



MIND & LIFE
I N S T I T U T E

Inspiring Minds Transcript
Yoga as a Tool for Social Change
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Susan Bauer-Wu (00:00:14):

Welcome, everyone. I'm Susan Bauer-Wu, the president of the Mind & Life Institute, joining you from Charlottesville, Virginia. And it's really wonderful to see the names of old friends and new ones from all over the world. Thank you so much for joining us today. Mind & Life's work sits at the intersection of contemplation, research and action. And we recognize that the challenges in today's world from loneliness and anxiety to climate change to racial injustice, and to growing polarization, all have roots in the human mind and there too, life solutions. So during this time of disconnection from one another and to the natural world, Mind & Life is committed to co-creating with you a new narrative, a new story that binds us together in the awareness that we are all deeply interconnected.

Susan Bauer-Wu (00:01:32):

So all of us at Mind & Life are so happy that you could join us today for the second monthly Inspiring Minds conversation. Once a month, we're bringing together prominent thought leaders and contemplatives to explore these issues and others. And this month, we are pleased to be exploring yoga as a tool for social change, with two renowned yoga teachers, Richard Freeman and Dr. Gail Parker, and an artistic performance by Grammy Award-winning composer Peter Kater. And I'd like to take a moment to thank Mind & Life supporters who make our work possible and to all of you who contributed during the registration process for this program. We so appreciate your generous support.

Susan Bauer-Wu (00:02:27):

And I'd now like to introduce the host of Inspiring Minds, Shankari Goldstein. Shankari in addition to her role as Program Manager at Mind & Life, Shankari is an avid social activist and a yoga teacher and she brings great warmth and a deep commitment to Mind & Life's values in creating positive social change. And so we look forward to this rich conversation now on how embodied practices and ancient yogic wisdom can lead to greater self-awareness and agency to creating a better world. So thank you again and enjoy the conversation.

Shankari Goldstein (00:03:11):

Thank you, Susan. Welcome and thank you all for attending the second episode of this series. Before I make introductions, I want to share a few housekeeping items with you all. First, I just

want to let you know that this call is being recorded so it can be available to those unable to join live today. All registrants will receive a link to the recording. And because we are live and mostly at home, if there happens to be some unexpected technical glitches and background noises, we certainly appreciate your understanding. I have a dog at my feet so I'm always aware that there could be some extra noise. I also want to formally acknowledge the land and the peoples who inhabited the land where our Mind & Life offices and I are located in the U.S. here in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Shankari Goldstein (00:03:56):

This includes the ancestral land of the Monacan Indian Nation who have lived in Central Virginia for over 10,000 years, and the African American residents of Vinegar Hill, who developed a thriving business district and were displaced. This is important because local histories of colonization, disenfranchisement and oppression have had devastating effects on the indigenous and African American communities here. And Mind & Life intends to build relationships, promote awareness, recognize resilience, and show respect for these communities, disrupting the history of silence and exclusion that has created disadvantages today.

Shankari Goldstein (00:04:33):

I invite you to take a moment and acknowledge those who have come before you and on the land upon which you sit today. Feel free to drop that in the chat. We'd love to see where everybody's coming from. I'd like to introduce our three guests for this episode, a psychologist and a certified yoga therapist, Dr. Gail Parker has been practicing yoga for over 50 years and teaching it for 20. She is the author of the book, *Restorative Yoga for Ethnic and Race Based Stress and Trauma*. She is president of the Black Yoga Teachers Alliance board of directors. Our second guest is Richard Freeman. He began studying yoga in 1968. He has studied yoga Asana, Sufism, Sanskrit language and Indian philosophy, numerous Buddhist teachers to draw insights into the interfacing of Buddhism and yoga as a reflection of life.

Shankari Goldstein (00:05:27):

Richard's metaphorical humorous teaching style appeals to students of many backgrounds and nationalities, and he recently released *When Love Comes to Light: Bringing Wisdom from the Bhagavad Gita*, written with his beautiful wife and partner, Mary Taylor. We're going to open our episode with a contemplative arts offering from two-time Grammy winning, multi-platinum selling pianist and composer Peter Kater. Peter has been a leading innovator of contemporary instrumental music for over three decades. He's received many awards and accolades for his rich and diverse music, including 14 Grammy Award nominations, two Grammy wins and the Environment Leadership Award from the United Nations. Thank you so much for being with us today, Peter, and I'll hand it over to you.

