



MIND & LIFE

Mind & Life Podcast Transcript

Thupten Jinpa - Cultivating Compassion

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Opening Quote – Thupten Jinpa (00:00:02): *Compassion powerfully and directly relates to the question of ethics. And the question at the heart of ethics is, how do I treat the fellow human being in front of me? And compassion basically says, recognize the other human being just like yourself. Just as I do not wish to suffer, just as I wish to be happy, the other person, too, wishes to be free from suffering and wishes to be happy. So then honor that person's wish. If you take seriously your own wish for happiness and wish to be free from suffering, then you need to honor your fellow human beings' aspirations as well. That is the central message of compassion.*

Intro – Wendy Hasenkamp (00:00:45): Welcome to Mind & Life. I'm Wendy Hasenkamp. Thanks for checking out our podcast. We're really looking forward to sharing it. Before we jump into the first episode, I just want to say a few things about the show. Our aim here is to explore the field of contemplative science. And for those of you who are new to this area, I'll just share a few points that might help with orientation. Contemplative science is primarily focused on deepening our understanding of the human mind. And at first, that might seem like a purely academic pursuit, but actually, it's incredibly relevant for our daily lives. Our minds are the foundation of our every experience. How we perceive the world and act in it, all of our thoughts and emotions, how we conceive of ourselves, and how we treat others. So it's really critical to examine and understand our mind, especially because a lot of the ways they work are often outside of our conscious awareness.

(00:01:41) It's important to note, too, that understanding the mind goes far beyond brain science. Studying the brain is definitely an integral part of this work, but it's just one part. When we speak about the mind, we also include the body, along with our day-to-day lived experience of the world. So this begs the question, what is a mind? And you'll see as this show unfolds, there are a lot of ways to start to answer that question. Contemplative science touches on many fields including psychology and neuroscience, but also anthropology, religion, philosophy, and clinical science, just to name a few. The essential element here, and the common ground, is the use of contemplative practice to inform what we're learning in these different areas of study about the mind. Contemplative practices such as meditation, mindfulness, yoga, tai chi, and other forms of inquiry can give us unique lenses that allow for fresh insights into our personal and shared experiences.

(00:02:42) This bridging of science and what we often refer to as "contemplative wisdom" sits at the very heart of what we'll be digging into with this podcast. I won't try to lay out all this here in detail, because I think it will unfold organically through the course of these conversations. These ideas really can't be summed up in a single explanation. That's the idea behind this show — is to give a lot of different perspectives on how we investigate the mind, and how we might integrate contemplative wisdom to

improve our lives and create a more connected society. I'll also just add that the Mind & Life Institute, who produces this show and where I serve as Science Director, has been involved in this work for decades, funding research and bringing people together to share insights around these topics. It began with a series of dialogues between the Dalai Lama and western scientists and philosophers, and you'll actually hear a bit more about that in this initial episode.

(00:03:36) Our guest today is Thupten Jinpa. Jinpa is a Buddhist scholar, author, and the longtime English translator for the Dalai Lama. His life and his career represent a true bridging of Eastern and Western ideas. Jinpa was born in Tibet and was just one year old in 1959 when his family fled to India with so many others in the wake of the Dalai Lama's escape from Chinese-occupied Tibet. He grew up as a refugee in India where he eventually trained as a Buddhist monk, and received the equivalent of a PhD from that Tibetan tradition. And he went on to study philosophy and get a PhD in religious studies at Cambridge University in England, and he now lives in Canada. His work with the Dalai Lama has put him at the forefront of the conversation between science and Buddhism, and he has really been involved in contemplative science since the beginning, which he reflects on in this episode.

(00:04:29) I should also note that Jinpa is currently chair of the board at the Mind & Life Institute, so he has a deep knowledge of our organization's work. But we actually would have been interviewing him anyway, given his long history with contemplative science and his contributions to the field. Our conversation covers many topics including his early interest in the mind and monastic training, how he met and started working with the Dalai Lama and some insights from 35 years of translating for him, the relationship of language and mind, tips on stage fright and how to deal with self-consciousness, the development of the dialogue between Buddhism and science, and first- and third-person ways of investigating our minds. Jinpa has also done a great deal of work in the area of compassion, and we discuss the relevance of compassion for our wellbeing and he also describes a program that he developed to cultivate compassion with colleagues at Stanford University. And at the end of the episode, Jinpa shares his insights about the value of mental training and compassion in the time of COVID.

(00:05:31) I think this conversation will give you a good sense of the breadth and variety of topics within contemplative science and it's a great way to set the stage for this podcast. So with that, I'm very happy to bring you Thupten Jinpa. I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:05:53): Jinpa, welcome and thank you so much for joining us today.

Thupten Jinpa (00:05:56): Thank you, Wendy. Thank you for inviting me to this podcast. I'm very excited.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:06:00): So you've had really a front row seat to the whole evolution of the dialogue between science and Buddhism, as well as the development of contemplative science as a field, so I'm really looking forward to digging into that with you. But before we start that, I'd love to hear a little about your personal story. You have such a unique and interesting story, and I know you've been trained in both Eastern and Western forms of scholarship. I know you were a Tibetan refugee growing up in India. So you became a Buddhist monk in the Tibetan system. Can you share a little about how that unfolded for you and what motivated you to take that path?

