

MindFIT Podcast – Is this Spiritual? Mindfulness, Yoga and Spirituality: A Community Conversation 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.

Chloe: I'd like to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

So we are very, very lucky today to have a wonderful panel of speakers. And so, I'm just going to give a brief bio for the speakers before we begin, just to give all of you a little bit more background information.

So Dr. Bright is a registered psychotherapist. She has a PhD in the Study of Religion with a collaborative specialization in Women's Health. Dr. Bright works as a spiritual care clinician in the ICU at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto and teaches courses on Buddhism and psychotherapy at Emmanuel College. Dr. Bright's research interest includes spiritually-integrated psychotherapy, spiritual health and moral distress, and Buddhist spiritual care.

Soroosh graduated from Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto with a master's in Pastoral Studies, Spiritual Care, and Psychotherapy. He is also a graduate from the University of Waterloo, master of Peace and Conflict Studies Program. He currently works as a registered psychotherapist in private practice as well as with a clinic in downtown Toronto. He is deeply interested in the definition of spirituality and how people develop their own personal spiritualities.

And our third panelist, Hela, is a fifth-year student at the University of Toronto, pursuing a major in Buddhist Studies and minors in Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health and Indigenous Studies. She is a Yoga, Meditation, and Mindfulness Program assistant for the Multi-Faith Center, where she assists with MindFIT and other Mindful Moments programs. She has completed her 200-hour yoga teaching training in 2021, and she continues to explore the relationship between yoga, health, and wellness.

And last but certainly not least is Lauren. Lauren is a PhD candidate from OISE at U of T. Her research focuses on student well-being in higher education. She has taught yoga and mindfulness in schools and healthcare settings for the past nine years. Lauren is also the program coordinator for Mindfulness, Meditation, and Yoga programming delivered

to the Division of Student Life here at the University of Toronto. So we are so grateful to have all of these panelists here today. So now the floor is yours. Take it away.

Dr. Bright: Okay, so I think I am first up. I'm going to lead us in a grounding exercise. I'm going to do a bit of an experiment with you all this evening, I've been in an experimental mood lately, where I'm going to combine our centering practice.

We're going to focus on the breath, and then, following this, I'm going to lead you through a spiritually-integrated mindfulness exercise by way of introducing you to what spirituality is and how it might fit into a mindfulness practice. Okay?

So I'm going to invite you to get comfortable, get into a... Find your non-anxious self. Get yourself seated, comfortable, and just start to take a few deep breaths, all the way in till you can't breathe in anymore and all the way out until you can't breathe out anymore. And do this a few times.

Remember, your task here is to focus on the breath. And when your mind becomes distracted and wanders off as it's want to do, your task is to return it to the breath, return your focus to the breath. It's okay if you need to move around a bit during our practice. Mindfulness doesn't necessarily mean we have to always be still.

You need to stretch or move, feel the physicality of your body and space, your butt on the chair. And continue to focus on the breath, breathing all the way in and all the way out.

Now I'm going to invite you to move your focus away from the breath and onto your spirituality. I want you to enter into this exercise with the spirit of self-kindness and with curiosity and exploration.

I'm going to lead you through some spiritual themes and invite you to contemplate what they mean for you. So the first is purpose. Everybody needs to have a sense of purpose in their lives. Of course, it can shift and change throughout our lives.

And I want to invite you to consider right now, what is the purpose of your life at this moment? It might be one or two big things, some small things, but whatever that is for you, take a few moments to explore what that purpose is for you. I invite you just to take a further moment to feel yourself grounded in knowing that you do have a sense of purpose, which gives you direction, taps into your hope, the future.

Meaning. How do you make meaning in your life, in good times and in hard times? How do you make meaning of suffering? Think of your purpose. What are the meanings attached to this purpose?

Identity. Identity is essential part of our spirituality. "Who am I?" Think for a moment, what makes you you? I invite you to take a few moments to honor yourself.

Community. Of course, we all flourish in community. I mean, part of spiritual health is being connected to ourselves and to a wider community. It's part of feeling connected and feeling that we belong and that we belong to something greater than ourselves. So I invite you for a few moments to contemplate your community. Where do you belong?

