Buddhist Happiness

David Van Nuys interviews Sylvia Boorstein, PhD

Shrink Rap Radio

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Sylvia Boorstein: (Music) Happiness has quite a specific meaning. It doesn't necessarily mean pleased. We often, I think, equate pleased with happy. Things are going my way. I feel pleased, that's good, I'm happy. This is the kind of happiness that means the mind and the heart engaged in a warm way with one's self, with other people, with people we know, with people we don't know, with the whole world, actually. I do, in fact, define happiness as the ability to engage in warm relationship.

David Van Nuys: "Happiness as the ability to engage in warm relationship," so says my guest, Dr. Sylvia Boorstein. Sylvia Boorstein, PhD, has been teaching meditation since 1985 and teaches both Vipassana and Metta meditation. She is a founding teacher of Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Marin County, California. She is also a senior teacher at the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts. She writes a regular column for *Shambhala Sun* and lectures widely. She's a psychotherapist, wife, mother, and grandmother who is particularly interested in seeing daily life as practice. Her latest book is *Happiness Is an Inside Job: Practicing for a Joyful Life.* Her previous books include *It's Easier Than You Think; Don't Just Do Something, Sit There; That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist;* and *Pay Attention, for Goodness' Sake.*

Now, here's the interview.

Dr. Sylvia Boorstein, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Sylvia Boorstein: I'm happy to be here.

David Van Nuys: Well, you've been teaching and writing about Buddhist meditation for more than 25 years, and you're also a psychologist and a psychotherapist. Were you a psychologist first before you discovered meditation?

Sylvia Boorstein: I was, actually. That's an interesting part of the story, too. I began to be a psychotherapist, I guess, in my early 30s. I think I was 31 when I got my first job after graduate school, and I was 41 when I went on my first Buddhist meditation retreat. One whole other area of exploration, if you want to go that way, that people often ask me is did my psychotherapy change as a result of my meditation practice, and if so, how?

David Van Nuys: Well, you're anticipating a question that I have in front of me, but I wanted to cover a couple of other things first. You were a psychologist first. Actually, you and I spoke offline just a little bit ago and you told me that, originally, you were, I guess, a licensed clinical social worker, and then you went on to get a PhD in Psychology.

Sylvia Boorstein: I did. In fact, I went to social work school, because, in a surprise turn of my life, because my undergraduate degree is in Chemistry and Mathematics.

David Van Nuys: Oh, my goodness.

Sylvia Boorstein: The way I got there is I got my degree in Chemistry and Mathematics. I was married when I graduated from college. I had a child soon after that and then three more children in the next five years. During those five years, my husband had finished medical school and he had his psychiatric residency. I got very interested in the kinds of things that he was studying that were no part of my undergraduate experience. I had very little background in Psychology. That was one part of how my interest in working with the mind and levels of happiness, clarity, came about.

The other part, which is probably more to the point, is that after the birth of my fourth child, I really had a difficult time psychologically myself. It was a hard time. I had four young children. My mother had died not long before. I was, at that point, 25 years old. It was a hard time, and that was my first experience with looking for psychotherapy for myself. It was so helpful to me that I really wanted to do that and be helpful to other people.

David Van Nuys: Okay, so then moving down the timeline a bit, tell us about how you first got involved with meditation and what attracted you to it.

Sylvia Boorstein: Well, again, it was a serendipitous meeting of where I was in my life and the outside times. I became interested in meditation in the 1970s, when meditation had become really popular in the United States for the first time. People who are old enough will remember that the first major interest in meditation was interest in TM. That came about because the Beatles had studied with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and introduced TM. It was introduced into the larger culture as being good for your health, and good for your blood pressure, good for your nerves, and so large numbers of people were interested in becoming initiated into the practice of meditation, specifically into TM.

Soon after that, I think that interest broadened into other kinds of meditations, and there was a proliferation of meditation practices that were available. I used to joke about the fact that my husband, who was, in some ways, far more of a spiritual adventurer than I was, would go off, it seemed to me, every weekend, to get initiated into some other new contemplative form, and often came home and said, "Syl, this is great. You should try it." Often, I did.

