



MIND & LIFE

Mind & Life Podcast Transcript

Bobbi Patterson - Contemplation, Place, and Resilience

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Opening Quote – Bobbi Patterson (00:03): *It feels to me that the contemplative traditions of... all traditions actually, that we are drawing from some sort of shared deeper river. And in that river is a spaciousness, is a complexity that none of us can control, but from which we can all draw and share. And I think we are all interested in the body, and we're all interested in this deep recognition of love as the only path.*

Intro – Wendy Hasenkamp (00:45): Welcome to Mind & Life. I'm Wendy Hasenkamp. Today I'm speaking with professor emerita and Episcopal priest, Bobbi Patterson. Bobbi's work integrates Christian contemplation, Buddhist meditation, contemplative pedagogy, place-based knowledge, and adaptive resilience. Bobbi is actually the first person I've known to formally train as an interdisciplinarian, which means she's perfectly suited to exist between fields and perspectives—making her a natural in the exchanges that happen within contemplative science.

(01:21) Our conversation begins with how she was drawn to the power of silence within Christian monastic communities, and then her involvement in early dialogues between Christianity and Buddhism. We talk about how Christian contemplatives view the human mind, and the commonalities there between traditions. And she reflects on her experience as a woman in a leadership position in the Church. Then, we get into her interesting work on the importance of place. She describes how we can listen to a place, and shares some of her experiences bringing students into both nature and urban settings to learn from these places. We touch on the role of the body in contemplation, and then Bobbi shares about adaptive resilience and how it can give us a new understanding around the experience of burnout.

(02:13) As always, there's more information in the show notes, including this week, a podcast extra, where Bobbi reflects on the role of place in an increasingly digital world. I love how Bobbi's work embraces conversation, discovery, relationship, and action—all of it emerging at the intersection of contemplative practice and community engagement. I hope that her warm heart and bright spirit shine through in this conversation. I'm so happy to share with you, Bobbi Patterson.

Wendy Hasenkamp (02:50): Well, I'm so happy to welcome Bobbi Patterson. Thanks so much for joining us, Bobbi.

Bobbi Patterson (02:56): It's a joy, total joy.

Wendy Hasenkamp (02:58): I would love to start by hearing what drew you to the world of meditation and contemplative work. How did you end up doing this work?

Bobbi Patterson (03:10): Yeah, that's a terrific question. Because I think one of my interests and concerns, I guess I would say, is that the Christian tradition, which is my root tradition, has an expansive and rich history and tradition of contemplative practice. But it has in many ways been kind of sheltered, maybe we would say "put in a fortress," which is the monastic tradition. And there are ways in which the institutional church just was more publicly facing in those practices, take a kind of time and settling. So, for me, growing up in the Christian tradition, I heard about the contemplative traditions, but it really was when I went to divinity school and there was a monastery down the hill from where I was in school. And it was an Episcopal monastery, and it was in the '70s. And I began to just attend worship services there with a classmate and fell in love with the stillness. Fell in love with their very up-to-dateness in how they talked and how they were living, and their work in community-based justice. And then this deep kind of welling of stillness. So, I began to really explore at that time more deeply what the tradition was.

(04:57) And it was also in the early '80s that there were these Buddhist-Christian conversations happening—which actually Buddhist and Christian monastic communities have had a long time, but it just wasn't available to the public. It was all monastics. And yet they began, David Steindl-Rast and Thomas Keating, they began to, if you will, come out. And I went to some conferences at Naropa [that] a friend put me onto, and then I ended up also going to Naropa for a few courses. And that was the foundation. I became a kind of fellow with the Society of St. John the Evangelist, that monastery in Cambridge, Mass, and continued to study with them. So, that's how I began the kind of journey was... these practices just drew me.

Wendy Hasenkamp (05:58): That's fascinating. I'm glad that you raised the contemplative tradition within Christianity because I agree, I feel like it's not often explored or talked about. So, I'd love to hear a little more of what you've learned about that and maybe the view of the mind and how, through contemplation we might change it, from the Christian perspective.

