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[00:00:37.740]
Sam Harris dug to request a free account and we grant 100 percent of those requests. No questions asked. OK, no housekeeping today, today, in presenting a conversation I had with Stephen Lawrence, who is a Belgian neuroscientist and neurologist, he has a clinical practice as well, and he's engaged in a lot of fascinating research, which we don't actually talk about that will be left for a future conversation this time around. He wanted to interview me for a book he's doing and he wanted to talk about meditation.

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And as the conversation got into some interesting detail, I thought many of you would like to hear it. So this is me being interviewed about meditation, what it is, and why one would do it, how it can help us understand the mind scientifically and the ways in which it can't. And now I bring you Stephen Lawrence. I am here with Stephen Lauras Stephen. Nice to meet you. Nice to meet you, Sam.

[00:01:47.900]
So, Stephen, you're working on a book and you wanted to talk about meditation and consciousness and related things. And so I'm happy to do it and happy to go wherever you want to lead. Thank you for that. Yes, indeed.

[00:02:00.440]
I actually wrote a book. I was invited to do so by a Flemish small publishing company and. It's about my personal experience and then as a neuroscientist, how we study the brain of these Buddhist monks and how as a neurologist, I now actually prescribe meditation and it turned out to do very well. It was then translated in French and other languages and now it's coming out in in English.

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And so I'm very, very happy to have your testimony and how, when and why you started to meditate.

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Nice, just so my listeners know. So you're a you're a neuroscientist and a neurologist, so you have clinical practice now or you're in your hospital. Yes, right, I mean, in the University Hospital of Lige, I'm an M.D. and neurologist, our area of expertise actually is the damaged brain. So I created the Coma Science Group and now had the Jega Consciousness Research Unit where we tried. And from a scientific point of view, basically to understand human consciousness, which, as you know, is one of the biggest mysteries for science to solve.

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And we do that not only by looking at patients who have severe acquired brain damage after trauma or haemorrhage or survivors of cardiac arrest. So that's coma and related states, also near-death experiences.

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But then we also have a lab looking at what happens in your brain and mind when you are anesthetized, when you're giving these narcotic drugs or psychedelic drugs, for that matter. And finally, we have a strong tradition here and a whole lab looking at hypnosis and its medical use. We have over 10000 patients who had surgeries, like taking out your Turid or tumor in the breast were anywhere you would have general anesthesia or pharmacological coma. But here people are undergoing this intervention while basically thinking about their holidays.

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And in this hypnotic state, wow, you've had thousands of people have surgery without anesthesia under hypnosis. Yes. Yes.

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This is a wonderful woman who's called Meredith for Mooresville, who is an anesthesiologist. And see, she's really a pioneer who introduced hypnosis. And as you know, this is, you know, what we know from from television and theater, you know, doing tricks.

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But it's also something that illustrates, I think, again, the power of the mind and how she if she is shown you can use this in the operating room during surgery, but also now in the pain clinic. So, yeah, that that's what we do with the team. But talking about meditation for me is is something I it's out of my comfort zone. It's not something that I, you know, would have predicted 20 years ago.

[00:05:28.440]
Yeah, I'm happy to get into it with you. So I think your first question was how I got into it. And it was in my case, and this is really not unusual, my interest was first precipitated by a drug experience. In my case, it was MDMA, otherwise known as ecstasy. And I think I was 18 and I had an experience there which. Was not what's the all too common one now, I wasn't I wasn't at a rave or a party or it wasn't really a recreational use of of that drug, I took it knowing its potential to reveal something interesting about the nature of my mind.

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And I took it very much in the spirit of investigating my mind and and seeing what transformative experiences might be on the other side of my. My ordinary waking consciousness, and so the experience itself wasn't so directly relevant to what I later came to consider the true purpose of meditation, but it revealed for me the fact that it was possible to have a very different experience of of myself and the world and my my sense of my being in the world and just it was possible have a much better life than I was going to have by just living out the the implications of my own conditioning and tendencies at that point.

