

# Conjuring Up Courage

## #119

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nitika Chopra

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**Shohreh Davoodi:** You are listening to episode #119 of Conjuring Up Courage. This episode features the founder of Chronicon and The Chronicon Community, Nitika Chopra. Nitika chatted with me about her experiences navigating chronic illness and entrepreneurship, her definition of self-love, her thoughts about how folks can support the people in their lives with chronic illness, and more.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to [shohrehdavoodi.com/119](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/119). That's [shohrehdavoodi.com/119](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/119).

Hey there Conjuring Up Courage listeners! If you enjoy the show and have been thinking about taking things to the next level by working with me, my year-long self-trust membership program, Follow Your Arrow, is now enrolling members for the January 2022 cohort. Follow Your Arrow is a program I created to help you be more of who you are and less haunted by who you think you're supposed to be. It's 12 months of deconditioning, personal growth, and group coaching so you can free yourself from self-doubt and embody a deeper sense of self-trust.

If you want to be able to do things like take the guilty out of your pleasures, say both yes please and no thank you with conviction, break out of the vicious cycle of black-and-white thinking, look fear in the face and have the courage to take the leap anyway, and wield your power and influence to make the world a better place, then Follow Your Arrow might be the perfect fit for you. Each month of the program we'll dig into a new topic to help you develop your self-trust. For every topic, you'll get three lessons, a deeper dive tool or practice that accompanies

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each lesson, a book recommendation, and bonus topic-specific resources. I'll also facilitate a live group coaching and Q&A call each month for members to foster community, share experiences, and get their questions answered. Plus, I'll host members-only workshops with expert guest speakers and teachers throughout the year.

The January 2022 cohort of Follow Your Arrow kicks off on January 10<sup>th</sup>. To learn more and become a member, head to [shohrehdavoodi.com/FYA](https://shohrehdavoodi.com/FYA). That's [shohrehdavoodi.com/FYA](https://shohrehdavoodi.com/FYA). I'll also include the link for the program information in the show notes for this episode.

[Music plays]

This is Conjuring Up Courage, and I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. As a self-trust coach, I help people come home to themselves so they can be more of who they are and less haunted by who they think they're supposed to be.

I created this podcast to celebrate what's possible when you commit to being brave. You'll hear from diverse guests who are refusing to let fear and self-doubt stop them from building fulfilling lives and creating a better world for everyone. I'll also teach you my favorite tools, strategies, and mindset shifts so you can do the same.

Consider this your invitation to stop living according to "shoulds" and to step into your motherfucking magic instead. Stay open, get curious, and let's grow together.

[Music fades]

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Hi Nitika! I am so delighted to have this opportunity to chat with you today. Thank you so much for being here.

**Nitika Chopra:** Thank you for having me!

**Shohreh:** Yes! This is such a busy time of year as I was saying before we started recording, so I really appreciate that we are getting to do this. I think this is gonna be such a great conversation for people to end this ridiculous year with that we have all been having [laughs lightly].

**Nitika:** Totally. I could not agree more. I think we're all ready for it.

**Shohreh:** [Laughs lightly]. Exactly. So for those who are not familiar with you and your work, could you please just start by telling me a little bit about who you are and what you're feeling passionate about these days?

**Nitika:** Yeah. So I'm Nitika Chopra, and I am the founder of Chronicon, which is what I'm passionate about honestly every single day. And I think most people who are doing their own business or working on their dreams can probably relate to that. It's just the thing that I wake up every single day thinking about, plotting [laughter]...

**Shohreh:** Plotting is such a good word.

**Nitika:** Plotting all the time. And it's a company I created back in 2019. And it's dedicated to helping those who are chronically ill live a better life every single day. And so we do that through events, which we have every week, and also content that we have daily. And it's all a part of our community, our online community. And then we, um, launched back in 2019 with an in-real-life conference here in New York City, which was

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amazing. And we hope to do that again soon [Shohreh laughs lightly] when it's safe enough to do that. Especially for this population, we have to be extra careful.

So that's what I'm passionate about. I'm just really, really committed to finding a way to carve out an industry for us, honestly. That's, like, what I think about every day [laughs lightly]. And I'm just, like, not sure how I'm supposed to do that [Shohreh laughs lightly], but I'm gonna keep goin' for it. So here we are!

**Shohreh:**

Oh my gosh, yes. As a fellow entrepreneur who, in particular, works with a lot of marginalized folks, a lot of queer folks, I feel like I'm so passionate about what I do. And at the same time, like, you kind of had a vein of this in what you were saying, there's also this, like, frustration of like, how do I do this? How do I make this happen? Like, all the entrepreneurial business owner, like, crap and frustrations that you have to deal with. It's a lot. I don't think people realize, like, how much happens behind the scenes to put these things together.

**Nitika:**

Yeah. And I think a lot of times, entrepreneurship and like, being an entrepreneur can feel like it's, like, glamorized in certain ways. And like, this such and such company just became a unicorn. And this person just raised a bajillion dollars. And this person is on the cover of some business magazine. And you're just like, wow.

