



MINDFUL IN MAY

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

Lori Schwenback, B. Comm., M.A. co-founded Mindfulness Therapy Associates, a San Francisco based coaching and psychotherapy practice. Lori began her career in consumer product marketing and grew from designing marketing campaigns into focusing on human flourishing. She is a senior teacher and program designer at the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute and facilitates mindfulness and emotional intelligence trainings internationally in corporate, healthcare, education and government settings. In addition, Lori facilitates programs for other organisations including: Wisdom Labs, Purpose Blue and Mindfulness Tx.

Elise: Welcome, Lori, to the program. It is a delight to have you here. We've met once in person at the Google training which we'll talk about through the conversation. I'm delighted to re-meet you virtually.

Lori Schwenback: Thank you. Yes, it's a delight to be here.

Elise: And I was saying just before we started recording that I also want to thank you cause you're fresh off the plane from Bhutan where you've been doing some fascinating work. And so, extra thanks for doing this amidst your travel and jet lag. I thought before we get into why you were in Bhutan cause it's relevant to this conversation, perhaps for the listeners who have not come

upon you or your work, if you wouldn't mind sharing a little bit about your story and how you landed in the world of mindfulness.

Lori Schwenback: So, my background is in business. I'm from a business background and I worked in product marketing and I really liked it. But I got to the point where I thought, you know, I couldn't imagine continuing to do this the rest of my life partially because it didn't feel particularly meaningful and I thought if I can understand people enough to sell them something which was a product, to use that same skill set, to understand people well enough, to support them living a life of meaning, and so the behaviour change wasn't about purchasing something but was really about creating a new way of being. And partially that came about because I'm curious about people, I'm fascinated about people, so I left my business career in pursuit of studying psychology and to be honest, at that time I really wasn't so sold on meditation. I had an idea that was a misconception but that meditation was about abandoning everything and sort of **navel gazing** and I was much more wanting to be in the world and connected, and so I had a misperception that meditation was about kind of self-indulgence. However, I came to understand meditation and appreciate it through recognising how much it is a science of the mind, a study of the mind. And I was like, oh, now I really get it. So, I'm kind of humbled and a little embarrassed about my preconceptions early on that kind of caused me to reject it. So, my initial foray into mindfulness practice was through the door of psychology actually. I'm a psychotherapist in California and I've worked with people for a number of years with mindfulness-spaced emotional intelligence to help them regulate emotions. And then I came across this program that was initially developed by google and now it's part of its own entity and that's a search inside yourself leadership institute program, and it was almost identical to what I was doing every week in my clinical practice and because I have a business background, oh this is a perfect fit to offer these skills that make such a difference in people's lives but in a way that they don't have to come in from a

place of being in therapy, that they can access this widely. So, that's how I first got into it and now I'm **writing trainings** through Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute as well as on my own I do other work.

Elise: Which we'll go into. Do you want to give us a brief summary of what you've been doing in Bhutan cause it's pretty phenomenal.

Lori Schwenback: It is really phenomenal. I feel incredibly humbled and privileged to be doing the work. So, Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute again was initially developed by google but it's its own thing, we've been offering trainings in a variety of organisations around the world whether it's corporates or schools or government agencies. And the kingdom of Bhutan was looking for a program to help support the well-being of their students because there's unfortunately quite a high suicide, depression and addiction problem in Bhutan and they're very oriented as a country around supporting the well-being of their people in their countries. So, they are looking for a program that will ultimately help the students. So, through a series of events they found the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute program and we came in as offering a training to their teachers. So we're training 125 school teachers and principals and their administrators to then go and deliver these practices to all 10 thousand teachers in Bhutan. It's been a year-long project and it's amazing to me to hear the stories – ultimately, the trickle-down effect as how these kids' lives are being transformed through these practices. It's really extraordinary.

Elise: Yes, it's very meaningful. You couldn't really doing more meaningful work in the world, could you? And I wanted to thank you for sharing your initial impressions of meditation, because I think that that's such a common thing and I certainly as someone who's kind of a high energy person, it really was quite a struggle for me to connect with the practice, I found it so boring and there was so much resistance and I didn't get it for a long time. So, it's good for people that might be starting off to hear those stories. I'd love to hear your

definition of mindfulness. There are a lot around but how do you make sense of what this is.

