

# Gen Y Shift™: Ocean Robbins

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Ben: Hello, hello everybody. Welcome back to the Gen Y Shift series. This is Ben with you again. I'm very excited to have our guest on tonight. He is a recent friend who I just have so much respect and appreciation for and it's really happy to have Ocean on tonight to share his wisdom.

Before I bring him on the mike I just want to quickly share a bit about him. I think most of you are familiar from the e-mails I've sent out. But his long, beautiful, extensive diverse bio, and so I just want to hit a few of the points just so we can kind of set a context for where our conversation might go.

First of all, he is a CEO and co-founder of the 32,000 member of Food Revolution Network. He is also the former co-director and the founder of Yes, which helps visionary young leaders build a better world and he founded that at the age of 16.

He's an author of Choices For Our Future and The Power Of Partnership, and also an internationally acclaimed speaker who has spoken to over, I think, 200,000 people at this point.

He has won many awards for public service and social action; facilitated dozens upon dozens of gatherings with young leaders or even old leaders around the world. And he is an adjunct professor on few studies at Chapman University.

So there are a lot of things in there that we can cover. I'm very excited to do it. So, Ocean, thanks so much for being on here tonight.

Ocean: Well, my pleasure, Ben. It's really an honor.

Ben: Awesome! Well, to begin you know our session is entitled Passion and Purpose and certainly we can go in many directions with that. But one of the reasons why I wanted to bring you on and talk about those issues or those topics is that I think you are such a great example of someone who connected the passion and purpose at a really young age, and was able to create from that place amazingly.

And so, I think it would be great to just hear a bit about your story, and if you could just share how passion was alive in you, and how you followed that as you did. There's a lot for those of us who are in 20s and early 30s to do learning and even later on in life about what is to really ground in our passion and move that into purpose. So I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

Ocean:

Certainly. Well, some of the credits certainly has to go to my parents because my grandfather started Baskin-Robbins ice cream company, and my dad was gloomed to follow his father's footsteps and eventually joining in the company, but he ended up walking away to follow his own rocky road, because he felt that he wasn't put on this earth to invent a 32nd flavor.

He had some deeper calling for his life and he wanted to make not just to make the biggest buck but more to make the biggest difference. And so he walked away from Baskin-Robbins and he chose to devote his life to working for a more healthy and sustainable world, ended up becoming a bestselling author with the publication of *Diet For A New America*, and inspired millions of people to look at their food choices as a chance to make a difference in the world.

So I grew up in a family where our dinner table conversations were about things that mattered. I mean, we talk about our dreams, and we talk about the world, and what's their hope for humanity and what can we do to make a difference; and we talk strategy and politics, and heart and spirit and love, and social change all at once.

So when I was seven I learned about the nuclear threat and it seems very natural to me to organize a peace rally in my elementary school which is what I did. And when I was ten, I wanted to contribute to help in my community and also develop some entrepreneurial skills, so I launched a bakery called Ocean's Bakery. I ended up on the front page of the local paper that said, "Boy! He isn't very rich, but he's got dough."

So throughout my life, I feel like -- you know, a sense of purpose and calling has always been there, and the question has always been, "Well, what can I do to make the biggest difference? How can I use me, this one life I've got to make the biggest contribution I can?" And at times that felt a like a burden or a pressure, or sometimes it can feel overwhelming.

The more you take on of a sense of responsibility for the faith of the world, the more overwhelming it can be, because we're up against some

enormous problems in the world today. But at other times it felt like breathing life into me, like my spiritual lungs were full of air because I felt like I had a reason to live.

And so my life has always felt purposeful and I've always felt that I have a limited number of days on this planet, and I want to make the most of them. And I'm really thankful to my own parents for cultivating that sense of possibility in me, and for all of the friends, and allies, and mentors that I've met through the years that it helped me to become more true to that calling.

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Ben: That's beautiful. One thing that strikes me as I hear you saying that is how so many people seemed to get connected to a sense of purpose, gaining something -- like a single thing that they're meant to be doing and they're trying to figure out what that would be. And I see you really kind of following the threads of where you're called and where you're interested and doing many things. I'm curious for you, have you followed all those threads of interest? Or how do you navigate that without getting too widespread and thin?

Ocean: Well, I remember a mentor told me once, "If you try to be everything to everybody, you'll end up being nothing to nobody." The number of issues that we could focus on and it's completely overwhelming, and we ultimately have to -- you know hopefully have a wide focus as we look at the world, so we can take in a lot of issues and not get too narrow. But at the same time we have to do something. We have to start somewhere.

And we each have 24 hours in a day. We each have 60 minutes in the hour. We don't know how many years we're going to be alive on this earth, but basically we have the same amount of time in every day as anyone else does. And it's up to us I think to use that time the best way we can in accordance with our values.

And for me that means, sometimes I need to have fun. I need to play. I need to rest as well as serving gives. I think an overflowing cup gives more bountifully. And when we're ragged and worn out, that's not going to be able to do much good for the world. And in my own experience, when I'm really worn out and exhausted, I sometimes make mistakes, and then I end up spending a whole lot of time cleaning up the mess I have made.

So it's a lot easier actually and a lot of more effective to be resilient and calm and guided by some sense of inner wisdom so that we don't have to be constantly making messes along the way. They're saying the road to hell is paved with good intentions can be perhaps a bit cynical, but there's also truth to it which is basically all the passion in the world and all the desire in the world to make a difference isn't enough if we don't combine it with some degree of wisdom.

