Introduction to Mindfulness and Chronic Illness

Hello and welcome to the DrTalks Parkinson's Solutions Summit 2.0. I'm your co-host, Dr. Barbara Pickut. Today we'll be speaking about managing chronic illness with mindfulness and compassion.

The benefits of mindfulness meditation for people with Parkinson's will be highlighted, as will the power of choice and ownership for managing chronic illness.

It's a pleasure and an honor to introduce Fleet Maull, who's a PhD and author, a meditation teacher, a mindset coach, a social entrepreneur, and a peacemaker who works at the intersection of personal and social transformation.

He founded the Prison Mindfulness Institute and a national principal Prison Hospice Association, which catalyzed two national movements, and he did this while serving a 14 year mandatory federal drug sentence.

From 1985 to 1999. He also founded the transformational education platform the Heart Mind Institute, which offers international online summits and online courses integrating cutting edge science with ancestral and contemplative wisdom and addressing themes of trauma, healing, resilience, building post-traumatic growth, expanded states of consciousness, psychedelic assisted psychotherapy, and more.

He co-founded the Engaged Mindfulness Institute, where he trains trauma informed mindfulness teachers to work with individuals and communities impacted by trauma and marginalization.

He has served on the leadership team for the annual Auschwitz Bearing Witness retreat for more than 20 years. He co-founded the Rwanda bearing Witness retreat and has trained genocide survivors as volunteer para counselors working in villages throughout Rwanda.

He is a roshi, a seniors and teacher in the Zen Peacemaker community, and a senior dharma teacher in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, leading meditation retreats worldwide.

He developed his neuro somatic mindfulness meditation, which is a deeply embodied neuroscience and trauma informed approach to mindfulness and awareness meditation practice that facilitates and accelerates self-healing, self-regulation, and awakening.

Dr. Maull is the author of several books. One is Radical Responsibility how to move beyond blame. Live your highest purpose and become an unstoppable Force for good.

Another Dharma in hell. The prisoner writing the prison writings of Fleet Maul. And then finally the resilient CEO. Mindfulness based wellness and resiliency for corrections professionals.

Fleet Maull. How am I address? Who would you prefer? Fleet Dr. Maull Fleet is fine Fleet. Thank you for being here today. And welcome. Thank you. Barbara.

Your book, Radical Responsibility focuses on the power of choice. How can this approach support people in managing chronic illnesses such as Parkinson's?

As well? I think any time, we're experiencing any kind of illness and then especially chronic illnesses, it's very easy to find ourselves in, in somewhat of a victim mindset, to whatever degree and quite reasonable.

So, I mean, we may just well, why did I get this? And in some cases, you know, people lived very healthy lives and they still get struck with some, chronic illness and, you know, the, the, the obvious question, why me?

You know, arises and, and, and then, of course, you know, navigating the difficulties in our health care system and all the challenges that anyone with a chronic illness, faces are quite daunting.

So it's very reasonable that one would, you know, feel victimized by that and feel, you know, a sense of powerlessness and helplessness, again, especially not only in the face of the, disease or the old ones, but in the face of, trying to deal with the complex medical system and insurance and all the rest of it.

Right.

Radical Responsibility and the Power of Choice

So and and to say nothing of then the actual impact of the illness itself on one's symptomology and how that social impact, one's quality of life and so forth. So, and. To whatever extent that we do get caught, I mean, it's completely reasonable to feel victimized in some way or feel like something's happening to us or life's happening to us.

And, you know, to feel all kinds of feelings, they go through, you know, the stages of grief and and dying could happen in the face of, of a chronic illness, because it shifts.

That can shift our life and our quality of life so dramatically that we might go through those states of anger and denial and, you know, bargaining. And so forth, the classic Elizabeth Kubler-Ross framework.

But, you know, so all that can be going on is quite reasonable. That will be going on. And we may really it may be very helpful to have that validated, to have our feelings validated, to get support around all that.

However, at some point, if we if we get if we get stuck in a kind of victim mindset and, any kind of learned helplessness or just, sense of disempowerment, it's not going to help us deal with our, our challenge because basically someone receives that diagnosis, okay, rightly or wrongly, a, profound challenge has dropped in their lap.

