

## The Tim Smal Show - 24 May 2020 transcript

*Nidhi Chaitow talks about conscious rhythm, self-care and transitions to eldership.*

**Tim Smal (host):** Hi everyone and welcome to the show today. My name is Tim Smal. Thank you so much for joining me today. My guest on the show is Nidhi Chaitow. She is a psychosocial counsellor and facilitator living on the Garden Route of South Africa. Nidhi, welcome to the show.

**Nidhi Chaitow (guest):** Thanks, Tim. It's really great to be here, thank you.

**Tim:** I'm really looking forward to speaking with you today about the work that you're involved in. Could you tell the listeners a little bit about yourself and the work that you do?

**Nidhi:** Sure, with pleasure. And thank you for the opportunity Tim, this is really great.

So I call myself a psychosocial counselor and that means that I work with the physical, mental, emotional, social and relating, as well as spiritual aspects of a person. And very much about: coming home to wholeness and bringing the different aspects of the self together into becoming a whole human being who can have a whole human experience in life.

My practice is very person-centred, meaning that I work with people at their own pace in a very gentle, loving, safe way. And I've been working as a psychosocial counsellor for four years now. I went to study at the age of 52 to do a degree in applied psychology. And based on many years of working with people and working with drumming as a therapeutic tool and seeing the need of having different ways to reach people and allow them to feel safe and express themselves.

So going to study at the age of 52 was quite a big thing and I was very blessed to find an institution in Cape Town that allowed adult learners to go and learn in a very quiet, uncluttered environment. So I did a degree: a Bachelor of Applied Psychology. It took me three and a half years and it was a huge step to go back to studying at that age. I had to do a lot of "brain gym" – my brain was very tired. And through that and my experience of working as a facilitator over the years, I created a practice.

And what was interesting is that, when I started studying, I was going to work on doing a master's in drumming as a therapeutic tool for trauma, because I saw the need of that and I saw what a wonderful medium it was for helping people to release their pain and get in touch with their own rhythm. And then while I was doing my internship at the end of my degree, I took on the role as the counsellor at SACAP (South African College of Applied Psychology) for the students and I ended up doing a year there. So I did my internship and then I did, sort of, 8 months of counselling as a volunteer and realised that this is something that I'm really good at. And that I have an ability to walk with my students because I'm an older woman, that I have more experience – I have big life experience. And it helped me to make people feel comfortable and people were very much drawn to me.

So that's how I got into doing this work. And I just worked in Cape Town for a while and started a practice and it was a slow start – which it always is. And then in June two years ago, I moved back to the Garden Route (which is where I've lived for many, many years before I went to Cape Town to study) and started a practice here. And again worked with

the clients that I was working with. So I went online and set myself up as an online counsellor and that's grown and developed up until now. And as the lockdown happened and COVID-19 happened and people needed to work at home and needed to have their practice online, it was a very easy transition for me to go into because I was already set up. And I'm very grateful for that and feel blessed. And since the lockdown, my practice has started to grow at quite a fast rate. And I'm working with people all over the world which is quite an amazing thing. So experiencing what life is like in different cultures and different countries, which is quite wonderful.

I'm able to meet clients where they're at and help them along and work with deep, emotional stories. Also just dealing with daily life, how to cope with stress, anxiety, depression, trying to stay present. And just each story and each client, there's a common thread – but there's also differences. And it's a really huge privilege and honour to really be able to meet and work with people in the way that I do.

I just want to mention my name because it definitely causes a lot of questions. So my name is “Nidhi” which is N-i-d-h-i. It's a Sanskrit name and it was a name that I took on. It was given to me at the end of 1993 – in fact, on the 1st of January 1994. It's a spiritual name and I legally changed my name to “Nidhi”, making my birth name, which is Amanda, as my second name. And the name means “treasure” and it's a very beautiful gift to get another name and to grow into it and accept it and make it part of your life. And so the lesson in my name was very much to treasure and honour and love who I am. And also beautiful is that by having discussions about my name, often it encourages people to look at the meaning of their name and to see how powerful that is. Yeah, so that's me in a nutshell.

