

Can Contemplative Education Save Our World? *A Special Interview with Dr. Joel and Michelle Levey*

From a forthcoming book titled,
*Meditation Can Change Our World:
With Voices of Remarkable Spiritual Beings*
By Deb and Ed Shapiro

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DEB: I want to start by asking you what meditation means to you.

JOEL: Meditation is a very general term; it refers to traditions that developed in all the world's wisdom traditions that encompass millions of forms of practice. And as I understand the diversity of contemplative practices, the practices of meditation are about recognizing and liberating ourselves from our delusions, confusions, and unrealistic views of reality that lead us to act in ways where we're just missing the point of what's going on and who we truly are. So meditation helps us recognize and free ourselves from the forces of habit and delusion and compulsion and addiction. And to begin to discover and realize the true freedom of the mind, and to come to awaken to and realize our true nature and our highest potential, and to touch and discover and live more fully into our most essential nature. As we come to see the true nature of ourselves and reality more deeply, then the practice allows us to live in harmony and be congruent with the way things are, and as we come into that kind of harmony then the way that we live will naturally be informed by participating in a wisdom and touching a dimension of the mind that is resonant within all beings. So there's deep compassion, there's kindness, non-violence, peace of mind, a sense of reverence and devotion for the mystery and majesty of ourselves and the world in which we live, a way of carrying an energy of blessings and goodness.

ED: How does non-violence, which is possibly the most important thing that we haven't touched on quite enough, because you used non-violence which is ahimsa, non-injury, how does meditation awaken that?

MICHELLE: The purpose of meditation is to revert the process of habituation with the unwholesome properties of the mind, by becoming habituated with the wholesome.

JOEL: If my awareness is so occluded that I don't realize that my right hand is connected to my left hand then I could chop that off or I could hurt it in some way because it's other than me. But once we awaken to a deeper sense of our connectedness to everyone and everything else, then we awaken to the realization that we are a part of a single body, and to hurt or harm ourselves is to hurt all beings.

We took a group of soldiers on a month-long silent Vipassana retreat called the encampment. We're three weeks into this month-long mindfulness style retreat, and we gave a talk one night about interdependence and interconnectedness. We explained how some of the experiences they were having through meditation where the feeling of being more connected to each other and the world, and participating in a larger field of being as the noise in their minds quieted down and they were able to touch more essential dimensions of their selves. At the end of that talk on interconnectedness and interdependence one of the guys raised his hand and said, Joel let me get this straight. He said if what you're saying is really true, then how can we ever kill anybody? And we spent the next 2-3 hours just exploring that dialogue because there's no easy answers to that.

MICHELLE: From my own experience of meditation, just the heightened sensitivity that comes from being a part of my environment, the deeper sense of empathy and connection with people becomes so much stronger, that I think it naturally leads to at least the aspiration to not harm, and ultimately an inability.

JOEL: They've done research on mirror neurons opens up such a deep understanding of the physiological and psycho physiological roots of compassion. There's some phenomenal research on that. How they discovered it was they had electro sensors implanted in a chimpanzee's brain. They were studying it and at one point they noticed that there were neurons firing that were associated with the lifting of an arm, but the arm of the monkey wasn't moving and what was happening was the researcher was eating an ice cream cone to lick it, the monkey was observing him and the same neuro circuits were being triggered in watching the human perform the action as if the monkey was doing the action himself. It basically opened a whole field of inquiry as it shows how the actions of other people are deeply imprinted in our own physiology, to the degree that we're able to truly be present with other people.

JOEL: One of the measures of empathy that I find interesting is to the degree that people are empathetic, like if they're physically present with each other in the same space, that the heartbeat of another person will be reflected in and registered as a subtle wave form in the EEG or the brainwaves of the person who is being empathetic.