Lori Schwenback: There are a lot of different ways. I think of it really as a study in presence. Like how to be really fully present with myself, with what I'm experiencing, then other person and of the world around me. Kind of operationalising that, I would say it's the ability to notice what's happening in my internal and external world with an attitude of curiosity and of kindness. So, there's a real orientation of openness or curiosity internally, externally and that supports presence.

Elise: And then, what is presence really offering us. Presence: what are we really talking about? Because another thought I had was that a lot of people come to meditation with lots of expectations or assumptions about what they're going to get from it. That it might make them feel more calm, less stressed..... but what do you really see as the purpose of this practice, of cultivating this presence. What is the purpose here?

Lori Schwenback: I'll go a little wide and then narrow it down for you. Ultimately for me, the purpose is really showing up for this one life that we have. As far as I know, this life is fleeting so fast and to be aware of what I'm experiencing, aware of another person, aware of the sunrise, aware of the lights streaming through behind this camera, when the computer is backlighting this beautiful tulip that I have, and just feeling the full range of what it's like to be alive, which, sometimes is beautiful, sometimes it's sublime and sometimes it's actually painful. But being able to show up whole-heartedly for life, is really the overarching piece, and in a really practical way it's operationalising how to be fully present, how to have the capacity to be with what's beautiful, what's hard, what's challenging and just stay. And just stay. There's so many ways that we get distracted and we're pulled away, it's hard, it's uncomfortable. Even the good stuff sometimes is hard to be present with. So, the drive for me comes

from this recognition that life is fleeting and I really wanna be here and encourage others to be here whole-heartedly for it.

Elise: Beautiful. As we're talking, I'm thinking about what you're saying about presence and this practice. And even in this conversation, for me, I prepared and I got my little questions on the side here and as we're talking I'm thinking, "come back here, just be fully present to what Lori's saying and trust that, the conversational will flow". So, in each moment there's that capacity to be aware of where your attention is and like coming back to this moment rather than always living slightly ahead of yourself.

Lori Schwenback: That's right. That's really well-said. And part of this moment is an awareness that you have some questions you like to ask too. So, I think they're not mutually exclusive, We can have plans, we have our intentions, aspirations, some structure, while also allowing the organicity if you will or whatever arises to be able to be here with that too, and having that nimbleness is important.

Elise: So, you're saying that it's about whole-heartedness and there's the sublime and there's the difficult, so I think people that start meditation will quickly discover that there is actually quite a lot of unpleasantness that you have to be with, and so people might think, "life is so busy, why would I consciously put aside time to sit down and do something that is making me feel agitated or is boring or all the kinds of difficult feelings that come up." So, what would you say to that? Why would we bother doing that? Is it some kind of masochistic personality that comes to this practice?

Lori Schwenback: One of the things that I really appreciate about the way that I've been trained and how to train others in mindfulness is that there's such a strong integration of this science of practice now. which points to outcomes that for many people and for me sometimes frankly, I know that by doing this, there's been some science that has shown a correlation between practice and

change in the brain in ways that support emotional intelligence and well-being. So, that kind of can keep me there when I'm kind of bored or restless. But I think the most important thing is a point back to experience. So, even if it's boring, even if difficult things come up, there's something if we really track closely enough, that feels enlivening by staying with what's here right now and that ability to stay with it and notice that it shifts and changes which is the good news and bad news of life, everything shifts and changes, there's something empowering about that, about building up muscle, building that capacity to stay with and watch how things shift, watch how things change which is a skill that we desperately all need to have in this life.

Elise: Particularly in such a changing world.

Lori Schwenback: Yes. Personal changes, planetary, social, political. Yes.

Elise: You just touched on this science and I'm obviously a big fan of the science that 's what drew me very deeply into it and this is what you've been teaching a lot in the various programs. Do you wanna share just a couple of highlights from the science? There's so much, but just something that comes to mind that excited you when you discovered it, that mind light up the listener who is newer.

