Podcast Interview

Wired for Connection: Beyond Attachment Patterns
Interview with Sahar Rokah
From the podcast *Stop and Breathe* with Hananal Nisan.

Hananal:

The guest of today's episode is Sahar Rokah – a psychotherapist, working with individual and couples and a mindfulness teacher. She specializes in attachment mindful somatic based therapy, emotional regulation, mindfulness, and body-focused therapy.

She works with trauma using an integrative approach and teaches attachment-based mindfulness workshops and is also a mindfulness teacher specializing in trauma-sensitive mindfulness combined with emotional and physical regulation tools inspired by polyvagal theory and Somatic experiencing therapy for stress, anxiety, and trauma.

She is Registered Psychotherapist in the Israeli Multidisciplinary Association for Psychotherapy.

Hananal:

Hello Sahar, how are you? Thank you for taking the time and joining us.

Sahar:

Thank you for inviting me.

Hananal:

So, we're here today to talk a little about attachment. In our pre-conversation, you mentioned that you don't want people to walk away from this episode and start labeling themselves. So, we'll try to approach the topic in a slightly different way. But before we dive deeper into the theory and try to understand it more thoroughly,

how do we recognize attachment in everyday life? How do we see attachment in our lives?

Sahar:

Attachment is something very natural and fundamental, we are all wired for connection, and for secure connection. It's our basic need to relax together, be together, and co-regulate and find comfort. It means to feel safe within connection, because only then, we can go back to the world, feeling free to play, explore, and create.

Hananal:

And for adults who want to feel this within their space, how and where can they identify their attachment styles? I'm talking about the everyday communication with a partner, in their social circles, with people close to them. How do we really recognize what's happening with us in this space?

Sahar:

I think it's important to differentiate the spaces of attachment-related interactions we have with people. Sometimes, we go to a workshop, have an incredibly intimate moment of sharing something personal, and we feel completely seen and understood, and it feels so safe... and then we come home, and we feel the complete opposite. This is really important to recognize because attachment relates specifically to an attachment figure.

Of course, we have interactions, but we're not emotionally dependent on that person to the same extent as we are on our partner. Our needs and systems are more concrete and clear in intimate relationships, as opposed to one-off interactions where the risk level is high for that moment, but there's a chance we might never see that person again, and if they miss match our need/style/wound , it doesn't impact us the same way.

When we talk about attachment, it's important to note that attachment refers to an attachment figure – the person in our life with whom we make a connection, and with whom we are most exposed. That's why we have defenses in these relationships—we are most vulnerable, most dependent, and most sensitive with them.

Hananal:

Originally, that refers to the primary caregiver, like parents or the main therapist.

Sahar:

Yes.

Hananal:

You started mentioning how we see this in life…

Sahar:

There are many ways to see this in life, and I'll share a few examples that I think will resonate with the audience that is listening now… When we feel a certain level of distress, and something is happening to us that feels strong, not easy, and painful… We don't want to be dramatic, we don't want to exaggerate, we don't want to burden others.

One way to notice this movement is that we might withdraw, even though there's distress, and then we end up feeling even more alone.

Perhaps we learned in childhood that expressing our pain or distress doesn't really calm us. Or we recognize the distress but can't really settle down. It never feels quite right, deep enough, or soothing enough to relax, to rest in the connection.

Hananal:

Yes, I can share from my own experience.

I remember myself a decade ago. Back then, I started attending workshops and therapy, and I remember sharing something personal and then feeling uncomfortable about sharing it. Even though, when I look back at the responses of others, they were wonderful responses, something about really bringing myself forward was unsettling, not comfortable.

People told me, "Sharing is good…" but I felt completely different. I've come a long way since then, but I truly remember that experience. I think many of the listeners might recognize that feeling, which might be the root of it—of not wanting to be dramatic or exaggerate, which ultimately means not wanting to fully show ourselves. Because the responses we may have received to attempts to express ourselves in the past might not have been nurturing.

Sahar:
They're not adaptive...