JOEL: Bodhicitta is a term from Mahayana Buddhist tradition. One translation is awakening mind. It's the mind awakening to the aspiration or the wish or the dedication in one's life to fully awaken to one's true nature and highest potential in order to activate and inspire that awakening within all beings. So someone within whom bodhicitta is awakened and that being called a bodhisattva, the nature of meditation at that level of the game, meditation only makes sense when you're practicing it with and for all beings. It's not just some practice that you're doing to find peace or feel better about yourself or to awaken or whatever. It's a practice dedicated to awakening in order to, through that awakening and through meditation, generate a field of affect within yourself and throughout all creation to bring blessings and benefits to all beings.

MICHELLE: This really opens up an interesting dimension that I hope you touch on in your book, because in the west especially meditation—there's a distinction between meditation actually and spiritual practice, whereas I think in many of the countries that the practices that we're doing came from, there isn't. But we've got now meditation to ease your headache, and meditation for stress management, meditation for self-help, and no doubt meditation will help on that level, but it's not necessarily a spiritual practice unless you're dedicating that energy, that healing energy beyond your own well being, beyond yourself, beyond your ego's feeling better about itself. So often we're invited in to teach meditation for stress management or something like that and we try to make that distinction clear that it's really for a larger purpose even though it does have great health benefits. I think it's misunderstood and misused in the west and given that your book is talking about can meditation save the world I think yes IF it's in this context of going beyond one's own benefit, if meditation is seen as a doorway to connect us beyond even this lifetime, our own benefit, in this lifetime and certainly beyond our own limited sense of well being to a shared well being, the well being of the planet and future generations. It's always held in a larger context.

JOEL: Some of the meditation practices will help to simply recognize and investigate and better understand the nature of fear, or

compulsiveness or whatever the mental affliction may be, so the mindfulness practices in particular can really help us begin to wake up to understanding our fear and examining it and seeing how it changes and flows and modulates and what triggers it and what's happening in the body and where it goes and how it comes back. Through gaining a deeper insight into the flowing field of the experiences of fear and all the subtle modulations and changes, we can then begin to open our hurt to more compassion for ourselves, more loving kindness,* we can begin to infuse in a sense the wound or the infliction, to hold that with not only deeper understanding but deeper compassion and loving kindness and equanimity and appreciation with ourselves so we can create a more healing environment with ourselves that's less reactive so those energies can more quickly resolve.

So when I was working—I used to run the biofeedback and stress management program for a large HMO (medical center)—I teach people all kinds of meditation practices for dealing with their stress and their fear and their anxiety and all their stuff. In a lot of ways those kinds of practices can help people not get crazy about being crazy, and not be afraid of being afraid, or not get angry about being angry, but to see it clearly, to hold it in the heart of compassion.

JOEL: To cut through the reactivity and the cycling through the escalation of being anxious about being anxious, or being afraid of being afraid of being afraid. At the next level you even begin to actually transform the energy of fear anxiety or hatred, and that's where you kick into the transformational practices of tonglen and that's where as you recognize and feel the presence of fear or anger or hatred or disease within yourself, in the practice of tonglen you can open your heart through compassion to take the energy of that into your heart and let it break your heart open to a deeper and more universal dimension of yourself and allow compassion and mercy and goodness and ease and courage to flow back to that part of yourself that is suffering from whatever you're suffering from.

MICHELLE: Starting with ourselves, and then realizing that just as I'm suffering and wish to be happy, that same suffering, that fear, whatever that difficult emotion is, that other living sentient beings, other living humans, animals, they feel it too, they share that, and when you sit with your own suffering and really go deep in accepting when you're just able to get to know it and disidentify so much from MY part of the suffering and just suffering. That begins to then open your heart very organically to suffering as a universal principle and not the ME become less important than the heart that reaches out in a healing response to that suffering which then goes beyond oneself

naturally to the person next to you, and across the planet from you who has that same ache in their heart or in their bodies that you know.

