



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

Mind & Life Connect Transcript
Gail Parker & Gabriela Torres-Platas
March 7, 2024

Retrieved from [video recording](#)

Shankari Goldstein (00:00:05):

Welcome to our eighth Mind & Life Connect session. I'm Shankari Goldstein. I'm joining you from Charlottesville, Virginia here in the US. It's so wonderful to see so many of you gathered from all corners of the globe, including those who are joining from indigenous and native lands, which many of us are, honoring those people. So we have people signed up for this live event and many more are going to be joining us in the recordings later. So we just want to hold that space for those who are joining in the recordings and welcome you as well into this conversation today. If you need captions, for those who would like some more features, just select "more" on the bottom of your Zoom taskbar and you're able to view the full transcript there.

(00:00:54):

Great. So welcome, and there's going to be an opportunity for you to ask questions live to our speakers in a little bit. So feel free to stay on. Again, this is a welcoming community space—and apologies, things are kind of moving around on my computer here, so I'm getting settled, having a little bit of internet technical difficulties. Okay, there we go. I just want to say in addition, we appreciate all the support of our donors that help allow programs like this to continue across our platforms. You can always support Mind & Life programming by looking on our website, and we do encourage you if you can, to make an offering to this program to keep programs like this going for Mind & Life here in the community.

(00:01:42):

So today our conversation is going to be on the transformative power of practices like restorative yoga and Tibetan dream yoga. Our conversation is going to explore how these practices connect us to our inner selves, promote mindfulness, and challenge prevailing cultural norms around rest, and potential health benefits. Joining us are two incredible speakers who will guide us through this exploration. I'm thrilled, so thrilled to have Dr. Gail Parker join us again. If you can see, I'm a super fan—I've got her book here, dog eared. I've interviewed her before; you can view an old recording of an Inspiring Minds episode with her talking about yoga as a tool for social justice with Richard Freeman.

Shankari Goldstein (00:02:25):

Gail Parker is a psychologist, a yoga therapist educator, and the author of *Restorative Yoga for Ethnic and Race-based Stress* and *Trauma and Transforming Ethnic and Race-based Traumatic Stress with Yoga*. So thank you Gail for joining us. And we also have Gabriela Torres-Platas, who holds a PhD in neuroscience from McGill University. Her current research focus is to understand the neural correlates and psychological mechanisms of contemplative sleep practices, particularly Tibetan dream yoga and its potential benefits for mental health. So I'm really excited. I never knew about Tibetan dream yoga before I met Gabriela, and I'm really, really looking forward to diving into this conversation with both of you.

(00:03:08):

But before we start, Dr. Parker, wondering if you could lead us in a short meditation practice.

Gail Parker (00:03:15):

I would be happy to, and I want to welcome everyone, thank you for joining us. So in a village in Cameroon, there is a greeting that is traditional before a conversation begins. And the greeting is, "Are you in your skin? Is your soul in your body?" And the response is, "I'm alive and well and in my skin, my soul is in my body." And so today we will begin by inviting our souls, if they're not already there, to come into our body with intention. And so what I'd like you to do is if you're seated, make sure you're comfortable, make sure your back is supported. If you are prone, then that's fine. Just experience the support of wherever you are, the comfort of wherever you are.

(00:04:11):

And let's close our eyes or lower our gaze to begin, and place your right hand on your heart and your left hand over your right, feel your heartbeat. Begin to focus your awareness on your breath and take a deep inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth, and feel yourself grounded. Another deep inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth, and one more deep inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth, and then return your focus to your normal natural breathing rhythm. And on your next inhale, inhale to a count of three, hold to a count of three, exhale to a count of three, and hold to a count of three.

(00:05:36):

And let's do three more breaths just like that at your own rhythm, in your own pace. Inhale, hold, exhale, hold. Do three more. As we come into feeling grounded in the body, let's now ground ourselves in the collective body. On your next inhale, just silently repeat to yourself, "I am breathing in just like you." And on your exhale silently repeat to yourself, "I am breathing out just like you." Take two more intentional breaths. "I am breathing in just like you. I am breathing out just like you." And one more. And then silently repeat to yourself, "We are breathing in and out together." Two more times, "We are breathing in and out together." And then just sit in the awareness that no matter where we are physically, we are all breathing the same air and we are all breathing in and out together. And just sit with that awareness.

(00:07:58):

We are breathing in and out together, always. We are always connected through our breath, through our shared breath. And just notice how that awareness feels. And now either release your palms into your lap or bring your hands into prayer position. And if they're in prayer

position, just begin to rub them vigorously and create some heat. And then gently place the palms of your hands over your eyelids, and open your eyes into the palms of your hands and let the light filter through. And then we'll return our gaze to the screen. And just look around and see who you're sharing breath with.

