



MINDFUL IN MAY

Dr. Elise Bialylew, founder of Mindful in May (mindfulinmay.org) and The Mind Life Project (www.mindlifeproject.com) and author of The Happiness Plan, interviews Tara Brach

Tara Brach

Tara Brach, PhD is an internationally renowned meditation teacher, clinical psychologist, founder of the Insight Meditation Center in Washington D.C and author of bestselling books Radical Acceptance, True Refuge, Radical Compassion and her latest book Trust in the Gold. Her popular weekly podcast addressing the power of meditation to relieve emotional suffering and serve spiritual awakening is downloaded 3 million times a month in more than 200 countries.

Elise: So, Tara, welcome to the program. It is such a delight and an honor to have a conversation with you again. So, thank you.

Tara Brach: It's a pleasure to be with you again after five years, Elise.

Elise: Yes, and you know, in those five years I was thinking about how your voice has often been part of my daily life, and it must be quite amazing for you to think about the many people sitting in their rooms through this pandemic that your voice has touched and supported. I'm sure many of the listeners are saying...."Yes, me too". So that's an amazing gift and service to the world. So thank you for that.

Tara Brach: Well, thank you. And I'm so aware that these five years have linked us all so much. I mean, you're talking about one directional situation but boy to be woven in with so many people going through so much and feeling like there is a sense of we're going through it all together....

Elise: Yes, yes. And we were talking before we started recording about how your five years have been and how when we had the last conversation five years ago, we couldn't have imagined, what was going to unfold. And I've heard you talk about both the gratitude and the sorrow of this whole experience.

Tara Brach: Yes. Well, there's the inescapable, you know, being with the suffering. I mean, there's just so many people that have been hard hit and it's the most vulnerable. So, I'm very linked into many, many networks, many friends who lost people and those that are on the frontline. So yes, the grief around it, and then also, for others - I'm reclusive, and it has allowed me to be quiet and have a little more solitude. I've done some self-retreats that have been fantastic. And you know, I get to do what I did before in terms of teaching, but really connecting, as you were describing, it's much more global now. People can kind of connect through different countries and it's just all much more diverse. So it's rich and it's also like we're all living in much more conscious uncertainty.

Elise: Yes, yes. So today I really wanted to have a conversation about the latest book that you've written called 'Trusting the Gold'. And my personal experience reading the book - unlike your other books that I've read - this one is like a beautiful journey into sort of storytelling with wisdom infused into it. And I really appreciated how we got to learn a bit more about you through your very vulnerable and honest sharing in this book. But before we dive in, I wondered if you could actually start off by sharing what you mean by Trusting the Gold? What does this mean? This phrase 'trusting the gold?'

Tara Brach: Yes. Well, I'm glad you asked Elise, because it's become almost a mantra for me. You know, often I'll say to myself, just trust the gold, because what it means to me is trust the basic goodness that lives

through us all, the awareness and love and mystery and beauty that's inherent in our nature. And it doesn't mean that we overlook our personalities and our patterns of getting greedy, or angry or aversive. It just means to know about it - I think of it like the ocean and waves. Those are changing waves and there's this ocean, this mystery of the spirit that lives in us. And just to say a little bit more the story that I've told a lot because it's such a useful image and I'll just share it with you. You're probably very familiar with it, but maybe some of your listeners aren't that familiar.

So, there was a statue, a massive statue of the Buddha in plaster clay, very popular, which endured over centuries. But in the 1950s, some cracks appeared. And this was not a beautiful statue it just was popular. But the monks looked into the cracks, and what gleamed back at them was the gleam of gold. And so, they took off what turned out to be just plaster clay coverings, and it turns out that this is the largest solid gold Buddha in Southeast Asia. But what's interesting about the story is that they've discovered historically that the past monastics covered it over with plaster and clay to protect it from some invading armies that would have defiled, desecrated it, stolen it, whatever. It's much the same way that we cover over our innate purity to get through difficult times and, to get through times where there's a lot of addiction or violence or, in our own families of origin, a lot of dividedness and a lack of belonging. So, we take on coverings and the suffering. The problem is that we get identified with the coverings. We think we are our defenses or our judgements or aggressions, our personalities and we forget the gold.

So the book is really about how to remember the essence of who we are so we can actually live aligned with that for more and more moments of our life.

Elise: Thank you for sharing that story. I think it's such a powerful one. And so just to explore that further. In your book and your teachings, it does seem like there's this theme of the two ways we can be living our lives. One of them is when we're connected to presence and there's a calmness and there's an openness, and then the other one is kind of the ego or our reactivity and we kind of go between the two. Is that what you're talking about with this trusting the gold and then the clay that covers over it?

