



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

Mind & Life Connect Transcript

Tony Chambers

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Shankari Goldstein (00:00:08):

Welcome to this Mind & Life Connect session. My name is Shankari Goldstein. My pronouns are she/her. And I'm joining in from Charlottesville, Virginia in the United States. And we're gathering in this space with so many of us from all over the globe, many spaces of indigenous and native lands. There are nearly a thousand people signed up for this live event. And many of you will be watching this as a recording at a later date and time. So we're creating space in this container right now to bring you in with us today as well. So welcome to all of those that are watching the recording.

(00:00:42):

There's so much gratitude for virtual spaces like this for us to connect. And this community keeps getting bigger every session, from season one, cycle one, to cycle two. Looking at all of your faces, it's really beautiful to see you today. These virtual spaces share stories, build a scaffolding system of support. And these spaces can cause the mind to wander. So what we've heard is there's a lot of sensory overload, many images and boxes to look at, notifications when people chat, not to mention the sounds, the texts that are coming in on our phone and the images around you in your home or workspaces at this time.

(00:01:22):

So this is an invitation to just start to set your space up now in a way that feels whole, that feels clean and distraction-free. Saucha is one of the niyamas or observances in yoga philosophy, and it simply means to create a clean and pure environment, both physically and mentally, to support your overall wellbeing and spiritual growth. So let's take this time to maybe change your video view to speaker only for a bit, just to focus your attention on one person at a time. Maybe take a small piece of paper or a post-it note and place it over your chat notification box in Zoom on your computer screen so you don't easily feel distracted by any notifications during this session, because we keep hearing the chat's a little distracting for folks, so support yourself.

(00:02:15):

Place earbuds in to block out any external noise and chatter. And let's start our session by finding a comfortable place to land at this time before we introduce Tony. And when you're ready, just check in with your body. Find a quiet and comfortable space where you can sit or

stand with your feet or your sit bones firmly planted on the ground. And there's an invitation now for you to close your eyes if it feels comfortable to do so. And let's all take a few deep breaths. An invitation to inhale deeply, allowing your lungs to fill with fresh air. And then exhale slowly, releasing any tension or stress. And continue to breathe deeply and rhythmically. Just focus your attention on each little breath.

Shankari Goldstein (00:03:33):

And when you're ready, just check in with your body. Notice any areas of tension or discomfort. Take a moment to adjust your posture. And just creating a sense of ease and alignment. Spine of your back, allowing it to be straight and relaxed, like a sturdy tree rooted firmly in the earth. And as we begin our practice with one another, let's just take a moment to recognize the significance of fostering an environment that welcomes in and encourages safety, inclusivity, and open-mindedness. Throughout our session today, we're going to be exploring ways to address issues related around race, harm, inequality.

(00:04:56):

So let's collectively just consider how we can contribute to this positive change and advocating for meaningful impacts in the world. And as we continue to ground, let's focus on the idea of wholeness that Tony has invited us into today. Imagine yourself as a complete and interconnected being, encompassing your physical, emotional and spiritual aspects. Just moving forward, keeping in mind that practicing soulfulness involves nurturing all these facets of your being. Soulfulness. One of my yoga teachers, Faith Hunter, uses the phrase soul nugget. So to help you stay connected to this concept of soulfulness, here's a little soul nugget that you can hold today.

(00:06:45):

I am a vessel of change, grounded in my purpose. How can I bring wholeness to my actions in this discussion today? Take a few last moments to remind yourself of your breath, of this ease in your body, of this wholeness. When you're ready, you can gently begin to open your eyes, move your fingers and toes, and join each other back in this space. And as we come back, I'm going to introduce our speaker today, Tony Chambers. Before I introduce him, you're also going to have a chance to experience what we hope will be a reflective dialogue with him, and there's going to be an open discussion and Q&A.

(00:08:40):

And then we're going to encourage you to stay online and we're going to do breakouts with the other participants. And we're going to take about 10 or 15 minutes, time depending, and you'll be able to share takeaways of today's discussion as well as building relationships with folks from around the world. In the chat, you'll also see some added features to show captions, I think Ellen's put that in there for you to view as well. So I'm going to introduce Tony. Tony is the Director for Community Wellbeing at the Center for Healthy Minds, the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He's also a Senior Lecturer in Counseling Psychology, an Innovation Fellow for the Badger Belonging initiative, and the Director for Black Wellbeing Strategy at the Center for Black Excellence and Culture in Madison, Wisconsin.

Shankari Goldstein (00:09:32):

With a diverse academic background, he previously served as Vice President for Student Development and Dean of Students at Edgewood College and held roles at the University of Toronto, University of Michigan, and other institutions. Tony's work spans higher education, student development, civic engagement, with numerous publications and international speaking engagements. And he's just an overall beautiful human being with a lot of soulfulness, so I'm really glad that you all get to experience him today. Thank you so much, Tony, for making time for us, and I'm going to hand this stage over to you.

Tony Chambers (00:10:08):

Oh my gosh, Shankari, I'm overwhelmed. And a resume is the thing that only your mother can write for you, right? Because she can't say bad stuff about you in a resume. So big ups to mom for sure. So listen, I want to thank you and nisch and Amit, who actually is working with us at the Center for Healthy Minds, he's Visiting Scholar there. I want to give a big shout-out to my students. I teach a class of 360 or so undergraduates, the class is entitled The Art and Science of Human Flourishing. And it's a special group of people, first incoming students to help them understand themselves and help them develop skills to flourish in this really contentious world we live in.

