



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

Mind & Life Connect Transcript
Rob Roeser & Christa Mahlobo
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Shankari Goldstein (00:00:05):

Hello everyone. Welcome to you all joining; people from Norway, Chile, Nevada, Bhutan—nice to see you here to support Rob from that community. So good to see you all. Welcome back to our third cycle of Mind & Life Connect. My name is Shankari Goldstein. I'm joining you from Charlottesville, Virginia in the US, and it's so wonderful to see so many of you gathered here with us from all corners of the globe, to see return faces, to see people who live just down the road from me who are tuning in. It's really beautiful. So thank you. And for those who are not joining us live, there's over 900 people that are signed up for this event, so many of you are joining us through recordings later. So welcome, we're welcoming you into this conversation today as well.

(00:01:00):

Just a little housekeeping, you have the opportunity to add captions and transcripts for viewing. If you click the three buttons on the bottom of your Zoom taskbar, you can select “captions” or “view transcript”; that might be helpful for those who have any issues. Just to let you know, there's going to be an opportunity for you to stay on and ask questions to our speakers as well as create community with one another and do some breakout spaces. So do stay with us because this is an experience with the group today. So really grateful for our virtual platforms that allow us to connect, and continue to allow us to connect over these last few years, share stories and engage with one another. We're going to start as we always do at Mind & Life with a grounding practice. So find a comfortable seat, maybe you feel inclined to lay down, take a moment, allowing your body to relax and just begin to settle into a sense of ease.

(00:02:14):

Perhaps it feels good to close your eyes, or softly gaze at a spot in front of you, and maybe you'd like to bring your awareness or attention to your breath. Maybe take a deep inhale through your nose, feeling your lungs expand, and exhale slowly through your mouth, releasing any tension that you may be holding. Maybe just practice this mindful breathing as you ground into this present moment. An invitation to perhaps visualize a beautiful, serene landscape in nature. Maybe picture yourself standing in a lush forest underneath majestic trees, feeling the earth beneath your feet, grounding and supporting you. As you continue to breathe deeply, perhaps

imagine a golden thread extending from your heart, reaching back through time and just connecting us to our ancestors; we're celebrating Black History Month here.

Shankari Goldstein (00:04:00):

So maybe, maybe just honoring and noticing the sensation of what it feels like to imagine the shoulders of those giants and leaders that came before us, thinking into their wisdom. Just lastly, bringing your awareness to your heart center, maybe placing one hand over your heart and feeling its gentle rhythm with each beat, releasing tension, honoring legacy. As we come back, allow yourself to land in this space. Gently open your eyes.

(00:05:29):

So I have the pleasure of introducing our two speakers today. Rob Roeser is a professor at Penn State University focusing on child and adolescent development and the role of contemplative practices in education. Christa, or Chris, Mahlobo is a Provost's Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania, and she specializes in multicultural psychology and mindfulness practice for Black youth. So thank you both Rob and Christa for joining. I see a lot of smiles on the Zoom, so people are definitely really excited to be here with you, and I'm excited to be here with you because we're going to go on a bit of a journey with our audience today, exploring this theme of advancing contemplative science in education and development.

(00:06:18):

Just to set the stage for our discussion, let's consider this. Research shows that resilient individuals are not only able to withstand adversity but also experience flourishing in various aspects of their lives. This intersection of resilience and flourishing is crucial in understanding how contemplative practices can promote moral and ethical growth and contribute to a more holistic development. Social and emotional learning, or SEL, is a process through which individuals acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions. So as well as set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, and establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions, it plays a significant role in our human development, particularly in shaping how individuals navigate challenges, relate to others, and contribute to their community.

(00:07:14):

So there's no better time, I think, than now to have you both here, and I'd love to delve deeper into these concepts with each of you. So maybe we can first just start by briefly sharing a little bit about your personal journeys and how they led you to focus on contemplative practices in education and development. Maybe we'll start with you Christa, if that's okay?

Christa Mahlobo (00:07:37):

Of course. First, I wanted to say thank you all for being here. I'm always excited to talk about flourishing and well-being and mindfulness. So thank you for joining us today. I don't want to start at birth, but I would have to go back pretty far to think about my mindfulness experiences because I think a lot of them, I actually learned through more spiritual and religious and cultural practices. So perhaps my first experience with meditation was prayer in a lot of ways, maybe in a different setting. Another really pivotal experience for me was my first yoga class.

