



Interview with Christopher Germer

Christopher Germer, PhD is a clinical psychologist specializing in mindfulness and compassion-based psychotherapy. He is a founding member of the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy, a clinical instructor in psychology at Harvard Medical School, author of *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*, and co-editor of *Mindfulness and Psychotherapy* and *Wisdom and Compassion in Psychotherapy: Deepening Mindfulness in Clinical Practice*. Dr. Germer lectures and conducts workshops internationally on the art and science of mindful self-compassion.

Elise: Chris, welcome to the program, I'm delighted to have you here, I'm a big fan of your work and your book, so it's a pleasure to have this conversation today.

Christopher Germer: Thank you, it's great to be here.

Elise: Now, for people that might not have come upon your work before that are listening to this program, I wondered if you could give a short background of how you yourself came to be teaching and training in self-compassion. And a bit of your background in general.

Christopher Germer: Sure. I mean I first learned mindfulness back in 1977 when I was 25. Now I'm 65. I practiced mindfulness and I was particularly interested in the interface between mindfulness and psychotherapy. But throughout all this time, as some people might have read – so I'm not going to go through the whole story – but I had a public speaking anxiety problem. So, basically whenever I got up to speak, sometimes I couldn't. And it got so bad once that somebody in the back of a room yelled at me: "Take a breath!"

Elise: God! That's just horrible. That's everyone's worst nightmare.

Christopher Germer: Yea, thank you! So, and what made it worse was I was trying to talk to clinicians about mindfulness, it was about stress management and calmness and being anchored in your own experience, centred, that I could hardly speak. So, this was a big problem and as a clinician, as a mindfulness practitioner I had a whole toolbox of things that would surely help, but nothing did, you know. I tried everything, I tried medication, beta blockers, I tried to make space for anxiety, all these things, but nothing worked. And then, in 2005, my colleagues and I here that in Cambridge, Massachusetts write a book *Mindfulness and Psychotherapy* and then after that I knew I had to do a lot more speaking. And so, anyhow, at one point around that time I went on a retreat and I learnt the loving kindness meditation, mostly self-compassion meditation, and it actually changed everything. And what happened was when I – you know, four months after this retreat – I went to give a talk at Harvard Medical School, and as I got up to speak, the usual terror came up with me, but there was a new voice in the back of my head which was these lovely phrases that I've been saying all along like "oh, may you be safe, may you be peaceful". And the terror turned into excitement and warmth and love. I looked at the audience – and usually when I looked at them, they looked like the enemy, like

people who were going to criticize me, like I'd been criticized for 20 years – but they all looked so beautiful to me at this point. And this was the result of basically practicing loving kindness meditation, self-compassion, loving kindness meditation for a few months. It changed everything, and since that I haven't had much public speaking anxiety. But it did get me thinking what is missing from my practice, my mindfulness practice. And in particular what I realized was that there are some experiences which are just really-really hard to make space for and to hold. And in particular, the way this manifested in public speaking anxiety was that for me public speaking anxiety was not actually an anxiety problem but a shame problem. In other words, the reason I couldn't make room for anxiety was because of underlying shame. In other words, I couldn't tolerate the thought that everybody in the audience would consider me stupid, fraudulent, incompetent, and here I am trying to talk about mindfulness. So, obviously, I'm a fraud, you know. So that was just not a tolerable experience. So basically only when I could start to hold myself as kind of a broken, imperfect person, could I begin to actually address the anxiety. The first thing I learnt was sometimes when we're in grip of intensive disturbing emotions, we need to add something in order to make space for the experience, and in this case it's compassion. And so, what that means is that sometimes in order to hold our experience, sometimes we first have to hold ourselves. So, then as a clinician, when this kind of dawned on me, I started basically exploring more about self-compassion and shame. Self-compassion is an amazing antidote to shame, I believe like none other. And then I met Kristin Neff in 2008, and then in 2010 we created this program together. I can add that the first time we did it, there were 12 people who came to this workshop, and after the first stage three of them dropped out. That was a rough start for us as well, but we were both very persistent.

