



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

Inspiring Minds Transcript
Mindfulness and Racial Healing
Live online conversation: October 21, 2020
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(Note: Due to technical difficulties, portions of Ruth King's commentary are marked inaudible. We sincerely regret not being able to capture her sentiments in full.)

Susan Bauer-Wu (00:01:44):

I'm Susan Bauer-Wu and I'm pleased to welcome you to Inspiring Minds, our new series. We have three fabulous guests here today: Sharon Salzberg, Ruth King, Stephen Nachmanovitch, and our host, Shankari Goldstein. We'll give them a full and proper introduction. Shankari is our host for Inspiring Minds. She is a program manager at Mind & Life. She is an active social justice activist, as well as a yoga teacher. Shankari brings great warmth and commitment to our values to do good in the world. So welcome, Shankari.

Shankari Goldstein (00:02:32):

Thanks, Susan. I'm grateful for this opportunity to be with you all, and thank you for hanging in there as we move through these technology glitches. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to participate in this unique and courageous conversation, and for this first episode, entitled "Mindfulness and Racial Healing." As Susan shared, we have three incredible guests, so I'd like to do some brief introductions.

Shankari Goldstein (00:02:57):

Ruth King is the founder of Mindful of Race Institute. She's a celebrated author, an educator, a meditation teacher. Ruth currently teaches the Mindful of Race Program to leaders, teams, and organizations, weaving mindfulness-based principles with an exploration of our racial conditioning, its impact, and our potential. She's the author of *Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out*.

Shankari Goldstein (00:03:23):

Next we have Sharon Salzberg. She's a meditation pioneer and an industry leader, a world renowned teacher, and bestselling author. As one of the first to bring meditation and mindfulness into mainstream American culture over 45 years ago, her relatable approach has inspired generations of meditation teachers and wellness influencers. Sharon's most recent book is *Real Change: Mindfulness to Heal Ourselves and the World*.

Shankari Goldstein (00:03:48):

We will open our episode with a contemplative arts offering from Stephen Nachmanovitch. Dr. Stephen Nachmanovitch performs and teaches internationally as an improvisational violinist, and at the intersections of multimedia, performing arts, the humanities, ecology, and philosophy. He's the author of two books on the creative process, *The Art of Is* and *Free Play*.

Shankari Goldstein (00:04:10):

So without further ado, I'd like to bring Stephen up for his art performance.

Stephen Nachmanovitch (00:04:13):

Thank you so much. It's such a pleasure to be here. Thanks so much to Susan Bauer-Wu and all of her partners in the Mind and Life Institute. Shankari mentioned my book, *The Art of Is*. I wouldn't have begun this episode in this way if we didn't have a technical glitch, but to be an improviser, which means to be a human being, is to deal with what is. We "is" in a world where we're dependent on technology that is full of interesting little technical bloopers and bleepers. We might choose to live in a world that's free of racial prejudice and hatred, but we don't live in that world. We might choose to live in a world that is free of ecological devastation and of the effects of human ignorance on the possibility of our children and grandchildren having a civilization, but we do live in this world.

Stephen Nachmanovitch (00:05:27):

As an improviser, I play with the sounds that are around me. If I'm playing with other people, I have no score, I have no plan. So listening is the score. Paying attention with all of your senses to who is around you and what is happening around you is the score. Even when you're playing alone, you are surrounded by invisible companions--human, nonhuman, living and dead, and we play in those surroundings. We play in the languages that we've known. We play in the setting of this world, which is imperfect; impermanent.

Stephen Nachmanovitch (00:07:53):

You don't have to be a musician, or a Buddhist, to know that listening is the royal road to understanding other human beings. You don't have to be a Buddhist to know that the three poisons are greed, hate, and ignorance.

Stephen Nachmanovitch (00:08:52):

In the Buddhist tradition, *avalokiteśvara* is the bodhisattva of great compassion, and that name means listening. It means literally hearing the cries of the world.

Sharon Salzburg (00:13:17):

Thank you so much. That was really, really beautiful. Actually, it reminded me, listening to you, Stephen, of a conversation I had recently with somebody where they asked me what security meant, how I would define security, and I said being able to meet the unexpected. I think that was very resonate for me in your work. It also reminded me of my own practice, which I'd like to lead us in just a very short meditation together. There's what I see in myself in these days in our times that in order to have perspective, or regain perspective once I've lost it, and in order to have a vision of possibility, even in order to have some more courage, I need to have that sense

of centeredness, some sense of groundedness, and some sense of rest, and with that foundation I can build many things. So I just want us to do a very foundational exercise in meditation where we sit together and use the breath as an object to rest.

Sharon Salzberg (00:14:44):

So if you want to sit comfortably, just close your eyes, or not; however you feel most at ease. See if you can find the place where the breath is clearest for you or strongest for you, maybe that's the nostrils or the chest or the abdomen. Bring your attention there and just rest. See if you can feel one breath without concern for its already gone by, without leaning forward for even the very next breath, just this one.

