

Caverly Morgan: The Heart of Who We Are by Tami Simon

What follows is the transcript of a Sounds True/Insights at the Edge interview between Tami Simon and Caverly Morgan. You can listen to the audio version of the interview [here](#).

Tami Simon: This episode of Insights at the Edge features my guest, Caverly Morgan. Caverly is a meditation teacher, author, and a nonprofit leader. She's the founder of Peace in Schools, a nonprofit which has created the first for-credit mindfulness class. It's called Mindful Studies that's offered in public high schools, and we're going to be talking quite a bit about that, the introduction of mindfulness and compassion practices for teens right in the high school system. She's also the founder of Presence Collective, a community committed to personal and collective transformation.

With Sounds True, Caverly Morgan is the author of a beautiful new book that Caverly has poured her years of practice and her heart and soul into. It's called *The Heart of Who We Are: Realizing Freedom Together*, and at the center of the book is the intersection of the depth of our spiritual life with how we address the problems we're facing right now in our world today, that intersection. Here's my conversation with Caverly Morgan.

Caverly, welcome.

Caverly Morgan: Tami, I'm so incredibly grateful and honored to be here. Thank you so much.

TS: All right, let's jump right in. One thing I learned about you is that you were a Zen monk for eight years in a monastery where silence was practiced. So tell us. I mean, it's very unusual and it brings up a lot of curiosity. So first just share a little bit about why you decided to be a monk and what that process was like for you, and then what was it like for eight years?

CM: Well, Tami, I'll start by acknowledging that I did not mean to be a monk. I really didn't. I had no idea that my love of practice would lead to being a monk when I was going on various meditation retreats. It wasn't until my teacher at the time turned to me in one of our one-on-one guidance appointments that it was suggested that I could go to the monastery for an extended period of practice.

At the time, it felt reasonable because I was—a relationship had ended, I had finished art

school, felt reasonable to say, “OK, well I’ll take six months to do an intensive immersion to really dive in deeply and wholeheartedly to Zen training.” Then, in my mind, I was going to leave the monastery and go out into the world. I mentioned in the book—it was very specific for some reason—I had this visualization of living in San Francisco with a dancer, and I even had a dog named Dakota. I don’t know why, but that was my story.

It wasn’t until I was asked to recommit after that six-month period that I felt at the time that I had only scratched the surface of what was possible regarding training. So from there, I recommitted each year to further study. Yes, the backdrop was silence. So I became quite accustomed to navigating a training experience in which there were really no distractions from the experience of training. I didn’t have my own bank account. I wasn’t tracking, paying monthly bills. I didn’t own a cell phone, which is—at this point—seems particularly radical, but I gave myself wholeheartedly to that training.

TS: Now, Caverly, if I were to ask you what was the biggest—and I know this is kind of, “Really, come on, Tami,” it’s a very kind of American question, but I’m going to ask it anyway—the biggest insight, the biggest transformational experience if you will, that you had when you were practicing for that eight-year period. What would you say? Just humor me.

CM: No, Tami, it’s a neat question. No one’s ever asked me that question. It’s interesting to me just to be present to what arose when you asked it, which was—what arose immediately was the day that I had an experience in which I asked myself the very thing that I’ve been longing for is my own being. What are we doing here? So ironically enough, I think the most important insight—again, I’ve never voiced this before in this way, but it was so important—this moment where I realized we can practice and train forever and ever. If that’s just something you enjoy doing, great, wonderful, do it.

But it wasn’t the training that created an experience that was there prior to me deciding to be a monk, “prior” meaning it’s so fundamental, our very being. So it was an important insight to actually question, what are we doing here? What is going on with how we’re going about practice? Now, that didn’t mean it wasn’t valuable. It just meant that it was important for me to have an experience where I got to question the nature of what we were doing.

TS: That’s so interesting. In a sense, you could say you went from, this is my language, “practice to performance” in deciding to leave monastic life and enter all the challenges of the world. I mean, would you say that’s true? Your biggest insight came as part of the inspiration for you to leave? Why did you leave? is another way of asking.

CM: Yes, thank you. This is another important piece of it, because leaving wasn’t a glorified moment of, “Oh, it must be time for me to bring my knowledge out into the world.” I have to use that kind of cloud-like, airy-fairy voice when I say this, because I’m trying to be dramatic about what it might seem—how it could appear on paper. But in actuality, leaving was a very disruptive experience for me because my teacher suggested

that it was time for me to move on, and in that particular moment it was not what I would've chosen. So it was disturbing, and in Zen fashion, it wasn't warm and fuzzy. It was a very dramatic push out of the nest.

