



MIND & LIFE

## **Mind & Life Podcast Transcript** **Jamie Bristow – Exploring Systems Change**

Original Air Date: April 17, 2026

Retrieved from: [podcast.mindandlife.org/jamie-bristow-mini-series-episode-1](https://podcast.mindandlife.org/jamie-bristow-mini-series-episode-1)

---

Intro – Phil Walker ([00:04](#)):

Welcome to Mind & Life. I'm Phil Walker, co-producer of the podcast. As I noted in our previous episode, we are presenting a special mini-series on systems change with guest host, Jamie Bristow. Jamie is a writer and policy advisor working in areas such as transformation, resilience, and sustainability. And as some of you may remember, he's also been a guest on this show.

([00:32](#)):

Jamie approached us last year about developing this series when Mind & Life embraced systems change as a focus area for its new strategic vision. As our world grows in complexity, we also find ourselves more interconnected than ever, with profound challenges that often require cooperation across diverse groups with different values or goals. Systems change refers to efforts to shift the underlying structures, relationships, power dynamics, and mindsets that shape how complex systems behave. These efforts increasingly recognize that inner dimensions, such as awareness, values, and ways of relating play a critical role in enabling lasting change. As you can imagine, systems change itself is complex.

([01:24](#)):

So I caught up with Jamie a few weeks ago to discuss some key concepts of systems change, inviting him to highlight ideas that will be explored throughout the series. In the coming weeks, Jamie will serve as guest host for five episodes with expert panelists diving into a variety of topics, including mindset shift, trauma and healing, social and ecological mindfulness, as well as the work of activist Joanna Macy, and an approach called Theory U, developed by Otto Scharmer. Otto was a guest on this show last year, so Jamie and his panel will expand on the concepts presented in that episode. Of course, we'll provide links to previous shows and other resources in the show notes.

([02:12](#)):

We are so excited to share this miniseries with deep gratitude to Jamie and all of the panelists for taking part. So stay tuned to your feed and let us know what you think. Send an email to [podcast@mindandlife.org](mailto:podcast@mindandlife.org). We'd love to hear from you. And please sign up for the Mind & Life Newsletter at [mindandlife.org/subscribe](https://mindandlife.org/subscribe). You'll get updates on the upcoming season of the podcast with our new host, David Creswell, along with the latest news from the Mind & Life Institute. For now, I hope you enjoy this interview with Jamie Bristow and our upcoming miniseries on Systems Change.

([02:56](#)):

Jamie Bristow, welcome back to the Mind & Life podcast.

Jamie Bristow ([03:00](#)):

Thanks so much, Phil. Really lovely to be here.

Phil Walker ([03:03](#)):

Before we get started, I just want to offer a deep note of thanks to you for jumping in and creating and hosting this miniseries on systems change. It's become a key area for Mind & Life's strategic vision, so the timing is perfect.

Jamie Bristow ([03:19](#)):

Yeah, and it's an area or an inquiry that's very close to my heart, and there's a particular question that I think is really important to explore now, and that's the kind of how of contemplative- based systems change. And so it was fantastic that the stars aligned, that you guys were as keen as I was to develop this conversation.

Phil Walker ([03:38](#)):

Before we get into the how piece of it, I'm wondering if maybe there is a way to contextualize this a little bit, maybe even define systems change. How do you typically explain or express systems change when you begin working with people?

Jamie Bristow ([03:53](#)):

Well, even talking to people about what systems are is a good place to start. Like that proverbial fish in the water that doesn't realize what it's swimming in is within a system. And there are certain conditions, constraints, ways in which the world works, both physically and psychologically and culturally, which condition the events that we see pop up in the world.

([04:17](#)):

And there's a common systems thinking tool called the systems thinking iceberg, which is a good visual analogy for this. So above the waterline, we have the events. And if you just see the world at that level, it can seem quite chaotic and random and unpredictable. And not that it isn't all of those things, but there are ways in which below the water line, there are certain patterns. And if you start to see those, it becomes a little bit less chaotic and you can start to see how things repeat. But then beneath that, you have the deep structure, both in terms of our structural systems, like our economics, but even below that, our mindsets, which includes ideas about who we are as humans, like what a good life looks like, how we relate to nature, and how we should relate to each other.

