

Shrink Rap Radio #232, March, 12th, 2010, Mindfulness and The Art of Choice with Karen Sherman, PhD.

David Van Nuys, Ph. D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Karen Sherman, Ph.D.
(transcribed from www.shrinkrapradio.com by Kirsten Pettifor)

Excerpt: *By being mindful of how you're feeling in a situation and starting to be aware of that, because you can never make a change unless you're aware, but starting first to be aware of yourself you can start to question it. You can start to observe it. And then you can start to make changes. And the change is never going to be a quick process, nor is it going to be overnight, nor is it going to be steady, but little by little you can start to make those changes and then you can actually have the ability to look something over and say “Is this really what I want?” And even if it doesn't go the way you want it to go you could learn from it.*

Dr. Dave: That was the voice of my guest Dr. Karen Sherman, speaking about her book on mindfulness and the art of choice. Karen Sherman, Ph.D. a licensed psychologist in New York, has been in private practice for over 20 years. Her focus is relationships and marriage and helping people achieve their greatest potential. Karen is the author of “Mindfulness and The Art of Choice: Transform Your Life” which enables people to let go of conditioned responses and empower them to make their own choices; she's also the co-author of “Marriage Magic! Find It, Keep It, and Make It Last,” as well as a contributor to “101 Great Ways to Improve Your Life, Vol. 2,” writing a chapter about overcoming stress. She's a featured writer on Yahoo Personals, a relationship blogger for ThirdAge.com, and writes the “Disputes” column for Hitchedmag.com. Karen also conducts workshops, teleseminars and speaking engagements. She's a frequent guest on national radio and her expert opinion has appeared in numerous publications. Additionally, she was a former relationships expert on the “Bo Griffin Morning Show,” and a marriage expert on ClubMom.com. Karen also teaches in the undergraduate psychology program at CW Post University. Now, here's the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Karen Sherman, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Karen Sherman: Well thank you so much for having me Dave. I appreciate it.

Dr. Dave: I'm pleased to speak with you and I'm hearing that it's very snowy; you're in New York right?

Sherman: I am indeed and we are waiting for the blizzard to hit big time.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Washington D.C. the Government is closed down. How far are you from New York City?

Sherman: Um, I'm in a suburb and so without traffic it would take about 35 minutes, that's not a usual occurrence though but we're suppose to be getting hit really big. So we've got all our food supplies and we're all warm and we're just cozying up and getting ready for, you know, what's going to hit.

Dr. Dave: I actually miss that, I've lived in the East at various points in my life and it's kind of fun to get snowed in [laughs] and to just kind of have to give up on everything for a while.

Sherman: Absolutely, absolutely.

Dr. Dave: It's called cocooning I guess.

Sherman: Yes, yes it's a lot of fun and my daughter is visiting from Australia and so it's like an extra play day I have with her. So it's wonderful.

Dr. Dave: That's great. Well I've been reading your self-help book "Mindfulness and The Art of Choice" and it was the title of your book that really grabbed me because in a way that title really says it all.

Sherman: Well then I'm glad that I picked that title. [laughs]

Dr. Dave: [laughs] Yeah, yeah it's a great title and we'll get into that in a little bit but in the introductions in the early chapters you tell the story of your own growing up and I think that's all ways of interest to listeners. So maybe that's a good place for us to start here. Tell us about the sorts of challenges you faced growing up.

Sherman: Well, as you probably know Dave a lot of us go into the field, not everyone, but a lot of us go into the field of psychology had a dysfunctional childhood and mine, I feel, was especially dysfunctional. Um, and, for a very, very long time this odd fantasy of having a relationship with my Mother because I really felt that through my childhood I wasn't able to get close to her because of a very domineering and abusive Father. And then what happened is, and I tell that story in the book and I do so for a reason which I am glad to explain, but what eventually happened was he died, um I thought, oh wow now I finally have my Mommy, and I purposefully say Mommy because it was really this childhood fantasy, and low and behold what I found out is that there was no emotional nurturing Mommy. And since I had held onto this hope, this dream, this fantasy my entire life it really threw me into a tailspin. Um, initially if you looked at me from the outside it looked like I had a very successful life. I was married, I had two children at the time, I had a thriving practice, but internally there was a void. And so here I thought my void was going to be filled.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Sherman: And, clearly, not only was that void not filled but it really opened up this huge wound for me. Um, what then happened was that it set off a horrible, horrible, depression. So painful at one point that I wasn't sure that I could stand the pain and I had to make a choice and that choice was whether I wanted to continue living or not. And so obviously I made the choice that I wanted to and worked with somebody using tools to help me deal with the pain and found them to be very successful, continued to use them with clients and felt that the tools I was using was very different than traditional talk therapy. And therefore felt "Wow this is something that was so helpful to me and others that I really became very impassioned about wanting to share those tools with other people". And so that's really what was the motivation for writing the book

Dr. Dave: Uh huh. Now how long ago was this crisis that you were describing?

