

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 94: Tara Brach

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Tim Ferriss: Hello, ladies and germs, this is Tim Ferriss – otherwise known as Fe-Yu-Chung but I'm not going to ask you to call me that – and this is another episode of The Tim Ferriss Show where my job is to deconstruct world-class performers or teachers – oftentimes both – in many different areas and that could range from chess, to sports, to acting, to government, to military. And this time, we have an incredible meditative thinker and teacher, specifically, in the Buddhist tradition. So Tara Brach – I have been looking forward to speaking with Tara for many, many, many months.

Tara has a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and is one of the leading teachers of Buddhist thinking and meditation in the western world. She is the founder of the Insight Meditation Community in Washington, D.C. and her lectures – which are fantastic – are downloaded hundreds of thousands of times every month.

I was first introduced to Tara's work by another guest on this podcast, Maria Popova, who's amazing. You should listen to her episode as well. Soon thereafter, it looked like the universe was conspiring – a friend who is also a neuroscience Ph.D. recommended her book, "Radical Acceptance." She claimed it was life-changing and all of my red flags went up. And it ended up exceeding all my expectations – it really had a profound impact on my life. So it's my hope that this tactical conversation offers you techniques for addressing all sorts of issues ranging from loneliness, to anger, self-hatred, the "trace of unworthiness," and much more.

Tara has had a meaningful impact on my life and, of course, I wish the same for you. That's why I invited her to be on the podcast. And for those of you who know my fondness for stoic philosophy, I think Tara's work and certain facts of Buddhism, in fact, are a fantastic complement to all of my talking and reading about Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and the other favorites. So, without further ado, please enjoy a conversation that I really enjoyed and a wide-ranging romp across all sorts of subjects and topics with Tara Brach.

[Theme music]

Tara, thanks for coming to the show.

Tara Brach: I'm delighted to be with you, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: And I am having a bit of déjà vu all over again – as one very wise man once said – because I've heard so many of your guided meditations that it seems unreal to be talking to you live.

Do you get that a lot? Do you have people come up to you and have to do a double take with your voice or people recognize you in restaurants because they've heard your guided meditations?

Tara Brach: Yeah, that and they'll say, "Oh, you look so much littler than I thought." And then I'll start speaking and they'll go into sort of a hypnotic trance or something.

Tim Ferriss: I've been introduced to you through many different people and, eventually – almost with the same way that meditation knocked on my door until I finally answered – Maria Popova, who runs a site called BrainPickings and is just one of my favorite people, brought you up on this podcast, in fact, and then a number of my other friends – I have a friend named Olivia who also brought you up – and it just got to the point where, specifically, your guided meditations and "Radical Acceptance" had been introduced into my life – or my slipstream, my consciousness – so many different ways I felt like perhaps it was time for me to sit down and take a look at things.

And, so first off, I wanted to just thank you for the work that you do because it's had a very positive impact on my life and, based on the response of my audience, on many people who are likely listening to this interview. So, first off, I just wanted to thank you for that.

Tara Brach: Thank you. I appreciate hearing it and it's very mutual but I won't go there right this moment. But thank you for how much what you're doing ripples out. Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: I'm just, every day, slogging along in my own way. Although if people could see, sometimes I think, how the sausage is made... I – not so much worry – but part of the reason I usually decline journalists who want to follow me around for three to five days, I'm like, "You might be envisioning something that is very different from my reality. I think you see me snowboarding in the Alps and then taking some type of zip line into a bathtub where I'm reciting poetry or whatever the image might be."

I have no idea what the image is. I'm like, "Most of the time, it looks like I'm just sitting there."

Tara Brach: I know. It can be awful ordinary from the inside out – or extraordinary. Both.

Tim Ferriss: So I was hoping we might start where things began and to rewind the clock a little bit and just give people a retrospective of how you got to the point where you're teaching Buddhist meditation, and mindfulness, and so on. And I have a little bit of the background from "Radical Acceptance" and having read that but, for those people who are unfamiliar with your work, maybe you could give just a brief overview of your background. I think that would be a helpful place to start.

Tara Brach: Sure. Well, if I go back more to the teens, I was completely... I remember when I first went to a class on comparative religion and got a whole mess of them introduced and I decided that Buddhism was at the very bottom of my list because it's just like, "Why would I want to give up desire?" I was a total hedonist and I loved my desires whether it was nature and athletics, or drugs, or sex, or parties, or... It's like, "Why give up desire?" and it was about another five years until I got it that that wasn't the message. It wasn't give up desire. It was to not have desire be a tyrant over your life – not be possessed. So I was just a thrill-seeking and also Type-A kind of teen – very hard-working and hard-playing.

Tim Ferriss: And where was this?

Tara Brach: I grew up in Montclair, New Jersey which we all called "The Hub of the Universe" because it seemed like the center of everything. And then I went into college thinking I was going to be a lawyer and, when I graduated, I moved right into an ashram so something happened in there.

Tim Ferriss: That's quite an abrupt transition.

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Something happened.

Tim Ferriss: I'm so curious. What triggered that? Was it a conversation, a particular movie or book? How did you go from preparing to be a lawyer to going to an ashram?

Tara Brach: Well, there are a number of influences. Part of it's the times – I went to college and it was social activism. I was very anti-war, very involved with left-wing politics. And the combo of that with psychedelics combined with the whole east coming to the west and introducing yoga. I began to do yoga my junior or senior year in college.

My reality shifted, Tim. I've always had an interest in learning an academics to some degree but it was like I was passionate about discovering what is the nature of the universe – what is reality? And I've always been fascinated with the psyche – how do these minds work? So I knew I just had to give myself to that.

So when I graduated, I went to what's called a summer solstice gathering. It was a big yoga, meditation gathering and there was just this experience that there was a mystery that was so much bigger than the world that I normally lived it – that that was the thing to commit myself to. So I really, literally, went from college right into an ashram community. And ashram, for those that are listening and don't know, it's a spiritual community where we practice yoga and meditation.

We'd get up at 3:30 in the morning and start with a cold shower – that was the beginning of the day was getting into a cold shower – and then doing a lot of very vigorous yoga, and chanting, and meditation. And after a few hours, I'd enter the day just feeling absolutely ablaze with both energy and also very, very peaceful and happy. And then, during the day, because I carried all my Type-A stuff into ashram listening, I was a pretty driven yogi.

Tim Ferriss: You were a varsity player.

Tara Brach: Yeah. You got it. It's amazing. We do that. I've seen pretty much everyone I know get into spiritual life or spiritual practice but bring all their normal egoic, neurotic stuff into it.

So I did that and I remember I had –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I'm sorry.

Tara Brach: And we all have different ways of doing it. For me, I had this idea that if I worked really hard at it, I could get enlightened in six or seven years. And I have no idea where I got that number but that

was my... I just figured I'd really throw myself in and... So I would sometimes go to different teachers and say, "Well, what else can I do?" because I was going at it. As a group, we would get up at 3:30 in the morning but I'd often get up at 2:30 so I could get a little extra in. And I don't say this by way of pride – I've learned since then. So I'd ask this question, "What else can I do?" and to a T, the response would be, "Just relax."

And then I'd go, "Oh, just relax," and that would become my next practice, "I'm going to do this now."

Tim Ferriss: "I'm going to wake up 30 minutes earlier to relax."

Tara Brach: Exactly right. It's like race, race, race to get there and wait. Anyway, those were my earliest years in the ashram. I was pretty driven and trying really hard to purify and become a better person. And I got drawn both because I intuited this mystery, I intuited a love that really was possible to inhabit and express and an awareness that was very vast. And I also was drawn because I wanted to become a better person and I spent a lot of my earlier years feeling like I wasn't enough – I needed to be better. So it was also a self-improvement project at the same time.

Tim Ferriss: How did you feel you weren't good enough? Or what were the things you hoped to improve?

Tara Brach: Well –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Because I'm a head case about this stuff so this is not me talking down in any way. I struggle with a lot of these, I think, issues so I'm asking for myself as much as anyone else.

Tara Brach: Yeah. Well, I've come to call it the "trance of unworthiness," in retrospect, and I like talking about it because I feel like most everyone I know... It feels like a pervasive suffering in our culture that we have this sense that we should be better. There's a cartoon I love with this dog on a psychiatrist couch and he's saying, "It's always good dog this and good dog that, but is it ever great dog?"

Tim Ferriss: Sounds like a New Yorker cartoon.

Tara Brach: It does, doesn't it? Yeah. So I'd say, for myself, I think the biggest areas of feeling unworthy or not good enough was a sense of being selfish or self-centered like, in some way, my own needs come

first. I remember, also, in high school and the first years of college being out of control with my eating and feeling overweight and being really, really ashamed of that so I just felt that something was wrong with me there. And that I just, in some way, was falling short – whether it was as a friend or a daughter, whatever, and I had a lot of insecurity and I was just very driven to seek approval. And so I could see the different ways that I played out but it was definitely the core sense of not good enough.

And that really became the seed of writing "Radical Acceptance," was both through my own experience of not enough and then, as a psychologist and then as a spiritual teacher, just seeing the torment of how many people are not able to enjoy their moments because, in some way, there's a sense of something's wrong.

I'll share with you one story that really hit me – and I think it's in "Radical Acceptance" – of a woman who was in a coma and her daughter was by her – and her daughter told me this story – and she was dying and, at one point, her eyes bolted open and she looked her daughter in the eye and said, "All my life, I thought something was wrong with me." And then she closed her eyes and that was it.

That was her last words. She died after that. And for my friend – for the woman – it was a parting gift because she realized just how sad it is to spend so many moments at war with ourselves. And part of when I teach about the trance of unworthiness we can start to see how, if we're really not trusting ourselves – if we're filled with self-doubt – it's really hard to feel intimate with other people. There's always the fact that –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Totally agree.

Tara Brach: Yeah. It's like they'll find out. It's like if I'm right now talking to you and I feel like there's this core deficiency, it means I won't be able to be spontaneous or respond with tenderness. It's like there's always a defensiveness.