Thupten Jinpa (00:06:38): Well, thank you for the question. The uniqueness of my background is purely a consequence of my circumstances that I happened to be born in. I was born in Tibet just before my parents left in 1959 and then I was part of that first generation of children who grew up in India as refugee children. And one of the most fond memories from my early childhood, where we were put to

boarding school, was the presence of two monks at the school. And they were, among all the teachers, they were the ones that I felt most attracted to. They even physically looked radiant and they always had this very assuring smile on their face. There was a kind of a level of serenity and presence in those two teachers that I could not find in any other adults around me, which really left a powerful impression.

(00:07:31) And then later when I was in grade school, in grade 4, we had a group of monks who came to teach at our school as part of their training, turns out, and the teacher who was assigned to my class taught us elementary debate, which is very central, fundamental to Tibetan monastic education. And I was fascinated because my memory of early childhood school years is that of just boredom. Looking back, probably I wasn't that intellectually challenged in the classroom, so when these monks taught something that was completely new and really training the muscles of the brain, as it were, I was just fascinated. And I just wanted to become a monk. So to cut a long story short, I became a monk at the age of 11 — against my own father's advice and pleading.

(00:08:27) So I had a monastic background, and I was fortunate to be able to eventually join an academic monastery at Ganden, and go through the entire Geshe training. Even tragedies always have silver linings. One of the silver linings of my early childhood was in Dharamsala, where the monastery that I joined first was based, there were a lot of enlightenment-seeking hippies around. And I had the good fortune to be able to sort of hang out with some of them, meet them on a regular basis, and really try to acquire a working knowledge of, speaking of English, so a command of English. So by the time I was at Ganden doing my Geshe studies, I had a reasonably good command of English. So that's how my combination of East and West kind of began.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:09:18): Yeah. You've obviously devoted so much of your life to language and translation. Did you always have this love of language? Is that why you were drawn to learning English?

Thupten Jinpa (00:09:29): No, initially I think it was more of a joy. Because for me, English opened a whole new world that was not available to me as a Tibetan, speaking Tibetan. So I feel that was probably, initially, it was just curiosity and joy. And as I remember, once I began to have a reasonably good command of comprehension, I started reading some of those second world war comics, and that is an entire world that was not available to my other colleague students and monastics. So I think initially it was not so much any grand plan that I had, it was just one of those things that you happen to do as a kid that you enjoy.

(00:10:12) But then as my command of English got better — and also I took formal training in Tibetan grammar and linguistics — by then, around age 18, 19, then I started really taking interest in Tibetan and English as language, different languages, and began to appreciate how languages in a way represent different ways of carving up the world. And it's almost like a kind of a cognitive systems in their own. And that cross-comparison of Tibetan and English, and expressibility — particularly of English. English is a very practical language, and I really began to appreciate... And the way in which there are a lot of things that you can do in English, particularly in the form of writing, that you can't do in Tibetan.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:11:00): Oh, can you give an example?

Thupten Jinpa (00:11:02): For example, in English, you can have a flowing sentence strung together with colons and semi-colons and dashes, as well as you can use the relative clause using the relative pronoun. "I'm the one who said this" kind of thing. And those relative pronoun usages are very specific to Indo-European language, and Tibetan handles that kind of usage in a different way. So being able to start noticing those differences and the strengths and weaknesses. I mean, each language has a strength and a weakness. So Tibetan is really good in very specific areas. It's very contextual and it's very good at

capturing the more subtle nuances of philosophical thinking and particularly that has to do with kind of psychological mental map, whereas in English, it's a bit more complicated because the systematic articulation of the mental map is much later in terms of historical evolution. So though you begin to see these differences. Yeah.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:12:09): That's so interesting how looking at language is almost a reflection of our minds, and language shapes our minds and then becomes a reflection of it. So your facility in English also played a role in your meeting the Dalai Lama, right?

Thupten Jinpa (00:12:25): Yes. As a Tibetan growing up in India, of course His Holiness as a presence in our life is always very, very pronounced. We think of him every day. We have photographs of him in everybody's room. And especially as a monastic scholar... He would visit the monasteries almost on an annual basis and he'll keep an eye on the emerging young scholars and whenever he visited the major monasteries, he would have debate sessions that he would attend and observe. So he knew me by sight. But then of course I was one among hundreds of young scholars.

(00:13:05) But the first time when I had an opportunity to interpret for him was 1985. This was in Dharamsala and a Buddhist group in Los Angeles had arranged for a specific set of teachings from His Holiness. And turns out that the official translator that they have arranged was not going to be able to make it on the first day, so the teaching was scheduled, and they were looking for someone to stand in for that person. So this was in October '85 and I happened to be in Dharamsala to visit my sister, who was at the time a student. And I, of course — it was a happy coincidence — wanted to attend the teachings. But then they were looking for someone to stand in. Word got around: There is this young monk who has a reasonably good command of English. One thing led to another. I was plucked from where I was sitting, it was in an outside veranda of the temple, to be brought in. And it was a very scary moment, too. But fortunately, the translation was being done simultaneously through FM so there was no silence. It was a continuous teaching, which is much less nerve-wracking because if you have the speaker like His Holiness speaking, and then stopping and then the interpretation comes, then there is an absolute silence where you are now speaking. So it was a simultaneous one.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:14:27): Wow. Can I ask about that? Because I've been struck — sometimes I've heard those simultaneous translations. So that actually means that the person you're translating for is speaking and as they're speaking, you're translating but you're also listening to what they're saying. So I've always just been amazed. How can you... How does that work?

Thupten Jinpa (00:14:46): Well it is actually an interesting kind of attention exercise because you have to split your attention. So one thing in simultaneous translation or even in subsequent translation, the biggest stumbling block is the problem of self-consciousness.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:15:05): Yeah.

