



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

Mind & Life Connect Transcript

Jon Kabat-Zinn

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Retrieved from [video recording](#)

Shankari Goldstein (00:00:04):

Welcome to this transformative Mind & Life Connect Session, where we will embark on a journey of collective wisdom and inner exploration. I'm your guide for today. My name is Shankari Goldstein and my pronouns are she/her. And in this virtual space, we come together from every corner of our beautiful, interconnected world. I'm seeing people from Germany, San Juan, Charlottesville, yeah, more people from Germany, Italy. It's incredible. And may we acknowledge that the sacredness of all of the Indigenous and native lands upon which all of us are joining, which we stand today, are acknowledged in this space too.

(00:00:46):

So there's over 2,500 people signed up for this beautiful experience with Jon Kabat-Zinn as well as watching simultaneously on our livestream. And we also know that more will join us in the future as they delve into this recording. So, welcome to everyone. And just a reminder in about a week, that an official transcript of this program, along with the edited video, will be available on the Mind & Life Connect webpage. So keep your eyes out for that email.

(00:01:15):

So in this very moment, we create a vessel, a container that welcomes you into the rich tapestry of our shared consciousness. We hold deep gratitude for the existence of spaces like this one that enables us to bridge geographical divides, exchange stories, and construct a strong support network. However, in the vast landscape of all of these virtual realms, the mind continues to wander freely. Our senses are often bombarded with a multitude of images to gaze upon and notifications and phone pings that beckon our attention and the incessant hum of technology.

(00:01:51):

So amidst all of these digital distractions, find yourself a space that nurtures your wellbeing and take this opportunity to shape your immediate surroundings. Change your speaker view, place your phone away, cover your Zoom chat notifications, whatever you need to grant yourself the gift of this undivided presence.

Shankari Goldstein (00:02:12):

So now that we have all of those housekeeping items out of the way, I'd love to introduce our guest, Jon Kabat-Zinn. Jon is a renowned professor emeritus of the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He's known for founding the Center for Mindfulness and the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Clinic. He's authored 10 books translated into 40 languages, influencing mindfulness in various fields worldwide, including medicine, psychology, education, and more.

(00:02:42):

Jon's work has led to mindfulness programs in over 700 hospitals globally, and he also lectures and leads workshops worldwide. He's a Mind & Life Fellow, a Mind & Life Founding Steward, and he previously served on the Mind & Life Board of Directors, so clearly he's a Mind & Life rockstar. This is my third or fourth time getting to be in a dialogue with you, Jon. Such a pleasure. Here we go again, and I'm going to hand it over to you.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:03:10):

Thank you Shankari, and wonderful to be here. And, hi everybody. You might take a moment, as you know I like to do, and just put your view on gallery and take a look at the faces and the environments of everybody who's here today. I love doing this because there's a certain way in which mindfulness is about being at home in your life, being at home in your own skin, being at home in your own moment, which is always this one. And so, we can see each other, everybody's at home or maybe at work or maybe someplace else, but for the most part, the world has arranged for us to be at home in many different time zones. So, just to acknowledge that we're part of some larger unfolding of intentionality.

(00:04:14):

And the subject of today's... I'm not going to zoom through all 24 screens that are open at the moment, but just to say a deep and profound welcome to you and the very fact that you've taken the time. There are almost 600 people right now tuning in. The very fact that we have taken the time to do this means something, and it means something really profound. It's a signature diagnostic that the question, what is my karmic assignment, means something to you.

(00:04:56):

And, it doesn't matter—I'm looking at people of all ages here, including children. The sooner you start asking this question, the better in a certain way. And it's not meant to be driven by anxiety or any kind of concerns about who you are or your worth, but much more a question of what it means to be human and in the form of you, and at this moment in your life. And no matter what age you're at, the challenges of the particular moment that you and we find ourselves in are extraordinary. And those are challenges that the entire planet is facing, as you all know.

(00:05:45):

So the confluence of meditative awareness, mindfulness, social activism, and planetary concerns about not just global warming but many, many other consequences of the way we have chosen to live since our Industrial Revolution of several hundred years ago, really require in some sense a whole new level of consciousness, a whole new level of awareness of how we

use resources, even recognizing what resources we have and what your individual contribution to both yourself, your family, and the larger world could be if you were in complete alignment with, what?

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:06:40):

I would say with what you most love, with who you are when you drop more and more deeply into what you most love. Or, if you don't know yet, or you don't know because it's a complicated question, let me just remind you that the not knowing is more important than any answer that your mind might produce. That the potential to stay in not knowing is so profoundly catalytic, and it's synonymous with wakefulness. It's synonymous with mindfulness meditation because you're not meditating to try to get somewhere else. You're meditating to actually realize where and who you already are.