Christa Mahlobo (00:08:20):

I started taking yoga classes in college and then from there realized that there are more ways to heal yourself, rather than just doing these physical things, taking medicine, getting your sleep, getting nutrients, that sort of thing. So I felt like yoga was a practice that allowed me to engage in deep reflection, but then also healing from a lot of different things. So from there I thought, well, I have to research this and figure out how I can translate this to audiences that might not have the same exposure that I've been able to have to this kind of practice.

Shankari Goldstein (00:08:58):

Love that. Rob?

Rob Roeser (00:09:02):

Good afternoon, Shankari. It's so good to be with you and to be with my color-coordinated colleague and friend Dr. Mahlobo.

Shankari Goldstein (00:09:10):

We didn't plan it.

Rob Roeser (00:09:11):

It was not planned. I just want to say hello to all those that I can see and I can't see and who are present, who might be present here soon. I'm really happy that we're together and I feel a little like bringing coals to Newcastle given some of the names and brilliant educators that I see in the audience. So I'm happy that you're all here. I think the turning point in my life around contemplative practice, human development and education—which I sort of see as of a single cloth, I think our developmental, our contemplative practice and our education in that is lifelong across our whole life if we have eyes to see that, and that's what we'll speak about a little today.

(00:10:02):\

But a key turning point came for me two years into graduate school. I was studying in a program called the Combined Program in Education and Psychology at the University of Michigan. We were trying to explore how to create schools that were more intrinsically motivating and engaging so that we could cultivate what we called lifelong learners. As part of that journey, I became better and better at the psychological study of development and statistics, worked on large scale data sets, and was becoming more and more unhappy because I didn't really have a vision of what it was that I thought we were seeking. So I started to explore Montessori schools in the surrounding area and Waldorf or Steiner schools, really looking for sort of models of education that could in some ways show me the way. To make a long story short, I decided to quit graduate school after two years, something Chris and I talked about quite often.

(00:11:17):

And I went to study with a visionary contemplative and religious scholar and educator named Matthew Fox in Oakland, California. At the time he had something called the Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality and really it was an educational experiment, par excellence, where he had brought together contemplative practitioners from a variety of traditions, artists, scientists, and social activists, and was really experimenting with the kind of education in which the cosmos and our place in it was central. Our bodies and our earthiness, our humility, our humus,

our being made of earth was critically important. So the body was central and this idea of compassion and contemplation and questioning was at the heart of this kind of education. So in some ways it was an imprint that indelibly left a mark on me in my career. I'll just finish by saying, by good grace, Aaron Stern, who's a board member of Mind & Life and also a visionary educationist, is good friends with Matt Fox.

Rob Roeser (00:12:44):

So we've been back in touch and I've gotten to share with him the impact that he had on my life. I think in a way that was so precious because whatever we're talking about today, I also see it, as you were leading us in that beautiful meditation Shankari, as an intergenerational project, that this is something that is being passed along and hopefully in our time we can contribute in a significant way to re-imagining education for human flourishing. Matt Fox really was one of the most important people in my life to help me on that journey.

Shankari Goldstein (00:13:26):

Yeah, thank you. That's so great. Let's stay in this place, this concept of flourishing, right? You've mentioned this a few times, and I think flourishing really goes beyond this simple happiness or wellbeing, right? It encompasses a holistic view—which, like that being made of earth that you described, which was so beautiful—this holistic view of psychological constructs. It makes me think of Dr. Martin Seligman's PERMA model, providing this framework for understanding flourishing, highlighting the importance of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, all that. How do you—and I guess I'll start with you Rob, because you brought up flourishing in the context of wanting to have this conversation—how do you define flourishing and how do you see these practices impacting the developmental paths and fostering resilience and flourishing in individuals?

Rob Roeser (00:14:18):

Thank you. This is something Chris and I—Chris is my former graduate student—so we had many conversations-

Christa Mahlobo (00:14:26):

So many.

Rob Roeser (00:14:26):

About—hopefully it wasn't too many—about what we came to call wise flourishing because we wanted the concept of flourishing to include the struggle and suffering that's inextricably linked with joy and happiness. So I think that in a loose sense, my colleagues and I have thought about flourishing as the temporal construction, over time building a life of meaning and fulfillment and service. Since time immemorial in traditions all over the world, whether it's in the Greco-Roman world and the teachings of Mencius, or the Sanskrit world of India and the teachings of Buddha, or the indigenous teachings in what are called the Americas of peoples like the Lakota, the royal road to cultivating a life that is full of meaning and fulfillment is the development of virtue.