I spent quite a bit of time. I left the monastery, and I went to... You might recall my dear friend Paulus Berensohn is in the book—he wrote the book *Finding One's Way with Clay*. He's passed now, but he was an artist in North Carolina. I sort of fled to his home and lived in his attic for a period of time while I maintained a monastic schedule and started to get my feet on the ground of the relative world. How was I going to be moving forward was a question that was not just an esoteric spiritual question, it was very practical. What am I going to do now?

TS: OK. So you were kicked out of the nest, and you mentioned here you are, you find yourself in the "relative world." So let's just get into it, Caverly, because in the book *The Heart of Who We Are*, correct me if I'm wrong, but it seemed to me that part of the working thesis of the book is expressed here in a sentence from the beginning where you say, "I believe that true and lasting world change depends on knowing ourselves in the absolute sense, and that it's about knowing ourselves in the absolute sense that we can then apply to the challenges in the 'relative world.'"

I'm imagining that many people are hearing these terms for the first time. What are you guys talking about? "Absolute sense." "Relative world." There's both the absolute and the relative. I'm confused. Let's start there. What do you mean by these two terms?

CM: Thank you. Relative, that which is changing. The relative world is the world in which I'm identifying as a white cisgender woman. The relative world is the world in which I'm paying my bills. The relative world is the world in which things are coming and going, arising, passing, dissolving. The absolute is the ground of being out of which the relative appears, arises, exists. And the absolute is unchanging. So the absolute is that which is always present. I don't mean "present" in a limited sense. Sometimes we think of present as this tiny little moment in between past and future. But we could say the absolute is beyond a construct of time. The construct of time exists in the relative.

TS: OK, Caverly. So I'm going to just track right with you and say as an advocate for the listener, but also from my own experience as a spiritual journeyer, I know things come and go. Impermanence, I get it. Emotions come and go. Thoughts come and go. Bodies come and go. The weather comes and goes. All these things come and go. What is unchanging? I'm not so sure. I'm not so sure. I mean, of course I hear people talk about it all the time. The eternal. You refer to this, that which doesn't change, using the Buddhist term the "unborn." How can you help us right here in this moment know in our own experience that which doesn't change, so we can say, "I'm tracking with you, Caverly. I'm right with you"?

CM: Well, I'm going to borrow an image that I found very useful the first time I heard it from the meditation teacher Rupert Spira. It was the image—what he did is he guided a

student through a few questions. So again, I'm going to borrow those questions and invite us in this moment to ask what—I'm going to riff off what Rupert did a little bit. I don't remember it going into this much of a guided imagery, but for play, I'd like to do that now.

So visualize for a moment yourself when you were five years old. How did it feel to be you in the world? Then jump to an experience. If you're listening, track with me, if you will. Now visualize that you're 10, roughly. Just imagine in this experience, what does it feel like to be me? Now 15. So all the drama of being a 15-year-old is what's coming and going, my likes, my dislikes, my aversion to X, my cravings. But what's it feel like to be me under all of that? Then we'll just do one more. Visualize that you're 20. Don't just see it in your mind's eye, but actually go to an experience of being yourself. So my question for the listener and you, Tami, is do those experiences of being feel different?

TS: Right. I think that probably most people, certainly I, can track a sense of an essence quality that is a thread there throughout all those different ages. But the fact that it hasn't changed while I'm alive and incarnated doesn't necessarily give me confidence that I'm touching into something that's unborn that won't change upon my death. Maybe it'll be extinguished at the time of death. Really, I'm pushing this, Caverly, because I think it's a core premise of *The Heart of Who We Are* is that what you're pointing people to do is first of all realize this absolute in our own experience and then apply it to the changing circumstances of the world that are weighing on so many of us. But the first part is that we actually know this. So I want to see if we can touch in even deeper.

CM: Yes, thank you. I think it is important. One of the reasons I think it's important is otherwise so many of the tools I offer in the book, so many of the contemplative technologies, could be viewed as simply self-improvement practices. That's not bad and it's not wrong, but the book is meant to guide us beyond the tendency to improve a sense of self that we actually aren't posing the question because we're busy improving it. So what you're pointing to is how can we trust that there is truly something beyond this sense of separate self? Is it possible that what's beyond the sense of self is actually timeless?