I invite you to put your hand to your heart, breathe in deeply and conjure and feel the warmth of the people in your life, your connections with others, connections with animals, with pets, to your community, your people. And I invite you to ground yourself in knowing that you belong somewhere.

And lastly, the sacred. We need to feel connected to ourselves, to others, and also to the sacred, whatever that might be for us. It might be the divine sacred. It might be a godhead. It might be found in more universal sense. Or perhaps a sacred for you is found in nature.

When was the last time that you felt that you were in the presence of the sacred, whatever that was for you? Do you remember what that feeling was like and where you were and who you might have been with? I invite you to breathe in deeply and conjure up in your mind and in your body that feeling of when you feel connected to the sacred, whatever that is for you, however understood.

And as you breathe in and feel the sacredness, I invite you to remember that you are rooted and connected to the sacred and that the sacred is the wellspring of your spiritual resilience. And when you're ready to come back to the room, take your time.

Okay. Well, I hope that was a useful exercise for you. What it's meant to achieve is to introduce you to some of the core themes of what we in the spiritual care world consider to be elements of spiritual health or spiritual well-being. So I talked about purpose, meaning, identity, connection with self, others, and the sacred.

But there are many other things that I could also talk about that falls under that umbrella of spirituality. One thing I can talk about, which is, I think, important, is to have a sense of your spiritual community. It could be a religious community. It doesn't necessarily have to be. It can be a 12-step group. It could be a nature club. But something in which you share similar values and a similar sort of sense of what is sacred for you with other people.

And this can be really helpful for building your own resilience and your own connections. Because doing sacred things with other people, such as ritual or prayer or planting trees, or just sharing in fellowship, all of those things connect us in ways that are really important for our spiritual well-being.

The other thing that spiritual care or spirituality is also a lot about is those big existential questions, "What happens to me after I die?" Or things like, "What is the nature of the universe? What is the role of humans?" These larger existential questions can give us often a sort of framework from which to sort of think about our lives.

And also, when things get rough... I work in an ICU. Not as much anymore because I teach a lot. But when you're going through life, you want to have an idea of these sorts of questions, "What do you believe about the world? What do you believe your role in the world is?" And you want to be at that place before the times get really hard, such as when you end up in the hospital.

And so these are things to think about. And I would like to say that knowing and nourishing your spiritual selves gives you the ability... A strong spiritual resilience gives you the ability to endure hard times and to also enjoy the good times, and to have a sense of meaning and purpose through no matter what you're going through.

And anyways, mindfulness is a really good way, I think, to explore your spirituality. I teach a course on mindfulness modalities, or what I like to think as spiritually-integrated mindfulness, at Emmanuel College. So if you can't take my course, I can sort of distill a semester into a couple of... A little bit here.

But one thing I would advise you to... I should say, I myself use mindfulness and Buddhist meditation. I've had a Buddhist sort of yogic tantric practice for over 20 years. And I use mindfulness a lot in my clinical work and in teaching. And this is where... Because I know that many of you are training to be psychotherapists or mindfulness facilitators.

And one of the two... There's two things that I find mindfulness really important and useful for. One is holding silence to create a caring and open, and warm space, an inclusive space that people feel that they belong. And being able to hold that and hold that with a non-anxious sort of presence. And it takes a while to develop those sorts of skills to be able to hold silence. And mindfulness, on your own and with other people in community, is a really good way to hone this skill of holding silence. I use that a lot in teaching and in clinical practice.

And also, keep in mind that that silence is also a form of intimacy. And often, I find with mindfulness is that, even though we're in a meditating community, is that there's a lot of intimacy in being able to hold silence together. It allows for the spontaneity of the moment, the spontaneity of what happens between people, the psychodynamics of the room to unfold.

And I think that you can't say enough about that mindfulness and holding silence. And so, if I was to give any further sort of advice on how to integrate spirituality of

mindfulness, there's a million ways to do it. My students in my Emmanuel courses come up with lots of fun and interesting ways.

