

2022-04-02 Matthew Brensilver: Mindfulness, Dharma, Mental Health & Science Part 1

SPEAKERS

Matthew Brensilver

So welcome to all of you. Happy to be with you and be reflecting on these themes this morning. I just have a few slides that I'm not planning to present a lot in that form. But here you see the growth of interest in meditation in the scientific literature. So over the last 30 years, you see from searching for the keyword meditation 13 in 1991 to almost 2000 last year. And we go back to to William James, say we're saying the faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again, is the very root of judgment character and will an education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence, but it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical directions for bringing it about. In a way, one set of practical directions for bringing in about is is what we do, when we do this attentional training that we do. But this is also this, this Asian monastic path is also a mystical path that is not attentional training for its own purposes. Exactly. And so again, we have James echoing with a certain kind of reverence for for this mystical dimension. Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness, as we call it is but one special type of consciousness. Well, it's all about it parted from it from the by the film mist of screens, their life potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence, but no account of the universe in its totality can be final, which leaves these other forms of consciousness disregarded. How to regard them as the question for they're so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness, they may determine attitudes, though, they cannot furnish formulas and open a region, though they fail to give a map, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality.

The increase in the kind of scientific interest around meditation is evident, reflected in the increase in in practice use of meditation. And so this is there's not good data from from more recently that I could find easily. But but one of the kind of repeated national surveys here we see from 2012 to 2017. You see that growth in that that center center columns of meditation, and this is this is just have you practice meditation at some point in the past 12 months? That's that's been the question. And you see, it's grouped here with with, with yoga and chiropractic three, which is kind of interesting and sort of a testament to the state of how these things are grouped together is is meaningful in itself. Here's data for for kids. You see, the, again, the growth over the this period of five years and I imagine there's been a lot of growth since 2017. Certain just anecdotally, when I teach retreats, if there's 100 People in the retreat, there will be men. I don't know what it's a lot of people who are now coming into retreat residential retreat through the route of apps and digital technology. And, and so the, the, let me pause this for a moment that the kind of motivations that people are coming in with to practice meditation about 10% were recommended by a physician. Yeah. Maybe 20% Did consulted a teacher or a class,

most people are practicing on their own actually, it seems. And the people who did consult with a class or teacher something, the median annual spending on meditation was \$120. And the practice motivations, the practice motivations, were general wellness or, or disease prevention and about three quarters of people improving energy in 60%, improving memory, concentration, and about half of the respondents. And I don't know where enlightenment was there, but it's lower down, right? And so, this is a different this is, this is the convergence or collision of different traditions. And so, the question like how should we? How should we think about the application of a kind of Asian renunciate tradition to the realm of mental health of healing? What what exactly is the dharma for? And who gets to decide what it's for? Or what is to use medical language? What is the scope of practice of the dharma? What is the the scope of practice of a nurse or nurse practitioner or physician or something like this? What is the scope of practice of the dharma? And how is how is the dharma transformed by its interaction with the realm of mental health with the realm of all the different different encounters it's having in this culture? In the The New York Times about now above, about 15 years ago, they wrote the questions not whether mindfulness meditation will become a sophisticated therapeutic technique, or lapse into self help cliché. The answer to that question is yes to both.