Sherman: Um, I would say it was now about twenty years ago, fifteen-twenty years ago.

Dr. Dave: Okay. And you know, as you say often those of us in the helping professions are trying to work out some of our own issues. And have the fantasy that well if we learn how to help others we will some how, in that process, get our own needs met. And I know when I was a student I bridled at that notion [laughs] when it was implied by some of my teachers and I think in, you know, at this point in my life I can look back at my own life and realize that that was more true for myself than I was willing to admit at the time.

Sherman: Mhmm.

Dr. Dave: Was there something that happened in your life twenty years ago that kind of triggered those childhood traumas to kind of create the crisis that you experienced?

Sherman: Well as I said, when I finally had this clear pathway to my Mother and you know initially when my Father died- it was two three times a week and you know I had all these expectations of now finally having this typical Mother daughter relationship. There was no Mother, she just was not emotionally available and so I had to reflect back on my entire childhood with a very different kind of reflection and realize that she truly was never available to me. And then sort of reassess all the pain that I had gone through, all the times she was absent, all the times she didn't protect me. And there were many, many, things in my childhood which were very abusive, various types of abuse where she did not step in and help me and be nurturing and take care of me. And as I said I had all ways made this excuse thinking *Well she couldn't because my Father was such a villain*. But you know, after this situation presented itself to me I realized it was not really because he was such a villain, which he was, but also because she was not able to be available and to step into that role. And it felt very lonely, it felt very- ... for me and so, you know, that feeling, that pain, that void having it come up from my childhood was just- ... and I think very often what happens with people is that when they reach that level of devastation it very often catapults them, it bolts them, into really taking a very,

um, clear look at what their life is and having to face the reality of their life and then go from there. Um, hopefully in a positive direction, which I truly feel, I mean at this point I look back Dave and I'm very happy that all that happened to me. Which may sound kind of strange but I'm really not at all upset that my childhood happened to me, that the incident that I'm describing to you happened to me, because I know that I wouldn't be who I am today had I not lived through all of those experiences.

Dr. Dave: Exactly, I totally understand that. I totally understand that. Well, tell us a little bit about how you came to be a psychologist psychotherapist. What did you major in college? uh [laughs]

Sherman: [laughs]

Dr. Dave: Then how did it evolve into this particular career?

Sherman: You know, that's interesting because when people ask me what my specialty is I say that I specialize in relationships but I always unqualify and say relationships with others or with yourself. Because I really feel those two things are very intertwined and the truth of the matter is that I have been a relationship specialist since I'm eight years old. Because my parents had such a horrible marriage um, and there were so many awful things going on and among the irresponsible or dysfunctional things they did is that they allowed me really to get involved in it. And to attempt to help them when I was eight years old.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Sherman: So, to me, I've just been doing this my whole life.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Sherman: Um, it was a no brainer. I mean of course I was going to be a psychologist. You know, I've had years of practice doing it all ready.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Sherman: It was just getting the credits then to back me up. [laughs]

Dr. Dave: [laughs] So did you major in psy-

Sherman: Yes.

Dr. Dave: The reason I'm asking about all of this is some percentage of my listeners are students, or people who are contemplating a career in psychology psychotherapy, so I'm trying to understand a little bit about your path. So did you major in psychology?

Sherman: Yes.

Dr. Dave: As an undergraduate even?

Sherman: Yes. Yes I did. I majored in psychology all the way through. Um, you know a lot of times when I'm teaching Dave, what I tell students is that I think we each have things that come naturally to us and those are our strengths. And if you can parlay and do something that matches with those things that are your strengths that's what you're going to be really happy in, because those are the things that come easily to you. And so as I said I've been doing this all my life and so it just made sense for me to go into this. It truly was not, you know, a difficult decision for me to make.

Dr. Dave: Mhmm, and then as you went on to your graduate work did you get trained in a particular approach?

Sherman: Um, I started out my masters was in the humanistic approach.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Sherman: And uh, then I just went on and had more of a clinical background and I guess that for me um, the humanistic approach. Which is very non-directive was not really fitting my style. I tend to be a little bit more active and directive so I've gotten trained in a number of different ways. Not necessarily through my graduate program, but I've gotten trained in cognitive certification program and I've taken courses on my own. I continue to learn. I think that in order to stay fresh in my field um, I'm always taking extra courses and extra trainings. Because I really feel that that's the best way to go, I mean up to, and including, the fact that last year I took a workshop with Sue Johnson who is very strong on doing couples work with attachment theory. So um, I don't think, and this is my personal view, that you can really stay fresh and new and really offer your clients the best information unless you're staying on top of your game and your field.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I totally agree and the way that I do it [laughs] is through these interviews. I learn so much talking to people such as yourself.