Rob Roeser (00:15:41):

Where I think this conceptualization dovetails with Mind & Life is around what I now think about as the epistemic virtues, the virtues of knowing, so wonder, awe, open-mindedness, curiosity, all of which through some alchemical process may, if we're lucky, create something called a mindful person, over time, if the causes and conditions are favorable; and of course the social virtues of compassion and kindness and forgiveness and altruism, that the cultivation of these virtues is on the view of cultures and peoples all over the globe and throughout history, the, so to speak, royal road to flourishing amidst the inevitable ups and downs and slings and arrows, as well as joys and triumphs of life.

Shankari Goldstein (00:16:42):

Love that. So maybe before we talk about how the things we care about lead to flourishing, just for our audience, we have so many researchers on here, are there any statistical findings or trends that either of you have seen that support the correlation between the development of specific virtues that you were talking about and overall well-being, that would be helpful for our audience?

Christa Mahlobo (00:17:10):

I can speak at least to resilience as a virtue in and of itself. I know that there's a pretty significant correlation between having a high ability to bounce back or be resilient and a lot of aspects of well-being including psychological and interpersonal well-being. So I think, yeah, resilience as a virtue in and of itself is one way that you can, one factor I guess, that you can add to the basket or the cornucopia of things that someone needs to start to flourish.

Rob Roeser (00:17:48):

Yes. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often says, if you want other people to be happy, practice compassion, and if you yourself wish to be happy, practice compassion. There's been a meta-analysis of many, many studies of help-giving. A meta-analysis is an analysis of a number of other studies where we try to understand the overall findings of a group of studies on the same topic. What this meta-analysis showed is that the one who helps, as His Holiness suggested, their well-being is significantly and positively impacted by helping others. So compassion as a classical social virtue is clearly related to well-being. I think that we can think about forgiveness and unburdening ourselves from that state of unforgiveness where anger and resentment and revenge may be sort of eating away at us; we know there are studies of forgiveness that are associated with better health and psychological outcomes.

(00:19:05):

And Chris and I worked together, we're lucky to work with our friends at the University of Virginia and Wisconsin, on a course called the Art and Science of Flourishing here at Penn State and at the other universities where we actually teach for 15 weeks a variety of these epistemic and social virtues, what is it, and more importantly, we engage in practices to build the flabby muscles, so to speak, of these virtues. And what we found was that the course, compared to a matched group of controls, really helped with what some think about as the mental health crisis. That is, over time and even into the COVID period, 6 to 18 months later, those who took the course showed less anxiety and less symptoms of depression and showed greater flourishing

as measured by a small scale that was based on Dr. Seligman's PERMA model. So I think there's evidence, I'm giving you a very selective set that's relevant to our work, but I think that more and more there's empirical evidence to suggest these kinds of trainable, educable human qualities really do conduce not only towards the alleviation of suffering, but the promotion of well-being and flourishing in individuals younger and older.

Shankari Goldstein (00:20:32):

It leads me to think about, and we talked about this earlier, how do the things we all care about lead to flourishing? How does this include the moral and ethical growth that you've been speaking about?

Christa Mahlobo (00:20:51):

I think the things we care about, in a sense indicate what we value. In the same way that Rob was talking about values, I always think of that verse in Matthew, where your treasure is, your heart may also be. So I think if you value companionship and you value community, then all of those things if practiced in different ways, much like we practice them in the Art and Science of Human Flourishing course, if you practice doing those things through compassion practices, through actively helping your neighbor et cetera, that can lead to healing and flourishing in your own life. I'm sure that Rob has lots of examples of the ways that students have talked about that in the Art and Science of Human Flourishing course, and then also perhaps in your own life as well.

Rob Roeser (00:21:50):

Yeah. I think there's two ways to go with this question. I think one of the things that's central to Mind & Life's mission is a deep understanding of the nature of mind and how this can relate to our own flourishing. I think one of the deep, deep, deep insights, which goes to why virtue cultivation may be associated with flourishing, is it can take us beyond the smallness, the rigidity, sometimes the pettiness of our own self, that the key idea here is sort of moving out of the me and mine and moving towards a sense of, as Chris was saying, the collective, the community of beings, which, if we have eyes to see, we are inextricably interdependent with.

(00:22:47):

So right there, you're already working on an ethic, what his Holiness the Dalai Lama would call an ethic of restraint from the kind of self-centeredness that is part of who we are as human beings, and moving towards an ethic of virtue where we're considering others' wishes not to suffer and deep desire for happiness alongside of our own. So I think that's at the deep structural level, and of course, this is what so many spiritual traditions talk about with regard to our development—you know, I'm not saying we don't have to develop an ego, but we also have to soften and open and become bigger in a sense, if we want to grow spiritually and ethically. And I think that contemplative worldviews and contemplative practices from many different quarters are very sophisticated pedagogical practices that help us to do that in some sense.