Tara Brach: Well, a way to think about it is that and there's nothing wrong with our ego. We all have to have an ego. We have to have an executive functioning that looks out for us, protects us and can enhance us and so on. Where we get into trouble is when we're not aware that it's operating, you know, unconsciously. And it's all driven by fear. And then we get identified with the ego, and it's like identifying with a small cluster of waves and forgetting that we're the ocean. We get very small and we know what that's like. We know what it's like when we get caught in craving or caught in anger or judgement, We know that we get small and our world is organised around this sense of a needing, wanting, and fearing self. And we lose sight of the beauty and the mystery and what others might be going through. So, it's not whether or not we're reactive and an ego is reactive. It's really how conscious we are about what's going on. And I think Joseph Campbell gave a very

beautiful metaphor. He said, imagine a circle of awareness, a huge circle with a line going through it, and whatever we're aware of is above the line and whatever we're not aware of is below the line. And so, when we're operating from below the line, you know, from parts of us that we haven't seen and been open to, then we get small and then we get identified.

Elise: And we're suffering.

Tara Brach: Exactly right. That's suffering. Suffering is when we forget who we are and suffering is when we get identified with a small kind of distorted fragment of our being and forget the wholeness that's here.

Elise: And so, in our lives, we're constantly interacting with others and relationships are kind of the ground of living, really. And so how does this look in relationship? You might even want to share- I mean, in the book - you were really open about sharing about your relationships and how you've navigated this kind of 'trusting the gold' versus the other option. Do you want to say something about that?

Tara Brach: Sure. So, in the moments that we are identified with our coverings if I am caught in identification with my ego and I feel like I'm a deficient person who has to prove herself and I'm not OK as I am. Let's say I'm living in that narrative of my ego, what I'm going to see in others are their coverings, I'm going to see, 'Oh, is this a person going to judge me? Is this a person going to give me that fix of approval?' So when we're caught in a small place, it's like we see other people's

masks, but we don't see who's looking through. So, the way out is just to deepen our attention whenever we get a sense of suffering. You know, if we feel anxious, if we feel angry, if we feel self-aversion, if we're judging others to let that be a flag, to say, 'Oh, I've left home, can I come back again?'

Elise: So, would you share about those moments - and we all know them very well - some more than others, but in those moments where we are stuck. I was reflecting on myself and just the other day with my two young kids thinking about, you know, getting a bit overwhelmed and sometimes, might even have those thoughts of just not good enough mother or whatever it is. And I noticed that when I get into that, it can spiral me into a really- I call it - a crappy soup of self-criticism and self judgement. It's just and it gets quite sticky. So, what do we do in those moments?

Tara Brach: Well, I'll share a story about that because I think what you're describing is called the trance of unworthiness where we just kind of get caught in this narrative that there's something wrong with us. And the only way out is to say, 'Ok, this is a flag to deepen our attention.' And I remember getting caught in that -I was not writing this book, but writing the book before it and my mother had come down to live with us and she was like, eighty-two or something like that. And it was a very busy time for me, and I just felt terrible that I was always falling short on, you know, I just could not be enough in terms of a daughter and really helping her to get rooted down here. And I was constantly anxious about getting stuff done and meeting the demands of the moment.

And I remember one particular time Elise, that I was here on my computer. I was actually working on a talk on loving kindness, which is ironic because my mother walked into the office here and she had an article she wanted to show me, but she saw I was really immersed. I didn't even look over. She put it down. She's very gracious, and she started walking away, and I looked at her retreating form and thought, 'Wow, I don't know how long I'll have her.' So, I decided to do some meditation and, you know, be with what was going on. And I used the meditation on mindfulness and compassion meditation, the acronym RAIN that you and many people are familiar with. It's not a new meditation. It just gives you a nice sequence on bringing mindfulness and compassion to a stuck place. It's an applied meditation, the RAIN meditation. So, I love it. And so, I sat down here actually on the couch right behind me, and the 'R' of RAIN is recognise for the acronym recognise, so I recognised 'OK, guilty guilt, feeling guilty, feeling bad about myself, feeling that trance of unworthiness, feeling anxious about that.' So recognise. You can just mentally whisper just the words or whatever, the emotion of the moment and that begins to create a little mindfulness. In fact, there's a little less identification in even just naming it. The A of RAIN is allow, which means rather than saying, 'Oh, I shouldn't be feeling this,' or ignoring it or judging it, just let it be there. And I often will say this belongs, because it's ok. It's like, yes, this is like a wave in the ocean. It belongs. It's OK that it's here. It doesn't mean I'm going to feel it for long. It just means it's reality, you know?