Peter Kater (00:06:13):

Thank you, Shankari. It's great to be here. I'm happy to share some space with all of you. I'm in Boulder, Colorado right now, originally home, I believe, of the Arapaho Native Americans and the Ute Native Americans, also for thousands of years. So I'm going to start off playing a piece called "Wings."

Let me play you another piece, this one is called "Spirit." Thank you.

Shankari Goldstein (00:15:00):

Thank you Peter, thank you.

Peter Kater (00:15:02):

My pleasure.

Shankari Goldstein (00:15:03):

Thank you so much for that powerful performance. We had people saying it was stunning, beautiful in this moment and amazing. So we look forward to inviting Peter back to the discussion for the second half of our public Q&A to share some insights with us. Thank you so much. I'd like to invite Richard and Gail to come up on screen at this time. Great. So as they get settled, I'll just share that today we're going to tap into the ancient wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita text and psychotherapy, in exploring the use of yoga for both personal and societal healing. My work with Black Yoga Teachers Alliance and Yoga as a Peace Practice with you, Dr. Parker, and my commitment to personal exploration into deeper aspects of yoga teachings has really allowed me to have a deeper understanding that yoga can be a social justice practice, I really truly believe that.

Shankari Goldstein (00:16:09):

However, most don't ordinarily think of yoga as a tool for social change. People often pursue yoga practice as a physical activity, and a way of staying grounded in the present moment. And so today we're going to be talking about the Bhagavad Gita text, which is an ancient Indian text, and it depicts a battlefield upon which Arjuna must face a war amongst his family. Being from the warrior caste, he begins to question if he should stay and fight his family and friends, or should he retreat. And the Hindu deity, Krishna, is there to guide him on the quest to uncover the connection between the branches of yoga, their healing powers, and the purpose and action that we take in life as humans and spiritual warriors.

Shankari Goldstein 00:16:53):

So I'm so excited to have this conversation with both of you. And I'll start by saying you each have decades of experience as veteran yoga practitioners and teachers, combined there's over 100 years of yoga practice and wisdom between the two of you, which is no small feat. So I'd like to begin with Gail. Gail, if you can unmute yourself, could you briefly share a personal experience or story related to the healing power of yoga?

Gail Parker (00:17:23):

Oh, boy, I have a number of them. But I will tell one that I don't often share. And I didn't realize it had to do with yoga until many years after the fact. But yoga is a transformative practice. And so I stumbled upon a yoga class before there was no such thing as a yoga studio 50 years ago, and I suspect that what we were learning was yoga nidra, although it wasn't called that, but it was a very relaxing, more than relaxing, it was just a deep experience of release. And I was involved at that time, I think I was 22 years old, in an abusive marriage, a physically abusive

marriage. And I think that going to this class was a way of supporting me during that very, very difficult time. And as I've said before to many people, I did everything but leave.

Gail Parker (00:18:23):

I did everything in that abusive marriage, but leave. I got nicer, I did all the things that people do when they're being abused. And on the last time it happened, I was being physically assaulted and just in a moment, I had this experience, I kind of could see what was happening. I wasn't in it anymore. I was observing what was happening. And I felt no physical pain, although I should have. And I remember this voice saying to me, as if it were somebody in the room with me, "You know he's crazy, but so are you for putting up with this." And in that instant, everything in me shifted. I felt the shift. And this happened in seconds, I remember thinking, "I've got to get a divorce." And this is when there was no such thing as no-fault divorce and you couldn't get divorced in those days. "I've got to get a divorce. I've got to go back to school because I'm not ready to leave yet," I remember thinking that.

Gail Parker (00:19:30):

And I meant it. I felt it. It was in my body. The miracle was that all of a sudden, the man who was abusing me, hitting me, stopped just suddenly I didn't say anything to him, he stopped hitting me and he never lifted a finger to hurt me again, ever. And in one year, I had gone back to graduate school, contacted a lawyer, somehow got a divorce and was out of there. And it was not until many years later that I connected the dots backward and realized it was the transformative aspect of the practice I had been engaged in that opened the way for that moment of clear observation. I was really in witness consciousness, I was in it, I hadn't planned to be in it, I didn't know what it was, I wasn't thinking about that.

Gail Parker (00:20:26):

And so I say, and most yoga practitioners who are experienced will say, it doesn't matter why you start practicing yoga, it doesn't matter if you come into practice as a physical exercise or as a form of relaxation, if you stick with it, you will be transformed. Whether you want to be or not, whether you mean to be or not. And so that was the most powerful transformative experience for me. And the recognition that this practice is amazing in many, many ways, in many respects.

