

(introductory music)

DISCLAIMER: Welcome to *Taking Back Birth*, a podcast for women who know the truth about birth and those who want to explore the path of radical birth love. I'm your host, Maryn Green. *Taking Back Birth* celebrates the power you have to make decisions in alignment with your own truth. Decisions not subject to anyone else's authority. Decisions that create experiences that will change your life. *Taking Back Birth* is a production of the Indie Birth Private Contract Association and indiebirth.org. No material on this podcast should be considered medical advice. Birth is not a medical event.

(music)

MARYN: This podcast is another conversation for the guys or for anyone that wants to listen in. My husband, Jason, is back this time with our friend and wise elder, Thom Knoles. I've had the honor of supporting Thom and his wife through one, soon to be, two amazing home births, and his wisdom is definitely something I hope you share.

JASON: So welcome, everybody, to the podcast. My name is Jason. I am Maryn's husband. And I am honored to have today with us Thom Knoles, who is a great friend and supporter of Indie Birth for quite some time now. So thank you for donating your time to come on.

THOM: Thank you. It's a pleasure.

JASON: So Maryn asked me months ago to start kind of reaching out to men and having conversations that maybe they've never had or maybe they've never had a chance to hear about the birth experience from a male perspective and, more specifically, from a father's perspective. So I know you have witnessed the birth of nine children like I have.

THOM: And a tenth coming up (cross talk).

JASON: And coming on. Yes. Yes. We're in very similar situations in some ways. So I know that my journey has kind of been a cosmic education of sorts in witnessing all this. So my first place to begin with you is if you can kind of think back to the birth of your first child and what that experience was like for you.

THOM: Well, my first child was born in 1973. And it was, at the time, considered to be revolutionary that my wife had chosen to have me in the delivery room as they used to make a distinction room between the labor room and the delivery room in those days.

JASON: Wow.

THOM: And she was practicing the breathing methods of Leboyer, which nobody had heard of. This was in Australia, which—where the greening of obstetrics had already begun there. But nothing like what we would see today. And she chose to have no drugs or assistance, but it was a hospital birth. The revolutionary thing was that the obstetrician agreed to allow me to be in the delivery room and to actually witness the phenomenon of the delivery. And my wife chose to take no drugs or painkillers of any kind. Now in 1973, that was absolutely cutting edge. And our son was a relatively long labor. I think about 12 hours or so. I do remember the nurses around me looking at me and saying things like, “You’re a cruel man. You should let her have some painkillers. And she just needs a simple epidural. And the doctor has a golf game at 3:00 p.m. And it would be great if he could be born today, so the doctor doesn’t have to skip his golf game.”

And that was thought of by the nurses present in the obstetrics ward as they were being kind to my wife because they were motivating her to push harder. So compare that with my most recent experience of being a father present at my child’s birth with Maryn in attendance where Maryn sat quietly as an innocent witness bringing her cosmic aura into the environment speaking very, very quiet words of encouragement to my wife, who was floating in a birthing pool at home in our living room with a nice, little, merry fire burning in the fireplace. And the labor took about 8 hours and happened overnight. And we were able to make a video of it. And the whole atmosphere was one of sanctity. It was one of—you felt like you were in some kind of a super sacred space. There was nobody shouting or yelling. There was no one wearing hospital gowns. There was no nonsense going on. Basically, the kind of birth that probably appends, I would say—and I don’t know the truth statistics, Jason, but I would say, perhaps, 90% of births that occur on the earth currently are children being born while landing on sand, or landing on ice in an igloo, or landing on a banana leaf in the tropics.

JASON: Mm-hmm.

THOM: There’s a relatively small number of births that happen in hospital settings as we had become used to it or, as in the west, we are still used to it. So it was—I remember when our son came out being able to look at him and him lying there in the crib when we took him home probably three or four hours later which was also revolutionary. And seeing him lying in the crib in the darkened room, and I approached him and felt like I was in the presence of a little avatar. Someone who was just pure being, who was really pure spirit. The adulteration or pollution of the hypnosis of social conditioning hadn’t yet had its chance to play on his mind.

JASON: Right.

THOM: And so being able to look at him like that—and it was a humbling experience for me as a father.

JASON: We spoke for a minute before we started recording this about current world events and the amount of fear that's currently present and being shown to everyone. And you said something to the effect of—I mentioned it's interesting to see what people are carrying on the inside be expressed on the outside. And you said, "There only is the inside." And for anyone listening who doesn't know, Thom is, for lack of a better word, a world renowned teacher of Vedic meditation. So you have much experience with the inside. At your first birth, what was going on inside for you?

