



Mind & Life Podcast Transcript

David Creswell – New Season, New Voice

Original Air Date: October 23, 2026

Retrieved from: <https://podcast.mindandlife.org/david-creswell-2>

INTRO – Phil Walker • 00:03

Welcome to Mind & Life. I'm Phil Walker, co-producer of the show, and I'm here today to introduce our new host for the Mind & Life podcast, David Creswell. David is a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Carnegie Mellon and the chief of science at Equa Health, among many other things, which we'll dive into today. And of course, David is well known to the contemplative science field and the Mind & Life community. And he has previously been a guest on this show. We'll provide links to that episode and other key resources about David as we launch into the next era of the Mind & Life podcast. So David, on behalf of everyone at Mind & Life, welcome and thanks for taking on this role as host.

David Creswell • 00:50

Oh man, thanks, Phil. I am so excited to be on the show today, to be the host for this upcoming season. I know we have big plans. I can't wait to tell folks about it. And I get to talk a little bit about, I think, some of the things that have been inspiring me lately today. So I'm really excited about that. I feel like I know what it's like to be asked a really good question on this show and I get to, now as a host, you know, pass that on and ask those questions to others. And so it's going to be, I think, an exciting run. Yeah. I would just wanna say thanks to you, Phil, and to Wendy for the last five years. You know, you guys did eighty-four, was it eighty-four shows? Yeah. And, you know, Wendy had this, I think, really amazing way to go deep with folks and podcasts are really great about that. You get to go deep with topics. And so I feel like I have some really big shoes to fill. And I know she's probably going to be listening to these podcasts and still engaged. So Wendy, thank you for all you've done. And, you know, we're going to have to get her back on the show for sure.

Phil Walker • 01:52

For sure. Yeah. And I also, I really want to encourage everyone to check out Wendy's interview with you from 2023. Like I said, we'll put a link in the show notes for everyone. That interview clearly lays out your background and research. And I think we'll pick up a little bit on what you've been up to since that interview. In addition, as you noted, we'll set the stage for the upcoming season of the podcast and perhaps a little glimpse into the future here. But first, I do want to give a quick shout out to Jamie Bristow, who served as guest host for a mini-series on systems change earlier this year. If you missed it, please go back into the feed and check it out. We so appreciate Jamie and all the guests who contributed to that important and really valuable work. And deep thanks to Suzanne Bond, the president of Mind & Life, and the board of directors for continuing to support this effort. And I also want to lift up our dear colleague, Erin McCarthy. Erin is also a producer of this show. Many of you know Erin. She's a professor of philosophy, a scholar, a mindfulness teacher, and much more. Erin has been integral to this transition, and I just want to express deep gratitude to her for guidance and support along the way.

David Creswell • 03:09

Yeah, you know, Phil, I'll just add that stepping in in this host role, I've really got to see, you know, how these shows are made and just the village that takes to lift up this show. And, you know, Phil, that starts with you. You're behind the scenes, you're building these episodes, and you described yourself to me at one point. I hope I can share this, that you're the show's biggest super fan, you know. You've been in it, and I hope today we can spend a little bit of time, me asking you some questions about you know, some of the highlights over the last five years and where you see things going yourself because you really are the sort of brain behind the whole enterprise.

Phil Walker • 03:49

Well, I defer, always, to the hosts of the show who are really the people that drive it. And Wendy certainly did that and she was integral to the creation of this. And I really look forward to where you're going to take the show and you and Erin and I have been talking about this for a couple of months now, really since the beginning of the year, about how this show can evolve. And I'm really excited about it - where we're heading and what we're going to do - we're going to jump into a little bit of that. But first, I want to do a little bit of background stuff with you. These are some questions that always come up for me in terms of people who are guests on the show. But you as host, I want to define a little bit for our audience where you're coming from. So you have a PhD in psychology and you describe your areas of expertise, and I'm going to have to read these, as clinical psychology, health neuroscience, health psychology, psychoneuroimmunology, and social psychology. So I'm curious where these things overlap, stand apart from one another, but mainly, what the relationship is between psychology and neuroscience.

