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[00:00:37.650]
And Sam Harris dug to request a free account. And we grant 100 percent of those requests. No questions asked. OK, no housekeeping today. I will jump right into it. Today, I'm speaking with James Doty. James is a professor of neurosurgery at Stanford University and the director of the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education. He is also a philanthropist who has funded health clinics throughout the world and has endowed scholarships and chairs at multiple universities.

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And he also serves on the board of a number of nonprofits. And as you'll hear, he has a very unusual background. He grew up in real poverty and faced a number of challenges and seemed by no means guaranteed to succeed in life. But as you can hear, he has accomplished quite a lot. So we talk about how he did that and how we might better understand and facilitate the human capacity to overcome obstacles and bring more compassion into our lives and to generally make the world a better place.

[00:01:49.840]
And now I bring you James Doty. I am here with James Doty. Jim, thanks for joining me. It's a pleasure to be with you. Thanks for having me. We're going spent a lot of time talking about how you came to be the Jim Doty who's who's now speaking with me. But tell me how you summarize what you're up to now.

[00:02:14.510]
I'm a professor of neurosurgery at Stanford. Probably more germane for our conversation as I'm the founder and director of the Center for Compassion and Altruism, which is part of the School of Medicine and of which the Dalai Lama is actually the founding benefactor. And I'm also an inventor and entrepreneur and philanthropist at times. And I have really an interest actually in what drives people to be good, if you will.

[00:02:46.730]
OK, well, let's begin at the beginning. You've written a very poignant memoir into the Magic Shop, which covers your childhood, which really is not the usual childhood, or I can only imagine it's not the usual childhood for someone who who has the breadth of your your life experience at this point. I mean, your memoir is it's almost like a fairy tale of challenges. I mean, just it entailed an incredible amount of stress. In your earliest years, your father was an alcoholic.

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Your mother was clinically depressed and often suicidally depressed. And then you had this transformation based on an encounter you had in a magic shop, literally a magic shop. So let's talk about how you began this journey of yours in life. How would you describe your childhood and what happened in the magic shop? Sure. Well, of course, when a child grows up in poverty with a father who's an alcoholic, a mother who's had a stroke, partially paralyzed, clinically depressed, the big factor is that.

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In some ways, you're in a war zone all the time because you never know what's going to happen. You know, I wouldn't know whether my father was going to not come home or come home drunk or whether I would come in from school and my mother would be passed out from an overdose and I would have to call an ambulance. So, of course, when you grew up in that type of an environment, it's quite chaotic. And as you know, there's something called adverse childhood experiences.

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And this is essentially a technique where you sort of collect these events that a child lives with growing up poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, et cetera. And the higher the number. The less likely that child is going to, if you will, succeed by societal norms and more likely that the child themselves will have drug and alcohol abuse and mental illness and a variety of other obvious negative events happen in their life. And at the age of 12, I was filled with hopelessness, despair, anger, and obviously it was affecting me.

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And in fact, I was becoming a juvenile delinquent and I had had an interest in magic. And what would happen is when an event would happen at home, that was. Not particularly pleasant, I would get on my stingray bike and ride as far away as possible, and on one of those adventures I happened by a strip mall and at the strip mall was a magic store, which I went into. And the thing was that when I walked in, of course, my interest was in magic in the store.

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And there was a woman sitting there who had long flowing gray hair and her glasses on the tip of her nose and a chain around her glasses reading a paperback. And she looked up at me and she had this really extraordinarily radiant smile. And I asked her about the magic that I was interested in. And she said, well, I don't know anything about this. This is my son's store. I'm just here for the summer. But this led us really to a conversation that ended up being quite deep and one, frankly, which I wasn't used to.

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And the reason the conversation happened was because this is a person who made me feel psychologically safe. I wasn't fearful of her. I wasn't fearful that I was being judged. And she actually spoke to me as if I was an equal and that my opinion actually meant something, which for a child from my background was somewhat unusual.

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Yeah. So, I mean, we'll talk about meditation and compassion and all of these interests that you and I have in common. And you're obviously your connection to training. The mind was initiated in in this dialogue with with Ruth in the magic shop. But what she was teaching you was not in some ways it was kind of a standard meditation practices, but in other ways that it wasn't. How would you summarize what she taught you there? Well, I think there were four parts and and I have to tell you, I mean, when she offered over the period of the six weeks to meet with me and if you will train me, which isn't really what she called it, but I actually, you know, had some concerns even about showing up.

