

The Garrison Institute Presents: The Common Good Podcast Transcript

Sharon Salzberg: Interconnection and the Tools for Real Happiness (Episode 8)

[Please note: Although the transcript is largely accurate, in some cases it may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages or transcription software errors.]

[00:00:00] **Jonathan FP Rose:** All right. Welcome to the Garrison Institute presents the Common Good.

I'm Jonathan FP Rose, co-founder of the Garrison Institute, and today our honored guest is Sharon Salzberg. Sharon Salzberg is a meditation pioneer, a renowned spiritual teacher, a New York Times bestselling author whose influential work has shaped the modern contemplative practice. I'm gonna re-say that Sharon Salzberg is a meditation pioneer, a renowned spiritual teacher, and a New York Times bestselling author.

Her influential work has shaped the modern contemplative landscape of practices. As the co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society and a prolific author, she has. Uh, actually, I don't like the way this is written. She is a co-founder of the Insight Meditation Center. She, she's a co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society and a prolific author.

Her latest books include real life, a Journey from Isolation to Openness and Freedom, and real Happiness. Uh, Sharon has dedicated a career to exploring the transformative of power. Sharon has dedicated her career to exploring the transformative power of compassion, mindfulness, and loving kindness. Sharon, welcome to the show.

[00:01:18] **Sharon Salzberg:** Thank you so much. It's so nice to be with you.

[00:01:21] **Jonathan FP Rose:** It is really wonderful to see you and uh, it's particularly wonderful to think about compassion in what are these generally uncompassionate times. So I want to go back in time to the times that we both really grew up, which was a time of, um, much more hope and optimism, although it was clouded by a series, you know, the Vietnam War and some other things too.

So take us back to, um, uh. Where you were in your life and what led you to your first journey to India?

[00:01:54] **Sharon Salzberg:** Well, I went to college at the State University of New York at Buffalo, and I do think about those times so often 'cause the parallels to now are pretty striking. The Vietnam War was going on. There was a lot of political discord. There was a lot of alienation between generations. Psychedelics were all around.

I mean, it was just like, wow, what an interesting thing. And um. When I was in college, I was a sophomore and I took an Asian philosophy course, which honestly looking back, felt almost like happenstance. Like I looked at the schedule, I thought, well, that's on Tuesday. That fits nicely, you know? So I did that one, and the course completely changed my life in two ways.

One was, uh, Buddha, the Buddha section, the Buddha talking very openly about suffering in life. And I, like many people, had had a a. Childhood and a family system, uh, that was full of

conflict and chaos and trauma. And it was also a, a family where nothing was ever spoken about. And so I just felt different than everybody else and weird.

And I didn't know what to do with all those feelings inside of me. So for many people, of course, hearing the Buddha talk about suffering, it's a rather depressing message. But for me it was liberating 'cause I felt. I belong, you know, I'm a part of life. And then in the course of that class, I heard that there were methods and practices called meditation, that if you wanted to, you could practice and you'd be a lot happier.

And something inside of me, which is the big mystery of my life, lit up and I thought. I've gotta learn. I wasn't, you know, so much of my, uh, habit patterns were like standing back, being on the outside, being passive. But I just thought, I've gotta learn. So I looked around Buffalo. This is 1970, 1969. I looked around Buffalo.

I didn't see it anywhere 'cause it was a different time. And the university had an independent study program and I created a project saying I wanna go to India and study meditation. And they said yes. So that's how I ended up in India.

[00:04:12] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. That's amazing. And there you actually met some teachers.

[00:04:17] **Sharon Salzberg:** Mm-hmm. I met many teachers. I mean, I was really. Caught with the idea of the direct practical instruction. That's what I really wanted. I wasn't really interested in comparative religion or philosophical analysis. I, I wanted to know that the really straight, how do you do it? You know, how do I get to be happier?

And so. That was really my burning desire and it took a while to find that approach. And I finally, I started in January of 1971 with SN Goenka who was teaching these intensive 10 day kind of immersion retreats. Very much like that, you know, based on, on method and practice and how do you do it. And, uh, met a cluster of teachers around.

Him, uh, in that same town and then, uh, went on and studied with some Tibetan teachers and it just hasn't stopped since January of 1971.

[00:05:17] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And you also met a community of friends, met of you. You found yourself all of a sudden on the outside, actually on the inside, and then you came back to America and you founded IMS really, I think on, uh, some of the foundations of Goenka.

[00:05:33] **Sharon Salzberg:** Yeah, yeah, very much. Um, stylistically it wasn't, um, in terms of method, it was not sort of streamlined toward one, uh, insight meditation approach as his, his, uh, lineage is. But in terms of like the course structure and the idea of silence and things like that, it was very much based on, on his style. Um, yeah, I mean.

