



Conscious Life presents

Meditation to Heal Individual & Collective Trauma

Guest: Dr Fleet Maull

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[00:00:09] Alex Howard

Welcome everyone to this interview. I'm super excited to be talking with my good friend Fleet Maull. We're talking about the power of meditation and mindfulness, not just for individual trauma, but also for healing our collective trauma.

Fleet Maull, PhD., is an author, meditation teacher, and social entrepreneur who developed Neurosymatic Mindfulness, a deeply embodied neuroscience and trauma-informed approach to meditation that accelerates healing, integration, and awakening.

He is the founder of Heart Mind Institute, the Global Resilience Summit, Prison Mindfulness Institute, and Engaged Mindfulness Institute. Dr Maull is a Zen Roshi, and a senior Dharma teacher in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

He is the author of *Radical Responsibility, How to Move Beyond Blame, Fearlessly Live your Highest Purpose and Become an Unstoppable Force for Good.*

Firstly, Fleet welcome. I look forward to another one of our many conversations in our series for each other's events and conferences. Welcome back.

Dr Fleet Maull

Yeah, me too.

Alex Howard

We always have a plan of where we're going to go, but there's always some treasures along the way, I'm looking forward to where we end up. Maybe a good starting point to open up today's interview is, I'm interested in your perspective of how you look at the impacts of trauma, and how that shapes our nervous system. I think that's a good foundation for then where we're going to go in today's conversation.

[00:01:52] Dr Fleet Maul

I think the accumulation of trauma at the individual level of all sorts, whether various forms of childhood trauma, historical trauma, racial trauma, single incident trauma, just all the different things we're exposed to, end up creating patterns of stuckness in our nervous system.

Trauma is, basically, experiencing some kind of threat, physical, emotional, psychological. Threat of some kind that overwhelms our ability to cope with it, and thus our nervous system, our fight or flight response tends to get locked on. Now, it doesn't mean it stays on permanently, but there's a pattern there of it being on and stuck on, and that can be triggered by various things.

It can be state specific, memory specific, various associations will retrigger these traumas. When it's triggered, we're suddenly in this locked-on, fight-or-flight response, which could go into shutting down, into hypoarousal. Or could go into overactivation, into some hyperarousal in various forms, into various forms of rigidity and addictive compulsive patterns, or into acting out, and aggression, and anxiety, and so forth.

These patterns are there that get embedded in our nervous system, and there are actually neural networks that develop, that support us going down those rabbit holes, if you will. When we get triggered by various things, these are literally in our nervous system, in the neural patterning of our neural architecture.

They're these patterns of stuckness that we got stuck in unresolved cycles. Normally when we get triggered into fight or flight, I like Stephen Porges's view on this, and his polyvagal theory, he and I have talked about it a number of times. When we do get triggered, there's this bell curve of arousal. It goes up one side, and that can go up, it can be more hyperarousal in terms of acting out anxiety, frustration, anger. Or it can be more rigidity going into addictive, compulsive, reactive behaviors, that can even go into a pure rigidity freeze response.

That goes up and at a certain point, if it really becomes life-threatening, then we can go into a total shutdown response. You get up to the top of that, and then it comes down. There can be a whole other set of emotional feelings on the way back down, it can be shame, and further anxiety, embarrassment, depression.

We're all familiar with that triggering, we've all been emotionally triggered, and then we've gone through the trigger, and then we've come back down, we thought our life was going to end but a little while later, okay, it's okay. I was emotionally triggered.

What happens with these traumas is we get stuck. It doesn't come back down, it doesn't complete the cycle, and it doesn't relieve itself, there's no ultimate de-escalation, it just stays stuck in these patterns. Then often there can be a repeated patterning like this, like getting stuck, and stuck again, layers of trauma layered on layers of trauma from various sources.

There's just this stuckness and ultimately the work, there's many forms of trauma healing, most of the more effective ones are somatic-oriented at least. Various forms of talk therapy can be helpful, there's a lot happening now with psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, and there's the various forms of somatic therapies that help us somehow loosen up these patterns of stuckness, and then allow them to resolve themselves, and release themselves out of the body.

[00:05:48] Alex Howard

I'd love to come a bit more to the role of flow states, meditation, and so on. Let's start off with some of the benefits of how it can help, and I'll expand from there. Maybe speak a little bit to how mindfulness, meditation, flow states can help unstuck those stuck places.

