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James Shaheen: Hello, I'm James Shaheen, and this is *Life As It Is*. I'm here with my cohost Sharon Salzberg, and you just heard Jonathan Rose. Jonathan is an urban planner and philanthropist whose work focuses on creating more environmentally, socially, and economically resilient cities. In 2003 he and his wife Diana cofounded the Garrison Institute, a retreat center in the Hudson Valley dedicated to the intersection of contemplation and engaged action. In our conversation with Jonathan, we talk about how he first came to Buddhism, what led him to found the Garrison Institute, and how the Garrison Institute focuses on building resilience, both for individuals and for the planet as a whole. So here's our conversation with Jonathan Rose.

James Shaheen: Okay, so I'm here with Jonathan Rose and my cohost Sharon Salzberg. Hi Jonathan. Hi, Sharon. It's great to be with you both.

Jonathan Rose: James and Sharon, great to be with you.

Sharon Salzberg: Hi.

James Shaheen: So, Jonathan, we're here today to talk about your work at the Garrison Institute and how Buddhist principles inform your work, but first I'd like to ask you a bit about your own background. So to start, how did you first come to Buddhism?



Jonathan Rose: So when I was 15, I had a spiritual experience. It was just a moment in nature in which I felt a deep connection with all of life, and I went to a high school teacher who I knew was kind of a mystic to ask him to explain this to me because I just didn't understand it, and he said, “Oh, you experienced Buddhist satori.” And I said, “Oh, what is that?” And he said, “Read this book.” And he gave me *The Three Pillars of Zen*, which I completely did not understand at all. But I knew that he was right, and I knew that somewhere along the way I was going to become a Buddhist. So then I began to look at all kinds of different spiritual traditions, and in my freshman, sophomore year of college, probably sophomore, junior year, I felt like I was being disloyal to Judaism, which I grew up with. And I came across this guy, Reb Zalman Schachter, and I thought, okay, I should really study what Jewish mysticism and Jewish meditation could be.

So the way I came across Zalman was I had visited the Lama Foundation, where Ram Dass had been working on, I don't know if you remember, but *Be Here Now* first came out as a box set. Are you familiar with this?

Sharon Salzberg: Oh yeah.

Jonathan Rose: So I got a box set and stuff like that, and I signed up for something they had called the Lord's Bountiful Delivery Service, where you literally paid like a dollar or two a year and the Lama Foundation would just send you stuff every once in a while when they had something to send you. And I got this little thing in the mail as kind of almost like a mimeograph pamphlet from Zalman Schachter called *The First Step*, and it was a Jewish guide to meditation. I thought, this guy's really interesting, and I feel like if I'm checking out Hinduism and Buddhism and Sufism and all these other conditions, I should check out Judaism.

A year later, I happened to be in Berkeley, and Zalman was holding high holiday services there. So I connected and attended them. They were mind-blowing. I connected with Zalman, and through him I felt like I really needed a deeper understand of the Jewish path, which I did for



some time. And one day he called me, and then my wife Diana, we were then married. He actually married us. And he said, “I’m doing a retreat, and it’s called ‘The Rabbi, the Monk, and the Guy in Between,’ and you should come.” He always knew I was interested in Buddhism. He was the rabbi, the monk who wasn’t really a monk but was a Buddhist teacher was Gelek Rinpoche, who became our Diana’s and my main spiritual teacher, and the guy in between was Allen Ginsberg. And it was a retreat at a place called Elat Chayyim, which was a Jewish retreat center. And anyway, it was meeting Gelek Rinpoche through Zalman that really then began our deep Buddhist study.

James Shaheen: So you ended up, I think, with Gelek Rinpoche, is that right?

Jonathan Rose: Yes. So by the way, along the way there I was also, my main career is in building very green affordable housing, and knowing that I wanted to explore Buddhism and also applied Buddhism, I had met Bernie Glassman, who at that time had founded the Greyston Foundation, and I became the chairman of his board. And so I was also involved in a context*, so just about the same time I was meeting Gelek Rinpoche, I was also getting deeper and deeper involved with the Greyston Foundation and the Greyston Bakery and trying to think about how do you apply Buddhist principles to low-income community economic development.