Bobbi Patterson (06:21): Yeah. Well, I really became just enamored with, falling in love with, the earliest Christian contemplative traditions, and particularly in my graduate studies, did a good deal of work with the Desert Mothers and Fathers, they're called. They kind of started in Egypt and then it moved towards Syria and on to the east. And the Eastern Christian Church has always kind of kept that monastic, contemplative thread a little bit more to the forefront than the Western church out of Rome, which became quite liturgical, meaning all the ceremonies, and political. And the Mothers and Fathers of the Desert just totally took my heart. They just totally wrapped me in their arms.

(07:16) And it was because they wear these characters. They were real people who experienced a good deal of life's pushes and pulls, ups and downs, which only got more tense, more exacerbated in the desert itself. The African desert is not a human-friendly environment. So, when you go there, there are... And they went there partly to get away from the hustle and bustle. Some were evading the Roman empire, but others were kind of drawn to wanting a deeper experience of the holy. And there was a good deal of developing in those communities what you might call a mind science. How do you begin to take to a prayer that's deeply settling, when there's lots of noise in the head, there are little lions and other creatures right around you? And you're trying to also do this deep work, but there are other monastics in the area. So, there's human tension. And some of them of course were selling their mats

that they would make out of straw in the city market and then go back to their hermitage or their huts. And their sense was that if you attended to the mind's busyness and rooted in the love of God, that would begin to transform your relationships with yourself—a lot more self care—and with others. And they began eventually to become communities of people, and that science got more developed. And of course they were doing worship services, and doing kind deeds to other people. So, they were for real.

[\(09:21\)](#) And I'll just one other thing, Wendy, that I think helped, is they were doing this inner exploration and development of practices to, as one old monk said, "Learn how to get up and fall down and get up and fall down. That's what we do out here all day." But they were doing this work before the church got embroiled in: Who is Jesus? Is he God? Is he not God? Who's his mother? How do we talk about this revelation? They were starting this life of deep prayer for self transformation and life with others before those arguments got their steam, which I think gave them some freedom.

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(10:19\)](#): Yeah. Did they continue? Once those arguments came to the fore, did they get caught up in them, or did they kind of remain separate?

Bobbi Patterson [\(10:27\)](#): They did continue. And they... Really they continued and still are alive today. From that route, comes the Benedictine tradition. And from that comes Eastern Orthodox traditions, Mount Athos in Greece, and all the Cistercians, the Trappists, they all come from this root. And some of them did get involved in this kind of doctrinal conversation. Some of them were teaching other men, predominantly, who became the bishops of the church; Athanasius was very aware of this community and took teachings from them. But they continued to live their steady, very simple life of singing the Psalms and doing their private prayer and trying to live in community with a good deal of silence. And those early monasteries are still in Egypt! And I got a chance to go. And it's just crazy—Macarius's monastery from the 300s is still alive. It's an amazing legacy. So yeah, they of course were pushed and pulled by some of that doctrinal work, but they had an ability to separate due to their practices and their way of focusing on transformation in Christ is out of this deep practice of stillness that becomes a wellspring of love, you might say.

[\(12:15\)](#) I just do want to say one other thing, Wendy. And to name—there were women. And they were powerful. And of course there are not as many stories about them in those early days. And there were even, by the 600s, women who were heads of communities. A few, like Hilda, even of men and women, who were the superior, you might call it, of a community. So, they're there.

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(12:45\)](#): That's great. And so, you yourself are an Episcopal priest. And so, I'd be curious, coming all the way from that lineage, what your experience has been as a woman in a leadership position in the church. And is that now normalized? Is it still unusual in your tradition, or what's been your experience?

Bobbi Patterson [\(13:05\)](#): Yeah. I think now it's actually quite normalized. And the number of women bishops is very large. When we say "normal," I think we have to know that that's a word that ebbs and flows. So there may be times that you can suddenly experience a set of assumptions about power, or about training. For me personally, one reason that monastery of the Society of St. John The Evangelist became so critical was they were actually in the middle, in the '70s, of splitting in two. By which I mean, numbers of the monks who were there left over the ordination of women. They became Roman Catholic monks, to my knowledge.

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(14:10\)](#): Where women were not allowed to be ordained.

