**35. Plants, Sustainable Living & Being Multi-Passionate with Jonathan Drori CBE**

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:00:00] I think I've realized, along with perhaps everyone else, just how much people matter. You know, the sort of physicality of being with people, the hug, the body language, the being able to talk to each other without the delay of Zoom. I've also thought about how much nature matters.

**Intro** [00:00:14]

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:00:14] Hello and welcome to ALSO in PINK. The podcast all about lifestyle design. How we live, the clothes we choose and how we organise our space. I'm your host, Alexandria Lawrence, a certified KonMari consultant and personal stylist. I'm here to guide you on your journey to live a happy, fulfilled life.

Every Tuesday, you'll get new insight on what it means to live well, plus actionable tips.

Redefine what's possible and create your ideal life.

Our guest today is Jonathan Drori. Jon is multi-passionate in the fullest sense of the word. His interests and expertise span everything from engineering to science and education, documentary filmmaking and writing books to being on the boards of Raspberry PI and the Eden Project. He's also an ambassador for the Woodland Trust and WWF.

And you'll hear how plants gave Jon a literal taste for history. Hint, hint. As we chat about his latest book Around the World in 80 Plants.

Jon, welcome. Thank you so much for being here. I'm really delighted to have you in the show.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:01:34] Thank you so much.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:01:36] And, speaking with you reminds me of how long I've actually been in this country. I can't believe it's been 18 years since I moved to London. And you're one of the first people I met in a non-academic setting. And you also happen to be married to my guest from episode nine, novelist Tracy Chevalier. So it's lovely to have you and Tracy and your whole family as part of my London life.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:02:04] Thank you. 18 years has gone by quickly, but I think the past year has gone even faster. I think time dilates during lockdown.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:02:13] It definitely does. It's been such a strange year and funnily enough, in terms of location, I've ended up where you started your journey. So your roots are in Twickenham, a leafy part of Southwest London, and part of Richmond upon Thames, which is known, I think is London's greenest borough. It seems like a great place to be a kid with nature on your doorstep and the River Thames and all those trees and parks and Kew Gardens.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:02:42] Yeah, it was a great place to grow up. You know, our mothers used to just bung us all out of the door in the morning and then expect to see us in the evening. And so in the meantime, there was you know, all that space along the river and Kew Gardens as you say and Richmond Park and so on. Big areas that we could kind of go and run around in. And I remember my parents often taking me to Kew as a child. And I think that sort of love of plants and exotic plants has stayed with me all my life really.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:03:10] Well, it seems a natural transition from that environment to botany and the natural world playing an important part in your professional life.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:03:19] Yes, my parents used to take us on walks when we were very little, every week, really. We'd either go to Richmond Park or Kew and they sort of jollied my brother and me around Kew byyou know, obviously sweet treats here and there. But some also by telling us stories about the different plants and one of the things my father used to do was feed me bits of them.

Sometimes they were very you know, obvious things to eat like herbs and other times they were less obvious. I remember him giving me a lick of the seed capsule of an opium poppy once. My teacher was most concerned about that when I told her.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:03:55] I assume you didn't feel any effects of it.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:03:59] Well, I could feel the sort of slight numbness on my tongue.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:04:02] Oh, really?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:04:03] Andnothing else. but years later, when I was a trustee at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kewthey handed round some opium capsules to trustees who were all wearing suits and ties and things. andmine was just exuding a little bit of this sort of white latex. And it was an impulse and the reflex, I just licked it and all these out of those people would say it, it suddenly I was a child again.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:04:28] Oh, that's amazing. Are there any other um, strange and unusual things that your parents encouraged you to taste in nature then?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:04:38] Yes. also at Kew Gardens I remember my father giving me a little square of leaf of a plant called Dieffenbachia, which has known in America has dumb canes and it's actually quite a poisonous plant. And he used this in order totell me the story of slavery really, because dumb canes had been used as a punishment plant in the deep South of the United States.

It was used to try and subdue enslaved people. And so, I remember, I think it was about nine my father telling me the story of this plant and giving me a tiny little piece to taste. He said that it would hurt and it did. And it's got these tiny sort of microscopic crystals inside each cell. They're needle shaped and allow the poison in the plant to be accelerated through the mucous membranes of the mouth into your body. I remember that was a lesson that stuck with me again, all my life really.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:05:31] That's amazing. And it's a wonderful way to package history as well. I know when I was growing up, history was never really one of my favorite subjects, just because in the context in which I experienced it, it was more of that dry sort of memorizing of events and battles and all sorts of things that were hard to relate to.