And then you realize, like, it's really not like that in the day-to-day. And even for those people that have achieved those things, it's like, the day-to-day is a kind of nose-to-the-ground, minute-by-minute experience

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most of the time. And there's nothing wrong with you if that's what you're experiencing. And I think especially for young entrepreneurs, they don't necessarily get told that enough. And then they can start to compare themselves with this glamorized version of what it's like to be an entrepreneur, and it's just so much more than that.

**Shohreh:** It is so much more than that. And at this point, I have been running my business for five years. And it's like, every year has been different. Every year has had its different states of, like, hustle and flow and all the things that are needed to do it. And I think I didn't quite know what to expect when I was going into running a business for myself. And I still, in a lot of ways, don't know what to expect because it changes all the time. And I happen to love that. That's one of the reasons I like running a business versus being an employee. But it's definitely not the right path if you're someone who's like, I like my days to always look the same and for everything to be very predictable. Like, nope, that's not what happens here.

**Nitika:** Yeah, I agree. I feel like there's, like, a level of stability in the sense that, like, I know what I'm working on and I know the goal hasn't changed. And that's, like, where I get my stability. But, yeah. I love that, like, at any moment I can get, like, an email that's gonna, like, totally change things [Shohreh laughs]. Hopefully it'll be, like, a new opportunity. And I'm just like, what's gonna be in my inbox today? Like, this is so exciting. And I get to experience so many new different things and also grow my skillset by doing that too, which is really nice. So I agree, I

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think it's so fun. But I know it's also not for everyone, and I honor and respect that, too.

**Shohreh:** I would agree with that. And sometimes people do it for a little while and then they go away from it. And there's all different paths that people can take. But I do think there is something just really fun and interesting and exciting about it. I'm glad you feel that way too.

**Nitika:** Yeah, for sure.

**Shohreh:** So obviously you have The Chronicon Community, and this is in part because of your own experiences with navigating chronic illness since you were very young. And I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about the stages of what that was like for you and how your relationship with your chronic illness has changed over time.

**Nitika:** Sure, yeah. So I was diagnosed with psoriasis at the age of ten and psoriatic arthritis at the age of 19. And there have been many, many stages, but I will say predominantly when I was diagnosed, I didn't have the words for it then, but there was a major stage of grief and loss. And it was really traumatic in a lot of ways because when I was diagnosed with psoriasis, I was so young, so I was, like, in soccer and I would go play soccer every day after school and I loved it. And I loved running around. And I was, like, a pretty normal kid, whatever that means, right, but a stereotypical just, like, average kid, just being a part of things.

And when I got sick, it was also at the same time that I got my period for the first time and I was in fifth grade. And I started to become, like, a bit curvier, even that young. And I started to get psoriasis. And I

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started to have spots, like, all over my body, and eventually within a year it was like, from the tip of my head to the tip of my foot. I was pretty much covered with psoriasis.

And there was just so much that we didn't know at the time about the condition. There was so much that I didn't understand, my parents didn't understand. It was all so new to us. So there was so much separation happening, which I think is something, even if you're not a kid and you get diagnosed with a chronic illness, I think that's something that happens to a lot of people who go through a diagnosis. Where it's like, okay, before I was, like, a "normal" healthy person that was, like, the picture of health, right. And I say normal in quotes because, like, what the hell is normal [Shohreh laughs lightly] anyway? None of us are normal in, like, the best way I think.

But you know, whenever you see, like, the doctor's office brochures [Shohreh laughs] or like, you know, like, the pamphlets and stuff—like, oh, that's what I'm supposed to be. And then as soon as you get diagnosed with something, you're just automatically put in this category of, like, I'm not like everybody else. I'm not like my mom. Or I'm not like my best friend. Or I'm not like the kids I see at school. Or my teachers. Or whatever it might be. My coworkers, if it's later in life.

As I said, I didn't have the words for it then, but there was just this feeling of loss and separation and trauma that was happening. And it went on for a long time. It went on probably for the first decade and a half, maybe? So, like, almost 15 years, I would say. 'Cause then I was diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis at the age of 19, and my bones

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started to deform. I started to have a really hard time walking without severe pain. Like, getting up to go to the restroom was, like, I would, like, be screaming in pain.

And people don't always realize that about my journey because I don't look like someone who has been through all of those things when you look at me just, like, on social media or whatever. But that's the beauty in it, right? Because it's like, we have all been through our own version of you would never know this thing just by looking at me.

**Shohreh:** Yes.

**Nitika:** So for me, it was, like, so jarring, and maybe, like, it's a little more visual or it was, like, for a longer period of time or something like that. But I really believe, like, we have all been through our own version of that.

For the first, like, 15 years, honestly, I didn't know who I was other than the fact that I was a sick person. And I tried. You know, I really did. I loved to sing as a kid. I was always, like, really talkative [light laughter] and funny and feisty. And you know, my mom called me a *pataakhe* since I was, like, two years old, which means firecracker in Hindi.

