



MIND & LIFE

## Mind & Life Podcast Transcript

### Social & Ecological Mindfulness: Connecting personal & planetary health

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Jamie (00:00)

Hello and welcome to the Mind and Life Podcast. I'm Jamie Bristow, your guest host for this episode. Across this mini-series, we've been asking a practical and increasingly urgent question: If inner work really matters for outer change, then which approaches are most helpful now, and how might they need to evolve to meet the scale of our social and ecological challenges? In this episode, we turn to the family of approaches that can be called 'mindfulness-based', or more loosely 'mindfulness-informed'.

No inner development approach has captured the public imagination or the media headlines quite like mindfulness training. Over the past few decades, it has moved from the margins into medicine, education, workplaces, public policy, and everyday life, carried by a growing awareness of the importance of mental health, well-being, and resilience, and supported by a substantial evidence base as a clinical intervention. But those strengths have also, in some ways, shaped the limits of how mindfulness is understood.

Clinical and academic settings have tended to focus on individual outcomes and personal benefit. So even though many practitioners and teachers have always seen mindfulness as much more than about just stress reduction and self-improvement, that broader message has often struggled to break through. Mindfulness practice has too easily been boxed in as a tool for helping individuals cope with difficult conditions, rather than as a way of transforming how we relate to those conditions and to one another.

As a result, some critics of the mindfulness movement have argued that it can reinforce the very individualism and self-preoccupation that underpins many of our shared challenges. And yet, that's only part of the story. Less widely recognized is the fact that mindfulness has been applied to complex social issues almost since its modern inception. And particularly since the early 2010s, mindfulness practitioners have been in the vanguard of a wider movement that now often travels under the banner of 'inner-led change' or 'inner development', bringing contemplative practice into conversation with questions of justice, systems change, ecology, and collective flourishing.

Then over the last five or six years, a new wave of socially and ecologically oriented programs has begun to take shape, integrating mindfulness-based pedagogy with group process, relational practice, and systems change approaches, and a much more explicit tailoring of interventions for collective benefit. So this conversation is really about that newer and wider horizon.

What can mindfulness offer when it's not confined to the individual, but brought into relationship with communities, institutions, and the living world? To help me explore the current landscape and future potential of this work, I'm delighted to be joined by three leading voices in the field. Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, Professor of Medicine Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, where he founded the world-renowned Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction Clinic in 1979, and later the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society.

Paula Ramirez Díazgranados, who is a Colombian anthropologist, peace builder, body-based practitioner, and mindfulness trainer, who has supported humanitarian teams in communities affected by conflict, displacement, and systemic violence across 23 countries.

And Liane Stephan, a highly experienced mindfulness facilitator and innovator. She is managing director and co-founder of the workplace training organization Awaris, and of the Inner Green Deal, a non-profit spin-out dedicated to sustainability and systems change.

Welcome everyone.

So to get us started, I'd love to turn to you first, Jon, if that's okay. So when mindfulness is understood through the lens of stress reduction and personal wellbeing, what do you think gets left out? And what becomes possible when you have a wider social and ecological frame?

Jon (03:46)

Well, frankly, I don't think anything gets left out. I think mindfulness is a universe unto itself and it's in some sense boundless and completely coextensive with human awareness. So the fact that we started in a hospital with a clinical program aimed at what looked like medical patients who were, in fact, medical patients with specific diagnoses, but who were falling through the cracks of the healthcare system at the time.

Now those cracks in the healthcare system 50 years later are Grand Canyons. It was basically meant to be a skillful means to introduce mindfulness in some way or other into the mainstream in a place where dukkha was predominant. And if you think about it for a moment, hospitals really function in the society as dukkha magnets. Nobody wants to go to the hospital unless some degree of suffering or fear is associated with it.

Jamie (04:44)

And that's what you mean by dukkha, right? It's suffering essentially.

Jon (04:48)

To just explain is a classical expression of what's translated as suffering from the Pali in Sanskrit. So we go to the places where there's most suffering and then we see and study actually. So we don't make an assumption, but we study the viability, the usefulness, and the transformative and healing potential of these ancient meditative practices that have to do with waking up to our true nature as human beings and not necessarily merely as individuals. So yes, your own personal well being and mental health and physical health is fine, but one can't be healthy in a sick world, in a polluted world, in a world that is toxic in so many different ways. Even a society that is toxic creates huge problems for the health of individuals as well as of course the society as a whole.

So MBSR and then other mindfulness-based practices and programs were basically meant to be a demonstration project that mindfulness itself could be of some value in mainstream

societies globally. And of course, we need to research that to verify that in fact it does have salutary effects. But in terms of our conversation today, now

The patient isn't an individual person suffering from chronic back pain or headaches or heart failure or something like that. The patient is the planet. The patient are all these individual nations which are at war with each other and creating havoc in terms of destruction on unimaginable levels, human destruction and also eco-destruction on fantastic levels.

So I think our project now... and I think that the Mind and Life Institute has always been a catalyst for bringing the question of ancient meditative practices and wisdom and compassion into the mainstream of the world in all of the ways that the world might be crying out for. And to not do it in the way that is kind of culturally dominating, but to actually find ways to see that mindfulness is actually a universal aspect of our humanity.

And so that in some way or other it's in all cultures, including the original cultures of the past hundred thousand years of native peoples everywhere, indigenous cultures everywhere. So I think the challenge is a very big one, but I don't know anything other than mindfulness that is actually remotely up to this challenge. And that gives me a lot of hope in the face of so much despair and suffering on planet Earth at the moment.