Dr Fleet Maull

When I speak about flow states that we act access through meditation, I'm talking about really deep states. Even though I use the term neuro somatic mindfulness for the approach that I've developed, which is synthesized from many, many different traditions. I'm thinking of changing it to meditation because mindfulness is wonderful, but it tends to point to just training our attention so we can be more present, more attentive, and it has all kinds of wonderful benefits.

But it's not necessarily taking us into deep states of flow, which might be more akin to almost in Vedic traditions and other Buddhist traditions, to Samadhi states. Of course, there can be many depths to that, and I'm not necessarily talking that we have to go into the deepest states of Samadhi, but there is a level of beingness that we can access.

It does start off with mind training and mindfulness, and some form of self-directed self-regulation. We choose to place our attention somewhere, and whenever it wanders, we bring it back. That's that self-directed attention switching, self-directed self-regulation. But over time, we're training our own neurobiology, our own brain, heart, mind system, to learn to autoregulate itself into that depth of our being.

It moves from an effortful practice, there's always some effort in the beginning, effortful, self-directed practice into a less effortful and ultimately effortless practice which we're tapping into. In some ways the body heart mind system's pre-existing capacity to autoregulate. We're also really creating, we're reinforcing and developing, a new capacity through developing new neural networks in the brain for the body to autoregulate itself.

The reason that's important is because the more it's auto-regulating, then it can go deeper. Because if we still have our hands on the wheel, and we're still involved in effortful self-regulation, that prevents it from going deeper. So by accessing this capacity for autoregulation, it starts to go deeper.

This is based on a deeply embodied approach to the practice. Deeply enhancing interoceptive awareness, which is internal perception, the body's capacity to feel itself from the inside out. Based on the fact that the entire body is a living organism, all containing neuronal cells, all connected to the central nervous system. All the way down to the bone, even including the marrow of the bones, the outer white, hard layer of the bones, the periosteum of the musculature, the vital organ, circulatory, lymphatic, all the glands, it's all sensory.

These sensations are subtler than external sensations on the surface of the skin, which go through a different set of neural networks that are highly myelinated, so we're more sensitive. The internal sensations go through different neural networks that are less myelinated, therefore less efficient, so the sensations are subtler, unless there's some extreme internal pain.

Nonetheless, with practice, we can tap into these. There's this vast universe of this somatic experience, landscape, sensate landscape within the body. By going into that, the further we go

into that, we're creating a basis to relax that effortfulness, and we're creating a basis for that autoregulation.

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We're also creating a basis for a more nondual approach to the practice, it becomes so compelling. We're just feeling. We're just in that experience of the internal landscape of the body. Then our internal systems start to cohere, all of our internal systems have different wave vibrations.

We have our brainwaves, we have our heartbeat, all the different glands and organs they all emit certain periodic wave formations, and these start to cohere, and we start to experience this internal resonance and coherence. Which is then starting to access into deep states of flow, that are physical, they're cognitive, they're physical, they're emotional, but primarily they are physical.

They're a physical, neurobiological reality of these deep states of flow. When we start to tap into that, we can relax into that, and that holds our awareness. Eventually becomes synonymous with awareness, and now we're starting to drop into what some of the traditions call various levels of Samadhi, we're in that deep state of flow, we're in the very depth of our being.

The wonderful thing that happens there when we experience that, we're conscious, we're aware there, it's not getting into an unconscious Samadhi, which is possible. You're very much aware and conscious, but it becomes immediately recognizable in that state that we are whole, that we're not broken, that we don't need fixing, and we're not missing anything.

In fact, we're touching into that level of our being which has never been touched by the trauma. From that place, we can have a very different perspective on the traumatized part of our being and our psychology. We don't feel captured by it, we don't feel victimized by it. At the same time, we're healing, because when we're in that state of flow, our nervous system is starting to literally untangle itself, and starting to release those patterns of stuckness.

Because we're literally moving from stuckness into flow, there is a healing. Even spending a moment or two in those deep flow states, the brain is rewiring itself to learn how to get back there. It knows that, okay, I know that, and now I'm learning how to get there, I know how to get back there. And it becomes easier and easier, and the more we practice, it's like always there in the background.

Even in the midst of busyness and scatteredness, the more we practice, there's a quality that it's right there in the background, and we can easily just drop back into it. This provides an incredibly nurturing foundation for our life neurophysiologically, psychologically, emotionally. In the same process, it's actually healing all these stuck patterns of trauma in the nervous system.