**Tim:** Wonderful. Thanks for sharing your story. That was really lovely to hear about where you've come from. I wanted to say, firstly that I'm really proud of you for going back to college at the age of 52 and completing your bachelor's degree – I'm sure it must have been quite a lot of hard work, so congratulations on that.

But I just wanted to touch on a topic that you brought up during your story and that was: the drumming aspect of the work that you've done. You've been involved over the years in conscious rhythm. Could you maybe tell the listeners about what conscious rhythm is and the work that you've done within the drumming sphere?

**Nidhi:** With pleasure. So as South Africa was going through it's changes in 1994, I was living in Johannesburg at the time and I went to visit a friend. Across the road from where she lived was a, sort of, an old church community hall where a lot of artisans and artists used to work. And I went across the road to her studio and there was this man sitting under a tree working with this huge big piece of wood. And I asked him what he was doing and he said he was making a drum. And I was absolutely fascinated by that.

And then discovered, through conversations, that there was a drumming circle at a house in Oaklands (which is a suburb of Johannesburg) and went along with some friends and was absolutely blown away. And at this house, there was maybe 75 to 80 people. It was a Tuesday evening. People came from every walk of life. There were [people] of every colour, of every culture, of every socioeconomic level – people just came and drummed and made amazing music. And it was unbelievable and it touched me so deeply.

And then I bought a drum, which everyone in my family and friends thought I was absolutely mad, and started drumming. And I started having lessons and it was just

immense fun. They used to have big drumming circles – it grew and then they'd have big drumming circles at a hall, Sandown Hall, and 200 - 300 people would come once a week and they would just play. And it was the time when we were building the Rainbow Nation (South Africa) and it was just so healing and powerful to connect with people through rhythm and through music without even needing to talk to each other.

So it changed me and I went from being a very shy, conservative, contracted, young person into a much more confident person. I started feeling the benefits of the drum and what it did to my body and my soul. And also being able to interact with people.

And I wasn't that good. And I started meeting a lot of drummers who'd been playing for years and during apartheid and had been in Europe and had learnt from master drummers. And this whole new world opened up for me and I didn't realise it. And I think it opened up for a lot of people during that time.

And I left Johannesburg at the end of 1997. And at the time, a man called Warren Lieberman had started "The Drum Cafe" and I had been going to that – that was where we'd go in the hall and drum and he opened a little shop and he had drumming lessons, etc. And that's where I'd gone to learn, etc.

And when I left Johannesburg and moved to the Garden Route, he said to me "Do you want to open a Drum Cafe in the Garden Route?" and I said "Yes, I would." And we started and one of the first things we did was: K-TV phoned and said "Please won't you do some drumming in the forest, we want to come and film you." And we had no drums and we had no experience. And I remember phoning friends and saying "Please help, I need your children and have you got a drum?" And we did this little drumming in the forest, which is so fabulous and things started to shift from there.

And I started to work with... we started facilitating and running drumming circles and we got drums and we built it up. And then what started happening is – beside the corporate work and the working with school groups and the working with different events, etc. that started emerging from drumming as a team building event – I started using it as a therapeutic tool. And it started with these street children that used to sit on the side of the road and drum on these plastic drums. And they would drum for money.

I started connecting with these children and I started taking them drums and we would play together and they were amazingly good. And I just got caught up in their story and their sadness and the fact that they... you know, most of them didn't go to school and they were really down and out, sleeping on the street. And we started a little project called "Beats of the Street" where we tried to get these kids to drum for tourist buses, thinking that they could perhaps earn some money and start uplifting themselves. But we were quite naive at the time and it didn't really work. But it did work, in that, I started to see the benefit of drumming as a tool for helping to help people feel more safe as a release for tension and stress and trauma.

And then I was approached by a hospice in Knysna. They were doing a research project for three years that got some funding and they were doing different modalities to care for the carers. And one of the aspects was to use drumming as a tool for caring for the carers. So I participated in that project and wrote a program called "Finding Your Rhythm." And that was the beginning of where this immense creativity started to flow from me and I started to see more and more how drumming was actually more than just a team-building tool – it was deeply therapeutic and a lot of my language around the time was that "How

do I express in words what I was witnessing in the shift and transformation it was having in people's lives?"

