

[00:00:01.570] - Wynne Leon

Welcome to the Sharing the Heart of the Matter podcast, where we celebrate the why and how of creativity. I'm Wyn Leon, and in this episode, Vicky Atkinson and I are talking with writer and retired psychologist Dr. Jerold Stein. In this fascinating episode, we talk about the factors that keep us from accurately predicting how we'll react in a situation or what we want life to be. We talk about the tests in life like money, Fame, winning, and more that look promising but probably feel different than we imagine if we achieve them. Dr. Stein talks about the factors that impact our ability to anticipate how we'll feel. In the face of our poor predictive power, Dr. Stein provides us some ways to face the future, like evaluating our patterns and preparing for change. He also reveals the practice of Ticken Olam, a Jewish concept that directs our energies towards repair of the world. This is a great episode that reveals the perils of prediction and suggests how we can live our best life even when we don't know what's coming. We know you'll love Hi, Dr. Stein.

[00:01:46.290] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Hello, Wyn. Hello, Vicki.

[00:01:49.250] - Wynne Leon

So glad to see you again. We love these conversations with you.

[00:01:54.370] - Dr. Gerald Stein

I enjoy them, too. Thank you for inviting me.

[00:01:57.910] - Wynne Leon

One of the conversations that we loved is the episode that we did called the Accidental Philanthropus. It's about your group of zealites, and you make a promise when you were 16 that you needed to keep when you were nearly 50.

[00:02:14.650] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Right. Just over 50.

[00:02:16.000] - Wynne Leon

Just over 50. But it's unusual to be able to do that because of poor emotional forecasting as humans. Can you talk about emotional forecasting and the perils of prediction?

[00:02:32.440] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Sure. But just to start with the Zeolites a little bit. One of the reasons that we, and there was no reason for us to be as mindful of this condition as the future would, of course, tell us we should be, was that we couldn't predict what conditions would exist in 37 years from the time we made the promise as 16, 17-year-olds to the time we fulfilled the promise, 8 of the 10 of us meeting together on the steps in the Museum of Science and Industry on the first year of the new century. We couldn't predict. So because we knew we couldn't predict, we built into the promise, no matter what we're doing, no matter where we are, we will meet on the steps of the front steps of the Museum of Science and Industry on the first day of the new century, which we thought was also another prediction. That would be the only date we could remember. Any other date, we'd probably forget it. And we, as I say, either of us did this coming from all over the country. And so we went forward from there. So because there was a built-in idea that we accepted that we couldn't predict something, so we had to establish conditions that would survive the encounter with whatever happened in life between 1963 to these 10 people and the year 2000 on January first at 12 noon.

[00:04:13.530] - Wynne Leon

Right.

[00:04:14.560] - Vicki Atkinson

What a leap of faith.

[00:04:16.350] - Dr. Gerald Stein

And- And we were certainly involved, too. And of course, we were very close at that time. But in any

case, and many of the relationships continue.

[00:04:27.010] - Wynne Leon

We've been looking at one of your posts that we really Vicky and I really admire. Don't be too sure of yourself, why we aren't good at predictions.

[00:04:37.380] - Dr. Gerald Stein

All right. So the stoic philosophers talked about testing, and I certainly recommend not that this recommendation will do anybody any good unless they follow it, that we don't know who we are. We are blinded in some ways because we haven't experienced experienced yet at any point in life, we haven't experienced the fullness of life, all of the possibilities that we read about, hear about, and live through, if we're lucky. And so what they said is, you only know who you are when you have been tested. And in that particular test, some you might pass, some you might not. Certainly true for me. And They talk about tests broadly. But I can say there are a few that we can apply to ourselves and think about how the idea or the ideas involved in making a choice with respect to each of these items will determine where your life goes to some extent. So for example, about money. Most people think in general, Well, boy, if I make enough money, that's great. And if I make more, that's even better. And of course, what they don't know, unless they've read Daniel Kahneman and other writers and researchers, is that up to a certain point, that's absolutely true.

[00:06:21.940] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Your life is going to be better. Don't talk to somebody who's underneath a viaduct living in a that they can be happy without reference to how much money they're making. They know very well what the conditions are. But up to... The research is unclear on this because it's a little bit old now. But the notion is that \$75,000 is enough to create a level of life satisfaction that you want better by making a whole lot more. Well, the truth of it is you will you feel incrementally better. But with each succeeding dollar, you will not get as much bang for the buck. And so your life is going to diminish, and \$75,000 should be understood in terms of inflation. So it's, undoubtedly, more than that at this point. All right, so that's one bad estimate we make about life. And we think, of course, then we're going to be happier and happier and happier, and it's not true. There may be exceptions, of course. Another area in which we potentially can get tested is in the area of sexual attraction. It's one thing to say, Oh, I will be faithful under any and all circumstances.