Sharon Salzberg (00:15:24):

When I describe my earliest meditation practice, this was the first instruction I ever got: just sit and feel your breath. I'd say that almost as soon as this breath was beginning, I'd be leaning forward mentally to get ready for the next 50. I was very frightened. I was very wary. I didn't know what might happen next. A lot had already happened to me in my life, and I was hypervigilant. So, I used to say to myself, "Settle back. Let the breath come to you." I'd also say, "You're breathing anyway. All you need to do is feel it. Settle back. Let the breath come to you. Rest."

Sharon Salzberg (00:16:33):

The sounds or images or emotions or sensations come. If they're not very strong, if you can stay connected to the breath, just let them flow on by. Here is space, it can come and go. You don't have to follow them, you don't have to fight them, but if something is really strong or just picks you up and whirls you away, you get lost in thought or spun out in a fantasy or you fall asleep, truly don't worry about it. We say the most important moment is the next moment after you've been gone, after you've been lost, where we practice letting go and we practice beginning again. Just bring your attention back to the feeling of the breath. No blame. You don't have to add a sense of failure. We let go and we start over.

Sharon Salzberg (00:17:34):

When you feel ready, you can open your eyes, you'll lift your gaze, and we'll end the meditation.

Shankari Goldstein (00:18:35):

Thank you, Sharon. Thank you, Stephen, too. That was, both practices, were a beautiful way to ground and come into this space. So I'm going to begin a conversation between Ruth and Sharon. So my first question is for both of you actually. I'll start with Ruth. We're clearly in a catalyzing time, where we're being asked to meet the unexpected, as Sharon just shared with us. So for Ruth, what has been one transformational moment that you've experienced in these challenging times, and what did you learn?

Ruth King (00:19:25):

Well, it's hard to narrow it down to one, but just to first acknowledge a sense of gratitude for being with all of us here in an atmosphere of true blessedness as well as chaos in the world. One of the things I've learned that would be pivotal would be that the practice works, the

practice of steadying the mind and the heart. Actually, it works in a sense of retrospect. I find myself looking back on a situation that was upsetting and saying it used to be.

Ruth King (00:20:21):

I think Joseph Goldstein refers to this momentum of mindfulness that eventually creating, for me, an atmosphere that supports a sense of stability and kind heartedness, this ability to soften more readily in distressing times. I think I'm appreciating that I've got that's got my back in a way as I move through these challenging times that are tossed around from time to time. But not having control, everything that's happening, and the reminder that how I might be seeing it just may not be total [inaudible 00:21:11] but rest back in sense of allowing and accepting and appreciating that I've invested in the practice so that it now holds me with a lot of care and supports me through these challenging times.

Shankari Goldstein (00:21:32):

So I just want you to know, Ruth, that your signal's just a little delayed. So in the absence of challenging times and acceptance, I just want you to be aware of that. I may ask you to repeat something if we miss something really good from you, but we are getting some comments in the chat that you're breaking up a little bit... Just wanted you to know that, but thank you for that sharing. So same question for you, Sharon. What has been one transformational moment that you've experienced in these challenging times, and what have you learned?

Sharon Salzberg (00:22:09):

I would certainly both celebrate and support everything Ruth just said, that my own personal practice has been this tremendous support, and when I first knew you were going to ask me this question, I actually did think of a moment because practice is both the inner work that we do in cultivating certain skills, certain strengths, and it's also relational in terms of how we are with one another. So I spent the month of February in California, which I always like to talk about because it's like I went somewhere. I was somewhere else. So, I took an epic journey somewhere. I got back to New York City, which is where I am now, just in the beginning of March and did some teaching. There's a tremendous amount of anxiety here. The groups I was teaching were very large and it felt weird, but no one knew quite why.

Sharon Salzberg (00:23:13):

There was one place I was teaching, which is the last place I taught before I decided to go to my home in Massachusetts and the format of that place was that the presenter or the speaker sits in the audience and gets formally introduced, and then they get up on the stage. So I was sitting next to somebody in the audience who was massively anxious, and she said, "Well, I didn't know if I should come, but I'm here. Maybe it was a mistake." So I said, "You know, you could talk about using the breath as a meditation. Often people find that centers and it does these physiological things." That wasn't interesting to her. So then I said, "Well, there's love and kindness meditation, which is another whole method, which really is expansive and it does all these things," and that wasn't interesting to her either.

Sharon Salzberg (00:24:13):

So then I just looked at her and I said, "Is there anyone you can help?" And she lit up and she got completely radiant. She said, "I have this elderly neighbor. Maybe I can slip a note under her door and ask her can I help her with shopping or something like that." It was like all of that random energy of the anxiety had a channel, and that was actually a transformational moment for me where I thought, "Oh, remember that aspect. Never forget that."

Shankari Goldstein (00:24:44):

Thank you for acknowledging that human connection. I think many of us are missing that in these times. It's wonderful to talk about just connecting with people and wanting to help them and checking in in a different way than just a generic question, really asking what you can do for them.

