



Mark Williams Interview: TheMindfulnessSummit.com

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Interviewer: Melli O'Brien of MrsMindfulness.com

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MELLI

Good day and welcome to the Mindfulness Summit. The not-for-profit online conference teaching you how to practice mindfulness and showing you how mindfulness can change your world from the inside out. I'm your host, Melli O'Brien and I just wanted to say thank you. Thank you for joining us on this journey. You are actually joined by over a hundred thousand people from around the world. We're going to be taking 31 days of mindfulness together and I'm really excited to be taking this journey with you. Many of you have already taken up the 31 days of mindfulness challenge, and I want to congratulate you for that. If you'd like to join us on this 31 days of mindfulness challenge, go to [TheMindfulnessSummit.com/31 days/](http://TheMindfulnessSummit.com/31%20days/) and you'll find all the details on how to join us on that adventure.

This Summit was really designed to be an interactive event. So join the community by joining the discussion each day which will be in the comments section below each speaker's video. Here you can ask questions, you can share your own experiences and insights and just connect with the community who are going through this 31-day adventure with you. Myself and the speakers will often be there chatting with you. So we really look forward to connecting with you. The other place you can always go to connect with the community and ask questions is the Facebook page which is [Facebook.com/MrsMindfulness](https://www.facebook.com/MrsMindfulness). So I look forward

to connecting with you there and without further adieu, here's Day 1 of The Mindfulness Summit.

Today we are joined with Professor Mark Williams as he guides us through an introduction to mindfulness. Mark is Emeritus Professor of CLinical Psychology at Oxford University, where he was the Director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre until his retirement in 2013. Mark co-developed this program called Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy which is designed to prevent relapse of major depression. And he co-authored one of my favourite books on mindfulness simply called *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace In A Frantic World*.

Here's my interview with Professor Mark Williams:

MELLI So I thought maybe we could start off by simply getting you to describe, what is mindfulness and how do we practice it.

MARK Well mindfulness really is the word, but really simply means awareness - awareness of what's happening as it's happening both in the inside world and the outside world. It comes from a very ancient word, but it's probably easiest to understand if you think of it's opposite mindlessness. Mindlessness - where you keep forgetting to do things, you don't listen properly, you're not attending properly, the world is going by without you really being there for it or here for it and mindfulness is the awareness that emerges when you make a decision to train your mind, to some extent, to check in more often to how things are. So the original word, awareness, it actually came from a word meaning 'memory' which slightly changes its meaning to being non-forgetfulness. Non-forgetfulness to mean that sort of direct, intuitive knowing of what's happening around you both inside and out. And that's really what mindfulness is about.

MELLI And one of the things I actually really love about this book, one of the things that really struck me about it is that not only does it have a really clear explanation of mindfulness but you actually go into that description of what mindlessness is as well. And a really wonderful description of why it's so important to wake up out of that. In other words, how it can really get us into trouble. So maybe we could elaborate a little bit more on that. What's the problem with auto-pilot? Why does it seem to get us into so much trouble?

MARK Well I think the problem is not so much with autopilot itself. So automatic pilot is a very useful thing that the mind and body does. If you think of learning to drive, for example, it was probably if you drove in a stick shift, a car with a gear stick, probably you frightened your parents or your partner or whoever was teaching you to drive to no end because you'd look down to see where your hand needs to be and what gear - so you use all your mind for that moment. Not just to steer the

car but to change gears and it's just as well you've learned to make that automatic. Or if you've never learned, you've bought yourself an automatic car so that you'd actually know how to keep your mind on other things. So when you make things automatic, that's a really helpful function. The problem with it is where the automatic pilot takes over on things that actually it would be easier or more adaptive if you weren't so automatic. So if you take the driving analogy again, it's very important to have all your attention on the road at a point where you come up to a rotary, a roundabout, an intersection and that's a point at which you can't be on automatic. And if you are, then accidents happen. If you don't look left and right because you know or every time you've come up to that intersection before in the past 10 days, there's never been any traffic there. So you just assume automatic that that's going to happen again. And then, of course, accidents happen. So it's when automatic pilot takes over things and you get so absorbed in something that automatic pilot is doing other things for you, and the difficulty with that is- well since there's 2 aspects to mindfulness. One is the way in which mindfulness training transforms destructive emotions and perhaps we can come onto that later and on the research on that. But also that mindfulness is helping you to re-engage with moment-to-moment living. And that re-engagement with moment-to-moment living, that sense of approaching life with a sense of awareness and really being there for it, experiencing being alive moment-by-moment means if that you cede too much control to automatic pilot, you're just not there. You don't taste your food. You don't listen. You don't see. And although it's all there available for you, it's just not being processed, it's not being attended to.

MELLI Yeah. And one of the things we didn't get to, we talked about this before when we previously met, but one of the things that which really affected my life was when I was 19, I was working in a nursing home and one of the things, you know they really wanted to impart their wisdom, and one of the things they would often say is things like they felt like they didn't really live a lot of their lives and had regrets when they got to the end. That was a very impactful thing for me. And it kind of strikes me that it kind of does seem that we seem to spend a good portion of our lives in that mode of kind of doing one thing after the other after the other after the other and not really being there fully.

MARK Yeah. Absolutely. Thich Nhat hanh has this wonderful example of, you know, having a drink. Maybe if you go have a drink before you go out to go shopping or something and you realise all the cups need washing. So you wash the cups. But washing the cups is just a preparation for making the tea so you're not really there for washing the cups. So you don't notice the water or the washing and so on because after all, who would? It seems irrelevant. But then when you're drinking your tea, where is your mind? Often your mind there is on your shopping expedition and what you need to buy. And you look at the cup and you think, 'oh,

did I just drink that? I must have done because nobody else drank it.' But then you haven't been there for the tea. And then when you're on the way to shop you're thinking about what you're going to buy. And when you're going to the supermarket you're wondering if there's going to be long queues. And when you're queueing, you're hoping this person in front of you is not going to ask the price of bread, and so on and so on and so on. So you go through, there's a whole morning lost - where the tea, the washing, the tea, the drive, the shopping, the driving home, the cooking - it's all been lost to you. And you're quite right that - losing a morning doesn't seem that important. But if at the end of your life, if say you have 6 months to live, you look back on your life like you looked at that cup. And you look back in your life and you say, 'Was that my life? That was it? It must have been because nobody else lived it. I was the one who lived it. But actually I wasn't there for it. I wasn't there for it.'