In our usual unmeditative culture that many of us grew up in, the response to suffering is denial, take a pill, or distract yourself somehow, go shopping, drink, watch TV, all the many ways we have of numbing ourselves. Meditation requires great courage because what we're being asked to do is instead of distracting and numbing and avoiding is to stop and sit in the fire of it. And observe that actually it's changing moment to moment. There's healing energy within it. I feel with our psychological stress and our mental afflictions, the seed of the healing is to be found in the mind and heart, that the suffering is also to be found, comes from, the source. Stopping running away from it and facing the fear and the pain.

JOEL: I've sat probably over the course of my life, 2-2.5 years of silent meditation retreat, and I've really got to know—a long time—a lot of time just seeing the tape loops of my own neurosis play out, the cartoons, the twisted and habitual patterns of my own mind, had enough courage that I could endure those waves of continual insult and awakened deeper insight into "Oh these are the energies of frustration or disappointment or craving or fear, anxiety or doubt. And through getting to know those energies as they live deep within my own bones, through knowing and understanding those, not being afraid of those within myself, finding compassion for those energies and experiences and realities within myself, that's really the foundation of being able to then expand the field of that compassion to as Einstein said embrace all living beings and all of nature in all its beauty.

For me the real threshold that I work with within myself and when I'm working with other people, is that point where whatever the wound may be that they're dealing with, it could be a loss or a disappointment or a fear or whatever, to go so deeply into sitting in the fire of that, to experience it with such intimacy and depth and whole hearted courage to embrace that, to then take the step from that intimacy with oneself to then generating compassion for all other beings who may suffer in the same kind of way, or feel vulnerable or afraid or ache in the same kind of way.

So to use my personal wound, to universalize that to open my heart to compassion for all beings who may suffer in the same way. To take all of that into my heart and to let compassion flow to all of those parts of my body, to bring healing and benefit and blessing.

MICHELLE: You don't have to call it meditation. That's number one step. It's not important what you call it. That's what the gift of mindfulness has actually been I think, having such a neutral term that people can relax. We have minds, we have hearts, we have feelings, we have pain, we have love. And here are some tools that are useful to become free from suffering. We let them bring the word meditation usually, rather than starting from there.

JOEL: How can we help people not create so much suffering in their lives, especially if we love and care about them. At one level if they're hungry feed them. If they need shelter give them shelter. If they are creating chaos help them to simplify. Helping people stop creating so much turbulence on the outside so there's less turbulence on the inside, and when there's less turbulence on the inside you can just teach them to focus or listen or be more fully present and then you can help them deepen that into a kind of mindful quality of presence and investigation into the nature of their circumstance, and then you can begin to awaken deeper compassion, so it's sort of like meeting people where they're at and helping them take a step in the right direction.

DEB So talking about business, let's go into that a little bit more, in terms of how you've been able to use meditation with the hundreds of businesses and organizations that you have worked with around the globe.

MICHELLE: For example, a program we're doing next week is around how to deal with and work with change, be more resilient, we're in a business environment. Big changes are coming down in that organization – and in our world. Jobs are changing, leadership's changing, people are losing jobs, there is increasing uncertainty. The whole world is changing as well as the marketplace. So how do we cope with this in a healthy sane and more productive way? How do we develop our capacity, our wisdom, awareness, intuition, creativity, and compassion to effectively respond to the changes, challenges, and emerging opportunities of our times? We'll look at change together, and human nature and ourselves and how do you line up with change in a way that's most empowering and compassionate and actually can help you thrive rather than the become more and more stressed and anxious, or get sick in the face of stress and change.

Often, our work is focused on helping people to understand and to develop the capacity of their minds to be more high performing at work – and then that generalizes to every other arena of their lives. So

what's involved with that? What are the qualities of mind-fitness and extra-ordinary performance? How can we create healthy workplace cultures where people have the resiliency skills necessary to actually thrive in the midst of change, and where people can come to work and look forward to being with their friends on Monday as much as they look forward to leaving work on a Friday? How do you create an environment at work that is life-affirming rather than life-depleting?

DEB So you're actively integrating contemplative education into business and using meditation or mindfulness techniques to accomplish this?

