



**MIND & LIFE**  
INSTITUTE

## **Mind & Life Connect Transcript**

**Eve Ekman**

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Retrieved from [video recording](#)

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:04):

Welcome to this Mind & Life Connect. My name is Shankari Goldstein. My pronouns are she/her. And as we gather here today, let us begin by acknowledging the land on which we stand and the indigenous communities who have stewarded this land for generations. I'm a little unsettled because I also just wanted to send a big mahalo to the communities in Hawaii, Maui in particular. We're really in awe of how the local ohana is showing up for one another in true aloha spirit with deep respect and gratitude for them and others who have walked this path before us, creating enduring connections to the earth. We're so grateful for the opportunity to hold them in our hearts and to engage in this meaningful dialogue today. We are so honored to have Dr. Eve Ekman, who is a Wellbeing Lead at Apple, a Fellow of the Mind & Life Institute and a contemplative curriculum specialist.

(01:07):

Eve's work bridges clinical social work, integrative medicine, emotional awareness, contemplative science and meditation, and her insights have profound implications for our wellbeing and our interconnected world. So I've been waiting to have this conversation with Eve since probably Inspiring Minds, we've been talking about having a conversation with one another. I see Dr. Gail Parker's picture floating around somewhere. She was on our first season of Inspiring Minds, so it's really just a beautiful full circle moment. Thank you, Eve, for joining us. And before we delve into our conversation, we're going to just allow Eve to help ground us and help ground us in this space of holding the Hawaiian community as well.

**Eve Ekman** (01:50):

Thank you, Shankari. And thanks to Mind & Life. I'm so happy to be here. It really feels like being with family when I get to collaborate with the Mind & Life friends and folks who make it all possible, and absolutely a meaningful day to be together. I am here in San Francisco, California, so we are so fortunate that the Coast Miwok and Ohlone people have helped preserve a lot of the beauty and continue to teach a lot about those traditions and how we can revitalize our relationship with the natural world. And the natural world begins with our own bodies. In a practice together, we're going to explore, what is it like to tune in specifically to the emotions that exist in our bodies. If it's comfortable, I invite you to have your eyes softly focused in front of you or closed; we'll practice together no more than five minutes, so no need to take on a formal

posture. This is a practice in which first we invite our attention and our awareness to really come inward.

**Eve Ekman** (02:58):

Everyone is calling in from different time zones here, but for many of us, this may be the first opportunity to take a truly intentional breath in the body. So take a moment and really notice this breath, this unbelievably intimate aspect of our everyday life that is so easy to miss.

(03:26):

And as we tune into the body, what we first notice might be areas of pressure or weight. Maybe we're sitting on a chair or a couch and we notice the feeling of our body being supported. We may also notice other aspects of the physical body, like the temperature around us. And also seeing if we can feel the sensations of the body through the fabric of our clothes. And what so often captures our attention, for many of us, we might be holding some stress or tension. And without any agenda or expectation, just noticing sensations and where they might exist throughout the body.

(04:40):

This simple shift away from thinking and doing, to kind, curious attention of the body, is in and of itself a wonderful intervention, a wonderful way to help us really inhabit the present moment and make space for whatever might be here.

(05:12):

It's okay if you're distracted and thoughts and memories and images arise. No problem. We can continue to develop our meta-awareness by coming back to the body and continuing to notice, and refresh, and rejoice in our interest in the body.

(05:43):

And we'll take one more step together in this settling-in practice, and this is to move towards a practice that the wonderful Tsoknyi Rinpoche has shared with hundreds of thousands, possibly millions of people. In this practice, we meet not just the physical sensations in the body, but the emotional residue in the body.

(06:07):

As Shankari mentioned, there is much in the world that could make a heavy heart. Many of us have had a full day already with myriad emotion episodes: excitement, disappointment, frustration. And without chronicling everything that has happened, just notice, is there a layer or level in the body that we can feel sensations that are not just physical—it's the emotional layer in the body?

(06:48):

Again, with gentleness, curiosity, no agenda, not trying to get rid of anything we're feeling, not even trying to understand, this feeling of shaking hands or meeting whatever is here, and feeling as though whatever we are experiencing in the body has plenty of space.

**Eve Ekman** (07:34):

This simple practice is coming back over and over to noticing the shifts and changes of sensations in the body. Noticing as maybe a sensation arises and passes away, noticing the quality, emotionally, of these sensations.

(08:25):

Just a couple of moments more. And seeing, feeling, or imagining that we can experience the waves of emotion, that we can make space for the residue of emotion from a place of real gentleness, kindness, and a pliancy of mind and body.

(09:09):

With this spirit of friendliness towards our emotions, we gently begin to wiggle our fingers and toes. And if our eyes have been closed, gently blinking them back into our shared space. Thanks, everyone, for your practice. Welcome back.