MELLI Yeah. Yeah. And I know, you mentioned too in the book, and I know - I'm a big fan of Matt Killingsworth's research on this as well. And there's this, it seems like being on autopilot makes us vulnerable to deeper states of suffering, of anxiety, stress, being revved up and those kinds of things as well. So there's that kind of cost to it as well.

MARK Exactly so. Exactly. So that research where it shows that the mind is wandering, it's not actually a pleasant experience. I mean some people imagine that daydreaming is always pleasant. The problem is that daydreaming is the first cousin of rumination and brooding and worrying. And especially if you're a little vulnerable to worries and concerns and depression. Under the surface when you're on autopilot, you can coalesce and negative mood can coalesce - irritations, hostilities, sadnesses, hopelessness, worries, fears. And you're not aware of them until they've already built into quite a mass. They've affected the bodies. The body's already sending signals to the mind saying 'I'm tense so you better be tense too.' And that's already happened. And by the time you wake up from it, you're already quite far down into for example, depression. So that waking up and checking in regularly is an important thing. The other thing is that we often get so preoccupied with projects, you know. And if we're doing a thesis or an essay or I got a big project on, you can see exactly why during that project, you put aside the things that you normally enjoy in order to focus on the project - the essay, whatever it that you've got to do. Promising yourself that when it's over, then you'll do the things you promised. But actually while you're doing that project, the mind is doing a pretty good automatic job of suppressing all your other jobs that you have to do. So when it's over, all though you promised yourself bliss and a bit of freedom, actually what comes crowding in is all the other things, all the other projects that you put on hold.

MELLI Because you're already kind of in that kind of revved up state of just getting it

done.

MARK That's right. That's right. Yeah, so you don't give yourself very much nourishment. You just go, the end of one project is just the signal to the start of another one. And promising ourselves that next year, in New year, after this vacation, after this ... then we'll start enjoying the life that we actually promised ourselves becomes actually a bit of a delusion. It never actually happens. So the question is, how can I nourish myself in the next hour? Not even in the next day but what can I do, some small thing, in the next hour or two that actually will make a difference and give myself a break and give me some practice at attending to my life in a more wholesome way? Not just giving my thinking a break but actually switching on a different mode of being and letting that be exercised and letting that have some play in our lives as well.

MELLI Yeah. It's such a seductive mind pattern that 'one day when...'. That's amazing how seductive that is.

MARK. It is. It is.

MELLI And I catch myself over and over, over and over just you know

MARK Well, exactly. We all do. It's natural human nature. And what we're doing as mindfulness teachers is not saying we've sussed it, we've got over it. It's actually a sense of recognising, perhaps just a little bit more recognising when it undermines our best intentions. And because we live in this world of ideas and taking a break is such a lovely idea - yeah - taking a break for the future, next week, whatever. So it only stays in the realm of ideas and never actualised today. And that's what we need a bit of practice on.

MELLI Yeah. Wonderful. And Mark, you know we've touched on a little bit of wanting to talk about the research and you're one of the premier researchers in the field of mindfulness. So I would love you to share with us what are the research-backed benefits of mindfulness that we know of so far? I know things are still evolving, but what do we know?

MARK Well things are still evolving. And one of the mistakes, I think, is that mindfulness is a panacea for everything. That all we have to do is pour mindfulness on a problem and suddenly it will all dissolve. Not only does the research have a long way to go, but also the way in which mindfulness has addresses different forms of suffering. It's bound to be slightly different in each case. So just generic mindfulness courses, although they will probably get you at least halfway to, because there are universal problems that get us stuck and mindfulness is very

good at those. If it's going to address specific issues, it needs to be specifically aware of on addressing the suffering that's coming.

But the research is, I mean most of our research - myself, John Teasdale and Dan Siegel's research was on the prevention of depression. We could see in the 80's and 90s that depression had or was destined to be one of the major burdens in not only the Western, rich countries but also in low income and middle income countries as well. And it's a burden increasingly we're aware of it partly because it's recurrent. It tends to come back in many people. But that wouldn't be a problem if it started late in life. But what we're now aware of over the last 20, 30 years, is that depression actually starts quite young. And the most common age of onset of serious clinical depression now is between 13 and 15 years of age. And 50% or more of people who are ever going to be depressed, in fact, 75% of people who are ever going to be depressed have been depressed before the age of 24. And that means they have got a whole lifetime ahead of them where if depression gets into a recurrent pattern, it could blight their lives for the whole of their lives. And there's now long-term follow-up suggesting that once it settles into a recurrent pattern, you're going to be depressed about 4 months every year over the 20 year, 30 year period.

MELLI Wow. That's a lot.

MARK And that's function impairment. That's not just feeling a bit sad. That's unable to work maybe. Unable to feel effective at work or with family, with leisure pursuits. So it's not surprising it's one of the biggest burdens for the World Health Organisation. Well the problem there is there are pretty effective treatments for depression, for when people are depressed. So cognitive therapy, interpersonal therapy, antidepressants - and all seem to be quite effective. But those depend on depression being there to be treated. These don't work as preventative things, if you're not depressed now. So if you do cognitive therapy, people do get better and once they're better their relapse rates are lower. But the question is what is the critical thing that cognitive therapy was teaching and could you teach that to people who are not depressed, who we know are vulnerable but are not depressed? Well, it turns out that the critical thing that cognitive therapy was doing was to help people to stand back from their thoughts and not take them so personally, to have a more curious-centred approach to their thoughts rather than an aversion - I don't like this and I'm just going to bury my head and suppress them - or get lost in them and take them all personally. And that's what cognitive therapy was doing so effectively. Now maybe we could find a way of teaching that same skill to people who have no negative thoughts at the moment. Mindfulness is really good for that because you only have to sit for 10 seconds on a cushion before your mind wanders and you have the opportunity to practise

seeing your thoughts clearly, feeling lost in your thoughts and actually noticing you're lost and coming back. And I think that is, for many people, I think the really critical thing that mindfulness allows you to do, we call it to de-centre from thinking. And when you do that and when we do the research it shows that, yes, you teach that for 8 weeks to people through, as you say, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy which is closely based on Jon Kabat-Zinn's work in MBSR but subtly changed in an important ways to address the problems of depression, you find you can almost half the rates of depression in the most vulnerable people or with people with the most recurrent pattern of depression.

