



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

**Inspiring Minds Transcript**  
**Finding Connections: Pathways to Embodied Wisdom**  
**Live online conversation: December 16, 2020**  
Retrieved from [video recording](#)

**Susan Bauer-Wu** (00:08:17):

Welcome everyone. I'm Susan Bauer-Wu, the president of The Mind & Life Institute. I'm in Charlottesville, Virginia, where we're having a winter snow storm and I hope that you are safe and well wherever you are in the world. It's really wonderful to see all the names of old friends and new ones from all over the world. Thank you so much for being here with us today. Mind & Life's work sits at the intersection of contemplative wisdom, research and action. And we recognize that the complexity of today's challenges, need and value bring together diverse perspectives, disciplines, and voices to create solutions. Creating spaces where multi-disciplinary dialogue can take place, that really lies at the heart of our work. And that's why I'm so happy that you can be part of the conversation today in our third inspiring minds program. Our theme today is finding connections, pathways to embodied wisdom, and I'm delighted to welcome as our featured speakers, Dr. Peter Wayne and Lama Willa Blythe Baker, and our guest performer, sitarist Srinivas Reddy. It's going to be an amazing program.

**Susan Bauer-Wu** (00:09:48):

And today is especially unique in our inspiring minds program because we're going to be announcing the recipient of this year's Catherine Kerr Award for Courageous and Compassionate Wisdom. And that will include a special presentation given by the recipient. And then after that, we'll proceed with our normal Inspiring Minds program and format, which will include a musical performance and a rich conversation moderated by our host Shankari Goldstein and closing with a meditation. So I'm thrilled, really thrilled to announce that Dr. Peter Wayne is the recipient of Mind & Life's 2020 Catherine Kerr Award for Courageous and Compassionate Science. The award honors the memory of our dear friend, Cathy Kerr, a neuroscientist and a humanist whose brilliance and fiery spirit out-of-the-box innovation touched all our hearts and left a remarkable legacy for the field of contemplative science.

**Susan Bauer-Wu** (00:11:02):

Cathy was a dedicated practitioner and scientist of embodied Eastern wisdom practices. So it's fitting and wonderful that this year's Catherine Kerr Award goes to a fellow tai chi and qi gong practitioner and researcher. Peter Wayne has had a distinguished career with over 25 NIH funded research studies studying contemplative mind, body, and other integrative medicine approaches. Peter is the director of the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at the Harvard

Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. And besides numerous peer review publications, Peter is the author of an award-winning book, the Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi. We're so glad that Peter will be joining us again for our Summer Research Institute where he is the tai chi teacher for our week-long program. And this year, our Summer Research Institute theme is on human-earth connection, which is also fitting with Peter because he started his career in ecology.

**Susan Bauer-Wu** (00:12:16):

And beyond Peter's remarkable professional accolades, even more importantly, Peter exemplifies the qualities and character that Cathy brought to her work: bold innovation, imagination, courage, authenticity, and heartfulness. So on behalf of The Mind & Life Institute, our deepest congratulations extend to Dr. Peter Wayne for this very well-deserved honor. And before I pass it onto Peter, I'd like to take a moment to thank Mind & Life supporters for your generosity in making our work possible. And to those of you who made a contribution as part of the registration process today, deep appreciation to all of you. So now, I'd like to welcome Peter Wayne to share his special presentation about finding connections. Congratulations, and much gratitude, Peter.

**Peter Wayne** (00:13:20):

Susan, thank you so very much for the very kind introduction. Being fortunate enough to have known Cathy Kerr personally, I'm really deeply honored and humbled by this award. So I start with this union cartoon for two reasons and for any of you who can't read it, I'll read the caption. It says how much longer is this social distancing thing? And first, I share it because I really wish we could all be together under one roof in a much more intimate setting. But I also shared this cartoon as it symbolizes the heart of what I want to share with you today, which I think reflects one of the important aspects of both Cathy and my own transdisciplinary and somewhat unorthodox journeys through academia, namely how exploring edges where one discipline ends and another one begins can lead to a synergy and create a space for novel ideas and ways of thinking to emerge.

**Peter Wayne** (00:14:22):

So the idea of synergy and emergence is implicit in the union symbol as we all know and it's underlying philosophy of Taoism, which purports that Yin and Yang and their co-mingling is what's called the mother of 10,000 things. But I also think that this idea of synergy at the edges can be practically seen all around us. In nature, for example, and Susan mentioned my background in ecology, where cold and warm waters come together. For example, in coastal ecosystems, there's turbulence and mixture and upwelling, and that generates a lot of productivity and generally species richness, so things coming together. Similarly, we all know where the people connect and work together, much more can be accomplished than when they work alone. And of course, when we nurse the connections between ourselves and the physical and social environments, that's where we believe health and wellness emerge.

**Peter Wayne** (00:15:21):

And I think Cathy epitomizes a seeker who courageously explored connections at the edges. I first met Cathy in the year 2000 when we both joined an interdisciplinary think tank at the

Harvard Medical School led by Ted Kaptchuk. It was a beautifully strange group. Cathy arrived as a social scientist who was attracted to placebo research. I was an evolutionary biologist interested in traditional East Asian medicine. Ted Kaptchuk modeled and normalized what we call anti-disciplinary thinking. Early on, Cathy and I had the opportunity to collaborate on both placebo and acupuncture research. Afterwards, Cathy shifted her focus to the neurobiology of mind-body practices. Ted reminded me of her bold transition. One day, Cathy came in with this big fat textbook on neuroscience and she proclaimed, "I'm teaching myself to become a neuroscientist." She had never had courses in that area before, and we all know how remarkably well that turned out.