So I just allow the guilt and the anxiety to be there and then the 'I' of RAIN is to investigate. Now first I started investigating by saying, 'What am I believing right now?' Because usually when we're suffering, we're believing something limiting, something fearful and the belief was, I'm falling short on all fronts. You know, I'm going to fail my students because I'm not going to be prepared. I'm going to fail my mother, you know? And then after identifying that belief - this is really important - it's somatic, it's not a mental cognitive process, it's feeling in the body where that guilt and anxiety live, and it was like a twist or clench and my chest. And so, you investigate. I put my hand here because it helps me stay with the process. And it also is the beginning of the inner brain, which is nurturing. And I breathe with it and I felt it, and I just brought a lot of attention to it and my sense to what, what is this place most need? And it really just needed me to trust my own goodness.

What would flow through would be good with my mom and good with my students. You know, just trust the goal, really. So, during the nurturing part of RAIN, I just said 'trust, trust, trust, the goodness,' you know, with my hand on my heart communicating care. And then I spent just a few moments in what I call after the RAIN. And it's just like after a real rain. That's when everything flourishes in the moments after the rain. You realise that the guilty self isn't who you are. You're not identified with the small self. It's more just resting in a field of compassion and care, and after that, you know, I did a lot of light RAINs where I would do it a lot, you know, just to keep on loosening things up. But my time with my mom changed, and you know, we'd have our big salads for dinner and I wasn't always thinking, 'Oh, can I get upstairs

and get back to work?' Or we could go for a walk on the river and I was there with her. And you know, she died about, four years later, and it was huge grief because, you know, she's very dear, but I didn't have regrets. And I feel like a lot of people when they do RAIN, tell me the RAIN saved their life. You know, I feel like RAIN saved my life moments with my mom. And that was such a blessing. And actually, that's what shaped the book that I wrote. It was radical compassion, and it's really a guidebook on how to use RAIN, and the basic mantra that I came up with there was 'trust the gold,' which became my most recent book.

Elise: That's a great anecdote. Really, really powerful. And there were a few things that came up as I was listening to you, one which was ...it's been five years. I was imagining, in 20 years' time, we have another conversation and this idea that you can practice and practice and read and learn but still, things happen to us . It's not like we meditate and then at some point down the line, we're just not have the clay claddings. This stuff is still happening. I was going to ask you the question, does it get any better? You know... do things get better when we have decades of meditation under our belts

Tara Brach: You know, the waves keep waving. In other words, the fears, the anxiety, the self judgements kind of crop up. But the reality is there's much less suffering, there's more 'oceanness'. I can be the ocean, rest in the ocean and see the waves coming, and it's Ok. And I don't get so identified. I don't believe the stories of limitation. So, when I get a thought of, you know, 'Oh boy, you really blew it. You know, some sense of personal badness, there's a witness going, yeah, well,

this is a familiar one, but you know, it doesn't stick, you know? Yeah, and that to me, that's everything. It's like there's not a goal on the path to get rid of fear. In fact, we'd be brain dead if we didn't have fear. If there's such a thing as a goal, it's to know who we are to know that formless awake presence so that when fears come, we can listen to the intelligence of their message, but not get possessed or not get hijacked.

Elise: In the book, you talk about the limbic caretaker, which I really thought that was a brilliant framing. Can you share what you mean by that?

Tara Brach: Sure. So, our limbic emotions, let's I use fear as an example, it's there to protect us. Every emotion has an intelligence and if we can listen to the message but not get possessed or hijacked, we're in good shape. But we often get hijacked because we think that it's bad that it's happening, in other words there's a very deep conditioning in us when fear comes up or anger comes up to think we shouldn't be having this experience. And a lot of times people use meditation to try to get rid of the experience. The challenge is that, you know, we sometimes say, 'Well, I'm going to sit and be with this fear, so it will go away.' But it knows, you know it doesn't really work until there's truly a profound quality of allowing and letting it belong. But back to your, the basic question, you know? The limbic caretaker, if we can get that every emotion has a positive intention, it's trying to help us in some way, even if it's misguided, even if it's now causing us trouble, then we can be in relationship with it differently.

So, for instance, a woman a couple of weeks ago - I was working with her on an online kind of program- and she was talking about the fear she had in trying to confront somebody and speak her truth. And it was keeping her tied up, and she was really angry at the fear, and she felt like the fear was stopping her from being who she could be. And I said, 'Well, let's slow it down. What's that fear trying to do for you?' And she said, 'Well, it's trying to protect me from having her be angry at me and reject me.' And I said, so how about just saying thank you to the fear? It's a protector, you know, it's trying to protect you. You can say thank you, but I'm really Ok. And she tried that and that it gave her a huge amount of space. She was no longer at war with the fear but she was including it and appreciating it. Sometimes we'll thank our limbic protectors and say, 'Is there something you need that would make you be able to relax?' You know, we can do it. But the point is to not be at war with a part of our psychobiology because it never works to be at war with parts of ourselves.