Shankari Goldstein (00:25:04):

So my first question for Ruth is about her book. You released *Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out* in 2018 and Sharon your book, *Real Change*, just came out. I've been reading them over the course of this month to get ready for this conversation with both of you. So for both of you, Ruth to start, what does it feel like to birth projects that discuss transforming unjust systems and what does it look like to be on the front lines of human suffering?

Ruth King (00:25:33):

Thank you so much for the question and I think about the book's subtitle being "Transforming Racism from the Inside," and that is important and from where I sit. That's kind of a [inaudible] lot of energy around how we jump out and do something and I don't want that to change by the way, but what I do want is to bring a sense of understanding of our racial conditioning to the mix, to bring it understand the root, how we've been shaped. We've all been conditioned. My book is centering race and racism, and we've all been shaped around that, whether we understand that or not. The opportunity we have is to investigate and interrupt the harm. For many folks, it's hard to do that if race doesn't attempt to come up as an issue, like in your meditation practice, if the stimulus is like it doesn't get investigated.

Ruth King (00:27:00):

For others of us, race comes up all the time when we're doing this practice. It's important that we get educated around issues of race and racism, particularly in terms of how we've been conditioned beyond what about our racial inheritance has been ungrieved and unrecognized that needs our attention, because I believe every generation is challenged with elevating the tribe, elevating the consciousness to a different level, transcending, bringing a sense of alchemy to the mix when we start to look at our conditioning and support.

Ruth King (00:27:54):

I think what's important to understand around race and racism is to embrace it fully though we're all in this, we're all good individuals and we're also part of racial groups and that collective racial dynamic has impact in the world. As we're investigating our conditioning and how we've been shaped to enter into understanding of race and racism, it's important to hold some principles around that. The principle, for example, of interdependence and that we're all connected. This

pandemic that we're in is really amplifying an understanding of how the hip bone is connected to the leg bone and the right arm is connected to the elbow. There's just no way to work this without an understanding that we have impact. That's a fundamental nature of reality that we need to keep in mind as we're looking at race and racism, that it's not happening over there, but it's about our interdependence.

Ruth King (00:29:15):

Another core principle has to do with the notion of not doing harm. Imagine just moving through your day reminding yourself with regularity to do no harm, to do no harm to yourself, do no harm to others, and to really see the subtle gradations of how we impulsively can do that from our conditioning. So just having that be a practice and remembering that we are connected having a non-negotiable, of non-harming.

Ruth King (00:29:56):

The third thing that I think is so crucial in the mix that we need to remember when we start to investigate how we've been shaped and formed to be in relationship with race and racism, has to do with kindness, kindness as a weapon of mass healing that can inform race and racism without the heart being intimately involved. That race and racism is about the heart. It's about a division of heart, but a division of heart that influences our actions knowingly or unknowingly.

Ruth King (00:30:34):

So these are things that are foundational as a way of entering into this engagement. The other piece of this, and I think Sharon just spoke to that, has to do with our relational field, that our awareness around race and racism is amplified when we're in community and there's some dynamic that we need to be sensitive to, which we can talk about a little later, but I think it's the rubbing it's the body to body that echos and reflects back to us our conditioning. Sometimes this is kind of a mirroring we need in terms of our impact.

Ruth King (00:31:26):

So maybe I'll just leave it there for now, just to offer that these are some of the ways I'm holding the energy of what's possible when we can dissolve the heartbreak and heartburn of patterns of race and racism. It begins on the inside and it has a profound impact on ourselves, our wellbeing, and our collective wellbeing.

Shankari Goldstein (00:32:02):

Thank you for touching on collective community care. I think Sharon was speaking to that as well in her first response and the kindness with other people. Sharon, is there anything that you wanted to add in terms of what it looks like right now to be on the frontlines of human suffering, and to work with other activists in this moment? We talked about that in our early conversation before this episode.

Sharon Salzburg (00:32:29):

Well, in a way, I've always worked with activists and so much of my teaching, especially in recent years, has been more with what we might call caregivers, international humanitarian aid workers, or people who are really on the frontlines of suffering, as well as people who are

maybe taking care of parent or a sibling or something like that. What came up in my mind listening to Ruth was something a little bit different, which was, because I also teach just in general, and what I've seen for so many years is that meditation practice for the most part really develops a kinder heart and much more compassion, but what might be another step that isn't always there is a kind of view of systems change.

Sharon Salzberg (00:33:32):

The example I usually give is I've had, I don't know how many students come to me and say, "I started meditating and then I was taking a walk and somebody on the street asked me for dollar and I gave them a dollar because that's my habit, that's my practice to give them money, but this is the first time I ever looked at person in the eye and realized that was a human being," and that is really, I think, in an unfolding of a greater wisdom, a sense of interconnection, a way of paying attention that's different. What may be missing is whether that person then goes on to say ever, "I wonder what the housing policy is in my city so that [results in] so many people on the street?"