Right? It's there. And, you know, we may have again, we may have all kinds of feelings about it. And, that's all quite normal, quite human. But at some point, our our future, how the course of that illness, and the quality of life as we go through it.

And again, there may be elements of it that we really can't influence. but some of it maybe we can influence and certainly our quality of life and our mindset and our heart set and so forth, we can influence those things which will impact our quality of life and could impact the course of the illness.

and, and the extent to which we're suffering with the symptoms and so forth. So, you know, at some point, our choices are what's going to create that to one degree or another.

That's the only place we really have any power. And, and so, somehow at some point making a shift to be willing to feel what we're feeling, experience what we're experiencing, get support around it validated.

But then, okay, I made a choice point here, or I'm made a series of choice points. In fact, every morning when I get up, I'm at a choice point, you know, how am I going to work with this?

And it's really up to me. And again, I may need I want, may want to get support and and information and research and allies and so forth. But it's still ultimately up to me.

And if I can embrace that, it gives me a lot more power, a lot more power to navigate, whatever my life journey is going to be at that point. and so, you know, the idea of personal responsibility and personal empowerment, you know, it's not absent from our culture, but, there's a lot of support for embracing more of a victim mindset in our culture.

And our culture is kind of, I feel is like become sort of permeated with, with the psychology of shame and blame and victimization and both in terms of, you know, we can take on very debilitating kind of self shaming.

It's, you know, one of the important things, one of the key distinctions in my book, Radical Responsibility and the radical responsibility model is the distinction between ownership and blame.

So when I talk about radical responsibility, which you could equally say radical ownership, it has nothing to do with blaming others, obviously, but it has not one iota to do with blaming oneself or shaming oneself.

And it's clearly not about blaming victims, it's just about the power of choice. And how do we get how do we support ourselves and focusing as much of our, attention and resources and so forth on where we can make choices that are in our own enlightened self-interest.

Right. And what's the most creative way I can respond is that's going to lead to the best results for me, and which is probably going to be good for everyone else as well.

So, so I think that's that's the power here. And it's going to come up again and again and again when someone's facing a chronic illness, every time the symptomology changes, every doctors visit, every, you know, effort to navigate with insurance companies in a medical system, it just constantly there'll be constant opportunities to get knocked back and say, you know, and just feel victimized and kind of, lose one's power or lose one's personal power, one's energy.

And so the journey, the challenges to continually sort of get back in the driver's seat of one's life and, and embrace choice and, you know, really take this on as a challenge.

And, and in some ways, I think, you know, the classic, framework of the hero's journey, I think is very helpful here, which, you know, Joseph Campbell and others put together, drawing from the world's mythology, traditions of literature and mythology and so forth.

there's this classic journal, journey, structure and, so it always starts with a fall or a departure or something happens and it changes everything. Right?

So, and then you know, then one takes on challenge after challenge after challenge. And, so to the extent that someone dealing with a chronic illness can find their way into that mindset and that heart set, do the do the grieving, they need to do, you know, over the loss of the previous life, they had, expressed the anger and resentment, you know, Safeway get all up and get all out and then, okay, now what am I going to do?

And we say, that this question, what can I do? We call it the magical radical responsibility question, because the minute I asked myself that question, assist me out of any kind of victim mindset, a sense of helplessness and powerlessness into the mindset of creativity and creativity, because there's always a million things we can do.

What can I do to improve my situation? What can I do to best work with this? And we get back in the mindset of creativity. We get into solution based thinking and and we turn problems into challenges and, and that can rouse our energy and and and we know from there's a lot of research that I know you're very familiar with this.

you know, I remember, Doctor Bernie Siegel's research, and it was working with cancer patients. You know, passive patients don't do well. Yeah. You know, this is someone who really grabs the bull by the horns and engages and becomes their own advocate and really engages with the illness, engages with the medical system, engages with their providers, and, you know, is fully engaged.

Those patients do better than others, right? Yes. Interesting. Thank you for that. Yeah. The choice. And so becoming aware that we have choices, becoming aware of what's in front of us, being able to see what there is with as few filters as possible.

one might. Consider that part of mindfulness, to, you know, with each breath being fresh, with each day being fresh and, and life being fresh, continuous.

