

Jerry:

Well, welcome Sharon Salzberg. What a delight to have you on the show. My teacher. My friend. My companion, especially these last few years, Sharon Salzberg. Welcome to the show. Thank you for coming on the show, Sharon.

Sharon Salzberg:

Thank you so much and thank you for your beautiful words.

Jerry:

Well, you know, before we get started and talking about our topic, which is really related to your latest book, *Real Life: the journey from isolation to openness and freedom*. I just wanna let folks know, I mean, I've mentioned, you've been on the show before and we've talked before and I've been very, very vociferous in my praise, but there are a few people in my life who have affected me as deeply as you, Sharon.

And whatever wisdom I might hold really stems from people like you in my life, holding me up, especially in times of extreme difficulty for me. And, you know, every now and then, I hear somebody praise you out in the world and I read praise and I know from hearing all that, that you do that for so many other people. So, from the bottom of all of our hearts, I wanna start off by saying thank you.

Sharon Salzberg:

Now I'm going to cry. See? You got me to cry and you're famous for that. So.

Jerry:

Yeah. Well, you know, there are very, very few people that you encounter who embody the Bodhisattva vow of working towards the alleviation of suffering of all beings. And you are the embodiment of the Bodhisattva. You know. And I know that that's a foundational component of this book, which I'm delighted to speak to you about and hear more about. And I'll confess, I've read the book now three times. I read the book early in your writing, and then I read it when it was done and submitted, and then I reread it just for this conversation. And each time I read it, I find something new in it. But I want to start this conversation kind of at the beginning. As we both know, *Real Life*, the book is a continuation of the real series, right?

Sharon Salzberg:

Mm-hmm.

Jerry:

It was *Real Happiness at Work. Real Love and Real Change*. Do I have that all right?

Sharon Salzberg:

Mm-hmm. I think that's all that's real.

Jerry:

I wanna talk about *Real Life* and what you mean by that phrase. And I'm going to read to you from your own book and then see if we use that as a jumping off point. And early on you write.

"Perhaps our early conditioning has trained us to imagine that very little happiness is available to us. And oppressive personal or cultural atmosphere might work to depict our right to joy as negligible. A room to move. is awfully limited. A path to liberation counteracts this conditioning and culturally reinforced constriction. To accomplish such a transformation, it asks us to go forward into the full range of our feelings and reactions with kindness and honesty. When we do so, we realize we can travel from painful constriction to expansion and freedom. This is not a one and done journey. It's something we repeat again and again. Not because of compulsion and obligation, but because we are fueled by the happiness of discovery, by the relief of openness, and by realizing with joy the breadth and depth of what we might well be capable of. This is what I'm calling real life. Real life is about what happens when we fully engage with our everyday lives. Whatever shape our lives take, whatever challenges and obstacles that life may bring."

Okay, so I think what I hear you saying is that real life is not just what happens to us, but it's about how we engage with that. Is that right?

Sharon Salzberg:

I think that's really right. The irony of course is that I wrote it during the height of pandemic lockdown. So life was sort of virtual life, you know, and many people, it was not the real life we had expected, any one of us most likely, and anticipated, and yet here it was. And it's something also like, I think if I was going to describe myself in one word at the age of 18, which is when I went to India to learn meditation, it would have been fragmented. That would be the word.

And so there's something about having a sense of some authenticity or some integration so that I didn't feel like I was a different person in all these different circumstances that I think was also in my mind in the title that so many people do have a sense of compartmentalization and there's no sense of this is who I am, this is who I... This is what I care about that carries through. And especially in the circumstances that were all turned upside down. It's like, where's my normal workplace and the accolades that come from that. And the sense of competition or success, it's like everything was turned upside down. And so what was real in those circumstances?

Jerry:

Yeah, you know, it's such a fascinating title in some ways because my first reaction to it was, I'll confess, was a little negative.

Sharon Salzberg:

Mm-hmm.