(00:11:00):

I want to say hey to a few folks I see online there. Mohammed, I know you're out there. So big love for Mohammed, Mohammed from the Fetzer Institute, and a few other friends out there that just seem to pop up on the screen. I'm glad to see you. Hopefully what we have to share is going to be enlightening. I'm looking forward to learning from you all. So thank you so very much. And finally, I want to give big ups to my colleagues and friends at the Center for Healthy Minds because they've been really instrumental in how things have unfolded around me and in me.

(00:11:39):

As we were doing the reflection, as Shankari was doing our opening practice, I went to a space that I typically go to when I tend to get lost in the bigness of things, which all of us do periodically. So I had to remind myself, this little mantra I have is to remind myself who I am, and even more important, whose I am. Who do I belong to? To whom am I accountable? Why am I here? So I'm going to start off and try to keep that thread going through any of my comments that I have. And I have to apologize upfront; I guess I shouldn't, but I am anyway. If I look down quickly, it's because I have some really cryptic notes in front of me, and I don't want to go off track because I have a tendency to go to places where my mind and my heart takes me, but I want it to stay on track given the time that we have.

(00:12:44):

So what I'd like to do today, just briefly, because I think we have 20, 30 minutes or so for me to deliver some quick comments about the topics today. I want to do that. I want to also position myself in somewhat of an autobiographical way to give you a little background of who I am and how I came to do what I do and feel what I feel, give a little bit of that. I want to say a couple of

words about the topic that I was going to cover at the Mind & Life Summer Research Institute, mainly because the title of what I was going to do has generated a bit of discussion among my colleagues and other people. But there's a logic for it and I want to share that.

Tony Chambers (00:13:35):

And I wanted to close with some reflections on the role of contemplative practice in the lives of the kind of people that I want to talk about today, that is underrepresented people of color, mostly in my world, students of color and scholars of color, in predominantly white spaces, and the kind of conditions that we are experiencing and have been experiencing historically, and how contemplative practice or what I'm going to actually lean on, soulfulness, from Shelly Harrell's work, and how that enlivens us and can lead us to a place of healing and remembrance or reconnection. So I wanted to end with that. And then we could get into some discussion at some point in time during that period.

(00:14:27):

I'm hoping to get through all of that. So keep me on track, folks, if you will. Appreciate you. So like most of us, I'm guided by a series of questions. My life is guided by the big questions. And the question that I've tried to hold for most of my decades has been something like, what guides the success process? How do people come to a sense of being successful, particularly in the face of huge obstacles? And I'm speaking specifically about people in US society, but this is holding true for people across the globe because we're all connected in that way.

(00:15:17):

There are folks who have achieved many things, exceptional success, and they've done it in the face of extreme challenges, extreme obstacles. And then I try to localize, I try to localize my life question around the question, what's my role? What's my responsibility in supporting the evolution of this success among people who are facing extreme obstacles? And how do I do that and maintain this fidelity to this belief in the human capacity for justice, compassion, and love? How do I do this and still stay centered in this belief that human beings have this enormous capacity for justice, for compassion, and for love? And to be true, I honestly believe that human beings have that capacity. Sometimes we lose our way, but we still have that capacity to reconnect with that.

(00:16:18):

So my story is somewhat of a roaming journey. In fact, I'm writing a memoir now. And the title of my memoir, loosely, is called *The Uncurated Life*, mainly because I didn't plan any of this. I just sit still and let the universe push me around. So my story, I never intended on going to college. I'm one of these first generation dudes that wanted to go to the military or go work in a factory because that's what people did in my neighborhood. And I grew up in a segregated environment south of Chicago. Never encountered white people, never had a white teacher, never had a white classmate or neighbor. And my folks lived in this fairly insulated and isolated place where we had all of our needs met within the span of 10 blocks.

Tony Chambers (00:17:16):

I thought that was the world. We had all of our commerce, our work environment, all of our teachers from grade kindergarten through sixth lived in my neighborhood. We all went to church together. We all went to restaurants in the neighborhood together. It was the perfect bubble as I like to think about it. They knew my parents, my parents knew them. We all hung out together for the most part. Until I went to middle school and I was pushed into a space, because that's when busing started in some parts of the north, I was bused across town. Me and several of my friends who I went to school with bused across town to the white side of town where all of my teachers were white. We were positioned in groups for two years.

(00:18:09):

And of the 27 kids that I wound up in class with, four were little Black boys. And the rest of our classmates, 23 or so of them, were white students, whom I had never encountered the likes of before. And that started the process of me wondering, how does success, particularly amongst these really gifted kids that I was around, how does the process of success, succeed or move forward in the face of obstacles? I watched these young men, these boys who all were quite gifted, I have to say. I don't know how I wound up in this space with these guys. But these guys were really gifted. But somehow, the system and the way things were set up took the spirit out of them. And subsequently, one by one, they fail. They essentially were erased out of the process.

(00:19:12):

They might've been standing in human body, but you could tell that their spirits had been taken. And these are folks who, prior to the year, had been seen as promising, gifted, young artists, scholars, people who had much to give to the world. So again, that started the process. I, for some reason or another, survived that process. And the reason why I think I survived it, and I've had to think about this over the years and it's caused me a lot of angst, was that I was able to separate myself from myself. I could disconnect it from who I was, and almost hovered above the situation like it was an out of body experience. I felt nothing. I cared for nothing. I saw very little. I internalized almost none of it. But for some reason, that might've been what was necessary to survive that transition.