Really. So how might mindfulness and meditation help people with Parkinson's, particularly, in the manner that,

that, you have, developed the neuro somatic mindfulness?

Yeah. Just, maybe an aside, but what came to mind as you were speaking, I lost, a life partner, to cancer in 2008, and she was diagnosed in 2005. Originally given less than six months to live.

and, she had some kind of bile duct cancer. We never quite learned for sure whether it was the ducts inside or outside the liver, but, and to hear that, they had trouble diagnosing it to begin with, at any rate.

But it was serious, and I gave her less than six months to live. She, in fact, survived three years. but, you know, she was a long time meditation and mindfulness practitioner, very, very deep practitioner.

And I think this supported her profoundly in dealing with that diagnosis. And I remember, you know, I was with her when we went to the doctor, and I wouldn't say the doctor was extraordinarily skillful in delivering it.

But anyway, it's hard to do probably. but I remember, you know, for a day or two, she was kind of just sitting with it, you know, just being with the shock.

Right? Because she had lived an extraordinarily healthy life. She ate organic food. She worked out. I mean, she was just a paragon of healthy living. Right? And here she is.

She was I think she sits in her late 40s and she gets this access. maybe she was 49 or something like that.

Mindfulness, Parkinsonu2019s, and Brain Health

so, within a couple of days, you know, she was saying, you know, and she was a Buddhist practitioner as well. So as I haven't been practicing with impermanence and relating all the teachings of impermanence for some 35, four years now to suddenly, you know, freak out over this.

Right. And so she didn't freak out. She just started looking. What. Well what choices that you have. And, and she pursued what convention null or URL path thick and you know, mainstream medical things were available to her reasonably.

She didn't just, you know, and she pursued some alternative stuff, but not with a sense of desperation, with a very kind of reasoned, you know, thoughtful and, and, I my role was basically being her medical advocate.

I know how to do research. I was doing all the research and working with the doctors and the insurance companies, but but it was, you know, she just really exemplified, living at choice in the midst of that very difficult situation.

And, and I think it was, you know, the years of mindfulness practice and meditation and, you know, really gave her the strength and resilience to do that.

However, you know, I think even if someone, you know, for example, is diagnosed with Parkinson's and has not been a meditator, I think it can be incredibly valued.

And, you know, begin a mindfulness or mindfulness meditation practice of some kind. Now you're very you're more familiar than I am with the research. You did some of the early research, mbsr, mindfulness based stress reduction, interventions with, those suffering from Parkinson's.

And as you know, there's been a lot of it. The research is really expanding. There's a lot of research in the area. And so there's clear demonstration that, that a mindfulness practice can, ameliorate some of the symptomology possibly slow down the course of the illness and certainly improve the quality of life of people who are dealing, with Parkinson's.

And, you know, I think there's, get getting into the weeds around, how that works in terms of, it can go pretty far down a rabbit hole. But, you know, with any illness that has a neurological, basis, right, that, mindfulness has been

shown to, increase neuroplasticity and to, actually, support neurogenesis in certain areas of the brain, the new cell growth of neurons and in ways that can support areas of the brain that that support, emotional balance and positive outlook and things like that.

So basically, it helps us have a more resilient, more integrated, higher functioning brain. So if our brain is challenged by a neurological disorder of some kind, anything we can do to support that, that same brain, is going to be helpful.

and, you know, there's again, we can go deep into the weeds of the functionality of actually how that happens. But I think it's just clear evidence that, you know, in terms of even looking for all of us in a preventative way, and just, you know, we know that the healthy functioning of our brain is probably should be one of our most critical concerns because, when we start to experience neurological disorders or any form of dementia, these kind of things, it profoundly impacts our quality of life, right?

And every dimension of our life. So, and one of the, there's a lot of things we can do to have a healthy brain. virtually all the things that are good for the body are good for the brain.

Right. So getting, an up exercise and a really healthy diet and, drinking enough water and learning to breathe properly and getting enough rest, all these kind of things.

And very importantly, and one of the other interventions you can bring to bear is mindfulness, a mindfulness practice has been shown to really, support, brain health over the long term.