Shankari Goldstein (00:23:53):

I love that. It's taking me into this place of maybe talking a little bit about culture and community that you all have been exploring. So we know culture plays a significant role in shaping our well-being programs. So how do we ensure that these programs are inclusive and considerate

of diverse cultural context? And I think this is really where your work comes into play, Chris. Can you shed a little light on the importance of cultural diversity in program development?

Christa Mahlobo (00:24:28):

Absolutely. I think one of the key reasons that actually led me to what ended up being my dissertation topic, where I was studying what are some factors that might impact well-being for Black youth and young adults over longitudinal time, was that I felt like there was sometimes a bit of a framing problem, particularly when talking about Black youth. So in many of the studies that I'd seen and then also in media, which I think impacts scientific research, there was always 'the problem' of Black youth, the problem of Black youth in America, what are we going to do about Black youth? I grew up in a culture where there were so many rich traditions of not only rich mindfulness traditions that were practiced, but then also rich traditions of really being cognizant and caring of one another. So there were a lot of collective well-being practices, and I thought this should be studied and this should be highlighted.

(00:25:32):

So I think when I think about culture and context, I think not only about the cultures that we exist within, but then also the developmental states that we exist within. I think particularly for Black youth and young adults, that's a time where developing a sense of agency around being able to take charge of your life and make that a life that's worth living, I think all of those things are really important. So when I think about program development, then it would be completely missed if we were developing a program for Black youth and we didn't take any of those factors into account. So I think the process of culturally tailoring an intervention could be a workshop in and of itself. It's a very iterative process.

(00:26:20):

I think part of it, at the very start at least, needs to include some real qualitative research or getting into figuring out, what are the customs and values and practices that you all are already doing? Then maybe, how can I integrate that into any intervention or program that I'm doing? So I wouldn't recommend going in blind, so to speak, because there's already this really rich—I know a lot of folks maybe don't think of African-Americans as indigenous, but in a lot of ways, everybody from the African diaspora is indigenous in a way—so all of these really indigenous practices are super important and valuable and have allowed Black folks to thrive in the United States for decades. So all of those should be infused in any intervention that you create.

Shankari Goldstein (00:27:10):

That's great. Yeah. Rob, you have that beautiful metaphor about cultural values and it being a palette. Can you share that with your audience? I loved how... It's so beautiful the way you put that.

Rob Roeser (00:27:24):

Yes. So Chris and I really were on a journey to think about how to begin to make culture central and not peripheral to the study of flourishing. So much of science, to be honest, has a set of assumptions and norms that are grounded in white culture. So this became a challenge and a research problem as we started to explore, what does flourishing among Black Americans from adolescence to early adulthood look like? So this became her thesis topic, as Chris could tell

you, and she landed on Shirley Harrell's model. That model is beautiful because it's trying to, very similar to PERMA and Carol Ryff's model, lay out a set of elements that, like the ingredients in a delicious Indian dish, could come together in different ways to create different delicious foods.

Rob Roeser (00:28:27):

The idea that Shankari is giving rise to is, it may well be that there is a universal set of virtues and values that is sort of like your spice rack in your kitchen or the artistic palette of a painter, but that what creates cultural diversity and difference is that different groups and different places and times decide to use a little more coriander and cumin in their cuisine, and others may decide to use a little more dill and parsley and oregano. It's not that they're not all delicious virtues, but that cultures tend to tune up certain qualities and not others. They don't neglect them, but they're not as central.

(00:29:16):

This is called universal pluralism in the study of moral development. It allows us a way to, as we put it in a recent article, to go beyond all splits between, for instance, what is universal and what is culturally specific. Maybe there's a way to mediate that, a middle path that says, everyone agrees all of these virtues are universal, but in this particular place, this was accentuated and in this particular place, this other one was accentuated. And that's what Chris did in her dissertation, she thought about, what is the palette and what might be very unique to the Black Americans that she was studying over time to create a sense of flourishing in that group and that place and that time.

Shankari Goldstein (00:30:08):

Yeah. So let's talk a little bit about that. You guys have this unique mentorship relationship, and it leads me to talk about the mentoring, the practical, the educational. So as we move into this more practical realm, how do these concepts continue to translate into real world programs and educational settings? Maybe each of you can share the impact and the origin of your own unique mentorship relationship. Then also, Chris, you're a part of our Global Majority Mentorship Program here at Mind & Life. Maybe share how that has flowed into programs, and you're in this more of museum, art, cultural institution setting, so how are you seeing mentorship come into play here?