Thupten Jinpa (00:15:05): If you are able to somehow prevent the arising of self-consciousness then you are in a kind of a flow and then it goes smoothly. So in simultaneous translation, it's less nerve-wracking because there is no silence on the stage, so therefore there is less chance of being self-conscious. Because self-consciousness arises when you think you are being looked at by others or heard by others. Whereas in simultaneous, the challenge really is in being able to maintain the continuous attention, and at the same time speaking, so that your own speech does not interrupt your attention of listening to whoever is speaking. So that is a big challenge. And it takes a little while, but after a while, you get into that state, because it's a skill that you can acquire.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:15:58): That's intriguing what you said about the problem of self-consciousness and needing to kind of bring that offline. Do you have any tips that you developed over the years? Because I'm thinking it's also relevant for Buddhist theory at large, about the self and reducing the self.

Thupten Jinpa (00:16:12): True, yeah. I mean the same thing, and it's a general problem for stage fright. Stage fright is often a function of self-consciousness. And the problem with self-consciousness is that it's a very weird experience. There is a beautiful essay written by Jean-Paul Sartre about the problem of self-consciousness where he says that the demon is the "other". So there is this idea of, and there is even a painting of you being seen by someone else. So self-consciousness is a function where you have a consciousness of yourself looked at from outside, and that's what makes it sort of very disrupting. There is a big difference between self-awareness and self-consciousness. Self-awareness is a function of mindfulness and attention, where you don't have that second loop. Whereas self-consciousness is an awareness of you, as viewed from as if you were looking into a mirror and seeing yourself. And that's why it makes it disruptive.

(00:17:13) The way I found to deal with that, and probably it's because of my monastic background. One thing, I set an intention at the beginning and once you are on the stage, and especially when I am interpreting for His Holiness. Fortunately, there is always an introductory preliminary kind of part, like either there is a chanting or His Holiness is speaking. And during that moment, I take a deep breath and then I just remember, I'm here purely as a mouthpiece. I'm a medium. And my role here is just to be the medium. And that kind of intention really kind of relaxes me.

(00:17:53) And the other thing is, with His Holiness because his command of English is really good, so I know that I cannot go wrong too badly, because he is going to catch me. So there is that safety net as well. So the combination of these really make me relaxed. And once you are relaxed, then you forget yourself. And when you forget yourself, then things flow smoothly. So I think the self-consciousness is where... I think you need to somehow find a way to relax yourself, create a space, and probably doing some intention work. Yeah.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:18:27): So you began working with the Dalai Lama then in this way. The first time, you were just describing, but then it continued.

Thupten Jinpa (00:18:35): Yes. It's been a real joy and honor for now over 30 something years. It's going to be 35 years this October. And it's been for me, as a Tibetan Buddhist, as a former monk, as a student of His Holiness, for me also, I began to appreciate that how this ability to offer a service to him was also a powerful opportunity for me to really put into practice the bodhisattva ideal of trying to bring about others' welfare. Because in my own capacity, in my own right, my ability to reach other people is very limited. Whereas by serving him, by being his medium, I have assisted in His Holiness's message reaching across many more people and bringing some solace and comfort and peace of mind in their lives. And particularly, one of the things that His Holiness has been very powerful and effective, is in really advocating a more universal human-centric understanding of the place of compassion in our self-definition of who we are as human beings, and the fact that any serious ethical system, moral system, must be ultimately grounded in compassion as a foundation.

(00:19:54) And that teaching has really been very powerful to me in my own personal life and also I can see the power of that teaching in offering something, a very fundamental, robust basis for people from all walks of life, all kinds of cultural and religious different backgrounds and ethnicity, to really come together to appreciate each other as human beings in the human condition, sharing the same exact condition.

(00:20:21) So for me looking back, of course initially when I began, there was a huge amount of excitement. There was a high level of anxiety and nervousness because for us, the Tibetans, serving His Holiness is like serving God! And initially, it was also quite tough because... I have a friend who was a professional interpreter at the UN in Geneva, and when I began interpreting for His Holiness early on, I asked for some tips, and one of the tips she gave me was that whenever His Holiness is speaking about himself, you as the interpreter should use first person language. And if he is talking about his childhood, then the translator should say, "when I was a kid." And for me as a Tibetan, initially that was really tough because I know it's not me, and I'm pretending to be His Holiness, and using to describe the word "I". It took a little while, but once I got over these hesitations and stuff, it's been a real joy. And for me, when I leave this world, one thing that I will take probably the greatest pride in, and rejoicing, is my service to His Holiness.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:21:44): So part of your work as a translator for the Dalai Lama has put you in the middle of this conversation between Buddhism and science. What were your first experiences like of that dialogue? Do you remember some of the first meetings?

Thupten Jinpa (00:22:02): Yes, actually, I do. The main one came in '87, which was the first Mind & Life dialogue in Dharamsala. Francisco Varela was one of the coordinators of this. Actually, he was the scientific coordinator. And at that time, of course, I did not know that this was going to be an ongoing engagement on His Holiness's part, that this was going to lead to a whole movement and global work and all of this. I was very curious. I was quite excited. But until that point, my interest with Western thought really had been more in philosophy than in science. Partly because I left school after finishing grade 4, I did not even finish grade 5, so my level of math competency is very low. And whenever I look at scientific publications, there's always these numbers and graphs and... So I sort of gave up on science fairly early. Whereas philosophy, you can play with intellect. It's more about concepts.