And so, so I think there's a lot of reasons why it makes sense that it is, showing results in supporting people with Parkinson's and other similar, illnesses and, it also, besides whatever impacts mindfulness meditation may have know biologically, we're also cultivating self awareness, right?

We're cultivating self awareness, which allows us gives us, gives us the awareness. And to get more in the driver's seat of our life, to embrace choice and to have more awareness around just, you know, kind of what's making me tick and how I am responding and how, you know, what are my habitual patterns, my life and the conditioning that most of which I've got early in my childhood.

How's that playing out in relation to having now with dealing with this chronic illness in my life? And if I have awareness around that, then I have more choice about how to get some support to, possibly change strategies or change habits or learn new habits or, you know, just get support around not just living in a reactive state around all this.

Right? You know, one of the things that mindfulness shows us is how much we do live in a very mechanical, kind of reactive way until we learn not to. Right.

And one of the really profound things is we recognize those those moments of choice, those gaps, you know, going back to Viktor Frankl and others, that the gap between a stimulus and a response, in there lies the whole of human freedom, right?

So we recognize those choice points, and our mind is slowed down enough that we have the ability to make different choices, healthier choices, more empowering choices.

Right. So I think there's lots of reasons why having a mindfulness meditation practice is both a formal practice, and integrating mindfulness into daily living will not only help the brain neuro biologically, but give us the presence of mind, the awareness, to, to do all the other things that are healthy for us.

Right. All the other things I mentioned about exercise and diet and sleep and hydration or breathing, we're more likely to do all that and make improvements of all the in all that if we're being mindful. Right.

And then the other really important part of that is the fact that in most mindfulness programs, there's also a strong

emphasis on cultivating compassion and to begin with, compassion for oneself.

even as we're practicing mindfulness, we're we're inviting and encouraging attitudes and qualities of openness, curiosity, non-judgment, beginner's mind, you know, these kind of things.

And these, again, are going to be very helpful to someone, who's dealing with the challenge of a chronic illness, right? To to not to see if one has tendencies to blame oneself, a big one, see that and see the efficacy of that, and also the illogic, the fact that it's not logical, but also that it's not helpful.

but also to, to start to really befriend oneself as one goes through this and really be one's best friend. hopefully one has other supports. But, you know, if we're not going to be our own best friend who will.

So again, I think my plus, especially the way it's introduced in the mainstream and programs like MSR, in other words, and, you know, direct compassion practices like the Metta practice or the loving kindness practice is often incorporated into programs.

So I think all these things can be incredibly beneficial for someone dealing with a chronic illness. Yes. Thank you. As you were speaking, there were many questions that came up.

but one thing I'd like to clarify, I'm not sure that all our viewers know what Ms. are is mindfulness based stress reduction, which was developed by Kabat-Zinn and Su and then together with Saki Santarelli, at the UMass General Hospital, I was it's a it was actually a non-pharmacological intervention.

to help people with chronic illness and pain. in that context, it's an eight week program and it's a secular program. And people practice, mindful meditation, mindful yoga, and then the body scan so that, you have a, you have a, an interesting insight into meditation, with the neuro somatic mindfulness.

Can you tell our viewers a bit more about that? Sure. So, MSR is a wonderful intervention program, and I think it's last, heard, I saw, like in over 700 hospitals worldwide.

And it really was focused on supporting people dealing with chronic illness and chronic pain. So it's quite wonderful. And, yeah, I've been practicing meditation in various traditions for more than 50 years now, and I've always been kind of a very passionate student of the art of meditation.

So even though my core training has been in Tibetan Buddhist tradition and in Zen, I've explored every other kind of meditation you could possibly think of, including, mbsr, John Kabat-Zinn and Sakae Santarelli, long time colleagues.

I've done some of the massage training and, trained in many other modalities, Vedic meditation and other forms of secular meditation and you name it for passion.

Neuro-Somatic Mindfulness Practice

and so, over the years, I was sort of led into serendipitously, being attracted to a more and more embodied approach to the practice. Now, I think many basic meditation instructions we will will orient you towards the body.