(00:07:29):

I'm preaching to the converted. Any Mind & Life audience already knows this, but there's some value in us gathering together like this from time to time and affirming it. And the way we most affirm it is to embody it, and the way we are most able to embody it is to begin in silence, or to drop down into a silence that's here all the time. And just... Whether you're sitting or standing, or lying down, in some kind of formal meditative way, begin to feel that this moment is... You're alive. And, you're alive sitting in front of a screen, I know, and a person talking with you, hopefully not at you. But ask yourself why you tuned in today.

(00:08:43):

And, don't try to fill up the space with answers. Of course, everybody knows why they tuned in one way or another, but why did you really, really, really, really, really tune in? And now, let whatever that is, and not knowing is probably the biggest and best and most honest answer one could give in a certain way, along with all the reasons that you might have, and let's actually together take up residency in the not knowing heart and not knowing mind. So that means resting in awareness. Your eyes can be open looking at the screen, or they can be closed because we are present through so many senses, far more than five, that we can feel and hear whatever is unfolding inwardly in our hearts and outwardly on the screen with the eyes even closed.

(00:10:07):

And see if you can be 100% at home in your skin right now and aware of a sense of the body as a whole in whatever position it's in, but I'll assume it's in some kind of dignified position or repose, and just opening to the actuality of wakefulness right in this moment, awareness right in this moment. And we don't have to say awareness "of". The awareness has this property of being like space, boundless. There's no beginning, no end, and no center to it. And it's not something we have to get because it's something we're born with, but we do have to cultivate access, ready access, reliable access to it. And that's what we're doing when we meditate formally and carve out some time on the clock to take our seat as a radical act of love and sanity and wisdom. Not to get somewhere else, but to actually drop into who and where and what we already are in this timeless moment we call now.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:11:50):

And then just rest here with no place to go, nothing to do, nothing to attain. And then ask yourself in this stillness, if you will, in this boundless spaciousness of awareness... you can introduce the question, "What is my karmic assignment in this moment?" And I'm not going to unpack what that question means or what the word karma means. It will be good enough no matter what you think it means to just listen deeply to what the world is calling out of you and what your unique constellation of elements or tendencies, your loves and your intuition and your genius, let's say, how it intersects with the longing and the beauty and the suffering in this world. In ways both little—so it doesn't have to be some kind of 'save the planet'—but little and big. And as you know, the little's not so little. Tiny little insights can transform the entire world.

(00:13:55):

Tiny little acts, when in alignment with the full dimensionality of your being and your love, transform the world. In fact, it's probably the only thing that's ever transformed the world. And so, just rest in the questioning, what is my karmic assignment?

(00:14:48):

Another way to put it is to listen to your intuition and ask the question, "What is my job on the planet, with a capital J? My calling? What do I love so much I'd pay to do it?" That's a little flip on working or jobs. Of course we need energy coming in in all sorts of ways, including money. But work works in an infinite number of different ways, and the imagination is just that kind of infinite repository or reservoir of possibilities that's reflected in every single one of us.

(00:15:48):

So what I'm inviting, it'll be absolutely different for every single one of the now 664 people on our screens. Absolutely different, and at the same, coming from the exact same place, the human heart, when it asks this kind of a question. The human heart, when it trusts your own deepest nature, your own beauty, your own infinite possibilities. And you only need one of those possibilities to actually manifest in a way that might be profoundly satisfying, both in terms of its contribution to the potential to alleviate suffering in some way and to enhance beauty and creativity and wellbeing somehow or other. And in your own life in terms of wellbeing, an embodied at-home-ness. Sometimes we use the word equanimity, you're just at home.

(00:17:47):

So at home that there really is no place in this moment that you have to be. No place to go, nothing to do. No special something to distract you or fill up the time. It's just pregnant with possibility and beauty and wonder. It's simply the nature of this moment when we don't try to extract anything out of it, but just reside in this way, in it. Questioning who we are, what we love, and how we are in relationship to everything. And can we live our lives in such a way, you could call this mindfulness or heartfulness, that we actually in all our encounters, inwardly as well as outwardly, family and work and in the larger world, optimize wellbeing and wisdom and kindness, and minimize self-centered contraction that often leads to the kinds of things we're seeing in the world so much of the time? Greed, hatred, ignorance, delusion, self-ing itself, the attachment to the personal pronouns and investing them with an energy and momentum that is

only oriented towards me and what I need and what is best for me, which is the exact opposite of asking, "What is my karmic assignment?"

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:20:16):

Your karmic assignment is not really about you. In fact, it might be synonymous with the question, "Who am I?" Because who you are will give rise to whatever needs to come out into the world in ways the world is, you could say, starving for, yearning for, even dying for.

(00:20:48):

So with that said, let's just rest in awareness and I will stop talking because the talk is just meant to invite you into the space inside, underneath and in between the words. And, the word we use for that is silence. And silence in my vocabulary is really synonymous with the wakefulness and the awareness that is already here and that we're inviting ourselves to bathe in and luxuriate in. So we're not doing this for any external purpose. We're not trying to figure out what your job is on the planet. If you don't know, we're just asking and then resting in the not knowing. And you only have to ask once or twice. Invite the questioning into your heart and then just let it sing or chant or sound or dissipate. Whatever arises. And we hold it all, moment by moment by timeless moment, in this silence, in this awake-ness that we call awareness.