([05:09](#)):

So systems change is about going down into that iceberg below the waterline, upstream, and to use another kind of watery analogy, to the causes and conditions, essentially. And particularly when it comes to contemplative based systems change, we're interested in what the Donella Meadows termed the deepest leverage point for change, and that's down at that mindset level.

Phil Walker ([05:35](#)):

Yeah.

Jamie Bristow ([05:35](#)): And yeah, when you start to talk about it like that, people kind of get, "Yeah, we have a certain view of things. I can see how that shapes our reality."

Phil Walker ([05:42](#)):

Yeah. And I'm assuming that this applies across any type of system, large or small. I mean, you could look at an organization or a community or scale it all the way up to, as you have done, policy work for a nation, right?

Jamie Bristow ([05:57](#)):

Yeah. Or in a family, there are some complex system dynamics going on in most people's families, right?

Phil Walker ([06:03](#)):

Right.

Jamie Bristow ([06:04](#)):

And so the term, systems thinking, has become more and more common, I've found, in the public sector, like civil servants, those thinking about organizational development. And even more trendy at the moment is thinking about complex systems theory and complexity is another lens. So this is not the system as a machine, as complicated parts, but this is seeing it as an emergent living, breathing thing, which is sort of beyond rational analysis, being able to put it down in paper like a blueprint. And yeah, seeing things in that way really unlocks very sophisticated ways of intervening in that system and understanding how these dynamics are kind of fluid. And it's not like you're a mechanic opening the hood and getting your wrench out, but it's more you're working as a gardener or as an orchestrator more than a mechanic.

Phil Walker ([07:01](#)):

I liked Otto Scharmer in his interview with us, talked about the soil, the social soil, right?

Jamie Bristow ([07:08](#)):

Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Phil Walker ([07:08](#)):

And being a gardener of that, or I guess enriching the social soil.

Jamie Bristow ([07:15](#)):

Yeah. And we have one of our five episodes in this mini series will be with other folk from the Presencing Institute. Katrin, who we founded the organization with, will be going into the detail of what Theory U is and their particular interest in the social soil, how that needs to be a serious subject of research and what that would bring us if it was.

Phil Walker ([07:36](#)):

Yeah. Well, I wonder if we can keep on this topic of the context for people. And I know much of your work in systems change came out of policy work that you did in the UK, and you covered a lot of that in our previous episode with you. And I wonder if you can just expand on that a little bit, what you've learned in the years since we've talked to you last and an update of what are the tools and how have you expanded your own work inside of this?

Jamie Bristow ([08:05](#)):

Yeah. So for context, for those who haven't heard about that work, between 2014 to 2022, which is when I had the conversation with Wendy on the podcast, I was working with politicians in the British Parliament and around the world to make mindfulness and compassion and contemplative practices serious considerations for public policy. And we looked at specific things, health, education, but also these bigger, more complex problems like climate change through that lens.

[\(08:39\)](#):

And I had the sense that although ... In fact, I've come back around to really appreciating how key mindfulness, compassion and contemplative practices are. And I'm happy that that's my base camp. That's where my deep expertise is in terms of a family of approaches, but it's part of the picture. And with mindfulness and the vanguard, we have, over the last 10 years, had a number of other things. Compassion came quickly through afterwards, but then there have been lots of other approaches and other ways of seeing inner led change or inner work and its importance for the world. And it's great that we've had these other conversations.

[\(09:13\)](#):

So I felt that mindfulness in public policy could be ignored as a kind of fringe interest. Like if it's on its own and that we needed a kind of coalition of the inner capacities to stand together and say, "Hey, actually we're a hugely important missing domain of human systems and of experience and potential intervention, solutions, approaches to dealing with the challenges of the world."