Sherman: Yeah, sure. You know I think when we're constantly talking with each other and exchanging ideas, that is certainly a process of learning.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Now the idea of Mindfulness seems to have really caught on in a big way. How did you come to be involved with Mindfulness?

Sherman: Well um, I think that what I realized in myself is that part of what I did in order to deal with my life was I became an overachiever. I was given a lot of reinforcement growing up for what I was able to do. Um, I was a high school student I was class president, I was the editor and chief of the yearbook, um, I had all sorts of activities. And

I also got very involved in school activities because that would be something my parents would accept, and it kept me out of the house.

Dr. Dave: Mhmm.

Sherman: Okay, now I became a busy person and that allowed me to not feel my pain so much.

Dr. Dave: Mhmm.

Sherman: But when you do that you miss a whole bunch of life, you miss the small things in life. You're not aware of appreciating nature. You're not aware of appreciating your children's fun times. And so again as a result of this transformation that I went through I was able to really access what it meant to have joy in life. To not be running around all the time. To really um, embrace those little moments and to stop and pay attention, not only to my own signals, so that I could be aware when something was upsetting me, but to really be cognizant of things in life that were important and that were to be a priority. And I think that that's a major difference in how I live my life now, as opposed to how I use to live it, which was just to get caught up all the time in this overdrive.

Dr. Dave: So then what would you say Mindfulness means to you? I guess in a way you've just described it um, but would you like to say anything more about what you mean when you use the word mindfulness.

Sherman: I think it's a matter of being more present, being more in the now. Not getting, not being in this autopilot, not being responding to things just habitually with out actually being aware of what you're doing. Which is what I think happens to people um, emotionally. I think that so much of our behavior is reactive that those reactions are based on old patterns that we've learned in childhood. And so what I want to let people know is that they can bring this sense of old awareness of themselves and how they're behaving to their everyday living so that they can then make choices that they're not just repeating these old patterns and that they can truly live in the now responding, even to emotional situations, with a choice.

Dr. Dave: Mhmm, I love the way in the books title you pair Mindfulness with what you call the Art of Choice.

Sherman: Right.

Dr. Dave: And so what do you see as the relationship between these two. Between Mindfulness and Choice? And you call it the Art of Choice.

Sherman: Yes, I chose art because I see it as a process, I see it as something different then science. Um, science is something that's more precise, that's more exact and in the book I

don't give people a formula. Because it's impossible everybody's got their own processes, their own journey. But I do think there's a methodology that can be offered as to how you can go about your journey. And so that's why I say it's the art of choice. The art, it's the process of learning how you can become more present, more aware of who you are, of how you're reacting, of what your behavior is really signifying about who you are. And once you start to become aware you then have the choice to make changes and to control the way that you react to things, because that's really the only thing any of us have control over, is our reactions. Because again, my feeling is that most of us just function on this autopilot.

Dr. Dave: What came to mind is Viktor Frankl's book, "Man's Search For Meaning"

Sherman: Mhmm.

Dr. Dave: And in there he talks about how when he was in Nazi concentration camp

Sherman: Right.

Dr. Dave: How exercising choice in a situation in which, from the outside it looked like there was no choice, but just making small choices like hoarding a little bar of soap made the difference between life and death.

Sherman: Absolutely. Because when you feel that you have some control over a situation then there's all sorts of research which indicate that that will make you feel like you can go on living. Um, but again the point is that so many people will continue to function in situations where they're not getting the results they want and they're unhappy, yet they continue to do it. Why? Because they just all ways do it that way. That's what they know. That's what they're comfortable doing.

Dr. Dave: Mhmm.

Sherman: But it doesn't have to be that way. So again by being mindful of how you're feeling in a situation and starting to be aware of that, because you can never make a change unless you're aware, but starting to first be aware of yourself you can start to question it. You can start to observe it. And then you can start to make changes, and change is never going to be a quick process, nor is going to be over night, nor is it going to be steady. But little by little you can start to make those changes and then you can actually have the ability to look something over and say, "Is this really what I want?" And even if it doesn't go the way you want it to go, you can learn from it. But again you're clearer thinking you're not just caught up in that, let's say that feeling of drowning because a wave is coming at you. You know that, if you can imagine a wave coming at you and you're under the water and you can't really see clearly or just, sort of like, desperately trying to stay afloat. You have the ability to really sort of deal with the situation and make a choice as to how you want to respond to it.

Dr. Dave: As you pointed out though we tend to respond automatically and that can happen just so quickly. How does a person become sufficiently mindful to move from being on automatic to being more choiceful?