So we can think about well-being as a kind of as a continuum as a continuum. And so on one end, we have the most intense, unmitigated suffering. And then on the other end, we have like just profound flourishing, maybe we call it self actualization or awakening or something like this. And then at the midpoint, we have something what we call normal, no. Of course, Maslow said, what we call normal in psychology is really a psycho pathology of the average. So undramatic, and so widely spread that we don't even notice it. Ordinarily, the very harsh language actually, but what we call normal is the psychopathology of the average the meaning, what we consider kind of like, what, an okay, human life is actually full of dukkha. And treated traditionally, the path of dharma has been largely devoted to the span of well being from okay enough to profound flourishing. It's been about potential creating well being. It's been about kind of refining out more and more subtle layers of suffering. But Importantly, the the dharma has relevance for this half of the spectrum of well-being to. And this is where the public health interest really is. This is where there's much more bang for the buck, actually, fiddling with the subtle Calais says attachment to light and bliss, this is not the priority of public health institutions. Yeah. It's like, no, there's like so much suffering. And how can this path of practice be of use in those ways? So there are academic, and there's, there were so many different ways I might have gone during this this time together, and how I sort of structured the different themes and am Yeah, no doubt, leaving, lots of questions unanswered. And, but hopefully, we we have some, some productive discussions together. So there are one of the questions is how we sort of situate this Buddhist tradition with with science with empiricism. And, and in enact the academic world, there isn't something there are there are buildings that separate different departments, there's the biology, and this is the Literature Department, and this is education, this is medicine, right. And then there are these kind of siloed academic departments based on particular expertise. But then there are also increasingly common interdisciplinary approaches, interdisciplinary approaches where you're bringing to bear a range of different forms of expertise and hear the problem rather than the discipline becomes the focal point. And a very diverse expertise is relevant. And what I would say what I often say is that that Duke, is an interdisciplinary problem. Yeah. It is not the province of just like, one discourse, yeah, be it dharma, science or any.

And the fact that the dharma is, is the only medicine I would say, for certain species of suffering, doesn't mean it's the medicine for all species of suffering. And how we, we kind of this, this dialogue that's happening between disciplines is important and we want to have it in intelligent ways. So what is the stance and I have like, very deep devotion, in for in to science and the spirit of empiricism, and obviously, to the dharma, which I have have, dedicated my energy to life till. And so anyway, as I talk, I'm sort of like, on one shoulder, I have my dharma teachers. And on the other shoulder, I have my scientific mentors. And I'm trying not to modify either of them. And we will see how I do. Yeah. We'll see. Yeah. So what is the what is the stance of the dharma towards other discourses towards science, medicine, philosophy, history, these things? What is the stance of a religious tradition to these other other traditions? So, so one possible stance is just to ignore to ignore these other disciplines. And this would go something like well, the dharma is is dukkha might be an interdisciplinary problem, but the dharma is really suffering. For all that truly matters. Yeah. Another stance might be competition, this is a very familiar stance of religious traditions towards the secular, a sense of like, yeah, that that the the secular, the scientific, the historical is a kind of encroachment on this sacred ground of the dharma needs to be fought off in some ways you see this acted out historically and present. Another way of situating dharma science is something like, what non non or non overlapping magisteria Yeah, so there's a famous phrase from Stephen Jay Gould, who was an evolutionary biologist and a science communicator and was trying to situate, like, find a way for religion and science to coexist somewhat peacefully. And Gould said, science tries to document the factual character of the natural world and to develop theories that coordinate and explain these facts. Religion, on the other hand, operates in the equally important, but utterly different realm of human purposes, meanings and values, subjects that the factual domain of science might illuminate, but can never resolve. That that was, that was his attempt non overlapping magisteria ways of of situating dharma science, religion science. There's another way and have something like selective appropriation there's, there's the cultural appropriation of kind of, on one side of science or mental health of,

divorcing mindfulness from its cultural rich cultural history. But the other side, there's a kind of selective appropriation of how, for example, the the sort of tropes and dharma of highlighting supportive scientific data, things that sort of confirm our Buddhist presuppositions and sort of trotting out data that amplify those, so much of like, the way neuroscience is used rhetorically, is an attempt to convince us that we should keep practicing, which is okay, that's all right. But this is a kind of, selectively, cherry picking certain, certain bits of science as a way of reinforcing Buddhist notions. And I just want to say, science doesn't just give it also takes. Yeah. And so if we, as dharma practitioners get into the business of marshaling scientific evidence for our claims, we want to do this carefully, because science doesn't just give it will take to Yeah. Now, the last kind of relationship between these these different traditions which is is closest to my heart is something like a conversation. It is a truly bi directional flow of information, it is treating dukkha as an interdisciplinary problem with a degree of reverence for the, the the respective zones of expertise. And, and it is about accepting influence. In couples therapy, there's a notion of like, accepting influence, can one partner accept the influence of another? Yeah, and I think we want to be open open to accepting influence. So there is I want to say the problem of scientism, scientism, in this discussion, there's the problem of scientism, which is sort of the sense that that science is the ultimate arbiter of all kinds of claims and all value or something, it's sort of the kind of reductionistic vision of the

