

UFYB 152: Hope & Commitment



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And now here's your host, Harvard Law School grad, feminist rockstar, and Master Coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello my chickens. Alright, this has been a very intense week for many of us. It's not often that on the podcast I talk about kind of current events, although obviously I did quite a bit for the pandemic and the sort of movement around racial justice in this country earlier this summer, so maybe that's not true anymore.

In 2020, I do talk about current events. So last Friday, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Supreme Court Justice passed away. And I think a lot of women have truly have no idea how much they owe to her, regardless of their politics. So don't worry, this episode is not going to be all about RBG, and I do not think that RBG is a feminist saint.

There are certainly things to critique in her jurisprudence, especially around police accountability. And she did not seem to understand the significance of some of the work on racial justice that's been happening socially and politically the last few years, like Colin Kaepernick's protest.

So this is not about reifying her as the perfect feminist by any means, but since this is a podcast about how we, as women, create change in ourselves and in the world, or people who are socialized as women or identify as women. And when I use women on this podcast, as you all know if you've been listening for a long time, I'm talking about anyone who identifies in any of those ways.

And I think that because of the way we are taught history in this country, depending a lot on what kind of education you have access to, which may be partly socioeconomic, but then also sometimes just has to do with what

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state you live in, like Texas purchases a lot of school books, and so it has a disproportionate influence. School boards in Texas have a disproportionate influence on what gets included in textbooks across the country just because of things like that.

A lot of us, especially on the younger side, are kind of unaware of how recently we did not have even full legal rights on paper. Now obviously, a lot of rights that women or people of color have in this country or other marginalized groups, some of them still don't exist on paper and some of them exist on paper and are hard to enforce.

But I think it's just important to understand how many things that we take for granted as basic, neutral, non-political legal rights that everyone now would agree are obviously should be the case. Where radical feminist projects 50 years ago, when not only your grandparents were alive but possibly your parents were alive, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg led a lot of the legal movement to make them happen.

Before she was a Supreme Court Justice, she ran an entire project at the ACLU around women's rights and in that capacity, she created an entire legal movement strategy. So I'm just going to do a little educational moment here before I get into the thought work aspect because this sort of is part of thought work in the sense that when we think about how hard it seems to change society or how hard it seems to advance the causes we care about, yes, sometimes it is an uphill battle, but so much has changed so recently.

And at the same time, I think if you are someone that the law recognizes as woman and you don't think you need feminism or don't think you're a feminist, or think feminism is unnecessary or whatever, I think the odds are that you don't have a good understanding of how many of your basic legal rights that you take for completely granted that seem completely

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unexceptional and not controversial at all today were extremely controversial when feminists were fighting for them.

So here's an incomplete list of things that you can do in this country because of Ruth Bader Ginsburg and her work as a lawyer and a judge, and of course, the many other women who worked in this movement.

You can get a mortgage without a male co-signer. So I really want you to think about what if in order to get an apartment, even if you made enough money for it, you had to have your father co-sign your mortgage no matter how old you are if you aren't married. What if he was dead or he wouldn't do it? You'd have to find someone else like your uncle Bob you barely know.

You can get a checking account without a male co-signer. Imagine not being able to have your own checking account without a man having access to it and being able to sign on it. You can get a credit card without a male co-signer. Just imagine not being able to get your own credit card. This is not that long ago.

You can start a business or get a business loan without a male co-signer. You can get birth control without your husband's permission. You have the right to be considered for a job without discrimination based on your gender. You can't be fired just for getting pregnant. A lot of people don't know this. This used to be 100% the norm. Once you got pregnant, you were just fired and that was that. You didn't have any rights and you were generally not rehired after the baby came.

You can receive pension benefits equal to men. We know still that women don't make as much as men in equivalent jobs, but this used to be completely legal and above board. It used to be explicit. You would be told you were getting paid less because men had families to support, as if

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women didn't have families to support, or if that's what salary should be based on.

All these legal rights changed only in the last 50 to 60 years. So again, RBG, not a saint, not a perfect record. There are lots of criticisms that could be brought about aspects of her jurisprudence or her approach. I'm not listing these rights or changes to say that she was perfect.