Shankari Goldstein (00:21:03):

Thank you so much for that, Gail, and that vulnerability to share that as somebody who had a very similar experience getting out of an emotionally abusive relationship because of my yoga practice, I never knew that story about you. And so thank you for sharing that, it really makes me feel even more connected to you more than I thought I could have. Richard, same question for you, is there a personal experience or story related to the healing power of yoga that you'd like to share? I'm going to ask you to unmute.

Richard Freeman (00:21:43):

Oh, thank you, Gail, that was most amazing. I've had a number of yoga experiences. And I'm still a beginner at the practice, that's what I've discovered after a long time, is I have to keep going back to the present moment. And oftentimes, we've had students who came to our yoga studio and who quite personally I was a little bit afraid of, and they're obviously suffering deeply.

And we've found on many occasions that if we can allow them to stay with it rather than over-correcting them or under-correcting them, but allowing them to stay with the practice, they start eventually to go, "Ah," and they get a taste of what the practice is actually about.

Richard Freeman (00:23:18):

As far as personal experience, I found that years and years ago, I was trapped in the revolution in Iran, and actually, not in a safe position. And it was kind of the end of one phase of my life more as a yoga fundamentalist, but someone still interested in communication between different disciplines. And I came through a roundabout way back to the States here and it was really through just then, for me, almost the beginning of practice, that I started to get the sense that I was starting over. And I had a whole deep revision of yoga as this way of letting go of my storyline. And just as importantly, letting go of my storyline about the people and other disciplines.

Richard Freeman (00:24:36):

So coming from a place where different yoga schools really would fight with each other, and maybe behind each other's backs really radically criticize each other to the point where letting go of the politics that comes between religions and then within a religion or a yoga group, the politics that arises. And even people within the same group, they fight with each other, often viciously, but in public, they'll smile and pretend to be all nice. And here, where I am currently in Boulder, Colorado, like Peter, there was this opportunity because this was a confluence of so many different traditions, many of them very critical of each other. But the important lesson for me was go ahead and as best you can communicate. And that lesson is still going on for me.

Richard Freeman (00:25:54):

Find out what the other is actually thinking as best you can. And sometimes, all you have to do is ask a question like, "What do you think of that?" And then, oftentimes, you get back a completely different answer than what you were expecting. And sometimes if you ask the wrong question, they'll become angry or they'll become happy, and you don't know. And this whole teaching of the Gita is, you have to do something in order to make this connection with other beings, and occasionally, the paradox is, you have to give them space and not actually interfere. And then times come when you actually have to have the courage to say something to them, inquire into the history, just like even now I'm starting to learn the history of this area of the United States and the deeper history of the United States, deeper history of the Americas, deeper history of the earth. And I find myself a beginner in the practice.

Shankari Goldstein (00:27:13):

It's so beautiful, and I love that you talked about the religious ego, right? I'm sure that was such a tumultuous time in Iran. And so much aspects of religious studies and just in our culture, there's these religious wars and these spiritual wars. And I love that you also talked about maybe some of the darker aspects that show up in these communities where light and joy and these yoga practices are supposed to keep us as these balanced beings, but even then the religious ego can creep in and this sense of ego can show up. And your new book explores the timeless wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita, so maybe we can talk a little bit about that and the relevance to modern life, Richard, what are some of the lessons that are embedded in this

classical text that can inform how we live in these challenging times and maybe how we deal with some of that religious ego that creeps up?

Richard Freeman (00:28:12):

Oh, well, Mary and I interpreted the text in a non-sectarian way in which the text is actually designed to make you ask questions. And then when your mind gives you an answer, which it always give you some kind of answer, to keep looking, to keep asking questions in order to discover what really matters, the Gita gradually reveals that, which is explained there as the beloved, who is Krishna, who is the you of you, living in the core of the heart, not only within your heart, but in the heart of all beings. And in order to feel that connection, one experiences this great satisfaction and pleasure that is stunning, that is satisfying beyond the need of the ego to actually know things, to grasp things and to have formulas or religions in order to get what it thinks is the ultimate goal.

Richard Freeman (00:29:34):

And so, the Gita always talks about different traditional religious approaches, many of which, if you don't understand them, seem to conflict with each other. And the Gita is very happy to present them in a way that leaves the reader or Arjuna confused because it never answers the question, but it makes you listen and inquire more deeply. And gradually, it takes you into feeling your own body, feeling your own breath, feeling the miracle of just waking up to that which is happening, which is even hard to label or to explain, they call it the *pratyaksha* or that which is right in your face, or rising in front of the eyes, which is indescribably amazing and interconnected. And then all of these different schools try to describe it, but the reality actually slides through all of the different categories.