(00:20:24):

Now, fast forward a gazillion years, I went to college, never expecting to go to college. I had no intention, no desire, didn't know anybody who went to college, so I thought. And that further got me to thinking about this notion of success. And these are the people that I've chosen to work with because they resemble my trajectory. I didn't know what college was about. I didn't know the hidden agenda that was pervasive in those environments, that there were expectations that were unspoken, that there were needs that could or could not be met depending on what currency one brought to those spaces or didn't bring to those spaces.

(00:21:16):

So I became a student of process, a student of environment. And I think I've told some of my friends I became a student of whiteness. Because in order to understand, I thought and still

believe, in order to understand how to maneuver and how to accept and how to transform the world which I'm in, and this is the world which I'm in and my students are in, we had to first understand the folks and the environment. So I became a student of whiteness. I understood, just like my students and many of my other scholarly and senior colleagues, I understood how to dress, I understood how to speak, I understood what to value, I understood how to perform, I understood when and where to enter and when and where to exit.

Tony Chambers (00:22:13):

Now, at the same time, understanding that we all understand that we have to switch when we get back into our home space. So living two lives was not an unusual thing, and it's still not. And I see this in my students, and I'll get to that after a little while. So I spent time in the educational environment, went on to do other stuff, different degrees, pedigree, blah, blah, blah, how we do it in higher education. And I chose to become a faculty member after many years of trying to lead other initiatives at the institutional and community level.

(00:22:53):

So my trajectory down the faculty lane gave me an opportunity to engage with people in a different way until I realized there was a cost to be paid for being outside of myself, which again is not an unusual lesson. I lost myself, as many do, in the process of becoming something that I didn't know what I wanted to become, that was a recognized and respected scholar, someone who was accepted and responsible in a larger sense. It was at that point that I changed my focus to a process of healing. Someone asked me at one point during that time, what's the purpose of higher education? And my response, I didn't prepare the response, but what came to mind was, the purpose of higher education was to heal and transform.

(00:24:07):

Most people would think of higher education as a place where you prepare to get a job or somebody prepares you to develop a deeper sense of knowledge and skills to explore truth. My position has been and still is, the purpose of higher education, and I would argue the purpose of most sectors in a loving society, is to heal and to transform. And by that, I mean, if what we do does not help somebody's life, if it doesn't improve the human condition, if it doesn't heal hurts that have been transgenerational, that have been historical, that are pervasive and consistent, if we don't do those things and if we don't get people from a life of want and a life of pain, and to a life of joy and a life of love and plenty, then we have no purpose in whatever it is we do, whether it's business, religion, education so forth.

(00:25:17):

So that experience has led me, or that realization has led me into the spaces that I've been in throughout my several decades, let's put it that way. Okay? So I wanted to share that with you, to give you a sense to position the comments that I need to make about the work that I'm currently doing and the work that I've been trying to do for the best past several decades, and to try to tap into the topic that we're trying to explore today. And I'm hoping to learn from you all. I have to issue a caveat that this is my story and my story alone. These are my insights and my insights alone. You may be familiar with some of these in your own life, but these are my stories.

Tony Chambers (00:26:11):

And when I talk about the students that I'm working with and the colleagues that I'm working with, I need for you to understand that there is no single profile of any of the folks that I'm working with. Black students, brown students, transgender, lesbian, gay students, students with different abilities. None of the people that I care about and care about me are the same. Everybody has a different path, a different story. So I want you to understand when I say Black students, I don't mean that there's a monolith, that they vary, for sure—or Black scholars or brown scholars. And hopefully that's understood.

(00:26:58):

So we know that over the past three or four years, there's been several reckonings. One was a pandemic, which is not over by the way, just to be clear. The other is one that's been a repeat of many of its kind throughout history, and it's been called a racial reckoning. And this racial reckoning supposedly was stimulated by the murder of a Black man in Minneapolis, supposedly. Now, most of us understand that there's something that preceded that, that there's something that succeeded that, there's things that happened alongside that in parallel, and that this was not because of an isolated situation. Horrific as it was, it's not because of that.

(00:27:54):

But somehow, it tapped into a consciousness in the country and around the world that caused people to think that things were changing in a significant way. It tapped into, and I do mean around the world, to cause people to think we're transforming in a different way. Which is why, I guess, people called it the grand racial reckoning. Okay? I could buy it. During that time, many organizations, much like Mind & Life Institute, much like my Center for Healthy Minds, much like many of the organizations that many of us are a part of, decided that they needed to say something about this, issue statements, make sure that the world knew that they and us were on the same page, that we cared about something that was going on in the world and cared about the people who were blatantly impacted by what was going on in the world.

(00:28:57):

Did a little, I call it a cheesy study, some people call it something else, where we did an online assessment of what the websites of all 119 mindfulness based organizations around the world, what they were saying about issues of justice, support, racism, and the like. We did it pre George Floyd, we did it post George Floyd, and then we're doing it again years later to find out if there's been any changes given how society has shifted. Well, pre George Floyd, I could say that most of the organizations that we explored online didn't have statements. There were very few organizations that had leadership, and these are mindfulness based organizations, which all of us think have a different sensibility.

(00:29:59):

They didn't have statements. Very few had senior leadership. Even fewer had multiple staff. There are some that were outstanding, I have to admit, and I'm quite pleased with that. Post George Floyd, things started to shift almost immediately. Statements were issued, programs evolved during the time period, which is good. And organizations seemed to develop a

consciousness, and an active consciousness, about what could and should happen in society. Now, fast forward several years to now, we haven't collected data or haven't analyzed the data on all the sites, but given what's happening in our country and perhaps even around the world with what some people consider attacks on issues of inclusion and justice and diversity, many of our organizations that we hold in pretty high esteem, and believe have a different sensibility and consciousness around these things, have downshifted.