Anyway, that's a long way around saying that that became very clear to me – at the end of college and the beginning of living in an ashram – that I really wanted to... In some ways, I needed to befriend myself. That became a very clear thing. It wasn't just a psychological thing – it was very much a part of spiritual awakening that I needed to really befriend this life.

Tim Ferriss: And when you were having this ashram experience, when did things change? When did you leave the ashram?

Tara Brach: The ashram, the strength and the positive aspects, were that it made it very easy to have a very regular, strong practice. And the nice thing about having a group of people – and I really recommend this to all of us to periodically be able to practice with other people and exchange what's going on – that sense of community can keep on nourishing and enlivening what's going on in terms of awakening.

And the ashram had a lot of rigidity to it, Tim. I joined when I was 21 and I came from this very liberal background. I was very independent and yet I joined something that had quite a hierarchy. It was very patriarchal. It was really very different from what I would have thought for myself. Gradually, those qualities of the rigidity made it so I needed to continue on the spiritual path but not inside the ashram environment. I stayed for ten years and I had an arranged marriage. This is something that's not so typical in the West. I had all the longing to fall in love, and prince in shining armor, and get married and, instead, I was assigned my husband and... I don't know if I should speed over that one or not.

Tim Ferriss: You know, I might come back to that but you can please continue and then we might come back to that.

Tara Brach: Okay. So I went along with a lot of stuff because, again, I was having very intense altered states of experience that were very lovely. I learned to concentrate my mind and I had a lot of devotional experiences and so on. But the structure and the authoritarianism of the community got to me so I left after ten years. And then right after leaving, got pregnant and had my son, Norian.

Tim Ferriss: And, if you wouldn't mind, there's one particular story about the ashram... This being called out –

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Oh, yeah.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: – group setting that I think... It really struck me as a turning point, perhaps, or an important event at the very least. If you wouldn't mind describing that, I think that would add some context, as well.

Tara Brach: Sure. Yeah, I had been trying to get pregnant and really eager to have a child. And I finally got pregnant and I went to a gathering – we would gather for about a month in the mountains – and I remember it was very, very hot and it was very rigorous activity at our gatherings and I miscarried. And so I wrote a note to the spiritual leader of the community and basically said, "You might want to warn some people that, if you're pregnant and you're in this kind of heat, it might not be a good idea."

And I think that must have made him feel like I was saying, "Well, something about your teachings caused me to miscarry," – which, of course, wasn't what I was saying. But I was in a group of several hundred people when he had me stand up and he said, "You're trying to blame your miscarriage on such and such. You miscarried because of your ego." And it was very crude and it was abusive – it was an abusive behavior – here I was two days after a miscarriage – to have me, in that vulnerable of place, berated in that way. And I'm glad you brought it up because I'd already had a lot of misgivings about ashram living but his behavior made it utterly clear to me that I couldn't be part of something where the leader would treat people in an abusive way.

And, interestingly, I have had no abuse or trauma of any real sort in my history. I think if I had already been an abused person and I'd already had trauma in my nervous system, that it would have been much more difficult for me to process that experience.

It was hours after it, I remember going into a little chapel and crying deeply – the humiliation of it, the pain of it, the hurt of it, the betrayal like, "How could somebody I'd trusted do that?" and then I got to a place where it became very clear to me that either I was going to, in some way, believe that he knew something and use it against myself or I was going to absolutely get behind myself in the sense of really dedicate to embracing myself – not to buy into some badness.

Because it could have easily played into the trance of unworthiness.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, definitely.

Tara Brach: It could have been the killer – could have been the nail to the coffin. But what it made clear to me was that it was intrinsic to the spiritual path to trust and embrace the life that's here. And that doesn't mean, Tim, that I felt that I was ego-free and that I didn't make mistakes – I'm very, very aware of all my imperfections. It more meant that, on some fundamental level, I was going to trust my goodness. And so it was a turning point because it was after that betrayal that I chose to... I really committed myself to accepting myself as I was.

And, since then, I ran into this quote from Carl Rogers who says, "It wasn't until I accepted myself just as I was that I was free to change."

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, this is... So I'm glad you brought that up. I was actually going to bring up that exact quote –

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Oh, really?

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: – later in our conversation and we'll get to that – just because I found it very challenging and I've talked to many friends about this. The balancing of acceptance versus proactivity – or acceptance versus being proactive. And we'll come back to that because I know this is something that you've spoken about before. But the ashram, then, at that point, is a closed chapter of sorts. So you decide to do what many people, perhaps, would not have done because of their background or circumstances – which is really sad and you see this a lot in closed communities.

But you took the path trying to accept yourself as opposed to accept this negative version of yourself that had been reinforced by this leader. At that point, where did you go with your studying and/or your teaching?

Tara Brach: I had been doing a lot of teaching while I was in the ashram – yoga, meditation. And my meditation started shifting and I got very drawn to Buddhist meditation which, interestingly... If you think of a lot of the yoga meditation as very much of a training and concentration – and I suspect we'll get more into the different kinds of meditation as we speak – but it can really allow you to quiet the mind and settle the mind and have access to experiences of a lot of peace.

It can be profoundly pleasurable – and I loved that – but what it didn't teach me was mindfulness which was really how to open up into the present moment with a very profound quality of just simple acceptance and presence to really notice what's going on right here. So I got drawn to Buddhism because that capacity for mindful presence became more and more what drew me. So, after I left the ashram, I started reading and then going to retreats that were Buddhist meditation retreats. And I also had a child so I was juggling a few different worlds there but they came together okay.

Tim Ferriss:

And – since I promised to come back to it – arranged marriage, I'd like to talk about this because – and I want to hear your thoughts on a couple of things – I've had a couple of conversations, half-jokingly, not totally jokingly, with friends who are, say, Indian who have friends who've had arranged marriages. And some of these friends live in, say, New York City and they have this paradox of choice conundrum where whoever they're dating – however smart, or attractive, kind, and so on they might be – they are passing so many people on the street that they worry might be just a little more attractive, a little more this, a little more that that they hop from one person to the next, to the next, to the next in relationships.

And, if I have a few drinks with them, sometimes they'll joke, "It would be a lot easier if I just had an arranged marriage because it would take the decision making out of it on some level or perhaps my parents could say not, 'This is the one person,' but, 'Here are the five people you have to choose from.

They're all really great people. Take your pick." And I'd just love to hear how your arranged marriage was arranged. What were the criteria? How were you two paired? And just your general thoughts on that entire experience?

Tara Brach:

Yeah, so maybe I'll – just to make a broader comment – that, for some people from some traditions, it may well be that, given a handful of people, that there may be somebody in that handful that it really does work better for them and so this is not a judgement that, culturally, this is a bad ritual. And, in this particular case, it happened, I'd say a good number of times, maybe three-quarters of the marriages of the – we were all in our 20s when we first joined the ashram – were arranged by the head of the whole organization and so mine was.

And it was not done by any criteria that any of us could ever think of. It was very much that there was a man who lived in Canada and needed his green card – that's what it was. And he was part of our larger community and they wanted him to be able to move into the country and get a green card and so they were looking for somebody to match him with. And they knew I was single and they made the arrangement for me not only to marry him but I had to leave where I was living – which was Boston – and come down to Washington. So it seemed, in my mind, to be absolutely this crazy, groundless pairing. It was just so far from what I had imagined for myself. And when I met him, he was a perfectly nice person but very, very far from anybody I would have naturally, in my own choosing, have picked as a mate.

So it was really, really rough. I was very upset by it. I pleaded not to have to do it. And, ultimately, it was my sense that, "Well, to be dedicated to this path, means to go along with this." That was somehow or other how my mind construed it – that I needed to surrender my wants and just do it. And I could say right now, in my current state of mind, astonished that I would have viewed it that way because, as I say, I came out of pretty independent thinking people but that's what happened.

And I married him and it turned out he was a wonderful, wonderful human and he continues to be a dear friend and brother.

He really is. We're very much... We had a child together. Even though we divorced, we co-parented and we're good friends. And I think, Tim, that part of it is, because we didn't fall in love in a romantic way, when we decided to divorce, it wasn't the kind of painful tearing apart that brings up so much anger and senses of betrayal and so on. We were able to move on together.

Tim Ferriss: This is very interesting. Yeah, you didn't have the enmeshing – I don't know if that's the right word – but you didn't have a lot of the components that create the complexity. And, I suppose one could say, the irrational anger and exaggerated anger directed at the other person just didn't exist.

Tara Brach: Exactly. The more attachment there is, when we come apart, the more pain and feeling of vengefulness and everything flies up. So, no, it didn't have that.

Tim Ferriss: I'd love to talk about meditation and mindfulness and we'll get to that looking at the different types of meditation. But I'd love to ask you a couple questions that are just on my mind right now. So you

mentioned enjoying the desires – the sex, the drugs, the this, the that, which all sounds pretty fun, quite frankly – is it possible to be a mindful hedonist? And, if so, is that a bad thing?

Tara Brach:

A mindful hedonist? That should be my next book. I like it. I think it's possible to take tremendous pleasure in this world. In fact, one teacher says, "Why fixate your desire on one thing? Why not just desire it all?" and the more we're just in that receptivity where there's just an amazing appreciation for the simplest things – for everything.

Actually, there's a lot of freedom in that because there's not a lot of clenching, and holding on, and having to control. Where the idea of mindful hedonism could fall on its face is if we become attached to the particular cruets of hedonism being a certain way – so if we become attached to always having a certain food and then we end up getting addicted, or if we get attached to a certain chemical substance and then it becomes harmful for our body, or we take hedonistic pleasure in being with one person sexually but then it turns out that it doesn't work out with that person. So if you see what I mean, when there's attachment and it's a tight holding, it actually causes suffering.

Tim Ferriss:

Totally agreed and I think that I have a friend who uses hedonistic as this... He says it with this bitter cutting edge to his voice. He's a very close friend – I won't name him. But I think it's got a bad rap. Not to say that everyone should aspire to be hedonist but I think that there's also, from my own experience at least and just looking at modern technologically culture, there appears to be a disconnect where a lot of human beings do not know how to enjoy sensual pleasures – and by that I don't mean purely sex. They don't feel at home in their own bodies. They don't walk around barefoot. They don't have these types of sensory experiences that can be so rich. And I feel like the baby's getting thrown out with the bathwater a lot and I'd be curious to hear how you might recommend someone experience pleasures without developing a harmful attachment.