So, like, I've always had parts of my personality, but I really didn't know who I was for a really long time outside of, oh, you're a sick person. And especially because if you were to have met me during that time, you would see it, right? Like, the first thing that you would see was my skin and how, you know, affected it was.

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Yeah, so I wore it on the inside and on the outside. And it took me a very long time, through a lot of different things, to understand that I am so much more than my illness. My illnesses have shaped me into the woman that I am in so many powerful, necessary ways. But they are not the full story. They are not the end of the story. And they are not who I am.

So I guess, like, the next chapter was probably a lot of fumbling. A lot of, you know, like, Bambi's legs [Shohreh laughs] kind of thing, where I was like, well, I don't know. Like, well, who am I? Maybe I'm like this. Maybe I'm like that. Maybe I like him. Maybe I don't. Maybe—you know, whatever.

And then now, being 40, I feel like I'm sure I will continue to settle into myself as I age by the grace of God, of course. But I just feel like I'm so much more clear on who I am as a whole person. And my health is a part of that. It's obviously a huge part of my work and things like that. But I'm so much more clear about all the different parts of myself.

And there's still grief in all of that. There's still anger. There's still resentment. There's still, like, shame, sometimes. I just have been through it for 30 years, so I can, like, move through those feelings a bit quicker than I used to be able to. And I can have grace within those feelings a little bit more than I used to be able to. But for me, it hasn't necessarily fully gone away, it's just shifted and other parts of my life are louder now.

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**Shohreh:** Mm, I love the way you described that, that other parts of your life are louder now. Especially I think that's so true with grief. I think we regularly associate grief with death, but in reality, you know, grief is associated with so many things, so many different kinds of loss and pain that we experience. And I really think too that maybe some people would describe it that, like, they fully overcome or get over their grief or whatever words they'd want to use, but in my own experience, it has been just like you said, that it gets smaller, it gets less loud, as other things become bigger and louder in my life. That doesn't mean it goes away.

And I think that's important for people to realize because we really like to depict things as a destination, you know? Like, I am trying to get to this point and then I will be fine and wonderful from there on out. And the reality is that, like, we are complex people and we can hold a lot at one time. It doesn't have to be, like, this one feeling or this one place that we're trying to arrive at.

**Nitika:** Yeah. And I honestly think, like, I have to constantly remind myself of that, right? It's like, I love having goals. I love having dreams. And I love, like, being in that creative space of achieving from creativity. But sometimes when you mix that creative, and honestly, like, to me, I'm a very spiritual person, so to me, it's, like, that divine space, too, of just being one with something greater than myself. And for some people, that is their art, you know, that is divine for them. And I definitely feel that in a lot of the things that I do.

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But then you mix that with the capitalistic [laughs lightly], results-oriented, you know, very different energy and I feel like I'm in a constant reminder of, you can just create today. And it doesn't have to be you created an e-book that's going to cure this thing [Shohreh laughs] and then you... No, no, no, no, no. I just wanna create.

It's a huge reason why I love The Chronicon Community so much because, like, I made the container, which, obviously, like, you can opt into or whatever, but the actual container inside of it is, like, I just get to, like, create events every week and create content every day. And I just get to curate awesome speakers. And it really allows me to play and explore those parts of myself without having this, like, pressure that every single step I'm taking has to amount to this, like, groundbreaking level of achievement. [Shohreh laughs lightly] 'Cause that's just exhausting and it's draining. And I honestly don't think it's helpful.

So yeah, it's been a good—a good balance.

**Shohreh:**

Yeah, that is an exhausting feeling, and I think right now, too, we have this idea that everything has to become a side hustle, and, you know, you have to be able to go sell it on Etsy or a pop-up shop or whatever. You know, people constantly say that to me about my various non-work hobbies. Like, I love to bake and people will try my stuff and be like, "This is so good! You should sell it." I'm like, no, I'm good. I just enjoy doing this. I like making people happy. I'm like, this is not something I'm looking to make money off of.

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Same thing, I love to play music. It's, like, such a good creative outlet for me. And like, at one point, maybe, I would have loved to have been a professional musician. In fact, I went to college, uh, for music. But at this point in my life I'm like, I do this because it is a non-capitalistic outlet outside of all of the other things that I do. And if I didn't have those things, I feel like it wouldn't give me that same sense of peace I'm trying to get from it.

**Nitika:**

I think that's beautiful. I love that you're so determined to keep it pure in that way, you know, and just keep it creative. And I wish more people would allow themselves that, myself included, you know. I think I waver in and out of that. I usually get distracted by thinking it needs to be more, and then, like, a month later I'm like, oh wait, I can just do this and it doesn't have to be anything more. So I'm still retraining myself in that way.

**Shohreh:**

Yeah, like, to be clear, the messages are there. The pressure is there. I still have the thoughts about it. This is, again, right, we don't have that arrival point where I'm like, we're fighting this stuff, like, all the time in our own heads and out in the world, and sometimes we're, like, yeah, we'll try that and see how it goes. And other times, we're like, no, no, that's not what I want for this.