(00:24:57):

Now, as you continue sitting here, I would invite you to allow your eyes to open if they've been closed, and notice that the awareness is the same awareness, whether you have your eyes open or you have your eyes closed. If you could only be aware with your eyes closed, it would be really very sad.

(00:25:45):

And before we move into questions, which is what I would most like to do, I want to just invite Shankari to say a few things in response to what you've heard and in the context of what Mind & Life is trying to create with this whole series, and then we're just going to go into dialogue, which is, as those of you who've sat with me before whether online or in real life—in person I should say—the dialogue, the exchanges between us, they're not like, "Oh, after we do the meditation, then we do the questions and answers."

(00:26:47):

No, it's all part of the meditation practice because the real meditation is nothing other than living life moment by moment as if it really mattered. So this is all meditation. If you got up and walked around, that would be meditation. When you go downstairs and make dinner or put your kids to bed, that's meditation. It's all meditation. Life is the real meditation practice, not sitting in some contrived posture on a zafu for some period of time.

(00:27:20):

But let me just say, the more you sit in some contrived posture on a zafu or chair or whatever on a regular basis, preferably very early in the morning to start your day, like tuning a violin before you play it, then there's a convergence between the formalized meditative practices that are

strengthening the muscle, if you will, of mindfulness, and the real application of it in everyday life where there's actually no separation and it's all one creative work of beauty in every single face on this screen and on all now 28 screens. Insanely beautiful.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:28:11):

And I'm not talking about narcissistic, "Mirror, mirror on the wall" stuff, but just recognize no matter how old you are, no matter how young you are, you are truly insanely beautiful. The world, the entire universe has come up with you for a very short period of time, it turns out. It's called a lifetime. And if you're lucky, it's longer, but the fact is that it's very, very brief. And so, the more we can capture the infinite space and time of the non-dual in each moment, that's the way to live forever. To make maximal use of all your moments.

(00:28:58):

So, Shankari, over to you. Let's keep this at about three or four minutes and then we'll go to Q&A.

Shankari Goldstein (00:29:05):

Yeah. No, I think that what you shared, the thing that stuck out the most was complete alignment with what you most love. That line was so beautiful. I often struggle—I'm not teaching yoga as regularly as I used to. I'm doing more farming and herbal medicine and feeling like, "Oh, well, I'm not living in my practice," and so I really appreciate that, that this karmic assignment is being in complete alignment with what you most love.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:29:34):

And, this is living in you, that you don't need to live in your practice. Maybe your practice is living in you.

Shankari Goldstein (00:29:39):

Yeah.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:29:40):

And then, there's no separation.

Shankari Goldstein (00:29:42):

Yeah, I love that.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:29:44):

You don't have to feel so bad even if you say, "Well, I'm not doing my yoga as much as I should." How many of you ever think that or say that to yourself? But then you don't have to feel so bad because what I said about meditation is the same for yoga. Everything you do with your body is yoga, if you bring awareness to it. Everything.

Shankari Goldstein (00:30:05):

When I last heard you speak at SRI, you talked a lot about upstream and downstream policy, so I know you want to go to Q&A, but I want to talk more about this because I feel like we're in this space where everybody is talking about the challenges and the tensions that may arise when we balance the need for collective healing and the urgency of addressing systemic problems. So, can you talk a little bit more about the upstream and the downstream? Because it makes me think of... I think her name is Nan Goldin. She's an artist, and she said today, young people... really praying that young people would get out on the street and protest.

(00:30:51):

And, I know you are a fellow protestor. I think I read somewhere that you used to protest with the Black Panthers and other organizations back in the day. That seems like such a different generation from a lot of people now. It's like we saw it in 2020, there was momentum, and now people just want to be in peace. They want to rest. They're exhausted. How do we balance this tension when people want to use collective healing through kindness and sitting on their mat and focusing on their mind-body healing and wellness, when the need for action is so critical?

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:31:28):

It just gets a lot more complicated when you get out there in the streets or when you're trying to influence things in one way or another. The fable of upstream-downstream, or the metaphor of it is that in terms of medicine, where I used to use that story a lot, the story goes that there's this village, and it's by a river, and they're finding more and more bodies floating by in the river. Bodies. People. And they're trying to rescue them, get them out of the river and resuscitate them, and they build a giant hospital by the side of the river and they develop all sorts of effective teams for going out in boats and capturing people, and resuscitating them in the boat before they can get them to the dock and then get them to the hospital.

(00:32:35):

And, they get really good at rescuing people and saving as many people as they can, but they're not thinking about, how are all these bodies getting in the river in the first place? So what's happening upstream becomes really, really, really important. What is the root cause of our suffering? Whether that suffering is in the form of the gigantic challenges facing the planet where just, climate change, you see it everywhere in the world. It's wreaking unbelievable havoc and it will do more. And, I don't even like to talk about it that way because it inspires so much fear or concern.