Lori Schwenback: Well, recently I'll start with what's fresh for me, what's alive. I'm currently working with LinkedIn and supporting them in creating compassionate readership training and I'm really doing a deep dive to look at the research on compassion. And one of the things that's fascinating to me is that the research shows that the circuitry or similar circuitry of the brain lights up when we're acting compassionately, when we're orienting towards others with kindness. That same circuitry maps onto the well-being circuitry of our brain. So, we are rewarded, it feels good when we take care of and gift others. And when you're thinking about that... often, I ask some of my participants or students like, "remember the time when helping felt good?" And most of us can

think of that time when we went out of our way to make contact, to make an effort, to just show up, listen, to do something. There's science that shows that we're wired to be rewarded for kindness for generosity for these more pro-social skill sets. So, that's really exciting for me. Another thing again in my personal life that I find interesting is the research on anticipatory anxiety....the amygdala, the part of our brain that's tracking for threat like salience detection, if you have practised staying in the moment, through mindfulness training... A study done where participants were told they were going to be delivered an administration of heat and that was gonna be really hot, so they mapped the amygdala activation of people who were practitioners and people who were really **novice** practitioners. What they found is that the amygdala activated strongly in those people who were not long-term practitioners when they are anticipating the heat, and then both groups when they got applied the heat, the amygdala activated, it's not like it's numbing you out to life, it's like appropriate, like, "oh, this is hot," and then after the heat was removed, again in long-term meditators, their amygdala was still pre-activated. So, that shows that anticipatory anxiety and the post pain rumination was much longer, so this adverse experience when life gets stretched out to anticipating and ruminating. And how many times in my life do I do that, where I'm aware, "oh, my gosh, I have to go to the dentist, I have to have that difficult conversation or something bad", it's not happening right now. So, those are just two of the things personally in life that feel really like, "Wow. The science is supporting this."

Elise: Just to clarify, cause I think you might have said the long-term meditators kept having the amygdala firing. So, just so I'm clear that it was post the event, the amygdala kind of stopped firing as violently in the long-term meditators. Is that correct?

Lori Schwenback: That's right. Sorry that's what I meant to say.

Elise: And that sort of speaks to resilience as well, doesn't it? Because they talk about resilience as being the ability to bounce back and be flexible and this

adaptability, this flexibility in the amygdala being on and off rather than extended on, switched on for too long.

Lori Schwenback: That's right. I think that is really well-said. I'm going use that.

Elise: I think that research, I know that to be true for myself. I laughed with the dentist because I don't like the dentist at all and it's really helped me. My dentist even said to me after a number of years of practice, "you've changed". And it is that Mark Twain thing like, "I've worried about so many things that never actually happened," though that period of anticipatory anxiety, well that's life you can never get back, where you were just worrying about..... You founded an organisation I believe called The Mindfulness Advantage in Women's Leadership. I wonder and this is an area we're interested in, leadership , particularly for women. Can you define what you mean by leadership and also what you've noticed in the teaching around why you went out and created this organisation and how mindfulness can help us be better leaders. I know that's a big question, so... What did you see that was missing that you wanted to solve and how do you see the relationship between the mindfulness and leadership?

Lori Schwenback: First of all, I will start with how I define leadership. It's the ability to influence. And when I speak about influence, it's influencing ourselves, it's influencing the people around us, our friends, our community, it's influencing in our work and globally. I just think that we are desperate for strong leadership in this world regardless of title, but people to step up and say, "this is what matters, this is what I'm willing to risk and willing to have the courage to step in" and it does take courage. And so, why I became really interested in supporting women specifically is that – what I saw consistently in my trainings, and I work with both men and women, is that men needed help regulating their anger and we talked about mindfulness as a way of building emotional intelligence and to regulate that amygdala activity and a lot of the

examples I used were more in the area of fight. Oh, you get that email or something happens like how do you not be reactive. And I see women more often than not with a different response. They might go into freeze, they might tend to the relationship more than they tend to an outcome. And there might be a gap in the courage that's needed to take action. So, I began to look at this and I thought, "wow, there's something in the way that a lot of mindfulness and emotional intelligence trainings are being oriented that is missing a huge swathe of human experience primarily but not exclusively for women, that women who are more – sometimes we call it more communal, connected to relationship, rather than agenda. So, I really looked at, what gets in the way? Why is it, and some of it is in. socialisation maybe specific to families, to cultures for sure, so many women might have a vision of how they want to make an impact, or feel the desire. But they have the beliefs that in the world I'm not good enough, I can't really do it, if I'm too big, someone else could get angry at me or there's only small slices of pie metaphorically. So, I really looked from a self-awareness perspective, for women, what is really getting in the way of you living into the potential you have to make impact, to influence, to ultimately be a leader. And it's through the cultivation of self-awareness that women begin to actually see that, and that is one of the outcomes of mindfulness practice to really look at what is it that is driving you, what is it that has framed your way of seeing yourself and seeing the world.