Shankari Goldstein (00:09:25):

Thank you, Gail. That was lovely. Everybody's feeling grounded, seen. Wonderful. So I'd love to start this conversation with Gabriela. Like I said, I'd never heard of Tibetan dream yoga in the Buddhist context until I met you and read your blog; I'm hoping our team can put a link to Gabriela's Mind & Life blog in the chat and we'll put it up on our resource page for those watching the recording. I think I know about yogic sleep and yoga nidra and deep relaxation, which is very much tied up into the work that Gail Parker does. Can you share a little bit more about the purpose of Tibetan dream yoga and its significance in Buddhism through your research?

Gabriela Torres-Platas (00:10:18):

Sure. So first of all, thank you everyone and welcome, and thank you for the invitation, Shankari and everyone at Mind & Life. Yeah, I can share a little bit about what's the purpose of Tibetan dream yoga. It falls under the umbrella of contemplative sleep practices, yoga nidra being one of those, you have dream yoga and sleep yoga. And it's pretty much trying to keep awareness not only during the day, when we do meditation to keep awareness and to be able to stay focused and grounded, but you can also extend this practice in the night.

(00:11:03):

And so pretty much dream yoga, it's a practice that you usually do when you are in REM sleep or in a dream state. So to be able to practice dream yoga, the first step is to work towards having a lucid dream. And a lucid dream is when you get into the awareness that you are dreaming. So you are in a dream and all of a sudden you realize, "Okay, is this a dream?" And then you are able to have certain control or influence over your dream state.

(00:11:41):

So Tibetans and other cultures around the world—because this is not only a Tibetan practice, it's been found in many different cultures around the world—they use this moment of sleep and lucidity to practice with the objective to increase awareness and to attain enlightenment, which is the ultimate objective of Tibetan Buddhism. So some of the practices that people do in a lucid dream are practices that actually help you change the way you engage with life. So in Buddhist terms, we usually grasp, we have grasping and aversion to many different things or situations or emotions, and that creates karmic seeds.

(00:12:42):

So the idea is to change the way you engage with all of these situations that are your conditions. So all this to say, you're very wired up to react the same way over and over to the conditions you have, as beliefs, or education—whatever has happened in your life, you have the conditions to do this. You can go in the dream, and because when you are in the dream, part of your consciousness is off, but you still have this lucidity or this awareness, you're able to work in the dream without the control of your conscious mind, the awake mind. So then that's why in

Tibetan Buddhism it is believed that working in dreams is 10 times more powerful than working in waking life, because you're working directly with the subconscious mind.

Gabriela Torres-Platas (00:13:35):

Well, this is the overview of Tibetan dream yoga, explained very quickly. Sleep yoga is like a continuation of dream yoga where you just keep the awareness in all the stages of sleep. So you go to sleep, you would start with the hypnagogic state, which would be mostly through yoga nidra or there's also Tibetan practices of dream yoga that you can keep this awareness as you fall asleep, and you hold it and hold it and you bring it to a REM period or a dream state. And then sleep yoga really is when you reach the point where you can observe the different stages of sleep and just be a witness of what's happening. So that's the overview of the three different practices.

Shankari Goldstein (00:14:29):

That's great. So I'm hearing that there's this understanding of the transient nature of reality that you're doing in these lucid dreaming and sleep yoga states. So through your research, what are you seeing as a way for these practices to be integrated into personal and clinical settings to promote wellbeing and personal growth in the work that you're doing?

Gabriela Torres-Platas (00:14:51):

Yeah, I think the work of dream yoga, it's new, I would say. There's not a lot being done in dream yoga, but there's a lot being done with lucid dreaming. So a lot of the teachers of dream yoga are starting just to try to apply these learnings through lucid dreaming in different clinical settings. For example, in the lab, we actually had a pilot that we were running with people with narcolepsy that have nightmare disorder. So the idea is, people with narcolepsy, they are better at lucid dreaming, just naturally with the way of their condition, they just go into a lucid dream very quickly. So just in pilot studies, we've shown that these people with narcolepsy that have very strong and persistent nightmares, they're able to change the outcome of the nightmares and reduce stress.

(00:15:53):

It's not only in our lab, but it has been done in different laboratories, and there have been different publications of these studies. And this is not dream yoga, but it's getting there, because there's also this very cool practice in dream yoga where when you are in the dream, you summon something that is very scary for you and you know that it's not real. So then you have this ability to confront your fears in a safe space, like a parenthesis. So this is kind of the beginning of the exploration of this space.

(00:16:28):

And then there's also some work being done with PTSD. There are these teachers, Charlie Morley and Dr. Tadas Stumbrys, that just published this paper where they teach people with PTSD to have a lucid dream in an online platform, and they were able to teach 76% of the people to lucid dream. And the stress of the nightmares and the outcome of the PTSD subjective measures decreased after a very short treatment with lucid dreaming.

Gabriela Torres-Platas (00:17:11):

So we see that it can have many potential benefits and also, actually it's been accepted as a line of treatment by the American Association of Sleep Medicine. So it is not only new research, but it's been used a lot, lucid dreaming. So I think now it's like, let's move to Tibetan dream yoga and see how we can actually use the part with the contemplation to see what benefits it could have. And this is what we are trying to do in the lab.