**Shankari Goldstein** (09:28):

I feel a smidgen less stressed and burnt-out already, Eve. It's wonderful.

**Eve Ekman** (09:35):

Wonderful.

**Shankari Goldstein** (09:37):

Which is what we're going to dive into today. Before we get into the depth of your conversation and your offering today, maybe you can just... We'd love to hear, we're eager to hear about how Mind & Life Institute and the journey into exploring emotions have shaped this remarkable offering you just gave us, all this expertise, the foundation of your impactful work. Tell us a little bit about your story.

**Eve Ekman** (10:01):

What a fun question, and I will aim to keep it brief, because I think the content is really what I want to share with folks and tools that you can use today, tomorrow, and share with others. I was quite literally born into this work. Both biologically with my family, but also in my system. I am a sensitive person. I really attune to others' emotions. I experience what is going on for other people, and always have. The earliest memories I have, growing up in San Francisco, was actually a sense of dis-ease in seeing all of the unsheltered folks living on the streets here, and just not understanding and feeling this great tenderness about our world and trying to understand how to take care of my feelings. I didn't have the words for emotions then. So I think that sensitivity has always been a part and a driving factor of my work, of how do I meet this call to compassion that feels so natural to me through this empathy?

(11:06):

And then the other is, both my parents are academics who are committed to social change and social justice. My mom was a real advocate for women's rights and that was always a part of our family table dinners and discussions, the policy changes she was making and her interest and her care. And my dad was very involved in the civil rights movement and anti-war movement. That was, again—I think once a month we had the board meeting at our house and I never

knew what was going on. There were just a lot of bagels and fighting and good times. And then my dad, of course, was such a foundational researcher in emotion. And when I was a kid, I just thought he had this weird lab that I thought was a little creepy, because there were all these rooms with video cameras and I didn't quite understand it.

**Eve Ekman** (11:56):

But growing up I started to realize that the work he did, it mattered so much to people. And I started to understand that how we feel about our daily life was one of the most important things we experience. And when my dad got invited to the Mind & Life Dialogue in 2000, it was the beginning of a journey I never could have imagined. I just thought it was a really amazing trip and time to be with my dad, but it completely shifted me and him, and really shifted how I grew up professionally in my career. I feel so fortunate Mind & Life opened the door for myself and so many people of my generation to be able to have a career in wellbeing. I did not go to school to be a wellbeing professional. That was not a thing. And yet there's so much scientific evidence that we can train wellbeing.

(12:45):

It's not just something you're born with. So I was able to follow along in my own research and in my own interest, even though I tried as hard as I could to not be in the shadow of my dad—for years, I was like, "He's doing this thing, it's so important. I'm going to try to do something else." And my heart was really in direct service, so I was doing social work and crisis management, crisis counseling, and yet still felt this pull to, "How do I understand at a deeper level the way to support people?" Especially people who feel compassion deeply like myself, frontline providers. Somewhat begrudgingly, I decided to just let go of the resistance and go all in. And I just feel so fortunate to have Mind & Life and all of the associated friends and faculty who've helped me along the way.

**Shankari Goldstein** (13:36):

So really just growing up and getting to see the birth of this field is pretty fantastic. There's not many folks that can say that they got to see it from start to finish the way you did. And this session is really dedicated to synthesizing those insights from contemporary social, cognitive and Buddhist psychologies.

[Cut; tech issues.]

**Eve Ekman** (13:55):

I think I know the question. How do we weave and synthesize these practices together? And it's so interesting. My first experience really diving into this contemplative science world was with Cultivating Emotional Balance, a training that was really trying to honor these wisdom traditions of cognitive psychology, social psychology, and contemplative practice and science. And one thing I remember from the founders of that training—my dad, Paul Ekman, and Alan Wallace, the Buddhist scholar and teacher—is not to try to mix them together, not to try to make them the same, but to have this honoring and parallel. And one example of that—beautifully, there are many aspects of this in contemplative science—is emotions. In contemplative practices, you

don't see the specificity of emotions. You see the mental formations. You're almost looking at the macro level of, what are these habits of our mind that lead to difficult or disturbing emotions?

**Eve Ekman (14:59):**

But with the contemporary science of emotion, it's like the microscope—let's look at these 30 to 90 seconds in which our experience of emotion rises and falls. So we have these two different lenses, you could say. And the contemplative really gives us an understanding of, what are the intentions and values that cultivate a life that supports more enjoyable, more constructive emotions? And then the specificity of looking at our moment to moment emotion experience and the physiology in our body, it gives us the handholds of, what is it? What does it mean to have emotions? What does it look like?

