



MIND & LIFE

Mind & Life Podcast Transcript Jessica Morey - Healing Attachment

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Opening Quote – Jessica Morey (00:00:03): *If you don't have good enough parenting, there's what's called insecure attachment or insecure wounding. Because the attachment wounding happens pre-verbally, and is so intertwined with even the way that we perceive reality, doing talk therapy is pretty ineffective because it didn't happen on the verbal level. And so the insight was that contemplative practice, like visualization and meditations, go below that cognitive or verbal level. So actually doing contemplative practice over and over was re-laying a different perceptual framework.*

Intro – Wendy Hasenkamp (00:00:45): Welcome to Mind & Life. I'm Wendy Hasenkamp. My guest today is meditation teacher Jessica Morey. Jess leads secular and Buddhist meditation retreats across the US, and she's also the co-founder and lead teacher for Inward Bound Mindfulness Education, also known as iBme. That's an organization that offers in-depth mindfulness training for teens and young professionals. Jess began practicing meditation at age 14, and she has deep training now in both the vipassana and Tibetan traditions. In recent years, she's been approaching the contemplative path through the lens of attachment theory, which comes from developmental psychology. We get into the details a lot more in our conversation, but basically the idea in this theory is that the earliest bonds we form as children with our caregivers can have a tremendous impact on other relationships throughout our life. I caught up with Jess last fall, and we dug into how she's currently thinking about these modes of healing.

(00:01:51) She first shares her long roots in the contemplative path (as I mentioned, she started meditation when she was quite young), and we talk about her own experience with meditation retreats as a teenager, and how she eventually co-founded iBme to offer these retreats more widely. Then we get into Jess's interest in attachment theory. She gives a frankly amazing overview of the basics of the theory—it's probably the clearest I've ever heard, actually—and she shares some interesting contemplative approaches to healing attachment wounds.

(00:02:25) We talk about the subtle body and trauma, developing embodied safety, grounding practices with the earth and land, and that takes us into a discussion about ancestor work and why it's important to examine your own lineage. Jess also touches on benefactor practices, and other links between Buddhism and attachment theory. And we wrap with her reflections on the joys and opportunities of working with young people.

(00:02:55) As always, there's links for more in the show notes, including to some practices that Jess mentions in our conversation like imagining your perfect parents. And I'll also add if you, or someone you know is between the ages of 15 and 25 and is interested in learning more about mindfulness and meditation, I highly recommend checking out the retreats offered by iBme. I've had the great pleasure

to attend some of them as staff myself, and they are amazing. So definitely check out their offerings on their website.

(00:03:28) I've long been interested myself in attachment theory and how it intersects with contemplative practice, so I really love this conversation. I also appreciate how personal and vulnerable this gets, and I want to thank Jess for modeling that vulnerability. It's not always an easy thing to do in a public space. I hope you enjoy her warmth and wisdom here. It's a great pleasure to share with you, Jessica Morey.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:03:58): Okay. Well, I am so happy to be joined day by Jess Morey. Jess, welcome, and thanks so much for being here.

Jessica Morey (00:04:04): Thanks, Wendy. I'm so happy to be here with you too, excited.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:04:07): And thank you for joining us from your closet, with the excellent sound. *[laughter]*

Jessica Morey (00:04:12): You're welcome.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:04:14): So I always love to start by hearing people's back stories and how they ended up doing the work that they did, how you got interested in contemplative practice, and the path that's taken you here. So if you want to share some of that.

Jessica Morey (00:04:27): Yeah, totally—happy to. My mom is a contemplative. I'd say that's probably where it started for me. Originally, she was actually a Catholic nun for nine years before leaving the convent and deciding to have a family. So she definitely raised us with a contemplative perspective our whole childhood, within a Catholic tradition primarily. But then she used to go to the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) when we were kids. And every year, she'd do at least a 10 day retreat at IMS, in the '80s. And so when IMS started a teen retreat, the first one was '89, she sent my sister (at the time I was 12, so they said I was too young to go). So I went on my first teen retreat when I was 14, which was in the early '90s.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:05:21): And this is at the Insight Meditation Society, which is in Barre, Mass. It was founded by Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield. So, wow. When you were 14, that's quite young to start getting into these practices.

Jessica Morey (00:05:34): Yeah. Yeah. I don't know—I think probably if there was a past life... I could tell a story of there must have been something past life. Because even younger, my mom would go to her friend, this man from India—she was a public school teacher and his wife taught at the public school with her—and she would go to their house on weekends and meditate with them. And I would beg her to let me come. So I remember I was eight years old when I first went, but what I remember is I think I... You know, they had a meditation room, I sat down. I probably sat in silence for like three minutes. And then I pulled open my library book, which had all the crinkly plastic covering. *[laughter]* And Shakti was this name, he reached over and was like, "Maybe you should take that... just right outside, to the living room." So I definitely was really curious and drawn to practice. And as soon as I went to the Insight Meditation Society, I was all in. And I kept going back every year.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:06:32): Do you remember what, in those early days, drew you the most? Or what were you in particular fascinated by or excited by?