plurality of knowledge traditions. And you Yeah, Karl Popper said, despite my admiration for scientific knowledge, I'm not an adherent of scientism, for scientism dogmatically asserts the authority of scientific knowledge, whereas I do not believe in any authority and have always resist the dogmatism.

The more you study, the philosophy of science, the more humble you are about what science does and does not do. And so, there needs to be there is and I think in in scientists who are conscious of the, this, the philosophy that kind of epistemological understanding of science, there is a lot of humility, and and empiricism is the scientific method is has staggering power. And many of the claims of the dharma are empirical claims they are, they are empirically testable claims. They are falsifiable claims. Yeah, the nature of unhappiness of well-being of flourishing claims about the value of training or attention in this way claims about the value of ethics for well-being claims about how mindfulness, alleviate suffering, these are all actually empirical claims. And science is a powerful way of assessing the validity of empirical claim. And maybe even more fundamental science, in my experience is not always practice in this way. But science, I think, when done well is actually a form of intellectual honesty. It's a form of intellectual honesty, a willingness to be wrong. And that is the willingness to be wrong as like, just obviously, profoundly lacking in the world. So the last thing I want to say about this, and then I'll just say a few more things before we pause and open it is that the commitment to deep love to awareness, to a kind of reverential stance to the EU in relation to the dharma, I feel this is actually compatible with a scientific sensibility. And there's this sense of like, well, if we, we welcome in kind of some of the impure empiricism, what happens is somehow the sacred will be compromised. And I don't think it has to be that way. It might go that way. But I don't think it has to be that way. And I don't think the kind of openness to the discourse of science these kinds of things necessitates a kind of reductionistic vision of the path of its potency of its beauty of its depth.

Sincere integration integrations are possible, sincere, beautiful integrations of the the mindfulness tradition of dharma tradition. are possible. As an example. Marsha Marsha Linehan developed dialectical behavior therapy as used initially around borderline personality, but kind of generally emotion dysregulation and self harming behaviors and, and mindfulness is really it's not like one of the modules, it's sort of a backbone of that that treatment approach. And Linehan, about 10 years ago sort of revealed the origins of, of, of the, the treatment that she's largely responsible for developing. And so this is from the New York Times Are you one of us? The patient wanted to know, and her therapist Marsha M. Linehan of the University of Washington, creator of a treatment used worldwide for severely suicidal people had a ready answer. It was the one show I always used to cut the question short, whether a patient asked it hopefully accusingly or knowingly having glimpse the macro may have faded burns, cuts and welts. And Dr. Linda hands are you mean have I suffered? No, Marsha, the patient replied in an encounter last spring. I mean, one of us, like us, because if you were it would give all of us so much hope. That did it said Dr. Linehan 68, who told her story in public for the first time last week before an audience of friends, families, and doctors at the Institute of living the Hartford clinic, where she was first treated for extreme social withdrawal at age 17. So many people begged me to come forward. And I just thought, well, I have to do this. I owe it to them. I cannot die a coward and then she disclosed her own history of mental illness and failed treatment and a sense of Yeah, the depths of hopelessness of that and necessity of like, okay, we can do better. How do we treat people like me. And

then some years later, I saw her her dedication to one of the kind of one of the workbooks, one of the DBT workbooks, and which is a skills workbook, it's developing skills of emotion regulation. And, and she wrote, When I'm on retreats, if each afternoon, I walk and wring my hands, saying to all the mental health patients of the world, you don't have to wring your hands today. I'm doing it for you. Often, when I dance in the hallway of my house or with groups, I invite all the mental health patients of the World to Come dance with me. This book is dedicated to all the patients in the world, I think no one's thinking of them. I considered telling you that I would practice skills for you. So you don't have to practice them. But then I realized that if I did, you would not learn how to be skillful yourself. So instead, I wish you skillful means and I wish that you find these skills useful.