David Creswell • 04:58

Well, one of the things I love about Mind & Life is it's fundamentally interdisciplinary. And I think some of the best moments for Mind & Life and our contemplative science over the years has been where we're sort of working at the boundaries between domains, whether that's contemplative science and contemplative practice. But then a lot of other domains have really, I think, informed so many of the, you know, catalytic moments for Mind & Life over the years. And so, you know, I think I adopt that interdisciplinary approach, you know, in my own work. And certainly looking at neuroscience and psychology as sort of one boundary that I like to play in. And you know, I think fundamentally if you ask me who I am, I'm an experimental health psychologist. You know, that's where I sort of put my home base. And, you know, part of that work early on was really studying the mechanisms of mindfulness meditation. How is it that paying attention to our experience with real intention and openness can transform our suffering and increase our fulfillment in life? And, you know, when we talk about mechanisms, neuroscience provides one set of mechanisms and looking at the brain and our biology in meaningful ways. And I definitely, early in my career, dipped my toes in there and was doing some neuroimaging work looking at brain mechanisms. But then I also brought in psychoneuroimmunology, which is this uh field that's really focused on brain-immune interactions and like how does our brain and our immune system, how does our brain and our peripheral stress biology talk to each other? What's the sort of biological links there? And so I brought that in uh in my early work as well. And, you know, I'm still a psychologist at heart. I was trained as a social and health psychologist at UCLA, you know, I got my PhD in two thousand and seven and so, you know, a lot of my interest really is focused on people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and you know, how we can transform people's suffering. So there's certainly like a clinical applications piece. And I feel like to be, at least for me, a good

contemplative scientist, it's about uh adopting these different lenses and bringing in these different ways of knowing people. And, you know, I think Mind & Life has really pushed me to also think about first person experience and phenomenology. You know, practicing these contemplative practices really opens us up into being astute first-person observers and understanding subjective experience in unique ways. And so I feel like getting to be the host of this podcast is amazing because I get to talk to people about these intersections between spaces. Yeah. And a lot of my early work really focused on, you know, looking at these biological mechanisms. And to be honest, I still do some of that work, but a lot of my work in the last 10 years is really focused on translation. So how do we scale up these programs in ways that are going to make an impact in populations of people, in systems, and so, you know, I've started having these really interesting conversations with implementation scientists and system scientists and thinking about, you know, how we can scale these things up. And you know, I think we're going to see some of that this season. We're going to talk about system science in a couple of different ways and we're also going to talk about mechanisms too. So I think it'll be a fun season where we can really get into uh thinking about contemplative science and practice at these different scales.

Phil Walker • 08:30

That's fantastic and I think health obviously is a key to really almost everyone's life on some level. And I know that since we interviewed you in 2023, you've had a lot happening. And maybe just give us some updates on the research you've been doing, the work you've been doing, writing, etcetera, whatever's been really, you know, up for you over these last few years.

David Creswell • 08:58

Yeah, maybe I'll mention just a couple here. I mean, one is we're still in my lab really interested in these biological mechanisms and and these clinical outcomes and and applications. And so, you know, we're finishing up a five year project looking at mindfulness training. For folks with irritable bowel syndrome, so sort of looking at these functional pain disorders and really looking at how mindfulness training can transform people's symptoms in these contexts. But we're also collecting stool samples and looking at the gut microbiome and how mindfulness meditation training might be changing, um, you know, gut microbiome signals. So that work continues. I'm really interested too, in questions around digital meditation apps. Simon Goldberg and I just wrote a review on this for the *American Psychologist*. So we've been spending the last couple of years, um, he and I and others thinking about this digital meditation app space because frankly, in the last ten years especially we've seen this just dramatic adoption of these apps. If you look at the top five meditation apps, there's been over 300 million downloads of those apps. So these are like amazing numbers for people worldwide having access. I think there's been a lot of questions about how effective these apps are and the initial clinical trials in that space. And frankly, like people aren't sticking around on these apps. So if you look at, you know, 30-day continued practice, you know, about four percent of people who download these apps continue to use them after 30 days. So, you know, we've got a real engagement challenge there as well. And frankly, digital meditation apps just look really different than a lot of our kind of gold standard approaches to in-person meditation training, whether that's on retreats or with the mindfulness-based stress reduction program. And so I've been working on digital app studies trying to understand the space, and one of the unique questions that we're just starting to work on is like, how do people's mindfulness skills first occur? When people are first starting these apps, you know, how much is enough in terms of starting to build these skills? So we've got some new dose ranging trials where we're manipulating the amount of dose that people are getting and looking at outcomes and mechanisms in that case. So I think that's going to be a really exciting next step for my lab.