[00:06:56.030]
So it set me on this path of self inquiry, really, and where I would then, you know, explicitly studied techniques of meditation to try to explore the landscape of mind further directly through through introspection. And I have taken other psychedelics since. And I you know, and so psychedelics have been a part of this, but they are separable. I mean, perhaps you want to talk about that. But it was there's no question that but for that initial experience, it seems pretty likely that I may never have grown interested in meditation or anything like it.

[00:07:34.330]
So when was you were 18 years old, curious and then taking these drugs to kind of explore changes in self perception? And then and then you turn to meditation and what kinds of meditation did you try? I had been given a book by Ramdas, who originally was named Richard Alpert, and he was along with Timothy Leary, led some of those initial experiments at Harvard in the 60s studying LSD and was also fired from Harvard, along with Tim Leary for their their misadventures and in handing out LSD to all comers.

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He then he many people know his story. He went to India, he met his teacher. He came back in with a very long beard and in a dress calling himself Ramdas. And he then was a kind of spiritual teacher for many, many years. He only recently died. And so this was around. This was 87. I sat my first meditation retreat with him and there he was teaching an eclectic mix of practices. And he was it was really a kind of buffet of spirituality, but part of it was Buddhist meditation in particular, Vipassana or mindfulness meditation.

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And that was the practice I most connected with on that retreat. And then I went on to sit, you know, explicitly Buddhist Vipassana retreats, you know, in silence after that, and spent a lot of time studying with my friend Joseph Goldstein, who is one of my first Vipassana teachers, and sat with his teacher side open data, a Burmese meditation master, and then eventually migrated away from strict Vipassana for some reasons. I think we'll probably talk about just the the logic of the practice and the kind of goal seeking that was built into it eventually seemed mistaken to me, or at least unnecessary and and also a source of, you know, a fair amount of striving and psychological suffering.

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And then I connected with so-called non dual practices both within and outside of Buddhism. And that did change. It did significantly shift my approach to meditation, but that took a few years to happen. So there were several years there where I was mostly and never exclusively, but certainly mostly practicing. You know what people in the West know as mindfulness now, but very much under a kind of Burmese Theravada Buddhist influence and then migrated to the Tibetan practice of Zogu Chen, but also influenced by some teachers and teachings I encountered outside of Buddhism.

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And yeah, it's all of that during my 20s that absorbed a fair amount of time. I spent about two years on silent retreat in the decade of my 20s and had dropped out of school and, you know, wasn't quite sure how I was going to integrate all of these things. And then only after that decade that I returned to school and get a PhD in neuroscience and begin to get all of my my interests aligned. And it's taken some time.

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But, you know, now I'm in a position to have the kinds of conversations I want to have about the nature of the mind and what can be understood about it or not based on first person methods like meditation. Wow.

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So how would you define these nonjudicial practices and how they differ differ from from mindfulness?

[00:11:38.380]
I think it's best understood, certainly by anyone who has tried to meditate by describing the, you know, the usual starting point for the practice of meditation. So someone decides they they want to meditate and they're taught a method and they say this can be mindfulness is can be, you know, some other method like transcendental meditation. Your mantra meditation could be a visualization practice. It can be any use of their attention. But most of us start that project from a specific point of view.

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I mean, people tend to close their eyes and, you know, if it's ordinary mindfulness practice, they might be told to focus on the breath. And so if you close your eyes and you try to pay attention to your breath, most people will feel that their consciousness, their awareness is a kind of a locus of of attention in the head. They're paying attention from someplace and it's very likely in their head, behind their eyes, and they can aim their attention at the object of meditation.

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So if they're aiming their attention at the breath, whether, you know, at the tip of the nose or in the rising and falling of their chest or abdomen, there's a sense of. Being a subject in the head that can now strategically pay attention to something and of course, that the real obstacle to doing this successfully is distraction, getting lost in thought. And so thoughts are continually arising and you're getting pulled away from the object of meditation. And then you bring your attention back to the breath or to sounds or to a visualization or a mantra, whatever you're focusing on.