And then we learn that the natural movement that wants to open up, that wants to lean into a relationship, comes with a feeling that makes it frightening for some of us.

Frightening to the point of being terrifying... breathless... And then it's clear that even in adulthood, we want to, we try, there's this organic movement of life that wants to connect, wants to feel that I'm in a relationship, wants to feel love, wants to feel that we can lean and rest in the connection, and along with this, maybe a memory or learning from the early stages of our lives comes up, based on how responsive those early relationships were?

How well were they adapted? How supportive were they, encouraging? How often were we looked at with sparkling eyes? Loving eyes? Or how much did we experience criticism, even just in a glance? How much did we experience that we should be ashamed of our needs, and of course, "That's not a reason to cry. Let me give you something to cry about..."
All of this is learned through our body and psyche, and even through our nervous system.

An important part of this is bringing it to our awareness, because attachment is natural for us, we're wired for connection.

Hananel:
Yes, wow, can you say that again? I think that's an important and strong statement. Many times when we talk about attachment, we skip over it too quickly. It's something that is

natural for us, because sometimes it feels so unnatural. Yes, like the story I shared about myself.

Sahar:
It just scares us, it's often filled with so much fear and panic.
It really disconnects us because of this panic.
What does it do to us to hear that we need connection and that we are wired for it?
It's in our biological system, in our physiological system.
A baby cannot survive in the jungle for an hour without someone who cares for him.
So attachment is survival.

Hananel:
I once heard an example: A baby who went through abuse and was hurt severely. To survive, he needs to keep loving its parent, so it splits its experience. Despite the intense trauma, the question is, how does it continue to love the parent after being hurt like that? Because he needs to, in order to survive. So he splits the experience. This is how much we need it.
And I think that sometimes it's missed because someone says, "Well, that's a luxury... I need food, I need sleep, I need something. But when it comes to connection, it's like connection isn't that necessary." In the clinic, I often see this: we don't understand that this is truly an existential survival need, this need for connection.

Sahar:
Exactly.

Hananel:
So, this whole family of desires on one hand to want connection, yes, it can appear in dramatic ways or in other forms, and on the other hand, either to avoid connection or not be able to find comfort within it, or not be able to relax in it. That is, these are the things related to attachment experiences.
Yes, if I understand what you meant, then it could be an example of someone who is already married and has a relationship, but is not really able to rest in it. I can't really surrender, I can't really enjoy what the relationship can offer me. It's like something that's always restless.

Sahar:
Many times we come into a relationship in adulthood with all that we've learned, yes, and I like to imagine it as if we are sitting here right now. If we were a couple and had an insecure experience, but we still deeply need connection, we need touch, we need loving eyes looking at us, we need a voice that's pleasant to hear...

We need that connection, but if an insecure experience comes along with it—either something in me awakens that's not secure or something in the interaction feels off or missed—then I like to imagine there's a fixed distance between us, something that

desperately wants to break that distance, but there's also something that feels "safer" staying within it. This is the pattern.

Hananel:
And that never really fulfills us...

Sahar:
Right, we reach the glass ceiling of attachment. We reach a place where it's not satisfying... It's a very valuable place, in my eyes, because it's the place where we can start looking deep inside and into the relationship, and begin to create something new.

Hananel:
So, when I actually recognize I'm in that place, I recognize that distance I'm walking around in, meaning it's not just on autopilot, but I'm actually navigating through it—then, I already manage to identify, "Wow, I can't feel the closeness..."

Like I shared a bit about my workshops, where at some point I said, "Wow, I'm sharing, and that's beautiful, but it's not even fun, it's not even pleasant."

Sahar:
Yes. And what happens with attachment styles is that John Bowlby, who developed the theory, and basically understood it through observations of young children, describes the internal working model.

This internal working model can be thought of as some sort of user manual, which essentially has full chapters... talking about what we've learned about connection? Now, because we grow within connection, we can't not be in connection. We also get hurt within connection, so our self-perception is built within connection, and the expectations we have from others and ourselves are built within connection. And the sense of how many of my needs are being met within connection, how much can I expect this response? How much does that really soothe me? These are the questions.