I was also contacted by a drug rehabilitation centre – actually, a few of them – and I started working at different drug rehabilitation centres. Working with the drumming, I'd go and drum with the people who were in recovery and that was a very beautiful experience. They don't use music – or they didn't use music at the time, during the rehabilitation process and it really touched these young people's lives. And they loved the concept of just “letting it out.”

I had The Drum Cafe [on the Garden Route] – we lived on a farm and we had a big hall and often addicts from one [drug rehabilitation] centre that was close to where we lived would come once a month and just come and play. And they never wanted to go home – they just wanted to play. And they would just use this drumming as a tool to just release all that pain and addiction trauma from their lives. And it just evoked such joy and opened their hearts. And they started having a very positive high experience from their own energy and from the energy within the group. And that motivated me to go and study because I really wanted to give it a theoretical basis. I wanted to be able to write on a piece of paper what the good was, that drumming was having.

So that's how that started. And I've worked in it for many, many years and I've done very many programs. I still do it, I still work – I haven't now because we're under lockdown. But I have a group of adults at a centre in Cape Town called Astra, which is for slow adults. And they live in a residence and when I'm there, I go and drum with them and I've been doing that for three years. And that's one of my biggest motivations that I go to Cape Town every two to three months, to work with the group. I take drums and we play and we close our eyes and feel our energy and our heartbeat and it helps to open up conversation. It helps them to feel safe and it's a lot of fun. So it's therapy with a different beat.

It's something that has changed my life. It's a deeply healing, amazing modality that came into my life and that created my ability to be a facilitator: to be able to listen and hear, to be able to hold space for people, and contributing again to where I am right now.

**Tim:** Yeah, that's a really amazing story. Thanks for sharing. And just listening to you talk about your history in working with people and drumming together, it's interesting to think about how each individual person has their own unique rhythm and you're essentially helping them to discover these parts of themselves. So it's just a really wonderful way to connect and interact creatively with others. And I'm just imagining the television show on K-TV when they announced: “Nidhi Chaitow in the Knysna Forest with the drumming circle” – that must have been quite humorous, hey?

**Nidhi:** We never, ever saw the video – that was the sad part. [*laughs*] We didn't have television, we were living in the forest. And we never, ever saw the video from K-TV. But it was seen and enjoyed by people. It was just an amazing thing to get things moving. So yeah, it's a long time ago.

**Tim:** So if we fast forward a couple of years to the present time and space that we are in now... Of course, with the lockdowns around the world, there is a lot of change at the moment. Can you tell the listeners about what you're involved in, in terms of your work at this point in time?

**Nidhi:** Sure, Tim. So there's two things that I'm doing currently which have happened

because of the lockdown. And the first thing is that: I could just feel the angst and the fear in the environment once the first COVID-19 statistic was given in South Africa, and I just had this idea and I started a mindful sacred circle online. And in the beginning I was gonna do it everyday and then I thought “No, I'll just do it once a week” and I got a Zoom room and I opened it up and I made a little flyer and I put it online and I said “Let's meet once a week on a Friday at 12:00 noon (SAST) in a safe space.”

And I started doing that and you know, the first time 14 people came and I was really excited 'cos I'd never done an online workshop before. And this was a free offering and I am still running it. I will continue to do it every Friday and really, it's just about creating a safe place. So people check in and then we do a mindful meditation moment where I bring everyone into being present. And then just give people place to share what they going through. And just that has meant so much to have a safe place – it hasn't got any particular agenda, it's just a safe place to share and let off your chest what you feeling. And that really has made a difference and gave me the confidence to do the next thing that I'm busy doing and that is: to write, based on what I can see from my clients – the stress and the uncertainty and the anxiety and isolation and fear that people are going through – is to create a workshop which I've called “Being okay with where you are right now.”

And from that, I came up with this concept of: first of all, the core of the workshop is about exploring and honouring your inner freedom. That was because my first one was on the 27th of April, which was Freedom Day. And I think just also because we're not free on one level, it's really important to check in with the self and see where you're at and how you can grow and honour your freedom within. And what came out of that, is how important self-care is.

And so I took the concept of self-care – not just self-care, I took it to the five different psychosocial levels. And I looked at the **physical self-care**: it's about how we talk to ourselves, our language within ourselves, how we treat ourselves. And then moving into the **mental aspect**: how we think and then what is going on in our internal world and what is going on in the external world and that we have no control over the external world, but we have control of our inner world.

