*Tricycle Talks*
"Uprooting Harmful Habits"
Episode #120 with Valerie (Vimalasara) Mason-John
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**Vimalasara:** When I go back to the four noble truths, that first truth, when I learned that actually our life is characterized by suffering, it was like, "Oh my God, I'm normal," because I thought I was the only one who suffered. It was all about me. And I thought that there was something desperately wrong with me that I was experiencing this suffering. The teachings gave me space. It was a doorway to something different. It was a doorway out of my hell realm.

**James Shaheen:** Hello, and welcome to *Tricycle Talks*. I'm James Shaheen, and you just heard Valerie Mason-John, who goes by their dharma name Vimalasara. Vimalasara is a senior teacher in the Triratna Buddhist Community, and their work focuses on how Buddhist teachings can support a sustainable path to recovery. In their new book, *First Aid Kit for the Mind: Breaking the Cycle of Habitual Behaviors*, they lay out practical tools for uprooting harmful habits and finding a greater sense of freedom and ease. In my conversation with Vimalasara, we talk about how they first developed a practice of meditation after their experience in solitary confinement, how Buddhism has supported their own path to recovery, and how we can learn to work with shame productively. Please note that this episode includes mentions of sexual assault and suicidal ideation. So here's my conversation with Vimalasara.

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**James Shaheen:** So I'm here with Dr. Valerie Mason-John, who goes by Vimalasara. Hi, Vimalasara, it's great to be with you.

**Vimalasara:** Hi, thank you for having me.

**James Shaheen:** So, Vimalasara, we're here to talk about your new book, *First Aid Kit for the Mind: Breaking the Cycle of Habitual Behaviors*, but first, I'd like to ask you a bit about your background. To start with, how did you first come to Buddhism?

**Vimalasara:** Yeah, that's always an interesting question. I would say that it was meditation that actually brought me to Buddhism. When I began to experience meditation, it was like, *Wow*. It

was like, I can get high on this, and it doesn't cost anything, and it isn't illegal, and it doesn't take up any space in your luggage. And so definitely it was meditation that brought me to Buddhism. And then, of course, you start going to dharma classes, and then you get hooked.

I think what's more interesting is my journey to meditation. In the nightclubs, I was a street dancer, when I was 17 or 18, a street dancer in the nightclubs, and that was the place where I first experienced non-self, having a non-self experience, where I could just do these things. I couldn't say I would do it, but it was just where you just lost the self and just really in the moment and just totally here now. I'd also say there were two other experiences. As a kid, I grew up in orphanages, and if we were caught speaking at night in the dorms, you were hauled out of your bed and you had to stand opposite a wall with your hands on your head, and you never knew when you were going back. At some point, I think I really enjoyed it. I didn't mind having to stand with my hands on my head, and I could see that it was really taking me into meditative states. And then, of course, at the age of 15, I was incarcerated for shoplifting and being a runaway kid, etc., and I did a lot of solitary confinement, and again, going into altered states in solitary confinement. So I think definitely in my young years, I was in the direction of Buddhism and definitely meditation was the raft, and it still is my raft. So that's a long answer.

**James Shaheen:** Yeah, so just out of curiosity, solitary confinement at age 15?

**Vimalasara:** Yeah, you know, it's really interesting. A couple of years ago, I read an article where they said that they're no longer going to put people in solitary confinement under the age of 21, and I thought, *Wow, that was me*. Because it's pretty, you know, you don't even have a bed. It's just this concrete slab that you get to sleep on. You don't even know whether you'll get to see daylight for half an hour if you're lucky, and your food is served to you through a hatch, and you're lucky if they open a door for you to be able to empty your pot where you defecate, and you're just given one piece of garment which you can't tear, and then you had some really distressed people around there. I mean, for me, I just went into altered states, but definitely I can remember, because of the pipes, the pipes would run through, so you knew somebody was really distressed. But yeah, at the age of 15, 16, I did quite a lot of solitary confinement. I thought it was another kid's home since I got into trouble a lot.