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And I showed up not because I had self-awareness or insight. I showed up because she was giving me cookies. And frankly, I had absolutely nothing else to do.

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But I did show up. And the first thing she taught me, which is a technique that now we would call a body survey and. And a breathing technique, and I did not appreciate that when you're stressed and you're anxious and your mind is all over the place, that. With intention and doing this technique of relaxing the body and then slowly breathing and and releasing your breath really had a profound physiologic effect. This was in 1968. And of course, terms like mindfulness or meditation or neuroplasticity were certainly not commonly used at all.

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And after a few weeks of doing this practice, I felt in some ways much calmer. And it was interesting because while the first few weeks I didn't really notice anything as I did it more, I did notice something. And but one of the things I was having challenges with was as I did this and sat with my own silence, I would have this negative dialogue going on in my head. And it was one that said I wasn't good enough, I wasn't smart enough, etc.

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, etc.. And what she explained to me was that that dialogue was not truth. And that negative commentary, if you will, sticks to us because they're the things that potentially put it at risk and that, in fact, that negative commentary could be changed. And this is what she called training the mind or taming the mind and basically. It's what we would now call self compassion, this technique that has been advocated by Kristin Neff and others to be kind to yourself.

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I realized that. I was always beating myself up and blaming myself for my situation and so with that technique and she described it as listening to a radio station, if you will, that you could change it. I changed it from one of negativity to one of self affirmation and self acceptance, and that, in fact, I was worthy. I did tell people that when you make these types of negative comments to yourself, it's as if you're laying these bricks down that are creating a self-imposed prison and very much giving your power away or agency away to change things in your life.

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Because every time you say I can't, it's not possible. The reality is that and I did not even understand that at the time. And so by changing that dialogue was extraordinarily helpful to me for a couple reasons. One is many of us have a shadow self that we don't want to admit to and things that we don't like about ourselves, things that discuss this about ourselves, our failings and. For many people, they have a tendency to try to push it away from them or hide it somewhere and it doesn't go away, and in fact, when you're troubled or have difficulties, that's when it shows itself.

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And this is where you can relate it to addiction when you're particularly stressed that addiction comes out. And so she taught me to accept that as a part of me and don't deny it and just be aware of it. And the other thing is that because I was so critical of myself, it made me hypercritical of everything and everyone around me. And what I found is that because of that, when I interacted with others or tried to accomplish something, I would take a negative view of it.

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And what I didn't appreciate is that human beings have this unique ability to intuit emotional states from facial expressions, voice intonation, body habitus, even smells. And when you carry yourself in that fashion, people don't want to be around you or they shy away or they're not open and they're not generous.

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Hmm. And as a result, what I tell people is that when I changed how I looked at myself and it changed how the world interacted with me, the other side effect of that was that I cared a lot of anger and hostility towards my personal situation, my parents. And of course, that was not fruitful in any way. And what happened was that I was able to see them in a much different way.

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I saw them as human beings who had their own pain and suffering, and the tools that they had to deal with them were not effective at all, you know, hiding your pain behind alcohol or, you know, taking pills to get rid of the pain and hoping that it would keep it away isn't helpful. And I in some ways forgave them and accepted the situation, not trying to hope the situation would be different. And that change in perspective, which I think is important in a lot of these practices, is really very, very important.

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Well, she taught you something else in the magic shop, which on the surface can sound pretty spooky. I mean, it's in line with what you just described generically in terms of changing your concept of yourself. She asked you to list what you want in life and to visualize yourself having it to really inhabit the person who already has these things, whether it's great wealth or great success, or you had a list of things which was fairly adorable for a 12 year old, I mean, including, you know, having a Porsche and a Rolex.

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But she wanted you to not see it from the outside, but really see it from the inside and to practice this visualization that that really this is a fait accompli, you're guaranteed to arrive at the desired station in life. And what you need to do now is inhabit the the psychology of that and make it real for yourself. And, you know, as you walk a line in your description of this, that is to my eye on the right side of rational here, because there's a rational way to understand how this can benefit a person.