(00:23:11) But that 1987 dialogue was really an eye-opening experience for me. One thing that I particularly remember is the presentation given by Jeremy Hayward, who gave a history and philosophy of science kind of presentation, and for the first time, His Holiness as well as myself were introduced to the idea of Kuhnian paradigm shifts. And this was, for me, a revelation. I don't know whether it was a revelation to His Holiness, but for me because I had a naïve understanding or attitude of the status of scientific knowledge, as if scientific descriptions really mirror what is out there in the real world.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:23:53): Yeah. Can you describe that concept of a paradigm shift?

Thupten Jinpa (00:23:56): Well the paradigm shift basically questions the naïve assumption that the scientific truths are truths in a truly objective sense, that scientific descriptions of reality are somehow mirroring what is out there in the actual facts of the world. Whereas the paradigm shift was suggesting that actually, that is not accurate. Status of scientific truth should be more understood in kind of more pragmatic terms of how, at that point, given the understanding and information people have, that is the best description that one has. And those descriptions should always be taken with kind of a caveat that it could be revised, it could be changed, when new information comes in.

(00:24:46) And the real test of the scientific theory should be its ability to predict, its power of predictability. And then in Kuhnian paradigm shifts, there are examples of how major paradigm shifts occur in science when there are counterexamples which stretch the explanatory power of existing theory. And then this is how scientific revolutions happen, and new discoveries are made, which then opens up a whole new way of understanding things. And that for me was a real revelation.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:25:19): So as these dialogues evolved, you were a part of these dialogues as translator for the Dalai Lama, so these were dialogues between the Dalai Lama and Western scientists, philosophers. This was kind of the beginning of the field of contemplative science. Can you describe the original impetus to bring these two viewpoints together?

Thupten Jinpa (00:25:43): I think His Holiness has been interested in science for a long, long time. He tells the story of his interest in science from his childhood, beginning with fascination with mechanical objects. And he had a telescope that he was able to use from the rooftop of the Potala Palace. And he was fascinated by the whole ideology, if I can use the word, that led to the development of this kind of technology. And that, of course, is science. So when he became a refugee, came to India, and once the initial activity of trying to settle down the Tibetans and find some livelihood for them sort of settled, then I think His Holiness was able to take advantage of meeting with people from different backgrounds.

(00:26:32) So his interest in science goes quite far and initially, I think he says in his book that it was really more out of curiosity about a different world view there. And then he also began to realize the pervasive nature of the influence of science in the modern world. And began to also understand — like the Darwinian evolutionary theory has a whole account of how life on earth came into being, and propagation of life from the simple to the more complex forms — all of which are very powerful. And initially, he was also fascinated by quantum physics.

(00:27:10) So I think initially it was more of a curiosity but then he also began to realize that actually, there is something that the Buddhist philosophy could learn from science because there's a kind of a pseudoscience in classical Buddhist thought. For example, many of the early, very, very early Indian versions of atomic theories were developed by Buddhist thinkers going back to the beginning of the common era, in the Abhidharma, in the texts. There was a lot of debate on whether there is a space between the individual particles that make up together into a unit of an atom. So there was that kind of a debate. And then how do you account for the integrate of the microscopic-level objects, all of which are composed by the same kind of stuff, but there is a boundedness beyond a particular object. So those were questions that were there, and there was also in Buddhist writings, a lot of speculations on the origin of the cosmos. How do different world systems come into being?

(00:28:11) So clearly these are scientific inquiries, although the actual science may not have happened in a modern sense, because there were no instruments and equipment and measurement. So I think His Holiness then began to realize, actually there would be a lot of benefits for Buddhist thinkers engaging with science, or that at least the physical, the material theory could be updated. Because the ones that are in the texts are fairly old, and now with many modern physics and discoveries of modern physics and biology and all of this, there could be a lot of updating that could be done. So I think initially the motivation was not so much the Buddhists could offer to the world, but more what the Buddhist thinkers and philosophy and thought could learn in terms of updating the more scientific aspects of the Buddhist tradition.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:29:04): Yeah, and that's making me think of something that I've so appreciated about the Dalai Lama's view. I remember, I think it was 2005 when I first heard him speak at a meeting in Washington DC, I think, and he said, "If there are things in the Buddhist view or philosophy that science proves otherwise, then we should change the religion," basically. And I think for many Westerners, that's just a mind-blowing openness.

Thupten Jinpa (00:29:31): This is really important, because at least in principle (I don't know how, whether it translates into practice is another matter, but at least in theory), in Buddhist philosophy, particularly the version that the Tibetans uphold, there are recognized three sources of knowledge. One

is direct experience and perception, which includes our perceptions, the evidence of the senses, if you want. The second is inference, inferential knowledge. And the third is testimony. So within these three sources of knowledge, for many religions, the product of the testimony of the scriptures is the highest. In Buddhism, it's completely turned upside down. So the authority of the testimony of the scriptures really comes last. It has the least value in terms of authority as the sources for knowledge.

(00:30:23) So among the three, the highest authority is really the evidence of the senses, which is empiricism, empirical evidence. The second is the inference that we draw based on our empirical evidence. And then finally on matters where you cannot use these two sources of knowledge, then testimony comes in. So testimony is totally irrelevant when it comes to trying to understand the nature of the world because understanding the nature of the world can be accessed through the first two sources of knowledge, which is the empirical evidence and the inference. So in Buddhism, it's really upside down. So His Holiness is absolutely right when he says that as a result of engagement with science, if there are aspects of Buddhist thought that need to be revised or discarded, we should do it. And he's right.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:31:16): What you were just describing, too, I think reflects an alignment in approach between science and Buddhism in some ways, about this emphasis about experience of the senses and what we can learn about the world. So how do you feel like the dialogues and the conversation between science and Buddhism then evolved into really this joint way of investigating the mind and understanding the mind?