So, for instance, before we started recording, I was chatting with you a little bit about fasting. And I've been experimenting with fasting, partially just to prove to myself that I am self-sufficient and can survive fasting. It's been a very empowering experience for me. And similarly, I did an experiment with my audience a few months ago called "NOBNOM" – which I got a lot of grief for – but it meant, "No booze, no masturbation" for 30 days. And we had about 10,000 people do this experiment. It was very empowering for everyone involved – even those who didn't make

it the full 30 days. But aside from these intermittent periods of abstinence, these experiments, are there other ways or practices that help someone not develop attachment to – I suppose anything – but certain pleasures that certainly would fall in that category?

Tara Brach: Yeah, it's a wonderful question because, really, if we look at our lives, where there's suffering – if we're not happy and if we're not at home – it's really because of the sense of, "I want things different. I want more. There's not enough here," and that's attachment. It's like, "I have to have more. I have to have feeling." And so my experience is that the more we actually are in the moment and in the senses – like right here, right now – the more we decondition grasping because grasping comes like you have something and then you have the idea that you need to have more to be happy.

But if you actually let go of the idea and just experience – directly contact – the pleasure in the moment and just notice that and then if there's this arising of a sense of wanting more, you just notice that and you come back right to your body again. It's staying in the moment that actually interrupts the chain reaction that leads to grasping onto things. But that takes practice, Tim. It's like, for most people, as soon as we have the first few spoons of ice cream, it's like we just spoon it in and we don't taste until, at the end, there's something lingering and then we have to have more and we're already leaning into the future. So to stay with each bite, there's actually a fulfillment in it and we don't go down that track of having to have.

Tim Ferriss: Right. And I'm glad you mentioned the eating. My girlfriend – who, as I mentioned before we got started, is a massive fan of yours – has done quite a bit with women with eating disorders and I know you've spent a lot of time thinking about this. But she's had a lot of success with her past clients simply saying, "You're allowed to eat whatever you want to eat but you have to really enjoy it and focus on the experience of eating that food." And just by, not forcing, but facilitating that mindfulness, a lot of those people didn't go on autopilot and consume the 12 scoops instead of one, for instance.

Tara Brach: Exactly. Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: She was trying to stop me from drinking wine last night and she said, "You're allowed to have another glass but I want you to think about it first," and I was like, "Oh, you got me." Anyway... It was a very nice Sunseri, in my defense.

I'm going off the rails here. Let me steer my thinking back on track. One of the challenges that I have is, for instance, anger. I've been rewarded in life for a lot of, I feel, aggression – bull in a china shop type of... Aggression has a negative connotation but being very, very proactive with trying to accomplish the things that I set out before me – whatever those things might be. And a, maybe, side effect of that is a lot of anger directed at myself, directed at other people, and I'd love for you to talk about – when I talk about "Radical Acceptance," this is one of the examples I bring up or one of the stories – could you talk about Mara and inviting Mara to tea?

Tara Brach: I'd love but can I ask you a question about the anger?

Tim Ferriss: Sure.

Tara Brach: Yeah. Do you feel like it causes you suffering? And, if so, how do you notice it as suffering? Because I get that you've gotten rewards for aggression.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, and I'm not convinced... The answer is yes, absolutely suffering which is part of the reason that I finally started attempting to meditate regularly – and I've done a fairly good job – was because I recognized the suffering – not only undesirable on so many different levels, but unsustainable. It was – and I'm not the person who came up with this analogy – but the acid hurts the vessel that is storing it more than anything that it happens to be poured upon. And I was just carrying around all this acid all the time and I recognized it wasn't sustainable in any way and so yes, definitely suffering. I'm never good enough for myself, ever, for instance.

And this is where I have so much trouble because – I won't mention names here but I'll give you the type of anecdote that people can, on one hand, say is ridiculous and, on the other hand I really enjoy. And maybe you can read into my pathology here. So there is a very famous tech entrepreneur who's a billionaire several times over and he was playing chess with a very well-known competitor at one point and this billionaire lost. And he stood up and swiped all the pieces off the board and stormed off. And the other guys said, "Wow, you're really bad at losing," and he said, "Show me a good loser and I'll show you a fucking loser." Now that's a very exaggerated example, perhaps, but, if you look at some of my favorite movies like "Miracle," which is a Disney movie but it's amazing.

It's about the U.S. hockey team when they were, I think, expected to be No. 16th or 17th and made it all the way to the gold medal match against the Soviets who, at the time, were thought to be invincible. And just the extreme nature of the training and the pushing and how hard they had to push to even make that remotely possible is attractive to me. And so, as a competitor – and I'm going on a little long-winded bit here – but I was always taught – and, in fact, maybe I just taught myself – second place is first loser. I would rather be last place than second place because second place means you tried really, really, really hard but just not hard enough. You tried 2 percent less than the person who got the gold medal and no one remembers the silver medalist, ever. So it's that –

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: So let me ask you a question about that, then. If you had to step back and look at your life, what is the most important place that you would want to win a gold medal?

If you really think, at the end of your life looking back, if you could be the very best in something, what do you most want to be best at?

Tim Ferriss: I would say creating learners who are better than I am. And, if I do that, I feel like I can create a benevolent army of partly tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of thousands of world-class teachers and that just self-replicates. So I think that would be the answer. I know we're bouncing around here but it's okay. When I started meditating regularly for the first time, it was only because I had two people I could identify with recommend it to me when I was really in two dark places.

One was Chase Jarvis, who's a world-class photographer. He's been on this podcast. Another was Rick Rubin, legendary music producer who also has been on this podcast. And, in this particular case – and we'll get into the different types of meditation – they said, "Why don't you try TM?" so transcendental meditation. And because these two guys did not strike me as very whoo-who or overly detached from the stresses that I faced – does that make sense?

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Yeah.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss:

Like they were negotiating contracts, they were dealing with difficult people, they were really on the frontlines of their respective wars, if you want to look at it that way, and so I was like, "Okay. If they're recommending this thing that I've discarded as not a fit for me," – I've always shied away from using the word spiritual, for instance. But, because it came from these two people, I decided to give it a shot and then I started seeing the benefits of meditation.

Even if I just looked at it through the lens of my Type-A personality full of ambition, and piss and vinegar, and self-flagellation, I was like, "If I meditate in the morning, I get more done with less stress and there's less flailing. So, for that reason alone, I will meditate."

And then I remembered getting to a point, after meditating for the first time ever in my life consistently for about, let's call it, two weeks, I was on a road trip with a friend of mine who had had a very similar experience and she asked me, "Do you ever worry that you're getting too chill? That you are losing your edge? That you're not doing things you should because you're too accepting of whatever happens as being okay?"

So I struggle with that. I know we're digging in here but that balancing of enjoying the benefits of meditation and how much, I would say, happier I am and how much more content I am when I meditate regularly with the nagging concern that perhaps I've taken it too far and I've just come lackadaisical or complacent.

And when I talk to my friends who are world-class performers, Type-A personalities, they all have this concern like, "What if I lose my edge? What if I lose the thing that has allowed me to be in the top 5 percent in my field as opposed to an also-ran?" I'd just love to hear your thoughts on that because this is something that – it hasn't stopped me from meditating because I feel like that's my medication, on some level, to keep me from not being a huge pain in the ass to myself and to everyone around me – but...

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach:

Well, how about this? Here's the way that I like to frame it is that meditation is evolution's strategy to bring out our full potential.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I like that. Okay.

Tara Brach: And just the way we know we need physical exercise to maximize our body's health, we need to mentally train, too. And so meditation's very broad view – there are many different types of meditations – but a training of, I'll call it, the heartmind, really what it does, in a very specific way – this is what research is showing – is it activates a part of the frontal cortex where there's neurocircuitry that really has to do with being able to have a larger perspective, being able to have better executive functioning, being able to have more empathy, being able to have more compassion.

And it started evolving in the human species and we know it's what let us form tribes and be able to start collaborating more and it's collaboration that's actually allowed us to have the greatest of the scientific breakthroughs and so on. So if you look at it in terms of evolutionary development, both your own evolution.

And also, as a species, the more than we learn to direct our attention, the more we have access to what's called whole brain thinking – where we really can be creative, where we really can be spontaneous. It's almost like it evolves us past the identification with a separate self into something more whole. And I think often of how this actually describes this reducing valve of awareness where, in the egoic state, the mind just takes in the information so we can survive and do our daily functions.

And it blocks out a lot of the vast mysteries of the universe. And, as we meditate, that reducing valve doesn't reduce so much. So we actually have more of the flow of a universal intelligence of creativity that moves through us. So I do think of it that this training actually can allow us to access our greatest potential. Now here's a couple of pieces to it. In the egoic state, dominance and competition are really the way to flourishing.

Tim Ferriss: And for those people not familiar with the term, egoic state is just the focus on "I."

Tara Brach: Yes. It's very self-focused so that we're doing things so that I can be the best because I want to be recognized because I want to be special because I'm an important person – so it's that kind of thing.

Tim Ferriss: Sounds like my writing. No, I'm kidding.

Tara Brach: And, when you think of the moments when you're happiest, we might get an initial rush of chemicals when we feel personally

recognized or personally the best. I know I wrote in my most recent book of my "special person complex," where I get caught in feeling important in some way and, yet, that's not when we're happiest. In fact, the way that you can sense it, in an evolutionary way, is that we are, as a species, learning to identify with wider and larger circles of beings. We're able to feel or sense, as you and I talk, that it's not me proving something or impressing but there's some collectivity that's going on between us that's creating an entirely new field.

Tim Ferriss: No, I could not agree more and, also – just to speak more because I've had a lot of caffeine –the fact of the matter is, if I want to have the impact that I mentioned and to create hundreds of thousands or millions of world-class learners, the more effective way to do that is by having a team to help me. So whether I'm collaborating with 5 people, 10 people, or 100 people – or even fewer, potentially – having a very short fuse has been a major handicap for me.