Christa Mahlobo (00:30:54):

Yeah, I feel, and Rob knows this, but very honored that I was able to work with Rob over the process of my dissertation because I don't know that we ever used this language, but—well, we likely have—but I think by working with Rob, I was able to realize that one of the big issues that I think I was having in academia was that I felt like my life experiences, the experiences of people who looked like me, et cetera, weren't being highlighted. So in a lot of ways we were able to decolonialize my curriculum during grad school, and that is in big part due to the fact that Rob was just very open to learning about these things himself. So I think maybe in some past mentorship relationships, they were like, oh, that sounds really great, I'm glad that you want to research it.

Christa Mahlobo (00:31:48):

But with Rob, I was able to really dig in and realize that the problem with academia was not me necessarily. It was more that there are these set in place narratives about particular groups of people, in particular global majority members. And I was able to then mold my work into being able to really highlight the good that's already happening in those communities. So in a similar vein, in the global majority program that I am in, it's been such a... I could go on literally forever about how healing that experience has been, because I think above all things, it has given us a place to feel a sense of belonging among people who do the work that we do. I never walk into the space feeling like I have to justify why I'm studying what I'm studying. I think that's a really big deal.

(00:32:49):

I also think that it's a place where I have been allowed to heal in a certain sense from some of the daily or weekly microaggressions that I might face in academia. It's just a space where we are allowed to give voice to our circumstances and give voice to the things that we've seen. In a very similar way, I think art is able to do the same thing, which is why my research is slowly walking a little bit more in that direction. There's something about art, and I think we all know this, but perhaps have not been able to put our finger on it or ever really needed to define art, because we all know how powerful art is. But in some ways, I want to quantify, what is it about arts experiences that allow us to flourish in all of these different facets of our lives?

(00:33:40):

I mean, on top of it bringing joy to our lives, it also allows us to deeply think and to deeply meditate and be in the present moment. Then I think in the Black American context, it allows individuals to give voice to their circumstances. I think Angela Davis, she was speaking specifically about Negro spirituals, but she was saying that it allows for a collective healing and a collective voice to be heard. So yeah, I think, I don't know, there's just something so beautiful about art. I could go on about it forever, but in the same way that I've been able to be mentored out of this idea that I have to study flourishing in this particular way, I think art has had similar parallels.

Shankari Goldstein (00:34:34):

That's great. Yeah, I love turning that suffering into beauty. Rob, you might have a response back to that, but I just want to note our time, because Rob's going to have to leave a little bit before the top of the hour, and I want to make sure people have Q&A with you as well. But do you have a quick response, or I can go into the last piece that we wanted to share with our audience?

Rob Roeser (00:34:53):

I'll just say I think the virtue of not knowing is not uplifted in the academy. Somehow, we think that knowing is the virtue in the academy, but of course, the true scientists, the Einsteins of the world, are filled with wonder, mystery, and curiosity. I think that was part of the journey that Chris and I went on together. There was a sense of not knowing where we were going, and also a sense of needing to try to help provide her with a source of data where she could see herself in

the data set. We did that, and I think that was really, it helped our relationship and mentorship move forward.

Shankari Goldstein (00:35:40):

Great. And Rob, I just want to give you the opportunity to share: you have this project called the PEACE Research Network, and we talk a lot about interconnection at Mind & Life, and it feels so deeply intertwined, but can you share more about what's happening in the reimagining meeting, there's an event happening in Bhutan, and how are you seeing this collaboration across disciplines showing up in this work that you're doing?

Rob Roeser (00:36:06):

Thank you so much for that opportunity. PEACE Network stands for Promoting Empathy, Awareness, and Compassion through Education, and it's a dream, it's not a reality, although the first meeting may be occurring in India soon. And it's really, to pick up on the themes that Chris and I have been talking about, it's an effort to really promote the idea that developmental contemplative science would be very useful. That is, to introduce time into the study of virtue development, time in terms of moments, time in terms of a lifespan, time in terms of generations and evolution. And if you bring time into the study of contemplative practice and worldviews, from birth through death and whatever you think comes after it, culture and context come along for the ride, because all time unfolds, as far as we know down here on earth, from our perceptual lens, in very specific places and settings.

(00:37:20):

So this network is an idea of bringing together scientists, educators, philosophers, and contemplatives to try to understand the development of these epistemic and social virtues from birth through death. The idea there is to unify the field of contemplative science, in which now we pretty much study adults, and then there's this lonely stepchild that studies children and youth, and yet all of us were children and youth before we were adults. So it would be useful to know how these things unfold in culture, with other people, in history and in time. And the big idea here, which is something that builds on the Emory-Tibet Science Initiative, is the contemplatives that we aspire to engage with in this research network are those who've been trained in the monasteries, both monks and nuns, and who've been trained in science, both. So that we're moving, as Geshe Lobsang Negi and Robin Nusslock, who I see is on the podcast for this month, as they're doing, they're moving from monks and nuns being the quote-unquote "subjects" of research, to becoming research partners, to hopefully in the future, setting the research agenda alongside the scientists.