JOEL: Yes! Though the scope of our work varies from organization to organization. Sometimes our charter is more explicitly focused on outer or organizational focus. It's about the main charters around teamwork or developing a healthy organization, or helping two clashing cultures go through a merger and get aligned and attuned in a more coherent synergistic way. And with growing frequency as the pace of radical change ramps up in our work, our charter is explicitly expanded to also include a focus on themes related to "change resilience," "personal mastery," "mind fitness" or extra-ordinary performance or "mastering stress." We are very fortunate to be able to touch people's hearts and minds in a very deep and transformational way as an integral approach to developing greater effectiveness of teams and whole organizations.

The reason people hire us to come in – rather than other consultants – is that they know that regardless of what the title is for the project we are working on, that we're will approach the work in a very strong, integral manner where the inner work and the outer work are seamlessly integrated, and the inner quality of the beingness of people will be affirmed in the highest possible way that is appropriate within the culture of their organization. In this way we have been very successful working with hundreds of very diverse organizations and with many very conservative, discerning, skeptical, scientific, engineering types of people. What we have found is that this inner work – call it meditation, contemplative education, personal mastery, or whatever – is universally very warmly embrace by most people once it is properly contextualized to have meaning and value for people and supported by compelling scientific research and perspectives.

ED: You've talked about "collective wisdom and intelligence." Could you say a bit more about that?

Joel: Yes. This is worth coming back to—just this notion of can meditation save the world? I think you should have a whole chapter in your book explicitly devoted to the emerging field of “collective wisdom and intelligence.” This work involves helping groups of people learn to understand the value and methods for meditating together in order to source the guidance and the inspiration necessary for breakthroughs in creativity, research, development, and innovation.

This work of collective wisdom is especially important with regards to bringing together groups of researchers, community members, stakeholders of challenges or problems in the world, or their communities, or businesses and to help them learn the inner collective skills necessary to find solutions to the mind-bogglingly complex challenges and problems that plague our humanity. To us these times of radical, rapid, and accelerating change and danger are calling us all to learn how to pray and meditate together and to source a larger field of guidance than any one individual is able to do.

From our experience doing this work with research teams in dozens of organizations, we have absolute certainty that these methods of collective wisdom and intelligence hold great promise for helping humanity. If we are able to rise to this challenge as communities, concerned citizens, and people with a common stake in finding solutions to global problems, I think this may be one of the greatest gifts that come to our world from these incredibly difficult and exciting times!

DEB That brings me to my next question, which is what changes have you seen with businesses or corporations when you’ve been working with them with mindfulness work?

MICHELLE: Training in mindfulness definitely enhances people’s capacity to live with uncertainty, to go through changes, to go through reorganizations, to stay healthier, and to cope more resiliently with the stress. With one of our clients, Intuit software, we’ve been working with people at call centers that have really peak stresses around tax time, people usually getting sick. We’ve seen absentee levels go way down around stress related illnesses, and just people’s general capacity, kind of the core competency of resilience through change has been resilient. People have learned skills for “mindful dialogue” and that has improved relationships building between coworkers, and clearer more effective communications with their clients. People have learned skills to dealing more effectively with difficult conversations, difficult situations, and reducing conflict because they are learning to listen more deeply to themselves and to balance and harmonize their own inner energies, emotions, and states of mind. Many of our clients

report that that they have learned to be more mindful of their motivations, intentions, priorities, and choices and to live more on purpose staying true to the principles and ideals that they hold most dear. All this has translated into improving efficiency, reducing costs, and increasing profits, and an increased capacity to succeed even in challenging times – but also into an over all improved quality of life and positive impact on others in their sphere of influence. This is just one specific work example that comes to mind, but these kinds of enduring positive results are very common and well documented in the work that we do.

