

Shrink Rap Radio #269, July 8, 2011, The Power of Relationship in Psychoanalysis and Buddhism

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave”, interviews Pilar Jennings, Ph.D.  
(transcribed from [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com) by Deborah Swayne)

**Excerpt:** The student or the client really begins to internalize the teachings of the traditions through the relationship, so it’s through an intimate encounter, it’s through really getting to know the therapist in terms of that intimate relational experience and through getting to know your buddhist teacher, through a deep sharing, that the fruits of the tradition come to be.

**Introduction:** That was the voice of my guest, Dr. Pilar Jennings, speaking about the key role that relationship plays in both psychoanalysis and Buddhism. Pilar Jennings, Ph.D., is a writer and researchers who is focussed on the clinical applications of buddhist meditation practice. She received her Ph.D. in psychiatry and religion from Union Theological Seminary and has been working with patients and their families through the Harlem Family Institute since 2004. Dr. Jennings is also a researcher at the Columbia University Center for the Study of Science and Religion as well as a facilitator of a Columbia University faculty seminar. Dr. Jennings is a long-term practitioner of Tibetan and vipassana Buddhism. She is also trained as a buddhist chaplain through the Zen Center for Contemplative Care. Dr. Jennings lives in New York City. Her 2010 book, “Mixing Minds: The Power of Relationship in Psychoanalysis and Buddhism,” explores the interpersonal dynamics between buddhist teachers and their western students in comparison to the relationships between psychoanalysts and their patients. Dr. Jennings is a researcher at the Columbia University Center for the Study of Science and Religion, where she explores the effect of narcissism on environmental issues. She is also facilitator of a Columbia University faculty seminar addressing topics relating to slavery and memory. In her ongoing psychotherapeutic work with inner-city families, Dr. Jennings has sought to explore the impact of racism on children. With her unique approach to clinical work, she has integrated traditional psychological healing models and meditation. Through her training in chaplaincy and contemplative care at Beth Israel Hospital in New York, Dr. Jennings has brought the combination of her divergent interests and background to another population in need of sensitive psychological and spiritual care. As a contemplative care provider, she has made efforts to explore the psychological and spiritual needs of disenfranchised populations. Now, here’s the interview.

**Dr. Dave:** Dr. Pilar Jennings, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Pilar Jennings:** Thank you, Dave. It’s good to be here.

**Dave:** I’m excited to have this opportunity to speak with you about your work, which among other things, very carefully examines the commonalities and differences between psychoanalysis and Buddhism. But before we get into that, I was intrigued to learn that you got a really early exposure to buddhist meditation. Tell us about that.

**Pilar:** I did. I had the good fortune to be exposed to Buddhism when I was about ten years old. I had a very spiritually curious mother. She was actually ethnically Jewish, went to Catholic schools in Catholic Peru where she grew up, but brought me to a variety of spiritual communities when I was a child, and then she and I enrolled in a vipassana meditation course together. So it was, I would say, the first spiritual practice that felt very resonant. I had an immediate interest in what it meant to sit in silence, particularly since I was a child sitting with a group of adults who seemed to be taking it very seriously. (Laughs.) I figured that there might be something meaningful going on.

**Dave:** It's interesting that at that early age, that you really did take to it.

**Pilar:** Yes, I think it has something to do with my personality. I'm a relatively introverted person, and I was a fairly shy child, so I think I was soothed by the experience of sitting in silence and being in a safe space where people seemed particularly gentle with themselves and with each other. So just on an intuitive level, I found the experience to be quite compelling.

**Dave:** That makes sense. So how did your journey along the buddhist path continue from there? Maybe you can just give us the overall arc.

**Pilar:** Sure. As I aged, I began reading more. I read a fair amount of literature, some buddhist scholars, buddhologists; I was also reading a lot of western psychology, and as I became a teenager and into my college years, it became clear to me that Buddhism seemed to be a very psychologically sophisticated tradition that really paid attention to our psychological experience, and that seemed to be part of the spiritual healing journey as it was laid out in buddhist thought. So I just began to glean a little bit more insight into the teachings, and little by little began to in my practice as well.

**Dave:** And at what point did you get exposed to psychoanalysis?

**Pilar:** Also very early in life, not because I was in analysis (laughs) but because my mother is a psychoanalyst, so in addition to exploring meditation with her, I was aware that there were people who sought out therapists and analysts, I was aware of the concept of having a psyche, of having consciousness and having an unconscious, and I would say in my twenties, I became very curious about the relationship between these two worlds: what they had to offer each other, and what might not be addressed explicitly in each tradition that was found in the other.