Sherman: Well, first of all I want to comment on you know, your astute comment that you're right is in an a nanosecond that we respond and that's based on the fact that we've got these wired in implicit memories, or as we would say in normal jargon, that our buttons are getting pushed.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Sherman: So the first thing is that you've got to observe yourself. So the way I notice it with clients, and the way people can start to notice it in themselves. Is if they see that their reactions are these intense reactions. That happen so quickly and they can't seem to let it go, sometimes I tease people where I say to them you know, if you swear every cell in your body that it's the other person, chances are it's really because of you.

Dr. Dave: Mhmm.

Sherman: But when you start to see that then there's a way that you can start to really allow yourself to be aware of your body. Your body is your barometer. There's all ways going to be a bodily reaction, a bodily sensation when you're feeling something emotional. And so if you start to tune in to that and become aware of your body then you can say, "Okay, so what is it that I'm really feeling? what did this situation, that just upset me, what did that remind me of?" And when you start to look at that you could actually, what I call, float back and go back and think about, "Okay you know, when I was ten there was something that felt the same to me." And that's the process I'm talking about Dave. That then you really get to what the root is, that "whatever just happened now between you and me, yeah that really upset me, that set me off. It's not really what happened now, it's not really what you just said to me. It's because it reminded me of something else." And when you get to root then you can start doing the healing work where you can start to change these wired in neural connections. Because if you don't get to those roots it's almost like you're working with weeds. You keep cutting the weeds down and momentarily your lawn looks good, but they're going to grow back. So if you don't deal with the original source of injury they're going to keep getting triggered every time there's a situation that reminds you of the original wound.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Well this kind of ties into another thing that you write about which is releasing fear. How big an issue is fear in your experience of working with people?

Sherman: Oh, major. And you know, I would say that the two strongest emotions are love and fear. And if you're working from a fear prospective one can become unbelievably paralyzed. But that fear is fear most likely that you have wired in, again from your

childhood, and so when something happens, in the now, and it triggers the fear from your childhood. You're no longer responding as an adult, you're responding to the remembered fear of your childhood. So, as an example, I'm working with a client who has the fear that he's not going to succeed at something. It paralyzes him horribly in trying to get a job and so he really can't send out resumes. And he can't, you know, go for job interviews. It has nothing to do with the reality of who he is because when he actually does certain things he's quite successful. So the point is that you store these memories but you've stored them as a child so, have you ever had the experience where you've have the opportunity to go back and see a kindergarten classroom. And you look at it and you say, "Oh my God look how small those chairs are!"?

Dr. Dave: [laughs] Yes I've sat on those chairs as a parent.

Sherman: That's right. But when we were little those chairs didn't look small to us.

Dr. Dave: No.

Sherman: Well the same thing happens with these fears or these pains that we've had, you know, from childhood. We store them as children so when we go back to... When they come up for us we feel them as if we are the child, we have to tell ourselves that "yes they fell awful". So what happens as soon as the fear comes up we shy away from it. "O no, I don't want to feel that, I don't want to feel that." Well the truth of the matter is if you would allow yourself to re-experience it it's only going to hurt for a little while. And if you start to work with it, and I do that through visualizations, if you start to work with that and allow those feelings to come out then they go away.

Dr. Dave: Yeah well for example the fellow that you were talking about, who was having trouble going out looking for a job. How did you use visualization, if in fact you did, working with him?

Sherman: Okay, there's two things. One thing is to go back to some of the early sources where he had experiences where he didn't succeed and for him to work with the image of his small self and allow his small self to be able to express whatever the negative experiences were. And he does that, again visually expressing them to his adult self, as he is now.

Dr. Dave: Mhmm.

Sherman: The adult self is suppose to substitute in for the nurturing loving unconditional parent, that we would all love to have. Okay?

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Sherman: And by the expression, but again this is done with energy work in other words with a bodily feeling coming up, not just talking about it cognitively, and through that

process of the adult self the understanding and loving and healing eventually the small self feels okay, “It’s okay, I don’t feel so bad about it.” I mean I’m simplifying it. So that’s one way. The other way is that as the fear comes up to acknowledge the fear, not to say “don’t be ridiculous” or “don’t be silly” or put yourself down because you had enough of that when you were a kid. But to acknowledge and say, “..but you know what? I need you little one, to trust me, to allow me to do this.” and to start to take little steps”. Because when you start to take little steps, and they’re successful the small self will start to say “okay this is working out” and then you take the next step and when the little self gets scared again you can say, “When you trusted me, when you allowed me to take that step it worked out” and little by little the confidence starts to build. Again, in an interview such as this, I’m over simplifying it. The main point is to be able to transform the experiences that were stored in early childhood but to do more than just talk about it. To actually bring up the raw feelings from childhood so that they can be worked with visually because through the visualizations they start to get transformed. There’s lots of literature about the um, effectiveness of visualizations.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Yes and certainly what you’re saying makes a lot sense even though, as you’re saying you’re needing to simplify for interview purposes, it certainly is clear and makes sense to me. I love the kindergarten metaphor of the little chairs, by the way. [laughs] I hope I remember that. I don’t have a lot of confidence that I will. But it’s a lovely-

Sherman: [laughs] No, I think you will. I have confidence in you.