So, just for anyone out there who's also having that struggle, I think that's pretty common for most of us now, again, just given the society that we live in where it's like, your work is your worth. And everything you need to do needs to somehow make you money. I'm like, no!

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**Nitika:** Exactly. I totally agree.

**Shohreh:** You know, I'm also curious for you about some of the difficulties that you've found specifically, you know, being at the intersection of having chronic illness and then also being an Indian woman. Whether that's specific to Indian culture itself and maybe the views there of chronic illness, or just how the world treats you as a Brown woman who has chronic illness.

**Nitika:** Yeah, you know, it's so interesting because I feel like the world is honestly waking up so much more every single day to what it is like to be a minority. And to have so many different things working against you when you are, obviously, like, race minority, like, that has always been a thing that we've sort of talked about. But even for the South Asian community, I feel like [laughs lightly], we still have so far to go, I personally think, for how much we're talking about it and normalizing that, like, it's true and it exists and all of that.

But when it comes to chronic illness, I feel like it is still emerging in a lot of ways. And I think the pandemic, honestly, brought it to the forefront a lot more. Which, that's one thing I am grateful for because we talked about immune-compromised people, we talked about people with pre-existing conditions in a way that we never have before, and it brought those people into the light. And when the old president said that it's not gonna impact that many people, just those people with pre-existing conditions and of a certain age—

**Shohreh:** [Sarcastically] Just those people.

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**Nitika:** Just those people, right? And I was just like, you don't know what you're talking about. Almost half the population of the United States has a chronic illness. And that is significant. That's, I think, the thing that comes up for me a lot in the work that I do, is the reason why I'm so passionate about it is 'cause I lived most of my life thinking that I was the only one. And literally thinking I was the only person that had a chronic illness. And every time I meet someone who has a chronic illness, they feel the exact same way. And to find out that over 133 million Americans are living with a chronic illness, it just could not be further from the truth, right?

So I think the conversation around being a South Asian woman is an interesting one because I get a lot of questions, I get a lot of comments, I get a lot of messages from other Indian women, Brown women, you know, not just Indian women, who are dealing with the cultural pressures, the cultural judgment, right, of being the way that they are within their community. And I went through that. I absolutely went through that. I mean, I got divorced at the age of 24. Like, if you don't wanna have a community uprising in [laughter] the Brown community, don't do that, let me tell you [laughs lightly]. Because it is just not recommended.

**Shohreh:** Sorry, fellow divorced person here, that's why I'm laughing [laughs lightly].

**Nitika:** Yeah, like, you know, it's such a scandal.

**Shohreh:** Yes, if you're Brown, it is such a scandal in the community.

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**Nitika:** It's literally such a scandal. Like, I remember feeling like I was gonna walk around with, like, an engraved "D" on my chest or something, being like, she's the divorced one! You know?

**Shohreh:** Oh, well, I came out as gay after I got divorced, so just imagine how that went.

**Nitika:** Oh my gosh. You were, like—your inner strength must be, like, [Shohreh laughs] perfectly, you know, perfectly primed after that experience.

**Shohreh:** Woo, I just have to laugh at it a lot. A lot of that.

**Nitika:** You do, you do. And that's something I feel like we don't talk about enough when we talk about these things, is just, like, after a certain point, like, I laugh all the time. I'm dealing with all these neurological issues right now because I just had COVID. Unfortunately, I had a breakthrough case after being vaccinated. And because of my immune system, I was more prone to getting it even though I was fully vaccinated. And I'm having all these neurological symptoms afterwards.

And I just feel like I wanna cry, but I also [laughter] am like, you know what? I don't have time for that. It's just like, what are you gonna do? Like, if I were to cry about all the symptoms every time I had a symptom, like, I would never stop crying. Like, you've just gotta laugh your way through it and make the best of it.

But in terms of the conversation around the Brown community, you know, and our South Asian culture, I just feel like where I went with

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things is I stood up for myself so fiercely in ways that I wish my parents would have stood up for me, right? And they didn't know how. Um, and that's the truth. Like, they're such incredible, incredible parents. But that was not a skill that they were ever blessed with or that they were ever, honestly, brave enough to try on, you know, to stand up for what's right in the face of other people's judgment.

And I have been that person since I was a little kid, much to my parents' frustration [Shohreh laughs lightly]. Much to my relatives' disappointment at times. Much to, you know, all of that. And I think when a lot of times when these, like, mostly Indian girls write me and they say how hard it is, I'm always just like, I feel like there comes a point where there is a choice that we make. I'm not saying it's an easy choice. I'm not saying it's a choice that doesn't have consequences and that doesn't result in pain and sadness. But I would rather feel the pain of some auntie judging me fiercely and spreading rumors about me, saying bad things about me, than deal with the pain of me denying my truth.