THOM: I felt that there was—any fears—because I was already a meditation teacher way back then. And quite an experience one even though I was young. I had been grounded in a sense of nature knows best how to organize that whatever is happening here is not an event that has to do with me, my expectation, or fulfillment. But an event that was nature working within itself to bring someone onto the earth. And that it was not even an achievement of my wife's. Not that I want to take anything away from her. But that it was a phenomenon that our bodies were being used for and to have fear meant to be loaded up with expectations.

JASON: Right.

THOM: And I had already become very used to by—as one of the results of practicing my meditation regularly as to allow nature to structure your expectations. And not to become rigidly attached to specific timings and specific outcomes and trusting that in the larger picture nature knows what it's doing.

JASON: Yeah.

THOM: And because of that, I can honestly say that I was largely without fear. And I think one of the things that (inaudible) particularly a first birth, for a father, is fear. What if something happens to my child in the process of birthing? What if something happens to my wife? What if it's all a disaster? What if? What if? What if? And I think that I'd had sufficient training at that point. I had already been a teacher for about four or five years. I'd had sufficient training to just absolutely relax and let go and let nature do what nature was doing and to be an innocent witness of it. And for me, that made all the difference. And, of course, I was delighted with the outcome. Everything turned out just fine. I was delighted with the outcome. But I think that I was also, inside, prepared that if, for some reason—if, for whatever reason, things went in some way that people

normally wouldn't expect or anticipate or prefer, that nature was still doing its work in its own way.

JASON: Yeah. Just to serve as contrast, my first birth—I was living a life where I was the voice in my head. So that leads to a very different experience when our first birth was in the hospital too. When you enter a world like that where you haven't yet separated, to become the observer, and you are so caught up in the movie that is happening and the commentary that is happening about the movie. And you kind of get swept away in what feels like—like, frankly, I don't even remember it because I was that detached. I didn't have the ability then to be present at a deeper level. And so, when I look back and say, "Oh, there are things that we would have done differently now," it's almost like we weren't there.

THOM: That's right.

JASON: I mean I wasn't there. A woman, in birth—I mean she gets to a point where she shows up no matter what the situation is. But the guy has to muster that for himself, and I did not have the tools back then.

THOM: Yeah. And I think that one of the—so many of the things that are worth talking about, I believe, for men is the feeling that men can have—fathers can have—expectant fathers in the case of someone who is about to have a child but hasn't had it yet—with his partner. We feel so different to what the women are feeling. We feel—we know they're going through something that we can't even imagine. And even if we did try to imagine it, we probably would get the magnitude of it all wrong. And so there is a degree of, "Well, gosh, I'm kind of left out here." You can imagine out it evolved that, as you can see even depicted today in movies, the men being left in a waiting room. And the doctor coming out and saying, "It's a boy. Or it's a girl." And then the cigars are broken out. And the man has absolutely nothing to do with whatever was going on way deep inside the internal aspect of the hospital. I think that even when a man is present at his partner's birth sometimes the feeling of, "What am I supposed to be feeling? How am I supposed to be relating? I can't have the sensations that she's having,"—I didn't have a being growing inside my belly and kicking and distending my belly and moving all around and waking me up in the night by its legs moving and things like that. She had all of that experience. She's been feeling all this coming for nearly 10 months. 40 weeks. I always wonder why we say nine months because 40 weeks is 4 times 10 weeks, right?

JASON: Right.

THOM: Or 10 times 4 weeks I should say. So for 40 weeks, she's been going through all of this. And what am I? Am I kind of a bystander? I mean what's my role here? What am I supposed to be experiencing, doing, feeling? Of course, I'm ready for anything. And I think we men have a little bit of a tendency of if there seems to be anything that appears to be suffering I have to solve it. I've got to come up with a solution for this. I have to make the suffering come to an end. My role is leap into action. That's the way our western indoctrination is anyway. And then there we are. Even if we're present at a birth, we might be wondering, "What the heck am I supposed to be doing here?" Surely, if I get invited in to massage shoulders or to run and get water or if I'm asked to do something, I'll willingly do it. But other than that, I might feel a little bit left out of this whole thing. And even though I'm physically right here present. This is a very interesting subject to examine. I wonder what your thoughts are about that.

JASON: Well, for me, I mean I—like I said, I wasn't—I was a straight A sheep. So I had a long way to go to get that separation. But then even to—I look back on it now, and I would almost describe it that, for a guy, the journey is one where you are given the opportunity to touch what is ultimately power of—in its purest sense. But you have to walk through this long tunnel of what feels like powerlessness. And if it bothers you that you can't fix it or make it go this certain way, you stop walking. And if you get through that tunnel, you're ushered into a world that guys—I don't think—I mean I think that is our chance to experience that. I mean birth is unique in that. I can't think of another male initiatory rite, perhaps—at least in my experience—that delivers that so consistently.