Tony Chambers (00:31:08):

Some of the statements don't appear to be there, at least prominent as they were. Many of the programs seem to have fallen into different spaces and not into very prominent spaces. Still very little attention to the increase of staff and leadership. So what that tells us is that what we considered at the time of racial reckoning and the potential transformation of societies was really episodic. Again, not a surprise. Many of us predicted it. And we predicted just a reversal across the globe, a reaction to the racial reckoning, which has happened. And this is where our students enter. This is the world which they enter now. The title of my presentation that I was supposed to do at Mind & Life was, how did I call it? Behind Enemy Lines.

(00:32:15):

And I was looking at resilience and looking at trauma and how the lives of these young people were being experienced because the experiences they were having reflected and resembled what happens with folks who are captives in war and what happens subsequently when they develop PTSD. Many of the same characteristics, many of the same dynamics these students are experiencing. And one student said to me, and I wish I had made this up, but I didn't. One of the students said to me, "It feels like I'm behind enemy lines."

(00:33:03):

And it struck me that they would see their position where they were, as a war zone. And it wasn't the only person, the only student that said that to me. They see their position as being in a war zone and that they are behind enemy lines, that they're not on the other side of the zone, that they're in the middle of it, that they're captives in a space, or potential captives in a space where they're subjected to a certain type of treatment and perhaps certain types of outcomes. Which in fact they are.

(00:33:46):

PTSD, we know from the sciences that there are different manifestations of it. You have behaviors that are altered, your physiology is altered, sleep is altered, diet is altered, ability to process information, performance issues are altered. All of that is reflected in the lives of the people that I work with, or the people that I've chosen to work with and who have chosen to work with me. Our students are experiencing the life of former captives of war. And I don't say that lightly, and I don't mean and don't intend to say that all the people who aren't like my students are enemies. So don't go to that place. Even though my colleagues challenge me on that. I'm not saying that everybody who is not like the people that I work with are enemies.

Tony Chambers (00:34:42):

It's systemically—all the systems which we exist in, suggest to these young people that they are in fact not in the right place. In fact, the place that they are in is a place that's not hospitable or supportive of their existence. And these are primarily, predominantly white institutions. Although, I have to say, we have students who are graduates of HBCUs, historically black colleges and universities, because of the way systems are set up, not just because of the way the people appear in those spaces, also feel like they're behind enemy lines because the systems are inconsistent with their lives and their values. Okay?

(00:35:31):

So I want you to hold onto that if you could for a minute. As I was thinking about the presentation at Mind & Life this summer, I was thinking about the role of resilience. And I don't know about you all, but when I think about resilience, I have leaned on the definition that resilience is overcoming outrageous obstacles. You overcome outrageous obstacles. Some people talk about grit, which I still don't think I fully understand. Having the sticktoitiveness and the chutzpah to get through these things in spite of it all, in spite of all the challenges and obstacles before you. To succeed beyond the obstacles.

(00:36:17):

When I think of resilience now, it's a different ball game. When I think of resilience, particularly as I learned from my students, it's that there are some characteristics of resilience that have to be in play. And it's not just beating the odds. It's—one has to have a sense of belonging. And what I mean by that is, a sense that somebody that's important to you, cares about you, somebody who has your back and you know they have your back. It doesn't have to be a lot of people, but that somebody has your back in that space, and that somebody is going to let you know that you're important and that you're loved.

(00:36:58):

The other thing that has to be present in these spaces in order for resilience to occur, from what I've observed and what my students have told me, is an opportunity for creative outlet. It could be through dance, spoken word, music, could be through anything, writing, which I think is one of the most prevalent forms of creative expression for our students. And it could be writing any way. The most important characteristic that they have shared with me, which is one of the hardest ones to achieve, is for our students and ourselves to have a sense of agency that we can make a change, we have the capacity and we have the desire and the resources available to us to actually make those changes, and we believe that we can do it. That is the missing piece for many of our students because there's this sense of hopelessness and haplessness.

(00:37:58):

In fact, if you think about one of the impacts of what's going on with our students, we know that there's a super-duper increase in mental health issues around college campuses with students, probably one of the most significant shifts in multiple generations. And one of the things that shows up in this milieu of mental health conditions is what our surgeon general Vivek Murthy has called this epidemic of loneliness. Now, typically when folks think about this loneliness thing,

they think about older people like me. We're just lonely people generally because we've had friends and others that have left us and we disconnect, and it's hard for us to make friends.

Tony Chambers (00:38:44):

But the generation that's experiencing the greatest amount of loneliness and isolation are those folks who are within our student categories, gen Z, if you will, generation Z. And these young people, because of this sense of loneliness and isolation, have higher degrees of depression, anxiety, suicide ideation, you name it. They're experiencing all types of maladies because of this sense of disconnect. And the pandemic has not helped the situation. In fact, it's exacerbated it to extensive degrees. And because of that, students of color, Black students in particular, because of all the other things they have to deal with, are experiencing these conditions at a much larger rate.

(00:39:38):

So they're dealing with not only feeling like they're behind enemy lines, as they define it, they're also dealing with issues because of this super increase in loneliness and isolation, which is related to some of the other mental health conditions that students are experiencing. And it's escalating. And it's finding its way in younger populations who ultimately sometimes wind up in post-secondary higher education. And that's the group that winds up at my door and I wind up at their door. So those are the conditions that we're working with.

