

## MindFIT Podcast - Buddhist Roots of Mindfulness with Dr. Jennifer Bright Transcript

Lauren Brown:

Hi, and welcome to the University of Toronto's MindFIT lecture series. On this podcast, we discuss the Buddhist roots of mindfulness along with current issues in mindfulness and yoga. My name is Lauren Brown, and I'm the Mindfulness, Meditation and Yoga Program Coordinator for the Division of Student Life. Thank you for listening.

So welcome, and a welcome to Dr. Jennifer Bright, who will be speaking with us today. I've had the pleasure of hearing Jenny speak in multiple locations, and she is a fabulous, fabulous speaker. So you're in for a wonderful lesson today.

Before I hand things over, I am going to read the Land Acknowledgement for where I am zooming in from today, which is out in East York. The land I am on today is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples. I also acknowledge that Toronto was covered by Treaty 13, signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaty, signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands. Thank you. And over to you, Jenny.

Dr. Jennifer Bright:

Thank you very much. It's a really pleasure to be here, and it was a pleasure last week to meet you at the Buddhist Forum, so that was really nice as well. So I'm just going to start sharing my slides here. Oops, play from the start. There we go. Are you able to see these? No, I can't see. Oops, sorry. Hold on just a second. Technology again. What did I do after this part again? There we go. Excellent, thank you.

So let's just start though, before we get into the slideshow, why don't we just sort of ground ourselves and to settle into a sort of non-anxious presence. I'm sure maybe we rushed to get here, we're coming from different places. And we're going to spend an hour together, and so let's just find a nice comfortable place for us to be able to have a few, couple of minutes of just taking some breaths and finding our non-anxious selves, and opening ourselves up to learning and to openness to one another.

So I'm just going to ring my singing bowl to start the meditation, and I invite you to breathe. I trust that many of you have your practices, to take some deep breaths and to breathe naturally or wherever you need to be right now, to just take that space to find sort of your calm and settled self.

So come back when you're ready and able and willing. I just want to thank you all again for being here. It's such a pleasure to share this material with you. I'm teaching a course at Emmanuel College right now on Spiritually Integrated Mindfulness for Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy, Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy. My students at Emmanuel are mostly doing Master's. It's Master's of Pastoral Studies, but within a very short time it'll be Master of Psychospiritual Care. Some of my students are... Which is a great movement forward because it's getting us out of Christian traditions, but into something more open. Some of my students are Masters of Divinity who will become ministers or things like this. So this is a fun course, because it's an elective for many students, and it's Spiritually Integrated Mindfulness.

So I'm sort of drawing a bit from this course and sort of the things it follows a little bit what I do, just so you get a sense of what I mean by spiritually integrated. But first I provide us some context and some background to think about mindfulness, maybe different ways. I'll make a PDF and make these slides available. And at the back of the slides, I have quite an extensive... I have basically all of the readings, the course readings, the recommended and the required readings for this mindfulness class. So if anything piques your interest, you can find it there.

So let me move ahead to my next slide. So the first thing that I want to pose to us is, is mindfulness Buddhist? I just invite you to reflect just for a few moments. I have a lot of time for us to reflect and absorb things. I won't talk, talk, talk, talk. But is mindfulness Buddhist? Because we typically equate or we think about mindfulness coming from Buddhism. And of course, in our Western sense it does, in the sense that our understanding of mindfulness generally speaking came from Western Buddhist practitioners who learned about mindfulness and learned about meditation and the Zen tradition and the Theravada and the Tibetan traditions.

And then, they saw this mindfulness and they thought, "I could really use this in my context, whether it's in medicine or in therapy or different places." And so, it's interesting how mindfulness is very much sort of equated with being a Buddhist practice, but in fact, we find mindfulness or meditation traditions or practices throughout all of the world's spiritual and religious traditions.

