

## Becoming Who You Are Meant to Be by Tami Simon

Tami Simon: Welcome to Insights at the Edge produced by Sounds True. My name's Tami Simon. I'm the founder of Sounds True. I'd love to take a moment to introduce you to the new Sounds True Foundation. The Sounds True Foundation is dedicated to creating a wiser and kinder world by transformational education widely available. We want everyone to have access to transformational tools, such as mindfulness, emotional awareness and self-compassion, regardless of financial, social, or physical challenges. The Sounds True Foundation is a nonprofit dedicated to providing these transformational tools to communities in need, including at-risk youth, prisoners, veterans and those in developing countries. If you'd like to learn more or feel inspired to become a supporter, please visit [SoundsTrueFoundation.org](http://SoundsTrueFoundation.org).

In this episode of Insights at the Edge, my guest is Dr. Jean Shinoda Bolen. Jean Shinoda Bolen is a psychiatrist, a Jungian analyst, and an internationally known author and workshop leader. She's the author of 13 books in over 100 foreign editions, including *The Tao of Psychology*, *Goddesses in Everywoman*, and *Moving Toward the Millionth Circle: Energizing the Global Women's Movement*. Jean Shinoda Bolen is an outspoken activist for the earth and for women. There's even a global movement of women who meet regularly in circles, online, inspired by her book, *The Millionth Circle*. With Sounds True, Jean has released an audio of her book *Like a Tree: How Trees, Women, and Tree People Can Save the Planet*. This conversation with Jean takes place when she's 85 years old, a true wise elder for our community with a laugh you won't soon forget.

She talks about how soul work is the path to each one of us becoming who we were meant to be. Jean's clear statement: "I'm not done yet." Here's my conversation with the vibrant, gifted crone, Jean Shinoda Bolen.

You and I have known each other Jean for a long time. I was counting up the years and I think it's something like more than three decades.

Jean Shinoda Bolen: Time passes really swiftly. The older I get the faster time seems to go by.

TS: I have so much admiration for you. You've accomplished so much as I was reacquainting myself with your work over the past couple decades, I was floored by how much you've done as an activist in terms of all of your publishing activities. On your website I found a sentence, and I wanted to start our conversation with having you share a little bit about what is behind this sentence. Here it is: "Once we believe that there is a

purpose to life and that we have a soul, then what we do with our life matters.” And I wanted to start right there, this notion of having this conviction, that there’s a purpose to our life; and then the second part that we have a soul; and have you explain this more to us from your perspective.

JSB: Well, I think back to when I was in, about the last year before high school ended. At that time I was also rather active in a lot of different ways. And I fully intended—because I had been a high school debater that like all the other debater folks that had gone to state and national meetings—that I was going to go to law school too, and I was going to be a lawyer. And then I went up to the mountains—and I’ve always had a much deeper spiritual sense up in the mountains, under the tree in the sky, than I have had in institutionalized sacred places. I was up in the mountains at a religious camp, and at some point, it struck me deeply about how now all the things that I was so proud of, my accomplishments and all of that, that they were gifts that I had gotten. I could enumerate the gifts and the parents that supported me, but what I really realized was that I could have been my brain-damaged younger brother. Somehow, I could have been him.

I realized very humbly that all the pride that I had taken in my accomplishments were gifts, and that all I could do is be thankful that the pride that I had dissolved. That night in the chapel by myself, I’m not sure what exactly went on in my psyche, but a lot was going on. And at one point, I seemed to have a dialogue with divinity, about what I should do with my life. And somehow in that experience, I felt my calling was not to be a lawyer—it didn’t even come up. I promised divinity, God, that I would help people, that I would be a doctor.

I held to that promise for years after, even though I never was very good at scientific stuff [...]. People could say that I was just doing what my mother did, because my mother was a physician, and I have doctors in my family, but I wasn’t a scientifically minded kind of a person. I never thought I would be a doctor; but I had made this promise up in the trees and in the mountains, in the chapel, in my humility and appreciation for the grace that had imbued my life, I decided I’d be a doctor. I promised I would be one, which took a long time, to live up to the promise. it’s a long story that I think I should bring to a little bit of an end right now.

