

■ BENEATH THE SKIN OF FEELING ■

A Solo Podcast on the Mystery of Human Emotions

Episode 1 · Host: Leila Noor · "The Emotion You Cannot Name" · ~22 min

■ COLD OPEN

There is a moment — and I think you know it — when you are standing somewhere completely ordinary. A kitchen at midnight. A bus stop in the rain. A rooftop at dusk when the city below is turning golden. And suddenly, for no reason you can name, something rises inside your chest. Not happiness, not sadness. Something **wider** than both. Something that has no edges.

You look at the sky, or at your own hands, or at a stranger's face — and the world feels unbearably beautiful and unbearably brief at the exact same time.

"What is this feeling?" you wonder. And because you have no name for it, it slips away — like water through open fingers. Like the last note of a song you almost remember.

Tonight, we are going to chase that feeling. We are going to name it. We are going to sit inside it and ask: **what are human emotions, really?** Where do they come from? Why do they shape every choice, every memory, every single moment of our lives?

Welcome to *Beneath the Skin of Feeling*. I'm Leila Noor. And this is Episode One.

■ PART 1 — THE UNIVERSE INSIDE A SINGLE TEAR

In 1982, a photographer named Rose-Lynn Fisher lost someone she deeply loved. In her grief — raw and overwhelming — she did something strange and tender. She collected her own tears. Caught them in a vial, let them dry on a glass slide, and looked at them under a microscope.

What she saw stopped her breath.

A tear of grief looked like a shattered winter landscape — jagged, crystalline, a frozen tundra stretching toward the horizon. But a tear of

joy? It looked like a warm aerial photograph of a river delta, branching and curving gracefully toward the sea. And a tear shed from cutting an onion? Smooth. Simple. Almost boring. The body knew the difference between a real emotion and a chemical reaction, and it showed.

She spent thirty years photographing tears — tears of laughter, of rage, of exhaustion, of new motherhood. And her conclusion was extraordinary: **the emotion behind a tear changes its very molecular structure.** Our feelings are not invisible. They leave a physical signature on the world. They are written into our bodies at the chemical level, as real as fingerprints.

Think about that. Right now, as you listen, your body is running thousands of chemical reactions that we call “feeling.” Cortisol flooding your veins when you are afraid. Dopamine lighting up your brain like a city at night when you are in love. Serotonin wrapping you in warmth when you feel safe. Oxytocin rushing through you when someone you trust holds your hand.

These are not poetic metaphors. They are real molecules, swimming in your blood right now, reshaping your thoughts, your decisions, the very way you perceive the world around you.

“We do not have emotions. We are emotions.”

Every emotion you have ever felt was once, in the long history of our species, a survival tool. Fear flooded your ancestors with adrenaline so they could outrun the predator. Grief kept them bonded to their tribe — because alone on the savanna, you did not survive. Even loneliness — that hollow, 2am ache that feels like a punishment — was evolution’s way of *pushing* you back toward other people. Your pain had a purpose. It always did.

Your emotions are not weaknesses. They are ancient, brilliant, battle-tested intelligence — millions of years in the making, living inside you right now.

■ **PART 2 — THE EMOTIONS WE HAVE NO WORDS FOR**

Here is something that haunts me. There are emotions we feel every single day that the English language has **never bothered to name.** They exist in us, real and heavy and

luminous — but we have no word for them, so we cannot hold them, cannot share them, cannot even fully think them.

But other languages did name them. And the moment you discover these words, something extraordinary happens inside you. You feel, for the first time, completely and utterly *seen*.

Saudade.

This is a Portuguese word. It describes a melancholy longing for something beautiful that is now gone — or perhaps that never existed at all. The ache for a summer that ended too fast. For a childhood street you will never walk down the same way again. For a version of yourself that existed only briefly, and is now unreachable. Have you felt it? Of course you have. You simply had no name for it.

Mono no aware.

From the Japanese. The bittersweet awareness that all beautiful things must fade. The particular ache you feel watching cherry blossoms fall — not grief exactly, not joy exactly, but something that holds both. The feeling that the beauty of something is inseparable from its endings.

Toska.

Russian. A spiritual longing — a restless, shapeless yearning with no clear object. The soul searching for something it cannot name. The writer Vladimir Nabokov once described it as “a longing with nothing to long for.” A sensation of vague but all-consuming desire. You have felt toska. Every human has.

Sehnsucht.

German. A deep, inconsolable craving for an alternative life, or a world more beautiful than the one you are currently living in. The sense that somewhere, in some other version of your story, everything is as it should be — and the exquisite pain of knowing you may never find it.

Dadirri.