I was also thinking of leaders in general, who through learning and applying many of the principles and practices of mindfulness and contemplative education have improved their ability to listen better – to themselves, their colleagues and coworkers – and to their families. When you are able to bring these kind of contemplative perspectives and skills into a workplace, relationships improve, people take more responsibility for their own health and well-being, and overall health and the overall performance of the organization improves as a reflection of more people taking better care of themselves – and each other. We're talking about simple practices for focusing attention, getting clear on intentions, being more mindful of the "whispers" of emerging issues rather than waiting for the "screams" of escalating problems.

JOEL: There's an interesting story of when we first introduced the notion of mindfulness, the head of manufacturing in the largest division of Hewlett-Packard where we were primary consultants for many years. at one point, we were doing a values exercise with the executive leadership team at special emergency retreat. A week before this meeting the general manager for the division had left to go to a competitor, and executive leaders of each of the divisions were left to run the division by themselves. When this crisis hit, we were called in to help the team unify and align themselves in order to run the division collectively until a new General Manager could be found. In facilitating this meeting we faced quite a challenge in helping them really get aligned collectively and cooperative as a leadership team because up to that point in time they had operated in a somewhat contentious, independent, and polarized manner.

As part of the team alignment process we were engaged in an exercise to clarify the core values that were the priority for the members of the executive leadership team – both individually and collectively. Early in the process, senior vice president of manufacturing picked up the mindfulness card and looked at it and said, "Mindfulness, who needs that!?" as he dismissively threw the

mindfulness card back in the pile of cards on the table. He clearly didn't really understand the value of "mindfulness" and its great relevance to his life and work. In response, I said, "Ok Chas, you're senior leader for all of the manufacturing in this division. Do you care about the quality of printers that come off of your manufacturing line? Do you care about how many defects that you have or how many mistakes people make during the manufacturing process? Do you care about efficiency and how time and resources are being used in your manufacturing process? Do you care about the quality of attention that people bring to doing the work that they do? Essentially I was illuminate, "This is what mindfulness is all about. It's about the discipline of paying careful attention to whatever you are doing. It's being able to manage effectively and you can only manage what you monitor and pay attention to." Chaz was a very bright, show me the numbers kind of guy, and this line of reasoning got his attention. He reached out to the values cards in the pile on the table and picked the mindfulness card up again and put it in his hand and said, "OK, I get it. Mindfulness is about the discipline of developing my attention and it is really a key to my personal success – and to the success of our whole division. Mindfulness is really of value to us, but until now, it has been an invisible quality in our work. Thanks for helping me learn how to pay attention to paying attention!"

Two days later the division leaders went back to the site and the head of quality and Chaz the head of manufacturing addressed the thousands of people in the division who were eagerly waiting for news regarding what the new plan was for the division heads to cooperatively run the division while a new GM was being recruited. As they outlined their new priorities and values to guide their decisions and the work in the division, Chas spoke to the importance of "Mindfulness" as one of the five key values to guide their work through this time of transition.

As the work progressed in the months to come, this mindfulness initiative rippled out as we worked closely with people in each of the functional areas from the executive leaders down through the organization to the secretaries and the people on the manufacturing lines to help them all to develop skills to bring the value of mindfulness alive through actual practice in the work place. Initially this training was about getting good business results but as people practiced and became more mindful, they quickly began to realize that their health began to improve and the quality of their relationship with their significant others and their kids and their co-workers improved, and that they were better able to respond to the stresses and changes in their lives with greater resilience and confidence and effectiveness. What happened next was that they start inviting us to offer programs

to spouses and kids and the community or paying for our time to go out and work with the schools or the medical center in the community, because they're getting so much personal benefit from the work we're doing, that they want to share that with their families and their colleagues.

MICHELLE: And I just want to comment. We work from the top of the organization down to the secretaries—secretaries are really important. When the admins get the mindfulness and the important of the inner work, they are in a position to affect how the entire organization works.