Richard Freeman (00:30:44):

And so the book is really teaching us to stay with the conversation of looking and then looking again, and then looking again, and looking again. And so it's just the looking or the listening that is stunning and leaves you stunned or awestruck. And we have to do that in the present moment. And you can dream about it in terms of mythology and old stories, but it's really trying to get you into your immediate, how do you feel right now - in your relationships? How do you feel in the body? How does the breath feel? And you start to become gradually awestruck or stunned by the amazingness. And if I use any words to say what it is, then whoops, what it is actually slides out of the word.

Richard Freeman (00:31:48):

And so the Gita has a very deep sense of humor, in which half the time, Krishna, who is Arjuna's pal, rather than playing the role of big, theistic, autocrat or tyrant, which Arjuna keeps trying to make him into that and Krishna keeps coming down, but he just gets him to say, "Ah, look." And so look again, ask again, communicate again. And so the one who is most awakened is that who feels that they are a kindly servant to all beings, not just human beings—we got to start with that species because they're kind of desperate—but all beings. One has a delightful love for all beings and that's where satisfaction is. And that's our work. So there's a lot of work to do.

Shankari Goldstein (00:32:55):

Yeah. I love that. And I love that you brought it all back to communication. There were aspects of nonviolent communication in there too, and just this listening, and it leads me to bring you in Gail, because as we move into this space of listening more, the concept of fight or not fight seems so incredibly relevant in these times of political strife and division. And in some ways, there's this internal war of fear, desire, anxiety, loneliness, attachment, this came up in my conversation last month with Ruth and Sharon Salzburg going on in our own minds. And we really are having a hard time communicating with each other and getting to this place of oneness. And your book focuses on healing race based stress, and trauma. And maybe you can just give us a little insight and sense of how restorative yoga practice affects the nervous system, helps with all of these internal war areas that I just mentioned, to help heal these internalized emotional wounds that we're facing right now.

Richard Freeman (00:34:04):
So.

Shankari Goldstein (00:34:05):
Oh, yeah, it was for Gail, but I can come back to you, Richard. Go ahead, Gail.

Gail Parker (00:34:12):
Me?

Shankari Goldstein (00:34:12):
Yeah, please.

Gail Parker (00:34:13):
So I'm going to tie back to the story I told, which I didn't know I was going to tell. And I first told that story when I was teaching a graduate course at the University of Michigan called Change the World, and the premise was that through individual personal transformation, we can change the world, this is where the social activist aspect of yoga comes in as far as I'm concerned. And someone in the class asked, I remember this, someone in the class said, is it possible... we were talking about business relationships, organizational development, "Is it possible through changing yourself to impact an abusive professional relationship?" An abusive boss for example. If I've changed me, can I keep my boss from being abusive to me?

Gail Parker (00:35:05):
And all of a sudden, this memory came back about what happened in that instant when I realized, "Wait a minute, it's me. I need to change, I need to quit trying to get that other person to change." And it was not a thought, it was an embodied experience that I had. So I told the story, and I said, "Yeah, it is possible." Because what was amazing to me, more amazing even to me than the fact that I was hearing this voice telling me, "You know he's crazy, but so are you." He never lifted a finger to harm me again after that thought that I had. But it was more than a thought, it was an awareness. So it not only transformed me, it transformed the abuser. I think that's really important for us to get clear about. So what I write about in this book, *Restorative Yoga for Ethnic and Race Based Stress and Trauma* is we each have our own individual work to do, we live in a racialized culture.

Gail Parker (00:36:15):

Some of us are directly impacted by race based stress and trauma, others of us are indirectly impacted, but we're all in this together. There is no separation here. There is an interconnection. And I think that part of what's happening today currently, is we are waking up, the universe is asking us to wake up to the fact that we are interconnected. We are not going solo through this experience, and that's what Richard is talking about. It's about the relationship. But it's a heart to heart relationship. And when we can do the deep work, the deep inquiry of going within our own selves, to ask, as we'll talk about race and ethnicity for the time being, "What is my own relationship to my own race and my own ethnicity?" This is not just about black and brown people, this is about everybody.

Gail Parker (00:37:13):

"Do I have the will and the courage to do self inquiry as it pertains to my own race and my own ethnicity?" I don't know, that's my invitation. Let's go inside, let's tell our story, let's discover our stories, and let's share them with each other. You have to make yourself vulnerable to do that. And that is not a comfortable place for us to sit. But our practices support us, hold us in a place where we can feel—I don't know, I was going to say safe enough, but this isn't safe work. Self-inquiry is not safe work, it's deep work. And sometimes we have to do it scared. You know what I mean, you can't wait to be safe or not scared to share. If you're doing the kind of work that I think needs to be done now.