**James Shaheen:** So how has Buddhism supported your own path to recovery?

**Vimalasara:** Oh, yeah. I mean, I always say I got my recovery in the rooms of dharma halls. I was just recently teaching the practice of *anapanasati* and actually seeing how each tetrad maps onto one of the noble truths for me, really, just really seeing that so clearly. When I go back to

the four noble truths, that first truth, when I learned that actually our life is characterized by suffering, not that there is suffering, but it's characterized by suffering because I'm in this human form, I'm going to experience suffering, it was like, "Oh my God, I'm normal," because I thought I was the only one who suffered. It was all about me. And I thought that there was something desperately wrong with me that I was experiencing this suffering. At that time, I thought the only way out was to take my life. That would have been when I was around 18, 19. So the teachings gave me space. It was a doorway to something different—it was a doorway out of my hell realm.

**James Shaheen:** You've written extensively about how Buddhism can support a sustainable path to recovery. So how do you define addiction from a Buddhist perspective?

**Vimalasara:** Gosh, you know, my views on addiction have definitely changed over the years. I think addiction can look different for each individual. So I think really what I would say is in a way some of the things that characterize addictive behaviors—because at the end of the day, we're addicted to self, aren't we? I mean, if we strip away all of what we think of as gross addictions, we are really addicted to the self and trying to protect this self. But definitely, I think some of the characteristics of addiction are, well, craving. I mean, let's look at the dharma. I always say that the oldest recovery program that we know of to date are the Buddhist teachings. It's said that the first discourse that the Buddha gave said that there was addiction to hedonism, which was lowly, coarse, and unprofitable, and there was addiction to self-mortification, which was lowly, coarse, and unprofitable, and what we want is a middle way. So in a way, really, I would say that one of the things that characterizes addictive behaviors is when we've lost the middle way, when we've polarized, when we've gone to an extreme. Of course, addictive behaviors are on a spectrum, because we have to remember that for some people it is a matter of life and death, and for some people they function, they bumble along, and they've still got addictive tendencies.

There's other characteristics, of course: craving, clinging, the loss of control, the compulsion, continuing to do the same behavior despite consequences. It's really interesting, as a kid, I can remember my house parents at the dining room table, and they seemed to be obsessed with madness. They would say, "What's the first sign of madness?" And it would be talking to yourself, and the second sign of madness would be hairs growing on the palm of your hand, and the third sign of madness would be looking for hairs on the palm of your hand. I always remember this so clearly. And if only they had told me that the first sign of madness is habitually doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome!

So again, how would I describe addiction? Just recently I got into a very addictive mental state because something happened with friends and I wanted to be right in it, and it just assailed my mind in just how I got caught in it. I was able to set myself free. Our thoughts can be addictive. Thinking can be addictive. How do we define addiction? You know, some people ask me, James, "You know, I drink, I'm not sure that I have an addiction," or "I smoke marijuana or I do this, and I'm not sure I have an addiction," and I say to them, "Well, if you're concerned about it, or if it's causing you misery, maybe you need to do something about it. You don't need to ask me. You know, if you're really concerned about it, then most probably you have got an issue." But it's like, are you wanting me to set you free and say, "No, it's OK"?

**James Shaheen:** Yeah, I suppose it's self-diagnosed, and unless you think so, it doesn't really matter what anybody else thinks.