(15:38):

So you just see this beautiful connection. And I think for my dad, who is definitely coming from a really scientific, 'if we can't measure it in modern science it just doesn't exist'—what really opened him up, what was so exciting is, here's all these other strategies and tools far beyond what contemporary psychology had come up with. And of course we live in that, we see mindfulness now as permeating all aspects of mental health and wellbeing treatments. And there's so many types of meditation. Mindfulness has gotten the lion's share of interest, but in Tibetan Buddhism, there's 84,000 meditations at least. So there's still so much opportunity for us to learn, measure, understand, and make these meditations accessible for more people.

**Shankari Goldstein (16:24):**

I love that. And you talked a little bit about that, the meeting with His Holiness, back in 2014 maybe—but we can go back to the meeting of 2014 where that notion of a map of emotions was discussed. How can you, you know, invite us in, navigating that landscape of our inner world? How can this map be born from both ancient wisdom traditions and modern science? How can it help guide us on this journey towards these heightened senses of emotional awareness that you're talking about? And is there a way that we can collaborate and cultivate that emotional wellbeing and compassion within communities? We're seeing it play out in Maui, and that's why I gave them a shout-out today. I'm just so in awe of the level of local gathering, to be holding each other. What are your thoughts on that?

**Eve Ekman (17:15):**

Beautiful, wonderful. Many questions wrapped in. And I think it's interesting, in 2014, the Mind & Life meeting, it was the conference in Boston, maybe some people here attended. It was such a fun, exciting meeting and I just remember so clearly, His Holiness saying on stage, "We don't need laboratories to study suffering. Go out in the street, it's right there. We don't need laboratories to help intervene on suffering, just go out and do it." And it's just this beautiful tension of, yes, we want to learn, we want to investigate; and, we need to address and meet the call of the world. We need to be able to equip people on a day-to-day basis to be able to take care of themselves, and as you said, take care of others. I think when he asked my dad and I to create this Atlas of Emotion, his goal was really actually, keep it only to science.

**Eve Ekman** (18:14):

Don't put any of the contemplative practices in there. It's funny. I understand why he wanted that, and I also see the limitations of that. I think the reason he wanted it, in his words was, "We need a map to understand the territory in order to find a calm mind." Like we need a map to get ourselves from San Francisco to New York City. You could get there without one, but it would take a long time. And so to have a map of our emotions, in his mind that would offer us insight, wisdom. So these very contemplative qualities, but through a scientific approach. And so in the atlas, our goal was to give people a vocabulary. We know from beautiful research out of UCLA and other places that just labeling and identifying your emotion—so instead of, "How was your day, Shankari?" "Oh my God, my day was horrible, I'm stressed." Saying, "I felt frustrated. I felt anxious."—that that alone can help us regulate our emotions, just this vocabulary.

(19:14):

And then we see the work of Resmaa Menakem, who's really been showing us that identifying and naming the states in our bodies also increases our understanding and awareness. And for Resmaa, he's recognizing that essentially the difficulties of holding racism in the body, whatever body, bodies of culture, white bodies, that there's a difficulty of trying to understand it with the head but not meet it with the body. So what he really encourages us to do is to name and identify the experiences in the body associated with our contraction around certain issues, whether it's racism, insecurity, fear of death. So I like this idea that one of the most important things we can do is labeling, identifying and developing a vocabulary of our emotions, both verbally and physically, and in that way we can communicate it to others.

(20:08):

When I think about especially some of our most destructive emotions, this is the passion of the Dalai Lama, to help us overcome those destructive enactments of our emotions. A lot of those happen, of course, with other people. That could be other people we're imagining in terms of very profound self-criticism or self-hatred. And that could be directly with another person with anger, fear. Without identifying our emotions, being able to communicate them, we have literally no hope. So I really understand why he wanted people to have this basic understanding of their emotions and names of them. And what's interesting too, is it really does align with this contemplative approach of first person introspection. We don't need, necessarily, to use a scientific approach from the outside to understand ourselves. We can use a scientific approach from the inside, really developing a subtlety as we did in our opening practice of, what are the sensations of emotion in my body and how can I use those to understand what's going on for me?

**Shankari Goldstein** (21:15):

I love that, Eve. I turned my camera off just because I want to make sure that the Internet's stable, I live out in the country here. So the Dalai Lama's vision of creating this Atlas of Emotion, I think it resonates so deeply for many of us on this call and just offering that guide for emotional exploration and understanding. How do you envision or how can you share this atlas supporting emotional wellbeing more on a global scale? And then also how is it serving as a shared resource for educators, parents, therapists, healthcare workers, these individuals that are in these high pressure situations and they're seeking to deepen their emotional intelligence?

How do you see this being passed down through generations and showing up in these different areas of work?