And so, even though we think of mindfulness coming from Buddhism, it's a little deeper, a little more complicated or complex than that. And even though, and I'll say at the beginning because I'm going to talk a bit about mindfulness-based modalities in so far as like NBCT, mindfulness-based cognitive behavioral therapy or mindfulness dialectical behavioral therapy. But a lot of how we understand mindfulness does come from two Buddhist sutras, namely The Foundations of Mindfulness. Some of you will know this is the Satipatthana sutra, and so the four foundations. I'm sure you all know. I don't want to get lost in details because I have this habit. And the other one is The Mindfulness of Breathing from the Anapanasati sutra.

So while yes, mindfulness has great influence from Buddhism and Western interpretations and the borrowings of Buddhism, is that actually the Buddha was very clear. And of course, the

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Buddha lived during the time where there was a lot of Indian traditions around him where people of course had yogic meditative practices. But he was very clear that he did not invent meditation or mindfulness. He discovered it in his own path or in his own way.

So it's always been clear that it is open or available to anybody. This isn't something specific to Buddhism. And indeed, we find that through around our world's traditions, there are mindfulness or meditation-type practices. So next semester I'm very excited. I've just been looking at a syllabus for a new course at Emmanuel that's going to focus on Islamic mindfulness.

And so, interestingly enough, when we open ourselves up to it, our spiritual traditions all have these similar ideas. So for example, in Christianity, you have this idea of centering prayer. And some of you may have heard of this. It's been in the tradition for a long time, but the esoteric or those mystical traditions were sort of suppressed for a while. But in the last hundred years or so, Thomas Merton and these people have come out with these centering prayer practices. I encourage you to check it out on YouTube. You can follow along. And they're really quite interesting, but they're sort of breathing, centering and then breathing exercises. Part of it is you breathe out and breathe in. And so, you might say, "God is love." So you might say, "God, love," and sort of bring these words in and out.

And the point is to connect with the divine. It's to connect with God in particularly so that God, you feel that connection God within you and that God can move in you. And so, it has this sort of mystical experience of oneness with God. And so, I've done them. They're really quite... It's interesting, you're sort of finding God within you. It's quite interesting.

In Islam, we have the Muraqaba. I'll say that more slowly. It's the Muraqaba. And this is also very much now you can read articles in the bibliography about how this is being integrated with, it's a mindfulness practice and integrate with psychotherapy. And it comes from sort of Sufi esoteric practices and knowledge. And again, it's this idea of being able to encounter God directly. And then again, when you encounter God in this direct way, there's a sort of transcendence that takes place.

Again, and then in Judaism, also has a mindfulness or a meditation tradition that involves a lot of visualizations, prayers, breath work. It is known as, or a common translation of meditation is Hitbodedut. And again, this is again a meeting with God within us, but meeting... And in the Judaic tradition, it's often broken up, but then with sort of prayer and then contemplation and prayer and perhaps visualization.

And then, of course, in Hinduism you have Dana, which is, I'm sure many people know more about this tradition, but it's actually a very high yogic state, and you have this complete absorption with the ultimate or the divine or the absolute. So again, it's within this sort of feeling of oneness. And so, you'll see in all of these is that there's some sort of union with some transcendent, whether it's emptiness or whether it's a God figure or something like this.

What is also interesting about these and brings us back to when we think of contemporary mindfulness is the fact that all of these traditions, all of these things I just sort of very briefly described to you, they all take place or they flourish and have been embedded in ethical frameworks and theological or spiritual or cosmological worldviews. These are not separated out from sort of basic ways of being and knowing your place in the universe and your place in the world or your place in society, that these all come with ethical frameworks. And these practices are thought of being, I don't want to put this in a gatekeeper sort of way, but sort of like you have to be leading some sort of ethical life to be really able to engage, not engage, but these are for people that are really working on their spirituality, if I put it that way.

But just keep this in mind that this idea is that these come from an ethical framework. And also, let's take a moment to think about what the intention of these are, or what is the purpose. And a religious studies word might be what is the soteriological aim? And soteriology is really the mechanism by which we breach salvation or we're liberated or awakened or something like this.

And so, just reflect for a moment perhaps, what is the goal of this? Or think of your own and perhaps if you have your own religious tradition, what would be the goal of your spiritual tradition? What's the goal of this?