**Vimalasara:** Exactly.

**James Shaheen:** Yeah. I didn't ask you this, but what form of addiction brought you to recovery?

**Vimalasara:** What brought me to recovery is disordered eating. I was diagnosed as an extreme bulimic anorectic, and that's something that I still work with, not having the anorexia bulimia, but I still work with that disordered eating. Sometimes there can be some neurotic behaviors. And then, of course, there were the gateway drugs, like recreational drugs, and they were easy to let go of, and I'd say they were a gateway because things like cocaine gave me respite, gave me time off. Alcohol, that was more like an ego thing, I was a Champagne Charlie person, but definitely disordered eating. And it's a hell realm. You know, sometimes people think, "How can that be an addiction?" And I tell people, especially with something like bulimia, there's a whole trance that you go through when you're on a binge. When I remember those days of just being in a trance and how you'd go into altered states and balance would go and just as somebody says when they take heroin, that when they take that first shot, nothing else matters, nothing. And it's the same on a binge. Nothing else matters. And then of course, there's the purging, and that takes you into another altered state. So in a way, sometimes I think on a particular level, was I more addicted to the state, the mental state it took me to in the binges and when I purged rather than actually addicted to the food? I remember when I got to a point of realizing I actually didn't need this but I didn't know how to stop.

And again, just in terms of recovery, in my first book that I wrote with Dr. Paramabandhu Groves, we say that the Buddha was in recovery. I think now if I wrote it, I would say the prince

was in recovery, and when the prince became a Buddha, he went beyond recovery, very clearly so. So again, for people who really separate, "Oh my God, addiction's over here, and this isn't me," we're all in recovery as soon as we're born. You know, I think the most traumatic thing in life is birth, and we're recovering from that.

**James Shaheen:** Well, earlier you mentioned stinking thinking, which I often hear called stinkin' thinkin', and you said it was your biggest addiction. So what do you mean by stinking thinking, and how can our thoughts become addictive? I think anyone who meditates probably has an inkling of what that is, but what do you think?

**Vimalasara:** Well, anybody who meditates who is a dharma practitioner will be familiar with *papañca*. Papañca is that proliferation of thought. What I would say is that we can really get addicted to our thoughts and live in this world, this illusionary world. I mean, isn't it Epstein, who writes the book, *Thoughts without a Thinker*, and I play with that and say "thoughts without a stinker."

I remember a friend of mine who had experienced depression saying that one day they had been to see a therapist, and one day the therapist said, "I really hope you have a good weekend," and they said, "I don't want a good weekend." They realized in that moment how they were addicted to this way of being. We know that many people who let go of alcohol have to then face the depression, which is often about being assailed by this toxic thinking, which is most probably why they went to the alcohol, to silence those thoughts.

So in a way, what do I mean by stinking thinking? As I said, recently, I was just so in it for a moment where all I could think of was me, in that world and having a dialogue with this person of "It's not right," and you're just caught in your head, and actually it can be, as it was for me this time, very distressing, It was great because I had to really be with the discomfort. But for some people it could be exhilarating. It can make people think they're powerful and that they're in control and that they're in charge and they can do something about it, you know?

**James Shaheen:** Right. You mentioned two categories of unhelpful thoughts, negative thoughts and facilitative thoughts. Can you tell us a bit about these types of thoughts and how you work with them?

**Vimalasara:** Yeah. Again, I firstly, I do want to say, I don't want to demonize thoughts. I think that's what the mind does. The mind produces thoughts. And actually, the issue is when we begin to identify with thoughts, which can put us on that cycle, that vicious cycle. So if you think of facilitative thoughts, there are thoughts like, take for example, somebody has been trying to stop

drinking, they've been in rehab, they've come out of rehab, and they're not going to pick up a drink and basically they've asked their partner not to keep alcohol in the house. A couple of weeks after being out of rehab, they go to the fridge, they open the fridge, and they see a bottle of wine in there: "Oh, it's talking to me. Oh, this must be a message. Oh, I deserve a drink. I haven't had one for several weeks." That is facilitative thoughts, where we really are actually talking ourselves into picking up—and it can be so subtle. It might be you're working with sugar, and it's like, "Oh, it doesn't matter if I just have one. I can have a day off. It's important to be part of the group." So those are facilitative thoughts.

Other kinds of thoughts like negative thoughts can be like, "I'm a piece of crap," "Nobody likes me," "I knew I couldn't do it," those thoughts where you really beat yourself up and really put you in self-pity and self-blame. It's one of the places that we move away from experience. That self-blame and that self-pity can be manifested in this negative thinking of putting yourself down and bringing yourself down and everything's bad and everything's dark.