THOM: Yeah. By the way, I concur completely with the way you said it. I don't know if I could even add anything to it. I think that's so well put especially that perhaps using the language that I've developed is just a different way of saying the same thing. If, successfully, you can let go of the need to control, if, successfully, you can let go of the need to fix things and control, then you're going to be in the right frame of mind, the right state of consciousness to allow the gift to come to you. But then I think it's a matter of percentages. To the extent that you attempt to control—like if you attempt to control to 80%, you're going to only receive 20% of the gift.

JASON: Right.

THOM: If you manage to let go of control utterly, then you're going to receive 100% of the gift.

JASON: Well, and for many men who didn't grow up like—I mean weren't on the path you're on which is a very unique path—you think that—if you can do it during birth and

give up that need to control, you think that that's just about birth. But you've really just kind of chanced upon the secret to everything.

THOM: That's right.

JASON: That if you can carry that with you in a normal day, that's a different way of living.

THOM: Yes. I was raised in my tradition that—I grew up largely in India for 25 years. When I say grew up in it, I entered it when I was in my late teens and was trained by my Master (inaudible) for the next 25 years. And during those 25 years, several children were born. Let's see. During my time with him, about five of my ten children were born. The phrase that sticks with me that he espoused frequently was, "Control is opposed to evolution." That everything that you do—if you have the idea that evolution can only occur with my assistance, individual—my individuality is going to cause evolution to go faster, that nature doesn't know best how to organize it. It needs a little help from me. That to whatever extent you buy into that and then live that and actualize it then to that extent you're actually retarding the effect of nature's evolution. You're actually slowing things down. And so learning how to certainly be available—you're wide awake and conscious and available to be drawn into meeting and interacting with any new demand where it's relevant to act, of course. But to be in that state where control, for me, is not only not required, it's almost like a pollution of the phenomenon.

JASON: Mm-hmm.

THOM: Then as you say, transposing that, you've been initiated through childbirth. Allowing that to translate into almost everything else in the world around you. That is to say, everything that you interact with. Demands are being made on you. Are you going to interact with them? Or are you going to react to them? And interacting with a demand is a spontaneous phenomenon where we become engaged. But reacting to a demand is effectively the definition of stress. That's what stress is. Stress is not a situation. Stress is a reaction to a situation.

JASON: In the video that you made of your most recent birth, there was a point at which—it was a beautiful—like you couldn't order up a more beautiful environment. It was just unbelievable.

THOM: Yes. It was.

JASON: There was a point at which you started expressing really what I could only call pure joy.

THOM: Yes. I think it was pure joy. It was—tears were flowing. I'm not someone that—I don't readily tear up. I mostly find most things quite acceptable. So joy, tears, to get me to that level really takes quite a major event.

JASON: Well, it was. I guess it qualified.

THOM: Yeah. It qualified. And I was flowing pretty well. And I really felt that thing that we were just talking about. Getting to the end of the tunnel without any effort, without any control. And then being granted an experience of an offering to me of fatherhood. There is the offering of fatherhood. And we were all so ecstatic that—including Maryn—it took us about 5 minutes to bother looking to see if it was a boy or a girl. I'm like 5 minutes into this thing we're like, "Oh, it's so wonderful. It's so fantastic and so on." And then it finally occurred to me after about 5 minutes, "Has anybody looked to see if this is a male or a female?"

JASON: That's funny.

THOM: We finally look and went, "It's a boy." So almost the reverse of that thing that the suited gentlemen in the 1950s movie sitting in the waiting room with their cigars at ready. Someone going out and going, "It's a boy. It's a girl." That's the first thing they hear. It was like that was the last thing we bothered to look at. The other phenomenon was so—just the deeper phenomenon of suddenly there was a very palpable new presence in the room.

JASON: Mm-hmm.

THOM: And that was Henry. Very palpable new presence in the room. And it wasn't Ariella, my wife. It wasn't me. And it wasn't any longer something moving around in her belly which we knew had its own entity, status but was still moving around in her belly. There was this new thing in the room. And whether it was masculine or feminine was the last thing that occurred to us to check on.

JASON: Yeah. That's amazing. So having as many children as we've each had, it's pretty rare in our western culture. What would you say—even though I know where you started and you were kind of in an accelerated position as it were even from your first experience—what would you say that these experiences have taught you about yourself?

THOM: I think they've taught me that your individuality actually is cosmic. By that I mean, your individuality actually is—you are the Universe having an individualized human experience.

JASON: Yeah.