Thupten Jinpa (00:31:43): I think as scientists began to sit down with His Holiness — one of the amazing things about His Holiness is that he has got a very inquisitive and fast mind, and he anticipates, often, what could be the next question that needs to be asked in the process of research. So many of the scientists who have had the opportunity to sit down with him have really also found a way to ask new questions, take a new angle in their research. And the thing is that in science, the systematic description of our mental life is a fairly recent phenomenon. And of course, science being science, it has access to these powerful tools and has the ability to measure. That's one thing that is powerful about science, is that when science takes on a topic, it has to operationalize the constructs and find a way to measure them. Because if science cannot measure something, then it has no handle on it, and that's why science brings a very practical approach to exploring whatever the topic is.

(00:32:56) Now Buddhism on the other hand brings a powerful, long history of using sustained attention in a way where we can take seriously the first-person perspective. And also because Buddhism has, in some sense, been in the game for much longer, at least by 1,000 years, there's a lot more content to the conceptual side of things — about teasing out our mental life, in the fine distinction between aspects of attention and focus and mindfulness and meta-awareness. And one of the amazing things about Buddhism is because Buddhist monks were not simply interested in finding a passive description of reality, they were also interested, ultimately, they were motivated by what can we do to train our mind. So there was always a practical agenda, just as the scientists, but for the Buddhist the practical agenda is to transform their mind.

(00:33:59) So along with this sophisticated, complex description of the mental life, also comes development of techniques that can be applied by the individual. So for example, there's a whole training which involves a very refined application of attention, and also regulation of meta-awareness through monitoring what's happening inside one's mind. So Buddhism has really developed these mental training techniques, and also appreciation of what are the key faculties that are involved in specific types of mental training exercise. So I think as the dialogues proceeded, I think both sides began to really recognize there is a lot that can happen through this dialogue.

(00:34:49) And the beautiful thing about Mind & Life dialogues is Mind & Life has been really singularly successful, and I would say actually a pioneer, in creating a dialogical method and approach and process where a space is created where no one side has the impulse to reduce the other side into its own paradigm. So in some sense, offering equal footing of the two voices, so that there is always a striving for a common language, common ground. And what can we learn through this synthetic process, and what can come out from this synthetic process? And also having the patience — because sometimes you have this series of dialogues which, it's not so obvious what the immediate practical applications of those things could be.

(00:35:44) But Mind & Life has been able to create that space and the patience to really allow for these conversations to proceed, and increasingly expand the horizons of this discourse, that even the scientists can venture beyond their comfort zone and really start thinking, looking at issues from a different angle. And for the Buddhists too, to really bring in the role of brain, because Buddhist texts don't describe at all. If you look at the Buddhist texts, despite all their sophistication, there's no brain! So the most important human organ, the role is not there, because the whole approach is from the mind side of the story. So I think this is what has led to this really powerful dialogue and engagement. Yeah.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:36:35): Can you say a little bit more about... You spoke about the first-person and juxtaposing that with the third-person, quote-unquote third-person views of science. Can you explain a little bit more about that for our listeners, those two viewpoints?

Thupten Jinpa (00:36:49): The third-person viewpoint is the standard perspective of science, because the science is always seeking a kind of objective description, or at least objective evaluation or analysis of whatever the phenomenon is.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:37:04): Like looking from the outside in?

Thupten Jinpa (00:37:06): Yeah, from the outside. Yeah. And this is important because for many scientific findings, repeatability of that finding is crucial. Because if you did research and you found something and you describe what the process was, what your hypothesis was and what you've found, you publish it. And then if another group of researchers replicate it exactly the same way and they find the same kind of findings, then it is taken more seriously. So for scientific knowledge, one very crucial factor is the repeatability, that it has to be quantifiable and it has to be repeatable. So, which means that the very conception of the scientific knowledge has built in this third-person view, and looking at a phenomenon from outside and measured in an objective sense.

(00:37:58) Whereas the Buddhist approach is primarily first-person. It's really from the perspective of the person who is living that experience. How he or she experiences it, and how he or she views it and observes it. And where richness of the Buddhist tradition and Buddhist thought emerges is really in the domain of philosophy of mind and cognitive science, and what is today part of the neuroscience, and clinical applications of this. And this is where a meditator is able to, first of all, consciously settle the mind. Then once you are in a restful state of mind and then learn to observe it in a sustained way, apply attention, maintain it, and then observe what comes and goes. And what you discover through this process is really a first-person approach because it's from the perspective of the living individual who describes it and understands it as it is experienced.

(00:38:56) So I sometimes describe the two as — one is the mind side of the story, the other one is the brain side of the story. So the scientific explanations are really powerfully more from the brain side of the story. (There is a peripheral biology that comes in, but it's mostly from the brain side of the story.)

There is the contemplative, the Buddhist description, is really from the mind side of the story. And individuals ourselves, when we experience something, particularly at the mental level, although their body has a role to play in it, but most of us really experience more at the cognitive-emotional level. And of course, body and brain... The brain processes, we don't have access to them. To the actual physical brain processes and the chemical processes, we don't have access to them. Maybe if you are a yogi who has a very advanced mental state, maybe it is possible, but they are completely beyond a subconscious level of the individual human being.

