



Stephen Porges: Finding meaning in this crisis

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Stephen W. Porges, Ph.D., is Distinguished University Scientist at Indiana University, where he directs the Trauma Research Center within the Kinsey Institute. He holds the position of Professor of Psychiatry at the University of North Carolina and Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Maryland. He served as president of both the Society for Psychophysiological Research and the Federation of Associations in Behavioral & Brain Sciences and is a former recipient of a National Institute of Mental Health Research Scientist Development Award. He has published more than 250 peer-reviewed scientific papers across several disciplines including anesthesiology, critical care medicine, ergonomics, exercise physiology, gerontology, neurology, obstetrics, pediatrics, psychiatry, psychology, space medicine, and substance abuse. In 1994 he proposed the Polyvagal Theory, a theory that links the evolution of the mammalian autonomic nervous system to social behavior and emphasizes the importance of physiological state in the expression of behavioral problems and psychiatric disorders.

Serge Prengel is the editor of the Active Pause® project.

*Serge Prengel (00:00):
Hi Steve.*

Stephen Porges (00:01):
Hi, Serge.

*Serge Prengel (00:02):
These are times where we have the opportunity to live a new paradigm, in the full catastrophe.*

Stephen Porges (00:11):
It is truly an interesting period because part of the dialogue that's going on is: Will this experience result in transformative changes in what humanity is? What will become important to us? Under catastrophic situations, there's one thing that becomes important, and that is our relationships with others. And how important that is for us in maintaining our humanity, which means staying healthy, staying creative, and maintaining the capacity to be loving and caring of others. And we forget that being human is really about being connected, and we are not a safe species unless we're connected with others.

(00:59):
Perhaps this challenging period is directing us to what our real goal in life is. And that is to relate to others, to connect. And through that, we may end up with a better understanding of what our goals are. And our goals, within this culture, have always been very self-oriented. It's accumulation, it's status, it's resource based. It's very constricted about our ability to be compassionate to others and to be generous and benevolent because there's always a background voice saying: If you give it away, you won't have anything. Or: If you're generous, you'll be exploited.

(01:38):

It's all about the lack of trust in others, and this results in our bodies being in a chronic state of defense. Yet our society doesn't talk about bodies' needs and states of defense. It uses other words. It says chronic stress, toxic stress. It's as if it could be taken away while we're actually being returned to basically perpetrate and continue, perpetuate and perpetrate this stress on others, of: perpetuate on us and perpetrate it on those who are close to us. Because we believe that, if we keep moving, this is part of our culture, if we keep moving, we will be safe.

(02:23):

But, within a polyvagal model, that's saying: if we keep moving, we just won't fall into the pits of hell. We're not going to be safe. We're only going to be safe if we find safety and trust in others, and that becomes our goal in life. So our transitions or possible transformative experience during this very challenging and potentially catastrophic set of events is that we learn what is really valuable to us, valuable to us as a species. And it's not the accumulation of wealth, it's not prestige. It's how we relate to other human beings. And how we are embodied in that relationship is really what our goals need to be.

Serge Prengel (03:05):

Wow. Thank you, Steve.

Stephen Porges (03:09):

You're quite welcome. Serge.

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