[00:07:49.550] - Dr. Gerald Stein

And certainly when one gets married, that's exactly what you say in different words. But would you? Is there no one on earth who you might encounter who would perhaps sway you if they were really into you and relentless in their pursuit, for example? Would you? Well, I don't think you know. Another item is the question of how much do we value things like prestige, status, and so forth? And of course, it's a big deal. But one of the things, and I can say that it's not what it's cut out for, but I don't know because I never was famous. Anyway, or as my friend Rich used to say, who was not a well He was a known academic, but he got to be a full professor at a big deal university, he used to say, I'm famous in a group of 10 people. I expect all of us could say that. Anyway, so when When you think about prestige and status and so forth and all the things that are good about that, you probably don't think about the cost of it. For example, my daughter, my younger daughter, was a budding opera singer who got various young artist positions and was Getting close to the point of making a decision about whether her future was going to be in opera.

[00:09:35.970] - Dr. Gerald Stein

And of course, it's a punishing business. I mean, it's like, if you want to do something difficult, don't become a brain surgeon, become an opera singer. Anyway, but what's the cost of it? Well, she told me a story, and I haven't forgotten it, about what it was like when she was singing at the Lyric Opera in Chicago. And the star performer, one of the star performers, a woman, would spend a part of virtually each day they were in the rehearsal after the rehearsal was over or when there was just time to do it. She would go on some version of Zoom, as we are, and she would call her children and have a conversation with children who are like a thousand miles away or something. End the conversation. At the end, she would be weeping. Well, that's one of the costs. Another example of a similar cost is a very famous French horn player. As some of your readers may know, I was the oral historian of the

CSO for about 23 years. So I met a lot of impressive people, one of whom was Dale Clemenger, who was a world renowned principle horn player, and he played soloist elsewhere, both for the Chicago Symphony and other orchestras.

[00:11:09.430] - Dr. Gerald Stein

But that was his main job. He was in Chicago playing with the Chicago Symphony. And he had the desire to become a conductor. And he did conduct some international orchestras, but not famous ones. And in at least one local orchestra that he was the music director of. But again, not anything like the Chicago Symphony, the New York Philharmonic, anything like that. And so he was wondering, he felt his career as a conductor was stalled. And he went to Italy to talk with Carlo Maria Giulini, a very famous conductor who he had performed under in Chicago on a great many occasions. So he knew Giulini at some level. I mean, he wasn't buddies. They weren't drinking buddies, but they both respected each other. And he wanted to get advice from Giulini, who was by this time, I think, in retirement. And they talked for a while. And then Giulini said to him, but remember that in the Chicago Symphony, if you stay there, you get to sleep in your own bed at night. And I don't know that that changed Clemenger's mind or not, but the point is, of course, there was a cost to running around the world.

[00:12:42.510] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Can be very famous, and people will applaud you if you can handle the pressure of it all, of course, too. And there's a lot. It's like being a baseball player. Every day, those numbers are in the newspaper, where they use it. And or online, and you got to keep up. You have to be able to handle that pressure. So there's a cost of prestige. And I don't think when young people go into it, and now the daughter who was a budding opera singer is now a mom, which is the great love of her life, along with her husband and a music, private music teacher. She has her own studio. So the question then is, what What is the cost and what are the alternatives? And she tells young people who are gung-ho to do this, If there is anything in your life as valuable and important to you as this, do that, do the other thing.

[00:13:50.040] - Wynne Leon

You raise such a good question about testing ourselves in these areas, or at least understanding that we will not know how we will behave unless we are tested.

[00:14:02.640] - Dr. Gerald Stein

In the sense of living it.

[00:14:08.440] - Wynne Leon

It really struck me, especially when you were talking about faithfulness and marriage. Does that mean we shouldn't make promises?

[00:14:18.090] - Dr. Gerald Stein

No, I think we should make promises, but be careful about which promises you make. I'm happy to talk about marriage after a bit, after I go through one more test that I is worth talking about. But you should know some things about marriage. And again, can you know them before you get married? Well, maybe, maybe not, but we'll get there anyway. So that's a good thing.

[00:14:45.520] - Vicki Atkinson

Dr. Sun, can I just ask, too, that as I'm listening to you talk about these anticipatory moments where we want to think ahead, I will be happy, I will be successful. There's a lot that's ingrained, I think, in some of us about positivity and being achievers and being focused and all of that. But what I get from what you just said is everything in life is a moment in time and being true to who you are and making the decisions that are right and true in that moment. I think we've all seen people who denied what their inner voice or whatever you want to call it was instructing. And carry it on. And there's little life satisfaction if you don't follow that. So some of what you just said, it points out the importance of trusting self, most of all.