But this is a podcast about patriarchy as a social structure and when I tell you that our brains have been shaped by a society that treats women as inferior and unreliable and needing external validation and guidance, I want you to understand how recently these beliefs were the literal law of the land.

So it's no wonder that we're still impacted by them. Of course there's a stereotype that women are bad with money and many women have internalized that and judged themselves and think they're bad with money. It wasn't that long ago that legally, you weren't allowed to have and control your own money because of that stereotype.

These beliefs we have, they don't come from nowhere. And now that they're not legally validated, some of them, it can seem confusing or strange that we have them, or we just think they must be true about us. But it's really, really useful to understand the history and see how recently these were not just stereotypes but just explicit parts of the law that were considered totally fine.

So when Ruth Bader Ginsburg passed away, I think a lot of what people were mourning wasn't even about her specifically. She has a complicated legacy like any person of great power and achievement. And a lot of the country is having a lot of thoughts and feelings about it, and so I thought this would be the perfect time to teach you all about hope and resilience.

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Because I think that's what we need to understand right now. We need to understand what is happening with our reaction to this news, what creates hope, and whether hope is even the emotion we want to be having right now.

So I think that RBG's death is an amazing example to apply the coaching model that I teach in The Clutch. So we're going to walk through this and use it as an example to teach about how our emotions happen. So we always start when we are using this model with the circumstance. The circumstance is a neutral statement or fact about what happened.

A person named Ruth Bader Ginsburg died. That's the circumstance. It's neutral. What that means when I say it's neutral is that it happened in the world and it requires a human brain to give it meaning. We know this because we can see all around us people are giving it very different meanings, and some are giving it no meaning.

Some people don't care, aren't really aware, heard the name, didn't know who it was, or knew who it was and just don't give a shit. Some people are happy that she's gone. Some people are devastated. Some people are angry. Some people are sad. Some people are relieved.

People have all these different feelings about her passing because of their thoughts about her. People have different thoughts, so they have different feelings. So if you're someone who doesn't follow or care about politics, you might be thinking, who cares? And you just wouldn't feel much of anything about it.

If you're someone who didn't like her jurisprudence and you love Donald Trump and you love conservative justices, your thought might be, this is awesome, now we get another seat on the Supreme Court.

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And if you're someone who really loved RBG and found her inspirational, and if you believed she was one of the few people protecting your rights, and if you're scared of having someone more conservative on the court, you might be thinking thoughts like, I can't believe she's dead, she was so inspirational, this is so sad, now we're fucked, without her on the court, they're going to overturn Roe v. Wade, we're going to lose our rights, people are going to suffer, she should have resigned earlier, she fucked this up for us.

I'm not saying any of these are my specific thoughts. This is just the range of the different thoughts that I have seen people displaying online. And depending on which, if any, or how many of these thoughts you have, you're going to then have a lot of different feelings.

So the circumstance is always the neutral circumstance, this person was living, they now are not. If you think this is so sad, you'll feel sad. If you think, now we're fucked, you may feel despondent. If you think we're going to lose our rights, you may feel afraid or anxious. If you think she should have resigned earlier, she fucked us over, you may feel angry.

Her death is the circumstance. It just exists. Human thoughts are what give it different meanings for different people. So first of all, I feel like I always need to say this. There's nothing wrong with feeling negative emotion about this or anything else. The point of thought work is not to never have negative emotion.

If you looked up to RBG, and you believed that she made the world a better place and you found her inspiring, you may want to feel sad that she's passed away. This is what I call clean pain. It's grief, it's natural, it happens when someone we love dies, if we have thoughts that produce it, whether we knew them or not.

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And then there's the dirty pain, which is the fear, the anger, the despondency. Again, that doesn't mean you shouldn't have those emotions or they're bad. It's just that we want to look more closely and think about what thoughts are creating them. Do we want to keep creating those emotions? Are they serving us?

I have a whole episode about clean and dirty pain you can check out for more on this. So let me say as usual also, this conversation is not about whether these emotions are real or valid or warranted or any other kind of judgment on whether they should exist. They do exist. We create these emotions when we think thoughts that create them. That's it.