Well, I've sort of given the answer, and the explanation is the goal is to achieve these high states of transcendent connection with the sacred. Right? It's a very deep transformative place where we connect with the sacred, however we define that. And ultimately, that's sort of the goal of these practices. And sure, yes, they will bring you some sort of secondary benefits. I'm sure it feels very blissful. There's feelings of bliss and joy in the transcendence, and so this helps us feel good.

But the goal isn't to feel good. The goal isn't for mental wellness, not that that's not also a side, a secondary thing. Right? That it is good if you're in this sort of practice where you can settle and reach these high sort of practical states. Certainly that is healthy for you, but that's not the intention of them, it's just a byproduct.

And I think that when we get into thinking about what does spiritually integrated mindfulness look like, intention is very important, and what is your goal? Is your goal for wellness? Is your goal to have less stress? Those are all good goals. But I think as we go through this presentation is that mindfulness at its heart has something else going on to it, that there's something spiritual, that there's something that we're coming back to. Do I say anything else about this? Right.

So let's just hold this in our mind about what the goal of these are. So I'm just going to say a couple of words about secular mindfulness. And so, when Kabat-Zinn and others very cleverly were able to sort of fit... Right? It's quite interesting. They were able to pull stuff out of Buddhist mindfulness practice and apply them into secular spaces.

And they were pressured to do so because we live in a secular society. And they worked for big medical places or different organizations that weren't going to let in this Buddhism stuff or this religious stuff. And so, they really had to, and they really feared that if they didn't put this into a secular sort of framework, a lot of people wouldn't be interested in it. And they thought that this could help a lot of people. So their reasoning was, "This is for the benefit for the most people that we believe that we can do."

And so, I think that's quite fair. I'm not actually really critical of that point, myself personally. This is sort of the environment that they were working in. Some people have had some criticism, maybe some of you have heard of these, they call this maybe stealth or backdoor Buddhism. That the idea is that you're not saying it's Buddhist, but this is essentially sort of Buddhist. And so, there's been quite a few like Ron Purser with McMindfulness, there's been a big sort of almost backlash to the secularization of mindfulness.

But my view of it is that it was sort of something that had to happen to get us to where we are. We build on what we're doing. But not to say that there aren't consequences I think, which have been written about, and again look at the bibliography, about removing the ethical framework when we take something out of its spiritual or theological worldview. When we take it out, there are some risks to that.

And there's been some interesting studies looking at some of these risks. And before I get into more specifics, generally for some people, the focus on the self makes them become self-absorbed. Right? Without this ethical framework, without the spiritual, without this maybe joining with the divine or the sacred, when this is sort of a wellness, "I just want to feel better and look better."

And basically what happens, there's been some really interesting studies that show that there's a group of people, one study, a group of people had never practiced mindfulness, had never no exposure to it. They took a few, then they were put through this program, they did some mindfulness. And it was a secular framed mindfulness. And what happened is some of them developed real spiritual superiority, meaning that, "I meditate every day. I have this great self-awareness." And maybe you know some of those people, but really have a high horse about their mindfulness practice.

Also, there was some real uptick in narcissism. And I think if you've been around the community long enough, you can sort of see how that happens, the sort of narcissism that you think that you're very special. I think there's already seeds of it there, but mindfulness without its ethical framework can actually bring out some maybe propensities or tendencies within us that might not actually be that good for us or the people around us.

And of course, there's been the corporate mindfulness. And this is the issue that gets a bit more to social justice and to the point about how... What was I going to say about that? Is that basically the idea is if you worked for a company that's not very nice and you don't have good

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working conditions or you're doing something that might be with your values or your morals, and instead of speaking up or working against the system or moving for change, it's like, "We'll give you some mindfulness so you'll accept your situation as it is. Just be calm about coming into the office five days a week and working 10 hours" or whatever that is.