Elise: And that feels like so much of what you're teaching in all the various forms. Whether it's your podcasts, your meditations or your book, you know this message of not being at war with the difficulties that we're having within ourselves, and I really loved that in that chapter in the book where you were talking about it and you just referred to it, as 'Yes, this belongs.' I just found that chapter the day there was something going on for me and it was perfect timing. And I had that, 'Yeah, okay, this belongs' experience, and there's something so comforting about that.

Tara Brach: The way I figure it is, if we're at war with reality, reality will win, and all that happens is we create more tension. And so, our only real refuge in reality is making friends and peace with it and holding in our hearts what's happening. And I remember when I first started this, you know, for myself doing this meditation, I was at a retreat Elise, and I was just going through this a long time ago, decades, I was going through a divorce with my husband and we were working out the arrangements around my son, Narayan and I went there and I had a sinus infection.

So, there I was, dealing with all the stuff around my fears and concerns around our separation and my son and feeling sick. And I was completely aversive. It was like I was at war with reality. So, I just decided to do the exact opposite and see what happened if I said yes to whatever was going on inside me. So, I would say yes to this kind of achey, congested feeling or yes to the anxiety, or you know, at that point I was at a retreat center and people were having this thing with window and doors: some liked it open, some like them closed.... so window wars, and I just was saying yes, to everything. And at first it was kind of a game, and then, you know, it was kind of amusing. And then I found that when I'd say yes, there was kind of a pause, you know, it would be like I was no longer caught in reactivity. And then I found that I'd say yes, and there was actually a tenderness. There was in that space a kind of tenderness. 'Ok. These waves are just happening. This is what's here right now,' and my relationship to the waves changed. So, I was more resting in that space of the ocean.

Elise: Yes. I'm just digesting... well, there's a lot in what you're saying. There was a story told in the book that's similar. And again, I'm very mindful of not spoiling the book. I don't want to do too many spoilers here, but there was a story about one of your teachers and a mentor that you had a long time ago that you still carried forward. And the teacher said something like 'Every time I think there's a problem, I decide there isn't one....' And I heard it and I laughed, and I've been playing with that since I read it, but I'd love to hear your perspective on what this actually means and why you found it useful?

Tara Brach: Yes, this teacher is Joseph Goldstein, and it's a great one because here's the thing we humans go around in a problem mentality. You know, we have a negativity bias where our survival brain is scanning for what's wrong or what's going to go wrong. And if we are honest, we spend a lot of the day figuring out things. We're trying to figure out how to navigate, and we often assume we're kind of overcoming an obstacle. So, there's something about shifting the frame and instead of considering whatever, we might be calling 'a problem' considering it, you know, from a larger picture that, 'Ok,' so this is the situation without adding the valence of bad or good. There's a lot more creativity that opens up because all of a sudden, we go from the survival brain, which really is fear based to the prefrontal cortex a more integrated brain, which has all the creativity in the world. And I'll share the story because there's tons of stories in the book. We're not going to be giving away too much...

Elise: There were so many and I could share from all of the chapters. But yes, I just wanted to respect the fact that you wouldn't want....anyway.

Tara Brach: No, it's fine. There's are good ones, and I hope people will feel drawn because it has, I think, some really juicy stories, it's beautiful. It's illustrated in a very beautiful way. So, it's a perfect holiday gift. But Ok, no more promotion.

Elise: If I have to, I have to confess to, actually, I actually read it on Audible. So, I'm going to now have to go and buy the book and have a different experience with it.

Tara Brach: Well, I wish I could show it to you and to be able to see it. But it's got these beautiful illustrations throughout and it's just a lovely gift book. So, Vicky Alvarez is the illustrator, and I do a real bow to her. She did a beautiful job. Ok, so, when he gave that little teaching and I had been in a situation, my parents had died and my siblings and I were trying to work out this tangle around inheritance, which happens to a lot of siblings, and we all were looking at it like this kind of knotty problem.

And I went off to retreat with that knotty problem. And then, low and behold, Ok, nothing's a problem. It's just, you know, a situation here, too to be creative with. And I just gave it a lot of space. I was able to just hold it more lightly, and I realised, you know, I did not have to feel oppositional. I could feel co-creative in it and see new angles and be able to come up with ways that just felt like win, win, win. And it just freed me up a lot. So I found that when I got back and we all got

together, there was something in the mood that we all had that I think was contagious, because we just came at it in a whole different way, much more collaboratively.

Elise: Yes. Wonderful. I kept saying it to myself. I was thinking "I don't quite understand this quote, but it's working." And then I got it, "Oh yeah, it's just opening up some freedom. I'm not in this kind of siloed.... This is a problem. This is a problem. Like, maybe it's not a problem."