[\(09:40\)](#):

And so I threw my lot in with the inner development goals, which were just getting started around 2022, '23. And for those unfamiliar, this is a little bit like an advocacy project for the whole gamut of inner work that we can do in addition to the contemplative approaches. And yeah, at its core, it's a communications tool, a communications framework with, there are now 25 inner skills in five different dimensions of being, thinking, relating, collaborating, and acting. And it's really most squarely designed to get a foot in the door to places where the inner just doesn't show up at all. We're still very much thinking about external factors when we're thinking about the success of organizations, societies, et cetera.

[\(10:34\)](#):

And so we were able, with that framework, which has now been developed with input from 100 countries, tens of thousands of people responding and saying what they think the inner qualities are that are needed in order to address our collective challenges in the 21st century. And so it's the world's first kind of lexicon or language for talking about inner skills. And so with that, it took us to the White House in the previous administration. It took us to other countries, Costa Rica, Albania, Wales, saying we want to be about inner development, as well as outer development to meet our sustainable development goals that the UN set for us in 2015. And so that was fascinating time. A little bit like when mindfulness blew up in 2013, 14, and I was involved in that with Headspace and then in the British Parliament, inner development more broadly blew up for two or three years, and this language helped it, like I say, travel into places it couldn't reach before.

[\(11:40\)](#):

And also, we learned a lot and it showed us still some further limitations of that framing and of how we can actually get people doing the deep work individually and collectively. And so now, I'm working with a team based at Harvard on an education and advocacy project, which is really concerned with inner, outer shifts, but has a really systemic lens looking at what we now call the polycrisis or the metacrisis,

the way the challenges of the world are going to go deep down that systems change iceberg and what we can do about it.

Phil Walker ([12:18](#)):

Yeah.

Jamie Bristow ([12:18](#)):

So through that time, there was a lot of success. It's like we had a meeting in the White House with all of the sustainability leads from the main government departments of the US government. Right? And that question becomes, okay, yeah, we get the memo, we need to do something in terms of building transformational skills to thinking about the inner when we think about our problems, but how do we do this really at scale, at the scale of the US government across public service? Or we have some of the biggest funders in the world now who have three billion grants a year saying, "Okay, well, we've been spending 800 million on climate change and we see that some of that should be going to inner stuff. How do we spend that kind of scale of money?"

([13:05](#)):

So that leads us to this question of not whether the inner should be considered and included, and the policy reports that we've been doing, perhaps, have helped make that case. Now, it's a question of like, okay, really, how do we do this in a big grownup way? And that is the question that has kept coming back through that work with the inner development goals, and now, I think we need to answer better because the why has, to some extent, in some places, started to be settled.

Phil Walker ([13:36](#)):

I just want to go back a little bit. I know the progression here is work on the individual and then expanding that out into the sort of communal reach that a person has and then ultimately scaling that up to larger institutions or systems. And going back to the inner development goals, those are really... Are they specific to individual people developing practices as we would think of them as mindfulness practices perhaps? And you mentioned 25 things. What are some examples? Is this like empathy, developing listening skills? What kinds of things fall into those inner development goals?

Jamie Bristow ([14:14](#)):

Yeah. It's interesting when we hear the term inner development, we often think individual development, and as we found actually, particularly in the US, that's the kind of the go-to. But we've been at pains to say individual and collective skills addressing collective challenges. And yeah, so in being, you have stuff that sounds a lot like mindfulness. In fact, mindfulness is sort of all over it, but it's not a specific skill. So you have presence and self-awareness and sort of integrity being in the being domain, inner compass as well.

([14:47](#)):

And then in the thinking domain, you might have complexity awareness or perspective taking and critical thinking. In collaborating, relating, then there you have relational qualities, empathy, compassion, as you say. And then going into acting is interesting because do we need perseverance, courage, and optimism? Is that something... Or rather active hope in another way of framing it? Are these things to be cultivated at scale?