Phil Walker • 11:22

Well I want to ask you about that because if you think about the experience of learning meditation, in a traditional context, you would be with a group, probably on a retreat, maybe in some kind of uh study group or something like that. And you're actually being guided by a teacher through how to actually meditate. And whereas an app, some of them are very good, but it's a different context. You're sitting at home, you've got an electronic device in front of you. So how do you see those two things sort of weighing out as approaches to learning meditation practice?

David Creswell • 12:01

Yeah, I'm glad you asked about that. I've got so much to say on this topic. But yeah, I think it's so important the group context, the direct connection with the teacher, the practicing with others as ways to really lubricate the practice and build these skills more effectively. So I don't discount all of the kind of in-person and group-based elements that are these important elements for success with these programs. So I think they're really valuable. And there's a couple of studies in this space. There's also the fact that we've been doing trials where we take those things out and still see benefits. So Jon Kabat-Zinn, his early work with psoriasis patients, you know, he had these psoriasis patients practicing alone, never with a teacher, just for a couple of minutes while they were getting treatment for their psoriasis, you know, this sort of itchy skin lesion or set of skin lesions that can pop up. And you know, he saw fourfold faster clearing rates. And just a plug, we're going to have Jon on the show this season. And I'm going to ask him about that study because I talk about it a lot. And a lot of times when we think about Jon Kabat-Zinn, we think like he's one of the best at group-based mindfulness training. And here he is, you know, doing this study with psoriasis patients where he doesn't give them groups or access to a teacher. So you know, we'll have to see how he sits with this. But you know, clearly we have these signals that it works or it can be really helpful for folks. And you know, we have to weigh the group-based approaches, the in-person-based approaches, with the fact that we can scale these programs. So now, you know, I grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska, and I think - what about all those people in rural Nebraska who didn't have easy access to an MBSR teacher or a group? Well now they can download apps wherever they are and at least get into and start building these skills. So I think there's a lot of value in them too. And frankly, if you look at the horizon for where our digital technologies are going, we're building live group-based and interactive approaches to these contemplative practices. And so, you know, it's going to be a blip in history here where we don't have ways to connect with groups and teachers online and you know people are already doing this. I was so impressed with all these MBSR teachers during the pandemic, you know, going to remote based programs where they're shifting to online. And I know even Jon Kabat-Zinn's been doing these, you know, online meditation groups on Zoom. And, you know, I think we gotta talk to him about that too, because it's an interesting space where I think teachers are innovating and figuring out ways to to get the best of both worlds.

Phil Walker • 14:48

Yeah. You know, it's interesting you mentioned the number of downloads for digital apps and then the lack of continued engagement. And I think both of those speak to something. There's a desire, but there's also a challenge, right? And I wonder if that intention to download an app and to use it is speaking to something that you've also done a lot of work on, which is stress. And I'm curious if maybe you could share a little bit about your work on stress and in particular, something you focus on, which is discomfort. And I'm very curious about that as well. So how would you frame your work on stress and discomfort and maybe share a little bit around that?

David Creswell • 15:26

Yeah. Well it comes out of that discussion I had with Wendy on the podcast a couple of years ago where we were talking about equanimity and how mindfulness training really builds these skills of being open and receptive to your present moment experience. So you're learning how to be non-reactive and curious to your experience, even if that experience is otherwise uncomfortable or challenging. And so, you know, part of the work that we've been doing is really building this equanimity science. You know, equanimity is this capacity for being kind of open to the push and pull of your experience. I think we're going to have Shinzen Young on this season and I'm going to ask him about equanimity because he's been doing so much work in his life as a contemplative practice teacher around teaching, you know, these equanimity skills. So we'll do a deeper dive there with him for sure. But I think this equanimity science that I've been working on uh over a number of years has really pushed me to start thinking about like what it means to lean into discomfort and that so many stressors that are in our lives, to the degree that we're sort of leaning in and opening up to those stressors can transform that stressful experience and transform how we react to it and transform how that stress impacts our our health and well-being over time. And so you know, I've got this new set of talks that I've been giving over the last year and a half on leaning into discomfort and that, you know, interestingly, I think we think about meditation as being, you know, a very kind of, well some people do anyway, think about it as a very relaxing activity, you know, it's about relaxation. And in fact, I think what meditation actually is is spending a lot of time with a broad range of benign discomforts and learning how to work with our attention to open up to those experiences and not react to them, and get curious about them. And each time you're sort of doing these like little equanimity reps and you're building these equanimity skills such that when you go out and you meet big stressors out in the world, you're meeting them in a different way and you're not reacting in the same way. And meditation is like a beautifully oriented system for making people uncomfortable. And yes, it can make people feel relaxed, and there's all sorts of deep states, you know, jnana experiences and there's a deep end there that can happen too. But for most people, most of the time, anyone who's listening to this has been on retreat can say, like, it is a workout, you know, it is a marathon that you're running dealing with a whole range of challenges from sleepiness to agitation to boredom to body discomfort. And that, in my view, and maybe this is where I've really changed a lot over the last couple of years, is that those moments of leaning into discomfort are the moments where you're really building skills and meditation is working its best. And I think that's a major rebranding because I think a lot of people think, oh man, I'm really struggling with meditation right now. I must be doing it wrong. And I think one of my big messages that I talked about with Wendy is that no, that's like it's working its best.