**Peter Wayne** (00:16:24):

Since then, I've always thought of her as one of the smartest and most courageous scientists I've known with a keen gift of exploring rich edges. I think this quote captures her spirit beautifully. And in case you can't read because of a small screen, I'll read it for you. A wise person does not fear the edges and fringes, but studies them. Indeed, he or she is often in them working to make change happen. And I think that captures Cathy very beautifully. So in the remaining few minutes, I want to shift to a few of my own explorations at the edges, including my own career shifts, some explorations around what we call the connection between mind and body and the dance between being a researcher as well as the practitioner and teacher of mind, body and contemplative practices.

**Peter Wayne** (00:17:16):

So like Cathy, I made a significant career change around 2000 after about 15 years of being a PhD student then postdoc and junior faculty at Harvard studying evolutionary ecology, and then climate change. I jumped ship quite drastically and started a research program at a college of Traditional Chinese Medicine. My goal in this transition was to refocus and sort of combine my research interests with my deepening commitment to understanding, practicing and teaching tai chi and related practices. The richness and the opportunities of this boundary-crossing became apparent, quite quickly for me.

**Peter Wayne** (00:17:57):

So shortly after we published a couple of papers showing that tai chi can be beneficial to patients with heart failure or balanced disorders, some of my more skeptical colleagues began to ask, how do we know this stuff isn't just all placebo? What's the active ingredient? And of course, as an ecologist, my first thought was, do we only get to pick one active ingredient? So this led my group and others to characterize tai chi and related practices as multimodal interventions, ecological interventions with lots of active ingredients. And just briefly, there's a lot going on in this cartoon, the diagram. But we can see there's all these components, mechanical pieces, cognitive pieces, affective pieces, social pieces, breathing. And the idea is that these unique interventions are very different from a drug that targets a specific receptor in the body and an axis of change through there. Here we've got lots of different active ingredients that hit lots of physiological systems and try to enhance the crosstalk and the synergy between them. And we think that it's health that emerges out of this crosstalk.

**Peter Wayne** (00:19:05):

So accordingly, our group and others have begun to borrow tools from systems biology and quantitative ecology to characterize the health benefits of these multimodal interventions. And I think even more broadly, this sort of framework has led us to redefine integrative medicine, not so much as just putting an acupuncturist in a pain clinic or mind-body practitioner in a stress clinic. We're trying to see the whole person and treating and enhancing the interconnections between those interdependent systems. And again, I think health emerges out of that rich crosstalk and disease starts to creep in when they start to break down. And therefore, healthcare providers are akin to gardeners or stewards helping to cultivate this resilience and wholeness of people.

**Peter Wayne** (00:19:58):

One specific example of this more ecological approach to health that I know greatly interested Cathy as well as myself is shifting research related to mind-body connection to a more embodied framework. And this is a topic we'll come back to a little later today in our dialogue with Willa Baker and Shankari Goldstein. Cathy and I, and I bet many others on this webinar today began to question what we perceived as an overemphasis of what might be called a top-down or brain-rules-body paradigm even though we all believe in the mind-body connection. With less of an appreciation for the intelligence of the body as a whole and with that, more limited appreciation for mind-body moving contemplative practices and even measures of integrative health that are focused on the body, not just the brain.

**Peter Wayne** (00:20:52):

I think this top-down bias is nicely challenged by a guide collapsed in this book called *Intelligence in the Flesh*. And again, for those who have a small screen, I'll read this. "My mind was not parachuted in to save and supervise some otherwise helpless concoction of dumb meat. No, it's just the other way around. My intelligent flesh has evolved. As part of its intelligence, strategies and capacities that I think of as my mind. I am smart precisely because I am a body. I do not own it or inhabit it, but from it I arise." And I think later in our conversations before this event, Willa is going to bring in the concept of body fullness as a complement and balance to the emphasis on mindfulness.

**Peter Wayne** (00:21:40):

My own interest in a more embodied framework for understanding health and also my background in tai chi led to exploring how cognitive motor processes interact to impact balance and gait in older adults and how tai chi influences this. And what you can see in this diagram, this is real data from an elderly woman in one of our lab studies. She's walking in the top panel here without any distractions. And here she's being asked to do the same walk while she's counting backwards by sevens. And you can see two things. This is in real time. So in the bottom panel, she's walking much slower. It takes so much longer to do the loop. But you can also see the irregularity in these spacings and positions to these steps relative here to the above. So there's a cost to this cognitive distraction.

**Peter Wayne** (00:22:24):

And what we want to know over time is whether tai chi will help toggle between these cognitive motor interactions and indeed, without tuning the data, we have a number of studies that have

shown after doing tai chi, she walks much more like this than she does like this, even with a cognitive task. But the bigger point I want to make is that we don't need to scan the brain to study executive function or executive cognitive motor interactions, but we can see it in the body and then the body doing very important activities of daily living,

**Peter Wayne** (00:22:57):

Working with my friend and colleague, Evan Thompson, and one of my pre-doctoral students, Kamila Osypiuk, we've also become interested in exploring how body postures of tai chi, qi gong and yoga, and pretty much anything else can influence our psychological wellbeing. One recent example of this work is a pilot study with breast cancer survivors that have a horrible situation that's referred to as persistent post-surgical pain. So in addition to the initial trauma of being diagnosed with cancer and then undergoing very invasive procedures, chemotherapy, and radiation, and then either a unilateral or bilateral mastectomy or lumpectomy, they come out the other end with chronic pain, which keeps reminding them about their cancer and the fear of recurrence. It's just a horrible mix of symptoms. And because of that bio-psychosocial problem, it's not just a physical pain. We thought a multimodal intervention like qigong would be really helpful.

**Peter Wayne** (00:24:03):

And by and large, what we found was that at a 12-week intervention, it's a small study but provocative, improved pain, anxiety, depression, but it also from this embodied framework helped women feel more settled in their body. This is a quote from one of the women that I think captures that and they were incredibly articulate in sharing their experiences. "How you feel about your body is a challenge after you've had breast cancer. Qigong helps you think about your body in a different way, and to trust your body, to get inside yourself in a different way. It doesn't mean you're not going to get cancer again, but it could mean that you're more at peace with your body." Many of these women described being violated by these diagnoses and this helped them settle back in.