James Shaheen: So you just talked about building low-cost housing. You’ve held a lot of different roles, and you’ve worked in different fields, and in 2003, you and your wife, Diana, cofounded the Garrison Institute, a retreat center in the Hudson Valley. So what led you to found Garrison, and what was your vision for the institution?

Jonathan Rose: So Diana at the time had then become the executive director of Jewel Heart, which was Gelek Rinpoche’s organization. So we started studying with him seriously in the early nineties, and his organization kept growing from a little place in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to a bigger place, to a bigger place, and he wanted a retreat center. And through my work, the Garrison Institute came up, and we thought that that could be a great retreat center for Jewel



Heart for his organization. He came out and he looked at it. Although he had an active Sangha, then Jewel Heart Sangha, in New York, he really was Michigan-based. Anyway, to make a long story short, there were also complexities that came up in trying to buy the Garrison Institute. We bought it in conjunction with the Open Space Institute, which is buying to preserve land, because this was a key part that connected the Garrison train station with the Appalachian Trail. At any rate, there was all this political opposition, stuff that happened. And so Gelek Rinpoche went to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who went to his oracle who said, “Here's the sequence of events. This is not going to be the retreat center for Jewel Heart. Jewel Heart's going to get a retreat center in Michigan, and then all the tumult is going to settle down and you're going to get the Garrison Institute. But the world has enough Buddhist retreat centers. Its mission should be to connect the contemplative wisdom of all traditions with civil society and the environment.”

So connecting inner and outer. And that mission, which then, Diana is our founding executive director, working with Sharon, one of our founding board members, worked on was, so, although retreat center is one of the key things that we do, and we host amazing retreats, we really developed a much more expansive sense of what is an institute in terms of incubating ideas, growing fields, finding trends all related to taking inner wisdom and connecting it to outer action. But so the work that the Garrison Institute does in the world in some ways is much bigger than the work that takes place on site or their partners.

James Shaheen: Right. You know, you talk about the inner and the outer, and something I often hear at Garrison is focusing on the intersection of contemplation and engaged action. So can you talk a bit about how you aim to bring these two together at Garrison?

Jonathan Rose: Well, we always have, and I'm going to turn to Sharon because Sharon created, along with my wife Diana, the first in signature programs, the Contemplative-Based Resilience Program. So Sharon, why don't you describe that?



Sharon Salzberg: Sure. Well, this really was born in Diana's great heart and vision. You know, she came to me and said, “I'd like to do a program for people who care for people, people in a way who are on the front lines of suffering, trying to make a difference.” And it was my first direct exposure to that population. I'd done programs before, certainly many programs just open to anybody who would come, and I never knew who was in the room. Of course, there were a certain number of people who inevitably were in that kind of role. But this was clearly people who, I mean, the whole idea of vicarious trauma or the toll taken on people who really cared a lot and yet were often burning out and having a real bleakness arise in their efforts. It was just beginning, I think, as a field of study.

And so the program began with working with frontline domestic violence shelter workers. It was people who worked in the front lines. And it wasn't long before they were showing enough changes that the directors and supervisors of shelters came to us and said, “Well, can we have a program too?” So we had a parallel program for them, and I just learned a huge amount from these people and mostly women who were doing that kind of work and was able to really celebrate that the Garrison Institute, for example, took that program to international humanitarian aid workers and people in all walks of life.

What I've discovered actually is my sense of who's a caregiver has changed a lot, because people would call and say, when it went beyond just domestic violence shelter workers, “Can I come? Do I qualify? I take care of my partner or my parent, or I'm a manager. I take care of my staff, or I have a particular relationship to suffering, I have empathy, I care, I'm trying to make a difference. This is really hard on me.”

And so it really expanded so hugely in my mind and began to include activists and all kinds of people. So I think it was for me a tremendous program and still is and really taught me so much, and I think it has had and will continue to have a great effect.



Jonathan Rose: So the program also set a model for us, which is that all the Garrison Institute’s work has a foot in contemplation, which is key to contemplative-based resilience, has a foot in science that we’re using, neuroscience, social science, behavioral economics. We’re trying to really ground it in science. And part of it is because, as you know, our field can also get New Agey. And so we think that there’s a rigor that comes with science that is important and then always a foot in application in the real problem. So Sharon and Diana started with the Boston Trauma Center, which was working with domestic violence shelters. They really workshopped this in the specific application, domestic violence, and then it grew to humanitarian organizations, and this program has been carried out in Africa and in Jordan for people coming out of the Syrian refugee crisis, et cetera.