Sharon Salzberg (00:34:20):

I was talking to David DeSteno from Northeastern University, who did that study where the last part of his study was in the waiting room of the lab where he hired many actors and the question was who got up to offer their chair to the next actor who walked in who was on crutches and looked they were in terrible pain. Was it the meditator or the non-meditators who got up to offer their chair? He found that a vast amount more meditators than non-meditators got up.

Sharon Salzberg (00:34:50):

So my question to him was, "Did anybody ever ask why there were so few chairs?" You know, where's the lab spending its resources? There's a kind of education or a way of looking at things, looking more deeply at causes and conditions, which I think would serve us as we try to make a difference. It's always a balance because there is the immediate situation. There's the assumption we're making about somebody that might be unjust and so we need to really change our own way of thinking, or there may be the person who seems ill at ease or whatever it is, and then there's the system.

Shankari Goldstein (00:35:35):

Sharon, why do you think it's important to understand the structure of the mind and its conditioning, and how is racism's human capital system a projection of that conditioning? Because you both just talked about systems and conditioning. So how does the mind come into that?

Sharon Salzberg (00:35:50):

Some of it is sort the lack of what Ruth was talking about, the awareness of interconnection. I was talking to a physician not too long ago, the head of a large medical practice at a hospital. He said to me, "You know who I'm appreciative of in a way I never was before is the cleaning staff," and I thought, "Well, yeah. If I'm a surgeon, I would really want that operating theater to be sterile." Or the way people we normally discount and look through, often people of color, the grocery store clerk or the person serving our food, and we don't necessarily stop for a moment

and say, "This is a person who has hopes and dreams and aspirations and challenges, and wants to be happy, just like I do." We tend to look through them or objectify them. What happens when we look at them is the question.

Sharon Salzburg (00:37:00):

What I'm really fascinated by, in terms of this discussion, is assumptions. You know the assumptions we make about someone else based on some story, not based on who they are. It comes up quickly and the challenge is can our awareness, can our mindfulness be as quick so that we see, "I'm assuming that person doesn't belong here. I'm assuming that person is doing that job because they can't do anything else," or "I'm assuming," whatever it might be. One of my personal goals is to have my mindfulness speak fast enough so that I can just see those assumptions.

Shankari Goldstein (00:37:52):

Did you want to add anything to that, Ruth?

Ruth King (00:37:55):

Yeah, I do. Especially as it relates to race and racism I think there's some dynamics that we can begin to recognize that speak to [inaudible] and when we understand that patterning that the collective wave actually lives in our social realm then it starts to take on a mightier understanding I think. You can look at individual interactions and making sure we keep the humanity in the front of our heart and mind. There is a dominant and subordinate racial dynamic in our social realm. This is a pattern you can train the mind and heart to see. It's not looking at individuals, it's looking at collective dynamics, as our actions collectively have impact, and they are a reflection of mind. I've been reading Isabel Wilkerson about the past and I feel like she talks similarly to how I talk about dominance and subordination, of racial hierarchy. There are ways I played with something she said in that there is a social hierarchy where races are ranked based on [inaudible]. This is an important thing to see as a swarm of activity in our social realm, as an inflammation that we pay for, for example, in the political system, and in a way to drop this awareness into our investigation of this practice.

Ruth King (00:40:07):

Often, I ask the people that I work with to look at why matters of race and racism are of such concern and what does that have to do with me. It's that, "What does it have to do with me?" part that I'm most concerned about because we're not touching the reality of how it lives in our own hearts and minds. The best that we're seeing so to speak in our political realm and social realm right now is a reflection of heart and mind... how we are in relationship to what's happening right now are seeds that are planted, that will bloom.

Ruth King (00:41:00):

We need to be educated on how to look. I'm happy to see perception come up because perception is shaped around our conditioning. It's usually something related to the past that we layer on top of the present, and then we're often running as if it's a real thing. So how do we interrupt that? How do we interrupt our perceptions? I remember being in Charlottesville. I've done a bit of work there with the Insight Community. Early on I was there. After a training,

someone was driving me to the airport and we stopped at this intersection and I looked up and it said, "Barack Avenue," and all of a sudden I was so excited. It was like, I got hot, and I sat up straight, and I felt like I was speaking in Swahili. I had a whole story about, 'wow,' look at what a progressive city this is. All of this going and I didn't bother to open my mouth to ask the woman driving the car. What I said was, "Wow, what a progressive city you have here, Barack Avenue." She cleared her throat and said, "Well, in these parts we call it Barracks Avenue," but I was so convinced that it literally had me on a whole momentum of conviction of story and beliefs, only to open my mouth, because sometimes we don't open our mouth, we just keep going with our beliefs, right? We giggled all the way to the airport. But just this conviction that you can have about a view and perception, this same vision is how some people pull a trigger and how some can be seen as criminals and others are not. It's the same mechanism at work around their perceptions, which is really driven by how we've been conditioned to be in relationship at a personal level with race and racism.