And so, there's been a lot of criticism about the fact that it takes what are actually a lot of social problems and inequities of all sorts, from racial to financial, all of these sorts of inequities that we live in our world, and sort of putting it on the individual to then, "Deal with this, and deal with it mindfully." And again, this only makes sense or can happen when it's taken out of that spiritual context, when it's put in that secular public consumption, a bit of that capitalist framework. So there's been benefits to secular mindfulness, but there's also been consequences.

And the other thing I want to touch upon too is who is mindfulness for? And this brings us back to a bit of the social justice. And you think about who mindfulness programs are for, who has access to them, the time, money, these sorts of things, and also the colonization of mindfulness. I won't say too much about this because I'm just being a bit mindful of time. But you'll see in the sources, especially in the earlier my bibliography, you can see some of the things that I'm talking about there, about the colonization of mindfulness if you're interested to take a look.

And I also want to point to also in the bibliography, one of the most important articles you'll ever read if you're a mindfulness practitioner, by Rhonda Magee, who is a Black woman, mindfulness scholar and practitioner and teacher. And she has this article, I always teach it, Teaching Mindfulness With Mindfulness of Race and Other Forms of Diversity. And I don't think we'll have time for it, or perhaps we will for a minute. Let's just try this for a minute.

But it's an interesting idea. She has a meditation on the skin, right? Meditation on skin color, skin texture, temperature. And it's interesting, skin is the largest organ of our body. It is the most prominent marker for our societies, the color of our skin. It leads to a lot of bias and discrimination. And so, she has students and I have students in my mindfulness class in pairs do this meditation on their skin.

And it's really interesting what comes up. Just take a few moments just right now, just a few moments. We'll give us 30 seconds, maybe a bit longer, just to meditate, just to close your eyes and meditate on your skin. Think of its color, its texture, what it means for you, how you move in the world with this color of skin.

Our skin is a culmination of all of our ancestors. And I'm curious, I'm just guessing, that maybe you haven't done this before. This is not a popular mindfulness exercise. We do body scans, we all do sorts of things, but we don't do skin scans or ideas of meditation on the skin. So I just really want to sort of point you to this, these other ways of thinking about mindfulness that are maybe not as mainstream.

I'm not going to talk about these, except to say in my mindfulness class, these are sort of the four modalities that I get to in the third part or the last part of the semester. And what's interesting is what we see, I've sort of put them in order of when they've appeared chronologically. And so, mindfulness-based stress reduction, of course, is the most well-known, came up first, became a model for the other ones. Then came a mindfulness-based cognitive behavioral therapy. Again, very sort of in that secular and very useful modalities. These are great modalities. I know people, they've really worked for them.

But it's really interesting how once you get to mindfulness-based dialectical behavior therapy, you kind of see spirituality starting to sneak back in. It's interesting that there seems to be a movement towards recognizing that actually mindfulness brings up a lot of spiritual sorts of things. And then, when you get to acceptance and commitment therapy, its focus is in large part on values. And what are values? Right? So what is spirituality? Meaning. Purpose. Identity, who am I in the world? Community, our sense of belonging. Our values, our morals. Hope. And connection with self, others, and the sacred. So as much as mindfulness has been secularized, interestingly, it's moving back, because you can't move away from these things. These things are spiritual, and mindfulness brings up these things.

So for the rest of my presentation, I'm going to run you through. I just have a couple of slides, and I'm just going to read some things to you and give you some space, some time to pause. And you might want to just reflect on it or you might want to write it down, sort of what is going on with you spiritually speaking, if you have a mindfulness practice.

So find your comfortable space again, and consider how do you experience your spirituality and your practice of mindfulness? And I invite you to consider what spiritual insights about yourself have you gained from mindfulness? And how does your mindfulness practice speak to your values?

So I'm hoping that these questions have sort of, and maybe you've already thought of these things and this is nothing new to you, but to think about how perhaps you already have a bit of a spiritually integrated mindfulness practice. Right? And I'm curious, maybe I'll finish this and we can share afterwards, but I'd love to hear from you what came up for you. Because I just love hearing, because we're all different. Right?