James Shaheen: Jonathan, you anticipated my question to Sharon, so I’d just like to follow up with one thing, Sharon. How has your understanding of resilience changed, if it has at all? I mean, you talked about broadening out to include a larger number of professions and people whom you consider caregivers or activists who burn out. How has your view of resilience changed?

Sharon Salzberg: I think it’s expanded and deepened in many ways. I mean, the kind of older understanding I had of resilience, of course, was bouncing back. So it was about restoration. It was coming back to some status quo state. It wasn’t about moving on or furthering an understanding or having this strength and ability to make change, for example. It was more about some inner composure in my mind in being with things as they weren’t, and certainly as I met the people and saw what happened as they not only employed a number of contemplative tools, but they formed a different kind of community and they were really helping one another in a different way. It really surprised me, for example, at first with the domestic violence shelter workers who never really talked to one another about their experience. They certainly didn’t take the experience home. They felt, not just for reasons of confidentiality, but they would say, “My family, they can’t bear these stories. They couldn’t deal with what I hear.” And yet they weren’t



even talking to one another in a deeper way. And they began to, and it was both the inner tools of contemplation and the experience of the community that had them and me define resilience as moving forward and being able to undertake some effort toward changing the institution, changing the work environment, changing situations from that kind of a pillar of collective action and also the kind of composure and centeredness that they were developing.

James Shaheen: You know, you've been doing this for a few decades. You and Diana founded this program quite some time ago. And I wonder how it's been for you, because, you know, resilience and helping people develop resilience is one thing, but what about your own resilience? I mean, it really seems pretty amazing to be dealing with people who've experienced such trauma. You've dealt with people whose children have been the victims of mass shootings. You've dealt with nurses during the pandemic. And all of this came out of this Garrison program. And I think of it so institutionally, and yet there are people involved like you. How did you hold up, and who did you turn to?

Sharon Salzberg: Oh, my friends, which is true. I think one of the great lessons I took from that program, and there were many, but we would always start the program with having people, you could do this as a kind of journaling exercise or just a reflection. And we would have them write down, say, in one column, what do you do to get a break, to get some perspective, to be able to breathe again? What do you do? And people would write down all kinds of things like “I listen to music,” or some people had a very strong faith tradition that they turned to, or they go out in nature. Or some people would write down in a fit of frankness, “I drink a lot.” And then in the next column we'd say, look at what you just wrote down and write down how you feel about it. People would either say, “I need to do it more, like, get out in nature.” Or if it was to drink a lot, they'd say, “Whoa, you know, maybe that was something where I need new skills to deal with the stress or whatever.”

But I took that exercise, which I learned at the Garrison Institute, to a program I was doing for military caregivers, for chaplains and medics and so on. So somebody had written down in that



first column, “I go out into nature and I kayak, and it gives me such an incredible feeling, and it's so relieving of all the stress.” And then the next column, and this is actually a true story, in the next column he wrote down, “I haven't done it in about seven years.” So I took from that that not only of course meditation practice, which is the pillar of my resilience, but the things that I maybe used to do and get too busy or too tired to do and, and remind myself, don't just abandon that. You really need a kind of holistic approach to the things you know will support you.

James Shaheen: You know, Jonathan, I want to get back to something you said. You said our work can get New Agey, but the Garrison is the last place I associate with New Agey things. It seems very practical to me and very hands-on, but it does have a spiritual basis. So I wonder if you could talk a little bit about Garrison's theory of practice and change.