(00:39:59) But as individual human beings, we do have access to the mental side of the story. For example, when we are beginning to get worried, we can catch ourselves. When we are beginning to get frustrated, we can catch ourselves. When we are beginning to get tired, we can catch ourselves. That's the mind side of the story. And there is a very strong experiential dimension to them and this is where, I think, mental training and mindfulness — you begin to notice them, bring more awareness to them. But that is the mind side of the story. And at least in principle, there is a beautiful promise of the integration of the two, and that is the promise of contemplative science.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:40:41): I think what you were just saying was making me also think of when you can become aware of different emotions arising or mental experiences, a lot of times, that signal that you can become aware of is coming from your body. And so I think that's just one example of how work in this field has expanded our understanding of mind well beyond the brain. You were just describing important, obviously central parts in the brain, but the role of the entire body is also fully integrated into mind, and then even beyond into our social environment, our physical environment, culture, things like that. So then the field starts to bring in anthropology and all sorts of other domains. So I think it's just been really striking for me how much the concept of the mind and what the mind is keeps expanding and expanding.

Thupten Jinpa (00:41:34): It is. That's one of the beautiful things about our time. Because the conceptual tools to analyze is becoming a lot more sophisticated. And also we're beginning to understand the role of the social relationship in this context. Because many of the emotions and other things that we experience are very relational, and although it is the individual who may be experiencing it, but the individual experiences within a context. And that context has a very strong social dimension. And until recently, those things were difficult to analyze for scientists, because there was no real conceptual tool, and also technical tools as well.

(00:42:20) But now there are different ways of capturing it, and experience sampling type kind of approaches... There's more qualitative and quantitative approaches that can capture those social dimensions. And also we are beginning to also understand how our own identity of who we are as individuals and human beings are also shaped powerfully by the culture we participate in. And many of the influences are coming from subconscious processes where we have been conditioned in a particular way. And this is one area where I think humanities and anthropology and others can really shed more light on understanding the mind.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:43:03): So you spoke very beautifully before about how His Holiness has inspired you about the role of compassion. And you've done a lot of that work in your own right now, both developing compassion interventions at Stanford, and you have a book called *A Fearless Heart*, which outlines the importance of compassion and how we can cultivate it. So can you say first just a bit about why you feel that compassion is such a central aspect of human life, and why it's a key to our happiness?

Thupten Jinpa (00:43:52): Thank you for that question. One of the things that I noticed, as I said earlier, when I began working for His Holiness, serving him and traveling extensively with him, is that I noticed

that he... There's certain things that are constant in the message that he's bringing to the world. In those days, it was during the Cold War before the Berlin wall fell. So there was a lot of fear in Europe, so "world peace" was a major theme in his talk. But along with it was also a very strong emphasis on promoting a particular approach to understanding compassion, which was, he would call it a secular ethics approach. Sort of a way of talking about compassion and understanding by using, primarily common sense, shared human experience, and science.

(00:44:40) In the early days, there was not that much, the science of compassion hadn't really kicked in yet, but he was beginning to draw on scientific information. And one thing that I noticed that he was also making a powerful case is, more of an ideological case, which is he was making the point that — because of the popular interpretation of Darwinian evolutionary theory, there is this widespread belief that the fundamental drive for human behavior, fundamental explanation for human behavior, is the pursuit of self interest. And he, of course, admits it. That's one of them. But one of the things that he is trying to argue is that it's only one side of the story. There is the whole dimension of human nature which has to do with nurturing, kindness, connection, that has been overlooked by science. And that needs to be brought into the very conception of our human nature.

(00:45:37) And without this, you cannot explain the emergence of large-scale cooperation and altruistic behavior. I think now, of course, science has moved on. It's now a different story. But one of the things that I realized is that actually His Holiness has really made the way, but in order for that message to really take root in a way that will change the world, we need to create practical programs that can actually make that real. And that was the inspiration for me to develop the Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT) at Stanford. And I was inspired by the success of Jon Kabat-Zinn's MBSR, standardization of that, and the eight-week framework.

(00:46:25) And I looked at that structure and I thought, I could do the same thing with compassion. And mindfulness has really shown a way to the secular world. There are techniques from the Buddhist tradition that could be universalized and applied in a way that can be really helpful to us as individuals, not just in the clinical setting. The one thing that I'm particularly enthusiastic about compassion is that compassion, unlike mindfulness, directly relates to the question of ethics. This is where mindfulness and compassion are different. Mindfulness is neutral when it comes to ethics. Compassion, you cannot avoid ethics.

(00:47:04) And at the heart of ethics, the question at the heart of ethics, is how do I treat the fellow human being in front of me? That, in a way, is the fundamental question of ethics. And compassion, the principle of compassion basically says, recognize the other human being just like yourself. Just as I do not wish to suffer, just as I wish to be happy, the other person too wishes to be free from suffering, and wishes to be happy. So then honor that person's wish. If you take seriously your own wish for happiness and wish to be free from suffering, then you need to honor your fellow human beings' aspirations as well. That is the central message of compassion.

(00:47:46) And one of the things about formal training of compassion is that it also teaches us how to consciously shape our intention, because motivations are powerfully shaped by emotions. Motivations, you cannot get to them directly. Emotions are powerful. When they arise, they arise. You cannot do much. But intentions are conscious thoughts. Intentions are goal-directed. So in compassion training, one of the powerful techniques that we use is setting your intention so that you consciously bring compassion into your every day intention. And that, I think, is another powerful technique which can be done by anybody, regardless of whether they are Buddhist or not.