And so hopefully wisdom is what we get when we apply what we are learning on behalf of what we love, then we just people are learning and growing. And I think as long as we have open minds and we keep learning then I really believe that good intentions will lead to a better and better outcome in the world.

Ben: Yeah, that's beautiful. I'm curious, you know, you're somebody who I think does a beautiful job of bouncing, making the inner cultivation, inner wisdom, inner spirituality with being very effective in terms of social change. I heard it, and Joe Harvey speak to people who focus on spirituality need to get up and get active in the world, and people who are so active need to learn how to sit and really contemplate and deal within.

And I see you as someone who is really bouncing, both of those. So I'm wondering how you continue to do that to really not pull away from the world while being fully engaged but not to the point where you lose yourself.

Ocean: Yeah. Well, it's such a beautiful question and I think that it's something that every human being needs to work with in some way. And I don't think that anyone will really be happy, honestly, if we're just doing our yoga and meditation, and saying our affirmations, and seeing our therapist every week, and doing work that we hate and doing nothing to better the world around us.

And I don't think anyone will really be happy if we're running our bodies ragged, eating crap and filling our mind with all kinds of senseless resentment while we struggle and fight; all the forces of evil in the world. So I think, ultimately, we need to find a way that we can -- as Gandhi has implored as to do, be the change that we wish to see in the world.

And that's my passion, you know, how can I really live in a way that's congruent with my values? How can I have a full heart and open spirit and an open mind and a healthy body, and from that foundation make

the biggest difference? And I have kids as I think you know Ben, that have autism and they're 11 years old. They're twins.

And they completely will pull back for me. I can get so excited about big social change, missions and visions, and then I'm back at home with my kids helping, change their pull-ups and helping them eat because they can't really eat with regular silverware and really basic things that are very humbling for me.

And they actually keep me really grounded in this level where I'm practicing with them, manifesting unconditional love, manifesting acceptance of them as they are, and realizing that all the perfectionism, all the ways that I drive myself and push myself to do more, accomplish more, be more, and make myself respect and myself love conditional and what I give to world.

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Those are all getting undermined right now as I'm learning to practice loving my kids for who they are, not because they're necessarily on the fast track to Harvard or huge social change in agendas. Who knows what they'll do with their lives?

But at this point, I'm realizing that they need love and acceptance just for who they are and for being who they are. And I think the same is true for everybody on earth, and if I can apply that externally, then maybe I can apply it internally as well.

Ben: That's beautiful. I love the way that you frame the seeming challenges that you've experienced through being a father, and how you've turned them into such a gift to your development and who you get to be in the world.

I remember when we first met, we we're in a circle and you were sharing a bit about the night your boys were born and sort of -- I learned about your spirituality through that because you spoke about going out and kind of praying and opening up, and asking what was going to happen, and what if you shared about that in terms of how that relates to your view of how we can shift our perspective to see the challenges we have as gifts, and how we can kind of walk through life in that manner, which is much more empowering as I see in you.

Ocean:

Well, I think that we all face these many things in our lives that don't go the way we want them to. And I think that how we are with the suffering, and with the pain, with the devastation that we face is a lot of what defines us as human beings.

I remember, Ben, you and I just a few weeks ago, we were in Japan and we went to Tohoku which was this region that was devastated by the tsunami and by the earthquake. And we went through this whole region that was just completely annihilated. And I went there, kind of the story I had in my mind was, "Oh, I'm going to see the Gazillion Sea of the human spirit."

Like I'm going to see the survivors, people who lived through this tragedy, and I'm going to see how they're rebuilding, and I'm going to be inspired by human being's capacity to respond to crisis and rebuild. And then I was kind of struck because actually what I got from that experience was something else, and I think something much deeper.

I realized that sometimes people die and they don't come back. Sometimes things get broken and they never get fixed. And so how we are with our mortality, with the mortality of this planet, with the reality that everything that is born dies is part of what shapes us. And so I want to build dreams and I want to manifest brilliant possibilities in this life.

But I want to meet my hopes and my dreams, and I want to build them out of a foundation of truth, out of a foundation of what is so. I think that we can't get somewhere without starting where we are. If you want to look at a map and say, "Okay, I'm here and I'm trying to get there." It takes both knowing what the here is and what the there is accurately to move effectively.

And part of what the here is a world where we're all going to die; a world where there is massive suffering and violence; and somehow we need to find a way of accepting what is and bringing love there, bringing compassion there, bringing peace and kindness there if we're going to be able to create any real lasting change in this world.

So to me then, seeing the Japanese people and their depths of grief was very impactful. And also hearing a story of how for some time after the devastation occurred, the whole communities were literally wiped out; some of the survivors felt like they wanted to die. They wanted to join in their love ones, and they felt that they had no reason to live, and how

could they go on when everyone they cared about or so many of the people they love were dead.

And there was actually a lot of suicide at that time, but then they gradually set in for many people this belief, that actually the best way they could honor the dead was to live. And now you see these cemeteries in an area where there are just destroyed, demolished houses, and everything has been wiped out. The only thing that's sort of there that humans are really investing in is the cemeteries; and there are these gorgeous tombstones, and fresh flowers, and everything so beautiful, and people have polished it and it looks just magnificent.

And I felt the sense that people are living in honor of those who have died. And I wonder what would it be like for the rest of us if we have had more of a connection to death? Yes we can be afraid of it, but what if we also accept it and realize that we actually have nothing to fear if we're going to die anyway, we might as well live. Because ultimately, isn't that one of our greatest fears if we really put ourselves out and live our passion, we'll be annihilated, right? We'll be killed.