Ruth King (00:43:27):

So to slow that down, which is the beauty of what a mindfulness practice can offer us, to drop in and see what the body is doing in relationship to the stimuli that we're interacting with. If we can drop this into our practice, then we have something to investigate. But if we're not educated on working with race... how we turn away, shut down, and don't see all these dynamics... then we don't have what we need. It's just a concept or it stays at the individual level. My interest is highly in how we bumped up to see collective dynamics, recognize ourselves, and interrupt the habits of harm, and by the way, bring some folks with you when you're doing that.

Shankari Goldstein (00:44:25):

Yeah, I love that.

Ruth King (00:44:25):

That's what I would add to this very important piece.

Sharon Salzberg (00:44:34):

You're making me think of something I learned when I was writing my book, or learn more about, which is attribution bias, which is something like if somebody that you consider one of your kind or in terms of self and other or us and them somebody who's... or us, messes up and does something wrong, then you think, "Well, they got overwhelmed by the bad crowd they're running around with," or "It was inevitable because there was some circumstance." So it's not about who they are essentially as a person. It's about the way conditions brought them there. But if somebody from the other group or tribe does the same thing, then you think, "Oh, they're a bad kid." They're essentially bad. It's not about conditions, it's about some irredeemable character trait. So again, it's just the play of our minds, the story that we tell.

Ruth King (00:45:39):

In our minds, and it's also a social conditioning, because a lot of that dynamic of the young kid that's doing bad, there's a racial strata to that. A lot of black and brown bodies are impacted by that collective social norm and the white bodies are conditioned around how that might play, so it looks individual. I think we're conditioned as a human race, often conditioned to see individual

lens and people of color are conditioned to work around issues of the collective. So our story and the way we talk about them... we miss each other when we're in the conversation because what people of color are bringing are the collective story, the cumulative impact of the weight of trying to point this out. White people enter often with common sense and well-meaning, and there's nothing wrong. It's just that the history of whiteness is not always [inaudible], so our hearts don't connect. I think that's a missed opportunity and a ripe opportunity to consider how we enter into engaging.

Ruth King (00:47:10):

So people say, "Well, why can't we just all get in a room and figure it out?" Well, we can't all get in the room because we bring different things, and then some people, a lot of brown bodies end up carrying the weight of their own traumas, as well as educating people, and then others end up uncomfortable, because this is all being pointed out. So there's a series and accumulation of ways we mend our heart and minds in the middle of that. This is one reason why I think we need to be in racial affinity groups to fortify our understanding of our community from a mindfulness sense, so that we can rest the heart and open it enough to be able to engage around the heart, chronic fatigue [inaudible] pain of this issue and very intentional and to the degree possible, safe, sacred space.

Shankari Goldstein (00:48:13):

Ruth, you just brought up two of the six hindrances that you speak to in your book on to racial harmony. Can you share a little bit more about those characteristics, particularly focusing on intent and impact and cumulative impact? Then maybe just to follow up, you can tie in the inner generational trauma and how we begin to heal through the black lens and through the white lens. Maybe Sharon can chime in with that as well, how we begin to heal some of this intergenerational trauma.

Ruth King (00:48:45):

Thank you. The hindrances that I talk about in the book are these six hindrances that show how the dominant and subordinated racial dynamics play out. So there's some observable things we can train the heart to see. One of the ones I like to start with, that I think sets up intent and impact well, has to do with how we're trained to perceive. I tell the story of 2014, when Michael Brown was killed by 28-year-old Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. Many of us know this story. So I was in a group of people talking about what happened and they showed the clip and there was a few people in the circle [inaudible] after watching the video and he said, "I can't believe that that guy shot that boy," and, "That should have never happened." He's trembling. He was upset. He saw the star.

Ruth King (00:50:09):

When I share this story, what I talk about is I can't believe that once again, an unarmed black man has been killed by a white police officer. I saw a constellation. I saw color. I saw the Big Dipper, and this is what happens when we try to talk about race. We were both distraught, our hearts, both broken, but our eyes were trained to see different things, right?

Ruth King (00:50:40):

So that's an example of stories and constellation and intent. The intent in that situation was very clear. We showed up at that meeting for conversations to open our hearts, to talk about what could be done. So our intent was good. The impact on me... was the invisibility of color. So here we are. What happens collectively with intent and impact, especially for black, indigenous and people of color, is often the impact of situations like that. We call them microaggressions. There have been many words over the generations that refer to it, what happened to impact black, indigenous, and people of color... The cumulative impact is coming from the perpetual state of pointing it out, working it out, that has collapsed in all of those situations.

Ruth King (00:51:47):

So we end up being in situations where often we have to manage our own situation, in addition to try to talk about it, and needing to talk about it in a way that we're not upsetting the other person, and then dealing with the intent, "Well, that's not what I meant. Let me explain what I meant." All of this is just messy at best. It's our attempt to try to come together, but these are the obstacles we run into.