And the most recent research, that we just finished last year and published last year, added I think an important way to that, a couple of ways. First of all we were looking at people who tend to get suicidal when they get depressed and we found that after the mindfulness course there was an uncoupling of depression from suicidal thoughts. So even when people got depressed after mindfulness, it didn't trigger suicidal thoughts.

MELLI It didn't kind of escalate to that

MARK It didn't escalate into suicidality which is important because we can't ban depression from the world and if people who have been depressed and suicidal in the past, whenever they get depressed again they tend to feel suicidal again. So uncoupling those things are quite important. That was the first thing. And that's just coming out this year in The Journal of Consulting Clinical Psychology.

But two other things. One was that nobody up to now had compared mindfulness for depression with an active treatment control. They'd tend to compare them, at least not an active psychological treatment control, so they'd compare them with antidepressants and data suggests that they are at least as effective as antidepressants. And actually when you put all the trials together, they are slightly more effective. So that data came out at the ___ couple of weeks ago. Willem Kuyken, my successor at Oxford, showed - his trial wasn't big enough to show that mindfulness was better than antidepressants. But when you put all the trial together, there are 4 trials by now, then mindfulness-based cognitive therapy is a little better. But no trial had looked at an active treatment control that was a psychological treatment control. So we didn't know whether when people come to class and learn mindfulness in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, MBCT, it might be just that they have a nice teacher, that they meet each other and make new friends, that they talk and learn about depression. Maybe those non-specific effects are what's doing the business. Maybe it's nothing to do with mindfulness at all. So in this research we had another psychological treatment which was like MBCT without the mindfulness. So people came to class, they had the same teacher, they learned about depression, they met each other, they met good

friends. Everything was the same but they didn't learn to meditate, And the data suggested that yes, as once again, MBCT was highly effective for those most vulnerable people, in this case people who had long histories with trauma in their childhood and adolescence and abuse. So they were the most vulnerable and that's where MBCT was the most helpful and it's more than halved the rates that has relapsed, as it's called. But interestingly, if you looked at this, what we call cognitive psycho medication, this active psychological treatment, it got you halfway. So it took the relapse rates down about halfway. So coming to class, meeting each other, learning about depression is quite good. But if you want the full effect, if you want to go the other way of the other half and get the full benefit, you have to learn to meditate.

MELLI Hmm. It's really amazing what happened over the past, what is it, I think 35 years since MBSR has been really made. I mean it's an incredible thing that mindfulness is as effective as antidepressants or slightly more. I mean, that's amazing. It's wonderful that mindfulness is going so mainstream.

MARK Yeah, and the thing is what I think is probably the third part of that research is something that might disappoint some people but not others, is that enthusiasm for mindfulness actually doesn't predict any benefit.

MELLI Interesting.

MARK So just being enthusiastic about it. So we, I mean a well known phenomenon in psychology, psychological research, is that if you are enthusiastic for your treatment you tend to do better at it. And that's also true of antidepressant medication or any medication. If you think this is the thing that will help you and you think that it is plausible and you'd recommend it to a friend and you think you're going to do well on it, then you tend to do well on it. And that's true for psychology or physical medicine. So we were really concerned . Maybe actually the important thing wasn't people meditating but people just being enthusiastic about MBCT or mindfulness. And so we actually measured it, at session 2 we gave some standard questions like how plausible do you think this is, how enthusiastic, would you recommend this to a friend, for example. Do you think this would work for you? And the first thing that we found was the enthusiasm for our control treatment was just as good, in fact slightly better. Not significantly better but slightly better. So people were enthusiastic for both but noticed that MBCT did better than the control treatments. So it wasn't just enthusiasm but then we looked at how much people practised, just in the MBCT group, how much did people actually practise. And you know some people practise, other people don't. Well we were interested in that because we wanted to know was practise of mindfulness, you know doing a full day's practise, does that affect the outcome. And some people have shown that it did, other people shown that it

didn't. We said well even if it shows that it does it might just be enthusiasm. It might be the enthusiastic people, both get good outcomes and they practise more. But our results published last year in the Behaviour Research and Therapy Journal were very clear. Enthusiasm didn't affect how much people practised. But how much people practised did affect the outcome. So basically every extra day you practised over the six days we asked people to practise actually benefited and reduced the risk of relapse. So if you just split people by the middle and say, okay, so people on the average practise three-and-a-half days a week out of the 6. So just take the people who practised 0, 1 and 2, all the people who practiced 3, 4, 5 and 6. And you find when you split people down the middle, people who only practised a little only got half the benefit of people who practised more than three days a week. And none of that has anything to do with enthusiasm. So basically if you're enthusiastic for mindfulness, I'm afraid it's not enough.

MELLI The phrase that springs to mind right now is you know, Jon Kabat-Zinn's quote well-known for saying: You don't have to like it, you just have to do it. Just do the practise and let it unfold.

MARK Exactly. So this is exactly why, I mean you know, we've never, we believe Jon but we never had any evidence to suggest he was right. Now we've got the evidence to show that he's right. And actually, even people who weren't enthusiastic, if they practised they got the benefit and that's the critical thing. And that's important for us as teachers to know when we're meeting people for the first time that what we're doing here is potentially transformative but one has to do the work.