Jamie (07:40)

When you originally developed the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction, MBSR, curriculum, Jon, am I right in thinking that it had this planetary health perspective? And that it was originally longer, that it was a 10-week course and became an eight week course because of the constraints of working in a clinical environment. Could you speak a little bit to that? Like what was the original vision and what was originally included? And why was it lost?

Jon (08:08)

The fact that originally when I started it, the vision was to have a 10-week program because I felt, you know, that the longer the exposure to practice and the support environment that we would create with medical patients meeting, coming to the hospital once a week for a two or two and a half hour class, that 10 weeks would be a relatively good launching platform to see whether the concept of bringing mindfulness into the mainstream of medicine would be of any, you know, value whatsoever. And of course, in order to determine that, we'd need to study it.

The vagaries of the clinical calendar in the United States are that the end of summer and then Thanksgiving gives us a window that felt like after the first year or so, it was more appropriate to reduce it to eight weeks for all sorts of logistical reasons rather than 10 weeks.

So certain things were cut out. The ninth week refocused on diet and its relationship to health and mindfulness and food, which is of course an eco subject that is huge. And then the tenth class was the world. Okay. And those are chapters in full catastrophe living. So it's never not been part of MBSR. Right. But we decided that for skillful means we needed to keep it at eight weeks.

After the first year or so, and then add, and this was another instrumental factor, add an all-day retreat in the sixth week to give people an extended experience of practice over, say, eight hours. And so it did shift a slight bit in terms of its form, but the essence and the content of it never changed because we would bring diet and the world into all of the conversations in every class to whatever degree it's appropriate, because lifestyle and environmental factors have so

much to do with one's health and well-being. And it was never about curing, by the way, just to emphasize this, it wasn't like, well, we're going to find all these people falling through the cracks of the healthcare system. And then we're going to do what medicine's not able to do for them after three back surgeries and they're in more pain or whatever.

But we're not saying we're going to take the pain away or we're going to cure your coronary disease. What we're saying is that if you come to a class and it's in the form of a class, what goes on in classes? Well, what goes on in classes is learning. We learn about aspects of ourselves that we may not have actually paid any attention to or been taught in school, like the power of awareness. And I'm using awareness and mindfulness as synonyms.

And then out of any kind of learning, why what happens when we learn? We grow. That's why we read books. That's why we listen to lectures. That's why we learn from all of our experiences moment by moment by moment. So the arc of the eight weeks in MBSR ideally would be that you come with strong motivation because of suffering. You discover new capacities in yourself using these kinds of very open, spacious meditation practices that emphasize the body, heart, and mind and world from the very beginning, all built in. And then out of that learning, you grow. You realize, my God, I'm actually bigger than I thought I was, or more capable than I thought I was, or less stressed even than I thought I was, or have more potential than I thought it was. And out of that growing, what happens is very interesting: healing. What happens is healing. And I don't mean by healing that all of a sudden you're cured from whatever it is that brought you in the first place. What I mean is that you found a new way to be in wise relationship with it. So you're not discarding classical medicine or, you know, any kind of treatments, but you're now participating in the arc of your own well-being across the lifespan.

So that is my working definition of healing is that it's coming to terms with things as they are, with the actuality of this moment. Okay. And when you're in this moment and you come to terms with it, then what happens over time with practice is that you are in some sense transformed. You become who you always were. And it's much bigger than who you thought you were with all the, you know, sort of self-criticism that we carry and so forth. And so there's that arc of learning, growing, healing and transformation that goes on simply for the rest of your life. So that the eight weeks of MBSR is really a launching platform like Cape Canaveral into the rest of your life. And we say that the last week, the eighth week of the program is the rest of your life.

Jamie (13:17)

Mm-hmm. Yeah. And when you were including some of these elements around health and the world in the day-long retreat and throughout the rest of the program, it sounds like it was left implicit or rather up to the individual facilitators to bring that in through inquiry and to connect threads. Do you think that that was then translated into broader mindfulness teaching outside of the fold of the Center for Mindfulness?

And what do you think gets lost when it isn't an explicit part of the curriculum and is instead an intention loosely held?

Jon (13:56)

Well, you know, the world was very different in 1979 than it is now. So MBSR was meant to actually ~ I don't want to use the word change, but stay in fine relationship with what's unfolding in the world at the moment that it's being offered. So that's a really not something you can script. And MBSR is really meant to privilege and feature the genius of the teacher.

In an embodied way to bring whatever makes the most sense, including newspaper clippings from that day's, you know, newspaper or whatever, if it's relevant, into the curriculum of the MBSR. So there's a huge degree of creativity and embodied presence and sensitivity to what's going on in the world that is on the shoulders, if you will, or in the bones of the MBSR teacher, that can't be scripted. And that's, I think, one of the orthogonal dimensions of MBSR that's extremely powerful because it's not a cookbook or something that like you just read the book and then you can teach MBSR. No, it has to come out of your practice. So one principle, the most important principle of MBSR, in terms of teachers, is that we never ask more of our patients than we're asking of ourselves on that particular day.

So if you're asking people to practice 45 minutes a day, six days a week, you'd better be practicing at least 45 minutes a day, six days a week, because we're in this together. And you're not teaching out of a script or a cookbook or a manual or a protocol. You're teaching out of your own Dharma lineage and trajectory, whatever it is. And I've trusted that from the very beginning.