Tara Brach: The very nature of calling something a problem shrinks the mind and narrows the focus. You miss out on the bigger picture.

Elise: Can I shift now to... well, it's kind of linked to problems, but the topic of decision making, which can feel like a problem a lot of the time. You know, sometimes we all reach forks in the road and there can be big decisions that need to be made or even little ones, and we get stuck and we get confused. How do you navigate times like that and are there practices or anything to say about that?

Tara Brach: Yes, it's an important enquiry. What I don't do is make any important decisions when I'm caught in a limbic hijack, when I'm caught in fear or anger or hurt. I know I'm living in a smaller place than my full heart and awareness. So, one piece is to do whatever supports us in coming back home to a larger space of presence which is going to help us in deciding things., Just to not make decisions at the wrong time. So that's one piece. The second is whatever the decision has to do with

step back and reconnect with your deepest aspiration. There's a beautiful teaching that the most important thing is to remember the most important thing, and I love that because when we get in touch with what our hearts most long for, we're actually coming home to who we are. You know, our deepest longing is to be fully who we are to fully awaken to our heart mind.

So, coming back to aspiration gives us a lot more clarity on the particulars of decision making. It really guides us in how we're doing it. And the last piece I will say Elise is, we have a lot of fear around decisions like if I make the wrong decision, I'm going to be unhappy. And our happiness and unhappiness doesn't have so much to do with the decisions. In fact, our happiness or unhappiness isn't in a deep way linked to any outer conditions. It really has to do with the quality of our presence. So even if we make a decision that ostensibly seems like, "Oh my God, I went up the wrong creek or got together with the wrong person or left the job, I should have stayed at." As long as we then meet those waves with curiosity, with open heartedness, with presence. We'll keep learning and growing and waking up and finding our way to happiness. So, it's not the decision itself. And if we can take a little less weight off the decision, you know, it's like, just remember our aspiration, do the best we can with what we know in the moment, and then trust that we're going to wake up through anything.

Elise: Yes, trusting the gold.

Tara Brach: We're going to come back to it a lot because trust is a big deal. You know what I've found when I watch people and I've now had many decades of watching myself and others evolve on the path, is that one of the deep signs of freedom is that we trust in reality, we trust in the reality and the goodness and the love and the awareness that's living through us all. And that trust helps to relax the habit of fears, and the trust lets us be intimate and the trust lets us have fun and lets us celebrate. So, it's a real gift when we deepen trust.

Elise: Can I ask- because this is a program on mindfulness- can you speak to how mindfulness fits with trusting the gold?

Tara Brach: Oh, for sure. You know, I'll again use the RAIN model - basically recognise, allow and investigate all deepen mindfulness. The essence of mindfulness is to recognize what's going on and allow it, to see what's happening, and make room for it. It's got those qualities of seeing and not judging presence because we're often in a trance we have to deepen our interest and attention with investigating to really contact and allow. So that's part of, it's part of mindfulness and mindfulness also has to have heartfulness. You know, the Chinese script for mindfulness is heart presence. So, when we add the nurturing of RAIN, it really fully opens up that awake, mindful presence heart.

So, each element of mindfulness carries us home to the awareness that really is our nature, and every time more mindful, and we wake up and we sense the waves but we realise we're the ocean. Every time that happens, it deepens our trust in who we are. And there's a beautiful

understanding about indigo dye, where if you take a white cloth and you dip that into a vat of indigo dye, you know that brilliant indigo and you pull it up initially, it'll just have this very pale bit of blue on it. But then you do the rinse and you go back in and you pull it up, and each time you do it, the cloth gets more and more saturated with that very luminous, brilliant color. And so it is with mindfulness that every round of being mindful with the waves of the moment deepens our trust and familiarity and access to that larger sense of beingness.

Elise: That's a beautiful metaphor.

Tara Brach: Yeah, I love it, and I love Indigo, so it helps it.

Elise: Also, I think it also speaks to the kind of subtle accumulation of wisdom and the way that you have to be patient. And it takes time. And it's this subtle deepening of something that happens when you commit to the practice.

Tara Brach: It's true, and it's also it's also fits with neuroscience because there's a lot more research on turning a state into a trait. And let's say you might have a state of periodically feeling mindful, which is that kind of a spacious presence with what's going on that's balanced and got equanimity and so on. Let's say it's a very periodic state, but you want to turn it into a trait. The way that we do that is in the moments of mindfulness which really deepen your familiarity with what it's like. In other words, if there's a sense of presence, if you feel some stillness and some openness and some wakefulness, perhaps you sense a kind of

field of awareness that is what you're resting in. Immerse yourself into it, you know, just really get curious and open to what it's like in all ways. And it's the way scientists describe it for negative states. It doesn't take much to really have our memory hold on to it, our implicit memory, hold on to it. But for positive states like a spacious, mindful presence, it actually takes immersing and being familiar with it for it to go into our implicit memory and be more and more accessible. So, the message here is when you do have moments of freedom, get to know them, get familiar. This is for me one of the most practical of the Tibetan teachings, which is, in any moment where you really feel that sense of homecoming, immerse in it, just absolutely get familiar.