Phil Walker • 18:44

That was a key takeaway for me from that interview you did with Wendy. And I've shared that with many people who've asked me about meditation, not that I'm a meditation teacher or an expert in any way. But the first many years of meditation I struggled and I would say what I hear many people say is, well, I'm just not good at meditation. And I said that to myself all the time. And I would see pictures of people obviously in beautiful, serene poses, seemingly filled with bliss. And that wasn't me. Uh that was me instead struggling with my own mind and my own thoughts and my own body discomforts and all those things. And so really appreciated your reframing of that. And then of course later on I came to realize, well, that's the practice, right, is getting comfortable with that. And I loved how you compared it to, you know, exercise. Like if we go to the gym and we're lifting weights. Yeah. Are we good at lifting weights? I don't know. Uh we're just doing it, right? And we get stronger over time. So, and I think there's so many benefits that come out of it. So I do use that reference to your work around that all the time.

David Creswell • 19:55

Yeah, I mean I think meditation is like a gym workout, it's not always a massage, you know, or at least a Swedish massage. Maybe not. Maybe it's more like a deep tissue massage, you know. You're really working with deep stuff and you're working fundamentally with your own suffering. And you're changing your relationship one rep at a time to your own suffering. And if we think about it that way, it then kind of transforms how you think about your meditation went in that, oh wow, like I really I had a lot of challenges this time, but I, each time I kept building this capacity to be okay in that experience, to be able to with open eyes and open heart just sort of move into that experience. And so I just, I do, I hold a special place for meditation and different forms of contemplative practice that allow you to work in this space. And I've also realized that maybe meditation isn't in its own category, in fact, you know, exercise, psychotherapy, journaling, cold water plunges, you know, these are all ways that we get people to move into discomfort and to open to that discomfort. And that maybe meditation is part of a much broader kind of category of ways that we can build our resilience and well being. And that maybe meditation is a bit more explicit about it in terms of ways to really practice that open welcoming stance, but that it's not unique. In fact, there may be other practices that are doing these things. So that's kind of the ideas that I've been playing in right now and that to the degree that we do that, we can really transform stressful experiences into being not threats but challenges that help us grow and adapt.

Phil Walker • 21:44

I'm really curious about the discomfort piece too because I run into that a lot. There's probably a tendency for many of us to be what I often refer to as harmonizers. We kind of want the world to be okay, right? But sometimes the world is a discomforting place, right? And I'm curious how you think about that. We're in the world, we're socially engaged in some way, and some discomfort comes along. And, like how does that sense of having a relationship with discomfort act for you, like where do you go when you feel uncomfortable in a certain situation?

David Creswell • 22:21

Oh man. Well, I think our common knee-jerk response when discomfort hits is to distract ourselves, move away from that discomfort. And so these practices of radically throwing yourself into the experience of that discomfort and opening up, you know, feel contrary to kind of what our knee-jerk reactions are. And so I think a lot of these practices give us an opportunity to play in that space, and play with how our mind can I think play tricks on us, or have us reframe the experience so quickly. And I think if we can practice, whether that's with exercise or meditation, it gives us an opportunity to try something new and try turning our attention toward that experience. And you know, I'll tell you, we like did a study early on with smokers where we brought smokers in and we showed them these really desirable smoking cues. And we told some of them to like, just, you know, allow and accept your experience as it's happening. We just gave them that simple prompt. We hadn't taught them meditation per se yet, but we were just asking them to kind of turn toward and open up, and we found that just by doing that relative to, you know, control blocks, that they reduced their kind of craving response to the smoking images and that also reduced their distress. So I think we have this assumption that like, when I'm feeling discomfort or I'm feeling craving, for example, by putting my attention on it and really opening to it, it's going to make it a lot worse. And certainly it is going to sensitize us to that experience, but there's so much wisdom in those moments of turning toward that we can learn. And most people, like those smokers in our study, they were kind of surprised, like, oh, it didn't bother me as much, you know, as I sort of opened up and allowed that experience to happen. I

wasn't fighting with it anymore. And you know, we also, that was a brain imaging study, we found that it also turned down their brain's craving response. So we'll link to this study, I think, in the show notes. This is Cecilia Westbrook, she led the paper. But I was just so interested, and this was 2013 when we had this. This was actually a Varela grant study. So Mind & Life has these amazing Varela grants. We got one of those to support that project, and really I think kicked off for me, this whole new kind of equanimity science agenda in my own research.