(00:48:26) And another thing in compassion is that because compassion is completely relational, it has a way of opening our heart because there's a lot more affective content to compassion training compared to mindfulness. Mindfulness is primarily a cognitive approach. Compassion has a lot more "wetness" to it, and it allows us to open our heart, and once we experience opening of the heart, we feel expansive. There is a power to it. So compassion offers a lot more richness, and also compassion training allows us to bring closer alignment between values that we cherish deeply, and the actual reality of our everyday life.

(00:49:11) So because of these, I developed this training program — and Emory has also developed at that time a six-week training. So there was a movement. And then by that time, Sharon Salzberg has already written that book on Loving Kindness, which is drawn primarily from the Theravada Buddhism. And there was research that was done by Barbara Fredrickson. So the time was perfectly ripe to develop a kind of systematic approach to training compassion. So I began that when I had the opportunity at Stanford. Yeah.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:49:45): And can you describe some of the steps or kinds of practices, what someone would do to cultivate compassion?

Thupten Jinpa (00:49:50): Well in the CCT training, it has six steps. The first step is really a basic mindfulness type practice, where the aim is to learn some skills on learning to self-quieten your mind, learning to focus by consciously breath counting or noticing the breath. So just learning to apply your mind on a task. And then the third aspect of that practice is applying meta-awareness. So observing without any particular focus, what's happening in your body, what's happening in your mind. So it's basic skills of applying your mind and settling your mind.

(00:50:29) And then the larger background to all six steps in eight weeks is really the intention setting. It's a two-hour once a week class over a period of eight weeks, so every session begins with an intention setting. In the first session, there's a more didactic explanation of the role of intention setting, but from that point onwards, we just do the intention setting. The second step is then loving kindness for a loved one, and this was an important revelation for me because in the traditional format, we begin with self-compassion, and then to a loved one, to others. But that was the first protocol I developed at Stanford. But we tried it twice among Stanford undergraduates, and self-compassion was just too tough.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:51:20): Can you say why you think that is?

Thupten Jinpa (00:51:22): Probably there is something in the culture. And I don't think it's East versus West. I think it's more to do with the highly competitive nature of our society in the affluent world, where we're so used to being evaluated early on, where our sense of self-worth is really heavily contingent on how we perform on a criteria set externally. But whatever may be the reason, I was surprised to find out that even for some students, there was a kind of aversive reaction to even silently wishing themselves the phrase, "May I be free from suffering. May I be happy." Even this phrase, "May I be happy" seemed to be... There seemed to be almost a kind of an aversive reaction to it. So it turned out to be just too much to ask.

(00:52:10) So we switched the sequence. And so the second step is loving kindness for a loved one. And in our training, we really focus more on the somatic experience. Try to conjure an image of a loved one — an easy target, not a complicated person in your life, but someone like an infant child, or a pet, or a loving grandparent. And then the aim of this step is to really bring awareness to what it feels like when you truly care for someone unconditionally. What does it feel like in your body? What does it feel like around your heart? Where does the softness come in? Can you notice the tenderness? Can you notice

your instinctive tendency to sort of lean in? We bring a lot of yoga type aspects to this to really bring up the role of the body and sensation.

(00:53:01) And then the third step is self-compassion, but the self-compassion we split into two weeks because it's such a challenge. And in our protocol, the self-compassion as a construct is much simpler. Basically it's the same compassion that we have, now we are directing at ourselves. And the idea here is that in the loving kindness step (for a loved one), we notice that we can do this naturally for someone we care [for]. Now it's simply a matter of shifting the object, shifting the focus. Of course, it's easier said than done, but conceptually, it's easy. It's simply a turning. So the third step is self-compassion. It's spread into two weeks.

(00:53:41) And then the fourth step is common humanity. So now we are moving out from self to others, the neutral person. And there, we take common humanity as a primary foundation of recognizing the shared human condition, and vulnerability and susceptibility to fear and all the rest, hopes and fears. And then the fifth step is to really extend compassion to all. And then the final is a more integrated step where we go through the whole thing, and then bring in the active compassion. So now we are trying to prime ourselves. So imagining scenarios of helping others, and sending strength and courage to others.

(00:54:27) So those are the six steps. And where CCT particularly is an interesting approach is, the method that we use is kind of a synthetic approach where we rely, of course, heavily on contemplative approaches drawn from the Buddhist practices, but we also use quite a lot of interactive exercises that are performed in the context of two people. Because if you look at the traditional meditations, many of the meditations involve imagining scenarios and evoking your natural response.

(00:55:00) So in those types of situations, it's sometimes more effective if you actually do a role-play. And then the interactive exercises, which are often in the form of a dyad, are also very powerful. Where you simply sit in front of the person — and it has to be a little contrived, it's a discipline, so that you don't immediately give commentary or interrupt. So we say, each person has two minutes, two people, partners, facing each other. And then one of the exercises is to ask the other person, "Tell me something about yourself that you really appreciate." And then the other person has no commentary, but full attention for two minutes and listens and at the end says, "Thank you for sharing this." It's a powerful experience because you have the full attention of someone for two minutes uninterrupted, just attending to you. So those kinds of relational exercises are really powerful.