MICHELLE: We were recently working with a large aerospace company in Seattle. Our audience was all engineers, hundreds of them, the type of folks that you wouldn't think would go out seeking instruction in meditation. And they came in really excited to learn about learning mind fitness and understanding the mind-brain connection and how it works. It started that way and when it really kicked in it was so touching, when we got them to be in touch with themselves, to really get quiet and listen to their heartbeats, to find their breath, and to experience through the practices of meditation just being more fully present with themselves. We taught them how to awaken more fully to the many different levels and dimensions of mindfulness and how to carry that awareness into every domain of their daily life-work. Just to see the softening, the excitement, the depth of connection or love that starts to naturally flow among colleagues in a corporate team of engineers.

From these kinds of examples I hope you can see how simple yet profound practices that may have been taught in traditional meditation courses, can offer tremendous value when they are properly introduced and contextualized in a mainstream business setting. The first step is to provide a meaningful context that affirms the value of this "inner work." To accomplish that we have found that case studies, data from other programs, and reference to good scientific studies of contemplative science are very helpful. We've seen some people introduce meditation into audiences that haven't much understanding of the methods by saying, "Ok now we're going to learn to meditate and this may seem a little woo woo now." And to us that approach is doomed to fail. As we mentor others in our work in contemplative education we encourage them to introduce these methods as totally sensible and natural ways of learning to understanding how our minds work, learning to think better, deeper, and clearer, and as ways to open our hearts to be more compassionately in touch with the beautiful and difficult realities of our lives. To accomplish this we rely

on language that people will be comfortable and at home with, and encourage them to actively “experiments” with these different principles and practices in the many situations of their daily life, work, and relationships. If people apply themselves to this experimentation, they quickly discover the value in this inner work, and as they do, their confidence, energy, focus, mindfulness, and insight naturally begins to grow.

JOEL: You can see from some of the data and case studies from our organizational work that is posted on our website (<http://Wisdomatwork.com/>) . Quite a few of these studies were done by objective, third party, academic researchers, who were amazed at the degree of positive and enduring change that our work– which relies heavily on methods of meditation and mind training – has been able to make. Generally speaking 95 to 98 percent of the ratings indicate that people have found great benefit in this work, and that they are more mindful in their lives. In the research for University of Minnesota Business School on our programs at HP, Travelers Insurance, and Group Health Medical Center showed that 17 of 20 factors related to personal and team effectiveness were very significantly improved through our integral approach to blending inner and out work. Two factors that really surprised and inspired the researchers were that in each of the groups we worked with there was a significant shift in the “locus of control” and in the quality of “risk taking” which indicated a greater sense of confidence in oneself and a greater sense of trust in their relationships with coworkers. Second was a significant shift in the “locus of control” from feeling victimized by the outer circumstances of one’s life, to feeling more self-empowered and in control of one’s own responses to the conditions of ones life. The principle investigator in this research noted that in studying dozens of other corporate change programs and team building programs involving over 22,000 people, that they had never seen any shifts in the locus of control, which in our case was attributed to our strong reliance on the inner practice of mind training that are so key to our work and our success. On self-reports from their work with us more than 90 percent of the people have indicated that, “Other people noticed I’m more present,” “I listen better,” “I’m able to recognize whispers better and not wait for the screams.” These are really tangible and consistent indicators of the universal value in this kind of mind training and meditation in the workplace. One final note on this research is that the beneficial results were measured to not only endure, but to often increase over time.

This is supported by published studies using functional MRI’s with highly stressed corporate employees who were trained in

mindfulness meditation. After 8 weeks of training and practice, there were measurable shifts in their brain function that were correlated with reduced anxiety and with enhanced ability to deal effectively with stress. These measurable brain changes – and their psychological benefits – endured for at least four months after the training concluded. The research on neuroplasticity provides a great deal of support for understanding that as we train our minds, we change our brains! (And there is a great book available by that title written by Sharon Begley.)

MICHELLE: We've found that engineers in particular. If you apply that same rigor of attention that you would use outwardly and scientifically to the inner science—this is how we speak of meditation often—if you take that same capacity to investigate and attend in a rigorous manner to one's own body-mind-spirit to one's primary instrument, then they really get it and they can teach others very quickly. This is very inspiring.