THOM: Rather than you're an individual seeking some universal experience. You're already the Universe.

JASON: Right. You are the (cross talk).

THOM: You are that. And it is—what that joy that I felt that you described at Henry's birth which was a repetition of the joys I'd had every time really was I—it wasn't even my individuality wasn't able to contain the universal joy that was flowing through me. It was almost like it was bursting the boundaries of the dam. The individuality couldn't quite express it all. In fact, I was a bit speechless and lost for words. There is such a phenomenon as the cosmic self. And since the cosmic self is that one indivisible whole consciousness state—and if you've meditated a bit, you know that. You've experienced it many times. Then to feel that universality operating through your individuality—it really is the Universe taking joy and it—replicating itself once again? And bringing yet another version of itself into existence. And I felt that very much. The smallness of the small self couldn't possibly be either the cause or even the individual experience of this thing. There was something bigger going on. And being able to allow that, that was the great gift of my years of meditation throughout all of these births. Being able to allow the Universe to play through my individuality and enjoy what it's doing.

JASON: Yeah. Yeah. We've been doing Indie Birth—I think we started when we lived in Flagstaff. Maybe 2007. We printed our first little magazine on a printer and sent it around town. So ever since then, there are plenty of women that want the birth experience like you're describing. And whether it's at home or whatever, some of them have fear about that. But in all these years of kind of being in this world, I've realized that it's really the guys who have exponential levels of fear. Maybe of them about this particularly having a child at home. And constantly in our word, we hear, "My husband won't let me do that. My partner doesn't feel comfortable." And so you have this expression of—yes. Love. But it's so overshadowed with fear. It's just fear. What would you say to that collective—I mean for lack—it's a thought form out there that is so prevalent. And it's keeping people from this experience.

THOM: I would say one sentence. Knowledge eliminates fear. One of the great things that Maryn has created and you've co-created with her is a knowledge platform. I mean I remember prior to Henry's birth I had—with a previous partner other children at home. But the big difference with the Indie Births was the knowledge platform that came in advance of—I mean and right throughout the entire pregnancy. Being able to listen to the seminars and taking all that in, the combination of conversations between Maryn and other women experts, the—all of the understanding and the raising of specifically

the things that might frighten you and, prospectively, raising those things and then dealing with them and kind of unwinding them. Unpacking them so that you looked at them and they were just basically sets of facts about a perfectly natural phenomenon. One of the things that—and one conversation that I had with Maryn that we both laughed about was that if you look at the worldpopulation.com speed with which children are appearing on the earth—and it's literally one one-tenth of a second.

JASON: Wow.

THOM: Birthing is, in fact, got to be one of the most natural things that is imaginable. I mean babies are landing on the ground or in hospital rooms or wherever they're landing at a rate of something like 10,000 every 10 minutes or less. So then what could be more natural than that phenomenon?

JASON: Right.

THOM: I mean so the idea that there's something to be afraid of—basically, what causes people to be afraid is lack of knowledge. When you don't have knowledge—and, admittedly, knowledge is made up of two components. I think intellectual understanding is a big part of it. And then direct experience fills it all in and really puts it properly into knowledge. And for somebody who is a first time expectant father, they're yet lacking the direct experience. But getting the intellectual understanding in advance and really exhaustively being able to hear these subjects unpacked—all of the aspects of, "What if this? What if that?"—I just found in listening to—my background, besides meditation, is in science. I'm a cognitive neuroscientist. Being able to listen to the scientific presentation of the way that Maryn lays out the knowledge, the intellectual understanding part of the knowledge is so complete. And then I think that once somebody has had a direct experience to fill in the gaps on the intellectual understanding side, they will be able to enter the next childbirth, if they decide to have another, with significantly decreased fear due to them having greater and greater knowledge.

JASON: Well, I think one of the things that you probably do automatically without even thinking about it that I certainly didn't do back at the beginning was this isn't just cramming your head full of stuff. Like you're talking about using knowledge to bring your fears which you're projecting into the future here to the present and integrating that now, right? So you're doing something very proactive with the knowledge.

THOM: Mm-hmm.

JASON: And that, for a guy—you can either learn everything but never do that second part. And you're still going to be in a tough bind.

THOM: Yeah. Yeah. And I think that we have to enter any field of knowledge with that idea that if you have good intellectual understanding, fantastic. But you also have to experience and grades the direct experience so that you can complete your knowledge in that way. And even then, things that are—there is also a danger, I think, in getting cocky like, “Hey, I’m an expert on this. I know everything there is to know about it.” And things can happen that are still outside your range of expectation. But I think that certainly making yourself into a knowledge person on both fronts, intellectual understanding and direct experience—both those things go a tremendously long way in making you not fear-based administration at home. Fear-based administration at home is—we hear it a lot too because, of course, Ariella has so many friends who are of childbearing age. And just like you, we hear women saying, “I want to do this. I want to do that.” And then the first line of—very often, not in every case—but very often the first line of resistance and control is the men. And then the second line is the mothers and mothers-in-law. And other family members who consider themselves to be stakeholders in how the birthing is done.