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And as concentration builds, this can become more and more successful as you can. Actually,

attention can rest on the object of meditation for a longer period of time. And if you're practicing mindfulness, you can get good enough so that you can even notice thoughts arising as objects and consciousness rather than just be merely taken away by them in each moment. And many interesting changes in one's state of mind and emotion can happen here. But if you're practicing dualistic, it more or less always feels like there is a meditator.

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There is a subject who is paying attention. There's the subject which is the source of awareness itself, and then there's the object of awareness and whether it's the breath or a sound or whatever. And that point of view, that duality, that subject object perception is an illusion. I mean that and it is the primary illusion that meditation is designed to cut through. And if you're practicing really well in this dualistic way, that will occasionally happen and it may happen.

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A fair amount can happen if you go on retreat and you do nothing but meditate for 12 to 18 hours a day and your mindfulness gets very continuous and effortless, you can find that this subject object distance collapses again and again and again. And so you'll hear a sound, for instance. And in that brief moment of just the impingement of the sound on your eardrum, you might notice that there is no sense of one who is hearing the sound. There's just hearing there's no there's no you know, you and the head listening to a bird out there.

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There's just this ineffable appearance of hearing that has unified the subject, drops away and the object drops away, really. And there's just kind of the unity of knowing and and its appearances. But again, it's haphazard. You don't have any control over it. When it stops happening, you're left thinking, oh, that was that was interesting. How do I get back to that? And it seems under that way of practicing that, the only way back to that is to once again summon this heroic level of concentration and continuity of mindfulness.

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And what non dual paths of practice have understood is that there really is a fundamental illusion to cut through there. It really is not the case that you need massive, sustained concentration to get to this experience of of unity or non duality. In fact, it's already the case in every moment of consciousness and consciousness itself doesn't feel like a a centre in the head. It doesn't feel like a spotlight of attention being aimed at its objects. There is no self in the head or thinker of thoughts.

[00:16:29.440]
There's just this open condition in which everything is appearing and it can be recognised as such directly. And so it's that that recognition that really is is the starting point of non dual practice practice like Dzogchen. And and really, you can't begin practicing it until you recognize that, that this is the way consciousness already is. But once you do, then your your mindfulness becomes synonymous with that recognition. So what you become mindful of thereafter is not the breath or sounds or anything else.

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Persay, though your you may in fact be aware of the breath or sounds or whatever happens to be appearing. What you become mindful of is that there's no subject in the middle of consciousness. The practice itself becomes simply familiarizing yourself with this intrinsic property of consciousness that you basically had spent every moment of your life overlooking, you know, prior to learning how to practice in that way. And so that that is the difference. I mean, again, it's somewhat paradoxical to talk about and can be confusing to many people, but I think most people realize that, you know, whether they're trying to meditate or not, they do feel like a subject.

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They don't feel identical to their experience. They feel like they're at the centre of their experience. They're having an experience. They're. Operating it from a place in the head, and that's the central illusion that is cut through in nonwar practice. Thanks so so we briefly discussed the when and how

and you mentioned the why to curiosity, as I understood and also mentioned to try and live a better life. Can you say a little bit more why you continue to to meditate and what are your current favorite exercises?

[00:18:30.970]
Well, so the y there are really two Ys, which can be more or less important for people. I mean, the most common Y though, the Y that is certainly advocated by the Buddhist tradition generally isn't really intellectual curiosity. It's much more a matter of overcoming suffering. We all feel unhappy to one another degree in our lives. And it's not to say that happiness doesn't come, but it also goes. You just can't stay joyful all the time.

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And if you just wait long enough, you'll feel frustrated and annoyed and angry and sad and fearful and just that's there's a lot of psychological pain that most of us experience fairly regularly. And meditation is offered as a as a method of having some fundamental insights into that process such that you don't keep suffering to the same degree and in all the ordinary ways. And it certainly holds out the promise that it might be possible in some sense not to suffer at all, to actually fully escape the logic by which you tend to make yourself miserable.

