before the break about kind of this challenging authority. That's how I heard it, and I know that as someone, I actually had cancer as a teenager and it kind of is what sent me down this rabbit hole of how does that happen? Western medicine saved my life, but then to actually heal myself from the chemo and everything, I had to question the authority. What stories that we've been socialized into that don't make us question authority that – I guess the better question is what story do you think we need to start living into or asking about or suggesting as possibility so we can stop looking at nutrition [inaudible 00:48:27]. We can look at food for the holistic offering that it does provide. Connecting us to nature, vitality to create a life we want. What story do you think would help us course correct with how we grow our food? How we eat and all of the side effects and implications of that?

[00:48:50] CE: Well, yeah. One way to phrase it, one way to present it would be it's the story that life is relationship, that existence is relationship, that health comes from rich relationships. This would include social relationships. In fact, I've been told or have read a statistic that loneliness is the biggest predictor of ill health. It's like better for you, statistically speaking, to smoke and drink and be social than it is to have a totally abstemious lifestyle but you don't have any friends and you don't engage socially.

Life health, we thrive in connection, and that is true on every level. Food that is grown in a mono-crop or grown hydroponically that's shorn of its connections to soil, to water, to other species, etc., is going to be less healthy. People who are stripped of their connections to soil, to place, to microorganisms, etc., are going to be less healthy. I would say also any health paradigm or any medical paradigm that embraces a larger understanding of self, of a person, is



going to – Because what is health? Health is about wholeness. What is it that we want to make whole? Is it the separate self?

If you're restricted to that version of a self, then we will never have health, because to make a part of yourself whole is still not wholeness. It's still not health. We have to attain a level of health beyond what our society recognizes as normal requires opening up to a larger self, and that includes the relationships I talked about before and it also includes aspects of the human being that are excluded by dominant paradigms.

Maybe our energetic bodies, our subtle bodies, even like cellular metabolic pathways that are not commonly recognized, or the fact that the structure of the water in our bodies is related to our immunity and the functioning of our mitochondria. I mean, there's like a whole universe. If you go into functional medicine a little, but you start to see some of these interconnections that are not really taught in conventional medical school. Then there're the relations with the plant world that we call urbanism. There's the relationships with materiality, each substance in the world having its own energetic signature that is the basis of homeopathy.

I would say that the story that that we are may be ready to transition into brings in all of these excluded relationships. I know that many of the things I've mentioned are controversial. Yesterday, I want to heal my eyesight. When I turned 40, I start have to go like this to read, to pull my head back a little bit just like, "Wow! I'm getting old," and every year then it got a little worst and a little worst. I've met people who have healed their eyesight through the Bates method, and Bates was an ophthalmologist who practiced in like the 1920s and cured thousands of patients using these eye relaxation and retraining techniques of many, many visual problems and he had a whole theory underneath it and trained people and people have taken it up, and there's like thousands and thousands of people, maybe more have benefited from those techniques.



I'm looking for some eye exercises to do. Exercises isn't quite the right word. It's more retraining habits of tension in the muscles around the lens. Anyways, I looked Wikipedia. The Bates method isn't ineffective da-da-da-. It's just like this hatchet job. If you look up any alternative medical thing on Wikipedia, it'll tell you it's fraudulent. I guess this goes back to the immune system of the dominant story.

The only reason I mentioned that, it's kind of on my mind because I looked it up yesterday, but here's official reality. If we are going to transition to anything different than we've already known as normal, then we have to question official reality, which is the same as questioning authority.

[00:53:41] AS: I think people need to understand that even – I see the parallel of monoculture farms with monoculture medicine. I mean, I talked about it a couple times here on the podcast, but Andrew Carnegie in Pittsburgh – I mean, they created this Flexner report. He had this buddy, and basically wanted to try to industrialize and scale medicine and shutdown the Bates' of the world and indigenous people and people who are doing homeopathy. Now we assume that like, "Oh! Everything is standardized and reduced to this, and this is how all scientists think." It's like, "No!"

To me, I want to go – I mean, again, I think Western medicine has its place, but I think people need to understand that there are plenty of schools of thought, of scientists, and unfortunately with how funding is going, it's going more and more only towards pharmaceuticals. But that doesn't mean that there aren't entirely different paradigms that are true. I just kind of wanted to plug different paradigms, because you even mentioned functional medicine, and functional medicine totally helped heal a lot of that IBS and depression that I had from chemotherapy, but actually at 40, I was told that I was like infertile and couldn't get pregnant. I actually had to use one step further than functional medicine, but I worked with a naturopath who helped me see that even functional medicine is trying to correct a way what the body is doing versus like homeopathy is kind of removing the impediments and she helped me get pregnant on my own



after like Western medicine was like, “You need to do donor, an IBF,” but it was this further “fringe” that has brought me back to what – I love the name of your podcast, a new and ancient story. I’m like, “this is so new to me, but this is what ancient people and traditions have been using in terms of plant medicine and actually just removing what’s impeding the body, not having to even correct the body.” I don’t know if that – I don’t know, but it’s just kind of a plug for the fringes I guess.

[00:55:39] AS: Yeah. Not everything on the fringes is used to be accurate or true.