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So if you realize that you're going to die anyway, then maybe that changes the conversation just a little bit, maybe we realize that we're already naked, we're already done. Our ego and our identity and how everyone sees us just doesn't matter quite as much because when we die, depending on what your belief is -- you may or may not believe this but I have the sense that when we die, we're going to go before -- I'll call it God, or the Almighty, or the Infinite, or the truth of our own soul.

We're going to go before something greater than us and we're going to take stock of our lives and look back. And personally, when I look back from the perspective, I suspect I won't be asking how much money did I make and I certainly won't be asking, "Did everyone in the world like me?" "Was I popular?" or "Did I dress right?" I'll be asking how deeply did I love, and how deeply did I serve, and did I follow the call of my own conscience, did I follow the call of my own heart, and did I live in a way that was true to the prayers and the dreams that I was born with?

And from that perspective, everything kind of changes and things that seemed important in this mundane, day-to-day or earthly reality just aren't as important anymore and other things become more important. As much as I can, I want to live in congruence with the insights that come

out of that kind of big picture perspective and that I want to live it day-to-day in the world, and of course, that means that you've got to deal with the details.

There's a passage in the Quran when the Prophet Muhammad was in the desert with his followers and he said, "Time to tie up our camels for the night." And one of them said, "Oh, but Great Prophet, shouldn't we trust in Allah to take care of our camels?" And the Prophet Muhammad said, "Trust in Allah but tie up your camel."

So I think we all need to find our way of trusting in the Infinite and also tying up our camels and doing due diligence in the world, but we do so not from a belief that it's all up to us but rather that we are in the hands of a greater power and maybe we are being used to do something good in this world.

Ben: Yeah, I absolutely agree. It strikes me as you're speaking about death and the realization that can come from confronting that reality, is how much we need to refresh those insights; to really -- as you've said -- take it every day; what is the realization, what are the values that come out of that space and then how to live the moment by moment.

And one thing that I'm aware of is I think it would be easy to look at you and say, "Oh well, he had a bestselling author, father who is doing this great work, 16 years of precocious and he started this organization. That's not me." And certainly knowing you and feeling connected to you I know that's not the case at all. I felt your humanity and I see you as someone who's done a lot of work to get to the place you are.

And so I'm wondering what you'd say to people who you know are later on in life but still find themselves struggling a bit with really bringing passion into the world and really finding purpose in a meaningful way that feels fulfilling?

Ocean: Well, two things. First, I want to say that there is no one else like me in the world and there's no one else like you either. Every one of us is completely unique and I believe there are more than 7 billion parts to play in the transformation of our world, one for every human being on earth. And whatever our gifts are, whatever our struggles are, they've actually prepared us perfectly for our part that we have to play.

I actually spent a lot of time in my youth feeling guilty and thinking that I would be far more effective to accomplish my visions for the world if I



was Black and if I came from poverty, because I wanted to work for social justice and social upliftment, and I would experience people of color and people from lower income backgrounds than my own saying, “Well, I can't relate to you” or “You can't help me because you come from a different background.”

And I really felt like it was a barrier for me because I wanted to help people who were struggling the most in the world. And those seem to me to be, most of all, people who are victims of racial injustice and economic injustice, so I was reaching out to those communities and I kept feeling like I wasn't able to effectively communicate to people.

So I felt guilty about my privilege and I felt that it was a handicap and then some people eventually sat me down and said, “Ocean, you've got your gifts and we've got ours, you know? And if you don't talk to the White people, who will?” And I was like, “We can't reach your audiences. You can go to conferences. You can talk to the rich people better than we can.”

So you got gift and we can talk to people of color and low-income communities and inner-city America and the Bronx South better than you can.” So we got to work together, we got to learn from each other, and challenge each other and help each other grow, but ultimately, we all need to work in our communities wherever those are. And so that's what comes down to what's called “constituency organizing.”

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If you're an artist, you're going to be way more effective than I am in organizing artists for social change. I'm not a brilliant artist. I love art, but I'm not a great artist. I'm not a great musician. I'm not a great painter. Someone who is will be better at organizing musicians and painters, you know.

I'm becoming an autism organizer better than you probably would be if you don't have kids who are autistic, you know? What life brings us, even sometimes the most painful things is also an invitation; a door that opens towards whatever it is that we are here to give. Whatever your age is, you know, that's a doorway. We're talking to young folks here, and I started Yes when I was 16, and a lot of old folks would say, “Oh, you're young. You can't change the world. When you get a good education and then you can make a difference.”

And I say, “No, we need to work with the youth and who better to work with the youth than the youth.” So I started Yes when I was 16 because I felt like I needed to reach out to my generation. Now, I’m 38 and I still work with young people, but I also work with all ages because I think that that’s appropriate now that I’m this age, you know.

So whatever our niche is or whatever our context is, it prepares us to give our gifts. I’m male and as much as I might have said, “Oh, one of the horrors of the world is sexism, and therefore women’s voice and women’s empowerment is necessary.” I have the humility to recognize that women are going to be better at reaching out to women, in helping women’s voices come forth than I am.

I can be an ally. I can be a friend. I can help men to support that cause, but ultimately when it comes to traveling to world villages or working right here in America, and working with women --you know, frankly, my gender is a barrier.