**Dave:** And did you yourself go on to become a psychoanalyst?

**Pilar:** I did, although it took some time. As the child of an analyst, I wasn't too keen on the idea of becoming one myself (laughs). I wanted my own path, and my own sense of identity. I resisted it mightily. I was a writer for many many years and still consider myself primarily a writer. As a graduate student, I started exploring medical anthropology, and I was looking at illness narratives, which basically explore how people talk about pain. In that work, I became

increasingly curious about being a clinician and listening to experiences of suffering as well as efforts to become joyful and happy and well.

**Dave:** So where did you do your training in psychoanalysis?

**Pilar:** I went to a relatively little-known analytic institute called the Harlem Family Institute, which has, I think, an excellent and noble mission to bring psychoanalysis to the inner city and to transcend the class barrier in psychoanalysis generally speaking, which I think is still very much an issue and a struggle in many analytic communities. One of my interests is in addressing race and class around spiritual and psychological issues.

**Dave:** OK, we will come back to that topic towards the end of our interview, I think, though I'd like to now focus a bit on your book, "Mixing Minds," which seems especially timely, because meditation -- especially mindfulness meditation -- seems to be integrated into more and more therapeutic approaches. In fact, there's so much being written about mindfulness meditation that I've jokingly observed that we might be in the midst of a mindfulness bubble.

**Pilar:** (Laughs) Anything's possible. I find that vision compelling. I'm not sure what it means, but I like it.

**Dave:** I was thinking of the financial bubble, you know, how there's so much interest and excitement about the stock market until it crashes.

**Pilar:** Uh-huh, uh-huh.

**Dave:** I think we're maybe in a phase of a similar level of excitement and interest in mindfulness meditation. But hey, these traditions have been around for a couple thousand years at least, so ..

**Pilar:** They've had some real staying power.

**Dave:** Yes. In your book, you point out that there are two major branches of Buddhism, the Theravada and the Mahayana, and both have been an important part of your own journey. Maybe you can give our listeners a brief overview of the history and practice of these two traditions.

**Pilar:** Sure. So the Theravada tradition of Buddhism is considered to be the original Buddhism that arose during the historical Buddha Shakyamuni's time. Theravada basically means "school of the elders." There was a split that took place quite some time later around the Vinaya which were the original monastic rules. The story goes that as the Buddha Shakyamuni lay dying he suggested to his faithful assistant that with the changing times and the various causes and conditions, perhaps they could change some of those rules accordingly. Some of the monks agreed that this was a good idea but others thought that this was an impossible thing to figure out -- which of these rules could be considered less foundational. This was what facilitated the split.

Basically the teachings are the same in all of the various lineages within Buddhism, but there are different methods and slightly different understanding of how liberation happens, how we awaken to reality. In the Theravadan school, the idea is that before you can help anybody else, you really need to stay with your own mind and make efforts to awaken before embarking on the path of what's called the bodhisattva -- the person who forestalls their own entry into nirvana or liberation until all people are awakened. So in the Theravadan school, you try and awaken first. In the Mahayana school, which includes zen and Tibetan and Pure Land, the idea is that we actually wake up to reality, we become a buddha -- which just means "awakened one" -- through the process of helping others, though the process of helping other being become happy and free from suffering. So they're just slightly different approaches to this overarching goal of awakening to our buddha nature, or our innermost goodness and mind of clearseeing.

**Dave:** Okay. Now you point out that mindfulness meditation, or vipassana, which comes out of the Theravadan tradition, tends to have most resonance for those of us in this country. It's somehow an easier, less demanding fit for us, and you point out that virtually all the teachers of vipassana in the U.S. are in fact westerners. Take us through that, if you will.

**Pilar:** Sure. I think in any religious tradition, there's always the issue of culture, and whether or not there's a cultural resonance between an individual practitioner and the tradition. Most American Buddhists, I think, generally speaking -- and these are generalizations, because there are many American Tibetan Buddhists in every lineage -- but generally speaking, I think many American Buddhists feel a certain comfort and compatibility with mindfulness because it seems like less of a religious practice and more of a philosophical system, more of a spiritual practice. For people who feel uncomfortable with the idea of religion or being a religious person, it offers fewer roadblocks and potentially a quicker entry into the Buddhist practice of meditation.

**Dave:** I had the impression that you started out as a practitioner of vipassana but then developed a hunger for something more demanding, more rigorous, and that led you into Mayahana.