MELLI Yeah. And not just important for us as teachers but for everybody who's watching this that's interested in mindfulness and you know, wanting to find out what it can do for your life. Just go for it and find out and find out for yourself from the inside out.

MARK Exactly. Just give it the 8 weeks that we ask you to give it and see what happens. And make a judgement at the end rather than 10 minutes in/ Because it's going to be quite difficult. In fact, in our early days of developing work for suicidal people, suicidal depressed people, we actually looked at who drops out. Because in our first pilot work in Oxford, a lot of people dropped out and that's I think because people who have suicidal depression often are very highly ruminative and when thoughts, and now we know images, they get very clear picture in their mind which are very, very toxic and vulnerable. So when this comes up, they've learned to ruminate about them rather than approach them. And they've learned to suppress them. And we found that those who are most highly ruminative, are most highly avoidant and dropped out. So we now spend time in that pre-class interview, the intake interview, really saying what are you going to do when you

feel like giving up? Because it'll happen. It'll happen. You'll feel like giving up. So see that as an opportunity, real to say that that is where the biggest learning might come. So when you feel like giving up, say: Aha. This is it. Here it is. This is what I was worried about. What now? How am I going to approach this? What's going on in my mind, in my body, in my impulses, in my thoughts and feelings? So think, what is this about? And this provides people, when we did the big trial having made those adjustments, instead of 30% dropping out only 7% dropped out, which is very low for a trial of this kind. So I think this is important messages for mindfulness, for people doing mindfulness and for mindfulness teachers.

MELLI Yeah. Absolutely. And in your experience, you've taught so many people over the years and you must have a sense of common themes or common challenges or obstacles as you mentioned that come up for people when they're learning to practise mindfulness. Are there, could you speak about that a little bit, are there common challenges? And if any, so what advice do you have for anyone out there beginning their mindfulness practises that might come up against this challenges?

MARK Well, I think, one of them we'd already mentioned, that is actually putting aside a time to practise. In our clinical work, we tend to have long meditations done once a day. You know 25, 30, 35 minutes. In the Frantic World book, we decided to split that up into shorter meditations twice a day. And one of the reasons for doing that is that although people in the end get rather similar amounts of meditation in total, it does give people for one more opportunity to discover what time of day is best for them. It might be the morning. You might get up a little earlier before the household is up. Or it might be middle evening or middle of the day.. And if you only do it once a day, it might take a long time to discover what works for you. Try it twice a day or even more gives you that sort of flexibility. But also, by doing things more than once a day, you get to practise one of the really, really hard things about meditation which is actually getting there. Meditation is not hard once you arrive. That's a different business, I'll come to that in a moment. But actually getting from your bed to your chair or your stool or your cushion or from the television to the bed or from ... Because in the mode in bed or in front of the television, you're in sort of a doing mode in which you're either snatching some relaxation or you're working hard. And whether you're snatching relaxation you think: Oh I don't want to do the meditation now because I'm relaxing. Or: I don't want to do meditation because I've got too much on. And those two things, the snatching of a little bit what you call down time but often is just slouching in front of the television. So I think practising twice a day gives you more chance at practising the hard thing which is making that switch. Once you're there in your special place where you sit on a cushion or a stool, of course you don't have to have a cushion or a stool, a chair is perfectly good. For people

meditating for the first time it's usual to put a cushion under themselves so their hips are slightly higher than their knees and their feet can be flat on the floor and the back can be self supporting. But that can be done with an ordinary chair. You don't have to do anything special. But that sense of just transferring from one mode to the other and just sitting there is really important. Once you get there, then you can decide how long to stay. Switch on the tape, switch on the CD, download the stuff and be there for it. And then the other thing is not to worry if your mind wanders. A lot of people who begin meditation for the first time think this is to try to clear my mind. And actually, the media often gives that message. Partly through its photographs of monks or beautiful women at the top of mountains who look completely blissed out and you can't believe what actually might be going through their head is: ow, this stone is a bit hard or I feel a bit hungry. Because they look so blissed out. They look as if their mind is empty and often you'll see articles in the press about learn to meditate and clear your mind. And actually so when people sit and their mind wanders all over the place, they say: I can't do this. I can't do this. Actually, mind wandering is indeed needed for the practise. So that, if your mind didn't wander it would be a bit like going to the gymnasium and finding there's no equipment in the room. There's nothing to practice on. Well going to the gym and finding an empty room, you'd probably want your money back. Okay. So when you meditate the mind starts to wander and that's like the gymnasium equipment. That's what you're going to be practising on. Because the mind wandering is going to give you also the micro challenges. It may not be huge things your mind is preoccupied with but the mind has a really good way of just reminding you of all the things you've forgotten to do, for example. And making you feel unless you do them now, you'll forget them again. So those challenges come up, you get that sort of sense, so that's where, the practice is noticing that, noticing you got a bit lost, waking up and escorting your mind back. That's attentional muscle training, you might say, is the cornerstone of the foundation of mindfulness using the body as the foundation because you can't leave home without the body. It's always there for you and using the body to learn to attend to the breath or to the sensations in the body.. And then the mind will wander, bring it back. The mind will wander. so the going away and the coming back is actually the practise. And if you can sit there and there was nothing on your mind, then you wouldn't have the practice that you need to have.

MELLI Right. So knowing that that's completely normal and not a sign of failure but that it's just part of the practise. yeah.

MARK It's part of the practice and it's what gives you the practise. Many mindfulness teachers are very aware their mind wanders all the time. And as you get more and more practice, it's not that your mind doesn't wander, it's that

there's an ease of returning, a sense of self-forgiveness, a sense of cultivating compassion for yourself.