So, we got to use what we got and you get to make the biggest difference we can. And for a lot of you, as my dad felt like, his background with the Baskin-Robbins context was a barrier to making a new difference. People would just say, “Oh, you were born with a silver ice cream spoon in your mouth” and “Why should we trust you? You can’t relate to the common American.”

And then history became an asset because he’d walked away from the ice cream company and the money that it represented. And now suddenly, everyone took him more seriously. But learning how to tell your story is an art form that each of us has to find and sometimes what once a liability becomes a strength when we learn how to tell it in the right way.

I would have said that having kids with autism was a huge liability to making a difference. I mean, look at how many hours I have to spend dealing with mundane things, but actually it’s making me deeper; it’s making me wiser; it’s making me more humble; and it’s helping me to deepen my sense of connection to all of humanity and learning about unconditional love.

So I say it’s one of my greatest gifts and so I think the question is how can we find the gifts in the pain, in the struggles of our lives and use them to mobilize us, to empower us, to galvanize us to make the biggest difference that we possibly can?

Ben: Yeah, that's great. That's really great. A number of things come up as I'm hearing you speak about the way that has been in your own life. And what I'm wondering at this moment is -- you know, at this point in your life, the journey you've gone through in the last 20 plus years, what is it now that most is tugging at your heart in terms of what you're wanting to manifest and bring forth in the world?

I mean, I know it's certainly just a further evolution of the work you have been doing, but things like the Food Revolution Network and the work you're doing to get your sons at Son-Rise. I wonder if you could share what your current passions and inspirations are.

Ocean: Oh, don't get me started. Yes, I would -- well, let me talk about food for a minute because we haven't gotten into that very much yet in this call. So of course I talked about my family's story; and now I'm working with my dad. We launched the Food Revolution Network. We interviewed 23 of the world's top food revolutionary leaders; many of them are New York Times bestselling authors.

And we wanted to talk with them about food and how we can work for healthy food, and sustainable food, and humane food, and delicious food, how we can change our food culture and how we have healthier, better food in our lives and learn from the latest findings of medical research and scientists, and humanitarians to see what's really going on in the food world. And it's immense.

You know, everything we eat has such an impact. If you want to think globally and act locally, you don't get any more local than the food on your plate. If you want to care for your own body, and you want to care for the world around you, then what you eat is a great place to start. We all eat every day pretty much. And what we eat has a huge impact on the ability of human beings elsewhere in the world to simply eat because it takes, in the United States 12 to 16 pounds of grain to make one pound of feedlot beef.

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So if you're eating that beef from those feedlots, then for every pound of beef you're eating you're essentially robbing a lot of other people of 11 to 15 pounds of food that they otherwise could have eaten. So I'm not saying that food we get to those people but particularly in the context of droughts and food shortages which we're entering into more and more in

the years to come. We do need to be conscious of where our food is going and how our crops plants are being used.

Because as we consume meats from factory farms, we're essentially driving up the price of all the feed that those animals are eating because of the laws of supply and demand which is increasing world food price, and guess who loses out when world food prices go up? It's the poor who can't afford to eat anymore. So, this is one issue. There are many others when it comes to food.

What we're finding about our food choices and their impact is just enormous. We've been watching in recent decades a movement towards organically-engineered, mass-produced, corporately-driven food systems that are driving family farmers out of business and we end up eating food like products full of chemicals and additives and junk foods that are heavily marketed and advertised and that are causing to get sick.

In the United States, we have the most obese and ill population as human beings that we know of in the history of the world right now. We have more people who are chronically ill than any other country in the world and it doesn't have to be like this. We know better. We know more about the relationship between diet and disease than any other people in the history of the world.

We have so much medical research and literature and knowledge now. There have been tremendous amount of studies. It's honestly pretty conclusive for all the fad diets and all the tricks people try to tell us we can play with our bodies. The bottom line is simple. You have whole foods, simple diet; eat real food instead of junk and chemicals. Eat locally, eat inorganically as possible and eat lower on the food chain.

As we make these kinds of steps, we realized that it has a huge impact. We could extend our life expectancy considerably. We can reduce or eliminate heart disease. We can dramatically reduce rates of cancer, osteoporosis, diabetes, many of the other diseases that are plaguing the modern world and we can do so in ways that are actually good for the world around us that are create a more humane system of agriculture, that are going to create more opportunity for everybody to eat it all.

We can dramatically impact global warming. It turns out that what we eat has more impact than climate change than what we drive and what we fly. In fact, if you took all the cars and all the airplanes and all the trains, and all the buses and all of the trucks, all of the ships and all the

transportation sector and you shut it down tomorrow, it will have less impact on climate change than if everyone in the world change our diets to produce or eliminate animal agriculture.

And I'm not calling for the total elimination of animal agriculture but I am making a point which has such a huge impact and if we care about global warming and we're serious about this issue, then this is one of the places that we can have huge leverage. I personally think it will be easier to change our diets than it would to eliminate all of the transportation sector.

So, I'm interested to what we can do to publicize this information, help people to become informed and engaged and healthy and vibrant and build a better world starting with the food on our plates.

Ben: I love going in to this topic and hearing you open about it because it's kind of like opening a door and there's a whole other world, and all of a sudden you have a thousand things to say about it which is so great. I really appreciate the work you're doing around it.

There are two things that just come up for me as I hear you talk about that. One is I'm wondering, the way that I've made food choice changes in my life has come about less so from the information about how it will affect the world. Of course that's in my heart and that's really important but it has come about also through just noticing how I'm more vital and more present and more enjoying my life when I eat healthy and when I eat well.