I was introduced to that first Goenka course in January of 1971 by Dan Goldman, who is, you know, a close mutual friend. And, um, so, and I met Joseph Goldstein at that first retreat and RDAs and Krishna das and so many people who really became lifelong friends. And, uh, it was a very pronounced aspect of what was happening there because. We felt like we were discovering and, and we were all like, pretty new to, to meditation practice. And it was also exciting, you know, and, and we were just gathered together in that spirit of discovery. It was wonderful.

[00:06:41] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And then you came back to America and you actually founded an institution now, and we know that's not such an easy thing to do. So how did that happen?

[00:06:53] **Sharon Salzberg:** Well, I mean, the story of my coming back and teaching is really the story of one of my teachers, this woman named Deep Ma or Deepa's mother. It's kind of a nickname. Uh, you know, so I, I went to India in 1970. I came back like 72. I stayed a little longer than my junior year abroad. I came back to finish school, which was really writing papers and things like that.

At that point, got two years of independent study credit and went back to India to continue practice. So in 1974, I knew I had to go back to the states and like get a new visa and do these things and I was convinced, absolutely convinced that I was gonna spend the rest of my life in India. A student. So I went to see this teacher, DEMA, who lived in Calcutta for her blessing from my very, very short journey back to the US.

And she said to me, when you go back you'll be teaching. And I said, no, I won't. And she said, yes, you will. And I said, no, I won't. I thought it was ludicrous. It know in my mind. I mean, it wasn't like a career path in those days, you know? It was, uh. It was something I never even dreamt I was capable of doing.

And she kept saying, yes you will. And I said, no, I won't. And she said, yes, you will. And then she said two things that were very important. She said, you really understand suffering. That's why you should teach. Which I'm sure we're gonna talk about compassion at some point, you know? Um, and then she said, you can do anything you wanna do.

It's your thinking. You can't do it. That's gonna stop you. And I left. She lived up. These four flights of stairs. I walked down the stairs thinking, no I won't. That's ridiculous. I'm never gonna do that. And I got back, um, Joseph Goldstein, whom I'd met at my first retreat at this point, uh, it was the first summer of Naropa Institute.

They were just opening up. He was sort of round us'. Um, ta at that experience, a bunch of us. You know, newly back from India thought, let's go visit Joseph in Boulder. So we went to visit Joseph and I ended up staying, uh, Jack Kornfield was living down the hall. That's where I met him. And I ended up staying for the second summer session where Joseph was teaching and I was sort of his ta.

And the whole time I kept thinking, I'm going back to India soon. I'm going back to India soon. And then we got some invitations to lead retreats. Then we got more invitations to lead retreats and then we got more. And one day I woke up and I thought, oh, she was right. You know, this is my life. And, uh, we were, uh, just, we had nothing, you know, we were living in people's couches and going from house to house.

And one of the people whose house we were often crashing in. Said, I think in some defense, you know, I have a rental property down near Santa Cruz. Why don't you go stay there? So we went there and we invited people who were interested in doing retreats just to come through and we would feed them and stuff like that.

And somebody came through and said, why don't you start a real retreat center? Um. It would be as, as you know, it would be like a kind of sacred site in this country. It would be a repository for the kind of energy that doesn't have to dissipate at the end of people coming together with common purpose.

And he said, I know all the people who can help you. They're in Massachusetts. And he was right. And, and so we ended up looking up and down the east coast and finally settled on the street retreat center in Barry.

[00:10:34] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. And it's been an amazing place. So, meditation. So you've, you had this wonderful, um, you were growing as a meditation teacher. Uh. So, but somewhere along the way you discovered that in some ways the essential, um, ingredient was actually compassion. It wasn't necessarily meditation, it was compassion. So talk about that.

[00:11:05] **Sharon Salzberg:** I mean, meditation is a skills training, you know, uh, the most popular word is probably mindfulness in describing one of the skills. But really mindfulness is also, um, it will do many things. And most of the time when people talk about mindfulness, you're talking about more fully inhabiting your life, like really taste that.

Cup of coffee when you're drinking it and don't just multitask all the time and, and that of course is a huge benefit. As you know, classically, the great benefit of mindfulness is really wisdom or insight. It's seeing things clearly, so it's not just inhabiting your life, it's understanding your life, the sources of suffering, the possibility of freedom, the path to be more free.

And, uh, so many, how alone are we really, you know, we feel so disconnected, but is that the truth of things? Um. There's so many discoveries to be made along that path and, uh, one of the qualities that you can see it both ways. It, it's a natural outgrowth of wisdom. The more we see how truly connected we all are, the more there's a kind of natural compassion and generosity and so on that that arise.