Gail Parker (00:38:16):

We're being asked to wake up, wake up to the fact that we are all connected here. There is no separation, there is no distance between you and me, between any of us on this platform right now. We're not one, because we're all different, we all have our own individuality, but we are interconnected like Indra's net. We are all jewels in the web of that net that are reflecting one another's essence for infinity. It goes on and on and on and on and on. So this is what our practice invites us to experience. And as Richard said, each time we begin again, we begin again, we begin again.

Shankari Goldstein (00:39:07):

I love that when we all chatted last we talked about the *varna* or the color or the caste system, maybe we can stay on this topic of race based issues. And I think *varna*, the caste system of the Hindu people, and how even now in these modern times, these classifications and identities were still defined by, I mean, I was texting with you about it earlier this week, Gail, and it leads me to think about something that you've shared in the past, I think you say it's *jam bah doo nah*, which translates to are you in your skin, is that the right?

Gail Parker (00:39:41):

Yeah, there's a story of a Peace Corps volunteer who goes to Cameroon to do her work. And when she arrives at the village, she knows the language, she knows everything that she could possibly know without having lived in the culture. She shows up well prepared, she thinks, and she's there to help. She's going to do her work. So she approaches the women at the well who are gathering water and she greets them and they ignore her. And they don't help her. And she

falls when she tries to put water on her head and they laugh. And this goes on for a while, and she can't figure it out. And so she sees another volunteer who's being well received. So she asks her, she said, "What's the problem here?" And the other volunteer says, "Well, there's a traditional greeting, that if you begin the conversation this way, you will be welcomed into the group of women. And it is *jam bah doo nah*, which means, are you in your skin?"

Gail Parker (00:40:48):

And the response is *jam core doo may*, I am alive and well, my soul is in my skin." Isn't that beautiful? Anyway, so she began to use that greeting, and of course, was well received and warmly received and things began to shift. So you're talking about appearance, we're a visual species, we judge each other based on appearance, we do. And in this culture in the United States, and actually, it's probably worldwide, but we know that we operate on a skin color hierarchy here. And the closer you are to looking white, the higher up on the hierarchy you are, and the closer you are to having dark skin, black skin, the lower you are on the hierarchy. And then the various shades of brown are in the middle. And so to deny that we see color is not true, we do and we react to it, and we respond to it, and it's not helpful.

Gail Parker (00:42:12):

And so again, as far as an exploration around race and ethnicity is concerned, I just suggest that why don't we take a look at our own relationship to why do I even say I don't see color? I mean, what's the problem? Why can't I see color and say it? Well, because we attach meaning to it. And we don't want to explore that meaning that we have attached to it because that might say something bad about us. But the invitation here is to take a look, really, what is my relationship to all of this stuff? That's the yoga as far as I'm concerned.

Shankari Goldstein (00:42:54):

Yeah. Did you want to add anything to that, Richard? Given that you shared that story about people rationalizing their harmful behavior, intent versus impact, their harmful behavior to bring it in line with their actions, maybe just what it means to bring awareness to cognitive dissonance in these different, whether it's race, whether it's the practice, is there anything that's standing out for you in this conversation?

Richard Freeman (00:43:21):

Well, if I say, *jam bah doo nah* was that?

Richard Freeman (00:43:26):

Jam bah doo nah. One is in the skin. And I'm just thinking of different species, the skin is where one of the forms of prana called vyana is. And it's a form of intelligence that just vibrates. So if you're in your skin, in yoga, it really helps you, you get this sense of proprioception or equality towards front, back up, down, north, south, past and future. And there's just this vibrance that is like light. And so that's one of the stages of yoga practice, is to literally coach your skin with mantra or with compassion or with awareness. And so that's kind of an internal or esoteric meaning. But then I was thinking that the word *varna* which just means color, is one of the most irritating things when you read the Bhagavad Gita because Krishna says, "Oh, I am ultimately the source of the fact that there's a *varna* system."

Richard Freeman (00:44:53):

But then it's explained that it's not necessarily by birth, but it's merely by practical relationship, that if you got a group of people who have a job in a field, one of them organizes it and then the others are temporary. So the idea of functionality, that I have my unique qualities, and if I communicate, then I can find, within a specific task, how I'm most useful. But then people, of course, think it comes by birthright, and this I think the tradition of the Mahabharata and the Gita are trying to disassemble without saying, "Oh, all of us are unique and finding out what your actual function is, which might vary from one day to the next, is really helpful." So it's quite funny that the word Krishna means black. So here's the beloved and it's supposed to be this beautiful black like a monsoon cloud.