Phil Walker • 24:51

I love that. And it also speaks to areas of addiction, which is such a struggle for most people, right? In some frame, yeah. So is there anything else you want to talk about with regard to your more recent work or anything that's come up for you?

David Creswell • 25:05

Yeah, you know, I mentioned that I'm really thinking about scaling up these meditation programs and implementation science and digital meditation apps because I think these meditation apps allow us, you know, not to bring 300 irritable bowel syndrome patients into the lab and do a deep dive on studying them, but to actually study 3,000 irritable bowel syndrome patients out in the world, and give them an app out there and look at how we're impacting their their daily lives. And so about five years ago I started a meditation app company called Equa Health. Uh Equa is short for equanimity. We really wanted to figure out ways to bring these equanimity skills to more people. And I just want to call out, you know, as I've worked in this meditation app space, it's created this really unique conflict where we have these commercial offerings like this commercial work that I'm doing around trying to scale this work up. And you know, ultimately my hope is that it's actually going to really be a tool for researchers and ways that we can, you know, study meditation training out in the world. But it does create this interesting conflict and I know we're going to have people on the show that are in the same boat, where we've been starting to work with these different commercial entities and so I think my hope as a host is to really be transparent about that in the show and in our show notes so that people can make their own decisions on how they want to interpret some of that information. And then also just to uphold the fact that, like this type of new set of conflicts is a sign of maturity for the field and that there are lots of people out there who are wanting to build products and build ways for people to train out in the world. I do think that's a really interesting new direction where a lot of us scientists are kind of negotiating like, how do we work with some of these commercial entities and how do we work with industry in ways that's going to be you know, consistent with our values and consistent with making an impact, because there's just so much interest. I just think that's great. And so my real approach in this space has been for us to turn our attention toward it and for scientists to be working with industry in ways to build better products and ultimately help more people.

Phil Walker • 27:16

Yeah. Well, and I think it's the nature of academia now. It's the new world, the real world that's been evolving for a while. Almost everyone I know in academia has some connection to a commercial enterprise or a private lab or entrepreneurial endeavor. It just seems to go with the territory. So I appreciate you sharing that and bringing that up and probably many of our guests will be in similar situations as well. So let's dive into the podcast itself. First thing is I'm really curious why you were interested in taking on this role as host. You've touched on it a little bit, but just curious, any other thoughts you may have around you in this new role.

David Creswell • 27:58

Well, those eighty-four episodes that you and Wendy did where you're talking to some of the best contemplative teachers and scientists and spending really an hour, hour and fifteen minutes just taking a deep dive into their work and the way they were thinking, was just such an amazing resource for me because there's so much more that can happen in this long form format of a podcast that's more personal and relevant than I could get in just reading their papers or work or even hearing them give a talk. And I am so excited to kind of continue that and I want to continue that thrust. I think that we shouldn't change the secret sauce of that success. And I think, you know, what we do so well on this podcast that I want to continue, is really looking at that intersection between contemplative scholarship and contemplative practice, and trying to see what wisdom we can pull out of that intersection.

Phil Walker • 28:59

Yeah, I really appreciate you coming in to be host of this show and bringing your unique experience and perspective, background and all of that into this work. So look, let's dive into what people can expect for the season coming up. Some of the guests that we know that we're going to have on the show. There's some good stuff coming. So let's do a little preview for the audience here. Actually, Phil, before we do the preview, can I ask you a couple questions?

David Creswell • 29:22

Actually, Phil, before we do the preview, can I ask you a couple questions?

Phil Walker • 29:27

Of course.