So first about that question, I think it's very important to name—I don't know, I'm speaking from my own direct experience—but I think it's important to acknowledge this isn't something that even the Buddha ever... He invited everybody to go to their own direct experience. That's the best way to say it. He always underlined, "Don't just trust my words." So the words are there. What I hope to do with a body of work like this book, *The Heart of Who We Are*, is to have page after page invitation to explore inquiry that guides us to direct experience on the very topic that you're speaking about.

So what am I hoping folks will experience directly? I'm hoping that folks will become more intimate with the direct experience of our very being. In my own experience, the more intimately I give myself permission to rest in this experience, the more I am able to recognize the nature of its reality. The nature of its reality is that it is not bound by the notion of a separate self. It's not bound by a space. It's not bound by a concept of time. As Zen master Bankei said, "It's unborn. It's the undifferentiated experience of being."

What I love most about the experience of getting to work so directly with teens is I've proven in my own experience that this is not some esoteric thing that's abstract and that

we read about and we're not sure if that's true or not, that we all have equal capacity to experience directly our own being. It's the most natural and actually simple thing.

TS: Now, Caverly, we're going to return to applying this realization of the unborn to our collective social problems. But you introduce here your experience working with teens through Peace in Schools. I wonder if you can just set the stage for us a bit how, after you left the monastery, what happened in your own life that you became the founder of Peace in Schools and specifically how you've set this up, the work that Peace in Schools does with teenagers and what you've seen happen.

CM: Yes, thank you. I'd like to answer that by moving backwards a little bit, because the most important thing I think in relationship to what you and I have been talking about, Tami, is to underline how profound the moment was when I was doing demonstrations about the class for teens. I dropped the phrase, "You are not your thoughts." It was like a pin dropped in the room, because to say you are not your thoughts was a way of guiding the teens in the room into an experience of a very important question in practice, which is, "Well then, what or who am I? I've identified so completely with all of these thoughts, I've identified so completely with my emotions, what could I possibly be if not that?"

So I was doing these demonstrations in a high school gym, which is really a trip to think back about. The students didn't know they were going to have a demonstration for a class that I was proposing for the semester-long experience at the high school called Mindful Studies. I, to be honest, had no idea it was going to take off the way it did. I was just meeting the students in the room, and the principal gave space for this experience because he saw an afterschool program in which I was with a colleague at the time, Allyson Copacino. She was bringing in mindful movement, and I was bringing in these contemplative practices, these tools—recognizing the conditioned mind, being able to see the inner critic and recognize negative self-talk, learning how to disidentify from that negative self-talk—all tools that are in the book, seeing and recognizing the mind of duality, how our mind is habituated to see things in terms of right, wrong, good, bad, this, that, black, white.

So the students came in. The principal suggested that I have a demonstration, and he said, "If you get 25 to 30 teens that are interested in this experience, I will create a semester-long course." Which was very significant, because I knew that the only way I could have real reach with these tools was to have it embedded in the school day. If it's after school, I'm missing the kids who play soccer. If it's after school, I'm missing the kids who work or take care of Mom or Grandma.

So that was an important opportunity that he provided. He said, "If you get 20 to 25 teens who want to take the class, I'll figure this out." Over 300 teens after two days of demonstration said, "We want this." I think that was the beginning of something that hasn't simply been life changing for me, but at this point, life changing for thousands of teens.

TS: Now, Caverly, you made this distinction between self-improvement and what we might call self-realization or self-discovery. Why is that distinction so important to you?

CM: Thank you, Tami. I think that's such an important question. To me, it's at the crux of this entire conversation. If my attention is on improving myself, I will by default be maintaining a sense of separate self that is the very source of my suffering. So freedom lies in knowing the self that is unbound, timeless, beyond that limited perception, that limited view of I. So in the beginning of practice, we might find it very helpful to be able to recognize I'm getting better, I'm less reactive, I'm more able to be responsive, for example. Wonderful. I mean, we would all say hallelujah. So that is by no means bad or wrong.

We will still stay in a context of trying to improve something that doesn't exist, however, if we don't make the turn to that more primary question I put forward, which is, Who am I? What am I? What is it that is longing to know my inherent wholeness? What is that, and what is it like to trace that longing back to its source? That's where our real happiness lies, in knowing who we truly are and in specifically knowing the heart of who we truly are. By heart, of course, I'm not talking about the organ. I'm talking about the core experience of who we really are. I love that it does—the heart speaks not only to unconditional love, but it speaks to possibility. All of that sense of what's possible in this world arises out of the heart.