In truth, I was interested in the things that I tried, but none of them really held my attention or spoke to me as decisively as mindfulness meditation, which I learned from teachers who have studied with teachers in the Buddhist tradition. Mindfulness is a central practice that the Buddha taught. It was, in fact, my husband who had gone off on a retreat, come home, and said, "Syl, this is great, you should try it." I tried that and never left.

David Van Nuys: Okay, now what is it that distinguishes mindfulness meditation from some of the other Buddhist schools?

Sylvia Boorstein: Well, I think it was for me, certainly an accessible meditation. Mindfulness really is, in its own self, nonparochial. It doesn't require a belief system or a cosmology. It didn't require of me that I become a Buddhist. It's really a mind training practice that, when I define it, I talk about mindfulness as being the balanced, moment-to-moment acknowledgement of one's experience, both inner and outer. What's going on right now, what's going on out here, and what's going on in me as I am aware of whatever is arising in this moment?

The fact that it's meant to be the balanced recognition is already the hint that it's a practice that aims at equanimity. We are all the time, I think, challenged by surprises in our life experience. It's not a mistake that life is difficult. Actually, when the Buddha really expounded his understanding of the cause and the end of suffering, he started by saying, "Life is suffering," which actually is an inaccurate, not exactly correct translation of the Pali.

Really, it meant, "Life is continually challenging," because it's always changing and always presenting us with new situations, some of which are really difficult, some of which are a little difficult, considerably difficult, and the balanced recognition of, "Oh, this is happening. What would be a good thing to do now? This is happening. This is how I feel about it. What would be a wise response?" is really what mindfulness is about. In some way, the instruction really gives a hint of the goal, which is a mind that's balanced enough to be able to hold itself in a certain amount of equanimity and make wise choices.

David Van Nuys: Was there a certain moment when you realized that this was your path? If so, how did you know?

Sylvia Boorstein: Well, it's an interesting story, and I'll be glad to tell it to you, because I only knew it ex post facto. My first experience of mindfulness meditation retreat, which was an intensive 14-day retreat, held in silence, was not remarkable until the very end of it. If someone had asked me on the 12th or the 13th or even the 14th day, "Are you much changed from this regimen of sitting quietly and walking slowly, paying attention moment to moment, not talking to anybody for two weeks? Are you changed? Do you know more? What's happened?"

I would have said, "Not much has changed." I think that the line about cleansing the doors of perception makes sense to me. Colors looked a little brighter; the leaves looked a little sharper. The food tasted a little bit more tasty or more clear. I could smell what was for lunch a far distance from the dining room. If someone had said, "Is this a reason to take up a discipline of practice?" I don't know that I would have been so moved by it. I very much was moved by my teachers telling the story of the possibility of a mind that could abide in peace, abide balance in a life that was continually challenged.

The story of the possibility of peace moved me very much, but I don't know that that was a decisive element. It happened that on the last evening of that retreat, after the understanding of silence had been ended, the other ritual, and people visited with each other, I chose to make a phone call and call home, just to check with my husband about my schedule for arriving home and which plane I was coming on. In the course of that phone call, I inquired after the health of my father, who, at that time, was 65 years old and had been in very good health. Actually, excellent health.

He was an athlete, lived down the street from us, and he and I had a very close relationship. I am the only child of an only child and we had a very close friendship. He was very dear to me. Just before I'd left on that retreat, he had been feeling unusually peaked, and I knew he had a doctor's appointment. When I said, "How's my dad?", my husband said, "Well, I'm sorry to tell you, but he has a cancer, and it's not one for which there's a cure."

Here I am in a phone booth, several states away, and I'm always, when I tell this story to people, I'm very careful to say I felt so sad, lest anyone think that there's something about meditation that distances people from their affect. I felt so sad to hear that that was happening. My previous experience of hearing dreadful news had been, in addition to feeling sad, feeling frightened, actually feeling sometimes so stunned, feeling faint, or feeling like I'd fall over or fall through the floor. Actually, I felt myself hear it quite steadily. I felt sad, I felt terrible, but there was a part of my mind that I knew was thinking, "Okay, I wonder how we'll do this? We'll just do this together."