And so, we come up with these different ways that we actually realize that there actually is spirituality in our practice already. Because it can't help when we become more self-aware and more aware of what's happening around us, and we can name our emotions and we can have all those benefits that mindfulness can bring for us, it gets us in touch with ourselves, with our more authentic selves. It gets us in touch with our sense of how we belong and perhaps how we might be implicitly putting this, interpreting this into our own spiritual or cosmological worldviews. So there's lots of implicit ways that we're already doing this, lots of them. And so, let's be mindful of this as maybe you keep practicing.

And the next questions I'm going to ask you to reflect on, these are more about intentions, is being intentional in spiritually integrating mindfulness practice. So a lot of the work I do with my students, because they'll all be psychotherapists or spiritual care clinicians, which you have to be a psychotherapist as well. So they'll be therapists. And so, they have to be able to facilitate doing this for other people, to help draw both for them their implicit. Part of when we do a spiritual assessment with people, we do sort of assess. I know some people aren't comfortable with the word assess, but we'll say assess because you know what I mean. But we do assess for implicit source of spirituality like connecting, going for a walk of nature. Walking in nature is an inherently spiritual sort of act actually. Right? There's lots, even knitting or baking or volunteering or doing all sorts of things are implicitly spiritual.

And then, something explicit is something that's more intentionally what I would say, probably more religiously-focused or from a religious or spiritual tradition. Sort of the things I mentioned earlier, if you look at all of our great world traditions, religious and spiritual traditions, they all have this aspect of mindfulness. And so, when we're working with patients or clients, we're often actually trying to draw these sources out and how they're meaningful for them, and then integrate these with a mindfulness practice.

So I'm just going to give you, again, a few moments to reflect or maybe write down what your answers are to these questions in regards to your own mindfulness practice. So what is your goal or your intention for your mindfulness practice? What is your end game here? And what can you draw from, from within your own spiritual or religious tradition or your spiritual worldview or your cosmology, what is something in there that you could maybe draw into a mindfulness practice, whether as a visualization or a focusing of words or reading a sacred text and being mindful of it. What from those traditions, whether they're religious or spiritual or what they are for you that you can draw from? Perhaps this is the religions of your ancestors.

I'd also like to invite you to consider, what is the sacred for you? How do you experience the sacred? Where do you feel it?

And lastly, I invite you to think about or feel about what mindfulness your practice of mindfulness makes possible not only for you, but how are you seeing it as it works in the world or even the universe, something bigger than yourself. What does mindfulness do for you in society? You doing mindfulness, what does that do for a wider world, thinking of your system of interpretation.

So I hope that these reflection questions have been helpful for you in thinking about how you might integrate spirituality, or how you already are and how you might be a bit more intentional about it. And I can say that when you add this intentionality part, when you have a clear sense of what your goal is and that goal, it's okay if a goal is to have less stress, to deal with depression. Those are all great goals, and mindfulness can certainly help with that.



But it also might be helpful for you too to think about beyond that, too. It depends on your orientation, whether it's beyond or deeper, but to think about when you can intentionally integrate your own spirituality with this, I think it makes it that much more powerful. Because I think that these traditions come from spiritual, mindfulness comes from spiritual traditions. I think it's an innate capacity that many of us have. And despite our best efforts to be secular about the whole business, we sort of are always drawn back to the spiritual because it draws it back to ourselves and to our existence, and to the nature of what reality is. Because mindfulness kind of gets at that in some ways, if you take it that far.

But I hope that this has been helpful. I'll just show you and then I'll stop sharing, oh, here we go, just to show that I do have... Yeah. I think there's four or five pages of bibliography here. But these, like I said, are all of the readings that I assign for this class. Some of them are more based assuming that you are the therapist, but I still think that they can be quite useful for you. And then, you'll see quite a few resources and studies on how you integrate specific religious or spiritual traditions with mindfulness. And also, the last ones are on mindfulness and spiritual care and sort of narrative therapy, so I really like those ones as well.

So I'll stop sharing and thank you for your kind attention, and wanted to open the floor up for questions.