TS: Now, you mentioned teaching teenagers how to work with negative self-talk, not as a self-improvement practice, but as a way to get underneath the sense of the separate self and all of the negativity we're putting towards our separate self. I realize when you did that practice, when you said, "Go back to when you're five, 10, 15, 20," I definitely connect to the teenager inside. So, Caverly, teach me like I'm a teenager and I'm working with negative self-talk the way that you frame it.

CM: Well, first, Tami, I think you'd probably enjoy that, if I was teaching you, we would be in a classroom with other people. One of the reasons I focus on collective in this book is because of what I've seen happen in community with these tools. So you would get a chance to see how—if you were, Tami, to give me a snapshot of a primary identity, what teen identity were you most often identified with? Was she the bad girl? Was she the smart one? Was she the jock? Who would you say that was?

TS: I was smart, cool, and good at sports. So I was like a—

CM: You were smart, cool. You were the well rounded.

TS: I was smoking pot with the cool kids. So I had this identity of being super cool, super achiever.

CM: So you were a super cool super achiever. If Suzi Q—

TS: It was a lot. It was a lot.

CM: It was a lot. I'm not surprised to hear that was a primary identity: complex, intellectual, engaged, but also too cool to be too engaged, right? If Suzi Q, who people might have labeled as the class loser, for whatever reason, was in your classroom, for her to learn that she—through a direct experience guided imagery, we reveal our negative self-talk in a safe container and in an anonymous way at the beginning—but for her to realize she has the same negative self-talk as you, and maybe more importantly for you to learn that you have the same negative self-talk as her, is so profound. Because that's the beginning of realizing none of this stuff that I talk about in the book, all of this conditioning, none of it's personal.

We are conditioned to be running these storylines about who we are and what the world is. There's some change in content, but the process is the same. So it's incredibly connecting for us to have a direct experience of that. So now I'm speaking to you, the 15-year-old. What are you? You're the cool kid. Go there, Tami, there you are. You've got your weed. Maybe you've skipped a certain class because you thought it was stupid and you're too cool for it. What are you telling yourself about yourself in a moment where you're struggling?

TS: Oh my. I don't connect to my family. I feel like an outsider. Deep down, I'm lonely even though I have friends. I don't feel like I fit in the world. Things like that. Alienation.

CM: Yes, it's the most common thing I see in working with teens right now is a deep sense of isolation and alienation. So there you are. All of that self-talk is reinforcing the "truth" that you're alone, you're isolated, you're cut off. So now can you get in touch with a need that's underneath that storyline, that narrative, like a real need?

TS: Yes. I think the core need underneath was to feel a sense of connection and belonging, belonging with others, belonging on the earth, belonging here and now in a world that looked insane to me.

CM: Yes, let's be clear, a world that is insane on a particular realm in a particular way. So you had a need to belong, a need to feel like you're part of. I would suggest that that is what we all need. Another person might have slightly different language for it. "I need to feel safe." "I need to feel whole." But they're all variations of the same theme, wouldn't you say? So when working with young people and tools I offer in this book are direct ways

to support us in returning to the very thing that we most need.

If you're listening to this, you know that you're not going to get what you most need through a new car. Or if I'm in high school, I'm not going to get it through the next new drug experience. We're speaking here about how to meet that need in the deepest sense. So to be practical about it, next I would invite you to ask yourself, what is it that, if I were to craft a statement, if I were to create a reassurance that is not an affirmation, it's not boosting the ego, it's not plumping up a sense of self, it's a statement that returns me to, in your case, a sense of inherent belonging. Can you offer, Tami, what a statement like that might be?

TS: Yes, maybe something like, "You're intrinsically part of everything."

CM: Yes. I would invite all of our listeners to pause for a moment and just receive the words "you are intrinsically part of everything." If we're offering reminders to ourselves like this, we're not, again, plumping up a sense of separateness that just furthers the notion of the very isolation that you are able to name creates suffering for you. We're using a practice to return us to the very nature of our being, to the thing that we most long for, to the source of our happiness. When you practice with this enough, and I've seen this very directly—I'll just go back to speaking about teens. When I watch teens practice with unconditionally loving reassurances throughout the semester, I see incredible shift based on the landscape out of which everything else is happening change.