I think it's all in the presentation. So it's a nice segue to the new book that you have coming out. I love that you've taken such a different approach to history with Around the World in 80 Plants. Combining those stories and plant science and creepy unusual things.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:06:09] Yeah, I've always found history like yourself quite difficult to remember and to engage with. And it means when people tell me things, I've got nothing to hang it on. I've got nowhere to put it.

When people tell me scientific ideas, because I've got sort of grounding in science, I find that a lot easier. And so I wanted to write something that would be accessible to people who had either come through history or through science or were interested in culture or folklore, but be things were familiar to them in each story, but would also be really surprising. So that there'd be something that was accessible to them, that they could pin everything else on. But there'd be enough in there that would be a real shocker that they would enjoy.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:06:53] That's wonderful. I think that's exactly what I needed when I was a child as well, to help me engage. Do you think there's any kind of direct path from your father talking about slavery for example and dumb cane or where did that idea initially come from do you think?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:07:12] I'm sure it came from my parents because either they had complimentary interest in plants. either my father from a botanical point of view my mother more from a kind of human stories point of view, but they were both absolutely captivated by the beauty of plants. And I think just as with art, you often need someone to point out the good bits to look at so that you can start to appreciate.

I think I felt the same way about plants really that's you know, like many other people, I probably started out being a bit plant blind. And thenthey help me to see you know, they'd say, well, look at the patterning on that. Look, you know, just feel this leaf and doesn't that have an amazing sense.

And I wonder why it's got that scent, which you know, to us might seem like something rotting, but why is the plants evolved that way? They would constantly ask these questions alongside pointing out the beautiful shapes and colors and patterns and scents and so, so I think it was absolutely a direct line from them to my interest as an adult in plants. On the way, I took this long detour through engineering and television program making and online and all sorts of other things. And then finally come back full circle to plants.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:08:27] It's funny how that happens. I know you have one of those biographies that's hard to process, I think simply due to the sheer volume of things you've done.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:08:37] One of the things that I rail against I suppose in modern life is the way that everyone needs to be somehow compartmentalized. Everyone needs to be described in two words, Oh, you're a marketing expert. Oh, you're uh, you're a technologist. Oh, you're a plant person.

And you know, it wasn't always like that. There was a time when people were encouraged to be interested in several things or adjacent fields. And for me, I think part of the beauty of life is what happens in the juxtapositions between things. So, for me the exciting things happen on the boundaries either between people or between communities or between ideas. So I'm much more interested in not being pigeonholed into one thing. Yes, I do some environmental work and yes, I'm interested in plants, but I'm also interested now in history and in science and physics and in engineering. To me, these are all connected and it's the connections which are exciting.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:09:38] I remember the first time I heard that Steve Jobs quote about connecting the dots going backwards. I felt some comfort as well since I've had a diverse career too.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:09:49] Yeah. I mean, you started in music and now you're doing all sorts of things with design and interiors andpersonal branding and you know, it's amazing how these things go off in different directions, isn't it? You know, and one of the things that I always tell young people when they're starting out isyes, it's good to have a plan, but your life won't follow it.

So you should be open to the opportunities that life gives you.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:10:14] Yes, I think that's a wonderful way of looking at it. And do you think that there's any kind of societal change in how people view that with portfolio careers being more acceptable, I think, and maybe encouraged instead of staying for 30 years in one profession.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:10:31] It's true that people are having more and more different roles, but I think that it is very difficult, unless you have some sort of personal wealth or stability or somewhere that you can be where you don't have to kind of worry about the rent every month.

It's very difficult otherwise to try things that might not pay off. You know, one of the things that'sI've been sort of terribly lucky with is first of allI got job when I left university that's I thought it was the one that I wanted. And so I was very pleased about that and that paid the rent for a while.

And then once I was in the BBC doing my engineering thing, they have a sort of system of internal attachments. They call them where I could go and try something quite different but still keep my job. And so within the BBC, I then went off to try television directing. And because I had experience with theater when I was at university in the school you know, that actually worked out quite well.