And your question loops back to another element that's really important. And that is the question of how explicit or implicit ethics should be, sila, you know, within the Buddhist tradition. How explicitly should we talk about ethics? And I think that, you know, that can backfire very easily if you get holier than thou in your expression of like ethics. But if you embody non harming, deep listening, full presence, that you are compassionate rather than blah, blah, blah about compassion in the classroom, then that's really the model for MBSR up to this point. Now, of course, it really trusts the depth of the practice of the individual. And no individuals practice in the same way or teach in the same way. And that's, I think, one of the core and salient virtues of MBSR is that it's no better than the teacher's understanding and love for the practice.

Jamie (16:58)

Hmm. Yeah, thank you, Jon. That's really helpful. Liane, you've been at the forefront of bringing mindfulness into the workplace across Europe and further afield. And that requires you to embody those qualities in the way that Jon is pointing to. And also to evolve how it is taught. More recently, you have integrated more explicitly some of these components about diet and ethics and planetary health.

But before we go into that, could you give us a sense of the history here? How you see workplace training has evolved, how it included, you know, issues related to corporate social responsibility, sustainability, et cetera, or not, as the case may be. And how did we get to where we are now?

Liane (17:47)

Well I can first maybe just summarize a little bit about the history when we brought mindfulness to the workplace, which was in 2012 with Awaris. At that time it was Kalapa Academy. So we shifted or changed the name. So that was 2012. We started with bringing mindfulness programs to the corporate world. And at the same time, Search Inside Yourself in the US started with that program, started from or emerged from the Google company.

And we started immediately with research. So we had a collaboration with the Munich University. And at the beginning there was a lot of skepticism in organizations. I know mindfulness, meditation, even the word meditation would shock people, you know. But it turned out after the research and we could see the impacts of mindfulness, like you know, better noticing, relaxation, stress reduction, but also emotional regulation and positive outlook.

So, after these results, people in organizations and HR started to shift their mind and go like, this might be interesting for us, because people get more and more stressed in organizations. And so we developed diverse programs and offered that to leaders, mindful leadership. And we could even use the name, you know, mindful leadership. So for a couple of years, I would say till COVID or 2019, mindfulness was really you know, mainstream.

Every company had some kind of mindfulness program. But I have to say it was still meant ~ you know, it has these two tastes. One was really helping the individual who was suffering, and on the other hand there was a taste of optimization, you know, of less distractions, you can better focus and you feel better, you can reduce your stress, which which is all valid and good, but they didn't understand really deeply the relational aspect of mindfulness I felt.

So then we started at Awaris to develop also programs for teams so that teams can see that there is a team body that can actually be mindful and can be present and can relate to each other and see each other's suffering. So that was the first time where I felt, ~ now we are going into the right direction, you know, so that people can help each other, take care for each other.

But then through COVID everything changed and then suddenly the term resilience got very popular and mindfulness was just not important any longer. People didn't talk any longer about mindfulness. It was a hype and the hype was done. So then it became resilience. And I have to say it's not so bad that actually you know the word shifted, because resilience without mindfulness is not possible. Without awareness, it's not possible. So, but it's more practical. And I feel now that the relational aspect of mindfulness becomes even more important now with resilience, because you know, you cannot solve problems as an individual. You can only solve it with collective intelligence, with collective wisdom. People have to listen to each other.

And the social connection is so important in order to become more resilient that I feel that's a good path now. And when you think about the climate crisis or you know, any other crisis that is present right now, you have to become resilient if you understand resilience not as the, you know, strength, but if you understand resilience as the ability to shift inner states and to relate to others in a very caring and very compassionate way.

And from here I thought, aha, interesting. Mindfulness is in a way declining in the corporate world. But on the other hand, suddenly it became very well known and more prominent in the field of sustainability. So in between 2012 and 2020, I would say mindfulness wasn't at all connected to sustainability or corporate social responsibility. Nothing, nothing. You know, there was no connection to that. It was just about the leader or the team, the individual, and yeah, to work better and to foster well being and to foster well doing in a way, but it didn't have that relational aspect so strongly. Which is sad, but we didn't get there. I think in other ten years, yes, people would have understood it more deeply, even though many people started to practice, I have to say, but still the practice had the taste of I do this for something, unless I do this to be present in the present moment. And that is a huge difference, as we all know.

Jamie (22:41)

Hmm. Yeah. Paula, much of your work has been about helping people to be resilient and to recover from conflict and difficulty. You've worked with the UN for over ten years, being invited to teach mindfulness in some of the toughest places on the planet. So in that way, as Jon said earlier, even without explicitly talking about

Importance of working relationally with groups or bringing in ethics or linking individual health to planetary health. Mindfulness has been going out there, you know, it has been meeting suffering, dukkha, and it has been addressing systemic dukkha, I guess you could say, in conflict zones, etc. Could you just give us your you know, your work as an example of of where mindfulness has been touching lives? Particularly, I know your passion is around the connection to somatics and trauma healing. So please just sketch how it is that you've been working with mindfulness in these places and their and your relationship to the UN and their systemic work.

Paula (23:50)

Yeah, thank you, Jamie. Yeah, out of hearing John and Liane, it made me think about the first time that I actually taught an MBSR in South Sudan with internally displaced people from the Nuer ethnic. And it was very revealing in many ways. The first session that I had with them when we went into the practice, the first two minutes of the practice.