Ruth King (00:52:19):

So it's the reason why I think we need spaces where we can get more fortified and clear into our habits, our reactivity, and investigate that and understand the truth of it and [inaudible] a support and sense of stability, clear seeing, staying present to [inaudible] run into, we need places where we can develop that. We can't always just get in a place and hash it out because there's a burden that happens in the [inaudible] dance and that's some of the ways that it looks now.

Ruth King (00:53:07):

Now one of the ways that I try to work with that is through racial group development work, where we are working with our own people in investigating our racial conditioning and understand [inaudible] same races, as well as the complexity and the ways we've been shaped that influence how we're in relationship to each other and race. Throughout this year-long program, there are times when people are working within their own racial affinity groups, and then other times when we come together as a larger cohort to leverage the [inaudible] of our heart, but I think we need places where we can do that. Otherwise I think the burden is always on people and black folks, indigenous folks to educate white folks when this is something I feel like that can happen, they could be doing that, we could all be doing that.

Ruth King (00:54:08):

I just think it's important. It's a prime place for our mindfulness practice, to be using our practice this way to investigate our vision. The Buddhists specialized in suffering and I don't know of any greater suffering right now than what's happening and how we learn how to strengthen our capacity to bear witness, clear seeing and again, keeping the fact that we're interdependent, keeping harm out of the mix and keeping the power of a compassionate heart. This is a life's work. This is not a quick fix minute practice, that's a good use of our mind moments.

Shankari Goldstein (00:54:59):

Thank you, Ruth. Sharon, would you like to add on to that? And then we'll probably begin to wrap it up and move on to public Q&A after that.

Sharon Salzburg (00:55:08):

Yeah, I think beautifully said. First of all, thank you and I have this memory. I'm not sure if it's the last time Ruth and I were together physically, but in Charlotte there's a Democratic National Convention in 2012. So when you said that about Charlottesville and the city I just remember us walking down the streets together in a way how much hope was in the air, and how difficult, difficult things are.

Sharon Salzburg (00:55:45):

I think that people are at all kinds of different levels of understanding and to be supported in growing because the point is changed. The point is creating a better world and that means change. So to have a learning environment, whatever that looks like, so that that can really happen seems to be the most important thing. I was remembering even something I've written about often is the stories that people tell about us and how we can absorb them and then just sort of become them and I know that obviously not as a person of color, but as myself.

Sharon Salzburg (00:56:45):

I remember teaching somewhere, I was in Kentucky and somebody said, "I don't get that. I don't buy that. How can people tell a story about us if they don't know us, they're not telling a story about us?" And I just said, "Everything tells a story about us. Architecture tells a story about us. Do you belong or do you in the wheelchair have to go three blocks out in the way to get in or something like that? Everything actually is telling a story about us and I think for people even to start there and to have some understanding of that and to realize it is a profound story too, because there is the question of intergenerational trauma and it's not just a personal story. So I think that that's like a good note to really emphasize.

Shankari Goldstein (00:57:37):

Thank you for that, Sharon. So I want to invite Steven to come back in and keep this conversation going, but allow participants to come in and ask you some questions. We have plenty of questions in the chat, and I want to invite Rabia. I hope I'm saying your name correct, to raise her hand. She has a question and she would like to come on and ask it live.

Rabia (00:58:14):

Am I live?

Shankari Goldstein (00:58:15):

Yes, you are live.

Rabia (00:58:17):

Thank you. Thank you, both Sharon and Ruth for your wonderful teachings. I am part of a spiritual community, a Sufi community, and we love unity and divinity and oneness. So my question is how can we help bridge the tendency of spiritual workers to transcend challenges and bring them to look at the root of the challenges--racism, the ecological crisis--and transform them rather than transcend them?

Shankari Goldstein (00:59:07):

Stephen, please feel free to answer, too, if you feel called.

Stephen Nachmanovitch (00:59:14):

Well transforming means you are part of the story. It's very easy to have a bird's eye view of the culture that we're in and if you're lucky enough to be in a pleasant situation where you have enough to eat and where you have housing and everything else, it's possible to talk about transcending, but to realize that no matter what our conditions we are part of the story and that it's an interaction. It's an intersection among ourselves, all of ourselves. That's not easy sometimes because it causes us to have to revisit who we are and to participate perhaps in things that we're not very comfortable in.

Shankari Goldstein (01:00:15):

Did you want to add anything Sharon and Ruth?

Ruth King (01:00:24):

Sometimes I think that... I know for a lot of the work that I'm [inaudible] first with people, especially people that I care for, that I'm... I don't want that to sound like I don't care for certain people, people that I'm that in community with them and have a regular relationship with, is I find myself in situations where I'm asking consent around how to go about... whatever the question might be, whatever the concern might be "would that be okay with you? Do I have your permission? Are you willing to engage me around this?" So that they are willing to be engaging with you.