Dr. Dave: [laughs] O good, good. I’m feeling better all ready.

Sherman: [laughs]

Dr. Dave: Now you’ve got a chapter on being with others, and we are social animals and at the same time it seems many of our biggest challenges lie in relationships. What have you learned about that?

Sherman: Ooh..., there’s so much I could say about that, and let me just say that the newest edition of my book is coming out in a couple of weeks because I’ve added a chapter on how to actually use these tools when you are involved in a relationship. So there’s a lot that I have to say about it. The first thing that I want to tell people is that unfortunately our media has really romanticized the concept of being in a relationship. And they’ve made it out as if you must in a relationship because if you’re not in relationship you’re not complete. And that’s hogwash. Is it nice to be in a relationship? Absolutely. Um, there is you know, there is ala Sue Johnson that I mentioned before. Um, work which indicates that as human beings we all need a sense of healthy attachment. However, as I said a moment ago, media has made it sound like we can’t live without each other.

Dr. Dave: Mhmm.

Sherman: You know, “you complete me”. “You had me at hello”. And that’s just not true. So when you put yourself in that position, if you lose somebody, either through a breakup or through a divorce or through death, God forbid. Then you feel like you don’t exist any more and that’s just not healthy, and that’s why I wanted people know that it really was okay to be without a partner. Because in being in a relationship with yourself it’s very important to accept yourself for who are. That you are complete with yourself, you’re not going to be perfect. You have to accept yourself, warts and all, because there are some parts of you that are not perfect and there many parts of you that very special. And the more you can accept yourself for who you are the more that you’re going to give out that vibe. And then guess what? You’re probably going to be more desirable as a partner. But once you entrust your happiness to somebody else you’re going down a very slippery slope.

Dr. Dave: Yes, in fact I see that you co-authored an earlier book on marriage called “Marriage Magic: Find It Keep It and Make it Last”

Sherman: Yes.

Dr. Dave: How does one create a magical marriage?

Sherman: Well I think that what happens is, you know, the divorce rate, as we all know, is very high. And what I was finding is- So I was finding all these couples who were staying married but they were really unhappy. And they were unhappy because their marriages were getting stale. And so that book was written because I wanted to help to learn how to revitalize their marriages. And so many people complain, “Oh the best part of the marriage is the honeymoon phase” And you know “What happened to that?” Well you know what? You could have that back. What’s unique about the honeymoon phase is that you can prioritize your relationship, you let the other person know that they matter. Now in reality of course once you get married and you start to feel comfortable with each other there’s a bit of a trade off, you’ve got the commitment you feel more comfortable, and life starts to happen. And for many couples part of life is also that you have children. Now of course even though it says marriage magic it’s also any couple that’s in a long-term committed relationship. So this doesn’t apply just to marriage, and nor does what I’m saying about what happens to a long-term relationship. But you want those feelings back? Prioritize your relationship. Let each other know that you matter to each other, do little things to let each other know that you appreciate each other. That you respect one another. And so those are the things that are going to help you have a solid good relationship

Dr. Dave: And you’re saying this as someone who has been married for some time, right?

Sherman: Yes. I’m about to be married 35 years, this summer, to the same man.

Dr. Dave: Okay, good for you. [laughs]

Sherman: [laughs] And I think it's also important to have the proper expectations of what marriage is about. You know, it's really not about getting carried off on a white horse and living happily ever after. Um, there are times..., you know it's so interesting, I had somebody come into me about a year ago and um, she was very upset because she was not feeling in love with her husband. And I said "uh! The first time that happened to me in my marriage I got really scared." She said "The first time?" I said "O yeah. You feel you know, like "Oh my God something terrible is happening!" And then you fall back in love again. And next time it happens you're not as nervous." She said, "Wow, nobody ever tells you that." Well sure, a relationship is a live kind of phenomenon, it ebbs and it flows. So there's going to be good times and there's going to not such good times. And I think that unfortunately there's not enough information that couples have about what to expect in a relationship.

Dr. Dave: Wow, that really makes sense to me because as you point out there is so much romanti- [laughs] it's hard to say the word, romanticization, in the media. I mean just listen to, you know, pop music for example it's almost exclusively about that sort of early stage of infatuation.

Sherman: Right. Right. But you know, what are those songs- Who writes those songs? And who writes those novels? Those are really the projections, we can use a psychological term, of the artist. So those are their dreams and those fantasies. [laughs]

Dr. Dave: [laughs] Yeah.

