

## EPISODE 64

## [INTRODUCTION]

*TS: I'm waitressing. I'm doing this volunteer radio thing. I'm just trying to grow and integrate as a person. I'm going to yoga classes. At one point, I decided to do a series of rebirthing sessions. I don't know if you know much about it. This was something that was big in the '80s, but you did this deep breathing. As part of this rebirthing process, these 10 sessions, you're given the opportunity to say what your prayer is for your life.*

*As a result of those rebirthing sessions, the prayer that came to me was, "God, I'm willing to do your work. Please show me what it is." Because I knew it wasn't working at this Chinese restaurant, and the volunteer radio thing, I didn't really, really have a sense of that being anything but a way to share music and get educated myself. "God, willing to do your work. Please, show me what it is."*

**[00:01:01] LW:** Hey, there. It's Light Watkins. You are listening to At the End of the Tunnel, which is a podcast that features the backstories of luminaries and artists and people who are out there, using their platform or their voice to make a positive difference in the world. My intention is to interview people who seem to have found their calling in the world, and to go deep into their backstory, to see how it all happened.

What I find is that there's usually a moment where they hit upon some conflict or internal crossroads, where they can either go in the direction of fitting in or they can go into the direction of being more of themselves. The people who find their calling are usually the ones who choose, sometimes against all odds, to be themselves and to do what's in their heart. It's really that simple. I think, we need to hear more of these kinds of stories over and over and over to build up the courage and the confidence to do the same thing in our lives.

That's why I have this podcast. That's why I choose the guests that I choose. Because we need to keep choosing to be ourselves. It's not just a one choice deal. To find our calling and to properly see it through, we need to make that choice a 1,000 times, because the world is not set up for people to be themselves and to follow their heart. It's scary. It's uncertain. You question

yourself over and over. Eventually, you become the model for what it looks like to follow your calling, or your path. That's when everybody starts writing books about you and having you on their podcast and making films about you.

What's interesting about my guest this week is that she is a person who has been responsible for putting out the work of so many luminaries and authors, including yours truly, through her publishing company, which is called Sounds True. You guys have heard me talk about my newest book, *Knowing Where to Look: A 108 Daily Doses of Inspiration*. Well, Tami Simon is my publisher. She is the publisher for Sounds True. She started that company back in the 1980s, after getting a download that she was meant to help people while she was working in a greasy Chinese restaurant. She was a waitress. That's why I say there are no throwaway moments.

Soon after that, her father passed away. She got a modest inheritance, which she used to invest in some audio recording equipment, and she started recording spiritual speakers when they came to town to do lectures. Then, later on, she partnered with someone who knew how to grow those kinds of businesses. Together, they created the publishing company, Sounds True, which went on to publish books by Eckhart Tolle and Michael Beckwith and Wim Hof and Michael Singer, who wrote *The Surrender Experiment*. The name is also her mission statement, Sounds True. She wanted to amplify the work of people whose messages sounded and felt true on that spiritual level.

Anyway, it was fascinating to hear the backstory, because I've had so many wonderful experiences working with Sounds True over the last couple of years. I found out about some things that I didn't know, which made a lot of sense why I was attracted to them. For instance, they've got a wonderful foundation that gifts books to prisons, and their office environment is also very progressive and inclusive of all points of view. I think, you're going to be inspired to hear how all of that came together, and why Tami Simon is so passionate about conscious capitalism and changing the landscape of the work environment.

Without further ado, let us dive into my conversation with the incomparable Tami Simon.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:04:59] LW:** Tami, thank you so much for coming on to my podcast. I'm honored for my listeners to hear your story, because what they may not know is that you are the founder of the company that published my most recent book, *Knowing Where to Look*, which everyone is so proud of. Not just me, but also the people who have gotten the book, have gotten so much wonderful feedback. I didn't know a lot about Sounds True when we made the book deal. I mean, you guys definitely showed me that you were willing to invest in everything that I stand for, and which is what an author obviously wants.

I got a chance to go back and do a lot of research on the company and the meaning behind the name. I'm so excited, because when I was reading your story, you were like Forrest Gump, in the spiritual sense, where in that movie, *Forrest Gump*, he was always – he was around Nixon and Johnson. He was around all these really amazing people. You're around a lot of amazing people in the spiritual community, people that we now look at and herald as icons of spirituality in our modern age, the Thich Nhat Hanhs, the Ram Dass', Sharon Salzbergs, Joseph Goldstein, etcetera, etcetera. It's always interesting to connect the dots to see how all that came about. Thank you for coming on to the podcast, first of all.

**[00:06:21] TS:** Well, it's my pleasure. I want to say, Sounds True. I personally, am so pleased that we've published *Knowing Where to Look*. It's an honor to be your publisher, Light.

**[00:06:30] LW:** Oh, thank you. I want to kick off the conversation, taking the listeners back to childhood. Where did you grow up again?

**[00:06:40] TS:** I grew up in Coral Gables, Florida, which is right outside of Miami, South Florida.

**[00:06:45] LW:** Okay. I lived down in Miami before, so I know Coral Gables well. Back in Coral Gables, little Tami; you're six, seven-years-old. Do you remember what your favorite toy, or activity was as a child?

**[00:06:59] TS:** Well, little Tami is a tomboy for sure and liked to play football with the kids in the neighborhood. Even though my mom really wanted me to go to the dance class and finish my piano lessons, none of that for me. The big thing for me was I wanted to be chosen early, when you were picking who's going to be on your team, I wanted to be chosen early, and I wanted to

be a wide receiver. It was that thing of like, so my favorite toy was a football. I wanted to jump in the air and catch the ball.

**[00:07:30] LW:** What did that represent to you?

**[00:07:33] TS:** Well, I think some of it is that the grace of that moment, when you're jumping up in the air. There's just something about that, the leap, the full flight. I think, also, it was clear as a young kid, I was a really competitive person. I could turn anything into a competition. Anything, like who can run there fastest? Who can swim there the fastest? Who can climb the highest? Whatever, tap their head as many times as possible. Didn't matter what it was. I think, there was just something in my spirit that wanted to excel and win. It was really deep in me, even as a little kid.

**[00:08:07] LW:** Who were these boys or girls who embraced you, or maybe didn't embrace you on the football field or in the neighborhood when you –

**[00:08:15] TS:** Just the kids that lived around our neighborhood and stuff. Quite honestly, I can't even really remember all of the actual faces. I don't see it. I do remember myself wanting to get chosen early in the picking line.

**[00:08:28] LW:** What was your household like? Were your parents together? Do you have siblings?

**[00:08:32] TS:** I grew up in a liberal Jewish family. I was the youngest of five kids. There were three older kids, and then a 12-year gap, then my brother and I. My brother wasn't a planned birth, but he came and then my parents thought, "Well, we don't want to have just one child. We'll have Tami to accompany him." There was a real emphasis on education. That education was the number one most important thing that would give you opportunities in the world, and a really big emphasis on ethics and action. It's what you do that matters. You can talk a big game, whatever, but are you an ethical person based on your actions?

In a nutshell, I would say, I was raised to be, this is a Yiddish word, a mensch. A mensch is the do-gooder. A mensch is the person who takes the trash out when you go over to someone else's

house after dinner and says, “Oh, let me help. Let me do the dishes. Let me take the trash out.” I was raised with that mindset very heavily. Quite honestly, I'm grateful. I'm grateful for it, because it created such a strong sense of conscience inside of me that has been a part of my guiding light as a person.

**[00:09:46] LW:** Was it articulated by one of your parents as a mantra? Did they have a saying in your house, that they would echo all the time?

**[00:09:55] TS:** It was just “you're judged by your actions and you're judged by your good name.” This was the idea that it wasn't so much a mantra, but if you went to a funeral of someone, listen to the sound of their name being said out loud at the funeral, and what reverberates from it? Can you feel the goodness of all of the actions they've done? All the people they've touched, the wake of their life. That idealism was put in me that, at the time of your death, when your name is said out loud, what will it sound like in the room? What will reverberate from it?