Jerry:

Not to the title of the book, but what it sounded to me like initially was... Okay, we're gonna talk about real life, not this fantasy stuff that you're talking about, right? And so it always felt like it was chastising that phrase for me. But I think what I'm really sensing, and I'm glad you mentioned the start of this book being during the pandemic, which, you know, just for the listeners, we of course stayed in quite close contact throughout that and we continued our twice monthly, sometimes more contact, and sitting together throughout that entire time. And so realizing that what I think what I'm hearing you share is that so much of the way we react to those experiences of our life, how did you put, what was the phrase you used? "Fully engage with our everyday lives, whatever shape our lives take, whatever challenges and obstacles that life may bring."

You know, there's this, and the pandemic lockdown is brilliant evidence of this, right? There's a movement towards constriction, a movement towards isolation. There's a movement towards telling us and convincing ourselves that we're the only one who, fill in the blank, suffers. Or the only one who's feeling the vicissitudes of this life. And, you spoke about the fragmentation that you felt, that you really noticed at 18. And as you were describing that, I was thinking about you know, the antidote to that might be considered wholeness.

Sharon Salzberg:
MmmHmm

Jerry:
And our mutual friend Parker Palmer might say, divided it no more. Right.

Sharon Salzberg:
Mmm.

Jerry:
Which is the title of one of his books. And it's that notion that a life that is that real life is in effect. How we confront those vicissitudes. Moving towards wholeness, away from that fragmentation, and away from constriction and isolation. Am I getting that right?

Sharon Salzberg:
Yeah, another is beautifully put. And I think about those chat rooms, you know, on Zoom during those years. I mean, I did an enormous amount of teaching online. Everything was online, you know, and I was so moved by people. You know, it was just heart-wrenching. Like somebody writing in the chat, I'm a resident in a nursing home. I haven't had a visitor in a year.

Jerry:
Right.

Sharon Salzberg:
Or somebody writing, I'm a school teacher, my kids can't learn this way. They're so depressed.

I'm so depressed. And it was like every day, so many people struggling so badly and I'm doing what I could, you know, and you helped me tremendously in that period, really. And it was really important, you know, that I feel that kind of support as I was on demand, you know, like in all these places and. First of all, it was a glimpse of how a lot of people live, and that was really poignant. But it was also seeing how, okay, we're not gonna have what we normally have, and what can be intact, what can be whole, what can be flourishing even in this kind of time. And obviously, needing to discover it in myself before I could impart it to other people.

Jerry:

Well, you know, I want to bring attention to that. from our many conversations and for your gracious writing the forward to my first book, *Reboot*, you know what a fan I am when an author puts themselves into the book and that we don't stand back. And, you know, as I've often shared with others, my first encounter with your work was a book called Faith, which I continue to recommend to people. And in part because, to use one of your words, it was real.

Sharon Salzberg:

Mm-hmm.

Jerry:

Not that the other books aren't real, but you were there.

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah.

Jerry:

And maybe because I have the insight of being as close to you as I am, and the good fortune of that, the good karma of a past life, I know that you're in this book.

Sharon Salzberg:

Hehehe

Jerry:

I know that you battled with the feeling of isolation and constriction.

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah. Yeah.

Jerry:

And so when you speak about the journey from that isolation to openness, you know from what you're speaking, you know the experience of that. And in some ways, what I see is in this book is your encounter with your real life.

Sharon Salzberg:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Jerry:

Right? I want to spend a little bit of time in this, you know, what was it like for Sharon? You know, at the end of that introduction, you go on to talk about real life and you say, *“Real life is about the inner journey and journeys we make when we decide to fully live life, whatever the world has presented to us, knowing that life is short and also that life is sacred.”* Okay, so again I have special knowledge and in that special knowledge I know that among the things that you did during this whole pandemic period, I mean you made reference to it a little bit here, about teaching so much, but I also know that you were on your own inner journey, weren't you?

Sharon Salzberg:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Jerry:

What was that like for you? What was that experience like for you?