Ocean: Yes.

Ben: And definitely it feels like a balance of how we can get all of that information out there and how to be known as well as just to get people experimenting in present to how food is affecting their well-being. And certainly, you throwing out all those statistics is not something my mind often goes to so I so appreciate you holding that pole so strongly with a huge stick in the ground.

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One thing that I'm thinking about is just what people can take away because there's so much information you have about food and that one thing maybe you could do is like what are two or three things that you

think people could do to better support their food choices moving out of this call?

Ocean:

Well absolutely, thanks Ben. And you don't have to become some kind of radical to take a step in a positive direction. We can all lean into, whatever is healthier and better for us, and have time to see yourself. You're working out to dream here. I mean it's easier -- or infinitely easier to get a Snickers bar than it is to get a bowl of spinach.

And any convenient store, so probably 50 -- well, more than 50, probably 100 forms of junk food and how these things get -- how they get this water in a plastic bottle? So the reality is that you have to go upstream in order to change the course of things when it comes to food systems. And so I say, start one step at a time because habits -- you know, you can't change all your habits at once most likely. But if you change one habit at a time, eventually your habits become your destiny.

And if you change the direction you're walking, just a few degrees, it's not a big difference at first but over the course of many miles, you end up at a completely different place. So leaning to what's possible, take a look in your refrigerator, think about one thing you buy that you know is unhealthy for you or unhealthy for your world or not true to your values. Now, think about one thing you could replace it with and then see what happens.

If you can eliminate that one item from your diet and replace it with something better, that's healthier and more true to what you want, or the life you want. You can find one good recipe. One recipe that you just think it's delicious that you could see yourself making regularly. Most of us, truth be told, when we have you know 10 to 15 recipes that we make most of the time and we repeat those over and over.

So replace one crappy recipe that's unhealthy with one healthy recipe you love or eat out a little bit less often and a little bit more often. Share food with friends and family because food is a very social thing. So if we can build networks of supports for the food choice that we want, that can be great, whether it's potlucks or get-togethers and many hands make light work when it comes to food, you don't have to prepare it all yourself even if you live alone.

Try to spend you know once a week, get together with some friends. "I'll make you dinner this week, you make me dinner" next week kind of deal. And it can be really fun that way. So those are some basic tips as well as

getting informed and if you join the Food Revolution Network at [foodrevolution.org](http://foodrevolution.org), we'll send you regular updates, tips, ideas and resources to help you on the path.

Ben: Beautiful. What a great tip, I love that. Thank you. I certainly have more -- I want to discuss about food but I'm noticing that it's really -- I would love to like kind of do a well-rounded overview of all the things that you could kind of speak on because I think it was such a rush to know all that.

And so I'd love to make sure we just touch on some more around the parenting themes because I think they're just so much richness in what you've gone through with your boys and what you're bringing to both autism parenting and just what you have to say about parenting in general.

And so I'm curious -- you know, one of the things I've heard you speak to about is just the kind of the sense of you had a feeling that your children would be doing incredible social action in the world based on who your father was and who you were, and just the kind of the children you expected to raise. And I know that there has been a lot of struggle and I've heard you say that there has been a lot of challenge in that.

So I'm curious, what have been the biggest challenges as you face that that you found in yourself and how have you really continue to stay on in a way that feels fulfilling and as it sounds like incredibly opening and beautiful?

Ocean: Well, the biggest challenge has been letting go of all the hopes and expectations and dreams that I had as a father. I mean, my wife and I when we decided to become parents, we imagined that our kids will be saving the world by the time they were out of diapers. I mean we were these big social change makers to accomplish -- we both were really pre-cautious in accomplishing big things and having a deep sense of purpose early in life, and we both envisioned that parenting was some kind of a strategic social change investment.

And my dad did use to tell me when I was little that he loved -- was proud of all my accomplishments and he would love me just as much if I was autistic. And I used to think that was very sweet, but it didn't really mean a lot to me. And now I get kids all autistic and I get to find out, do I love them just as much autistic?

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And it's a deep question really, but in order to love them as they are, I have to let go of wanting them to be somebody they're not. And the dissolution, the depths really of those hopes and expectations, it's part of what my particular parenting journey has demanded of me. And I think every parent, to some extent, goes through that. We all have to let go of wanting our kids to be who we expect them to be or letting go of our expectations, really.

And seeing who shows up in them and in us when we release those expectations because those expectations occur like a prisoner that somebody is -- that they're always going to fail to measure up or they're not going to be quite what we wanted and then we're not there to meet them for who they are.

And so I've had to let go of that, all the dreams of nurturing my kids because we'll change visions. I hope they would be writing books by the time they were 11 and we're not quite there, to say the least. But when I let go of that, I also find such richness and beauty in who they are. They're beautiful beings, they deserve incredible love and we have a lot of fun together. And I'm so much a better dad when I'm seeing them for what they are and not for what they're not.

And I kind of think the world is that way too. We're better lovers of life when we see what's here, other than being mad at the world for not meeting our expectations. And frankly, in relationship too, I mean my partner and I, we're deeply in love and I'm a much better husband when I'm seeing who she is rather than wishing she was somebody else, wishing she was different.

You know, everyone, it's for those of us who are in a relationship. We're all maybe the best experts in the world and all the shortcomings of our partner. But ultimately, is that going to help them? It matters who they are and who they want to be, but the best we can do I think is to love them unconditionally and support them in being true to their own development.