[00:55:44] AS: Right. Right. Right. But to explore it and not think just – Not think it's fringe just because your doctor didn't present it to you, I guess.

[00:55:51] CE: Right. If it’s fridge, it must be wrong, because official reality is right.

[00:55:55] AS: Yeah.

[00:55:55] CE: The problem is official reality keeps changing too. 100 years ago, official realities, the biggest problem facing humanity was genetic degradation, and then prescribes as a remedy, mass sterilization of the inferior people. If you doubted that, you were unscientific.

[inaudible 00:56:14] can raise many other examples where official reality changes. But today we've learned from our mistakes and it's correct, right?

[00:56:21] AS: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Meanwhile, you look at – I had a son in October and my husband is a little bit more, I don’t want to say conventional, because he is not, but like as we’re making health choices for him and everything, I’m like, “Look, if children were like prospering and their health was great, I would just go along with whatever the resource, the community MetroHealth that we go to, and I love them. They're working with us on how we want to do this, but I was like, “Look at the statistics. How can people just say like we figured it



all out when you look at children's health in terms of asthma and just so many learning disabilities and all this kind of stuff?" Yeah, I want people to question the food supply, normal, all of that kind of stuff. I'm glad you brought that up.

[00:57:12] CE: Yeah.

[00:57:13] AS: One thing too that I've heard you said that I think is really – It was such a powerful metaphor for me in remembering this interconnectedness was you talked about the organs of Gaia. I love that metaphor as, "Wow! We are in our own bodies, but our also within earth's bodies and how we can –" I had to go grocery shopping yesterday. We had no food in the house and I was just like standing in the freezer aisle at Whole Foods and I was just like, "I don't know the people who grew this frozen food." I just had this moment of like, "I have to work harder at doing local food supply, because that nourishes the organs of Gaia more than these vegetables that I'm probably buying from California that have been shipped."

I don't know. I think thinking about the organs of Gaia helps me start to shift how I even make food decisions, because you look at the holism rather than just as an organic or not. When we know that organic has been – Now we have biodynamic. It's like industry is always trying to capitalize on what the consumer now knows is important and then do as at least little as possible to get there.

[00:58:25] CE: Yeah. Right. Organic food, commercial organic food is basically less bad.

[00:58:30] AS: Yeah.

[00:58:31] CE: Yeah. When I have a choice, I buy organic food over conventionally grown food. But yeah, compared to getting it from a local farmer, it's just totally – It's a poor compromise. Biodynamic is a different story. That's coming from Rudolph Steiner's, and it embraces an understanding of inspired world where the land is alive, or regenerative agricultural also is



tapping into that spirit. The consciousness is rising and basically the question is how do we consume in a way that is part of that contributes to life, because death is supposed to contribute to life. When something dies, it becomes food for something else. How do we become part of that circle?

[00:59:25] AS: I love that you brought that up. Have you read *The Vegetarian Myth* by Lierre Keith?

[00:59:29] CE: I have not. I mean, no. I haven't read it.

[00:59:32] AS: She talks about – Kind of actually circling back to your point about nutrition and all the stuff. I joke that people who don't have religion find nutrition, it's kind of this like, “Oh! This is going to help me live – It's going to save me in a different,” right? But she talks about the philosophical story that was keeping her vegan even though it was – Her spine was deteriorating. She was having all these health problems, but she basically had to come to this spiritual acceptance like life requires death and that a lot of what she had learned as “being vegan” was like biologically incorrect about the soil. I mean, it's a great book, and I don't need to go into it, but it speaks to story and interconnectedness and that life requires death to continue.

[01:00:17] CE: Right, and when you understand that, our whole society is built on the denial of death and the war on death, whether it's to try to maintain your youthful appearance as long as possible, or to have euphemisms about death, or to hide away old people in nursing homes, or a medical system that tries to keep you alive as long as possible. That fixation prevents us from asking important questions, because if you really know that you're going to die, then it's not like how do I survive as long as possible? Because at some point you're going to be in the same place as you would any way. You're going to be there with minutes to live. No matter what, you're going to be there someday.



What's actually important maybe is how well you live and how well you die. To apply that to the system of food production, instead of trying to reduce death, we might say how do we eat in a way that is consistent with a good life for the plants and animals that we eat? Obviously, industrial agriculture is not a good life for the animals that we eat, nor is it a good life for the plants that we eat. I don't think plants like to be planted in these long rows without any companions without their insect and plant and earthworm and bacterial companions. I mean, industrial agriculture basically kills the soil. It becomes just a medium for a plant to grow. Those are lonely plants. They're not happy, and that's how plant is supposed to live either.

This is the kind of question that gets skewered in the ferocious debate between the vegans and the paleo people or the conventional people, like how well do the animals live and how well do the plants live? What if we used that as our orientation? Then the whole system would change.

[01:02:23] AS: I love that you say that, because I feel like we talked about political polarization, but also dietary polarization. The same truth is that we actually change the questions, we could come together and realize that this is like a top to bottom issues, not like a left or right or vegan-paleo, whatever polarization topic, to eat sugar or not. I'm like, "Well, maybe it depends, and sometimes it's okay." Bring some context and nuance, but all realize that we want the same thing.