Sharon Salzberg:

Well, you know, I had so many different levels. I was in New York until I think about March. I left New York on March 14th. I decided to leave on March 9th, having just been there for a few days really. And I have a home here in Barry Mass and it's next door through the forest to the Insight Meditation Society, which we established in 1976. And when I got back here, I thought it was gonna be for a couple of weeks. I was gonna ride it out, you know, and then. Center was still open, closed within days. You know we had to close. And that was a part of what I was going through was like, in so many ways, this place is very tied up with my sense of legacy and you know, what am I leaving behind that's intact, I mean, the work and the books and, but the Center, you know, like what if, and you know, it was established in 1976 and we're awfully close to that. 50th anniversary and I thought, I want to make it to 50. I just want to make it to 50.

You know, what are we going to do? And so I put an enormous amount of effort into, with other people, obviously, you know, figuring out, can we go online? What would it be like to teach online? And, you know, I, none of us really knew how to do it. I still probably don't, you know, but, that was like a big learning curve and, and a lot of effort, you know, to keep the institution alive. And then. There was the reality of what about the staff, you know, and everything that was happening, and just like, there was so much along those lines.

I have asthma. I was really sick about four years ago. I was, I, you know, nobody knew and, uh, I was trying to be really careful. There was a period where I just didn't see anybody. Like if somebody was in here dropping off groceries, I went upstairs, you know, they were in another floor. Or if they were cleaning, I was in a different floor. And, uh, or looking back, it was like so weird, you know, like that degree of isolation, um, and then as things got clearer, you know, in terms of transmission and things like that, and I got more relaxed, you know, then I'd see people, but it was like three people, you know, for like a year or something, except online. Uh,

so for me too, the online experience was, was essential. Um, and, and slowly, you know, there was more contact or there was more, but I still, unlike so many people, as you know, I have not been on an airplane since like March 3rd, 2020.

So I wondered, you know, you know, there's always that thought in my mind, like, is this actually going to be okay? Am I actually going to be okay?

Jerry:
Yeah.

Sharon Salzberg:
And it was.

Jerry:
Yeah. Would you say that you were afraid? Right.

Sharon Salzberg:
Yeah, I was somewhat afraid in the beginning because as you know, my father was like severely mentally ill. And so there's always this little bit of a specter like, is this going to work out? Okay. You know, like, am I going to be ok? I mean, not in a, a deep, deep, deep way, but it's there. It's absolutely there. And, and so it was just kind of like, all right, this is different. You know, the. And that was the question I kept asking myself with my previous book, *Real Change*, which came out during the pandemic, um, was what's still true and what can I rely on? Like what's, what's holding me up, you know, like what's supporting me. And I realized absolutely the practice and I took tremendous delight in meditation practice. I went way back to the very first instruction I'd ever gotten. And I thought, look at that, you know, and I saw it pretty quickly.

Jerry:
What did you take from that? What was that instruction?

Sharon Salzberg:
Oh, it was like, so not only reassuring, but it was like, it was like a blessing, you know, like I've often said, you know, to people, to other people, like, it's really important as far as I can tell to practice in the boring times, to practice in the, um, ordinary times, to practice in the repetitive times, cause it's like strength training. And when the bottom falls out, you're going to need it and it's going to be there. And it was there, which was fabulous. And then the, the kind of values, like I played around with, um, what aspect of what I had been taught through all these years and had been teaching through all these years, do I absolutely count on as being true?

And I came to the statement of the Buddhas, which was echoed. So many years later by Martin Luther King Jr. where the way the Buddha put it was, "*Hatred will never cease by hatred. Hatred will only cease by love. This is an eternal law.*" So I always thought that was a little quirky because here's the Buddha like Mr. Impermanence talking about this is an eternal law. Like

what's that about? But it's one of those truths like that's uncomfortable, but I suspect nonetheless is true. You know, you think of a certain person or certain situation, you think, surely not this one, you know, like this must be the exception. Uh, this is almost an eternal law, you know, except for that guy. Uh, but, uh, when I come to really, you know, do I really believe hatred is the answer and do I believe that's going to get the job done of inclusion or transformation? No. So, oh, well, I guess him too, you know.