**[00:10:34] LW:** That's interesting, because you actually took it a step further. At the dinner table, you would say, “What happens after you die?” What was the reaction for those kinds of questions?

**[00:10:45] TS:** As I said, I really appreciated the grounding in my family. The part that I didn't appreciate as much is that I, as a child, was extremely inquisitive, and you could say, philosophical, reflective. You might even say, existentially tormented, if you wanted to take it to an extreme. I was sitting there like, “Am I part of a dream of a dreamer? Who is the dreamer? Then, who's dreaming the dreamer?” These were the kinds of things that were coming up in my mind.

I wanted to talk about them. I also wanted to talk about, is it really possible that there could be a nuclear war? What would happen? Why is there so much police brutality in Miami? Help me understand that. Who are the policemen? There were so many questions that I had as a kid, including what happens after we die? What do we know about it? My parents would always say, “Let's not talk about that at the dinner table, Tami.” I'd be like, “When are we going to talk about it? When are we going to talk about it?”

It became clear to me that I wasn't talking to the right people, actually, about what was happening inside of me that I wanted to have – I didn't want it just to be witnessed. I really wanted a conversation. I really wanted an interesting conversation. In some ways, you could say, Sounds True, which I started when I was 21, 22-years-old. The idea came to me when I was 21. Started the company a little bit later. That it was an outgrowth of this loneliness that I had, to have a real meeting and real conversations about ideas that matter, because it was just – I felt so isolated in my inner spin. I found talking to people so healing, useful, instructive. It made me feel I connected and belonged here on the earth.

**[00:12:38] LW:** What was your relationship like with books when you were younger, when you were a teenager?

**[00:12:43] TS:** Books saved my life, to be honest with you. They saved my life. I remember reading Hermann Hesse for the first time, and it started with *Siddartha*. Then I read *Demian*, *Narcissus and Goldmund*. I took these books, and I slept with them. I literally, I put the book under my pillow at night.

**[00:13:07] LW:** How old were you at this point?

**[00:13:09] TS:** This was when I was a teenager, like 15, 16. The reason I say they saved my life was that, I had this feeling that the writers, Hermann Hesse, and then also books by Alan Watts and books by Rainer Maria Rilke, I had the feeling that these writers went through the same existential, inner wrestling that I was going through. They came through those experiences of wrestling. They came through it in such a way that they were able to deliver books that would live on beyond their lifetime and help other people.

I thought, if they could do it, I'm going to make it, too. I'm going to make it. I'm not going to just somehow combust here as a tortured teenager. There's a path for me. These other courageous souls found a way. They found their way.

**[00:14:07] LW:** Were you the type that would read a Hermann Hesse book, or Rilke book, and then you would tell your siblings or your parents, "You guys have got to read this book. This is amazing." Or would you keep it to yourself as your own little precious secret?

**[00:14:20] TS:** I kept it to myself, because I didn't know who to talk to. I didn't really know who to talk to. People didn't seem that receptive. I think, I didn't want to keep it to myself, but I didn't know who to talk to.

**[00:14:32] LW:** You mentioned that you're a self-described outsider. How did you know that? Was there an incident that happened where you're like, "Okay, I can't talk to anybody about this stuff"?

**[00:14:41] TS:** Yeah. Well, there's a couple things. I think, first, let's go ahead and start with the fact that from a young age, I was slightly more attracted to girls than I was boys. I was also attracted to boys, but a little bit more so to girls. I knew that this was not okay. We're back now in the 1970s. I had to keep this quiet. I couldn't even tell my girlfriends. Then, I had to find the right time. Girlfriends, meaning my little young friends. Could I say, "I want to kiss you"? How would that go over with my little young friend?

**[00:15:16] LW:** How did you know it wasn't okay, though? Did you hear somebody in synagogue?

**[00:15:22] TS:** I didn't see any lesbians around me. It wasn't modeled for me. I did have experiences from a young age, where I made approaches to other little girls, where I wasn't well-received. I had experiences that this is unusual, Tami. Keep it to yourself. Keep it to yourself. It wasn't at a time – I mean, now you hear the kids, it's a whole different situation, but it wasn't like that for me when I was in junior high and high school.

Since I was also attracted to little boys, I was just like, "I don't really know what to do with this. Make out with the boy. That's going to be okay." I knew in that sense already, that there was something different about me. You used the word 'outsider'. "I could tell. You're an outsider, Tami. You're different."

That was a pretty big difference that I had to work with. I mentioned, too, I was a tomboy. I went to a regular school, but then there was this special acceleration program, gifted child program thing that I went to, where we went to a large public high school. I remember walking down the

halls and people would come up to me and they would say, "Are you a boy or a girl? Are you a boy or girl?" There was also a question, just because I liked to wear whatever, ripped jeans and big shirts, that people didn't know my gender identity. That made me feel a little odd as well.

Then there are a couple other things. My parents very much wanted me to be a good Jew. At age 13, I was about mitzvah. Then at age 16, you're supposed to be confirmed. When you're confirmed, you declare that you are going to be an adult Jew in the community. I remember having conversations with the rabbi, saying, "I'm a global citizen. This whole thing about Jewish people are the chosen people. Chosen for what? I don't believe that. I don't like that. This is tribalism. I don't want to be part of a small tribe. I'm a universal citizen."

The rabbi said, "Well, maybe you shouldn't get confirmed." I'm like, "Correct. I don't want to be confirmed." Of course, my mother was so disappointed in the rabbi. This was also a big debate. Not only that I was a universal citizen, but I remember my parents, they would say, "Look, we're cultural Jews. You don't have to believe that there's some mysterious God, or something like that. It's just being part of the culture." I was like, "But what if there is some mysterious, awesome force that's actually the source of everything? What if there's something?"

I also didn't feel I could connect there. I didn't want a cultural form. I wanted a direct connection to something like source, that I could feel was real inside me. All those things made me feel like an outsider. There's more, if you want me to keep going, Light.

**[00:18:12] LW:** No. Actually, I know the feeling very well. I grew up in Montgomery, Alabama. You can imagine, there wasn't a lot of esoteric or occult circles, or metaphysical discussions happening down there, either. Question, you've been reading these books, and you're a mensch in your community. How did you see success as a teenager, when you projected ahead, maybe 10 or 20 years? You said, you're competitive and all that. What did you see yourself becoming, or doing in life as a teenager?

**[00:18:45] TS:** I thought, I would be a philosophy professor, or something like that. I didn't know what it meant to be a philosophy professor. I thought I would probably take some academic path, because I loved learning, and that it would have something to do with the deepest ques-



tions of meaning. I think, author, philosopher, teacher, something like that, I think, was what I thought might be possible for me.

**[00:19:23] LW:** The Swarthmore have an amazing philosophy department. Is that why you chose to become a philosophy major there?

**[00:19:30] TS:** I thought I was going to be a philosophy major, but that didn't last. I got kicked over into the religious studies world. I went to Swarthmore. I went on a college tour. First of all, I just want to say, how lucky I was that my parents wanted to support me to go to a really good college and had saved up their money to help me do that. I think, as a kid, I didn't necessarily recognize it. Now as an older person looking back, I can see how much support I was given as a person, and I was given a lot. I was given everything, really. I have tremendous gratitude for that.

Quite honestly, a tremendous sense of debt; debt to the world, to take everything that I was given as a person and do some good stuff with it for other people. As that young person, I got into all kinds of fancy colleges. I got into all fancy colleges, because I went to a college preparatory school down in Miami, called Ransom Everglades. Maybe you've heard of it. It's located in Coconut Grove, Florida.