[00:19:52.120]
And it has a lot to do with with having insight into the the nature of thought itself and breaking one's identification with thought I was. So much of our psychological suffering is mediated by our thinking about the past and the future. And in failing to connect with the present because we're thinking so much and not noticing that were lost in thought. So my motivation, while it was always somewhat intellectual as well, it certainly was primarily about living a better life in the sense of just not suffering unnecessarily.

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I mean, just actually being happier, recovering from the ordinary collisions in life that cause psychological pain, you know, recovering more quickly. And I think that certainly is the most common motivation. And, you know, for me, you know, both of these motivations continue. What's changed for me is that it's not so much a sense of practicing. Deliberately anymore, I mean, you know, I do sit and meditate, but it's much more a sense of always practicing in that my moment to moment experience is always being punctuated by, you know, what I would call meditation.

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And, you know, what would qualify as meditation if I happen to be, you know, formally in a session of meditation, which is to say a recognition of the way consciousness is and it happens automatically, you know, it doesn't happen all the time. It's you know, I spend a an impressive amount of time still lost in thought. But when I'm not lost in thought, the thing that I become aware of is this non duality of subject and object in consciousness.

[00:21:40.280]
Figure and ground have flipped here a little bit, which is in the beginning I was trying to get to this experience and meditation was a formal attempt to do that. Initially I was it was haphazard and then I was doing it more or less on demand. But now there's much more of a sense of this is the way consciousness is and much of normal life is my inadvertently overlooking that. But when I'm when I no longer overlook it, you know, in any given moment, it is what you know, what I'm restored to.

[00:22:18.380]
It no longer feels like a practice of any kind. In fact, it's you know, when one is actually really meditating, one isn't doing something. One is doing less than one normally does, you know, is simply the absence of distraction. You know, once you know what to pay attention to, it is simply the absence of being lost in thought for that moment. Mm hmm. And you were you suffering as an 18 year old, were you in a crisis that decade of dropouts was?

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What's your personal story there?

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Well, I had had many experiences of intense suffering, you know, but a completely ordinary, nothing extraordinary, just completely ordinary sorts of suffering that people experience in life. But I had had them as a teenager, you know, when I was 13, my best friend died when I was 17. My father died when I was 18. Just proximate to this experience with MDMA. My girlfriend had broken up with me in college and her freshman year. You know, these are very ordinary experiences.

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I mean, some people don't have anyone die until they're a little bit older than I was. But if you just you just wait around, you know, people are going to start dying on you. And so, you know, I was not living in a civil war or I mean, it was really there was nothing unusual happening in my life. I had a very lucky life at that point, all things considered. But, you know, those experiences hit me really hard.

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I was really unhappy, for instance, after my girlfriend broke up with me in college, you know, I was probably in some kind of clinical state of depression for several months after that. I was not myself, and it was because I was thinking incessantly about what I had lost. Right. And I just I was meditating on loss and loneliness and grief and had absolutely no insight into this process. I mean, I was just a mere puppet being blown around by whatever this next train of thought would be.

[00:24:39.720]
Right. And that's everyone's condition. I mean, if you if you do not see an alternative to being identified with the next linguistic or imagistic appearance in your mind, I mean, the next emotionally laden statement that, you know, seems to appear in the voice of your own mind, you know, whether it's self judgment or something that produces anxiety or something that produces sadness over a loss you've suffered. If there's no space around this automaticity of thought, there's no alternative but to be living out the emotional implications of whatever the thought happens to be.

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And most of us most of the time have at best mediocre thoughts. We're not tending to tell ourselves a story about how good life is, how grateful we are for all that we have, how beautiful the people in our lives are, and how lucky we are to be with them. I mean, you can decide to shape your thoughts along very deliberately wholesome lines that will will improve your mood. And that's a totally useful practice that is, you know, very much supportive of mindfulness.

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And these are the practices we're talking about. But most of us don't tend to do that automatically. Most of us think about all of our disappointments. We notice everything that's wrong. We have a long list of things we wish would happen. So we tend to be captured by a story of deficiency. Right. Things are not yet good enough. And we're telling ourselves a story that if only we could change these things about our lives, if only I could get another girlfriend, right.