Elise: Thank you. So, if you could go a little more into self-awareness. Because it's what we're really talking about, when we talk about mindfulness. So, if you could speak a bit more about how mindfulness is a vehicle to self-awareness. So, for the listeners, we're doing this practice, we're trying to do it regularly... On the one hand it's like we're sitting there, sensing our breath and when the mind wanders off, we bring our attention back to the breath – just as one example of the practice. So, can you just pick a path how a practice like that

can support self-awareness? How a practice where we're focusing on the breath can actually cultivate self-awareness?

Lori Schwenback: Yeah. It's a great question. First of all, I want to take a step back slightly just to say, I think that – and it's not just me who thinks this – different types of mindfulness practice have different outcomes. So, if we're looking at focusing on the breath and returning our attention to the breath when it wanders, it's more of a focusing practice, and that can be wonderful in creating sense of calm, and settling the snow globe of the mind... Often, when we're distracted by the pull of attention, pull of our mind that is leaning to the future, leaning to the past or it's ruminating, it's hard for us to get clear. So, by focusing attention on the breath, what we're doing is we're disciplining the mind, training the mind to not get spun off into some of those other thoughts or emotions. So, as a foundation for self-awareness, it's building that muscle of first recognising when the mind has wandered and bringing it back. That is a super power, really. Bringing a wandering mind back, the outcome of it is focus, the practice is bringing the wandering mind back. Because people think, “oh, but I can't do this, my mind always wanders”. Of course it does. The practice is just bringing it back, the outcome being focus. So, with that settle... And I used the snow globe analogy. When you set a snow globe down, the snow settles and what happens.... more clarity. You can actually see the little figurine. **S**o when my mind is not activated, I begin to be able to see myself a little bit more clearly. And from a science perspective, one of the things that's happening, is that the settling is settling the nervous system in such a way that I'm not in that fight or flight reactivity. I have access to other capacities in my brain so that I can actually see and think and reflect more clearly. So, that practice of focus foundationally supports self-awareness because it reduces the noise a little bit. The other practices of being able to just notice what's happening as it's happening without getting hooked is called open awareness. This is more the flexibility of the mind rather than the focus of the mind. So I

begin to be aware that my awareness is different than the contents of my awareness. So, again, that helps me to not get hooked. So, if an emotion or thought comes up, I see that, as just one phenomena that is rising in my experience. How does that help self-awareness? Again, I'm not getting hooked by the contents and I might become aware, like, "oh, there's this phenomenon of this belief coming through a lot that if I'm really strong in the world, I might upset others, that's connected to maybe something in my past, in my childhood," so I have a bigger screen basically to see, and that diminishes the power that that has on me.

Elise: Beautiful. That's really well put. I think for the listeners who are newer to this concept, and again just to clarify that this is kind of getting into it more down the line, a more advanced practice. If listeners are thinking, what's this awareness. Do you want to share a metaphor: there are many metaphors to kind of make it more tangible for people that might be newer to this around that separation of awareness and the contents in awareness...

Lori Schwenback: Sure. This is a metaphor that I often use is standing on a train platform – this came to me years ago as I was travelling through Europe when I was on a train platform in Italy and the ground was shaking and I could see the train coming down and I was like, oh, I have a choice I could get on this train or I could let it go by. So, that metaphor is useful for me. So, thoughts are like trains, emotions are like trains and I can see the train and it has a placard that might say "thoughts about my boss" or "worry thoughts about my mother or my holidays" and I feel that emotion or the thought. It's not that I'm trying to jump on the truck and stop those trains. Cause that doesn't work. But if I stay on the platform and I notice and I name, oh, there's the thought about my mother, there's the worry about Christmas holidays or whatever it is, I still can feel the train, I smell it, the ground shakes, I feel the emotions. So, it's not about not having emotion but it's about recognising that I can have a choice of getting on a one track mind and losing myself on that thought and the rumination....