**[00:20:35] LW:** Yeah. I have a friend who used to teach there.

**[00:20:36] TS:** Yeah. You put your name, Ransom Everglades graduate on your college application. That really helps. Quite honestly, I also had – and I'm not trying to say this in a braggartly way, but I had high SAT scores, which was cool and wonderful. I got into Harvard and Yale, and the fancy schools, including Swarthmore. There was something about Swarthmore that I liked, because I could feel its innovation. I could feel that it was trying to do something different. It was trying to bring forward a different thinker or scholar. I liked that. I liked the campus.

Also, when I originally went there to interview, I was being interviewed for a social change, a laying scholarship for social change. I ended up not getting the scholarship. In the process, I met a lot of people. My best friend at the time was going to Harvard. I felt there was something important about she and I doing something different. It's weird. Some people would be like, “Go

where your best friend's going, so you can be friends." I was like, "No, don't go where your best friend is going." I don't really know why I thought that way, but I did. So you can differentiate and find your own way. All of that led me to Swarthmore.

The interesting thing is that in my sophomore year, I had a meeting at Swarthmore, which was hugely life-changing, with a professor that was there for just one year, from Sri Lanka, on a Fulbright scholarship, teaching in the Religious Studies Department. He was teaching Buddhist ethics and Buddhism and existentialism. It's just so interesting, because it's also, it's just interesting, Light. Here I am, I'm almost 60 now.

In a certain way, I'm starting to look back at my life and have certain insights and understandings that I maybe didn't have when I was just busy living it forward. Then looking back, one of the real big pieces of meaning was that I met Professor Gunapala Dharmasiri, who had been a monk for the first 16 years of his life, from Sri Lanka, there in my sophomore year. It was hugely life-changing. I think, that's a big part of, if you were to ascribe meaning to the choice looking backwards that I made the decision to go to Swarthmore.

**[00:22:56] LW:** You recognize something in his presence, or energy that just stood out to you? If so, what was that?

**[00:23:04] TS:** Well, I'm going to give you the honest answer. It wasn't so much that. I mean, I was really interested in what he was teaching. I remember, in the very first class, there was a chalkboard, believe it or not. Hard to imagine in today's world, but there was a chalkboard. On the chalkboard, he wrote the three marks of existence in Buddhism. That the first mark was impermanence. Everything's impermanent. I was like, "That's true. That makes a whole lot of sense. Sure. Great."

The second thing is that, if everything's impermanent, you are too. There's no solid sense of self. This person you think you are, you're always changing. There's nothing solid. I was like, "Oh, my God. Someone finally named the thing that I've been feeling, that there's nothing solid here." I felt that I'm falling in some weird abyss and there's nothing solid. Someone's saying, "You're impermanent, just like everything else, so you feel that way." I was like, "Oh, thank goodness."

Then the last thing, the third mark is suffering and that we suffer, because we hold on to solidity, and we want things to be solid. We don't want things to be changing. We want things to be there. When he put those three marks of existence on the board, that was like a homecoming for me. I was like, "Oh, thank goodness. Someone finally said something real. Someone said something real. It's cool."

It was more that. It wasn't so much him really, as a person. It was what he was teaching that just struck me as so important and resonant, and relieving that I wasn't just alone, having these discussions inside myself, but that now it was out on the blackboard. Then, he and I became friends. We became really good friends. It wasn't necessarily because he was the most present human. I mean, he was a chain smoker. He was a deep thinker. His wife cooked fabulous curry dinners. I would go over to his house, where he had these three little, beautiful Sri Lankan kids running around.

I would help his wife, Kusum, do the dishes afterwards in the kitchen. She'd be like, "No, no, no." She barely spoke English. I was like, "Yes, yes, yes." Then, he and I would spend hours talking into the evening. We were talking about the Tibetan Book of the Dead. He had a lot of questions. He taught in the Religious Studies Department. We became real friends. That's really what it was.

**[00:25:26] LW:** You also, I'm assuming, had a chance to enjoy your outsider status in college, and all the things that came with that.

**[00:25:34] TS:** Kind of. Quite honestly, I coined this phrase inside that I was the fringe of the fringe. At a certain point, when you're the fringe of the fringe, you might fall off the fringe. I did fall off the fringe. Some of it, quite honestly, was I started experimenting with psychedelics. I didn't do a lot. Thank goodness, I didn't, because I don't really have the makeup for that. It was – the experiences I had were so powerful, that I didn't need a lot of them.

Those experiences also increased the cosmic and slightly separate world I was living in, and increased also this feeling that I couldn't follow the conventional path. I think, part of it at the time, was that I really wasn't that interested in studying other people's ideas, and writing about

them and analyzing them and critiquing them. I really wanted to understand what was going on inside of me. At the time, especially in academia that was like, well, that's not what we do here.

You write a paper on someone else's published paper. I was like, "But this is religious studies. This is supposed to be about something about the inner journey." That really wasn't welcome. I became the fringe of the fringe. At the end of my sophomore year, I left and I decided to follow Gunapala Dharmasiri and his family to Sri Lanka, where I stayed for six months. Then I traveled in India and then in Nepal, and really went on a pilgrimage, a personal pilgrimage.

**[00:27:15] LW:** What preceded that decision to leave? Did you have a specific conversation with him that he invite you to come and follow him over there with his family?

**[00:27:26] TS:** Here's the scene that I remember. I was in the mailroom, where you get your mail at Swarthmore College. Not that big a room, so you'd bump into other students and stuff and everybody had their little mailbox. I got and opened my little mailbox. It had paperwork, where you had to declare your major.

Here I am, I'm a sophomore. I have to declare my major. I looked at it all and I thought, "Why would I major in religious studies?" I had been studying writings and teachings of the mystics and I thought, "Any really solid mystic worth their salt would not major in mysticism. I'm out of here." It was that moment of looking at the form. I remember taking the form, and putting it in the trash when I walked out of the mailroom. I just put it right in the trash.

Then I was like, "I don't know what I'm going to do." Then I had a conversation with Dharma, which was his nickname, Gunapala Dharmasiri. I had a conversation with Dharma. He was like, "Why don't you come over to Sri Lanka? You can stay with us. You can go to Peradeniya University," which was the university there, which I didn't end up doing and didn't want to do. Then, he extended the invitation and I started cooking up a plan for something or other.

**[00:28:37] LW:** Did your mom think you had an affair with this guy? Or some weird thing was happening? How did you even afford to go to Sri Lanka?

**[00:28:47] TS:** Sure. Well, she didn't think I had an affair with him, partially because I'd already come out as a lesbian. Also, he and his wife and their three kids, ready for this, we all drove down to Miami in a wagon that we had rented, a car. We all went down to Miami together. He and his wife and three kids stayed at my mom and dad's house and met them.

My mom liked him. It was all very in the family. She wasn't suspicious about that. She did think that I was losing my mind and losing my way. She was pretty worried about it. I mentioned how lucky I was that I had the support of my family. My mother wanted nothing more in her own life than to have someone pay for her to go to college, and there wasn't enough money in her family for that. She was one of four kids. One of her brothers got to go to an academic institution, and she didn't. She wanted to go studying.

She was like, "You're throwing all of this away. Everything we worked for. Everything," whatever. You spoiled this –"

**[00:29:56] LW:** Wow. She [inaudible 00:29:57].

**[00:29:59] TS:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Totally. Totally. I was like, "That's your thing. That's not my thing." It was devastating to her. She could not understand it. At the time, I said, "Let me just go away for a year. I'm not making any big decisions. I'm just going away for a year. This is a journey inward. Give me the space to do this." My father was like, "Well, we're not going to pay for it," to answer your question, Light, "but I'll match you. If you earn half the money, I'll give you the other half of the money," which I thought was pretty right on. I thought that was like, "Good on you, dad. That's reasonable. I'll earn half the money."

I spent the summer living at their house. They were someplace else during the summer. They had built a second home on the Berkshires. I was in their house in Miami. I spent that summer waitressing. Got on my bike, rode to the restaurant, waitressed, waitressed, waitressed. It was a little French Café. Kept every dollar I made and earned a couple 1,000 bucks, enough money. My father matched it and I went on this journey.