**Shohreh:** Yes.

**Nitika:** You know? So it's not to say that it's a choice in a flippant way, right? I completely acknowledge how crappy our culture can be about things that really should just be the norm and should be understood and all of that. But I refuse—I refuse mostly because my body breaks down when I don't listen to it. When I don't listen to my truth.

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So I've had that barometer sort of keeping me in check my whole life. But you know, everybody has that choice. And so I think it's—I think it's incredibly important to know that that's what that crossroads is, and it's up to us whether we want to go down one lane or the other.

**Shohreh:**

It takes a lot for people to even realize that there is agency and there is choice in the matter because especially in our cultures, you know, we're taught that there is only one option. There is the right way, and then there is the wrong way where you are the bad outcast kid. And you don't want to do that. And, like you said, there are absolutely consequences to choosing yourself and not going with the path that has been meticulously laid out for you. And you have to decide which is the pain that you want.

And similar to you, I came to that same conclusions that, I was like, at the end of the day, I am the only one I can trust to advocate for myself. So I need to do that for me because I will regret it if time goes on, I get to the end of my life, and I didn't do that and I did what everybody else wanted instead. And other people make different choices and that's totally fine. But I think that we can tell, like you said, by turning inward, by listening to your own body and what it's telling you, like, if your body feels out of alignment, like, it will let you know.

**Nitika:**

Yeah, my body knocks me all the way out [laughs]. Like, she is just like, no, no, we're not going there. As hard as that is, it's also such—I can see it as such a blessing.

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And the other part of it is too, I've learned, especially as I've gotten older, that my parents were not given the privileges that we have been given. And I feel so much compassion for the antiquated system that they were in and how deep those roots went and how them moving to this country and giving me these opportunities and putting me in this American life has afforded me the ability to see that there is another way.

You know? And—and I have, for me, I have so much compassion for my parents. It doesn't mean that I will have so much compassion that I will deny my own truth. But it can be both, right? I can have so much compassion for my parents and be kind with them because I know this isn't comfortable or easy for them. But then I can also rise up to meet my own truth and be very vocal about it at the same time. But it's taken practice.

**Shohreh:**

It does take practice. And I think that learning to set and hold boundaries is such a big part of that. Learning to have that both/and is a really big part of it 'cause I think that for years, I held so much resentment against my parents for a lot of these things you've talked about. And it really is only as an adult and working through some of this stuff that I've been able to say, you know what? They did the very best with the tools that they had, and their experiences with their parents, and, you know, my dad being in a new country, moving to the U.S. when he was 16, adjusting to that, trying to raise children here in a totally different environment than he was raised in.

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So I can look at that and say, you know what? I'm proud of you for the work that you did and I have so much compassion for you. And now, as an adult, being able to really state, *and*, some of the choices you made hurt me and they affected me or they had this sort of thing on my life. And I'm going to be listening to my own self going forward.

And that's been hard for them [laughs lightly], as I'm sure it's been hard for, uh, a lot of people's parents as we're kind of trying to break some of these cycles. But I do think it is important to remind ourselves that, like, they are trying. Most of them are really—they're trying to get it, and it's maybe slower than we would like, but there's a lot of reasons for that.

So again, it's all of these complicated feelings. There's not, like, one right way to feel or one feeling to arrive at about it. It's this constant push and pull of the grief and the caring about them and love and all of these other things that it is to be a child of a parent.

**Nitika:** Yeah, I completely agree.

**Shohreh:** We were also talking a little bit about this piece of learning to kind of listen to your body and trust your body, and that's a lot of the work that I do with my own clients as a self-trust coach. And I know those are some of the threads running through your work as well. And I'm curious about the particular difficulties of learning to do that when you experience chronic illness and when, I imagine, it can feel like your body is working against you and that you're not on the same team and you're actually on opposite sides of the field.

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**Nitika:** Yeah, it's such a beautiful question. I try to be so honest about the fact that, like, I really don't feel, most of the time, that I've arrived at some major conclusion or final destination with all of this. I think it's always evolving and always unfolding. But when I was younger, I definitely went through many, many, many years of my life, like, during that first decade and a half that I was telling you about earlier, where I just felt exactly what you just said: that my body was not on my side.

I've always been a spiritual person; really since I got sick I have been spiritual. It just sort of was ignited in me. And it's not from a religious standpoint at all. But, you know, my parents are always like, where did you come from 'cause we never talk about God. Like, why are you always talking about God? Like, I don't understand. But it's just been a part of me. And, you know, even that, feeling like, what did I do wrong? Why am I being punished? Like, all of these things.

And it's only been since I've gotten older, and you know, throughout the years, I would say in my twenties I started to really listen to my body for the first time and realized that it had its own emotional body inside of it, right? There was its own feelings, its own needs. It was sort of like I started to treat it like it was the younger version of me. Or, you know, a different part of me. It wasn't all that I am, but it had different needs than I might think it should have, you know, and I needed to sort of take my time and get to know what that is.