Jonathan Rose: So one of the things we really focus on is what we call field development. So we sense that something is emerging. I'll give you an old example and a new example. But we sense it. So for example, when we started, Diana sensed that there was a field of contemplation and education, that there were teachers all over America and all over the world, ranging from preschool teachers to college professors, who were using contemplation as part of their educational process. It could be for executive function in classrooms, it could be for a variety of things, to have people think more systematically, to open their minds. And so number one is we develop a hypo, we sense an emerging field, what Peter Senge calls an emerging social field. And then if we think there's something there, number two, we would map it. And we still do this, and we use graduate student interns and other people. And we go around and we try to figure out who are all the leaders and the practitioners in this field, and if we can find enough people, then we form a steering committee with some thought leaders, because this really needs collective leadership. And we use the steering committee to find the essential themes, and we hold a convening. We publish the map. So we tell everybody, “Hey, look, here's the others who are doing what you're doing.” And typically when you publish the map, people are amazed because they feel like they're alone or they're working alone or they don't know that many people, and all



of a sudden they find that there could be hundreds of people who are doing the work that they're doing. And then we hold this convening. And when they all show up at the Institute, you have 100 or 150 people all working in contemplation and education or spirituality and social justice or whatever we're convening on, you get this incredible energy, and that confirms that we're ready to launch a field now. We need to find funders to help support this and a variety of other leadership steering committees continue. We need to find program leadership. But there have been many cases now where we have helped launch a field.

Now, when Sharon was talking about contemplative-based resilience training, our goal was not just to do the training, but when Sharon and Diana started, the view was that the human frontline workers were almost expendable. If they burnt out, they weren't tough enough to do the job. And this idea of caring for the caregivers, they created a lot of advocacy for this idea. No, you have a duty of care, a moral responsibility to your workers to actually care for their well-being and mental health. Well, when we started, that was not considered a mainstream thought. And now the idea of caring for your caregivers is much more of a mainstream thought.

And at any rate, field development is I'd say the key methodology for our change work. We most recently did a mapping of spiritual organizations, frontline social justice organizations of all kinds working in the prison system, working in education, working in poverty, and low-income communities that are spiritually grounded and contemplatively grounded in their social justice work. We mapped about 300 of them. We found not only, and the mapping now of the social network tools, we used something called Kuma, was getting much more sophisticated. You can see interdependencies and relationships and where there are gaps in the system. Again, we did a mapping. We did found a steering committee. We created a convening. It was amazing. We got a grant. We're now really working on growing that field.



James Shaheen: That's great. So in addition to personal resilience, Garrison focuses on the well-being of the planet as a whole, particularly through the Pathways to Planetary Health program. So tell us about this initiative.

Jonathan Rose: So when we started, our first environmental program was actually focused on the Hudson River Valley, where the Garrison Institute was founded. And we did some wonderful work growing, connecting religious organizations and spirituality and Hudson Valley. And we did a program called Climate, Mind and Behavior to look at the neuroscience and social science and behavioral economics of how people behave and to see how we can shift those behaviors towards more environmental behavior. The Pathways to Planetary Health program got started by doing a mapping of all the different environmental strategies. If you lay them out, there was technology like solar and there was investment, and they're all in a wide range of things. We had a list of twenty-something and we said, well, that's too many. Anyway, the bottom is we kept consolidating, saying what fits with what? And we said that all the environmental strategies come down to the following four.

The first one is that we need to create what is called an ecological civilization, all the things about creating green buildings and having carbon credits. Anyway, we'll get to that in a minute. But all the elements of, what do we do in the world? We need to create a more ecological civilization.

The second thing is that our civilization is run by an economic system, so we need regenerative economics. But what became clear to us was that all these strategies, the other one was that we really need to protect the earth. E. O. Wilson had done this study called Half-Earth and that nature was being assaulted, and it was something just formed that has become very successful, called the Planetary Health Alliance, that the health of humans and the health and nature is so intertwined. So how do we really protect nature and bring back biodiversity?



So we said these are all amazing things and there are wonderful people doing this work. What is our center of gravity? And we said, it is the idea of the common good, that we as a society have become overly individualistic, and you're never going to achieve the first three pathways until human beings and the social systems that we organize return to things that we saw in the past, particularly the Indigenous cultures, which is a prioritization of the common good over the individual good, or certainly a rebalancing. Certainly in Western materialism, we are very selfish versus collective communal-ish. And so the Garrison Institute Pathways to Planetary Health program has many manifestations, but at the core of it is this idea that we are here for the benefit of all sentient beings, not just human beings. And a vernacular way of describing being for the benefit of all sentient beings is for the common good.