**James Shaheen:** You know, you draw from the *Vitakkasanthana Sutta* in laying out methods of working with harmful thoughts. So could you walk us through the strategies the Buddha identifies in this sutta?

**Vimalasara:** Yeah, I love this sutta. Sometimes it's called the Sutta of Relaxing Thoughts, and I have definitely used it myself. The first way is the Buddha advises us to replace thoughts. You know, can we replace them? He uses the image of a carpenter knocking a peg through. If we have one thought, could we replace it with another? So for instance, when I first came along to the dharma halls, my mind and my stinking thinking and my negative thinking was "I hate myself, I hate myself," and I used to do that ten to a dozen. I began to replace it with "I love myself," and that worked to an extent because what happened was 50 percent of the time I was hearing "I love myself," but 50 percent of the time I was still hearing "I hate myself."

The second way is that the Buddha advises us to reflect on the results of our thoughts, the impact of our thoughts. To think of the impact of "I hate myself," once upon a time, I could say "I hate myself," and I would feel great. Do you know what I mean? I love this because the Buddha uses the metaphor, the image of a rotting carcass. Just imagine this was a rotting carcass around your neck. So that's where the stinking thinking comes from, just that rotting carcass around your neck.

And then the third way is to begin to get curious about our thoughts, pay attention to the thoughts and redirect your thoughts and get curious about them. Sometimes I think the Buddha uses the

thing of walking up and down, doing walking meditation, walking up and down. However, we know that sometimes that just isn't going to work. I mean, what just came to mind is the Internal Family Systems method of asking the thoughts to step aside, asking them to relax, and sometimes it just doesn't.

The fourth way is to relax the fabrication of the thoughts. So again, there is the thought, and the fabrication is the thinking, so there is a thought, but when we go into thinking, there is the whole fabrication of the thoughts, so reviewing your thoughts, relax the fabrication.

That fourth one is restraining your thoughts, and some people might think, "Oh no, that is such a negative thing to happen," but sometimes you need to tell the thoughts to shut up. You just need to tell it just to shut up. The Buddha uses the whole thing of this huge man clenching his teeth and crushing the thought. For me, that has worked a couple of times when it's just been "Just stop" and shattering the thought. And I think for me, my equivalent for that is just tell it to stop, and in that moment, in that stop, there has been a shattering, and the particular thought has never taken such a hold on me again. So if you really want to know about that shattering, I do talk about it in my most recent book, *First Aid Kit for the Mind*.

**James Shaheen:** Yeah, one teacher said to me once, sometimes you just have to say, "Cut it out."

**Vimalasara:** Yeah.

**James Shaheen:** So you write that if we want freedom, we have to face experience without identifying with it or running away from it. So how do we begin to do this? Neither embracing it nor pushing it away, in other words.

**Vimalasara:** Well, you know, this points me back into the direction of the story of the prince's awakening, in a way, because I really do think, for me, that story of the prince going into samadhi and past lives arising and then every imaginable mental state that you could imagine arose in their mind, and he did nothing. He just allowed, just watched it arise and cease. And in a way, I'll speak in the I, I can be impatient. Something can arise, and I want to get rid of it, and then I resist it, and when we resist, it persists. If we were to really believe in the law of gravity, what comes up will go down.