Ruth King (01:01:27):

Sometimes I think these might be some basics or suggestions, with a book club with people where you're reading something that's well-written and then you're talking about it and you're discussing it and you're looking at the relevance of that [inaudible] and what you're trying to do. I was reminded when you talked about transcendence versus... what was the word?

Shankari Goldstein (01:01:58):

Your microphone kind of broke up, right? I think it breaks up just a little when you move. You're like me, you're an animated speaker. I moved my body and my hands.

Ruth King (01:02:08):

Was it transcendence and transformation?

Stephen Nachmanovitch (01:02:13):

Yes. Participating in the story.

Ruth King (01:02:25):

Yeah, I was thinking specifically to the words that were used-

Stephen Nachmanovitch (01:02:25):

Yeah, transformation was the-

Ruth King (01:02:26):

... and now I've kind of [inaudible], but I think so very basic things of asking consent, especially if you're talking about [inaudible] to say, "Hey, let's talk about this. I want to talk about this. This is important to me. Can we sit and talk about how we can do that?" Now there are situations where you don't have that kind of luxury. You just have to say some things, but in terms of that relational feel, building community. I think we need to really set the tone of saying, "Should we go there? Can we talk about this together?"

Sharon Salzburg (01:03:19):

And I think there's several conversations that may happen at the same time because like I don't necessarily use the word divine being from a Buddhist tradition, but if the vision is there's the divine in everyone and we're going to just see the divine in everyone when you say oneness, that doesn't mean that this other conversation shouldn't also happen. They both have to happen in a way.

Sharon Salzburg (01:03:50):

Just thinking about my goddaughter was born in China and adopted by her American parents, brought here, and she was in a movie when she was a very little girl. There was some movie about a family reunion. She didn't say anything, but she was there in the movie, so she was a member of the family and she was the only Asian appearing child in the movie, and one of the conditions of her mother for her to be allowed to be in the movie was that it not be mentioned that she was adopted, that this is what families can look like sometimes, this is what they look like and here it is.

Sharon Salzburg (01:04:37):

So in a way that's like saying, "Let's see the divine in everyone. This is what a family can look like," or the first time, maybe the only time, I saw Grey's Anatomy and Shonda Rhimes. The head of the hospital was a neurosurgeon. He was black and nobody ever mentioned that. It was just like this sort of professional staff can look like and here it is and I appreciated that, and I appreciate the fact that there's another conversation that also has to happen. Like, "What did that man go through to get to be that in that position?" It's not what maybe a white person would have gone through at all. So I don't think we need to discard the other, but we need to have this one right now.

Shankari Goldstein (01:05:29):

And I just want to acknowledge that we're a little over time, just because of the technical difficulties that we had at the beginning, but we're going to keep the Q&A going for another 10 minutes if that's okay. We do have a question coming in from Kammie, so maybe she can raise her hand now and ask her question.

Kammie (01:06:05):

So thanks for the opportunity to ask a question. My question is sort of nuts and bolts related. We're in the early stages of building a racial affinity group at my institution, and some of us are feeling restless by the prospect of doing this very, what feels internally social work,

self-reflective internal work, and feel pulled by the demands of the time and want to be acting or at least have a plan for action at the end of this group, whenever that might be. I'm wondering if, especially you Ruth, could speak to the balance between slowing down and paying attention and just observing, training those habits of mind, and this feeling that we need to be acting and making a plan.

Ruth King (01:06:58):

Yeah, that's a really good question that I appreciate. I think both need to happen. There needs to be action concurrent with an investigation of what you bring to the actions you're planting. What is this action? Really how conscious can we be about turning away from something or towards something rather than avoiding what can feel really uncomfortable about this topic? The ways that we flee. I think time is one of the pillars of privilege, we all have the same amount of time. It's kind of like race is often kind of subordinated in the scope of things that need to be done and this introspection is not... we don't run too towards discomfort, or the perception that we may be uncomfortable, easily.

Ruth King (01:08:22):

So it really requires a certain commitment. If you're following the framework in my book, it's very ascribed and inviting a lot of intentionality around the work. You're going to give it some time. You've got to wade through questions, you're gonna use your practice to support yourself and it's a commitment. So I would just invite investigation of the urgency to do something or to feel you must do something when you've committed to looking at this kind of inquiry. Just like in mindfulness, you catch yourself feeling that anxiety, wanting to do something there's a lot that needs to be done, and then you make that [inaudible] back.

Ruth King (01:09:13):

This practice for now is just really taking a dive into our conditioning, looking at how we stand in each other in this intimate way, understanding whiteness, right? This was our commitment for now, and just return and be caring in terms of that impulse, that conditioned impulse to kind of slide into action. Historically, there's always been money around this issue around race. We really want to look at what seeds we're planting when we move into action so it's grounded, it's well seeded, it's well intended when we do take action and we understand ourselves in the [inaudible]. We know our part. We know what we bring and we know what we can offer to not just do an action but to uproot the perpetuation of this situation. So those are some thoughts that I have there.