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But it could also just tip in to sounding like the secret. I don't know if you remember that. Oh, no, that book and that movie, the movie by the name that is the appropriate target of opprobrium at the center of New Age, irrationality. But the idea that if you just visualize things or think it's true or assert that it's true, it will become true whether it's, you know, attaining wealth or losing weight or anything else.

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But, you know, describe to me how you think about the power of visualizing certain outcomes and how that enforces change in one's basic neurology or one's associated behavior and the kinds of, you know, opportunities that present themselves in life.

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Sure. No, I think you're right. I will be frank with you. I'm not a fan of the secret or the Célestine prophecies, et cetera. You know, I don't believe that there's a magic external power and we just need to tap into it and everything will be wonderful.

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What I do believe and in some ways I said earlier is that. Each of us has extraordinary power. We just don't realize it and, you know, negative self dialogue limits that power.

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What she taught me and what I realize is that when you utilize your senses and I think we see this now, sports psychology, you know, people think about the athletic event, they're going to do it over and over and over again. And the reality is, as an example, you know, it's been shown in a variety of studies that when you think about as an example, lifting weights, you actually increase to a small degree your muscle mass just by thinking about it.

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And when you repeat something in your head over and over and over again, it starts setting down neural pathways. And when you utilize all your senses to do that, you write it down, you read it, you verbalize it, you think about it, et cetera, et cetera. Then I would say that if there is a possibility of it happening, that is the best technique to help that manifest. And I'll give you an interesting example. As a neurosurgeon, of course, I see a lot of patients who have variety of conditions, but most of the patients who see me will say something like, wow, doctor, I've never heard of that.

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And then I see them a few months later and they go, you know, it's the most amazing thing since we talked about. I found that I have that I've run into five people who, in fact, do have that. And the reason is, is because you have put a subconscious primer out there and they're now attuned to that. And in many ways, this is like the technique that Ruth taught me. I put into my subconscious this idea, this possibility, this potential opportunity, and then I am attuned to events that will allow that to occur.

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I don't know if you've seen the book by a guy named Bob Nese. It's called The Power of 50 Bits. I know. Well, the premise is as follows is that we have about six to 10 million sensory inputs happening every second, but we're really only able to process about 50 or 100. And so when you put these things into your subconscious, in some ways you're creating a folder with that thing in it that sits out there. And that's one of the things that you're going to pay attention to.

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But it's not necessarily on a conscious level. And I think that is how you're able to have these things manifest. But it's not, you know, praying to a power and hoping it happens. There's actually a process here. And, you know, if you look at the placebo effect, if you look at how different individuals are able to make things happen as an example, of course, we know monks who can control their heart rate or their body temperature.

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All of these things are available to us. It's how do you get access to it and what's the best way to get access to it, to have it manifest? Yeah, well, there's a fact here which explains a lot of this, and it's that the brain on some level doesn't know the difference between what's real and what is merely a simulation. I mean, the brain is a kind of simulation machine and the dreaming brain and the waking brain share a fair amount of real estate apart from their frontal reality testing mode that kind of goes offline when you're dreaming.

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So to visualize something vividly is not nothing for the brain, right? It is. You are training something and there are many levels of this phenomenon we can witness, you know, some deliberate and some not. I mean, the change you noticed in your patients, you know, everyone has noticed it in their lives when they decide they're they're looking for a new car or they're looking for a new anything, that class of objects in the world suddenly becomes super salient to them.

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And they're noticing that brand of car, that type of dog or or anything else that they have suddenly become interested in. They're noticing that thing everywhere. And it looks like there's been a change in the frequency out in the world. But no, it's just you're just filtering based on that class of information, it should be very easy to see how negative self concepts become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. If you think you're the kind of person who isn't good at parties, can't socialize effectively with people, a person who no one likes.

[00:20:55.110]
Well, if that's your self talk, you can imagine just what your ramifying in relationship with people out in the world and the way that becomes self-perpetuating and the opposite obviously can become the case. And what you're describing as a practice of kind of seizing the reins deliberately and jumpstarting a virtuous cycle of self fulfillment and just changing your self concept.