And so, in a way, how can we just ride that wave of energy? Heart like ocean. Just like in an ocean, the waves arise and cease, can we allow our emotions to arise and cease? Clouds like thoughts. Just as you get dark clouds and bright clouds which pass by, accept that there are dark

thoughts and bright thoughts and will pass by. So again, it's really a practice. We're in training. It's a practice of really learning to be with all experience so at some point we don't even label it as negative or positive or bad or good. It's just all experience. However, what happens is when we resist it, we begin labeling it. We move into aversion. We do move into aversion. So again, it's coming home to the breath, coming home to the body. And of course it's incredibly difficult to come home to the breath, which I think is really interesting. If we think of the *anapanasati*, we don't know, but it is said that it was the practice the prince was doing that pointed him in the direction of Buddhahood. And if we look at the tetrads and we look at those sixteen stages, we're being taught to breathe through the experience of the body, which again for me is that first noble truth. The body's suffering, and we're training ourselves in training to breathe through that experience of the body. And then we move into the second tetrad, and we're being taught to breathe through the experience of feelings. Again, the second noble truth, craving, clinging, but really learning not to crave, not to cling, not to crave for rapture or bliss and to become aware of mental formation and using the breath to soothe mental formation, just as we use the breath in the first tetrad to soothe the bodily formation. Just finishing that off, then we're taught to breathe through the experience of the heart-mind, and then in the fourth tetrad, we're taught to breathe through the experience of all dharmas, of impermanence, of fading away, of cessation, of relinquishing.

**James Shaheen:** You know, Vimalasara, you say, and I think this is key, that in order to be free, we need to find our way back to the body. And the question arises, what is it that leads to disembodiment to begin with? I mean, you say the breath can be our guide back to the body, but why do we even need to come back to the body? Here we are. What brings about this sense of disembodiment?

**Vimalasara:** You know, sometimes I see the body, the body is our house, isn't it? It's the house, it's the home, it's the home we live in. The only place we ever are is here in the body. And at some point, because of trauma or because of experiences, all sense doors are closed down. You know, the windows are shut, the doors are shut. So all six sense doors are closed down, and we become disembodied because it can be a safer place to be.

There are people who have been sexually assaulted, and in that experience of sexual assault, they experience some kind of pleasure. And what I have to tell people is that actually we have to remember that there are certain ways the body can be touched, and the body will naturally respond. And yet because they are so horrified and have blamed themselves because they had

that moment of pleasure, they've split from the body because they don't want to ever experience pleasure again because pleasure means wrong, it means dirty, etc.

There are so many reasons why we split from the body. There's an Indigenous teaching, which says, "When did we stop singing? When did we stop dancing?" We stopped dancing when something happened. It may have been when a parent said, "Grow up and stop being a sissy," or when somebody started looking at your body in a particular way, or where you're saying you're being bullied and your parents said, "Go back out and man up" or whatever it was. So there are so many ways.

We could be speaking for hundreds of years on why we move away from the body. It is the place that we live in, and it can be a scary place to be in the body. I know for myself, I experienced a time when I was completely out of my body so that I couldn't feel or experience what was being inflicted upon the body, and so it was the safest place to be, because if I'd been in the body, I couldn't have coped. Now I know how torture victims can survive. You can't be fully in the body to survive.

**James Shaheen:** One of the reasons I asked is that early on in our conversation, you talked about how you liked standing there with your hands on your head, or you liked to dance just quite naturally as a very young person. There seems to have been a change then. Is it wrong to assume that at that time in your life you were in your body?

**Vimalasara:** Definitely, you know, when you're standing outside or standing in a hallway with your hands on your head, what are you going to do? Are you going to go into papañca and be resentful and whatever? No. Somehow I dropped into the body, and definitely I would say that nightclubs are one of the things that helped to save my life. I do want to preface that that was without drugs and alcohol on the dance floor.

**James Shaheen:** It's interesting. People are going to experience disembodiment in varying degrees, depending on their experience. I mean, you talked about torture and sexual assault, but being disembodied seems to be the norm, even if it's not extreme. It seems to be the norm in our culture. And I wonder if a lot of that has to do with a kind of overstimulation where we're too much in our heads.

**Vimalasara:** Well, definitely. I mean, you switch on the news. Why would you want to be embodied? And then of course there's social media.