Alex Howard

It's really interesting Fleet, the point you make around there's a place that we can go to through meditation practice, which is untouched by trauma, that doesn't feel broken. One of the things I am very aware of, is that one of the gifts of dialogs like this, and your events, and our events, and others, is there's much more awareness around trauma and the impacts.

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But I think sometimes there's then an overidentification with that narrative. It's almost like we go from denial to becoming identified with the fact that we are a victim of trauma. Your point about that place, which is who we are, which is more than that, I think is important as part of that ability to be liberated from trauma. Because if we are identified with the impact, and that's who we are, how do we ever get free from that?

Dr Fleet Maul

If we don't have that sense of that part of our being that is free from the trauma, then we're really endlessly stuck in it. There's the possibilities of self-perpetuating it, because unconsciously we can be trapped in patterns where we're recreating the situation to breed.

Then we identify with that, and we can sadly develop a real victim mindset around that, that it just becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even in the Internal Family Systems work, which is more of a psychological approach to it, by doing all the work with the Parts, and having the Parts unburden themselves. But what you're getting in touch with is the Part of our awareness that can do that work, that can relate to all these Parts, and have the Parts connecting with each other, and doing these dialogs. That greater Part is not traumatized, and in Internal Family Systems, they call that the Self with a capital S. I think that's very interesting work.

I think also creating the neurobiological foundation for actually experiencing the quality of that non-traumatized awareness and consciousness, in the very depth of our being, is incredibly powerful. Then it changes everything, because then all the traumas we begin... This is not in any way to idealize any trauma, or dismiss the tragedy of many forms of trauma, or the injustice of many forms of trauma.

Nonetheless, none of us ever got some guarantee that life was going to be easy. Again this isn't to dismiss the deep profound need of motivation we all need to have, to try to remove so many of the systemic forms of injustice that continue traumatizing people.

But life is traumatic, and from that place that's not traumatized we can then see whatever trauma we've experienced for whatever reason. Individual history, or collective history, just, or unjust, or whatever. I mean, it's never just, but whatever kind of trauma it is, it can then be something that we can leverage for post-traumatic growth.

We can begin to see whatever challenges we've been dealt in life as really the playing field in which we grow and evolve spiritually. From that place, we have the place from which we can leverage whatever trauma we've experienced for post traumatic growth, psychological, spiritual evolution. And to me, that's really what life is all about.

But it's very easy, if we don't have some access to some part of ourselves that's not traumatized, it's very hard to get to that. And it's very easy to understand how we can get so identified with it, and see no way out, and develop our mindset around it, because we don't have an experience that's not traumatized.

[00:16:39] Alex Howard

One of the challenges we can have when we've experienced trauma is that we sit to practice meditation. And as we turn our attention more inwards, we feel all of the feelings that we're trying to get away from. Like, particularly if the nervous system is dysregulated, we become more aware of that dysregulation. I'm interested in your approach, how people navigate the initial, sometimes discomfort and challenges, that can come as they turn more attention towards themselves.

Dr Fleet Maul

This is very important. Whether it's just turning attention to one's own experience, cognitive, emotional, physical experience, but in particular the body. Our nervous system holds that trauma and those patterns of stuckness, stuck dysregulation, as you referenced, that can be retriggering.

It's very important to take a trauma-informed approach whereas we're guiding people to do these practices, that we're giving them lots of options, lots of different ways to do the practice, give it flexibility around posture, flexibility around what one takes as the object of one's attention, the ability to move around, and move away from and move back to. The approach that Peter Levine has always recommended, somatic experience, that he calls pendulating.

We lean in, and if we're experiencing some discomfort, whether it's physical, emotional, cognitive, and it starts to feel too overwhelming, then we lean back out. We lean in, we lean out. It's very helpful to find some reference point for okayness. So whether that's posture, or being accompanied by someone, or just having a safe place to practice, or having familiar reference points for oneself. If one's starting to feel overwhelmed, one can simply open one's eyes and reconnect with familiar things in one's room, or if need be get up and take a walk.

But then you can come back, and maybe next time, you lean in a little further. And then you lean out, you lean in, and over time, you're developing greater tolerance. You're expanding what Dan Siegel calls the Window of Tolerance, or we've others called the Zone of Resilience. And we're broadening our capacity to work with these things.