It doesn't mean people can't change, but most of the time they changed because they want to and it was part of their destiny, not because someone else thought they should.

Ben: Yeah, that's beautiful. I love the way you spoke to seeing children as a possible social change investment and it really shows like as you



described that. I just feel like the way that relates to purpose and how we can get so connected to a certain purpose for the way our energies are going to flow and the way our intentions are going to flow.

And I really see such a beautiful example of finding a deeper purpose and a deeper listening and a deeper acceptance in the journey you've gone through and continue to be on which, in my own self, even I think of the ways that I relate to how to my career purpose is unfolding in my life and what deeper listening and acceptance I can do in the space of that, so on the presence of that.

And thank you for the example of that which I think stretches across all of life not just in parenting.

Ocean:

Certainly, you're welcome, yeah. Well, and I mean, Martin Luther King told us "You have no moral authority with those who can feel your underlying contempt." So when we're holding a contemptuous or disrespectful relationship to the world around us, I think we lose moral standing in relationship.

And whether you're working for social justice in the U.S. South, fighting racism or you're parenting or you're working for sustainability or whether you're fighting politically or spiritually or in relationship to your own parents, ultimately, we regain more outstanding when we have some sense of respect, the dignity and the humanity in every other.

Ben:

Yeah, that's beautiful. And I even see that encompassing parts of ourselves, you know when I can hold the space of love and unconditionality for the parts of me that are lazy and totally selfish and all those things. There is a way that a space opens up and our morals already could come in and work with those parts much better.

So I wanted to just say we're going up the questions in a moment so people who are on the line, start getting your questions ready. On the webcast, you can feel free to type them in and the phone line, go ahead and hit 1. Before we do that though, Ocean, I just want to make sure that we touch on the Son-Rise program just for anyone who may have autism in their life, just to make sure.

I know the work you're doing is so great, just if you could share a few thoughts on that before we transition would be a gift.

Ocean:

Sure. Well, as parents with kids who have autism, we've encountered the reality that conventional autism treatment really doesn't know what to do. So the dominant treatment that's out there right now focuses on modifying behavior. And really the underlying belief is that autistic kids are not going to be able to most likely ever get married or function in the world, most likely. And the best you can hope for is to train them to behave better.

[0:40:15]

So it's a system based fundamentally on rewards and punishments. They trained kids to have better table manners and greet people better and fit in better into the world. But in many cases, the kids would behave better but they don't know why they're doing it and it's almost treating them like machines. And that wasn't really satisfying to us. Although frankly, I think we would have done anything that worked.

But then we discovered a program called "Son-Rise," S-O-N-R-I-S-E, and the focus of Son-Rise is it looks at autism fundamentally as a relational issue rather than a behavioral issue. So instead of pathologizing our kids, we love them and we build connection with them, and to focus on is on how to build eye contact, how to build relationship and instead of pushing away their autistic behaviors, we actually join them.

So for example, my friend, River, has a particular passion for Barbie dolls and he used to love chewing on Barbie dolls' feet. And he had never made eye contact to the first ten years of his life with anybody. And one day, he was chewing on Barbie feet and instead of trying to yank the Barbie out of his mouth and judge him for it or be worried about, "How the heck is my kid ever going to have a dating life if he has this Barbie chewing obsession?"

I decided to pick up another Barbie across the room from him and really get in to chewing on her foot just the way he was doing it. I was really having a good time with it and suddenly he looks at me with this huge smile, and this again, is a kid who had never made eye contact before. He looked at me and we were just beaming at each other and I could almost hear him saying to me in his mind, "Oh my God, there is intelligent life on this planet."

So then, he comes over and he gives it to me, he puts you on the other side of his Barbie. So now I come over and we're three inches apart chewing on the two feet respectively of his Barbie doll and we're just

beaming in each other's eyes. I was just falling in love with my kid right then and I felt so powerfully. When I joined him in his world, he showed me the door in. We made contact and out of that contact, I could show him the door out.

Once I've earned moral authority and credibility in his world by taking an interest in him and entering into the world of his interests and passions, then we're in contact and I am so much more able to invite him into new behaviors and new ways of engaging and relating, and that's we've been seeing.

So since we started the Son-Rise program a year and a half ago, we've seen eye contact increased maybe thirtyfold and we've seen huge breakthroughs in relationship, and taking an interest in other people, and emotional connectivity and all kinds of things that you're not supposed to see in kids that have autism.

So we're pretty inspired about it and we've become spokespeople in the community. If you visit [autismandmiracles.com](http://autismandmiracles.com), that's part of my website focused on this, we're organizing trainings and helping people learn how they can implement the Son-Rise program in their own lives.

With 1 in 80 kids having autism in the U.S. right now and the number going up fast, I think it's crucial that we find ways of relating to this that are most congruent with our values and that they work. And my own experience is that Son-Rise is a beautiful option to have in the mix. It's not the be-all, end-all for everybody. It takes a lot of work to run a Son-Rise program.

But I highly encourage any families that are working with autism to at least check it out and learn about it. It's been a game changer for our family.

Ben: Beautiful. Thanks for sharing that Ocean. And if people join your newsletter you, from time to time, send out little video clips or things about your boys, which is such a beautiful thing to see. So I definitely recommend people getting connected to you that way which will show us some more info on at the end of the call, but beautiful.

I want to open up to the questions now. So again, if you're on the phone, please hit 1 and if you're on the webcast, you can go ahead and type your question in. We've got a few questions coming in here.