James Shaheen: Tricycle holds its annual retreat up at Garrison, and I had a chance to chat with you a little bit last time I was up there, and I was especially curious about the Bioregional Resilience project. So first, what do you mean by bioregional resilience?

Jonathan Rose: Great. So much of the world and certainly America is organized around political boundaries. We have counties, we have cities, we have states, and if you look at their lines, their lines are often pretty straight. Occasionally they follow a river. But the way nature organizes herself is around bioregions. And so if you think, for example, in the Mid-Hudson Valley, there's a series of mountain ranges to the east, the west, and the north, and they define a watershed, and actually the rain all flows into essentially the four counties of Putnam, Dutchess, Ulster, and Orange. There are a particular series of tree species that live within that and other plant species and animal species.

So the bioregion, if you want to connect humans in nature, let's start with how nature organizes herself. And she starts organizing by bioregions, by following these natural geological boundaries. Now let's step back. So the climate is certainly suffering. Much of the world is suffering not only on an environmental basis, a tremendous loss of biodiversity, but we're also seeing a rise of income inequality. We're seeing society becoming more and more brittle for a



variety of economic and social reasons, and many people feel like this system is cracking. It's certainly not working for a large body of people, not only in America but around the world. The sense of the future is that the future is likely to be worse and not better. And for much of the last probably thirty or maybe even forty years, the major economic theme was we're going to globalize and that's going to bring prosperity, and that idea now has run past its due date.

So it seems like the bioregion is a wonderful way to organize. It's not too big, like the world, like I can't change the world. They're not too small like a village. So it feels like the right organizing reason. And if we can then map its different parts and look at how we connect them, we can create greater resilience, because resilience comes from connecting diversity. That's just like a biological principle. It's a psychological principle. You know, Dan Siegel, one of our board members, says the healthy mind integrates diverse parts. So, for example, New York State has a program in which school systems get paid a little bit more if they buy food from local farmers. It's better for the local farm economy. It's healthier for the kids. It's a win-win situation. So we're beginning to map all these different relationships in the food system, the education system, the healthcare system, the housing system, the political systems to look at where can we weave pieces together to create greater interdependence and along with it to create greater resilience.

James Shaheen: Right. So you gave an example of schools buying local food. Can you give another example of what this looks like in practice?

Jonathan Rose: So, if you think about it, it's like how do small actions have larger systemic effects? So, for example, it just so happens the Mid-Hudson Valley has its own utility system. ConEd is a utility downstate in New York City, but we have something called Central Hudson. In 2012, Central Hudson got bought by a Canadian company, and Central Hudson earns a 9.5% return. So for all our electric bills, the profits are all going to Canada. So imagine if we could raise a local bond issue and buy our own utility back. And if we raise a bond whose interest rate is 5% or 6%, that means there'd be 3.5% that could be reinvested to create community solar, to create resilience, to provide more affordable electricity to low-income families, et cetera, and



how would we do this? Imagine if all the local universities and foundations and endowments and wealthier people in their bond portfolio allocated something toward buying back their electric systems. So, not to pick on them, but Vassar University, the wonderful university of Vassar College in the Mid-Hudson Valley has an endowment. It's invested wisely, but imagine if as part of its bond portfolio, instead of investing in bonds all over the world, they invested in buying back the utility. They'd get the same return, but their money would be recycling within the system. It'd be connecting more of the parts. That's another example.

James Shaheen: Oh, good. So the next question builds off this. Your bioregional resilience work emphasizes place-based ethics, a kind of “small is beautiful” approach. And at the same time, your work has always involved larger systems thinking. So how do you think about the relationship between local action and global systems?

Jonathan Rose: Got it. I'm going to add one more piece before we get to that.

James Shaheen: Okay.

Jonathan Rose: Which is everything I've described to you could be done by somebody other than the Garrison Institute. So what does the Garrison Institute bring to this bioregional resilience? So we got a wonderful grant from the Best Foundation a couple years ago, the Best Family Foundation, that helped us generate a mapping of what we call earth-based contemplative practices. What are the meditation practices that people are doing, some Buddhist, some not, that deeply connect them to a sense of place and sense of nature? And our view is that if you are going to really carry out bioregional resilience, in your heart, in your being, you have to feel all sentient beings and feel this connection with them. Contemplative worldview is a catalyst for deepening this work. And so our approach is that while we're thinking about very technical things like how do you do a bond issue and buy back a utility, we're also thinking about how do



you really, using contemplative, earth-based contemplative practices, connect people to the most intimate nature in their places.