Gradually we can just work our way through that, and into dropping into that level of our being where we experience that non-traumatized aspect of our being. But again, we need to do this, and we may need support and guidance around this to create safety around that work, depending on what we're working with. Or it may be simple enough to have a sense of always grounding our practice, and self-compassion, and self-acceptance, and not pushing. It's never aggressive, it's always allowing and releasing.

Alex Howard

Fleet should we turn our attention a little bit to collective trauma? Then we can bring this all together. I know that you speak about collective trauma as being frozen patterns of social dysregulation. Let's speak to that piece a little bit.

Dr Fleet Maul

I think that's so important, especially in terms of what we're experiencing today, all these human conflicts have always been going on right now. The war in Gaza, and the war in Ukraine, and other

conflicts going on around the world, it sometimes seems like it's getting worse. Our forebears went through the 20th century with two world wars, so we should keep that in perspective. What we're experiencing now really is a result of those wars, and of those traumas.

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If you study human history, it's just a history of trauma, it's a history of trauma. It's different here in our country, in North America, in the US, and Canada, a lot of us Anglos think of ourselves as having been relatively free, unless of course, not to forget the civil war, one of the bloodiest wars ever.

If you're an indigenous person, and your whole history in the Americas is one of trauma. And Europe, for Europeans it's just been conquest after conquest, war after war, horrors coming back and forth, and back and forth since ancient times. It's just a whole history of trauma that we have. This gets stuck in these patterns of social dysregulation, very much the way the individual and the collective works.

It's that classic spiritual saying, 'As beloved, so below'. It's always the same, it's the same dynamic, the same pattern. I love the way that our colleague Thomas Hübl talks about, it becomes frozen, like a frozen tundra. We need to find ways to... We need to unfreeze it, so we can work through it and deal with it. It's very much similar to process.

One of the things that I found very effective in my own personal experience. I've been involved in this bearing witness work, along with the Zen Peacemaker community for probably 25 years now, or longer. We've been doing bearing witness retreats at places of deep suffering around the world.

The primary retreat, probably the mother retreat, is the annual retreat at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the former Nazi death camp. One of the most infamous camps, where the most people were killed and the most Jews, but others as well were killed at Auschwitz, which is in Oświęcim, in Poland. We've been going there since 1996.

I was still incarcerated then, so I went for the first time in 2000 or 2001, I've been over 20 times now. I was just there in November. We've been there many times when there's been upheavals in Israel and Palestine. This last most recent November, we're there in the midst of this horrific war in Gaza. Obviously, it brings up a lot, it always brings up a lot, but to be there, the juxtaposition of those things we've just referenced.

We've done bearing witness retreats around the world and other death camps of the Holocaust in Germany and Poland, also in China, in Japan, in Northern Ireland, places where there's been pilgrims in France.

Members of the Zen Peacemaker order and community have done various bearing witness retreats around the world, and continue to do so. The native American bearing witness retreats that are happening every summer in the Black Hills here through the Zen Peacemaker order. And more recently we've done several around the legacy of slavery and mass incarceration in the US. It's a worldwide effort.

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Coming back in particular to the bearing witness retreat at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In the past, we've had people come from all over North America, and many have a history, many are of Jewish heritage, and lost family members in the Holocaust, and many times at Auschwitz in particular. We've also, up until recently, always had survivors that were in the camp with us. Now there's hardly any left, any of those who are alive now were very small children at the time. But we've always had survivors with us.

We have a lot of people come from Germany. And in the past, we've had many participants whose parents or grandparents were involved in the Nazi movement. Some who were even guards in some of the death camps. It's really about including all the voices. It's moving beyond blame, it's moving beyond shame into just opening up to the reality of this, and embracing this is part of our human experience.

These horrific, genocidal, unspeakable horrors are ours, we have to embrace this. We can't just other it and say, this is something horrible that happened over here by these horrible people. It's really about embrace. This is ours, and we want to include all the voices.

One of the really intense things that happened in the early years, in the late 90s and early 2000s, some of the German participants, and some of the German Zen peacemaker activists, who were leaders in a Zen Peacemaker movement and were from Germany, were calling for doing some healing ceremony for the Germans who were there, for the Nazi guards and the other German military, and so forth.

This created a huge upheaval in their retreat. I mean, people were outraged at the idea of even doing it. It took about 3 or 4 years of dialogue before it was finally able to happen. At one point it happened, some healing ceremony happened outside the camp, that was not officially part of the program.