So there really is a tremendous amount of sociological and psychological pressure on a couple and specifically on a woman to be able to actually make a choice that she wants to make to take a knowledgeable approach to the natural way—to nature’s own way of birthing and take—to use that familiar byline of Indie Birth’s. Taking birth back and giving it back to the person who is doing it which is the woman. Taking it back from what? Well, all of those members of society who consider themselves to be righteously stakeholders in the event. And it doesn’t stop, of course, with family members. It goes on to all of the vested interests who earn money from you being afraid.

JASON: Right.

THOM: There is no way that you can birth a baby without scores of hospital professionals with long degrees after their name who are going to make this thing happen. And then I have to go back to, “Well, hang on. There’s babies hitting the earth by the thousands in the deserts, in the snow, in the jungles, everywhere.”

JASON: They didn’t get the memo, unfortunate, I guess.

THOM: Yeah. This thing is going on irrespective of modern medical science. It’s a great thing to know that a hospital is there if you break an arm and if anything weird goes on in a birth. Of course, a hospital is there. Medical professionals are there. But really, by and large, it’s only fairly recently that this whole birthing thing suddenly

became in the domain of all these profit making stakeholders. I mean that's a whole other subject. But I'm trying to remember which of the presidents it was that was the president of the United States who first was born in a hospital.

JASON: Yeah. I don't know.

THOM: I believe it was Clinton. Before that, all of the presidents of the United States were born at home. So it's a relatively recent event. I could be wrong about Clinton. It might be the guy who came before him. But I think it might have been Clinton.

JASON: What do you feel—what experience of life do you feel you would have missed out on had you not made these choices that you made with your partner about birth?

THOM: I would have missed out on the results of the initiation. That's the biggest part of it.

JASON: I know you can't really put that into words. But I'm going to put you on the spot anyway.

THOM: Well, I think the idea that you can control your way into greatness—it's kind of like nature doesn't know what it's doing. Humans know what they're doing. Humans are here to tell nature what to do. That we have to corral nature and control it. And then applying that mentality to everything you do. Like I get a desire, I want to fulfill that desire. And so I'm going to carve a path of destruction, if necessary, to close the gap of time between where I am now having a desire and me getting my desire fulfilled. Even that idea that a desire that I have is my personal property, it came from inside me. And I own it. That tendency, which is caused and wreak destruction on the earth—whereas what's the opposite of that? Well, I'm thinking as a result of my fatherhood initiation and initiations, multiple, I now know that if a desire bubbles up in my mind it's the property of the Universe. It's not my personal thing that I own. Because of my fatherhood initiations, I know that when nature wants me to be somewhere sometime it's going to tell me through the instrumentality of a desire. It's not that if I have a desire and fulfill then I'm going to get fulfilled.

JASON: Right.

THOM: No. A desire is actually—it's an evolutionary mechanism. Nature births a desire in my awareness and says, "Go over there and stand in this particular place. If the thing fulfills itself, fine. If it doesn't, that's my timing. Not yours." And so I've learned that from my teaching and my teacher but also from my initiations in fatherhood, which really were very practical initiations. A child coming into the world is not my property. The woman, who is having the child—my child who is coming to the earth—is

not my property either. The phenomenon is not my property. And so then if that's true in those areas, then it must also be true even with my own desires as they bubble up. They're not my property. They're nature's way of saying, "Move in that direction. If things happen to go in a particular way that you envision, that's fine. But if things don't go in that way, then rest assured nature is in control."

JASON: It does seem like we've all been given a foolproof recipe for consistent misery in the see the goal. I'm going to get the goal. I'm going to kill something and drag it home kind of brainwashing that is everywhere.

THOM: And then—and I think what makes that worse even is and then I'll be fulfilled. Desires will stop coming. Well, of course, they don't.

JASON: Right.

THOM: And so we get in that acquisition mentality. I'm going to acquire something. And when you realize through the birthing process, I'm not acquiring a child. I'm not acquiring a family that I've created. I'm being gifted an experience and an initiation into an entire new way of thinking if I'm open to accept it and learn from it.