(00:40:15):

Now, what is the role of mindfulness or contemplation or soulfulness in trying to shift the script or flip the script on these conditions? Now, I did mention the concept of soulfulness, and I do want to say, Shelly Harrell's work—and if you haven't read her work on soulfulness, I strongly encourage you to try to find it. And she has a center for soulfulness, which... Just go on her website. You'll find all the good stuff. The concept of soulfulness appeals to me much more, and I'm glad she introduced this to the world. This concept of soulfulness is more appealing to me than the concept of mindfulness.

(00:41:01):

Now, not that mindfulness is something wrong. But mindfulness, the way we have treated it in the world that I've lived in, is a singular focus dynamic. It is trying to be present, non-judgmental, right now, you're right here, right now in a non-judgmental way. But it's focused on the individual. Soulfulness, on the other hand, is experiential. It's how we engage the world. It's relational, how we engage the world with one another and around and about one another. And it's about collective emancipation or liberation. It is how to get us to the space where we feel free enough to be who we are and whose we are. That's how I've experienced Shelly's work.

(00:42:01):

It's also what I would call sensual, in that if you think of soul, particularly from my generation, I think of soul food. I think of soul music. I think of soul brother, soul sister. It's central because it taps into all five senses. When we engage in soulfulness, which is a contemplative practice, it's about how we smell things. It's about how we see things. It's how we feel things. It's how we

hear things. It's about all of our senses being activated. So when we sit to practice, or stand to practice, or walk to practice, or write to practice, or listen to practice, those things in a soulfulness practice activate our entire anatomy. It activates all of our senses. It activates all of our relationships. It activates all of our connections to the world and our behaviors.

Tony Chambers (00:43:04):

So it's not just sitting. Not that mindfulness has to be that, but it's not just a singular practice. And that's how I see soulfulness. One of the things that was made clear to me when I started thinking about this soulfulness thing, and Shelly doesn't say this, but when we talk about mindfulness, it's been referred to as self-transcendence, to bring one out of oneself, not to be connected. It's almost a disembodiment. But not to be connected to oneself, to be bigger than or more than or outside of oneself. The phrase that comes to mind in my conversations with people is this concept of self-imminence, and that is to bring one to oneself, to connect to oneself, to heal oneself, to remember, reconnect. It's not about taking oneself away from oneself.

(00:44:12):

And those are the practices. When I work with our students, over the last several decades, and work with my colleagues and engage my colleagues, what I try to help all of us understand is that we're worth it, and that we've been hurt, and that a process of contemplation is about the healing. It's about reconnecting to our history, reconnecting to the self that we want to be and that we know to be, reconnecting to all that has been laid before us, before we got to where we are. And it's also to transform conditions from where we are and where we could be and all done in the spirit of love and compassion. Try not to escape that point because it's easy to become cynical and to let hate take over. And we can't do that, or else we won't be able to do the healing and the transformation.

(00:45:07):

That's where I am. I've jumped all over the place. But I thought I'd just provide some fodder for discussion at some point. And I am totally open to wherever we want to go with this.

Shankari Goldstein (00:45:17):

Yeah, Tony, thank you. Who knew I had a name for my practice? Soulfulness. I love that. So beautiful. And I just want to say that this is such a rich discussion, and I don't want anybody, nor yourself, to feel rushed throughout this process. So we're going to opt to not do breakout rooms and just allow these last few moments with each other to be open Q&A, dialogue, sharing, the conversation back and forth that you really wanted to create. So if you have some opening questions for them, we can do that. We already have a hand raised so we can bring them up.

(00:45:52):

But basically, Tony's got some questions in mind, possibly. And once he asks them, you can go to the reactions button at the bottom of your toolbar and raise your hand, and I will bring you up live. And there's already so many awesome people like Apteem. Yay, this is great. So Tony, anything to start before we start opening up the questions?

Tony Chambers (00:46:18):

I had a bunch of stuff to start with, but I'm really curious, what moved you? What did you hear? What did you hear and what landed for you? And I'm just interested in where people are in a more general sense. So I have a bunch of questions. If we get stalled, my questions will emerge. But I sense that we won't get stalled. So go for it folks. Let's hear what you got.

Shankari Goldstein (00:46:43):

Amazing. So Apro from Houston, come on.

Apro (00:46:51):

Thank you Shankari, and thank you Dr. Chambers for doing this for us. So I'm in Houston, Texas, and I've been over the last 15 months working in Uvalde, helping co-create a contemplative community of care. And when you said the key ingredients for resilience, a lot of that made sense. I don't disagree with any of it, but one thing that I've been coming up against in Uvalde and really in all communities that I've worked in is this idea of belonging. And I guess my question for you is, how can we belong to each other when both sides are right?

Tony Chambers (00:47:41):

Oh my gosh. I love the question. I absolutely adore the question. My instincts are telling me that the opposite of a right is not a wrong but is another right. And that's not to have moral equivalency thrown in the middle of the thing, but to be open to the possibility of right. Now, there are some wrongs, to be clear. Uvalde, painful. My oldest son lives in San Antonio and his relatives live in Uvalde. His wife's relatives live in Uvalde, so his relatives. And the pain that sent through our family was unimaginable. So I vicariously understand the pain.