And I suppose the other thing I'd say is that the challenges, is that even if you've noticed the mind has gone and you bring it back, what I suggest that people do is look very gently and carefully at how they're bringing the mind back. Are they supposed to be pulling it back in a rather abrupt way with almost a frown on their faces as if a naughty child was being pulled away from a biscuit tin. Are you treating yourself as if something's gone wrong as if you've done something naughty and you better get your mind on your breath before anybody notices that you're not there? And so that sense, you sort of get a sense of contraction around it. In order to do the opposite, when you notice your mind has gone just spend a few moments noticing where it went, acknowledging where it went, perhaps even being amazed and wondering at the mind and cherishing the mind. You won't have your mind forever. So cherish the fact that here's my mind doing it's thing. Isn't that fantastic. But that's not what you intend to be doing, so now you're going to very gently escort the mind back to where you had intended it to be, perhaps settling yourself into the body first before going back to the breath. So rather than going, my mind's gone now back to the breath, which is narrow, narrow. Maybe go to the body first and then gather it back to the breath. So it's one graceful movement of acknowledgement and bringing back with a sort of sense of compassion and then really you're getting the practice you need to get.

MELLI Yeah. I'm so glad that you brought that up because it makes such a huge difference in the whole tone of practise, doesn't it. It can really just be this feeling of struggling and striving and pulling and pushing at the mind or it can be, like you say, light and easeful and yeah, I'm really glad that you brought that up.

MARK Indeed, and when we developed a sort of a mini-meditation that will be portable for people for MBCT, The Three Minute Breathing Space, we deliberately, well we call it the breathing space, it's actually not going to breath as the first step. It has three steps. And the first step is about acknowledging what's going on. Because if there would be a danger if you said: Oh, things are going a bit wrong. Right, take a breathing space. Go to the breath. What you're doing is simply changing what you're focusing on. You were focusing on that now you're focusing on the breath. Changing what you focused on doesn't necessarily change how you're focusing on it. So this speaks to what you just said about the nature of the going away and the coming back, how you treat your mid. Do you treat your mind with friendliness, with a friendship? And so the sense of the three minute breathing space of pausing and acknowledging what's going on in mind and body right now and brings an approach quality to your experience. Before then you do step 2 which is gathering the mind and settling the mind. But even then we don't go back into the world before we've done Step 3 because that

gathering is great but that's just a very narrow focus and then again if you took that back out into the world you might go back out into the world with a narrow focus. So we ask people in Step 3, before they finish the breathing space to expand to the whole body so that's a more open stance and then what they take back out into the world is a stance of openness and spaciousness, a sort of a being mode than a doing mode. So that's why the breathing space has at least three elements, these three steps to it deliberately. So to cultivate a different attitude to the self and the world, rather than just give your thinking mind a break.

MELLI And I love the 3-Minute Breathing Space not only because it's a really wonderful way to bring mindfulness into any moment really in your day you can do a breathing space. But what I really like about it is that it's really wonderful in those moments when we do find ourselves a little bit revved up or a little bit caught up. It's such a wonderful way of bringing mindfulness and embodying the present moment that has such a wisdom in that. I was wondering if you would care to maybe give us an experience of the breathing space. Would you guide us through a little experience.

MARK That's fine. yes. Okay. Yes, So wherever people are watching this, maybe just adjusting the posture. Allowing the eyes to close if you want to. But just lowering your gaze if you don't want to close your eyes if that feels uncomfortable for you. And then in this change of posture, that's already a sign of automatic pilot.

And then moving to Step 1 of the breathing space. Acknowledging what's going on in mind and body right now. What thoughts are around? Any feelings? Any body sensations? What do you notice? And don't try to make anything different about who things are, simply acknowledging, allowing things to be just as they are just for this moment. Sense of noticing the weather patterns in the mind and body right now.

And then allowing this to move into the background and moving to Step 2. Gathering the attention and allowing the attention to settle on the breath. Maybe moving down to the breath in the abdomen. Noticing the rising of the in breath, the falling away on the out breath. Not trying to control the breath in any way. Allowing the breath to breath itself and if the mind wanders acknowledging where it's went and gently escorting it back to the breath.

And then moving to Step 3 of the breathing space, expanding the attention to the body as a whole, sitting in here. Noticing all the sensations from the crown of the head to the bottom of the feet right out into the surface of the skin. Noticing any and all sensations in this body sitting here, breathing. A sense of coming home to the body. Doing the best we can bringing this sense of open spaciousness to the next few moments of our day.

And when you're ready moving fingers and toes, allowing the eyes to open if they've been closed and taking in your surroundings again.

So that was the 3-minute breathing space.

MELLI It's amazing that 3 minutes can be so refreshing. As you were saying?

MARK As people sometimes call it 3-step breathing space. Because if you keep that structure - the open start, the narrow middle and the open base - it's like an hourglass. Starts open then gets narrower and then open again. And you keep that 3-point structure, we then use Step 1, Step 2, Step 3 to remind ourselves that there's three steps to it so it doesn't get all mashed together. And then of course it can be 5 minutes long or it can be three breaths. So you can take 10 minutes or whatever. You can have your whole meditation, however long it is in those three sections: of the sense of acknowledging, of the sense of gathering, and then the sense of opening. But when you're up and about, you know getting on to a busy tube train or going to a classroom where you've got a difficult situation to meet or whatever, you can take three breaths with a sense of acknowledging, gathering, opening. Yeah.

MELLI Yeah. Wow. Just as a way of just touching in those moments. Yeah. That's wonderful to have that structure to work with. Thank you so much for sharing that and one of the other things in the book that I really appreciated, you know, when we were talking about autopilot before you introduced in the mindfulness book, you introduced what you call 'habit releasers'. And I really love those. And they're so simple. Just little things we can do everyday to be more awake and embodied and to switch out of autopilot mode. So would you care to share with us what are habit releasers and maybe some examples of how we could use them?