**[00:31:03] LW:** Did you have a aunt, or a grandparent, or somebody who was in your corner who was saying, "You should just do it. You have to live your life," and that conversation? Be-

cause I can imagine it, if your mom lays it on that thick, it can be pretty – I mean, even for the strongest young person, you still may buckle under that pressure, unless you have some Obi Wan Kenobi figure in your ear telling you what you can do.

**[00:31:27] TS:** I didn't really have anybody like that, to be honest.

**[00:31:30] LW:** No? Older siblings. No one said –

**[00:31:33] TS:** No. I mean, it makes me a little sad, but I didn't have anybody like that.

**[00:31:36] LW:** Well, that just shows how strong you were as a young person.

**[00:31:40] TS:** It's also, it was like, how can I put it? The door had closed. The academic door had closed. It was meaningless to me. It was like ash in my mouth, or whatever you want to say. There was nothing there. In a way, it was a little bit choiceless, to be honest with you.

**[00:31:56] LW:** You had your books, too. You had Rilke in your consciousness. You had Hermann Hesse in your consciousness. You had those mentors. Which I tell people, if you don't –

**[00:32:04] TS:** Yeah. I've read along other books.

**[00:32:06] LW:** Yeah, exactly. If you don't have a physical person in your life, then you can find that in books as well.

**[00:32:12] TS:** For sure. I mean, I have written papers. I was like, "Can I take Rajneesh's books and write a paper on what it means that we have a sky-like mind," in my religious studies department and things like that. I'd read Meister Eckhart and Teresa of Avila. I had the mystics, and they were with me.

**[00:32:34] LW:** You said, you discovered meditation when you were in India and Nepal and Sri Lanka, and felt like a homecoming? Can you articulate what that actually feels like?

**[00:32:44] TS:** Sure. Well, so when I was in Sri Lanka, there was a opportunity to attend a 10-day boot camp meditation experience, with someone named Goenka, who teaches Vipassana meditation. It's an interesting meditation. It's very body-based. You focus on tracking your sensations, literally from the tip of your toe, up to the top of your head. For six days of the 10 days, you start tracking every little pinprick of sensation on your body. You start at 5 in the morning, and you go till 10 at night, and you're in noble silence the whole time.

You're not supposed to say a word. Not one word. You're not even supposed to start talking to yourself in the bathroom, or anything. It's just noble silence the whole time. That's the first six days. Then the last four days, you do this sweeping technique. Once all the sensations in your body have been contacted, then you sweep up and down, up and down your body. After I did this first 10-day retreat in Sri Lanka, I remember coming out of the retreat, and I remember Dharma looking at me, and he's like, "Your eyes look different." I'm like, "Oh, what's different?" He's like, "It's like the lights went on inside." I thought, it's true. The lights did go on inside.

I felt so, you used the word home, and homecoming. It's a beautiful word. Sitting on the cushion doing that practice and being silent. Honestly, I'd never been that happy, content, rested. Just there. Just really there in my whole life. All of the like, what about that? What about that? All the angst, all the struggle to figure stuff out, and all that had – I dropped it all. I discovered what it was like to rest in space, rest in eternity, rest in being. I loved it. Love, love, love, love, love. You can say this many times, underline it. Loved the practice.

I decided to go to India to Goenka's center. It's this place called Igatpuri, where he teaches these 10-day retreats when he's not traveling and traveling and offering them in other places. I went to Igatpuri and I did two of these 10-day retreats back-to-back. Quite honestly, I did the first one. I was only going to do one and then I was going to keep traveling. I walked out of the center. I walked out and I walked just maybe a 1,000 yards away, and I walked right back in. I was like, "I just want to go back in."

Then I did one more of these 10-day retreats. I followed him. He was teaching up to Katmandu. On the one hand, this sounds very romantic, very deeply revelatory and meaningful, which it was. I didn't know how to integrate this experience into the rest of my life. Demonstrated by the

fact that I walked out and walked right back in. I was like, "I don't know how to do this, and be part of the world. I don't. I'm just going to go back and do this, because I really like this."

**[00:35:55] LW:** You also mentioned that you lost a bunch of weight while you were over in –

**[00:36:00] TS:** Right. Here I am, I'm doing this meditation thing. I mentioned to you that I experimented with psychedelics when I was in college. Then when I was traveling through Sri Lanka and India, I smoked some hash with people and stuff like that. What I'm saying is that my nervous system, I don't think was really grounded and able to take these deep experiences and become healthily embodied. It took me a long time to bring it all together into one integrated being.

At the time, when I was doing this deep meditation, I didn't find that there was a whole lot of need to eat or talk, interestingly. Two things I do a lot of in my normal life today. A lot of talking, a lot of enjoying, eating. At the time, I was just like, people talk to fill space. Why fill space? Just appreciate space. Eating, I'm not really hungry. I started losing weight. Started losing weight. Okay, no big deal.

Then, I started noticing that there were some certain things with my health that didn't seem quite right. Not going to go into the details. I feared that something might be wrong, so I went to a clinic. It was my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Because I was in a clinic where I was sleeping overnight, I didn't call home on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. This alarmed my parents to no end. You didn't call home on your 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, you must be dead. I called a couple days later. I told them I was in a clinic, that I had hepatitis. That I'm sure I'd gotten from eating street food, or whatever the heck I was doing in India, which makes sense. Then they were like, "Okay, game over. Experiment over. Journey inward, pilgrimage over. We have now wired money for an airplane ticket immediately back. You're getting on the next flight. It's done."

**[00:37:59] LW:** You went back.

**[00:38:00] TS:** I went back. I get off the airplane, and I'm wearing this funny outfit, and I only weigh 90 pounds, and I'm wearing this overalls. I get called to go, when I get off the airplane to a special line. I don't know why I'm in a special line. Then, they want to pat me down and make



sure I'm not carrying drugs, because I look like a drug dealer, you know what I mean? I mean, I got frizzy hair out to here. I'm wearing these big overalls, and I look spaced out as I'll get out.

I come out the line. After being patted down, and of course, I didn't have any drugs with me. I'm like, "Where are my parents? I thought they were going to pick me up. They must be running a little late." Just a little bit of an odd thought, because my parents wouldn't be running late to pick me up at the airport. I had this motto. I can think. I can wait. I can fast. This is from a Hermann Hesse book. I was like, "I can wait. I know how to wait. I'm just going to sit here on this curb, and wait for my parents to come."

Meanwhile, they were in a different part of the airport waiting for me to come out of the line with everybody else. Their experience was that I didn't come off the airplane that I was supposed to be on. I'm sitting there, I'm just patiently waiting on the curb. I probably waited about three hours. Suddenly, I see my mom and dad looking like the saddest humans on planet Earth. Their faces, their mouths are down to the floor practically. They're so sad. I'm like, "Mom, Dad. Hi, I'm here." They're like, "Oh, my God. What are you doing sitting out here on the curb? We've been waiting in this other place." Anyway, and I explained to them that I came out to a different line. We had this reunion and everything. Yeah, that was the story of my homecoming.

**[00:39:43] LW:** Did your mom tell you right away, "Oh, my God. You've lost all this weight. Got to make you eat. Da, da, da, da."

**[00:39:49] TS:** They took me immediately to Baskin-Robbins and said, "Please order as much ice cream" –

**[00:39:55] LW:** A banana split.

**[00:39:57] TS:** Yeah, exactly. "Please eat as much as you can eat." It's sweet to think of it. Both parents aren't alive anymore, Light. Having these memories with you, it's meaningful to me. I have such gratitude to both of them. Thinking about their love of me and their care and their confusion at what I was up to and stuff.

**[00:40:19] LW:** Did you mention to them the promise that you made to yourself when you're over there in Asia, about doing anything that you could to bring the practices that you had experienced to as many people as possible, and for the universe to use you?