Sherman: But not reality. Not reality.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Well speaking of media I see that you're very much a media psychologist writing for Yahoo! Personals, relationship blog for ThirdAge.com, a disputes column for HitchedMag.com, and ClubMom.com, and also a frequent guest on NPR. How have you managed-.. Again I'm thinking of listeners who are, you know, trying to think about their own careers. How have you managed to build this aspect of your career?

Sherman: Well, um. Little by little.

Dr. Dave: Okay. [laughs] You're very persistent, I learned that about you.

Sherman: Yeah, I am.

Dr. Dave: 'Cause you didn't let go of me. [laughs]

Sherman: I know, I am persistent. In high school, I will share with you, that they voted me most stubborn.

Dr. Dave: [laughs]

Sherman: And when the advisor was giving me the award he said “We’ll really say she’s most persistent.” I am persistent, I do it little by little and um, I don’t necessarily do all the-.. For instance ClubMom now is not using experts as much, um, and basically also I you know, try to create balance. So I regularly blog for ThirdAge.com I write for HitchedMag irregularly. Um, none of what I put in my bio is an untruth but I wouldn’t say that I do all of it every week.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Sherman: Uh, ‘cause it is just impossible to do all of it every week, but I make sure that I keep my sort of toes in a whole bunch of different places.

Dr. Dave: Okay. So there’s still a little bit of that overachiever in there huh?

Sherman: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: [laughs]

Sherman: You know I have to tell you, I try to just sort of say “I’m not going to do it” and I guess it’s just who I am as a person but also if I just cut it out totally I’m just not happy as a person.

Dr. Dave: I think I’m similar, so I can definitely understand that. Now I believe you also teach at the university level, is that right?

Sherman: I do. [laughs] I do. Undergraduate psychology. And I have my private practice.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. What courses do you teach?

Sherman: I teach, this semester, I’m teaching the second half of Introductory Psychology as well as Social Psychology.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Well as we wind down is there anything else you’d like to say? Maybe something that you hoped to get in that you didn’t get a chance to say?

Sherman: Uh.. Yes. In a self serving manner I’d like people to know that they can get my book, either at my website, which is DrKarenSherman.com or at any of the online book stores. But more importantly I want people to know that part of reason that I was as revealing as I was in the book is because I have truly lived the situation. I don’t want people to just think that I just espoused what I did to tell them what they should do. I have been there. I have known the pain. And I am very passionate about getting this

message out. You do not have to be a prisoner to your past, things can be different, I know it feels scary many times to feel the pain but it does go away. And there is no reason that anybody should not have a joyous life and I am really, in my own little way, on a mission to let people know that. And so that's why, Dave, I was so persistent in trying to get on to your show because you are affording me the opportunity to get that message out. And I am so appreciative of that.

Dr. Dave: Well it's a great message. Dr. Karen Sherman, thanks so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Sherman: And I thank you again.

[music plays]

Dr. Dave: I hope you enjoyed this interview with Dr. Karen Sherman. You heard me make reference to her persistence, the story behind that is I had possession of her book for quite a long time. I had a whole stack of books to go through and other guests that I'd lined up. Karen periodically sent me e-mails over a period of several months. Finally I had a last minute interview cancellation by another guest I had lined up. And due to Karen's persistence I immediately thought of her. And she was willing to do the interview on short notice. I'm glad she was as persistence as she was because she made some great points in the interview and closed with a wonderful message I thought. There was place in the interview where she spoke about the importance of learning to listen to your body as a of knowing what's going on with yourself emotionally. That triggered a set of memories for me, relating to when I first learned that lesson for myself. It was back in the days when I was in graduate school and was very involved in the encounter group movement. It was in the context of those marathons and counter groups that I learned to check in to my body. Were my hands clenched? Was I holding my breath? Was there a knot in my stomach? I learned that these were important queues that I was reacting emotionally to what was going on in the group. And that instead of sitting on my feelings, as was my tendency, I needed to speak up. That was an important lesson for me then and one that serves me well still. Dr. Sherman's book is a slim volume of ninety-six pages or so. Which is a quick and easy read. Her style is simple and engaging. And she suggests an array of exercises to help you implement the ideas into your life. Her website, again, is www.DrKarenSherman.com, and doctor is just abbreviated Dr so it's DrKarenSherman.com. She offers a free newsletter there as well as a free mini e-course on how to have a great relationship. I encourage you to check it out.