MICHELLE: A really important element that hasn't come up yet, that I think is really important for, not just in business but in the larger question of "can meditation save the world?" is how does the inner relate to changing things on the outer. And this point is about the discipline of "dialogue." Having "mindful dialogue." That's a real important way that we work with groups and teach that mindfulness. Using mindful dialogue we show people in a very direct and tangible way that mind training isn't only about listening to their own breath and their own heart and listening to their own minds but it's about bringing that deep listening and deep connectedness with ourselves more fully into our work and relationships. In organizational settings we really do a lot of work with people together practicing mindfulness in speaking in dialogue, so the whole distinction of inward meditation and expanding it to extroverted or more outer directed meditation, it's still meditation, it's bringing the awareness to the energy/information flowing between us. This is a perfect example of "mediation in action." This same quality of mindful, clear, presence can be brought into every activity of our daily life – and work – be it walking, talking, writing, working with our hands, interacting with others, and listening deeply for inspiration to creatively guide our lives-work. It's an art form of sorts.

JOEL: If people did no other meditation practice across the planet, but there was a huge wave of people learning how to engage in being more fully present and having more heart to heart real deep listening

mindful reflective dialogue together, can you imagine how different the world would be. No other meditation than that?

JOEL: Mindful dialogue can be a doorway in and for a lot of corporate groups we work with. Before we get too internal-focused with them, we'll teach them mindful dialogue and have them experience the power and the intimacy and the depth and the value of just being more fully present and as they listen. And as we teach that we have people assume a mudra or gesture where with one hand they touch their heart and with the other it's just open towards their partner and we talk about part of the discipline in this specific practice, is learning to distribute their attention evenly so that they don't lose themselves and get totally outward focused, or they don't get so imploded that they're not in touch with what's going on outside but they're finding a balance between the two. And there's a whole sequence of things to that.

MICHELLE: While we're still on dialogue—like hearing the Dalai Lama speaking so often about the need for dialogue rooted in compassion. We're talking about mindfulness—mindfulness and compassion are both present. The sense of really wanting to understand will really help it not hurt so bad. Mindful dialogue rooted in compassion is the most necessary thing—the need for that in order to have world peace is dependent on our learning the skill the ability to have dialogue rooted in compassion. And to do that you need the will, you need the intention. One last thing that I just learned from one of our Taiwanese student recently that I love: In Chinese, maybe you know this already but the word, I was asking a friend what the word for "peace" was in Chinese, and she said, "oh it depends if you are talking about the meditation peace, like the individual inner peace, or if you are talking about world peace." So I said, "well tell me both." And she explained that basically it's the same word except the words are reversed. *Ho ping* is world peace. *Ping* is kind of like a peace word. If you put it together it would be like hoping. *Ping ho* is inner peace. Wow! Look at the connection—inner peace and world peace—both are the same only just which way you're looking.

DEB What does meditation in action mean to you?

MICHELLE: It means I sit and I have the sensitivity and I have the awareness of peace, and then I have to bring it into action into daily life, in my relationships, political action, to be an activist, activating the insights to make a change, to bring awareness into the

marketplace when I shop. Little things. Remembering to bring my old plastic bags when I go to the farmer's market and not take new ones. Bringing that kind of mindfulness into making a change of consciousness. When I'm out shopping. When I'm in a difficult situation with somebody. Voting. Shopping. Writing letters to the newspaper. Speaking to my community. Being willing to stand up, take a stand for what I really feel in my heart when I'm sitting quietly. And not just keeping that in my heart but being willing to share it or write it, send emails out, raise friends to support, or whatever it is that is calling for attention to take a stand in the world, bringing the meditative understanding of interconnectedness into how I am with my relations in the world.

For more information on the Leveys' pioneering work in Contemplative Education, please visit:

<http://www.wisdomatwork.com>

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