**[00:40:31] TS:** Not really. Not really. I think, I was more like, they wanted me to eat. They wanted me to go have a doctor appointment and doctor appointment, and then they wanted me to go finish college. That's where they were coming from. It's like, "Okay, now you're going to go get your degree, right? Go back to Swarthmore. Finish your degree. You had a year, you did this thing. Now it's time. Get your degree." It wasn't really time for me to share my –

**[00:40:57] LW:** Your aspirations for spiritual enlightening.

**[00:41:01] TS:** No. That's what was happening.

**[00:41:03] LW:** You ended up going to this Chinese restaurant. Was that in Coral Gables, or was that in Colorado?

**[00:41:07] TS:** No, no, no. Okay. Just to set the stage. My parents had a summer home in the Berkshires. They picked me up from an airport and we went to their summer home for a bit. Then they said, "Please get your degree. Just go talk to the head of the religion department. Have a conversation." A gentleman named Don Swearer, and he knew Gunapala Dharmasiri, he knew me. He knew Dharmasiri and his whole family went down to Miami with me, which he thought was crazy for a professor that he had invited to be traveling down with a student. He just thought the whole thing was crazy. We all went to Disney World together. He was just on the way to Miami. He was just like, "This is crazy."

Okay, so I went and talked to him. I said, "My parents really want me to have this conversation with you. Is there any way I could, in a meaningful way, finish my degree in the Religious Studies Department?" He said, "Well, what are you interested in?" I was like, "Well, I'd like to go live with religious cults, and write about my experience of living with different cults and tell you what I learned and experience." He said, "You don't belong at Swarthmore, Tami." I said, "I could have told you that. You're right. I don't belong at Swarthmore. You're right."

That was that. That was the end of that conversation. Then, it's a long story, but my parents were so determined that I graduate from a college that I came out to Boulder, Colorado, where there's a university called Naropa University, which is the first Buddhist University. I thought, I can study the intersection between psychology and meditation. Maybe I can get some insight into what happened to me during this journey in Sri Lanka, India, and Nepal, and the meditation experience. Maybe I can get some insight.

I signed up to go to Naropa. When I went into Naropa, even this groovy university, where people meditate as part of their coursework, I just realized, I just didn't want to be in college. There's just something in me that wanted to be free. Just didn't want to do it. When I left Naropa, my parents said, "We're not going to support you. We're not going to give you any more money." I was like, "You shouldn't give me any more money. Good for you. Stop supporting me." That's when I started waitressing at the relatively greasy Chinese restaurant with the cook who used to smoke cigarettes over the wok while he was cooking.

Whenever the ashes would fall in, he just mixed it in. He thought, it was part of his special sauce. Then, he'd have some beer – put a little beer in. People were crazy about his sauces. I thought, they don't know the real – Anyway, I started waitressing at Mr. Lee's Chinese Restaurant. I told you, I was a really competitive person, because one of the things I realized, even then when I started waitressing, even after all that meditation, was the waitresses were like, "Let's all pool our tips." I was like, "I'm not pooling my tips with you." I'm covering half the restaurant at twice the speed, twice the tips. I'm like, "No. You guys are all slow, slow boats." They're, "That's interesting about you, Tami." I was reflective even at the time. That's just interesting, that that's your spirit.

**[00:44:17] LW:** This is around the time that you had developed this prayer that you started reciting?

**[00:44:22] TS:** Yeah. Here I am. I'm working at a Chinese restaurant, and another really big development had happened, which is I volunteered at the local community radio station, KJ New. Boulder County Community Radio. Two reasons. When I was at Swarthmore, I had gotten involved with late night radio. They called it The Graveyard Shift. The Graveyard Shift was be-

tween midnight and 6 a.m. The station manager at the college radio station said, "Here's a key. Do whatever you want between midnight and 6 a.m. No one else wants to be up at that hour."

You remember, I'm having strange outlier patterns at college. The idea that I could go at midnight, open up the radio station, play whatever songs I wanted and talk to people and say, "I have a quiz. I want to find out how many people feel uncomfortable wearing shorts. Call me, let me know." I mean, whatever. Whatever I could think of. I discovered from that, that I loved radio. I just loved it. I've been involved with a high school newspaper. I knew I liked journalism, but I liked audio journalism the most. I just loved it. That was part of it.

Then secondly, I thought, if I go and I volunteer at the radio station, maybe I could have an interview show, where I interview spiritual teachers. If I'm interviewing spiritual teachers, then I can continue the education that I want and need, but I can't get in an academic setting. I had two shows at the community radio station. One was called The After Hours Audio Amazon, in which I had my music show. Then I had an interview show called Live From Planet Earth, where I interviewed spiritual teachers.

I'm waitressing. I'm doing this volunteer radio thing. I'm trying to grow and integrate as a person, so I'm going to yoga classes. At one point, I decided to do a series of rebirthing sessions. I don't know if you know much about, this was something that was big in the 80s. You did this deep breathing. As part of this rebirthing process, these 10 sessions, you're given the opportunity to say what your prayer is for your life.

As a result of those rebirthing sessions, the prayer that came to me was, "God, I'm willing to do your work. Please, show me what it is." Because I knew it wasn't working at this Chinese restaurant and the volunteer radio thing, I didn't really have a sense of that being anything but a way to share music and get educated myself. "God, I'm willing to do your work. Please, show me what it is."

**[00:46:57] LW:** Was anybody listening to this radio show?

**[00:46:59] TS:** Oh, yeah. I mean, I don't know how many people were listening to the After Hours Audio Amazon, because that was between midnight and 3 a.m. Here in Boulder County,

late night radio has a small audience. Then, the interview show was on Sundays in the morning at 11 a.m. We had decent listenership, and I knew there was decent listenership, because I would get calls after the show. People would say, “Great conversation. Can I get a copy of that?” I was like, “Oh, interesting.”

I got a little dubbing deck, one-to-one copy. Press the button. I would make maybe three to five copies a week. On a really good week, seven copies. I'd sell them for 10 bucks. I will just respond to people who called me and say, “Can I get a copy of that? Can I get a copy of that?” Interesting.

**[00:47:49] LW:** Did you have to split the proceeds with the radio station, or anything like that?

**[00:47:53] TS:** No, the radio station didn't care. It's a volunteer thing. They were like, “Good on you.”

**[00:48:05] LW:** Then you quit the waitressing job.

**[00:48:08] TS:** I quit the waitressing job, because it just was meaningless at a certain point, after doing it for about nine months. I had accumulated a little bit of cash. Not much. I thought, I'm going to do this experiment. I'm going to say this prayer, “God, I'm willing to do your work.” I'm just going to say it again and again and again. I'm going to see if meaningful work shows up for me. Then, I have an entry in my journal that says, “I'm running out of money. Looks like my experiment has failed.” The next day, I get a call that my father has died. He died of heart failure.

Soon, I learned that I'll be receiving a small inheritance. My small inheritance is about 50 grand. That was back in 1985. That would be \$200,000 today. To a 21-year-old person, didn't seem that small to me. It seemed a lot of money, actually. Then, a sequence of events unfolded. Do you want to know what that sequence was?

**[00:49:22] LW:** I would love to know. I'm hanging on every word over here.

**[00:49:27] TS:** Okay. I get this small inheritance. The question is, what am I going to do with it? One of the people that I was interviewing for Live from Planet Earth was a local entrepreneur,

who is into crystals. It's pretty weird. When I would walk to the radio station from the house I lived in, I would walk by his street front window that had these large crystals. I'm talking about two, three-feet tall, major crystals here in Boulder, Colorado. I was like, "What's that guy doing with those crystals? What's going on?"

Then, he also had a sign in his window, which was a yin-yang sign with \$ symbol through the center of it, and the words 'transformational economy'. I was also, what's the yin yang sign and the dollar sign doing together? What's going on with this guy? I'm talking to him, befriending him, trying to learn about crystals. I say to him, "I want to do a radio show with you about crystals." Then I share, "Hey, you've got this transformational economy sign. I just inherited this money. Not sure what to do with the money. I don't really want to put it in the bank. I think, the bank could invest in things that wouldn't necessarily reflect my values. I'm not sure what to do with this money. What should I do with it?"