And I also feel that when I say that I feel like I have not, you know, arrived at any particular conclusion, it's because a lot of things in my life I still feel like I have to learn several times before I've really learned the

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lesson. And my body is usually like, trying to tell me something, trying to show me something. There have been many times in my life, I mean especially with dating, oh my god, where I've just been like, oh my gosh. I had this feeling. I feel like my body was trying to tell me to run in the other direction, [laughter] but I was just like, no, it's fine, it's okay, there's no problem, whatever.

And it's only been, now that I'm 40 years old, you know, the last couple of years that I've been like, oh, she just said something. Okay, I need to run. I need to go in the other direction. And I'm starting to listen to my body. But yeah, it's been such a journey.

And I think it really—also, the other thing I think about a lot is in this country, in particular, in America, we have such a society that is built on not feeling or being with the truth. And that shows up in our, like, raging addiction epidemic that we're having and all different forms of addiction, whether it's food or sex or drugs or alcohol. It's so deep, right? And people gravitate towards those things largely because there's something going on within them and being with a drug, a food, whatever it might be, is easier than being with what's going on within them.

And that's a simplified version. I know that there's family history, there's trauma history, there's so many things that make addiction really complicated and nuanced. But I have people in my life that I love very dearly that deal with addiction at a very serious level, and that is what I see time and time again, right? So even if you don't classify or resonate with being an addict, we as a country are constantly—whether it's

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addicted to our social media or it's addicted to our negative thinking or it's addicted to, you know, putting ourselves in harmful situations or whatever it might be, there's this, constantly this thing I believe that we are fighting where instead of doing that I'm going to sit with my truth [audibly exhales].

Even just saying that [Shohreh laughs lightly], I needed to take a deep breath. Lord help us all. But, like, I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it. But it doesn't mean that it's easy. It doesn't mean that it's fun. It's doesn't mean that it happens—that something miraculous happens overnight. But it's that push-pull constantly. Am I going to eat the thing or drink the thing or sleep with the thing? Whatever your thing might be. Instead of sitting at home or taking a walk by myself and really listening to the pain that my heart or my soul or even my body is in? Which am I going to do today? And we're in this cycle, and we have the choice around the cycle minute to minute to minute every single day. And I think people don't always realize that.

I define self-love as being more committed to your happiness than to your suffering in every single moment. And I came up with that definition years ago because I was like, what the hell is self-love? People are doing all these, like, downward dogs, which I can't even do [Shohreh laughs] with my arthritis. You know, I was like, I can't do a downward dog with my arthritis, so, like, does that mean that I don't love myself? Or, like, people are, you know, taking these baths, and, like, I have dry skin. I don't want to sit in the bath for two hours [Shohreh laughs]. Like, I don't understand. And then they're, like,

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drinking these green juices which are, like, \$25 a juice, and I'm just like what? This doesn't feel like self-love to me. I don't know, that might look like self-care on some days and that might be how I access self-love sometimes. But to me, that isn't loving myself. That isn't what it actually looks like.

To me, it's when I am in every single moment, I have this choice. And I say happiness, you know, being more committed to your happiness than your suffering 'cause it resonates for me. But for some people, it's being more committed to your truth than to your suffering. Being more committed to your peace. Being more committed to your joy. It doesn't have to be happiness; that's my word, right? And if that resonates, great. But it doesn't resonate with everyone and that's fine. But, you know, knowing that it's this moment to moment-to-moment thing.

And I think a lot of times in, like, self-help or self-exploration or self-love, there's such a disservice that's happening because it's painted as this, like—we've mentioned many times, right, when we've talked about entrepreneurship or, you know, getting to the destination—it's painted as this thing that you're like, that you've arrived at and that's how you know you're doing it right or you're good. Or you're, you know, okay or whatever it might be. It's so not about that.

It's about every single moment and that choice that you have to make in every moment. And sometimes it's about choosing the best you can and maybe it's not the most loving thing that you could possibly do. But the compassion that you bring to it or the nurturing or empathy that

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you have for yourself around it is the most loving thing that you could do in that moment.

So, yeah. It's, to me, I have literally no idea what your first question was even about [Shohreh laughs]. But this, to me, I don't know what your actual question was, but to me, this is, like, where it led me. So we'll just say that that was where it was meant to go [laughs].

**Shohreh:**

Hell, I don't even care what the question was 'cause I love where it led us. And I think that was such a beautiful way of describing that in this moment-to-moment choice that we have. Because, you know, when you were talking about addictions or similar things to that, I think another way that I might describe that is the ways that we choose to numb ourselves or self-soothe ourselves is essentially like a, a running away from the self a lot of times is what's happening in what you were describing. Where it's like, going inward seems really scary and painful and sitting with feelings seems like a thing that could swallow you up whole, so we're gonna run from that, and whatever it is, the thing that you may reach for to run from that is different for everybody. But I think we all have that urge.

And I agree with you, the importance of the recognition that literally every moment that we have, every day that you have the privilege of waking up, you have this whole new slate of choices that you can make where you can turn inward to yourself. Or you can numb, you can reach for other things, you can ignore. And to be clear, we're all human and we all [laughs lightly], no matter what, still make those choices. No matter how much you've worked on your self-love and your self-trust

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and those other aspects, it's like, you're still going to have those moments.