Elise: That is really fascinating. The alignment of, yes, the neuroscience and the practice and kind of a bummer that we're designed like that, really, that it's so not effortful for the negative to impact us, but so effortful for us to really absorb the positive and install that into our system.

Tara Brach: Well, and the great paradox is the way that we truly install it requires a relaxing and an opening. In other words, it sounds like effort, but installing is actually kind of a backward step of falling backward into a surrendering into. It's got more of a quality of surrender. But just be intentional, you know, hang in. Because we tend to practice and have lovely states arise. But then we just move on like, 'OK, what am I doing next? Meditation over. I think I'll go do the dishes" and then you know, learn to stay.

Elise: Yes. Can I ask a question around your own practice and how it might have changed over time if you don't mind me asking? And then following on from that, you know, there's lots of listeners here who are juggling work and kids and pandemic, and you know what it's like. Is there any hope for us? You know that people that just don't have a lot of time, like how can we make this work? So first about your practice and maybe how it's changed and what you're practicing and then a bit of hope or suggestions for people that are in the depths of business and what they can do.

Tara Brach: Well, my essence practice is what we would call informal presence, where it's just the intention to be as awake and open hearted in every moment, whether it's here with you and I connecting to not like, put this in a small frame and say, I'm doing this interview so I can then do you know, but be here for this, you know, and feel our connection. And so just to bring it alive everywhere. And I have a formal practice twice a day where in the morning, it's probably about forty-five minutes and I will first do a lot of exercise because I'm much better if I've exercised first, you know, and helps me embody more quickly. But mostly it's doing a little bit intentionally to get quiet and to be awake in my body. But then it's a real surrendering presence, it's just whatever comes up to open to, to allow and to sense the awareness that's aware, you know, looking back and sensing that formless presence and just to keep on relaxing back into that, over and over again. And I usually at some point before I close, have a time of prayer and I set an intention for the day that has to do with kindness. Sometimes it's "please teach me about kindness," and sometimes, "Please, may I be kind," or

whatever it is. And then at the end of the day, much, much shorter. It's very short because I am brain dead and exhausted by the end of the day, I just don't have much energy, so I just do five minutes. But what I do is I notice how the day was in terms of that open heartedness. And if I wasn't, if I see places where I was really in a trance asleep, it's not a blame thing, it's like, 'Oh, Ok, so those are the places I can be more attentive.' And you know, I don't take it too personally, I'm just going to sandwich in the day that kind of intention towards kindness so that's my practice. Well, I love your question, though, which is, not everybody has forty-five minutes in the morning, you know, and what if we don't have as much time?

And the main thing I would say is like physical exercise, awakening our heartmind, takes practice and it takes regularity, and there's no replacement to every day, no matter what. I really recommend every day no matter what, but give yourself a back door, which is, it doesn't matter how long, which means - and I did this for myself when my son was born - my practice, got a little spottier and I missed some days. And then finally, I could feel like, 'Oh gosh, I need my practice'. But so, I made a commitment that I would from henceforth, I would practice every day no matter what, but that it didn't matter. I mean, some days I was so tired at the end of the day, I'd sit down and I'd take, you know, five full deep breaths and I'd say prayers to the world and I'd collapse, you know? But that counted, you know? Yeah. So, this is the thing. Just getting into that rhythm, nature loves rhythms and a daily rhythm of, you know, it's like Rumi says, "Do you make regular visits to yourself." It's a gift to the soul to just at some point on purpose to become as still

as you can and pay attention notice what's going on with kindness as much as you can. And then that's it. And then the rest of the day have the intention to have that quality of awareness in whatever activity is going on.

Elise: Thank you. No, that's really helpful. And I think the thing is that if you don't do it regularly, then you can get pulled into the unawareness and it's like months can go by and you've just forgotten.

Tara Brach: I think of it just like that, that the whole path is forgetting and remembering. And each of us knows what it's like to remember. We know the times when all of a sudden there's something really beautiful, some stars or the wind and the trees. And there's a sense of wonder and there's, "Oh yeah," or we see the light in the child's eyes, or we feel that intimate connection with someone or we are with the breath and we feel that sense of, "Oh, my body and mind are in the same place in the same moment." And we know how precious that is. And that's the remembering it's kind of like we've come home again and then we get lost. We get into trance for long stretches. And it's sad because it's like we're racing to the end to the end line. We're all so busy in a rush, trying to get somewhere. And what is that? It's like death, you know, it's like, well, why not pause and arrive and cherish these moments?