**Pilar:** That's true, although I think that the experience of mindfulness in vipassana can be profoundly rigorous. Anyone who's tried to just sit quietly with their own mind knows how difficult that can be. It's not easy just to be with ourselves, particularly in this culture of technology where we're really encouraged to be constantly, chronically overstimulated. So I don't wish to suggest that vipassana is not a rigorous process; it really is. For me, I felt the need for something that I experienced as more relational, more devotional, if you will, and Tibetan Buddhism is historically a devotional practice where there's a greater sense of externality. There's no god in Buddhism, this is true; that said, in the Tibetan cosmology, you have a whole panoply of Buddhas and bodhisattvas and there's really a sense of relying deeply, with devotion, on this tremendous support system that transcends your own inner awakening. And so that way it feels very different. For me, it felt very relational.

**Dave:** That's interesting, speaking of the relational part. When I first encountered the subtitle of your book, "The power of relationship in psychoanalysis and Buddhism," I was a bit nonplussed,

I suppose because I had the image of Buddhist meditation being very inner, focussed on one's own mind, and so the idea of relationship didn't seem that central to me. As I read your book, I realized that was probably because I had been so influenced by the mindfulness school.

**Pilar:** Yes, yes. That's right, and I think you're not alone in having that perception of Buddhism as being focussed on the individual experience. But ironically, the basic teachings of Buddhism are all about interdependence, about the ways in which we co-create each other by nature of this deep structural interdependence, so there's actually a relational core in the teachings. It's just that those teachings get played out with very different methods based on the tradition you're in.

**Dave:** Of course I know there's a considerable emphasis in Buddhism on compassion, and that's very relationship-oriented by definition.

**Pilar:** That's right, that's right. If somebody is really seeking to deepen a Buddhist practice, it's profoundly heart-opening and heart-centered, which again challenges a lot of the perceptions of Buddhism as being somewhat ascetic in nature, philosophical, intellectual. But really at bottom, it's about awakening much deeper, more authentic feeling for all beings instead of the disinterested neutrality that we tend to feel toward people we perceive as having nothing to do with us, or a lot of aversion toward the people we don't like, or a whole lot of desire and grasping for the people we want more of. In the dharma -- which basically means the Buddhist teachings -- the idea is to recognize that all people are precious and impermanent, they're all suffering, that we have this profoundly shared experience and that others matter as much as we matter and to ritually, daily reinforce that reality.

**Dave:** Earlier, you were talking about devotion and you draw parallels between the relationships of spiritual teacher/guru with the student and of the analyst with the analysand. What are the similarities and the differences in those two relationships?

**Pilar:** Sure. The whole reason why I wrote "Mixing Minds" is that I was increasingly curious about these two primary healing relationships and how people experience western psychotherapy or Asian buddhism through relationship, either with a therapist or a Buddhist teacher, and in both of those healing couples, the student or the client really begins to internalize the teachings of the tradition through the relationship, so it's through an intimate encounter, through really getting to know the therapist in terms of that intimate relational experience and through getting to know your Buddhist teacher through a deep sharing that the fruits of the tradition come to be. I would say that the relationships are similar insofar as both the Buddhist teacher and the therapist would seek to be very respectful of the person they're working with, deeply curious about what their student or their client is sharing, and also ideally, hopefully, seek to create an experience of wellness, of working through pain and suffering and coming to a place of wellness. Where they're different is in their understanding of what's possible, what wellness means, and how they go about that. In therapy, generally speaking, a therapist would make efforts to be very curious about the personal nuances of the patient, so to learn many details about the patient's particular care providers, their family, their social location, really to leave no stone unturned, whereas in a

religious relationship with a Buddhist teacher, it tends to be a little bit more universal in focus. The ways in which that Buddhist student is suffering universal difficulties that we all get ensnared in by nature of this shared mind, so it really zooms out to look at the human experience whereas a therapist tends to zoom in and really look at the particularities of human experience.

**Dave:** Okay, good, that's very helpful and again on the line of thought of devotion, at some level I "get" the potential value of surrender to a spiritual teacher, but personally I'm deeply leery of the pitfalls of guru-worship in terms of Buddhism and the dangers of dependency in the psychoanalytic relationship, so I guess I'm very western in this attitude. What can you share with us of your own attitude and experience along this dimension?