And if I'd have been in some other organizations, I wouldn't have had that opportunity. And then later in my career, I was running BBC online and had an offer from another company. I wanted to do it because I'd been all my career in the BBC and yet, you know, I felt a bit difficult about taking the risk because we just had a child and, you know, all of that stuff having to support and all the rest of it. And I remember the BBC at the time said, look, you know, go off for up to two years, come back if you want to, we'll keep your job open for you or something similar.

And that ability to go off and take a risk and try something was the most fantastic luxury. As an employer, I've always tried to be that person who would allow employees to do that and I think that if you've grown up an environment without resources. You know, if you come from a poor family, that is a huge disadvantage that you have in life compared with other people who can go and try something for a bit and see whether it works out. And if it doesn't, they can try something else. And all the while the roof over their heads and their meals are being paid for.

You know, I think that's really fantastic opportunity that many people are missing. And I think this is very hard.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:12:50] It's very true. And I have even more respect for the BBC than I did before. I think it's fantastic that they enabled that. And yeahI mean, you're completely right. It does make it harder. Although in a very poorly paying profession, I did manage to do that. It's just, you don't have any savings. And I remember times when I didn't even have enough in my bank account to pay for tea or something like that when I was out and about. It is harder. I mean, you have to live on the edge. Yeah.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:13:25] I think it's especially difficult in things like music and the arts being a writer or what have you, you know, if you do very well, then you can do very well. But most people don't. And to get off and take the risk of doing something, which might be enjoyable, but may not be the thing that you can make your living from when you've already got a job that kind of pays the bills, but isn't really the perfect thing for you. I think that takes an awful lot of courage.

On a parental levelwhen kids are sort of working out what they want to do, I think that parents have a big job there to encourage their kids to try things. The easiest thing in the world is to take the first thing you're offered. But there might be something else where, you'd either be completely brilliant at it or you'd enjoy it a whole lot more and helping lots and lots of people find those things just going to be better for society, isn't it? It's going to be better for the world.

One of the things that I suppose stands in the way of that is if people feel that money is absolutely the most urgent thing and different societies deal with this in different ways. So, if you come from a Scandinavian country, there's a much bigger safety net in those countries and in those societies than there would be, for example, in the United States. And the fact that there's a safety net, meaning you know, if you're out of work you're not going to go hungry.

You'll still have a roof over your head. It may not be absolute luxury, but you're going to survive and you'll be fine. And that makes an enormous difference to people's behavior. Because it means that you can try more things. You can try things outside your own sort of comfort zone, much more readily than if you're in a place where you think I have to have this job. I have to have the health insurance that goes with it, which means I can't leave my job and go to a different one.

It's sort of,curtails people's it's shuts down their horizons, so think there's a lot that different societies can do to operate in different ways to make it more congenial to try new things.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:15:33] That's very true. And even on a kind of more granular level the people in your immediate circle, I have a huge impact on how adventurous you might feel or how much of a safety net you feel you need. I think if you're surrounded by all sorts of freelance types, who've always lived on the edge, maybe you're more likely to be able to be adventurous, I guess it can go in either direction, but

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:15:58] Yes, I suppose you are not. think, what I would love to see isI don't think that the state should pay for a luxurious lifestyle for everyone without them working, because I think you get too many freeloaders who would just do nothing. I might be one of them but I think that I would. I would absolutely want everyone to know in a civilized society that there'll be at least supported with the absolute basics, in other words, health care, enough food to eat and roof over your head. It may not be luxury. It may not be perfect, but you're not going to be homeless and you're not going to be lacking in basic health care. People will strive to make their lives better on top of that. So you'll still have the ambition, I think, in society.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:16:46] Yes. Now I can see that's a privileged position to be in when you can try to make your life better. But if we could only all start with that baseline of just having food and healthcare and a place to live, then we can dare to dream. Yeah.

**Promo** [00:17:06]

Imagine... if you lived the life you really want. You know, your dream life.

Have you ever taken time to picture what it would look like? I mean, what it would really look like?

We're not talking about the life you feel you should have, but, deep down, the life you secretly want. Your ideal life. Maybe you already have a vision.