But you can also see it as something we cultivate as we. Experiment with how we pay attention. You know, like if we are really in the habit of being kind of miserable to ourselves and we just, you know, we make a mistake and we freak out like we're the worst person in the world, you can make a little experiment and say, what's it like when I, you know, I mean, mistakes are mistakes and we, we don't need to ignore that, but what.

Is it like when I don't denounce myself for the next year and a half, you know, for that mistake and, and we experiment. So I was really entranced by that possibility, um, of a very purposeful, intentional experimentation in life so that I was relating to myself differently in, in a more compassionate way and learning to relate to others, you know, listening and recognizing.

Kind of the poignancy of, of things that maybe, know, someone is so caught up, they're so ensnared in their own mind that they're acting in a harmful way. But look at how diminished they are. You know, that's worthy of it, of compassion and it also's a tremendous exploration to be had. With what does it mean and what does it not mean?

You know? 'cause it sounds so stupid in so many ways. Like, you know, this person is carrying on in this harmful way, and you're talking about, you know, loving kindness and compassion. Like, how dumb are you? You know? So, uh, it takes a lot of exploration to know what it actually means.

[00:14:08] **Jonathan FP Rose:** It does, you know, one day, uh, Deanna and I were wrestling with whether we should fire somebody or not, and, um. Gallic Ache, who was a great teacher we had, who you knew, uh, turned to us and said, keeping that person on is idiot compassion. And uh, he said, you know, like they're, you know, it's, it's not for their benefit or your benefit for them to keep doing, to keep failing to do this job.

You know, just move them on and, uh, uh, and, um, so true compassion. So let's describe what to, from your point of view, what is true compassion? Because true compassion doesn't just always mean you're lovey-dovey in the world.

[00:14:52] **Sharon Salzberg:** First I wanna say how much I loved Gache and how, um, one of the really amazing things I think for us. As a generation was having models of people, you know, who they've suffered. You know, they were not cushy lives by and large living in exile or, you know, um, like Han a war torn country, you know, and yet this is what they come down to, you know, uh, is not hatred or fear. Uh, not even anguish in a way, you know, but. But really a compassionate heart. So the classical definition of compassion, um, it starts with kind of a resonance, you know, like, um, the trembling or the quivering of the heart when we witness pain or suffering. And the second part of the definition is it's a movement toward.

So it's a movement toward seeing if we can be of help. The liberating quality of compassion of something like loving kindness or compassion is that it's an internal state of freedom. It's not a mandate for a certain kind of action. You know, if we're motivated by this kind of resonance and caring, seeing if we can be of help. Then that doesn't mean we're gonna be so sweet all the time, or only say yes or let them have more money or let them move back in, or, you know, I, as I'm sure you as well, have been asked. Extraordinary questions. Like, if I were to develop a more open heart, does that mean I have to go visit him in jail?

Does that mean I have to give up everything? Does that mean I have to let them hurt me? Does that mean I have to let these other people be oppressed? You know, and it doesn't mean any of that. But the heart space, the motivation for action is not, um, separation and division and hatred.

[00:16:57] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So there's a particular. I was gonna call 'em class, but group of, of people who in Americans in the World Society, the caregivers, the people who have really committed their lives to compassionate action through being nurses and hospital emergency room workers and frontline workers, um, of all different kinds working in refugee camps.

So you and Deanna Rose, the co-founder of the Garrison Institute and my wonderful wife, co-created a program. For these people. Um, so talk a little bit about that, because those are the people who are really living in the, not, not only their own suffering, they're living in a vast sea of suffering. And how does compassion, um, relate to their work?

[00:17:45] **Sharon Salzberg:** Well, first I, I also want to give all due honor to Deanna because this was born completely in her, her mind and heart, you know, and, um, you know, she came to me one day and said, I wanna do something for people who care for other people. Um, now I, I find it fascinating work and I've learned and continue to learn so much.

Mostly I think we can have a kind of conditioning, any one of us that is pretty self-centered, you know, we want to get ahead, we're taught it's a dog eat dog world. Don't help anybody else. Um, you know, 'cause they're not gonna help you. You're on your own. And, and we're kind of hyper competitive and, and, uh, belittling of others.

And, and so the obvious remedy, you know, the antidote is. Open up to others. You know, don't be so self-centered. Don't be so consumed with only thinking of yourself. And so we hear, of course, great teachers talk about that all the time. What fascinated me about these people is that they were conditioned, it seemed in, or at least they were operating in a different way.