Jessica Morey (00:06:41): Yeah, initially... I think seeing my mom, how she would be when she would come home from retreat. I think there was something about that. Noticing the shifts in her, that had some impact on me.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:06:56): What kind of shifts did you see?

Jessica Morey (00:06:59): Definitely more at ease, happier, lighter. My parents got divorced when I was two. So she was a mostly single mother of four kids, and we were all within five years of each other. And then she worked full-time as a teacher. So I just think about that now. It's insane what her life must have been like, and the level of stress. And so those 10 days we'd be with my dad. And when we'd come home, it was just the lightness and the ease and the happiness, I think I would see, was pretty dramatic.

(00:07:40) Yeah. So I know that's probably the very earliest in what inspired me. And then going to IMS... What I remember was, the first piece was the kindness, the kindness of the staff. And the safety, this feeling of safety and kindness that was at the Insight Meditation Society. I think even the first year when I was 14, I'm not sure what was even happening in my meditation. I think it was much more that I was just picking up on the environment. And then what I would see too, is that kindness translated into my own mind.

(00:08:14) And my brother went with me, and he struggled a lot as a young person and all through his life. And the transformation in him, his kindness would grow so much, and it would last when we got home. Like, he'd take out the trash without being asked. And so I just could feel the goodness of the space. And then as I got older, I got more into what was happening in my own mind. I think I had experiences of just peace and ease in my own mind that felt really good.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:08:49): So your path took many turns before you've ended up now as a meditation teacher. So do you want to share some of that as well?

Jessica Morey (00:08:58): Yeah. I did the teen retreats every year. And then when I was 18, I graduated from high school, went to the teen retreat, was planning to start college in the fall. And I had this... it literally felt like hearing a voice of in my head while I was meditating one time. It was like, "Go to Burma." And some of the other staff had been to Burma. You know, there's such a strong connection with the teachers in Burma. So I just decided right there and then that I was going to go to Burma. I don't think I had any conception of what that meant. But I deferred college. I saved money. I bought a plane ticket. And so I went and practiced in Sayadaw U Pandita's monastery in Rangoon for the next year. And then another monastery. And then I went to India and saw the Dalai Lama, went to teachings by Dalai Lama in Dharamshala.

(00:09:53) So I kind of had that year of practice and spiritual commitment, and went back to college. So it was like I knew that practice was pretty central to me, but I went back to college. I got a degree in engineering and basically went on into a career on in climate policy and clean energy finance, and was living and working in [Washington] DC. And at that time, folks who had been my mentors when I was a teen started a teen retreat in Virginia, through a series of connections. And so wrote to me and said, "Hey, Jess, we're going to Virginia to teach a teen retreat. You should come down and help us out." So

that was 2007. So I just took a week of vacation, drove down. And at that time it was like 10 teens. And my main job was to clean the bathrooms.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:10:46): Right! *[laughter]* Just a question that I had never thought about, but... You did this whole career in engineering and climate policy, you already were so committed—unusually so, I think, for a young person—to practice and this contemplative life. Did you ever think about doing that as a career, or was that just a separate personal thing?

Jessica Morey (00:11:09): Yeah, I did. I totally remember being in Burma, and part of my time there I was practicing with my teacher, Michele McDonald. And she had been the teen retreat teacher... I totally idealized her. And definitely had these thoughts of like, "When I grow up, I want to be like Michele." That was my dream and fantasy. I also was aware that I didn't want to have some ego connection to teaching. So I had some idea that I wanted to go out and live in the world, have a career, maybe have a family. And then later in life maybe teach from that. Like, how do you actually integrate practice deeply into life, and then teach from that.

(00:11:52) But more importantly, when I was in Nepal, at Kopan Monastery, I did a Tibetan retreat. And there was what they call the psychic monk, and they said to all of us, "You could go meet with this monk, if you wanted to, you could have an interview with him." He was very old at the time. So I met with him, and I went in and I said, "I want to be a nun." I was like, "This is it. I'm going to ordain." Especially because seeing how Tibetan monastics lived—because you could touch money, and there's just a lot more compatible than the Theravādan monastics—and so I said this, I'm like, "This is what I want to do for my life."

(00:12:29) And he just looked at me and said, "No. You should go home and work." Is what he said. And then he said, "Maybe later in life." And at the time I was devastated, it actually felt like a rejection. I was like, "I'm going to give up my life for the dharma. This is what I want to do, and you're telling me no? Go back to school and get a job?" But I really took it to heart; that stuck with me when I went back. And I think part of it was I felt like, "Wow, that means whatever I work I do in the world needs to be valuable enough that it's worth not being a nun." Which felt huge. So it also was a bit of a weight. I was always thinking like, "Okay, how am I going to contribute in the world that's more than just practicing the dharma?" Yeah.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:13:20): Right. So I'm sorry. You were in the Virginia, you met up with your friends and started that retreat. Yeah.

Jessica Morey (00:13:26): Yeah. So we went to Virginia in 2007, and we had like 10 teens, and did this first retreat and it was so... I hadn't been on teen retreat maybe for eight or nine years, since I was 18 or 19. And it was so fun. It was just immediately reminding myself of how powerful and important they are, and seeing the impact on the teens. So they started getting them going again in Virginia, and pulled me in to help set them up.