The answers to these questions are actually formed in the very early stages of life.
We walk around the world with them and we see through them.
There's also a degree of alignment between the experience that the world is a safe place, that there are people who will help me if I'm in distress, and secure attachment. We also understand a lot of things about the world through the interaction of our first relationship.

We understand and draw conclusions about ourselves, about connection, and about what the world is and how safe it is to be in it and act in it. How flexible we are—all these things are very much related to the initial belief system, and the first step is to really get to know ourselves, because it's like wearing glasses through which the world appears.

How could we expect something different? Because it's like this. And this expectation is that very precious place, where the "sparkle" is, that the body knows it can be closer and more soothing.

Hananal:

This is the same natural place you mentioned earlier, where attachment is a natural thing.

So this place, supposedly, hasn't forgotten that it's natural, and it constantly longs for it and wants it, but there's like a block of ice around it, which really makes it impossible to break through.

When I recognize this in the clinic, I point it out, saying: "Look, there's a place here that wants connection. It's a very valuable place, a very healthy one, yes. And usually, when it emerges, it can also bring pain because when we want something, we suddenly feel the lack or the distance, so there can be a withdrawal from that space. But I say no, this is actually a very healthy space that tells us that there's still a place inside us that hasn't forgotten that connection is natural and safe."

Sahar:

We relax best in connection.

Hananal:

It's interesting because, for example, during the war in Israel, I worked a lot with emotional and sensory regulation with soldiers and evacuees, and also ran workshops for the general population and organizations. People constantly wanted exercises, tools! And I never really understood what they meant by those tools... But I say, it's something that gets missed: in the end, we relax best with each other, that's the tool.

All those breathing exercises and such are great, they're an addition. They might help us reconnect, but in the end, connection is what calms us. And if we're in that space, which, as you said, always feels like there's some distance, a glass ceiling, then we never really manage to relax completely, and there's always this feeling of unease.

Sahar:

It's actually a survival experience, even though it's clear to me that if someone leaves tomorrow, I'm not actually going to die, unlike the baby.

If the baby's caregiver leaves, they will not survive. The baby needs the paternal warmth, they need the care, they need the admiration, they need the excitement from the caregiver in order to grow healthily and in a way that they will feel good about themselves, that they are good.

And that place, where we really wake up, is also accompanied by panic over how much we need it, often with deep sadness and mourning. Even sometimes when we get what we needed so much, it's accompanied by waves of grief over all the time it wasn't there.

Hananal:

Yes, wow...

And you mentioned glasses earlier, and I immediately remembered... we're a family where almost everyone has glasses, except for a few who went through laser surgery. And I remember their descriptions, where they wake up in the morning and search for their glasses. A month or two later, they're still on autopilot, adjusting their glasses on their nose, even though they're no longer there.

I think there's something in this metaphor about the glasses. It's such a part of us already—the glasses are an external object, we're always putting them on, and it takes months to get used to being without them.

So, I think that, really, part of the issue with attachment styles, with this belief system you talked about, is that we don't even realize it's a belief. To us, it's reality, and it immediately pops up in front of our face, and we adjust it there. We settle into this place with the glasses, it's comfortable, and we can see well, but it's glasses, not our eyes.

I think with this metaphor, it's important to understand that there's something very automatic there, something we're very used to, this belief system.

Sahar:

Yes, and it also helped us survive. There's a reason it developed this way and not in another way. There's wisdom in it, even if it seems to us now as something very limiting, and maybe it does limit us. But it's important to see that there's actually wisdom in it... We're always talking about emotions and emotional regulation when we talk about attachment.

In the end, we learn through the first interaction we had, how well it responded to us, how attuned it was—imperfect, no one's perfect, but good enough. How to establish our emotions in adulthood.

And if there wasn't enough of it, or if we got it once out of twenty times, that's okay. Maybe once in twenty times we got the response we really needed. Then our system learns that it will probably only get it after much effort. Or if that response simply wasn't there, we learned to deal with our emotions on our own. There's power in that.