But one of the ways, or the first thing, I think, and maybe many of you are already on this path, is to think about... To really nourish your own spirituality, to really explore it, to be able to name about your purpose, your identity, your values, your hopes, your social connections, to be able to have a sense of what it means to be connected with the sacred.

And I say this as you can't really lead other people in integrating spirituality of mindfulness unless it's something that you do yourself. And this is something that you know can only go as far with clients or people you're working with as you can with yourself.

And so I invite you, really, to explore what spirituality means for you. And this takes some time, some time alone. And also to explore with your friends and speak with them as you go through this process. And I think once you do that, then you can understand how you can... When you're working with other people. And then, you can help them explore those sorts of categories or things for them. Then you can start to integrate a mindfulness practice. I think that I will... My 15 minutes are up, and I will pass on to the next person. Thank you.

Lauren: Thank you, Jenny. When you're facilitating mindfulness, obviously, your lens on this practice is that it is a spiritual practice, but when you are... I'm wondering if you have any thoughts or if you could share anything about whether when you're teaching in either of the programs that you teach in, do you feel that that also is part of your spiritual experience?

Dr. Bright: Yeah, that's a great question. I definitely do. I start every class with silence. I have my singing bowl here. And so, my purpose is... Most students, undergraduate, graduate, when they show up to class, they're very anxious. And so, I allow them time to get into... When we hold silence... And Hela, you might remember, in our class, we held... Our record was 12 minutes of silence of 240 students. The whole room was silent. It was beautiful.

And I think that's creating a bit of sacred space, actually. I do relate that to my spirituality. I'm a Buddhist practitioner, a Buddhist, and so for me, being able to deeply listen and to be able to hold that silence is a sacred or a spiritual practice. And it is something... The intimacy does evolve. Especially when you do it week after week, students get used to holding this silence and being together. It changes the dynamics to the room, and I think it creates a safe space for everybody. And that's part of community.

Lauren: Thank you so much. I think, Hela, you are going to share a little bit about your understanding of how these impact yourself.

Hela: Yes. Hi, everyone. I just wanted to quickly say that I am so grateful to be speaking alongside this panel. I just want to acknowledge that there is so much wisdom in the space today. So I'm very excited to share some of my thoughts in this conversation.

I wanted to start with a quote that I actually came across a couple of weeks ago. It is from The Foundation of Buddhist Practice, from the Dalai Lama. It says, "Since we live in a multicultural, multi-religious world, one of my aims is to present ethical conduct and compassion in a secular way, free of reliance on a specific religious doctrine so that people of all faiths or no faiths can benefit.

"I also wish to give society access to the intellectual treasures in India's ancient texts and ensure that they are perceived in the body of world knowledge. Buddhist science and philosophy can be studied by all. However, Buddhist religion is for Buddhist and those interested in it. We respect each individual's choice regarding religion."

So I thought that was a nice quote to kind of dive into this conversation. And now, I'm just going to speak a little bit about what spirituality means to me. And as Dr. Bright touched on earlier, I think ultimately, for me, it's about connection, connection to myself, learning more about myself and unlearning maybe some things that I've convinced myself of, connection to others, learning how to understand others' suffering, as well as connecting to the world around me. And also connection to the source or God, whatever you want to call it.

I think that a lot of us might experience this sense of deep yearning to learn more or to feel more connected or just this kind of curiosity about what our meaning or purpose is. So, in my practice, that's been something that I've followed, just following that curiosity, and it's kind of led me to where I am now. And I'm still following it.

My practice just helps me feel more connected to that, and it just makes me feel closer to that source. My understanding of spirituality has been a windy road. I was raised as Hindu. My parents are immigrants from Guyana. And I was born here in Toronto. So I was raised in a Hindu household, but as a child, it didn't really mean much to me. I didn't feel very connected to it. There was no one else in my community that practiced. So I think there was some resistance there growing up.