MARK Okay, so habit releasers are addressing one of the issues that much of our automaticity, our automatic pilot is shown in the fact that we do the same thing day in and day out in the same way. You know, we brush our teeth with the same hand and we put the other hand in the same place, wherever that is. I mean I don't know if you know exactly what happens to your left hand when you're brushing your teeth with your right. It's amazing to know. But so it takes a very simple situation to say, But what if I deliberately just for a day or two do it differently. So for example sitting in a different chair at the table at home or in your lounge or sitting room or drawing room, or on the bus or on the cab - you always sit on the left hand side or the right hand side, at the back or the front. Maybe just do something different. See what you notice about doing things different. So they can be as small as that. Or when you go for a walk look up for a moment, I mean if it's safe to do so. Just stop and look up maybe and look at the

tops of buildings rather than the ground. We're so used to being in an LS LAurie position, the artist who had all his figures bent almost double looking at the ground and what about standing uprightly. But there are other things that take more arrangement, to be spontaneous. Like going to the cinema perhaps with a friend but not trying to find out what's on before you get there. So when we were teenagers maybe we would go out with friends and we would just say let's go to cinema and we didn't know then because there wasn't any internet to find out what was going on.

MELLI So you just turn up at the cinema?

MARK You just have to turn up and see what was on. And so it's really interesting to just go and as soon as you almost decide to it, you can feel the thinking going on saying: Oh dear. What if it's a bad film? What if I won't enjoy it? What a waste of time if it's you know. Well, most cinemas have about 9 screens these days. So there always bound to be something which is tolerably okay, even if it's Bambi. So interestingly my daughter and I did this. We just, when the book was being written I said to my daughter: Come on let's just go to the local cinema. And we went there. And yeah, there was a film that was starting in about 45 minutes that looked quite interesting. One of the things we discovered is the staff these days, who are mostly the ticket sellers are also the staff that sell the popcorn and they don't know what films are on or anything about them which is one discovery we made. The second thing was it was happening in 45 minutes so we had to go and find a place to have a drink or a bite to eat, so we discovered that as well. And then we saw this film that was really enjoyable but I would never have gotten to see that film normally. It would have passed me by. So there's a sense of getting the spontaneity back. But most of the things are very small things. I mean another example is learning to value the television. You might think: Why? Good gracious. Surely if we're mindful we should put the television off and never watch it again. But valuing the television by actually switching it on when you want to watch it and switching it off when that programme is finished. and if there is something else you want to watch later in the evening, switch it on again. So you don't have the thing just playing in the background. Just going. If you want to just slouch in front of the television all evening, then fine, make that decision and do so and you can channel hop all evening. But at least you made a decision.

MELLI Yeah, you made a conscious choice. That I'm going to sit here for three hours and I'm going to channel flick.

MARK That's it exactly. And this is my nourishment for that that you made a conscious choice. But most times, we don't make a conscious choice. We just discover that's where we are. And under those circumstances it's quite nice to just turn it off, make a new choice, and then turn it on again if you want to. And that's what

we call valuing the television and what it offers rather than just taking it all for granted. So those are the little habit releasers which take things that we do automatically and just shift them very slightly in order to help us support the idea of waking up.

MELLI Yeah. I love that because it's very kind towards ourselves, I feel that's kind of you know, I'm not supposed to watch TV and I'm not supposed to eat that kind of food and I'm a bad person if I do this and this. But just changing the way that we relate to those things, change can happen just by itself or we just relate to that thing in a different way and enjoy it more. Yeah. So I love that.

MARK Absolutely. I have an 8-year old grandson who loves mixing the foods and drinks and stuff. It's really nice to hear him say, What would it be like if I took that ripe pina and put this orange juice and some of this mango juice and you know. And we adults are going, I don't know. There's something really beautiful about what would it be like?

MELLI And there's only one way to find out.

MARK There's only one way to find out. But so although I said, it's shifting the ideas, it also shifting the experience. In fact it's not just the ideas that shift it's the experience of being a little kinder to yourself and shifting a little bit of the moment-to--moment living in these tiny ways. That's all the habit releasers are all about.

MELLI I love that. Thank you for sharing that. Gosh, I feel like I could talk to you all night and I have so many questions I would like to ask you but I would love if you feel so inclined it would be wonderful to have you take us through a practice of mindfulness so we can kind of experientially, I know we did the breathing space, but maybe another just simple mindfulness practice. Just kind of taking us through the basics would be most wonderful.

MARK. Okay. Yeah. Let's do something like the 8-minute meditation which is the one for Week 1 of the book, the Frantic World book. And this is a brief body scan, scanning through the body, settling down on the breath and allowing people to really gather themselves as an entree into mindfulness.

Okay, so once again, you find a place to sit or you can lie down if you want to. and allowing the eyes to close or the gaze to be lowered and tuning into this body sitting or lying here. Perhaps starting by taking the attention right down to the soles of the feet. Noticing what's happening when your attention gets there. Maybe some sense of tingling, or warmth or coldness in the soles of the feet. Not trying to make anything happen but simply registering what's already here in the

feet. What sensations change from moment to moment and what sensations stay the same. and if there are no sensations, simply registering a blank. There's no right or wrong way to feel. Whatever your experience is your experience.

And expanding this quality of attending to both feet as a whole. Not just the soles of the feet, but the top, the toes, the heel. Perhaps including the ankles as well. So you're holding both feet in the centre stage of your awareness.

Then expanding this attention to the lower leg below the knee. So your feet and lower legs held in awareness. What sensations are here right now?

And the knees. And including the thighs as well. So focusing on both legs. What sensations are here. If you're sitting, you might notice the slight pressure of the hands on your lap or your thighs, the ground under your feet, the thighs sitting on the chair. And well maybe imagine that your legs are empty and as you breathe in the breath can fill up the legs all the way down to the feet on the in breath. And then it could empty out on the out breath. Just imagine it that that were possible. And what would feel like it if your legs were empty and could fill up with breath on the in breath and empty on the out breath. Just playing with that experience for a few breaths.

And then taking a deeper breath. And on the out breath letting go of the legs and coming to the waist, the hips, the pelvis, the buttocks on the chair What sensations are here?

And then expanding the attention to the abdomen, the chest, and around the back - the lower back, the middle and the upper back. Now including the shoulders as well. The hands and the arms. So the whole of the upper body held in awareness, cradled in awareness.