It helped me.

It's important to see the ways in which the system chose to cope, not as something to immediately label and then look at ourselves through lenses that are very painful, but to understand that this was a strategy to adapt to the environment.

It was the best path chosen for us.

Hananal:

This reminds me of a metaphor I really like, because I think it brings a lot of compassion to the whole thing, and also to those patterns we so badly want to change.

Do you know how, when you're walking on the sidewalk, everything is paved, and suddenly, from some crack, an obstinate plant emerges, finding its way out?

I really like to look at these patterns like that plant. We have this very deep need for attachment, all sorts of needs, and when there was responsiveness and the soil was fertile and nourished, we just grow straight up, enjoying the sunlight and everything.

But what happens to a seed when it's under paving stones? It can't reach the sun, but it still needs the sun, like all the other plants... So it'll find a way, it'll find a crack, and it's amazing to see plants coming out of walls... It'll find a way, simply to reach the sun!

Even if it's a very winding, convoluted path, and it goes through a lot of things along the way, it will find a way. Now, what happens when the paving stones are removed?

Let's say now they remove the paving stones, it will still carry all the winding path it took, because that's how it grew, right? So, it's very important for me, I'd even say it's moving and inspiring... to see how much life force there is within us. Just like that plant, it found its way to the sun within that maze.

I think that's something very important to embrace when talking about attachment because we can easily get into a very frustrating place if we don't...

Very looking...

מה הכוונה?

I think one of the less discussed things, but very felt, is the experience of vulnerability.

Children take on the quality of care, of concern, of being looked after.

And they internalize through that, who they are... or what they deserve.

Sahar:
A lot of what I encounter in the clinic is a sense of fragility, where people essentially say,

"I don't deserve this..." and that's also a limiting belief. It's a way of telling us much more about what happened than about who we are or what's happening now.

That's why it's very important, in my view, to look at attachment not only through the prism of attachment patterns and label ourselves, because we enter into different relationships, and in each relationship, we show up a little differently.

For example: If we meet someone now, and we tend to lean more toward anxious attachment, and we meet someone who has higher levels of anxiety in relationships, there's a chance we might find ourselves in a very surprising place, becoming more passive...

And the opposite is true too. That means, it doesn't necessarily change the belief system inside of us, but it changes the dance between us. It's important to take this into account because we can suddenly feel very different in a relationship with someone who is essentially a mirror image of us, or maybe just a little more intense.

So we're dancing a little differently, but our belief system inside is essentially the same. Our self-perception, our perception of relationships, and of the world remains the same, but our dance changes, and that can be very confusing. That's why I'm saying this.

It's very important to know ourselves, and there are many ways and tools for this. One of the tools I use is attachment-based meditation.

But it's no less important to understand what's happening with us in this relationship, in this partnership, in the live moment of the relationship—when I need something, when it hurts—what do I do? What's scary about it?

Hananal:
Interesting. There's something about it that seems a bit more convenient

מה הכוונה בחירת המילה לא ברורה לי. Yes, I think, "I've categorized myself, this is the doctor's diagnosis—I have avoidant attachment, or anxious attachment, or secure attachment. Okay, that's the label, and now here's the recipe, here are the instructions for operation."

But in reality, life is much more complex than that. It's not just this or that or that. Really, as you're saying, such a relationship leads to such a different thing. A relationship like this with me creates that. What you're offering invites us into a territory that has a bit of uncertainty… Yes, or I'm not always like this. On one hand, it gives freedom, but on the other hand, it also makes you think, "Wait, so who am I? Am I like this? Am I like that?" We have to constantly be flexible and truly work with what's happening now.

Sahar:
That's exactly it!
It's so beautiful because, along with this openness, something opens up... Ah, wait, but now something is happening, so something opens, and along with that comes a moment of panic. Because this is the moment when we have the chance to put our foot back into territory where we'll take a risk, but it also gives a chance for connection to move closer and for true closeness to emerge.