One is about parenthood saying, "I've been scared to become a parent as I have a great fear that it's going to take away from the work I'm meant to do in the world. Hearing you talk about parenthood is making me see that I might have a big blind spot. I'm wondering what your feeling is about, what you're able to do in the world in balancing parenthood and if my fears may be justified."

Ocean:

Well, I think there's no question that parenthood takes a lot of time and a lot of energy, and that's time and energy that you will put into other things. I think the question is, "Is that a part of what you're supposed to do in the world?" Because from a certain perspective if the purpose of life on earth is to bring more love into the world, then you'd be hard to press to find anything that's going to bring more love through your heart than parenthood.

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I mean if you become a parent, you prepare to have your heartbroken and have your heart blown open and experience more love than you ever could have imagined. A love big enough in fact to want to do anything in the world to help somebody with autism like in my case, it's like for me when I really opened my heart fully to the parenting journey, I feel that it changes me.

It deepens me, it empowers me. It helps me grow, but that's because it was part of my purpose. If it really wasn't part of my purpose, maybe I'd be feeling resentful or burdens. There's no question that the amount of hours you can spend out there in the world, it's probably going to be less as a parent. The question is if it's making your heart bigger, making you a deeper human being then maybe what you do in the world will be deeper and truer to your conscience and your spirit.

And ultimately that's a very personal choice but everyone needs to answer for themselves and with whatever guidance you attend to in your life.

Ben:

That's great, Ocean, thanks. A few more questions off the webcast, one is asking, "With all the young readers that you've worked with around the world. I'm wondering if there any themes you've seen in terms of the challenges young people are facing and also in terms of the inspiration and excitement that's coming through them."

Ocean:

Well, I think a lot of people right now are facing a crisis of Sinicism and we are in a world where we work really hard to try to make a difference and a lot of times it feels overwhelming. You know, we are up against some problems that are pretty insurmountable in many respects such as climate change. If you follow the data and realize that 97% of the world's scientist seemed to agree that climate change is real and it's being caused by human activities.

And then you go step further and realize that the amount of knowing fossil fuels in the ground is enough to raise global temperatures so much that we're talking about the flooding of Miami and New York and many other cities, and billions potentially of human beings having to be displaced, and massive changes, in terms of droughts and floods. And if you look at where our dramatically warmed world leads us, it's pretty terrifying.

And then you think about human beings tension for fighting wars over scarce resources, you know it's easy to feel pretty pessimistic. And so what I want to say is that we need to do what we can and we need to also, I think, come to terms with our own mortality. The mortality of our - even our own species and I don't mean to sound too depressing but actually I think if we find more strengths and more power to make a difference when we realized that everything is going to die.

And I know I spoke of this earlier but I'm just moved to share it again that I want to build my dreams on real grounds. And that reality of the ground I build on includes the awesome preciousness and miracle of every life. And the fact that, hope is so deeply alive, as long as there's breath in my lungs and blood in my veins and love in my heart then hope is alive in this world.

And at the same time, there's a lot of suffering. And my hope is that we can be open with all of that and not shrink our hearts from the presence of the suffering but rather let our hearts grow and expand into deeper wisdom and compassion and empathy and power to make a difference.

Ben:

That's great, thank you. Well, these questions are actually spinning the whole gamut of possibilities, so I'm loving this and there's questions about money. The question is, "I'm finding it hard to be fully committed to my passions and be able to support myself financially. What lessons from your life of balancing money and purpose might we take away that could support us being able to devote all of our time to the social actions we're called to?"

Ocean: Great question. And how wonderful that you're asking that question because a lot of people follow into this belief that, you know we got to do jobs we hate to put food on the table and then we have to volunteer our time on the side, if we want to try to make a difference in the world. And for some people, that's how it is. But the more we can bring our nine to five, our core prime energy into alignment with our purpose for the better or for our world and for our own fulfillment.

**[0:50:00]**

So it's vital to ask those questions and one of my friends who started Yes with me, his Ryan Eliason and he started the Social Entrepreneur Empowerment Network and he offered a lot of resources to help people who wanted to become social entrepreneurs, that is to say to make a living and make a difference at the same time. You know tools and help for everything, from time management to practical skills and ideas.

Another friend of mine started [marketingforhippies.com](http://marketingforhippies.com) where he's offering resources and training and support to help people learn how to market their stuff. People that are offering good things to make the world a better place but don't know how the heck to market it. And so he's helping folks do that, and these are just a couple of resources that are many.

And I think that we need people that are working within establish systems, be it a government or corporate institutions and trying to make change from the inside out, trying to make them more humane and more conscious and more sustainable and we also need the people working outside those systems and building new systems and new forms of the economy and ways of living and being.

The reality is that our dominant economic system in the U.S. and Canada and much of the world right now is a system that focuses -- in which money and actual contribution are pretty disconnected. So you can become a billionaire without really making a significant and positive impact on the world just by investing in a certain way. Or by selling a lot of something that's actually harming our planet.

So my dream is someday live in a world where the bottom line is deeply interwoven with our world's bottom line. If we could create that and our capitalist system would really be a driver, an engine that would empower the world we dreamed of. Right now though, it's like this bizarre

distortion because a lot of times, money is made without making any real contribution.

So each of us has the opportunity then to ask how can we live within this system and make the best of it? And sometimes again, that means working within established systems and trying to bring love and joy there. If you're working in a restaurant, waiting tables, smile at people. Look at every interaction as an opportunity to bring a little more joy and love into that restaurant. And you'll be surprised; you'll probably get bigger tips. And you'll probably be happier.