TS: Well, what’s in it to me is, here you are now at 85 years old, and still this memory of the promise you made at the end of your high school years is so vivid for you in thinking about the purpose in life and your assignment. But now I want to make sure to understand the second part of this, believing that there’s a purpose to life and that we have a soul. And then what we do with our life matters. Tell me this notion of your conviction of what it means to have a soul and how this be became clear to you.

JSB: I wonder if it has something to do with the intuition that there are old souls and young souls, and that somehow we who have a sense of being an old soul have more patience, maybe more sense of a spiritual side, maybe more experience in some way with the trials and difficulties, and rewards of life. I mean, you do get a sense often when you meet people that there are old souls and there are very young souls. And what if those of us that have been drawn to being here now especially, what if a number of us do have a

sense not only of having a soul, which I've never questioned actually, so I can't say anything about it. It's sort of like the capacity to love, for example, the capacity to feel a sense of awe and sacredness under the stars and among the trees. How does one get that?

It's sort of built into us. I have no question about soul. And I also have a sense that there's something about coming here, and touching into... We don't actually come in as a blank slate—which people project onto us, and parents tell us who we are to be and all that. There truly is a collective unconscious or an old part that each of us can draw from and know something from. It's a simple question: how do you know you have a soul? And how do you respond to something that's beautiful? How do you feel something deep in your heart area? I mean, it's sort of like breathing or using your hands to make something that the body and the mind, the heart and the soul all seem to be built in, in some way into this amazing life we each have. I didn't quite answer your question.

TS: It's OK, Jean, but here you are, you're an MD and you said you weren't that great at science, but you persevered anyway so that you could fulfill the promise you were given. I think a lot of people in our materialistic society question whether or not there's such a thing as a soul—when we die, the lights go out. I think there is a sense of “if it's not evidence-based it's not happening.” I don't think, for many people, it's self-evident.

JSB: It also isn't self-evident if you are always attending to what is going on outside of yourself, if you always turn the television on or the radio on, or whether you're always moving towards the outer information that keeps pouring in. And what, if you then don't feel something moving you from inside out then how do you fall in love? Or how do you feel a sense of grace, a sense of real thankfulness? How do you feel a sense of beauty and marvel at a sunrise or a sunset? There's this whole side of the human being that we naturally come into, but sometimes it gets suppressed and never encouraged to grow. That sort of thing about being moved by and a sense of a sacred space, for example—I'm not trying to say anybody could be persuaded, because it's all in this realm that is not cause and effect. In fact, there is sort of the linear side of the brain that is yes/no, cause/effect.

The more that you are forced to always be in that area of left-brain logic, what you're cut off from is the right brain. And the right brain has within it such things as images, dreams, the sense that it can handle different thoughts, feelings that may not be coherent, may actually be opposites, but they can be held in the right brain, as dreams are held there, while the left brain is the logical side. And if you could go between the two—which we do have between the two hemispheres of the brain, we have these passageways, these networks between right and left brain.

To become a whole-brain person, you need to have both aspects of human experience and be moved by it and use both of it. What happens within especially a patriarchal world when everything is linearly developed, and proof is always required, and it's always outer oriented, what happens is that the left-brain level has often a sense of arrogance, that it knows best while the poetry, the art, the music, the movement, the soul is felt by the other side, or so it seems.

TS: One of the things I'm curious about, Jean, is how you know, in your own life, when an assignment is yours to pick up—how do you know?

JSB: There are some things that have to do with—I mean, I look back at some of the difficulties I've gotten into, because I have felt that I should've spoken up. I've learned overtime that I can hold that impulse and decide whether I will or won't. It's a choice really, of deciding over. And I see how so many people have trained themselves to suppress a reaction, because they have been troubled by speaking up and speaking out and made fun of. And I've worked with a lot of men who are really solid men, but who went through a very difficult time when they were in elementary school or junior high school or both. There was what went on in the school room, which is one thing, but the school yard was often run by the guys who often would make fun of or scapegoat someone who was more introverted, who seemed more feminine, who seemed to disagree. What happened to most of the boys in between is they learned to not speak up from their feeling side, but to go along with the leader. Then, later in life, to become whole people, they often look back at what was done and what they responded to when they were in their elementary and high school years.