And this comes with fear, and that fear is no less intense than a fear of death.

Hananal:
A fear of death...

Sahar:
And it's true that in the real world, I won't die, but in the emotional world, it's really terrifying to bring myself into that moment, to actually be in need... or to express what's happening inside me, to say what's going on inside my world, what emotions are rising in me, what thoughts are passing through my mind—even just about myself. Oh no, I feel so broken because of such and such... and to bring that up and then receive the gaze of the other person, to even expect it—this is not yet receiving... There are even earlier stages to this, that expectation…

What will I get from the other side? This is the moment when we take a risk. We're also actually giving the space for the distance between us to shrink and for closeness and love to appear.

Hananal:
Interesting…
We hold retreats, and some of the exercises in the retreats include activities that help identify these automatic pilots and enter into territories that are a little new. One of the exercises we do in a different context is to look into each other's eyes, and the request is to walk freely around the room, and every few moments, stop in front of someone else, stand facing each other, and align our gazes… A moment of communication through the eyes, and people discover a lot there. There's also an invitation to close the eyes if it's uncomfortable; you don't have to stay in the connection.

People are often surprised at how hard it is for them to hold eye contact for just a few moments, or how emotional it suddenly makes them feel... how much is happening in that interaction. Then we do several rounds, and sometimes people share that by the third round, they were really looking forward to meeting eyes.

This came to mind from what you said about the expectation for eyes, the expectation for connection. I think these things can really only happen when we agree to be in a space that is exploring and testing, and we're willing to not be in the same familiar pattern.

I often feel that when we talk about attachment, it really enters into the more "square" discourse of attachment and less into these open spaces. I'm really happy to see that there's room for this here now.

Sahar:
I can share from my own personal journey how much pain arose and intensified when I looked through that specific "square" lens, when I looked at things from a place that essentially seemed like there was no hope.
It was like, "Hope left the room."

But actually, attachment is a living thing because it's a survival system.
We can notice when it's triggered, and it usually lights up not when we're comfortable, but especially when we're in distress, and it's precisely in those moments that there's an opportunity to do something different.

And together with that possibility, which can be incredibly emotional and truly amazing to see, comes the need to do the counterintuitive thing at full force. And that comes with fear. And then there's the other side, on the other side is a whole world.
A world that comes with learning, with experiences, with memories, with intentions, and with a heart. And then the dance begins. Really, as you describe it, the moment of staying there in expectation of eyes, that moment when something is needed, that connection is actually the heart that loves to love, knows how to love, wants to love, needs love, is nourished by love, and heals through love. It's magnificent, and it never gets lost.

Sometimes it’s covered by the concrete tiles you described, and sometimes those concrete tiles come with trauma, and then we’ll experience strong activations in our nervous system. But even with them, we can work slowly, we can work with them.

Hananal:

Can you tell me more about that? You introduced a new term into the attachment world. So what does it mean that these "concrete tiles" carry trauma?

Sahar:

For many years, I've been working with a model that I find very effective—it's the "Window of Tolerance".

You can imagine that we have a window, and what happens inside the window, what we experience and feel, flows within the rhythm of life... we can tolerate it, we can bear it, we can observe it, we can understand it. We can be curious and present with an open heart. We can also process our events and experiences, draw meaning from them, and understand the next steps we need to take.

In that space, we have a lot of presence, and we can be there with openness and empathy. Essentially, we are regulated, with our nervous system in balance.

Then there's the area outside the window. Going upward, the top part of the window leads to high sympathetic activation, meaning more anxiety, panic, and, at its extreme, a "fight" response from the nervous system, body, and brain. When this happens in relationships, particularly in emotional dependence, we are overwhelmed by our internal stories because our body is in heightened arousal.

The bottom part of the window is toward hypoactivation, a state of under-arousal, where we disconnect, numb out, and seek distractions like screens, smoking, and other avoidance behaviors. In this state, we're no longer present in the relationship, nor with our own feelings, and there is no presence or regulation. Our nervous system is out of balance. It's like the screen comes down on us.