If you're a garbage collector, then like collect that garbage with a passion and enjoy and pray over those streets. And if you're working in a corporate job in a cubicle, try to bring some humanity into that job. Try to bring some love and some peace and some joy into that job and see what you can do to make that corporation a little bit more beautiful and a little bit more true to your value.

And I think each of us has those opportunities and then some of us want to start new enterprises and new businesses and new ways of doing things and bless you on the paths as you try to make a living and make a difference at the same time. There are -- I think it was Rumi who said, "There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground." I think there are hundreds of ways to follow the call of our spirits and to make this world more beautiful.

Ben: I love that. Thank you, Ocean. And that actually transitions beautifully into this next question that's here. This person is saying, "I'm finding myself passionate about working with people's inner worlds, with their mindset and their spirituality, but I often feel guilty that this work isn't really social change and it isn't helping the most intense suffering in the world, like hunger, poverty, environmental issues. From what you're saying I'm feeling like, I need to be true to my calling and gifts but I'm not sure how to work with this strong guilt. Do you have any thoughts?"

Ocean: Well, I want to hear -- can you repeat that last sentence again?

Ben: Yeah. "From what you're saying, I'm feeling like I just need to be true to my calling and my passions but I'm not sure how to work with the guilt that I feel."

Ocean: Yeah. Well, I want to say about that is guilt doesn't really -- in my experience, generally do a whole lot of good. And sometimes it's actually

a form of self-hate, and so I think there is a place for remorse but ultimately, what I'm interested in is what's actually going to be useful to help us be happy and fulfilled and make a difference.

And so my suggestion is bring some compassion there. Bring some love there. Bring some kindness there. Things become beautiful when we love them including you. So bring some love to your heart and your spirit and your life and your choices before you and you'll watch the world become more beautiful right before your eyes.

The next thing I would say is that you can start with a step. The first step is often the hardest, and once you've taken a step then you take another step and eventually your movement builds a kind of momentum and eventually it's unstoppable. But inertia and apathy are really the thief of time and engagement.

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And so if you want to make a difference start by doing something and you don't have to have a strategic plan for the rest of your life in order to start doing something and learning as you go.

Ben:

That's great. Thank you. Well, we're getting to the end of our call and so I'd love to just end with a question I'm trying to bring more for all of us, which is just kind of a personal question for you, Ocean, of what is your biggest growth edge these days?

I mean you certainly spoke it about it a bit a parent but I'm curious just in terms of or as a husband or as a teacher or as speaker or just as a human being. What's your growing edge right now just for the sake of people having a sense of where you're at and what you're working with?

Ocean:

Well, I spoke about guilt and self-hate, and I feel like I'm working with applying what I'm learning from my kids in-house. You see if I can love them the way they are then maybe I can love me the way I am. Not just to that person who is passionate and trying to make a difference but as me with all that I am. If I can really find a place of unconditional love and acceptance of who I am, I'm curious how that will change my action in the world.

I feel like sometimes I've engaged as an activist from a place that felt that something was wrong and I had to change it. And right now I feel like I'm exploring what does it mean to say things that are perfect including part



of that perfection is the desire to change it. But it doesn't have to be wrong or bad in order to be loved and to be engaged with and to make a difference.

So I see you, like that massive violence and craziness in the world, and I see places in myself that are pretty dysfunctional sometimes. Can I love them? And can I love me as I am? And if I've got this little boy inside that is crying out for attention and love, and just afraid of being abandoned and all this kind of things, and whenever I notice him, I have a choice I can either be resentful and say, "Damn it, why is he messing things up again? Can't you see I'm trying to get something done over here?"

And they could say "Oh I love you. I'm so sorry that you're feeling scared. Let me hold you and embrace you." And when I do that then something softens in him and instead of being at war inwardly, you find that peace inwardly. And then I meet the world from a deeper ground of being.

Ben: I love that. That's beautiful and I'm happy to be holding unconditional love for you from the outside to support your journey in that. So thank you so much Ocean for being here with us tonight, and just who you're being in the world, it's really just a pleasure to have you on here. I'm wondering before we close if you just share how people could stay connected to you and get involve in some of the work you're doing.

Ocean: Absolutely. If you want to learn about the Food Revolution Network, go to [foodrevolution.org](http://foodrevolution.org), sign up for our list and get resources, action tools and insights to help you live the food revolution in your own life. If you want to learn about autism and miracles, go to [autismandmiracles.com](http://autismandmiracles.com) and sign up for my e-mail list and you will learn about all kinds of things that I'm doing and ways of getting involved.

And if you want to participate and work with me, then listen to your own heart and hear what's next for you? What's calling you? What's one step people you could take to bring your life and your actions into greater congruency? What's your sense of purpose?

Ben: Beautiful. Thank you so much Ocean. It's such a pleasure to have you. So much love your way and have a beautiful rest of your night.

Ocean: Thank you Ben and thanks to everyone listening. I hope these calls have been of some use to you, in your journey of love and service.

Ben:

Absolutely! Thank you everybody. Just a quick note, we will be back next Monday in a week with Bill Bowman at 5:00 p.m. on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and Bill is such a wonderful, wonderful elder, just a beautiful, light, wise soul. I'm really happy to have him on. So I think it's going to be a great continuation of our series and I'll be sending an e-mail this week.

**[0:59:41]**

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