**Pilar:** Well, Dave, you are not alone in having those concerns. They are widespread and particularly in western culture, and I think that's a product of many factors, not the least of which are the post-enlightenment-era values of the discrete individual being the locus for change, being the agent for all action. So I think that, generally speaking, we have this legacy of distrust and discomfort with dependency, because we're so enculturated to be fiercely, vigilantly, independent, to try and figure things out on our own, to be skillful, to take care of business. Many people feel either consciously or unconsciously shamed by nature of needing others, particularly when we really feel like we cannot manage our problems alone. That tends to bring a great deal of shame. So I think that's a foundational current that informs the discomfort. But then of course you do have all the stories of power abuse and religious leaders causing a great deal of harm by nature of all the power they wield, so it's perfectly appropriate, I think, to be wary of potential religious mentors and therapists and carefully discern whether or not the mentors and therapists a person seeks out are trustworthy.

**Dave:** Yes, I was going to ask you about that, because you made reference to Buddhist tales of enlightenment by exasperation, in which a roguish teacher confounds the student's intellect by being very unpredictable, and given that tradition, do you have any guidelines as to how the western spiritual seeker might distinguish between this kind of a teacher and a spiritual charlatan?

**Pilar:** Yes, there are a few things to look out for. In fact, last night I was discussing with my students in a psychology and religion course Anthony Storr's wonderful book called "Feet of Clay," in which he analyzes what a guru is through the lens of a variety of historical figures. Basically -- and again, these are generalizations, but I think they're helpful -- true religious mentors, people of faith who have a good noble intention to simply support other people in moving through their experience of suffering, where they're feeling cared for, of learning from their experience of suffering, they don't demand exclusive devotion -- they're simply not interested in it. So if their disciple or their student tells them that they're curious about other faith traditions, or they're even curious about other Buddhist teachers, a true teacher will be able to tolerate that. They won't demand the kind of exclusive attachment, nor will they have any real difficulty with criticism. So if a Buddhist student is feeling like they've had an uncomfortable exchange with a teacher, if they feel a teacher was rude or they got distracted with their cell

phone (laugh) -- whatever it is, you know, Buddhist teachers are people, too -- a good teacher will really be able to handle hearing that a student was not happy with an encounter, and they'll make efforts to reflect on those exchanges -- kind of like a good parent. There's wiggle room for humanness, there's wiggle room for real communication, and usually there's opportunity for some kind of direct communication around conflict.

**Dave:** I think we struggle with those issues both on the Buddhist path and in psychoanalysis, and in that relationship. Jeez, my therapist is human, how much humanity can I handle?  
(Laughs)

**Pilar:** (Laughing) It's a question we have in *all* our relationships, right? We just don't want too much humanity in our relationships, right? And for very good reasons. But in terms of how much a therapist should expose of their humanness, that has something to do with match -- I mean some patients will really want a therapist to reveal a little bit more about the therapist's own personal experience, and others will not want that at all. I think every patient, every client, has the right to seek out the kind of healing relationship that's going to work for them. And if a patient is beginning a therapeutic treatment and they feel uncomfortable with the level of sharing that's happening from the therapist, they get to address that and potentially find a therapist who has clear boundaries.

**Dave:** You know, as I read on in your book, I think I discovered that your title, "Mixing Minds," was a kind of double entendre. On the one hand it seems to refer to your comparison of Buddhism and psychoanalysis, but it also refers to a mixing of minds between analyst and analysand and spiritual seeker and spiritual teacher. Tell us about this mixing of minds, if you will.

**Pilar:** Sure. In Buddhism, and particularly in Tibetan Buddhism, there's a concept of the teacher's mind, their awakened mind, mixing with the mind of the student, and in that process, the student's mind comes to awakening, so it's a kind of deep intimacy in which the student discovers what they're capable of through connection with the teacher. Something similar happens in a relationship between a patient and a therapist, and I think in all close interpersonal relationships, where we actually discover lost parts of ourselves through others, and often that has something to do with projection, so the ways in which we project parts of ourselves onto others. There's also a term that Melanie Klein, who was a great object relations theorist, posited called "projective identification," where we project onto other people the parts of ourselves that we are getting rid of, or not comfortable with, and then we locate it in another person, and then we maneuver that person as if that part were their dominant attribute. It sounds kind of mystical and like the stuff of science fiction, but it actually happens all the time, and when we're evacuating unwanted parts that are very negative, so our rage, our lust, our homicidal tendencies, etcetera, it can be very dangerous to project that onto another person and then perceive them as being rageful. But when a teacher is projectively identifying a tremendous capacity for compassion, for sensitivity, for insight onto their student, that can actually be profoundly enlivening, and I think something happens in the therapeutic relationship where the therapist or

the analyst is locating their own curiosity, their capacity for wellness, their belief in wellness, in the patient, and that starts to mix in with the patient's sense of who they are.