[00:26:32.280]
If only I could meet somebody. That was almost certainly a story I was telling myself at that point. Or if only I could get back to the girlfriend who broke up with me. That self talk seems to promise something which proves to be a mirage. This idea that if we could only arrange our lives perfectly, there would be a good enough reason for attention to truly rest in the present moment and be satisfied. But unless you have a mind that is capable of that, that's not what happens.

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I mean, you get what you want and you find that you simply want other things at that point. And again, your your happiness appears to be contingent upon satisfying those desires. I'm not saying it's not better to get what you want than to have just one disappointment after the next. I mean, yes, there ordinary sources of pleasure and happiness in this life, but none of them are durable sources of happiness. All of these contingent sources of happiness need to be continually propped up by our

efforts.

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They all tend to degrade. And, you know, you accomplish one goal and no matter how. Wonderful an experience it is to do that, you know, it doesn't take 15 minutes before people are asking you, you know, what are you going to do next? Right. I mean, nothing nothing gets finely banked as the foundation upon which you can rest and be happy, you know, every moment thereafter. So meditation is the practice of understanding something about the mechanics of this dissatisfaction and the search for happiness and to deliberately step off the hamster wheel here.

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I'm interested to see that, you know, if you're running on this wheel on some level, you're not not getting anywhere. And the only way to truly come to rest is to step off it. That resonates with my own experience. You mentioned your crisis, losing your best friend, your father girlfriend seems quite often the case that that we we seem that seemingly need these difficult moments to go and discover things like like meditation. It's also what I see in my outpatient clinics.

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And maybe that's a pity. People actually tell me. It's it's it's a pity. I had, you know, I had this burnout or depression or whatever, and I wished I would have discovered meditation before that.

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So so strangely, it's something that is I think also maybe with your community and your app is something that you most often hear that people come to this because they they don't feel or go well. And maybe we should invest more in in prevention and talk about this before we we. What do you think about that?

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Again, it is difficult to talk about because it is somewhat paradoxical. I mean, this is the the line one continually walks in describing meditation and its benefits because it's not that nothing else matters. Right. It's not that there aren't ordinary requisites for happiness that you want to recommend to people. I mean, yet, yes, it is good to have good relationships being integrated in the community and having people you love and who love you, who can support you and who you in turn support.

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I mean, you know, all of that is for most people, most of the time, a necessary component of being a happy person. And yet there is an illusion here. It's not stable. And all of that is made better by discovering. That the true foundation for psychological well-being doesn't rest on even those relationships, to have the best relationship, to have the best marriage on some level, you really need to already be happy. You need to bring into that relationship not your need for companionship, but your ability to simply love the other person.

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Right. It's not transactional. It's not a love you. If you love me, it's you're already happy and you deeply want happiness for this other person. You're not extracting something from them for your own benefit, though. You are getting a lot of benefit by being with them. But you're already, you know, the center of gravity of your well-being is already, you know, over your own feet to me, where you stand, you're not leaning into them in a way that that makes the whole enterprise precarious.

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But again, this is paradoxical because I wouldn't want to say that it's not important to have the other person, but there's no question that relationships get healthier and healthier the more you on some level can be just as happy when you're alone in a room, when the one you love leaves the room, you know, you're not diminished by that. And there's kind of two levels at which we can seek wellbeing. And, you know, one level is to continue to do all the things that that matter or seem to matter for most people most of the time.

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So, yes, it's better to be healthy than sick. It's better to be comfortable than uncomfortable. It's better to to have financial resources than to not have them in. All of these things remain true. And yet the deeper truth is you're only going to be as happy as you can be based on what you're doing with your attention in each moment. And if you're just habitually lost in thought and thinking, you know, crappy thoughts about what has happened to you on social media, you know, whatever your the actual character of your life, you're not in a position to enjoy it.

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And it is, in fact, also true that there are people whose minds are such that they can be deeply happy, even in conditions that would drive most people totally crazy. You know, I have studied with people who spent, you know, decades in caves just meditating right now. You put the average person in a cave and separated him or her from everything they they want out of life and everything they love in this world. And they'll go insane and they'll go insane based on an inability to pay attention in a very specific way.