Their eyes went into REM, into the rapid eye movement, which happens in general, more or less after 90 minutes after we're sleeping. With them, it was very quickly. And then I realized something about the practice. And it's like, yes, the practice is for, you know, like there's this developing our capacity for awareness, for insight. But what happens if you're exhausted? Like what happens if war and violence is so loud that it's very difficult to have a little bit of that awareness and that insight because what your nervous system needs is to rest. So that was very interesting because it was like, okay, a lot of of the essence, no, had to change to give the collective nervous system what it needed, which was safety. They couldn't sleep at night because they were unsafe. So they were not resting.

So it was like okay, being there with the possibility of sleeping together, of resting together, of having a moment, of not having to do anything. No, like this excuse of finding each other and finding themselves in this is what slowly, slowly brought that insight or their resilient capacity. And then what started happening in the sessions is that they started bringing their drums or the plants that they used to work with.

Yes. Like it was about this connection and this remembering of what it is that we're talking about when we talk about resilience. And it's like how life just wants to live in the middle of the most difficult situations, no? And that is something that I have seen in different contexts, but I just thought that this no, like, could bring a little bit of a of a picture of how that was. And my work with the UN it starts by having grown up in the middle of the armed conflict in Colombia and asking the question of war and collective trauma. And I developed an autoimmune illness related to a memory of war when I was a child. And it was through somatic practice and through mindfulness practice that I could start a healing process. And in that question, the question of peace building started to come in. I did a master's on peace building. And yeah, with how is it that we can heal in a way that is looking within ourselves so that that peace building can be sustainable in the long run. No?

Right. And then I started working with with the UN when I was in Colombia working for an NGO that we co-created with Matias Roost, bringing mindfulness to schools affected by armed conflicts. And then when the UN was seeing that that was working with communities affected by war and violence in terms of bringing their resilience, I ended up working with them in in different places. And that's when we worked on that program that was looking into supporting the mental health of first responders through mindfulness practice. And that's what we did in those twenty-three countries and contexts, no? Taking into account trauma sensitivity and cultural sensitivity.

Jamie (27:56)

How have you brought in the context that the classes are being offered in? And how have you met the kind of collective suffering of that place and of that moment rather than just the individual suffering that people are showing up with?

Paula (28:12)

Yeah, I think that that distinction that you're making, it's very interesting. Yeah. So the first when I was working with internally displaced people or with refugees, again, like after resting, there would come space for insight. And what insight was bringing slowly, slowly to the surface was a knowing that they could survive because they were together.

And that what they were missing was the spaces to be together and to remember that that's what kept them alive. Because sometimes work goes too fast too soon, that there's no time to cry, there's no time to mourn, there's just no time. So what mindfulness does is bringing up that quality, that relationship with yeah, with with catching up with your life.

So that again those cultural resources can come about. And that for me, with what Jon was saying, no, like what's the quality of my practice was I'm I'm just here to listen. I have an agenda, I have an MBSR that is like how much my practice can help me hold the complexity of cultural codes that, for example, I don't know. Yes, I didn't know that a big reason why.

The gravediggers in South Sudan that I was working with had PTSD in like no, like these nightmares, mostly because they didn't have the time to bury their people as they used to with their rituals. I couldn't have known that. They either in the first moment. It's something that we discovered together by coming together, resting, and listening. And on the other hand, with first responders, it was when I realized that we co-regulate ourselves, no. And first responders, if it was like gender-based violence worker, mental health workers, the people who were bringing water or food, they didn't have the emotional capacity to hold that complexity. Yeah, to be there, just like, how is it that I can be with myself in relationship to what this needs from me, which is presence? And that's when everything started shifting now in my work around ~ it's with first responders that I want to work with for their mental health, but because that's the strength that's needed in the field to start shifting the ecosystem of trauma and war into a life, no, into a living ecosystem.

Jamie (31:03)

Yeah, indeed, powerful. Liana, you have developed one of those emergent comings together of practitioners who are trying to share these insights and capacities with others, particularly or explicitly with a social and ecological lens. So the Inner Green Deal that I mentioned in your introduction has been working with policymakers in the European Commission and in other mainstream institutions. Could you give us a little sense of where you are now with your thinking, with your innovation around yeah, in explicitly talking about systemic issues and collective action within a practice container?

Paula (31:51)

Mm.

Liane (31:52)

So first of all, I would say we have learned really a lot. So the Inner Green Deal started with a pilot in 2020 and 21, actually with people from the European Commission and with leaders from

private corporations. And at that time we did, I think, five pilots. And at that time we, you know, the sessions were really packed, you know, eight sessions, two hours, and they were full. So we learned very quickly.

That the longing of people was like being in a safe space and having time and space to exchange and to have deep conversations about their suffering, their pain, their anxieties. So that yeah, I just want to start with that because that was such a strong learning. How spaciousness, how important spaciousness within these programs, yeah, how important it is.

And we also learned very quickly that we had, for example, to redesign the practices, which I felt at the beginning a bit irritated about, but to bring in the individual, the collective and the systemic level into the practices very explicitly, so that people experience themselves, feel their body. The body is so important, which we are cut off, we are separated from ourselves. So to bring back a felt sense for the body.