Kammie (01:10:28):

Thank you.

Shankari Goldstein (01:10:28):

Anybody else? All right. We have a question from Kevin. Kevin, did you want to come up and ask your question? Otherwise I can ask it.

Kevin Riordan (01:10:52):

Sure. Hey thank you, Shankari. I guess I've just been spending time lately reflecting on... What I guess I'm kind of thinking about it as the contemplative lens, the ethical, philosophical foundations, cultural foundations within which these contemplative practices evolved and were developed and were really intended to be practiced within, there's this foundation of support. So I think about things as you all have been talking about interconnectedness and all this, and I feel like in a lot of ways these practices might sort of presuppose a certain familiarity with these ideas or like an attending to them in our daily lives that might not always immediately be as present for say a Western participant in a traditional MBSR program or something. So I wonder what is, I guess, lost in that extraction from a cultural context, but also just like what's the interplay between the contemplative practices themselves and this contemplative lens and maybe how can we do better at focusing on that lens piece in our secular application of these things?

Stephen Nachmanovitch (01:12:16):

There's this huge interaction between culture and spiritual practice and the Buddhist practices that originated in India and spread to China, spread to Japan, spread to Tibet, spread to the West have kept changing and morphing through all these transformations and yet they still contain a deep rooting in those original cultures and they're going to keep changing. If we manage to not destroy human civilization in the next couple of generations, one can only imagine 20 centuries from now what further transformations there'll be.

Stephen Nachmanovitch (01:13:06):

I think it's also true in artistic traditions because looking at Indian classical music, Western classical music, dance, painting from the Middle Ages, there's always something to be gained by understanding the culture from which those practices arose, but there's also something to be gained from allowing them to be transplanted and allowing them to change and allowing ourselves to be moved as 21st century modern people by all of this ancient stuff that came from a completely different context.

Stephen Nachmanovitch (01:13:49):

We have in the United States, there's this huge political brouhaha now about originalism, so we interpret the constitution exactly the way that a couple dozen white men in the 1780s thought the Republic should be, or can we allow ourselves to evolve? If we can allow ourselves to evolve and it's possible for a woman to become a Supreme Court justice. If we're going to stick to the way it was in 1787, a woman cannot be a Supreme Court justice.

Stephen Nachmanovitch (01:14:26):

The monastic practices of Buddhism in its original form and its subsequent forms in China and Japan were largely practiced by men, though not entirely, and historically there've been women practitioners forever. But today we're living in a different time and we're living in a time when the traditions are open to everyone, and that means the traditions will be somewhat different. I don't think anyone is the authority on to what extent is the tradition itself as we change it and to what extent is it a new thing, just as the DNA that we're composed of it's both very, very new and it's three and a half billion years old.

Shankari Goldstein (01:15:25):

Thank you, Steven. I think that about wraps up our time. We've gone over quite a bit. I just want to give Ruth the opportunity to close us out. I hope that you all enjoyed this portion of the Q&A. So Ruth is going to lead us in a short meditation.

Ruth King (01:15:45):

Okay. Thank you. Thank you everyone. Thank you for your heartfelt presence and for plugging in and just turn your attention inward again and returning to what Sharon offered us on breath, maybe just lowering your eyes and dropping your awareness in and down. Just take a moment of gratitude, as you soften with each breath, maybe resting on the exhale, appreciating all the care that's here collecting us, our good intentions. Appreciate work and work that went into organizing us and making this work for us, the generosity, and all of the sharing.

Ruth King (01:17:42):

Taking a moment to notice warmth and gratitude on the inside. As we leave this time together may we remember that we belong to each other and may we understand that what we do can help or hinder racial wellbeing. And may our thoughts and actions reflect the world we want to live in. May we feel the foundations that we get from our ancestors and gratitude for this life. May all beings benefit from our growing awareness. May our thoughts and actions be ceremonies of wellbeing for all races, of all humankind. May we honor being diverse relations with human rights, and may we meet the racial cries of the world with all the wisdom and grace we can muster. May we all be well and kind on the path. Thank you to all.

Shankari Goldstein (01:20:26):

Deep bows to Ruth, to Sharon, to Stephen for giving us time today and thank you to the Mind & Life team who worked behind the scenes with today's Inspiring Minds online event, and as we mentioned before in Susan's opening, we're going to be gathering together again next month for the November Inspiring Minds episode. The date is Wednesday, November 18th. We're going to be joined by Gail Parker, Richard Freeman, and a live performance by Peter Cater. The theme will be "Yoga as a Tool for Social Change", where we will explore how embodied yoga practices can lead to greater self-awareness and agency in contributing to a better world. So please be sure to register for that.

Shankari Goldstein (01:21:13):

Again, I want to thank you all for joining us today. Please continue to stay connected to Mind & Life as we move forward in these challenging times. Thank you, Ruth. Thank you, Sharon. Thank you, Stephen, so much.