I find that touching Yeah. And you can't write a dedication like that, unless your your heart has been pierced in some way by the path of practice. And I have some trust that when when one has a kind of deep encounter with the path of practice that The modifications the distillations, though the articulations, of, of this path of practice, no matter what they look like, they're also they will have integrity if they come out of an understanding of of the depth of what's possible. So we can, can hear many of the themes that I've been articulating. And this last last piece I'll share which is from a number of the the, the leaders in the kind of movement around mindfulness based programs. So, this is Jon Kabat Zinn, Christina Feldman, Buddhist teacher, Judd Brewer. And, and they asked in 2016 paper like the the, what is the warp and the weft of mind from this space programs? And so I think the warp on in like a rug is sort of like the the backbone of of it and the weft is sort of the the design or something. And so what is the what is the what is the warp and the weft of, of mindfulness space programs, and just, I'll just read, the five essential qualities of mindfulness based programs, you'll hear innovations and you'll also hear echoes of, of the the dharma path, which we're familiar. So mindfulness based programs are informed by theories and practices that draw from a confluence of contemplative traditions, science, and the disciplines of medicine, psychology and education. To is underpinned by a model of human experience, which addresses the causes of human distress and the pathways to relieving it. Three, develops a new relationship with experience characterized by present moment focus decentering, and an approach orientation. Four supports the development of greater attentional emotional and behavioral self regulation, as well as positive qualities such as compassionate wisdom equanimity five, engaging engages the participant in a sustained intensive training in mindfulness meditation practice, in an X in an experiential inquiry based learning process, and in exercises to develop insight and understanding.

No, yeah, I'm curious how that reads to how that lands and you can certainly hear a lot of echoes of the dharma path and and also more of this kind of interdisciplinary approach and they highlighting particular aspects of the dharma path and to the exclusion of others, for example, this was their their attempt to to characterize mindfulness based programming, yeah. The war of mindfulness based programming. And, and this whole conversation is happening in the context of

Jon Kabat Zinn's work, which is he said this in 2011. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, the eight week program that's quite prominent as sort of secular mindfulness

was developed as one of a possibly infinite number of skillful means for bringing the dharma into mainstream settings. It has never been about MBSR. for its own sake, it is always been about the M. And the M is a very big M. We use the word mindfulness intentionally as an umbrella term to describe our work and to link it explicitly, with whatever I have always considered to be a universal dharma that is coextensive if not identical, with the teachings of the Buddha The Buddha dumb. Yeah. So I don't know where that leaves us, what are we to think of all of this and and I don't want to fight about it either. But I do want to open for questions and just any any initial responses to to me laying it out in this way. If you Yeah, if you want to want to ask a question maybe can raise your your electronic hand and all of a new chair. Yeah,

that sounded that is the self description sounded incredibly idealistic, particularly about the sustained, serious practice. The few people I've known who are not Buddhists who have done some sort of mindfulness thing, it was pretty short and not sustained, not deep and they came away. One friend of mine came away, not really understanding what what it was or what the point was. And I mean, she's very intelligent. She has a PhD in psychology, and it wasn't very, I mean, that's, that's anecdotal. But and the other question I had was, the fifth description point was that mindfulness? The mindfulness movement is approach oriented. And I didn't know what that meant.