(00:33:28):

And, we're probably among the most privileged of people and immune or protected to some degree from climate change, but not for long. If you live below sea level in Bangladesh or something like that, or-

Shankari Goldstein (00:33:43):

New York.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:33:44):

Pacific Islands or wherever it is, I mean the entire planet is experiencing this. So, it is an all hands on deck moment, but what I'm saying about 'what is your karmic assignment' is asking the deep questions about yes, what can we do at this particular moment to ask the deep questions about what's happening upstream, and to the degree that we can, transform what's happening upstream. But, this has been going on for centuries. It's not like all of a sudden, humanity is going to wake up and there will be no greed or hatred or delusion.

(00:34:24):

Just watch what's going on in the United States House of Representatives in the past two days. You're seeing greed, hatred, and delusion on the part of a very small number of people who somehow, because of the calculus of the system, they've been able to completely paralyze an entire government. Out of what? Out of self-ing, out of self-interest, out of small self-interest. That even if you get what you want, it's going to not be healing or helpful.

(00:35:00):

And so, the root problem is the human mind when it doesn't know itself. And we could think, "Well, we're the elite, we know ourselves. We're good meditators, and all of that stuff, it's all those other people." No. If we're honest with ourselves, we know greed, hatred, and delusion operate within us as well, and we have to really exercise the muscle of self-compassion and mindfulness and kindness to actually minimize the harm and maximize the good. So, that's where upstream and downstream intersect.

(00:35:36):

And what I'm trying to say in this conversation, and in this inquiry, is that this solution's not going to come out of one person, or one government, or one ideology. It's going to come from all of us, the cells of the body politic of the world, taking whatever actions we can, and non-doing is a fabulous action. Gandhi was really into non-doing and brought down the British Empire by practicing non-doing. When you have a million people on the Mall of the Capitol bearing witness in silence, that would be a powerful political force.

(00:36:27):

How that might come about, who knows? Or, maybe something else will come about, but that's why I'm encouraging all of us to ask this question, "What is my karmic assignment?" Whether you're 20 years old or you're 200 years old, I don't care. As the great yogi, Bob Dylan said, "If you're not busy being born, you're busy dying." So even if you're 90, or 100 years old, be busy being born.

(00:36:53):

And, your karmic assignment is not over because you retired. You never retire from your karmic assignment, you just grow more into it. Or, it changes in ways that, maybe your transmission is to your grandchildren, new life, or to your neighborhood, or whatever it is. But that's the thrust behind bringing what looks like nothing on the meditation cushion, but turns out to be just about everything important about human wisdom, insight, compassion, clarity, equanimity. And, you

can't meditate in the house that's on fire and just say, "It doesn't bother me. I'm beyond time and space." You have to actually get off your cushion and put some water on the fire or call the fire department, or rescue the babies or whatever it is.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:37:49):

And so that's the invitation of this question, this koan really, zen koan, "What is my karmic assignment?" So, don't beat yourself up because you haven't had any ideal response to it like, "Oh yeah, now I know. I should know by the time Jon stops speaking." Nonsense. This is a lifetime's inquiry, a lifetime inquiry. And you'll only know here [inside yourself]. You may not ever be able to articulate it with your voice.

(00:38:25):

So, let's go now to invite-

Shankari Goldstein (00:38:28):

Questions, yeah. So if you want to, you can click reactions and raise your hands and we can bring up somebody live to ask a question. Great.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:38:44):

And tell us what your name is and where you're calling from, if you wouldn't mind.

Victoria Martino (00:38:50):

Jon, my name is Victoria Martino. I'm calling in from La Mesa, California, summer weather here again. My question... Actually, I'm so delighted, I signed up for this as soon as I got notification of it from Mind & Life Connect, but it's more timely than ever for me personally. And, I apologize to this huge group if it's not relevant to you, but I think the karmic calling is, clearly we're all here for the same reason in that sense. I'm in the performing arts and also an academic lecturer in art history and literature and music. And, I was just having a debate last night as it happens, with my very best friend from college who is also a musician, or was, but he has become so disturbed by what he sees as the end of the world being imminent. He's very progressive politically and in every respect, and he reads the entire New York Times—he lives in New York—from cover to cover every single day diligently before he even starts his day.

(00:40:02):

So he was attacking me in the sense that he felt that in this urgent situation in the world today, it's no longer appropriate to be involved in the arts, and that what we all need to do is get out there and protest and do what we can to make a difference and volunteer, et cetera. And while my heart is there as well, I don't know in terms of karmic calling, I feel like especially at my advanced age to make a shift seems like it might be... Well, not bogus, but gratuitous, if you know what I mean.