Shankari Goldstein (00:17:46):

So that's really interesting. And there's a question in the chat about, how do you get into that lucid dream state? So if I'm at home and I'm just a lay practitioner, I'm not in this clinical setting getting researched, how do I bring myself into an at-home lucid dream practice?

Gabriela Torres-Platas (00:18:03):

There's a few different techniques that have been used, and I think the most popular, or the one that at least worked for me right away when I tried it, and that's the one I recommend because I have a personal experience, is the "reality check". So you train your mind during the day—again, it's awareness: every moment you are questioning what state you are in. Am I awake, am I sleeping? And then you find ways that you can—how do you know you're dreaming or you're not, right? So a lot of people try blocking the nose; if you are awake, you're not going to be able to breathe, but if you're sleeping, the air is going to go through.

(00:18:46):

The other one is flying. So if you are awake, you won't be able to fly if you jump. But in a dream, if you have the intention to fly, you jump, and then you might end up flying. And then that's when you realize that is a dream. So it's kind of questioning your state, where am I? Am I sleeping? Am I awake? And then eventually when you are doing this on a very consistent basis, then eventually it's going to show up in your dream, and then you can question that in your dream. And then that's when you're like, "Oh, okay, I'm dreaming."

(00:19:17):

There's a lot to do with intention. You need to have a very strong intention. At least we've seen that people... It's a discipline, let's say. So I think intention is one of the most important ingredients for lucid dreaming and the practice of dream yoga. And there are other different techniques, and there are a few books that I can recommend afterwards in the chat that people can just look at—like there's the reality check, then there's waking up, "wake back to bed". So you wake up in the middle of the night, 90 minutes after you go to sleep. So you're trying to time it with your REM period so that you are awake just before and you can enter from your awareness, you're going closer to REM sleep. So you have that.

(00:20:08):

There's some drugs that people use. They're prescribed for Alzheimer's, but you can use it to help you have lucid dreams. There's many, many different techniques, but I can share them in the chat afterwards. So if anyone wants to really try, it's fun.

Shankari Goldstein (00:20:26):

Great, I'm sure the audience would really appreciate that. So it's making me see this beautiful intersection and overlap of the work that you both do, even just in our very traditional yoga teacher training experience to this kind of Buddhist Tibetan yoga approach. And it's bringing up this questioning of what's real and unreal and facing those truths, which is really disillusionment, which is at the core of a yoga practice and what we learn. And so I'd love to hear Gail, from just this psychological perspective, noting that disillusionment is a natural part of realizing the impermanence of life—what do you want to talk about in terms of your perspective in this work?

Gail Parker (00:21:13):

On disillusionment, first of all, I would say that it's more than a psychological experience. It's really a spiritual experience. So I think I would like to talk about it from that perspective, from the spiritual experience, which really, we go through various stages of spiritual maturity. When we're in our spiritual infancy, we believe or we think that if we do all the things, all the practices... We'll stick with yoga. If we meditate, if we engage in the physical practices of yoga, if we engage in the breathing practices of yoga, then everything's going to be just fine. That's the infancy stage of our spirituality.

(00:22:06):

Then something happens, a betrayal occurs, it doesn't work. Whatever's happened. Let's even talk about lucid dreaming. So you practice, practice, practice, what Gabriela has said, and nothing's happening. Nothing has shifted, nothing has changed. And so when you're in your infancy, you get mad at the fact that it's not working, "This isn't working, I'm not going to keep it up. What's the point? It's a waste of time," et cetera, whatever that is. If you come out of that phase and move into the adolescent phase of our spiritual development, then you try the things, you keep trying the things, but then let's say a favored teacher betrays you. Something happens that you find out that they're human too. So you get mad at the teacher and you throw in the towel, you throw out the baby with the bath water, and you walk away from the practice altogether.

(00:23:09):

If you can get through that part, that's the disillusionment phase. When you begin to realize, things are not working the way I thought they were, then you can begin to take a look at your beliefs. How did you think they were? I think many of us are going through that now, in our cultural shifts and changes that we're experiencing. Oh, I thought it worked this way, but it's not working the way I thought it was. Some people can fall into a deep state of what psychologists might call depression, and instead of understanding that, no, this is an experience of disillusionment, things aren't the way I thought they were, the disappointment that comes with that, the grief that comes with that, the frustration and feeling of helplessness that comes with that...

(00:24:04):

So disillusionment, it's not an easy experience. We might go for medication, we might go for an evaluation and be diagnosed. So that sort of makes it difficult to move past the disillusionment. Some people would call that the dark night of the soul. That's another experience. If you

pathologize that, if you make it something wrong with you—there's something wrong with me, I don't feel good anymore—you're stuck in that space. If you can get through that space to the other side and you begin to realize the impermanence of what I thought was permanent, the impermanence of my belief system, the impermanence of my emotions, and that's the yoga, you now can move to another level of maturity where you realize, "You know what? Things don't work the way I thought they did. This is how things seem to be working, actually." And that's just an ongoing process. It's not like you feel disillusioned once and then you're done.