**Dave:** Earlier you referred to Buddhism as a religion, and in fact you have a chapter on Buddhism as a religion, and I think what I've been most drawn to in Buddhism is the secular view of it as more of a philosophy and a discipline than a religion. So your chapter title poses two great questions: Is Buddhism a religion, and is psychoanalysis a science? So what are your answers to those two koans?

**Pilar:** Yes indeed, big lofty questions. Well I raised the question about religion in part because of the relational issue that we were talking about before and the rather pervasive discomfort with dependency in this culture, and I think it is that discomfort that has a lot to do with why so many American Buddhists prefer to understand Buddhism as a philosophy or a spiritual practice. The tricky thing about that -- and I think there are so many really excellent secular Buddhist teachers, they do a wonderful job of helping people really enter into Buddhism without all the trappings of institutionalized religion -- the thing is, the common denominator in all the great religions is that wish to somehow transcend the self, and transcend our steadfast interest in ourselves, and somehow get curious about a larger reality, whether that's other people or the divine, it almost doesn't matter, it really has to do with our capacity to recognize that we are a very very tiny, though very significant, part of the world, and to somehow learn to contextualize ourselves in that world. That's the meaning-making that happens in all the great religions, and I think to lift Buddhism out of its original religious context and posit it as a secular endeavor is potentially to bypass that endeavor of really wrestling with our ego, the way we so wish to be front and center, to be the main player in this world. But when we get fixated on that notion of being the main player, we tend to lose sight of the ways in which so many people around us are suffering, so many people around us need support that we could offer, but if we're too fixated on ourselves, we're not that likely to be curious about how we might offer that support.

**Dave:** Okay, I think you've really provided a basis for understanding how Buddhism, which in general doesn't rely on a concept of God, can still be a religion, because I sort of thought you had to have God to have a religion, but you've kind of shifted it a little bit.

**Pilar:** Yes, generally speaking, all world religions have these so-called sacred referents or sacred symbols and beliefs that a community collectively invests meaning in, and in Buddhism, that meaning is found in Buddha, or the Buddhas -- all awakened beings, the dharma -- the teachings of the Buddha, and sangha, which means spiritual community. So it really does fit the criterion of being a religion. It's just that it has become quite a malleable (laughs) religion, particularly in the United States.

**Dave:** Maybe you can briefly touch on that other koan that you posed: Is psychoanalysis a science?

**Pilar:** And I raised that question because, of course, so many therapists know that what happens in the therapist's office can feel quite sacred. It doesn't always just feel clinical. Sometimes there's a tremendous feeling of mystery, sometimes there are tremendous feelings of reverence. I'm sure there are many, many therapists and analysts who have had experiences of something else moving into the clinical space that transcended their own theoretical insight or transcended the insight of their patient, and it had a spiritual valence. So part of what I wanted to do in that chapter is just have a look at the aspect of clinical work that is not specific to our discursive minds, that isn't solely born out of our capacity to conceptualize the psyche. I'm sure that if you took a poll, the vast majority of practicing clinicians would probably suggest they have had such experiences, where whatever it was that was facilitating healing had something to do with their insight and their training and the relationship between the patient and the therapist and had something to do with something else that's less tangible.

**Dave:** I have to share that I often have that set of feelings about these interviews that I do.

**Pilar:** That's interesting. That's interesting.

**Dave:** Well, because I know that in some way I'm feeding a need and a hunger for people out there, and so I have a sense of mission about that, and I suppose this feeds into actually my next question, which is this: Some people treat psychotherapy as a sort of religion and others pursue Buddhist practice as a substitute for psychotherapy. So what sort of healing can one expect from each and what are the limitations of each?

**Pilar:** Thank you. It's an excellent question, and it's a question I'm very sensitive to, in part because I live and practice in New York City, a place where psychotherapists are relatively common (laughs), and many, many people living here -- and urbanized people throughout the country -- seek therapists for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is to address their spiritual needs and condition, so often I think that there's an expectation that therapists can address the full spectrum of human needs. And I'm not convinced that's the case. While I was just suggesting that there's a sacred element to clinical work, therapy is not a religion. It does have a particular methodology and particular objectives, so I'd love to see a little bit more humble respect for the limitations of each system, so that therapists might encourage or at least make known to their patients that, if they're needing more support beyond the clinical space, there are spiritual communities, there are ways in which they can be fed beyond the hour or two or three they're with a therapist.