JASON: Yeah. Yeah. I remember early on between our first and second births where we were making the transition from hospital to home. Even then, it's so ingrained—it was so ingrained in me to project my—I just want her to be safe. I had to project that story of this is how it needs to go for it to be okay. And no one—I didn't have a midwife—our midwives were a little different. So no one looked me in the eye and said, "Do you hear what you're saying? Maybe you should just take a breath next time and not say anything." No direct lessons like that. So I had to kind of bumble my way to realizing that—I mean ultimately I realized that being is the ultimate doing.

THOM: Yeah. That's a beautiful statement. It is. I mean it really is the ultimate action. It's the source of all action. The sources of all thoughts.

JASON: Yeah. Have you noticed any similarities between the characteristics of the births of your children and your children? How they came versus how they are.

THOM: Yes. I think there is an infinite correlation because there is something else going on that, again, could be probably be another one-hour conversation. And that is that these beings are bringing into this existence some—in Sanskrit from the ancient language of India, we call it (inaudible). (inaudible) means a memory. They're bringing with them the memory of wherever it was that that being was prior to this. And one of the traditional ways of stating that would be karma. To say that there is some unfinished business being brought to the earth. From the Vedic perspective, the cause of

birth—that is to say what causes a soul to be born is unfinished business. That you have, at the end of the previous life, still some unfulfilled desires and some unfinished business. And so you're not born a perfected being. You are born with an agenda. And so then is that consciousness bringing an agenda to earth. And if so—and the answer is yes. And given that it is, is that going to influence the way that it experiences itself? Its own birthing? Of course, it is.

And so there are some children who their consciousness when they're born causes them to create a bit of a struggle in the process. And there are some whose consciousness—they're much more take it as it comes and let's just go with the flow here. And they slip straight out and with relatively little drama. And then as they grow into adults, you can see that seed form of them. Now it has germinated into a full grown plant. And as they're working out their unfinished business, you can see that as they are now they were in seed form. But, of course, evolution being what it is they're getting better and better every day.

JASON: Yeah. Sure.

THOM: And more and more comfortable in their skin every day.

JASON: It's amazing to witness.

THOM: It really is.

JASON: If you were speaking to someone who—let's say they're an expectant father. Perhaps they're considering moving out of however they have been conditioned to think into a realer expression of who they are, who their partner is, and the life they feel they're here to create. How would you describe your understanding based on your experience of the role of the father in the birth of his child?

THOM: I would boil it all down to two—what will sound initially—but I'll flesh it out. Two very frustrating sounding words. Relax and enjoy.

JASON: Those are good.

THOM: Why would you relax and enjoy? Well, then that has to be answered. And I think that we have to consider how many—right now there are 7.3 billion people on earth. And they were all born sometime within the last century. The oldest of them is about a hundred. Nobody much older than that. So 7.3 billion people have been born in the last century. And when we start thinking about how many billions have landed on the earth prior to that, surely we can relax and enjoy since this thing is not anything new. It might be new to a particular man. A particular man might say, "I have never done this

before. This is new to me.” So I would say being able to relax and enjoy because that would be my mandate. I would say, “You’ve got to do this. You’ve got to relax and enjoy.” “Well, how do I get there?” And once again, get knowledge. And the older the people are you get knowledge from, the better, in my opinion. If you can go to some of the oldest people you know, particularly the women, and say, “What’s this all about,” you’re like to get a spectrum of experience that’s going to tell you that everything is going to be okay because there is something that goes along with longevity. And that is accrual of at least a little greater wisdom. Not to say that there’s not some relatively old people who are panic merchants. There are certainly some of those. But you can tell the difference between them and people who have that wisdom.

JASON: (cross talk) Go ahead.

THOM: Go to the wisest people you know and ask them if it’s appropriate to relax and enjoy.

JASON: I mean they have such a wealth of direct experience that is synthesized into simple truths. They’re the easiest source of that type of knowledge. So yeah. The birth experience has so—because—I mean it is life. It’s funny that we’re sitting here talk—I’m talking about it as though it’s something different. These are the lessons of life. And this is just one application of them. But learning some of these through birth is what radically kind of shifted my path irrevocably. You can’t put the egg back together once something like this breaks it open. You’re kind of screwed. You have to keep going now.

THOM: Yeah. That’s right. The way my master put it was once an elephant enters your tent, the tent is never quite the same any more.

JASON: That’s funny. That’s funny. What do you think is the greatest part of this whole experience for you?