Jerry:

Can I ask a question about that teaching? Because I'm always going to be your student. So I hear that Buddha, that teaching from the Buddha. And I go to a different place, and I'm curious if it would be true that fear and suffering are not defeated by fear and suffering and if that too is an eternal law because if that's true then the teaching says when we encounter real life and we are frightened by real life or we are pained by real life, And there have been so many real-life situations where you have provided comfort and solace to people. I think of your friend Shelley and all the work that she's done around gun violence and you know the Parkland families. The response to real life is real love. which is really hard.

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah, it's very hard.

Jerry:

It makes a lot of sense to say it,

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah. Yeah.

Jerry:

but to feel it.

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah.

Jerry:

You know? I mean, during those times you started writing your book. It was such a crazy time, right?

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah, it was a crazy time.

Jerry:

Where we all thought it was going to be a few weeks at the most, and in fact, you know, we saw, you know, just kind of like what felt like the fabric of society being ripped apart. You know,

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah. Well, I think we see the consequences of that to some degree because one of the mantras that we use around here is mental health is not that high. You know, people are struggling. A lot happened for a lot of people in these three years. It was not easy. And I feel like I am privileged in so many ways as we are, you know, that I had support at home and country. friends, you know, an enormous number of friends, even if I wasn't hugging. And work that I find completely meaningful and a practice, you know, to help deal with the fear, and also part of it is remembering the joy. You know, it can be so hard when things are rough and they're so rough for other people and you feel like an idiot, you know, for. sitting and appreciating a sunset or something like that, but it's right outside my window. Sunset, you know, and so.

Jerry:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Well, I hear you and I think back to, you know, the last few years and our encounters and You know, we would have our regular Zoom calls and we would talk and we would chat and then we would sit.

Sharon Salzberg:

Mm-hmm.

Jerry:

And we would literally sit, you know, our eyes would close and we would be together 15 minutes, 20 minutes, maybe a half an hour here and there. And we would always look up afterwards and say things like, "Well, that was nice."

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah, that was really great.

Jerry:

Right?

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah.

Jerry:

And it was a form of connection that sustained when confronting, I'm sorry, I'm going to say the phrase again, real life. But you know, rereading the book yesterday, I encountered another story. a story that I remember from the first time I read the book, but then it struck me again because you gave me this teaching just a few weeks ago when I was struggling with a health scare and to set the context I had an emergency CT scan or an unexpected unplanned CT scan that showed a herniated disc. that was so large that they thought I was in imminent danger of paralysis. Surprise!

Not what you expected when you went into the ER. And I was struggling. I ended up seeing four

different neurosurgeons who each said, yeah, you don't have any symptoms, we're not going to touch it. Which I think is the right thing. And in the end they said, just go live your life. and you know I'll have it checked on a regular basis but you gave me a teaching at that time and I'm going to read to you from that because I was like oh right and this is one of those instances where the student hears a teaching not once not twice three times and the fourth time they finally remember it okay, and so this is from a paragraph in the book on illness and physical pain on a section in the book.

“Bob Thurman, a Tibetan Buddhist scholar and author, once said to me, You should never be ashamed of suffering of the suffering you've been through. Bob was passing along a message he'd received many years earlier after he lost his left eye in an accident. His teacher at the time, a Mongolian monk named Geshe Wangel...”

Sharon Salzberg:
Wungya!

Jerry:
...had told him, never be ashamed of what happened to you. You have lost one eye but gained a thousand eyes of wisdom.”

So in the fullness of being real with that experience, you shared that story with me on a Friday night after maybe a week or two of intense emotional vicissitudes. Where I was getting conflicting information from doctors and trying to decide if I had the surgery, I might get paralyzed, but if I don't have the surgery, I might get paralyzed. And what occurred to me when I was re-reading that section, Sharon, was that was my encounter with a very real aspect of my life.

Sharon Salzberg:
Mm-hmm.