David Creswell • 29:28

Can I turn it back on you? I feel like you were so engaged. I mean, I don't think folks know, but for every episode that you released, you were working on cuts of it, you were looking deeply at those things, and I know over our conversations, there were so many moments for you that like would sort of fly by or maybe fly under the radar of a first-time listener, but then as you were listening back and those episodes and you were working on them there was like this profound wisdom or spark for you. And I know you talked about some piece that I had in my interview with Wendy, but I'm just curious, as you look back at those eighty-four episodes, were there any like just off the top of your head, like moments where you're like, ooh, like that was really interesting, that we should be connecting to people. And maybe we can in the show notes, you know, link to some of these episodes because I feel like you saw things that I didn't catch.

Phil Walker • 30:20

Well, I really appreciate that question. And I want to answer it in a way that speaks to this idea of repeated listenings. Something that I felt with many of these podcasts is that on a first listen, you only catch so much of it. And the depth of anyone's work, the complexity of any given conversation, oftentimes, I think, begs for repeat listens. And of course, I have the benefit, on every show, of listening many times. It's just part of the production process. So given that, my favorite show by far is with John Powell. And this is a show that goes back to our first season. So John is the director of the Othering & Belonging Institute at the University of California, Berkeley. He's a lawyer, a professor, and a civil rights advocate. And really just a remarkable human being. So in the episode, he unpacks the wisdom of a lifetime. John uses the lens of race and civil rights and othering to focus on what it really means to be human, I think. And he addresses all sorts of issues, implicit bias, structural changes, social instability, personal anxiety, and even how the self is constructed. And he does it all fluidly and seamlessly, with great nuance, through a variety of perspectives. Cultural, political, economic, spiritual, psychological, all of it. toward

what he refers to as bridging. Bridging groups of people, bridging communities, and even bridging entire countries. So I won't get too far into it except to say that I have returned to this episode many times over the years. And each time I hear something new. I hear the thing that I need to hear, right? And these aren't just talking points. These are real insights and tools that I can use in everyday life. So, I'll just say this, even if you have a good understanding of all these issues, I still recommend you give John a listen. It's that good and it's that important. And we'll be sure to put a link in the show notes for that episode.

David Creswell • 32:52

That's great, but just to call out, Phil, I just love the way that you approach this and just the care that you take to really transform this show or uplift it into something that people will want to listen to multiple times. And you're right, that John Powell episode, so good. And, you know, we talk a lot about systems change and we talk a lot about psychology and how we relate to experience, and he kind of puts it all together and he says it in this kind of understated way that you're like, wait a minute. No, no. That was really big, you know. And but for him it was just, of course, this is how the world works.

Phil Walker • 33:30

Yeah, yeah, I agree.

David Creswell • 33:32

And Phil, just one more question before we turn to the next season. Do you feel like working on this podcast has changed your own approach to your own contemplative practice?

Phil Walker • 33:42

I feel like every episode delivers decades of wisdom that our guests have distilled. And so there's always, always takeaways for me. And you know, it's interesting you make that analogy about reps. And I think of it the same way, and you even mentioned this like with therapy. I think of the show in that way too. You know, even as just a super fan of the show, I'm listening and absorbing all the nuggets, and they I think come together in a way that continues to evolve and inform just my own life. And so this show for me and other ways that I engage in the contemplative science field, I think it helps inform how I practice, and I think of practice as life. Like how you show up at the grocery store, how you show up when a family member calls. And believe me, most days equanimity is hard to find. So I think the opportunity to listen to our guests and hear what they have to share. And I think for you as host to be able to really dig into the nuance of a lot of these topics will continue to be rich and beneficial hopefully for our guests, but certainly I know it will be for me.

David Creswell • 35:09

Yeah, I think there are a lot of lessons and reps. This is a form of practice, you know, getting to work on this podcast. Well, so I'll also just mention we have an email account for this podcast. And, what's the name of that email account?

Phil Walker • 35:27

Podcast@mindandlife.org.

David Creswell • 35:30

Awesome. We'll link that in there too. Yeah, yeah. So I really do encourage people to write to us and share their insights and thoughts and questions. And hopefully you and I can surface some

of those things in this season and the seasons to come. Yeah, yeah, and we're going to read all of it.

David Creswell • 35:47

Yeah, yeah, and we're going to read all of it. So we're really open to feedback and trying to make these shows as helpful as they can.

Phil Walker • 35:52

Yeah. So David, let's dive into a little bit of this preview of some of the guests that'll be on the show this season.