But in Western culture, we've become so disembodied. Right. I have a friend that says in Western culture, our bodies have been relegated to the role of just being a brain taxi, something to carry around a supercomputer on our shoulders.

Right? And there's so much support and conditioning around that that even if you get, you know, relatively good, clear, meditation instruction or guidance that does include the body, there's still a strong tendency to practice from the neck up.

And we're dealing with this busy discursive mind. And we know from current neuroscience Overreactive default

mode network, which is active when we don't direct our attention all of the time, travel into the past, and loves the time travel and the future and ruminate about the future. Worry about the future, fantasize about the future.

Keeps a running commentary about the present and thinking about me and what others think about me and all my opinions and just the constant self sensing who am I, where am I? How's it going?

You know, just that, you know, radio station has been going on between our ears ever since we can remember that's the active default mode network. And over it, it has its evolutionary purpose and even its purpose in our lives.

But it's overactive and modern human beings. I would I would suggest and so, and it makes it very hard for people to learn a mindfulness practice. Right.

And then also because they tend to practice from the neck up, you know, the mind's getting pulled up into thinking and they try to drag it back and it gets pulled away and you try to drag it back.

And it's this whole kind of mental exercise and all that becomes so much easier if we really intentionally include the body in a deep way. And by body, body is just a word.

it's a concept, a word, as well as breath. you know, in, in mindfulness training is generally an object of mindfulness of some kind or another. And so you, you intentionally place your attention there.

And when your, your attention wanders, you gently bring it back, wanders, you bring it back. And every time it comes, you bring it back. You're training your mind to recognize when you're distracted, and also you're training yourself to be able to come back and you're building kind of that muscle of mindfulness, but you also building building neural networks that make it easier to recognize, distract your mind to come back and to to spend more time in the present.

Right. So, when you develop a deeply felt physical presence with the body and dive into not just the concept of body, but the actual tactile physical sensations, the landscape of sensate experience, of touch externally on the surface of the skin, and also, very importantly, internal, activating our capacity for what's known as interception.

Fancy word for internal perception. All of us are familiar with it, and we never heard the term because how we know when we're hungry, when we're tired, sleepy, thirsty, how we experience pain in the body.

That's interception. The thing is, though, an absent discomfort, we generally don't pay attention at all. If there's no pain or discomfort in the body, we usually just completely ignore the internal landscape of the body, much your own detriment, I think.

And that leads to these very cognitive and externally externally oriented, disembodied lives. So if when we start training our self in this deeply embodied approach to mindfulness and awareness meditation by really feeling into that landscape ever more deeply, we develop, this really felt physical presence and that anchors us in the present moment.

It serves as a, really effective anchor to be in the moment, because the actual field of sensation, all the trillions of sensations coming and going, constantly changing, appearing and disappearing and coming do all that is happening now.

But that's happening now. And so to the extent that we can really bring our attention and be with that flow of constant sensate experience, it's bringing us into that now.

Now, the other thing we know from current neuroscience is that when we do focus our attention really in any way, and I think this is a particularly effective leverage way to do it.

But when we focus our attention, we activate something called the task positive network. Sometimes the executive network, and at least to a degree, anytime we talk brain science, there's a risk of oversimplification here.

But this is accurate to a degree that these two networks, the default mode network, the noisy part of our brain, and the task positive network, which is attention stabilizing, they're mutually inhibitory, at least to a degree.

So to the extent that we bring the task positive online, the report one network starts to go offline and our mind starts to quiet down naturally. Also, many people, when they start meditating, have this idea of means you're supposed to stop thoughts.

Well, that's almost impossible to do anyway, but it's very counterproductive to even try to just struggle with our thoughts. What we really want to do is just be present.

Let the thoughts come and go like clouds in the sky by. But it's hard to do it actually, because we keep getting caught up in them. They're very sticky right and right down a rabbit hole, daydreaming or distraction.

So by working with activating the task positive network very intentionally through really exploring the body and feeling by ever more deeply, the mind naturally quiets down and we don't have to struggle with it.

And our attention stabilizes. And as our attention stabilizes, we gain access to deep states of awareness, and it can go deeper and deeper and deeper.

Now, we can take anything as an object of mindfulness. You can work with any of the sense perceptions. You can work with sight, sound, smell or taste.