Jerry:
And that is... mirrors the encounters that so many people have day to day with health decisions with life decisions where things are going along great and then shit happens and I don't remember I remember feeling that upset that I felt like my body had betrayed me And that's what brought that story to your mind to share to me now. But I want to say that it, it, it, it helped me feel so much less afraid.

Sharon Salzberg:
Mm-hmm, that's great.

Jerry:
In part, because I think I let go of that shame, but me more about that story because obviously, that story has stayed with you as well.

Sharon Salzberg:

Oh yeah, I mean, this story has been immense for me. Bob told me that story at first, I think when he read *Faith*, because *Faith* is really my story. It's the story of my Faith journey and it involves my father's illness, my mother's having died when I was nine. And so my family was always like a little off, you know, compared to kind of convention and...

Jerry:

Compared to the Brady Bunch.

Sharon Salzberg:

Exactly, which was the comparison at the time. You know things were not really spoken about. And, you know, like what do you say in a school where in French class, you have to say what your father does for a living? I don't know what to say. Or, you know, I have a friend whose daughter was adopted from China. And one of the questions in school was, tell us how you physically resemble your mother or your father. I don't know if they were talking about genetics or whatever. It's like a little girl who sobbed and sobbed and sobbed you know, and didn't know what to say.

And that's also the kind of cultural milieu of, you know, pain is disgraceful or being different needs to be hidden. I mean, it's weird, you know, that, and so it was very much my childhood atmosphere. And... hopefully somewhat less so now, although obviously still prevalent in so many ways. And it was only actually when I went to college, which was at the age of 16, and in my sophomore year, I did an Asian philosophy course. Really, honestly, as I often say, I think it was happenstance. There was a philosophy requirement. I looked at the schedule. I said, hey, that's on Tuesday. That's convenient. Let's do that one.

And it completely changed my life beginning with the Buddhist statement that life has suffering in it. This is natural. This is inevitable. And for me, that was in no way a depressing comment. That was like, I belong. Finally, it's like, I'm not so weird. I'm not so different. This is everybody. Not to the same degree, obviously, or the same type, but in a very vulnerability to that. We all belong, you know, and, and that was a huge thing for me. And then I heard in the context of that class, there was such a thing as meditation. If you practiced it, you could be a lot happier. So this is Buffalo, New York, 1969, um, 1970. And I looked around Buffalo. I did not see it anywhere.

Jerry:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Okay.

Sharon Salzberg:

So that's when I created the independent study project and presented it to the university and said, I want to go to India for a year and learn how to meditate. This was 1969, 1970. I said, okay. I look at that time, I look at that moment so often because I was really a frightened person.

I was 18, first 17 actually, and then 18 when I actually left. I had never even been to California before. I was not the kind of person who said, What I can do, I was like, I don't think I'll go there. I went there. It was not a question of maybe I'll study this in graduate school or this is interesting, maybe someday it'll come to Buffalo or New York City. I was like, I've got to go, I've got to learn this. I've got to learn this. In some ways, that's actually why I wrote Faith because of that moment, like stepping into the center of things.

Jerry:

Well and I, you know, to use the current phraseology from your book, I think what you're describing is an early encounter with real life. It's not to say that, you know, the experience of being a child who loses first one, then another parent, right? And having to experience that. isn't an encounter with real life. But I think that there is this encounter with what was truly happening, what was really happening with you. And in this case, the realization of the universality of suffering.

Sharon Salzberg:

Mm-hmm.

Jerry:

In which, call it karma, call it some brave aspect of a scared kid's character structure. put you on an airplane to India, right? And, and we are all the better for that encounter and for the way you responded to that.

You know, I think about that teaching about suffering, and I too had that same encounter when I've... first began to practice, when I first began to try to study and understand the words of the Buddha, I realized, like, that just the phenomena of the universality of that suffering. And as I often joke with people, you could, you would not be out of line if your first reaction to that notion is nihilism, you know, is well that sucks. If suffering is so universal. But I think that one of the things that you, Ani Pema Chodron, and others have taught me is that by encountering the realness of that suffering, even if it triggers our own stories and shame, we create a currency of empathy that enables us to overcome that isolation.