Later on in life, when I started university, I became curious about yoga, mostly the physical aspect of it. And then, that curiosity started coming up again. And as I followed it, I started learning more about yoga philosophy. As I've progressed, it's been really interesting to see there's been this re-return back to Hinduism, and a lot of that has been coming up again. So it's been a nice circle.

I will say that I do identify as multifaith or spiritual just because I really pick and choose what works for me from each tradition and practiced religion. I don't identify as just one.

In terms of teaching, it's been really interesting navigating teaching here at U of T in Mindful Moments in a secular space when my personal practice is deeply spiritual. So when teaching, I have focused mostly on asana, the physical aspect of yoga. When structuring and sequencing the class, it's often inspired by more of the yoga philosophy, but that's not what I teach within the space at U of T.

However, there have been some students that might approach me after a class, and they're following their own curiosity and inquiring more about, "What's the connection here? What's going on energetically in the body?" Or, "Why am I feeling this way? Why are these things coming up for me?" And I take that as my opportunity to kind of dive into more of that conversation and dialogue around spirituality in yoga and mindfulness spaces. That's some of my thoughts on today's conversation. I'd like to pass it over to Soroosh.

Soroosh: Okay. Lauren, was there anything before I started speaking?

Lauren: I did want to ask one thing of Hela. So similar to what I asked Jenny, when you are sort of flipping the tables... Because you're still an undergrad student. When you're a student in these settings, where... Because your studies are... You've got sort of three main areas, but a lot of them are underpinned by spirituality. Do you think of your learning, your actual academic learning, as a part of your spiritual development or a spiritual experience on the receiver side? So we heard from Jenny on the teacher side in our formal classroom, but on the receiving side, Hela, how does that land for you?

Hela: That's a great question. I would say most definitely, just because a big part of my knowledge and all of this has come from my academic studies here at U of T, from the Department of Religion, majoring in Buddhism, and also the BPMH program at New College as well as my minor in Indigenous Studies.

So I've really had the opportunity to explore a wide range of what spirituality is in a set of contexts, as well as I've had the opportunity to practice quite a bit within the BPM program. Hopefully, that brings some expertise but also some limitations to what I can offer as a teacher and in this discussion. Thanks.

Lauren: Thanks, Hela. Soroosh, you're up.

Soroosh: Yeah, thank you. Hi, everyone. I use mindfulness a lot with the people that I work with as a psychotherapist. Like Dr. Bright was saying, it can be a practice that can just help folks find stillness and silence.

And the reason why it's called a practice, it takes some time, some commitment, some intention to be in stillness, to be in stillness in the body, either... In mindfulness, it's a particular way, there's a particular process. So there might be seated practice, or maybe you're standing or lying down even.

What's been really important for me in my work, in my work with mindfulness in psychotherapy, where talking to clients about their spirituality, is supporting them in defining spirituality for themselves. So I'm saying this because everything I say isn't some statement about spirituality, but it is a statement about my experience of spirituality and that word.

And right now, for me, there's a struggle with this word and what it means to be spiritual. So I find myself... This is the question that I'm sitting with is... The question that we've been offered as a guiding question is, "What does spirituality mean to you?" And the answer is, I don't know.

So I start there. And this is where I'm starting. I don't know what it is. There are a lot of definitions. They're all valid. I'm not here to debate any of that with anyone or with myself. But the place where I've arrived at right now is there can't be anything that is like to be a spiritual person. And there can't be anything that is like to be not a spiritual person. And this is simply for me. So again, it's not a statement for you, it's simply for me at this point in my life, and it's simply a question to help me deepen, not a final stage.

I've spent so much of my time... I'm 32 now. So much of my time in my 20s having reactions to different traditions, spiritualities, and practices, trying to attain and experience certain ways of being, trying to grapple with enlightenment or liberation or salvation, trying to understand if there is a God or gods or goddesses.

And it's kind of like a koan. So in Zen Buddhist practice, you have these riddles, essentially. And Dr. Bright might... I'm kind of nervous because she might be like, "Dude, what are you... That's not what a koan is." So this is just my understanding of a koan.

Dr. Bright: I'm not an expert. Go on.