Bobbi Patterson ([14:12](#)): Where women were not allowed to be priests. And so, they could be in leadership, but not priests, but the idea of becoming a priest for them was not tenable, not doable. So, for me, in an interesting way, the contemplative space they embraced together, in the conflict of real-world decision-making—"Can women do this?"—created a spaciousness to allow my pain as I watched some leave, and to allow my capacity to be with what was real. Which was, many were staying, a few elder ones and a number of young ones, very encouraging. And so, that contemplative space for me was a critical starting point that helped me feel my own groundedness. Carter Heyward was at the Episcopal Divinity School up the street, and she was helping us at Harvard Divinity and meeting with us. She was irregularly ordained—very upsetting to the church—a beautiful lesbian theologian. So, I was in an environment of empowerment, you might say. It took a number of years for me to get ordained because I was all out of order and... *[laughter]*

Wendy Hasenkamp ([15:41](#)): What do you mean by that?

Bobbi Patterson ([15:42](#)): Well, yeah, it was one of those funny things like, "Okay, you want me to do the steps in order, but you're not allowing me to start the steps. So, now I've gone to divinity school and you want me to be in a program to discern my vocation..." Okay... So, it's kind of like, already moving forward and then moving back and moving forward, moving back. For instance, Wendy, my first job was in the cathedral of Jackson, Mississippi; I specialized in urban ministry. And the deans of cathedrals, in my limited experience, would hire a woman as a kind of testimony to the godness of women as priests. They wanted that displayed at the cathedral, which is a powerful holy space and a diocese. (And the Bishop also lives there, in the cathedral, his offices are there.)

([16:50](#)) This dean asked me to be the outreach minister; I did worship every Sunday. That Bishop of Mississippi did not ordain women and he had the right to not do that. So, I worked for two years with a Bishop who was very genial toward me, but absolutely clear that I was not ordainable because of my gender identity. So, by the time I got to Atlanta—and the Bishop of Atlanta was welcoming of women, but that's when he said, "You need to discern your vocation and we have a series of steps, and you're out of order." And so, that took four more years to get "in order."

([17:37](#)) And I had great, great encouragers. And I once had a Bishop I just adored in Atlanta, a very loving, very, very smart man. And he said to me, one day, "Bob, why are you all, you women from that..." (A little bit older generation, I wasn't the first.) "Why do you kind of hang on the margins?" And I said, "Because you pushed us there!" *[laughter]* And then you become comfortable in the margins. There's a lot of creativity there.

([18:12](#)) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp ([18:46](#)): So you've been in conversation with the Buddhist tradition for many decades then, it sounds like.

Bobbi Patterson ([18:54](#)): That's right.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([18:56](#)): I'm wondering where you see similarities and differences, maybe, in terms of the approach to contemplative work and the goals between the traditions.

Bobbi Patterson (19:13): Yeah. I think you and I have talked a little bit about my sense that my training in the Buddhist traditions—which really are all Tibetan, because it was Naropa that had these Buddhist-Christian dialogues I first went to. And then, a Tibetan teacher came to Emory to get a PhD in the same program I was in, and I studied with him a long time and still do. It feels to me that the contemplative traditions of... All traditions actually—African traditions, Christian traditions, Native Americans or Native peoples, Islam—that we are drawing from some sort of shared deeper river. And that, in that river is a spaciousness, is a complexity that none of us can control, but from which we can all draw and share. And I found that to be a place of cultivating a deeper spiritual sense of the fundamentals that I think all contemplative traditions embrace. Which is, stillness is a source of insight and strength. Pausing is a good idea. Breathing is a terrific idea. Loosen your grip. I think we are all interested in the body. Christianity calls it incarnation. We're all interested in this deep recognition of love as the only path. And that the present moment is where love shows up. And that one has benefactors in all these traditions with whom you can find solace. You can welcome the stranger inside yourself and others. And you can continue to develop the skill to give way to love.

(21:33) So, for me, one of the sadnesses I feel today is that Christianity is not really participating fully, I believe, in the current conversations about contemplative living, of mindfulness, of meditation. We have more to bring to the conversation—as there were conversations in the '80s. So, I think we could do better. And for me it's been so enriching.

Wendy Hasenkamp (22:11): Can you say more, how it's been enriching?

Bobbi Patterson (22:15): I think about the power... You know I love pedagogy, it's been one of the streams that's kept me alive. Pedagogy is really about turning the deep self in a new direction. I love this poem by Marie Howe called, "The Annunciation", the announcing to Mary, you're going to have this child. She talks about that as a "turning a mirror inside herself," so that the light that is already shining suddenly bursts on the mirror. And bursts into insight. And I think cross-training is a way we turn that mirror to only engage the light that's always shining. And there are just ways in which, if I'm always holding that deep inner mirror at the same angle, with the same words, and the same texts, and the same liturgies, and the same teachers, it's hard to turn it. And then I lose the opportunity for that flash of insight that comes by cross-training.