Phil Walker ([15:17](#)):

Yeah. So you touched on the why piece of this, and I wonder if we could just explore a little more deeply this area of need in the world. And obviously, we live in a very complicated world. It grows in complexity every day. A lot of us feel overwhelmed by that, and yet there are many, many things that we need to act upon. So I'm really curious how you see the world right now and where that need exists for systems change.

Jamie Bristow ([15:44](#)):

Yeah. Well, one of the things that me and my colleagues have done in the last few years was produce a report called The system within: Addressing the inner dimensions of sustainability and systems transformation. And that was for The Club of Rome, which is the oldest sustainability and systems thinking sort of think tank group, I guess, in the world. They were founded in the late '60s, early '70s, and they created The Limits to Growth report, which was really fundamental to the environmental movement in 1972. Now, 50 years on from that, they did a kind of update, "Okay, so we warned you that if we keep on going in these ways, we're going to hit some buffers in terms of resources and spoiling our own nest. Let's see what the situation is." And sure enough, it's spookily on track-

Phil Walker ([16:36](#)):

It is.

Jamie Bristow ([16:36](#)):

... as what the computer model's basic, rudimentary in our current understanding of a computer model said in the 1970s, right?

Phil Walker ([16:44](#)):

Yeah.

Jamie Bristow ([16:45](#)):

And so The Club of Rome did a couple of different sort of 50-year reports, one of which was called Earth for All, and it said, "We need some radical turnarounds at this point if we're going to change that trajectory." And like almost all policy thinking, systems thinking in serious mainstream-y type places, they thought about inequality, they thought about finance, they thought about food systems, they thought about carbon dioxide levels and sequestering feedback loops, et cetera. But there was a big kind of "If people only see this picture, then we can make the change" sort of gap in the logic where the magic happens, and suddenly, we obey the science and act on it. Right?

([17:30](#)):

And it's that bit of the thinking that we need to fill in because we have so many psychological barriers to climate action, take that one particular part of the crisis, and we have such a big collective action problem. The problem isn't really the new policy instruments, the new technologies, although more sophisticated instruments would help. It's like, how do we get the political will? How do we collaborate across differences? How do we overcome bias and denial and develop much greater agency in a collective way than we have in the past? And they are all inner challenges.

Phil Walker ([18:06](#)):

Yeah.

Jamie Bristow ([18:06](#)):

So in that report, the system within the paper was commissioned by The Club of Rome as a compliment to this thing, Earth for All, which is the 50-year summary, because they recognized actually, fair enough, we have got a missing piece here. So myself and others like Phoebe Tickell, Otto Scharmer, Christine Wamsler, Julia Kim, Tomas Björkman wrote a paper for The Club of Rome essentially. And it says, why do we even need to write this paper? What are the philosophical roots that means this is missing, not just from Earth for All in The Club of Rome's work over the last 50 years, because it's fair enough, because it's just sort of missing from society. And we take it back to the enlightenment and reductionism and Descartes dualism and that kind of stuff. There are big philosophical reasons why we're just a bit myopic and blind to the importance of the inner.

Jamie Bristow ([18:54](#)):

And then we lay out all of the ways in which the inner is really crucial. We've got a number of them. Let's look at the primary role of values, identity, mindsets, public imaginary, what we call systems of belief and meaning, the very bottom of that iceberg. And then let's look at the skills and capacities and qualities, states, traits that will help us to sense, make, to collaborate. And that's a bit more in the kind of inner development goals frame.

([19:21](#)):

And so the why is that we have been looking at the picture with one eye closed by only seeing the inner, which gives us like we lose a whole element of depth to the picture. We're seeing in two dimensions if we haven't got both of these sort of lenses online. And we're trying to solve it with one arm behind our backs, and it's quite hard to really intervene and to make change in the system if you're sort of fumbling around just with the outer stuff, when you're not thinking about social fabric, you're not thinking about public trust, you're not thinking about narrative framing, you're not talking about the role of imagination, hope, that kind of stuff. So when we look at how the world works, the problems of the world that we need to address, are we seeing it just in terms of largely outer stuff? And that's the eye we have open, right?