[00:15:44.030] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Well, for sure. So that's important. And you don't want to live your life feeling like you should have taken the other road when the fork in the road came.

[00:15:53.390] - Vicki Atkinson
Yeah.

[00:15:54.140] - Dr. Gerald Stein
But on the other hand, as one author, whose name is escaping me for the moment, but she wrote a book on regret, regret the persistence of the possible. And she described regret as coming to that fork, making a choice, going down the road so far that it's hard to retrieve moment, and it's hard to back up and get back to the other road, but thinking, you know what? I should have taken the other road. And partly, that is in the nature of choices because, and now this is a slightly different question, Can you have everything? And if you think you can, then you're a more optimistic person than I am.

[00:16:56.460] - Vicki Atkinson
Then all three of us, yeah.

[00:17:00.210] - Dr. Gerald Stein
So yes, and we do tend to adapt, and that's another question and answer that's related to this. We do tend to adapt to the circumstances that exist. So I think that we might overrate in many cases, not in all, but in many cases, that we could never recover from X, that we would never recover from having not taken the road on the right and chosen and instead the road on the left. We, as creatures, tend to adjust to circumstances. And if we did not do that, and if our ancestors did not, I don't think we'd be here.

[00:17:45.200] - Wynne Leon
Well, and you've talked about that in one of our previous podcasts, our Set Point. Returning back to the Set Point. But you said you had one more test that you wanted to share with us.

[00:17:56.310] - Dr. Gerald Stein
Well, avoiding pain and humiliability. No, there are actually two. One is winning as a desire as in athletics, the importance of winning. I think it's important to remember that every professional athlete that we encounter has been a winner all of their life. They're now on the biggest stage, but there's not one of them that's a loser, and even though they may not do well on the biggest stage. And so what happens is one of the tests is Happened to the Houston Astros baseball team just a few years ago. They had a system where they were able to steal the signs electronically or by a camera, I think, something like that. Of what was going on, the signs that the catcher and pitcher share, in order to know what pitch was coming. And then they had a signal system where they made sounds or something like that from the dugout. And if they made that sound, one pitch was coming.

[00:19:08.270] - Vicki Atkinson
Nasterdly.

[00:19:09.630] - Dr. Gerald Stein
Yes. But again, do you know, can you predict how you'll behave when somebody on your team says, We got this, and we can give you help with it. And finally, the other one is just, how will we react when we encounter some terrible possibility of pain and humiliation. Will we be honorable or will we point the finger at somebody else? Will we stand up for it? Will we run away? You have to live it. So that's that.

[00:19:46.660] - Vicki Atkinson
Wow.

[00:19:48.560] - Wynne Leon
It's funny because it seems like some of these things are things we've practiced on the playground from growing up. It's like they're little tests that can become bigger and bigger as life goes on.

[00:20:00.250] - Vicki Atkinson

I think they compound. They don't operate in isolation. I think I can think of folks who struggled in life where they're in a constant mode of maneuvering around. They're a minefield, sometimes of their own making, sometimes fate and things that were unavoidable. But sometimes they travel in trios or pairs.

[00:20:29.110] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Wow.

[00:20:33.890] - Wynne Leon

You were sharing with us some of the problems in effective forecasting. Can you explain what that is?

[00:20:43.380] - Dr. Gerald Stein

How are you going to feel at a certain point down the road if X or Y happens. And that's a prediction we make instinctively. And the most obvious example, which is, I'll just talk about it briefly, is one we did talk about, I think, on one of the other podcasts. The study that Daniel Gilbert did at the University of Texas, Austin. There were two groups, and one of them, they were all hoping to get tenure. One And tenure means you can stay at the university, and you're going to get paid more, and you're going to climb the academic ladder. And of course, not everybody does. And they're all, every one of them, and I was in this situation myself, is shooting for getting tenure. And then the question becomes, what happens if you don't? And what happens is predictable. You think your life's over, that your life will never work out, or some version of that, that you're bummed out. And the people, of course, that get it think, wow, my happiness is assured. But it turns out, of course, and Gilbert looked at this in a longitudinal study, he looked at the same people over a 10-year period, and he discovered that at the end of that time, everybody felt the same way, whether they got it or not.

[00:22:13.290] - Dr. Gerald Stein

They were not happier or there wasn't an advantage in happiness or sadness or disappointment. They were all emotionally at the place that you would expect them, about the same place. So that's an example. We're talking about promises in marriage and so forth. So there's some things one should know about marriage, of course. But I should say first is that we know a great many things. We humans, but we ignore them very often. To start out, I suppose one should... It's the easy stuff to look at. 40 to 50 % of marriages end in divorce in the United States of America. And if you get married a second time, 60 to 67 % get divorced. So your chances don't get better. So that's something one should know. But then a person will look at this and say, Oh, but that's not me. I can't argue with that. I can't. Well, think about this. Oh, no. It wouldn't happen to me. Anyway, so that's part the dilemma is that one takes knowledge sometimes that we're perfectly willing to ascribe to other people as useful knowledge, but somehow we are the exception or there are. That's a tough spot to be in.