Wendy Hasenkamp (23:46): That's beautiful. It also really speaks... it makes me think of interdisciplinary work in general, not just in the religious or contemplative tradition, but all the lenses, for example in contemplative science, that we bring to studying the mind. In my own work, being exposed to humanities was like that—it's such a different training and perspective than scientific training. And I love that metaphor of turning the mirror, and bursting insight.

Bobbi Patterson (24:18): Yeah. Yeah. That's why I think for me, once I finally decided to do a PhD, there was nothing to do but do an interdisciplinary PhD. I simply couldn't grasp being trained only with one content. And I think what interdisciplinarity gives us is to recognize [that] we share methods. Investigation is a broad approach. Mechanisms is a broad approach. History and growth of field is a broad approach. And there's so much... intersectionality might be the new word, where we find all these crossings that enrich us. I'm with you. And for me, learning with Mind & Life more about the neuroscience, the cognitive science (in my very limping way) has been great, because I can bring stories and poetry and a sense of groundedness in place to the conversations.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([25:35](#)): Yeah. I'd love to talk more with you about that sense of groundedness in place. So, you recently helped co-chair and plan our Summer Research Institute that just happened this past summer, which was on the topic of climate, but you brought such a beautiful perspective on the importance of place. So you said, "Taking places and their stories seriously is fundamental to planetary healing." And you suggest that we begin that process by remembering and listening to what places are teaching us. So, can you just say more about your perspective on that?

Bobbi Patterson ([26:16](#)): Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, you can see that already poetry is a kind of river in me, because remembering is really Joy Harjo, the poet laureate's poem, "Remember". And it's about place. It's about the place of the womb of a mother that birthed us. It's about the place of the soil. And she has the beautiful litany of all the colors of soil in the world that really grew humanity in evolution, and our multitude of colors and experiences. That the places we come from shape so profoundly the stories we know and the stories we hear. And that human variety is a mirror if you will of the plant world variety, of the cosmos variety, the stars, of the rivers.

([27:22](#)) And certainly as a Southern woman, place is a tremendous metaphor for us. With all of its destructiveness—because one can get so tied to place that it then becomes worthy of killing, and of great brutality, the racism of the South, the white supremacy of the South. And yet, it is also our stories about all beings finding healing in their places, about listening to the gifts of those that come into one's place. Slavery [was] brought here by force, but the gifts of music, of the Mississippi traditions, of the Gullah traditions of South Carolina... Knowing the deeper, richer, painful stories of place is what shows us the capacity of humanity, from our brutality to our great beauty. It's very much embodied in the land, embodied in the stories with the land, embodied with the creatures. And of course, as Lewis and Clark made their way... I think I quoted Least Heat-Moon's book *River-horse*, where he took the rivers of the United States to move across the country, often following Lewis and Clark and the magnificence of all the places, all the diversity. That each of them have stories, and there's such hope and healing in experiencing those stories—as well as facing the great painfulness, the great injustice of them. But stories give us an access to another layer of human sharing that I think is similar to science, but it's just of a different kind.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([29:32](#)): I'm wondering, this might seem like a silly question and there might not be a good answer, but... I hear a lot about the teachings of the land and the importance of listening to places, and to land and plants and creatures and all the embeddedness that's around us. I think sometimes this can be a foreign concept for people, the idea of listening to a place. Do you have any examples from your own life of learnings that you've gained from a place, or even just tips, I guess, or instructional ideas about how to go about listening in that kind of a way?

Bobbi Patterson ([30:16](#)): Sure, sure. I'm still learning. But I think for me, at the deeper kind of more personal level, my family, both my parents were in public psychiatry, and to kind of get away from the giant state hospital they committed their lives to in transformative ways, they bought the teensiest little cabin on a lake near where we lived. And when they weren't on call, we would go there as a family. And we were also a family emerging into what would become a full-blown addiction of one of my parents. And in that painfulness as a child, it was going out into this pine forest on the land, and letting go of my grief. Of going into the water and letting go of my grief and confusion and pissed off-ness. And I think I learned it out of a kind of desperation to find a place that could take the grief. And the land seemed willing to be present, so that I found comfort in a certain tree that would hold me. And certainly now we see the earth is carrying her own grief. So, it's time for us to hold her.