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No, I think that's exactly right. And you know, what's so unfortunate is that this is free and available to everyone. And what's unfortunate is, as you point out, people get into these cycles of these negative emotional states and ruminate on them. And again, unfortunately, it just reinforces that. Again, I was fortunate in that with Ruth's intervention, if you will, that changed everything. And it made me see the issue wasn't me. The issue was my negative self talk.

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And once I got over that and truly believed, if you will, of infinite possibilities, then that allowed a whole series of events to happen.

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Well, so then you went on to go to college. As improbable as that seemed, given your background and it really did seem improbable, even even with all your visualisations, you sort of barely got an application in hand. And then you not only went to college, you went on to become a neurosurgeon. Let's talk for a few minutes about the choice to become a neurosurgeon. I, I actually, you know, have a as you know, a PhD in neuroscience, but I don't know too many neurosurgeons.

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Well, I mean, I know a few. But in terms of actual friends who are neurosurgeon, so what I know about the culture of neurosurgery is from the outside. I remember reading this book a while back when the

air hits your brain. And if you ever read this book by Bertus, you know, I don't know how faithfully he captures the culture, but he really does paint the culture of neurosurgeons as a kind of culture of gunslingers and frat boys.

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It seems to be a specialty that selects for a kind of high testosterone arrogance. And you and your you know, certainly in your residency, as you were, as your visualizations were actually working, there was a fair amount of arrogance that came online for you. Tell me what it was like to become a neurosurgeon and how you view that field of expertise.

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Well, I would say that over the last number of years, the that has changed somewhat, but. But you're you're right, I mean, this is a group of people and who are comfortable with somebody's life in their hands, realizing that false move can destroy someone's life. And with that power, in some ways, for many people, comes a sense of arrogance and a belief of infallibility. And and so, of course, the system selects for those types of people.

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The other interesting thing about it is, of course, not only do you have to be intelligent, hopefully you have good judgment and technical abilities. That's not always the case, but the thing for many of these people is most decided they were going to be a neurosurgeon. I mean, literally in high school or early in college. And it was this driving force that made them want to be a neurosurgeon. My situation was quite a bit different in that I was actually interested in plastic surgery, specifically in caring for children who had craniofacial deformities and I thought being a neurosurgeon.

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Would be helpful for that I realized I wasn't that interested in general surgery, which is usually the path to then to a fellowship in plastic surgery. So I was, if you will, very late to the game. And it was never a burning desire of mine to be a neurosurgeon for the typical reasons, so my view was somewhat different. But I would also suggest. It's an extraordinarily demanding specialty, and I tell people, if there is absolutely nothing else you can imagine yourself doing, that's great, become a neurosurgeon.

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Otherwise, if there's anything that interests you beyond that, you should do that, because this is a lot of hours and hours of training.

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I mean, neurosurgery is now seven years. Certainly if you're going into academics or many people, just regardless to a fellowship of one to two to three years. So, you know, ten, ten years down the road from college. And it's a specialty that requires intense focus, an immense amount of diligence and, frankly, heartache. Nothing is, you know, more painful than to, you know, have to tell someone that their loved one either was devastated, didn't survive.

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You weren't able to do what you were going to do now. Interestingly, I know colleagues who for them, those types of statements are just another day at work and it's like, you know, water on a duck's back. For me, I take it much more personally. Hmm, yeah, I can hear so yeah, I wanted to ask you about that because, you know, obviously we're now getting to the topic of compassion. And I was wondering how much your experience as a surgeon, which really, again, from the outside of any kind of surgeon bag, I think a neurosurgeon is maybe the ultimate example of this and a pediatric neurosurgeon.

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And one of your the beginning of your memoir puts us in the E.R. where you're operating on a brain tumor in a child. I just can imagine having those conversations with parents, you know, who are understandably in extremis. I mean, this is the height of a fear of uncertainty before surgery. And obviously, in those cases where it goes, well, that has to be a joy second to none. But when it doesn't go well, that has to be truly harrowing.

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You just raised the topic that I was wondering about, if compassion and again, we need to talk about compassion, define it and differentiate it from other states of mind. But before we get there, I'm just wondering if compassion is the only tool you need to navigate moments like that or if if there's something, you know, less ideal. I mean, I can imagine there's there's almost a kind of benevolent or fortuitous psychopathy that comes online for many surgeons where it's just like this is just the job.