(00:48:33):

So how can you have a sense of belonging? Now, one of the things when we talk about belonging that we don't talk about—one of the things that exists that we don't talk about is, in order to belong, the people to whom you want to belong or the reality to which you want to belong, have to want you to belong to them. And that throws the equation off a bit. When we talk about our students here and trying to craft a sense of belonging... And I lead an initiative at the University of Wisconsin called Badger Belonging, where we're trying to get people, particularly those who've had a history of being told that they don't belong, trying to have them create a sense of belonging.

(00:49:12):

And the pushback obviously is that some feel like they're behind enemy lines and that they are not wanted. So why would they want to belong to a space or to a situation in which they're not wanted? Where we landed, and this might be instructive, it might not help at all, but where we landed is, belonging is both an internal job—it's an objective reality, and it's a subjective reality. Now, the subjective reality is the one we typically lean on, and that is, one has to have a sense, one has to have a feeling that they belong, one has to have this belief. It's subjective. Individuals determine this to some degree.

Tony Chambers (00:50:02):

But then there's the objective component of belonging. And that is, we have to have the rules, policies, resources in place in order to address conditions that have been missing, that have caused this sense of not belonging. If there are policies and practices in place that have supported this sense of folks not belonging, period—not even developing a sense of belonging, but not belonging, then those need to be addressed in the same way as trying to create a sense, a subjective sense among folks that they belong. It's not enough to just want to belong, is what I'm saying. It's not enough. There has to be some other things in place to push the needle in a more systemic and objective way.

(00:51:00):

So hopefully, I don't know how that fits into the question, but that's how we've been trying to deal with it in spaces I've been.

Shankari Goldstein (00:51:15):

Thank you. Kuya, do you want to come up and ask your question?

Kuya (00:51:17):

Yes, thank you. I'm living in Creston, British Columbia in an agricultural area, and we're currently trying to pull together a climate action plan. And there are two factions that I've been trying to work to create a sense of belonging among us. And it doesn't work to belong. They're never going to belong to the left, and I'm never going to belong to the right, and nor would I want to. But I do belong to the land. And resilience, resilience in our Canadian and the American First Nations and Indigenous people all over the world have demonstrated amazing resilience in the face of huge oppression. And for me, it's because they have that sense of belonging to the land.

(00:52:07):

And the people that are on the other side, to use the othering language, they think the land belongs to them. And that is a conceptual shift, to understand that we belong to the land, the land does not belong to us. I don't have a question, but thank you very much for connecting that, the resilience and sense of belonging. And right now, I've got a Kootenay-wide discussion group going via Zoom about the book *A Future We Can Love*. And to me, that's a beginning. Usually, we're talking to the choir, but here, we have a wide variety of people, so we're getting into the late adopters. It's good. So thank you very much.

Tony Chambers (00:53:04):

So much respect for the work you're doing. So much respect. And for being clear about, you belonging to the land and the land owns you, you don't own the land, which has been a very Cartesian thing that's happened in Western society. We've embraced and accepted and owned things that we can't own. There's no way we can own the land. The land does own us. And so does other parts. But we want to own it. So thank you so much. Also, I wanted to give a shout-out to my Canadian friends, right? I lived in Ontario for 12 years, spent a lot of time over in the Okanagan and Vancouver Island. Good folk over there. So loving it, loving it. Keep up the good work please. Please.

Shankari Goldstein (00:53:59):

Thank you, Kuya, I think you were talking about *A Future We Can Love*, right? Which is our very own Susan Bauer-Wu's book. So I hope that's what you were talking about.

Kuya (00:54:19):

I just wanted to note that there are low income people in this thing, and Mind & Life has donated five books to this process, and I just wanted to acknowledge that. Thank you.

Shankari Goldstein (00:54:34):

I'm glad we can support you. I want to make space for some extra questions. Should we still keep going in this format, Tony?

Tony Chambers (00:54:42):

Yes, let's do this.

Shankari Goldstein (00:54:43):

Yeah? Good. Okay.

Tony Chambers (00:54:44):

I'm enjoying this a lot.

Shankari Goldstein (00:54:45):

You're enjoying it. Awesome.

Tony Chambers (00:54:45):

I'm learning a lot, let's put it that way.

Shankari Goldstein (00:54:48):

Yay. Okay. Sylvia, you can go ahead and ask a question.

Sylvia (00:54:58):

My name is Sylvia. I am 78 years old, Mexican, and I live in an elder's house. And most of what you said is happening here, of course. I'm Mexican and I'm Jewish, and tomorrow is [the Jewish] New Year. So I feel like I'm ready to make a jump, a quantum jump in change. And I started taking several risks using my voice, trembling with fear. But if I don't speak, I will become like the rest of the elders, say now with dementia, negating the reality that the emperor is naked. So thank you.

Tony Chambers (00:55:55):

No, actually, thank you. Thank you. And to be clear, the emperor is naked. So, truth. Truth and respect. Thank you. And let me know if there's anything I can do to help elevate and amplify your voice because it's a voice that needs to be heard for sure.

Shankari Goldstein (00:56:18):

Great. Let's bring up Jeanne, Jeanne Catherine. We always love to hear from her.

Jeanne Catherine (00:56:25):

Thank you. I had no idea where I was on the list, so I wasn't sure if I was going to make it. Thank you so much. I was not familiar with soulfulness, so I downloaded her work and I'm excited to read it. And I can already see there's a lot of overlap with a construct that our research team researches, which we call Innate Health. But the overlap is this idea that every human being has this capacity for wisdom, creativity, healing, wellbeing in the face of all kinds of obstacles, and that we're seeing that in the world.