(31:57) But I think those initial experiences really put me on the path of place and of nature's capacity to be present, whatever I brought. The joy of swimming in that water. And then, Wendy, I'll just say, teaching classes at Emory on place—I would take students camping for a weekend. And these are students who ain't never been outside, period. And a little teeny backpack with one change of clothes, walking three miles in, for them was just unbelievable. They did it, they spent the night in a tent in the dark.

(32:43) But then I just girded my loins and said, "We're going to do some exercises." And we just started with standing and watching the sunrise. And you can imagine, getting them up to watch the sun was tough! And all the time my brain is saying, "They won't be able to be in this place. They won't be able to listen." But there is power in those places. And when the sun rises, and they see it, standing in their bodies, for the first time, it does its thing on them. They realize I'm part of a bigger experience. And there's learning here—for myself, and from the sun as it rises, from soaking rain that they're hating, but it's happening. *[laughter]* Okay, this is rain.

(33:44) And I'll just end by saying... You know, once I had an exercise that the first time I tried it, I thought, "Okay, this is it. This is when it's going to be total mutiny." I asked them to go to a tree, and try to offer to the tree a sense of mutual exchange. Recognize the tree, let it recognize you back. Just try to be there as if it were a living creature. And I really thought, "They will mutiny, they will intellectualize it." And it didn't happen. They began to talk about the rocks beneath, about the water flowing... And many of them now are in their forties and when I cross paths, they still talk about it.

(34:38) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (35:13): You've talked about how knowledge of places lives in our bodies, and is such an embodied experience and way of knowing. Which also makes me think, you mentioned that in the Christian tradition and in all contemplative traditions, this emphasis on the body. Do you want to say any more about that, the role of the body in this kind of work?

Bobbi Patterson (35:37): I think increasingly in my own practice, the touchstone of the body is a welcome advocate for letting the mind ease. I'm of a thinking family; I tend to default to thinking. And there are ways in which paying more attention to: What's actually happening around all those butterflies in my stomach? What are they? Who are they? When did they start? And my brain, again as a child of an addict, is very good at dismissing them, at rationalizing them.

(36:35) And I think I've learned to befriend what the body is suggesting I attend to. It makes me think of Teresa of Ávila, the medieval amazing monastic [who] began a women's order—much more inclusive than any orders before her, really. She has this wonderful image of an interior castle, or space. And she says, "As you begin to work with your interior prayer (your contemplative prayer), you might notice all the little reptiles that have come in with you." *[laughter]* We all have these precious little reptiles that are running around inside us, and the body is very aware of them, and which ones bite and which ones are hurting and which ones sing... And beginning to create an awareness of the body, those butterflies, or those creatures that scare me, the songs of my deep heart I haven't heard—yeah, I think it's been a rich invitation to me. And I don't have it mastered by any means, but it's been a powerful aspect of contemplative practice for me.

Wendy Hasenkamp (38:11): You were talking about how you bring students camping, into nature when that might not be a familiar place for them. And then I know you've also brought students into kind of

urban walks, to places that may not be familiar to other students. Can you share some of those experiences?

Bobbi Patterson (38:30): Sure. I moved into urban ministry because my family of origin was full of "do-gooding" change makers. And there were ways in which that activity did not include the full stories of the places and people they were working with. So, as I began to do urban ministry, I realized we needed to be in urban spaces understanding the history, and the cultures of the peoples and creatures and trees of that place, not just helping things be better.

(39:19) And so, I began to take students into the very famous area of Atlanta on Auburn Avenue, and down where a kind of hub of Black culture existed, and a major race riot in 1906. And we walk Auburn Avenue and we look at the buildings that are Wheat Street Baptist, and of course Ebenezer Baptist where Dr. King's father and Dr. King were preaching. And we go into those spaces, both old Ebenezer and new Ebenezer. And we try to reckon with a beautiful Black emergent culture, out of slavery after the Civil War, that continued to be crushed by Jim Crow and continued to suffer. And yet there were nightclubs and blues music... And to see the places and to walk the streets and to stand in the wooden pews of Ebenezer is much more transformative than simply deciding, "Well, how can I help?" It's learning to listen to the stories that are on the street, and in the walls of African Americans who were so brutally killed, and rights taken away.