We don't need to debate their validity or their justification or anything else or argue with people about how they should feel or how we should feel. I don't believe feelings are valid or invalid. They're not justified or not justified. They just are. We think a thought, it creates a feeling. That's it. Doesn't need to be in a category of valid or invalid or justified or unjustified. I don't think it's useful to try to categorize it.

We always just get to decide, do I want to keep thinking that thought and do I want to keep having that feeling? I do think it's useful to ask whether a thought is useful or helpful in getting a result we want. We want to look at why do I want to keep thinking this or not thinking it.

But whether it's justified or valid or reasonable are just irrelevant questions in my view. So here's what is interesting about this. I asked a bunch of people how they were feeling after Ruth Bader Ginsburg died, and the most common word I heard was hopeless.

So people were making the change in the circumstance, Justice Ginsburg is alive, then she's dead, to determine whether they were going to feel hopeful or hopeless. But hope is not created by external circumstances.

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This is how we think it works. We look around for evidence outside of us to make us feel hopeful or to make us feel hopeless.

We think hope happens out in the world, but hope happens inside of us. I saw this great quote recently from Mariame Kaba, who's a Black activist against the prison industrial complex. And she said, "Hope is a discipline." And I love that so much because any positive feeling is a discipline in the sense that if you want to experience it consistently, you have to create it for yourself consistently.

You have to commit to the feeling, to staying in it, to producing it, to thinking thoughts that support it. You cannot just wait for the world to deliver it to you. So you know how I teach you that your romantic partner or your boss or your parents, they aren't your validation vending machine. They're not there for you to just poke a button and get your emotional validation.

The world is not your hope vending machine. The world is beautiful and terrible, and it always has been, and it always will be. Now, that's not a neutral circumstance obviously. That's my own personal thought about it. But for me, that's just another way of saying life is 50/50. There's always both.

You can always find evidence for or against hope. For or against progress. For or against change. So you have to decide on purpose which one you're going to feel. If you want to feel hopeful, you have to decide to feel hopeful.

I think about hope like courage. People think that courage means feeling no fear, but it's the opposite. If you don't feel any fear, you don't need courage or bravery. I just went downstairs to get more coffee, and that didn't require courage because I don't have any fear about doing it.

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To be brave or to feel courage are emotions that require the presence of fear to even make sense as a concept. And hope is the same. If everything in the world was following your manual for what would be awesome, then you wouldn't need hope.

Hope exists only in the context of the world not being the way we want it to be. So you can't expect that circumstances are going to give you hope. We only need hope when we want to see the world be different than it is right now.

Now, I talk a lot about kind of emotional childhood of wanting things to be different, and that's not what I'm talking about here. I don't mean when we want the world to be different in an emotional childhood like, the universe hasn't delivered the boyfriend or the job that I want kind of way, or my friends didn't invite me to the brunch. Not that kind of way.

I mean in a philosophical sense of the world is not yet aligned with our deepest commitments to justice and peace and equality for everyone. We cannot expect the world to give us hope. The only reason we need hope in the first place is because the world is not yet the way that we want it to be, so we can't expect it to give us hope.

If the world already was that way, hope wouldn't be a thing. It wouldn't make any sense. We wouldn't need the concept. You only need hope in a world that needs repair. So it makes no sense to be mad at the broken world for not automatically making you feel hopeful.

Now, this is a little side note. Some of you may not resonate with the phrase broken world, and that's totally fine. Everybody gets to choose their own thoughts. This is kind of a big Jewish versus Christian theology difference in some way. Jews do not believe that the world is perfect as it is, according to god's will kind of.

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There's no one authority on Jewish doctrine, so there's 1700 different authorities, so nothing you ever say about what Jews believe or Judaism says is ever true across all of them. But generally speaking, Jews believe the world is broken, not in the sense that it's inherently bad or wrong or sinful or beyond repair, but rather in the sense that inequality and injustice exists.

They've always existed. It's our job to work on mending the world back together by reducing and eliminating those things. So whether you use that phrase or not, you like that phrase or not, the concept is the same. We don't need courage when we're not afraid, we don't need hope when everything seems fine.

But there's one more layer I want to add on to this. So you certainly cannot expect the world to make you feel hopeful. Hope only is necessary or even exists or makes sense as a concept when the world is going in a way that isn't what we would want.