I left the phone booth. I remember sitting down to have evening tea with people and not telling them my story. They were all talking with each other. I thought to myself, "This is very odd. I'm sitting here, having a cup of tea. I've just heard that my father's going to die, probably in a couple of years, and I'm having tea with people. I'm sitting here, having tea." Afterwards, I went home and took up my life and in fact observed my father's illness unfolded, and I was with him through it and through his death as well.

When I look back, I realize that in that moment, I knew that my mind was different than when I had arrived at that retreat. I thought it was such a

piece of grace in my life to have received that news with my mind just at that point. Had I heard it before I'd left on that retreat, I don't know that I would have heard it with as much clarity and as much security that I could do that, really. I don't know if I would have been able to hear it the same two weeks later. There it was, just a piece of very good fortune. Maybe I would've stayed with this practice without that. I really liked what my teachers promised.

It's as if I had heard the promise, but hadn't really gotten it in my own body. Perhaps now that I'm telling you the story, maybe I get it that I really corroborated that promise in my own body at that time, which is not to give the idea that I have lived my life in equanimity since that moment, because it isn't about living in equanimity. It's about cultivating the mind of balance and then recultivating it when it's lost.

David Van Nuys: Okay, so you felt the sadness, but you also had this inner balance, this inner peace. The promise of the teaching, from what you've said, sounds like it was about peace and yet many people seem to stress enlightenment. I'm wondering what's your take on enlightenment? Is it a process or an end state, and how does that relate to the kind of peace that you're talking about?

Sylvia Boorstein: Well, I'll tell you first about the kind of peace that I'm talking about because it's particularly important. It is, for me, the most important understanding of what the Buddha taught, the kind of … In the paradigmatic story of the Buddha's enlightenment, when he sat down under the Bodhi tree and held his mind in balance and said, "I will not move from this place until I have understood the cause and the end of suffering." I'm sure many of your listeners will know that story, or at least they will now.

David Van Nuys: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sylvia Boorstein: He sat through the night, assailed by all the forces that can confuse the mind, all the forces of afflictive emotions that can confuse the mind, and he sat through them all with complete and dignified, steady equanimity. In the story about it, he makes the promise, he says, "I see these poisons coming to get me, and I am not afraid." And in the pictures of it and in the legends about his enlightenment experience, he's shown to be protected by a tremendous shield that … Actually, the drawings show all these spears and arrows of afflictive emotions coming towards him and turning into flowers and falling around him.

I think it's the metaphor for what our own minds can do when we are assailed with potentially upsetting events and the ability of the mind held in good will, is what the story says. Not only did he sit with equanimity, but he sat with a counterpoint of equanimity, which is benevolence, which is goodwill, which is the ability to wish well unstintingly to all beings at all times. The counterpoint, the balance, the other side of equanimity as it

manifests in how we behave in the world, is that it produces a mind that wishes well, a mind of unbroken benevolence.

That, actually, is what's very appealing to me. That always has appealed. I think it's actually, when you think about it, what appeals to people now about Buddha's teachings, even people who don't know much about it, who see the pictures of the Dalai Lama or read about the Dalai Lama. Somehow, they intuit from what they hear him say or even his very visage, as its shown in photos or stories about him, that he has something about him that radiates out, that calms the atmosphere, that keeps him a contented and happy person, even though his own life has been assailed with difficulty, and the idea that that's a possibility.

I was not so much looking for myself for peace. As I could have articulated it, I would have said I wanted to have the kind of mind and heart that are unafraid in life. I wanted to not be afraid, and I wanted to manifest myself in a way that seemed unfrightened.

David Van Nuys: Okay. Well, I'm sure you're aware that there's an increasingly popular movement within psychology called positive psychology, which is emphasizing the study of happiness. I've got your most recent book right here in front of me, which is titled *Happiness Is an Inside Job: Practicing for a Joyful Life.* What is the Buddhist view of happiness? Maybe that's what you've just told us, but …

Sylvia Boorstein: I think so. I've been thinking about it a lot. By the way, I love this book. I think it's the best book I've written.