**Eve Ekman** (22:06):

I wish I knew exactly how people were using it. I get emails from folks and I know especially [for] therapists and parents and folks who are working in frontline jobs, it's really great to have this vocabulary they can use with themselves and with others. But it's interesting, especially when we talk about something like burnout. Burnout is systemic, it's institutional. And I always really hesitate, I've committed so much of my career to working with and understanding burnout, and I always feel a little hesitant to say I can support people with their burnout because I can't change policies and institutions. And that is a big part of what leads and contributes to burnout. However, our individual resources also really matter. Burnout is chronic stress. And chronic stress is when our demands profoundly outweigh our resources.

(23:01):

And we can establish and develop stronger resources. One of the things we can do to develop our resources is emotion awareness, labeling our emotions, identifying emotions in the body, and then also learning how to work with our difficult responses to our emotions. We don't need to get rid of our emotions, we just want to shift how we respond to them.

**Shankari Goldstein** (23:26):

We're talking about the wellbeing of health professionals and it being of such paramount importance, especially in preventing burnout and fostering that emotional resilience that you've been talking about, with the emotional awareness. How do you see it being integrated into healthcare, supporting the wellbeing of those that, again, have really dedicated their lives to caring for others? What's some of the work that you're doing?

**Eve Ekman** (23:47):

I was so fortunate in my postdoc at UCSF, there was a lot of interest in burnout at the time. And when I was doing my postdoc, there was a big shift, at least in the training of medical professionals, physicians specifically. There's all these expectations and requirements to become a doctor, all what are called competencies. You need to be very competent at these skills in order to qualify to be a physician. And one of the competencies that was passed by the American Medical Association in 2014 was empathy. And people were just losing their minds like, "Oh god." 25 years of medical education prior had said empathy is the way that you will feel burnout. You can't feel empathy for your patients, it'll be too much. But then all this amazing research revealed that empathy for your patients made their outcomes better, their physical outcomes better, their experience of pain better.

(24:44):

So anyone here who has had a family member, or yourself, has had a medical issue of any seriousness, you know that when there's a healthcare provider who cares, it makes a huge difference. It makes us more likely to show up for our appointments, to adhere to our medical protocol. So it was such an exciting time to be in the healthcare community as they're starting to care about empathy. And then, how do we work with the burnout of, when you care, there are these challenges or difficulties? So I got to not only design trainings around empathy and



sustainable empathy, I also got to investigate, what are the emotions that are difficult to hold for healthcare providers? Because it's one thing to say, "I'm stressed," but how do I intervene if someone just reports burnout on a day-to-day basis? We can intervene when we know that actually I'm feeling frustrated every day and I'm feeling frustrated because of my colleagues, or I'm feeling lonely and isolated every day because I don't really know where I fit in. So much more specific than burnout.

**Eve Ekman (25:46):**

So I created a really simple app in which people logged their emotions twice a day for two weeks. And among these residents in training, they all filled it out at least once a day, sometimes twice a day. So we had a lot of data, something like 1200 responses, and they were just doing it on their phone, through their shift, often really long shifts back to back. And from that data, I discovered not only the source of the difficult experiences of frustration and fear, but I discovered that day to day people felt a lot more enjoyment than they thought. 50% of all the emotions they reported were enjoyable. And it wasn't like ecstasy, it wasn't like, "I'm so happy, I'm partying." It was, "I got to make my own lunch. It feels good. I listened to a song. It feels good."

(26:35):

So 50% of all the emotions reported over two weeks were actually enjoyable, 17% were feelings of anxiety and fear, 14% were of anger and frustration. And that specificity and nuance allows you to create tailored programs. And that was this group. This was a group of internal medicine, pediatricians and family medicine residents—that might be different for neurosurgery, it might be different for physical therapy. And we have to really recognize that our emotions, what causes them, can be very heterogeneous, not only to the person, but to the team and to the group.

**Shankari Goldstein (27:13):**

I love that. And I think you talked about technology, you work in a very unique job that is in the tech sector. How do you see us harmonizing these digital experiences with our connection to the natural world, drawing inspiration from the grounding sources that sustain life?

**Eve Ekman (27:36):**

It's really, we live our lives through technology, most of us, a lot of our lives. And that was something that was so inspiring to me to start becoming involved in work in the tech sector. And I think that there's something that many on this call are probably familiar with. And these are these beads that you often see Buddhists wear around their neck or around their wrists, and these are called mala beads. And you count these to make your prayers. It helps you focus your attention. And a mala bead is technology. And if we use it with the right intention, it's really beneficial for us. And what we see in the literature is, it's not necessarily just use of technology, it's intentional use of technology. And I think cultivating these qualities of heart and mind where we actually know, not I want to be happy, but we know what it means to be happy.