(00:57:05):

And I guess I found myself wondering... I'm really a student. I'm getting my PhD while I'm working with this research team on these projects. And I find myself wondering, what experience do you have working with other groups? These concepts have some overlap. Like some of the Buddhist concepts have overlap. I mean, obviously Mind & Life is a place where I've come to have these conversations and it's such a relief to be talking with people talking about these things. And I just wondered what was your experience in working with these different constructs that have so much overlap? Any ideas about that would be lovely.

Tony Chambers (00:57:49):

Yeah. I've spent a whole, pretty much a lifetime in collaboration with folks. I don't do much alone, never have, never will. So my work has been pretty much all over the world. I work with a group, or with some of the people in a group down in New Mexico, in Santa Fe, the Academy for the Love of Learning. And I think they do some pretty interesting stuff down there in transformative learning. And it's an active awareness group. So they focus on understanding the inner and the outer life or the relationship between the inner and outer life and how it applies in the process of learning.

(00:58:37):

So there's more to it than that, but I think they do some really good work down there. When I was at the University of Toronto, we formed a center for transformative learning, which not only has a bunch of scholarship going on, at least it did, but there's active engagement in community spaces. My life's work has been focused on community engagement, or at least looking at how certain institutions in society, how they live out their public purposes. And we believe that, based on how we think about a democracy or whatever kind of social system is set up, that there is a common responsibility for all sectors to address the wellbeing and the public good.

(00:59:28):

So my work has been working with people in Ireland, people in South America, in some parts of South America, certainly people in the US or groups in the United States. If Mohammed is on here, I did spend some time at the Fetzer Institute for a bit as a program officer. He's doing a much better job than I did when I was there. So big ups to you man. And I think we did some pretty fantastic work there. I think we have online here, Kate from Oregon, University of Oregon,

who has... we've been in and out of connection around some of the course that we're trying to teach on the Art and Science of Human Flourishing. And we're taking that work to communities all over the place.

Tony Chambers (01:00:23):

And my biggest—and now the thing that gives me much joy is working to develop this Center for Black Excellence and Culture in the Madison area, which is a model that's being taken up in other parts of the country to provide space for communities of color, to have healing and cultural spaces within spaces that have heretofore not had those kinds of spaces. And all of it is rooted around the concept of belonging. All of it. So it comes in different forms.

Shankari Goldstein (01:01:01):

Okay. We have time for just a few more questions, including one that was written in that I might not be able to get to. So let's go to our people that are raised first. Mangalam, sorry if I mispronounced your name.

Mangalam (01:01:15):

Yes, my name is Mangalam, and I am from Toronto. I just want to thank Tony. You brought this soulfulness. That soulfulness touched me because I belong to an organization called Initiatives of Change. So Initiatives of Change is an organization where, like Gandhi says, you be the change. If you want change in others, you be the change. So this is what Frank Buchman also says, the same thing. And it is so close to what you said, soulfulness is like, we listen to our inner voice. I think all of us have an inner voice. So we have time every day, we spend half an hour or 20 minutes every day just to listen to ourselves.

(01:02:05):

Now, I am religious. I have been more than 50 years in religion, Franciscans. And I did contemplation and meditation and all these activities. But then when I came to know this Initiatives of Change and practiced that quiet time, my life's changed. My life is changing. I won't say it changed completely. It's changing. Because every day, I sit and listen to myself. And myself speaks to me. Myself says—because in this organization, we practice the four values of honesty, unselfishness, purity of intention, and unconditional love.

(01:02:51):

So I listen. When I listen to myself, I know there are many things I take for granted. We call this green lies. I tell every day so many lies. Every day I fail in unselfishness, for example. Everything centered on myself. So I just want to thank you, Tony, for bringing that soulfulness, it's connecting with me. And if we can only... I have given my life. I have committed now to Initiatives of Change. It was called before Moral Re-Armament. I'm so happy. And I am happy when people talk, bring that connection to this organization. So thank you so much.

Tony Chambers (01:03:43):

No, really thank you for the hard work you're doing, and for doing it in a space that's near and close to me. I love the people of Toronto. I mean, I would live there now if you all would bring

down the wall a little bit and let me back in. There is a saying from Maya Angelou, which I use probably maybe two times a day. And the saying goes something like, "Take a day to heal from the lies you've told yourself and the ones that have been told to you about you." Take a day. Sometimes I say just, take a minute. That is my reflection. Take a minute to heal from the lies I've told myself and the ones that have been told to me. And just sit with that. Sit with it for a minute. I hear what you're saying. Thank you.

Shankari Goldstein (01:04:42):

Okay. Christina.

Christina (01:04:45):

Hi there.

Tony Chambers (01:04:46):

Hi.

Christina (01:04:47):

Thank you. I loved hearing everything that you've been speaking about. And it's funny because you mentioned Maya, who is somebody who I've been reflecting on for the past three years or so since the pandemic, throughout.

Tony Chambers (01:04:58):

Oh yeah.

Christina (01:05:03):

And I'm currently in Kingston, Jamaica. I was in London for 10 years. But I've always inhabited the professional space, and being a woman of color in a professional space, especially working in the UK, which is completely different from the Caribbean, us Caribbean people, we're a lot more outspoken. But in terms of belonging and what you've mentioned, I was just wondering, when you were inhabiting that space where you hovered over things in order to, should I say, to continue existing in that space and being safe—what I've been reflecting on from Maya Angelou is around, her saying around, that you belong every place. And she then continues that you also belong to yourself. I belong to myself.