You wake up after a good night's sleep on the most comfortable mattress ever. With pillows that support your head just the way you like. You go to your organized closet and choose colorful, unique clothes that fit you and make you feel good. Then pad through a clean, warm, uncluttered home to the kitchen. Your refrigerator offers up the most delicious, healthy options for breakfast. And you have a day of unstructured time stretching ahead of you to do with as you like. But. That's never going to happen, right? Wouldn't it be nice to take a step back, sweep aside all your worries... and imagine...

That's where I come in.

I'm your host, Alexandria Lawrence, and I've developed an exclusive questionnaire for the ALSO in PINK community to help you create a vision of your ideal life.

Simply join the ALSO in PINK email list and you'll get instant access to our Ideal Lifestyle Vision Questionnaire. Go on then, make a cup of your favorite tea, or whatever floats your boat... Go to alsoinpink.com and click Start Now. Redefine what's possible & Create your ideal life.

**Interview Resumes** [00:18:50]

So getting back to the world of plants, is there an especially surprising or creepy plant tidbit you'd like to share?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:19:05]

Some of them are very lighthearted. When pineapples were first grown in the United Kingdom. that was a real slog because they had to have heated greenhouses so, they burnt through coal and money try to make this happen to get the pineapples to fruit in the 18th century.

And when they finally did these things were so expensive that nobody could afford to eat them. And instead they rented them out and took them to parties. as a sort of status symbol the way that people nowadays wouldtake a little dog in a handbag or something is a little talking point. And thenthe Japanese lacquer tree has a much creepier story, which is that. So you probably familiar with lacquer, which is this amazing material made out of the sap of the Japanese lacquer tree painted, in layers and layers and layers. And you know, before the time of plastics, this material would have been the most amazing thing because it was waterproof and plastic like, long before hundreds of years before plastics were invented.

But the the sap from this tree and the bark are rather poisonous and irritant. And this group of Japanese monks who used to make a tea out of bark and then drink it. And they would become sort gradually mummified while they were alive and that their skin would become more and more sort of plasticky.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:20:28] Oh, my gosh.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:20:29] And when they died, their bodies were so poisonous that flies wouldn't be able to lay their eggs in the corpses. ask for creepy. And when they were dug up afteryou know, I think the three years after they were dug up if the body hadn't decomposed, then this was the sort of path to instant buddahood.

And so this was only outlawed, sort of the end of the 19th century. but that's a pretty creepy example of how people use plants.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:21:01] That is extraordinary. It seems like the stuff of science fiction really. Just in terms of pure decoration, plants have been very fashionable in recent years and I'm fully on board with the indoor plant craze and have my own um, indoor jungle goals, you could call them. So currently 20 plants and counting.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:21:21] Wow, what sort of things have you got?

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:21:23] Oh, all sorts! In this room I have a giant elephant ear in my little studio here, which is wonderful. And I hadn't realized how potentially dangerous as well, when I was chopping off a couple of these big leaves and I didn't wear gloves or anything. And I happened to get some of the sap I got it on my hands and I had this incredible itching and it took a while for that to go away. I knew you weren't supposed to eat it, but I didn't realize that it would have such an effect.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:21:50] Yeah. Either something eats plants or something eats something else that eats plants because it's only plants that can photosynthesize. It's only plants that can make the food the animals need. So, they are just lunch sitting there. And they've had to develop a ton of different ways to defend themselves. So they have spines, they have spikes, they have poisons, they have things that modify the behavior of things that would like to come and eat them. They camouflage themselves. They disguise themselves as something that's really unpleasant. They just do all of those things, you know, brilliantly. And so, you know, when you look at the tree that's there for maybe a thousand years and manages not to be eaten in all that time, while the things that would eat is have gone through hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of generations of evolution. And yet still, they haven't evolved to eat the tree. I mean, it's just astonishing.

**Realisations** [00:22:43]

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:22:43] It is astonishing. I've always enjoyed nature, but I think somehow creating a space, even if you don't have an outdoor garden to create your own green space is just so appealing. And I think the pandemic has also really highlighted the importance of nature this past year. And several months ago took part in a survey, exploring happiness and the lockdown and how much time people were spending outdoors, which I think is an interesting connection. But how about you? Have you had any kind of lockdown realization that's changed your perspective or your priorities?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:23:20] I think I've realized, along with perhaps everyone else, just how much people matter. You know, the sort of physicality of being with people, the hug, the body language, the being able to talk to each other without the delay of Zoom. I've also thought about how much nature matters, and it's interesting that you mentioned pot plants. I think there's something really important about nurturing something else.