Victoria Martino (00:40:42):

I don't know. So I wanted to bring that before you and maybe other people who have professions that aren't overtly in terms of social justice and working with politicians, et cetera—a message for those of us that are in very different fields.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:41:02):

Well, first of all, thank you so much for the question. I'm sure it's relevant to lots and lots of people. There are no dime store answers to this thing, and I think it would be folly to give up your love. I think what the world needs more is for you to bring your love out more into the world in a certain way and trust that your contribution, which of course your mind is going to say isn't activist enough or is not going to make a difference... Don't sell yourself so short. Maybe the intersection of your meditation practice with your artistry can come up with—I mean, that's what artistry is, it comes up with new solutions or new possibilities that can make a huge difference. And, artists have always had a political influence in the world and transformed things and uplifted things.

(00:42:00):

Just think of Picasso's *Guernica*. Yeah, he didn't stop the civil war, but he gave us something that really shows us a certain kind of anguish in war that should of course result in us never harming each other, but it hasn't so far. But, I think we need to be very careful that we don't idealize a certain outcome and then sell ourselves short. None of us are going to save the world, okay? None of us are going to save the world. But every single one of us is the world, and so the more you can bring your creativity to the process, especially if you're an artist of any kind... That's why I think this question of 'what is my karmic assignment' is so profound. It's a koan. There's no right answer. There's no one answer, but by keeping asking, you may come up with all sorts of interesting connections that are non-linear, totally outrageous, and may just contribute to the world in fantastic ways.

(00:43:17):

So let me take this opportunity, I was going to do it anyway, to recommend a book by somebody I had never heard of who is insanely famous, but I'd never heard of him. But my daughter gave me this book a while ago, and it's about creativity, and the subtitle is *A Way of Being*. And so, I like that: *A Way of Being*. Because that's what mindfulness is, it's a Way of being, and we could say with a capital W. So, you don't have to consider yourself to be an artist, to be an artist. From my perspective, you're all artists. We are all artists. We're artists of life, we're artists of love. We're artists of parenting, we're artists of whatever it is that we care about that's coming out of a certain kind of unique creativity that the world really needs. It needs more artists to be out there.

(00:44:21):

And yes, you can go out and protest or you could do all sorts of different kinds of things. And I'm basically suggesting that when we align ourselves with these kinds of questions, we'll come up with what I call orthogonal options, options that are beyond space and time and thought and not linear. And when they happen, everybody will say, 'Well, why didn't I think of that?' But, you know, they come up. And if in 661 people, even one of those comes up, we'd be way ahead of

the curve as a community, as a Sangha. So the book, because I don't want to go into it in great detail, but the book is called *The Creative Act* by a fellow named Rick Rubin, whom many of you probably have heard of because he's one of the record producers of pop music that's super successful.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:45:15):

But, this book is pure mindfulness. When I read it, I understood why my daughter gave it to me. It's like he's using the word creativity, but what he's talking about is awareness, pure awareness, mindfulness. The word's not even in the book, but I think if you read this book and you have a meditation practice, you will see how many different potential intersections there might be to your creativity and to not sell yourself short—which is a very big part of it, is how easily we lose faith in ourselves if we don't have faith in ourselves in the first place, and then say, "No, I can't do that. Someone else can do that, but I'm not talented enough, lovable enough, beautiful enough." Whatever it is. And that's all just nonsense. It's just thinking, and we're learning in the meditation practice you don't have to believe your thoughts because none of them are true. And certainly, none of them are true enough. So again, I could say a lot more, but let's go to Joshua.

Victoria Martino (00:46:25):

Thank you.

Shankari Goldstein (00:46:28):

Joshua, do you want to go ahead and unmute? There you go.

Joshua (00:46:31):

Yeah. Can you see me?

Shankari Goldstein (00:46:35):

Yes.

Joshua (00:46:40):

Okay, great. First of all, Jon-

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:46:43):

You just grew a beard, but that's no problem.

Joshua (00:46:46):

Yeah, right. That's age. But anyway, I want to thank you so much because I teach mindfulness to incarcerated individuals at Rikers Island Prison.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:47:00):

Oh my goodness.

Joshua (00:47:01):

And I have to tell you, I have seen a profound transformation in these individuals. And yesterday, in fact, I just completed my first cohort of nine individuals in the maximum security facility who have gone through eight weeks of mindfulness practice, and the officers came up to me afterwards to congratulate me—and, it wasn't me. It was them—for the transformation that they have seen in these young guys as a result of learning how to practice mindfulness skillfully.

Joshua (00:47:44):

One of the questions that comes up is that part of your definition of mindfulness, of non-judgmentally looking at thoughts and emotions, and they don't get that. So I always find myself having to use another way of describing it as non-reactive or-

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:48:09):

Yeah, that's very skillful because the word judgment, since judges and courtrooms play such a big role in their lives, maybe non-judgmental carries a certain kind of nuance that it's more skillful to say it differently.

Joshua (00:48:27):

But don't we make value judgments? Aren't we required to make value judgments about what is good and what is not good?