Speaking up, that's the question—and you know later on in life that you should have spoken up, that your heart knew what you should have said, but you lacked the courage to do so, or you thought it was smarter not to speak up. So, you missed something both good and maybe problematical. We have decisions all the time [...] to remain silent, to speak up, to think about it, to feel about it, to learn from it or to not give a further thought.

TS: There was another quote that I drew from your work—there are so many that I loved—but this one: “In my broad understanding of activism, it's necessary for individuation, a Jungian concept of becoming authentically yourself, who you are meant to be.” I wanted to understand, first of all, what you mean by activism and then drawing on what you've just been and saying in this notion of if we didn't speak up, we might need to, what it means for individuation. Why do you think it's necessary for individuation?

JSB: Individuation, truly, for me is best communicated with easier words than “individuation,” which is “to become who you were meant to be.” There are natural talents and abilities that come with us when we are born. It doesn't have a name, but we are not blank screens. You can see it in a baby who responds to the music, for example, and in another baby who might not. There is something about the talents, the qualities, the naturalness in us that we came into the world with. And then we get trained by family and society, and culture, how to adjust to being here. And that's when often a person neglects that part, that's sort of built in. And it's when you find what is built in... One of the things that is a way of knowing that this is who you are and what matters to you is you get involved in it and you lose track of time.

If you, for example, work at practicing a piece, and you're a musician, or you work at writing a chapter or a book, or you get involved in painting something, if you are yourself involved in expressing what it is that is coming out of you and being in some way

expressed outside of you, you lose track of time. Whenever you love what you do and it grows out of a depth in yourself, you have to watch a clock, because it really seems surprising that “Oh, four hours have gone by.” I have had to train myself—for example, I’m really good at doing a 50-minute session, because I have to pay attention to that, because it is so easy just to drop into listening, responding, hearing a dream, working with that person with that dream.

In the discipline of being a Jungian analyst, psychiatrist, I’ve had to learn how my left brain, which tracks things like time, has to pay attention to that particular thing in order for the 50 minutes to really work in a rhythm that works. It’s sort of like if you are painting on a small canvas: you get a sense of what you have to put on that canvas, to complete that small canvas versus a big one. There’s something about that sense of knowing when you love what you do and you’re involved in what it is you are doing, and something is growing through what the work you’re doing, you do really have a sense of losing track of time.

So many people have been ambitious and pushed to do something. I remember one person I did quote in something I wrote about: he’d climbed a ladder for success, and then, when he got to the top, he realized he had put the ladder against the wrong wall. That, yes, he reached the top of the ladder, and it was successful, but it didn’t have meaning for him. An activism is just one of the major kinds of things that come along. If you are committed to, say, the organization or the education or something, if you are committed to where you are and something is going wrong, will you speak up? Does it matter to you? You want this organization that you belong to to be what it was meant to be.

If you were drawn to its ideals, will you then strive to have to speak to the situation which is going in the other direction? I think that something of my sense of activism is that it’s a feeling connection with the people; that speaks to activism for me. Also, to be appreciative of the gifts and the kind of help overtime that I’ve gotten.

TS: What I notice as a theme already running through our talk is this theme of gratitude and appreciation. You started by feeling grateful for your life, in the context of your family and the difficulties that your brother experienced and expressing gratitude for your incarnation. Anyway, I feel that, Jean, as a theme in our conversation, and I notice it moves me just as I touch in with how much appreciation and gratitude you have.

JSB: I do.

TS: I listened recently to a TED Talk that you gave, called “Crisis as a Turning Point.” This was last year. And here you are, you’re 84 years of age, giving—

JSB: 85.

TS: —now, but when you gave the TED Talk, you were 84, and were in the TED Talk saying that there were some questions coming at you about legacy and that you had come to the conclusion, “I’m not done yet.” And you said it very powerfully in those four words: “I’m not done yet.” And I thought to myself, “God, I hope I feel that way when I’m 84, 85 years old, I really do.” So, if you’re not done yet, what is it that you still want to be doing?