Yeah. Yeah. So let's see. I think one of the things you're pointing to is, is sort of the question of attrition to put in clinical language like, what are the attrition rates in the dharma realm in the mindfulness realm? It's high, it's high. I don't know exactly what it is people finish generally finished there. The dropout rates for like an eight week mindfulness class are quite low, probably lower than CBT or something like that are similar to that. I didn't know what CBT cognitive behavioral therapy, so like a standardized treatment, their, their Dropout is, but eight weeks is that right? In the course of a dharma life? What are we Is that is that a sufficient dose? Right? Like how many people it's amazing to me that there are treatment effects after eight weeks, because when I think about my mind on day one, and day 56, it was a circus gone wrong on day one, and the same at day 56. And so like that there are benefits, and they're probably the benefits, in those early phases of treatment are like, probably mostly cognitive reframing kind of benefits actually reappraisal, not attentional benefits. So another question maybe we'll get into, but it's like, yeah, are we this is like the the equivalent of giving half a milligram of Prozac rather than the 20, which is standard. And so what are we how are we to understand trician? In the different spheres? Are there ways of minimizing that? What is it mean about the people who stay and it may be the people we see, there may be that this group right here, we're the kind of super responders that are like highly unrepresentative of the initial sample, we're the weirdos actually, and we somehow stayed for whatever reason, and understanding those understanding the, what we call like the moderators of treatment responsiveness, the variables that predict kind of stronger response to, to the meditation treatment to the dharma treatment. That's, that's important. And then the second second thing was the approach orientation. This is, this is I will talk about more about that later in the morning. That is alluding to the fact that much of our distress, especially anxiety, but other things, too, is sustained by rigid habituated forms of avoidance. And, and mindfulness is an approach orientation in its basis, like all the instructions that you hear in guided meditations are ones approach. Yeah. And so this

is, this is, this is, I think one way of thinking about the dharma, I will say more of this is it is an exposure therapy, which is an approach orientation to all phenomena. We say it poetically, in instructions, I said something about all phenomena are the, is the the Buddha whispering in our ear or something. Yeah, that's a weird way of putting it, but it's like, that's an approach orientation. Yeah, that's an, the deepest kind of approach is love. It love and Samadhi. That's the deepest contact we can make with phenomena. And in this way, the the, the potential kind of extinction learning is most profound. When we approach that deeply. Yeah, I'll say more about that. Yeah. Thank you. Yeah. You. Diane, please.

Hi. So that figure about three quarters of them starting it because of health issues. Yeah. is probably the way Jon Kabat Zinn started it. But that sort of explains to me why I don't why how much I need sangha and, and how judgmental I get against all of us who are suffering versus those who managed to get by. And I just came off a two month retreat, my first and it was great. And it was not the miracle I wanted. And this is darn hard, and I'm running out of time. And I just feel like I'm envious of those people who managed to get by better. Because why not? You know, make hay while the sun is shining? I don't know where my question is. But I'm sure I've said enough for you to react to

that. It's nice to see oh, yeah, yeah. Well, some of the language around around dharma, like it's, it's a measure, measure in this meeting, where we're actually invited to step out of the realm of the comparing mind. Yeah, so I get where you're coming from. I know, I know, you're gonna be like, Oh, I know. I know, bad. But it's like, no, we're invited to like, this is not the view from which to understand suffering. It is suffering itself. Yeah. Yeah. And so like, Okay, how do you actually greater than less than equal to, it's like, no, we're really being invited out of that realm. Because it is, that is that is symptomatic of the dukkha itself. Yeah. And so and it's one of the most I mean, it's one of the most painful mind states. It's just just gruesome. Like I there is an n saps who said something like, Of the seven deadly sins, only envy is no fun at all. Like that's the only one like the laws than the only whatever, gluttony, envy is the only one that no fun at all, and it is no fun at all. And so it's like, Okay, let me just this is another expression of sexuality and like, this is the kind of this is this is needs to be, as my teacher said, love to death, love to death and so, just be careful how you kind of the difference fective dharma self congeals Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Thank you. Yeah,

thanks Ramses. There. Gotcha now. Yeah. Yes. Hi, Matthew. Hi, welcome.