(28:30):

We know the true causes of happiness. That's a real contemplative question. And that's one that I think contemplative sciences are so well suited to. Not just Buddhists, of course, many indigenous traditions as well, really take into the consideration of what is a good life, what is a



happy life? And I think we need to have that question in the forefront before we think about how we're going to use technology possibly to support it. It seems very clear to me that technology can help our awareness. The study I did with those residents, they were surprised how happy they were. They assumed because of their burnout scores that they had no moments of enjoyment throughout the day. But bringing mindfulness to their everyday experience through technology made them more aware of the good moments and made them more clear on what contributed to the difficult moments.

**Shankari Goldstein (29:24):**

I love this. Equanimity, that even-hearted response to life's ups and downs. And now you've got me looking at these beads in a whole new way. It's amazing. We have just another few minutes here before we move into the community-building breakout sessions, and plenty of time for you all to stick around and engage in direct questions with Eve. There might be things coming up, things that didn't come up in my questions to her, so I encourage you to stay on and ask her. But anything else you want to share? What do you have going on that's coming up work-wise, program-wise that you want to share with our audience? Any additional takeaways around this topic?

**Eve Ekman (30:01):**

Yeah. I think also in general, I really hope people stay for questions. It's my favorite part, learning what people are interested in and how I can meet them. And I think, in terms of the breakout too, I just want to say one thing about emotions in general that will probably be helpful for that. My hope in the breakout is that folks can come together and really reflect on an emotion experience. And that's actually tricky. We really think of our emotions as these long, all day... More like a mood. And emotion is really brief. Earlier in this call when the screen froze, I had a very strong emotion, because I wasn't sure, is that my internet? Is that Shankari's? So there was a momentary-

**Shankari Goldstein (30:50):**

I was checking all the things.

**Eve Ekman (30:52):**

... big rush. I had a feeling, there was a trigger to it. It was the screen freezing. But it wasn't just the screen freezing, it was the screen freezing right now, something that really matters to me, being available for this call, showing up. So if the screen froze on a normal work call, I'd be like, "Okay." So the trigger of our emotion has a lot of things that contribute to it. And then the experience of our emotion is in the body. We feel it. We learn about how to feel the imprints in our body. And then our response, my response I think was freeze. I was like... I didn't know what to do. Which is constructive, destructive, hard to say. It was just in the moment. But what we can really focus on, what we can really shift and change, is not our triggers, life is going to supply us with ongoing triggers, but we can start to bring awareness to what triggers us, what it feels like in the body, and most importantly, how we respond.

**(31:50):**

So even if our momentary response is not great, can we start to bring awareness and respond in a way that's helpful? That is the Dalai Lama's wish for all of us. Not to get rid of our emotions,

impossible, but to respond in helpful ways. And I think everything I do is dedicated to that. Cultivating Emotional Balance, this training I've gotten to teach now for the last 13 years, it's been such a joy. I've learned so much from my thousands of students, probably at this point, maybe some even here on this call. And we're offering it only once a year these days, as a full retreat coming up in October. That would be great if folks are in the, especially California, area, to have a full week to dig in.

**Eve Ekman (32:33):**

In Brazil, I think there are some folks here on this call from Brazil, there's also opportunities. And I just really encourage folks if they're interested in emotion, to use the online resources available, through the Atlas and otherwise, and do it with friends. This is really something that comes alive. There's nothing boring about emotions. Talking about our emotions gets exciting quickly, as I think you'll experience in the breakout rooms. So I look forward to hearing how you all reflect with one another on your emotions.

[Cut for breakout rooms]

**Shankari Goldstein (33:01):**

As people are starting to come back, maybe we could start Eve with this question that was in the chat. If you can, maybe share your reflections on Tania Singer's and others' work on distinguishing between empathy and compassion, specifically the way that compassion practices may be beneficial for healthcare workers. This participant said, "I'm a doctor working with other clinicians, and compassion practices have seemed helpful to mitigate some of the moral injury of the systems issues."

**Eve Ekman (33:35):**

Thank you, for that wonderful question and for the work you do. Absolutely. And I think it's really interesting to understand the relationship between empathy and compassion. It really can, not just feed our minds, which is nice, it's nice to have information, but I actually think it helps us internally regulate our experience. When we think of empathy, empathy has this incredible potential, but it's not a guarantee. Our empathy—one example I think of a lot from my time working in the emergency room is an example of a patient coming in, a patient who is often in the emergency room. Anyone who works in hospitals knows that we have folks who often, a lot of their needs are met through the hospital, so they come in a lot.