(01:05:48):

And I've realized that I've been lucky because of my parents who were in London and experienced racism in the sixties and so on. They were able to give me their account of how it impacted them. And I was lucky enough to grow up in a majority Black space within Jamaica. So my experience of racism when I moved to London is completely different than others. So my real question for you is about, when you're hovering in that space, do you ever reflect on, you're not tied to belonging in one space, and in order to survive, you have to focus on yourself and that you belong everywhere?

Tony Chambers (01:06:30):

That's a very good question. And to be clear, I no longer hover in that space. I'm pretty true to myself, almost to a fault. And other people will probably tell you that know me, I don't have too many filters about truth. It comes the way it comes, and it's digested the way it's digested. But it always comes from a perspective of compassion and love. I never intend to hurt anybody. And I always want people to know that my intention is for us to find a common love, common space of love. So do I hover or when I hovered... That would be quite generous to say that I thought about what I was doing.

(01:07:08):

I think, at the time, as a young person, I was extremely confused about the reality that I was in. And at the time, like many of our young people, my reaction to being confused was to escape. I'm a creative soul. So I believe in making up stuff. I believe in creating something from nothing, artistically. And that was my reaction. It was to create a fantastical world that included me, but didn't include me in that space. I created a different reality, which I referred to as hovering.

(01:07:52):

And I think that the thing that separated me from my dear friends and colleagues of that age was they lived too close to the bone. I mean, everything was real to them in real time. And my imagination allowed me to escape reality, which can be pathological at times and it can go too far. Which hopefully it didn't, but it can, and it has for some people. So yeah, it would be quite generous to say I thought about it, but I just knew myself well enough that my hovering was an attempt to create an alternative reality.

Shankari Goldstein (01:08:30):

Thank you.

Tony Chambers (01:08:35):

Thank you.

Shankari Goldstein (01:08:38):

So I think we should probably wrap up, but we did have one write-in question. Maybe you can answer it really quickly, Tony. And I also have a link for the Center for Healthy Minds. But somebody wrote in, "Can resilience be taught?" And I also have a link to a page about resilience from the Center for Healthy Minds too, that might be helpful for folks.

Tony Chambers (01:09:01):

Can resilience be taught? Yes. And it also can be learned. And that was a pretty snarky response. But yeah, it can be taught. And most importantly, it can be learned. But the thing about resilience, I do have to warn us, that it's not static. It's fairly dynamic. And it changes depending on circumstances. And we could be resilient in some spaces, but not resilient in others, because we have the sense of resilience in [some] difficult situations, [but] other difficult situations might challenge us to the point where we can't respond the same way.

Tony Chambers (01:09:39):

So it's not something that we just put on and it's on for good, for always, for everywhere. That it does depend on... And it's a practice. Resilience is a practice, just like any other contemplative thing or anything that we want to improve in or around. It's something we have to be diligent about and do as much as we can and be conscious of the dimensions that contribute to our own resilience for sure. But do it out of love and compassion, if I may warn you. Please.

Shankari Goldstein (01:10:10):

I hope that was helpful, Tenzin. Any last closing thoughts, Tony? I think we're out of time for questions. We're going to close with some quick announcements and a short practice. But anything you want to share with our audience?

Tony Chambers (01:10:25):

Just thank you. I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to learn from you all and the opportunity that you provided, not just me, but the people around you and the folks you care about and those that care about you, and to know that you belong not just to yourself, but you belong to others and others belong to you and with you. I appreciate you. Thank you very much.

Shankari Goldstein (01:10:54):

Appreciate you. Thank you so much for joining us. And as we wrap up this conversation with Tony, thank you so much for giving your time. Let's remember that transformation, as he shared, it begins with us. We've explored this profound shift of power in society and the role of higher education in shaping our world. But it doesn't stop here. As Tony just shared, it begins. We must drive systemic change and reshape power dynamics collaboratively, reflect on history and challenge these established norms and let compassion guide us. Together, we can uncover these unintended consequences and navigate trauma and nurture resilience and usher in belonging, as he shared.

(01:11:36):

So let's close by practicing a little soulfulness and advocate for these inclusive spaces. Before we do a closing soulfulness practice, I just want to share that our next Mind & Life Connect session is going to feature Jon Kabat-Zinn. Always excited to get into a conversation with him. It's amazing that I'm coming off of Tony to go into Jon. Two very amazing presenters. And his session is titled What Is Your Karmic Assignment. And I'm certainly excited to find out what mine is. And this is going to take place on October 5th, Thursday. And you can register for this event now and we can chop it up, as they say, with Jon.

(01:12:19):

So let's close our session today with a practice and gratitude. We'll take these last few moments. Just find a comfortable posture one last time. You can close your eyes. You can lower your gaze. If you want to lay down, if you want to stand up, if you want to walk around. And let's come back to that soul nugget from earlier today. I'm a vessel of change, grounded in my purpose. How can I bring wholeness to my actions today? And let's include gratitude now. How can I bring wholeness and gratitude for all beings into my actions today?

Shankari Goldstein (01:13:25):

And then take a moment to think of everyone outside of this call, your neighbors, those who you may be in conflict with, those suffering around the world, sending them loving compassion that they deserve at this time. How can we bring wholeness and gratitude to them today? And then lastly, turning within, to yourself, your own heart. How can you bring wholeness and gratitude today to yourself and beyond this day? When you're ready, you can bring any movements to the fingertips and toes, maybe bring the hands together at heart center in Anjali Mudra, in prayer, and just bow to your own divine inner light within.

(01:15:06):

And thank you all for joining. Thank you, Tony, once more. And I hope you're all blessed for the remainder of your day. Thank you.