Gail Parker (00:25:21):

But if you can get through the discomfort of the disillusionment—and you don't have to do it alone and you shouldn't try to do it alone, all of us need people who've had the experience. No one can do it for you, can get you through it. No one else can get you through your own periods of disillusionment. But there are people who experienced disillusion and know the difference between that and a pathological condition and can support you in the walk through that difficult passage. So I believe—it's more than a belief, I have observed and noticed, and I know that disillusionment is a necessary experience on our way to spiritual development.

(00:26:11):

As far as psychology is concerned, the original meaning of the word was the study of the soul. We don't learn it that way in Western psychology. We learn it as the study of personality. We are more than our personalities. We are more than our bodies. We are more than our thoughts. We are more than our feelings. These are hard concepts to... It's not a cognitive process. You can hear those words and think, "Okay, yeah. Okay, now what?" The experience is what really helps you understand that these processes are all processes of growth, of transformation.

(00:27:05):

Transformation isn't easy. It's not without discomfort. And our practices teach us how to tolerate the discomfort so we can get on the other side. Does that make sense?

Shankari Goldstein (00:27:22):

Yeah, definitely. It's funny because I have a calendar right in front of the computer here, and it has this circle, and it's layers, the art imagery—and even as you were talking Gabriela, I was visualizing myself going through levels. And you've even talked, I think at one point about pyramids being an access point to this dream yoga experience. So just this kind of, layers and levels, and restorative yoga, and dream yoga can be seen as this journey through the koshas, which, I'd love to hear your feedback on that, Gail. Because I think that the koshas just allow us to explore and heal each layer of our being just by integrating this understanding into our practice.

(00:28:10):

So how can understanding the koshas deepen our understanding of disillusionment and support individuals through this process of spiritual growth?

Gail Parker (00:28:21):

So in the yoga tradition, the koshas are the various aspects of being that we occupy. The physical level of being is the most obvious. It's the clearest, it's the densest. It's also the most

difficult to change, by the way. And then there are more subtle forms of energy that the yogis call bodies. So we have the physical body. The next layer is the pranic body, the breath body, the life force body. And so that is an important aspect of our being as well.

Gail Parker (00:29:02):

Then the next level of our being is the emotional and mental body. So we can see that we're getting more and more subtle as we move up this ladder. The next layer of being is our wisdom body, the body, the part of us, that goes beyond the obvious, the physical body, the breath body, the mental and emotional body. And now we're in the wisdom body. Now we don't have to have the experience to have a level of knowing. We don't have to keep putting our hand on the hot stove to remember that, oh, it burns. Experience is a wonderful teacher, but it's a painful way to keep learning. And so now when we've tapped into that awareness—so the wisdom body is really our awareness, which is not an aspect of mind.

(00:30:02):

Awareness is independent of... Well, we need minds to become aware, but it's not a thinking process. We go beyond information. And so we teach, we learn that, wait a minute, the mind, it's more than a storehouse of information. It can be a vehicle of awareness. That's what it is. It's our vehicle of awareness. It is not the thing. And then we have an opportunity to get to the most subtle level of being, which is the spiritual body. And the yogis call it the bliss body, the anandamaya kosha is what it's called. I wouldn't say that we need to heal any of that. I would say that when we are in alignment, when each aspect of being is in alignment, now we're in a place of balance. This is where we want to be.

(00:31:02):

And so typically in yoga, it's taught that we start with the physical body. The reason it's taught that way is because it's the easiest to access. I say, no, we need to start with the top. We need to start with the spiritual body, at least with the awareness that we have one, because it influences every other aspect of our being. So why wouldn't we want to start at the top or at least have awareness that this is an important place to be? So I say we have to make friends with the highest level of consciousness that we can reach. We can't go all the way, but the highest level of consciousness—and again, I think this is where Gabriela's work is critically important, because I think that that's another exploration of these very subtle, almost intangible aspects of being. We are sensate beings, but if we remain stuck on the level of sensation, boy, are we limited. We're really limiting ourselves. So that's how the koshas, from my perspective, relate to this work that we're doing.

Shankari Goldstein (00:32:25):

And I'd love to hear from you, Gabriela, just to chime in. I mean, in dream yoga, it seems like the practitioners are aiming to maintain that awareness and control over their dreams, and they're almost like moving through these subtle energy bodies. So, is there a dream body?

Gabriela Torres-Platas (00:32:40):

Yeah, exactly. So I think it's very interesting because the work of dream yoga or sleep yoga is really to change the perception that you have of the world and kind of transpose the abilities you get in the dream in waking life. And then take those rigidities and concepts that are solid and try

to change them in the dream and start seeing life as fluid and taking all these layers of heaviness and rigidity that we have. So it's very interesting because you do have a dream body. And the dream body, you can do many things with it that you cannot do in real life.

Gabriela Torres-Platas (00:33:34):

So one of the examples that I really love is—one exercise of dream yoga is like, let's cross [through] the wall. So this is something that you definitely cannot do in waking life. Because you are so attached to the idea of the body—again, this is not scientific, this is really what people that practice believe and say. So when you cross the wall—and this is something that I discussed with this dream yoga teacher, Charlie Morley, where he was explaining that the concept of crossing the wall is really very interesting because you have to believe first that you can cross that wall.