Elise: And for the listeners that don't know, you only have to look at your calendar. I was like overwhelmed, like oh my gosh! You're travelling the world, running these mindful-based self-compassion training all over the world. So it's a very good message for the listeners to hear because I think it can be easy for people to look at experts and think that's how it was from the beginning.

Christopher Germer: No, that's certainly not how it was for me. And so this self-compassion training has really taken off as you said. I think probably thirty or forty thousand people have taken it, and we have over a thousand teachers all over the world and so... Yea, this is my main interest at this point which is how to kind of warm up awareness on purpose and particularly how to hold ourselves in loving awareness, you know in self-compassion, in a way that we can then live our lives more mindfully.

Elise: Maybe I'd love you to sort of dive into what you're meaning when you say self-compassion so the definition you hold of self-compassion, and then how it's related to mindfulness, like how they fit together.

Christopher Germer: Yea, thank you. Well, so, Kristin Neff's definition of self-compassion has three components. The first component's actually mindfulness which is knowing what you're experiencing while you're experiencing it, and that's really necessary 'cause you can't be compassionate unless you're aware of your suffering. So the first component is mindfulness, the second is a sense of common humanity or feeling connected with others rather than feeling isolated and separate. And the third component is self-kindness rather than self-criticism. So those are her three components. But in a really kind of informal definition, you could say it's treating ourselves with the same kindness and understanding when we suffer as we might treat someone we truly love, someone, a good friend. So, usually what happens is we're much nicer to others than to ourselves. The research shows that 78 percent of us are kinder to others than to ourselves, about 6 percent of us are kinder to ourselves than to others, and another 14 percent just about even. So it's not so easy to be

kind to ourselves. So yes, in terms of definitions mindfulness I look at as awareness of present moment experience with acceptance, and compassion focuses... we could say if mindfulness is kind of a loving awareness of moment-to-moment experience, compassion is a loving awareness of the experiencer. And together they make a really powerful combination.

Elise: Can you say that one more time, just to emphasize that, cause I think that's really interesting, I haven't heard that before.

Christopher Germer: When we talk about acceptance and mindfulness, we're always talking about acceptance of moment-to-moment experience, in other words this thought, this feeling, can I make room for it, can I accept it. But as I described it in my public speaking situation sometimes we have to accept ourselves. Self-compassion is actually is very personal. It's one sentient being to another. You know, you can't have compassion for anger, you can only have compassion for person who has anger. So, self-compassion is the loving awareness of the experiencer, of oneself, whereas mindfulness is a kind of a loving awareness of the experience itself.

Elise: Interesting.

Christopher Germer: So, mindfulness basically asks "what am I experiencing right now?", and compassion asks a different question, it's "what do I need right now?" So, when you're practicing compassion, the quintessential compassion question is "what do I need?" And whereas if you're practicing mindfulness, the main question is "what am I experiencing?"

Elise: And you can see how they operate so nicely together. Like together that's a really powerful combo.

Christopher Germer: Exactly. They both help us to be more fully in our experience. And in particular in relationship to suffering, you know, when we're practicing mindfulness and we suffer, the question is "can I make room or space for that experience?" And in compassion training it is "can I be kind to myself when I suffer?" These are the nuances. But together they're really important. Another thing though is that one of the reasons why mindfulness is really important for self-compassion practice is self-compassion is about kind of warming up our awareness, bringing more kindness and warmth to it. So, mindfulness practitioners will say "well, that's really against mindfulness because you don't want to add anything, you want to really be with things as they are", you know. But when we combine these practices, we actually find that we can be with our experience more fully when we bring in warmth and kindness. So we say that space creates warmth, and warmth creates space. In other words, we know from mindfulness practice that compassion naturally emerges out of it, but it can take us a really long time. But it does. Space or spaciousness like mindfulness does create warmth, but warmth, that is to say loving kindness and compassion also creates space. Because it allows our mind to settle and then we can see things again. Does that make sense?