([20:11](#)):

And to also see it as a psychological and cultural system that is intimately woven through the outer world is to open two eyes and see it in its full dimensionality. And then once we've seen the system, how do we then try and intervene upon it? Do we just do structural stuff? Do we set up new power plants? Do we try and raise taxes? Or do we also think about the health of our communities, the trust and the fellow feeling in our neighborhoods? Do we also think about giving public space for grief when it comes to looking at the world as it's changing in difficult ways, not just through grief workshops, like the Work That Reconnects that we'll explore on this miniseries, but what's the role of politicians being leaders in this area? What's the role of the arts? What's the role of public monuments and holidays, or can we build in ritual and collective process to better manage and inculcate the emotions that come up in our personal and public lives?

([21:27](#)):

And so I think a little bit here of the work of Martha Nussbaum who wrote the book Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice. And this is an example, not from a kind of a particular pedagogy or an approach like mindfulness or something, but this is like political theorists saying that actually this is really the deep fabric of our societies. And we have just thought about creating better systems so we

don't have to be, to use a Gandhian quote, and think about rights and laws and other strictures, but we're not thinking about how we regenerate the moral re-

[\(22:03\)](#):

But we're not thinking about how we regenerate the moral resources of society, how we align our surface, become clear on, and then align our actions with shared values in a concerted way. So yeah, that's what I mean by getting both hands into the dough, into the clay, is to think about individual work, group work, but also these public things that we can do. We did in the past in statecraft, in nation building, speeches, national anthems, public memorials are inner interventions in some way to surface and shape the soul of the nation. So yeah, I really recommend that report, actually, which was designed as a 101 on ramp for people who are interested in systems, who have largely been thinking about it in an external way, to really think in this inner, outer, integrated way.

Phil Walker [\(22:56\)](#):

Well, you've alluded to a few of the pieces that are going to be a part of the miniseries that you're producing. Would you like to jump into expanding on what you're going to be exploring?

Jamie Bristow [\(23:08\)](#):

Yeah. So we had this question of how systems change approaches, or rather contemplative informed or based systems change approaches are showing up in the world, like what's the state of the nation, essentially, summary of where we're up to, because the innovation's been going on for decades. We start out with talking about Joanna Macy's work and the work that reconnects. And the reason for that is that it might not have the most developed evidence based compared to say mindfulness based approaches to sustainability or systems change, but in the roots of that work go back into the '70s. And it is hugely influential in activist circles and has huge reach, has touched many lives through Joanna's books, but also through the workshop format and the work that reconnects the course Active Hope. So we have three great panelists who are really representing different parts of the ecosystem that Joanna has left behind. And then we look at Theory U, trauma healing approaches, particularly in a collective lens. Then we will explore mindfulness-based approaches that are social or ecological in their framing and their desire, their intentions for impact. So there's a new wave of mindfulness interventions, particularly over the last five or six years, that you could call social or ecological mindfulness. So we'll do a little review of that. And we'll finish up with a look at contemplative based systems transformation in a broad sense, and the kind of work that is being done through groups like the Conscious Food Systems Alliance.

[\(24:57\)](#):

So this is a UN convened professional network, essentially, for people trying to bring systems transformation within food and agriculture globally in contact with consciousness approaches. And so that's one example about how we can be approach agnostic. They use mindfulness approaches, but they usually use other things as well, storytelling, and an indigenous African context, for instance, could be the most skillful thing to apply. So a lot of them have consciousness shifting or contemplative elements to the work, but we're thinking about the system as a whole. How do we work with, in this instance, executives from major agro companies like Mondelez or Unilever at the same time as working with grassroots farmers in Egypt, or indigenous food education groups in Brazil?