Beautiful. So the reason I signed up to this course is first of all, honestly, Matthew brown silver, I saw the name, I registered, then I read the topic. And so I love the way every one of your courses have impacted me. I've been practicing abs, really very disciplined. I do two and a half hours meditation every day, and I've done 10 weeks of retreat last year, unfortunately, unfortunately, all on Zoom. The question that concerns that I come from a STEM background, but I have this deep desire to know topic

like what you're talking. Right? I mean, science of mindfulness. This is not I don't have any academic credentials behind this. I'm wondering why am I interested in this topic? First of all, number two is a good way.

Why are you interested in in what topic Exactly?

In the in the science and psychology of mindfulness? Yeah, yeah, right. I'm enjoying the practice very much devoted to it. I'm also a chaplain, I serve in the prison, all the good stuff life. But there is I'm only I'm starting to think I have read enough books on science of mindfulness of the Dalai Lama's compilation of science and the work he organized, I'm starting to wonder, is it not helping my practice much? It's just much approach to knowledge. They just break away from this and just enjoy an experience of practice.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I appreciate that. I, I think. Yeah, it's totally legitimate to put all of this down and just practice, sincerely, it really is I, I do not feel like it's necessary. For many people. I feel like for a long time, the meditation research was so kind of, kind of primitive and sort of reductionistic it was kind of just like demonstration projects, just saying, like, we're not, this is not a cult, really, there's something here, there's something here, that was the sort of spirit of a lot of it, just dignifying it as a topic for empirically responsive people or something like that. And it did not add much to to practice. But now I think we're starting to get into just recently starting to get to the point where people who clearly have fallen in love with dharma and have a long history, and are collaborating and interdisciplinary teams, or they are the scientists themselves. And it's been seated in a lot of different ways. And it's starting to get to the point where it's changing some of how I think about practice, and some of the science is actually feeding back into how I think about dharma practice. And so that's starting to, that's starting to happen, but I think I don't, I wouldn't, I wouldn't feel like obligated to look to the emerging science around around mindfulness to like support your path of practice.

Yeah, see, this is a 2500 year history. I get that right. And is it going to help me or come hindrances in some unique way I have, although I'm also basically putting this all under craving I have yet another craving wanting to know this topic, but I can't explain it. Thank you so much.

Yeah, yeah. Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, yeah, sometimes we sort of like, get a little academic and sort of like, soak that up. But then we need to like dry it out dry the ground out with more practice, but you're doing a lot of practice. And so it's great. Yeah. Okay, to two more and then we'll always seem to be Yeah, let's see, where are we at? Okay, let's take the last last three questions here and then we'll we'll take a break. Please.

Hi, thank you for doing this. I think you're amazing. Um, and I just wanted to say I enjoyed the the same thing that I think it was rom said just it's interesting. It's fascinating, like, what's more interesting than this, I guess, I feel I do the same thing he does and kind of have the same background and just feel like I, this is just so interesting. Anyway, um, I have two questions that are sort of outward pointing, one of them is about four or five years ago, I was I went to a several day retreat type thing, where they played every day, a section of talks by payment children on this topic, and I've never been able to find it again, it was recorded. And I was wondering what it is, it was really interesting. She went through and said, This is what we know about the brain. And this is what we know about the dharma. And she was talking about the parliament parameters. Do you happen to

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know? I don't know. I don't it was

really interesting. And it was really good. And a room MIDI stuff, and I haven't been able, I've gone through all kinds of, you know, I've tried to find it and I can't, can't find it. So it's out there. Okay. And the other one is also similar. I'm wondering, I mean, do you know Sam Harris's work? Do you mean, this?

Oh, crazy.

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So some of it, some of it? Yeah.

So I just was wondering if if you did if you could if you could talk at all about his his approach to neuroscience and dharma and how that aligns with yours? Because it seems very soon. I'd love to hear an interview him interview you, because I think that would be great. But I didn't know how close you were to his work.