(34:23):

Let's say I see this patient come in and they seem and appear to be in pain. Now, my empathy is actually my immediate emotional resonance with that person's pain. And then my cognitive appraisal, which happens quite quickly, but not immediately at the same time. And that appraisal can lead to compassion, it can lead to distress and overwhelm, it can lead to even blaming and aversion. If my feeling of empathy led to compassion, I would see this patient and I would think, "Wow, they're here again. What might I be able to do to support them?" And that compassion doesn't necessarily mean I go over and embrace or even offer anything. That compassion is a stance. Matthieu Ricard often talks about this readiness of compassion. Our compassion is available. It's not necessarily that we need to generate it, we're always inoculating ourselves with this orientation towards, I care about the suffering of others. So that stance of compassion.

And then it may be there's something we can do. And I think especially for healthcare professionals, this leap of faith, that believing that just our stance of compassion is doing something...

**Eve Ekman** (35:35):

Because very often with our patients and clients, there's nothing we can do, we can't solve it or fix it for them. And that leads to a feeling of distress and overwhelm. So if I saw this patient and instead of feeling that, "What can I do?" and "I care," I might have a sense of, "This is too much. They're always coming in here. I can't handle how broken this healthcare system is. I can't." And that's the empathic distress. And you hear Tania Singer talk about empathic distress and the difficulties of empathic distress, but there's also a way in which I could see the same patient come in, they come in often, they look distressed, and I actually put it back on them. I say, "You know what? They were just here. If they wanted to help themselves, they would go follow up on the recommendations I gave. This is not my problem. I don't want to deal with this."

(36:25):

And so there my empathy, or my immediate resonance, turns into an appraisal of aversion and blaming. And if we're all honest with ourselves, we feel this for our patients and clients, all of these. Sometimes we feel them in succession with one another. And I think the question is, how do we have our empathy really help us cultivate that compassion? And the compassion can be so helpful, especially if we really have that idea that compassion, again, isn't necessarily the doing or the fixing. In my small group, which I had with some beautiful humans, I shared a quote that Pema Chödrön discussed with me. I got a chance to talk with her about burnout. And I said, "What can we do? How do we maintain this open heart of compassion?" And she said, "This will sound counterintuitive, but we have to give up all hope of fruition."

(37:16):

And she didn't mean give up, and she didn't mean stop caring, but stop having an expectation of how it will go. So hard, right? We want to know what we do is helpful, but actually if we focus more on our intention of compassion and really get that clear, then we're going to be always operating from the sustainable heart of compassion. And I do think often we immediately lend our compassion towards the other, which is beautiful, it's relevant, but there is a way in which, we might need to make a stop on the way to recognize that it's hard for us too, to hold the distress and suffering of others. Let's say I saw this patient come in, I saw them in distress, and I just took a moment and I was like, "My heart is heavy for this being who keeps coming in here, who keeps struggling. We don't have enough resources to house them, we don't have enough medication to get them well, they don't have family members in the area."

(38:15):

Really recognizing and then opening to compassion for this person instead of immediately pushing towards compassion. These are all words, but I hope for some of you, you know what that feels like. Our attention is the most invaluable asset we have, no matter what. Our attention that is kind, our attention that is curious. We can give it to ourselves, we can offer it to others. It is limitless, but it can get fatigued. So how do we have this attention of our empathy lead towards a sustainable compassion? It really is that emotion regulation to recognize, "Right now

I'm angry. I'm angry at the hospital for bringing this person in and not keeping them last time," or, "I'm so sad that this suffering is..." We have to be aware so that we can really care for ourselves, then care for others.

**Eve Ekman (39:07):**

I hope that's helpful. There's so much more to say, but one other thing: moral distress, I think it's so important to bring up this term, which has really permeated the burnout literature in the last five years. And this really helps us understand that it's not just a matter of, "There's too much to do," or, "It's too hard." But what I'm being asked to do is outside my capacity, it's outside what I signed up for, it's outside what I care about, it's outside of my values. So the moral distress of not being able to meet the demands of what patients are coming in with, not out of our own inadequacies, but out of the profound dysfunction of our systems. But even with that—this is a really big leap—we have to have compassion for our systems or else we just are going to lose ourselves in frustration, in that cynicism, that feature of burnout in which we just get negative and toxic.

**Question 1:** How do you weave together opposing ideas?

**Eve Ekman (40:16):**

I think this is very much related to my original professional training in social work, which is meeting people where they are. In this crowd, Mind & Life, I maybe tend a little bit more towards contemplative practice. I feel like there's an openness. But when I did my dissertation work in juvenile jail with the juvenile justice officers, I really leaned into stress. A lot of people care about stress, and if you want to understand your stress, you have to understand your emotions, because stress is an over-arousal of our emotion. And so often that's a way that I find myself able to get people interested in looking at emotion. And most people are interested in being happy. And so how do you get them like, "Well then, what's in the way? And how does it disappear?" And you can actually really translate a lot of the important features of cultivating the heart, of compassion, of lovingkindness, of empathetic joy and equanimity, in just very simple examples for people. And Buddha did it really well.