the mind likes to proliferate. And when I catch myself on the train, because I jump on trains all the time, that I recognise, oh, I'm on the train. I find the breath, and the breath is a good way to anchor and I just step back and I name it, oh, thoughts about my mother, thoughts about my boss, worry about the talk that I had with Elise, did I speak clearly not. *Whatever* it is that comes through and sometimes there's a phrase that we use in cognitive psychology "name it, to tame it" and there is some research that naming what we're experiencing has impact in diminishing the charge on it. So, that train platform, naming the trains, jumping back off when I find myself caught in it: super helpful. SO helpful that I had a client once who had got a tattoo of a train on her arm.

Elise: And the other arm "name it to tame it". (laughter) So, practically, for the listeners I guess this is something that can be used in those moments where we're feeling overcome by some kind of emotion, or we recognise that we're just caught in worry and this is a new perspective to be able to have, that helps us just have some space as you say, to not be in the train that's taking us to a destination that we haven't really signed up for – which could be greater anxiety or depression or whatever – and just staying steady on the platform.

Lori Schwenback: And if you'd like, I can give you a very simple practice of how to activate this.

Elise: I'd love to hear it.

Lori Schwenback: Would you like to try it?

Elise: Yes.

Lori Schwenback: So, this is not something that I've invented but I use it liberally because I think it's really effective. And it's a three-breath practice. And the instructions are these: so, for the first breath the instruction is to give full and complete attention to this sensation of breath. So, for the first breath – and I'll just give you these instructions and then we'll try it – the first

instruction is full and complete attention to the breath, so the breath fills your awareness. The second breath, the invitation is to relax the body... jaw, belly, soften. The third breath is to ask yourself the question, “what’s most important now?”, and see what arises.

Elise: I love it.

Lori Schwenback: First, attention to the breath, second, relax the body, third, ask yourself the question “what’s most important now” and see what arises. And we’ll try to practice and after we do I’ll tell you a little bit about the neuroscience of why this is so effective.

Elise: I’m really excited because I feel like you’ve just given thousands of people such a great tool that people are just going to do it ... because it’s so simple.

Lori Schwenback: Okay, let’s try it. As a way of just gathering attention, let’s just start the big full cleansing inhalation, exhalation and if you’d like to close your eyes just to minimise visual distraction, go ahead. So, for this next breath all you wanna do is get a full and complete attention to the sensation of breath. Second breath, relax the body. The third breath, ask, “what’s most important now?” and see what arises.

Elise: Love it. Thank you for sharing that.

Lori Schwenback: What’s most important to you right now?

Elise: Well, I just felt like to stay present, to really stay present and curious in this conversation.

Lori Schwenback: I have to stay present too.

Elise: That’s great, and what were you going to share about something you said about the neuroscience...

Lori Schwenback: Well, here's the thing: have you ever had – and this happened to me in the middle of the night last night when I was thinking about a presentation of a couple of days ago wildly jettisoned from Bhutan. I woke up in the middle of the night, thinking, “oh, I should've done this differently,” and what I tried – which does not work – which is “stop thinking about that.” Oh, I'm on that train. “Stop thinking about that,” but what does work is giving your mind an attention, something to occupy itself. So, full and complete attention to the breath. Relaxing the body, plus attention to the breath is the opposite of the fight or flight body posture which is tension in the belly, tension in the jaw that kind of contraction. So, when we pay attention to the breath, we bring a softness to the body and then we can ask that question “what's most important now”. We're able to generate an answer, a response that's coming from a body that is more relaxed. Because if I was to ask you that question when you're in the middle of your day running around like, “oh, what's most important now, it's like get out of my way, that was my parking spot...” The mind generates ideas, thoughts, impressions in large part based on how our body is. So, when we can relax the body, that helps us get back on the train platform more quickly and it creates that space so that we can notice what's happening.

Elise: I think the other thing that's great about it is that a lot of people listening, have the issue of how do we fit this practice into our lives. And there's that rigidity in that because this practice has come from monastic settings and people think if I'm not doing 30 minutes every day 7 days a week, I'm failing. I love this practice because it's one of those practices that there's no excuse – I mean it is so simple but does have an effect and if we did this multiple times throughout the day, just create these pauses, and that ability to be more aware of what's happening....