Tara Brach: That's exactly where I was going is that the thing you most want to experience and to produce for you, Tim, is world-class learners and world-class teachers which I'm imagining – if I read into that – would then allow there to be more creativity, healing, and well-being on the planet Earth. Yes?

Tim Ferriss: Definitely. And more problem-solvers so you have more –

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: More problem-solvers.

Tim Ferriss: More problem-solvers who can also train additional problem-solvers. So it becomes this sort of –

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Exactly.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: – benevolent virus. Maybe that's not the right phrasing to use but a wave of problem-solving that it's hard to contain.

Tara Brach: But that only happens when we are operating in a collaborative way. So the very domain that you are engaged with is really a more evolved domain. It's not the competitive domain – it's going more towards collectivity, towards belonging to a field and you're

working to wake up to that and engage other people in it. So, in a way, when you ask that question, "What will keep my edge?" Well, really, the new edge that we want to keep is our capacity for empathy and collaboration and mutual creativity.

Tim Ferriss: Right. I'm sharpening the hatchet when it's like, "No, dude, you got to sharpen the saw. It's a different tool. You're spending your time..."

Tara Brach: That's exactly right. And, interestingly, with meditation what it does is it actually serves that. You become better at that.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I've been really profoundly affected by a daily practice. And what I'd love to do to get granular for people is to talk about, perhaps some thought exercises or practices that people who are currently working 80 hours a week – and feel like they can't take a lot of time to meditate – could utilize. And I'm not sure if the sacred pause is a good one to talk about – I really enjoyed that discussion. But could you also, because I feel like, among my group of friends, this would be very interesting for them to contemplate, could you talk about little exercises that people could use if they want to not flame out. And what I mean by that is I know a lot of Type A personalities who are like, "If I'm going to meditate, I'm going to meditate," and so they try to block out an hour a morning for five days a week and, of course, they don't make it to the end of the week – it becomes too much.

So I'd like to prevent these driven people from defeating themselves which is what I did for a long time. But the inviting Mara to tea, I'd love for you to describe what that is and then I'll let you run with the discussion wherever you want to go.

Tara Brach: Okay, so in the Buddhist mythology – and this is, to me, one of the most amazingly contemporary, relevant principles in the universe – the Buddha's awakening to a larger reality came through as he sat this night under what's called the Bodhi tree – the Bodhi is the tree of awakening. And, through the night, the god Mara who represents, anger, greed, pride, aversion, passion, jealousy – all the forces that can take over and create misery – attacked him.

So there were arrows, and flames of light, and spears, and so on coming at him. And so he sat through the night and practiced this quality of presence so that all of the attacks, each of the weapons, turned into a flower petal. So, by the morning star when it rose, there was a heap of petals in front of him. But interestingly, Mara did not just vanish in the Buddha's lifetime – Mara would keep

appearing. And so the Buddha would be teaching in a field somewhere – a lot of people gathered – and Mara would start lurking in the outskirts and the Buddha's loyal attendant would be freaked out and he'd say, "Oh my god, Mara's here. What are we going to do? The shadow has come." But the Buddha would say, "Chill. It's okay," and then what he'd do is go right to Mara and say, "I see you Mara. Come, let's have tea."

And what those two communications really say – "I see you, Mara," is mindfulness. I see you. I get, in this moment, what's happening. Okay, there's fear, there's anger. So it's this capacity we each have to pause and just recognize, "This is what's here right now." It's an honest recognition. So he said, "I see you, Mara," and that's considered the first wing of presence – seeing what's here. And then the second, "Come, let's have tea," is, instead of fighting what's here in the morning, there's making space for it, there's getting to know it. It's a quality of heartspace that lets the life be just as it is in the moment.

And these two wings of presence that you see in this myth really are the very foundation of a meditation practice that, in any moment, that we can pause and you can ask that question, "So what is happening in me right now?" And I invite all of you who are listening to just right now, you might just check in – "What is happening inside me right now?" You might check the feelings in your body, sensations, see if there's a mood. This is the first wing of mindfulness that we say, "Okay, so here's what it's like right now," with our senses – very embodied. And then the second wing, which is, "Let's have tea," is really a good thing. "I'm just going to allow how this experience is right now to be just as it is and I'm going to bring some interest and some care to it. Let's have tea."

So it's a way of being with ourselves that's intimate, that's full, and naturally it extends because, if you can say to yourself, "Okay, here's what's happening. There's some anxiety and, okay, let me be with it," then when you run into another person and they are aggravating in you in some way and judgement comes up or they're intimidating you, you can say, "Oh, okay. So this is Mara again. I see you Mara," – and you're saying this to yourself – "I get that this is intimidating and let's have tea." So you create a space of presence for what's there.

In response to what you said earlier that you must be passive or a chill stance, it's really out of that presence that we can then act in a way that is most intelligent and most empowered. So this radical presence and radical acceptance that I'm describing – these two

wings of, "What's going on and let's have tea," – that's not our permanent stance.

That's the grounds for action. It's like we've come home into the moment, we've come into some stability and balance and then, when we respond to the world, we actually are responding from our full potential.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Tara Brach: We're not in a reactive mode.

Tim Ferriss: We have our internal house in order. We have...

Tara Brach: That's exactly right. We're online, again, in a way because what happens is, when we're reacting to the world, we cut off from some of the parts of our frontal cortex that actually can make us most effective. And I'll give you an example – a story that's always touched me. This is a commanding surgeon in the army who took an anger management course so this is to do with anger, Tim. And he took this course and it was very much based on mindfulness, based on "What is happening in this moment and can I open to this?" So he took the course because he was ordered to, actually, and –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Always a good start.

Tara Brach: Yeah. And, as the story goes, he went at the end of the day to a super market because he needed to fill up on supplies and he gets in the line and, in front of him, there's a woman with just a few items in her cart. And, not only that, she's got a baby and this is not the express line. And so he starts fuming – because why doesn't she get in the express line, she's in front of me and taking time – she hands the baby to the clerk and they're oohing and aahing over this little girl. Okay, so he is triggered and he remembers mindfulness. Okay, the first step with mindfulness is you pause and that's the sacred pause. You sense, "Okay, something's going on. Let's pause." And then the second step is, "Okay, so what's going on inside me right now? What are we seeing?"

So he noticed it was anger and then he could feel, underneath the anger, that anxiety – and many of us know the anxiety of when we're busy and on our way and it feels like our whole world's

going to fall apart because we're going to be late or not prepared. So he could sense there was anger and fear underneath the anger.

And then, as he had tea with it – as he just stayed with it – he found some more space and some more presence. So when he looked up and he saw the little girl, he thought, "Oh, she's cute." And, when it was his turn – the woman had left with the girl – he said to the clerk, "That little girl was adorable." And the clerk beamed at him and she said, "Oh, thank you. Actually, that's my little girl. My husband was killed in Afghanistan last year and my mom brings her by every day, twice a day, so we have a little time together."

Tim Ferriss: Wow. Yeah, it's...

Tara Brach: I share that story because if we don't pause and deepen attention, we live out patterns we've been living our whole life that keep us separated from ourselves – our highest self – and each other. And we don't know what's going on for others. It's not like everybody has just endured that kind of a loss but everybody's struggling hard and we're so quick to take personally and to read our lives into things. To be able to pause and both bring mindfulness and attention inwardly and then outwardly – this is what's going to change the world. This is what's going to allow us to step out of the reactivity that fuels wars and actually be more collaborative. This is evolution.

Tim Ferriss: I really appreciate that story also because it brings to mind, for those people out there who are struggling with some of the same things as the gent in this story or the kind of things that...

Sometimes, the anger very often takes the form of impatience – or maybe it's the other way around, I'm not sure – but very impatient and generally always have been. Ever since I was a little kid, if I sat with an empty water glass in a restaurant – and my mom thinks this is hilarious but also annoying – I would just get up and walk into the kitchen and grab a pitcher of water. I'm not known for my patience and there are benefits to that sometimes. But what I started doing a few years ago – and, in fact, what I think help primed me for meditation – is reading quite a bit of stoic philosophy – which I think has a lot in common with certain types of Buddhism or teachings of Buddhism, anyway – but a couple things really helped me. The first was trying, in the morning, to basically do what Marcus Aurelius did. So Marcus Aurelius – who wrote meditations but it was really basically a journal that was

never intended for publication – was, at one point, the most powerful man in the world.

And he would wake up – and this sounds depressing to some people but I don't find it depressing – and he would say, "Today I am going to," – and I'm paraphrasing – "run into people who are ungrateful, rude, entitled, etc. and basically, I need to be prepared for that and not overreact to it." And along the same lines, the mornings, what I've tried to remind myself of when I journal, usually after meditating, is everyone is fighting a battle you know nothing about – No. 1. And then, No. 2 – and I think this was extremely important for me and I can't remember who told me this initially but it was, "Don't ascribe to malice what can be explained by incompetence." And I actually added to that and I was like, "Don't ascribe to malice what can be explained by incompetence or busyness." I'm amazed sometimes – and I know I've done this in the past – but when somebody will come up to me – I've never met them before in my life – and they'll say, "You didn't respond to my email."

I'm like, "I don't know your name. I don't know who you are. I have no idea what you're talking about." But their overreaction to that, assuming that I had slighted them by reading the email and deciding it was unimportant and then ignoring it – which was not the case at all – has virtually guaranteed that I will not respond to their email because they got so pissed off and flew off the handle – and I have no idea what their name is in the first place. But let's look a couple of different types of meditation. I'd love for you to describe... Actually, let me take a step back. Let's talk about your personal experience – so what does the first 60 to 90 minutes of your day look like? Your morning routine?

Tara Brach: Well, if I don't wake up myself... I get up real early. I naturally wake up around – well, not real early – but 5:00 or so, 5:30. But if I don't pop out of bed, then I've got a dog that will climb on my chest and lick my face and nudge me out of bed.

And so she does that because we go right down to the river. I live right by the Potomac River. So I usually hike for about three to four miles in the morning – it's the first thing – with my dog and it's almost any weather, I'll do that.