But then one year, and I was there for this, we had a Rabbi from Israel whose family had been in Israel for 400 or 500 years, so deep roots in Israel. And a deeply trained Orthodox Rabbi who had become a very progressive person. Not that orthodox, and I'm not counterpointing the two, but conservative, liberal. He'd become pretty liberal for an Orthodox Rabbi.

He was able to hold the ceremony in a way that the Jewish people involved in our community, and in that retreat, were willing to accept it because of who he was.

We actually did the retreat in the... if people are familiar with Birkenau, at the entrance there's this infamous tower. We went up in the tower, and we did it in the tower. We weren't literally in the camp, which is a cemetery really, and a memorial of the Jewish people, and the gypsies, and the gays, and all the others, including German prisoners of war, and others who were killed there. Primarily the Jews were killed there, it was a death camp for the Jewish people.

We weren't in, but we were literally up in that tower. He did this extensive ceremony that was focused on healing the energy of the Germans who'd been there. It was incredibly powerful. When it was over, by him holding that, he had just turned white, he was like white as a ghost.

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Those of us who were the leaders of the retreat and facilitators went with him back to this place where we stayed nearby, the dialog center. And we did a circle with him, and just really supported him for a couple of hours to help him heal, and bring his energy back. It was so powerful.

But the process of what we see, we've seen this again and again, that people will come to that place, and just be in a state of horror, and grief, and outrage, and it manifests in all kinds of ways. And then find themselves on the other side at some point, maybe not the first retreat, maybe the second one, maybe the third one, but in experiencing different sorts of joy, and release, and freedom, and even ecstasy because of having gone through this fire. Being willing to sit in that deep fire with one's heart open, one's mind open.

The thing about the bearing witness and what Bernie Glassman, the founder of the Zen Peacemakers, called these plunge practices, is we put ourselves in environments that defy our ability to try to put them in a box, or define them, or use our conditioning, and our opinions to do something with it. They just throw us into a complete state of not knowing.

By being willing to sit in the fire of that over a period of time, something gets burned away, something gets released. Actually, over time, people who've been going to Auschwitz for many years, not just in our community, but many communities, feel the energy has really shifted in that camp, that the work of the peacemakers, and other groups that have come there...

A lot of groups are coming in and out, there are thousands of people coming in all day. I wouldn't call it tourism, but some of it's tourism, some of it's people wanting to go for other reason, but they come in for an hour they leave, they're not really connecting with the place. But there are some other groups, like the Zen peacemakers, that come and really do deep healing work there. And many people who've been involved in yours, even the camp historians and camp officials have said they feel like the energy of the place has really shifted over the years, and there has been something healed and something released.

In many ways, I think, to heal the collective trauma, every time there's another war, another refugee crisis, another displacement of any kind, as well as all the individual horrors. It's just adding to this collective load, of this unsustainable load, of trauma, and grief, and oppression, and horror that we're carrying in our human system.

It will always re-manifest as violence until we heal it, we have to find some way to heal us. The only way is to open to it, and face it, and be with it, and to gradually allow that, what Thomas Hübl calls that frozen tundra of collective trauma to thaw, and have it released, and then transform.

The reason we can do this, this is really important... The reason we don't do this on large scale is because it looks like all horror, and we just want to move on. It looks like going there would be overwhelming, and it would just be even self-destructive, or collectively destructive to focus on it. It seems unresolvable, overwhelming, and therefore we avoid it, and want to shove it away, and just move on.

We hope if we just keep moving into the future, somehow it won't catch up with us, it won't follow us, but it always does. The reason it is possible, is the same reason that there is a depth of our

own being individually where we can do this trauma work and heal. As we were speaking about earlier there is a collective consciousness. I don't mean the collective unconscious in Jungian terms, although there could be some relation.

[00:30:53] Dr Fleet Maul

I'm talking about the broader field of consciousness, if you want, quantum consciousness, or really, that is reality. If we can do collective practices, healing practices, but also practices that take us into not knowing, we can collectively access that field of consciousness which is not traumatized.

There is a collective field of consciousness that's not traumatized by this embedded social dysregulation patterns of stuckness. In the same way that there is for us individually, there is collectively, if we can access that.

I was at an event where people were talking about we need to develop new narratives of this possibility. We need to develop narratives around the possibilities of collective quantum healing. Otherwise, we'll just keep staying, we'll keep ourselves embedded in this cycle of re-traumatization, because we don't think anything else is possible. But it is possible, but it won't be possible until we see it as possible.