It's a little more, difficult, you know, sounds come and go. you know, there might not be any strong odors present for us to work with or taste, you know, kind of come in kind of subtle, visual people do either visualize internally objects, or you could use an external object that can be used, and, you could also just use thoughts.

But that's one of the most challenging forms and our advanced techniques about just placing your attention right where thought arises. Right. And how thought, seeing, how thought emerges dwells and disappears and, and but that's very difficult to do because again, thoughts sticky we get caught.

So we need a stabilized mind already to do those kind of practices. But the body for me is the most accessible. And not only that, as we really get into feeling the body deeply initially, we're starting with kind of gross physical sensation, right?

this physical sensation. Now, if you close your eyes without the visual part of that, it starts to feel much more like mind or energy or something. But even still, except the obvious physical sensation.

But the deeper you go, you're getting into subtler and subtler sensation, and internal sensations are subtler than those on the surface of the skin, because they go to a different set of neural networks to the brain, which is highly myelinated.

And thus we're very sensitive to touch. Internal sensation tends to be subtler unless there's a pronounced pain of some kind. So we're getting into subtler and subtler sensation.

And then really we're getting into subtle body in the mind, even in the spirit, if you will, because it's all on the spectrum. It's not body, mind, not really separate.

It's convenient to talk. Yeah, that's my body. And here's my mind. And I can look at, you know, I can direct my attention. But really it's all part of the unity.

So the deeper I go into the body, I'm actually coming in not only into mind and consciousness, but eventually into the very depths of being where I can have profound experiences of flow, brain nurturing and healthy experiences of of, states of coherence and flow, which can be very healing, can heal trauma and which I think can probably support brain health and brain integration.

Yeah. I love the way Dan Siegel describes healthy brain functioning. as our brain, confronts more and more complex problems, it becomes more and more differentiated.

Right? We develop many more neural networks and and complex neural networks to solve complex problems, life challenges and problems. And but we want those neural networks to be communicating really well.

So we need differentiation and linkage. And if you get good linkage and good differentiation good myelination. So good efficient communication, then you get well integrated brain that that operates in flow.

Instead of getting up into chaos or into rigidity. It's it's stays in a flow state. So this kind of deeply embodied mindfulness practice, we're training ourselves to access flow states with the brain, which, you know, I don't know, 12 centers from any direct research on Parkinson's.

But I know there's research, that at least you could extrapolate to it would be larger or at least would be a reasonable hypothesis based on what we know being in those states of flow and coherence, how those impact the brain.

Teaching Mindfulness and Holding Space

It would be a reasonable hypothesis that it probably would be helpful to someone, suffering with Parkinson's. Yes. Thank you for that lead. as you were speaking and to your last point, it that was a question that we asked back in 2013.

Could, a brain that has this Parkinson's phenomenon has a decrease in dopaminergic cells. Could that brain also react the same way to meditation? And we showed in volume that there were changes, in a positive sense, comparative to those who did not, practice the meditation.

And I appreciate that you use the word training because it's not I it seems to me now that there is, talk of mindfulness, it's everywhere. Right. And mindful is, in our common parlance, common parlance.

but and to have this neuroplasticity which you described, it takes practice. It's almost like learning to play an instrument, learning to play the brain in some ways.

So that that brings me to a thought. Then it seems to me that one would, like to choose a program to learn mindfulness so that, let's say, so that, you know, that's complex because there's a lot of in-person and a lot of online.

And so I was curious about how, and then, what are the qualities of a teacher and what does it mean to embody presence? And then going deeper, what does it mean to hold space for a person and an individual and within a group, and for the group holding space?

And then the last part of that is the idea which came we just performed a focus group analysis for people with Parkinson's. After mindfulness and what came out very strongly was this collective wisdom of the group and a connectedness and a sort of transcendence that they had where they could understand each other in ways that, were very special.

One gentleman expressed it as, you know, we're like dolphins. We communicate that way. You might not understand us, but we have this connection. So if you could talk a little bit about quality of teacher and integrity.

Yeah. Teacher. Sure. So what you were describing is right. we have a teacher training program and what you're describing is right. The heart of that, to, the nonprofit that I founded while in prison.