And I think what I really work on with my own clients is the awareness and intentionality of it. Because a lot of times we get stuck in these ruts and this decision-making without even knowing that we're there. And much of the time it's coming from a place of safety because of the experiences that we've had, right? It's a coping mechanism. It's how we best know, or maybe the only way we know, to be okay and take care of ourselves. And it's through bringing awareness to why we're making the choices that we're making that changes everything.

Because even then, even if you make the choice in that moment, like you were saying, to still numb, to still reach for something else that maybe isn't the most ideal or the direction you want to go in, if you do it intentionally, that changes everything about it. It changes how you look at it. It reminds yourself, again, the agency that tomorrow is another day, a chance to choose differently.

So again, I know we've come back to this throughout this conversation, but it really isn't about reaching a point where it's like, every time I make my elevated, you know, "perfect" choice. No, nobody does that. Nobody. But over time, with intention, you can start to make that choice more and more and more and see how that transforms your life.

**Nitika:** Absolutely. Totally agree.

**Shohreh:** So one last thing that I would love to talk to you about because my friends who have chronic illness talk to me about this all the time is that

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one of the biggest frustrations that they have is on top of everything that they are navigating with their own health and their own bodies, they also have to constantly deal with other people's comments and advice and questions about their health and just the way that that wears them down. And knowing that I'm sure we have plenty of listeners who don't have chronic illness, I'm curious if you have any thoughts for them about maybe what's not so helpful for them to do in your own experiences that you've had over the course of your life.

**Nitika:**

Sure. Well, I mean, for the first part, you know, with your friends that deal with folks wearing them down, I have so much compassion for that. I really resonate with that. I think that's why I created The Chronicon Community because it's a space where you don't have to explain. If you say you went to a crappy doctor's appointment and the doctor gaslit you and doesn't believe in your symptoms, like a hundred other people have literally been there and you don't have to, like, convince them of otherwise. Which I think people don't realize how much emotional labor really goes into that. And then over time, it gives you the confidence to navigate, in your own life, in a way, from a stronger place and a more supported place from having that connection with those other people.

But in terms of people who, you know, maybe are struggling to understand or to support the people in their lives who are chronically ill, I would say one of the things that has been so helpful for me is for friends and family to say, like, what are you up for today? Like, let's say we're making plans and you want to meet up and we want to have, like, a fun time or whatever, even just the slightest thing, which is so

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innocent and it's not something negative, but for someone who's chronically ill it can be challenging.

Like, I had someone ask me recently if we could go ice skating. And I really wasn't feeling well 'cause I'm dealing with all this neurological stuff and I was just like, I don't think that that's a good idea. And so I just felt so bad that I had to, like, say that and that I had to be the one to be like, womp, womp, again. I can't go. I can't do this. Right? But it would have been a totally different experience if they had sort of let me take the lead on, like, what I'm able to do instead of me having to reject them. Does that make sense?

**Shohreh:** Yeah, it does.

**Nitika:** It's the very slight difference, and it's something that might seem like not a big deal, but I've thought about the fact that I couldn't go ice skating so many times [laughs lightly] since my friend asked me. Because honestly, it bummed me out too, right? Like, it bummed me out to have to say, that's not really a good idea for me right now. 'Cause it's not the only thing I have to say no to in my day. Usually there's, like, five other things that I have to be like, oh, I can't eat that. Or I can't walk that far. Or I can't do this. Or whatever.

So I think that's something that people don't realize all the time. It's just, like, letting that person take the lead a little bit when it comes to making plans or, you know, making arrangements. A lot of times we don't want to seem high maintenance. And I always say, like, I'm actually not high maintenance but my body is [Shohreh laughs lightly].

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'Cause I literally could care less. I could go anywhere, do anything, whatever. It's that my body can't, you know? And so I, you know, think that sometimes letting people who are chronically ill take the lead a little bit with making plans is helpful.

I also think when someone's coming to you and letting you know that they're in a flare or that they just got a really challenging diagnosis or whatever it might be, do whatever you can to not diminish or dismiss what they are telling you in the name of support. There are times in my life that happened years ago and I will just never forget, when I shared, you know, that I felt really bad because my psoriasis had gotten really bad and then like, I showed friends, like, what it looked like. And they were like, oh girl, that's nothing. Like, don't worry about it. You look great. And I just wanted to be like, you cried last week over one pimple and you literally have not had a pimple for like, [Shohreh laughs lightly] ten years, and you, like, were crying about that. The fact that I have scales and flaky skin all over my body I think is worthy of me being a little disappointed and, like, upset, right? But they were trying to be supportive and they were trying to be like, it's fine, you're great. Like, but it ended up just making me feel unseen.