In this state, there is very little energy, and no emotional energy. It's the opposite of heightened anxiety; it's a shutdown state, often accompanied by loneliness.

In both states I described—either hyper-arousal or hypo-arousal—there isn't much connection to deeper emotions. There are other emotions, more defensive, but they're not the ones that create true attachment. True connection happens when we engage with our deeper emotions, when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable.

Hananal:

So, if I'm in either of these extremes, I can't truly see...

Sahar:

Exactly. And we try so hard. We need to stop for a moment and see what's happening within us.

This is essentially our system—our body and mind—telling us that we're in distress... and each of us has a certain tendency to lean towards one of these extremes. Some of us tend to the anxious side, and in anxiety, we'll often feel like we're trying to connect but it's not working! We speak up, we express what's happening inside, but we still can't calm down, even when we get a response.

On the other hand, in a hypo arousal state, we simply don't feel the need to connect... we end up avoiding or freezing emotionally.

These are two ways our nervous system can go out of balance—both extremes are far from a healthy state.

I'll add that in relationships, we're often attracted to someone who is different from us, but there's something about them that resonates with us. It's often a dance between systems—one person tends to hyperarousal, and the other tends to hypo arousal, which makes it hard to understand one another.

Hananal:

It's like my system is so different... how does your system work? Wait, explain that to me...

A metaphor comes to mind. It's like someone running away from a tiger chasing them—it's a flight/fight response. And then someone comes and tries to talk to them about how they feel, what's going on inside, or how scared they are, but it's like none of that matters at that moment. It's impossible to focus on that.

Because there's a tiger, and the first thing you need to do is climb a tree and get out of danger. Only after that, can you finally talk. For example, I've developed the habit of practicing some breathing exercises before I enter the house to bring myself back into balance, to regulate myself back into the middle of the window of tolerance.

And when I enter the house, it doesn't mean there are no arguments or things like that... But it's much easier for me to communicate. On days when I skip this because I'm stressed or busy, or the family needs me, or I'm really feeling overwhelmed, communication is much harder. Each person brings their own burden and pressure.

Sahar:

There's a huge difference between when this happens because of something within the relationship and when it's happening because of the world we live in.

The word "danger" is very important because there's a difference between the tiger outside and the experience of having a tiger in the relationship, and interpreting what's happening in a way that leaves me feeling angry or alone.

Then comes anxiety, and at some point, emotional disconnection... It’s an automatic nervous system activation, and I’m there... I freeze... I don’t know what to say... what do they want from me? I’m supposed to share what I feel, but I don’t feel anything!

Hananal:

Yes.

Sahar:

I want to say that these are ways our nervous system protects us so that we don’t become overwhelmed by what’s happening inside us—both in our bodies and minds. Because what happened to us in the past—when we felt these things, this danger—could simply be feeling sad or angry, and at home, we’re not allowed to be angry, so we have to do something with that. Maybe it's safer to rage... or maybe it’s safer to shut down. This is a kind of inner bodily state that originates from human interaction.

And then it gets reenacted... both as an emotional and as a nervous system activation, and also mentally within the relationship.

In those moments when we slow down... we start to see what's happening within us.

Ultimately, we want to reconnect with ourselves first.

One of my favorite workshops to teach is "Feeling connected ..."

This can be understood in several ways, but what I mean right now is to feel myself, to connect with myself. We're so often busy, but we miss what's going on inside us...

And there’s something happening within us that’s neither high anxiety nor a complete lack of feeling. We need help to understand what’s going on inside us—what triggered it?

Hananal:

What happened to us...

Sahar:

Slowly, returning to connection with ourselves, and from that connection, we can truly create a closer, loving, and safer connection with our partner.

Hananal:

You’re saying that for something to change in attachment, our connection with ourselves has to change. So, for those who are listening and recognize themselves, those who want to do something new… those who want something to start moving…

Wanting to put down these glasses for a moment and remember that it's like doing laser surgery...

What can we offer them, an observation or thought direction, things to try?