JSB: Well, one of the things that happened is that I came back from Egypt in something like the middle of March two years ago. And I went back to my office, and I had one day in my office when the pandemic came down on us. And suddenly everything changed in terms of sheltering in place, wearing masks, not going into my office and doing my work there, but doing it on computer, doing it on Zoom. And there was something about being sheltered in place and having a realization that I had, just before I had gone to Egypt, actually finished what I thought was my memoir. I had sent it to my publisher when I had come back from Egypt. And it had resided in my publisher’s hands for a couple of weeks when I realized all of the shifts that were going on with this pandemic, and also the potential to do what you and I are doing now—which, we can have a dialogue, we can have a talk that is like what I call the dandelion effect these days.

I have been, during this pandemic, speaking at conferences all over the world and going to meetings all over, locally and nationally and things. And I haven’t had to leave home. And there’s been something about, well, it is like the dandelion effect: the winds of the internet carry the seeds of ideas to wherever there is fertile ground. And my whole sense of the work I’ve done as a doctor, as a psychiatrist, as a Jungian analyst, is that my task is to help people become who they were meant to be, or—and this is really maybe what you asked me about much earlier, about soul work—to become who you were meant to be from inside out; it’s like your soul has a sense of what deeply matters.

I’ve had in this last almost—well, it’ll be two years—there has been two years of doing what I had an opportunity to do and felt like this was my assignment to help people to grow into believing in themselves, that every life, including the sufferings in it, including the pain of it, including the difficulties that we’ve had and that we over and over again, each time we have a major shift in our lives, we have like a doorway. I use the word “liminal” a lot these days, because I so appreciate this liminal time we are in during this pandemic. Once the pandemic happened, we could no longer go back to what was. Life changed for everybody.

And then there’s a time in between and the word liminal comes from a word L-I-M-E-N, “limen,” “limin-“ or “limen,” which is a Latin word for “threshold.” So when you go from outside, you cross a threshold into a house or a building, for example. Well, when you go from what life was like before the pandemic, before you were a person who was sailing along, and then you finally found out that you have an illness, or you have a betrayal, or you have a loss, or you’ve had a disaster, suddenly you are in this liminal doorway, as to how are you going to respond now? You can’t be the person that was before this happened. What are you going to do in between? I mean, that’s where I’ve been, that’s where I’m feeling all of us are in.

Although, some people just don’t want to seem to tune it out or drink too much or not know what it is that is stirring inside of them. I also see that as human beings. We have this decade before global warming might shut down our human race. So, whether it’s humanity or whether it’s an individual, you realize that this is a liminal time, that what

you do now will shape what comes next or not. That's really what I'm doing a lot of these days, because I really want people to understand that it is really something to be in this time when, what each of us does are like grains of sand. It adds to which direction this human experience will shift what we do.

I was so moved in the 60s and 70s, I guess, when I saw planet Earth from outer space and she/it was beautiful against the enormity of space. Here is this beautiful home, planet, with this aura around it of clouds and sky. This is our home. I just want people to get what an experience we all have right now. And then we're each like grains of sand, so that if we can each make a difference, we can help tilt the direction we're going in—maybe, but I believe we can.

TS: Jean, what if someone hears that—"Each like a grain of sand? It makes me feel so minuscule that what I do doesn't matter, I'm just a little old grain of sand."

JSB: Yes, but each grain of sand adding to a particular mound keeps growing. And then you are with others who also share a sense that we are here at a particularly important time to be human, to make a difference. There are so many things we can do to be helpful or hurtful.

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I think people will connect with what you're saying about this being a liminal time, a threshold time. We can't go back to what it was like before the pandemic. And we don't know, many of us, where we're going; there's so much uncertainty. People in the workplace are calling it *The Great Reevaluation*. "Where are we going? Is this where I want to be? Is this the organization I want to be with? Am I living in the part of the world I want to be living in, with the partner?" Etc. From your perspective, how do we each make the most use of a time that's liminal.