David Van Nuys: All right.

Sylvia Boorstein: I do, I do. I've been talking about it a lot these days and I'm so pleased with it. I'm so pleased to be talking to you about it, too. Happiness has quite a specific meaning. It doesn't necessarily mean pleased. We often, I think, equate pleased with happy. Things are going my way. I feel pleased, that's good, I'm happy. This is a kind of happiness that means the mind and the heart engaged in a warm way with oneself, with other people, with people we know, with people we don't know, with the whole world, actually. I do, in fact, define happiness as the ability to engage in warm relationship.

The warm relationship that I'm thinking about, which, in fact, is the reflection of equanimity, that warm relationship is either compassion, or friendliness, or appreciation, depending on the situation, because sometimes, there are difficult situations. We come upon difficult situations, painful situations. I can't say that I'm happy or pleased about this, I'm happy about this, but when I am in my most clear self, if I come upon a difficult situation or I hear some difficult news, if I'm able to relate to it in a way that addresses it or does something for it that's helpful, then I'll feel better.

Human beings feel better when they feel helpful, when they feel friendly, when they feel generous. I think that, generally, that the health research, that the happiness research that you talked about is actually showing that gratitude and generosity and relevance seem to be the pillars of happiness. We feel engaged in the world, connected.

David Van Nuys: Yes, and forgiveness, too, I would add to that.

Sylvia Boorstein: And forgiveness. In fact, that anything that keeps us connected to the world, because not forgiving is holding someone or something at a distance. If I am not forgiving, that means that there's something that I'm still so mad about, it's as if I'm stuck in the view, "I cannot be happy unless so and so apologizes, or this and that happens." As soon as I say, "I cannot be happy unless," then I really cannot.

The opposite of that or the contrast to that is to say, "This isn't what I wanted, and I wish that hadn't happened." Things happen, sometimes things that we really don't like. This whole book, really, I'm sure you've seen, is a book of stories about how the mind gets challenged when things don't go its way, and how, out of wisdom, it retrieves its balance and expresses itself in compassion and friendliness and appreciation rather than out of disdain or jealousy or envy or enmity.

David Van Nuys: I'm struck by the fact that the way that you're describing happiness revolves around relationship, warm and caring relationship, when I think many people probably hold an image of meditation as very introverted, and almost isolationist. It's burlesqued as staring at one's navel. It sounds like you're talking about something that's very different from that.

Sylvia Boorstein: Well, I am. Actually, to whatever degree … By the way, I know that stereotype about meditation, but I think that to whatever degree people even take on a contemplative practice that is for some period of time every day, maybe, themselves or quiet or nonrelational in an outer way that anybody else could observe, there are two things I want to say about that.

One is it's on behalf of them being able to go out into the world and do something in the world and interact with it. The other is I actually think of my meditation practice as being my whole life. Sometimes, it's intensive meditation practice and I'm by myself or it's time set aside, and I'm in my house or wherever I am, and I'm sitting quietly with the intention of cultivating balance and equanimity in my mind. Other times I'm going about my life all day long and in the supermarket or on the freeway, or … I'm also practicing mindfulness.

Maybe that's even the more important part of the practice, because I'm doing more of my practice moving around in the world than I am being by myself. I think it's definitely both on behalf of the whole world as it is on behalf of myself, because to the degree that I can notice the world out there and connect with it and really see it in wisdom. When I said earlier

on when we started to talk, and I said the Buddha based his whole practice on his insight that life is really difficult for everyone. What I think is that to the degree that I get that, whenever I rediscover that, I'm kinder and I'm nicer to people. Then I feel better. Even people I don't know as well as people that I do know.

I think it all depends on wisdom, not on the state of activity, whether I'm sitting in a contemplative mode at home or out on a community bus or in an airplane. It depends on being able to look and maintain a certain amount of wisdom about what's true. What's true is that everyone is challenged, everyone is heroic, everyone is doing the best they can. One of the students in one of my classes some years ago said what I think is the best teaching line ever. We were talking about the fact that people are always challenged and that the idea of a contented life and a contented and peaceful mind didn't depend on having everything fall out exactly the way you wanted it to do because it never would, but on being able to accommodate however it was falling out.