So it's super local. We are parts of loose associations with other people who are also doing bioregional work. So last fall I attended a meeting that King Charles hosted at St. James Palace as something called the Circular Bioregional Economy Alliance, which was groups of people working all over the world on these same ideas. And there are many other networks that are emerging. And what's interesting about this then is that we can share ideas between us, and again, it's an emerging field, and as long as each of us is only doing a local project, it has less impact. But as we connect the field and make the idea itself that we should create circular bioregional economies more and more prevalent, it gains weight and impact, and so that's the global aspect of this.

James Shaheen: So what are some of the spiritual or contemplative practices that you found help people connect to the earth? You mentioned Indigenous peoples earlier. Were there any synergies across traditions there?

Jonathan Rose: There are amazing traditions and synergies, and one is obviously just to quiet your mind and to be in place and to reduce your internal noise and to observe what's going on. So the indigenous people of the Garrison area were the Lenape Munsee people who were actually moved away, and there are very, very few who live in our area now. Many more live in Wisconsin. To make a long story short, an Indigenous woman from Wisconsin came to Hudson Valley and discovered this deep connection, even though she hadn't grown up there. Anyway, we were holding a retreat, and she was speaking and she said, as you move through the forest and as you are in nature, be aware not only that you are listening to nature, but that nature's listening to you. You know, we now know that plants can actually hear, plants can sense through chemicals. Some studies show certain plants can see, which is kind of amazing. And this idea that you're in a two-way relationship versus a one-way.



So there's one thing, and I think in Western Buddhism, we do a lot of this, which is to quiet your mind and kind of expand your sense of the world. But what we have not done as much is also receive that the world is sensing you, that it's a reciprocal, multi-way relationship, that you're part of a larger consciousness. It's not just about your consciousness perceiving everything, it's also about the other consciousness perceiving you, and you're all in this relationship. That's a mind-shifting perspective that I have found really deeply connects people to place.

Another one. We work with a wonderful Indigenous leader Tiokasin Ghosthorse who lives in Woodstock nearby. And Tiokasin is really focused on the idea that English as a language makes everything a noun, like a specific thing, and that Indigenous thinking is much more that everything is a verb, that it's in process that is continually unfolding, which totally aligns with the Buddhist idea of impermanence.

James Shaheen: Sharon?

Sharon Salzberg: Yeah. You know, before I get into the podcast more deeply, which I'm eager to do, I actually want to ask you a question. It's a little bit like the question James asked me. As background, twice in the last week, I've been accused of being an optimist, which is very unusual for a Buddhist. Once I was recording another podcast and the guest said to me, “I can tell you're a kind of glass-half-full kind of person,” which no one has ever said to me before. And then I was teaching an online class on ethics, and somebody wrote in the chat, “Well, that seems a little optimistic to me.” So, it's the question that I usually get asked without making assumptions about what I feel is where do I find hope? Do I find hope? And knowing the work that you do and the kind of large-scale issues that you're dealing with, even if it's step by step or in bite-sized pieces, these are huge issues. I mean, the planet, and so on. So I'm wondering would you call yourself an optimist? And where are you finding hope these days?

Jonathan Rose: So I am an optimist by nature. I think it's kind of just how your internal thermostat is set and, first of all, I want to be realistic. You know, Europe is burning, and its



future is to be hotter and burn more. And the same thing with the wheat crops are failing and the food shortages are coming. The ignorance of our actions at so many levels is creating conditions, increasing conditions of suffering. And I also really see that in the United States with the cutback on food stamps and on Medicare and Medicaid. And if you're realistic, you can see the trends are only going to increase suffering.

But what I also see is that this approach of deeply understanding systems, which is aided by deep contemplation, this desire to connect wisdom and compassion, is so much more vibrant than it was twenty years ago or twenty-three years ago when the Garrison was founded. There are so many more people sharing this language, sharing these ideas.