THOM: I think it is being able to have played a role, which I find—it’s funny because people often, and my children, often give me accolades at being a father and all of that. I don’t really feel like I’ve done that much, Jason. It’s like, “Oh, we’ve got the greatest father.” I mean even my grown up children. They’re like, “We have the greatest dad. We have the greatest father.” And then sometimes people come to me and say, “How did you get to be that way where your kids talk to you—talk about you that way?” And I go, “Actually, I didn’t do anything. I just kind of continued relaxing and enjoying.” But to have that knowledge that your individuality played a very palpable part in a cosmic continuity phenomenon. There’s a cosmic continuity phenomenon. And my individuality got to play a role in it. To me, that is just so satisfying. I have to tell you

something. This is a really interesting thing. That we've been talking a lot about men, but I think men need to contemplate this.

Once upon a time when I was walking around in India, I came across temple in far north India. Out in the middle of a field. I was lost frankly. I was trying to find—I was on foot. And I was trying to find my way to a major thoroughfare. And I went into this ancient temple. And on the wall of the temple, there was a mural. And that mural had the most—it was the most amazing painting. And I'm not sure how old it was. It looked to me to be at least hundreds of years old. At the top of the mural was a picture of a naked woman, who, obviously, had just given birth to a girl child. The umbilicus was emerging from the woman's womb and was still connected to the belly of the child. But the child wasn't a child. There wasn't a baby. It was connected by the umbilicus to her mother was another woman of childbearing years who also had coming out of her womb another umbilicus that was connected to the belly of another girl child that wasn't a child. It was a young woman, who had coming out of her womb another umbilicus connected to another woman. It went on like this for about eight declensions of women. And then the last of them, there was a woman who had given birth with the umbilicus coming out and attaching to the belly of the woman was a little boy with a penis. And then you could see the people all around the baseline of this picture looking at that almost like askance. Like with question marks. Like what happens next? Because there's no umbilicus coming out of him.

And I contemplated that. I walked away contemplating that for such a long time. That when we think about the paternal way in which have created our civilization where it's the male line by which everyone's named. And it's the males, then the males, and the males. Which was really a kind of way of our insecurity, which has to do something we may not have contemplated that particular picture and what it means. But there is a continuity between mother and daughter that, strangely enough, is broken when a boy is born because there is no umbilicus coming out of a boy onto the navel of a child. And so then that puts us then in a very interesting position. The position being what do we do with that. What is our role then? And I think these things are all really worth contemplating because we do still have a role. And, obviously, bringing the masculine end of reproduction into play. We have that role.

But we're not going to have that experience that was depicted in that mural of that kind of feminine continuity. And so then I think it's incumbent on us men to find our own umbilici between each other. In other words, it's incumbent on us to find the continuity. And I think that as a long answer to your previous question. But it made me think of it. That being about to be engaged in a—in close proximity to the phenomenology of birthing, I think it really does—it gives us a role which we kind of secretly

subconsciously guess at, as men, that we're missing something. That women are having. But we're being invited into that role through Indie Births. We're being invited into it through being a witness of a live birth by our partner in an environment that is—this word is horribly overused. But I mean the word literally. Naturally. There is a natural environment. Nature's own environment. And as you said, allowing yourself to go with the flow down the tunnel and being gifted with the gift at the end of that that is the compensation for not seeing an umbilicus emerge from between our legs.

JASON: Yeah. Yeah. I mean I know my experience over all of these has been—if you think of the female energetic, the constant motion. And then my experience or my challenge, really, over these nine births and with everyone is to figure out how to deepen—and I don't remember which one I experienced it first with. But the witness role. To stand there as a void basically. And over the births, that has deepened to such a degree where you realize that you get to almost touch the limitless in a different way.

THOM: I think of it like you're really hitting so many points. And you'd think that you and I had had deep conversation about this in the past, which we haven't. We're having it now.

JASON: That's right.

THOM: We'd always wanted to have this conversation. And we have to have it with lots of others listening. That's great. I think of the colorless sap inside of a flower. The colorless sap has no shape. It has no form. It has no smell. It has no—it's just colorless sap. But contained in it is the field of all possibilities. Emerging from it can come a green stem, a green flat leaf, a beautiful pink or red or yellow petal, fragrances and everything. And the color of the sap is pervasive all through the flower. Ultimately, that's the witness thing. It's the field of all possibilities.

JASON: Yeah.

THOM: It's not just in case any of our listeners might think that being a witness means that you're just a useless thing watching.

JASON: Observer. It's not quite the same as observer.

THOM: No. It's not the same as an observer. That you are the field of all possibilities like the colorless sap. You feel yourself at your baseline and your least excited state, which is right there even with eyes open. That simplest form of awareness is like the colorless sap. It is the source of all of this expression. And it's able to—and that's where that connection between individuality and your cosmic status is. That's what the connection is right there. Your own simplest form of awareness which is a field of all

possibilities. It can convert into anything. In fact, not only is it witnessing this phenomenon it feels unity with the phenomenon because all phenomena are emerging out of the colorless sap.