JSB: [We have] to be aware of, are we just going through motions and collecting a paycheck? Is it something that matters to us personally, because we get involved with the people that we work with? I mean, you can be someone, for example, who's a gardener who happens to love nature and watch plants grow. Well, that person may not be making much money compared to a salesperson of an object that is just something that you sell to get a commissioner on. And you don't really think that it does much good, but it does; it is profitable. The person who is actually loving what they do and watching something grow, whether it is a plant or a person, or an animal, there is something about that. That touches again—we go back to, what is soul anyway?

I never was able to answer that very well, but the soul recognizes when you are doing something that matters; it feels that you are adding to life in a positive way, or you're creating something, your business is creating something that's going to help people. And there is something about whether you get more mellow inside or more resentful inside, depending on whether you feel you have made a choice or whether you're stuck. I think that that's where a lot of people have to get to where they have to take courage or patience, or help transform the situation to make it better, but not just do time.

You go to school and you just do time. You don't get interested in what you are learning. Well, that's how it goes in life, in general. You can do time like people who are put in jail do time, or people that get into marriages that are for some reason intolerable and they don't change or something. And they feel like they're doing time rather than working on, "OK, can we make this work?" There are so many people that take it out on others who are weaker in some way, but what is inside of the person who's even being resentful and angry, is the unhappiness of leading a life that has some meaning to the person. And I think that this is what the soul is the measure of. I think that if you are in relationship to your own soul, then you do have a sense of this is soul work that I'm doing, raising these kids, teaching something, growing something, whatever it is that you are involved in doing, that you can say, "I'm doing my soul work."

TS: I'm curious, Jean, if there's a dream, a dream that you had while you were sleeping, because we're talking the framework of the importance of dreams in Jungian psychology, a dream that is important to you that is guiding your life, at this point at age 85.

JSB: Actually, I'm waiting for the dream life to return, because I had some major surgery in January. The surgery was very meaningful in that I had the surgery; it was a double surgery—one operating room, two surgeons. One of the abdominal area, one at the breast level area, both, had they continued untaken out, would've done in what's next probably. But I got freed through that, and I thought was really well, except that one has to recover postoperatively. And because we're in this liminal time of hospitals not being safe places for patients to be in, the surgery was done just before noon or something like that. And I was actually in the recovery area for hours after. As soon as it got to be evening, and I was awake when I went into the post-time, because they do anesthesia so that it acts when you are in the operating room on the patient.

But then the patient is awakened when they go into the recovery area. So, that happened. I was awakened, but then I just went back to sleep again, because surgery takes a great deal out of the person. And what I didn't realize was, because of the situation, I didn't have to stay over in the hospital. Actually, I could go home. I was wide awake, and I felt, I

knew the surgery had gone well. I knew that I expected I was going to recover, but what I did not learn and wasn't even taught as part of my medical school training, was that there's something about the anesthesia that may take from three months to a year to totally recover its effect on the psyche and on the mind.

One of the things that I found, was that in this time of not realizing that I had to sort of not do as much as I've been up to doing immediately post-off, because I really had a lot to do, is that I needed to spend more time asleep, more time recovering, and what I was missing were my dreams. It was like my body was taking over the side of the dream side and I was just deeply asleep getting the healing stuff, getting over the anesthesia. I'm waiting for my dreams to return, by the way.

TS: It's interesting you said that the surgery was very meaningful, and I have heard people describe surgery using that word very often. Can you tell me a little bit about what was so meaningful to you in it?

JSB: It means that when I get through this recovery period I will be in good health. And that will give me, I believe another decade to do what I came to here to do. What I'm doing now is responding to the invitations to speak online and all that. The whole idea of the dandelion effect of sending out ideas. If someone happens to synchronistically tune in to hear just a particular something that was put into words, what they didn't have words for, then that is something for their mind and verbiage to wrap around what is otherwise a deep feeling inside, but you didn't have words for it. I'm putting it out there, as that which I'm doing now. But I'm also doing a lot of recovering and sleeping from the surgery thing. [...] I withdrew my memoir as soon as I started to do these interviews and things online when I truly realized and truly said, "I'm not done yet."