Sharon Salzberg:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Jerry:

And I saw you do this so beautifully over these last few years in particular. You know. Here you were isolated, if you will. Yet not. You know, in the book you tell this wonderful story, for example, of the Saturday night Seder.

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah.

Jerry:

Yeah, tell that story because it's wonderful.

Sharon Salzberg:

I still love the Saturday Night Seder so much. So, um, you know, I grew up in this Jewish family and not really observant personally, but because family was such a strange thing in my life and an important thing that I kept yearning for the Seder, the Passover Seder, the dinner was, was very important in my, in my family, in my life. So even as an adult, every once in a while I've led Seder's. We tend to use the Jewish Buddhist Haggadah because the symbolic meaning of the Seder, the journey, that Exodus journey is from constriction to openness. The word Egypt actually means narrow place or narrow streets. Taken in the best possible way, nothing to do with geopolitics, nothing to do with real places.

That is the journey and it's not just the journey of a people, it's the journey of all people who are seeking that kind of freedom. That's what we do. We move from feeling trapped and constricted and no options. We can't breathe to this place of openness. And so there I was in lockdown, no Seder to go to. And I saw that there was this program on YouTube called Saturday Night Seder. which was one of the first programs I think written without a writer's room, because no one was together and a shot on Zoom or other things like Zoom. And it is a benefit for the CDC Foundation. So I watched it and I loved it. You know, it reminded me of that symbolism.

So I was looking at that journey, that arc from constriction. feeling trapped to openness, and I thought, that could be a book. Actually, there you go. So that became the whole arc of the book. And so the book actually begins with Saturday Night Seder and it ends with Saturday Night Seder as well.

Jerry:

And what did it mean for you there in that house in Bari, you know, by yourself, you know, tuning in, if you will? What was that like for you?

Sharon Salzberg:

It was fantastic, you know because I had spent some time aspiring to write a play, which I've never done, not yet. And maybe never, but maybe. And going to the theater and having a lot of friends in the theater in various capacities. And then it was all gone. And.

Jerry:

Folks may not know how much Sharon loves Broadway.

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah, I love the theater.

Jerry:

And the show Hamilton.

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah, well, that's in the book. The Hamilton story, of course, is I was working on a previous book and I was very late with it and really discouraged. I just hit a place of a lot of discouragement and which was, I think that was my 10th book. And it got to the point to speak very frankly, because it's you and your friends. Uh, I just thought, just phone it in for God's sake. Nobody cares what you have to say anymore. Just turn something in. And it was just then that a friend came through town and said, do you, he used to work in the entertainment industry. He said, do you want to see something?

Jerry:

Right.

Sharon Salzberg:

I can get a ticket for whatever you want to see. I said, oh, Hamilton, let's go see Hamilton. And I had no idea, you know, it was so hard to get a ticket or whatever. So he got tickets and we went and Lin-Manuel Miranda, who wrote it, was still in it playing Alexander Hamilton. And I just couldn't take my eyes off of him. I kept thinking you wrote this. Like this came out of your brain. Like, and I thought you can never, ever compromise the way I've been thinking. You know, you can, I'm not really seriously thinking, but, you know, kind of half jokingly thinking, I thought you can never just turn something in. You have to put all of who you are into everything that you do. You have to do it so completely. And my friend who brought me still teases me. He said, and then I said, You want to go to dinner and you said, I have to go home and write, you know, and it just turned everything around for me. So I have a big debt of gratitude there as well.

Jerry:

Well, I think implicit in that story, I think what you're doing is you're sharing yet another encounter with real life, if you will, right? How you chose to respond matters.

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah. Yeah.

Jerry:

What you've done and what you always do is take from your own life encounters and show up to model for us. What does it mean to encounter that suffering? With your own wholeness, whatever wholeness you can muster.

Sharon Salzberg:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm.