And I think that's, like, another huge thing, of, like, what would make you feel the most supported right now? Like, asking those friends that question. And I think you'd be surprised. Like, sometimes it's just like, girl, could you just come over and, like, watch something with me? Or, like, could you send me a funny video? Or, you know, just to lift my spirits a little bit because there's nothing I can do about this situation

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but I'd like to just not be in it alone, you know? So those are some of the things that I think might be helpful, um, for people who are trying to support others who are chronically ill.

**Shohreh:**

I really love that question about what might be the best way that I can support you. And, truly, this is a question that I use with friends who don't have to navigate chronic illness when they're sharing things with me about their life. Because I think we're really taught, through our society, that we need to fix people's problems and we need to make them go away. And I think that's why we have this sort of supportive urge to be like, you're amazing! You're beautiful! You're whatever!

And sometimes that's what people want, right? Sometimes when you ask the question, hey what would be most supportive, they're like, I need you to give me a stream of compliments because that is what will make me feel good in this moment. But it is not always what people want. And it can have the effect, like you said, of feeling like you don't get to have your feelings or your moment and that you're being diminished.

And so it takes nothing to just ask somebody what it is that they want or that they need in the moment from you and to then offer that. And I think training ourselves to have that pause long enough to be like, oh yes, I should ask, instead of our knee-jerk reaction of oh, I need to make this person feel better, I need to fix it. 'Cause a lot of times these things are not fixable. They just need to be. It's like how we've been talking about this whole time about we run from our feelings and it's hard to feel those. And it's like, some of the reason that is, is because as a

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culture, we're trying to smooth everything over all the time and not letting people feel.

**Nitika:**

Absolutely. Yeah, I think it goes back to a lot of what we were talking about earlier, just how this society is often trying to numb or mask or push away what we're actually feeling. And I think sometimes when I go to people who are not able to be with their own pain, it ends up leading me down a path of feeling dismissed in my pain. You know? And it's been a long journey for me to understand that, like, it's not necessarily my pain that's the problem. It's actually usually, like, an inability or a place that they're not ready to go in, the other person.

But it's a lot of work to kind of have to figure out, like, is it me? Is it you? Is it us? Like, what's happening? You know, it kind of sends you into this negative spiral, um, easily, if you're navigating that. It's taken me a long time, but I do agree, it's something a lot of people just can't be with.

And if you're someone who's dealing with a chronic illness or dealing with a trauma of some sort, you know, I have a list of my safe people and I always recommend [to], like, people in our community and stuff, like, make a list of your safe people that you know, like, no matter what—it might be two freaking people [Shohreh laughs lightly], okay? It doesn't have to be a list of 20 people. But you know, no matter what, this person will be there. This person will get it. This person will do everything that they can to try to understand. That's also really, really helpful.

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**Shohreh:** Yes. I think, again, community is so important. And I know that you know this 'cause you've built out such a beautiful one for folks who are dealing with chronic illness. And I think that being able to see, like, who are our community members is instrumental to dealing with a lot of this stuff. Because again, the reason why The Chronicon Community is so amazing is because sometimes it just feels like nobody gets you. Whether it is that you are navigating chronic illness or whether you are gay, like me, and sometimes I just need to talk to my queer people or sometimes I just need to talk to my mixed-race folks, right? Like, there's just some things that other people, even though they may try, they can't understand.

And so I do have those people in my mind that I'm like, alright, I know these people understand these things and that I can always talk to them about this. And so I'm so glad for you because, of course, it's not always possible to get that in person, in real life. Sometimes people are like ugh, I don't have those people. And that's why I think the work that you're doing is so important in creating that community and saying, hey, if you haven't been able to find this, and even if you have and you want more of this community, like, I've built it for you so that you don't have to feel that way.

**Nitika:** Yeah, exactly. I love that. [Laughs lightly]

**Shohreh:** Me too. Well, thank you again for being here. This was such a lovely conversation. How can people find you? And how can my listeners best support you at this time?

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**Nitika:** Yeah, thank you for having me. It's been such a pleasure talking to you. And yeah, you can find me on Instagram, @NitikaChopra or @ChroniconOfficial also has an Instagram. The best way to support is to, if you have a chronic illness, is to come join us. We are at thechroniconcommunity.com, or you can check out our website which has, like, our YouTube channel and a bunch of free resources too, at chronicon.co. Our membership is monthly, but we have scholarships available for anyone who needs them. You can sign up for a scholarship, apply for a scholarship, and you'll get one. And yeah, it's just, like, the best place on earth, really, for anyone who's chronically ill. So I hope to see some of you there.

**Shohreh:** Perfect. I will link to all of that in the show notes so it's really easy for folks to find. And I know you also had mentioned to me that you have a scholarship fund, so for any of y'all who might want to, you can also put money towards that to sponsor members to be able to join this community, which is awesome.

**Nitika:** Yeah, that sounds awesome. Thank you.

**Shohreh:** Alright, well thank you so much. And I hope you have a great rest of your day.

**Nitika:** Thanks so much, you too.

**Shohreh:** [Music plays]

And that's our show for today. If you're enjoying Conjuring Up Courage, don't forget to subscribe through your podcast provider of

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[Music fades]