(00:13:58) And then all of this was actually being run under a different non-profit. And it wasn't really going that well. Oh, and also actually it was being funded by this one business man, an amazing bodhisattva. And the financial crisis of 2007, 2008 happened. So he was just paying all the bills, and he couldn't really do that anymore. And so we knew that we needed to make a non-profit, we needed to learn how to fundraise, if we wanted to keep doing this. So we decided to make an organization, a non-profit, which finally we got set up in 2010.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:14:35): And that's Inward Bound Mindfulness Education?

Jessica Morey (00:14:38): Yeah. That's iBme, Inward Bound Mindfulness Education. And so even at that time, by then I was teaching... And also even the teaching that I was doing was because one summer, one of the teachers was sick. She was supposed to come out and got sick at the last minute. So they just were like, "Hey Jess, will you teach?" And so that's how my teaching career started. And then I was just thinking, I'm on the board, I'm going to help set this up and get it established. But I was really building a whole career in DC around climate policy and finance. And I've always felt super committed to environmental work. So at that time I thought, I'm just someone who shows up and helps however I can, and I'll help on the board and the org setup. And then that changed.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:15:24): Famous last words. Yeah. *[laughter]* So you ended up running that organization for many, many years.

Jessica Morey (00:15:30): Yeah, exactly. We had hired an executive director to run it—this really charismatic, who was at the time young, man. And about two months after he started, he went into heart failure, which came out of nowhere. I don't know that they ever even really figured out what was attacking his heart. He was in a coma, an ECMO machine for about eight months, needed a heart transplant. And so it set the organization into chaos, and my friends who were involved with it were like, "Jess, will you quit your job and take over?"

(00:16:07) And it was a couple of times that I was like, "Uh, no. I have two Master's degrees. I have health insurance. I'm well paid." But it was a little bit when I looked at it, kind of like the Buddha, the story of the heavenly messengers. Because this guy Jesse was 28, 29, we were about the same age. And I met my now husband at that time, who was 30. And he was just recovering from stage 4 lymphoma, where he had almost died. And then my roommate and very good friend got diagnosed with leukemia, and needed to go through chemo and have a bone marrow transplant as well. And so we were in that process in the hospital with her, managing, keeping the house totally clean for her. And then my brother was really not well.

(00:17:04) So it was just all these things together. I think I had that idea like, "Oh, later in my life I'll teach, or I'll focus my life on dharma. But for now I'm doing this other thing." And then it was this really example of, "Wait, there might not be a later in life." Because all of these people were late 20s, early 30s. So I was like, "Okay, if this is what feels most valuable, important to me right now, this is what I need to do." And it was. There was no question, being on teen retreat was the absolute best time of my year. So it was just that reflection got me to quit. And it was so scary. I felt like I was jumping off a cliff.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:17:43): Wow. And there's so much to say about iBme and your time there. The organization grew and now has teen retreats all over the country, all over the world?

Jessica Morey (00:17:52): Yeah. It has teen retreats all over the US, Canada, the UK... I mean, pre-COVID. So of course now there's a whole process of getting them going again and figuring out, but then also a ton of online programming.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:18:06): Right. And then you've just recently transitioned out of leadership of that organization, and now you're teaching full-time?

Jessica Morey (00:18:14): Yeah. So I left leadership (in August of last year, so it's just about over a year now) with iBme, and then I just teach. I teach the teen retreats. And then otherwise I just finished the Insight Meditation Society teacher training, their four-year training. So I'm teaching at IMS and Spirit Rock and... Yeah, a little bit, I call it my mid-career retirement. *[laughter]* I'm a little bit trying to figure out exactly how I'm going to focus time and energy, but it's all around teaching and dharma.

[\(00:18:48\)](#) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:18:48): Well, I want to come back to all of your experience in working with teens and youth around contemplative practice, because I think it's such a unique space. But first, I want to dig into something that I think is so unique about your approach to practice, and interest right now in practice, which is you've really been incorporating attachment theory from psychology into the way you think about practice. Do you want to unpack some of that? Maybe at first, the basics of attachment theory, and then how you see it being relevant.

Jessica Morey (00:19:52): Yeah. So my interest in attachment theory began about 10 years ago. I've been doing therapy my whole life, and different therapeutic approaches, because of my own childhood. Obviously, such good fortune and privilege to have been introduced to practice so early, which I think was huge in my development and well-being. And also I come from, on both sides, lots of alcoholism and I would say significant trauma—both in my own childhood and in both of my lineages of my parents. And so it was pretty clear to me that just meditating was not going to fix my problems. That was getting pretty clear.

[\(00:20:49\)](#) And one of my dharma friends, a man named George Haas, introduced me to the concept of attachment theory. And so I started working with him, and he had a whole meditation approach to healing attachment wounding. So the framing of attachment theory is that humans, when we're born, are totally dependent on adult humans to survive. And probably, for at least like eight or nine years on some level... but certainly those early couple of years, infants and small children would utterly not survive. So the theory is that biologically, we develop these attachment behaviors between adults and children, so that we would be protected and cared for. And also because our brains aren't developed so that we could communicate in some way, or have our needs met.