But I also want us to question whether hope is even the emotion that we want to focus on creating because I think hope is kind of like motivation. Motivation, I think I once sent out an email that said motivation is the fuckboy of emotions and I stand by that.

I don't think hope is a fuckboy, but there's some kind of structural similarities. Motivation is awesome. It's awesome when it happens to us from our unconscious thoughts not on purpose. That's super fun. It's awesome when we can create it with our thoughts. That also can be fun. Makes getting things done really easy.

But you know what, sometimes we aren't able to create motivation. And if we depend on it to do the work, that's a problem. Because then if we don't feel motivated spontaneously and we can't create it, we think something's

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gone wrong and so we check out or we take a nap, or we watch Netflix instead of getting down to business.

And I think hope may be similar. Sometimes we spontaneously feel hopeful. Awesome. Sometimes we may not spontaneously feel hopeful, but we're able to create hope with our thoughts. Also awesome. But we're humans. In human progress, none of us have 100% managed minds, and some days we may not be able to create the emotion of hope when we want to.

Or maybe it would take all of our energy to even do that and then it would be the end of the day. And then what? If we're depending on hope to be our motivation that gets us through the day or that gets us to do the work, to make the world the way we want it, then we're fucked.

So I'm not sure that hope is really what we should be focusing on if we want to create change in the world. It's sort of like when people are saying they feel hopeless, they're talking about two different things. One is their own emotional state, which they are not managing their mind. One is just like; I personally feel bad and I thought the world should make me not feel bad.

And so that is like, that's about managing your own mind and your own emotions. And then one is - I mean, they're both about your emotions, but one is like, the world is going this way I don't want. And in that case, your job is to be focusing on how to manage your mind to show up to help make the change in the world that you want to see.

And I think when we're talking about that, hope is not the right emotion. I think we need to focus on commitment. I think that quote, the discipline of hope, it's really about commitment. It's about hope as a practice, not an

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emotion. It means I commit to being hopeful, even when I don't feel hopeful.

Hope is not a feeling in this sense. It's an action. I commit to doing the things I have committed to doing to create what I want to create, whether that's in my personal life, in my business, in my family, in politics, in the world. If I want to take back the senate, I commit to working on it every day whether I feel like it's working or not, whether I feel hopeful or not.

If I want to find a partner, I commit to working on that project every day whether I feel hopeful about finding one in every moment or not. If I want to build a six-figure coaching business or seven-figure coaching business, I commit to following the work I laid out whether I feel hopeful that it's going to happen in that moment or not.

Hope is nice. Commitment will change your life. Hope feels good when it happens to arrive, and commitment will change the world. So there's been this variation on a Jewish blessing going around after Justice Ginsburg's death, which in the traditional version is, may his or her memory be for a blessing.

And people have been circulating a version of it that says may her memory be for a revolution. But what I want to say is may her memory be a commitment. Whatever you think about her, she was committed to her work, she was committed to her idea of justice, she was committed to a view of the world that did not exist when she started her career and that she had a major role in bringing to fruition.

She did not only work on the days that hope happened to arrive. I am pretty sure about that. So may her memory be for a blessing, may it be for a commitment to the revolution. Because hope doesn't create a revolution.

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Commitment does. So commit to something, chickens, and I'll see you next week.

If this episode spoke to you and you spend time thinking about how to change the world and make it a better place, you need to be in The Clutch because as a social justice lawyer myself, I know that what often derails movements and people who are trying to make a difference is that they end up succumbing to so much unwanted anger and resentment and burnout and exhaustion and catastrophizing and just so much negative emotion that ends up burying and distorting all of the things that they wanted to do and achieve.

Learning how to manage your mind, how to process your emotions, and how to work with your thoughts is the way to create the change that you want to see, whether that's personally or professionally in yourself or in the world, without burnout and without overwhelm and without giving up.

So come check it out. It's www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. Or you can just text your email to 347-934-8861. There's so much work being done on how to change the world outside of us, but if we don't learn how to change our internal worlds too, we're never going to accomplish those external goals and we wouldn't even be able to recognize and achieve the path to them when we wanted to.