What would you say to them?

Sahar:

First of all, I would tell those listening to us that they are not alone.

One of the strongest feelings when we work with these materials is that, on the one hand, they excite us deeply, but on the other hand, they touch the softest point in our gut.

It can cause pain, it can cause excitement, it can bring panic, and it can create a kind of dizziness. Just a moment to say, Oh, we're here, many, many people…

Who experience similar things.

And this place that wants something new, is a place that truly deserves to be celebrated.

Because in my view, dealing with these materials is not just super brave, it's also not simple, it requires a lot of determination.

Really, perseverance, and readiness to walk beyond what we know is possible, but we feel that something is waiting for us.

It's a bit like returning to being children who give trust... after they've hoped and hoped and been disappointed again and again.

I get goosebumps saying this.

It's truly for those who are brave…

Hananal:

On a practical level, what would you suggest?

Sahar:

I work in experiential ways. Knowledge is a wonderful thing, but no matter how many books I've read... and I've read a lot, that's not what brings change. Understanding in the mind is important, and it's often the beginning.

From my professional experience, and from my personal experience, what makes change is experience.

An experience, a corrective experience, something different from what we know. And as we experience this, slowly, our internal organization, our internal beliefs, begin to receive another possibility—this time, a beneficial one... I also mean, even if we're in individual therapy, not couples therapy, we're taking a moment to invest in ourselves. Maybe we're not in a relationship right now. These new experiences begin to create deep change.

How we understand ourselves, in relationships, and in life in the world, that’s why experience is what changes us. Knowledge is great, but it’s very limited because it’s in the mind, and the body is the one that experiences attachment. And when we talk about trauma, we’re talking about the body that remembers trauma and from those experiences, it draws conclusions and insights, and then acts accordingly, shaping a worldview.

So I work a lot through the body, through experience, through the nervous system, with a deep belief and also from my personal experience that that’s where deep healing happens, from which change comes.

Hananal:

And the question is... where and how can we properly receive this?

Sahar:

It can happen to us in life, sometimes simply because we have, from a different connection, suddenly a relationship that feels different. In a good way, suddenly we have this connection, and we feel much more seen and much more understood. It's no longer taken for granted that someone is with us, that they will be with us, that we're important enough, and we no longer have to fight for the connection itself. We simply know it’s here.

Hananal:

So, you're saying that the connection itself, having someone who offers a meaningful relationship, means that something within this internal system you spoke of starts to reorganize itself? Yes, like that natural force we spoke of that wants to attach, slowly starts to raise its head and becomes more dominant just by the presence of the connection, not necessarily through therapy?

Sahar:

Yes, and it's stable, loving, warm, close, with mutual regulation and balance.

Hananal:

If, say, now there’s a very good friend who understands me deeply, and I feel truly seen, could that impact this internal system as well, or does it only work in intimate relationships?

Sahar:

It can definitely have an impact.

And if we don’t have such a connection, it’s good for us to have a therapeutic relationship that serves as a model for a healthy, stable, supportive connection—one that looks at us with loving eyes and helps us understand ourselves better.

It won’t replace those moments in an intimate relationship because that’s a whole other level, the most activating, the most vulnerable, and the one where we’re most dependent. There's no replacement for that. But it can definitely help us understand what happens to us in moments of distress, what we do, what our system is actually doing, what our mind tells us, what our body feels, and what we’re telling ourselves about ourselves and the other.

What do we do in those moments? What do we tell ourselves about our partner? In those moments when we’re so sad and scared?

For example: "She’ll never understand me, she’s never been there for me..."

So, a supportive friendship or therapy can definitely give us support, help us understand ourselves, and let us experience a different, nurturing, safe connection, and learn how it feels there. Through that, we begin to develop the skills of secure attachment, and gradually, our set of expectations will start to change.

Hananal:

So, you're saying that the foundation for working on this topic and creating something new is to be in a connection.

Because the wound is created in connection, the healing must also happen in connection, right? In therapy, in a romantic relationship, or in a friendship, but any connection that creates new energy or allows us to explore and create space to examine these things. This will really take us out of autopilot and allow us to create new things.