(00:55:54) And also, we use from the learning theory, the need to reinforce through journaling. And the overall approach is a combination of contemplative practice and techniques that are drawn from more contemporary approaches. And then we also ask individual participants to do homework on a daily basis, which involves recorded MP3 guided meditation practice, starting from 10 to 15 minutes up to half an hour towards the end. And we also ask what we call informal practices. So if you happen to be, if that week's theme is loving kindness for a loved one, then in your every day action, seize the moment when you notice that feeling evoking in you. Then instead of just moving on, dwell on it and observe it and stay with it. So we encourage people to do informal practices. If you are doing common humanity practice, then if you are taking the subway, then just simply softly gaze at someone, a total stranger, and then just close your eyes and imagine what it must be like. Have the same kind of hope, same kind of fear, same kind of aspiration for their family members. So we do this combination. So that's why I think CCT has turned out to be quite effective.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:57:17): So we're recording this interview about three or so weeks into the global pandemic of coronavirus. And it strikes me what you were just saying about emphasis on common humanity, and extending compassion feels particularly relevant right now, and something that actually

might be coming more naturally to some people. What do you think about applying these practices, or the role of compassion in this current moment?

Thupten Jinpa (00:57:43): I think when the crisis began, and as it became obvious that North America was not going to be spared, I immediately approached the Compassion Institute, and one of the senior staff also suggested that we offer some free online classes. So we are now doing weekly drop-in classes that anybody can attend. And it's a way of kind of sharing time together to learn to relax ourselves. Acknowledge the anxiety that we're all feeling, and then recognizing the common humanity. Because one of the things that we forget when we are ourselves going through great anxiety and difficulty is that there are a lot more people who are in a worse situation than us. We tend to forget that, because when we experience our own pains, they are so real. They are so close. And there seems to be an element of eternity to them, which kind of prevents any space or time to think about others.

(00:58:47) But I think in those moments, thinking about others, in some ways, is a very powerful way of calming ourselves. Because to recognize that we are all in the same boat really makes us powerfully connect with others. And one of the things about these kind of diseases is they are real equalizers. No-one is an exception. So of course, the poorer people are more vulnerable, partly because they don't have, in the poor part of the world, healthcare systems are very poor. More people simply don't have basic sanitation facilities. Then if it strikes there, their ability to cope and kind of curb the spread is much worse. But as far as the susceptibility and vulnerability is concerned, we are all the same. So I think thinking about this is really helpful.

(00:59:40) And with compassion training, one of the things that I've been very keen [to do] is to really adapt the training for specific populations. So we have quite a big project, through the Compassion Institute, focused on law enforcement in northern California. We are at the moment confining ourselves to California state because I believe that you need to start small and try it out in one area where there is less variability. There is kind of a shared culture. And we also have an adaptation of the program for dealing with burnout among physicians through a collaboration with the University of California San Diego. And we also have a collaboration with Colorado University, particularly the René Crown Wellness center, a collaboration on developing, bringing compassion education to the teacher training (of schoolteachers).

(01:00:37) So I think there's a real chance to adapt it. And for the situation, I think one thing that would be really helpful is that people in the mindfulness and compassion world can really share with others — not in the form of proselytizing, but offering people some basic skills to learn to calm their mind down, to pay attention when anxiety arises, and also catch yourself before you start getting suspicious of others. I know, for example, right now — so I'm an Asian. Even though I've been living here, my wife is French Canadian, but when I go out to shopping, I'm conscious of the fact that because there is an element of racism towards the Asians, because of the origin of this... And I'm completely aware of this, and I understand where some of these suspicions and fear may be coming from. But it is important that on our part, we don't allow these to take over.

(01:01:37) So I think here, learning some skills to pay attention to your mind, because the mind plays tricks! Especially when we are confined and asked to be self-quarantined, then we are asked to be alone with our mind for long periods of time. And unless you're a monastic, you're not used to being alone with your mind for such a long time. So I think in those kind of situations, I think some skills from paying attention to your mind, checking your intention, and learning not to forget common humanity, I think these are really powerful ways to keep ourselves sane, and also keep ourselves more available for others in our lives. So for example, many of us have our relatives and family members living in different parts of

the world and different parts of the country. And in these days, I think we now need to use the virtual capacity to show our face, to Zoom or FaceTime, and assure each other.

(01:02:38) So I think when we come out of this pandemic — there will be an end, it may feel like eternal right now, but there will be an end — I hope we as human beings, and we as nations and societies, will learn something about common humanity from this experience. And also my hope is that as we come out of this, because of the isolation, social isolation, and the forced time to be with ourselves for a long period of time, I hope more and more people will appreciate the importance of developing some mental skills — to be able to pay attention, to be able to bring awareness, to be able to bring compassion into their intention. Let's hope that we learn something when we come out of this very difficult experience.

Wendy Hasenkamp (01:03:28): Well Jinpa, thank you so much for joining us today and sharing your wisdom with us. It's been wonderful to talk with you.

Thupten Jinpa (01:03:34): Thank you very much, Wendy, for giving me this opportunity. And I'm very excited by this new series, being able to bring to the much broader world the value of contemplative science, and its potential contribution to the well-being of entire humanity.

Outro – Wendy Hasenkamp (01:03:54): *This episode was edited and produced by me and Phil Walker. Music on the show is from Blue Dot Sessions and Universal. This episode was supported in part by the Lenz Foundation. Show notes and resources for this and other episodes can be found at podcast.mindandlife.org. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review us on iTunes, and share it with a friend. If something in this conversation sparked insight for you, we'd love to know about it. You can send an email or voice memo to podcast@mindandlife.org. Mind & Life is a production of the Mind & Life Institute. Visit us at mindandlife.org where you can learn more about how we bridge science and contemplative wisdom to foster insight and inspire action. There you can also support our work, including this podcast.*