So if the landscape—let's say I'm just trying to become a better person, but the landscape is a constant reassertion of the notion that I am a separate self, again, I'm just going to keep suffering and suffering and suffering and changing outfits, changing costumes within the dance of suffering. But for us to begin to move from the ground of being that is who we really are changes how our thoughts are forming within this vast ground of being. It changes our emotional landscape. It changes how we relate to each other. This is also something I see in the classroom. We begin to see the very being of others that we're relating to as opposed to, "Yes, but she's the cool one. I'm the loser. I'm the one that never gets anything right. Tami over there, she's the cool one."

We begin to connect, and I like to speak about it in terms of "essence to essence." My favorite thing about this is none of it's esoteric, none of it's religious, none of it. It's actually about something very simple, which is knowing who we truly are and connecting to each other from that knowing. It's so simple, and yet it's the very thing as you look around at the manifestations of hierarchical thinking in our world, as you look at our conditioned reality, you see so little of. We see so much divisiveness. We see so much polarization. We see so much, again, hierarchical thinking.

TS: Now, Caverly, you mentioned this introduction of unconditionally loving reassurances that we can offer ourselves. Can you share some more examples of that and how you see people working with that?

CM: Yes. Because I care so much about these contemplative technologies and tools reaching broadly, that's why I love working with teens in a public school setting is I can feel how accessible these tools become. It becomes something where we're not just going to a monastery to get them. Because I knew this particular podcast had the capacity for potential reach that I don't normally have, I woke up and was present to some nervousness. The self-talk is something along the lines of, "Oh, I really want to get this right. I want to be effective as a teacher. I want to reach people. I want people to have what I've had the opportunity to have through working with these transformational tools."

It was such a relief this morning as I was lying in bed, without any prompting, to just hear the voice of, "I love you, you've got this. You will speak from the heart because this is what you do. You know how to love, and you don't have to be perfect. You don't have to be articulate in just the right way. You don't have to sound smart. You don't have to get it right. You can show up and love, and that'll be enough."

TS: That's a beautiful personal example. You write in *The Heart of Who We Are* that perfectionism is a challenge that you yourself have had to work through as part of seeing how you separate off yourself. I wonder if you can share more about your journey through perfectionism, and specifically not as a self-improvement practice, but as a discovery-of-essence practice.

CM: Yes. It took some time to see that this notion of perfectionism was actually not at all helping me become a "better person." In the theme of what we've been talking about today, it was solidifying my sense of "I'm separate." It was giving the inner critic a full-time job. I want to be clear, I say that in past tense, but it's an ongoing practice to pay attention to the way in which that mindset seeps in and attempts to take over. It was when I began to learn more about how structures, oppressive structures on a societal level—I learned more about how the structure of white supremacy is maintained, for example—that I began to see that this notion of perfectionism, it's a byproduct of a larger system and that it's not personal. Within a context of perfectionism, we are always striving. We do it personally. I have a lot of personal conditioning emphasizing this notion of perfectionism. But—

TS: Caverly, just to ask, when you say "conditioning" and "personal conditioning," can you help us all understand what you mean by that?

CM: Thank you so much for backing me up, Tami. Yes. The unborn mind that you and I started the conversation speaking about is unconditioned. As I'm moving through the world, however, I'm often identified with a sense of separate self that has been conditioned or habituated to believe particular things, to think particular things, to act in particular ways. So I, for example, might be conditioned to believe that if I get everything right, then I'll be worthy of love. So I'm habituated to believe that. I'm conditioned to believe that. We can see this conditioning for what it is and let go of it in practice, because it's created. It is of the relative; it comes and goes. It's a form that's created. It's not absolute truth. Yes, let me pause there and see. Do you feel that that lands?

TS: It does. It does. I think we can all see the conditioning of our own personality formation and how we adapted to this or that as a survival tactic in our family and constructed ourselves in response to early inputs. So we created this conditioned, or you could say constructed, self and that your perfectionism was your version of that, I think.

CM: Absolutely, yes, on a personal level. Then within a white supremacist, capitalistic culture, we are also collectively moving through the world from a conditioned sense of we need to be perfect or get things right. That's one of the qualities of that collective conditioning. So for example, if we had different collective conditioning, there might be a different emphasis. But if you look at it, it's not just personal conditioning that says, "I should get things right, then I will be rewarded." We're doing it in a collective sense as well. So one of the themes of this book is to take practices that can help us recognize personal conditioning, see through personal conditioning, let go of personal conditioning.