I am a Cancerian astrology. And I started to think about liminal and Cancerian, about how it is at my age, between 85 and 100, or 95 or something like that, how fast it's going to go. And then I will leave my body. Well, what if once I leave my body I'm in liminal space between what used to be, which was an embodied human being, and in that next phase where so many people are hearing from people on the other side? I find that there's often an experience that people have a very vivid dream in which the person who has died is—they know in the dream that the person has died, but that person is speaking to the dreamer in the dream. It's happening a lot. I'm picking up that my work is to listen to dreams.

I just have a sense. The other day I heard about a woman who's younger cousin had been trying to reach her and she just shut her out feeling like she was going crazy. Then she got the sense that it actually could be her younger cousin who died and who was trying to reach her. And she got afraid to listen and she connected. That's another thing that I hope people will learn, maybe, from what we're talking about, is that with so many people dying in the hospital, in surgery unexpectedly from COVID, they've not had a time to say goodbye, to the relatives who are left behind. And what if now they find that there are many dreams that the people who are receptive to dreams start to hear from the other side and start to think that maybe there is something ongoing that we are not just our bodies, that we don't end our consciousness when we die, that there may be a phase which I can really appreciate with the phases of the moon, which is the Cancerian story.

If you read astrology and some newspapers, instead of saying “Cancer” which has a bad connotation, it says “moon child.” And the moon goes through phases of going from the dark of the moon, into slivers of the moon, into the quarter of the moon, half the moon, full moon, and then it starts to go down again. And then it goes into the dark of the moon. The fourth cycle of the moon is the dark of the moon. And so, what if, when I die, for example, what if it’s not over? What if I am then out of my body and in this liminal space that is like the dark of the moon? And from that place I can communicate, maybe.

Maybe I can watch, maybe I can be in a rush to just go through this liminal time to whatever comes next, I don’t know. But the whole sense of the messages that people have received, the dreams that they’ve had, the sense that there is something that goes beyond this embodied life, that there is something. I’m in no hurry to leave, because I still have what I want to do here, but I also have a sense that there is another adventure after I die. I would imagine that I will stay around as long as my daughter, for example, is still here on this side or her child too will still be here. And otherwise, maybe one hopes to be able to, in some way, be an influence if we’re asked. I think that one of the things that I’m sort of thinking about is that it does matter for people to have a sense of communicating with the other side.

TS: Jean, do you have a living connection with beings that have their physical body?

JSB: I do, but I don’t have them in the dramatic sense that people do when they see them or hear them. What I have is a sense of presence and a sense of being supported by those people on the other side, who supported me when they were here. And one of the things I’ve done is I live up and over the hill from Muir Woods. And there is an area in Muir Woods, which I refer to as a cathedral grove. And there was a place there that still is there, but it’s not as accessible; it was between two trees that had a space underneath them, that was like one clearing. And I remember going there often and I would call the circle on the other side. And that’s one of the things about, as you get much older than people that were your close friends or relatives, they died, and you’re still on this side.

But to think about calling the circle and feeling their presence and getting energy from that. Also, sometimes what is surprising is that somebody shows up in the circle that you didn’t have in your own mind to bring into the circle but certainly you have a feeling that this person is there. It happened during the pandemic that a friend named India Supera, who had started the Feathered Pipe Foundation in Montana—and I had been going there doing workshops, but we and Jenn Levitt Keen, who I’d worked with with India Supera and the Feathered Pipe on its major trips that we made to Ireland, to various parts of Europe, to various places in the world, suddenly India, who was an exceptional person and a unique person, and, unlike close friends who like to talk about their lives and relationships and things, she was her own person, and didn’t do that level of talk. But there was a hard connection with everybody that is in this circle. And suddenly there she was, a felt presence, but not a seen presence, not a heard presence; but this is because I’m intuitive rather than sensate. Now, if you pick up things in a sensate manner, you then can hear a voice, you can see a person, I feel a presence of my son Andy around. I think he has been in this liminal space for ever since he died in peace. But when he passed over, he spoke to his father, his father heard him speak and heard him speak about what he was experiencing.