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You know, again, this there's something paradoxical here, but it's the paradox is resolved by our doing both sets of of wise things simultaneously.

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You want to have a good life. You want to do work, you find meaningful. You want to participate in the world in ways that are fun and creative and connect you to other people. And you want to recognize this thing about the nature of your own mind. In my book, I argue for meditation courses in school, maybe just the way we have specific teachers teaching, you know, getting physical education, and it's important to take care of our body.

[00:34:14.430]
But I feel we neglect the emotional well-being in our educational system. There's wonderful things happening, but but nothing structurally, at least not in Europe. But I don't think it's the case in the States that still education is very much about acquiring knowledge and maybe we could and should do better.

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What's what's your opinion on that?

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Yeah, yeah. There's something my wife Arnica has focused on a lot. She's taught mindfulness in schools in both the school that my daughters go to and other schools for some years. And yeah, it's amazing you kids can really learn this. I think probably six years old. This is about the earliest that you can profitably start. But yeah, I mean, kids can learn to initially simply become more aware of what they're feeling, you know, six year old who can recognize specific emotions clearly and see how they motivate him or her to behave in certain ways.

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That's an amazing skill to teach. And I mean, it's the first step toward the primary value of living unexamined life that, you know, is so central to Western philosophy for, you know, at least a thousand years or so. And then we we lost it in the West. I mean, this is why so many people like myself have gravitated toward Eastern traditions to at least initially, to learn these techniques, because the value of wisdom, wisdom, as opposed to mere knowledge is something that it's not, that it ever completely disappeared in the West, but it got genuinely submerged by other priorities.

[00:36:10.770]
And it certainly has been the case for now centuries, that if you're a Western philosopher, that carries absolutely no implication that you're doing something that entails living a better life. Right. I mean, there's there need be no connection between philosophy and wellbeing or living an ethical life, being a benign person at a minimum in this world. And so you can have some of the great philosophers of the

Western canon who were just, you know, all mighty neurotics and, you know, toxic people.

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And that says nothing derogatory about their philosophy. Right. So you have someone like Nietzsche or Schopenhauer. I mean, just, you know, Schopenhauer through his housekeeper down a flight of stairs. Wittgenstein, who just, you know, beat pupils and treat his colleagues terribly. These are not people to emulate in terms of how they lived their lives. Obviously, each of these were brilliant men and can be profitably read for their thoughts about other topics. But there was an important bifurcation between what philosophy became in the West and its original purpose, which was to understand something about the nature of being in the world such that it transforms your capacities as a person had and transforms the actual moment to moment texture of your life.

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So we have largely lost that day. So I think the fact that even now it's really an afterthought, you know, or we're just it's a as a kind of new discovery that maybe we should be teaching children something about how to be such that they become happier, wiser, more ethical people. And I think that's the most important project we have. And it seems strange that we don't even discuss it for the most part at any point in our education system, and then just rely on people to figure it out for themselves once they become grownups.

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Absolutely. It strikes me even more as a caregiver, I'm supposed to take care of others, but actually throughout my studies at University Medical School and then and specializing in neurology, never, ever have learned anything about taking care of myself and listening to my own emotions. And in we know caregivers are at risk for burnout.

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I have two colleagues who committed suicide. We know this for such a long time and still so little is happening, structurally speaking, in our faculty and our educational system.

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So, yeah, yeah, there's another point there, which is, you know, we've all met doctors who are, you know, maybe brilliant physicians, certainly, in my experience, been recommended to me as brilliant physicians who have terrible bedside manners. They're in, in no sense, a healing presence as a person. And so you're coming to them essentially for their their expertise as physicians, you know, as, you know, diagnosticians or, you know, people who could recommend a course of treatment or they might be brilliant surgeons.

[00:39:48.710]
Right. So this is actually the pair of hands you want operating if it comes to that. But, you know, these are people who are just on some level canceling, uh, you know, whatever healing benefits there might be of actually connecting with a wise and compassionate physician because of who they seem to be, you know, in their own skins as people, you know, I don't know what they teach in medical school about how to be with patients.