And when we've been rather isolated, I think that people have turned both to pets and to pot plants for the feeling of nurturing something and also the feeling of having a little control over something else. Looking after something that is beyond oneself, I think those are important things. Those are my realizations, I think.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:24:00] I hadn't thought of the control aspect of it, but any way you control your environment, whether it's tidying your home or doing a bit of painting or putting plants in it, you create this lovely space for yourself to live in which can affect so many things. Your general wellbeing.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:24:18] For me, I thinkyou know, when I look at pot plants in particular, the plants around the home or perhaps garden plants, there's part of me that travels vicariously through them. You know, because these plants have come a long way, they've come from other parts of the world.

they are immigrants you know, those plants and my family were immigrants here. Especially when I'm locked down and I desperately want to travel. And I think about all those fantastic expeditions I've been on with Kew and other botanical organizations.

And I look at those plants and I imagine the worlds they've come from and in happier times when there's no pandemic, I think that's about people. You know, I I live in London, which has people from everywhere in the world.And I think about those places they've come from countries in Africa, in South Asia and South America is wonderful. but of course I haven't been able to do that. So I've been living vicariously, I think, through the plants instead of the people.

**Storytelling & Tracy** [00:25:09]

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:25:09] I realized more and more that life is about storytelling, whether it's plants or writing a novel, editing a podcast, or creating social media content, filmmaking, teaching anything and everything you communicate is really storytelling and a skill we all develop in our ways. And you and your wifenovelist Tracy Chevalier both have your best sellers now.

So yours is your previous book to this one Around the World in 80 Trees, and Tracy's is, of course, Girl with the Pearl Earring. So, um,do you offer feedback on one another's writing or how does that work?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:25:49] Absolutely not, Alexandria. We have a , um, I'm glad to say a very sort of happy relationship. And I know that if we offer each other feedback on our books, that happiness would come to a sudden them jarring halt. You know, one of those sorts of signs ofbeing a grownup is being not defensive about criticism. Being able to hear someone say do you know Jonathan actually, this is great, but you know that's not so good and maybe you should change it and so on. And I'd love to say I'm grown up enough to accept that from my wife, but I'm not. And and frankly, she hasn't grown up enough to accept that from me. However, I am grown up enough to accept it from almost anyone else and happily, so,

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:26:40] Well, at least you both know that and can live on those terms. I think that means something too.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:26:46] Yeah her mission in life is to say, you know, Jonathan, this is just one of the best things I've ever read. And that's my mission as well with her books is to say, GodI knew you were a great writer, Tracy, but this is just even more magnificent than I could possibly have imagined.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:27:02] Oh, that's wonderful. Yes, that's the praise we all need.

**Looking forward to** [00:27:07]

I was just wondering aside from your upcoming book launch,what are you excited about right now? What are you looking forward to this year?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:27:15] Oh, looking forward to having my second vaccine, be in about half an hour's time. Looking forward to seeing friends and having convivial dinners with bottles of wine and sitting around the table and laughing.I'm excited about some of the organizations I work with. So one of them is Raspberry PI, which makeslittle tiny very cheap computers.

And we encourage children all over the world to learn programming. We've just sold a 39 million computer.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:27:48] Oh,wow.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:27:49] I'm interested in the Cambridge University Botanic Garden where I'm on the board, the Cambridge science center, where we get to kids doing hands-on science.

There's a sort of theme here andI'm going to try and do another book, I think. If you do three books, then you can call yourself an author.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:28:07] Is that what Tracy says or is that

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:28:09] I mean, she was an author that moment she put pen to paper. She's a proper professional, but I still feel I'm a dilettante. I'm not quite sure what the next one's going to be. but I'd probably not around the world in 80 something else, but I hope something that will intwine science and culture in history in folklore. And so on again.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:28:29] Oh, that sounds wonderful. I look forward to that and yeah, as someone who's so active when it comes to the environment and the plant world and wildlife, and there are so many ways to get involved, but what's one thing. What's something we could all do to be part of the solution and protect our world?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:28:49] Okay. So I think there are several things that you can do. One is join an environmental organization. It's not about the money, though the money is helpful. It's actually about lending your voice and it's an organization that has hundreds of thousands or millions of followers and members will be much more powerful in terms of lobbying governments and so on than an organization with tens of thousands.