(40:52) And we go over to one of the first housing project areas. It's just empty lots now—the housing wasn't very good, it's been torn down. But the miracle there that community farmers around Auburn Avenue have learned is that they planted the seeds that they had. So, there are fruit trees that no one in Atlanta brought there. There are gourds, there are various kinds of squashes that the African American people brought with them, and cultivated, and kept. And they showed up in these housing projects started in the '30s and '40s, because work wasn't available and housing wasn't available. And it ain't the same to read it in a book. If you see it, if you walk it, the African American experience comes a little bit more alive. And I've still so much to learn. My own racism is still alive and well. So much to learn.

Wendy Hasenkamp (42:09): I'm thinking, I don't quite know how to frame this question, but... You've spoken about being a Southern woman and the importance of place in the South, and all the complexity there. Thinking too, I know you've talked about what it means to be an inhabitant of a land versus a visitor, and the process of becoming an inhabitant. And thinking about, particularly in the American South, there's so many layers of, I don't know, removal, initial colonization, driving out of native peoples, and then slavery... So, what's your relationship to being an inhabitant or not, I guess, of the land? And how can those of us who come from colonizer lineages start to become more inhabitants maybe?

Bobbi Patterson (43:07): Yeah. The quote is by Gary Snyder. "One can be in a place as a kind of visitor, or one can become an inhabitant." My people go way back in the South. They fought in the Revolutionary War at King's Mountain in South Carolina. I think being in a place as a white southerner might mean that you don't really become an inhabitant. Because becoming an inhabitant, in my view, means moving into what the earth and the trees and the peoples around you know about that history. The experience of learning—and it takes a lot of effort and I'm still doing it, and it's also a grace and an invitation—to listen to African Americans tell their stories about what they know about the place. It's painful as a white person to see the kind of colonizing legacy. It's also painful to have friends that you're close to, and then they begin to talk about their own experience. Even at my age, they experienced such racism in the '60s around schools.

(44:54) And letting myself be present to that is not easy, but it's pretty clear to me that I can't become a deep inhabitant, able to contribute and live a shared life, unless I move into the stories that I'm a part of, and part of the profoundly tragic causes. And I would miss out on learning gospel songs. I just came from a retreat and I sang a song I learned at Ebenezer about asking the spirit to come down on me. And I just bet it has some African roots. And we used to sing that song before the service, as a conjuring of God at Ebenezer, and other songs. And then American Indians, my grandmother as a Red Cross director was giving shoes, and taking clothes, and doing helping things... But I never heard the stories. But Joy Harjo, this poet laureate is Muskogee Creek. She is of the nations of my place. And I try to listen to her music and her poetry and her stories to learn what the Creek and the Cherokee know about the land, and the place.

(46:21) And it will bring up pain. It will bring up pain. It will bring up a kind of helpless grief, I can sense. Like, "Well it's so bad, Wendy, where do we go from here?" But it's part of becoming an inhabitant. It's part of learning to be here. And to notice the joy of the music to begin, to learn the dances, to begin to find the rich deep stories. So, I think our contemplative practice makes a huge difference, it gives spaciousness to that work. And I wish I had a rich answer... But I know there's no other way. There's no other way. Dive deeper.

(47:08) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (47:40): What you were saying just now is so beautiful. And it also makes me think of things you've said about land-based resilience. How can we use land, or place, to help build resilience?

Bobbi Patterson (47:59): There's a model of resilience that's emerging in the last 40 years, called adaptive resilience, which offers tremendous resources for us. Because adaptive resilience recognizes that resilience that's deep, that's life-changing is about breaking down. It actually requires change. I like the sweet spot, I call it, of stability. I like to get the answer and have it stay. But that is not a resilient system, because systems need to be adaptive.