He looks at me, and he says, "Why don't you put the money into yourself?" I said, "Well, that's a really good idea. Except, I don't know what to do." Me and myself, we're all confused. We don't know what to do. We're walking the streets, looking at people's windows and stuff. "I don't know what to do." He looked at me and he said, "Tami, you know what you want to do. You know. Come back in three days, and we'll talk about it." Then I walked out of his office, and something really odd happened. Something quite odd.

The first odd thing that happened was I felt like I wasn't quite walking on the ground after I exited his office. As I was walking on the sidewalk, I felt like I was three feet above the actual pavement. That was a weird feeling. I was like, "I feel like I'm walking in the air." It was really freaking weird. It's a really weird feeling.

Then, the next thing that happened was that I heard some voice and I don't know what it was. Internal voice, external voice. I have no idea. The words I heard were, "Disseminate spiritual wisdom," period. My foot hit the ground. I started walking on the ground. Now, I'm walking on the ground, and I start thinking about it. Disseminate spiritual wisdom? How am I going to do that? How am I going to do it? Well, books are a great way. I love books. A lot of people publishing a lot of books. I don't know if that would be something I could just break into.

Then I was like, well, there's video, but my parents watched a lot of television, so they were watching television instead of having the conversations I wanted to have. I don't think I want to go into video. That's an expensive medium. Then, it was audio. Oh, my. Well, look. I love the radio. I love learning by listening. I already had one of the smallest cottage businesses in the world with my little dubbing deck, making a couple of cassette copies a week. I'll disseminate spiritual wisdom through audio. That was really the beginning of Sounds True.

**[00:52:42] LW:** Did you talk to anyone about that experience, the night it happened, or in the days after it happened?

**[00:52:49] TS:** Right away, I didn't talk to anybody. I came back and talked to this gentleman with the crystals. I came back and talked to him about it, and told him what happened. He said, "That building over there, I own it. The upstairs isn't rented. You could have one of the rooms upstairs for just a couple 100 bucks a month." I was like, "Good. We're going." I talked to him. Then I kept talking to him. He said, "Stop talking to me so much. I got to go back to work. I got a lot going on." I was like, "Okay, he doesn't want to talk to me anymore. I got to find some other people to talk to."

I mean, disseminate spiritual wisdom, when I started Sounds True and people said, "What are you doing?" Those were my magic words, because they were given to me. That was my code word. It's like, that's what we're doing. We're disseminating spiritual wisdom.

**[00:53:33] LW:** I believe, your first recording was Ram Dass. Was it the first one?

**[00:53:37] TS:** It wasn't exactly the first one, but I've been – first, it was just I bought a little TCD-5M cassette recorder. I thought it was such a big purchase, whatever. \$500 for this. I would go around and I would record anybody that I thought was giving a lecture, or workshop in Boulder that had meaning and value. I just came. I was like, "Hi, can I record you? Great." People were like, "What?" Then, that built up to having the opportunity to record some more celebrity level teachers, if you will, like Ram Dass and Steven Levine and Marion Woodman and Clarissa Pinkola. Estes, and other great teachers in the late 1980s.

**[00:54:19] LW:** What was the plan? I'm going to record them, and then I'm going to pitch a deal with that teacher to sell the recordings?

**[00:54:27] TS:** The plan was really simple. One of the things I'd seen, and I'd seen it at some, I don't know, like at an event that I'd gone to was these high-speed cassette duplicating machines. You could take a master, then there was a unit that had three little open slots, and then another unit that had four open slots and you could string them together. Depending on how many units you had, you could make 10, 13 copies of a cassette master in three minutes.

I would bring this high-speed duplicating equipment with me. The part that I feel the most proud of is that I carried these high-speed duplicating machines. They were heavy, but I was just like, "Pick them up, girl. You don't got anyone else who's going to pick them up. Just pick them up and bring them." I would take them with me. I made an arrangement with the presenters where I'd say, "Hey, Light. You're giving a workshop. Here's the deal, if you're interested in it. I'm going to give you a sub-master of this recording. You're going to get your own set of master recordings. You can do whatever you want with them.

I'm going to professionally record you and you can do whatever you want. What I want to do is make copies for people. After I cover my costs of being here, and my equipment costs, whatever, I'll give you a split of the revenue of what happens right here. This will be a great service to the people who have come who want to leave. They're going to be able to walk out of the workshop on Sunday with copies of what just happened right here."

That was my original pitch to the teachers. A lot of the teachers were amenable. They're like, "Oh, good, I get a cut." A lot of them said, "You can't sell it later." I was like, "That's fine." Some people didn't care. Then, what happened was I accumulated a whole wall of cassette masters, that I had beautifully labeled from all of the events that I went to.

A few years later, I was talking to someone who was a direct mail catalog expert. He came, we were talking, because I saw that every time I went to a new place, people were interested in what I had recorded previously. Those authors who had given me permission to continue to sell those presentations, I had a list. At the time, it was just a pink sheet of paper that had a list on both sides of it that I xeroxed, that I gave away everywhere I went.



I'd get mail orders. People would take the pink sheet with them, and then they would send in, "I'd like a copy of this, a copy of that, a copy of that." I was like, "Oh, good." I thought, "Maybe I should make a catalog. Something that's better than this pink sheet of paper." A friend of a friend of mine was a direct mail catalog expert. He came in. He looked at the wall of cassette masters and he said, "You're sitting on a goldmine, Tami." I said, "You think it's a goldmine? It's a bunch of unedited workshop recordings."

**[00:57:22] LW:** You are a one-woman show at this point, right? You're schlepping around with this stuff. Is it only in Boulder? Were you traveling to LA and all these other places?

**[00:57:30] TS:** I started traveling a little bit and hiring a couple people, but it was still mostly me. Then when we'd go places, we would stay up all night, making cassette copies, so we'd have enough of them ready the next day when people were to leave, so we'd have just the final session that we had to record, but everything else would be – It was crazy work. I always was work for crazy people.

**[00:57:52] LW:** It was paying for itself. It was, you're making a decent money?

**[00:57:55] TS:** Oh, yeah. Well, I don't know decent. I thought it was good. I mean, these were events I would have paid to go to anyway, if I had the money. I'd pay to go to them. I was like, "I'm getting into the event for free." First of all, that was a win. Big win. Second big win, I'm sitting at the back of the room with a pair of headphones on, so I don't have to really participate in all the exercises and stuff, because it made me nervous. That was the second big win. Third big win, I leave afterwards, after I duplicated all these cassettes, with cash in my pocket. People would pay cash for these cassette recordings. I was like, "That's pretty cool." Fourth big win, I got to meet and interact with the spiritual teachers that I revered and give them a copy and all of that.

Also, I mentioned to you what happened to me when I was meditating. That I went so far out, that I couldn't integrate and come back in. All this hard work and schlepping and staying up all night and labeling cassettes ad nauseum, until my thumb's hurt, all of that was so embodying for

me. It was just so good for me. So grounding. It really helped me take all this energy, and find a way to use it and be engaged and learn at the same time.

Anyway, when this gentleman looked at the wall of masters and said that, he said, "I can build us a catalog. I can make a catalog. That's what I know how to do. I can make a little cover for each one of these programs, each one of these workshops you've recorded, and we'll put it in a catalog." I was like, "Well, look. If you're going to package these programs, with this phrase that he had, standalone information products, as a standalone information product. If we're going to package each one, I really want to edit them really carefully." I'd learned how to edit on a big reel-to-reel machine from volunteering at the radio station.

I was like, I want to edit each one really carefully. Because often, with these live recordings, there's questions you can't hear, or there's announcements about going to the bathroom. People don't want that, if they're going to buy something from a catalog. They need a really beautifully edited program. That was how he and I started our partnership. He ended up earning 20% of the original business through a sweat equity arrangement. I could only afford to pay him \$10,000 a year for the first few years. I paid him that small amount of money. Then he earned his part of the ownership. We put out the first Sounds True catalog together.