President Army Network, which now has three divisions. Prism points Institute, which does things my position in classes at risk, incarcerated, returning youth and adults.

And then we have mindfulness and public safety, which brings to mind plus based interventions, all the public safety professionals, correctional officers, police, probation policy, so forth.

But then we have the engage mindfulness and so to engage in some various kinds of peace work. And then but it also we have a mindfulness teacher training program through there which is a very strongly, trauma informed and neuroscience informed program.

And so I was just leading a retreat over the weekend for our current cohort and, and, so it feels very fresh in my mind. And what you were describing, being there with a group of, people dealing with Parkinson's and the way they were communicating, connecting with each other because it was really a wonderful it was online.

It was a zoom training. We do in-person retreats, too. In the fall, we'll have two in-person retreats, but these first two are online. And, so we're on zoom.

But there was still a wonderful collective field that, developed. this was their second online retreat together. This cohort, they had one last month, and then they had this one. And, and we were doing, this deeply embodied approach.

we were we were doing focusing on three practices over the weekend. We're focusing on body scan. We're focusing on basic setting mindfulness, and we're focusing on the the metta or love and kindness practice, but doing all three of them in a very deeply embodied way.

Now, you might think that will the body scan by nature, that's going to be a deeply embodied practice as well, based as those bodies can, bodies can you can even do a body scan in a more deeply embodied way than it's conventionally done.

So we were doing all this and, and it just created an amazing group field. But in terms of what, what our teachers and training hear from us again and again and again and again, what we're training them to do is, first of all, deepen their own practice, because all we have to offer to others when we get into the role of sharing the practice and supporting others in our practice, is the quality of our own practice, the quality of our being, the quality of how we show up and who we are, what we're being.

Right. So we say we're this is really going to focus on deepening your own practice. And then it's all about in terms of the art of teaching and sharing the practice and guiding others.

It's it's about really learning to take that seat with, profound presence and taking whatever you're doing, sharing, teaching, facilitating, guiding as a practice.

So your you're practicing while you're doing it right. And it's very easy to slip into kind of presenter mode where I'm presenting something. I learned how to present it. Right.

I can do that, but I'm not really kind of there. And I'm not even really doing the practice in a sense. So this is the exact opposite of that. It's really being deep into practice oneself and then teaching and facilitating and sharing and guiding from there.

Right. And that ultimately the role of the role of the teacher is to create and hold a safe space. Or sometimes I use the term workable space because, you know, I mean, there's risk in life, so nothing's ever completely safe.

I mean, it's okay, we want, but but, you know, I have it be workable, for whatever group we're working with so they can meet the practice in this safe or workable space and begin to learn it, work with it, and ultimately, their practice becomes their teacher.

We're there to hold space. Our job is really to hold space and hold an effective space, a workable space, a relatively safe space for the person to learn the basics of.

Now we want to be competent and delivering good instruction and so forth. So they get good instruction and good guidance. But really, the ultimate teacher is going to be their own practice.

Right. And so we're learning how to to hold space. And that really I mean there's lots of skills. We train our teachers and lots of skills and lots of facilities and skills and teaching skills and how to design a good short talk to give all kinds of different methodologies for facilitating Q&A or dialog.

And we train them and lots of skill sets. but the core of the whole thing is their own practice and how how their own how their own practice is evolving.

And, and it's a for some teacher programs for mindfulness, it's a prerequisite that you have your own practice, coming in right to. Yeah, we are for our, program, people, need to have at least two years of practice before.

I'm not sure where it is now. We, that whole space has gotten very competitive teacher training programs. There's, like, a million of them out there, and, varying, widely diverse quality.

I know it's. it's, but at any rate, so we've made it. One of the reasons we shortened it requires a little bit, because we're also trying to draw a lot of people who are working in the public safety field to train them to become facilitators and teachers, and many of them have not been practicing for ten, 15 years or even for five years.

But initially our our requirement was four years of practice, four years of consistent practice. And having done one silent, week long retreat, we still require a silent weeklong retreat.