So please join an environmental organization wherever you live. And, you know, there are plenty of them that you can join whether it's the WWF or the Woodland trust or whatever. You'll know in your own country, which one you can join. In terms of your own behavior. One of the things that really makes the most difference is moving towards a plant-based diet.

And you know, we don't all have to become vegans and vegetarians overnight, but just wherever you are on the continuum between having you know, meat meals three times a day, every day, you know, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all the way to being vegan the other end of the scale, just move yourself along that continuum.

Right towards being more plant-based, you know, make sure that you havelots of plant-based meals and make them social. So you learn how to cook vegetarian and vegan food. Now, the reason for this is that more than three-quarters of the soy, more than three-quarters of the maze, that's corn, that we grow is fed to animals.

And that's a terribly inefficient way of feeding ourselves. I mean, massively, massively inefficient, and it uses up an enormous amount of land, which was once forest and once was biodiverse and once was storing carbon. So, that is one of the things that we can absolutely do. And another one that we should be doing is wherever we can avoid using fossil fuels.

So it's absolutely not enough just to do carbon offsetting just to say, Oh, I'll plant a little tree and that'll make me feel less guilty about sort of taking flights all of those things. It just doesn't work. The oil companies would love you to believe that it'll work and that's good enough.

I'm afraid it isn't. Switch your energy supplier to a renewable one. Certainly in European countries we can do this very easily. And it doesn't cost much more. Don't keep buying things that you don't need. You know, because all the production of goods and transportation of goods depends on fossil fuels.

You know, these things make a difference. Fly less. if you're up to it, do some flight shaming, not in a horrible way, but you know, just when people brag about how they've just been on a long flight, just make it clear that it's not actually something you approve of. Because that can really make a difference to people's behavior.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:31:37] And I just wonder in terms of diet, so in moving more towards a plant based diet, do you think the ideal future would involve not eating animals at all? Or will that always be part of our culture, but just to a lesser degree?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:31:53] Think that what we're going to move towards, we'll have to move towards, is a diet, which just has a lot less meat in it. So if we were just having as a sort of maximum I dunno, one meat meal per week,that's probably sustainable.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:32:09] Yes. And I like that approach as well, because I think you certainly don't need meat all the time, but it would be lovely to enjoy it as an occasional special treat and enjoy food in all of its many forms, but in a way that's more sustainable.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:32:25] Yeah. one of the things that I had to learn. You know, I'm not completely vegetarian, but I've just tried to have much more vegetarian food in my diet. A, I feel healthier, but I definitely needed time to learn how to cook vegetarian food. You know, if you haven't grown up with it, it's not immediately sort of easy.

And that's why I suggest sort of make it social, so invite people around and have a potluck, you know, everyone brings a dish and then you can sort of work out well, what's worked and what hasn't, and you can learn from each other. And you know, the more that you make these things social, the more they'll catch on.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:32:56] Very true. And there's so many wonderful chefs like Ottolenghi is very popular in this country who are masters of vegetarian cooking and meat based dishes too. So I think there's a lot of inspiration out there. Do you have a top resource for that? For vegetarian cooking?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:33:13] I think Ottolenghi is great. I have this wonderful little box ofof index cards that my mother had and the most valuable thing that she left me when she died, actually her recipes. And because it's completely of another generation, they're much more obscure recipes than you would find nowadays, like there's potato pie, which sounds a bit dull, but it's got lots of mushrooms and spice and things in it. And in fact that you're great and you'd never find that nowadays.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:33:40] Sounds great.

**Lifestyle Philosophy / Top Tip** [00:33:42]

Yeah, do you have any kind of lifestyle philosophy or mantra that helps you hashtag live your best life?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:33:49] People matter. Environment matters. Money is only a means to an end. and if one can live by a balance between learning, earning and doing good. I think that is a good way live. And I think that Tracy, when she came on your showshe said learning, earning, and doing good.