[\(00:21:47\)](#) So in a healthy attachment system, caregivers for the infant are fiercely protective of that child, and they're present, reliable, consistent. They attune to the child, so they're tracking what the child's feelings are, what their thoughts might be. And this is particularly when they're pre-verbal, so 1, 2, 3 years old. How do you figure out that the child is hungry, cold, needs their diaper changed? You need an attuned parent who's tracking and starting to understand the child.

[\(00:22:24\)](#) And then it moves on to soothing and reassuring. So when the baby cries or gets hurt, a young child, physically soothing and reassuring, so they feel safe. Then these next two are what I would think of as later developments, but they basically help the child establish self-esteem and exploration in the world. So one is expressed delight, which is that the parent is expressing to the child how happy they are to be their parent. And I love seeing that, when I see parents act in that way.

[\(00:23:04\)](#) And the final one is that they're supporting and championing that child's development. So they're tracking what is this kid interested in? What are they drawn to? Maybe they're really into music and so then the parent supports them to take music classes or something like this, even as a young child—independent of what the parent wants. Maybe the parent's really into sports, but that doesn't

matter, they're tracking the child. So it's this sense of being protected, being deeply cared about. So there's this unconditional support that you have, and in your very being, you can express who you are.

(00:23:38) And so if you have that, you end up secure—we call it "securely attached." And that's basically like, "I'm okay. The world's okay. I can trust myself. I can trust other people. I can build relationships. If we have a problem, we'll figure it out. We can be collaborative." That's best case scenario. And then sometimes we don't have that good enough parenting. And so there's other... based on where there were gaps in the parenting or caregiving, we might develop particular conditioned patterns of perception and behavior that limit our ability to build relationships, to feel good about ourselves, to feel secure in the world. And so there's particular patterns that have been laid out with an attachment wounding.

(00:24:29) So there's secure—if you have the good fortune to have good enough parenting. And I also want to say, what's fascinating to me too, is that there's so many social conditions that impact a parent's ability to actually provide that. There's a strong correlation of insecure attachment with poverty and oppression, which just makes sense. If both parents have to be out earning a living, two jobs or whatever is needed, of course they're not going to be available to provide that consistent reliable presence and delight. So I really want to frame that aspect.

(00:25:11) And that there's a strong relationship between our own attachment relationship with our caregivers and then what we pass down. It's a very sticky mental pattern. Because these patterns and conditioning develop pre-verbally. And there's a lot of research—at 18 months, they can already predict a child's attachment patterning through something called the Strange Situation experiment. And 80% they can predict—okay this is what their attachment is, 80% correlation with what they are as an adult, when they do an adult attachment interview. So it's really sticky because it's pre-verbal, and it happens as the sense of self is developed. So it gets very intertwined.

(00:26:02) So we can talk about what the new technologies are for healing, but if you don't have good enough parenting, there's what is called "insecure attachment" or insecure wounding. And there's two main categories of that (and a third that I'll describe). But the two main ways that can go is 1) what's called dismissive attachment, which is for folks who just pretty consistently didn't get their attachment needs met—either weren't really protected, weren't delighted in, their parents weren't available emotionally or reassuring, any one of those qualities was missing to some degree. And dismissing means basically what happens with that infant, child, and then as they grow up into adulthood, is they turn off their conscious need for intimacy, for that kind of emotional connection. And the thing is, consciously they might say, "It's not valuable to me. I don't need relationships like that." But for young children they've tested this, that you'll see it right in the kid. They'll just basically ignore the parent. Whether the parent comes or goes, or a stranger comes, it's irrelevant to them. They look like they're just playing, they don't care. But actually their stress hormones are going through the roof. So they're still registering that they have a need for security and protection. So that's dismissive. And then those folks have a really hard time building long-term relationships, because they undervalue it and then don't act in ways to create [healthy relationships]. And the fundamentally, they think like, "I'm okay, but the world is not okay. I can't trust the world. I can't trust other people. I have to just rely on myself."

(00:27:49) The second main category is anxious or fearful attachment wounding, where basically... I just want to say there's so much more complexity to all of this. Which I love to know, because saying there's three categories you're like, "That can't be right." So I do want to just frame that. But the basic pattern is that it was inconsistent attachment with a caregiver. So sometimes maybe the caregiver was available

and present and attuned and reassuring, and then other times they totally weren't available. So what that sets up is this fearful, anxious pattern of, "What can I do" (for the child, or infant) "to get that need met?" And so being on edge all the time. And they believe, "I'm not okay. I need to do something different. I need to do whatever other people want so that I can get that safety need met." And so that's called anxious. And maybe a big pattern that looks like in adulthood is folks who... sometimes we might have a pattern of being clingy in relationships, or people use the word needy or something like this. Even though I think that's problematic, because we all have needs. And maybe more dramatic in their relationships. And so there's certain patterns of how they build relationships that can be challenging.