Someone joked and said, "When we meet each other in the supermarket and we see each other, we say, 'How are you?' and the other person says, 'I'm fine.'" That "I'm fine" would mean "I've got my share of challenges, just as everybody does, but I'm managing them," which we thought was a great idea. Then somebody else said, a woman whose name is Gwen; so we always call it "Gwen's wisdom," Gwen said, "I don't say I'm fine." She said, "When anybody says, 'How are you, Gwen?' I say, 'I couldn't be better.' Because I couldn't." Isn't that really remarkable?

David Van Nuys: Yes, yes, I like that.

Sylvia Boorstein: Isn't that good? She said, "Because even when I'm suffering, and I'm crabby or I'm unpleasant, I couldn't be better because if I could, I would." Nobody purposefully suffers, and that so struck me then. I love to tell it to people because when I remember that about people, even people who are annoying me, people who are behaving in ways that I wish they weren't, if I remember Gwen's wisdom about "They couldn't be better," they would if they could, I become more tolerant. It's really been fun teaching this.

I have a good time teaching this; really about saying that it's not about withdrawing from the world but really engaging with it. I, just as everybody else, feel excited when things go well, and I feel disappointed when things don't go well. The idea that people who meditate have such tranquility that nothing moves them is, I think, the furthest thing from what the Buddha meant. I think that equanimity is not tranquility; it's not calm. It's a full and total engagement in the world with some balance, enough balance to maintain clarity and wisdom.

David Van Nuys: Well, I like the way that you keep that balance and take into account our human frailty.

Sylvia Boorstein: Well, I think that's true. It's extremely easy. I love to tell people stories about how extremely easy it is to forget what you know, and maybe all of us know things pass. In the sphere of the whole life, this particular incident doesn't matter. You can put anything in the place of "this particular incident." It will pass. The same sorts of things that our grandparents used to say that sounded like old people; things like, "Don't cry over spilled milk" and "This, too, shall pass."

David Van Nuys: Yes.

Sylvia Boorstein: "It's not the end of the world."

David Van Nuys: Right.

Sylvia Boorstein: The kinds of things that a grandmother would say to a young child. You think, "Oh, they're just old." I think actually, those are the kinds of wisdoms that we all have in us and we forget. This whole book is just, as you know, a compilation of stories about how easy it is to forget and techniques for getting it together again so that we remember.

David Van Nuys: Yes. Let's go back to your earlier question. How has experience with Buddhism and meditation impacted or informed your work as a psychotherapist?

Sylvia Boorstein: Oh, I would say this. I would have said different things if you'd asked me 5 years ago or 10 years ago, probably. I think I am so respectful of how hard it is to be a person to continue on in a life with whatever kinds of things happen to us. The people who come to talk to therapists are people who are in pain about something in their life. Something has hurt them enough to look for help, and I think maybe I have less of a sense that, which I might have had when I was a young therapist, that I know what will help them.

I don't have so much of a sense that I know what particular technique to do that will undo some particular thing. I don't know. But I am pretty sure that if I am able to be present and really listen to people, so that they know really, really that I'm hearing what they're saying and that I care about them and what they're saying, that something happens in that caring envelope, in that relationship. You don't have to mention it. It just exists in the relationship, in the room together with the person. I think it provides the context in which one's own mind … mine, as well as the person who's come to see me … relaxes, and one's own wisdom reinstates itself.

Sometimes, the wisdom is, very often, I think you'll agree, the wisdom that comes up in people's minds about whatever it is that has happened to them in their life is, "This or that happened. I wish it hadn't. It was painful. It hurt me in this or that other way, but that was then and now is now, and everybody was doing the best they could. It wasn't very good, but it was

the best they could. Recrimination and anger is just going to make my life worse now. That I have whatever rest of my life left to do. How can I do it in a way that is warm and caring, not with other people only, but also with myself? How can I forgive myself for having settled in my life, for making some choices that turned out to be unwise, for doing some things that I feel ashamed of."