Soroosh: No, no. But there are these riddles that then monks and nuns, monastics, are given. And they're sort of unanswerable. Maybe the most common one is, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Which, apparently, isn't even a good translation of that koan, but it's supposed to be like, "What is that? What is that sound?" Is there another one, Dr. Bright, that you can think of? Another koan, like a popular one?

Dr. Bright: Put me on the spot here. I think of it as, you know, you practice and you practice, and then, all of a sudden, it's that interconnection, and you see yourself in the other. So, for example, one well-known one is when one, I forget which master, but great zen master

was awakened. He looked at the moon, and he said, "Ah, I am the moon. The moon is smiling." And it's where you sort of break those... The self dissolves, so to speak, and that you have a sense of oneness or unity. And so this is sort of that. And it happens often in sort of a paradoxical form or yeah...

Soroosh: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. So that word, paradox. Paradox, it's a bit of a paradox. So this question of what spirituality is, is mindfulness spiritual, or is it religious? For me, at this moment, it's a bit of a paradox because I don't want to discern or have to discern between something that is spiritual and something that is not spiritual. That doesn't work for me right now to do the work or to have in my mind a criteria against which I say, "This person is living a spiritual life and is doing spiritual things, and that person and that person isn't."

And that's where I'm at right now. When it comes to spirituality in teaching mindfulness or working with clients who are having these existential questions, what I'm curious about is what their definition of spirituality is. I want to know why it's important for them to connect with their spirituality.

So that means being really curious about them as a person. It means wondering, "What do you believe in?" So if someone's spirituality is based around God, then I'm interested in how they connect with God. Do they talk to God, or is God inaccessible? Or is God more of a friend by their bedside for them? It's so different. It's from person to person.

So that's what I'm interested in. When it comes to mindfulness, I'll have to admit, I haven't had a consistent mindfulness practice for some time now, and this is partly because I'm grappling with these questions around spirituality, "What is spirituality?" And I'm trying to see if I can, instead of meditating, feel as if I can find stillness and silence, even if things are allowed.

So to have this notion in mind that nothing I do or say, nothing I think can actually break silence or stillness, that all these excitations of the mind are happening in stillness and silence, that can be a really difficult thing to experience if you're fused with thoughts and body sensations, if you're really caught up in them.

So, without question... I mean, I think the research shows this. Mindfulness or anything that kind of leads to states found in mindfulness, again, that's stillness and silence mostly of the body, well, that helps settle the mind. It helps settle the body. I'm just trying to be bare-bones with it. I'm not trying to think about spirituality. I'm not trying to discern whether this experience is spiritual or not spiritual, stepping into my body.

And I think once that happens, then I can read a little deeper, and then I can engage with these questions with a little bit more clarity. And I say engage, not answer. I don't know if any of these... If I'll ever answer these questions. I don't think I'm really looking to answer them, either.

I watched a movie last night, The Glass Onion, or Glass Onion. It's a murder mystery. And part of the fun was just being wrapped up in the mystery and not knowing who the murderer was. I won't spoil it if you haven't seen it. So I'm enjoying sitting in the mystery.

Lauren: Thank you, Soroosh. It sounds like your practice, your contemplation is both in silence and in motion when you're concerned, when you're grappling, as you say. Are there any times where things... Or any actions or things that may be going or not going on for you when you feel like you're getting those... Or creating or having those deeply contemplative moments?

Soroosh: Well, I think that question's interesting because I'm sort of challenging myself to step away from placing importance on a certain action, be it a practice or anything leading to a personal spiritual experience. This right now, or just a moment of intense boredom, I think, is on the same level as a peak spiritual experience.

Again, this is just a stage, however, of course there are these ancient traditions and teachings and practices that people commit to, and they find benefit, and they experience things that gives them insight into their true nature. So again, this is personally for me. The contemplation is, if I could give it a mantra or a phrase, is just repeatedly saying, "This is it. This is it. This is it." And then also, it's negative, which is, "This is not it. This is not it. This is not it." Which is actually a practice that you'll find in a lot of traditions.