There's amazing, look, one of the things my company does is we raise impact investing funds, and the impact investing world has grown so much bigger and so much deeper. And I happen to be going to a conference in Singapore in September, thousands of people, a big impact investing conference. And the theme of the conference is that the currency of transformation is love. So thousands of impact investors of wealthy families and pension funds and foundation officials are all coming together on the idea that that love is the core, and consciousness must be expanded to use investment to change the world. I couldn't imagine that happening twenty years ago in a place like Singapore. So, I am seeing a movement founded in the principles that underlie Buddhism, that underlie the Garrison Institute that with enthusiasm and with discipline are growing like crazy. And the whole question is, we're small relative to the larger world. Can we grow faster than the suffering is growing? And I don't know what else to do. You know, there's a wonderful phrase. When you come to the end of the world, what should you do? Plant a tree.

Sharon Salzberg: That's wonderful. So in that light, because I think it fits, let's talk a bit about the podcast Common Good, which focuses on compassionate action in the context of climate activism, and I wonder if you could say some more about the podcast.



Jonathan Rose: Thank you. So interviewing throughout the podcast amazing thinkers and doers who are doing transformational things, some about climate, some others. And so it's a chance to hear some thinkers. So for example I don't if you know the work of Janine Benyus, she's the one who came up with the idea of biomimicry. She has this wonderful phrase that life creates the conditions conducive to life. If you look at biological evolution, it's not just about an individual species doing better. It is always also making the environment in which it thrives and the other ones better too, so life as it unfolds.

Take the Mid-Hudson Valley. We were covered 12,000 years ago. We were completely covered by glaciers. There was microbiological life under the glaciers, but there were no trees, no plants, no animals. And as the glaciers withdrew, the first little plants, and then they grew into bigger plants and then trees and then animals. And you could just see in that 12,000 years life just making it better for more life, better for more life, better for more life. So you get to hear ideas like that.

A woman named Suzanne Simard, who is the leader who really figured out how trees talk to each other, and again, trees are both supporting themselves and they're creating and definitely supporting the common good through their roots. They're distributing carbohydrates and nutrients to each other.

So we have thought leaders and then we have action leaders. So most recently we did a podcast with a guy who is an immigrant to the United States from Uganda. And he and another African partner started a company called Esusu, which provides credit to low-income families. It actually helps low-income families. Every time they pay their rent, they report it on time, they report it to a credit bureau, and they grow credit, which is a key step toward building more prosperity in your life. So it's this mixture of amazing thoughts and amazing actions.



Sharon Salzberg: I'm wondering if there were any recent guests who really changed how you thought about climate activism.

Jonathan Rose: Well, the one that surprised me the most was early in the series, Bill McKibben. So Bill McKibben came to the Garrison Institute in I think 2008 or something like that, and he was in a very cranky mood. There'd been some major losses in the environmental world and he was kind of railing about the stupidity—he's, by the way, right—of the system and the inability of the system, the larger political system to actually address climate change. And I've known Bill, I have not known him well, but I've run into him, had meetings with him, stuff throughout the following decades, and there was a fervor to him, there was criticism of the fossil fuel industry, there was criticism as much as there was enthusiasm. Anyway, the podcast with him is a hundred percent enthusiasm. What he is talking about is how the world of solar power and batteries are so cheap now, they're just taking over the world. And he told this story of Pakistan. So Pakistan has a very unreliable energy system, and somehow the solar panels are now so cheap from China that people started selling solar panels from China into Pakistan and people could buy like one or two panels and put it on the roof or even put it on their balcony and started getting electricity. And so that when the power went out, they still had a light so the family could do work, and literally in something like twenty-four months or something like that, something like 40% of Pakistan's electricity is now coming from this homemade solar, and they've completely changed it. The grid is now actually selling less electricity. Their use of fossil fuels has gone down. It's this amazing combination of affordable technology and people, all these small businesses now helping people install it and stuff like that, and totally changing the climate profile of a whole country, and Pakistan's a big country. So, Bill was full of stories of just enthusiastic opportunities for change.

Sharon Salzberg: That's wonderful. We can use some more and more of that energy. So another initiative is on spirituality and social change, and I wonder if you can talk about the work you've



done to support activists and policy makers to address social challenges through a contemplative lens.