Lauren Brown:

Thank you, Jenny. If anybody has questions, you can either pop them into the chat and I can read them out, or you can just turn your camera on or mic on, whatever you like. We're a nice small group tonight. Is it Rena or Rena? Did you have a question? I see that you unmuted, but I'm not hearing you, so I'm not sure.

I will go ahead and pose one question that's coming to mind from me, Jenny. It's interesting you mentioned Ron Purser and McMindfulness. And right around that era when that article came out, there was a concept of spiritual bypass that was being talked about a lot. I wonder if you could sort of shed some light on what that means for folks here and for me, too.

Dr. Jennifer Bright:

Yeah. That's a great question. And it's funny, because there's a few different ways of approaching it actually. It's sort of multidimensional in some ways. But spiritual bypassing is sort of when you're using spirituality or spiritual practices to sort of bypass deeper stuff that's going on. And so, say for example, I've got a deep pile of shame or guilt or having some stuff happening. And I just go into a mindful state and I just don't think about it, and I just sort of let it go and I'm just, "Everything is fine. I'm doing my mindfulness. I feel like I'm floating, my feet aren't even touching the ground. I'm so happy." And it's when people can use, and this can be not just mindfulness, but we find ways, but it's when we use spiritual mindfulness, we spiritually use mindfulness practices to bypass what's going on.

Another good example you'll see is a lot, or all really, most of our religious traditions, we have these hand fidgety things like mala beads, right? And so, we're tick, tick, tick on our beads or things like this. And so, sometimes again, there can be really something deep going on with you and like, "Oh no, but I'm good. I'm doing all of my circumambulations and I'm doing all my prostrations. I'm doing all my beads and I'm doing all my prayers. I'm going to the temple, I'm making my offerings. Everything's fine." It's when we were not really...

And then, other ways too, I've heard it spoken about, which seemed at first to me to be a bit different, but I am starting to warm up and get what this person was talking about, is sometimes in spiritual or religious communities, there can be real harm and some real bad behavior: abuse, sexual abuse and things like this. And spiritual bypassing can happen when you, or say you are a follower of somebody or in a religious tradition, and one of your teachers is accused of this or has been in credibly accused. And when you just are just like, "Nope, they're my guru." And you just keep sailing through, and you just kind of spiritually bypass that there's actually some problems here.

So it's this idea that you can spiritually bypass not just stuff within you, but maybe stuff within the tradition. So if there's abuse of things happening, or say you belong to an organization that has some really transphobic sorts of beliefs, that this is something in the community. But this is your community, you don't want to leave it. You're kind of uncomfortable with it, so you just sort of spiritually bypass it. So I think that that's also sort of maybe a valid way. In some ways, it's like a crutch. Yeah.

Lauren Brown:

Yeah. Thank you for that. That's great for folks to sort of get a sense of what that can look like, avoiding the difficult to stay in the sort of comfort or to find comfort, as opposed to managing some of those more difficult things. We have a question in the chat, and I think this is a fantastic question. "Can you practice mindfulness without believing in the divine?"

Dr. Jennifer Bright:

Yeah, sure, of course. Yeah. That is an excellent question. Yeah. Of course, Buddhists weren't... Of course, there is bodhisattva, and it's a bit more complicated. Buddhism isn't as atheistic as we imagine it in the West. But no, certainly, that's not a common practice in Buddhism. And also nature, there's other forms. That's the question I asked you. What is sacred for you? Right? Is that it might not be the divine.

And even for religious traditions, I know in the Jewish tradition, there are people who have real spiritual maturity or do their Judaic practices, go to synagogue, but God is not part of their theology, actually. Right? We don't want to get stuck in thinking that religion needs to have God, or that you have to believe in God to be spiritual. Right? Because that's just a, I don't know, that's a... I've been hearing this word a lot lately, the spiritual gatekeeping, so I'm trying

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it out in different contexts to see. But yeah, and I think that's a great question, because the sacred is what's sacred for you. Thank you for that question.

Lauren Brown:

Great question. Anyone else with a question? Something that's sort of anything kind of rattling around or developing?