They cared tremendously about others. You know, they had enormous empathy and care, and they were, as you said, in a sea of suffering. But the person they would tend to have less compassion for was themselves. You know? And it, it was just a fascinating dynamic to see. I mean, we all share a little bit of that, I think, anyway, but, um, it, it's very prevalent in people who are working to care for other people.

And, you know, at a time, different than our time right now when, uh, empathy was. Kind of praised and it wasn't, you

[00:19:35] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Oh, because you know, empathy is still just because we have certain people in leadership who are not empathetic. Uh, I think. Empathy is still a human trait that many societies value, so keep going.

[00:19:49] **Sharon Salzberg:** You know, so, but I would hear things about like empathy training, which I thought. It was wonderful. But then I'd look at the nurses and the refugee workers and all these people, and I think, well, they've got plenty of empathy. They're burning out for some other reason. So what's missing?

And often what seemed to be missing was a kind of balance, either including themselves in that circle of care and or, um, a kind of perspective taking, you know, unreasonable expectations. Of, of what success would look like in a dynamic, you know, of care or, um, not having what we would call equanimity, you know, some, some sort of balance around that.

'cause the reality is systems are hard to move, you know, and things. There are layers and layers and layers. Um, the last time I was zooming into the Garrison Institute for a retreat for caregivers. A nurse, uh, raised her hand and she said, know that I'm so much experiencing stress and burnout. I'm experiencing moral injury. You know, these are complex systems and they're all kinds of considerations and, uh, people I think need both a sense of community that they're not so alone and soldiering on. And. Methods, techniques to kind of care for themselves in a better way.

[00:21:20] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So you co-created a program with others too that, um, provides those methods. So you wanna talk about the ABCs of Care?

[00:21:30] **Sharon Salzberg:** Awareness, balance, and connection. Yeah. I mean, it's, it's a mutuality. I found that, um, the first retreat, the, uh, contemplative based resilience program at the Garrison Institute. We taught, we had about 60 people or social workers, people in the domestic violence world. 'cause that's where we started. Um, and I noted that of the many things people asked for recordings of at the end so they could take them home and keep practicing.

One was the. Kind of didactic or more theoretical explanation of what stress does to the nervous system, to the brain and the body and so on. Because so much of the time we feel, uh, pathological in our distress instead of realizing that's normal. That's a nervous system. Or as people sometimes describe trauma, it's a normal reaction to an abnormal situation, you know?

And it was so reassuring for people to hear, oh yeah, this is what happens. It's, uh, it's okay. I am not a bad caregiver. Or, you know, something like that. And then different practices, the movement, the embodiment practices to sort of get that relief or sense of solace in the body. Uh, meditation, especially loving kindness meditation, which included themselves.

And, um, that was really kind of an eye-opener that those were the things people were cherishing the most.

[00:23:11] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And it's had, the program has had enormous effect, uh, positive benefit to people all over the world and. Uh, frontline situations like refugee camps. But one of the things I think that you and Deanna learned along the way was that we actually had a society that, uh, or a care system that didn't value the care worker.

So they said that burnout was just a cost of business. And what you've really been advocating for is that we have to care for our caregivers. We actually, as a. Social system as an economic system, as a service delivery system. Have to have compassion for these people who are doing the compassionate work on behalf of all of us

[00:23:56] **Sharon Salzberg:** Well, we need them. You know? I don't know. I mean, being of an age now where, um, I mean my parents died a long time ago, but being it. Funerals of many people whose parents are dying. I don't remember a family ever attending the funeral without standing up and saying, we totally dependent, depended on so and so.

She helped my dad die at home. She helped him die with dignity. You know, she, I mean, always, you know, when there is a caregiver involved, there's a, a tremendous generosity of the spirit and. We need them. You know, like the whole, that is what I saw the first time we did the retreat for domestic violence shelter workers.

I thought, what would we do if, you know, like society's counting on these people to do their work.

[00:24:47] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So they're an essential part actually. The fabric of the commons and the common good.

[00:24:52] **Sharon Salzberg:** Yeah.

[00:24:54] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So I just wanna wind back and challenge one thing you said, which is you, you used the phrase, a dog eat dog world. I happen to have a dog and I walk my dog with a lot of other dogs and I have seen dogs sniff each other and wanna play each other.

I've never seen dogs want to eat each other. And the reason I say that is because. I mean, you're not the only one. Lots of people say dog, eat dog world. So we have. It. It's part of a mental construct. It's kind of like a con. What I'm gonna propose is just as it's false that dogs go out and try and eat each other.

I'm sure some dogs eat another dog, but in general, not only in general, in almost the majority cases, dogs would much rather play with each other than eat each other. It's not only a missed description of. Dogs. It's a mis descrip of the world. And what we're really learning is as we explore how trees support each other, how nature supports each other, how humans evolve because of our altruism more than our competition, that it's part of a.