[00:23:48.650] - Dr. Gerald Stein

It is true, however, that this is also true. The honeymoon period of marriage doesn't last. This is not news, I don't think. But the problem is that essentially, although there'll be moments of great happiness, overall, the constant level of happiness is unlikely to last more than something close to seven or eight years. There's a movie you might know about the Seven Year Itch with Tom Yuhl and Marilyn Monroe.

[00:24:26.630] - Vicki Atkinson

Yes.

[00:24:27.620] - Dr. Gerald Stein

You recall that Tom Yuhl, his wife, went on a vacation or something by herself to visit a relative, I don't recall. And Tom Yuhl, of course, has got the Seven-Your Itch, and Marilyn Monroe is his neighbor. And I don't know what I would do under those circumstances. Anyway. And that's when people tend to start to get divorced more, is after a period of time like that passes. But it should be said that one can say with some confidence that people who are married in general, it doesn't apply to every marriage, are healthier physically, they're happier, they have more sex and enjoy it more, things like that. But nothing lasts forever. And again, everybody's an exception.

[00:25:24.570] - Wynne Leon

It sounds like maybe if I extrapolate from a little bit of what you're saying, is we shouldn't expect any of these things to be the end all or be all. We still need to- Oh, absolutely. do our work.

[00:25:38.260] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Yeah. If you go into a marriage and think this person will, and by the way, their job is, to make me happy. Forget it. You're putting too much pressure on them already.

[00:25:52.950] - Wynne Leon

Yeah.

[00:25:53.620] - Dr. Gerald Stein

They've got a life to lead, too.

[00:25:56.610] - Vicki Atkinson

I often think about when people ask Paul and I about having been married for now 43 years, let me think, carry the one. We're getting into advanced math here. But there's one thing that just resonates, and it's compromise. As I'm listening to you, Dr. Stein, and your thoughtful questions, when I think for me, that's also a reminder that that's how I best navigate life with all of these decision points that arrive and opportunities and potential for regret, potential for happiness. It's this constant weighing back and forth. I feel like I'm always the fulcrum in the middle of weighing things. But I think something you said, Dr. Stein, about, and Wyn and I have said this to each other often, that you have to walk the path and get to a certain point, evaluate, be honest, consider what's really happening, and then choose, actively choose to keep going. And that applies, I think, to anything in life, marriage, relationships, all the things that we take on. But those active decisions and committing and being willing to compromise, I feel like those are the two things that operate most, well, in a good sense of humor. Oh, my goodness.

[00:27:20.470] - Vicki Atkinson

I'm not sure where Paul and I would be if we didn't laugh at one another often.

[00:27:26.180] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Well, with respect to marriage, I'm not sure I mentioned this to you previously, when I was treating people and I was treating marital couples, and I asked them, Okay, what did you find attractive about each other? And so almost every said to me, Well, he/she was hot and we had a lot of fun. Okay. So I stopped asking the question. I already knew the answer. I mean, I heard it plenty of times. But the dilemma is, of course, that he/she may not be hot in 30 years, and they're not having fun because you're in my office. If you're having fun, I would never imagine.

[00:28:12.500] - Vicki Atkinson

That's such a brilliant point. You're missing all the good stuff.

[00:28:18.480] - Dr. Gerald Stein

I think that one of the things to build on what you said, Vicky, is that you also need to know when things are beyond the possibility of your compromising without selling your life into some terrible situation that you will have to live by. What's not negotiable.

[00:28:41.140] - Vicki Atkinson

Yeah. What's beyond repair and only the individual knows the answer to that.

[00:28:47.790] - Dr. Gerald Stein

If they know, yes. If anybody know.

[00:28:52.600] - Vicki Atkinson

Oh, my. Wow. So much there.

[00:28:56.870] - Dr. Gerald Stein

So another effect of forecasting interesting interesting idea to me is the idea of children. And, of course, the, I think, widely accepted notion, naive notion is children will make me happy, which is, again, putting too much pressure on the children. But also you can't tell how it's going to affect the marital dynamic. You can't know whether time will erode the magic that you are experiencing with your spouse. You don't know how the kids are going to turn out, if they're going to be easy to raise, difficult to raise. So there are a variety of concerns like that. Also, we know that there are big national differences in how one reacts in terms of happiness or sadness when they have children. United States, it's close to being an even divide with people on one side being glad that they did and people are unhappy that they did, and people on the other side not. A lot of it depends on whether the conditions of your life allow you to raise kids without just creating more pressure and so forth. But again, it's a hard thing to predict, and a lot of things are going to happen in the course of the lives of not only you and your spouse or your lack of spouse or your new spouse and these children.