(00:34:25):

So changing that belief, in real life I can't, but in a dream I can, it's just changing this flexibility of your mind. And the idea is that if you believe it 100%, that eventually you will be able [to do it] in waking life. Well, this is a big stretch, but I like the idea... But dream yoga, as I said, our life is an illusion. What we see as solid is not. So we need to understand this and see life as a dream because it's just a reflection of our inner self.

(00:35:04):

So yeah, I totally agree that working with this subtle consciousness is something that needs to be addressed. And I don't know if... I was discussing this with my sister-in-law last night about why the body is so important and the importance of working with the body. So I think the layers are very important to go one by one, and going back to this concept of disillusionment, I agree that what we're trying to do is to peel the layers until we arrive, start de-identifying with the concepts that we think we are or the beliefs that we think we have and working with those. So that's why I think it's very interesting. Dream yoga could be a potential tool to work on this and see how that could actually change in different populations of psychiatric disorders.

Shankari Goldstein (00:36:03):

That's great. And as we continue to talk about these subtle layers of consciousness, there was a recent meta-analysis of randomized control trials that found that yoga-based interventions have outperformed or equaled mindfulness in all but one area. And I'm wondering if my tech team can put the link to that trial in the chat for those joining us live. So just building on the findings that we can infer that these practices, they offer valuable tools for navigating complex terrain of disillusionment. I mean, you both just proved that.

(00:36:35):

And while the meta-analysis focuses on measurable outcomes like stress, anxiety, depression, we can also extrapolate that the skills and insights that are cultivated through restorative yoga, dream yoga, these lucid dreaming techniques, are also bringing increased self-awareness, emotional regulation, acceptance of impermanence. They could be instrumental in facing and transcending these moments in states of disillusionment. But these subtle states of consciousness lead me to think about mind wandering, which is kind of our topic for this month at Mind & Life. And as we allow the mind to wander freely, we give ourselves permission to rest

and explore our thoughts and move into these deeper states of awareness and tap into our creativity and intuition.

Shankari Goldstein (00:37:25):

So Gail, I'd love to hear, in this fast-paced world that we live in, always connected, intentional mind-wandering can be a powerful form of, I think, resistance against the pressures of constant productivity and stimulation. How do you both see, and how do you see, the practice of yoga with this emphasis on internal awareness, help individuals better regulate while also finding liberatory ways to connect to nature and promote these states of mind wandering?

Gail Parker (00:38:02):

Well, I think the most powerful aspect of the work that we're talking about is helping people understand that they really do have an inner life. We, particularly in America, tend to be externally focused. We have great external focus. Most of us know... Well, let's put it this way, even if it's minimal, we know something of what's going on around us. And that's an important aspect of awareness. But we also have an inner life. And as a psychologist, one of the things that always surprised me, always, the 40 years I was in practice, I was always surprised and always had to remember and remind myself that people do not know that they have an inner life. They don't know that there's a connection between breath, between thought, between feeling, that there's a wisdom, their intuition—people are afraid of their intuition.

(00:39:04):

I remember years ago, giving a presentation somewhere, and it was like saying the word “intuition” was almost like “witchcraft”. I mean, really, it was not well accepted. And so these aspects of knowing, and spirituality beyond religion—because that's ultimately where this can take you, beyond the dogma of religion, which has value, but there's more. There's more. And so that is threatening to some people. But when you begin to discover that you have an inner life—and the scientists would call it interoception: you know when you're sleepy, you know when you're hungry, you know when you're thirsty, you know when you're not breathing properly, you know you feel better when you're out in nature than when you're stuck in a house or stuck in an office.

(00:40:02):

I remember going to my husband's office one time, and he loves being outdoors more than anything else in the whole wide world, and I like being outdoors too. But it was just, could not be satisfying for him. And we lived in a place where it was hard to be outdoors. There were no windows. No windows. And I thought, "Oh wow, what a place to be." How does that shape one's consciousness? You know what I'm saying? And so cultivating states of inner awareness, just on the most practical level, helps us know when we need something. In this culture... Now here's the—I guess a downside of some of this is: in this culture, a lot of us do resting practices so we can work harder. So this defeats the purpose.

(00:40:58):

We need to know when we're sleepy, we need to know when we're hungry. How many times do you put off eating because you're too busy? So these rest practices that we do, whatever they may be: walking in the park, being in green space, looking outdoors—I'm looking out of my

window now at the blue, blue sky and the beautiful clouds and the sun is shining here, and I'm aware that I feel uplifted. So these are the levels of awareness that we want to cultivate. What makes me feel good? What makes me feel bad? When do I feel relaxed? When do I feel tense? That's what the practices help us understand. And that's what's good for our health.

Shankari Goldstein (00:41:46):

That's right. Gabriela, do you want to add anything before we close?