David Creswell • 36:00

Oh man, we're going to have a great season. In two weeks, uh we've got Jon Kabat-Zinn coming on, and he's been working with mindfulness-based stress reduction and teaching mindfulness meditation for over four decades. He started by bringing it into the hospital and you know, that episode's really going to focus on like, what is he doing now? And yeah, you know, he's told me that he's like, genuinely loves teaching meditation to thousands of people over Zoom, which is not how I think about Jon. Yeah. So we're going to take a deeper dive on some of those topics, and you know, I assume he's going to remind us for an hour about how to really pay attention to our present moment experience. He has this way of doing that.

Phil Walker • 36:40

You know, John has previously been on the show. And my feeling is, it's always good to connect with John. And I'm so happy that he's going to be on the show again. He has a unique perspective, and I think so many people in our audience already know Jon Kabat-Zinn, but tune in, because it's always a fun ride with Jon.

David Creswell • 37:02

Yeah, so speaking of foundational leaders, we're also going to have Richie Davidson and Sona Dimidjian together on one show. These are big leaders in the field, they've both been on the podcast before. Richie's, you know, one of our leading affective neuroscientists, contemplative scientists, and Sona is a wonderful professor of clinical psychology and she's also the board chair for Mind & Life. I think she came in this year. So we get these like major leaders in the space, and so I'm going to take advantage of that and really ask them to reflect on what were some of the biggest moments in contemplative science as it's really sort of evolved over the last thirty years and come into being kind of a fringe topic to something, you know, scientifically mainstream. So part of the show is going to be focused on looking back at some of these major moments and major studies. And then also I'm going to push them on where does the field need to go next? So we'll start to get their ideas on ways where we can really, I think, make impacts and push our field forward in the coming decade or two. So that'll be an exciting show.

Phil Walker • 38:11

Yeah, I'm looking forward to having Sona and Richie together.

David Creswell • 38:14

Yeah, I think they'll be really good. We've got an interest this season on systems change, like how can we scale up contemplative practices and contemplative wisdom in ways that can change systems? We've got a couple, well I think all of our guests are going to talk about that in some form or another. But two guests I want to highlight in particular Willem Kuyken, University of Oxford professor. Many of us know him as one of the leaders in terms of mindfulness

meditation and sort of scaling that up into universal, school based mindfulness programs and like he's got the MYRIAD trial, so we're really going to look at like, you know, when they gave mindfulness meditation training to over eight thousand kids in schools. These are middle school kids, like, what were the impacts and some of the surprising results that came out of that. And so I'm going to take a deep dive with Willem there, he's just a really interesting guy that's you know, thinking about mechanism to implementation and like how do we scale in systems? And so I'm really excited about that, I think that'll be a really good show. But also, we're going to have Mara Arizaga on the show. And she's like, a really interesting person. So she was a meditation teacher for 20 years, she wrote this book on how Tibetan meditation really traveled to the West. And then she, like, took these ideas and took it somewhere nobody expected, which is the United Nations. So she runs the Well-being Unit at the UN's Human Rights office. And what she did was, during the pandemic, started teaching meditation over Zoom to folks in the United Nations. And now it's a program that's started to scale up across the whole system. And so she's really thinking about systems change in a whole different way. And I think that's going to be a really rich conversation from somebody who's been trying to work at the policy level and the human rights level and try to bring this contemplative wisdom into that space. So I think that'll be a really good show.

David Creswell • 40:18

You know, we also have folks coming on this season who are really about bringing these practices out into the world and focusing on teaching and transforming people's lives. And so, you know, two people that come to mind that we're going to have on the show. One is Jeremy Hunter, and he's been looking at ways he can teach these inner awareness practices to executives. So really thinking about executive leadership and how you can bring contemplative practices into that space and make an impact. And he's got these amazing personal stories too. Jeremy's been a friend of mine for a couple of decades now and I think we're going to get a really intimate look at how he's used these practices to transform his own suffering in his life and challenges, but also how he's translated his understanding into executive leadership and really taking people who might not necessarily be turning to contemplative practices as tools, to really leaning into those practices. And so I think that'll be a really good show on leadership and transformation. And then we're going to have Shinzen Young on. So he hasn't been on the show yet, a wonderful teacher, a bit of a maverick, you know, in the space around how to teach these contemplative practices. And, you know, as I mentioned at the front end of this show, he's been someone who's been really spending a life thinking about equanimity and this capacity to open up. And so selfishly, I wanted to just talk to Shinzen, have him tell his stories, and bring his unique perspective to contemplative science and practice. And he's certainly, I think a contemplative scientist at heart, who's really expressed most of his work in his life as a contemplative practice teacher. He boils stuff down to math so much. So like, he has this wonderful equation - suffering equals pain times resistance. I just love that, like, you know, there's a mathematical equation that we have for thinking about suffering and you know resistance being that equanimity piece and how we can, if we bring that resistance down to zero, we can still have pain in our life, but not necessarily have suffering. If I'm doing the math right, he'll have to tell us if that math is right. So he'll be on and you know he's a really interesting guy that you know speaks like ten languages fluently and focuses his free time on theoretical math, you know. So I think that'll be a really fun show. So Phil, you've been doing this podcast for five years. You've been around Mind & Life for much longer. So you've been involved in the dialogues. You've been involved in all the different programming that Mind & Life has done over the last couple of decades. And I'm curious, a) like how has that work impacted you? How have you seen it evolve? And where do you see the podcast fitting in you know, as maybe an extension to the dialogues or as some other format that kind of stretches the mission of Mind & Life.