Alex Howard

One of the things that I was thinking as you were talking Fleet, is that one of the struggles we have when it comes to our collective trauma, is that we become, a bit like we become identified with our individual trauma, we become identified with our positions and our perspectives.

So when it comes to finding those places of healing, it's like the more rigid we are, the more defensive we are, the less possibility is there for something new to happen. I'd love you to speak a little bit to how the practice of meditation can help us loosen some of that defensiveness, and some of that fixed narrative, that gets in the way of seeing new things.

That's one of the powers of really dropping into deep meditative states. Because when we have the experience of actually being in deep meditative states, they are not narrative states, and we then actually have the experience of seeing all of our conditioning, and all of our thoughts, and our opinion. We see it's all narrative, we actually see, and it's not to invalidate anything about our personal narratives or story, but we see it is just narrative. On some level, on the ultimate level, it's completely illusory.

Dr Fleet Maul

Now, we don't live in the ultimate formless, we live in the world of form, so we do have to honor our relative existence. We can honor our stories, but we don't have to hold them so tightly. When we experience that they don't have ultimate reality, that they're very malleable, and they're narratives.

There are many teachers and trainers out there that work with people who have strong narratives that are perpetuating suffering for themselves, and they basically encourage them, why don't you create a new narrative? Because it's all story.

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If the story you have about your life, because anybody's life, you could look back at anybody's life and create a million different stories, from a million different perspectives. Why not create a different story that is more empowering for yourself? That's going to give you the possibility of having a good life, of being happier, of empowering yourself, instead of holding on to a story that's so disempowering, and debilitating that it's condemning you to a life of suffering.

It's the same way collectively, that we can change our collective story, even with the current conflict in the Middle East. Which every brilliant statesperson in the world has tried to win a Nobel Prize by straightening it out. A few, I think, maybe even did, but it doesn't last. There's this embedded trauma and history on both sides of all these historical incidents. Like, both sides, "Well, they killed my cousins, they killed my grandfather, they killed my great grandfather."

I've even heard people on both sides say that they feel the other side is somehow genetically predisposed to kill those of the other side. It's so much history, and it's so hard to untangle it.

A really interesting case is the conflicts in Northern Ireland, which were called The Troubles, which you probably know more about than I do, living in the UK. But my understanding of how that was gradually deescalated was conflicts are all built on assumptions.

There's a wonderful model called the Ladder of Inference, where we go from the open field of data, of not knowing. We zero in on data points, and we start making assumptions about them, and then our field of vision narrows and we only see that which supports our assumption. Instead of trying to disprove our assumptions, like good scientists, we're reinforcing our assumptions and they become conclusions. "I knew that's the way, I knew they were out to get me." And then we further narrow our field of vision, and it becomes beliefs.

Once we have beliefs, we're willing to act on them, and we're willing to kill and die for them. Then that creates these self-enforcing loops that just keep reinforcing those patterns. You have these people that are all at the top of these Ladders of Inference, with these really hardened beliefs about each other, that keep them in these death struggles.

The process is walking back down the ladder. My understanding of what Senator Mitchell from the US, and others that were involved in some of the efforts to negotiate the de-escalation of the conflict in Northern Ireland, was it was a process of gradually walking both sides down that ladder. Then taking just little baby steps to start a new narrative, like just seeing if they could agree to show up at a meeting at the same time without weapons, that took three times, and it finally happened. "Oh, we were able to do this." Okay, there's a new story beginning, and then gradually building a new story of coexistence of some kind. It is possible.

I think what you brought up about our identification with narratives, it's really important because we can step outside of those. The bearing witness work, we call it, based on the three tenets of not knowing, bearing witness, and what comes out of that is wisdom-based, action, loving action, compassion, and action.

Well, not knowing is the way we get outside of the collective narrative. In our individual work, dropping into the very depths of our being, we experience that element of our being which is free

of narrative. In both cases, we then have a place from which to have greater perspective and see that narratives are malleable. Some narratives service individually and collectively, and some narratives do not serve us individually, collectively.

[00:37:25] Alex Howard

I think also part of what helped in Ireland was this collective sense of we're stuck, and we just don't want another generation to grow up with the same cycle of suffering that's perpetuating. Coming back to the power of silence and meditation, certainly one of my observations is that the less we're caught in the narratives and the stories, and the less we're rigid in our protection of those, the more able we are to ask fundamental questions, and to step back and to see things differently.