And I just want to tell you that was my idea. I got there first felt that it massive, in fact, We really wants to start a movement. So I should be pleased that people are copying the idea that yeah, it's in the end, if you think, well, what is life for? I think we should all be trying to leave the world in a slightly better place than when we found it. That's my feeling.

**Daily Habit** [00:34:31]

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:34:31] And do you have any kind of daily habit or ritual that brings you joy? Yes, I do crosswords. The thing about doing cryptic crosswords, which are these sorts of British style difficult crosswords. Getting to the answer like a detective process. I find that they stop me thinking about anything else at all, when I'm trying to do that.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:34:51] I do a little bit of crossword every day and it's almost like the kind of meditation really. Some other things that I would recommend in terms of tips for living well would be you know, try to enjoy buying, preparing, eating, and sharing real food. Never buy, ready, prepared meals would be one of my mantras. Don't have have margarine, have good butter.

I remember my mother at the age of 85when I said, you know, would margarine be better for you? She looked at me and said a little bit of what you fancy does you good? You know, butter is better Make cooking itself social was another thing that I think is really helpful.

**Packing for travel** [00:35:32]

One of my other life hacks, I've had to travel a lot you know, with work with expeditions and things. When you're goinghere to somewhere that is maybe a desert or a jungle or somewhere that's very different and you'd need to be actually working in that place, it's really worthwhile spending the time packing well you know, to pack properly. So separate containers for things, properly labeled. Take more plastic bags than you think you'll ever need because plastic bagswe're talking about reusing things again and again, so I'm not guilty.

They not only keep out moisture, but they keep out dust. And the work I do, I'm often taking camera equipment and recording equipment and so on.

So plastic bags, tins, Tupperware boxes. Fantastic. but Tupperware that have corners rather than the rounded sort, because they I'm not an efficient use of space.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:36:24] Oh, very good. So you have a fair bit in common with Marie Kondo then, in terms of organizing.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:36:30] Only on that level. Because the way I like to live, I mentioned earlier that I like juxtapositions between things and the most interesting things happen at the boundaries. And I surround myself with lots and lots and lots of things. I am you know, an absolute nightmare for this movement of kind of having nothing in your life and simplifying everything. You know, wherever I look around my office at the moment, I've just got tons of stuff. Little things that remind me of an experience somewhere. A seed, a branch, a crystal balls, someone gave me a spoon that is made out of some funny metal that when you dip it in your tea, it ties itself with a, not a kaleidoscopea bust of me that a child may data plasticine when she was about seven. tiles books is just absolutely crammed with books and papers and all sorts. And when I need ideas, I come into this space and I think, ah, this is inspirational.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:37:29] You have more in common than you think with Marie Kondo, since it's not a minimalist movement at all. It's about surrounding yourself with things that bring you joy essentially, and it doesn't matter how many you have. So if it's achieving that, I think that's the important distinction. Yeah.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:37:44] Yeah. So I'd misunderstood. Yeah. Thank you. Yeah. So yes, in this field of things that give me joy, but the trouble is that you never know what's going to bring you joy in the future. So I never get rid of anything. There are things that I never thought what that's going to bring me joy, but then, you know, when I put it next to something completely different, the combination of that thing with that other thing suddenly does bring me joy. And I wouldn't have been able to predict that. SoI hang on to a lot of stuff.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:38:17] Oh, interesting. Well, we could do a whole podcast episode just based around this idea. I think

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:38:23] , Hey, maybe I could start a movement. The Jonathon Drori movement for never throwing anything away.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:38:29] I mean, you have to work on your branding a little bit, but yes.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:38:33] I could just call it clutter.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:38:37] Clutter. Oh, that has a certain ring to it, doesn't it. I can see in Netflix series coming out.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:38:43] I'm not sure it's a positive ring.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:38:46] It's memorable, which is the main thing.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:38:48] My other life hack is when I'm traveling. I'm also going to places that are quite hot. And therefore in Europe I would normally wear a jacket of some kind into which I can put things in the pockets. But if you're going to a hot place, really like shirts that have chest pockets that shut so that you can carry your passport and valuables, where they're not going to get lost or stolen. I mean, they do slightly give you man boobs but you know, my paramo shirt that is unrippable and indestructible with its fantastic breast pockets, I wouldn't be without it.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:39:27] So we've entered fashion territory as well. I like that we got a bit of style in there, Jon.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:39:33] Yeah. I'm so glad that you call it style and fashion. I'm not sure that anyone else would when they see me. But you know, one of the things I like is to have really battered clothing that I've lived in and that when I put it on I'm reminded of all the sort of wonderful experiences or scary experiences that I've had that clothing.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:39:55] So again, it comes full circle to telling a story, like the plants and everything else. On that note, we've come to the finale, so I have a few quick fire questions for you to end the show.