**James Shaheen:** I stopped watching the news, by the way. I just couldn't watch anymore. I do read.

**Vimalasara:** Yeah, you know, because I'm in retreat conditions, I've deleted all my news apps at the moment, but just again, the whole consumer world, the whole advertising is to take us out of the body because we're being told there's something better and that something better isn't here, it's not right here in the moment. There's something better that we need to reach for, that we need to grasp for.

**James Shaheen:** Yeah, and substances become a very quick way to get out of the body.

**Vimalasara:** Yeah.

**James Shaheen:** Yeah. So you say that addiction can be a way of self-medicating, to follow that thought, and an indication that we're trying to take care of ourselves, however misguided, especially when we're out of touch with our body. Can you say more about this understanding of addiction?

**Vimalasara:** Most definitely. I might even be challenged by this, but I really see that many of the substances are medicine. It's so interesting that we're in a time in the West now where we've got this renaissance of psychedelics, and it's almost like psychedelics are the good medicine and everything else is the bad medicine. I think, hold on a minute, why do they have the monopoly on this being medicine? We know at one point in certain cultures, alcohol was used as medicine. So, coming back to this question of self-medicating, of course, why do people turn to something self-medicating? At the same time we talk about this in the dharma, turning away from our experience. Addictive behaviors are turning away from our experience. Why are we turning away from our experience? We're trying to soothe ourselves. And it's interesting, if we go back to the *anapanasati*, on the first two tetrads, on the fourth and the eighth, it's all about soothing. It's about tranquilizing, it's about soothing mental formations, it's about soothing the body, taught to use the breath. And so sometimes, James, I laugh because now microdosing has become the new marijuana, so everybody's microdosing, and I think, well, we can microdose on the breath, you know, because the breath is soothing. We're self-soothing. We're self-medicating. We're self-soothing.

Some people have turned to things which may have worked in the moment, and then, as we know, it can get so out of control, which could be a matter of life and death, and for some people, they don't want to come back, that's it, they are there, they've found the answer, they don't want to come back into the world that they've shut out, and they know what the consequences are. So,

again, I would say that sometimes when I work with people, I say, "Well, the great thing is you were trying to take care of yourself. You turned to something to try and take care of yourself. So that's something positive that there was a part of trying to take care of yourself. Now, how can we learn to take care of ourselves in a healthier way?"

**James Shaheen:** Right. Sadly, it often turns into a craving for nonexistence. So, you've developed a recovery framework that builds on Buddhist teachings called the Eight Steps, as opposed to the Twelve Steps. So could you briefly walk us through these Eight Steps?

**Vimalasara:** Yeah. So, the first step is accepting that this human life will bring suffering. It corresponds with the first noble truth. The second step is seeing how we create extra suffering in our lives, and I love it framed this way because I really could see when I stepped onto the dharma path, I could really see how I was creating extra suffering in my life. I could really see that it's just kind of caught on this thing of nonexistence, and for some people that really is OK. That is just where they want to be and where they want to hide and that has to be OK. Step three is recognizing impermanence, which shows us that our suffering can end. This was so interesting, because it corresponds with the third noble truth and end of suffering, and James, it was so funny, because when I came across the truths, I couldn't understand why the third truth was an end of suffering. Why wasn't it the fourth truth? I really battled with this. It's like, why is it third? It should be the fourth truth. And actually, you know, years later, I realized if it had been the fourth truth, I wouldn't have gone beyond it. That third truth, an end of suffering, gave me possibility, gave me hope, gave me possibility. The fourth step is being willing to step onto the path of recovery and discover freedom, really taking action, because some people don't want to step onto the path of recovery, and we have to accept that. That can be incredibly difficult for parents or for partners, that there are some people who just do not want to step onto the path of recovery, and that's what they've chosen to do. Step five is transforming our speech, actions, and livelihood. I know for me, definitely, I really had to transform my livelihood. Once upon a time, I went from having quite an ethical job from, where I worked as an international correspondent covering Aboriginal deaths in custody in Australia, covering Aboriginal lives out in Australia, and then I came back, and I still carried on writing as a journalist, and then I got into helping to produce London Mardi Gras and going to parties where there was that hedonistic realm. So I really did have to transform my speech, actions, and livelihood. Step six is placing positive values at the center of our lives. I love that step because in my tradition, in the Triratna tradition, Sangharakshita brought back going for refuge, the importance of going for refuge, the importance of placing the three jewels at the center of our lives. And I know for me, once upon a time, what was at the center of my life? Clubbing.