(00:38:50):

So this is the idea of the PEACE Network, and the dividend of that network, which goes to the Bhutan meeting, is we could learn, how does mindfulness develop over time from a dash of curiosity, a little bit of theory of mind, some executive attention? How does that come together, across the lifespan perhaps, to create mindful individuals? Can we use that understanding to measure and assess innovative educational efforts that people—at Naropa University, or Noah at The Middle Way School, I see others here—are doing? How could we start to develop a

better understanding of what the elements are that over time develop into these virtues that we think lead to flourishing?

Shankari Goldstein (00:39:41):

Great, so really shaping the individual from a young age throughout their life and leading to that meaningful life piece that you were talking about in the beginning, I love that. We're getting a lot of questions about PEACE, but I think we have a link that's just been put into the chat about that. And I want to give everybody an opportunity to raise your virtual hand, and you can come up live and spend the next maybe 10, 15 minutes asking questions live to Christa and Rob. Before we move to the live Q&A, because we'll give people a chance to raise their hand—and you might've answered this question that came into the chat, Rob, in what you just shared—but maybe for both of you, a participant said: “I'm curious about the use of the word virtue, and I'm not sure in the context of school, SEL programs, how the cultivation of virtues can create a response to the immense challenges that we are experiencing in the classroom, the school community, and the wider community. So how do we move this discussion about virtues to the real world?”

(00:40:54):

Essentially, how do we move this discussion about virtues to the real world given the immense challenges that we're experiencing in the classroom and the wider globe?

Rob Roeser (00:41:10):

This really goes to, again, I am being shamelessly self-promoting, a special section of the journal *Mindfulness* we wrote, we comprised, where I wrote a paper called “Beyond All Splits”, because one of the splits that we often make is that the individual and their caregivers, or the environment that they exist in, are two different things. But if we think about what it takes to create children who are caring, fair, want to make their classrooms a better place—it takes adults who are caring, fair, and want to make the world a better place; it takes classroom environments that instantiate those norms, and virtues and school systems that reinforce and value them. So as soon as we start thinking about education and human development, we're not thinking about individual minds in isolation, we're really thinking about, how do we create the quote-unquote “causes and conditions” for the kind of favorable development that we wish, not only for ourself and our children, but if we've been in a favorable environment, for everyone because we're all in this together.

(00:42:27):

So I really appreciate the critique that, isn't this too small and focused on individual minds, but again, I think that's a framing problem, and that what it takes to cultivate hearts and minds that are good is an entire community. So by necessity, we have to be thinking, how do we help the adults do this? How do we help the families do this? How do we do this in a sustained and engaged way over time, in place? This is why I just think we need new eyes in contemplative science that are more contextual, more culturally focused, more developmentally focused.

Shankari Goldstein (00:43:13):

I love it. That's really what you all are doing in that Global Majority Mentorship Program. I mean, you just described it, Rob, it's really amazing. I'd love for us to put some links in the chat for

people to learn more about that as well as Felipe Mercado's recent blog about nurturing equity in America too, and his participation in the program. Again, feel free to raise your hand and come up live and ask a question. Maybe this one's for you, Chris, it's similar to what you were talking about in the context of culture: what builds resilience for people who weren't instilled with that in early life? I remember when we had that conversation about resilience in our mentorship meeting.

Christa Mahlobo (00:43:58):

This might take me a moment to think about, not because I don't think that it's possible, but I'm trying to think of how to condense it to a couple of seconds. Maybe Rob, you have something that's coming online quicker than I-

Shankari Goldstein (00:44:14):

Just solve the problems of the world in two seconds. Yeah.

Christa Mahlobo (00:44:17):

That's what it feels like sometimes. But yeah, I might need a second on that one.

Shankari Goldstein (00:44:22):

Yeah, no worries, no worries.

Rob Roeser (00:44:27):

You know, I think in my own life, I can say, and this is from a certain social position, so it's relevant in a different way, but being seen and being positioned by others, being given opportunities to practice agency—all of these qualities are afforded or not afforded by others from a developmental... So if we want agentic individuals, then we need agency-enhancing opportunities for young people. We need to give them positions of social responsibility. And that's the way—agency is not a god-given, well, it may be god-given, but it is also developmentally constructed. So this was actually the work at Michigan we were doing: how do you position young people as knowers, as producers of knowledge, as agents of change? And that was all about the opportunity structure. So that would be my quick response to that. It sounds like that's the kind of opportunity structure, Chris, you're experiencing in that Global Majority Mentoring Program and you're being seen in that way. I don't know, is that so, is that how you would...?