Phil Walker • 43:15

Yeah, that's a great question. And I always like to go back to the origin of this organization. And I think as you know most of our audience knows, Mind & Life was started by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Francisco Varela, along with Adam Engle, and there were other founding stewards like Jon Kabat-Zinn. Richie Davidson, Roshi Joan Halifax, Matthieu Ricard, Dan Goleman, all these people played a very important role early on. But one of the things that the Dalai Lama did was, he set up this idea of dialogue. And most people think of the Dalai Lama as being somebody you go and you see him and he talks to you. But what these dialogues have done over the course of forty years, His Holiness meeting with scientists, contemplatives, philosophers, is he's primarily listening. He's primarily a student who is engaging in the latest neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, education, biology, quantum physics. He's just sitting and listening to people and then he's asking questions and people are asking him questions and he's interacting. But mostly what you get is someone who is an icon who is listening to other people. And so I think that these conversations and the dialogues were all about nuance, complexity and how two worlds could come together, the world of science and philosophy and sort of Western education and Buddhism, or as we like to think of it, contemplative wisdom, right? So for me, the podcast is this really great opportunity to continue with that work where there's this exploration of complexity and nuance, and ever-evolving topics. And as you noted, cross-disciplinary interests from many different guests. I just love that, like, how the podcast is a continuation of that effort of dialogue. So, you know, I'm looking forward to how it evolves for this season and seasons to come.

David Creswell • 45:36

Yeah, I just feel like the podcast is like a little mini dialogue where we can take a deep dive, much like we do with the Dalai Lama or some of these other big stage events. But do it in more of an intimate way. But then get that out to so many people for free across the world, in a way, where they can have that taste and that feeling of connection, to the work and to these practices and I'm excited about this season. I'm excited about next season. Can I just preview it? Is it possible? So we're working on next season. So this is going to be 2027. We're planning on a spring release and then a fall release. It's going to be on consciousness. So we're going really try to take a deep dive on some of the bigger questions that really, I think, underlie so much of why we all come to Mind & Life, or we come to this intersection space, is we want to know about the nature of consciousness. And there's so much happening right now across our contemplative practice science. But also like with psychedelics, generative AI, and what's going on there when we're creating thinking machines, you know, how does that relate to consciousness? And so we're building a slate of speakers now and thinking about a real powerful narrative arc to taking a deep dive. And I think if folks like this season I want to take some more risks next season. 2027 might mean us pushing the boundaries of our comfort zones in terms of, you know, looking at plant consciousness, thinking about animal hibernation and these states of torpor as unique states of consciousness. Looking at sleep and lucid dreaming, certainly psychedelics and AI as just topics that I think start to kind of flex into these questions about what is the nature of mind and the nature of, you know conscious experience. So I'm really excited about that future season. And for the meantime, you know, we've got all this great stuff coming for this season. So get ready. It's going to be a really good set of shows and I can't wait to get started.

Phil Walker • 47:45

Yeah, well David, thank you so much. I'm excited too. And so we'll just encourage everybody to stay tuned and make sure we're at the top of your feed and we'll be bringing you some really good shows in the very near future. Thanks, David. See you in two weeks.

Mind & Life is a production of the Mind & Life Institute. Show notes, transcripts, and other resources for all our episodes can be found at podcast.mindandlife.org. Visit us at mindandlife.org where you can learn more about how we bridge science and contemplative wisdom to foster insight and inspire action towards flourishing. If you find these conversations valuable and you'd like to support the work that we do you can make a donation of any amount at mindlife.org/give.

Be well, take care of each other, and thank you for listening.