And then moving to the **emotional side**: and that's about honouring and allowing the emotions to be there. And then almost stepping into the role of being a mother to your own emotions and allowing them to be there and to comfort and nurture yourself. And then to feel strong enough to let them go, so that they don't inflict others and it doesn't spill out into the environment. And then moving to **the social** which is more about: relational and it's more about how we are present with ourselves. And the concept of just really “What does it mean to be present? What does it mean to listen?” And that's all part of care, because when we are present and we listen to others in our lives, they feel held and supported. So we need to start to do that for ourselves.

And then we move into the centre of our circle of self care, which is about the **spiritual aspect of ourselves** and that's the part of: creating an inner sanctuary where we can hold ourselves and have a place to go to find refuge and stillness, and connect with our higher purpose.

And that by really honouring these aspects of the self – of really taking care of ourselves on these different levels, we start to feel that we can cope with what's going on because we are nurturing and loving ourselves. And I just want to share something with you that actually really was at the core of this workshop, is that: I was busy doing counselling and I

was witnessing sadness and deprivation and immense poverty and starvation in South Africa. And I started to really spin out and think “How am I going to manage this? Being OK for my clients and at the same time witnessing what's going on.” And I was in a dilemma, which I think many, many of us are, and still are, because of what we see that's going on around us in South Africa. And I realised that if I don't take care of myself and I don't fill my cup and I don't make sure that I am replenished and nurtured and looked after and supported by myself, there's no ways that I'll be able to do the work that I do.

And that was a huge shift for me and that motivated me to create that workshop. And that has changed my life, because my practice is growing and I'm feeling far more confident and strong within myself. And I have a very deep personal self-care practice that I put in practice every single day, in the fact that I take care of how I sleep, how I eat, how I move, what's going on inside my body, my thoughts – I have things that I put in place that support me and can hold me when I'm feeling overwhelmed. And so the workshop is very much from a personal space. And the way I run it has really helped the people that have done it to really find practical tools to help them to connect with themselves and just to feel more present.

And now I'm going to take each of those items and go deeper with them. I want to run workshops on each one and go deeper on that. So that's “The Circle of Self-Care” and that's how that has come from dealing with what's going on right now.

**Tim:** So I'm very intrigued with this work that you're doing and I'm certainly going to dive even deeper into it after this conversation. But for the listeners that are interested in the work that you do, what is the best way for them to get hold of you?

**Nidhi:** OK, so everything that I do and focus on, is on my website, which is [premnidhi.com](http://premnidhi.com) and that's [premnidhi.com](http://premnidhi.com) – I have a conscious counselling psychosocial practice Facebook group which is private and you need to ask to join. Yeah, I think that's a good start. On my website is all my details: there's information about the workshops, there's information about my practice and the conscious rhythm work that I'm doing. And this other work that I'm doing called “Transitions to Eldership” – can I talk a little bit about that, Tim?

**Tim:** Of course, I'd love to hear more about it.

**Nidhi:** Okay, so based on my own journey – again, which is what the core of my work always is, and the fact that this year I'm turning 60 – but for a very long time, I've had this calling to grow into becoming an inspired elder, so that when I do get to my eldership, to the age when I step into and transition into being an elder, that I age with consciousness. And that I can then be inspiring to the younger generations, because I believe that that is what we do as we get older: we offer an inspiration and a wisdom that can really invigorate and inspire the younger generations – just like they have energy, which we don't have anymore.

And because of this, I did a lot of research and work on eldership and ageing. And there's definitely more of a movement towards ageing consciously, of longevity, of people having a long life after they retire – and the quality of life is so important. And again, it's very much about our self-care: it's about “How do we care for ourselves? How do we be present in our lives? How do we be inspirational?”

And there was a couple of inspired conversations: I started working at various old age homes when I was in Cape Town and having deep conversations with older people

about... I also did drumming with older people – and I would ask them like “What gives you meaning in your life? What makes life meaningful for you at the age of 80 or 90 years old?” And besides the fact that they absolutely loved the drumming, their families gave them meaning – that was what they held as important.