**Peter Wayne** (00:24:51):

We also brought people into the lab to explicitly test the relationship between posture and mood. And in brief, we have very sophisticated, precise measures of body posture. Here, we have the angle of the carriage of the head from a more droop position to a more upright, confident position. And we saw nice correlations between changes over these 12 weeks in vertical head angle and degrees of depression, as well as some other outcomes, in this preliminary data. And the point I want to just finish here with is not that changing your posture changes your mood or changing your mood changes your posture, but that it's crazy to think of these as independent, that they're integrated in this embodied framework.

**Peter Wayne** (00:25:33):

And if you don't believe that data, you can always go to Charles Schultz. This is one of his cartoons from the 70s, one of my favorites. Here's Charlie Brown, talking to Lucy. And he says, "This is my depressed stance. When you're depressed it makes a lot of difference how you stand. The worst thing you can do is straighten up and hold your head high because then you start to feel better. If you're going to get any joy out of being depressed, you got to stand like

this." So finally and just the last couple moments here I want to say that Cathy and I were both committed, and I remain committed, mind-body practitioners like many of you on the webinar today. And I think the interplay between the firsthand personal experiences we have with our practices and the research we pursue greatly influences both our professional and personal trajectories. And there's not enough time to unpack this idea today, but I think it'd be a great topic for greater discussion at the Mind & Life in general. But in brief, the metaphor I'd like to share with you today is that in many ways, practitioner-researchers have two complimentary laboratories. In our personal practices and in teaching and watching our students learn, novel ideas can come up that we can bring to our academic shops to more formally explore using structured scientific methods.

**Peter Wayne** (00:26:55):

Conversely, the results of our studies and the wisdom and insights we get about our bodies and minds from interacting with our colleagues and reading the literature can deeply impact how we experience and teach the richness of our practices. The balance between these two sources of information in my opinion, is really important for progress in both pursuits. So again, my sincere thanks to the Mind & Life Institute for this honor, putting together these brief comments brought me back to many, many sweet memories of Cathy and made me realize how much like many of you I miss her. And thank you all for listening.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:27:43):

Thank you, Peter for that incredible presentation and congratulations on this well-deserved award. So my name is Shankari Goldstein, and I'm joining you today from seized Monacan land in Scottsville, Virginia. I invite all of you to take a moment and acknowledge those who came before you on the land upon which you sit today. And please feel free to drop that in the chat. Along with this wonderful presentation from Peter and having him as a guest, I'd love to introduce our second guest for today, which is Lama Willa Blythe Baker, who's the Founder and Spiritual Director of the Natural Dharma Fellowship in Boston, Massachusetts, and it's retreat center Wonderwell Mountain Refuge in Springfield, New Hampshire.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:28:31):

She was authorized as a Dharma teacher and lineage holder in the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism after 12 years of monastic training and two consecutive three-year retreats. At present, her teaching interests include embodied mindfulness, non-dual awareness and compassion. So in a few moments, we'll be speaking directly with her and Peter and having a conversation. But first we're going to open our episode with the contemplative arts offering from Srinivas Reddy. Sriniv is a scholar, a translator, and a musician. He studied classical South Asian languages and literature at UC Berkeley, and currently teaches at Brown University and Gandhinagar - please correct me if that's incorrect. Srinivas is also a concert sitarist and spends his time performing, teaching and conducting research around the world. He has also written several books, so I'd love to welcome Srinivas. Thank you so much.

**Srinivas Reddy** (00:29:35):

Thank you everyone. Thank you to everyone at Mind & Life. I've had a beautiful relationship with everyone there for quite some time, and it's an honor to play again. And to be with all of you.



Just very quickly, I will be playing this - a sitar. It's a North Indian instrument and I will be playing raag patdeep, which is the afternoon raga and ragas are well, it's a complex thing, but they're kind of melodic worlds. And part of it is trying to elicit or really the whole point of Indian art is to create an emotional state and hopefully through that kind of emotional artistic kind of experience to have some kind of peace at the end of that. So I will try to do my best to do that.

**Srinivas Reddy** (00:30:33):

And everything's improvised and I'll try to be as short as possible and stay within the time. I guess one last thing is that as my paramaguru says Indian music is the music of nature. It's very related to the place and the time of day and one's psychic kind of mood. But he'd always say when you stop talking nature speaks, so I will stop talking now and I will play raag patdeep. Thank you very much. Thank you.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:40:10):

Thank you, Srin. Truly wonderful offering. That was fantastic. We're going to be inviting Srinivas back to share insights with us at the end of this episode. So now I'd like to invite Peter and Willa to come up on screen with us. Before we move into the conversation with Peter and Willa, I encourage all of our participants to add questions to the Zoom chat box. Our team is going to capture those questions. For those who wish to have me ask them directly as we move into public Q&A, there's an opportunity for you to raise your hand and ask directly too, but the more questions that we capture now the more questions we'll get in as we move into the public Q&A section.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:40:51):

So first I want to just say I'm deeply honored that we're getting to learn so much about Cathy's work and impact, not only with the Mind & Life Institute, but with the world of research and contemplative science. And so my first question for you Willa is I'm wondering if you have any interactions, excuse me, or personal stories that you'd like to share about Cathy as well.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (00:41:15):

Thank you so much Shankari. I did meet Cathy just once and it was a very memorable meeting. I had asked a friend of mine, Gaelle, who is I think here, about who I might contact and I was researching the relationship between meditation and the body. And who I might talk to, who could reflect with, who is a scientist on the wisdom of the body, but from a scientific perspective and Gaelle suggest that I talk to Cathy. So I got her number and called her and at that time I'd never met her. She said that she was feeling a little under the weather. That was how she put it, which it turned out to be quite an understatement. She was quite ill at the time. And she said, "I'm horizontal and I'm a little under the weather."