[\(25:53\)](#):

And so yeah, there's some fascinating work that we'll touch on and explore where that could really go, if we have approaches that have been developed over decades, new practices emerging that's based on like the firm foundations of mindfulness based approaches combined with this whole global system lens about how we shift consciousness at scale. Yeah, so these are the five conversations I thought were the most important to give us a sense of the how right now in its most influential form, and a clue as to where this could be going.

Phil Walker [\(26:30\)](#):

Yeah. So these are five distinct groups or movements or sets of practices that are each working within their own frames?

Jamie Bristow [\(26:43\)](#):

Well, there's a lot of overlap. These are five conversations that I think are distinct enough in their scale, like what are we looking at here? Is it a single approach? Is it like the whole of the agricultural system and globally, or is this an area that is generating a lot of interest for good reason? Like for instance, trauma healing and integration approaches, which, like mindfulness again did in like 2014 or something, trauma's been having a moment for the last few years. There's a lot of interest about that, the interaction between that and collective challenges like climate, like why are we getting stuck? In what ways are we inheriting intergenerational and collective trauma? And what ways is part of the work to heal that, to acknowledge it, and to at least be sensitive to it and mitigate it?

Phil Walker [\(27:33\)](#):

And some of these organizations have knowledge of each other and awareness of practices and things?

Jamie Bristow [\(27:39\)](#):

Yeah. Well, what I found is that I talk about mindfulness, compassion, contemplative approaches as my base camp, right? And most people have a base camp. And they see the mountain of inner led change or systems transformation from that base camp view. Some people have a couple of different base camps, so they have a primary one and a secondary one. What I'm starting to find in my travels, particularly through the inner development goals, trying to weave together this world a little bit to advocate for it on a wide scale, is that actually, very few people have a good sense of more than a couple. And so these different conversations that we'll have represent different approaches that adjoin, abut each other, overlap. You could consider it in a way work that reconnects a mindfulness informed ecological approach that predates secular mindfulness. So it's like, which one fits within the other is an interesting question.

[\(28:33\)](#):

So yeah, there are blurry boundaries between them. In terms of these base camps, that is an interesting way of looking at it, I think, because I would say that there's a base camp that's largely around, their primary thing is like the systems of belief and meaning. It's like mindsets, shifting values and tensions. And I'd say Theory U, for instance, is really firmly based in that base camp. They talk a lot about mindfulness and the qualities and the skills and capacities that are needed to serve that shift, but an organizational level and Otto's talk about the societal level, very much about that. I think that's base cap number one.

[\(29:10\)](#):

Base camp number two, I'd say would be like the inner development world, and actually mindfulness fits in that. It's like seeing the challenge really as one of developing skills, capacities, qualities, and being more equal, either because we've got more ability to connect with ourselves, each other and nature, or we've got more agency, [inaudible 00:29:30] that's the end of development goals frame. There's another couple. There's one which is like the adult development, which is like Robert Keegan, Fisher, Susanne Cook Greuter, people who are looking at ways in which we grow and mature after the age of 18. We're not baked and done at that point, but the ways in which we grow and mature. And some people grow and mature in ways that others will never reach.

[\(29:57\)](#):

They become elders, they become very wise and have ability for complex perspectives. And the final one, I'd say is trauma healing approaches. And these different worlds have different sets of language, different ways of saying things, and they don't always understand each other and speak different language. That means from a policymaking perspective, from a funding perspective, when you're trying to get your head around this inner development world, it can be like, "Well, I spoke to these guys and they see it all through trauma lens, and speak to these guys and they're just talking about how mindfulness is going to be the main thing." So yeah, we need to, I think, as a family of inner led change approaches, even beyond the inner development goals framework of that language, we need to be better, I think, at understanding the full gamut of things going on out there, and how we talk about the whole sector.

Phil Walker [\(30:48\)](#):

Yeah, I'm curious too if you could maybe pull the thread through all of those pieces. Obviously, these approaches can touch any particular world, any particular problem within the world. And certainly, there are commonalities amongst these groups and approaches. And if you pull the thread together, what is all that leading to, because we live in a very polarized world, or at least that's the feeling that we seem to have, right? I always think maybe there's more common values than we think. But I'm just curious the big picture for you. If we're able to pull these pieces together and groups are having some success, as they have been in this arena, how do you see that evolving and emerging for us?