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Right. You can't take this to heart every time or even generally because this will destroy you if you're moved around too much by the outcomes here. And it sounds like some surgeons do this to a fault. They are kind of checked out emotionally around the reality of the situation for the parents or for the patients. How do you view the the range of emotions that are ideal in this circumstance? And how do you how do you navigate that?

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Well, it's interesting because it is a broad range. There's a subset of people who, frankly, may be on the Asperger's spectrum who there are great technicians there. They know the literature, et cetera, et cetera. They have no emotional connection. And it is a job and they do the job and then they're gone. And of course, if you're talking about a doctor patient relationship, there isn't one. And I've even had people say, well, I know he you know, he's not very nice and he's abrupt and brusque and arrogant, but he's a good surgeon.

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OK, and then you have, you know, the other extreme where someone's highly engaging, very sensitive and connected and suffers with you. But the key is to be able to understand the limits of your abilities. And as long as you can tell yourself, I prepared and did the best I can, then there's no more of a discussion. That's all you can do and you're OK. And I think in my mind, of course, that would be the ideal situation.

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As in my book, I talked about a woman who was an opera singer who had an aneurysm, which is a dilatation of a blood vessel in the brain near her speech area and asked me to operate on her. And by this time she had seen a few other people. We had become friends. And when I had the aneurysm exposed and really literally it truly was about to rupture, you could see the blood swirling in in the aneurysm because it was so it was paper thin.

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And during that moment, I started thinking about her. Versus the technical aspects of doing that job, and my hands started shaking to the point where I had to stop and actually go into a meditation to essentially become a technician and displace my emotional connection to her out of the picture. And once I was able to do that, I was then able to effectively treat her and she did fine. And that's really one of the few instances where connecting with their humanity does not allow you to do your job.

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And that is a job of being a technician.

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Well, let's talk about I think I do want to touch on your kind of the other side of your career, where you you've been an entrepreneur and someone who has, you know, run a company and had kind of interesting adventures in in wealth and philanthropy. Well, jump to that after we talk about compassion and how you came to focus on it and just what it is. How did compassion first become a primary focus of yours? And what is it how do you think about it as a a mental state and capacity?

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Well, on some level, I. It was always there, I just didn't quite understand what it meant, but what had happened was at one point I had left Stanford and I had been intimately involved with Stanford since, I

think 97, but I had left to run an entrepreneurial company. Then the dotcom crisis came and I used to consult for setting up, if you will, neuroscience centers of excellence and went to a hospital in Mississippi. And ultimately agreed to actually go there to build this program for them, but during that time.

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I had an experience with a a child who was not cared for adequately and as a result had an infection in his brain and an abscess, and his parents waited too long to bring him in. And he even with my best efforts, he died. But it put me into a period of reflection about all of these things. And when I went back to Stanford, I decided to explore this a little more and try to understand it.

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And interestingly, when I initially talked to my colleagues at Stanford in Psychology and neuroscience, actually, I was told that the academic exploration of compassion was a dead end and that if anyone made that the center of their. Academic endeavors, they were not going to go very far. The fortunate thing was that I had some financial resources which allowed me to fund what we initially called Project Compassion, which brought a group of psychologists and neuroscientists together. And we started the journal club looking at the literature and then did some studies.

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And really it was evident that actually these practices or if you will, the nature of compassion was quite profound in regard to how it affects your emotional state, how it can affect your physiology and a whole variety of both brain and peripheral physiology measures.

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And this led to the creation ultimately of a compassion cultivation training program, which we did some studies on, and also, I think led to some interesting studies. And and then, of course, over time and I think if you look over the last 12 to 15 years, this idea of the importance of compassion combined with our already significant interest in mindfulness practices really is one of the things that are at the forefront. I mean, years and years ago when we started this, you would talk about compassion.

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And for many people, it was completely pooh poohed, especially by the corporate community, because it's looked at as a form of weakness. You know, people run over you if you're too nice, if you're compassionate. And I think now people recognize that it is, in fact, extraordinarily powerful. Yeah. So let's talk about what the mental state is, because it's often conflated with empathy and sympathy and pity, and it needs to be differentiated even from something that's integral to it, something like loving kindness.