**Willa Blythe Baker** (00:42:23):

So we talked and in that talk, she shared with me some of her research indicating that and I remember in particular, she was describing that in her belief, the evidence showed that there was a reverse correlation between paying attention to, dropping attention into the body and rumination, you know the kind of rumination that we see present in depression or anxiety, that when you drop into the body, that rumination circuitry in the brain calms down. And she showed

me to a place where I could read more about that. But what really impressed me about that conversation was that even, and later, of course, not so much at the time, but later when I understood how ill she was, the disease that took her life, was how even in the midst of her own body's dissolution, she was full of compassion and readiness to share what she knew with somebody that she had never met. So that to me just spoke of her character and her kindness.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:43:38):

The reflection that you just shared, it also makes me think of the word resilience and it leads me to connect to Abraham Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation. So in this theory, he describes the basic physiological needs of humans at the lowest tier of this pyramid system that he's created. And as we evolve, we move closer to self-actualization. And so, as we move through the stages of this pyramid, we become more social and we move into stages of love and belonging. And Peter spoke about this in his presentation, he spoke about humans working together to achieve goals. So clearly we crave social needs with other people and I feel like just that interaction between you and Cathy really showed there with that human connection. So craving social needs with other people before focusing on what we are fully capable of doing as individuals at the highest level. So this question is for you Willa, can you share why relationships are so critical to our evolution as human beings and maybe how Sangha shows up for you in your practice?

**Willa Blythe Baker** (00:44:44):

Thank you. Yeah. You know, when I first started studying meditation and studying Buddhism, I was in my 20s when I first started seriously in on that. I had been meditating for a while at that point, but I hadn't studied much. And as I first encountered a more serious study of Buddhism, I had this idea as many of us do when we first learn meditation: that meditation is a solitary activity, that it is something that it's sort of forged in your own mind and that it's all about your own efforts. And I think in my early study of Buddhism I believed that, I remember thinking that and then... But over time noticing that community is so powerful for the practice of meditation to sustain itself over a long period of time. It's not easy to be on a path of meditation or awakening as a solitary quest.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (00:45:59):

And even the Buddha said in this one sutra, he was speaking to his one student Ananda. Ananda asked him, "Buddha isn't the Sangha" - Sangha means community - "isn't the Sangha half of the holy life?" And the Buddha replied, "No, Ananda. The Sangha community is the whole of the holy life." So even the founder of Buddhism, who so emphasized the power of meditation, the importance of meditation for human evolution and development acknowledged that it can't be done really without connection and community. So I think community is now, I see it as critical, critical to human flourishing and to even going deep with a contemplative practice such as meditation.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:46:58):

Yeah. Peter in your presentation, I loved that you touched so much about inter-relational aspects of the body, mind, breath and movement. And what makes this episode so special is that we're talking about pushing the edge of what is already known about these ancient



practices. And I find that what generally stops people from engaging in meditation practice, which you both are so skilled at discussing and talking about, is that they fear that they won't do it the right way. You know, people just don't know how to show up on the mat. You know, how to sit with their thoughts, with their mind, with their body.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:47:34):

And what I'm finding out from both of you through our different conversations is that we can speak about self-actualization and the needs by integrating the oneness of the body and mind, and even perhaps our surrounding environment. So I was really excited that you were joining us, Peter, because given the inner transformation that's needed in order to realize that shift in our collective consciousness and a realization of shared responsibilities toward each other and the planet.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:48:03):

Can you speak a little bit about the inter-relational pathways to awakening from an ecological perspective?

**Peter Wayne** (00:48:07):

That's a really rich question, Shankari. I think some of it goes back to your question to Willa or the comments about groups. I will say that groups are showing up more and more in the healing community, even in group medical visits, not only from a practical perspective of having a group of people together for billing purposes, but that there's an emergence that happens. Some of my colleagues have been starting to call it "the special sauce." You bring people together and one plus one equals way more than two, and there's something that happens. Even in movement-based exercises, you have studies where you have someone sitting in a rocking chair and someone else starts rocking with them. So how people move, how they hang out together creates a sense of connection.

**Peter Wayne** (00:48:54):

But I think going back to what I understand is at the heart of your question is, what's the link between what we do within ourselves and how it affects bigger social change? I recently have been going back a little bit to the climate change issue just because it's so in the forefront, and it's so vast and huge. The conclusion of this short piece that I wrote is "think globally, act extremely locally," meaning contemplate your navel and that as we learn about ourselves, as we learn to become aware of our cravings and the things we don't need to go shopping for, and to realize in our practices, like Willa was saying, that the boundary between herself and others starts to dissolve. We start to connect to a much larger concept of action in the world. I think we want to be aware of those. We want to steer our energies there, but without going in at the same time and sort of managing our own ecosystems, we're not going to be that successful.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:50:05):

Willa, would you like to add to that, maybe some insights on the oneness of the body and mind connection?

**Willa Blythe Baker** (00:50:12):

I was just thinking about, as Peter was talking, I was remembering a time when I was, I don't know, maybe 20 years old and know just your quintessential early twenties Asian experience. I hiked up the side of a mountain to find a Yogi who was up there. People had been recommending this Yogi as someone to get a teaching from, those going up there, and went into his little hut and he was a wizened old soul and a beautiful human being. I had no idea what he would say or what he would offer, but we asked him, "Would you please give a teaching?" He gave a teaching on something that he called "the nature of mind."