Sahar:

Yes.

There’s no other way except to return to the source of our wiring for connection.

And trust that when we feel safe, we grow. And when our system is occupied with danger, we survive. We stop developing. What’s important is the experience of safety.

And sometimes it confuses us because we search for some absolute safety, but safety is an experience that’s felt relatively, here and now. And in attachment, it’s not enough that it’s here and now; we want to know it will be here for a long time... I want to know that my partner will be here in 5 years, in 20 years.

Even though I know, intellectually, that we don’t know what life will bring, my heart wants to know that this is a place I can return to and find comfort in, not just now.

We live in a culture that emphasizes relying on ourselves and being very independent. And sometimes, that’s exactly the other side of dependence not working, where we can't relax. So if I didn't manage back then, now I’ll just love myself a lot, and I’ll handle a very high level of functioning and solitude.

Hananal:

I hear that so much!

“I don’t want my love for myself to depend on anything else. I don’t want my mood to depend on anyone else...” Do you know Brené Brown?

If you don’t know her, you really should. She’s a researcher on shame and talks a lot about vulnerability and connection. She has a bit of a bolder language than mine, but she says: Where did this idea come from that we need to do everything alone? To be alone? To do everything by ourselves? It’s just not true!

And I think in this understanding there’s something that, on the one hand, exposes our neediness, yes, but on the other hand, there’s also a lot of truth.

We need people with us. Something in this culture you spoke of creates an illusion that, in my view, is disconnected from our reality. We need connections. We need people.

Sahar:

Yes, and it often fits into our working model. It’s like keeping us in some kind of palace, which might also be a bit like a prison, but it’s familiar and feels safer than stepping outside to see something else. I think that if we look at a complete and balanced person, when I feel secure, secure in my relationship, something in me can be freed to go play in the world, to explore, to pursue my own things, knowing that I have a safe place to return to. That brings calm and creates new possibilities. This is exactly what John Bowlby understood from his observations of infants and toddlers. Children who didn’t feel safe enough clung very tightly to their mother and wouldn’t calm down when she left and returned. These are children with anxious attachment styles.

Children with avoidant attachment style simply ignored the fact that their mother left and even that she returned. The presence of the mother didn’t change much.

Essentially, both miss out on one of the systems: either the dependency-survival system or the play system in a more anxious pattern. With such a high level of anxiety, play isn’t interesting because it’s all about where is mom? Where are you? What, what play now? The world doesn’t matter… In the avoidant style, the experience is: What connection? Not relevant… What’s relevant in adulthood is achievements, making money, being successful, because that feels good here, and it works for me.

Of course, I want to remind you of the disorganized pattern, which is rarer in the population, and it describes the rapid shifts between hyperarousal (anxiety) and hypo arousal (disconnection).

When we talk about healthy dependence, we’re also talking about healthy independence that stems from healthy dependence. We’re talking about abilities within ourselves, the ability to rest in the relationship. Having a relationship and connection that allows us to venture out into the world.

Each of our systems has a purpose, and sometimes we turn more toward the spiritual world, but there's an avoidance there, a spiritual bypass. We're there, and it feels good and meaningful, but maybe it comes at the expense of our emotional world and the connection that isn't getting attention... Then, we don't really know what's going on inside us, we can't really understand ourselves. It's different to approach the spiritual world from a compensatory place than from a place of genuine connection.

And yes, it's important to love and accept ourselves, but not from a detached place where there's actually defensiveness, because in that case, we've lost the vulnerability and neediness, which is the very fabric of love... The responsiveness to that beautiful, precious vulnerability and need.

Hananal:

During challenging times, there are also opportunities. This really resonates with me. The optimism you bring to attachment and at this time is something I know I deeply need—other people. Thank you.

And also, thank you again for your time.

Sahar:

Thank you, it was a pleasure to be here, diving into this bath of love-related material.

Hananal:

Thank you so much, Sahar.