[00:30:30.060] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Again, it's difficult. But it's important to recognize that there are two groups. There's a group of people that feel they're great. I wouldn't live but for my children. It's the best thing I ever did. And there are a group of people that think it's less good. And the people, therefore, that are single, who don't have children, have less complications. Whether they have anything that compensates depends partly on them.

[00:30:59.160] - Vicki Atkinson
Right.

[00:31:00.700] - Wynne Leon

Well, it's funny because I have a dear friend who adores my children, but often says when I go to do something like this, taking my kids on a work trip to New Orleans, he'll say, That's going to be hard. You shouldn't do it. I think, he's right. It will be hard, but it's the hard that I'm willing to do. Now we're leaning a little bit into advice. What I might choose to do in this circumstance is different than what somebody else would do in this circumstance.

[00:31:42.310] - Dr. Gerald Stein

No, I think from what I know You're remarkable in a lot of ways, not the least, is your ability to do justice to a lot of different circumstances in your life. And then one of those is your children.

[00:31:58.490] - Wynne Leon
Thank you.

[00:31:59.980] - Vicki Atkinson

Not a little. And I think for me, when I think about when, it's also about parenting, it's the power of choice. And some people become parents, and it's a happenstance thing, and it's a moment and less of a decision, less of an intention. I think that also is something that I see applicable to other challenges, other developmental tasks, other goals that people have in life when you actively choose versus just following in line. I feel like there's so much more satisfaction that can come versus just doing what needed to be done next. And when it's so good about telling her story and being open about that. And I think there's a lot of power there. I keep telling her we need to talk more about her parenting journey. She's such a wonderful parent.

[00:32:54.890] - Dr. Gerald Stein

A good model. One of the other things about parenting that comes up is that it's very clear from the data that when the children leave, the parents get happier from the point that before, whatever before was. Everybody feels a little bit happier when the children finally leave, even though you may miss them. But their life is simplified and it's easier.

[00:33:22.440] - Wynne Leon

True. So there's some contributing factors to poor prediction. Yeah. Can you tell us more about those?

[00:33:33.790] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Well, one of them is, and we've touched on it here, our expectations. What do you think is going to happen? The same friend that is famous in a group of 10 people said to me when he was 16 years old, and he and I remembered this, I have remembered it probably till this moment, I'm going I want to do something great in my life. That's what he said to me. And I know where I was sitting, the building and so forth. And he does, too. But that's a big thing to put on your shoulders. That's essentially saying, I want to win the Olympic gold medal. I want to become a prima ballerina. I want to become an internationally known heart surgeon. I mean, what it's tough. And unfortunately, though he accomplished an enormous number of things, he came to the point where he never felt it was enough. And he went to three different Ivy League schools. I mean, it was not... He won two different awards for the best teacher at the university, the first of which was the first they ever gave and was created for him. He was so good a teacher.

[00:34:57.980] - Dr. Gerald Stein

I think I mentioned We've talked about this before. But then, so what if those kinds of expectations are almost sure to disappoint any of us? I came in, and I only use myself because I know I had no clear idea where I was going, and I surely wouldn't have said to you that I would have had the career that I've had. I surely wouldn't have said. I surely wouldn't have imagined. I would have said it was impossible for me to do some of the things I did. It doesn't make me famous. And it just was a really interesting way to live, to do a lot of good things.

[00:35:43.100] - Wynne Leon

That's right.

[00:35:44.450] - Dr. Gerald Stein

I think if you create expectations like that, you're missing also the fact that there is great pleasure and value in having close friends. And in fact, that may be, as as important a factor in addition to good health as just about anything else that's going to give you satisfaction. And it's modest. It takes work, and a lot of people have hard time with it. I'm not trying to diminish that. But if you focus on that, it is something that's possible for everyone, virtually everyone, almost everyone, and do something great in your life. Well, I'm not going to be Darwin. I mean, come on, get real.

[00:36:34.560] - Wynne Leon

Right.

[00:36:35.290] - Dr. Gerald Stein

And it has value for us if Jonas Salk, he creates the first polio vaccine. So if he came out saying he wanted, I don't know if he did. I don't know anything about his life other than that. But if he came out saying, I want to do something great, well, we all benefited from it. We need people like that, but I don't know if I would want to live that way.