Richard Freeman (00:46:20):

And Krishna comes from a tribal area at the time of the telling of Mahabharata, which actually involves a number of indigenous people. And part of the painful part historically, is that readers of the tradition, think, "Oh, the idea of skin color." It became an inspiration within the late 19th century, the early 20th century, the 1920s and 30s for the fascist movement. And so there were interpreters of the Indian *varna* system, both in India and all over Europe, that was a justification for a kind of slavery. So the *varnashrama dharma* system as a religious system, was a form of slavery, but without chains. In other words, people were trained to believe that they were stuck due to whatever their specific status in society he was born.

Richard Freeman (00:47:44):

And my understanding from the more and more I study is that that's not actually the case, the intention of the teaching, the intention of the Gita, is to deconstruct this misunderstanding so that people still see, "Oh, I'm unique, and I have unique talents, but it is not dictated by this silly thing, which is merely the color of the skin." And it's profoundly important. And I think the more we study, the more we communicate, the more we see, "Oh, what a silly misunderstanding we have."

Shankari Goldstein (00:48:34):

Well, I love that. And I always took Arjuna's boat to represent the mind in the Gita. And in some ways, the importance of yoga, the act of love, and a steady mind, helps bring us to this tenderness connection with each other and human beings, and ultimately, the planet, and more importantly, that vital life force of prana that you spoke of, Richard. So thank you for that. We are going to open it up for the public Q&A. And I see my computer might be dragging a little bit, so I apologize. There's so much we didn't get to and that only makes me feel catalyzed to have you, that you both need to come back for a second episode of Inspiring Minds. So as we begin to move into the public Q&A with Richard and Gail, I see that maybe some questions have already been added to the chat box. And our team has been busy capturing these questions so they don't get lost in the feed.

Shankari Goldstein (00:49:32):

For those who wish to have me ask their questions directly, you can continue to populate questions into the chat box. And you'll also have the option to raise your hand directly through

the Zoom features and I'll bring you up live and ask your questions directly to Gail or Richard or Peter. We're going to invite him in shortly to the Q&A with us. There's going to be a quick transition time between me selecting you and transferring you into the room before you unmute and go live. So just be patient. And at that point, I'll invite you to unmute your mic and voice your questions. So as I give you all time to put your questions in the chat or raise your hand, I'll start with just an initial first question for you, Gail to let people get settled. You've been teaching yoga therapists within a hospital setting, and how would you like to see these practices scaled within formal systems like schools, workplace and healthcare systems?

Gail Parker (00:50:22):

Oh, that's a big question. I don't know. I haven't thought about that so I really don't have an answer to that question. I think, though, that what I would like to see is... for these systems for educational system, our health care systems, yeah, I guess just to be open to the healing, I don't like to use the word, see, I'm trying to get away from using the medical model, it's not my favorite thing to talk about. I'm trying to find a different language. I'm just hoping that there's just more awareness and opening to the healing power of these practices. And this is what I'll say, that question is for the people who are actually doing the work in the field to answer, how can I bring these practices to wherever it is I am, wherever I have influence? In a way that supports the teachings. I mean, that's the best I can do with that one, Shankara, thank you for [crosstalk 00:51:39].

Shankari Goldstein (00:51:39):

Thank you, Gail. I don't normally get to test you, this is exciting. There is a question here from Tina Werth: how can others be invited to engage in a dialogue about trauma who have not been directly affected but want to engage? They're worried about overstepping boundaries perhaps, many of us want to communicate, as you said Richard, in a sincere way, but do not know how to take that first step. Do you have any advice, Richard, for Tina? Maybe?

Richard Freeman (00:52:12):

Yeah, when you reach out and ask a question, you don't know what kind of response you're going to get. And so that takes courage. You say, "Oh." And if you're honest, you say, "I don't know for sure, I really want to be of service but this is my situation." And one part of the skill of yoga is the skill of being diplomatic and then not being, what they say, being attached to the fruit, which is the immediate result you get in which someone says, "How dare you." And then you say, "Oh." And you try again. So it takes great courage to act at certain times. And you're not sure what the result is going to be, and the courage is not being too attached to whether the person likes you or not, because that's not immediately important.

Richard Freeman (00:53:26):

But perhaps giving them the sense that you are actually there. And we have opened ears and opened eyes and if the opportunity is there, you'd like to be helpful. So it's scary, this whole action thing. And so that's part of the yoga, is you have to stand up and not be afraid, even though it's an extremely mysterious situation, particularly now. So give it a shot and see what happens.