Lauren: Thank you, Soroosh. Speaking for myself, sort of coming up with the questions to discuss today and thinking about questions that students have asked over the years as I've taught yoga and mindfulness on campus and thinking about questions I've asked myself over the years before practicing and practicing...

So as a little bit of background, I grew up going to the United Church. I, as an adult, sort of stepped away and, ultimately, left the idea of being within organized religion. And I played with ideas of, "Does that make me agnostic? Does that make me an atheist? And what rooms would I say these different things in?" And kind of watching what kind of impact it would have if I said one of these things or the other.

And so I think I very much was a product of my time, the time that I was being raised. If I think about this scientific materialism that surrounded my upbringing in early education, this idea that, "If you can't touch it or feel it or prove it, then it doesn't really exist." And I think that was very much where I stepped away from any of these notions.

I also saw... As a young adult, saw spirituality and religion very much sort of one thing, not that they were too overlapping things or that one encompassed the other, but that they were very much one thing. And then, through that seeking part of life, coming into midlife or early midlife, kind of these ideas of like, "Oh, well." Then spirituality became

this idea of being very flaky. And I think that was also part of what the culture was doing in the '80s and '90s, that idea of... Not that I was in my midlife in the '80s, but it was still the framework of my experience.

And it wasn't until about 10 years ago when I was in a yoga teacher training, and I learned about this idea of Aparigraha, this idea of non-grasping or non-craving, non-attachment. And it was literally... I heard the car brakes squeal, and I was like, "What? All I do is strive. All I've been trained to do is strive. I'm never sitting still."

And then, later on, getting exposed to Jon Kabat-Zinn's work, and this idea of non-striving again comes up, and this idea that I have never... I remember thinking, "What does it mean, this idea of presence?" I really struggled. I was like, "Present. Like, I'm here." And it took me... I fought meditation, and I practiced for more than a decade. I'd lay there, and I'd be like, "What are we doing?" I'm making a to-do list and trying to think about how I was going to be productive in Shavasana and being super frustrated.

And so letting myself see... Sort of getting these little moments of where my world cracked open that little bit and seeing that there was another way to live, seeing that there was other worldviews really helped me enter into this conversation. And I think that's sort of where it became more of a shift, but it's still a lot really, really uncertain, like, "What qualifies as spiritual?"

So unlike Soroosh and Hela and Jenny, my education, all the way through and coming back to school and then into my PhD, really hasn't touched down on spirituality. But this is where I might just ask Hela to pop up a couple of slides if she doesn't mind because this was really helpful to me. I didn't have a framework to understand that spirituality could be many things. And I think Soroosh said this so very well. And it's sort of explaining this idea that it doesn't have to be one thing to everybody, that there can be some space inside understanding what spirituality can entail.

I think we can go to the next one. I think where I sit as an educator here at U of T, as Chloe said in the introduction, I've been teaching mindfulness in schools, both public schools and at the university and in healthcare settings. And there's this real concept that in those spaces, I need to be teaching through a secular lens.

And so, the National Standard for Mental Health and Well-Being is a document created in 2020 by folks across the higher ed landscape in Canada. And I just grabbed this piece because this is really the guiding document that many of us who work at the university are required or asked to be thinking about and engaging as we teach and interact with students on campus.

And so, this definition of spiritual as, "whatever or whoever gives ultimate meaning and purpose in one's life that invites particular ways of being in the world in relation to others, oneself, and the universe." And this was often the definition that I was getting as

I was kind of going, "Well, what is spiritual? What is spiritual?" And it's like putting a tack in Jell-O for me, like, "How do I pin Jell-O to a wall? There's no there, there in this definition."

So the academic part of me was like, "All right, meaning purpose, I'll grab onto that." I tried to hold onto that and see if I can get something out of that." But ultimately, it felt a little bit too slippery.

So Hela, if you don't mind going to the next slide. So here's where things started to help me out. We were kind of talking about spirituality through a lens that I understood, which was both adult and higher education, and this sort of different perspectives on spirituality. "Spirituality is different from religion." Okay, super. That helped me a lot. When I finally came to that place, that was really helpful.