Christa Mahlobo (00:45:48):

No, that's perfect, and thank you for jogging my thinking in that way. When you were speaking, the word that I kept thinking was belonging, and just having a sense of—I think agency is built by you feeling like you matter in any way, even if one person makes you feel like you matter, I think that that's really important. So I love what you said earlier, Rob, about, in order to build individuals with virtue, that means that the teachers need to value it, that means that the school system needs to value it, et cetera.

(00:46:22):

I'm forgetting the exact study but—if someone's interested, just send me an email—but there was a classroom intervention, but the intervention actually had nothing to do with the students, it

had everything to do with the teachers. And they found that by increasing the wellbeing of the teachers, the wellbeing of the students also went up. So just thinking about the fact that it doesn't have to be this individual-level intervention at every time. There's frankly not enough time and resources for something like that. But if we're building ecosystems of care, I think that that would help increase individual resilience.

Shankari Goldstein (00:47:01):

Great, thank you. Thank you both. I loved this conversation. I know we're about to lose you, Rob, but hopefully folks will stay on because we're going to do about a 10 to 12 minute breakout room, and then Christa is going to lead us in a beautiful contemplative practice, a gazing practice. But is there anything you want to share, Rob, before you hop off? Because you've got to go teach, as we've been talking about education today with our audience, any closing words?

Rob Roeser (00:47:29):

I just want to say how heartened I am by all of the interest. I think there is a worldwide movement, unnamed and unorganized, around a desire to reimagine education, and as Chris said, to move beyond resilience towards flourishing for all. This was one of the impetuses for her. So of course, we have to be resilient, but as we used to say, from negative one to zero is a journey that we probably have to keep making, and from zero to one is another journey, and we want to keep holding both of those in mind. So thank you for all the beautiful work that I know many of you are already doing out there in the world. It's so nice to be in your presence.

Shankari Goldstein (00:48:15):

Thank you, Rob. It's been a pleasure to have you. And of course, you can check out Rob on our podcast; I think links have been shared in the chat, and we'll put it on our landing page after we post the recording of this. We're going to allow our tech team to create our breakout rooms. You'll be in small groups. Again, just mindful, stepping forward, stepping back, giving each person a chance to have their voice elevated so we all feel like we belong in this space. It's mostly just a time for you to reflect. What landed with you in this conversation? How do you feel empowered after hearing what Chris and Rob have just shared? What are your takeaways? We'll just stay in there for about 10 or 12 minutes.

(00:49:00):

And I'm going to hand it over to Christa. We just have a few more moments left in our program here. She's going to lead us through a beautiful practice and offering that she has for you today.

Christa Mahlobo (00:49:10):

Yeah, thank you all for staying on, and we'll engage in one more practice together before you go on with your day. So as I had said earlier, my research is more and more focused on the power of art to both increase an individual's ability to be in the present, so mindful awareness, but then also impact flourishing. So I thought I'd lead us in an experiential or mindfulness exercise today using art. So I will go ahead and share my screen. There we are, okay, can everyone see this?

Shankari Goldstein (00:49:58):

Yep.

Christa Mahlobo (00:49:59):

Okay, perfect. So on this slide, I invite you to allow your eyes to wander all around the image and the accompanying text and see what you take in. What do you notice? You can unmute or put it in the chat or take notes if you'd like, but I'd love to hear some responses. What did you notice from the painting?

Shankari Goldstein (00:50:48):

[Reading from chat]: We see joy and abandon—feel free to raise your virtual hand, and I can bring you up live if you want to chat with Christa—freedom, joyful moving, dancing bodies.

Christa Mahlobo (00:51:00):

Beautiful. I love the themes that are being pulled out from this painting. I noticed the same things on initial glance. I can't see the chat at the same time, but I see responses sort of flowing in.

Shankari Goldstein (00:51:12):

[Reading from chat]: Yeah, how expressive, synchronized movement coming together, musical moving and joy, self-movement. Someone wants to see the painting again, if possible.