I'm curious as to how you see the practice of meditation helping this process of facilitating global change. We're not, obviously, going to see all of our world leaders sitting and meditating for an hour a day. It's a shame because I think the world will be a different place. I suppose there are other elements of having dialog and having a sense, as you talked about there, of de-escalating a situation. What's the role meditation can particularly play?

Dr Fleet Maull

Maybe we will see some of our world leaders. You know there's been a project going on in the UK for quite some time to bring mindfulness into your House of Commons and maybe House of Lords as well, I'm not sure. And there's been a couple of attempts at the US Congress. I don't think it went very far, but there have been a few attempts.

But more and more, when I have the chance to meet or hear about a lot of very high-level business leaders, at least in the US, and I'm sure it's similar around. Very impactful, you end up hearing that they're meditators, they have a practice. It's more and more common to find out that highly influential people in the world are practicing.

The thing about releasing narratives that recycle trauma, that self-perpetuate trauma, or self-perpetuate suffering, and we get so identified as human beings, we have a strong need for identity, we need a home. Unfortunately, our narratives are, even very negative, debilitating narratives, become our home. It's what we know. So when someone asks us to let go of those narratives, it's terrifying, who would I be if I'm not that story? Who am I?

We need to go into that question, who am I? Most of the introspective methods of the world's contemplative traditions are fundamentally asking that question. Well-guided somatic meditation gives a safe vehicle for going into that question. Gradually realizing that who we are, although we're not going to find this very solid kind of tangible thing, but who we are is not the narratives.

When we drop into the depth of our being, we think it's going to feel like being dropped out of a spaceship, but we find it's not, it's more like floating in a beautiful warm spa pool or something. We can actually learn to relax into that depth of beingness, and be at home there, because we need a home. We need a home individually, and we need a home collectively.

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Right now, in late December, going into the new year, there's a big event happening in South India where I think something like 10,000, they're gathering together 10,000 advanced transcendental meditation meditators. Really accomplished meditators to come in one place physically and meditate for peace in Gaza, and Ukraine, and other places. I think these things can have an effect. I think we need to start.

Dr Fleet Maull

It's interesting, sometimes quantum theory gets popularized in certain ways that are outside of the science, and are pseudoscience, and it's too bad because it gives it a bad name. Because quantum theory has been around since the 1920s, I think, or 30s. It's very well developed, and it's recognized hard science, yet the world of mainstream science and mainstream scientifically informed life pretends it's not there, but it's very much there.

I think we need to begin to open up to the greater possibilities of life. That things are not as fixed and solid, as real as we think we are. As long as we keep believing that this relative world of things, and the conditioned way in which we experience them, is all there is and that it's so solid, then we're just trapped.

Whether one begins to bring quantum theory back into society, not back into, but into society in powerful ways. Or just bring in the world's great spiritual tradition. Because they're all pointing to a greater reality that's outside this relative reality that gives hope. That's what's given people hope. Now, sometimes it's been a somewhat naive hope, that there's just some greater force out there that's going to save our butt.

But in a naive way that is pointing to there is a greater reality, we're not trapped in these stories, and we're not trapped in these relative circumstances. There are much greater possibilities we can open to, but we have to do the work, and we have to practice.

I think the fact that mindfulness, and meditation, and yoga are becoming more and more popularized all over the world, I think is part of, even though it may seem superficial at times, it may seem commercialized at times, I think it is part of a gradual process of transforming society. That will give us a basis for changing these narratives, and becoming less narrative identity-driven.

Alex Howard

It strikes me that part of that is people not just coming to these practices because life is in crisis, but it's also people coming to these practices because they want to maximize the possibility of what can happen in life as well.

Fleet for someone that's watching this, that is interested to go the next steps of meditation. We'll come in a minute to how people can find out more about you, and your work. But I'm interested in starting points, often people have lots of ideas, what they think should be happening in meditation. It'd be helpful to have just some simple fundamentals about even just the attitude that one brings to practice.

[00:44:25] Dr Fleet Maull

It's really important to get good instruction. I encourage very embodied approaches to meditation and mindfulness. I think many people try a meditation practice and quit because they just find it too hard. The percentage of people who have tried and continue, I think we'd be shocked at how small it is, because people find it very frustrating and they go, "My mind's just racing all the time. I can't do it." And we feel like a failure, and it's boring, it's hard, it's difficult. It doesn't need to be that way.