Shankari Goldstein (00:54:08):

Thank you, Richard. Did you want to say something Gail? I saw you.

Gail Parker (00:54:12):

Just to sort of support what Richard is talking about, particularly when it comes to trauma. First of all, you cannot support someone else, again, this is the self-study, the self-practice, unless and until you deal with your own unhealed, unbearable pain and suffering, which we all have by the way, you will not be able to support other people in theirs. What people who are in trauma need more than anything else is a listening presence, period, the end, goodbye, there's nothing for you to do. And I believe, I teach that our yoga practices support us, and this is why choose restorative yoga to teach this way, support us in being still.

Gail Parker (00:54:59):

In being still and just allowing whatever energy is moving through to move through. That's really what people who are in trauma need, not someone to fix it, not someone to make it all better, not someone to explain it, or even inquire about it, but to just receive it, receive it with an open, loving heart. So that's what you got to do, you got to do your practice so that your heart stays open and loving, no matter what, that's the work.

Shankari Goldstein (00:55:34):

Thank you. We're running out of time. There's so many things that people have in the chat, we're going to have to capture all these questions and send them to you. But I want to honor people's time, because this show is supposed to end shortly. And I want to bring Peter up too, and I have a quick question for Peter if he's available to come up and join us. Here he is. Peter, thanks for joining. I have a question for you because I was really excited that you were joining this episode, Keith Jarrett's 1975 Köln the concert album, is one of my favorite records of all time. There have been many Sunday mornings and times when I've needed it to reflect and just have a deep self-inquiry practice. And I know he's one of your inspirations as well. And I would love for you to share maybe your own personal experience with using music as a tool for social change and transformation and music as a way to unite people, as Gail and Richard have shared with us through yoga.

Peter Kater (00:56:35):

Yeah, I've been thinking about that, actually. And I think authenticity, just authenticity like Gail was saying, self-inquiry, and Richard was saying about asking some questions. I'm going to agree with Gail, that it begins with our own self-inquiry. And whenever I sit down at the piano, that's exactly what I'm doing. I mean, I do it away from the piano, actually, I do it in my life and then I bring what I learned to the piano. But I'm always sitting at the piano, asking myself, "Where am I at right now? What's the truest expression I could possibly say at this moment? If I was having a conversation with God or the universe and being totally transparent, what would I say?" I'd have to be completely, completely authentic.

Peter Kater (00:57:29):

And because I approach my music that way, I think people feel safe in my presence, at my concerts. And I have so many people coming up to me and talking about real things and real life

events and life-changing circumstances and their darkest hour. And I feel so humbled and grateful that I can have those conversations with people. And I agree, it begins with having that conversation with yourself.

Shankari Goldstein (00:58:02):

Well, I'm so grateful for the three of you. I just want to close with this one question for each of you, what is one action step or insight that you've taken from this conversation that you feel you can start to carry into your life, one action step, insight you'd like to share with our audience, and this is open for the audience to participate in as well and drop their feedback in the chat. Let's start with you, Gail.

Gail Parker (00:58:28):

Oh, gosh. [inaudible 00:58:29] one action step-

Shankari Goldstein (00:58:31):

One action step.

Gail Parker (00:58:34):

One action step is to recognize that just because you are being still doesn't mean nothing is happening, that stillness is also an action step, and a much needed one. And I think we're being invited into that space right now, to be still.

Shankari Goldstein (00:58:56):

Richard.

Richard Freeman (00:59:00):

I would completely agree with that, that what you're actually feeling right now has everything to do with what you're thinking, and what you think of others and what you think of yourself. And so there's always this going back to basics, like I'm breathing, I'm inhaling, and I'm exhaling for now, I know that won't last but if I really do that mindfully, with feeling as best I can, what is essential, just the kind of the raw, is it primitive or is it fundamental or is it a pleasure of just inhaling and exhaling without trying to make it long or make it short or make it behave in a certain way, that really helps me then let go of or see through kind of the stories that my mind makes about who I am and who other people are. And you just get this kind of internal sense of who they are, rather than who I think they are. So I'm giving up that reductionism where I'm immediately categorizing myself and others, even though that's what the mind does.

Richard Freeman (01:00:36):

And so it also makes me more tolerant of my own ego and my own dark side, which is quite profound the more I practice, I say, "Oh, my God, I thought that person was demonic, you should see this." And just being able then to let go of that and to get back to what's important. And so just the basic, simple yoga practices of like inhaling and exhaling mindfully has a profound effect then on the ability to be brave, or the ability to communicate, and then to transform.