[00:37:01.980] - Vicki Atkinson

I think it's challenging. Wayne and I often talk about wanting to encourage others to hold on to the creative capacity or the potential to live in the moment, but also be aspirational. But what you're describing, Dr. Stein, is such a good reminder to be grateful in the moment and to not constantly be reaching for what comes next. I think there's a culture of do better, do more. Everyone wants to be famous. Everyone wants to be an influencer, everyone wants to have impact. But I think what gets lost sometimes are the more micro things, being a good person with good people and not trying to assess less how you have impact broadly, but thinking at a smaller level.

[00:37:57.220] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Oh, I think that's so important. And I think you've hit it right And also you and Wyn both are good examples of living that way, trying to live that way, and often succeeding in living that way. We can't do it at every moment, but certainly, if you're conscious of it and if you set it as a non-punishing goal, you'll be more than this. Yeah.

[00:38:23.050] - Vicki Atkinson

But Wyn, my friend, it's hard sometimes because people poke at us and go, You're not real. You can't be all of that. But we're a Popeye. We am what we am, right? Very grammatically incorrect.

[00:38:38.450] - Wynne Leon
That's a troublesome phrase to pluralize.

[00:38:42.310] - Vicki Atkinson
Yeah, but you get the idea. Yeah, right? But you have to arrive at some level of peace about that. And then if people fall off, they fall off. But finding your people, even when they laugh at you, you're really lame. Yeah. Poor grammar. Look, even Dr. Stite is giggling at us. Oh, my gosh.

[00:39:04.840] - Wynne Leon
I was on a meeting this morning and somebody was mixing up his aphrodisms and came up with a ball of worms.

[00:39:16.070] - Dr. Gerald Stein
Yeah, that would be good.

[00:39:17.660] - Wynne Leon
Anyway, back on track.

[00:39:21.110] - Vicki Atkinson
No, but this is why we love talking to you because it sparks fly, right? To contain.

[00:39:26.570] - Dr. Gerald Stein
Hope that there's no fire.

[00:39:30.070] - Vicki Atkinson
No fire, no smolder. No.

[00:39:34.150] - Dr. Gerald Stein
Now, I was talking about things that we can't know because we haven't lived them. And one thing I do want to mention, because I think it's important, and we find it in our discussion before this session, I think you mentioned it, Vicky, about judgment and about how we tend to judge others. And part of this relates to predictions about who we are and under what circumstances we would be otherwise and whether we would be different under trying circumstances. And so you come to things where people have strong opinions that generally end in the phrase, I wouldn't have done that if I had been in that situation. So they're making a prediction they have never been. I once knew somebody who said, and he was talking about Muhammad Ali's decision to refuse to go into the military, to refuse to participate in the draft process during the Vietnam War. And he went to jail for this. And some people were going to, as you're It's too young to remember, but some people were going to jail. Some were going to Canada, some were marching, some were burning their draft cards, et cetera. It was a very difficult time.

[00:40:58.200] - Dr. Gerald Stein
So the question is, Could one put oneself in that situation? Well, I heard somebody who said very much he used Cassius Clay. I don't remember what his name was at that time, whether it was Clay or Ali. I think it might have been Clay still. But he used him as an example. He said, I would have done that. I would have done that. I wouldn't have gone to Canada. I would have fused and gone to jail. Well, I don't know. I have no idea. I got lucky. I mean, He never had to face it. So there's that question. And one good example and topical example is the life of not just of Robert Oppenheimer and the creation of the bomb, But more to the point, what would each of you and me have done if we had been genius scientists of the kind that were at Los Alamos and been offered this possibility? So one of the problems that comes with this is that we have certain knowledge about what happened. We know what the Holocaust happened, how it happened. We know a little bit about how it happened, unless we're scholars of it. But we know that many, many people died, and that the question would be, what What did you do to try to get out of Germany?

[00:42:32.390] - Dr. Gerald Stein

And for example, a great many people did. Actually, a couple of, there were something like 500 million Jews in Germany in 1933, which is about the time Hitler came to power, and 200,000 when the war started in '39. And so the difference in those numbers is mostly those people who left. The problem was, Hitler took almost all of Europe, and a lot of them were gotten that way. So people who are ignorant ask questions about why didn't you or why did you, or I would or I wouldn't. Now, with respect to Oppenheimer, the same kinds of questions come up because he and his fellow scientists created a bomb that did extraordinary cost of life, not just from the effects of the bomb directly, but from the radiation effects. And those people lived much of their lives, sometimes far shorter lives, suffering from the effects of those things. Anyway, so how would one look at that and make it more complicated? That is, to make more complicated the question of what would any of us have done? So I want to just give you a few ideas about that. Okay. So first of all, they didn't have any control over what was going to happen with the bomb.