Christa Mahlobo (00:51:24):

Well, we will see the painting again. I love it though. I love the ability for art—you don't have to say much, you look and you experience and you feel all of these different things. But yes, thank you all for all of these responses. So I purposely only put the piece of art up for this short amount of time. It's because according to a 2014 study, on average, when you go to a museum, museum visitors only spend about 15 to 30 seconds looking at an artwork, and that's including reading the label. So the large majority, I think because art museums are so big and there's so much to see, we want to sort of wander around. Then also sometimes we're like, okay, my eyes have visually devoured it and I figured it out and I'm moving on to the next piece. But I wanted to, or I've started to, in the research, look at different ways of looking at works of art.

(00:52:24):

In the literature, this is being called slow looking. So taking time to really carefully observe more than meets the eye at the first glance. In a lot of ways, this is a mindfulness practice, and one that I have quite enjoyed doing. So I want to reframe the exercise and take a little bit longer amount of time to look at this piece of art. So I want you, wherever you are, to take a comfortable seat or a standing position. And you may need to stretch in order to get there, whatever you need to do is okay; maybe your feet are firmly placed on the floor, or if you're not in an office chair, you're sitting in a cross leg position, whatever feels comfortable to you. So I want you to also take a moment now to look around and really notice your surroundings.

(00:53:20):

So what's in your space right now? Maybe observe the colors, the shapes, the lines, the textures. Look up, look down, look around you. And now I invite you to either blink your eyes closed or cast your gaze downward and soften your focus. Make any last movements that you need to get in a comfortable position. Maybe roll your shoulders up, back, and then down to create some space between your heart and your belly. You're welcome to keep your hands on

your lap or one hand on your belly and one hand on your heart. So as you start to tune in with your eyes closed or your gaze focus, bring your attention to your breathing.

Christa Mahlobo (00:54:28):

So on your inhales, feel your belly expanding, and on your exhales, let your belly soften towards your spine without any contraction or pushing or effort. Let your breaths be smooth and soft and continuous. On your inhales, sit up through the crown of your head, and on your exhales, lose none of that height. Maybe on your inhales notice the cool air coming in, and the warmth on the exhale. Tune in and notice how your body feels. And as we transition out of this mindful moment, you can softly flutter your eyes open. Take one more deep inhale through your nose, and on an exhale, sigh it out through your mouth. And we'll transition to looking back at our image. This time we're going to dedicate a longer amount of time to look at the image, a slower look at this work of art.

(00:57:34):

Now, what did you notice this time?

Shankari Goldstein (00:57:41):

And you all have the ability to unmute yourself and call out your answers if you want to lift your voice in this room.

Participant 1 (00:57:50):

The security guard with the slumped shoulders is not having fun.

Christa Mahlobo (00:57:55):

He's working.

Participant 2 (00:57:58):

It seems like there is no one focusing directly on someone else. The eyes don't seem to be meeting in the picture.

Participant 3 (00:58:09):

Yeah, and I noticed the eyes close in the spotlight that someone just mentioned in the chat as well, that big spotlight.

Participant 4 (00:58:15):

And I noticed the big pyramid, the big pyramid, geometric symbol that's covering the entire picture.

Christa Mahlobo (00:58:26):

I love it. Thank you so much for these observations. I know we're running a little bit low on time, but I don't know if you all were able to notice, but there's a night and day difference between really taking your time to mindfully ground yourself, and then to take time to sit and slowly look at a piece of art. So I hope that in the future you're able to add this to your toolkit of practices, because as I mentioned before, the transformative power of art is very evident in our lived

experiences, but also increasingly in the research. So thank you all for your time. I'll turn it over to Shankari for a final closing meditation.

Shankari Goldstein (00:59:03):

Thank you, Christa. Thank you all. Good to hear your voices. Good to see your faces. Good to continue this sangha and cultivating a space where we connect with one another. Let's just remember these practical implications of our discussion today. Contemplative practices offer the tangible tools for resilience and compassion as Rob shared right before he left, particularly in communities facing adversity. Doing this practice with you today, Christa, maybe this is a new contemplative practice and approach that people may have never tried before. So we can use these frameworks to really create meaningful change and support the wellbeing of all, throughout the whole lifespan, to really create that meaningful life that Rob talked about through his work.

(00:59:52):

I just want to share a couple updates. Our next Mind & Life Connect session is going to feature Dr. Gail Parker and Gabriela Torres-Platas, who's also a grantee with Mind & Life. They're going to be exploring the healing potential of contemplative rest, mind wandering, Tibetan sleep and dreaming, so it's going to be really cool, and that's on March 7th, same time, same place, Thursday.

(01:00:16):

Let's just take this last 30 seconds with one another. Maybe bring your hand back to your heart and intentionality. Standing on the shoulders of giants, ancestors, standing in the power of the deep, inspirational and transformational work that Rob and Christa have offered today. Thank you all for being present, and we look forward to seeing you again real soon.