Elise: Yea, absolutely. Thank you. I wanted to ask you, the mindful self-compassion training that you co-created with Kristin Neff that you run around the world: can you speak to any research that has been done around this program either by you or others, that supports actually the tangible benefits of self-compassion?

Christopher Germer: Sure, so Kristin and I did a randomized control trial, and we found that the program reduced...increased mindfulness, increased compassion for others, increased self-compassion, reduced stress, reduced anxiety, reduced depression, and the main gain for about a year longer when we tested again in a year... There was another randomized control trial done in New

Zealand, the same program but working specifically with people who suffered from diabetes, and it had the same positive effects, but it also decreased the need...decreased glucose levels.

Elise: That's interesting!

Christopher Germer: And it also reduced the distress associated with diabetes. So that's the MSC program itself. It has also been adapted for adolescents, and there was another randomized control trial done on that and with very positive results. Most of the research, Elise, is correlational, in other words it's not on a training that you do, and then you see what the outcome is. More like what are people like who are self-compassionate compared to those who are not so self-compassionate. And there are about fifteen hundred studies now, most of them are in that category. And there's a professor at Duke University here in the states who said that the research is now completely boring because self-compassion as a personality factor or as a trait is associated with just about every measure we have of emotional well-being. You name it, it's associated with self-compassion.

Elise: Would you say that this arena, this area of self-compassion is kind of a newer field in terms of research compared to something like the mindful strain that obviously Jon Kabat-Zinn was doing trials in like the 80's. So this is like a newer emerging?

Christopher Germer: MBSR has been around for like 38 years, and self-compassion training has been around for 7 years. So, there are now about 1400 articles in the academic peer-reviewed literature, on self-compassion about 1400. I think there are four or five thousand on mindfulness. Both of them also the research is also growing exponentially in both those areas. I think mindfulness is also one of those factors that's associated with just everything good.

Elise: Yeah. You know what I wonder about, you were talking about the statistics around how many people are better in being compassionate to others than themselves which was the dominant group. And I just wonder why it is that we like that as humans. If this ingredient of self-compassion is so important and it supports so much wellness. What is it that kind of sets so many of us into the default position of actually being not self-compassionate? Do you have any thoughts about that?

Christopher Germer: Well, I think I have a number of thoughts about that, and this is all speculation but I think the word "default position" makes a lot of sense, and so when we feel under threat externally, we move into fight, flight or freeze, but when the threat is internal, when the threat responses turn against ourselves, fight becomes self-criticism, flight becomes isolation and freeze becomes rumination. We get stuck in our heads. And this is a rapid, you might say reptilian response to danger. The addition of being a human is that you can actually attack yourself. I don't think snakes and lizards attack themselves mentally.

Elise: It's a little bit design problem in the human species, isn't it?

Christopher Germer: Yeah, it's a design flaw. But self-compassion is actually the opposite of that unholy trinity of self-criticism, isolation and rumination. So, Kristin Neff's components instead of self-criticism there's self-kindness, instead of isolation there's the quality, the insight into common humanity, and instead of rumination there's mindfulness. So, self-compassion is a training that we can actually activate to shift out of the threat state that is turned against ourselves. And so, we actually have evidence that practicing self-compassion at a physiological level is moving us from a threat state to a care state, and a lot of this work came from Paul Gilbert in the Derby in UK. And so, the threat state is kind of adrenaline based, but the care state is more based on neuropeptides such as oxytocin and the endorphins, feel-good hormones and bonding hormones. And what we're doing as we practice

self-compassion is actually shifting our physiology. But care giving is not the quickest response to threat, you know. It's more of a mammalian thing. It's more in the higher cortical functioning. So we need to practice it to make it more instinctive, compassion training.

Elise: Yea, I guess that point's really important for the listeners. It is that thing that I've learnt over the last number of decades of if we want to flourish as humans we need to actually take responsibility and train ourselves because the way that we're designed is so much to kind of automatically protect us from danger, which is great from a survival prospective but it's not really cutting it in this day and age where we need to evolve.