I think I've really become much kinder as a person. My husband will say, when he hears me say that, he says, "You were always kind," but I truly, truly think I've become kinder. I think that the therapeutic alliance is one in which that works, is one in which the client really senses that they're truly held in love and they feel better.

David Van Nuys: In some ways, that sounds like Carl Rogers.

Sylvia Boorstein: Does it?

David Van Nuys: Yes, he was shooting for that same thing. I think maybe the Buddhist practice helps you to get into the state of mind where you're able to do that.

Sylvia Boorstein: Yeah, I think so, and it does sound like Carl Rogers. I would say maybe what's changed is, first of all, I have more of an appreciation of people. Whatever they're suffering with, they came by it lawfully. Things happened to them. If I keep myself really present by not distancing myself … Sometimes when you work with people in therapy, you feel, "This is happening to them, not to me" or there's a sense of distance; sometimes even a sense of dismay that maybe I can't help this person, or a little bit of anxiety about, "Will I be able to help this person?" which backs you off mentally, emotionally from the person. I think it's about not backing off.

I think it's about being able to stay present even in difficult circumstances so that the other person knows that you are really there, not only for them but with them. It's really a joint enterprise, the therapeutic enterprise.

David Van Nuys: Yes.

Sylvia Boorstein: Then we both come out better for it.

David Van Nuys: I've been interviewing a lot of therapists from different perspectives, and I've been getting the impression that mainstream psychotherapy is getting closer and closer to the Buddhist point of view. I'm thinking of things like cognitive behavioral therapy and the whole cognitive movement are recognizing the importance of our thoughts and our beliefs, and that it can be harmful to cling to fixed ideas and expectations. Does that make any sense to you?

Sylvia Boorstein: Exactly so. As you know, in this book, I've talked about mindfulness and concentration and effort as the three key teachings of the Buddha in

terms of reorienting the mind to balance. I think that a very strong connection between cognitive therapy and the idea of noticing those thoughts in the mind that lead to unhappy feelings, and that lead to distress, and actually noticing them as they arise, and challenging them. This is not true; I'm putting that down. I'm not doing it that way.

The Buddha said that wise effort, as a trainer of the mind, was diligence, moment to moment, about what's the climate of my mind? What's come into it? If what's come up in it is wholesome and leads to happiness, then I'll nurture it there. If it's unwholesome, let me put it down right now. I teach a lot about being vigilant in myself, in myself, for the very beginning of what might be growing into an unwholesome state. It sounds like an old-fashioned term, but here's an example. I'll make up one now instead of one from the book.

Suppose I'm driving home from work at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and perhaps I've been in a group meeting with my colleagues. I'm driving home, and I suddenly think to myself, "I wish so and so shouldn't have made that remark about what I said. That wasn't such a good thing to say." Then I catch my mind getting a little tense about it, and a little irritated, in retrospect, and then beginning to hatch a little revenge fantasy. "Maybe when I get to work tomorrow, when I see that person, I just won't be so warm to them, and then maybe they'll realize that they said something that was a little off yesterday."

It's just the wee beginning of a revenge fantasy. If I'm alert enough to the beginning of that and I catch it, I can think to myself, "What are you doing, Sylvia? You know, it happened. You're driving home, you are filling up your mind with vengeful thoughts. Anger really is upsetting to the mind, to everything in the body. You'll go tomorrow and maybe you'll take this person aside and have a discussion about it in a kind and open way, but there's no point at this point to foment this indignant, righteous indignation."

Righteous indignation is one of the things that catches the mind and people, never mind people. I myself have discovered how invigorating it sometimes feels, but actually, it's enervating. It's tiresome, and it fills the mind with an unhappy fog. When talking about what's going to be in the direction of happiness, it's not in the direction of happiness. I think there's a great deal to … Actually, it challenges a lot of psychotherapy that we knew 20 or 30 years ago, which has dwelt in the past and bringing it up, and re-feeling difficult feelings of past times.