Yeah, I don't I don't I definitely don't know it enough to to speak to it. Yeah, I'm sorry. Yeah, I know, I know. He's in kind of like, a sort of Dzogchen, is sort of blending a little bit of the Vipassana approach with some of the Dzogchen approach. And, and, and that kind of, and talks in sort of non dual ish certain ways, a lot of times by kind of, in a in a sort of, without smuggling in as much metaphysics, and so, and, yeah, anyway, I don't know, I really don't know about it, like, the approach well enough, but it's that I've seen that his app that is like a common one to for in coming in from retreats. I'm seeing that more and more. Yeah, so sorry, I can't speak more to it.

Okay. Well, I just wanted to know, thank you.

Thank you. Thank, thank you. Yeah. Yeah, please.

Hi, Matthew, thank you so much for offering this point of view, it's, it's been expensive for me to listen, I guess. I'm one of those people at the moment, enrolled in a science based mindfulness training program. But I feel a sense of betrayal towards like this, like, I'm a lover of the dhamma. And so now I have the dukkha of the love the, you know, a sense of betrayal towards the dharma to eliminate it completely from the conversation and I'm kind of trying to find a way in where I can hold both and you know, not not see it as an either or. Yeah, I was just wondering if you if you had some, some could shine some light on a path that might, you know, helped me receive what I signed up with a noble motivation and not not rejected?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Well, I think it is, a lot of it is how it's done. Like, is it done with with integrity and with heart and with a kind of reverence for the sacred as it done with Yeah, is it done with a kind of a sense of, of not like, highly selectively extracting, practices and these reductionistic ways versus like, which can feel really yucky really cocky, and, versus like being skillful means skillful means, and I think that depends a lot on the wholesomeness of the intentions of the people Designing the Intervention and I, for me the line I teach in mostly Buddhist settings, but but some in very secular settings, primarily UCLA. And for me, the dividing line is not Buddhist verse secular, the dividing line is kind of like reverence for the sacred versus the kind of commodification of attentional practice. And that, to me is what matters and and so I think there are ways of doing of sharing the practice in secular contexts that are, really have heart and have that sense of reverence with it. But it can get tricky, especially when it gets pressured, pressurized by kind of symptom orientation, where it's like, the practice has to deliver on these outcomes. And it's this very short term window, and you're really taking that half milligram of Prozac and, and then the practice itself becomes cramped, because we're sort of like, yeah, it just like there's the the delight, of investigation of, is sort of not there. And the sort of the, the pressure of becoming of it, like bhava, tanhā is so strong, and it's like, I don't know, I don't know. So it's, it's tricky, but I I, I think it can it can be done, but it it depends. And I might share your sense of like, yeah, Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu was asked about this. And I don't remember all of his response, but I do remember one component, which was kind of stayed with me, he was hesitant in his own way as he would be. But it was something like, any way that Buddhism makes its way into culture is a good thing. Yeah. And I that was meaningful to me even in its like, reductionistic, or, like, forums are something like, it was like, any ways that the wisdom, compassion makes its way in, this is a good thing. And I sort of keep that in my heart. And that stayed with me. And so yeah, how does that how does all this sound? Or where does this leave you? Yeah.

Yeah. You know, I'm also recognizing there's a hindrance here within myself as well. So I appreciate you sharing, you know, even your dialogue with it and your inquiry with it. What comes up is, you know, there's this presentation that if mindfulness is presented with the name of dharma, or Buddha, it is not going to be received. And that that's the idea that a part of me wants to challenge. Because in my own experience, it is not true because I spent years not attaching the Buddhadharma to my practice, and I was spinning. And the minute I kind of made that association and kind of dove into that world, it it started to unfold in a meaningful way. So to assume that we remove it, it's that that's my that's my