Christopher Germer: We do have the default mode network in the brain which basically means that when we're not focused on something, you know, structures down the midline in the brain are going to become active, and what happens when those are highly active is basically we create a sense of self, you know, like Elise or Chris, and then we start looking for problems that happened to us in the past or could happen in the future. So basically the human mind left to its own devices is not a happy place to go unless you bring some order to it, like a task, you know. So, anyhow, Anne Lamott, writer in the US says that the mind is like a bad neighbourhood, you don't want to go into alone.

Elise: It's a great line.

Christopher Germer: That's what self-compassion and mindfulness is, it's basically an accompaniment into the inner recesses of the mind, so we can keep ourselves out of trouble.

Elise: I like that, it's great! So, being human – from the Buddhist texts, the first noble truth was that there is suffering, and I know a lot of people that, close the book straight away, like that's pretty depressing, isn't it? And I think that's kind of misinterpreted quite a bit. But as humans, we inevitably will experience suffering and we can often find ourselves in these situations like "I don't want it to be like this", like "I don't want it to be like this and this suffering". How can we bring self-compassion in a practical way into those moments? I wonder if you could share a tangible sort of takeaway for the listeners of a practice or...

Christopher Germer: Yea, so, what you're alluding to and what Buddha was alluding to is, you know, there are difficulties in life, but the whole Buddhist agenda is how to not make it worse. And what you're describing is that when we fight with our moment-to-moment experience, we make it worse. So, what we resist, persists, you know. So, in mindfulness we say what we can feel, we can heal. So, in other words kind of have the capacity to hold difficult experience. And that significantly reduces the amount of suffering that we have in life. So, we can say that mindfulness actually allows us to be with difficulty without resistance. In other words, it gives us the inner strength and the capacity to just be with things rather than freaking out over it. Self-compassion does the same thing. Both mindfulness and self-compassion are actually resources to be with difficult experience without compounding our difficulties. So, just examples by the way of compounding our difficulties are if you are anxious and you don't let yourself be anxious, then you can get a panic disorder, if you're grieving and you think you shouldn't be grieving any more, then you can get depressed. Like that, you know. If you're trying to sleep in the middle of the night and then you wake up and then you're angry that you're not sleeping, you're definitely going to stay awake. So, what we resist, persists. But compassion and mindfulness allow us not to do that. So, I can give an example. For example, taking insomnia as an example: when we're lying in bed at night, say, three in the morning and can't sleep, the system will naturally go into threat mode, and we can stop that fire by being annoyed and so forth. But we can also shift to a care-giving mode which is a quality of kind of tenderness or sympathy for

not sleeping. And there are a number of ways that that can be done. One of the simple ways – there’s a guy at the University of California Berkeley who says that two universal expressions of compassion are soothing touch and gentle vocalizations. So, soothing touch means like to put a hand over the heart or something like that and just feel the warmth with the hand and the touch of the hand. And gentle vocalizations – we all know – they are throughout the whole world. For example, the sound “aw” is understood as a sound of compassion. But sometimes the gentle vocalization, like we usually say “aw” when something’s cute but sometimes it’s just big and we say “oh” or “ah”. But the quality of those voices, of those sounds are softening, softening rather than hardening, caring rather than feeling threatened. So, literally, if you’re awake in the middle of the night and you start to get angry and ruminate, you can put your hand over your heart and you can just feel the touch of your hand and do this as a simple expression of kindness. And then you can even experiment with some gentle vocalizations like “aw”, really like that. But also keeping in mind the definition of self-compassion, think “you know, what would I say to a friend who is in a same situation as I if I knew right now, if I were lying beside them, and they were trying to sleep and couldn’t, what might I whisper into that person’s ear?” For example, what might you, Elise, whisper into somebody’s ear that is struggling to sleep but can’t?

Elise: Don’t use your iPhone, now I’m just joking. You’d just say “aw, don’t struggle if you can’t sleep, it’s hard isn’t it, it’s just so frustrating when you can’t sleep, but maybe just rest or, just allow your body to rest now, without trying to sleep”.