(00:29:18) And then the third category that's evolved, that's gotten more clarity about is, some people will use both of those, like shift quickly from being clingy to like, "I don't need anyone." And what they discovered with people like that is that it's when the caregiver is frightening or terrifying, or often an abusing primary caregiver, then what happens is these two internal mechanisms of, "I need the caregiver to protect me to be safe." So there's a movement towards the caregiver that is then also met with, "But the caregiver is terrifying and is the one who's going to hurt me." So there's a movement away. And it's almost like a freeze for that person. So they're going towards and away and it's chaotic. And that basic pattern can play out in relationships. "I love you / I hate you." There's some research or belief that some personality disorders are connected to that, in each of the attachment patterns.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:30:31): That's fascinating. Thank you for explaining that. So you mentioned some new ideas about healing these attachment wounds, and you were saying that you've been working with contemplative practice to do that. Can you share about that?

Jessica Morey (00:30:44): Yeah. So the insight—and I really first learned this from George Haas, and then more deeply dove in with a teacher named Dan Brown, who is a Mahamudra Bön Tibetan meditation teacher. What they, with colleagues, really identified was, because the attachment wounding happens pre-verbally, and is so intertwined with even the way that we perceive reality—just think about an infant who comes in, and all of that construction has to happen about perception and identifying things, the sense of self and other—doing talk therapy is pretty ineffective for healing attachment. Because it didn't happen on the verbal level.

(00:31:41) And so the insight was that contemplative practice, like visualization and meditations, go below that more cognitive, intellectual, or verbal level. So what started to be discovered is actually doing contemplative practice over and over was relaying a different perceptual framework, which could shift towards secure. And that was what actually could work. And quite "quickly," compared to 10 years of psychotherapy or something. And I imagine that we, as practitioners, have seen that in other ways, how the meditation practice can go to a deep level and actually shift our fundamental way of perceiving the world. And so this is one example of how that can happen.

(00:32:34) And so with George Haas, he would guide me in a few practices that were primarily around tracking my thoughts and emotions around attachment relationships, and developing basically equanimity with them. First of all, seeing that that was what was happening. Tracking thoughts and the emotions that I was reacting out of. So for me, I ended up with a pretty complex attachment wounding. I was disorganized with my father, anxious with my mother, dismissive with this woman who caretook us because my mom was working so full-time. So pretty complex. And when I got into a relationship, it just made relationships really, really painful and complicated. I say about my husband, I tried to break up with him so many times when we started dating. But he was just persistent and also, yeah, he was persistent and so confident. He was like, "You don't want to break up with me." *[laughter]*

(00:33:51) So we stuck at it, and at that time I was starting to work with George on attachment. And that framework basically what he was... Here's an example of a practice that I had to do. I would get to the airport—we had a long distance thing, my husband, Doug would be coming to pick me up—and what usually would happen is I would start a huge fight with him, and I would be so distant and mean when we first got together. And then I would do the same thing as we were separating. I'd get in another big fight. And that's usually when I'd be like, "This isn't working. We should totally break up. I'm not really into this relationship."

(00:34:28) And so with George, the instruction was, "Tell Doug to pick you up 20 or 30 minutes later than you arrive. Go out to the curb, and then you have to track what's happening." So the first thing that I would track was all these thoughts like, "I don't really like this guy, what am I even doing here? I don't want to be in this relationship." All of these... Even those were like, "I hate him." Right? And so as I started bringing attention to like, "I hate him," I was like, "I don't... That's not true." And George had pointed out, "These are not true thoughts." So you have to see the thoughts that are not true.

(00:35:03) Then go into your emotional body. What's actually triggering that thinking process? And I was doing this in my meditation in other ways too. So I was doing it in a formal practice. And then this was like bringing it off the cushion. And what I could feel was... so much terror. It was basically terror that was underneath it. That this pushing away, this thinking about, "I don't really like him. I don't want this," was a way of me avoiding the terror. And the terror was around abandonment—that, if I fall in love with this person and begin to depend on them emotionally, they're just going to abandon me. Or they could at any point. And so it's much safer to just think I hate him than in is to fall in love, and build intimacy.

(00:36:00) So then I had to just stand there and feel the terror. Actually track it in my body and try to work with it, with equanimity. Can I just be with the terror, without reacting to it, and not going into the thinking? So it was a very firm practice. And Doug would show up, drive up with the car.

(00:36:22) And George also had a list of things that I should do. It's like, okay, most people, when they're in an intimate relationship, they would hug the person and say, "I love you. I'm so happy to see you." And so, I would literally play that out in my mind: "When he gets here, I'm going to say, I love you. I'm so happy to see you." And I'm going to hug him. And I'd just play it out, and play it out. And so when he got there, I mean it was probably incredibly awkward. It felt really awkward inside of me. "Hi... Doug... I... missed you." *[laughter]* And the theory with that was, by reaching out for connection, I would actually get the attachment need met. He would hug me back and say he missed me. And that would actually sooth the terror—through the connection rather than going to disconnection. So that was one clear example of how I was using my meditation practice to re-work that pattern.