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But, you know, obviously, the profession of being a doctor selects for a range of personality types. And I'm sure that the various specialties further select. Right. So it's you're somewhat at the mercy of the personality that shows up there. And again, yeah, it's it would be better if there was a more holistic understanding of just what it means to be in that role. Right. Because it's the I mean, you're dealing again and I'm not speaking from experience.

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I'm really just speaking as a consumer of medicine. But, you know, depending on what specialty you're in, you're encountering people very often in the most vulnerable, anxiety ridden, you know, or even grief stricken moments of their lives. And it matters what sort of person you are in those moments.

[00:41:08.080]
Absolutely. In in my field of expertise, seeing patients after coma and their families and a lot of people die. Yeah, it is a big challenge to do the job with with empathy and compassion. And as you said, we were not selected for that. We had no particular courses. And that is that is a pity. Speaking of that, and in my job, again, I see that on a daily basis. And how did meditation change your relationship with death?

[00:41:44.150]
Well, you know, it's it's certainly traditional to frame the project of meditation, a spiritual practice, generally contemplative practice, very much in the context of getting ready to die on some level. Like this is part of the the explicit project, which is, you know, death is inevitable. And we spend most of our lives by default, you know, materially avoiding it for obvious reasons, but also avoiding thinking about it. I mean, this is the whole notion of death denial, which I think has a lot to it.

[00:42:27.530]
And there was a wonderful book by that title, The Denial of Death by Ernest Becker. We try to distract ourselves from this ever present reality, and many of us managed to do that rather well. I mean, there are people who don't think about death all that much because they're they're so busy trying to have a good time in life. And I mean, I would say that, you know, by tendency, I've always been a person who who has not been able to forget about death for very long.

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You know, this is probably due to the fact that I did lose a few people close to me, you know, fairly early on. So, you know, it was always obvious to me or at least, you know, from 13 onward, it was quite obvious to me that this was a reality and this could happen at any time. There are no guarantees that you're going to live a long life. And so it's something that I've always kept in front of me as a fact.

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I mean, I think more than. Than the average person and meditation is is a further way of doing that, I mean, it's a way of extracting the wisdom of doing that rather than than merely being made morbid by one's awareness of death is a method of recognizing just how much there is to be grateful for. You haven't died yet. Your life is right here to be enjoyed, and it can only be enjoyed by you right in this corner of the universe that is illuminated where you sit, you know, only you get to make the most of that and how you pay attention to it.

[00:44:04.210]
It really is that the most important piece of that? I mean, it's not really making the most of it isn't in the end radically changing. What is already the case there means it's really being able to sink into the experience of being in the world more and more and enjoy it and enjoy it in relationship to other people, enjoy it in relationship to the the natural beauty of the world, enjoy it by behaving more and more ethically. Enjoy it by having better and better intentions with respect to your collaboration with other people and enjoying the quality of mind born of those good intentions.

[00:44:44.410]
Right. I mean, rather than seeing yourself in competition with others actually wanting other people to succeed and feeling good when they succeed rather than feeling like your happiness has been somehow diminished by, you know, someone got a slice of the pie that you wanted. I mean, using all of that to come to rest more and more in the present moment, I really do see that as the project and an awareness of death is apart from just being in contact with with reality.

[00:45:15.130]
I mean, this is coming for all of us. It is the backstop that keeps you from just wasting all of your time and attention, you know, without an awareness of death. I don't know. I think it would be possible to just. Distract yourself as pleasantly as you could muster, always, right, and have kind of no deeper priorities, there really is something good about being aware of death. But unless you can find that and use that, it is easy to just.

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Feel like it's it's a source of of unhappiness. I mean, every time you think about death, you feel like, OK, that's there's no place to linger. And I just want the project now is to forget about it and. I think that's a a misuse of the actual opportunity. You've referred a number of times, too, to the Buddhist tradition and I'll be there. If you'd like to continue listening to this podcast, you'll need to subscribe at Sam Harris dog.

[00:46:22.450]
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