Complete misunderstanding of the true nature of nature. And so I'd love to hear your thoughts about, so what is the true nature of nature? So how is compassion something that just some of us have to learn meditation through, or is it real? Is it endemic? In our natures is are we all potentially compassionate of society?

Would just let us be.

[00:26:28] **Sharon Salzberg:** I have heard that dogs don't really eat dogs, but as you know, it's, it is such a common phrase and one of the things that, uh, I've enjoyed exploring with people, you know, because it's. It is an ethic that, that so many people have. Uh, strangely enough, I think if we look more deeply,

[00:26:48] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So what I'm asking is do people have it or do people think they're supposed to have it?

[00:26:55] **Sharon Salzberg:** I think people have it, but I think we have to look more deeply to discover interconnection, basically, you know, the way we respond to one another, like my favorite. Thing to do going into an organization, for example, to teach, is to ask people, who else has to be doing their job well for you to do your job well?

Because even if we don't feel like we're part of a team, we're part of a team. If that makes no sense. And sometimes it doesn't make sense. Um, do you commute to work? Do you ever think about that car mechanic or the train engineer? And if you don't commute, if you work at home, uh, and you're relying on technology, do you ever think about that?

You know, and. And if none, sometimes none of that resonates with people. And I say, well, did you eat today? You know, and if you don't grow all your own food, this, of course is a very classical reflection. Like how many beings have been involved in that plate of broccoli, you know, sitting in front of you one, one afternoon.

Um, somebody planted a, you know. A crop and somebody harvested it and somebody transported it, and we live in an interconnected world, and so it's not a gooey kind of compassion, but it's, it's almost like a bone deep recognition that our lives have something to do with one another.

[00:28:17] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So, but this is an, it's so interesting because. When you ask who has to do a job well for you to do a job well, you know, I can think of dozens and dozens of people. So the fact that there are people who don't, can't think of somebody shows how isolated our society has become.

[00:28:38] **Sharon Salzberg:** yeah.

[00:28:39] **Jonathan FP Rose:** I wanna go back to societal messages again because, um, in the past, you and Ethan Ter did some work on, on these two different ways of seeing the world and how they kind of affect how we are in the world.

And one was the three S's, which is that we're separate, which are scared and we are selfish. And, and the, the antithesis was the three Cs that were connected, were compassionate and were courageous. And, um, and, and my instinct is that.

So because we're so interdependent, actually we are. We're not autonomous beings. We're deeply related beings, but we, but it's very interesting when you are deeply connected and related to a society, I'm sorry, to a social message, which tells you, you separate. In terms of being selfish that it's all about you and you wanna gain more and not about others, and that you're scared, which really means that you're threatened by people of another race or another condition or another, something or other.

Um, uh, uh, so it's so interesting to me that when the true nature of the world is that we're connected and therefore we should be compassionate and kinda courageous, but they're these larger social memes that are, uh. Mis adapting people by telling them that they're separate, uh, scared and and selfish.

Okay, so that's a long way of reposing a question, which is, so how do we move society from the three S's to the three C's?

[00:30:20] **Sharon Salzberg:** It's not easy apparently, but I think it is possible. I think, uh, I dunno if it's moving society as, as and as a whole, you know, so much

[00:30:31] **Jonathan FP Rose:** can't move everybody. Come on.

[00:30:33] **Sharon Salzberg:** well. One by one maybe, or 10 by 10. But, um, I. Because underlying all of that is the belief about what's gonna actually make us happy. And if you feel, you know, I'm too vulnerable, if I'm connected, I'm, uh, I'm better off being scared.

That's strength. You know, that that's real strength being vengeful or something like that. Uh, it's what. We were kind of talking about earlier, you know, being compassionate is for wimps and for fools, you know, everyone's just gonna take advantage of you. So for a lot of people it takes a kind of personal exploration like. I held on to that grudge for, you know, 15 years, how happy did it make me, you know? Um, and that is not easy to do in terms of a mass movement, you know, it's developing insight and, and genuine understanding. But I think it's possible. And I think, you know, going back to something you were kind of inferring before, when we see children. Who are not strongly conditioned into antipathy and separation. There is a kind of natural altruism it seems that, that they exhibit. And so, um, there's a way of, of recognizing that, I think, and, and helping nurture that along the way, which I think is, is pretty important. And seeing through the, even as an adult, seeing through the, uh, the myth and the distortion.

Of being separate, selfish and scared, being something that is delightful. It's also tied up. I mean, for us in this society, I think with a kind of fear of death and, and a feeling that if we could only fortify ourselves enough, we'll be safe, somehow safe from change. Even in some minds in a way, safe from dying.