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:48:43):

You know, those are not judgments. If you listen to your heart, you'll know what's harmful and what's life affirming. Everybody will know that, even the most hardened criminal, unless they're just a brain-damaged psychopath. We've seen a lot of those, actually, running around. But in general, even if you're in prison, and I spent four years working with people in prisons in Massachusetts, you can connect with what's deepest and best in your heart. And you do not have to criticize yourself or judge yourself for having thoughts of one kind or another. And when you begin to see them as storms in the mind or weather patterns rather than the truth of anything, then they dissipate, and over time with practice, as I'm sure you're seeing in these people, I'm thinking kids maybe mostly-

Joshua (00:49:55):

Mostly.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:49:56):

...that they will discover that they have an intrinsic goodness, they have an intrinsic beauty, but it's never been seen by anybody else on the planet except maybe you in this meditation class. And all of a sudden, they're beginning to realize, "I don't have to live a life and generate karma that is just going to get me staying in prison or back in prison over and over and over again because I can't break out of my own mental imprisonment." And that's where the attachment to name and form, and believing in your thoughts is true and your emotions is true, is really important.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:50:37):

Now interestingly enough, Rick Rubin talks about this in that book about creativity. These kids might love Rick Rubin's—they'll love his music because it's all Beyonce and all the big hip hop stars. He's their producer. But he meditates while they're making the music, and he's listening in a very deep way. Now, that's what meditation is, deep listening, so listening to what's deepest and best in yourself. And if someone doesn't give up on you... I mean, I'm sure that in some sense you must be the lifeline for these kids because at least you see them not as just bad people who are just deserving of being locked in some hole for the rest of their lives.

(00:51:30):

And when people feel seen, all of a sudden they realize, "My God, maybe I shouldn't be generating as much trouble as possible because that's all the world has ever given me." But that requires an awakening, and that's what meditation can do even for kids in juvenile hall or in... Rikers is one of the worst hellholes on earth.

Joshua (00:51:51):

It is.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:51:52):

Right in the middle of the East River in New York City, so within view of the billionaire class in New York City, and you've got these teenagers who are being locked in cages basically. And there's something wrong with this picture. That requires a diagnosis of our society that we can make a difference. If you wait for the Congress, they're not even going to be able to do any work. So I'm saying yeah, sooner or later maybe we'll make laws that will be better and they'll be enforced with greater compassion and clarity instead of the racism that's so much part of the process.

(00:52:34):

But in the interim, trust that these kids or people, however old, are capable of love. And when you come at them with that and you offer it yourself and the practice, most importantly, it establishes resonances in them that are profoundly awakening, not just healing. So I just bow to you, Joshua. That's a hell of a thing for you to be doing, and I'm so glad you got to share it with all of us.

Joshua (00:53:09):

Well, thank you. It's a privilege and an honor to hear you today.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:53:14):

Keep up the one great work.

Shankari Goldstein (00:53:17):

Thank you, Joshua. Lori, do you want to go ahead and unmute?

Lori LaRiviere (00:53:26):

Hi, I'm Lori LaRiviere. I'm a psychiatrist in Chico, California. I work with Butte County Behavioral Health as the first street psychiatrist working with unhoused individuals. I want to say thank you very much, Jon and you who are hosting, I'm very grateful for all of your teachings. Jon, I actually had the opportunity to have dinner with you back at a Mind & Life Institute thing, so it's super good to see you. I just had a question with regards to whether or not... I believe that our unhoused situation in this country is the greatest symptom of our delusion of separateness, and that the only way we're going to solve this issue is if we can recognize our interconnection, and that requires coming from a top-down approach as well as a bottom-up. And for the bottom-up approach, I imagine that the only way that we're really going to be able to help folks is to find them safe, secure, dignified shelter.

(00:54:32):

But I believe that if we could incorporate some kind of transitional supportive model that included a retreat-like environment that was intentional, sustainable, provided wellness, and also provided the education that we receive when we're practicing, when we're doing this type of practice—which is getting to learn our brain, recognizing that our brain was built for survival, and our mind is here to thrive. And if we can connect with the mind and awareness, and with love and kindness and compassion, recognize that everything that we do is a manifestation of our desire to be happy and free from suffering, and sometimes that stuff is really stupid and unhelpful...

(00:55:24):

Yes, I recognize that's judgment, but I'm just discerning harm versus benefit. And then, also the wisdom, so clarity and compassion and wisdom of recognizing our interconnection. And, I just am working with an urban design planner that has developed a beautiful model of shelter that is a single room occupancy that would provide the dignity and safety for these folks. And I really am hoping to be able to find someone, especially... I'm in California, like I said. We need legislation that's going to support this type of thing. We need funding that's going to support this type of thing, and I know in my heart that this is where I belong [inaudible], and I just really need some guidance and support. So, I just am putting that out there.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:56:20):

Well, I'm looking at the clock and we're running out of time for this unfortunately. First, I just want to bow to you, Lori, because you're obviously acting on your love and your insight, and not necessarily on your training opportunities or what you were trained to do in medicine. And to work with-

Lori LaRiviere (00:56:50):