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It also gets operationalized differently in different studies so that the neuroscience, as far as I can tell, is still a little fuzzy because some studies, they're done in irreconcilable ways. I mean, it's some ask people just to generate the state of love and kindness, essentially without any stimuli, and then some present subjects with images of human suffering to which they they respond. And so I think that, at least in my view, the generic definition of compassion is loving kindness in the presence of suffering worse or human suffering or animal suffering is taken as its object.

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And it includes this desire, this motivation to alleviate the suffering of others. It has a few things bundled in here. It is directly cognizant of suffering. So it has a kind of cognitive empathy, but it doesn't have the same kind of emotional contagion. It's not like you're sad when the object of your compassion is sad or you're depressed when the object of your compassion is depressed. It's a highly prosocial and and even positive emotion. I mean, it's not morbid.

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It's not a a state of collapse. You're not feeling diminished psychologically by proximity to the

suffering of others. In fact, it's an expansive state that has the feeling tone of loving kindness. But it has this extra topspin of wanting to respond to the suffering of others by alleviating that suffering. Does that make sense?

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Yeah, I think you're exactly right. I think, you know, if you were to make a graph and you put agency and effort on one and you put understanding and engagement on the other, sort of in the downward left corner would be pity. And this is I'm sorry for you or and it's invariably related to I'm superior to you. I appreciate your situation. It has nothing to do with. Empathy or anything else, it simply has to do with you recognizing it and it you know, you feel bad for them but doesn't reply imply you're going to do anything for them?

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While sympathy is less than empathy, it's eye on a cognitive level, if you will. Understand that you're in pain and I feel for you, but it requires no agency per say, well, empathy is actually, you know, taking on the emotional state of another ad, but it has no valence. It can you can have empathic joy and that can feel very good. Or as maturer card will describe who is a Buddhist monk who I'm sure you probably know, he says, when, you know, I take on pain and feel for the others pain, it is so painful to myself that, you know, I can barely stand it.

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Compassion is different in the sense that it is associated with suffering. It requires your take on that emotional state, but you have a very strong motivational desire to alleviate that suffering. And I think that's really the key there, is that you are motivated to alleviate that suffering. Now, interestingly, Jamil Sakey, who wrote a book on kindness recently, says empathy is the same as compassion or he uses them interchangeably. He and I have had some discussions about that, but I think some people do have a tendency to use that, but I would not use it that way.

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Yeah, the terminology here is uncertain enough that even my friend Paul Bloom could write a book against empathy, differentiate in two different types of empathy. One of which I agree with him, is not a good guide for moral deliberation, which is again, just more than pure emotional contagion side of it, which is, you know, just being taken in by suffering and feeling it as your own, but in a way that is causing you to actually not be able to respond effectively or even think rationally about what would help.

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You know, their problem has become your problem. And, you know, you're you're yet another drowning person who doesn't know how to swim and needs to be rescued. Yes. So then how did you get connected with the Dalai Lama and other Buddhists in this? Yeah, so and this may sound like magical thinking, and I hate to do that to you. I was involved in this work with these scientists and we had begun some initial research studies and we were thinking about having a conference.

[00:40:08.760]
And I was walking through the Stanford campus one day. And again, literally an image of the Dalai Lama came into my head. And frankly, I had zero interest in the Dalai Lama, persay, and more interestingly, my wife was a huge fan and in fact, she had bought tickets for us to go to an event. And I actually refused to go because it didn't interest me. But for some reason, this image stayed in my head and I decided that it would be good to invite the Dalai Lama to this conference that we were thinking about doing.

[00:40:49.610]
And he had been at Stanford once previously. Discussing addiction and craving. And I tracked down the person in Buddhist studies who had invited him and then connected him to one of His Holiness's translators who had a Ph.D. from Cambridge and was former monk and took the Jinpa. Exactly. Yes. Yes. And and Jinpa then arranged for this meeting.

[00:41:20.240]
And and so at this meeting and it's always interesting how things go, because it was just me with this idea. But when I was meeting with the Dalai Lama, we had the dean of the medical school, the associate dean, you know, it became an entourage and we met with him and. His Holiness, as you know, was very interested in neuroscience and was very, very interested in this topic and was immediately engaged in our 15 minute conversation, ended up that was scheduled, ended up being an hour and a half.

[00:41:57.670]
And at the end of it, he began a very animated conversation with Thupten Jinpa.