**Willa Blythe Baker** (00:51:07):

Then at some point, I asked a question, "What is this nature of mind," and his reply to my surprise, is he said, "It's not only inside. It's not only outside. It pervades," and this word, "it pervades," became like this, this koan honor, this puzzle for me for several years like, what does it pervade? Does it pervade the universe? Does it pervade... Over time, I wonder now if he meant it pervades the body, it pervades this thing that we call the mind, it pervades everything, every corner of our experience and absolutely including the body. I think we often think, as Westerners, where you first learn a term like, "mindfulness," that somehow mindfulness happens from the neck up. We're becoming mindful, that it's somehow this top down experience of the control, the control of the organism.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (00:52:10):

But in fact, like Peter was saying, there's a possibility for a bottom up model that we can listen to the body and discover that the body is already mindful, body-fullness. The body is already paying attention. The body is already listening to and regulating with its environment. So maybe then meditation and mindfulness is not so much an activity of control as it is an activity of surrendering to this body's natural grounded-ness and wisdom. So I wonder if sometimes now when I think back on that story, maybe that's what he meant.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:52:59):

Yeah. I love that quote that Peter shared from his cancer patients. I wrote it down, "Trust your body to become more at peace with it," the qigong practice. You spoke about surrendering and it actually leads me to think about impermanence, the body in this impermanence. So if we're to follow the doctrine of impermanence and Buddhist traditions, then everything is constantly changing, constantly evolving. Death isn't really death. It's that holding place before the next existence, but most people think about impermanence as a thing that happens later. I see this when I try to have conversations with people, deep conversations with people about regenerative farming and combating climate crisis, to go back to your point, Peter, but later is actually really now in terms of that topic for me. So can each of you share your thoughts, maybe beginning with Willa, on how impermanence can be a pathway for change?

**Willa Blythe Baker** (00:53:59):

I think when we think about impermanence, we often think of loss, that impermanence is about the dissolution of things, but just as equally, impermanence makes room for other things to exist. Impermanence is not so much about death, as a reflection on impermanence, it's more about the truth of flow. Somehow I like the word, "flow," when we think about impermanence because when you think about change, change also has this sense of something maybe

frightening. We've had a lot of change in the last couple of years, something that is about unsteadiness, but flow, it's the same thing. But if we think about it as flow, this fact that the body is here for a while and then it will dissolve into the earth, it will dissolve into the planet where it came from and awareness will go wander where it goes next, then it's a much different paradigm. I liked that word, "flow." I do wonder what Peter would say about that. What word you would use or what paradigm do you use to talk about impermanence because Tai Chi is embodying that, embodying flow. Please, Peter.

**Peter Wayne** (00:55:26):

Yeah. I'm not a philosopher, but this notion really touches on some ideas that come up in Taoism, in Tai Chi, but also in medicine and that's our relationship with time. We know from, not to bring in quantum physics and things like that, but time is a funny structure like we're all going someplace and we're all coming from someplace else. I think Willa, you also have the opportunity and maybe other people in this webinar, to study with Charles Genoud who teaches gesture of awareness. It really deconstructs time.

**Peter Wayne** (00:56:04):

He would do very simple embodied things like make a movement and he'd say, "Where did it go? Can you make that same movement again, nothing like that, but that same exact movement? Can you make it in the past? Can you make it in the future?" And then he would just say, "Maybe we should just move," and there was a way of him bringing us right into, maybe what you're calling, the flow of the moment, the unfolding now that I think is an embodied state and does take away, as you said earlier, these ideas of ruminating of the past or the future. There's some link to impermanence there, just this unfolding now that exists without the fear of something ending or going backwards.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:56:53):

Well, to stay in the flow, my last question for you before we move into the public Q&A with our participants, what does it look like to be in the flow of this challenging moment? What does it look like to grieve collectively in this moment with all of the things we're facing, with COVID, with political strife, with divisions from racial inequality? What are each of you doing to really be in the flow of this moment? Or any advice that you can give to us as listeners? Peter, we'll start with Peter.

**Peter Wayne** (00:57:32):

Oh, I was hoping Willa would go first. I will say this whole idea of connecting and doing things together, even through Zoom. I've been so touched by how intimate teaching and working with my colleagues and students has been. There's a sense of all of us needing that support and the value of these practices is just revealing itself so much more strongly in these unusual times. There's a way in which people, even though they're in their little room by themselves and they have their own Zoom box like we have here, there's almost an opportunity there where they're no longer in a class and relying on each other as much, but we're together as a group, but they're still owning their practice in their home. When Zoom turns off, they continue that. So I would say in this time, the practices that we've been teaching and doing together have really

become very important. We're all so grateful for it. I think it's redefining our commitment to how valuable these are.

**Shankari Goldstein** (00:58:45):  
Willa, closing thoughts on that?

**Willa Blythe Baker** (00:58:48):  
Just to echo Peter's comments on community and how important it is in a time of isolation to learn to reach out, to learn to reach out. Another practice that I've been relying on a lot lately is practices of befriending whatever is coming up in response to what's happening with the planet, with racial tension, with COVID and the uncertainties that we're facing to meet that when we reflect on that, to meet whatever is coming up in the body. So we've been talking a lot about, and Peter talking so beautifully, about the importance of the body for bringing that back into our discussion of what it means to be a whole human being, what it means to study and to do research on human flourishing and resilience, that the body has so much to offer.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:00:04):  
So just my own take on what to do now or my own personal practice around what to do now is to keep coming home to the body and asking, how is that responding to whatever's arising? And then to meet that response in the body to surround it with loving attention and to witness that. Our body too is a community. It's a community of feelings and a community of emotions. Just as we can be in community with others, we can learn to be in community with our own difficult states.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:00:43):  
Thank you. Well, I have to say it's been a wonderful experience being in community with both of you through this process and getting to know you both more personally. I just want to thank you both for encouraging us all to explore the edges of these wisdom traditions. As we move through the theory of human motivation towards self-actualization and awareness, it becomes more and more clear that we must nurture impermanence and suffering to understand the injustices within humanity, you really both just described that perfectly. We have the capability to access the wisdom of our bodies by merging our minds and dare I say our environment to reach an awakening of bodhi or samadhi.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:01:24):  
So it's been truly inspiring to work with you both through this process. I wish we had more time, but we're going to move into public Q&A. So please continue to populate questions in the chat box. My team has been collecting those for me so that I can ask them directly for you. You'll also have the option of raising your hand directly now through the Zoom features. I'll bring you up live to ask your question directly. I'm going to keep my eyes open for the virtual raised hands and bring you up on screen, obviously time permitting.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:01:58):  
There's going to be a quick transition time between me selecting you and transferring you into the room before you unmute and go live. At that point, I invite you to unmute your mic, voice

your question. So we're going to get started. I'm going to post this first question to allow more questions to come in and hands to raise. This question is from Frank Schumann. It could be a question for both of you, but let's go back to Peter. "Are bodily and mental practices shooting for the same aim via different paths or for different aims?"