And so there's the whole ethos of being in control all the time of everything. And, uh, it, it takes a lot of deconstructing to sort of see through that.

[00:32:46] **Jonathan FP Rose:** See, my belief is you can be compassionate, courageous, and always in control. I

[00:32:51] **Sharon Salzberg:** another see, well, yeah,

[00:32:53] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Control, right? Yeah, that's one. That's what I have. Not let go. Um, but there's another CI wanna bring up, which is challenges in the real happiness challenge. So, um, one of the amazing things you've done in your career, through your books and through your teaching is that you're endlessly giving people tools.

You're actually not only. Preaching, but you're giving them pathways and, uh, and so I'd love you to talk about the Real Happiness challenge or any other pathway that you, you think could really help people.

[00:33:27] **Sharon Salzberg:** Well, I think that, um, that's kind of the point. That's what I was longing so much for when I went to India, you know, was really tools. And I'd say another community I've been able to work with are, are survivors of gun violence. Um, and in working with them that we had a retreat up in Barry, uh, for this group, which was.

Started, you know, we started the idea of the retreat just for people who'd been involved in Parkland in the school shooting there, and by so massive of a problem that there were people there from everywhere. And uh, the single word that was most appreciated was tools. That's what people wanted. That's what they needed.

And they, they could, they resonated very strongly with that. And I just took note of that. That's what people kept asking for was tools. I need tools. I need a path. I need a way. Um. Like, I had an unfortunate experience with a doctor a couple of years ago when I had pneumonia and I was in the hospital and I left the hospital on 24 hour oxygen and I ended up seeing a, a pulmonologist and you know, they take you off your, and I went in and trailing this oxygen tank and they take you off and have you walk around with a pulse oximeter on your finger.

And then so she did that and she said, you need oxygen, come back in two months. I said, tell me how not to need oxygen. And she said, come back in two months. You know, I found another doctor, but you know, I, I understand that yearning, you know, if you believe in a path that there's some way of not feeling so alone in this challenge or turmoil of, of connecting, of feeling part of life, uh, we need tools.

And so I think it's, it's a really. We don't need sectarian dispute, we need tools and, and so we do things, um, like on my website, we do have this real happiness challenge every February of 28 days. Uh, I wrote a book some years ago called Real Happiness and the original subtitle was something like, um, the Power of Meditation, A 28 Day Program.

And it came out in January of that year. And. Somebody said to me, well, February it's 28 days. Why don't you run a challenge? And so we did that and we do that every year. And, uh, every retreat I, that I teach in some way is really about tools because people have a lifetime to continue if they wish to refine those tools and, and utilize them in some way.

[00:36:17] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So tell the audience about some of these tools. A real happiness challenge. What are you challenging people to do?

[00:36:24] **Sharon Salzberg:** So, uh, I think it starts with like five minutes of meditation practice. I always am hesitant about that 'cause the first five minutes are usually the most difficult five minutes, you know, and so saying just sit for five minutes is, you know, sometimes a little counterproductive. But, um.

[00:36:42] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Except you can learn that you can sit for five minutes.

[00:36:44] **Sharon Salzberg:** That's true. Uh, it starts with tools of concentration where we learn to stabilize attention, maybe using the sensations of the breath, something like that. Just the normal in and out breath. It's not really a breath exercise. It's a way of getting a little more concentrated and centered, and then we open up that kind of awareness, so we're paying attention to.

To things happening in our bodies and seeing maybe the distinction, if you're in physical pain of some kind between that and the story, like, I'm gonna be this way forever and it's dire. You

know, things like that. We, we open our awareness to pay attention to emotions and. Ways we're feeling about things and uh, see more deeply, you know, if you're angry, for example, and you're not freaking out about the anger, but you're paying attention to it, maybe you see sadness, you see fear, and you also see change, things like that.

Um, we practice tools of love and kindness, which are actually that kind of intentional. Wish to pay attention differently. If you're in the habit, for example, of just putting yourself down all the time, you kind of ask yourself, what happens if I wish myself well, you know, for a few moments. Or if you think, you know, I have nothing, and life is so bleak and I'm desperate, and it's awful. Spend a couple of moments asking yourself, does anything else happen today? Like, anything to be grateful for, you know, so it's like stepping out of the ruts of our attention and seeing what it's like when we see things from another angle. So there are many kinds of tools that we, we employ

[00:38:36] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And what's the best book of yours for people to read to? To discover the tools.

[00:38:40] **Sharon Salzberg:** probably real happiness because it is just that, it's, it's a program. For, uh, paying attention differently.