I do that, too.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:56:55):

Yeah, but I'm saying you're working with the unhoused, and that is a word that didn't used to be familiar to anybody, and now look at all the people in the United States who are unhoused. I

mean, it's insane. And yet, if you just think about it for a minute, the people that are making out the best in this world at the moment—and you can see it because of what's going on in Ukraine and of course, what's going on in Ukraine is an abomination. But think how the arms manufacturers are making out. Every time you shoot some kind of shell, you have to replace it. And they're running out of shells and ammunition and airplanes and drones and everything else, and billions and billions of dollars that could house people around the world are being spent. And, we call that defense.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:58:03):

The really best defense is to get in close with the people that you have the biggest disagreements with and have some kind of collective recognition of the stupidity of that. That's what the martial art of Aikido is. And in one way, the koan that I'm asking us to ask ourselves, of what is my Job on the planet with a capital J, or what is my karmic assignment, is how do we actually shift things from a kind of 'the house always wins' sort of shell game, where the enormous resources of all the taxpayers in the world are going into armaments, when what we really need to do is stop the aggression inwardly and outwardly, and then house people, give them jobs, give them some basic income.

(00:59:00):

I don't know what, because the entire world is being disrupted by the digital age, and sooner or later, work... It's not going to be the Industrial Revolution anymore. And so, we're facing giant problems, which is exactly why we're asking this question.

(00:59:18):

So without being able to say any more about it, just the deepest of bows to you for what you are doing, and just keep up the one great work. And I think you will find that there are people out there mysteriously who have resources that could actually support what you're doing, or other people like you are doing. So, never give up.

Lori LaRiviere (00:59:40):

Thank you so much.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:59:41):

Shankari, do we have time for Natalia?

Shankari Goldstein (00:59:48):

Yeah, let's see if we can get to two more. Natalia?

Natalia (00:59:53):

Hi. Thank you very much for the teachings, and thank you very much-

Jon Kabat-Zinn (00:59:58):

Where are you calling from?

Natalia (00:59:59):

I'm calling from London, but I'm Brazilian. Brazilian calling from London.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (01:00:03):

Brazilian. Okay, lovely.

Natalia (01:00:04):

And my question is, if you could please kindly expand on that notion of being compassionate towards yourself when we know what is our karmic assignment, but we have the underlying feeling that we are not doing enough.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (01:00:30):

That's easier than you might think, okay? Because that underlying feeling that you're not doing enough is just a thought. And, what this meditation practice allows us to do is actually recognize that it's just a thought. And it comes with a feeling to it, but mostly it's a thought, and it's a thought that often is a limiting thought. It's a shaming thought. It's setting limits to or criticizing what you're doing. And it may be true that you could do more, but then why not switch things around, move into creativity and ask, "Being who I am and doing what I'm doing, what else might I do without exhausting my resources or myself?" And so, that's what it means. I mean, that's the yoga of living, to stay in balance. You stretch a little bit, but you don't stretch to a point of breaking or tearing anything.

(01:01:37):

And, you learn to balance between this and that and so forth. And you grow stronger by working with resistance, not against resistance. All these are principles just as the martial art of Aikido is a principle for working with the actuality of things in ways that are actually in alignment with wisdom and compassion.

(01:01:59):

So again, I have enormous conviction that just because there are so many people on the call, we can do this in one way or another. And it will not be over in my lifetime or any of our lifetimes, but we can change the world because we're changing our relationship to our own hearts and our own bodies through this really profound, liberative meditative awareness that we're cultivating that's beyond thought.

(01:02:37):

So as long as you're caught in the mere thinking, even if you think the thoughts are true, thoughts may be true, but they're also still limiting because there may be some bigger thought that will create something very, very different. And that's where that way of being that Rick Rubin is talking about and the creativity that might come that you can't predict. Even the moment before, you won't be able to predict this. But it can come when you're really listening in a very deep way.

Natalia (01:03:05):

Thank you.

Shankari Goldstein (01:03:07):

Patience, everyone. Seven generations to healing. Olivier?

Olivier (01:03:20):

Yes, I'm calling from France. I'm in the Pyrenees.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (01:03:22):

Bonsoir.

Olivier (01:03:24):

And first of all, I want to thank you so much, Jon, for your guidance at the beginning of this session, for somehow helping us or bringing us a little bit close to a place inside where we can actually look at this question, what is the karmic assignment? And, there is a feeling, there is a sense, how important this question is—that it's the only way probably to somehow connect with some kind of deep choice to be aligned with this karmic assignment and with the main intention of our lives. This question is so important.

(01:04:16):

In your guidance, the pieces of answer which came up had to do with the presence, had to do with heart, with connecting to the heart, to the heartfulness. And yet, with this question of karmic assignment, it's so important, and yet, I find that the answers that come up are so elusive, so difficult.