(00:37:22) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:37:22): I love that you brought up this distinction between working through cognitive or verbal modes, and how that may not reach this, since it's all formed pre-verbally. I think that's a huge insight. And also makes me think about, I know you've also done a lot of working with the body. And you just mentioned it there too, and kind of feeling that terror and things like that. I wonder if you can say more about the role of the body, in practice in general, in the mind, what you've learned about that?

Jessica Morey (00:38:29): Yeah. I think this is huge. A huge aspect of trauma and emotional healing, and just integration of practice and insight into our day-to-day life. I think we have to be working with the body. And I think this has been a big trend for me. I did a lot of yoga also as a younger person. And I worked quite a bit with Reggie Ray—who's a Tibetan trained teacher, his teacher was Chögyam Trungpa—and he's very, very focused on body-based practice. And what I've learned since then also is that there's a lot coming out of the Tibetan yoga tradition and some of the theories around the nadis and the central channel and how we hold... basically in modern language, we'd say like traumas in our bodies. Similar to somatic experiencing and Peter Levine's theories of trauma healing.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:39:34): So this, in the Tibetan system, is called the subtle body?

Jessica Morey (00:39:39): Yes.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:39:39): Yeah, we've talked about it on the show in a couple different interviews. So if listeners want to go back and check it out... yeah.

Jessica Morey (00:39:44): Great. Yeah. Because Reggie was the first person as a meditation teacher and Tibetan teacher that I was introduced to it from. And then I just read, not that long ago, Tsoknyi Rinpoche's book, *Open Heart, Open Mind*. And he talks about the subtle body in there, and his own fears and panic and how he had to actually go in and work it out through his body. So that's basically what Reggie's practices taught me how to do. So really come into my body... and actually sort of unwind these contracted historical, physical, or energetic patterns through breath work, and through attention—meditation and deep, deep, deep relaxation release practices. And I also did, like I said, somatic experiencing therapy, which has a similar [approach], you track the emotional pattern and then release the energy in certain ways.

(00:40:42) So I believe it's totally central to healing. And yes, especially attachment. What I've come to... So what I described with that practice with George, I would say was the first step for me. And now I have a whole other set of meditation, contemplative practices around attachment, which I can describe, but I'd say the primary thing for me is actually developing a visceral, deep felt sense of security and unconditional love or goodness. In the Tibetan tradition we call it Buddha nature. Actually fully trusting in my Buddha nature, and trusting life, which feels somatic and visceral. That's what I actually rely on in my day-to-day. So the nervous system is just settled into, "It's okay. I'm okay. I'm going to be okay. The world is okay, fundamentally. And I can respond to it in the ways that I need to, to get my needs met."

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:41:48): Yeah. That's making me think of your interest in the natural world and environment and the work you've done around that. And part of the way you describe that, of trusting in life and yourself, and I would assume that extends into the natural world... Yeah, it feels so grounding and supportive. And I know you've done a lot of work too, working with earth grounding practices and also nature-based practices. So can you say how that weaves in too?

Jessica Morey (00:42:23): Yeah. Yeah, I love that connection you're bringing. So a lot of Reggie's... He does a practice called earth breathing too, which the first time he taught it, I was like, "Oh, this is it. This is it for me." And this practice is, you let your awareness actually drop into the earth underneath you. And then deeper, deeper, deeper into the earth. And my understanding is that a lot of this, he learned from Malidoma Somé, who's an African teacher, a spiritual practitioner, Indigenous teacher.

(00:43:03) And if I conceive of it now, it's almost like we're healing our attachment wounding with the earth. With this place that we live in. Or I am, in my particular cultural situation. I was not raised with any sense of place, earth connection, geography. And then as a white person in America [with a] settler, colonialist history. Yeah. I've been doing actually a ton of ancestry work, which probably is all intertwined in this for me. Irish and English, but actually I found on my dad's side, most of my ancestors came over in the 1600s to Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and then they just followed the frontier, ended up in Oregon in the 1800s. And then my mom's mostly Irish. And just thinking about the ways that they were treated by the English, the oppression, pulled off their land, famine, came to the US during the famine.

(00:44:10) So there's just a clear disconnection from place and earth. And even when I look at my ancestry on my father's side, there's almost not a single generation that lived in the same place twice. Like, each generation moved. And I just think there's some connection between that and maybe what we might call healing our attachment with earth, with place, with community. That's part of the violence and chaos and confusion and lack of ease that I live with, and I think a lot of white people in the US live inside that culture. Yeah. So the earth practice is one way that I try to re-connect. And then bringing the more-than-human world back into deep relationship. Like, "I can trust you, you can trust me."

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:45:10): And you do that through visualization practices, mainly?

Jessica Morey (00:45:14): Yeah. I do a lot of that earth descent, and then I just will use it all the time. When I remember, going, letting myself... And for me, as soon as I do that, it's like the whole nervous system settles and relaxes. Then I actually go outside for nature practice. I just go outside. A strong influence for me within that is a teacher or writer named Bill Plotkin, who has some particular nature practices to re-connect. And for a period, I was doing a dawn practice—go outside and just sit at dawn, in the same place every day. Just sit. So it's basically like doing open awareness with the eyes open, in the same place every day. Or there's a practice called sit spot, and we'll do that with the teens. We did a number of wilderness retreats with the teens, where we brought in a lot of this. But basically you just go to the same place, and you just sit and that's your meditation. But it's not just my own feelings and thoughts; it's incorporating the animals, the sounds, the trees and the change that's happening. And actually getting to know your place.