And then at the same time to see, like you mentioned it, Jon, you know, that we are connected to, you know, receiving oxygen from the trees and then seeing the wider environment, sensing into it, not cognitively, but really sensing the environment. So that in each and every module you have the individual, the collective, the cultural, and the systemic aspect and dimension in it. And I think that's an extra effort if you want to really create systems change. I'm not sure if that is the past, but I can see the results that people suddenly open their eyes and see, ~ wow, I have an impact on the system, and the system has an impact on my well being and on my way of living. So those two were for me very strong learnings in the further development of our programs. And I can see that people

Are so used to that history of separation, to that narrative that we have in our modern societies, that the style of thinking is so strong within their mind, you know, it's so baked into their system that it's not so easy to open up. And yes, it happens through the practice, through the you know, creating a safe space, giving spaciousness for them time and space to exchange and start to sense the body to speak honestly. But it's not a given, I feel, because of that way of thinking. And the institutions, also the European institutions, organizations that I meet, you know, they are all into silo thinking. They are all so scared to open up because they are so stressed and because it feels like everything is too much.

They have to first just relax, you know, they have to learn to ~ come back to their home, which is the body. And from here, you know, being here in the present moment, then they can start opening up. And then to further on see, there are stakeholders, there's a system, there's an ecosystem, and I can influence that, and we together can do it, because it's a collective suffering that we experience, you know, everyone has a broken heart right now, whether they experience it or not. And then the biggest learning for them is always that actually everything is there. It's more about unlearning and uncovering instead of thinking, I have to learn something, put more onto them, you know, more and more more knowledge, more and more, you know, I want to understand it. But understanding doesn't help as we can see.

So, I think these aspects of individual, collective, cultural and ~ and systemic dimensions always have to be part of programmes if we want to, and in organizations, this kind of view if we want to shift worldviews, values and mindsets towards long term thinking, because all our assumptions, you know, biases and everything leads to short term thinking.

So that has to be from my point of view explicitly explored in programs. Otherwise, I feel people, because of their strong silo thinking, tend to take that mindfulness more as a really individual way of being healthier, let's put it this way. And I feel in our development we have done programs with a lot of big NGOs, European Commission, COFSA in the UNDP, and we got really far that people started to integrate

Jamie (37:16)

CoFSA is the Conscious Food Systems Alliance, which we're going to hear about elsewhere in this miniseries. We're gonna hear from Thomas Legrand, who's gonna tell us a little bit of bit about that.

Liane (37:27)

Yes, yes. But there we could see that when we talk about the Inner Development Goals dimensions, which were very helpful in terms of communication and understanding, that the part of collaboration was very strongly improved and people felt that they bring during the program already, they bring their insights to their organizations, to their work, and start talking about it, communicate in a different way, using more a regenerative language, not a polarizing language. And so that felt really already strong. But the next level I think would be to really bring inner development, mindfulness into the value chain of organizations. And here I have to say I don't know how, but I can see a path now that we could probably go and move forward. And I really see that super necessary, especially for NGOs who are working at the, you know, really at the front of the crisis and and do the field work that we need so urgently.

Jamie (38:31)

Liane, absolutely, that's great. You have the Inner Green Deal program, and you've also developed Mindfulness-based Sustainable Transformation, an MBI, a mindfulness-based intervention, along with Professor Christine Wamsler. And you've done some initial research on this, on your program, I think, and I know you're aware of the wider evidence of mindfulness and for environmental applications.

In fact, I want to plug - there's an academic conference in Rome annually now on the application of mindfulness interventions to environmental and climate issues. And so that's worth checking out for the researchers out there. But could you give us a little sense of how you see the evidence base for MBIs with a specific sustainability application?

Liane (39:21)

Yeah. So first of all I would say it's still an emerging field. It's quite new, you know, inner transformation for sustainability and mindfulness. And I just read the summary of Thomas Björkman and he said, you know, six years ago in 2019 there was almost zero citations around that topic. Not mindfulness as such, but you know, in that realm. And then today we have even more than two thousand citations, academic citations a year.

Which is a huge, you know, development. So it really moves forward and I'm very happy about that. And we collaborate and I think I also want to mention in the IPCC, in the ~ you know, the most authoritative scientific bodies on climate and biodiversity, also the IPBES, they also mentioned ~ and cited that, you know, mindfulness and inner development is really important that we not can just do all the technological development without shifting our mindsets and worldviews. And I think that's a huge success that they mentioned that. And Christine Wamsler, I think, is one of the most well known professors in that field. She works at Lund University and

she evaluates all of our programs. And I think she has more than 6,000 citations, meanwhile, since 2021.

And yeah, we did a lot of research papers together. The last one, I think, Jamie, you were part of this, and we also told that story of Jon, original ten modules. And in the whole research field that she's exploring, she talks about four really main results in terms of integrating mindfulness and seeing mindfulness as a core in inner transformation. And one is that she says it shifts paradigms and cultures. So she thinks that it helps people actually to notice and to question their assumptions that drive unsustainable behavior. So that's one thing, and it also nurtures, you know, sustainable behavior and sustainable ways of thinking and being. And the second thing that she found out is it really strengthens and helps to strengthen resilience.

Which for her is important that we, as I said at the very beginning, that we are able to sit with the discomfort, that we are able to face eco anxiety without getting stuck or reject it or suppress it, but work with it as a wonderful moment of insight that we can learn from where we are.

And the other thing that she found out it changes really behavior. We found, for example, the correlation between compassion and pro-environmental actions, that there is a strong correlation and the ability to observe oneself and the ability to pause between stimulus and reaction, that that actually leads to better behavioral change and not relying on old ways of behaving, or thinking, that lead to unhelpful behaviour and not to planetary health.