**Dave:** Earlier you mentioned your involvement and work with the disadvantaged in the inner city. How do your Buddhist and psychoanalytic orientations inform your work there? As you pointed out, we tend to think of both of those realms as pretty separate from the issues that people in the inner city are struggling with.

**Pilar:** For me, one issue that's particularly meaningful is the way in which we cultivate identity based on our particular modes of suffering. And I think this is something everybody --

particularly in western cultures -- struggles with: how our identity gets ossified, particularly if there's trauma, there's a sense of being victimized, or a survivor, and Buddhism can be very helpful in exploring the ways in which we get attached to identity because of the way we suffer. Often that linkage is unconscious for us, so if we're suffering due to injustice, that can reify a sense of being victimized and being in an unjust world that's fixed that way, and part of what I've been doing, somewhat gently and with humble curiosity, is just to help people that I work with contextualize their suffering and recognize that if they're suffering an injustice, and there are many horrendous injustices in this world, that many innocent people are subject to, this is an inroad to the human condition and the human family, it's a way to potentially reinforce a sense of sensitivity for other people who are suffering in a similar way rather than to feel separate from, shut out by, disconnected from. It's also a way potentially from a Buddhist perspective to imagine that the suffering we're going through now might change. One of the main teachings in Buddhism is impermanence; that is, because of the changing causes and conditions, nothing stays the same, including ourselves. Our identities are really very fluid, very dynamic, and I think for people who are suffering, and suffering injustice that seems really structuralized and entrenched, that can be a helpful approach so that hopelessness doesn't seep in and really kind of get into the bones.

**Dave:** So it sounds like you're a bit of a political activist as well, in your own -- what? -- introverted way?

**Pilar:** I suppose. I do care very much about suffering that's not so easily seen, and that would certainly be our inner lives and certainly the inner lives of disenfranchised populations, so in that way I do bring an activist spirit to clinical work.

**Dave:** Something that might be relevant -- I just saw a wonderful film that I got on Netflix called "Dhamma Brothers." Maybe you've seen it. It's about a series of ten-day vipassana retreats in an Alabama prison. This was based on a similar experiment in a prison in India, and there's also a wonderful film about that one, also on Netflix, called "Doing Time, Doing Vipassana."

**Pilar:** Yes. These are wonderful movies, and in fact I've seen Dhamma Brothers several times, and just watched it with my students recently because I found it to be so powerful. One of the things I loved about that film is, it was the psychologist in the prison who realized that something else was needed to help the men heal psychologically. It wasn't going to happen from any kind of traditional therapeutic treatment, and indeed, when you watch the film, you see that through this intensive spiritual experience, many of the men were resuscitating very very intense emotional experiences around a variety of complicated traumas, and there was real healing taking place.

**Dave:** Yes, I was really impressed by that as well. Now in your bio, you're described not only as a writer, but also as a researcher. What sort of research are you involved in?

**Pilar:** It's been somewhat intermittent. I've been involved in the Center for the Study of Science and Religion at Columbia which was founded and directed by a very fascinating biologist and person of faith, Bob Pollack. I had the good fortune to meet Bob many years ago when I was a doctoral student and he was teaching a very complicated course called DNA evolution and the soul, which I took and then tutored for him and have been involved in a few projects with him. He's very interested in environmental issues and sustainability and, at one point, I was doing some research on the impact of narcissism on our struggles to recognize the environmental crisis, so that's yet another piece of my work.

**Dave:** You refer to him as a person of faith, and that's a term that I would associate with Christianity. How does a person of faith apply -- I'm assuming that he's also Buddhist -- so how does that term apply in that context?

**Pilar:** Bob is actually Jewish, but I think it's a good question for Buddhists. What do we understand to be faith?

**Dave:** Yes, faith in what?

**Pilar:** Right. I think, if pressed, most Buddhists, even agnostic Buddhists would tell you that -- and you might have to hypnotize them (laughing) -- I think they genuinely believe, that they have faith in our capacity to awaken and to enter into reality. That's not something most people live out, at least on a daily steadfast basis, but the reason they stick with it, year after year, retreat after retreat, day after day, sitting on the cushion, is because they have faith that they are actually capable of somehow working through the normal ways their minds operate to hold a larger sense of what reality entails. I think without that faith, people wouldn't stick with it.

**Dave:** You know, that's probably a great place for us to wrap it up. So, Dr. Pilar Jennings, thanks so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

**Pilar:** It's been a pleasure. Thanks, Dave, for having me.

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