Tim Ferriss: And that's no breakfast, no coffee, initially? Straight away?

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Yeah. I just go out. I just leave. Because I find, for myself, I've always been very physical and, when I was younger, more athletic – but that's a whole other story because I did lose it for a while – but I find that, for me, just moving vigorously and being in nature is... If I had to say what my religion is, it's being in nature. So we go and we do an up/down hike by the river and the hills.

And then, about an hour into the hike, I have a place by a stream that I'll stop and then I'll do a meditation there. So I do a standing meditation there and it could last anywhere from 20 to 45 minutes. And then we do the rest of the hike and I come home.

Tim Ferriss: What does that standing meditation – what is that comprised of? What does it consist of? So if you could just walk us through what that standing meditation is internally – what you're focusing on and not focusing on, etc., that'd be great.

Tara Brach: Sure. The first part is really pausing – getting that, "Ah, okay. I've stopped this forward motion." We always have this sense that we're on our way somewhere so there's really a sense of, "Okay, I'm pausing to be right here and this moment matters as much as any moment in the whole universe."

Because we tend to think that this isn't what's important, it's yet to come or it's back there – so to really just pause. And there's a beautiful quote from Victor Frankel that says, "Between the stimulus and the response, there is a space and, in that space, is your power and your freedom." So that's the beginning, just pausing and arriving.

Tim Ferriss: Now are your eyes open or closed?

Tara Brach: They're closed. Well, sometimes, they'll start open and really take in the... I'm right by a stream and, right now, there's incredible birds and the sounds of the current and everything – it's quite lovely – so I'll take it all in. But I'll close my eyes eventually just to quiet my mind more.

I begin with very much with a sweep through the body with my awareness and I will just, starting from the head down, I'll just soften and relax different parts of my body so that I'm feeling the life from the inside out – so I'm feeling a sense of sensation. So, if you're listening, just close your eyes. And I sometimes will use the image of a smile to help to deepen that sense of presence and ease that you can sense the eyes smiling. You can smile into your eyes

and pull the corners of the eyes up a little and let the brow be smooth and that's just a way of softening in the eyes.

Because when we're thinking a lot and we're in that home movie that's filled with an incessant inner dialogue and a lot of fear, usually, or stress, the little muscles around the eyes are tense. So by softening the eyes and letting the brow be smooth, that actually helps the mind to quiet some.

And you can actually put a half-smile on your mouth and it's amazing. There's a lot of research on this, too – that, if you have a little bit of a smile on – you can feel the inside of your mouth smiling – that that actually sends a message to your whole nervous system that you can relax the whole fight-flight-freeze constellation and access more of, in evolutionary terms, it's called a "tend and befriend" that there's just more of a benevolent witnessing when there's a slight smile. So that's another trick. And, again, even if you're not sitting for a long meditation, just pausing, and closing your eyes, and relaxing the eyes, and having a little bit of a smile itself – just even a 30 second pause – can shift you from the sympathetic nervous system which is really very defensive and aggressive, to the parasympathetic which is much more ease-filled.

So I sweep down the eyes, the mouth. I go to the shoulders and let the shoulder fall away from my neck some so that I can just soften in the shoulders. And even, again, as you're sitting, you might feel the shoulders from the inside and see if it's possible to have a little bit of that melting of ice to water. Ice to water and then water to gas – letting go. And it's really, really helpful to let the hands rest in that very easy, effortless way because, when I have my hands by my side or if you have your hands in your lap – because, again, when we're stressed, we have these micro muscles that tense in the hands – so, by consciously softening your hands, you're actually deconditioning that stress reaction.

Tim Ferriss: This was actually a question that a number of readers had which was sort of a Ricky Bobby in Talladega nights – no, it was Anchorman – "I don't know what to do with my hands. I don't know what to do with my hands." And so they were asking, "When I'm sitting in a sitting meditation, does it matter what you do with your hands as long as they're relaxed?"

Tara Brach: It doesn't. There are what are called mudras that are hand positions that, in a refined yoga perspective, have energy circulating a certain way, but the deeper purpose of practice – if you're training

your mind to pay attention – if you just soften and relax your hands, there'll be a flow and you won't be perpetuating tension.

Tim Ferriss: Do you want your hands together?

Tara Brach: They can be touching lightly but you can also place them, palms down, right above your knees and just let it be a light touch there – and feel the contact, the warmth, the tingling – and that's fine, too.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I've sometimes placed, when I'm sitting with my back straight – and I always have a cushion behind me because I find it too stressful to do free-standing – but if I put my arms – this is going to sound like probably the worse idea, ever – but when I sometimes sit in a posture that's similar for what I used to do for judo. Before practice, they would have you do – Muk Sul, they would have you do a short meditation before and afterwards – and you basically put your palm close to the crease in your hip so that your elbows are just flared out to the side a bit – but, for my 20-minute meditation, I can tell almost to the second when it's 20 minutes because my wrists start to tingle. I don't want to interrupt the description of standing meditation, but how long do you do this sweep, then, from top to bottom?

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Oh, by the way, what I'm describing, most people would do this sitting – this just happens to be me because I just like being outside when I can – but everything I'm describing, for those that are listening, sit in a way where, ideally, it's comfortable but you can sit up tall.

Because, really, you want the posture to invite forward the qualities of mind that matter to you so we want to be alert and we also want to be at ease. So the idea is sit comfortably but sit with your spine tall. And I would not use the thing you described – there's good reasons for Judo – but, for training and meditation, let it be more relaxed. You don't need anything that adds tension to the body.

Tim Ferriss: I was just –

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Yeah, so if I was to continue – and I'm not going to because I realized I was moving right into a guided meditation – but just a sweep through the body and sense, "Is there anywhere that can

relax just a little bit more right now?" And what you'll find is, if you ask that question, you'll notice that, without even knowing it, the body tenses, and to re-relax and re-relax is really, really helpful.

Tim Ferriss:

And I want to emphasize just a couple things that have been helpful for me – and feel free to veto any of these because I'm still on training wheels but I know a lot of people on there haven't even tried to get on the bike with training wheels – so a few things. No. 1 is I have found that just the sitting alone has huge benefits whether or not I feel I've been able to quiet my mind in any way. So if I sit down for 20 minutes with very upright posture – imagining a thread being pulled from the crown to lengthen the spine – and really try to float my head into a place over my shoulders so that it feels weightless to the extent possible – I've found so many calming benefits, postural benefits, after even a week or two.

I've never had so many compliments on my posture, ever – I've never had compliments about my posture, period in my life because I'm built like a monkey and a caveman and I wrestled for too long so I have terrible posture – but after a week or two, having compliments on my posture and my walking gait and everything had changed.

And I found tremendous benefits of just sitting with that upright – not hunched over a laptop – posture even if I felt like my meditation was quote "a failure" end quote because I was just running through my to-do list or whatever for 20 minutes and unable to turn off that monkey mind. So what would you suggest for someone who's just getting started who's always been turned off of meditation for any number of associations they might have with meditation, mindfulness? What is a good place to start?

For instance, there is a guy named BJ Fogg who's done a lot of research at Stanford and, if he wants someone to start flossing, for instance, regularly, he'll say, "Don't start with your whole mouth. Just floss your front teeth," and he'll give them just the smallest task possible to start building momentum.

Tara Brach:

That's exactly right and that's the way we do it, too. In fact, I've got a program coming out – I think in January – called "Mindful 40" which is 40 days and you can really, really get the practice down. And we do 10 minutes a day and it's 5 minutes of some background and 5 minutes of a meditation – so I'm with you, Tim. I think starting with a commitment no matter what to every day

helps a lot because nature loves rhythms and you can build a habit with that everyday practicing. But here are the basic ingredients – it's useful at the beginning to have a place that's quiet and that you're not going to get interrupted.

And it's useful to close your eyes because there's less stimuli, visually, that stimulates associations. And it's useful to sit still for a few minutes and know that you're just doing this as this is your evolutionary strategy for bringing out your best – just a few minutes of sitting still. One of my friends says, "You put your tush on your cushion and you take what you get." It doesn't matter what happens. You just sit there.

Now there are, of course, all sorts of very helpful guidelines on how to direct your attention that will help to not only quiet your mind but wake up your senses. And one of the things that I most love about the effect of meditation is I'm more in my body. It's like I go through the day and I'm less in that trance of thinking where I'm in, I think of it as, a home movie where I'm just off somewhere else and I feel more of aliveness and energy through my body and my senses are more awake.

I'm more taking in the colors, and the forms, and the scents, and so on. So it is if you sit still for a few minutes, come into your body as well as you can – the breath is a very good home base or anchor if you want to calmly be with the breath – and that's it, for starters.

Tim Ferriss:

And one tip that I think you gave in "Radical Acceptance" that I found very helpful and it seems like such a – I wouldn't say trivial, that minimizes it – but it's had a larger impact than I expected is when I've been told in the past, "Focus on your breath and then, when your mind wanders, just gently bring it back to the breath," I was like, "What does that mean to gently bring it back to the breath? I don't know how to do that. What, specifically, are you asking me to do?" And a few things really helped.

One, for me, was focusing on the breath – I've always found it and still find it very difficult and I think this is partially because I'm a chest breather – but to feel the breath in the stomach and I remember someone said, "Focus on the feeling of the breath on the outer rim of your nostrils." And I was like "What?" and I started doing that and it really worked well for me – so focusing on the sensation of the breath at the very outside of the nostrils, inhaling and exhaling.

But the point from "Radical Acceptance" was focusing on the breath and sometimes I'll just say, "Inhale, exhale," as I'm doing that – and I'd like to talk about the pros and cons of TM in a second – but, when I would start thinking about something, whatever it would be and not the breath, I would just say, "Thinking, thinking," and then come back to the breath. That became my queue. And I'm almost certain that there were examples of that in "Radical Acceptance" but I don't want to attribute something to you if I'm off-base.

But I started using that throughout the day, too. When I would get angry or impatient, my way of saying hello to Mara would just be to say, "Hmm. Impatient," or "Oh. Angry," and it was just enough of a pattern interrupt to allow me a greater degree of self-control and more responsiveness – choosing to respond as opposed to being reactive.