And I think the last one that she is always talking about is the systemic level. So it fosters actually systemic engagement, which is to say that mindfulness is not a private thing or a private personal thing, but that you have to bring it into the institution, into policy, into the organisations.

And these four levels I think are quite evident, meanwhile. At least we can see it also in our programs. And for her, also the next level would be, you know, what kind of research, how can we design research in a way that we can figure out how to work with organizations and really bring mindfulness in a work into the value chain of organizations. And I think it's not only mindfulness, we also use, you know, related approaches that help, like indigenous approaches, nature approaches that support that systemic view and the give people the feeling of being embedded within the cosmic universe and not just, you know, isolated. So I think there is a really growing body, and it's not only Christine Wamsler, I think Jamie, you do a incredible job in the intersection of contemplative methods and policy.

And you know what Jon so there are many out there and it's growing and I think what might be missing is that all the researchers could come together and really find maybe a more of a common language that might be helpful in the future. I'm not sure, but that's ~ a thinking. On the other hand, every context is different and every context might need a different way of looking at it and and researching it.

And I think Christine does an incredible work with observation, interviews in our one year program. She was there in almost every module observing, digesting, taking the chat, interviewing people before and after modules, taking questions before and after modules. So it's ~ intense work that she's doing. And I'm happy that this body of research is really growing.

Jon (44:55)

What you're saying just is so profound and it makes so much sense. And I find it very optimistic to really hear how many creative things are going on on those kinds of levels of connectivity in

various, you know, organizations and governmental sort of agencies and so forth. This is really, I think, a symptom of a kind of larger movement of the waking up on the planet and it's just very uplifting for me to hear you recount that in as eloquent a way as you do.

Liane (45:30)

I think it's a collective effort that is happening right now, really. And it can become and is allowed to become stronger, I feel. Yeah. I mean if we think about sorry to say I have to say that if you think about the whole mindfulness community that is existing in this world and everyone would bring this a little bit more into the teachings, a little bit more, like the taxonomy that we built in the last research article. You know, just a little bit. I think there's such a ripple effect that could happen, you know.

Jon (46:02)

And I'm hopeful that MBSR teachers are already doing that. Yes, because they're supposed to be informing themselves of what the latest research and the latest findings are. And then, as I said originally, bringing them into the classroom as appropriate, not to sell people on anything, but to point out how you can't be healthy in an unhealthy world. And so that the the relationality, sometimes when journalists ask me to define mindfulness in one word, I say, well, I have two two ways of doing that: One is awareness or pure awareness, and the other is relationality. Because what mindfulness really is, is a kind of recognition of interconnectedness.

Paula (46:47)

Mm.

Liane (46:48)

And I would like at this point, I don't know if it's for the podcast or not, but really mention also ~ Margaret Fletcher who's doing a great work with eco awareness.

Jon (46:57)

I was about to do that too. Yeah.

Liane (46:59)

So she was also part of and you, Jamie, of the last research article we did with Christine together. And she's also doing great work and in her work, also in our work, it becomes very clear that the teachers really have to experience it. They have to become eco aware before integrating it into their teachings. We cannot just cognitively say, no, now the climate change put something, some eco in it.

No, we have to practice this too. We have to sense the soil and we have to hold the soil in our hand before we start teaching it and integrating it.

Jon (47:38)

And she's ~ Margaret Fletcher is actually, you know, calling it eco MBSR or eco awareness. And yes. Yeah. Yeah. And so this is this is and Kritee Kanko, I don't know if you know her name, but she's also out there doing that. And then and then Trish Magyari. I mean, there are so many people who, in one way or another, are resonating with this larger Indra's net that, you know, Christine Wamsler, for instance, is like, you know, just a kind of incredibly productive and illuminating in terms of what's possible.

Jamie (48:15)

So Paula, you've worked across at least twenty three different cultures, ~ or countries as you as you mentioned. Where do you see this work across those different places? What are the differences you know, where are things at this time?

Paula (48:32)

Yeah, so one of the most exciting jobs that I've ever done is happening now. I'm working with the Natural Resource Institute in the UK with Dr. Laura Forsythe on this research that is looking at gender-based violence inside food systems. And it's very interesting because it's like one of the things that I have learned working in 23 different cultures is that mindfulness, what it brings is this awareness of yourself, but the awareness of the relatedness of yourself with your environment. Yes, like this knowledge of your own individual nervous system in relationship with the relation with the nervous systems of others and the more than human world. So when we were talking earlier about the resilience, there's this remembering about how is it that we are held by the earth as well.

And what we're looking now in this project, and when I see where I see the field going, I see like two places. But when I see the field going is the integration of mindfulness towards understanding how violence has affected not only people in conflict-affected places, but all of us and the relationship that we have with ourselves, with others, and with nature.

This way in which we're working now with food systems is very interesting because what we're finding is that when we do mindfulness, somatic practices, storytelling, women go into this healing process with themselves that helps them remember the connection with the body of the seeds, the body of the waters, the body of the lands, which is knowledge that they have known forever. Yes. So what is the knowledge and what is happening with the people that have hold the knowledge of our food. No. And I feel that it would be amazing for all of us to remember this eternal connection that we have to the earth just because we eat from it, we breathe from it. No. So so that is one place where it is going now. And the work that I'm doing as well with the Conscious Food Alliance - we are no working on this connection between there it's not possible to do systemic change if there's no embodied change, no, at the individual and at the collective level. And the other place where I see mindfulness going is towards organizations as well, like what Lianne was talking about before. I think that we are understanding that the lack of awareness among individuals with themselves affects the way in which we collaborate with others because it's all about co-relatedness. Yes. So if one person doesn't know how to regulate or how to know, it's very difficult to create ecosystems that can collaborate. And the other exciting thing that I'm working on right now is with a - could hear a little bit of what you were saying about the indigenous knowledge. With indigenous people here in ~ in Australia, a lot of the work around healing the wounds of of colonization going into their own mindfulness practice, which in this land in one specific culture is called die diri, no, which is this moment to moment connection with yourself but to land is in constant relatedness with knowing that you're held by the more than human.