Jamie Bristow [\(31:34\)](#):

Yeah, we do live in a polarized world. We live in a world with deep problems. And I don't want to be pollyannaish here and say that if only we start doing the inner work, then all of our problems will be solved, because I think as well as the part of the political policy, business world that needs to see the inner, I think those of us who are really interested in inner approaches need to also see how systemic and how interwoven with outer constraints we are. And we need to develop love, for instance. I talked about why love is important for justice. But we also need to be literate in power and be systemically smart. And as Martin Luther King said, power without love is reckless and abusive, but love without power is sentimental and anemic.

[\(32:29\)](#):

So we really need to have two wings of a bird, or again, two eyes here on this. And so the hope is integration. And I talk about inner led change as a shorthand for this work, but it's really like inner and outer integrated approaches led change, which is a little clunkier as a title. And that's a really promising area of innovation and research. So take polarization, for instance, it's both a problem of how we talk to-

[\(33:03\)](#):

It's both a problem of how we talk to each other and of values, and it's also about the infrastructure of our social digital lives. And there are functional structural things that we need to do to stop the algorithms making us so irate at each other. So yes, we need to think about different ways of interacting, of inculcating values, but we need to think about the infrastructure digitally and physically that pull out of us certain values, that raise up certain values over others or lead to conflict.

Phil Walker ([33:36](#)):

Jamie, during the previous podcast we had with you, you mentioned Daniel Kahneman's book, *Thinking Fast, Thinking Slow*. And I loved what you added to that. You said, "Thinking fast, thinking slow and thinking even slower." And that immediately resonated for me because I felt, as you explained, that contemplative practices or even deep reflection or other tools that we have, those things are often the deep space that inform change for us personally, but then also they can have a ripple effect outward. So my question for you here is this. We feel this tremendous urgency in the world, and it seems to grow each week. And maybe the best decisions aren't made out of urgency. So how do we hold both this sense of change comes through deep reflection and also addressing the urgency of the world? Do you have any thoughts on that?

Jamie Bristow ([34:36](#)):

Yeah. One of the philosophers that I work with, Jonathan Rowson, talks about his work in this area and really all of our work in this area to be an urgent hundred-year project. And so, how can we hold both the fact that this is beyond a marathon, this has to be a relay race? We need to be able to put it down and pick it up and do contemplative practice, and do the self-care and the insight work that we need to do. And also, we need to be running pretty hard in order to turn this ship around.

([35:10](#)):

To get to the bottom levels of the iceberg, which is really what's going to turn things around, you have to listen deeply. You have to go slow. This is epoch shifting, civilization shifting. This is that deep tectonic level to mix my metaphors. And so in another way, you can't rush it. It's urgent and you can't rush it and it's going to take time, right?

([35:31](#)):

And so what's our appropriate relationship with that as individuals and as organizations will depend what piece of the puzzle you're working on. It's really important to counter the rise of fascism in the far right. And there are ways in which if you're doing that from the front line of that, God bless you. And you might need to be pretty vigilant. And that's kind of like what sometimes is called horizon one in this sort of three horizons of transformation. It's like we need to make stuff less bad or stop it getting worse right now.

([36:06](#)):

And we need to do the iterative transformation work, which is important. And that's kind of horizon two. We can sort of see where we're running to, and it's medium term, but then we also need to work on the third horizon, which is beyond all of that, which is the new system that makes the old system obsolete. That is beyond where we are now that it feels utopian in nature. "But the world's too dangerous for anything but utopia," one wise person said.