Tara Brach:

Exactly. It is in "Radical Acceptance" and it's one of the most important support strategies – naming or noting what's going on – it's really, really helpful. So with the breath, pick wherever the breath is easiest and most pleasant to detect. So, for you, it might be the rim of the nostrils is refined enough and yet distinct enough but, for somebody else, feeling the whole body breathing can be doing it. And, for some people, the breath itself is not a good anchor. I know people that have had trauma around breathing and that's not the best anchor so they'll listen to sound instead.

But you're right. When the mind wanders and you want to bring it back, if you just name what's going on – if you just name, "I'm thinking of, or worrying, or planning, or fantasizing." Sometimes, you can even name – we call it the "top ten hits" – like, "Which of the top ten hits is going on right now? Okay. I'm basically pissed at my partner for not doing his or her share." Whatever it is, you can name it. And here's the cool thing – when you name something, you're not as identified with it – and that's the thing that it doesn't control you as much. There's a saying that, when a shaman names a fear, they have power over it. So when you name thinking, you're no longer in the cloud of thought. You're opened up to something larger and then you can choose, "Is this thought useful? Is it not?"

Most of the time, our thoughts are very habitual, and they're fear-driven, and they make us perpetuate a sense of being a victim, or being at risk, or being endangered, or being stressed. And if you can catch when you're in one of those flurries and just say, "Oh. Thinking. Thinking," it creates some space. You can relax open again to a bigger world.

Tim Ferriss: Well, I was thinking of a quote that I actually put in "The Four Hour Workweek" which was, "Named must your fear be before banish it you can," which is, of course, by Yoda – so if it's good enough for Yoda...

Tara Brach: Yay, Yoda. No, that's good.

Tim Ferriss: So sitting for ten minutes... The way I actually started – and I know this is probably a terrible bastardization but just for those people who may find this useful – a friend of mine named Khaval Ravikant actually recommended that I try this because I was having so much trouble meditating in a way that I could view as successful.

And, in a way, the people that need to meditate – I'm not going to say the most – but are the people who are obsessed with doing everything successfully and yet, at the same time, they might be the people most likely to quit.

Tara Brach: Exactly right. Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: And I remember I heard someone say, "If you don't have 30 minutes to meditate, you need three hours," and I was like, "What? Oh. Okay." But, anyway, where I was going with that was he said, "Just pick a song you really like that puts you in a good mood and focus on your breath while listening to that one song first thing in the morning. Before you brush your teeth, before you eat breakfast, just wake up, put the earbuds in, sit up straight with a good posture – against the wall if need be – and just do that one song. That's your state queue."

And I've realized that that's not something that I use now but I found it very helpful to just break the ice and have the sitting down for three minutes be the pass/fail mark.

And not having to jump right into the deep end and wrangle with my thoughts quite as intensely. I found that helpful. I know it's a crutch but...

Tara Brach: In the Buddhist tradition, it's called skillful means. There are things that incline us and so, if the song inclines you... I know a woman who kept saying, "I don't have time to meditate," because she would rush through her morning and then she realized that her meditation time was while she was boiling water for her tea, and when she poured her tea, and when she drank her tea and that was going to

be her meditation. And if you call it your meditation, you actually – this might not be the language you like – but you create some quality of sacredness, or specialness, or importance, or meaning and that's helpful – that starts inclining you. So I'd go for anything that helps to move us towards presence.

Tim Ferriss: No, and I have no problem with sacredness, by the way.

Tara Brach: Okay. That one's okay.

Tim Ferriss: That one's okay. I'm just such a weirdo when it comes to language and definitions. Well, let me ask, just before I go on one of my massive left-turn tangents again, transcendental meditation – what are your thoughts on it? And just, for what it's worth, I'm not a purist or a militant TM person – it just happened to be the first thing that I did consistently – but I also do quite a lot of... There are days – and weeks, even – where I will do what people would consider vipassana meditation. But what do you view as the pros/cons of, say, TM? And just to throw it out there, one of the cons, for me, is the fact that, in most circumstances, people have to pay whatever it is, \$1,500, for basic training and a mantra which I think is extremely cost prohibitive for most folks and it really had me raise a ton of red flags.

But I found the accountability of having a four day, four lunchtime meetings in a row, to be necessary to get me to comply to doing the meditation twice a day for four days and so that was the main gift. It was really having a sunk cost which made me feel compelled to do it, No. 1. And No. 2, having an accountability which I think other people can probably engineer in a million other ways. But what are your feelings on TM?

Tara Brach: Well, first, a lot of people from the old days found their way into meditation through TM because it was one of the earliest and most well-known so we have many, many people that practice mindfulness that started with TM. I always have my antennas go up when any particular style claims that it's the best or the one and the only.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Tara Brach: I'm very fundamentalist about being non-fundamentalist so it's like that one always gets to me because I think that different personalities and temperaments benefit from different things – and, clearly, for you, having that structure served you – so I like that there's a structure for some people. There's different styles of that

structure. I, too, offer all my meditations for free, and I just feel like, "This came to me. This is given from the universe and I want to give it back," and so I like, whenever possible, not to have to charge for something in this domain of waking up so that always... And I also like to be very available to populations that are underserved or can't afford it so that's another piece.

But, in terms of actual meditation, TM is primarily a concentrated practice – you're taking a mantra or a set of sacred words and repeating them and repeating them –

And the benefit of concentration, which is a narrowing of the lens of focus is that it actually collects the attention and the mind gets quiet and, when the mind's quiet, there can be experiences of bliss, and serenity, and peace, and so on. So that's what TM does. It gives you a break from that incessant inner dialogue and the more you practice it, the more easily it is to collect the mind. Now there are other focuses for concentration other than a TM mantra but that's the way TM works. For me, the limitation is it doesn't allow you to see into the nature of reality and, by that, I mean it doesn't bring a presence that allows you to sense what's actually happening now. Most of our understanding of our reality is conceptual – we have ideas about things – and to really have a clear, penetrating insight, we need to be present and TM doesn't...

It aims the mind at something but it doesn't open the attention so that, whatever arises, you start learning how to view that. And, to me, the power and freedom of mindfulness is you start getting the knack of being with whatever arises. And one of the things that I'm very aware of is that, most of us, we're aware of our mortality and we're tensing against what can go wrong. And so we go around our day and, in some ways, there's this tension about, "What's around the corner that might be overwhelming?" And we're not always aware of that tension but it stops us from fully savoring and luxuriating and being creative and alive in the moment. And what deconditions that tension is when we unconditionally open to the life that's right here – and we don't resist it – and we realize that, "Wow, there is space for what's here, even when it's unpleasant, even when we're sensing a dying of some sort."

To me, the gift of meditation is it actually teaches how to be with living and dying. And so I think TM offers a support in one part of meditation training, but it doesn't go the whole way.

Tim Ferriss: So aside from your own books – which I recommend to everyone listening – a few things. If people want to start with two or three of

your guided meditations and they view themselves as stubborn, A-driven types, which meditations might you suggest that they start with?

Tara Brach: Well, on my website, there's a landing page for guided meditations.

And they're all free and they're usually anywhere from 12 minutes to 25 minutes and they start off with really guiding us into presence and then they keep going. You can even stop them. I would use one of the featured ones – those are the ones that are the most generically useful but also just play around. It really helps to have guided meditations to begin because you'll eventually internalize – you'll get an inner meditation teacher.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Tara Brach: But hearing it –and hearing a few different versions – will give you a sense of what works best for you because sometimes, I'll emphasize how to relax through the body and, sometimes, I'll emphasize how to really collect with the breath. And then other times, meditations on self-compassion or forgiveness so there's a lot of different styles and types to play with.

Tim Ferriss: And what is your website?

Tara Brach: It's tarabrach.com.

Tim Ferriss: That's straight and simple and I'll put that in the show notes, everybody, as well as other links to resources and so on. So The Rolling Stones have, let's say, "Satisfaction," right? Everybody knows "Satisfaction." They love it – it's a crowd pleaser. Are there any of those meditations that are like your "Satisfaction?" Are there any that appear to resonate with a higher percentage of people than others? And, of course, I'll encourage people to – people are going to be, hopefully enjoying these for more than one day so they can test quite a few – but if you had to give your hits, what might those be?

Tara Brach: Well, I don't remember the names but I have featured meditations on the landing page for guided meditations and just choose it according to length because there's pretty much the same content in them.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Tara Brach: But they're right there and they're easy to find.

And then there's also the audio talks page which gives the background of understandings and so on that really help us to not only start a practice and sustain, it but really bring it into our lives. Everybody talks about sitting practice – but really the big deal is can you and I be talking right now and still have that quality of remembrance where we're in touch with what matters, where we're embodied enough so we can feel feelings? We tend to cut off so habitually in our lives and, as you described earlier, we're so plugged into so many different virtual realities that, to me, the big challenge and invitation is can we get more real and alive in our day and less habituated and less automatic? And that's the carryover.

Tim Ferriss: Outside of your own books, what, say, two to three books for people who want to delve further into meditation, mindfulness, etc. – are there any other books that you would recommend?

Tara Brach: Well, Jack Kornfield who I teach with a lot and love – he's a very good friend – has a couple of books that are very good. His classic is "A Path with Art" and the other book that I think is wonderful is – I love Pema Chodron and one of her classics is – "When Things Fall Apart." So those are two right there that really, really help guide into the practices and really help heal the heart.

Tim Ferriss: And this does not have to be specific to meditation or Buddhism or anything like that – but what book have you gifted the most to other people – or books?

Tara Brach: I might have to come back to that because sometimes, I just gift "The Essential Rumi," which is a collection of poetry by Coleman Barks that I think is really, really beautiful or poetry by the poet Rumi. So sometimes, it'll be poetry books that I'll gift. I really value Eckhart Tolle's books and I think he's done a great job. I think Adyashanti's done fabulously – even more with his audio talks than even his books – but his books are also wonderful.

Tim Ferriss: What was the name again?

Tara Brach: Adyashanti. It's A-D-Y-A. Adyashanti. S-H-A-N-T-I.