And it sounds really simple, but in my PhD research that I'm in the midst of, of the undergraduate students that I've been interviewing, really only half of them understood this to be a lens on this. For half of the students, they thought spirituality and religion were the exact same thing. And of course, I see myself in that, and I will have to make sure I'm trying to be unbiased when I listen back to what the students have shared.

But I think it's really important to note that we struggle with this idea alone. And then, "Spirituality focuses on individuals' meaning-making process." So Jenny touched on this. Soroosh was talking about this in his own experience, I think, as well. This is about how we make sense of the world and the things that are going on around us.

To me, and that's my interpretation of this, and others' can be different, and I echo what Soroosh was saying, is there is no one exact way to interpret all of these different things, words, phrases for ourselves, that we have to be engaged with them to think about what they mean.

"Spirituality contributes to personal values and social action." And then that really had a lot of resonance for me. And we see that. And I know in the Buddhist psychology program... I think it's Ellie who teaches socially-engaged Buddhism. And I think that that sort of really speaks to a lot of people as well.

And then, "Spirituality relates to symbolic and unconscious knowledge construction process." Even for me, this is my area of study, I'm like, "What? This isn't helpful for me to understand this." It really... Again, there are just times where even in my own area of study, I get confused and struggle.

So then this last piece here, "Spirituality plays out in the living of our lives. The birth of a child, the viewing of a spectacular sunset, or being moved by a musical performance can all be spiritual experiences." And this landed. So thanks, Hela, we can end the SlideShare there. This really helped me.

And then, I think everybody on the panel has talked about different ways that spirituality resonates for them. I think in my own lived experience of the practice, my mindfulness practice tends to be most when I'm walking in nature. It's a moving practice more than a seated practice. I've had those moments of unity. So people talk about that idea of the blurring of the edges of the self-becoming one with the things that we're surrounded by and feeling, "I am the moon, and the moon is me." You said that much more eloquently earlier.

Have had those moments in my own moving practice where I feel deeply, deeply, deeply connected to the place and what I'm bringing into my... So what I do is I think of it as nature appreciation, and I kind of go to a natural setting and really lift through all of those things of listening to the sounds of my boots hitting the dirt and the birds and the creek and try to stay really, really anchored in that and the scent and things like that that are in the moment.

So does spirituality play out in my teaching? I would say, while I don't set the table to teach yoga and mindfulness meditation through a lens of spirituality, as a teacher, I get what I think of as a spiritual resonance. And I think you spoke about this in the holding of the silence. It's extremely intimate. And so, often, at the end of a yoga class... And it will happen for me more in yoga than in mindfulness, when I'm teaching yoga versus mindfulness.

There is that moment at the end of the class where I can feel sort of a deep resonance or a deep almost energetic connection between myself and the folks who are in the room, and that it's not just me to them. This is absolutely community experience for me. I feel very honored in a way that does those things, like, I get goosebumps, and I feel that sort of deep heartfulness at the end of a session.

I think I don't feel it quite as much when I'm teaching mindfulness because I feel highly responsible. Not that I don't in yoga, but I'm watching the bodies in movement. People are moving in response to what I'm saying, and I feel I can more easily sense their state. Where people are meditating with eyes closed, I feel like they're more vulnerable in a sense and that I feel a little bit more like I need to be very attuned to the signals, though subtle, that I can receive. And so, perhaps I don't give myself over as much in that setting as I can in yoga. And I've taught yoga for many, many more years than mindfulness.

Looking at the time, I think that might be what I have to share as a teacher and as a practitioner of both. And thank you to everyone. We've gone a little bit over, but thank you for sticking around.

So Soroosh, Hela, Jenny, thank you so very much for your time and your energy and putting your heart forward. And thank you for your engagement for everybody who's been here today. Our session next week, I popped it up in the chat, is going to be on

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cultural appropriation, appreciative knowledge as it relates to mindfulness and yoga. And Dr. Bright will be back with us next week and a new panel of speakers. And thank you so much for being here and for coming out to chat and to listen.

Lauren Brown: 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.