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Welcome to the Making Sense podcast. This is Sam Harris. OK. I've had a few encounters recently on other people's podcasts and on social media that have made me think that many people are confused about some of the views I express on this podcast. Those of you who are using the waking up app probably have a better understanding of what I'm up to, but I get the sense that many making sense listeners really don't know where I'm coming from much of the time.

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So clearing up this confusion requires that I say a few things about the role that meditation has played and continues to play in my life. First, let me say that unless you're deep into it, the term meditation almost certainly conjures the wrong ideas in your mind, and meditation has no necessary connection to Eastern religion, say. Much less to beads or incense or any of the trappings of New Age spirituality, unless you're unusually well-informed about it, when I use the term meditation, as I do from time to time on this podcast.

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I would bet that ninety nine percent of you get the wrong idea. Meditation is just a bad word for the recognition of specific truths about the mind is a process of discovering what is already true of your own mind. Of course, the discoveries one makes here are directly relevant to living a more satisfying life, which is the important part. And that's why I spent so much time recommending that people look into this. But the benefits aside, more and more, I'm realizing that many of you can't understand the positions I take on this podcast without understanding your mind.

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And these are positions which on their surface have nothing to do with meditation, my experience here is often the key to understanding my criticism of specific scientific and philosophical ideas, like the debate about free will or the nature of the self or the hard problem of consciousness. I mean, yes, a person can follow the purely philosophical or scientific arguments and arrive at some of the same conclusions. For instance, someone can understand how free will and the conventional notion of self don't make any sense in terms of ongoing neurophysiological changes in the brain.

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But even most people who understand and accept those arguments don't really have the courage of their convictions because they still feel like selves that enjoy free will. Most people don't have the introspective tools to discover that their experience is actually convergent with what makes the most sense scientifically and philosophically. So they're stuck trying to grapple with a pseudo problem. How can we make sense of our experience of an unchanging self that has free will when we know conceptually that these things don't make any sense?

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That's where many people are stuck quite unnecessarily. Meditation is also the key to understanding my criticism of specific religious ideas. How can I say with confidence that most religious doctrines are not merely scientifically implausible, many people can say that, but that they are also a perversion of a very real opportunity to experience self transcendence. I can say this because there's nothing hypothetical to me about the kinds of experiences that people like Jesus were rattling on about to anyone who would listen.

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And when you've had these experiences and can have them on demand is not just a matter of having taken LSD a few times and dimly remembering how different things were when it's absolutely obvious to you that the conventional sense of self is an illusion, then it's also obvious that our spiritual hopes need not be pegged to the idea that some historical person might have been the son of God who died for our sins. My experience in meditation largely defines my politics to me.

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For instance, how can I be so sure that the explosion of identity politics that we see all around us isn't a sign of progress? How can I know that it's an ethical and psychological dead end to be deeply

identified with one's race, for instance? And then all the people who are saying that there's no way to get past race in our politics are just confused. Well, because I know that a person need not even identify with the face he sees in the mirror each day.

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In fact, the deeper you examine your experience, the more you discover that freedom ultimately depends on not identifying with anything, even with how you look in the mirror. How much more so is it unnecessary to identify with millions of strangers who just happen to look like you in that they have the same skin color? In light of what's possible psychologically and interpersonally. In light of what is actually required to get over yourself and to experience genuine compassion for other human beings, it is a form of mental illness to go through life identified, really identified with one's race.

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Is just a bad dream. Of course, to say that as a white guy in the current environment is to stand convicted of racial insensitivity and even seeming indifference to the problem of racism in our society. I mean, what greater symptom of white privilege could there be than to declare that we should just all get past race? That's a retort that I believe I can hear percolating in the minds of many listeners and most well-intentioned people have been successfully bullied by that kind of response.

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How much easier would it be to back down here and just say, sorry, I don't know what I'm talking about. I'm just a white guy. There are massive incentives to take that path, but to insist upon the primacy of race is to be obscenely confused about human potential and about society's potential. And I'm not going to pretend to be unaware of that. So when I'm talking about racial politics on this podcast, I am also talking about meditation, even though the topic would never come up in that context.

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And when some of my critics say that I'm just practicing my own version of identity politics, I'm in a position to say bullshit. And to be clear, I'm not claiming to be fully enlightened. I'm definitely still a work in progress. But there are certain things that I actually understand about my own mind and about the mind in general. And the idea that racial identity is something that we can't get past is total bullshit. Insights into the nature of mind can't help but touch politics.

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Versus my attitude toward wealth inequality is born of the recognition that no one is truly self-made, all these rich guys walking around with their copies of Ayn Rand thinking they're self-made, it's pure fiction. And given how we do become ourselves, given the overwhelming influence of luck in our world, we have to recognize that we need an effective system of wealth creation that doesn't allow people to truly fall through the cracks. And as we get wealthier, the floor beneath which no one should be allowed to fall should keep rising.

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Compassion has to be built into capitalism because it doesn't seem to occur naturally. Otherwise, totally normal people begin to resemble psychopaths in how they conduct themselves in business. So this just to say that what I think I've learned through the practice of meditation influences many of the views I express on this podcast, but I can't get into the details here because there are so many other things to discuss. So that's what I'm doing over at waking up what I'm building and waking up is the laboratory where you can run the same experiment for yourself and there's really no substitute for doing that.

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I mean, you can pretend to want to integrate your intellectual and ethical and political life or you can really want to do it and to discover all the ways in which you have failed to do it so far. Again, I'm not claiming to have everything figured out. I'm very much in the process of still figuring things out. Each of us has to negotiate the terms of our disenchantment with who we were yesterday and with the ways in which culture distracts and misleads us, and that's what I'm doing over a waking up.

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So if you haven't checked it out recently, I just want to invite you to do that, especially if you think you know what meditation is and you think it's not relevant for you. I can virtually guarantee that you're mistaken about that. And if you can't afford a subscription, you need only send an email to support and waking up dotcom and ask for a free one, so please do not let money be the reason why you don't check it out.

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As always, thanks for listening.