**[01:00:21] LW:** I know eventually, you develop these three bottom lines. Obviously, you were thinking in that way, early, early on. You weren't being driven by money. You were being driven by disseminating spiritual wisdom, helping people, etc. When you're considering partnering with this person, Mr. Christensen, did he embody the things that you were seeing for yourself as his these bottom line? Was that important to you? Or the fact that he could do this catalog thing that you need it to take things to the next level? Was that more important, or was there a little bit of both?

**[01:00:56] TS:** It's a little bit of both, but probably more the latter. Meaning, I really respected his talent. We had a good, honorable, loving relationship with each other. I was much more invested in the values and the principles and how we were operating. He was very invested that everything in the business be tickety-boo in a good way. Like, all the contracts need to be perfectly well done with all the authors, which I appreciate and all the accounting systems.

I think, I was more the culture, philosophy, operating principles. He was the business principles and fundamentals. He brought just a lot of talent, raw talent, and hard work to what we were doing. I think, it was just more like that, if that makes sense.

**[01:01:43] LW:** He was the perfect person. Because I feel like a lot of people get in their own way. A lot of “spiritual people” get in their own way, because they look for other people to be as invested in the spiritual component as they are, and they discount. I mean, that's a great skill set, like you said, to be able to make sure that the contracts are in place, and to make sure that whatever you're marketing is marketable, so that people can actually come in and enjoy what you have.

**[01:02:11] TS:** Well, and I don't think I could have entered a business partnership with someone that I didn't feel a sense of alignment with. It wasn't his focus to focus as much on what the various bottom lines were, which I can explain in a moment. I felt a sense of, I guess, you would call it camaraderie, friendship, love, connection, truthfulness, partnership. I mean, we had an arrangement, where if we couldn't agree, we would not do anything, until we can get to a place where we did agree. That's pretty key. If we disagreed about how to do something, we just wouldn't do anything on it.

Then, we'd wait. I could come back and make my case again, or he could come back and make his case again, until we could get the other person to see the validity of what we were trying to do. That's a pretty good operating principle with someone. Not just like, “Well, hey. I'm the majority owner, so screw you. I'm going to do what I want anyway.” It wasn't like that. It was like, “No, we're going to keep talking this through. Because if you don't agree with me, you probably have a really good point. There's something important you're trying to represent in this discussion that I need to understand. We need to address it before we move forward.”

The three bottom lines, just to explain what that was in the beginning, I'm not sure why it was important for me to articulate this, but one thing that was very important for me to articulate, like I know why this was important, was I wanted the process of our work to be coherent and consistent with the products. I didn't want to publish these products that were about this beautiful way of living in an interdependent world, and then have the process of our work be something that wasn't congruent with that. The process and the products had to come together.

Then, for whatever reason, this is way before the whole notion of people, planet, profit, multiple bottom lines and business was a popular idea. It became apparent to me that what I was doing was three things. One, I needed to be true to this mission, disseminate spiritual wisdom. Two, I needed the process of our work, every step should be beautiful. Every step should be good. Every step should be honorable. Then the third part was, we got to make some cash. That's a bottom line for us.

We say now, no margin, no mission. It's true. If you're not making cash, you can't do these other two things. You can't all come to work and have a good time and increase your connection with each other and your customers and your authors. There's not going to be any money to do it. The mission, the integrity of the process, and the actual generation of cash, or profit.

**[01:04:59] LW:** Later on in your book, you articulated that second bottom line as the love bottom line. When you say do things, make things beautiful, is that what you mean by that is the congruency of your heart?

**[01:05:11] TS:** Sometimes, I think about it now is the relationship bottom line, I've called it the love bottom line for a while. You did a lot of different length process, how we do things, cultural bottom line. It's really the how, the how. For me, the how is as important as the what. Whenever people tell you, the ends justify the means. That doesn't work for me. It doesn't work for me because each step on our path, I believe, for myself. I want each step to be a good step.

In business, I think, especially, people would use all kinds of tactics to get to some end. Even just the whole old way that business has been done, make as much money as you can and then be a philanthropist. I was like, "That's one way to approach business. Another way to approach business is be philanthropic, if you will, or generous, or connected to everyone in every step of your business. Every step. Make a little bit less while you do it and bring everybody with you." I was like, that fits for me better.

**[01:06:24] LW:** Were you in the shower when you came up with the name Sounds True?

**[01:06:27] TS:** No, I wasn't in the shower. Interestingly, I was writing a letter to Gunapala Dhar-masiri. I was describing to him what I wanted to do. I was describing to him the vision I had for the business and everything. It was while I was writing that letter. You know how they used to have when you send something overseas, the stationery you would use?

**[01:06:48] LW:** Yeah, the airmail envelopes.

**[01:06:51] TS:** I was writing an airmail envelope, and that's when it came to me.

**[01:06:55] LW:** You knew right away that you had that feeling?

**[01:06:58] TS:** Well, I mean, first of all, I had a previous name, Crystal Sound. I fell in love with the name Crystal Sound. I had a logo made by some people who are on their way to the rainbow festival, who made it out of stained glass that was a crystal, with sound waves coming out of it. I thought, every cassette will be as valuable as a crystal, encoded with information for future generations, okay.

There was a mobile DJ unit in Boulder, Colorado. I couldn't register the name, Crystal Sound. Thank goodness. Thank goodness. Then, I had to come up with another name. I was like, "I don't know what to call this thing. I don't know what to call it." Then it came through in that letter writing.

**[01:07:36] LW:** Devin, was he into it when you told him?

**[01:07:38] TS:** Well, that was all before I met Devin. When I first came up with the name, then I spent a couple years by myself with the tape recorder and the heavy duplicating equipment, schlepping all over the place. Then it was a few years later, that I had accumulated the wall of cassette masters and Devin walked in, and we started our partnership. Three years after I'd started the company.

**[01:08:01] LW:** Talk about what that means, Sounds True. Because I had heard it a lot, but I didn't really appreciate it, until I heard you talk about what it meant in your book.

**[01:08:08] TS:** Yeah. Well, I think, I've already told you there was a level of alienation I had as a child. Part of that alienation included watching politicians on TV, or other leaders and thinking to myself, "They're not telling the truth." I can tell when people are telling the truth. I can tell. I can tell when adults are telling the truth and when they're lying. I was like, one of those little kids who had this little secret. I can tell when adults are lying. It also bugged me. It bugged me a lot. It bugged me that people who were supposedly our representatives were liars. That was a problem.

Then I realized, as I got older, that when people spoke the truth to me, are relaxed. I remember, when I would go to hear a Dharma talk – Remember, like I told you, even when the three principles, marks of existence were written on the blackboard and it was something, the deep truth that was being expressed as the person was talking. Everything in me felt a little bit like I was listening to music. So beautiful to me. That's what I mean by the sound of truth.

I think, people have different kinds of sensitivity. Some people are very tactile. Some people are very visually sensitive. I'm very auditorially sensitive. The tonal quality of someone's voice, the way they put their words together, everything impacts me in a very visceral way. When people are sharing deep truths, it's like, my whole body vibrates with the sound that is being expressed.

**[01:09:58] LW:** I'm going to flash forward a little bit. You guys became very successful. You had a few best-sellers. Then, you ended up moving apartments, and you had an epiphany in that process.

**[01:10:10] TS:** Yeah. Well, I don't know what it's like for most people, if you accumulate stuff or not. I have a tendency to accumulate – I know, Light, you've been really good of getting rid of stuff. You're good at this. I, unfortunately, can accumulate things. One of the things I accumulated, was a big couple boxes of cassettes of things I'd listened to, that I didn't know what to do with. What am I going to do with these things? They're halfway rewound, halfway not, they're missing from their case. I had all these.