We're also, in this book, making a link between applying these practices personally and applying them collectively. How can we undo some of the collective distortion? We have personal distortion. We have collective distortion. It's actually not different. There's an intimate link there. But because we live in an "I, me, my"-type society, we approach spiritual practice from this self-improvement lens, and we feel like "I am going to apply these practices to me so I can be happier." So what's it like to apply things not just personally but also collectively, and then to even get the question, What is the nature of this collective? What is the nature of the personal? It is the same nature.

TS: Well, let's talk about this, Caverly, because I feel like I have a lot of agency over my personal life. I can liberate myself potentially from my own personal conditioning, but when it comes to the collective, it feels so big, so out of how I can affect change. So help me understand, because you're trying to show us it's the same process. Doesn't feel the same to me.

CM: Yes, I hear you. Actually, Tami, I don't know that I would see it as the same either if it had not been for what I've experienced through Peace in Schools. So just one example—there are many—is, as I mentioned, how transformation happens collectively in this context where the tools are being offered and people are moving through their experience of the tools together. I remember very clearly the day that I was supporting one of our teachers. This teacher is now actually our executive director, Janice Martellucci. She was teaching in one of the classrooms, and I was coaching her. I trust that she won't mind me sharing this, but she was a little triggered.

There were some students in the class who she would've defined as class jocks who were from very conservative backgrounds and were saying things right out of the box that she felt created a less-than-safe environment for other people in the room. She, as a gay woman, felt more than just a little put off by some of the behaviors that she was witnessing. These students, fortunately—one of the things I remember saying to her is, "If we're not offering these tools for these students, then we're not standing in our vision for

true healing, remembrance of our very being, for all. This shouldn't just be for the students who are really drawn to arty, being able to live on behalf of their knowing that we're interconnected, for example."

These students fortunately exhibited—I think this also speaks to the teacher's relational abilities, but she was able to really show these students that she wanted them there. In that experience, the students began to feel like they could be present to how they are conditioned to move through the world, and they were able to be open to seeing how some of their conditioning was impacting other people in the class. Meanwhile, because some of the other people in the class—folks that identify as female, some immigrants that were in the class—they began to feel safer because they saw that these young men were open to seeing things about how they had been conditioned to think and act in the world.

So the class got to unpack personal conditioning in a collective context that didn't leave behind the collective conditioning. Young, white, male, cisgender folks are conditioned to move through the world and behave as a collective differently than, let's say, young, identified-as-gay women are. So for that practice to get to happen in a setting together created an opportunity for the undoing of personal as well as collective conditioning. So the personal conditioning is a little bit, again, for most of us, a little more accessible, easy to reach.

I'm conditioned that in order to be loved, I need to be a helper or a people pleaser. OK, I can work with that. But again, this is working with that personal conditioning and not leaving out the collective conditioning while always keeping our eye on what's true, what's underneath this conditioning, what's beyond this conditioning, what's real.

TS: Caverly, one of the things that strikes me about this conversation is I see you as someone who could teach PhD spiritual explorers. Here you are, and your work in the world is with teenagers. I just think that's really interesting, because you're bringing forward some pretty deep-end ideas. I'm wondering what your thought is about that.

CM: My thought is that my greatest practice is to serve love and truth. This is just where life has plopped me. I really love teaching adults. I love leading retreats for adults. I love writing. I love reaching the adults in my life who, like all of us—I mean, it really is universal—just long to be happy, long to know who we truly are, long to be able to move through the world with actions that are on behalf of that innate well-being and happiness.

I also just happen to love young people. I feel blessed that I have a kind of karmic wiring that makes it such that it's not hard for me to relate to teenagers. I talk to some people that are like, "Oh, that would be so intimidating for me to walk into a high school classroom and be sort of improvising with teens." Because the curriculum arose out of being in relationship with these teenagers. It wasn't some set thing.

But I feel very blessed. I love working with teens, but I don't at all feel limited to working with teens. I really can honestly say that I love leading retreats for adults equally to the experience of working with teens. I think the experience of working with teens simply took off in a way that, again, was I feel like sort of spirit driven. I didn't set out with some sort of goal to change education. But that is what started to happen here in Portland, in that the Portland public schools there has—not just because of our program, but there really is

more attention being brought to the kind of education that reminds us of inherent well-being instead of just—you know, the education that supports an exploration of the inner landscape, I should say. So yes, I love it equally.