So first off, what's your most treasured possession and of course no judgment.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:40:15] I think my most treasured possession is a coin that I have from the buck by revolt, which was the Jewish revolt against the Romans in the early decades of the Common Era. So around 50 to 180. And I think about my ancestors with that coin and the line between them and me. And I think that's probably the most treasured possession I have. I, I also have my son's first pair of shoes, which are tiny and very, very cute. and that makes me smile quite a lot. and I suppose my other one that is, I have a fossil plant from the Carboniferous era about 360 million years ago. I sort of look at that it's one of thosestones that you kind of pull apart and then you see this amazing thing inside it. and that's quite special to me.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:41:01] What a wonderfully diverse collection of treasures. And what's your favorite article of clothing or accessory in your current wardrobe?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:41:09] Well, it would be my paramount breast pocketed shirt into which I can stuff passport valuables and everything else in a hot country where I don't want to wear a jacket and they won't get lost or stolen. And it's kind of indestructable so, yeah, a shirt with breast pockets.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:41:26] And where do you go to get inspired?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:41:29] I would ideally go to the top of a hill. Looking down on clouds and birds is an amazing thing to give literally a different perspective. Otherwise Botanic Gardens for the vicarious thrill I have with all those plants that are come from different parts of the world. And if I can't have that, then a library you know, just the juxtaposition of books in a library,is something that I really enjoy.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:41:53] And speaking of books, what's one book or resource you'd recommend for everyone?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:41:58] I'd like to recommend a novel by Arto Paasilinna called The Year of the Hare the hare like a rabbit, not Hare on your head. And it's a Finnish book, but it's translated into English and it's funny . And it's ironic and it's optimistic and it has a kind of wonderful philosophy of life in it. but to do is laugh out loud funny. I'll just give away a tiny bit of the plot, which is there's a photographer and a journalist who are outdriving home and just on the edge of the foresta hare runs out in front of the car and they just clip the back leg of the hare. One of them gets out of the car to make sure the hare is all right. It is alright. And he pops the hare into his jacket and walks into the forest. And the rest of the book is about what happens to him. And so it is absolutely delightful. And you know, I can't recommend it highly enough The Year of the Hare.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:42:56] And what would you say you're grateful for? It's a very KonMari question for you.

Health, friends, nice wine. Living in a country with proper beer or a nice pubs. Having the excuse to travel. All of those things, I think.

And finally, what do you love most about life?

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:43:17] Variety, warm people, novelty.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:43:23] Well, Jon, thank you so much. It's been a huge pleasure chatting with you about all of these wonderful things and the creepy world of plants and stories they tell. So thank you so much.

**Jonathan Drori:** [00:43:35] Thank you for having me. And I hope thatif you read Around the World in 80 Plants, I hope you love it and enjoy it and tell all your friends.

**Alexandria Lawrence:** [00:43:45] Yes, note to listeners, please do.

**Key Takeaways** [00:43:48]

Well, hope you enjoyed that chat with Jonathan Drori. And check out his latest book Around the World in 80 Plants, it's hot off the press and full of lovely illustrations and engaging stories. So here's some key takeaways from our conversation. There's a lot about getting environmentally active. Here's some things you can do. One. Make your voice heard and join an environmental organization. Two. Move towards a plant-based diet. That doesn't mean going full on vegan, but see if you can incorporate more plant-based meals in your week. Think of meat more as a special treat. Three. In an effort to avoid fossil fuels, here are some things you can do. Switch your energy supplier to renewable one. Don't keep buying things that you don't need or things that aren't in line with your vision for how you want to live. And try to fly less post pandemic. Also be open to opportunities that life gives you. If you have access to healthcare, enough food to eat and a roof over your head, what's next? You're in a privileged position to be able to dare to dream.

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