question. Yeah. Yeah, I am. I don't have an answer. And so I'm trying to just explore and expand my perspective. And yeah, I really appreciate this conversation.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Well, thanks for your warm heartedness around it and I can say like, just within the university context, because there are religion, theology departments, all this stuff. It's actually way less cramped there. When I'm at UCLA Medical School is like, it's very easy for me just to start by kind of like articulating the roots of mindfulness, and using Pāli words and all of this, it's like, it's not weird there at all. You know, it's more in some of the kind of educational settings where it gets it feels more cramped, kind of and, and so yeah, I hope we can it feels him. It's like Jon Kabat Zinn would be mortified that people think he invented mindfulness or something like that was never his intention. He kind of came out in that article. I read from in 2011 in a very striking way, and that felt important to me. And on on on our side, on the Buddhist side, like, we, there can just be like a little creeping territoriality, about is like, no one owns the dumb. Like we all belong to it equally or something like that. And so anyway, I just say that too we're just for us to watch in our in our own minds and yeah, but may it be done well, may it be done well, and and maybe the last thing I'll say is just that what what often what, what the, what the Buddhist tend to accuse the secular folks of leaving out his seed of ethics, that is not generally than my experience, the sila is really actually well represented, the ethical roots of it is well represented and a lot of the secular mindfulness stuff. What is left out in the secular articulations? Is the renunciation, the surrender, that's that is what is minimized actually. And renunciation is at the heart of this path. Mindfulness is not something for nothing, right? And so it's, it's tricky, right? Because it's like you enter a dharma hall, and the teacher basically asked you for your life. Yeah, that is not a reasonable starting point in a lot of therapy, a mindfulness class as a school, so this kind of thing. And so the renunciation is sort of, like, it's like, titrated and it's like, they start, like, with a really, really small ask just take a look at your mind. Whereas we kind of begin with, like, take refuge, down on your knees, like, this is the depth, the breadth of practice that kind of reverence. Right. And, anyway, where to be said,

Thank you so much.

Matthew Brensilver

Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, yeah. Okay, last one, please. Yeah.

Yeah, I just wanted to add another perspective, which kind of reinforces what what you were just just saying, I was in one of the eight week a mindfulness based stress reduction classes in a medical setting, at the same time that I was really starting to explore the dharma. And for me, it was very synergistic, because I was able to see the limitations of the class, but also how it related to some of the other things I was doing. I think that the one who taught it she was a practitioner, but she was

she was really walking

a tightrope between the secular peace and the spiritual peace, because most of the people in the class were there, because of physical problems. The most common was chronic pain. In fact, I think Jon Kabat Zinn started the whole thing is when he was associated with the, with a Pain Clinic at the University of Massachusetts. And she, she wanted to be able to reach everybody on whatever level they couldn't relate. And some of some of the people, obviously, we're not Buddhist, some of them were not religious at all. Some of them were practitioners of other religions, that wouldn't be able to relate to it if she's spoken in dharma terms. And so, she really didn't but but I don't think she was diluting what what she was presenting, she was just doing it in a way that she thought she could reach the most people and that they would be able to take what they could from. So that was that was my perspective to the class that it had that limited application to me, but I was able to to use what I could from it.

Yeah, yeah. Got it. Got it. Great. Thanks for the testimonial there and yeah. In a way, in a way, I feel like very deeply, obviously connected to the Buddhist tradition. And at the same time, I do think sometimes, like, look, if I can't articulate this in a different language, if I need to, if I need to legitamate this practice by referencing the suit does this that may be a problem, and I want to be able to, I think we can actually talk about talk about these practices in a range of different ways that that are not not self referential not it's not, it's not citing the authority of the text itself and so I think there are ways to really talk about the depths of practice that are amenable to to even very scientifically minded folks, but I do get the tight rope and I get, and I don't think it's legitimate to say, like, well, Buddhism is not a religion, it's a philosophy or it's just self evident at some level all religions think they're not religions it's not like we study the Word of God, that's not a religion, right? That's just like the truth. Yeah. And like, same thing with the dharma. And so anyway, I don't want to wander into philosophical territory of which I'm qualified to speak but so I will take a break. Precisely now. And yeah, but appreciate the the spirit of the conversation and so let's, let's take a little time, away from from the screen