Elise: Yes, I'm. We have a short amount of time left, and I'm just thinking about where to go, and I think I just want to maybe come back to relationship because, yes it's just such an important part of what makes

us healthy and flourishing. Would you share the practices you shared a bit in your book about some of the practices you do or did and probably do with your husband or partner that kind of keep the relationship in presence and the keeping gold in the relationship?

Tara Brach: Yeah. Well, our basic practice is to meditate together in the mornings, once a week, twice whenever we can and then check in. But even more basic than that is that when we have an enquiry which is, you know, is there anything between us that's keeping us from being open and loving? And so, when we check in will ask that question, you know, first we'll talk about what we're grateful for because it really helps to soften and open the field. But then we'll say, you know, we'll talk about challenges and then what's between us?

Elise: And can you ask the question again? Can you repeat that?

Tara Brach: Yeah. Is there anything between us and really feeling open and loving? And sometimes there is. And what we've learnt to do is when we start noticing that there's stuff going on, and I'd say everybody that's honest with each other in themselves has stuff that goes on. You know, I think of it like, it's not a conflict between people, it's just a conflict between unmet needs, you know? And so, let's say I get judgmental and he gets angrier and more withdrawn. One of our practices is first, we do some time out work where we say we'll bring RAIN to what's going on inside us.

And I'll sense OK, judging, judging angry, angry, I'll make room for it and find under the anger. I'm feeling hurt. He didn't really pay enough attention to me at some point. Then I'll bring kindness to that. And as soon as I have more compassion with myself for what my unmet need was, then I can see him more clearly and say, wow, he was anxious or he was probably busy. You know, I can see him more clear., There's a metaphor we both love, which is if you imagine walking in the woods and you see a dog under a tree and you go to pet the dog and the dog, you know, lunges at you with its fangs bared and you go from being friendly towards the dog to being really, you know, angry and pulling back.

And then you see, the dog has a paw in a trap, and then you shift again and you go, 'Oh, you poor thing', you might not get really near right away. You might first catch your breath and take care of yourself and then figure out what you can do. But you see more. You see what's going on. So, it is when we act in ways when I act in ways with Jonathan that aren't so user friendly, you know? You know, I just act from my ego and my wants, my needs, my clinging, my anger, whatever, or he does. It's because of an unmet need. It's like legs in a trap and first I have to take care of myself, you know, just see that and be kind towards myself, and then I can see more what's going on for him. And we kind of have a joke, which is that the first one when we're talking, we then can be real about where our vulnerability is and not blaming, which is the key. We have a joke which is the first one who can roll reverse and really see it from the other person's perspective wins. And it's such a gift to be able

to, you know, once you've taken care of yourself, you can say, 'Oh, that's how that that's how he's feeling right now, OK?'

Elise: That's a great game. I'm going to take that one.

Tara Brach: And so if we broaden this out at least two relationships in general, it really helps whether it's our friends or colleagues or somebody who's a difficult person that we think of as a bad other, even, you know, to look to see the vulnerability, and see how that person might have a leg in a trap because people only act in greedy, domineering, selfish, whatever ways we're not liking they only act that way because something in them is disturbed and hurting. And if we can see that, it doesn't mean we let ourselves be taken advantage of, but it means that we're not responding in kind from unconsciousness and reactivity. Because as the, you know, the deepest truths we know, that hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love alone is healed. And so, if we can see the vulnerability will respond with more intelligence and compassion,

Elise: that metaphor is such a gift. The seeing the leg in the trap, I think that's going to be so useful for everybody, including myself.

Tara Brach: I use it a lot.

Elise: Yeah, because even like, as you say, in whatever relationships, even I'm thinking about friendships when we there's miscommunication and we're all just so vulnerable and we don't get our needs met. And

it's so easy to turn that into, you know, making assumptions about what this person didn't do for me, where it's like, what? What's going on in that person's life that they might not be available or, you know, it's just easy to not see the leg in the trap.

Tara Brach: Yeah, and it's a real freedom to be able to see it, but first we have to, before we can be compassionate with others, we have to put that hand on the heart and be kind towards what we're feeling, otherwise it's a kind of spiritual bypass. We try to be kind towards others, but there's still a knot inside that we haven't paid attention to.

Elise: Can we just open it up more broadly, we're talking about relationships and then, you know, we're in relationship, but we're also on a planet in relationship with this planet and globally. And I think in your book, you know, I loved how you talked about the newspaper meditation and would you like to share something about how we can bring all of this wisdom and this practice into the context of feeling just a bigger despair? Sometimes where we're like looking outwards and it can be quite overwhelming, particularly at this time with so many different things going on. How do you manage that? Or I'm sure this comes up a lot in the conversations that you have with people.