**James Shaheen:** I remember that.

**Vimalasara:** Yeah, it was a good time, but it was at the center of my life. Step seven is making every effort to stay on the path of recovery. That's a lifelong practice. As we say, there's no time off the spiritual path. And step eight is helping others to share the benefits I have gained. Again, I really want to say with this step, it isn't about how you need to go and write a book or you need to set up a recovery program. You know, some people get really excited. I think the best way we can help others to share the benefits we have gained is living recovery, really integrating recovery and living recovery and just being an example in the way that we live. So, those are the eight steps that we came up with.

**James Shaheen:** You know, as we get close to the close, there's something I didn't want to overlook because I think it's so core and so important to learn how to do this. What about working with shame? Because it seems to run through all of this. All sorts of addictive behaviors seem to be accompanied by a deep sense of shame.

**Vimalasara:** It's a hard one, working with shame, and I'd say one of the things of working with shame is that we need to forgive ourselves. And definitely, again, working with shame, I would say, is the first *brahmavihara*, the practice of loving-kindness, and actually for me, I mean, I found that practice incredibly difficult because I could do the other stages, you know, the friend, neutral, and enemy stages, but actually loving-kindness toward ourselves, to really steep my whole being in loving-kindness. And so actually I developed a practice called the five basic needs of the heart. The basic needs aren't needs that I came up with, but I developed a practice around those needs to unpack that first stage of loving-kindness, and in England that practice is used in the National Health Service because it's something that people who have a lot of shame have really resonated with, because it's like learning to pay attention to oneself, learning to give yourself affection, learning to give yourself appreciation and acceptance, and the thing is that often, when we've got a whole load of shame, we're hungry for people to accept us, to appreciate us, to give us affection, and it may never happen, and we have to learn to give it to ourselves. And then of course there's a history of shame as well, and sometimes if we look at some of those thoughts that create the shame, if we look at the story of shame, we have to look at where did that story come from. Whose story is it? Often it can be an intergenerational story, where it's not our story; it's something that was projected onto us. That meditation is on Insight Timer. The five basic needs of the heart are an antidote to working with shame. And then in this new book, I do actually have some practices, a practice for love and a practice for shame.

**James Shaheen:** OK, Vimalasara, it's been wonderful talking to you. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

**Vimalasara:** No, just that I just think the dharma is radical if we allow it to be radical. It can really turn the wheel of our lives. And it isn't just about sitting cross-legged on a cushion. I think some people think that that's it. It's more, much more than that. And thank you for the conversation.

**James Shaheen:** Yeah, well, thanks so much for joining us, Vimalasara, it's been a great pleasure. For our listeners, be sure to pick up a copy of *First Aid Kit for the Mind*, available now. Thanks again.

**Vimalasara:** Thank you.

**James Shaheen:** You've been listening to *Tricycle Talks* with Valerie Mason-John. Tricycle is a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to making Buddhist teachings and practices broadly available. We are pleased to offer our podcasts freely. If you would like to support the podcast, please consider subscribing to Tricycle or making a donation at tricycle.org/donate. We'd love to hear your thoughts about the podcast, so write us at feedback@tricycle.org to let us know what you think. If you enjoyed this episode, please consider leaving a review on Apple Podcasts. To keep up with the show, you can follow *Tricycle Talks* wherever you listen to podcasts. *Tricycle Talks* is produced by Sarah Fleming and the Podglomerate. I'm James Shaheen, editor-in-chief of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. Thanks for listening!