He had fallen and become paralyzed. He was 28 years old when he passed. And he did not feel victimized. When his sister asked him, "What are you doing?"—because he had a male nurse who could help him lift him up and all. And he was in my home, and he was peaceful. I mean, I think about being peaceful and having suffered this amount of loss, and you're a 28-year-old male. And so, his sister asked, "Well, Andy what are you doing?" And he said he was going over every significant piece of his life. He was reviewing his life. And then what he did when he died is just—I mean, the paralysis from his fall meant that he no longer could project his voice. When he was paralyzed—and as far as moving his arms and his legs—he couldn't speak above a whisper. And so, I was sleeping on the sofa next to his hospital bed up in what is an upper room.

Like every good mother, in a crowd of children, you can hear your kid say something. Well, when I was asleep, if Andy said, "Mom," in a whisper, it would make me up. I was used to that. But this one night, maybe it was two, three in the morning, I heard his old voice wake me up, and I woke up thinking, "How could he do that?" And then I went over to the bedside, which is right there. And, always, he would be looking at me and letting me know what is that he might need me to do. But this time when I went over to his bedside, his eyes were closed, and I could hear him breathe. And he took a couple of more breaths and then he was gone. So, he woke me up so that I wouldn't find him in the morning, cold and dead.

He woke me up, however that worked, where I heard his voice. And usually what I do is intuit feel rather than hear or see. But lots of people, not only did his father see him and hear him when he passed and said to him, "Tell Mom I'm OK." The next thing he said: "There are lots of people here. And many of them are very confused." Now, he had done all this work before he passed. And here were these people who were confused about being here with all these people who had died. So, that was interesting. Since then he has appeared in the dreams and he has spoken to a number of other people I know. And I just feel his presence. So, that's a kind of an assumption too, that when I cross over there will be a number of people I will be glad to feel, see or sense.

TS: The question that comes up for me, as I'm thinking of calling our conversation "Becoming Who You Are Meant To Be." And it feels to me that developing some type of comfort, some type of capacity to be on the dark side of the moon in our own experience, is a requirement to become who we're meant to be. We have to be able to do that in order to come from our own kind of deep fertility and genuineness. And I wonder, what do you think are the capacities? How can you help us become more familiar and OK with the dark side of the moon?

JSB: Nobody gets through life without a degree of suffering or betrayal or illness or loss. The question is, every time that dark quality comes into our lives, what do we do? How do we respond? One is, there does need to be a capacity to actually feel the pain of it, whatever it was, whether it was a betrayal or a loss, and to mourn it. I mean, that's one of the things that people do with grief. They move through the loss, they feel it, they cry, they write, they do whatever they do to feel what is deeply inside of them and to bring it up and out. And then there is the question about, what next? And it includes the capacity to see what happened and how that happened. And there needs to be a learning from that, including taking on your own awareness of what you were not too aware of, but you're not there to blame the other person and to hold a grudge.

There has to be a kind of moving through the experience and learning from it, and letting it go. And that's what everybody has to do, including some very, very young people who still don't have much of a verbal side. But you see in young babies even, something of the soulness that is there. And if we are fortunate enough to not stay stuck with our bitterness or our anger, but to learn from it and move through that dark phase, into realizing how so many people of the world are even less fortunate than whatever suffering we've just gone through. And that if we are here, and we've been educated and we have some energy left and whatever, what are we going to do with it? What have we learned? How can we grow through this thing?

Well, we keep going through these experiences, these liminal times. Then there was the pain, then there was a grief, then there was a loss. Then we were in this liminal time where, "OK, that's passed, now what?" And then we have the choices to make. We go through these cycles over and over again, and the final one is when we are moving from life into dying and crossing over to the other side. So I wonder when it is that we get a real clarity about why we might have even choose to come into this world at this time. Have we had many previous lives? Did we choose to come into this one? Was something in mind. And are we living that out now? I hope that people can feel that and not feel envious and resentful of other people, but to realize that there's something about what we have personally suffered through and learned, that is part of what we came here to do and to change something in ourselves so that we have deepened in some fashion that we could actually help this transition that is now called global warming.