[music plays]

Dr. Dave: Hello everyone out there! It's a beautiful spring like day here in northern California as I record this. I have some good news to report I've long felt that these interviews should somehow be able to earn C.E.U. That's Continuing Education Units for those seeking licensure or licensure renewal or certificates in certain areas. Well I'm

teaming up with the Zor Institute an on-line provider of continuing education credits for a variety of helping professions. I'll be pulling together clusters of interviews to form creditable courses around topical areas. Such as dreams, positive psychology and so on. It will take a while to put these courses together but I'm very excited about this latest development. I'll keep you posted as this initiative moves along. My plans for Prague and Vienna in May are pretty well solidified but I have a lot of work still to do on the presentation I'll be giving in Prague. Right now it's too long and I have to pare it down to it's essentials and I have to make it more dramatic somehow. However, I've heard from two listeners in the Vienna area! And I'm looking forward to a couple of face-to-face meetings with them. If you haven't done so all ready, you might want to hear my latest interview at WiseCounselPodcast.com It's with Dr. Kirk Schneider on Existential Humanistic Psychotherapy. I first knew Kirk when he was a young intern and he's gone on to become one of the leading exponents of existential humanistic psychotherapy and has published over one-hundred articles and chapters and has authored or edited eight books. By the way there is now a transcript on the Shrink Rap Radio sight of my interview with brain/meditation research with Dr. Sara Lazar. The transcript is a very quick way to take in the information, or to refresh your memory. I find them very valuable and will be relying on them to formulate my C.E.U. exam questions for those aforementioned C.E.U courses. And speaking of transcripts we could definitely use more volunteer transcribers, please drop me a line if you're interested. It's a great way for you, as a transcriber to incorporate the material deeply during the transcription process. And let me remind you to check out the Shrink Rap Radio store where you'll find my CD with two lectures I recently gave on positive psychology and the quest for happiness. I put both lectures on a single CD to give you greater value for your money. In edition, this CD includes the hand out that I passed out to the group with recommended readings and recommended Shrink Rap radio episodes related to positive psychology. And beyond that you will also get my power point presentation so that you'll be able to follow along, just as if you were there. You get both lectures for just fifteen dollars, plus shipping. And your CD comes in a beautiful DVD style case which will fit nicely on your bookshelf. Finally let me remind you that this show is supported by your generous donations. Both those that are one time and those that are continuing for six or twelve months. Thanks for your support.

Tom Carroll: Hi this is Corporal trainer and coach Tom Carroll and you're on the couch with Dr. Dave.

Dr. Dave: Thank you Tom Carroll! You'll be hearing more from this long time listener and corporate consultant in our next episode. In the meantime, lets dip into our listener mailbag. The first one is from Julia, who writes; "Dear Dave, I just listened to your interview with Pat Bracken", that's on Wise Council, "and wanted to let you know right way, how interesting and meaningful it was for me. I'm so glad to have his work and thinking brought to my attention as it fits right in with my laypersons general sense of the role and context of mental health, both it's labeling and the treatment. One thought that came to me while listening is the parallel with the discussion in medical treatment of

infection. The old argument about whether it's the bug or the soil, I don't think I'm quite remembering the exact phrase, but I think you'll know what I mean. So much of western mental health theory approaches mental illness as if there was some invading organism or malfunction within the individual almost completely out of context of their life. What Dr. Bracken seems to be saying is that the social/economic/cultural environment they live in is as much both the cause and the vehicle for healing as anything that's inherent in the individual. I'm not sure this is quite clear as it's probably easier to explain verbally, but I did want to share the thought. I will add that I have my own example of the healing power of finding meaning in suffering. Many years ago now, in my recovery from having been bulimic, I still do not really like to use an external label to express my struggle but it's an acceptable short hand in some cases. A turning point involved exactly that, finding meaning in my suffering, not the bulimic behavior but what I was feeling that was being expressed in a distorted way through behavior. So thank you again for your work, I've been exploring some other psychology podcasts and I think yours is really the best so far. You seem to have a broad scope and very intelligent and listening conversation with your guests, not to mention your choice of guests. I'll end by mentioning that one suggestion for an interview that I've made previously, Bob Fancher, is right up this alley as well. And might be a worth while complete to theme of substantive rather than wacky out there questioning of main stream mental healthcare. Take care, Julia." Well Julia, thank you so much for those comments and by the way I have interviewed Bob Fancher, due to your suggestion. I've interviewed him on Wise Counsel but I don't think that show has come up quite yet in the rotation but keep checking. Next we hear from Michael in Iraq; "Hello Dr. Dave my name is Michael and I'm currently serving in Army overseas in Iraq. I stumbled onto your show right around Christmas Eve when I was traveling through Kuwait. I very much enjoy it. I was very close to an associates degree in computer information systems software support but a department got in my way a bit. I took one psychology class and very much enjoyed it so I'm all ways trying to learn a little more." Good for you. "I also was involved in a behavioral psychology class that I was absolutely fascinated with and took a lot of helpful information from. I've listened to quite a bit of your podcast and started to keep a dream log in which I learned that I sure dream more often than I thought I did. Last night I had three dreams and in the third one there were a bunch of horses running through an urban Oregon community. And according to the radio Dr. Dave had some kind of entrepreneurial endeavor where he made an agreement with the city to use the city as a range for his horses at night. I'm not sure what that means but perhaps it meant I needed to make a small donation at your site." I think you got it, I think that was the meaning of it. [laughs] He goes on to say that; "I'm currently catching up on your episodes but was wondering a bout a video game addiction, specifically massively multi player on-line roleplaying games, MMORPGs. I played one or two years and finally quit and it felt like some people describing a bad relationship. I simply didn't understand how miserable it was making me until I gave it up. I even harbor ill-will towards the company that made the game. I accept personal responsibility for my actions but I feel the company was slightly to blame. In a sense I feel they were my crack dealers and the crack was getting more expensive as time went on. So far on your show I really only heard of these games described in a positive manner. I was