Gabriela Torres-Platas (00:41:49):

Yeah, no, if I may just chime in that this is exactly what dream yoga is also trying to cultivate, the awareness of the state that you're in and bringing all the... It is all about internal life and how that produces your external life. So I think it's a nice connection here of how this is very important and how... Well we just know now, all this research that has been done in mind-body interventions, and you just shared this meta-analysis, the impact of these practices and how effective they are even compared to medication. So we know that there's a lot we can change inside that can change the outside. So just chiming in with that comment before we go to the next part.

Gail Parker (00:42:46):

Can I just comment on what Gabriela just said?

Shankari Goldstein (00:42:47):

Please, please. Go ahead.

Gail Parker (00:42:48):

So what you just said, I'm going to paraphrase because I lost it real quickly, but your internal life is really what you experience externally. We don't know that. We think what's going on out here is what causes me to feel the way I feel. And it doesn't mean that what's going on out here doesn't have an impact. It does, but there's more. But my response to whatever is going on out here is an aspect of my inner life, and that's what I want to get curious about. How come of all the ways in life I could be responding to this, whatever this is, why? That's our exploration. That's our exploration to do, each of us, but we don't have to do it alone.

Shankari Goldstein (00:43:41):

I love that. Thank you both. This was so good. And I just want to say that there's time for each of you to come up and—not each of you, that would take hours and hours—but for some of you to have the opportunity to engage in Q&A with Gabriela and Gail in a few moments. But we want to take time for you all to connect as a community.

(00:44:01):

Again, this is a community space. It's very vibrant. We want you all to be able to engage with one another. So we're going to just take maybe 10, 12 minutes to go into breakout rooms, small breakout rooms, and as we come to the end of this discussion, just think about maybe a prompt for today of, how have these experiences of disillusionment or moments when you felt disappointment or let down, or just acknowledging that external, what's happening outside—how did it help shape your personal growth or spiritual journey? How did these states—how are they

aligning with you all today? Or just any reflections that you're sitting with after listening to this conversation with your fellow group members. So we're going to just open up those rooms for a few moments. We'll put the prompt in the chat too for you all to see in a moment.

Shankari Goldstein (00:44:54):

Hope you were able to share some reflections and thoughts and you were brave enough to delve into the prompt. Oh, great, there's already hands raised, amazing. So yeah, we're going to move into our Q&A portion, and you can select the hand raise feature by clicking on the reactions button, and then click that little carrot arrow button up and it'll catch your hand raising there. We've already got a few questions. I'm going to let Jerome come up and ask his question to either Gail or Gabriela or both. Hi, Jerome. Welcome.

Speaker 4 (00:45:39):

Can you hear me?

Shankari Goldstein (00:45:39):

We can hear you.

Speaker 4 (00:45:40):

Okay, good. This is for both, my question. Thanks for your presentation. I loved it. I have experienced some lucid dreaming in the past, and I think I need to get back to it. The question I have: is there a difference between dream yoga and lucid dreaming and the Tibetan process that was talked about at the beginning?

Shankari Goldstein (00:46:11):

Sure, Gabriela?

Gabriela Torres-Platas (00:46:13):

Yeah, so lucid dreaming is the practice of becoming aware of your dream state, and a lot of people just do it recreationally. So they go and they meet celebrities or they learn stuff. And dream yoga uses lucid dreaming as a means of spiritual growth. So you use the lucid dreaming to practice contemplative practices, redundant, but yeah. So it's more for spiritual gain and to practice things to be able to enlighten yourself more easily. And so if that answers your question—so the difference is just spiritual, it goes for a spiritual purpose versus recreational.

Shankari Goldstein (00:47:08):

Great. And Ellen, do you want to go ahead and come up and ask your question?

Speaker 5 (00:47:16):

Yeah. Thank you and thanks for your presentation today. I guess this will be a question for Dr. Parker. I'm curious about how one might cultivate intuition. I used to be much more intuitive than I believe I am now, and I'm curious how one might get back to that intuition based on your knowledge and research. Thank you.

Gail Parker (00:47:45):

Thank you for the question. Getting back to intuition, again, I'm going to remind us of what Gabriela told us, which is number one: intention. So the fact that you have set this intention is

step number one. Number two, then there are practices that you can engage in that support you in cultivating a relationship to your intuitive wisdom. We all have a wisdom body, but we aren't always paying attention to our wisdom body because we get distracted by all of the external events that are occurring, that really hijack us into being more aware of what's going on around us than what's going on within us.

Gail Parker (00:48:34):

So I would say cultivate practices that take you inside. Contemplative practices are available to you. It's what we do. It's why we meditate. It's why we do the restorative yoga practices. It's why we engage in the dream yoga practices. And so really, to me, it doesn't matter which one you choose, but being in a resting state, meaning... When you are in a deep resting state, then your intuition is more available to you. And then, well, how do I trust my intuition? I have to test it. And that's the risky part. Well, it's kind of like the dream yoga, thank you for all of this, Gabriela, because this is new to me too, but it's like you have to ask yourself, am I dreaming or is this real? So can I trust this intuitive process or not? You have to take a risk and test it.