Christopher Germer: And you might also give the person a hug, you might also say I love you, in other words, you would be caring. And so, can we say the same things to ourselves? Can we say them in a tone of kindness? Can we put the hand over our heart or some part of the body and gently stroke the body? What does it take to activate caregiving and to activate threat at that moment? So, this all probably makes sense. However, in that moment – this is the most critical part of all of self-compassion training – and that is that it only works when we practice not to feel better but because we feel bad. This is a very subtle shift in intention. When we are kind to ourselves, it all rests on intention where people can use any mindfulness practice and any self-compassion practice in the service of resistance and make our lives more miserable. What does it really mean to be with our experience? What does it mean to really be with ourselves? What does it mean to drop the fight and just be kind? This is actually what people learn in self-compassion training. How to give ourselves kindness not to feel better but because we feel bad? So the metaphor is like, say, if you have a child who has the flu, it might be a five-day flu, and your child has the flu the first day, you’re going to be nice to the child because the child is suffering, you’re going to say “aw, I’m so sorry you feel that way honey, how can I help you?” You’re not nice to the kid in order to make the flu go away in one day; it’s not going to go away in one day. So, your heart is naturally melting because the kid is suffering. So, here’s the deal. All of us basically have a life-long flu. We suffer: that’s part of life. How do we respond to ourselves when we suffer? Do we kind of start cracking the whip and blaming ourselves and saying “you should do it like this and not like that”? Basically, do we turn every moment of suffering into an opportunity to apply some strategy to fix things? Or can we let the heart melt in sympathy for our suffering? That’s the critical element. And what we found in the research is that when we do that, we really get better. Mental health improves, physical health improves, motivation to change our life for the better improves. We become more resilient in the face of difficulties in our lives. People who are in self-compassion may actually recover more quickly from illness, trauma, divorce. This is the paradox, is the capacity for our heart to melt in the face of our own suffering actually makes us stronger and more effective in life. And it resolves most of these unnecessary problems that we pile on ourselves by fighting the way things are moment to moment.

Elise: I wanted to ask you about – in your book and in the compassion training you talk about this concept of backdraft which I wonder if you could just touch upon it, because I think it's important that people might know about this when they're going into the training.

Christopher Germer: Yeah, so, backdraft occurs in mindfulness training, it definitely occurs more in compassion training, and it's a firefighter term that refers to... when firefighters go into a burning building, if there's a room with a closed door, and there's a fire in it, inevitably the fire will use up all the oxygen, and when you open the door, the oxygen goes in, then the fire intensifies. So, the metaphor is that all of our hearts are also hot with suffering, sort of like a building burning, in other words to get by in life and function we have to push things down, you know. And we've all pushed stuff down. And particularly we push stuff down when we have been wounded or hurt in relationships. Self-compassion drops us into the relational matrix of our lives. What that means is that when we say something to ourselves like may I accept myself just as I am, what's the first thing we think about when we start to practice like that? First thing we think about this, actually this and this part of me is not very acceptable. Or we start thinking about when people treated us in a way that was not loving and not accepting. That's backdraft. So, basically, the only way we know anything is by contrast. So, when we give ourselves loving kindness and compassion, we're quite likely to experience all pain. Just like I described. But that's not a problem, actually that's part and parcel of the healing process. So we like to say sometimes it feels like caboom, but it's really cabloom.

Elise: That's great!