Shankari Goldstein (01:01:23):

Peter, what action step or insight will you share at this time?

Peter Kater (01:01:27):

Let me go back to what I was saying earlier, one of my favorite phrases is authenticity heals. And that's because if we're authentic with where we're at, and if we embrace where we're at, it begins to shift and change, no matter where it is, if it's in love, if it's in fear, if it's an anger, if it's an ego, whatever it is, if we acknowledge, "Yeah, I'm really in my ego right now," and embrace it, then it begins to shift. So I think for me, that's my practice. And do not have a preference or a judgment about it, I can't be open all the time, I can't be loving all the time. And I have to love myself for when I need to shut down. Everything has to be okay, I have to embrace whoever I am, however I am, so that I can fully experience that and move on to the next thing or not.

Shankari Goldstein (01:02:29):

Well, after all of that, as we feel catalyzed and not paralyzed in this moment, and I think it's also important to remember to rest and I love that you talked about that, because Gail, you are the queen of take a rest, take a break, stop when your body says to stop. So, thank you for that, Peter. Gail, I'd like to hand it over to you before we close, maybe you can lead us in a maybe a three minute meditation?

Gail Parker (01:02:58):

I would be happy to do that. So what I would invite all of us to do is just to find a comfortable seat and close your eyes or lower your lids and focus your awareness on your breath. Feeling the soft cooling caress of the breath as it enters your nostrils on the inhale, and the soft, warm caress of breath as you exhale. [silence 01:03:39] And then just silently repeat to yourself in the spirit of our connection, on your inhale, I am breathing in just like you. And on your exhale, I am breathing out just like you. [silence 01:04:17] And on your next round of breath, we are breathing in and out together. [silence 01:04:43]. And then come to that moment of internal silence so you can let go of the words, the thoughts. And as you enjoy your breath, just listen to a reflection that I will invite you to contemplate.

Gail Parker (01:05:30):

So attuned relationship is nature's way. Trees communicate with each other through the sense they emit to attract bees for pollination and to alert other trees to impending danger and to express care and protection for one another through electrical impulses via their root system. And so I'm going to read a poem to you and just again, reflect on the words and on the power of our connection, it's called Joshua Trees Know. Joshua trees know each other, root systems connecting across vibrational sand. Science says Joshua trees hum, sing together, perhaps amongst their mycelium roots or limb to limb, mystery.

Gail Parker (01:06:40):

Whatever happens to one happens to all, evolved consciousness, oneness. Joshua trees know. How do we awaken to this too? [silence 01:07:00] Take a deep inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Another deep inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth, one final time. And then bring the palms of your hands together at heart center and just bow

very gently in gratitude toward your heart for the gift of this experience that we have shared together, knowing that when we leave this place, we will have established a connection with one another. And when you're ready, just come on back to the computer screen for what's next.

Shankari Goldstein (01:08:25):

Thank you, Gail. Yoga can be such a transformative tool on the level of self and eventually others. And we need to remember that the universe is asking us to wake up, reminding us that we are all interconnected. And our practice can be a tool to ground ourselves in those reminders as the quote of *jam bah doo nah* tells us, let's remember to be in our own skin. So a few action steps that Gail and Peter and Richard remind us of, let's learn how to be still, let's remember our breath and be present, and be our deepest, authentic self. And maybe leaving you with these questions of how do we accept others who may not feel connected to us? People who may believe differently than we do. So thank you to these three incredible, innovative thought leaders.

Shankari Goldstein (01:09:22):

There's a powerful Alicia Walker quote that says, thank you is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say this one a lot, she says, thank you expresses extreme gratitude, humility and understanding. So thank you all, thank you to the three of you and thank you to the Mind & Life team who have worked behind the scenes with today's Inspiring Minds online event. As mentioned before, we're going to be gathering together next month for the December Inspiring Minds series Wednesday the 16th.

Shankari Goldstein (01:09:56):

We're going to be joined by the 2020 recipient of the Catherine Kerr Award for Courageous and Compassionate Science, Peter Wayne, who will deliver a distinguished presentation with Willa Blythe Baker and a live performance with Srinivas Reddy, the theme will be finding connections, pathways to embodied wisdom. And registration is now open for this December event through the Mind & Life website. So we hope you all can join us. Thank you again for joining. And please continue to stay connected to Mind & Life as we move forward in these challenging times. Thank you, Gail. Thank you, Richard. Thank you, Peter.