Then extending this now to the neck and head as well. You might notice as you breathe in and out, there's some sensations in the nose, in the nostrils. So now tuning in to these sensations. So the sensations of the whole body in the background. But in the foreground sensations of breathing. In breath and the out breath. Perhaps noticing the slight coldness on the in breath on the nose. The greater warmth of the breath as it passes out on the out breath.

And now if you choose, you may also like to notice what's happening in the chest as you breathe in. So shifting the attention from the nose to the chest and seeing if there are any sensations here with the in breath and the out breath. Maybe a slight sense of expansion on the in breath. And a letting go on the out breath. See if that's true for you.

And you might also want to extend this by shifting attention to the abdomen and seeing whether there are any sensations in the abdomen, in the belly as you breathe in and as you breathe out.

And choosing one place where you would like to follow the breath for a few more minutes now. Either the nose or the nostrils, the chest, or down in the abdomen, the belly. Settling in in one of these places and just noticing the sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out. every breath unique, slightly different. See if we can be here for it.

And if the mind wanders, noticing where it went, then gently bringing it back, escorting it back. Not giving yourself a hard time. Nothing's gone wrong. This is the practise. the mind goes, we notice it, we bring it back over, and over and over again.

And so in this way cultivating stillness. And reminding ourselves that the stillness of which we speak is not the stillness of the quiet mind because your mind may not be quiet today. Your body may not be quiet or still. It's rather the stillness of allowing things to be as they are in this moment. And using this practise moment-by-moment and day by day to practise cultivating this sense of kindness to the mind and the body. Of allowing things to be as they are. A sense of befriending the body and mind.

And now beginning to move your fingers and toes. And if your eyes have been closed just allowing them to open and taking in your surroundings again.

MELLI Thank you for that.

MARK Thank you.

MELLI And I just have two final questions for you. And first one is simply this, you know I think I heard Joseph Goldstein say recently that he believes that mindfulness has the capacity to change the world from the inside out, one person at a time. So my question to you is from your perspective as somebody who has practiced mindfulness and watched that unfold in their life and watched the results unfolding in the lives of many other people, what do you think would happen if mindfulness were really to hit critical mass? I'm talking you know a billion or two billion people. What kind of a world do you think that would create? What kind of changes would we see?

MARK I think if mindfulness could sustain itself at that sort of level and sustain its essential qualities of compassion and friendship, I mean a moment of mindfulness in the ancient traditions, a moment of mindfulness never came

without a moment of compassion, joy, equanimity and kindness. They come as a family. And one can teach oneself mindfulness either through mindfulness itself or through cultivating joy or equanimity or kindness or compassion and the others will come. They're all part of the same family. And yet that moment can so easily pass. I mean it does pass, it's only this moment. And mindfulness at the moment, even where it's really taking hold, can easily give rise to a sort of faddishness like a panacea, mindfulness is a great new thing, everybody should be doing it. And those sort of, that sort of frenetic - let's get mindfulness - I think that will pass. And the question then will be, after the froth has gone, after the tide has gone out as it were, what will be left on the beach and will that be able to be slowly maintained? So but there are indications that even for those who are learning mindfulness now, doing 8-week programs for example, that is changing prisons, changing young offenders. We're teaching mindfulness in Parliament on the United Kingdom now. A congressman has written a book in America, The Mindful Nation. AND one of our own MP's has been across the Dutch Parliament to tell them about mindfulness in Parliament . The European Parliaments are learning mindfulness now, are being offered mindfulness. In British Parliament, by the time the election happened a few weeks ago, 10%t of the Labour party had done a mindfulness course. 10%. And they are very interested in introducing mindfulness into the health system, into the criminal justice system, into the education system, not based on an idea that it's a good idea because of the evidence but because of their own experience of the transformation that they've experienced. That's the difference doing it because of your own sense that this is really, really valuable. And the world has become something that needs this sort of ancient Asian wisdom of cultivating a different approach to life than just aspirational, you know we want to, we want what we haven't got. So a number of things have happened. Wellbeing has been put into the agenda in the UK government anyway. And so that's the, all government departments have to give an account on what they're doing on the wellbeing agenda which is important. So that's one segment that the government and the Parliamentary sector. So the part of the agenda for Parliament may well be able to introduce mindfulness to schools, for example. That's one place where you can teach mindfulness to a whole cohort in small ways at an age where our kids really get it and really enjoy it. And mindfulness in schools program which we've just been given a grant to evaluate is going ahead. Mark Greenberg's work in the Penn State with Trish Broderick and Tish Jennings is also teaching teachers how to be mindful and then their children as well. And the outcomes are great. And what teachers are now saying is why did we never realise that we told our children to pay attention without teaching them how to pay attention. And it is not just that this is a soft skill that they need if there's time in the timetable. but mindfulness and paying attention is actually foundational to all learning. You're not learning trigonometry or calculus if you're not attending. so attention is fundamental and so that's what's happening in schools. But the other things are what do we do about

adults. Well one thing is, mindfulness is spreading as a treatment for depression. And depression is going to affect 20% of us in our lives. That's a billion people on the planet. And often the people who are most likely to be depressed in virtually any country are the poorest, most isolated, most alienated, most helpless, the people that get forgotten. So one of the challenges will be making mindfulness available not just for those who can afford to pay to go to retreat centres but so that it's actually built into the educational social system for the poorest to enable them to have the resources to be able to solve problems not just because they get a helping hand, which they need anyway, but because they have a more active problem solving, a wiser, more inciteful approach in their own lives as well. So the depression work, I think, is essentially extremely important. It's a huge burden and it's a burden borne by the poorest, the most isolated and the forgotten in our society. And I think the third thing is CEOs. Mindfulness is now taught routinely at Davos in early morning sessions. I was there a couple of years ago and Jon Kabat-Zinn was there last year. There's nothing else scheduled at that time. People turn up and do mindfulness if they want to. And Janice MArtirano who's the head of the Institute for mIndful Leadership in New York teaches CEOs and leaders how to, in the title of her book 'Finding the Space to Lead.' And the account she gives of the moving sense of busy, busy CEOs suddenly discover there's a world outside the project - the biggest project they're working on - it has examples of CEOs suddenly seeing the stars in the sky. It sounds trivial but it's momentous. Now, we know the world of work has gone crazy over the last 20, 30 years. There was a time when people would work 8 hours a day and if they work longer than that they'd get paid overtime which is acknowledged in the pay packet. And then suddenly that became old fashioned. Then it became sort of a union thing and oh, that's old fashioned. And that happened at the same, when the unions were getting sorted out by Facton and Reagan and the politicians. Unfortunately, what was also happening was a sort of sense of excellence which means working as many hours as you would like to work, modeling the whole world on a few entrepreneurs and startups in Silicon Valley who had the sort of brain who maybe could work 80 hours a week.