(00:49:43):

And if it turns out that, oh, that was not what I thought it was going to be, then you just continue doing the practices. I don't know, does that answer your question, Ellen?

Speaker 5 (00:49:59):

It's a great place to start. Thank you.

Gail Parker (00:50:01):

Okay. You're welcome.

Speaker 5 (00:50:03):

There's a lot of more hands up, so I want to be sensitive to people's time. Thank you.

Gail Parker (00:50:07):

Thank you.

Shankari Goldstein (00:50:08):

Thanks so much, Ellen. Yeah, I love to see all these hands. We're going to kick over to Linda.

Speaker 6 (00:50:15):

Hey, thank you so much for your talks, they were really thought-provoking and inspiring to me. My question is that I'm very interested in the neuroscience of how we experience consciousness. And I got there through a long road starting out dealing with chronic pain and then pursuing paths to try to understand how my brain was interpreting the lack of safety in my body and exacerbating pain. And so through that, I've been very interested in the work of Lisa Feldman Barrett and Anil Seth and Donald Hoffman. There are a lot of people out there who evaluate this information, are trying to understand the hard question of consciousness, and I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about how the Buddhist tradition and the idea that the world is a projection of your mind fits with that, and how we can maybe utilize it to help move ourselves forward along the path.

Shankari Goldstein (00:51:32):

Thank you, Linda. Gabriela, you want to—go ahead and unmute yourself there.

Gabriela Torres-Platas (00:51:39):

I forgot I was muted. Yeah, thank you for the question. The first thing that comes to mind is this saying that, it's escaped me who said it, but a big Buddhist teacher said, "Pain is natural, suffering is optional." So we all have these sensations, we perceive the world, but whether we choose to suffer or not, that's pretty much a decision. I know you mentioned chronic pain, so this is a different level, but I think it goes, to answer your question, I think the way I see it, and this is just personal, no scientific evidence in this, but when you are going to disengage from, how solid is the world, I think there's going to be a lot of space.

(00:52:46):

So this is what dream yoga usually does. Okay, so you engage in dream practice to be able to... every time you have a stimulus that before was something that was painful or something that made you react, the more you practice in the dream, the idea is that when you have these stimuli in waking life, you will have more space between the stimuli and your reaction or your feelings. Okay, so then what I believe is if you are practicing dream yoga, you would be able to kind of decorticate these two different... So you are feeling pain, and yes, there's suffering, but then the way you engage with it, it might be different.

(00:53:32):

Obviously we still feel pain, we still feel everything. So the world is an illusion, it's really hard to... As Gail was saying earlier, one thing is what you understand and the other thing is the experiential part. And I think just going to that deep, deep, deep level, for me it seems really far away, but the idea is that you will be able to disconnect and just see it as a sensation rather than something that is causing you suffering. I know this is very easy to say, and I don't know if I... But this is the way I understand the teachings.

(00:54:04):

In terms of how we can connect it to neuroscience, I don't think there is a clear link with the Buddhist practices and how we could work with pain. So I could not answer to that. But I hope that answers your question or I don't know if Dr. Parker has anything to add.

Gail Parker (00:54:26):

Yeah, thank you Gabriela. One of the things that I think is really important for us to understand is that when our nervous systems are in contraction, tight like this, we're in pain. What we have to do is engage in practices that support the nervous system in feeling safe enough to release the contraction. But here's the trick, when we do that, we feel a different level of pain. It hurts. We become very aware of the experience of pain, but the pain of healing is different from the pain of suffering. The pain of healing is temporary. The pain of suffering goes on and on and on until we recognize that that's what it is.

(00:55:28):

So again, this is not just a cognitive process. In our physical bodies, when we are able to relax the nervous system, and there's a whole way of doing that that we don't have time for right now,

but to relax the contractions, then we're coming into a state of health. One of the things that my patients tell me is, it's not that I don't have pain—these are the ones with chronic pain, physical pain—it's not that I don't have pain anymore, it's that I'm not focused on it anymore in the same way. And so again, it's our level of awareness that can shift, but also it's physiologic. I mean, it really is physiologic. When you're able to tolerate the discomfort of letting go of whatever you're bound up in, that eases much of the pain. And that's what I call the pain of healing. So I hope that's helpful to you.

Shankari Goldstein (00:56:43):

Great, thank you. So I think, I know there's a lot of hands raised, which is just a testament to the power of this conversation between the two of you, really, just fabulous. But I think we only have time for maybe one, possibly two more if it's short. Deborah, do you want to come up and ask your question?

Speaker 7 (00:57:01):

Yes.

Shankari Goldstein (00:57:03):

Go ahead. We can hear you.

Speaker 7 (00:57:05):

Thank you, Shankari. Gail and Gabriela, thank you. I believe what I heard, Gail, was that we need to be in touch with the anandamaya kosha. We need to have an awareness of that. And many of the somatic practitioners and mindfulness practitioners tell us that one way to cut thought that's unhelpful is to focus on the sensations. And I wonder if there are ways, brief practices tapping into the anandamaya kosha that can also do that. Sometimes it seems that sensation leads to the bliss body, but I wonder what approaches you might have for that.