We may have shortened it to two years experience, but yeah, people need to have a practice already. and even while during that, and we also really emphasize that this is just the beginning, that we really encourage our aspiring teachers, teachers to, to become lifelong learners and to embrace what we call the spirit of mastery, which isn't necessarily a place that you get to, but it's not.

There's never settling. Like we're always looking to improve our skills and deepen our own practice. Right? We have our own teachers around guys, very much like in many professions where you can truly do continuing education or you have a supervise or a relationship with another clinician or something, you know, if you're going to be a practitioner and especially holding space for others, we're continually working on ourselves in order to show up in the best way we can.

Yeah. That's wonderful. Thank you so much for sharing that with our viewers. And I'd like to thank you for your time today. Very generous of you to be with us for so long.

is, how how would people best get in touch with you or your work? I just want to say one more thing quickly about this deeply embodied approach to practice.

Finding the Right Practice and Closing Remarks

Because especially if someone gets a diagnosis like Parkinson's and now, you know, maybe someone suggests to them you might want to try a mindfulness practice, right.

And, you know, massage is very available so that people couldn't go wrong going there. the but there's many, many different things available. But one of the things about this deeply embodied approach is it really accelerates the learning, because I think a lot of people start a practice and quit because it's too far, is too boring.

They struggle with their racing mind, too many thoughts. And and in our experience, we've been introducing this model now for quite a few years and to beginners, to intermediate students, even in advanced practitioners.

And they all find very accelerated development and quick development. Like in the old days. I used to go sit on the cushion and just, you know, be with your mind.

You work and you know, okay, if you do that for 20 years, maybe all this stuff wears out. You're finally, you know, it doesn't have to be that hard to take that long.

You know, with with brand new students, we have people actually, you know, having an experience like, oh, this this works. It's, you know, and so I think that's really helpful.

And there's also, there's an internal neurobiol feedback loop that one's developing. And I think, you know, things like biofeedback and neuro play back can be very helpful.

And helping one train oneself to work with challenges, like Parkinson's. But in this practice, your doc and internal neurobiol feedback loop. You're getting all this data internally with enhanced and receptive where.

So as you make any shift in your posture or technique or breath or anything else, you so that your body, mind, heart system, if you will, is learning and developing neural pathways to reinforce that how to drop in to flow.

Right. And and beingness and all the benefits of that. So and, and and I think it can people can get results very quickly by taking this approach. So I just wanted to was that so to find out about our work, heart mind that SEO or heart mind echo it's not com it's just SEO heart mind echo.

you can find all about all the online summits we do and all the courses. I have a neuro somatic mindfulness course there. We also, And you can probably find it, but certainly summits we make available following the summit a 21 day neuro smack mindfulness challenge where people get up a new guy to practice every day for 21 days.

We have an advanced, 90 day deep immersion training program as well, but they can find all about that, heart mind echo. And, you can also find your way to there to my basic website, which is free.

Malcolm. And from there you can find your way to all the prison stuff that people are interested in, the prison work that we do. But but the core, heart, mind skill and what?

Well, you can my book. You'll see it there as well. I was going to give the. But just go to that one heart. Mind how you'll find everything sooner or later.

That's wonderful. this pause, we will edit some of this out of the doctor talks will edit this. There's one thing that when you were speaking and whether this is used or not, what we found in our, cohorts, if I may call them that, because we're doing it in a study context.

The people with Parkinson's, what they enjoy the most. And we had them, you know, tabulate how much time they spent in things. What was it? The yoga? Was it the meditation?

Was it the body scan? It was easily hands down the body scan. I thought. So. And and this is not for probably for this tape, but, so when I teach, I also go very deep in the body, to the bone.

Yeah. And, and and work in that way. So, what you said resonates with me. Very much so. And I'm very grateful to have had this time with you and, Yeah.

So that will be probably edited out. I don't know what they'll do with it, but it was wonderful. Yeah. I learned TM when I was 17 and I studied with AI and GA back in the day because I live, grew up in Ann Arbor, and the faculty wives would fly him in, So then I got off the beaten path for a while, but but came back to it, in my 30s. So, everybody has a pathway, all the stories that we tell.

Right. So I appreciate you. And I thank you for, for being for sharing this time with me today. Well, thank you very much, Barbara. Okay. Take care. You too.