Most of us try to meditate, we're doing it from the neck up and all these thoughts. And I'm trying to get rid of the thoughts and come back and back, and we don't need to struggle with our thoughts. One of the most important contextual teachings to have is, there's nothing wrong with us, there's nothing wrong with our thoughts, we're not trying to get rid of our thoughts, we're not trying to get rid of anything.

The practice is being with ourselves and our experience as we are. Now how do we do that? Well, we know now, neuroscientifically, that there are two neural networks in the brain, there's a little bit of an oversimplification, but nonetheless valid, that have a mutually inhibitory relationship.

That's what's called the default mode network, which is responsible for the very noisy part of our brain. It loves to time travel and worry about the past, travel and worry about the future, ruminate and fantasize about the future, running commentary about the present, all our opinions, all self-sensing. It's where we create all our stress and suffering and all our identification as well.

That constant narrative has a development that way, and it's active when we don't direct our attention, and it has a purpose. I don't mean to demonize it, there's nothing wrong with any aspect of our brain. But for us modern humans, it's way overactive. That's why when people try to meditate, they're dealing with that, and they try to struggle with it, or they get the idea you're supposed to stop that or something, and that's impossible.

But there's a completely different strategy, and that is to yoke our attention with the body, to join our attention with the body. In doing so we're activating a different network called the task positive network. To the extent that we bring that online, the other starts to go offline, and our mind starts to quiet down quite naturally. We don't have to struggle with it.

Everybody's had the experience of, for example, trying to, let's say, thread a needle, or do something else that requires a lot, at least for a moment, your mind gets very quiet. You may not be able to sustain that, but at least...

Alex Howard

Before the frustration comes in because you can't get it through the hole.

Dr Fleet Maull

Yeah, but for a moment, we experience that very quiet mind. Well, that's activating the task-positive network. So in meditation, by really emphasizing feeling the body, a direct, embodied experience of not just observing the body, or thinking about the body, but actually feeling it. The sensory experience of being embodied, that activates the task-positive network at a deeper and

deeper level. And we find the mind quieting down, and quieting down, and quieting down quite naturally.

[00:47:28]

And that allows us, then our brain to rewire itself, to find that place of an activated task-positive network where our attention is further and further stabilized, which then gives us access to deep states of awareness, which then gives us access to these deep states of flow.

What I would encourage people is find good instruction, make sure that it's embodied. We can take anything as the object of mindfulness in a practice. We can work with any of the sense perceptions. We can work with thoughts, we can work with emotions, but all those are very difficult. There are advanced forms of meditation that work with all those, but thoughts are very sticky.

Other sense perceptions are a little more ephemeral. The body is the most tangible. It's the most tangible thing we have to work with. It's really the most efficacious way to bring online the task-positive network, which stabilizes our attention, drops us into deeper states of awareness.

When somebody meditates with good instruction and good strategies, then they start experiencing the benefits, and the fruits, and even the pleasure of meditation much more quickly. Instead of it being this very boring, difficult thing that they feel a failure at doing, they feel like, oh, this actually feels, it's not all about feeling good, but sometimes this feels good and it works, and I'm experiencing a little more peacefulness, and calmness. Yeah, I could do this. It's really important to get a good start and get good instruction.

Alex Howard

Fantastic. Fleet for people that want to find out more about you, and your work, and also what you have to offer. Can you give us some signposts and where people can go?

Dr Fleet Maull

They can go to my basic website, fleetmaull.com. You can find your way to most of the other things from there.

The courses and the online summits we do, like your wonderful super conferences, as you know we offer online summits. That, and my courses, including my Neurosomatic Mindfulness course, are at Heartmind Institute, which is heartmind.co.

We have a summit coming up that's on the art of meditation, where we're going to look at, we're going to have almost 60 renowned meditation teachers.

We're going to cover the Vipassana, Zen and Tibetan in the Buddhist framework of meditation. We're going to cover Vedic styles of meditation from India, from Hindu, or Vedic culture, Abrahamic, Jewish, Christian, and Sufi, non-dual direct awakening, secular mainstream mindfulness, self-compassion, and neuroscience informed.

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I think it's going to be the broadest, deepest look anybody's ever done that I'm aware of, at the art of meditation. There'll be lots of access points there, but they can find their way there either at heartmind.co, or fleetmaull.com.

Alex Howard

Amazing, Fleet. Thank you so much. I appreciate you, and I appreciate your work.

Dr Fleet Maull

Thank you very much Alex. It's been great to have another conversation with you.