curious to know if there's been any information or surveys in the psychology world, or if you had any guests who are familiar with people becoming addicted to these kinds of games. I have experienced many friends and family who call into work or don't sleep because of this. Thank you for the show and keep up the good work. Michael." Michael that is a great suggestion for a future interview, I've had a couple that have sort of touched on this topic but not one who was square on dealing with the subject of video game addiction and I have a good guest in mind for that. And uh, so I very much appreciate hearing from you off in uh, far off Iraq and I hope that you are safe and will continue to be safe. Michael one more thought before I move on. I recently read a fascinating article in Wired magazine about addiction to these MMRPG type games in China. They special rehabilitation camps for young people there, the government is really concerned about it. And these camps sounded like they might be some where between a military boot camp and concentration camp. In the article one of the young gamer who was sent to such a camp was killed there. I sent an e-mail to the articles author wanting to interview him but unfortunately he's never responded to me. And we'll close with one more e-mail from another listener with a dream. This one is from Christina who writes; "Hi Dr. Dave, I love listening to your show, even when I think a topic might not be that interesting I all ways come away fascinated and intrigued. There are some awful podcasts out there but Shrink Rap is always professional and has great knowledgeable guest and a fantastic wide choice of topics." Thanks so much for that Christina, that's what I strive to do. She goes on to say; "As you're doing a lot on dreams and their significant to the dreamers life I just waned to share with you a truly life changing dream I had. A "big dream" as you call them. Basically in that dream I saw myself organizing my own funeral. In Venice Italy of all places, I remember getting some things out of the way fairly swiftly. Such as how many pallbearers for example and then deliberately endlessly on the music that was to "see me off". In the end I settled for Beethoven's Ode To Joy but I remember getting very worked up in the dream as I couldn't remember the title of it. Just the melody. All the time during this dream I was fully associated in myself but then it all happened. In my dream I suddenly stood in front of myself, the self that was writing down the instructions, looking at my tear streaked face, mascara everywhere. And suddenly in that dream I remember myself thinking about my crying other standing in front of myself, "My God I never appreciated how wonderful you were and how hard you strove to please me." Dream over. Needless to say I woke up shaking and upset, even now it still upsets me. Well my interpretation, I'd say my critical parents self encountered my child self I'd all ways been fairly perfectionistic and other people sometimes commented that I'm a bit harsh on myself. But had no idea it was that bad. The dream left me shaken for about three days afterwards. I'm now on the journey of building a more positive self image, I'm still not sure what the issue with the song was, it was definitely a bit part of the dream as I got really worked up about it. The fact that my funeral was to be in Venice, I'm actually living in the U.K. doesn't feel that significant I think I watched a film abut Venice slowly sinking a few days before. So that might have been just a bight of frill on the dream. Aren't dreams amazing? Keep up the great work. Kind regards, Christina." Christina I think it's really wonderful that you were able to hear the message that this dream seemed to shouting at you. To back off of being so self critical and while

the funeral imagery might seem frightening it certainly was a dramatic way of getting your attention on the one hand. And on the other, I think might be foreshadowing the death of that overly self critical part of yourself making room for the birth of a more self accepting part. So with that I think it'll wrap it up for today. Remember to send your e-mails to Shrink@ShrinkRapRadio.com in addition to e-mails you can leave comments about individual shows in the comment areas on the site. You can leave voice mail on skype where I'm ShrinkPod and you can leave voice mail on our phone at 206-337-0622. Thanks to my guest Dr. Karen Sherman for her insights on the role of choice in Mindfulness. As I mentioned earlier my next show will be with Tom Carroll a corporate coach and trainer. He's also a Shrink Rap Radio listener and a really neat guy. I think you'll enjoy him quite a bit. So, until then this is Dr. Dave saying it's allll in your mind.