[00:44:08.830] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Discussion of the possibility of using it as a test thing. Yeah. To basically scare the Japanese out of having to be bombed. But they didn't have governance over those decisions of whether to use it or how to use it. It was a secret project. They were young people. They were mostly 20s and early 30s. So if you can, you need to put yourself into the mindset of somebody who's essentially a budding genius scientist of the kind that they used, who has devoted their life to doing things and finding things and discovering things that nobody's ever done. And nobody had ever done this. Yeah. They were in a race. The race against what we knew, what was known to the government as a race to get to the bomb before the Germans did. What we didn't know is eventually, we did find out the Germans weren't able to do it successfully. The Germans also had a big rocket program. And so the possibility of delivering rockets that bombed various places, of course, at some distance, was not out of the question. This was a secret project, adding to the magic of it. You're a very select group.

[00:45:44.590] - Dr. Gerald Stein

You've been elected. You're a Patriot. The United States hasn't won the war yet. Maybe it won't. And so you've got to be a Patriot and do this for us. Another issue that was in the air was the possibility of invading Japan. That if the Japanese didn't surrender, would the United States? The United States had plans. And in fact, my Uncle Sam, that was really his name.

[00:46:22.280] - Wynne Leon

My uncle Sam was in training in the United States Army for the invasion of Japan.

[00:46:31.480] - Dr. Gerald Stein

There was an anticipation of this. At the end of 1945, it was estimated that had the invasion of Japan occurred, that the United States would invade Japan, some 400 to 800,000 United States soldiers would have died, and 5 to 10 million Japanese. So this is another thing that we have trouble with, with respect to predictions. We We don't look to the other possibility. We don't have a control group. You do A or we do B. You can't do A and retrace your steps anymore, then you can go down a different road as we were talking about before. The work that these scientists did was exhausting and incredibly exhilarating. There was a team working together. So you want to be part of the team, and the team is working and trying to win the race. No one knew whether the bomb would work. And if it did work, no one had a good estimate of how deadly it was. They all thought it was far more modest anybody who had any thoughts about it. As I said, they didn't know the radiation effects. And in fact, a number of those scientists had radiation effects later in their lives.

[00:48:00.750] - Dr. Gerald Stein

And of course, there's no basis really to predict what's going to happen in these things. And I think those people who would like to say, well, if I'd been this budding genius in my 20s, I still would have said no. Well, maybe not. So we have trouble with predictions. And unfortunately, there's so many factors that go into this.

[00:48:24.320] - Vicki Atkinson

Right.

[00:48:25.210] - Wynne Leon

Well, given all those factors, how do we best face the future?

[00:48:29.920] - Dr. Gerald Stein

All right. How do we best face the future? Well, I think we have to be very humble, understanding that it's chancey. You can't be certain of You can be certain of some things, relatively certain. You can be certain of how gravity works, but you can't necessarily be certain about how the world is going to turn out and how you're going to. I think if you come at it with that point of humility, and humility sometimes means that when people say, Oh, everything will work out fine. Well, do you know? It's important to be optimistic, but you have to try to avoid silliness.

[00:49:15.710] - Vicki Atkinson

Do you often think, Wyn and Dr. Stein, that I think a lot of people in decision making are intuitively doing a risk-reward proposition analysis? I think what you described, Dr. Stein, is that there were so many things in motion in the example that you shared, and a level of emotionality, a little prestige, the lift that you get from team, the patriotism, I'm doing God's work. I'm a patriot. You lose sight of how to really evaluate risk and reward on an individual level. Each of those players involved became a tool. They were no longer... Maybe I'm wrong, but my perception of it is that they were no longer able to act in their individual interests. It had already taken shape.

[00:50:14.260] - Dr. Gerald Stein

Well, I would put it a little differently. I think you're on to something, though. I think they drank the Kool-Aid. They were in the flow of doing this, and the thoughts that might have given, there was almost no time to think of those things. It was a race. And all the time, voting was either to drinking alcohol and letting off some steam, which some of them did, many of them did, or trying to get to the project and win the race. Yeah.

[00:50:50.930] - Vicki Atkinson

Such a rich example.

[00:50:54.490] - Dr. Gerald Stein

So I think you have to understand some of the things we talked about in a good many others that we haven't that make prediction more difficult than some people think. I think you have to reevaluate who you are, what point you are in your life, what kinds of patterns you have created for your life, where you've gone right and where you've gone wrong, and being careful to recognize what were your judgments as opposed to blaming routinely and automatically, as we're often hearing now, especially politically, somebody else's fault. Take what responsibility is yours, but also know what your likes and dislikes are and what's hard for you and make a plan to follow through. But the world is changing very fast. So I think the question of prediction is much harder than it has been historically, just to give you an example. Blacksmiths. Blacksmiths, okay, among the things they did was to create shoes for horses, right? To put those metal things on the hoofs of a horse. So what happens to you if for hundreds of years, blacksmiths have been doing this? I don't know, maybe thousands. And you just get to be a blacksmith in 1905.