(00:46:25) And sometimes now I think about it. It's almost so rude that before I would just go to a place and just ignore most of my neighbors—the birds and the animals and all those things. And we behave that way with other humans too, actually.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:46:44): Right. So much of what you're sharing, I think is speaking to... I appreciate that you brought up the experience of whiteness in the US and this disconnection from land. I feel like there's also a deep disconnection from our bodies, from those lineages as well, which just plays into so much of what you were saying. So much of reversing that is needed for healing. I think not only these attachment wounds that you were describing, but just a lot of the ways that that's played out, in the way we treat others, the way we treat nature, animals, exploitive systems and all of this. And then also you brought up ancestry work, and I'm thinking of intergenerational trauma. You're speaking about your own traumas, but I think there's a lot more awareness now of how that is perpetuated through generations—not just culturally, but also now we know biologically through epigenetics things can be translated. So I don't know, I'll just throw those things out, if you have any reflections on those topics.

Jessica Morey (00:47:51): Yeah. Yeah, actually what I think is really interesting is even if we have insecure attachment as infants and children, we can become what's called "earned secure." Earned secure. So we can actually re-pattern our minds and our perceptions so that we act secure as adults. And one of the criteria for that, one of the ways that you can see that has happened for someone is their own ability to see where the patterns came from. So it's asking questions about, "Why do you think your parents acted in the ways that they did?" And being able to frame... Well, so for me, my mom's mother died when she was four. And it was totally not explained, her father went on to get married to someone else and had seven more children. And my mom was the oldest of the 10. So you can just see. My father's a little bit more of a mystery. Unfortunately, I don't know all... So I have to fill in the gaps there, but I can imagine aspects of his upbringing, and his family, and his lineage. Yeah, and with his lineage, part of the gaps I fill in is being settler colonialists, from the 1600s in the United States. What atrocities and violence they witnessed and perpetuated, and how that impacts bodies and lineages.

(00:49:19) So anyway, I just think one thing that's interesting is healing attachment, part of it is understanding the historical context, and generational traumas, and why people act in the ways they do. And having basically understanding and compassion and forgiveness for those.

(00:49:36) – musical interlude –

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:50:00): So you mentioned maybe some other contemplative practices for healing attachment. Is there anything else you want to share there?

Jessica Morey (00:50:06): Yeah. So the other practice I've been mostly focused on now the last number of years, I learned from the meditation teacher, Dan Brown, that he developed with a group of colleagues. (And Dan's also a psychotherapist.) So his practice is actually re-imagining ideal parents that meet all of your attachment wounds and needs. And you do it as basically a meditation. So you might meet with a therapist who guides it, based on your particular gaps. It's a recorded practice. And then you listen to it, and do that meditation for the week or two weeks. Go back, get a guided practice again, particularly focused on what your gaps were. And you develop this long-term relationship with these ideal parents (so letting go of your parents), who are perfectly suited to you, meet all your needs. It's amazing. It's almost like developing imaginary friends. *[laughter]* Imaginary parents.

(00:51:08) And the research on it is unbelievably effective, that Dan has done on this technique. And it's totally changed my life. It's unbelievable. And so even in moments of real challenge or struggle, I'll bring up my ideal parents. They'll like sit right next to me. In fact, I was teaching a retreat, not that long ago and a number of things about it made it pretty challenging. I could feel all this insecurity and doubt coming up, particularly when I was doing the interviews with folks. And so my ideal parents were just sitting right next to me, in my mind. Hand on my leg or my arm, and just saying, "We love you, completely. You don't have to do anything to earn our love. You don't have to be a good teacher. You don't have to say the perfect thing. You don't have to be wise. It's not going to change our love or opinion of you in any way." And just that is like, okay, I could settle in and then be fully present for the person in front of me. So that's a practice that has been transformative. And now I've been working with students, and offering that kind of guided practice for people.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:52:23): That's awesome. I love how it just leverages the power of our minds to construct our realities. Which is in fact, what we do anyway. So it's like, why not make it what you need, and what will serve? Yeah.

Jessica Morey (00:52:35): Yeah, totally. And again, I don't know, I'm way more familiar with the Theravādan tradition than Tibetan, but there's some aspects to it that feel like—I don't know if consciously or unconsciously, Dan was pulling from some of the Tibetan practices. Like the refuge tree, and reflecting on your lineage, and the loving support from the whole lineage of teachers. Some of those. And even the deity practices that we do with Vajrasatva and Tara and Kwan-yin, all of these different deity practices that are more in the Mahāyāna tradition. It's almost like using that same practice.