Jonathan Rose: Yes. And by the way, our podcast series has grown beyond just me. And so Steve Varley has done some interviews and Diana did an interview. And Gretchen Steidle, who leads our Spirituality and Social Change program, has just launched a series of interviews that are really, really interesting about leaders using contemplative practices for social justice.

So we did this mapping, we had this sense that for social change and social justice, more and more people were using spiritual and contemplative methods. We got a grant, we did a mapping of that. We discovered about 600. We recorded about 300 of them. We found hold this incredible convening, and there's some key principles to it, which is that spirituality is not only key to their individual resilience of the people who are on the front lines of this work, but it's also key to how they understand the world being the world in greater interdependence and impermanence. It is also key to the development and the maintenance and the growth of their compassion.

And so the spiritual part of social justice work, Gelek Rinpoche used to say it's like water in water or milk in milk. It's completely permeating through it. And what it's creating is deeper and better results. And so we've built a network now of these organizations. We're trying to grow the field of it, help them share lessons, learn best practices, and co-emerge this field together.

Sharon Salzberg: I'm wondering, what are some of the biggest challenges you've faced in this work, and especially what are some of the biggest challenges that the participants tell you that they're up against?

Jonathan Rose: Some of the organizations are smaller. So number one, the challenge in any part of the not-for-profit world these days is funding, and when you're struggling for funding and when you're under-resourced it makes everything more difficult because you can't hire sufficient staff to do the work. So being under-resourced, of which funding is a part of it, is a key



challenge. And then this is a harder time. We're in a time of enormous income inequality. We're in a time, by the way, where there's a whole Silicon Valley movement today that says empathy is weakness, that empathy is a disease of society. So it used to be that maybe people were more or less empathetic themselves, but everybody at least pretended to be empathetic and compassionate. We're now in a time where there are major social media voices that are saying that empathy is wrong. So they're under-resourced, number one, and we're working in a larger cultural context, which is making it more difficult to do this work. But on the other hand, when people find each other and they can connect on a common spiritual ground and a common ground of compassion, and a common ground of deep commitment to justice and a common ground of wanting to bring forth a more just and fair society, that connection is also deeper too.

James Shaheen: Jonathan, anything else before we close?

Jonathan Rose: I want to thank, James, you and Sharon because, you know, I've been talking to some degree about field development and how we grow the fields of these ideas and how we grow the communities that carry out these ideas, and Tricycle has been just a center of gravity, a core, not only the magazine itself, but the programs and the ideas in your podcast that you two do together. You've been a key light to the field, an enlightening light to the field. And so I'm extremely grateful for that. And Sharon, your teaching and the number of people who I run into now, when I say, “And who's your teacher?” I mean, there are a million people who think you are their personal teacher.

Sharon Salzberg: It is really beautiful.

Jonathan Rose: It's an amazing contribution. So what the two of you are doing, and you started long before the Garrison Institute started. And so we're very grateful for what you're contributing.



James Shaheen: Yeah, we're very grateful for the work that you do and the work that Sharon does, so thank you so much. Jonathan, it's been a great pleasure. Thanks so much for joining us. For our listeners, visit garrisoninstitute.org, and listen to Jonathan's podcast, *The Common Good*. So we like to close these podcasts with a short guided practice, so I'll hand it over to Sharon.

Sharon Salzberg: Thank you, and thank you Jonathan so much. I'm still kvelling, to use a Yiddish term, over an investment conference that uses the word love out loud. You know, it's like, wow. There's a source of hope.

Okay. Let's sit together for just a few minutes. You can rest your attention on the feeling of the breath. The word is rest, and I love that sense of listening to the world. Listen to your experience, allowing thoughts and feelings and sensations to come and go, and understand the world is also listening to you. Here we are joined together, and if you get lost, spun out in a fantasy, you fall asleep, something happens, doesn't matter. It's fine, because that act of letting go, that act of beginning again is what resilience is about. And when you feel ready, we can end the meditation.

James Shaheen: Thank you Jonathan, and thank you, Sharon.

Jonathan Rose: Thank you. Wonderful. See you both. Bye.

Sharon Salzberg: Bye-bye.

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