TS: I think it points, though, to the universality of what you're teaching, that at whatever age there is a doorway in. Now, I want to ask you something, Caverly. It's about this notion you talk about, "acts of being," that here at the intersection of our knowing, to whatever degree we can, what is unborn in us, we can impact the challenges in the world through "acts of being." Help us understand what that means to you, acts of being.

CM: I first heard that phrase from Mulla Sadra. My friend Barnaby handed me a book, and it was on the cover. I fell in love with the phrase itself. It began to feel like a koan of sorts, a Zen koan. It began to feel like some sort of guidepost, because one of the things I explore a lot in the book, as you know, is being able to discern. Having Zen roots, I love, as many Zen practitioners and dharma teachers do, just the practice of discernment. So I love our inherent capacity to be aware and to be aware specifically of the difference between acting on behalf of the egoic separate self and acting on behalf of the heart of who we truly are.

So a way we can bring this to the ground is, can you think of times in your life that you were in love, maybe falling in love, and you were just acting on behalf of that experience of being in love? Tami, I'm just curious if you'd be willing to share any times in your own life where you can remember falling in love and then acting from that experience of being in love.

TS: Oh my. The crazy stuff that's done from being totally in love, for sure.

CM: Those actions have a different quality, don't they?

TS: Yes. High risk, pouring oneself out, totally leaping.

CM: Not being constricted by a conditioned standard, not believing the inner critic, right? Those things all fall away, because you're acting from love on behalf of love and, I would even go so far to say, as love. That's very different from having actions that are on behalf of an egoic separate self. From an egoic separate-self perspective, I need to protect what is mine. The world of scarcity and deprivation appears. I am this little thing inside a world of scarcity and deprivation. I see others as others. I don't see you as myself. I don't see us as having shared being, our very being being the same. I don't see that. You're over there. You know what, Tami? You have more money than me, and you get to live in a prettier place than I do. So now I'm jealous of you, right? That's where all of that stuff lives. So "acts of being" are actions that are freed to arise on behalf of who we truly are,

and they have a very different quality in the world.

TS: Caverly, as we come to a conclusion here of just this conversation, what I'm struck by is not so much the what of what we've talked about, but something about how I feel. It's interesting. I feel a quality of big space. I feel a quality of kind of expansiveness and openness. I wonder, to end, if maybe we could just together go into a short meditation that you could lead us in that actually helps us really be here in this space together directly. We're not trying to follow anything you're saying. We're just experiencing, if you will, presence together and if you could take us into that for a few minutes.

CM: I would love that, Tami. Just tell me what time, how many minutes would be good.

TS: Take five-ish minutes.

CM: Five-ish minutes. Wonderful. Not required, but I invite the listeners to place one hand on the center of the heart and one hand right where the ribs come in together to touch. Just for three of the longest and deepest inhalations and exhalations you've taken yet today. You've given the last hour to your commitment to know who you truly are, sort of nourish that experience to listening to the kinds of conversations that happen on this platform. Offer one expression of gratitude or appreciation to yourself for that.

Then releasing your hands, if you'd like to, and then recognizing that so often our attention is conditioned or habituated to move from thing to thing to thing to thing. In this moment, allow your attention rather than to be directed outward to these various objects, these things, allow the attention to be freed, to rest back into its source. So if you think of the flashlight and the way the light of the flashlight lands on various things. Let the light now draw back into the flashlight itself. Let the attention rest in awareness. Sort of, these few moments, we're giving ourselves permission to rest in our very being.

This brief meditation isn't about disciplining the mind. Give yourself permission to be freed from any sense of striving or efforting, and simply allow yourself to enjoy your own aware, luminous, unconditionally loving and unconditionally allowing being. Just resting in love, as love, with nowhere you have to go, nothing you have to do, and perhaps most importantly, no one you have to be. Just being. Then taking one long, deep inhalation and exhalation. As you exhale, perhaps offering one unconditionally loving reassurance to yourself as you transition to what's next. Thank you, friends.

TS: Thank you, Caverly. Thank you. I've been speaking with Caverly Morgan. She's the author of the new book *The Heart of Who We Are: Realizing Freedom Together*. If you'd like to watch Insights at the Edge on video and participate in after-the-show Q&A conversations with featured presenters and have the chance to ask your questions, come join us on Sounds True One, a new membership community that features premium shows, live classes, and community events. Let's learn and grow together. Come join us at join.soundstrue.com. Sounds True: waking up the world.