Tim Ferriss: What does shanti mean? Because I've seen this word pop up quite a lot. I'm looking it upright here.

Tara Brach: Peace.

Tim Ferriss: Peace?

Tara Brach: It means peace.

Tim Ferriss: Ah, there we go. You beat me to it. Alright. Well, that's a good word to use.

Tara Brach: Yup.

Tim Ferriss: The beginning of your day, we talked about the hike first thing with the dog, the standing meditation and then what does your day look like at that point after that?

Tara Brach: Well, it varies, Tim, like most people. If I'm traveling and teaching – because I teach different centers around the country and some in Europe – then I'm out and about.

Tim Ferriss: Let's say that you're at home and you can do whatever you want. You have the –

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Ah, that's when I'm happiest.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, your ideal day.

Tara Brach: Yeah, well, usually that means that I am writing and putting together talks. Because it's like being a minister – I do my weekly talk and that's where a lot of my energy goes. But I'm also involved with where we have a meditation community here in Washington and a lot of socially engaged action initiatives so I'm involved with projects like we're bringing mindfulness into the schools in the area and that's amazing.

Just to imagine this next generation training their attention so they're able to be more collaborative, so they're able to be more emotionally intelligent, so they're able to find their center – so that one really excites me and I spend some time working on that. In fact, the congressman Tim Ryan and I have done a number of presentations in the area to different schools and there's thousands of kids in the area that have now been taking mindfulness courses. So that's just an example of something that I'd be working on.

Tim Ferriss: Is there a dedicated website for that or can people find more information on your homepage?

Tara Brach:

Yeah. Well, MINDS, M-I-N-D-S, is the group that I've been advising and that's affiliated with us and I think it's... I'll let you know before the end because I'd love people to check it out. It's amazing the kind of work they're doing. In fact, I'll tell you about one project that I really loved which is that I mentioned that Jack Kornfield and I are collaborating on this "Mindful 40"– this 40-day program – well, we're affiliated with M-I-N-D-S and we're going to be working in one very diverse, very underserved, very large high school in the D.C. area.

And we're going to bring mindfulness to all parts of it. In other words, they're going to do the training with the kids and Jack and I – this online program we have – all the faculty, and admin, and parents of the group that we work with are going to be taking it and we've got on the ground mentors.

So the idea is to see if we can change the whole culture of the school by bringing this in. And there's so much research now showing the beneficial effects for kids but to have the parents, also, to me, is what's exciting. So we've been able to get some revenue – enough to get the first round going on this – and I think it's going to be a very cool pilot that can be done elsewhere in other school systems.

Tim Ferriss:

Cool. I love these types of pilots because they can really set a precedent and provide a case study that people can replicate so I will put that – whether we get to it today or afterwards – but, for everybody listening, I'll also put a link to that in the show notes. I would like to ask a very self-interested personal question and that is – that I think also applies to a lot of people listening to this.

So, if I look at my circle of friends in Silicon Valley, if I look at my circle of friends in New York and, certainly, I think in many other cities around the world or just in many other places around the world, there is an increasing severe problem with FOMO, as we call it here – Fear of Missing Out – and this can manifest itself in many different ways. People feel like they can't stay away from email for 30 minutes because they'll get backlogged and there's a fear of missing either a problem or missing some type of opportunity.

In my particular case, I've talked to a number of friends of mine who are involved with startup investing and what-not about taking a start-up vacation. I would like to take a three month 100 percent vacation from new start-up investments because it's become

something of a source of stress for me. I think things are very unstable right now and irrational.

And the feedback, almost universally, has been, "You shouldn't do that. Don't make any kind of public proclamation because then you'll stop seeing deals and, before you know it, you'll be out of the loop and then you won't be able to get back into it when you want to get back into it."

And that, as you might imagine, puts me on edge because I've found that there's certain things that I feel I need to categorically say no to, even if just for a period of time. I can't do it 80 percent. If I try to do it 80 percent, then I'll look at everything and it just becomes self-defeating. I won't make any progress. So how would you think about – or encourage people to think about – this fear of missing out where they feel like they constantly have to be in the loop or accessible, or fill-in-the-blank? Because it seems to be a huge source of stress for almost everyone that I know.

Tara Brach: You're right and I think it's getting more so because of the degree of the internet and because we're always plugged in on so many levels.

You know that book "The Shallows?" Did you read that?

Tim Ferriss: No, I don't, actually.

Tara Brach: I can't remember the name of the author but it's really describing how technology actually shapes and changes our brain. And whether it's the onset of typewriter changing – because, instead of handwriting, which brings out a certain part of our brain, having a typewriter – but being plugged in all the time, our brain is changing and we're actually taking in a lot more information but at a lot more of a shallow level – not so dimensional. And we've lost our capacity to actually immerse and drop into the deeper, more subtle dimensions of things that people that used to be very avid, deep readers, just can't get themselves to...

There's a kind of attention deficit when it comes to certain things. And what the internet promotes is a sense of missing out because there's so much coming in from so many different angles that you always get the sense that you're missing it – that there's just something else that you need to be plugged into.

And one of my favorite little cartoons is of this man and a woman sitting in the living room and he's saying to her, "If I ever become a

vegetable, just pull the plug," at which point she goes over to the TV set and she yanks out the plug. And what I like about it is just that we get into an existential anxiety, "Oh, I'm not plugged in." It's like the world is moving on without us. And how to deal with it? The first is what you're doing, which is name it. Name it and really get that this is a product of the times – that we're at a very speedy time and it's accelerating. There's a relationship with the Chinese word for busyness that's in relationship to heart killing. The speedier we get –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Yeah it's mang. Yeah. Mang?

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Yeah. You can feel it.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: The left side of the character means heart and the right side means death. Yup.

Tara Brach: It's amazing. And so I can say, for myself, Tim, that when I'm in that fear of not being prepared or the fear of missing out, my heart's not so open. If my son calls and I'm in the middle of it, I really am not able to take in him – what is really going on for him – because there's some part of me that's tense and on my way somewhere else. So it feels like, first of all, to have the aspiration to be free from that trance is the first step.

To recognize it's going on and know that you can be a more full, more productive, more real being when you're not constantly being tugged around by that something more, something else. And then the second piece is, if I think of people that are really good teachers or people that are really good writers, people that really have done the music that goes to people soul...

They retreat, they unplug, they take space, they step out of the busyness and open themselves to something bigger, something wider, something more mysterious and fluid in order for that to happen. And I feel this in particular for you because I feel like you're very plugged into the pulse in a very good way and your sensitivity and attunement will get even deeper if you can take sabbaticals.

Tim Ferriss: Agreed.

Tara Brach: Because what'll happen is it'll break... We all get habitual to some degree, and the trick is can we keep on recognizing and opening out of any of the habits that stop us from being as sensitive and attuned as possible? And so you need a sabbatical to do that.

Tim Ferriss: And how would you contend with the fear of the unintended side effects of that sabbatical? So for the friends I –

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Right. That fear.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Right. So the friends I have are like, "Dude, you can't do that. If you make some kind of crazy public proclamation or put out a blog post about how you're taking an X month start-up vacation, you have no idea what kind of cascade of events you're going to trigger. You're going to be..." and blah, blah, blah, blah.

[Crosstalk]

So there's this fear-mongering that I'd love your thoughts on how to contend with.

Tara Brach: First of all, part of who you are, Tim, is, "You guys don't have to try it. I'll go ahead and try it. I'll let you know what's on the other side."

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Right. For sure.

Tara Brach: So part of it is just knowing that... Well, let me put it this way. There's a palliative caregiver who was with thousands of people when they were dying and she said the greatest regret of the dying is not living true to ourselves – that we're living according to the expectations or the cultural fears, or whatever.

So your whole path is about playing the edge and not buying in and part of what that means is that you're willing to feel the fear but not be driven by it.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Tara Brach: So here's now we're coming back to having tea with Mara. For you, it's go ahead and say, "I'm stepping back. I'm taking a sabbatical from," whatever it is, and then your process – and it's an important process, it's not like, "I wish I could sidestep this so I could actually have my sabbatical – part of it is you are learning how to find your peace, and balance, and ease in the midst of those energies of fear.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Tara Brach: And one of the interesting things to me is that, in Asia, there's these mandalas which are filled with images and, right at the center of them, is sacred space. And, in order to get to sacred space, you have to pass through what are called "the animal-headed goddesses" – and they're really fear, and anger, and hatred, and jealousy – and the only way to sacred space is to encounter these energies but be with them, not to side-step them. So it's almost like it is the path to face fear. And then there's the question, well, how do we do that in a way that actually frees us and not freezes us?

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Tara Brach: And, for me, the way that I work with fear is... And there's a difference, by the way, from traumatic fear and the kind of fear we're talking about.

Tim Ferriss: Definitely.

Tara Brach: Okay. So, with non-traumatic fear...

And, by the way, I'm doing a whole online course on working with fear in the fall, which I'll tell you more about – because I feel like everyone I know, what's going to free us most, what's going to bring out most of our creativity, and most let us be intimate in the world, is to really learn how to work with the fears that we run away from. In fact, there's one mystic who says there's only one really good question which is, "What am I unwilling to feel?"

Tim Ferriss: Oh, that's a good one.

Tara Brach: And fear is what we're unwilling to feel. So, to become fearless, you need to feel fear and be willing to be vulnerable – be willing to have everybody tell you, "Hey, you're going to go offline and then you're going to miss something," – to be willing to feel that vulnerability but not be driven by it.

Tim Ferriss: Well, that reminds me of – I'm paraphrasing, of course – but what Mike Tyson's trainer, Cus D'amato said at his peak which was the hero and the coward feel the same thing.

It's what the hero does that makes him different. Because Tyson was terrified before getting into the ring, oftentimes. It's just hard to imagine but true. I like this. Yeah, I need to, I think, make a couple of pretty big moves which I've been meditating on but I have been frozen and not freed. I need to pull the trigger on a few of those, I think. If you could have a billboard anywhere and you could have it say anything that you'd like, what would it say and where would it be?