And so I created a body of work called “Transitions to Eldership”. And what I did was, again on the psychosocial level, looked at different developmental stages that we go through in our lives where we transition and how important is for us to connect with those parts of ourselves and bring the wisdom and gems into our current way of living, so that we can move forward into our eldership, healed and whole.

And there's one thing that none of us want, is to have too many regrets, because it can really make one sad and lonely and unhappy and isolated. And so how do we let go of those regrets and come to terms with the things in our lives that we might not be so proud of or that we feel uncertain about? Or there could be trauma sitting in different stages of our life that we've never dealt with.

And so the developmental stages that I work with is: **the inner child**, which is very, very important work, on how to deal with our emotions. And there's so much that we let go of when we are little children: that innocence, that curiosity, that excitement, that presence that we have. And so the process is to look at that part of ourselves to see where we were let down, where there's sadness – and how to bring the inner child into current relationship with ourselves.

And then the next developmental stage which is a huge transition time, is when we become free-spirited **adolescents** when we move from childhood through puberty into our teenage years and young adulthood. And where our ego develops and we become invincible and strong and we start forming our own opinions and standing up against things that we don't believe in. But in that time, we also lose parts of ourselves – we silence our voice sometimes through relationships and comparison, of a sense of not belonging or not fitting in. We drop some of the important and integral parts of who we are.

And then, the third developmental stage is **the creative adult** and that's the part of being a creative being. And whether it's creating a family or creating a business or creating art as an artist, or you know, some people have children, some don't – but they still create and they formulate their adulthood and they step into this really strong passion and power. But there's also parts of us that we lose along that way and forget about and explain away or apologize for.

And then the fourth part of the developmental stage is to become **a graceful elder** and to work with our “shadow” and the parts of ourselves that aren't so great, but very much part of who we are and I believe teach us, and are part of our team that hold us in our life.

And then we move to the centre of our world, which is **our spiritual connection**. Our connection with the earth, our connection with our ancestors, and our connection with our higher purpose and with the Divine.

And so I work a lot in circles as you can hear, and I use the medicine wheel as a beautiful tool to create work in these different stages of development in Transitions to Eldership. And I've been running workshops face-to-face for nearly three years now, in Transitions to Eldership. I've done some workshops where I've done a workshop with all the phases and then I broke it down and I've done quite a lot of work with inner child work. I've done some

talks at SACAP (South African College of Applied Psychology), where I think you came to one of the talks. I run workshops on the inner critic, working with the critical part of the self.

And part of my journey at the beginning of this year was to take these workshops online – to make it accessible for people all over the world. And I was busy creating that and starting to write modules of the different work, looking at how I could take it online when lockdown hit. So that's really where I'm at now is to further develop that. And what I'm trying to do and hope that I will finish this year, is to write a book on this work – like a blueprint of this process. And that's where I'm at now.

So hopefully within the next couple of months I'll start my first online workshop with that and that is... I've called it "Inner child, inner critic." And yeah, we will see how that goes. So that's that work that I'm busy working on and creating and developing right now.

**Tim:** Very interesting and thanks once again for sharing. When I think about the work that you do, I'm very impressed with the fact that you are able to work with many different people from many different backgrounds, but also people of different ages and different stages of life. I think it's really a skill to be able to relate well to people who are at different stages of their life and come from different backgrounds. So I just wanted to commend you on the work that you've been doing and I will certainly put your website in the podcast description for anybody that would like to get in touch with you.

But Nidhi, thank you so much for joining us today. I really appreciate your time. Is there anything else that you would like to tell the listeners out there today before we wrap up?

**Nidhi:** First of all, thank you so much, Tim. Just that: life is an incredible journey and that even in the darkest places, if you light a candle, it creates a huge amount of light. And that there is help there. You know, there's a lot of ways that you can get support, that you can find the answers that you're looking for. And just to keep trusting in the process of life and to know that we are all in this together.

**Tim:** Great. Yes, I love those closing words: "We are all in this together."

So Nidhi, once again, thank you so much. I really hope you have a lovely day today in Knysna. Once again thanks, for your time and I look forward to seeing you again at some point in the future.

**Nidhi:** Thank you, Tim. It's been great to talk to you and thank you for what you doing, spreading the word. And I wish you lots of success for your adventure.