MELLI And when you mix all of that with technology so you can be constantly connected

MARK Exactly so. Exactly so. So it's interesting to think now that every generation has to rediscover that after 8 hours, your brain goes to sleep even if your bum's still on the chair at work, your brain's not active. And that you can be more productive if you take rests. Now, Henry Ford, exactly a hundred years ago in 1915, increased the salaries of his workers and cut their working hours and saw an increase in productivity. And in the decades that followed, other large firms saw what he'd done, Ford, and followed suit. We now need some really influential top companies to say that about after 40 hours a week, certainly at 45, to acknowledge that you're no longer - it's an illusion of productivity and if you take

breaks you'll actually get more productivity, more creativity and a better bottomline. And until someone really influential says that and we're not all trapped in the sense that if you go home at the normal time somehow you're a loser. I mean I felt the same, you know, when I was running departments and so on, you could feel the pressure to want to be the last person to leave. And there's always somebody with their light on. And you know, what if someone had just left their light on by mistake. Oh my gosh.

MELLI I'm not leaving till that light goes off.

MARK Right. I'm not leaving till that light goes off. And it becomes a pernicious thing and every generation has to re-learn that actually your brain can't function. And when people stop doing factory work and started moving in to do desk work, people thought then okay now they can work 80 hours. The evidence goes slightly the other way. Whereas you can go factory work for 8 hours without doing damage and bringing the whole assembly line to a stop because of an error that you made because you were too tired. Actually it's more like 6 or 7 hours a day for desk work because your brain actually needs to take a rest pause and if it doesn't it'll take an involuntary rest pause. And you know it'll just clam up. Your brain will go cloudy.

MELLI The foggy brain phase.

MARK The foggy brain, absolutely. So by taking rests during the day and by having good nourishment and evening and weekends when we can. If not it has to be built in somehow. And if mindfulness can do that CEO by CEO, company by company, if it can do it to Google, and there's no point in saying that we now give free donuts and meditation spaces in order that people can work through the night. That's not the issue. That's not the issue. It's actually saying, we pay you to work and we pay you to take breaks. And until a company like Google has taken that seriously, then the rest of us are going to have a hard time changing it. So I think there's the clinical world, there's the world of CEOs and the parliamentary world. And to maintain the incentive for practicing mindfulness even when the froth has died down and is no longer a fad, that would be the acid test, and then I think Joseph is right, it'll change the world one by one. But one by one isn't just the poor persons or the disadvantaged, but the person who seeks to employ them and the person who seeks to employ them, and the government officials and the council officials and so on. That's what I think. And at the end of our lives, when you and I are going to be looked after by somebody else - maybe a family member, maybe an assisted care worker - will know that care worker will be valued enough, paid enough, be mindful enough to look after us with compassion. That's what we'd like. Because you and I won't have a mind then to

argue back. It's not good for me to say to a care worker, you know I used to be a professor at Oxford. Yes dear. Yes dear.

MELLI That would be scary.

MARK Now let's get you washed. That's the point. and that's the reality of the end of lives. Now is our end of life care, are we going to be looked after by people who we respect now so we can, are we looking after the people who are ignored. That's the critical thing. That would be the acid test of a compassionate society. Yeah.

MELLI Thank you so much. And I hope that we have the pleasure of seeing some of that potential paradigm shift happen. It'll be a beautiful thing to see unfolding. We'll see. It's an adventure.

MARK It is indeed.

MELLI Is there anything else that you would like to add before we close?

MARK No, I don't think so. I was just thinking of all the things that - I mean one of the interesting things that I think about 8-week programs that people often say, well do I need to go to class or can I do it myself, it looks like you can do either. Some people prefer to get things online or to read the book other people prefer to go to a class, and I think that's good. And the 8-week course you know you talked about sticking at it. I think it's worth it because, partly because there's a narrative structure to the 8-week course. You know people are often on different meditations for addressing different issues, week by week, people look at different aspects of how the mode of mind that doesn't actually serve us very well. So it's science. How do we know that it's there and how do we know that that mind state has volunteered for a job that it can't do. And that needs a bit of time to work out. So I think it starts with the automatic pilot but then there's noticing that you're living in your head and noticing that you're wanting things to be different all the time or noticing you're trying to suppress some stuff. And so there's lots of different things. And that's why I think it's useful for people to take these things, just to cap them for 8 weeks and see how it all works out for them. And I wish them very well in their adventure in the discovering of this practise.

MELLI Thank you so much. Thank you so much for your time and for everybody who's watching, I'll provide some links to Mark's books. I really really highly recommend them. This is just written so beautifully, so practical. So get your hands on it if you haven't already. And I'll also link to some more information about the Oxford Centre for Mindfulness and about MBCT for people who want to look into that a little bit further. So

MARK That would be really good. All our papers and research are downloadable from the Oxford Mindfulness Centre website so it'll be great to link to that. Thanks Melli.

MELLI Will do. Thank you so much again and thank you all for watching.

Thankyou so much for tuning in and being a part of the mindful revolution.

With warmth,

Melli O'Brien

www.mrsmindfulness.com

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