[00:52:31.680] - Dr. Gerald Stein

What's going to happen to you? You're going to answer that?

[00:52:38.320] - Vicki Atkinson

I don't know. That Model T thing is going to be a problem, huh? Yeah.

[00:52:45.450] - Dr. Gerald Stein

And so was that in your hands? Of course not. But you're going to have to do something different. And with the speed of change we're dealing with, that makes prediction a little harder. But I think you have to prepare for a world where you're probably going to have to change a lot of things. Yeah.

[00:53:05.620] - Wynne Leon
Prepare for change.

[00:53:07.970] - Dr. Gerald Stein
Oh, my gosh. You got to make friends. Throughout your whole life, you have to keep making friends, not only because they're going to be people that you get joy from, but also if you have friends, you're likely to be able to figure out certain things that are going on in the world and get help with them, and they are from you. Being isolated is not a good way to face the future. I think with respect to patterns, you especially have to look at the good and bad judgments in your life, what mistakes you did.

[00:53:51.320] - Wynne Leon
This reminds me of wisdom from one of our earlier podcast with you. I like to make new mistakes.

[00:54:00.510] - Dr. Gerald Stein
Henry Fogh, Chicago Symphony former President, said to me it was one of the wisest things I learned from him. And, yeah, don't repeat them. So I think it's important, and this is preaching to an audience where there's no one listening, is that it's worth, I'm not speaking about you, but in general, I think there is little understanding of even recent history in the world. I could go back to, I'm thinking of the period, what it was like in the McCarthy era, for example. I was a small boy, very small. So I can't tell you from having lived it. But it is also true that we lose something of infinite value when a person who has had a certain experience dies. So I just read from Borjas, the tremendously inventive Hispanic, was he Argentinian? Might have been Argentinian writer, one of the great writers of all time. And he said, in one of the short stories you read, the Pharaoh Phalan, Imagine what it was like when the last person whom Christ died. There's something gone. It's just gone, completely gone, a way that one can't even describe because you don't know what you're describing. And you could think of a lot of other people and things and events.

[00:56:01.820] - Dr. Gerald Stein
The last person that got out of Clarksville, I don't know. Anyway.

[00:56:09.590] - Vicki Atkinson
Last train to Clarksville. Did we descend into monkey songs? Oh, no. Surely not.

[00:56:17.210] - Dr. Gerald Stein
And the last thing I would say is it is our responsibility. It's a Hebrew expression. It says, Tikkun Olam, T-I-K-K-U-N-O-L-A-M. And it means prepare the world. It's not somebody else's responsibility. It's each of our responsibilities. And it's a difficult moment in the world because a lot of people feel too afraid to do what they see other people doing or what the moment might call for. But if there's no one else to do it.

[00:56:52.500] - Wynne Leon
Do the next right thing.

[00:56:57.470] - Dr. Gerald Stein
There you are. I love it. That's the best preparation I can give you. And it's not perfect, but it's the best I've got.

[00:57:05.990] - Vicki Atkinson
But it's a beautiful way to remind us that the storytelling and the threading together of what was, what is, what we want life to be, it is a thread that is continuous, and we need to always look back, to look forward. I think the storytellers, we think about this often, whether it's within families or it's broader, I love what you said about Tican Olam, prepare for the future. I don't know that there's anything more important.

[00:57:43.400] - Dr. Gerald Stein
Yeah, right. Yeah. And the lives of the future, really, the future is young people. We're all going to live, I hope, a while longer. But I think for me, certainly, and I'm older than both of you, put together, I guess,

the No.

[00:58:00.710] - Wynne Leon
Not by a long shot.

[00:58:02.740] - Vicki Atkinson
Oh, good grief.

[00:58:05.930] - Dr. Gerald Stein
I'm bad at math, though. I forgot to say. Really bad.

[00:58:11.850] - Vicki Atkinson
Really, really bad.

[00:58:14.140] - Dr. Gerald Stein
If that's of the greatest importance, because the planet has to survive and the predictions, which some people, of course, deny, are troublesome, and we have to contend with what we've got. So you have to do what you can do, the next good thing, as you said.

[00:58:39.460] - Wynne Leon
Well, thank you so much, Dr. Stein, for sharing your experience and your wisdom and these wonderful examples that just really bring this whole topic, immediate and graspable. It's really lovely.

[00:58:56.560] - Dr. Gerald Stein
Thank you. Happy to do it. Thank you for listening.

[00:59:05.980] - Wynne Leon
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