**Question 2:** What are your thoughts on the feeling tones vs. emotions?

**Eve Ekman (41:22):**

I hope this isn't a cop out. I'll give you a small answer, but then also I'll direct you to... Mind & Life recently gave me an opportunity to write an essay, it's only 3000 words, on emotion. And I really did my very best to encapsulate what I know about emotion in a way that's helpful, in the contemporary science. And it is complicated. It's so funny, there are different fields of psychology and within every field there are different camps and there is debate. And I think debate is wonderful. For the purposes of emotion awareness, the debate as to the socially constructed view of emotion or discrete view of emotion is somewhat irrelevant. Both of them are things we can investigate in our experience. So whether my anger is really sensations in the body or my anger is something ancestral, either way there's a trigger, there's an experience, and there's a response.

**Eve Ekman (42:30):**

And the more awareness I bring to those, the vedanā sensations in the body, the actual trigger in the moment of the systemic issues, or my historic issues... So I think bringing both into the camp of understanding our awareness is so helpful. But thank you for the question.

**Question 3:** What does compassion toward systems look like and how can we cultivate that among clinicians?

**Eve Ekman (43:01):**

It's interesting, that one is always a tougher one in working in the healthcare settings, especially also in criminal justice settings or any of those where there's so much dysfunction, education also. And I think it really comes into, what are our options? Our options are: To ignore and avoid, good luck, that doesn't really help. We could blame and feel anger. Well, that keeps us pretty stirred up. We could try to understand and analyze, and there's probably not going to be an answer to, why is this system so messed up? And we recognize the systems are made up of people. And those people want to be free from suffering, those people are interested in seeking joy. They might be doing it in ways that are shortsighted. They might be doing it in ways that are uninformed. But when we are holding that frustration, ongoing—and God, I love talking about anger, because I think people are so confused about anger.

**(44:08):**

Anger is an inevitable and important emotion. It can give us clear seeing. There is no social justice movement in this country in which anger wasn't an essential part. And if we just let that anger fuel us, it will deplete us, it's exhausting. So we have to find a way to apply compassion to our experience. And even in this outrageous way—and I know sujatha baliga has a beautiful podcast with Mind & Life that came out at the end of the last season of, how do we work with our anger? And sujatha baliga, who's been working in social justice for decades and decades, what really came to her was—from the Dalai Lama, who asked her, "Have you been angry long enough?" And so we think about these systems we're mad at, and it's like an inquiry. What is my anger offering me? Has it been long enough? Is there another way I can hold this hot coal so it doesn't burn me so much? Thank you for that question.

**Question 4:** What is your experience with Internal Family Systems in handling burnout?

**Eve Ekman (45:21):**

Internal Family Systems, there are so many beautiful ways in. What I often teach from Cultivating Emotional Balance is really educational, and not therapeutic. Though it reaches your emotions, the reason I like it is because it's more accessible for more people. I myself have received Internal Family Systems therapy for over five years, and it's wonderful. It's a really interesting way—again, everyone has differences of how they learn and what they enjoy—but it combines visualization and meditation with this healing. I also recently published a study on the Feeding Your Demons meditation, and Feeding Your Demons is a Vajrayana-based meditation combined with Gestalt therapy, in which we visualize and imagine our difficulty and then dialogue with it. It's a freely available research study. If you search for "Feeding Your Demons,

Eve Ekman”, you'll find the study. And it's the first that's ever been published in a peer-reviewed journal.

**Eve Ekman (46:21):**

And I think it's really important for us, especially if we're interested in meditation, contemplative science, to explore more deeply how visualization practices offer us an opportunity to work with difficult, disturbing emotions. What I love about Feeding Your Demons, it feels so aligned, which is similar with IFS, is: turn towards our emotion, turn towards, open. As with Milarepa, this apocryphal story of him coming back to his cave—this yogi who dedicated his life to practice—coming back to his cave and it's filled with demons. And he tries to get them out of there with the broom and scare them. He tries to wait for them to leave, and some of them leave, but the biggest one stays.

(47:04):

And he realizes that the only way is, he opens the demon's mouth and puts his head right in, and the demon disappears. So all of our avoiding, all of our “argh!”, against these difficulties, and the surrender and movement towards; it's a really amazing opportunity. I think that's what I'd love to close this part with, is: to be so curious even about our difficult emotions, what they can teach you, how they can inspire you, there's just such richness there.

**Speaker 1 (47:36):**

Thank you so much. And I appreciate that you shared that you've actually been doing it. That to me is an endorsement, because you did it for five years, not five minutes. So thank you so much.

**Shankari Goldstein (47:45):**

Thanks for your question. Really quickly before we do closing announcements and your practice, so stay on because she's doing another practice; can people see the reference for your research on the eveekman.com website? We're getting a lot of questions about, I guess your EMA study research? Where can they go to find out more about that?