Which again, I feel it's something that all of us need to remember. And I think that when Lian was was saying, no, like we are all having a broken heart now, no, and since we are in the Mandan Life podcast, the bodhicitta, no, is like that broken heart of sadness that makes us like go into that love, no, and into that compassion and into that remembering our eternal belonging.

to the earth and to each other beyond no like the myth of separation, no like the first wound and the first trauma that is like we we are disconnected from the earth. And in that way, how can we connect with others and with ourselves in a more honest and caring way?

Jamie (53:13)

Yeah. That's a great example, Paula, of how innovation that includes bringing together different practice disciplines and different forms of wisdom with modern science to bring an assessment lens and applying that to the you know, the the practical issues of a particular system, in this case a food system, is is ex it sounds like exactly the kind of work that needs to

There needs to be more of. What is needed now, do you think, for this work to realise its potential? Liana, what's the what's the funding landscape like? Where are the research gaps? What do you think needs to happen now?

Liane (54:02)

Well, a lot. Yeah, I think there is a huge funding gap. You know, everyone who's working in with inner transformation, ~ most of them are like NGOs and they need funding to continue to do their work. And we as Inner Green Deal experience that too. How difficult it is to find funders because also f there's a lack of understanding for inner transformation. So funders don't know about it and not I mean it's certainly there are more than ever before, but it's still the the circle is still too small. So I think we as the ones who are the practitioners, we need to find a language that is even better understandable than it is up till now to that world. So what are the narratives that we use? How can we explain it in a way that people really get it? And I think that is still there's still work to do with that. So that to find the right language. And I know that big foundations start to be interested, but I also hear what is it exactly? I don't get it. And I cannot explain it to my management. I don't know how to explain it, that they find it worthwhile to think about it. So that's something that is I think urgently needed. And in terms of research, you know, I would love to have a conference only with the researchers in that field and then really exchange and find ways of finding a common ground. I think that would be wonderful. Not one framework for for all, but common ground also in terms of language. And the next step for research would certainly, as we already said here, would be how can we institutionalize inner development? How is that working? How can we do this? I think we are all on the way, all on the path, but there is still a way to go, I think.

Jamie (56:02)

Hmm. You've told me in the past that NGOs have more of an appetite to pay for trainings, or at least implement trainings, that have an explicitly pro-social and environmental focus. But that has its own challenges, that sector, right? Because like funding's short, particularly in the development sector, isn't it?

Liane (56:25)

Yes. I feel such a longing in NGOs. I I talk to many NGOs and they really see that their people are exhausted, there is less resources, so there is no budget, but also less people. So everyone is doing like double work and they're exhausted and when they are exhausted, you know, collaboration is difficult, clear thinking is difficult, impact is difficult. So it's like a vicious circle and they would love to do something, but they don't have the finances for it. So they are either dependent that we get funding and offer that for free or they get funding and can pay for the work. But it's pain for me it's very painful. I really want to honour the work that NGOs are doing and want to honor the field work specifically, who are really working in the field. That's hard work and so necessary.

And yet the most urgent thing they need to nourish themselves is difficult to get. So yeah, we have to find ways how to do it. And ~ and and there are ways. I mean it's not I don't want to sound negative, but I just want to also face the reality as it looks like right now.

Jamie (57:39)

Paula, where do you see this going in a UN context? And there's a lot of again, you know, it kind of breaks your heart to see such dedicated, well meaning people in in adverse conditions. Where is this work going in an intergovernmental?

Paula (57:53)

Yeah, so unfortunately, as Lianne was saying, the UN is having massive cuts at the moment. ~ there is an amazing woman called Mara Lisa Arizaga, who ~ works for the human rights high commissioner. And she is trying to advance work at the UN at a very high level because all the work that I have done has been with frontliners, which is important, but if the bigger structures of the UN don't understand it is very difficult and she's really advancing that work which is amazing. So that I feel I feel like a lot of hope in that. And I also see, no Lianne, what you're saying about NGOs, there's been a constant like wanting of resources and that have kept us very separated from each other.

And I feel that there's an opportunity now to perhaps bring people together, like amazing people to start you know going into projects together and stop, you know, like maybe this can bring us into one fund that can help us bring in this inner development that we need so much to understand that that we're not separated and that we need to collaborate. And for that we need awareness. And there's no other way in which we're gonna make it, no, in the current circumstances. So the opportunity is is amazing for us to to come together and yeah. And I hope that an institution like the UN and the High Commissioner for Human Rights really can give the importance and perhaps find the resources as well.