([36:32](#)):

And that's true. So some of us need to be working on that third horizon, like going deep, going with the retreat time, really incubating something, which can't quite plug into our current system, but is going to form the foundation for what comes afterwards. And that might come after significant disjuncture,

systems failure, partial systems collapse. That's kind of where my head's at. That's what I mean by playing the long game, we need the resources to get through a civilization or bottleneck that's probably coming at us. And we need to have the policy ideas, the practice, the communities lying around so they get picked up as a new way of living on the other side of that.

Phil Walker ([37:08](#)):

Yeah. I think that's really important as a perspective. And I also appreciated, you used the term relay, and I think I've seen this more recently where people say, "The work that you're doing is not going to end. You're simply going to hand the baton to someone else."

Jamie Bristow ([37:25](#)):

Right.

Phil Walker ([37:26](#)):

And I think that to me actually gave a great, I don't know, it's a great liberation to think of that. If I can run as well as I can to hand a baton to someone else, that feels good.

Jamie Bristow ([37:37](#)):

Exactly. We need to have that generational thinking. This is a long project to turn ourselves into a life sustaining and regenerating society. Similar philosophical mindset shifts, take generations, take hundreds of years. And the way in which I mean it, when people say, "It's not a sprint, it's a marathon." I say, "It's neither of those two. It's a relay race." Meaning that we need to be able to put the baton down ourselves in the kind of month-to-month time scale. And that's the role for silent retreat. Spend months on silent retreat, and show up in the boardroom, and in the parliament, and wherever your piece of the puzzle is, because that's the kind of spiritual warriorship, to use a kind of Buddhist frame of Shambhala Warriors, which John and Macy talks about, and we cover in the episode on the Work that Reconnects. That's what it requires. It requires deep work in systems and deep work in yourself.

Phil Walker ([38:38](#)):

Yeah. I appreciate that these approaches around systems change seem so rich and seem so important for us. So just wondering here, is there anything we haven't touched on as a sort of prelude to this miniseries that you feel would be important to lift up right now?

Jamie Bristow ([38:56](#)):

Yeah, sure. So each episode, we've broken a little bit from the format of the previous podcast, a fair bit, because we have three or four people on a panel rather than a single guest, which gives us multiple perspectives on the same ecosystem or landscape. So give us a little bit more of that State of the Nation, because the one person wouldn't be able to do it alone.

([39:20](#)):

And that gives us certain challenges and limitations as well as some great upsides. And also, we've tried to create an arc through each of the episodes so that we start out with some basic concepts. What are the fundamentals that you need to know to follow the rest of the conversation and care why it's even important? And for some people, that might not be enough background and enough detail. So you might, for instance, in the case of the Theory U podcast, it might be good to go back to the conversation that Wendy had with Otto Scharmer to get some sense of this deep systems change work.

[\(39:53\)](#):

Because then with Katrin and Martin and Megan in this new miniseries, we jump into, "Okay, what are the details of Theory U? How does the process work?" And then we go into like, "Okay, so what's going on and where? What's the scale? What's the reach? Where in the world has this got to? What kind of level are we working at? What is the academic evidence as far as it goes?" And then moving into, "Where can we go from there."

[\(40:22\)](#):

And so that's the novel thing that I think very few podcasts go into. We're trying to keep this engaging and fun and entertaining at the same time as actually quite ambitiously giving a lot of detail on what's actually happening. So I hope this works for people. It's ambitious. It's a bit of a departure, but I think it's where we need to go now, this detail and rigor to move on to the next phase.

Phil Walker [\(40:47\)](#):

Well, I've had a chance to listen to the first two episodes that you've produced and it's great. And I think you're right. Many of us, I guess, are looking for ways to be active in the world. And I think any new tools that are available to us make those possibilities much greater. So I just want to say, Jamie, again, just really appreciate you jumping in and creating this series. I'm really looking forward to it. I think our audience is really going to benefit from it. And just thank you again for all this beautiful work.

Jamie Bristow [\(41:20\)](#):

Thanks to Mind and Life for taking this direction. I'm really looking forward to seeing what the organization can foster in the area of contemplative based systems change.

Phil Walker [\(41:31\)](#):

Beautiful. Thanks.