Tara Brach: No, it's an important question. I mean, we are in a time of so many emergencies, climate emergency with fundamentalism spreading I mean it's out of fear. People are afraid, and then, of course, pandemics. So what happens when people get afraid? They start bothering each other and again we go into kind of a survival brain

contraction and we make others bad and wrong. So either, as you said, there's a kind of despairing, a powerlessness or else we go into that kind of angry blaming place. And I know for myself, I've had many rounds of this because I have such a passion around seeing our world heal. So, and right now, it's, you know, I trust that we're evolving, but I also see us devolving, you know, regressing. So, the newspaper meditation that you mentioned, I kind of found for myself back when the United States attacked Iraq, but I still use it in a different forms. And what was going on was I would read the newspaper and go into real anger and real blame. I blame the, you know, White Hawk politicians who are driving us to war that I could see was going to then ripple out and create a huge amount of suffering. And so, I started this practice where I'd put down the newspaper and I'd feel the anger and I'd honor it. Angers intelligent, angry, angry. Let it be there. Let it be as big as it was. And I'd find out that underneath the anger was fear. You know, I was afraid of all the suffering, and I'd stay with that mindfully 'OK, fear, let it be there.' And I'd find under the fear was a real grieving. You know, for all the lives, you know, I could feel it, you know, open to the grieving, you know, really allow it. And I think we have to let our hearts break, whether it's the climate or war or migrants or whatever it is. We have to let our hearts break. Racism is a big one here for me.

Ok grief, open. And I'd find under the grief was caring, and when I could get down to the caring at least, then I could act and respond from a caring intelligent way. In fact, a number of us got together and there was an approach to an interfaith protest where we got arrested and so

on. But the energy of it wasn't this hatred, like blaming anger kind of energy. It was like please, please take care and be careful. We don't want to hurt the children, the mothers and fathers of any of us, you know? So, all that is to say that when we get triggered, whether it's anger or blame or whatever to pause and reconnect with our caring because underneath anger is caring, and then we can respond from the caring. And if it's powerless and despair, let ourselves grieve.

Our planet is suffering our larger body, the Earth is suffering, and to not grieve the loss of species, to not grieve the billions of animals each year in factory farms that are just treated so cruelly to meet human appetites and not grieve what's happening to so many people around the world in terms of loss of life from the pandemic is to be shut off. So, we have to let ourselves have our hearts broken, but not alone. I feel like we need to grieve together. We need to hold hands. We need to act. We know that we can't be sure of what is possible in the future, but we know that we can take a step now towards healing and that that's the only thing that has integrity. We can't know for sure how it's all going to turn out, but we can hold hands and act. And I so often think of Fred Rogers, you know, his mother would remind him when he was despairing to remember the helpers that there are around the globe. Now there are more nonprofits that are trying to take care of the most vulnerable in the world. There are more people caring, more people waking up to racism, more people waking up to the suffering of the Earth. It's happening. Just remember the helpers. And that gives us more hope,

Elise: The holding hands is really powerful. You know, I think, yeah, I think that just shutting off like just the fear and the shut off, like being able to open your heart and feel the pain, but then drop down into what's underneath that which is caring, is so powerful and helps us to act, to do something.

Tara Brach: There's a lot of activists that act from anger and I'm glad people are caring enough to act. But if they can get down to the felt sense of caring, then the actions won't carry with it, that "othering", that increases the dividedness. So, we need to bridge the dividedness.

Elise: Just finally coming back to you? I ask this of all the guests and the final question is a lesson that you learnt or earned in your life that you would share with your younger self.

Tara Brach: It's a two-part lesson. It would be to trust, because my younger self was filled with self-doubt and feelings of unworthiness and to trust the goodness. I mean, really Elise, any time I in any mood where I'm feeling tight if I just say just trust. Trust the goodness. Not only do I trust it in myself, but I see it in the trees and I see it in you and in my dog and my husband. And, you know, I just see it everywhere and the other part of it is to mirror the goodness, to let others know because everybody forgets. And so, if each one of us in the next 24 hours with somebody in our life saw what we appreciated, saw the gold in them and let them know, that person would in a deep way, just come home a little more into relaxing into who they are. It's the greatest gift we can give, whether it's as parents or friends or colleagues. So, I feel like if we

could all be doing that, mirroring the goodness, it would help our world, you know, move towards much more healing and connection.

Elise: Thank you so much, Tara. Thank you so much for your wisdom and your generosity. And yeah, I'm sure all of the listeners will be going out and grabbing the book and gifting it to others, 'Trusting the gold'. And obviously, they can find your podcast and your website in so many different places. So, I just wanted to thank you so much.

Tara Brach: Oh, it's really a pleasure to be with you again, Elise. Yeah. Blessings.