JASON: Yeah. And it seems like throughout the generations men have gotten there whether excitatory or inhibitory ways, either feats of strength or initiatory rites. It's like you can come at it from both sides of the circle. And birth allows you this way where you can get swept along into it.

THOM: That's right.

JASON: In a way that I can't really think how else you would do it that way.

THOM: If you're open to it, and there's the big challenge right there. It's as you said. It's an initiation if you allow it to be. Or it's sheer terror. And perhaps your way of dealing with that is resignation. If you decide—if, for some reason or another, right now you're not ready for that initiation. And I do think that one of the great things about our Universe is nothing is your last chance. There's no such thing as a last chance. There's going to be lots of other chances. But this is an opportunity to have an initiation. What a great way of putting it. I really admire that. And by the way, I'm putting you on notice that I'll be plagiarizing your words.

JASON: I appreciate it. Thank you. It's been great to share this with you.

THOM: Likewise.

JASON: Yeah. So I know we didn't talk—we touched on Vedic meditation. But just in the closing minutes here, because I feel that what you teach is a key that so many men, humans—I mean I'm not just saying it's for men. It opens doors that a lot of people don't get the chance to find on their own. Could you just talk a little bit about your work and maybe where people could go to learn more?

THOM: Yeah. I think I'll answer the last question first. My website, which is my name—THOM. My name is spelled oddly. THOM for Thom. KNOLES. Thomknoles.com will answer most of those questions. But in brief, just to give a preview of what people would see if they went online and read about it, the word meditation is somewhat of a misnomer because when I look up the word meditation in the dictionary you can see, well, a thought process, a process of contemplation. There is even, for goodness sake, premeditated murder. So what does meditation mean? Well, it can mean almost anything. Specifically what we do is we sit with our eyes closed for about 20 minutes at a time. Typically about twice each day. And we make use of a specific kind of mantra. A mantra that has no intended meaning. It's a

beautiful mellifluous sound. And there are different mantras that work best for different people. And so not everybody gets the same mantra. There are groups of mantras and groups of people that are best served by those.

And then you just are thinking the mantra very effortlessly. Not trying to control the mind. Not trying to visualize anything. Not trying to structure anything. There is no concentration involved. The mantra starts to become softer and quieter as it repeats in the mind. And again, it has no meaning, and so it's not working on the level of wanting a thing to happen or trying to get some meaning out of it. It's just a pulsation of sound. And as that sound becomes subtler and quieter and fainter, it's drawing you in through that least excited state, which the nature of that least excited state is bliss. Inside of everyone's mind right now, it's not created by meditation. Inside everyone's mind is a layer that is just pure supreme inner contentedness. And so as the mind starts getting pulled in that direction, the mantra and other thoughts that may appear in the mind start to become—I use the word kind of gold dusted with charm. The mind becomes fascinated by the phenomenology of thinking. Not even the content. Just the mind begins to experience that it's a joyful experience just settling down into those less excited states.

Then ultimately, the mind will be taken to a very, very quiet place. And the mantra will just disappear. And the mind is left for a moment in transcendence where there is no mantra and no thought replacing it. But in a new meditator, it doesn't last for very long. The first thought you have is, "This is it. Here I am." But of course, you're not there anymore. You're thinking about it now.

JASON: Right.

THOM: So then you need to know how effortlessly to curve the mind back onto that pulsation of sound, that mantra, and it will draw your mind back to that silent place again. And so you do that for about 20 minutes twice every day. And then as you do that, your mind is not only going to a least excited state. Your body is resting by several magnitudes of restfulness greater than sleep. And this allows your body to release and relieve accumulated stress so that every time you practice the technique you have cleared accumulated stress out of your physiology. And therein lies one of the greatest parts of the practice. So as you keep practicing regularly, not only do you familiarize yourself with that simplest form of awareness that's deep inside you. But you also physiologically are finding that you have greater liberty to unleash all of your potentials and not be hamstrung by your stresses.

JASON: Yeah. Radically shifts your experience and dance with reality.

THOM: Correct. And puts you in a position where you can choose to interact with demand rather than simply reacting to them.

JASON: Yeah. Excellent. Well, thank you so much for sharing the stories and taking the time to do this. I really appreciate it. And all the listeners, I'm sure, it's a great positive force.

THOM: And thank you and Maryn for really creating what I believe to be one of the most relevant revolutionary forces socially that's currently extant on the earth.

JASON: Thank you. Yeah. It's an honor to be involved. Very good. Well, thank you.

THOM: All the best to both of you.

JASON: Yeah. You too. And blessings for the future.

THOM: Thank you.

(closing music)