When I cleaned out my apartment, I thought, "What do I do with them? I don't know what to do with them." I threw them in the dumpster. I took the two boxes, and I was like, "I can't deal with this." I felt terrible afterwards. Here I am, this is the business I'm in of creating these, as precious

as a crystal, whatever idea I had. Then, I took two big boxes and threw them in a neighborhood dumpster. What's going on here? It haunted me. It felt that, because I thought there are people who could have really listened and enjoyed this or that recording, but I didn't go to the trouble of figuring out how to rewind each cassette, stick it back with its cover, find a home for it. I didn't do that. I just tossed them.

From that idea, I thought, I wonder how many of our customers also have that experience, where they buy a cassette product from us, they listen to it, and then they don't know what to do with it. Maybe they listened to it twice. Anyway, it doesn't matter. Some people might think like a book. Like, "I want to keep it forever." I think a lot of other people are like, "I listened to it once, or twice and I'm done. I'm done. What do I do now?"

What we started, I had this idea that we could create something called the Prison Audio Project, where we would donate these cassette tapes to the people in prison who had access to the ability to listen to them. We then offered our customers the ability to send their used cassettes back to us and get a gift certificate that they could apply to a future purchase. We would take all the cassettes, rewind them, make them all beautiful, and send them off to a prison distribution group that we had made a partnership with.

**[01:12:31] LW:** That's beautiful. Is that still happening? I know you have a foundation, and we've all been on cassette tapes at this point.

**[01:12:38] TS:** Yeah. We donate books to the prison system through our foundation. Downloadable media. It's a lot more complicated with audio in today's world. CDs are no, because they're a sharp object. It's a lot harder to get audio into the prison system, but we do have a active book donation program.

**[01:12:58] LW:** You have worked with the biggest luminaries in spirituality, Eckhart Tolle, Caroline Myss, Michael Beckwith, David Data, all these people, Jack Kornfield. I'm just curious, in your assessment, what do people who you end up crossing paths with and publishing their work, what do they have in common, if anything, that you've noticed over the years?

**[01:13:24] TS:** Well, you know, that's a good question. I don't know. As you were talking, the first thing that occurred to me is – and this is probably a weird, freaky answer. I would say something about their astrology. I don't know their astrology. What I imagined was a star. There's some star blessing power and light that is operating within through them. It's the karma of their life. Some people have that, and some people don't. Doesn't mean that they have more wisdom necessarily than other people? Clearly, they have to have a gift.

I started calling certain people speech incarnations, especially when we're mostly doing audio work at Sounds True. Some people have a gift to speak directly from inner knowing. They just know how to do that. It's like, they enter a stream or a river of some kind and they can speak from that place. That's a gift. A lot of people have the insight, but it doesn't hook up with their vocal cords in the same real-time, compelling way. What gives some people that gift? I don't know. That's why I saw the star shining on them. I don't know what to say.

**[01:14:45] LW:** Your company that you started from recording talks on dub machines has been around for 30 years. You mentioned that you've been doing some reflecting, now that you're almost 60-years-old. How does Tami Simon look at the success these days? Obviously, not about in the material sense, but in terms of a successful life. Like you said, at your funeral, at the end of your mission here on the earth school, when the name Tami Simon gets echoed throughout that room, what does the successful life for you look like? What do you want us to feel?

**[01:15:25] TS:** I guess, a few things. One, she gave it all. She gave everything she had. She spent it all. She spent it all. She gave it all. I feel that way sometimes, Light. I feel like an athlete. When an athlete leaves it all on the court, and you're like, “Oh, my God. They left it all on the court.” Everything. I feel that. I want to keep living that way.

The other thing is I think of my family. I think of my wife, and think of the people closest to me, and their experience of me in my life is what matters the most, and that they feel how much I love them. That it's demonstrated. It's not like, “Yeah, she said that, but then she was too busy pouring her life out on the court for some mythic others.” No. The people that are closest to me, I need to make sure I'm pouring out my heart for them all the time, every day. The immediate people, the people I work with. Those are the two things that occur to me.



**[01:16:30] LW:** Final question. If you could go back and have a conversation with young 21-year-old Tami, is there anything that you would advise her to do any differently? Or just any words of encouragement that you would give her that you don't feel she really embodied enough at that point in your life?

**[01:16:53] TS:** I think, I wasted a lot of energy in my life worrying. Thinking things through too much, way too much. I would try to help the 21-year-old in me know, and to use your language that you shared with me, keep trusting, to somehow help that part of her brain function. Quiet the F down, and find that through-line of creative power that runs through her and not spend – I'd say, “Sweetheart, don't waste that much energy on those thought processes that don't get you anywhere. Don't do that. You don't need to do that. It's all going to be all right. It's all going to be more than all right. It's going to be beautiful and brilliant, and glorious, and you want to enjoy it.”

**[01:17:49] LW:** Well, I want to wrap this up by talking again, about your childhood. It's funny, you said, leave it all on the field like an athlete, because that's exactly what I was thinking when you mentioned football, and particularly, the wide receiver position. What makes a good wide receiver is someone who can really make a play for any throw that's coming, in anywhere in their vicinity. Sometimes, that means you have to catch it with one hand. Sometimes they're on their tippy toes, so they don't go out of bounds.

For me, what that represents, when I hear your story is catching this spiritual knowledge. You literally captured it, in order to disseminate it to other people. You did this thousands of times, just like a hall of famer wide receiver would do. You have to make thousands of catches to make it at that level. I think, that you're definitely satisfying your mission, which is to leave it all on the field. I just want to acknowledge you for showing up and saying yes, and going against convention as much as you've had to do in your life, even though you had a lot of support.

A lot of times, that can be a double-edged sword, because you have so much support going against that support, when they tell you, you've lost your mind, you don't know what you're doing, you're too young, come home immediately. It's really hard to stay on your path when you're facing that level of empathetic concern. You were able to continue moving through all of that and trusting your heart.

For anyone out here listening to this conversation, I know that they will be inspired by hearing your story and maybe, even inspired to pick up some of those books you mentioned. If they don't have anyone immediately in their life who they feel can identify with their version of whatever they're being themselves looks like.

Yeah. Just thank you so much again for hopping on this call, having this conversation and for publishing my book. Hopefully, this is the beginning of a nice, long, fruitful relationship and we'll get a chance to definitely meet in person. You're in Boulder, right?

**[01:20:00] TS:** Yup.

**[01:20:01] LW:** It's one of my favorite places. I was coming there a lot before the pandemic. Hopefully, I'll be back there soon enough, and we'll get a chance to sit down on Pearl Street somewhere and have some food.

**[01:20:13] TS:** I would love that, Light. Thank you so much.

**[01:20:15] LW:** Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[01:20:17] LW:** Thank you for tuning in to my interview with Tami Simon. To learn more about her story, she's got a book called *Being True: What Matters Most in Work, Life and Love*. She's also got some wonderful interviews on YouTube about conscious capitalism and being a conscious entrepreneur. I'll put those links in the show notes, which you can find at [lightwatkins.com/tunnel](http://lightwatkins.com/tunnel).

While you're on my site, you may also see links to my Sounds True published book, *Knowing Where to Look: A 108 Daily Doses of Inspiration*. Many of the inspirational stories in the book are drawn from my five years of sending out those stories to my subscribers of my Daily Dose of Inspiration email, which you can also subscribe for, while you're on my website.

My final ask to you is to leave a rating or review for this podcast, which you can do really quickly by glancing down at your screen. On the Apple Podcasts app, click the name of this podcast, At the End of the Tunnel, and then scroll down past the previous episodes, you'll see the five blank stars. Tap the one all the way on the right and you've left a rating. Thank you all so much for that.

Otherwise, I look forward to hopefully, seeing you back here next week with another amazing story from the end of the tunnel. Until then, keep trusting your intuition, keep following your heart and keep taking those leaps of faith. If no one's told you recently that they believe in you, I believe in you. Thank you so much and have a great day.

[END]