Lori Schwenback: Absolutely. And I'm sure as you know like longer practice creates more benefit. But this kind of binary idea that that's only what's valuable, no. and like you said this kind of bite-sizing. Bringing these practices

to Bhutan which is a country founded in practice, like deep, forever, I thought how am I, a western woman going to go in with something, there's kind of concern I had, really both **is this** of value and, who am I to go in there. And one of the things that is so beautiful is that in their culture meditation is what monastics do in the monasteries. And so, they were so excited about what we call these little micropractices – that they're doing longer practices but made it accessible in their life. It's like, wow, I get to have this impact, I can do this, I don't have to do half an hour a day.

Elise: I completely understand the discomfort that you must have had. It's like this really cool full circle where, you know, that rich history and tradition can add to the west and offered us so much and then we took it and adapted as well, like added and adapted and then come back to that context in offering in this modern ways of doing it. Even though you still do the extent of practice. You've come from the corporate where you teach a lot in corporate. I've noticed when I taught in corporate that there's resistance that people do feel that meditation might slow them down or make them less motivated or lose their drive and ambition. What would you say to that? What do you think happens?

Lori Schwenback: If I'm a manager, I'm gonna want people who work for me to know that they actually want to work there, so slowing down and checking in and seeing what's true for me. But from a motivation perspective we actually optimise when we are more efficient. When we are distractedthe whole myth of multitasking, this term has been used a lot – this is attention economy that attention is always getting pulled, there's a consequence. There's a consequence on our well-being, there's also a consequence on how effective we can be at work, how able we are to connect with other people and in a skilful way, how good we are at accessing creativity, to have the ability to find perspective, so that well, it might feel in the moment and certainly I have this perception as well, that taking time to do three breaths, 5 minutes, half an hour or whatever it is, might be taking away something, it's actually addictive

because this idea that in order to be efficient, we have to push ourselves all the time, is just actually such a myth. And so, the pausing, the breathing actually allows us to optimise, allows us to have more access to the internal resources to be successful at work and in relationships.

Elise: Thank you. Another thing I wanted to ask you about setting boundaries. Any thoughts around how mindfulness and this cultivation of presence or awareness can help us be more effective as setting boundaries. And you might like to explain what boundaries are for those who might not be so familiar with that psychological term.

Lori Schwenback: Again, this is something that I found really important for working with women again, not to generalise but I did see that this was harder. I just worked with a woman, an individual coaching client just earlier today where we were exploring this very thing. A boundary how I define it is an ability to know when a limit has been reached. So there is a clarity internally around there is a “no” inside, like if a request is made this actually I don’t have a capacity for it, I can’t do this, I can’t be efficient, also setting boundaries in how other people treat you. It’s basically a limit setting within ourselves and for other people within relationships. So, it’s a limit setting. So, how mindfulness can help... I’m just thinking of this person that I just worked with who conditioned her whole life to give to others, say yes and people please, so she overrode her own capacity to be effective or to take care of herself because she was very interested in saying yes, that was part of her identity, of caring for others, of being **liked**. With mindfulness, we’re just slowing down and just feeling what does it feel like to say yes all the time when it’s really beyond what you have the capacity for and it’s generally complex, it’s not like “oh, forget it, I don’t wanna do this. I actually want these persons to like me, that’s important and I don’t have the time in my calendar to do this.” And this conflict generally what arises and then we have to explore what do we feel like if you just first offer yourself kindness and not judging yourself that you might have had that

conflict and then exploring with a little more granularity and a little more clarity the impact of saying yes all the time for example, or of not being able to make request when you're worried another person's gonna get angry at you but just really studying. And then asking what resources do you need to support you. Being aware of the impact.

Elise: So, in a sense it is that thing of shifting from the automatic pilot or your habitual way of doing things, because that's how you have been conditioned, it's family culture, it's identity. And so the mindfulness opens up a way to stop before you give answer and just feel into -"can I, can't I" just explore what's actually there and that eventually will open up new pathways, new ways that you can be, not necessarily familiar to you because of your background conditioning identity.

Lori Schwenback: Right. And as I said earlier, that's where courage is needed. This is bumping up against deep conditioning identity, safety in the world. And it might be that you pause before reacting, it might be that you say yes and they afterwards you feel really bad and then how to go back and take an action that will course correct. So, a lot of courage and resilience can be needed.