**Peter Wayne** (01:02:35):

Hi, Frank. Nice to hear your question. I would say that we should begin exploring that question with semantics. Can you have a body without a mind? Can you have a mind without a body? I would say that like in Guy Claxton's quote, that mind in some ways, emerges out of these processes that we call body, that there's a unity there. I think sometimes that unity gets split. We get stuck in our heads to be colloquial, or in Brooklyn, we'd say we have our heads in the freaking gutter, but there's a split. But I think as Willa described, as we do our practices, as we settle in, as we realize that there is no future, that we have to be concerned with at the moment there's enough to just experience things, I think there's unity there. I think that's what we're looking for. Whether it's an evolutionary model of survival, or whether it's a contemplative model of some other spiritual goals, I don't think we can separate the mind and the body. I think they are one in the same, especially on a good day.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:03:57):

Willa, would you like to add anything to that?

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:04:03):

Yeah, just thinking about, in addition to that, in the Buddhist tradition, sometimes enlightenment is described, the actual, you could say that, the fruition of all the path of meditation is described as the oneness of the body mind. Dōgen called it, "the oneness of the body mind," and Yangonpa who was a Tibetan somatic theorist, he called it, "the inseparability of the body mind," so that what we're actually doing when we're meditating is embodying that inseparability. That's what meditation is, the embodiment of the oneness of the body mind. Just that was coming to me as you were talking.

**Peter Wayne** (01:04:51):

Yeah, and just to bring Srinivas' wonderful performance in, my sense is that the authenticity of his music emerges from that dance in the moment. It's not as if he's saying, "Over the next few notes, I'm going to play..." or, "The previous few notes, I'm going to play..." but he's improvising with himself and responding to what's unfolding. I think that speaks to the lack of duality there. When things are just right, it all comes together as one piece.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:05:25):

That's lovely. Thank you. This next question is from Christine Tello: "Given divisiveness in society, how would you describe your message of listening to our bodies and focusing on community in simple terms to the average person, versus those of us who are already believers?" Maybe Willa, we can start with you.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:05:51):

Yeah, listening to the body... Let me just start, or maybe I'll just do that one and then... Yeah, listening to the body... So when you really learn to listen to your... Oh first, maybe to say to non-believers, everything that we feel is experienced in the body and I'm talking about emotion. Everything that we feel, especially our difficult states, there's a correlation in the body. We feel stress and the posture hunches over, our belly contracts, our heart contracts, there's a visceral, visceral experience of distress. So learning to, you could say, meditate with the emotions is to notice that those experiences that we think of as mental, that there was a story attached.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:07:03):

"So and so did such and such and now, I'm experiencing stress," or, "COVID is happening and now, I'm experiencing stress" or, "I'm watching the news and now, I'm experiencing stress," is actually happening right in the present moment in your body. It's connected to a story, but it's happening right in the present moment in your body. If you can befriend whatever that is that's arising and become graceful with that, it's possible to become graceful with COVID, or it's possible to become graceful with those things that we think of as being out there. Meditation is so much more than navel gazing, and it's much, much more than just calming down. It's learning to be with our difficult states with grace, so that we can learn to be with others with grace. That's how I'd say it for a beginner.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:08:01):

Peter, did you want to add anything to that?

**Peter Wayne** (01:08:04):

I can try

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:08:07):

No wrong answers here.

**Peter Wayne** (01:08:10):

The first thing I noted was this idea of gut feelings. We have gut feelings. In Brooklyn, we would say we have this built-in BS meter and when we receive something, we can think of it intellectually, but what's your gut say? What's the embodied kind of read on that? So I think that the body can play a role in reading situations if we're more connected to it, and then we can get a better read for it. Then I think similarly, how we react to it is benefited by the more embodied state that Willa and I are talking about. Often in meditation, they say, "mind the gap."

**Peter Wayne** (01:08:50):

But because you're in your body and it's not just this labile of thought and emotional reaction, it has the anchor of a bit more substance. We have more time to see it in a certain way and react to it in a more measured way. I think, again, coming back to what I was saying before, contemplate your navel and think globally act locally. I think having these tools helps us navigate and discern these really challenging social, environmental issues that we're facing with a little bit more clarity and a little bit more nonreactive choice.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:09:29):



You both have talked so much about community and global connection. Can you both maybe just share some of the work that you're doing to help create inclusive spaces that support conversations around this practice of embodiment or mind-body connection? Just so people can know where to find out more about the work that you're doing or what they should be watching for, if that makes sense. Willa?

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:10:00):

Yeah. Yeah, what comes to mind that the moment when you're offering that question is just recently, so I am a part of a retreat center up North from where I am at the moment in Boston, New Hampshire, Wonderwell Mountain Refuge, that's our community or the Dharma community that I'm involved with these days. We recently were thinking, in fact, starting years ago, beginning to think about how can we do something as contemplatives, as meditators, those who go inwards and observe the inner state, the inner weather, how can we do something meaningful about climate change? What can we do?