[00:38:50] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm.

And are there places where you have seen the paying a attention differently? Paying attention positively spread where you've seen it's become communalized. It's not just an individual practice in Buddhism. You know, we have the Sangha and Judaism, we have the minion in Christianity, we have the congregation.

Um, I think these are all re um, in, uh, Hinduism. We had the K with like a hundred million people. But I think there's all recognitions that. Um, that spiritual evolution and is a, is a collective action, not just an individual one.

[00:39:36] **Sharon Salzberg:** Mm-hmm. I went to a Cumba mail once and like I was at Woodstock. I would just wanna say, these are my, these are my credentials for being a cool person. Um, the. Very first retreat we actually taught for, um, domestic violence shelter workers, I think was an example of that. You know, because we tried to have more than, these were all frontline workers to begin with.

We tried to have more than one person per shelter, so this person would not feel so alone. And then before too long, we were being approached by directors and supervisors of shelters who said there's big staff changes going on. In terms of their wellbeing, like, don't you do a program for us? And then we did a parallel program for them and they themselves, the directors and supervisors came up with a phrase which was establishing a culture of wellness at work.

They wanted culture change. Um, they talked about. All kinds of different things. You know, growing a rooftop garden and every single person talked about some space, having a kind of physical space people could go to, uh, you know, not religious or, or sectarian, but just some space where they could, they could be.

And I just watched it grow, you know, as people wanted to establish a culture. And culture could also mean your own body and mind. I. And your desk, your team, you know it, it's, it's got vary

dimensions. And one woman who I'll never forget, I quote her all the time, she said, I've decided that in order to establish a culture of wellness, I have to start taking a lunch break.

And everyone in the room who did not work at a shelter, it was completely aghast. And we said, you don't take a lunch break. Like, isn't it in your contract? And she said, oh yeah, but there's never enough time and there's always something to do and someone's struggling. And she said, but I can't go on until I do that.

And then she came, you know, week after week and told us her progress and actually being able to take a lunch break. And so that kind of thing also spreads. Because it's not seen as, uh, weakness or you can't do your job well about, look at that, you know, you're actually smiling. I've seen you smile in a month and you know, there it goes.

I think we do have tremendous influence on one another.

[00:42:04] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. So creating a culture of wellness is really, um. It spreads. Uh, so the, and, uh, so let's just go back again. The definite empathy is you feel deeply for somebody, but the feelings in a way cause you pain and compassion is you are able to shift those into

[00:42:28] **Sharon Salzberg:** Mm-hmm.

[00:42:29] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And so it is the flow of those feelings through you.

They motivate you, but you put them back into the world. In effect, you transform the suffering into positive

[00:42:39] **Sharon Salzberg:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

[00:42:40] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And so I. And that's hard to do alone, particularly when the rest of the world is not supporting that. But when you're part of a culture of wellness, then you're all mutually supporting each other and it, and you get the synergetic effect of being part of this.

Um, so the culture of wellness, um, has such an amplification effect.

[00:43:09] **Sharon Salzberg:** I think it really does, and it's very, it's also very tied to mindfulness because. When you have that kind of culture, you can admit your fears and your hesitation 'cause you're seeing it, but you're not taking it all to heart, like, I'm a bad person because I'm freaked out. You know? Um, people can share those things, their vulnerabilities as well as their triumphs and, and their joys and, and, uh, it's that kind of culture, you know, where you can pay attention and pay attention collectively in a way.

[00:43:42] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So Sharon, you have written so much and taught so much. Is there a next, so like, are are you right? So what are you writing now?

[00:43:54] **Sharon Salzberg:** Uh, there I have a lot of balls in the air, actually. It's like, uh, for one thing, I have a children's book coming out in

[00:44:01] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Whoa. Wait, wait. So what age?

[00:44:05] **Sharon Salzberg:** Uh, four to eight.

[00:44:06] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Whoa. Do we need this for some grandchildren? Wonderful.

[00:44:10] **Sharon Salzberg:** Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. Okay. It's called kind Carl. It's about Carl the crocodile who learns to be kind.

[00:44:18] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Okay,

[00:44:19] **Sharon Salzberg:** uh,

[00:44:19] **Jonathan FP Rose:** does this, does the crocodile become a vegetarian?

[00:44:23] **Sharon Salzberg:** oh, we didn't go that far. He does, there's loving kindness meditation instruction in the, in the back.

[00:44:28] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Okay, got it. All.

[00:44:29] **Sharon Salzberg:** does he become, well, he, his favorite food all along was crepes, so,

[00:44:34] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Okay. Got it.