But what if we come up against global warming and we transform it? How will that affect human beings? If every grain of sand was part of a huge humanity energy, positive energy, then there's something about how every grain of sand in that mound has a sense of having done something meaningful together with other species of life. Anyway, that's how I kind of can conceive of the metaphor you just handed me about this. Because, yes, we are just one individual, but within this one individual life we can affect what comes and who comes in touch with us, whether it's people or animals, or trees, or flowers, or the atmosphere itself.

TS: It's a great joy and privilege to be part of the dandelion effect with you here, blowing on the dandelion and spreading these, I don't know, seeds, if you will, all over. It's such a joy to be with you doing that here at 85. And, yes, I'm so glad your surgery went well and that you're not done yet. I'm so happy for that.

JSB: I have two things I want to do. I want to finish my memoir, because that was—clearly, I'm not done yet. The last segment of that memoir is since the beginning of the pandemic and what I'm learning through this. And then I have written a couple of small books that have had an effect. One is *The Millionth Circle*, which is like the grains of sand, again, everyone who forms a circle that has a sense of bondedness with the other members of the circle and holds in the center of the circle a sense that there is something sacred or spiritual, or soulful. And at the end of each circle meeting, people tell the truth of their lives and put their dreams in this circle, and ask for prayers or meditations, or whatever it is that each gives. And then hold it, and to know that those people who know you know what it is you dream to have happened, and they support it, and you feel they have your back. Those circles are forming all over during this pandemic more than ever, because

people were able to talk to each other when they no longer live near each other. So often it was that you remembered those classmates that you had way back when, get back in touch with them. And now you can share something of who you were then and who you are becoming now. And I'm seeing this whole idea of The Millionth Circle is a metaphoric number. The book is how to change ourselves and the world just by being in a circle with a sacred center and telling the truth of what it is and who it is that you cared for and things like that.

That's a simple sort of thing. The idea of circle has gone out in the seated idea, where instead of talking about groups, we're talking, often the word "circle" has come to mind. I know that, much more than one millionth, The Millionth Circle is the last one that tilts that the number of people who see themselves in hierarchical power over patriarchy and tilts it into circle, which is a whole different kind of a thing where each person looks at each other and sees each other in circle. And while you know when you're in patriarchy, there's the leader or the head that's speaking to you and telling you what you should believe and do. And there's the audience sitting in there. So to move from patriarchal image to circle image [is a] very, very simple thing to do in concept, but it is a deep connection that is made.

I went on to write another little book called Moving Toward the Millionth Circle. And one of just the little stories I said at the beginning was the person who spoke to the three stone cutters who were cutting square stones to build a cathedral. The person asked each in turn, "What are you doing?" And the first two thought that "It's stupid idea; it's obvious what I'm doing: I'm chipping away to make a stone." The third one says, "I'm doing this stone to be part of a cathedral that will last for 100s of years and will help people." Something like that. So, when you expand that sense of "I'm just a little grain of sand" or something like that into "I am participating in changing humanity and the planet," it's like this third stone cutter, who is working at what he's doing, just evening out the stone—but he sees it being placed within a cathedral. And I think of Chartres Cathedral with that image in my mind, anyway.

TS: I've been speaking with Jean Shinoda Bolen, you can learn more about this circle work, and there are resources for how to start or join a circle at [millionthcircle.org](http://millionthcircle.org). Jean Shinoda Bolen the author of numerous books, including the well-known Goddesses in Everywoman, and the book Like a Tree: How Trees, Women, and Tree People Can Save the Planet. And Sounds True has published an audio book of Like a Tree. You can learn more about that at [SoundsTrue.com](http://SoundsTrue.com).

Jean, terrific to talk to you. Thank you so much. You're listening to Insights at the Edge. You can read a full transcript of today's interview at [SoundsTrue.com/podcast](http://SoundsTrue.com/podcast). If you're interested, hit the Subscribe button in your podcast app. Also, if you feel inspired, head to iTunes and leave Insights at the Edge a review. I love getting your feedback being in connection with you and learning how we continue to evolve and improve our program. Working together, I believe we can create a kinder and wiser world. [SoundsTrue.com](http://SoundsTrue.com): waking up the world.