Christopher Germer: Because these all pains are coming out now because we feel safe and loved enough to meet them in a new way. And indeed, we can. So, when we give ourselves kindness and when we have old memories - often it's possible to have traumatic memories or any kind of memories - when that occurs, and we hold ourselves in kindness, it actually transforms them. It actually heals. And what's interesting about this is that compassion and mindfulness training are not therapies per se. What they are is resource-building programs. We're learning skills to meet difficulty. However, when we practice like this, we will see things we didn't see before and then we can meet them with mindfulness and compassion. So, we say about self-compassion that it's not therapy but it's therapeutic because building resources opens us to old pains but it also gives us the capacity to heal old pains. So how people practice, if you get too much backdraft, which you know people can regulate, the first thing to think is just let it be in the background. But if you have too much backdraft, you can just do less of what you're doing or do behavioural self-compassion like drink a cup of tea or listen to music or something. Compassion doesn't have to be all mental training. Compassion in daily life, you know, gardening, very safe, very ordinary. Sometimes the best thing to do for ourselves when we're struggling is not to do some sort of mental training but, you know, garden.

Elise: Yeah, getting to the body. Can you share with the listeners – so there's like obviously different meditations, there's different mindful meditations, loving kindness. Can you just give us a sense of the tone or the words that you would use even for someone to almost use that as a little mantra to themselves as they move through the day. What would they be saying to themselves?

Christopher Germer: Well, it's definitely about the tone. But the content differs depending on what people need. So, just let me say something about content. So, there's a yin and yang to self-compassion. Yin is more kind of feminine and being with, traditionally, and that means comforting ourselves, soothing ourselves and validating. So, the inner self-compassion is comforting, soothing and validating. Sometimes we need to be comforted, sometimes we need to be soothed, sometimes we need validation. But there's also a yang to self-compassion. And that's more about action in the

world. Sometimes the most compassionate thing we can do is to protect ourselves. Which means NO. Even to fight, sometimes we need to fight in sheer self-compassion. So, there's protecting, there is also providing, which is asking the question what do I need? And then there is motivating. You know, sometimes the most self-compassionate thing we can do is to motivate ourselves to do difficult but really important things in our lives. And so, as you go through the day, you can be compassionate any of these ways.

Elise: That makes sense!

Christopher Germer: Comforting, soothing, validating, protecting, providing, motivating. But what's common to all of these is an attitude of caring, is caring and kindness. So, if I were to say NO to somebody, and now you cannot do that, it might be a tough tone but it's coming out of kindness. Generally speaking, the tone of self-compassion is as you would speak with a dear friend. Sometimes you might say to a friend "you know, you can do this!", while sometimes you might say "oh, honey, I'm so sorry". You know, it varies, but the common thread is care and kindness.

Elise: And thank you for highlighting that because it just emphasizes that self-compassion doesn't mean that you're too soft and you're door mat, or something like that. Like there are times that the most self-compassionate thing you can do is actually hold your boundary and say "no, that's not okay".

Christopher Germer: For example, most of the women who actually come... most of people who come to compassion trainings are women because compassion has historically been associated with nurturing, and that tends to be associated with women. So, it's kind of an easy fit, you know. However, most of those women that come through the door, they also are thrilled when we talk about, you know, fierce compassion. You know that actually to be compassionate sometimes means to stand up to injustice. So, whether you're a man or a woman, you need yin and yang side, you know. For example, any number of people who are veterans from the military, from war, when they come home, they need to be able to comfort and sooth themselves. They need more of yin, you know. And what we've even seen in the research – this is amazing bit of research that was done in 2015 at a veterans' administration in Texas – that whether a person develops a post-traumatic stress disorder is negatively correlated with self-compassion. In other words, the more self-compassion you have, the less likely you'll develop a PTSD.

Elise: That's fascinating!

Christopher Germer: But more to the point that the severity of combat experience did not predict post-traumatic stress disorder as much as self-compassion predicting whether or not you got post-traumatic stress disorder.

Elise: Wow! That's really, really incredible.

Christopher Germer: So, this inner resilience factor, it is actually - and it is truly an inner strength an inner resilience - actually has a huge impact on the basically all aspects of trauma. What this means is that this quality of being kind to oneself is definitely not a weakness, it's a strength.

Elise: And coming back to the story you told in the beginning of this conversation, it really highlights that self-compassion seems to be a sort of balm that alchemizes these negative emotions, like you bring it to these emotions and somehow it transforms them.