[00:44:35] **Sharon Salzberg:** yeah. Um, and uh, many years ago I wrote a book called Faith Trusting Your Own Deepness Experience, which is really kind of my faith journey.

And there's some energy around to turn that into a play, a theatrical play. So that's cooking, that's right at the beginning. Um. It looks like I'm gonna have a workbook on Loving Kindness, which is really all tools coming out, uh, next year. And, um, my literary agent came to visit me in New York and sat down with me and said, I want to know what you would wanna write.

You know, like, what's, do you have another book? And what is it? So I thought about it really deeply, and I came up with. As you know, there's this, uh, famous quotation from the Buddha where he said, I teach one thing and one thing only. That is suffering in the end of suffering. I wrote her like three paragraphs about suffering in the end of suffering, and I think it was like way too depressing for her.

So I realized I've gotta really flesh that out. You know, it's not about being mired in suffering and being defined by suffering, obviously, you know, it's about recognizing suffering, not being so afraid to admit it one's own in someone else's. And, uh, what are we gonna do about that? So I'm sort of in the process of writing a proposal

[00:46:09] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm.

[00:46:10] **Sharon Salzberg:** about that there.

Lots of stuff you.

[00:46:13] **Jonathan FP Rose:** you know, I once was at a retreat with Galliger and he was talking about suffering, which is the foundation of, of Buddhism is recognizing suffering. And um, Deanna and I had just come from this fantastic. A camping trip in the mountains and we had gone on a picnic and like, you know, so I said, there are, you know, like, not everything is suffering.

And he said to me, you have to watch out for the picnic spots in Samsara.

[00:46:45] **Sharon Salzberg:** Nice.

[00:46:46] **Jonathan FP Rose:** said, you know, like suffering is not all just about pain. It's actually about being trapped in a constrained sense of self. It's actually being, and what this practice, the practice of meditation and analysis and, and thinking deeply about the nature of the world helps us see is, um, a, a Hopi friend of mine says how we make ourselves nouns instead of verbs.

How we. Constrain ourselves to these, these limitations versus these great expenses. And so part of the recognition of suffering is the tremendous opportunity that it offers us. Once we see the boundaries to recognize we can dissolve the boundaries.

[00:47:40] **Sharon Salzberg:** That's true. I, I had been thinking also, you know, um, back to caregivers, it's the perfect model of. Recognizing we don't have control or someone else's situation. We can have influence, we can have effect. We try our best, but we can't seize the moment, you know, and say, I'm in charge now. So it brings us right to those kinds of seeming paradoxes where we have to hold a lot of realities at once. we are that expansiveness and openness and at the same time, there are the real limitations of day to day and, and we hold them both hopefully.

[00:48:21] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. And so that in many ways is our, I was gonna call our challenge. You know, it's so funny you said you're writing a play. That is the play of our lives to actually recognize those. Those boundaries, those conditions in which we all have to deal with and yet try and be as open as possible.

[00:48:42] **Sharon Salzberg:** Yeah, we are.

[00:48:43] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yep. So Sharon, just one last thing is we're gonna link to this show, the meditation exercises that you did for the Garrison Institute app for caregivers, so that we can make that accessible to all people.

So do you wanna just talk a little bit about the history of that, how that came about, and what's in it?

[00:49:02] **Sharon Salzberg:** Again, Gianna, the, the great visionary, you know, your wife, um, really had a sense of, uh, wanting these tools to be accessible for people. And so, um, there's a range of exercises that are, again, very practical, very direct, very simple. It's just a question of putting them into practice if you wish. And I find.

It helps a lot to have some structure. Um, and, you know, the, some people don't really appreciate having a voice come in, you know, and, but most people really appreciate it and it's, it's a help. Um, just to bring us back the essence of learning and meditation practice as in so many things in life as being able to begin again, you know, our minds wander, but that's natural.

We can come back, you know, we can, we can get more stable or we freak out over something. We get consumed by something also natural. We don't have to stay there forever or build, you know, an entire self-image on top of it. We can start over. And so, um, that's a lot of the encouragement that's given by me, you know, and through all these, these various tools is, let's remember the underlying principles and, and we can put this into practice.

[00:50:27] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And they're a wonderful gift. They're short, they're easy, and then your voice leads us through. So I encourage our listeners to find them in the show notes or wherever we have them and, and enjoy them. Sharon, thank you so much for your, all the work you've done for the world of work you've done for. Me and, and the Garrison Institute, and you've been such a generous contributor, um, to creating a culture of care, and we're very, very grateful for that.

[00:50:58] **Sharon Salzberg:** Well, thank you so much and thank you for the podcast.

[00:51:03] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yeah, I look forward, I, I, and I look forward to our audience, enjoy this too, all