(01:04:46):

You mentioned it in your guidance. I find it so difficult to find this answer which can somehow help you steer your vehicle.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (01:05:00):

Yeah, don't look for answers. That's the biggest problem, and that will make you very frustrated and unhappy. The power of a koan, the zen koan, is that it's not about the answer, it's about the question. You just keep asking the question, and as best you can stay in deep, deep, deep listening and not knowing. And that involves a certain degree of trust, but none of us would be meditating if we didn't trust in some sense that it's possible to contact the deep actuality of who we are in this moment, because otherwise we'd just be living on autopilot our whole lives and then die.

(01:05:50):

And we would be the story we tell, or other people tell, about who we are and the stories we tell ourselves—what's wrong with me, what my limitations are, why I am not this or that, enough this or too much that, or whatever—these stories are never true. But we live a lot in our story of me, and that's why the personal pronouns are really in some sense severely imprisoning. And this

practice, even though you have to in some sense recognize the importance of pronouns that are not recognized in society by other people because there are more pronouns than just him and her... and that's happening globally, worldwide. I'm not talking about those kinds of third-person pronouns. I'm talking about first-person pronouns, I, me, and mine. When we are imprisoned in the I, the me, and the mine, we're imprisoned. Awareness is never imprisoned by the I, me, and the mine. It just sees them as thoughts or mind habits.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (01:07:06):

And, they're not true enough. So the more we can rest in and be the knowing that awareness already is, including the not knowing, then everything becomes possible. And you don't have to listen to those thoughts that say you're no good, or you're too old, or you're too young, or you're too this, or you're too that. And, just trust. And even the tiniest little things that you do, if they come from that place of not knowing, that place of open-hearted spaciousness that is what awareness is, then that will be a contribution. The mind might say, "Oh, it's too small a contribution. It's not going to save everybody in Ukraine, or it won't save the people in Uganda or South Africa or Cambodia or China or wherever." We're not in the business of saving other people. We're in the business of actually waking up as humanity, and then the saving takes care of itself.

(01:08:12):

That's my proposition for this afternoon or this evening.

Shankari Goldstein (01:08:18):

I think that was helpful to a lot of people. I'm sorry, I don't think we have time for one more question, just because I'm not sure if we can keep it short and sweet and we want to be mindful of everybody's schedules and Jon's time. Any closing last thoughts, Jon, that you want to share for us, for the Mind & Life community as we close here?

Jon Kabat-Zinn (01:08:39):

First of all, I want to thank you, Shankari and all of Mind & Life for hosting this conversation. Really touching, and I'm very happy to see so many people on the Mind & Life website for this. There's so much richness in the Mind & Life podcast with Wendy Hasenkamp. I mean, you could just listen to that forever and get phenomenal ideas about maybe what your karmic assignment is, listening to what their karmic assignment is, because she's teasing out from every single person she invites onto the podcast—really, if you listen with that ear of what are they really saying, that's their karmic assignment. They weren't always scientists or philosophers or whatever. They wound up in that space. So, that's one element of it.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (01:09:32):

The other thing is to just say how wonderful it is to be in community in this way. So let's take a few moments and just gaze at the screen again. Drop into silence and feel the body sitting in front of your screen. No matter what time of day or night it is, no matter where you are on the planet.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (01:10:08):

And let's see if we can bring a big question mark into our hearts right in this moment. Just a big don't know. The not knowing mind, the inquisitive, inquiring mind, the open-hearted mind, the loving mind and heart. It's all already right here in every single one of us in uniquely beautiful ways, and it's trustworthy. So trust it and nurture it. Nurture access to it by making some time each day for formal meditation practice. My suggestion, as you know, is to do it first thing in the morning because it will turn your whole day more. It will tune your instrument and have a big effect on the entire rest of the day. Ground it in that formal practice, but then let your whole life turn into the meditation practice and realize that it already is. I'm not telling you to do something extra. All you have to do is be awake and aware. That's all.

(01:11:46):

And then the love, there's no end to it. It's boundless. You'll find it just comes pouring out of you. And along with that love, the love is wise. There is insight, there is wisdom. There is a deep sense of seeing beauty in other people and seeing possibilities that nobody saw before. All these people are winning the Nobel Prize this week. They all are winning the Nobel Prize because they saw things no one else saw before, and then trusted it enough when everybody else said, "That's a stupid idea" to bring it to the point where everybody thinks it's not a stupid idea. It had tremendous power, and we're going to give you the Nobel Prize for it.

(01:12:29):

So look, that's not just for scientists, that's for every single one of us. That's why trusting your creativity and nurturing it and listening deeply to it; that is synonymous with mindfulness practice. So in the last few moments, let's just breathe in and breathe out and be aware of it, and then I'm going to invite you to just put your screen on gallery view if you haven't already, and unmute yourselves if we can get whoever's controlling things to unmute everybody, and let's just say goodbye until the next time.

(01:13:11):

And thank you for supporting Mind & Life, this incredibly important catalyst for goodness in the world. And, I just love looking at you all. I mean drinking you in, so to speak.

[Various speakers saying thank you and goodbye.]