Dr. Jennifer Bright:

It can be a half-formed thought.

Lauren Brown:

Well, we'll give folks another couple moments. But I will jump in with another question that I had. You mentioned sort of somewhere in the doing of practice without that intentionality. And it made me think about the quantification of mindfulness practice. Like, "You've done so many minutes. Have you done your five minutes? And closing the loop. "Am I closing my ring on my mindfulness practice?" Do you have any thoughts or insight or advice about using mindfulness apps?

Dr. Jennifer Bright:

This is a great question, but I'm a bit hesitant to answer this because I've never used one. So I feel like it's hard for me to say much, not having the experience myself. But it is an interesting... And I wouldn't mind exploring it a bit here in this space, because on the one hand, I think that sometimes everyone starts somewhere. And so some, I'm thinking of these apps that help you with your breathing. I know there's some ones, because a student did show me one on their phone, where you follow the ball up and it's like you breathe in and then you hold it and you breathe out. And they said that, "But when I'm stressed out, I can just do this and it actually works. It actually calms down my breathing." And so, I think that's great. Who am I to say you shouldn't do that if that's helping you? And so, that can be a wisdom in means or a good method.

But yeah, so I'm open-minded to that. But I would also think, and this is what I mean. We all start somewhere. So maybe this is where someone starts, but maybe after they've been doing this, they want to start being able to do it for themselves, or they want to dig deeper into a spiritual tradition or dig deeper into other facets of mindfulness.

So I think that the apps are for people for where they're at, if that makes sense. And maybe it's just I'm not much of a screen person, and I'm someone who takes long walks as much as I can in nature as much as possible. And I find my breathing calms down that way too, that I get into a good breathing rhythm just through walking.

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And I think, so on the one hand, I get it that apps can be good. But I think that there might be healthier sometimes ways. I always keep saying walking. Right? Walking is the most implicitly spiritual thing that you can do. It connects you with yourself, with whatever is sacred, it calms you down. You eventually stop... Ruminative thoughts often disappear.

And so again, but maybe if you're working downtown and you don't have that nature walk available to you, maybe that's when the app is a good idea. I'm wondering what your thoughts are actually, Lauren, about that.

Lauren Brown:

Actually, just sort of riffing off what you're saying there, it's the opposite of gatekeeping. It's the door opening. Right? So perhaps an app is a way into a practice for somebody. And I'm with you. How could we... I always tell students, "It's what is working for you. There's no one right way."

There is that point, if you've been practicing for a long time, where I think people just naturally or inherently want to sort of dive a little bit deeper. But I do think sometimes that comes from what brought you into the practice? Right? And that goes to that, again, kind of looping back to what you were saying about that sort of, I don't want to say bragging. I don't think that's the word you use. But people getting really like, "I meditate for 20 minutes a day," and it sort of becomes this score-keeping or again, the quantification instead of that subjective. Right? Because I guess for me, the practice is one of where I'm checking in and sort of checking out where things are for me on that sort of subjective level, me without a machine. So I orient to that, and I do think folks who come at the practice tend to get to a point where they're more curious about the spiritual. But if it's a door opener, if it's a way in, I am all for it.

Dr. Jennifer Bright:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, and it's funny because a lot of people come to deeper spiritual traditions through mindfulness-based dialectical behavioral therapy where it's interesting, they learn first from their therapist and then they go deeper. And they go deeper once they start getting good at it or that it is working for them. Yeah.

Lauren Brown:

Thank you. Anybody else? Any thoughts? Curiosities? All right. Well, with that, I think we will wrap things up. Dr. Bright, thank you so very much for being here, for bringing your wisdom and your time and your wonderful energy to our group this evening. And to everybody who came out this evening, thank you. I hope that you found this an exciting idea to think about, the spiritual integration into your mindfulness practice.

Dr. Jennifer Bright:

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Okay. Thanks for having me.

Lauren Brown:

Take good care, everyone.

On behalf of MindFIT, the Multi-Faith Center, and the Division of Student Life at the University of Toronto, thank you for listening and hope you join us for more.