It's not to say that it's not important in therapy to know what happened to people and to let them talk about it, and to feel it and to register the appropriate sense of having empathized with their distress, but I think it's very important to notice at what point the revival of ancient, acute feelings of distress doesn't serve anymore. It actually makes the mind in the habit of feeling embittered.

David Van Nuys: Yes, I totally agree. Your books have such intriguing titles, and one of the ones from a while back that you wrote is *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist.* I know that's a play on the old saw, "That's funny, you don't look Jewish." I know that you're an observant Jew. You mentioned earlier that what you liked about this approach was that it didn't require allegiance to a particular religion. I'm wondering, for you, how have Judaism and Buddhism come together for you?

Sylvia Boorstein: Well, for me, it has been not a problem at all, since I was fortunate enough when I began my meditation practice to hear one of my teachers teach early the sermon that the Buddha preached to the people of Kalamas. It's known very well as the Kalama Sutta. He said to them, "Don't believe anybody who tells you anything that … even if it's a trusted friend or someone you heard of or someone who's acknowledged to be an important teacher or even if you think it's a Buddha, don't believe anything until you practice it yourself.

If you hear some ideas that are interesting to you, try them out. If it works, do them. If it doesn't work, let them go. It was so clear to me that it wasn't about becoming an anything. It was about learning techniques that might enhance my life. In fact, that particular book that you mentioned is the story of not so much how I managed to integrate two different religious traditions, because actually, I don't think I've integrated two religious traditions. I think of a person who grew up as a Jew and enjoys being that and living in the context of that cultural and religious form.

What happened for me is I had the good fortune to learn from people who learned from Buddhist teachers this really lovely, non-parochial practice of attentiveness to the changing flow of mind events, moment to moment, so that I could begin to relax in my life and feel better. The other teaching that we haven't mentioned … By the way, there were two twin focal teachings of the Buddha: the teaching of mindfulness and the teaching of loving kindness, which is really bringing attention, all the time, to wishing well and filling the mind with benevolent feelings. They support each other.

It was clear to me that I could learn those two or it never occurred to me that it would be a problem to learn those two and just continue to live my life not only as a Jew, but as a psychologist, as a westerner, as a woman, as a social activist, as a political activist, as everything that I was, but it didn't challenge any part of my lifestyle. I've been happy through the years to notice that people who have a heart connection to Judaism, or to any denomination of Christianity, or to any other religious practice have been comfortable coming to mindfulness and loving-kindness retreats and lectures and workshops, and are able to work with the techniques that we teach, because, in fact, it has not only not challenged my life as a Jew, but has enhanced it.

David Van Nuys: Well, I will be putting a link to your website so that if anybody wants to find out more about the workshops that you're teaching and the dates and

times, so on, they'll have access to that. We could go on for quite a bit longer. There are a lot more that I'd love to talk to you about, but I think we've probably taken about as much time as I want to impose upon my listeners. I wonder if there are any final thoughts that you'd like to leave us with.

Sylvia Boorstein: Let me think one minute about that, because here it is, a final thought. In the Zen tradition, more than in the tradition that I know, people have said to practice what is the pith core wisdom that they've learned and say it on their dying breath. I'm not sure about that breath, but here we are at the end of this broadcast. Let me think what I want to say.

That I think it is possible, I have great faith that most … Okay, starting that sentence again. My great faith and trust and experience is that it's true for me, and I think for most people, that when our minds are not confused, we are, as human beings, caring, friendly, compassionate, appreciative, warm, companionable people, that that's what kind of beings we are. That our challenge in life is to keep our minds unconfused so that we can manifest in that best possible way. My best hope for myself and for everyone and for the world and for the planet is that we all, more and more of us, work more and more on unconfusing our minds so, in fact, we can actualize that potential of human beings to take care of each other and hold each other up in a great web and net of compassionate caring.

David Van Nuys: Well, that's an excellent closing breath for this broadcast. Dr. Sylvia Boorstein, thanks so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Sylvia Boorstein: It was a pleasure.