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:10:51):

When my mind even goes to climate change, it seems so enormous. So almost like, I can't even turn my mind there because to turn it there is to turn towards the potential demise of our planet in its furthest iteration and that's a kind of a death, right. To turn our mind towards death is a difficult thing. So what we started to do at Wonderwell, we were talking about the power of community and connection is, why don't we start with these small conversations where we just get together and we talk about our own grief and talk about not only that, but activity - What can we do as a community to move beyond grief towards meaningful action? So we started these councils, and with the help of Sarah Buie and some other people in my community, to create eco-sattva councils, which is to say ecological councils of...

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:12:03):

So just to say councils of ecological compassionate discussion and those have yielded, almost like a think tank, yielded real action, yielded deeper relationships. And so I think what I really learned from this experiment, we had never done before in our larger meditation community, was the power of small groups and really intimate discussion to seed action. And we were able to see that as an actual living thing happening on the ground and it is very, very exciting. That's what I can offer is something that we were doing recently that reflects some of the power of Sangha, the power of Sangha to actually move us from an individual awakening to a collective awakening.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:12:55):

I love that. Thank you, Willa. Peter, do you have any things to share about community building?

**Peter Wayne** (01:13:03):

Yeah, I mean on one end of my spectrum, I have my little tighty community here in Boston, which is now virtual and I sort of hide out in it and I like keeping it intimate. And it's a place for me to practice and have a nice group of people to explore this with. In my day job, so to speak, at the Harvard Medical School and Brigham Women's Osher Center, there's a lot of community things going on. So at the highest level, our center is what we call a center without walls, and

we became this unsiloed catalyst to bring together all the other rich activities and contemplative mind-body practices going on across all the Harvard campuses. So the Center for Health and Happiness, the Center for Chinese and Integrative Medicine or Benson Institute for Mind Body. So we sort of bring people together and try to create community and connectivity to see if there's more in the whole than the sum of the parts.

**Peter Wayne** (01:14:09):

The other thing we're doing is trying to penetrate strategically into places to give people a taste of all these practices that are not easily findable. So tonight after this event I have the privilege of being part of a wellness program, so all of the Harvard Medical School medical students and dental students will have a chance to explore mind-body practices. And I'll actually teach a 30 minute session on body movement. And this year, our education director, Darshan Mehta - two years ago, we were one of the first medical schools at Harvard Medical School to make this mind-body training and resilience training a required course. So early on, as physicians learn about healing, they're learning about healing themselves and developing skills to become more resilient in that very, very challenging space of being a healthcare provider. So I think that's one of the ways we're trying to influence our communities by penetrating in really strategic places and bringing people together.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:15:12):

Thank you. So important for people to hear real-lived experiences that the people are doing and people sharing the work out there and to see themselves in that work. So thank you so much. This question just came in from Ranya Renee: could you speak to the separation of body and mind in the Western approach to medicine, to art and etc? And its historical devaluing of the body's wisdom in favor of the analytical mind because this could be seen as a form of white supremacy? So speaking of the separation of the body and mind in the Western approach. Maybe Willa? It says for both of you. So, Willa.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:15:56):

I think when I reflect on that, I feel like at some degree our education in the West is based on a premise that our body and our mind are separate with a great deal of privileging of the mind in our educational system. That if we can sharpen our minds and develop the mind and work hard using our mental capacity, that that is our definition of success, that is our definition of doing well. And just even that idea is such an idea that separates, right? That mind is one thing and the body is something quite other.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:16:51):

And I do think that in Eastern traditions, there is much more of a longer history of non-dual thought as opposed to the Cartesian dualism that we have grown up with and been educated with. And I do think yes, that there is something about that separating of the body and the mind that privileges this hierarchy of the conceptual. And actually when we really look at it - especially if you start to meditate or you do an introspective or contemplative practice, you begin to notice that in fact, a lot more is going on than just the conceptual mind, a lot more exists.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:17:38):

There is space, there is the body, there are the senses, there's the present moment, what we're actually feeling. There's the feeling of our breath, there's the feeling of the body sitting wherever it's sitting. There's so much coming in, so much - and sound, there's so much happening that is non-conceptual. And in privileging the conceptual, we actually miss a tremendous resource for resilience, which are the non-conceptual sides of our experience, which is much more non-dual with its world. So I do think there is something about that.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:18:20):

And the othering, right? That is so much a part of white supremacy that there's me and the other, that othering is tied in to that notion that self and other is something real as opposed to interdependence, as opposed to the non-conceptual moment in which we are all one and partaking. I think there is something there to that, that some of the social problems that we're encountering in our world could be addressed or ameliorated by a greater attention to dissolving the boundaries between self and other through dissolving the boundaries between mind and body. I think there's a connection there.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:19:02):

That's beautiful. Peter, would you like to tag on briefly to that before we bring Srinivas up?

**Peter Wayne** (01:19:07):

Yeah, very briefly. I would just say that there's an unnatural selection that happens in our educational system. It really favors people who can sit still with their hands quiet in a small desk and take information in and put it out in a very head-oriented way. There's not a lot of appreciation for movement and art and those sorts of things. And I have no knowledge really about pedagogy and how to teach, but I think there are systems out there that are much more body-oriented that appreciate the diversity of ways of learning and different types of intelligence. And until we sort of broaden it away from the sort of more academic, fit-into-a-really-good-SAT-score kind of model, we're not going to be promoting the diversity of people that we want to bring as doers and leaders in the future. And of course, we need to provide access for everybody through that kind of education but I think the quality of the education has to change as well.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:20:12):

Thank you so much for lifting that up, Peter. I'm wondering if Srinivas is available to join us now? I wanted to bring him in briefly for a question for him. Hi.

**Srinivas Reddy** (01:20:22):

Hi.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:20:23):

Lovely performance, that was so great. Such a great way to start these episodes with music and art. So, Srinivas, I think about the instruments that you use as a complement to this conversation so much. The sitar, and I believe you play the tabla too, but I might be incorrect?