Tara Brach: It would say, "Realize and live from the loving awareness that's really who you are."

Tim Ferriss: Where would you put that?

Tara Brach: Ah, I'm not sure.

Tim Ferriss: Times Square? You could put it... Who knows?

Tara Brach: Yeah. I'm not sure. I'd put it inside everyone's heart and minds. I feel like... The Buddha said it pretty elegantly that if you're suffering, it's because you're forgetting who you are. You're living in a smaller narrative. And that, really, each of our jobs is to start recognizing, "What am I believing that's limiting me? What am I believing that's keeping me small, separate, either feeling deficient or feeling superior? Because I talk about the trance of unworthiness but I can honestly say that I am as much in the trance of specialness as unworthiness and both of them cause suffering.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Tara Brach: It's about really waking up and realizing that there's a basic goodness here. There's a humanness, and an aliveness, and intelligence, and a love that's what we are. And we all have our particular qualities but there's this basic goodness.

So a lot of what I'm doing in my books and in my teachings is how do we pay attention so that we can come to trust that and live from that? And then look at each other – so I can be listening to you and sense past any mask or persona just that consciousness, the sentience, the place that we're really in the same field.

Tim Ferriss: I have so many questions I could ask but I know we're probably coming up on time and I don't want to consume your entire afternoon. But I do have a few more I'd love to ask. And you're mentioning knowing thyself... Actually, before I get to that, just a quick side note for people who do face a lot of fire in the public world. When I first got exposed with the success of the first book and it was turned down by – whatever it was – 27 publishers – no one expected it to do anything – and, all of a sudden, I was having to contend with a lot of public-facing angst.

And someone said to me, "You're never as good as you say they are and you're never as bad as they say you are." And I was like, "Wow, that's good advice." Don't let it go to your head but don't get chopped off at the knees, either. So I'm going to ask a couple of questions that are, maybe, less serious than some of those we've tackled but feel free to answer, or not answer, or however you feel you need to respond. So the first is what music would people be surprised to know you like or listen to?

Tara Brach: Surprised? I'm not sure if surprised. I love Mozart and Beethoven. I love classical music. I'm not thinking that's being a surprise.

Tim Ferriss: You don't listen to Marilyn Manson when you're working out or anything?

Tara Brach: Oh, when I'm working out – but you didn't ask me that. My son widened my taste so I have the capacity to enjoy a whole lot of different art forms but I don't like a lot of... I like silence. I like quiet. So I try to, whenever I can, have it quieter.

Tim Ferriss: Got it. Okay. What about guilty pleasure that is a movie, or a documentary, or TV show that you really enjoy that might not immediately come to mind if people are imagining that you would like. Is there anything? Are you a big Lethal Weapon fan or any...?

Tara Brach: Wait a minute. What was that series? I'm forgetting it now but I loved it so much. Albuquerque and drugs and it was the best thing in the world.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Oh, Breaking Bad?

Tara Brach: Breaking Bad. I went crazy for Breaking Bad. I went so crazy for it that I would be teaching a class and leading a meditation and

knowing I wanted to get home sooner so I could catch it. I loved that. So, yeah, that's one. Does that count?

Tim Ferriss: Indeed. That counts.

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Okay.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Do you have a favorite documentary or any favorite documentaries?

Tara Brach: My favorites are more just because I just have so much passion for any of the documentaries about... There's been documentaries about the earth – those kind of things – documentaries about the pharmaceutical industry – it's kind of the political ones that I'm a believer in that undress things. The tobacco industry... There's been some documentaries on racism that I just saw one called, "Undoing Racism" or "The Illusion of Race" or something. Right now, because the times are bringing it more to our attention – we're seeing what's happening in the daily lives of African-Americans but we're just seeing spot hits of unarmed African-Americans being killed and then this whole shooting in Charleston.

It's like anything that brings that into our consciousness that this is not some distant other having a bad experience now and then. These are our brothers and sisters – part of our world right here who are living still in a daily way that is violent and oppressive. Documentaries that show that kind of thing.

Tim Ferriss: Got it. This is maybe a jarring Segway from that.
[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: That's okay.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: And I'll be curious to hear your response to this. But what purchase of less than \$100 is most positively impacted your life in the last six months or a year?

Tara Brach: Of less than \$100? Oh. I may have to come back to that one, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: We can come back to that one or we could table it.

Tara Brach: Oh, we got some raspberry bushes that – probably pretty much less than that – and they're like, "Gosh." I just went out this morning and picked a whole mess of raspberries. I really like simple pleasures so that might count.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: That sounds amazing. Well, that's the gift that keeps on giving, too. It's a long...

[Crosstalk]

Tara Brach: Yeah, exactly.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I'm so jealous. I wish I could walk out and pick some raspberries right now. So last question – last of two – but the last question is a parting question. What advice would you give your 30-year-old self?

Tara Brach: To profoundly accept and love myself as I am but I'm going to add onto that.

And this is more relational, because I'd like to speak to a little bit relational. We do a lot of training to be with ourselves in meditation but the missing component is how do we train ourselves to be with each other? And I would say to my 30-year-old self to take the chance of being more vulnerable – let your vulnerability be there so that, instead of feeling angry and expressing the anger, stay with the anger enough so you can feel the vulnerability underneath it and be able to name that. And this is particularly in intimate relationships.

With my husband, we have a ritual of – and by the way, we teach courses in bringing mindfulness and meditation into relationships which is one of my favorite things in the world to be teaching – and that's the message. It's to have the nerve, the courage, to feel what's vulnerable.

You know that thing I said before about what are you willing to feel? Feel it and to be able to name it and feel the relationship. Because what happens – just the way when you name something inside yourself, you're less identified – when you do it together, it helps both discover a field of intimacy that really is filled with compassion and understanding that you can't get to if you're not willing to be vulnerable.

Tim Ferriss: And what is the ritual that you have with your husband?

Tara Brach: Well, a couple of times a week – and we do this more than that, but formally we have to, it's on our schedule which is Tuesday and Friday mornings – we alter our morning routine some so that we sit down and meditate together and then we basically share whatever's going on. It could be anything in our life but more, "Is there anything right now between you and I?" "I'm really feeling loving. I'm feeling open," – and that's the inquiry.

And then to hold a space for whatever's there so we don't get into a habit of, in some way, covering over something and then having something build and then not be as tender and open with each other. And we haven't been married that long – we've been probably together for about 12 years – and it keeps on growing and unfolding. And I will tell you one very brief story about one of our ritual sessions. I had this feeling like he was staying on the perimeter and so on and so, at one point, I said, "So, how are we doing?" and he had that deer in the headlights look like, "Oh my god. Is it our anniversary? What'd I forget?"

Tim Ferriss: It's like every guy in the history of the world.

Tara Brach: Exactly.

Tim Ferriss: It's like when my girlfriend said to me the other day, she said, "Do you know what tomorrow is?" and I was like, "Oh god. Oh, no." Yeah.

Tara Brach: I know. It strikes terror in a man's heart. I get it. So but I did it and I was actually, I could even feel it as I was doing it that it was a very controlling move. So he had that look and then he pulled out his iPhone and he said, "Siri, what do you do when your wife says, 'How are we doing?'" And here's what Siri said – and I swear this is the truth. Siri said, "You say, 'I'm okay, and you're okay, and this is the best of all possible worlds.'"

Tim Ferriss: Really?

Tara Brach: Really.

Tim Ferriss: Wow.

- Tara Brach: In fact, he handed it to me – I looked at it and I gave up. I said, "Okay, let's go kayaking." I said, "Let's drop this communication stuff. Let's go play."
- Tim Ferriss: Wow. Unexpected turn of events. That's amazing. But I really like the idea of having these scheduled check-ins because it also avoids the bubbling over of these conversations or discussions so that they erupt at really inopportune, uncomfortable times.
- Tara Brach: That's right.
- Tim Ferriss: Or minimizes it – it probably doesn't eliminate it – but it helps to mitigate that?
- Tara Brach: Well, what happens is when they come at the wrong time, we go into our old habitual either defend or attack mode and then actually create the walls that are the same thing we don't want. So it really helps, just like formal meditation. It helps to have on purpose sitting times so that, if something needs to present itself and you need to work through something, you're available. And then stuff will come up at other times, too, but you've got more the knack of how to work with it, then.
- Tim Ferriss: I love it. And if you could make an ask of everyone listening to this – an ask or a recommendation – what would that be?
- Tara Brach: The real ask would be to pause enough so that you can contact what's really going on inside you and pause enough so that you can look at another and see the goodness that's there and mirror back what people know.
- Tim Ferriss: That's very good advice. Tara, I love your work. I'm so glad you're out there in the world doing what you do. Where can people find you on that web known as the internet? Tarabrach.com is one.
- Tara Brach: Yeah, that's the simplest way and if you then get on my email list. I'm not a massive emailer – I keep being told I should be but I'm not – but I do let folks know, then, the different in-person and online courses that I'm doing and the ones that are coming up – there's one on fear that's coming up that I'm excited about. And Jonathan, my husband, are teaching some relationship workshops. So those kind of things, you'll find out about.
- Tim Ferriss: And the guided meditations, just to reiterate that, on your site are fantastic. I've listened to them while traveling quite a bit, just to take the edge off. So, once again, I appreciate you putting that out

in the world for free. Is there anything else you would like to say before we close this Chapter 1 conversation?

Tara Brach: I want to appreciate you because I've been talking evolution and I feel like your curiosity and way of interviewing... One teacher says that attention is the most pure expression of love – and your way of interviewing and also moving through the world is deeply attentive, and courageous, and sets a model for us. So it's a pleasure to hold hands. It really is.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, thank you.

Tara Brach: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Thank you. That makes my day. I really appreciate it and, hopefully, we will get to meet in person sometime soon. And I would love to see the Potomac from the perspective of where you stand with your dog – that just sounds amazing. So I really appreciate everything that you do and, of course, everyone listening, I will take the resources, links, and so on from this conversation -- book recommendations, certainly "Radical Acceptance" and others – and put them in the show notes so you can find all that at fourhourworkweek.com/podcast, all spelled out. And until next time, thank you for listening.