[00:42:03.190]
And I thought actually I'd somehow irritated or, you know, made the Dalai Lama angry, which, of course, is a very embarrassing thing to do.

[00:42:12.730]
That would be a feat that I would take that as a feather in your cap.

[00:42:16.300]
Yes, on top of it, although I have seen him angry. Yeah. But at the end of this animated dialogue, Chen turned to me and he said. His Holiness is so moved by this effort that he wants to make a contribution and at that moment he made the largest donation to a non Tibetan cause he had ever made, which shocked everyone there.

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And I was quite overwhelmed and moved myself. And then shortly thereafter, two other individuals made significant donations and that actually created the center.

[00:42:54.770]
Nice. Nice. And how much time have you spent around him since? Have you met him on multiple occasions? Yes, actually many occasions in different parts of the world. I've spent time with him and have chatted with him. Ultimately, I also became chairman of the Dalai Lama Foundation for several years. So I was fairly involved with him. And it's interesting because we're talking about emotional states. I can understand why people want to be near him. And in some ways it's like what Ruth offered me, which is.

[00:43:34.120]
Unconditional acceptance and love without qualification. And very few people actually give that out in a in an interaction with them. And when you're in his presence, what I tell people is that. In modern society, which is different than how we lived a few hundred years ago, a few hundred years ago, we lived in a village, we typically had multiple generations in the village. Everyone knew you from the time you were a child of growing up. You didn't move away.

[00:44:08.240]
You had incredible support system. You had a community. And that community is extraordinarily important to your mental and physical health, I think. And in modern society, we don't have that at all. You don't have your parents around, you don't have your siblings, you don't have loved ones in proximity. And so as a result, we have a tendency to create these shields that we carry around, which are the ones that say, I'm this, I'm that I've accomplished this, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

[00:44:39.980]
But there's no true authenticity that is ever released. And when you're with somebody like the Dalai Lama, you know immediately that you were unconditionally accepted and loved. And it's really quite profound because when that happens, it's almost as if this weight is lifted off of you and this natural joy and exuberance about being alive in some ways is released. And so I think, you know, when you look at people who strive to be near these types of individuals, you can perfectly understand why it is still somewhat mysterious to explain.

[00:45:23.330]
But it is it's a genuine phenomenon. I have spent a lot of time with great meditation masters. And, you know, I spent some considerable time, albeit briefly focused over the course of a month with the Dalai Lama. I met him on a number of occasions, but I strangely got to be one of his bodyguards or for a trip through France. So he he was he was on a teaching tour of France. And for whatever reason, I got to be part of the Buddhist retinue.

[00:45:56.900]
That was the buffer between the real security guards. When he's in France, he or at that point he got, you know, their version of Secret Service protection, something he did not get in the United States. And so there were like four guys with guns who are, you know, really protecting him. But then there was this buffer of essentially students of meditation. And, you know, people sat three year retreats in France with various lamas and there may be 12 of us.

[00:46:23.810]
And ironically, you know, we had the most conflict with the general public because we were the buffer between the real bodyguards and and the public. It was a surreal experience to walk into a room more or less continually focused on what could go wrong, who was untrustworthy, just basically radiating bad vibes of of suspicion everywhere. And to have over your shoulder the Dalai Lama beaming unconditional acceptance and love and just general ease. And it was I must say, it was a bad job, certainly not where one wanted to be in one's thinking alongside him, but is where one had to be.

[00:47:05.630]
I mean, because he really does he did have security concerns. And it's amazing the number of weird people who show up when his presence is announced somewhere. But it would it gave me a chance to spend some time with him and see what he was like again and again and again, mingling with strangers of all sorts. And, yeah, he's he's a very impressive person in that way. He does have a kind of laser focus on just connecting with people, you know, you know, albeit very briefly.

[00:47:37.520]
I mean, he'll walk into the lobby of the hotel lobby for people. If you'd like to continue listening to this podcast, you'll need to subscribe at Sam Harris. Doug, you'll get access to all full length episodes of the Making Sense podcast and to other subscriber only content, including bonus episodes and Amma's and the conversations I've been having on the Waking Up app. The Making Sense podcast is ad free and relies entirely on listener support. And you can subscribe now that Sam Harris Doug.