From the Ngan'gikurunggurr people of Australia. A deep, quiet listening to the world around you. Presence so complete and so still that it becomes its own emotion. Not meditation as a technique, but listening as a way of being. A state so rare in our loud, hurrying world that it feels almost sacred when you find it.

You felt all of these long before you knew their names. They lived in you, unnamed, like ghosts in unlabelled rooms. And now you can open the doors. Name your ghosts. They lose their power to haunt you the moment you look them in the eye and say: I know what you are.

■ PART 3 — THE MAN WHO LOST HIS EMOTIONS

In the 1990s, the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio began studying a patient he called Elliot. Elliot had undergone surgery to remove a brain tumour from his prefrontal cortex. The operation was declared a success. His intelligence was entirely intact. His memory was perfect. His logic was sharp and precise. By every clinical measure, Elliot was fine.

But Elliot had lost the ability to **feel**. Not dramatically, not visibly — he did not become a monster. He simply became... flat. Emotionless. Perfectly calm about everything.

And here is the thing that shattered every assumption neuroscience had made about the relationship between emotion and reason: without feelings, Elliot could not make a single decision. He would sit for hours in front of a menu, paralysed. He could not choose which pen to pick up. He could not decide when to schedule an appointment, which shirt to wear, what to eat for lunch.

His reason was perfect. But without emotion to guide it, reason had nothing to stand on. It spun endlessly, like a compass with no north.

Damasio called this the **somatic marker hypothesis**. The idea is this: every choice you have ever made — even the ones that felt purely logical, purely rational — was quietly guided by an emotional signal in your body. A tightening in the chest that said *no*. A warmth in the stomach that said *yes*. A low humming unease that said *wait*.

We have spent centuries building a culture that says: be rational. Suppress your feelings. Think clearly. Keep emotion out of the boardroom, out of the courtroom, out of the laboratory. But Elliot's tragedy tells us something we were never taught in school: **you cannot think clearly without your feelings.**

They are not the noise in the signal. They are the signal itself. Remove them, and you do not become more rational. You become lost.

■ PART 4 — THE FEELING AT THE EDGE OF EVERYTHING

Now I want to bring you back to where we started. That feeling on the rooftop. That feeling in the kitchen. That nameless, enormous thing that was wider than happiness and wider than sadness and wider than anything you had a word for.

Psychologists have spent years studying it, and they have finally given it a name. They call it **Awe**.

Awe is what happens when you encounter something so vast, so complex, so far beyond your current understanding, that your brain must *physically restructure itself* just to hold it. Your default mode network — the part that chatters constantly, narrating your life, rehearsing old conversations, worrying about tomorrow — goes suddenly, completely quiet.

For a moment, the self dissolves. You are not your name, not your job, not your worries, not your history. You are just — present. Open. Part of something so much larger than yourself that the boundary between you and the world becomes briefly, beautifully unclear.

Researchers at the University of California found that just fifteen minutes of awe per week measurably reduces inflammation in the body, increases generosity toward strangers, deepens a sense of meaning, reduces anxiety, and makes people feel that time — that most precious and terrifying of all our possessions — actually *expands*. As though, for a little while, the universe took a breath and gave you extra hours.

And the beautiful, almost impossible thing is this: awe is free. It costs nothing. It is available in a night sky thick with stars, in a piece of music that finds the exact shape of a feeling you never knew you had, in a paragraph from a book that breaks you open, in a child's laughter echoing through an empty corridor. You do not have to travel to the Himalayas to find it. You only have to **stop**. Look. And let it in.

***“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.”
— Albert Einstein***

■ CLOSING

So here is what I want you to carry with you tonight, or this morning, or whatever quiet hour you have chosen to be here.

Your emotions are not noise. They are not weaknesses to be managed or inconveniences to be suppressed. They are not the soft, irrational parts of you that get in the way of your real, serious, thinking self. **They are your real self.** They are the most sophisticated technology in the known universe, placed inside a body made of stardust and salt water, trying to make sense of a world that is beautiful almost beyond bearing.

The next time you feel something you cannot name — do not push it away. Do not scroll past it, or eat past it, or sleep past it. Sit with it. Be curious about it. Ask it, gently, the way you would ask a friend who showed up at your door at midnight: *What are you? Where did you come from? What are you trying to tell me?*

***Because your feelings know things your mind has not caught up to yet.
They have always been ahead of you — running through the dark with a
lamp, trying to light the way.***

I'm Leila Noor. And this has been *Beneath the Skin of Feeling*.

Episode Two is called: **“Why We Cry at Things That Are Not Sad.”** I'll see you there.

Until then — feel everything.

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