**Eve Ekman (48:07):**

Yeah, on my website, there's talks there about it. And then I think the Feeding Your Demons article [is in the Zoom chat] too.

**Shankari Goldstein (48:15):**

Great. I highly recommend checking out the Insights [essays], the blog is amazing, our team has been passing that around in our chat channels. There's lots about what Eve talked about in that Insights essay. So thank you, Eve. Eve has shared this history of emotion science and how it's unfolded over these past few decades, revealing these intricate patterns and responses within our emotional landscape. So encouragement to continue to hold and explore this terrain with the remembrance of that earth beneath your feet and the grounding that it can offer. How can this call to compassion, I love that, this call to compassion and understanding of emotions enrich our daily lives, enhance our emotional vocabulary, guide us through this intricate web of



our feelings? Are these responses helpful or constructive for you as you continue to tap into the responses of your body? Those questions that you gave us just in the breakout.

**Shankari Goldstein** (49:09):

So wonderful to just walk throughout your day, to just hold that, how you're showing up in your body. So thank you. It's been such a privilege to engage in this enlightening conversation with you, Dr. Eve Ekman. And as we conclude, may we carry these wisdoms gained from today, honoring our deep connection with the Earth. Before we finish and we move into the closing practice with Eve, I'll just share that our next Mind & Life Connect session is going to feature Tony Chambers.

(49:39):

And I hope we can have a large chunk of our recent Summer Research Institute community, I see some of you in the background, all of our Summer Research Institute participants: come back on September 14th because Tony was unable to join us in New York due to family issues, so this will be the chance to participate in a presentation and dialogue with Tony directly. And it's a wonderful place to explore some really deep new questions that he's holding at this time. I had a fabulous meeting with him a few weeks ago. This is going to take place on Thursday, September 14th, and we'll post details directly after this session on our closing slides. So thank you all. Thank you, Eve. Can you guide us into a closing practice for our day?

**Eve Ekman** (50:24):

Absolutely. I thought we could close with a little compassion for our difficult emotions to experience. Before we get started, because sometimes we get a little nervous in the practice, can you think of a time you responded specifically to anger in a way that you regret? Maybe it was too hot, maybe it wasn't expressive enough, maybe you didn't say what you wanted to say. Can you think of a recent time where it just felt like, "Wow, I didn't do that right.", because we want to work with compassion towards a recent experience. And then again, inviting folks to close their eyes if that's comfortable, or just have them softly focused in front of you. Feeling that wonderful invitation to bring all of our attention and awareness to the body.

(51:21):

Feeling the support beneath us, that allows us to drop into the body, the support of the earth through the chair. And invite in a softening and a gentleness through the muscles in the face. Our 42 different muscle groups in the face, they just have so much activity, expressing, all day long. Let's give them a little ease and relaxation. Let's soften through the chest and the heart. And soften through the belly. And connect to the basic desire that brought us here together. Each of us came here out of some basic impulse of caring, caring for ourselves and caring for others.

(52:35):

And see if you can feel that basic impulse of caring. Maybe it's like a little spark at the heart. And as we feel that spark at the heart, we could imagine that this entire body is a body of compassion. Every cell in our body, every tendon, muscle has the capacity to be caring, to be kind. And then bringing to mind a time when we didn't respond in the most constructive way. We could vividly imagine this episode of frustration or anger where we just didn't act in our best way,



didn't act or live up to how we'd like to be in relationship. And feel the heart's longing, the aspiration to respond in ways that are more helpful, but also just allowing ourselves to feel the heaviness or challenge of this experience.

**Eve Ekman** (53:57):

Shaking hands with this feeling, maybe of regret. And then embracing, encompassing this feeling as though infusing it on all sides with that care, that compassion. Recognizing that each one of us on this shared virtual space, each one of us on this planet have instances that we regret; we don't always act the way we want. We are not alone and all of us need some care and tenderness as we develop our emotion awareness. And if it feels comfortable placing a hand on the heart, the symbolic, tactile gesture of care to our own difficulties. Considering this aspiration: may I really learn to know my anger. May I learn to more skillfully be with my anger. And may this support my ability to show up for those I care for and for what matters in this world.

(55:30):

And then extending our sphere of care. May all beings understand their anger, more skillfully show up with their anger, in this outrageous aspiration that all beings could feel connection and belonging, all beings could feel gentleness and kindness, that all beings would know a calm mind. A couple breaths, just feeling this intention or aspiration in the body. Gently releasing the hand from the chest and wiggling fingers and toes, blinking our eyes open if they've been closed. Thank you for your presence, for your interest, for your practice. Thank you so much Mind & Life, and Shankari, amazing. So great to be with you all.