Jamie (59:38)

Yeah, the policy report that Christine Wamsler, myself, and Rosie Bell wrote on the application of mindfulness and compassion for climate action was called Reconnection, Meeting the Climate Crisis Inside Out. And we we looked at how mindfulness and compassion could support, you know, relationship and connection at these different levels. And, as John says, you know, a way of understanding mindfulness is as relatedness. And so I think we can embody that that aspiration, that movement of reconnecting across everyone who's working on this area and have a different sort of value system in collaboration and innovation. I completely agree with you, Paula. I think as Jon says, yeah, the rebuilding of relatedness or recognizing our our inherent relatedness is key, and acting as if that were the case. So, Jon, what do you think is needed now for the next evolution of this work? You have confidence that this emergent phenomena will continue. Is there anything practical do you think that needs to support that emergence and deliver on this great potential here?

Jon (1:00:55)

I would say that everything we've touched on is incredibly practical, that we are bringing forth what we most care about in embodied ways in community. And the aspiration, of course, is that it affect the world at scale and affect institutions at scale and affect the minds and hearts of human beings at scale.

And we don't know exactly how to go about that. And what I hear from this conversation is that we're contributing in whatever ways we can where we find ourselves and with the communities

that we are most familiar with, and the different domains that we're most familiar with, including, say, medicine, healthcare, business, the United Nations, global relief of one kind or another.

There are so many different streams that we can be part of and contribute to. And I really do feel like there's no kind of one solution waiting out there that we're all going to kind of get on board with and realize, yes, that's the one thing, or the one funder or 10 funders that are going to make it all okay to take us to another level. I think, you know, that if we're waiting for to be rescued nobody's gonna come and rescue us. We're we're we're the ones that need to rescue ourselves in a certain way. And so part of that is associated, it seems to me, with the four immeasurables in the Buddhist practice, which are often called divine abodes or refuges. They're places where, you know, and it's just there's a such a huge displacement going on of peoples on planet Earth.

There's huge displacements of people because of war and climate change and famine and so forth like that. So there are refugees everywhere. And I think we need to identify with those refugees and learn how to find refuge in ourselves, in our societies, in our community, and in what's left of our planet and what's worth preserving on our planet in ways that actually are transformative and healing.

on every level. So when we actually engage in the practice of loving-kindness and seeing self another and in compassion and in experiencing the joy of life in this moment in the face of the suffering. So it's not like, ~ we can't be joyful because there's only suffering and, you know, sort of madness. No, we have to find the beauty and the joy and the connectedness.

And then, of course, equanimity. It's a mind quality that is really associated with wisdom, which means that we can hold the discordance of all these dissipative forces that are you know terribly ~ destructive and potentially just inhuman to unimaginable degrees, hold all of this in a way that doesn't destroy us, but in fact motivates us to find the love.

To connect, as we're doing right on this conversation, just the four of us, to next, and we represent because it's going to be a podcast, and lots and lots of people are going to hear it, and they're going to hear that what each one of us has said, they're going to not hear it, but feel the resonances in their own heart. And they themselves are an entire universe, every single person that has infinite potential for.

Finding the one thing that would make a difference in this one moment, this only moment that we ever have. And when we practice and when we embody mindfulness and compassion in that way and kindness in that way, and recognize our interconnectedness, I think in the end, what we're going to learn is that is to govern ourselves differently. In fact, meditation practice teaches us to govern ourselves differently.

I'll just remind us that the words dharma, the word dharma, which is classically used as kind of in some sense the formal teachings of the Buddha, but in the larger sense it's the kind of lawfulness of the universe. The Dharma means lawfulness. And it invites governance, that it means how we govern ourselves. And I think this is the koan for humanity at this point in time is can we govern ourselves in a way that doesn't let our technology and the potential for artificial general intelligence and what the hell that's going to be doing to amplify our capacity to kill each other and warfare and everything else? Can we use our own analog cleverness, which is the result of 13.8, not too shabby billion years of evolution since this Big Bang, at least? Can we recruit all of our own interior, collective more than human genius on this planet, and move

forward moment by moment by moment without too strong an attachment to outcome, even as we have a very, very beautiful outcome in mind. And I would say, and it's my hope, that that is infectious, that that orientation, that affirmation is infectious because it reminds us of our own humanity and it lets us feel it in a certain way that's not self-centered. It's not all about the story of me, and then it becomes the story of we. And then the love affair wants to actually contribute to the well-being of others, even people we've never met, are halfway around the world. So that's my kind of aspiration for even having these conversations. And I'll also say

Jamie (1:07:07)  
Beautiful.

Jon (1:07:15)  
The role of mind and life, both in the United States and the Mind and Life Europe, are playing central catalytic roles in actually elevating the conversation, expanding the conversation, and bringing this kind of governance, this kind of dharma, this kind of lawfulness into the world to minimize suffering, suffering that we're all carrying, and optimize well-being to whatever extent we can. And it's not a pie-in-the-sky idealism or idiocy. It's, I think, a very practical way to actually reclaim those four immeasurables, inhabit them, take refuge in our own beauty, and let the love affair of what makes humanity so special manifest in such a way as we see that we're not any more special than the elephants or the, you know, the paramecia or the trees or the roots of the trees in the forest. That we're everything is insanely special and it's all completely interwoven and interconnected.

Jamie (1:08:29)  
Beautiful, Jon. Jon, Liane, Paula, thank you so much for this conversation. It's been a real honor as ever, colleagues and comrades. That's it for this episode of the Mind and Life podcast. We will put links to all of the books and programs that have been mentioned in this conversation in the show notes, as well as a few others that the guests will suggest. Thank you so much for your attention, for joining us here.

Until next time, go well.