(00:53:16) Because when I do those practices, I feel the same thing. I feel this deep soothing in my system, like I've got support out there in the world. I'm not in it alone. I'm loved, going to be okay. It's almost like he transferred that wisdom into a modern way of conceiving of it. And then it also makes me think about, sometimes I wonder if Ngöndro is actually attachment and trauma healing practices. Psychological practices that get the practitioner into a place where they feel secure and loved, and have a refuge, so that they can then do the later practices.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:54:00): I think also John Makransky has done a lot of this work, too, in terms of translating from the Tibetan guru yoga tradition, and receiving the love and blessings from these deities into a more secular or modern form, where you use moments with people in your life. Doesn't even have to be the whole relationship with the person, since relationships are so complex, but moments of just pure connection or acceptance or love, and just fostering those and steeping in those. It sounds like a really similar process. It's amazing how powerful they can be.

Jessica Morey (00:54:38): Completely. I love John Makransky's meditations. And that's one where it's so visceral. I love his metta. And then I would say, so those are these very targeted, I feel like brilliant translations and practices that are coming more from Tibetan tradition, but within the Theravādan tradition, doing the brahmavihārās and the four measureables... I think those are playing a similar role. Basically really touching into unconditional metta, loving kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity. In fact, I've played with mapping those onto the qualities of secure parenting. And it totally... The metta and attuning and protection, the soothing and reassuring of compassion, the delighting.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:55:29): Sympathetic joy. Yeah.

Jessica Morey (00:55:31): And the equanimity of just supporting, tracking that I don't have control and this is their life, and how that quality comes in.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:55:38): That's a great connection.

Jessica Morey (00:55:41): So I've been teaching a lot about that and thinking a lot about that. Because actually even when I started doing this attachment work with Dan, despite my different intensities of my childhood, he assessed where I was at and it was so amazing, he was like, "Well..." You know, he laid it out, like basically you're totally disorganized. But he was like, "You know, we could probably clean this up in about three months."

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:56:06): Wow.

Jessica Morey (00:56:07): I was like, "Oh my God. Yeah. Let's just clean this up." And I really credit that to the amount of metta and mindfulness—the metacognition, but also the deep metta. I did one three-

month retreat where I basically just did loving kindness. And I think that started to lay the foundation of being able to actually shift the pattern in a deep way. So it's also there in the Theravādan.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:56:31): Yeah. So I know we're coming up on our time, but I just wanted to get your thoughts... You've spent so much of your career as a dharma teacher working with youth and teens. And I just wanted to hear your perspective on that population, that community, maybe compared to working with adults. Or what do you think are the particular opportunities and challenges in working with youth?

Jessica Morey (00:56:56): Yeah. It's way more fun, is the primary thing. *[laughter]* Yeah. I absolutely love working with teenagers and youth, young adults. So I mostly see opportunities. The opportunities that I've seen, that I've witnessed is, for one thing, it feels like youth are much closer to that kind of unprotected heart. And also the flexibility of mind. And we know this with all the brain science of what's happening at that age, of pruning and myelinating and all the things that are happening. But I feel like I can see it. How quickly they can have an insight. And that can shift... you can just tell it can shift a whole trajectory of a life.

(00:57:41) I've often thought of it as almost like this door is open at that time, because they're also questioning what their parents taught them, or their culture. I love that about how teens are, rebelling and questioning. And so it's like everything's on the table. And to be able to bring in these practices at that time, of, "You can find out for yourself, you can look into your own heart and mind and body, and feel what your values are, what your purpose is, what you want to do with your life, through these practices." It just feels like they can make really good use of it, and it can change things dramatically. So that's really meaningful and fun to see the quick change.

(00:58:24) And then they also just... that softness. Like I say sometimes, they have less crust on their hearts. So it's like the amount of kindness, openness, vulnerability, just coming into expressing who they are so quickly, is really fun to see. And then of course they have so much energy and creativity. We have dance parties and yeah, just so fun to see how they see the world, and how they're thinking.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:58:53): Yeah. I just wanted to bring it back to when you said your own experience, one of the first things that you remember on teen retreat is the kindness among... Just the vibe. And as soon as you that, it really resonated because I've had the tremendous good fortune to staff some retreats with you as well, and with iBme. And that is absolutely the environment that you've created in those spaces too. So you've really carried that forward. And it's so powerful to be in a context of kindness and acceptance and love, and just what that does for everyone who's in that environment—just allowing people to show up as their full selves and their best selves. So I just want to thank you for the work that you do.

Jessica Morey (00:59:40): Thank you. Yeah, so happy... And I also want to say that you create that as a staff person, and I'm also quite protective of who we invite into those spaces. Just people who I know are going to hold that space for you.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:59:58): Well this has been so rich and fun. And maybe we could have a part two sometime, because I feel like we could go on for hours. But thank you so much for spending the time, and sharing all these wonderful insights with us.

Jessica Morey (01:00:10): Thank you, Wendy. So fun. Yeah, I totally appreciate it.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([01:00:17](#)): *This season of Mind & Life is supported by the Academy for the Love of Learning, dedicated to awakening the natural love of learning in people of all ages. Episodes are edited and produced by me and Phil Walker, and 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. And if something in this conversation sparked insight for you, let us know. You can send an email or voice memo to podcast@mindandlife.org.*

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