Jerry:

Right. I don't even want to put big words like courage and bravery on top of it because sometimes we encounter that with fear and or with anger but but you know in our long long

relationship i mean it probably goes back almost 20 years at this point which is phenomenal to think of, to imagine that what you've taught me most of all is to not shy away from leaning in even the most difficult points. You know, and I think that's what you do in this book. And the promise is just like the promise. of the Exodus story. The promise is, right, the openness, the non-constrictedness, the freedom, and the community that lies on the other side of the Red Sea.

I think that that's part of so much of what I took away from this book. You know, I mean, there are beautiful stories in here about our interconnectedness. There's, you know, the notion of the way in which we are experiencing things. You know, I think of Shelley and what she did, for example, during COVID. She took those amazing organizational skills and created that organization Pandemic of Love. Maybe you tell us a little bit about what Pandemic of Love is all about.

Sharon Salzberg:

Yeah, well, Shelley is, Shelley Tagilski is her name. And I have to tell her we spoke about her. She'll, she'll be really honored. She is somebody I met in Florida when I was there teaching, who was connected to, she was an activist and she lived in Parkland and she began, she's a mindfulness teacher as well, and she began teaching, I think the day after the shooting, just offering what skills she could and. We met through mutual friends and then she said, would you like to come and do some teaching? I said, sure. We became close through that work. She brought me into the Parkland community.

So she woke up one morning in the pandemic and she had the thought, you know, you could just create two Google Docs, one that says I need help paying rent or medicine for my kid or something like that. I need help. The other one says, I can offer help.

Jerry:
Right.

Sharon Salzberg:

And you just match people up. And you don't need an organization because the money's not going to an entity, it's going from person to person.

Jerry:
Right.

Sharon Salzberg:

And that was part of her vision that it'd be a relationship based. So she started putting it out and she just started matching people and matching people and matching people, and then it grew and then she got volunteers in other cities who said they wanted to do it. So they started matching people. And then it grew and grew. And at one point, I think the last time I asked, they had exchanged a hundred million dollars.

Jerry:
Wow, that's amazing.

Jerry:
Right, well I love the story because you know what you do is encounter real life with a full body contact and The result is people's lives are better You know, and that's, I mean, to me, that's the most profound takeaway. That's the most profound teaching is that we, in effect, create the constriction. We add to the isolation. But if we can allow ourselves the breath to lean in to even those most difficult moments, we get to create this encounter that comes back to us, that is powerful.

Sharon Salzberg:
Mm-hmm.

Jerry:
You know, and I think people like Shelly, people like you, people who teach us how to encounter real life when it throws itself at us.

Sharon Salzberg:
That's great. There's also, you know, a certain like, um. You know, back to the skills of meditation, you know, there's a certain need just to like take care of your nervous system. Like I know some of those teachers from Parkland, you know, and we had a retreat up here in Barry for survivors of gun violence. And we thought it was going to be just Parkland because those are the people we knew the best. But of course, it was so widespread by then that people came from everywhere. And one of the teachers from Parkland later told us that I think the retreat ended on a Sunday. They flew back to Florida. They were back at work on Monday and had a drill, which is another thing that's happening all the time for these kids and teachers. So she said she had a panic attack in a closet and she was like bent over. And then she remembered some of the tools about breathing and things she'd learned and in the course and the retreat. And she said, you know what? I have skills. I have tools. Tools was like the favorite word of the entire retreat. It's like. We have tools. Oh, look, we have tools.

I always remember this teacher who's saying that I was in a closet bent over having a panic attack. Then I remembered, oh, you know what? I have tools. I can breathe. Let me just breathe.

Jerry:
Right. Well, you know, I think that you've given the world another set of tools as you always do. And, you know, I'm really grateful for that. As I've always been grateful for our relationship, for our friendship. I really appreciate your coming on and talking today. I know it's going to be a real gift to the folks who listen. And, you know, I just hope that everybody gets a chance to read the book. And I look forward to talking to you again.

Sharon Salzberg:

Thank you, dear. Thanks so much.

Jerry:

Thank you for coming on the show.