(48:54) So, again, if I'm going to learn about colonizing and racism, I need the breakdowns. I need the work that requires me moving into the rubble of history that I've been a part of. And finding in that rubble, according to adaptive resilience, that there is growth there, there is potential there, and that I can reorganize the pieces, even my grief, to begin to reconstruct next steps to move into the change our culture is in now in a resilient way. That the resilience—actually, I call it gathering the mountain, that contemplative image of being a mountain. Well, the mountain falls apart regularly. And if I can gather the mountain, it's pieces, and begin to rebuild it, it might be a sculpture I never imagined of healing and hope. And so, resilience is allowing the painfulness, the breakdowns to happen, and then move into that work. And contemplative practices help us give it spaciousness, patience, looking at that mirror from a different angle, and then begin to reconstruct. And then begin to bring in resources you never even thought about. And then you'll find a nice little stability again, and if you're like me, you're going to grab onto it and hold onto it as hard as you can. But it will break down. So, yeah. Change is critical for resilience.

Wendy Hasenkamp (51:00): Yeah. So, this is work that you explore in your recent book, *Building Resilience Through Contemplative Practice*, which we'll certainly link to in the show notes. And I think it's so interesting in that book—which you just started to share this—you talk about the experience of

burnout in many service and caregiving professions, which is a large topic of conversation within the contemplative of space. And I feel like what you're offering is somewhat of a different view than is sometimes taken in this field. Whereas I've often heard the narrative of employing compassion to kind of fight burnout or avoid burnout. Or the idea is to kind of not even go there, to be able to just sustain and keep going. So, what you're sharing feels like a little bit of a different flavor, to acknowledge the reality of burnout and collapse in an adaptive system, and to kind of move into that or accept it. Is that part of what you're saying?

Bobbi Patterson (52:06): Yeah, absolutely. Many of us in service are kind of fixers, and we like to get the fix. And then we like to hold on, and keep the fix. But no fix is permanent. As all contemplative traditions know, nothing is permanent. So, when you find yourself... And I think there are phrases that we often say as social service workers or helping professionals—things like, "Oh, well, it's tough now so it's all up to me. I will take it on to hold things in their place." Well, you're not going to be able to do that. And by the way, it's not all up to you. And remember that—that the breakdown is going to happen and you can't stop it.

(53:08) And we're seeing this so strongly with COVID. There is a force among us that just makes adaptive resilience profoundly, frighteningly concrete. This virus will adapt. It's clever. And so, we have to be adaptive in our resilience. That, if you will, stability is a moving target. Stability is not stable, it changes. And contemplative practices help us move into that. And I find that in my numbers of years in service and public engagement and community-based partnerships, I tried very, very hard to get things in a good place and keep them there. But that is detrimental to healing and growth. And it's about learning to be with the breakdown and then gather the mountain, gather the pieces, begin to rebuild. And equality and justice have shown us over and over, as Dr. King says, it's a long arc. And we're going to be breaking down all the time on the way. So I think that it's very, very important to take adaptive resilience to heart, and know that the breakdown is just normal. It's not a failure and it's nothing bad inherently about you. There's a skillset for moving through it.

Wendy Hasenkamp (54:51): Wonderful. Well, I know we're coming up on our time. I'm wondering whether you have take homes that you'd like to share with the audience, or kind of big picture reflections at all from the really diverse spaces that you've worked in. Or anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to mention?

Bobbi Patterson (55:14): I think a really critical piece is community, of course. And community is something that contemplative traditions have always taken profoundly seriously. Community is the place that gets under our skin, that breaks it open. And community is the place that brings healing and insight. And if it's a contemplative community, what we are working at is loving kindness, as we do that work of breaking down and breaking open, and then coming to new spaces of healing. We all need time away. We all need time alone; that has its power. But there is inestimable good in community life, finding it wherever you can, building it wherever you can. And then of course, longstanding communities like a contemplative practice community, or Mind & Life communities, or your church, or your mosque, synagogue, your political activism committee. We need community so much. Trees know that, they're all interconnected. Animals know that. The climate knows that. So, maybe that's one thing to say—we need community. And it needs to be diverse. That's the strongest.

Wendy Hasenkamp (57:08): Thank you so much, Bobbi. This has been so enlightening, and it feels like I've just received a sermon and a Dharma teaching all in one.

Bobbi Patterson ([57:19](#)): Thank you, Wendy, for all of this, thank you.

Outro – Wendy Hasenkamp ([57:28](#)): *This episode was edited and produced by me and Phil Walker. Music on the show is from Blue Dot Sessions and Universal. 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 Apple Podcasts, 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@mineandlife.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 towards flourishing. There you can also support our work, including this podcast.*