**Srinivas Reddy** (01:20:40):

No.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:20:42):

No, okay, so just the sitar. And I think about how it just complements this conversation on theories of human motivation. Seemingly you have this inanimate instrument, the sitar, and yet it's this means to connect cultures and create social belonging and to bring people together through the music. And clearly it's led you to have a deeper understanding towards a form of self-actualization, however that looks like. Can you share maybe some insights on the thought provoking power of classical Indian music or the music that you share?

**Srinivas Reddy** (01:21:23):

Yeah. Well, first I just want to say thank you to Peter for the comment earlier, which we could talk about, too about improvising and the kind of being in the moment, quality of improvised music of any kind or art just generally or the creative kind of spirit generally. But to what you were asking, Shankari, actually, the sitar is not inanimate, the sitar is a totally animate thing. And we think of instruments with souls that's why we never step over our instruments. That's like one of the main rules is never step over instrument because well, in India we don't step over a human being because they also have a soul. So the sitar is very much alive and like the gourd and the wood and everything, it's living and it changes over time, it gets seasoned. We say the more you play it, the more it responds to you.

**Srinivas Reddy** (01:22:21):

I know what you're saying though too, in the sense that I'll walk away and leave my room or something, but I think the beauty of that part of the instrument or that part of art is it responds exactly to what you give. The more you give yourself to your practice of the instrument and love for that instrument, cleaning the instrument properly, keeping it nicely, practicing every day, then it starts responding more and the sounds are better, it doesn't go out of tune. And so it's like this feedback loop, so you have to give in order for the sitar to give back. My guru used to always tell him that you have to love your instrument, not only in terms of like doing the scales and thinking about music, but the body of the sitar - you have to clean it, you have to keep it in a nice place, so both of those things together, I think are really important.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:23:26):

Thank you so much, I agree. And as a fellow musician, I'm glad that you, you talked about the instrument not being inanimate, so that's great. So at this time, we bring a call to action to share not only with the three of you, but we also encourage our participants to engage in this final question, the signature question that we always ask to the three guests. So I'll start with Willa. And the question is, what is one action step or insight that you'll take from this conversation today and perhaps carry through into your life? And again, I invite our audience to respond as well in the chat.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:24:12):

Well, I think one of them is related to Srinivas' playing. When he was playing and I was closing my eyes and feeling the sitar in my body and feeling it, the vibration of that in my body, I was reminded that contemplative practice as a form of deep listening and that what we're doing is

listening to the body. And it's very much like listening to music, the way that music can captivate and draw in and actually take us out of our suffering, it can relieve us of suffering. Just like meditation relieves us of suffering, music relieves us of suffering. And so just thinking about that connection of deep listening and the power of deep listening to bring us into states of greater ease and greater focus and greater relaxation. And so maybe what I'm taking from this is the connection between listening to music and listening to the body in meditation.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:25:28):

It's beautiful. Peter, one action step or insight that you're taking from this conversation today?

**Peter Wayne** (01:25:40):

I think it brings me back to my practice. I'm probably the most nervous, neurotic tai chi teacher I know and yet I've been able to overcome that and share the practices and be out in a very public face. And so I think sticking with this inner work so that I can stay out of my way and try to make small differences out there and let other people know that even being nervous and being afraid - as Willa said just being kind to those things that come up and integrating them is a way of letting other people feel more empowered and being part of something bigger.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:26:31):

Thank you. Srinivas, in the spirit of going with the flow?

**Srinivas Reddy** (01:26:36):

Yeah, going with the flow, there's a lot. I guess one thing I'm grateful for is just to have had this opportunity again to connect with new people and old friends. And I guess the action point as much as possible to just continue to create more of that sense of good community, making decisions to spend more time - watching Mind & Life video and maybe instead of some other types of video - and always reorienting toward something kind of positive and wholesome, I think is what I think about. So thank you.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:27:16):

Love it. Conscious decision-making, it's wonderful. So after such beautiful reflections and action steps, I'm going to invite Willa to come up on screen and lead us in a beautiful contemplative-guided meditation. We'll just take about three minutes for this, Willa. So, Willa, please.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:27:37):

Let's take a moment to settle the body. And feel your body as a field of warm water, as if your body were a vessel of warm water. In that vessel there's movement, there's the movement of the breath. There's the feeling of the air and skin. And there's the heaviness in the body, the weight, this vessel. And imagining that your mind is like a handful of salt. And toss that handful of salt into this vessel of warm water so that the mind dissolves evenly all over the body. And rest in the oneness of the body mind.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:30:58):

Thank you, Willa. So in closing, today we honored and celebrated Peter's work and celebrated and honored the memory of Cathy Kerr, an explorer of rich edges. She's a revolutionary human being. We've been programmed to think about the mind and body as separate, which are probably the cause of so many of our social issues such as othering. And Peter and Willa reminded us to examine our own ecosystems and to listen to our own bodies. They reminded us that being present in the unfolding now takes away from ruminating about the past or present. So thank you to our three distinguished guests today for this enlightening and enriching conversation.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:31:56):

As mentioned before, we will be gathering together next month for our January episode of Inspiring Minds which will take place on Wednesday, January 13th. And we'll be joined by Jack Kornfield, Rhonda Magee with a live performance by dynamic duo DJ Drez and Marti Nikko. The theme will be mindfulness, resilience and compassion for the new year. And registration is now open for our events through the Mind & Life website. As always, thank you so much for joining us today. Deep gratitude and appreciation to our Mind & Life team which works tirelessly behind the scenes. And please continue to stay connected to Mind & Life as we move forward in these challenging times.

**Willa Blythe Baker** (01:32:43):

Thank you.

**Shankari Goldstein** (01:32:44):

Thank you, Peter. Thank you, Srinivas. Thank you, Willa.

**Peter Wayne** (01:33:00):

Thank you, Shankari.