Gail Parker (00:58:07):

Thank you Deborah for the question. The simplest approach that is available to all of us, all the time, is breath. Begin to do these breath practices that help release the tension, the contraction that I'm talking about. There's more, but we always have the breath available to us. People would come into my office: "How are you?" "I'm fine." I'd say, "Okay, well that's nice. Let's have a seat and let's just do a little breathing together before we get started. How do you feel now?" "I feel better." But there's not an awareness that the fact that I'm holding myself this way is what's causing a lot of the discomfort. Not all of it, but a lot of it.

(00:58:59):

And so as we can begin to come into that place of awareness that oh, it is possible to feel good, then that is part of the growth process. I'm trying to stay away from medical terminology here, but it's part of the growth process or the healing process, if that is how you want to describe it. Breathe. Breathe and do yoga, that's what we say.

Shankari Goldstein (00:59:36):

Great. Yeah. I'm going to be brave and just try to squeeze in one more question because I'm just so excited that there's so many. So Jane, if you can ask but maybe keep it short.

Speaker 8 (00:59:55):

All right. Hi. So one of my, I guess wonderments about this, and I may not be fully understanding the whole yoga dream process, is when I dream, I try to let the dream happen and believe it's trying to teach me something or have me let go of something. And there's certain types of dreams, there's normal dreams, and then there's some more prophetic dreams where there's more of a message in them. But I would be afraid of being too aware of it that I'd be manipulating the dream somehow or having too much ego involved with it and not letting it happen. Maybe you can speak to that.

Gabriela Torres-Platas (01:00:31):

Sure. So the way I see it, a lot of people that start lucid dreaming start doing mundane things, things that you cannot do in normal life. You're having fun, meeting celebrities and doing all this stuff so that you're trying to learn to control the dream. Just as a parenthesis, there is a spectrum. There's a spectrum of lucidity and there's a spectrum of control. So you become lucid, but it could be a little bit lucid, you know it's a dream, but you are kind of lost; or you are very lucid, and then you are very lucid, but you [only] have a little bit of control over the dream or no control. So there's these two different scales.

(01:01:22):

Usually people that practice dream yoga start by learning to control the dream so that you can actually manifest what you need to manifest. Because in order to be able to become a deity—like there's this practice where you conjure a deity, let's say a Tibetan deity, and you become the deity—you start manifesting this person or this deity, and then you try to become the deity. For that, it requires an exceptional level of control that you need to practice in a dream. And then once you get to that control, it's kind of like exploring a new world. Then you get to this level of control and then you learn to allow the dream to happen. You can control, but you also get what the dream has to teach you. So I think these are the different levels also of the practice of dream yoga.

(01:02:18):

When you start with a little bit of control, just playing, exploring until you get to some control and then you let go and go back to learn what the dream has to teach you. So yeah, there's different levels. So I wouldn't say that if you want to control it—I mean, if you already passed to the level that you can control it and now you're ready to let go, then you're playing with the ego there where you're letting it go and allowing. That's also a very spiritual practice. I would encourage you to just go deeper and see what the dream has to teach you.

(01:02:56):

This is something one of the teachers we are working with was saying too, that at the end when you reach a very high point of your dream yoga practice, then you are a co-creator with the dream. So you have influence over the dream rather than controlling it and you treat the dream and the wisdom of the dream with respect and get it back. So it is different levels of engagement. So I hope that answers your question.

Shankari Goldstein (01:03:26):

Thank you. And apologies to those who raised their hand. We won't be able to get to you today, but please come back for future episodes, and thank you so much, Gabriela, Gail. I think this is so cool. What a divine coincidence that the three of us get to be together on International Women's Day. That's amazing. And I think everybody really appreciated your presentations. Just a few Mind & Life announcements. We're going to be returning with future Mind & Life Connects in the coming months, so stay tuned. You can sign up for our Mindstream newsletter, which our team I'm sure has put in the chat, or you can go to our website. And stay connected with us: we've got the newsletter, Mind & Life podcast, and again, don't forget to, if you can, give generously to help sustain programming and our grant funding for our contemplative practice and research community. It's because of all of you that we're here. So we really appreciate it. And I'm going to hand it over to Dr. Parker to just ground us in a closing practice.

Gail Parker (01:04:32):

Okay. So very gently bring your palms together and put them at heart center and lower your gaze or close your eyes and just, I would like us to bow in gratitude for the Mind & Life series that supports us all in our spiritual growth. I would like to bow in gratitude for all of the preconditions that had to occur for all of us to be able to show up here today, and in gratitude for our breath. Thank you so much for joining us.

Gabriela Torres-Platas (01:05:12):

This was great. Thank you. Thank you everyone, and thank you, Mind & Life. Thank you, Shankari. Thank you everyone.

Shankari Goldstein (01:05:19):

Thank you all. Have a beautiful rest of your day or evening. Appreciate you. See you soon.

Gabriela Torres-Platas (01:05:24):

See you. Bye.