Christopher Germer: It does, yeah. Kristin eff calls this the secret sauce.

Elise: Wonderful! As we close this conversation, which has been so fascinating and valuable, I'd like to ask you - I like to ask the people I speak to - about any books, particularly non-fiction books, besides your own books, obviously, that have really had an impact on how you think or on your own life, anything that comes to mind.

Christopher Germer: Yes, well, I can tell you that the book that kind of set me on this path, got me thinking about all this was Radical Acceptance by Tara Brach, another one was When Things Fall Apart by Pema Chodron, and as I got more involved in it, I got interested in more the psychology of this thing, and so Dacher Keltner brought a book called Born to Be Good which basically turns Darwin's notion of survival of the fittest on its head, basically said: "Actually, Darwin did not say, that the toughest organism survived, he actually said the most cooperative survived." This is a fact. We don't know this. And actually, cooperation, born to be good is what makes us thrive individually and as a society. So, that made an impression on me. And also, Paul Gilbert's work in clinical psychology, he wrote a book called The Compassionate Mind where he really focuses in on this physiological aspect and he also really was the first to create a whole suite of practices that can bring self-compassion into our lives. So, those guys...

Elise: Yea, thank you, great! Definitely many books to add to the list, the ever-growing list of learning. And another question I wanted to ask you, in your own personal practice of compassion or mindfulness - whatever your practice is - what's been a teaching that you've received that really kind of helped shift your own understanding or practice?

Christopher Germer: I have a friend, his name is Bill Morgan who wrote dissertation on stages of progress in meditation practice, is also a hard-core practitioner, he's a clinician, as well as he and his wife recently completed four years of silent meditation. Anyhow, in his dissertation he wrote about these stages of progress, and we have adapted these stages of progress for self-compassion training and basically the three stages are striving, disillusionment and radical acceptance. And the disillusionment part which he taught me about really made an impact on me which is that the stages are about refinement of intention - not unlike what I said before we practice not to feel better but because we feel bad - disillusionment occurs when we hijack a practice in order to manipulate our moments of experienced anxiety and the service of resistance. So, what I really discovered in a very deep way through forty years of practice is the subtlety but also the radical transformative capacity of really, really, really just being with our experience in a spacious and loving way. Because every fibre in our body wants to move forward to somewhere else and doing something else. So, this notion of like being versus doing is I think at the very heart of practice, and the joy comes when we give ourselves permission to be. And the disillusionment occurs when we wish to fix which springs eternally in our human heart emerges. And so, there's basically this dance between the arising of the wish for things to be otherwise and the willingness to love ourselves and open to the experience in the present. So, when people practice, mostly they're going to practice if it's enjoyable. But the main obstacle is this eternal wish for things to be different. So I think what we need to do is never to forget that that will definitely lead to disillusionment but the disillusionment will definitely lead to radical acceptance if we stick with it.

Elise: Oh, that's really beautiful, thank you for sharing that. Thank you very much. And I think that for the listeners that are particularly at the beginning of the path - for all of us - that message is a very powerful one. So, thank you. As we conclude, I just wanted to open up a space and if there was anything else that you felt needed to be said or that we haven't covered in any ways or form, just wanted to offer you the space.

Christopher Germer: Oh, I think we covered a lot. I just would like to thank you for this interview, Elise, and also for the project. Nowadays, we have the benefit of the internet for community but I would like to not only say thank you for this amazing project but also how you have made in this project individual practice a community effort, and that this community effort you are sharing with even a broader community. So I think once Jon Kabat Zinn asked Thich Nhat Hanh: “Mindfulness is mainstream now, what are we missing?” And Thich Nhat Hanh responded: “Sangha” or “community”. So, I think you’re responding to that need, and I feel very good about that.

Elise: Thank you so very much and thank you for your work, it’s been such a wonderful conversation. I know the listeners are going to get so much out of it and be diving to finding more of your books which we will share some links to. So thank you so much, Chris.

Christopher Germer: I thank you, Elise, it’s really delightful time. Thank you very much.