Elise: So, you've been practicing for many years and this is your whole life now and I want to ask how you manage personally – this is a challenge that I'm working on and for those who are more experienced, they have been practising and then there are those moments where you just so badly screw up and fall into your lowest self. And there's shame... Not shame, well maybe a little bit of shame, a bit of like self-criticism, a bit of "why is this still me after so many years of practice".

Lori Schwenback: And I'm a mindfulness teacher.

Elise: And my partner can vouch for this as can my toddler probably if she had the words to communicate it. But how do you navigate that? What do you do?

How are you working with that in those moments where... We're just human, we've just got big emotions...

Lori Schwenback: Yes, that's such an important question and I think many things arise. As a teacher, I come up against it, in order to be **credible** I have to be perfect at this. And that's very common for women I would say. Not just women, for sure. But what actually becomes the teaching is how we show up and how vulnerable and how real we can be with it. So, when something comes up, I feel myself triggered or I'm not acting in a way that reflects mindful awareness or kindness even, it's just that pause of offering self-compassion, which I think is so important. And I love **Kristen Neff's** steps. The mindfulness is the first step that I'm recognising what's here, it's not going into defensiveness or denial, recognising, oh, it doesn't feel good that I was reactive in that moment, I was judgmental. So, that recognition that one's here. The second: common humanity. You ask me a question, I say, oh, yes, me too. Everybody has.... and I've had great transgressions in my life and little moments where it doesn't feel so good. So, that whole range of being human is part of the deal. And, there's a little voice inside that comes up like "oh, this will be a good teaching story" and then, how to be kind with ourselves. And this is a revolution, especially for those of us who are perfectionists, care a lot about what the people think about us, and I don't wanna cause harm to people and consciously or unconsciously I have and I will continue to do that. But the learning from it comes through being able to recognise it and being kind . So I turn towards myself, and that's when the transformation comes. Denying it or wishing it wasn't there which is the opposite of self-compassion, I don't learn. I don't grow.

Elise: Yeah. Thank you. That definitely resonates with me and that's the only place to turn to, self compassion, And it is so comforting to tap into that number 2 point that you raise which is the common humanity. I think that's really reassuring as well. It's like we're all in this together, we're all trying our best.

I'm aware of the time, I wanted to ask you if there is a teaching, a favourite story or teaching from the ancient teachings that you've come upon – could be a long time ago or recently - that you just really love, that speaks to something about this.

Lori Schwenback: I was just looking at a poem that's on my desk, it's not ancient, and I'm going to read it, this is by poet David Whyte who is still alive, not ancient. And I'm just gonna turn back to that question like what is leadership and what is influence and how to be with ourselves. So, David Whyte says: "One of the powerful dynamics of leadership is being visible. One of the vulnerabilities of being visible is that when you are visible you can be seen, and when you can be seen you can be touched and when you can be touched you can be hurt. So all of us have these elaborate ways of looking as if we are showing up and not showing up." So, again be fully present and that vulnerability and courage that takesmindfulness is the turning towards what's here, how can I support what's here and a recognition that who we are, affects... like there's a ripple effect of who we are and to be intentional in showing up with kindness, with presence, and in so doing so summoning up the courage so that I can really be visible, so that I can be seen with my full humanity.

Elise: I think that's a lovely place to round off the conversation. Thank you so much. And wishing you well on all of your teaching and training and hopefully you'll come back to Australia one day. Was there anything that you would like to offer the listeners on this practice: maybe a piece of advice or something that someone gave you, a teacher, that really helped you to kind of navigate any of the difficult obstacles that come up on this meditation path.

Lori Schwenback: I'm not thinking of anything specifically from one teacher but just the impression that I have from a lot of teachers that have really shaped me which is again this attitude of meeting ourselves in the moment with kindness. So, whatever your intention is or whatever shows up, the ability to

turn towards and hold oneself as an ally in the path of being human including your meditation practice, your mindfulness practice, whatever it is but just that invitation to really cultivate kindness towards yourself. In different ways, many different teachers have offered that to me and it's been really transformative for me.

Elise: Thank you so much, Lori. It's been a pleasure.

Lori Schwenback: My pleasure. Take care.