I love your question. I think that's kind of can orient people, like how do we eat and live in a way that we have a good life and what we consume has a good life. That is like simple but complex to get there for everybody. You know what I mean?

[01:03:07] CE: Yeah, it's complex, because in nature most beings have a very short life. How many baby rabbits make it to adulthood? Maybe one in 50?

[01:03:17] AS: Yeah.



[01:03:17] CE: I mean, mom, mother rabbit has a lot of babies.

[01:03:22] AS: Use the metaphor of like –

[01:03:23] CE: There's a metaphor about that, isn't there? How many of them make it to reproductive adulthood? Very, very few. How many frog eggs end up hatching and the tadpoles live and they become reproductive frogs? Very few. There's a lot of death out there. How many seeds from a maple tree end up actually growing to a full maple tree? Most of them meet a gruesome fate.

[01:03:49] AS: You're right. You're right. This speaks to your point about if we aren't an interconnected culture, death feels very different.

[01:03:58] CE: Yes.

[01:03:58] AS: Than if we feel we have contributed to this greater community or greater whole of our community.

[01:04:06] CE: Yes. Death feels much more scary. The more that inhabiting the story of a separate self, the scarier death is, because the separate self is annihilated upon death. But the more that we understand our full selves that is relational and that includes aspects that may not be snuffed out like a candle flame upon the death of the body, then death feels very different. I think that would affect not only medicine, but it would also affect our food system and all of these discussions.

[01:04:43] AS: Yeah, because I think people who thought that they were like had to hoard like the best food just for themselves to extend – Maybe extend their life potentially, doesn't mean you're not going to get hit by a bus or something else, right? It's like we could trust that there is



enough for all of us, because I think it creates a sense of scarcity. I think that's not just sense of scarcity of time, but scarcity of resources.

[01:05:08] CE: I was just on a thread where people are talking about, “Yeah, I've got my little farm, I've got my freezers full of meat. I've got like my – I've stocked up on coconut oil.” It's kind of like preppers almost. I'll be okay when the food rationing starts, when the food riot start, etc. etc. I'm like, “Someday, you're going to be dying anyway. We're not going to be okay. None of us. From that perspective of survival, we're not going to be okay.”

At that moment when you are on your deathbed and you look back, maybe you're going to regret having kept so much for yourself. Maybe you're going to wish that you had shared more instead of prepped, because why are we here? If we know we're going to die, then then you got to ask, “Well, why am I here for this short sojourn into life?”

[01:06:02] AS: Oh, that makes me want to cry. It's so beautiful. Yeah, do want to give more rather than – That is so beautiful. Oh! Charles, thank you for such an amazing – I know we talked about a lot and covered a lot. Do you have any parting questions, or I know you not kind of like a tips and tricks guy, but parting questions or orientations so that we can start to feel more interconnected with ourselves, our bodies and how we choose to eat and connect with others over food?

[01:06:39] CE: Maybe I would just return to the theme of life thrives in community. Life thrives through connection, especially as we're in the COVID era, facing a choice about do we want to continue to isolate and to lock down and to quarantine and to distance? Will we really thrive? Will we really be healthy that way in the long run? Because we will be invited to continue the distancing, and I would like to bring in this piece as well just to speak to that knowledge that we are not meant to be alone. Yeah, maybe I'll just toss that in there. The end.



[01:07:23] AS: I love that. That is the guiding, I think, truth to a more beautiful world. I love that you say that – How do you say? That we know it's possible. Maybe that explains a lot of the anxiety, right? It's not just our blood sugar. It's existential angst of knowing that we could be spending our time more connected in harmony with life rather than separated and biting with it. Thank you so much. We'll link to your site, and I know that you don't do social media, but you have friends of Charles Eisenstein who do social media for you. I'm like, "Wow! That's amazing."

[01:07:59] CE: Yeah. Yeah, I just got sick of social media. I mean, I am on Facebook and occasionally I put something there, but I never check my messages. I really don't do it right.

[01:08:08] AS: Is there a right or wrong? I mean, I think –

[01:08:11] CE: I don't use the tools to its full potential, whatever that is, which I don't even know.

[01:08:16] AS: Which means you're not getting tracked and you're not getting ads in your feed for like something you talked about on the phone.

[01:08:24] CE: Yeah.

[01:08:26] AS: Well, we'll link to all your social media stuff in the show notes as well. Thank you so much for your time and your work. I love it. Thank you so much for all that you do.

[01:08:34] CE: Yeah, thanks Ali. It was really fun.

[01:08:37] AS: Good. Take care.

[01:08:38] CE: Okay. Bye-bye.



[END OF INTERVIEW]

[01:08:42] AS: Thank you, health rebels, for tuning in today. Have a reaction, question or want the transcript from today's episode, find me at alishapiro.com. I'd love if you leave a review on Apple Podcast and tell your friends and family about Insatiable. It helps us grow our community and share a new way of approaching health in our bodies. Thanks for engaging in a different kind of conversation. Remember, always, your body truths are unique, profound, real and liberating.

[END]

