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J.J.: Welcome to the "Talks at Google" Podcast, where great minds meet. I'm J.J., here to bring you this week's episode with Haemin Sunim, one of the most influential Zen Buddhist teachers and writers in the world. "Talks at Google" brings the world's most influential thinkers, creators, makers, and doers all to one place. Every episode of this podcast is taken from a video that can be seen at [YouTube.com/TalksatGoogle](https://www.youtube.com/TalksatGoogle). In this beautiful follow-up to his international best seller, "The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down," Buddhist monk Haemin Sunim turns his trademark wisdom and kindness to self-care, arguing that only by accepting yourself and the flaws which make you who you are can you have compassionate and fulfilling relationship with your partner, family, and friends. In conversation with Googler Shifali Mudumba, here is Haemin Sunim, How to Accept Yourself in a World Striving for Perfection.

**[00:01:08]**

HAEMIN SUNIM: When I was a teenager, I often wonder, "Why am I here?" You know, I felt as though I was just thrown into this world without giving me any kind of answer or guidance. And some philosopher describe this feeling like a waking up in a movie theater, and then the movie has been playing for the last 10 minutes. So you are just waking up and then try to figure out what this drama that we are experiencing right now, you know, you are just thrown into this movie theater. So I was, you know, watching the drama of my life, you know, as a teenager, and try to figure out, you know, "What is that which is watching this drama?" You know, so I became very interested in spiritual practices, and became very interested in religion. So I ended up studying religion in college, and then I was following many different teachings, but ultimately I wanted to just experiencing-- experience "enlightenment."

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HAEMIN SUNIM: You know, like the way Buddha did. So I said, "Maybe I should become a monastic and get the proper training, and maybe I'll be able to have that experience." So, you know, I became a monk after my graduate school. And then I went through the training, and while living in Buddhist monastery, I realized that while we are meditating and all that, however every Sunday, we do offer services for laypeople. However, after the lay services, they will want to come and have a conversation over tea with Buddhist monks. So what ended up happening was I was sitting there in my 20-something, I was like, mid-20. And then having, you know, a deep conversation with people over 40s, 50s, 60s. You know, they're telling me about stress at work, you know, their problem with their children, their illness they are going through. Of course, I didn't have enough life experience at that time.

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HAEMIN SUNIM: All I could do was just listen very, you know, attentively and compassionately. And-- but the good thing was that that really helped them, apparently. So what they really wanted was somebody there, rather than giving them the answer, you know, they wanted somebody to really listen, you know, and so I was getting you know, good at that, actually and I realized that that could be part of my spiritual practice. In Buddhism, you need two things to become awakened. First one is wisdom, and another one is compassion. And both side it is absolutely necessary. And I realized that maybe I can cultivate compassion by engaging with everyday problems that people are having, and offering whatever the wisdom that I have. So that led me to do a little bit of social media you know, in my opinion, you know, I think the social media is a tool. You know, just like any other tool.

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HAEMIN SUNIM: It can be used, you know, in a positive way or it can be used in a negative way. So I start you know, writing something much more meditative and helpful remarks that came from my meditations, you know, or helping other people. And then that became really popular in Korea first. And then I was invited to write a book. At first, I didn't know, you know, I didn't think that my

book will become very popular, to be honest. But it became really popular. It's called "The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down." I think it was published here like, couple years ago in London, in the U.K. as well. And then what happened was I decided to use whatever the attention that I was receiving for the public good. So I began what is called School of Broken Hearts. So I set out four years ago in Seoul.

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HAEMIN SUNIM: Where people who are going through a difficulty in their lives, they can come and they can share. Like for example, if you are just recently diagnosed with cancer, or if you just lost your family member, or if you just went through very difficult divorce, or people who just got laid off, you know, all this difficult experience. Often time we feel that we are all alone, completely isolated and scared. However, if you are, you know, if we come together, then you will realize that, I'm not the only one. We can all do this together. And especially if you get to share your feeling, you can share through language or through dance, through writing, through paintings. Different ways. In a very supportive and caring way. And they can help you tremendously, I realized. So the school has grown quite a bit now. And we have like 50 or 60 teacher working together.

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HAEMIN SUNIM: And we have two different center. And then from that experience, and as I was speaking with more people in the center and while giving a talk, I was able to write a second book, which is the "Love for Imperfect Things." And here I am.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: Welcome. We're very glad that you wrote the second book. So I actually want to touch a little bit on your school because when I read about that, I thought about, you know, the skills that we're taught at school. We're taught everything from, you know, ceramics to woodwork, to circuitry, but the education system doesn't really equip us with every day skills, whether it's compassion or self-care. What are your views on that, and what can we do? Maybe there are people here with children. And how do we educate ourselves on this journey?

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HAEMIN SUNIM: Right. I noticed that, unfortunately, the traditional school system, they do not teach us how to become more self-aware, you know, become aware of who we are, and under what circumstance I thrive, and under what circumstance I don't do very well. And what kind of personality do I have, and what kind of path do I want to walk along. You know, these are the very important questions, and if we fail, you know, how can I pick you know, myself up, you know? How can I get out of this? When I feel so much anger, how do we overcome it? Or, if I need to forgive somebody or let it go, how do I do that? All those important you know, skill, that's directly related to our life, everyday life. We didn't learn it, unfortunately. So that's why I started the School of Broken Hearts. I think we as a human being, we go through difficulty, whether we like it or not.

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HAEMIN SUNIM: Because we have a human body. So we will get sick, you know, we get disappointed. You know, so in my school, I invite many you know, therapists or you know, wonderful teacher, we do it together to figure it out. Things that we didn't learn in college or in high school.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: So one of the tenets of Buddhism is "life is suffering." But when you look at the world that we live in today, I think it's fair to say that everybody feels that life is good, or life is great. How did we end up here, and what do we do?

HAEMIN SUNIM: Uh-hmm. Okay. Very philosophy question. Very good. Well, in Buddhism, life, by nature, is not suffering, you know, when we are grasping, when we are attaching you know, ourselves to a certain thing, whether it's your idea, whether it's your health.

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HAEMIN SUNIM: Whether it's your relationship. And holding onto it and hoping that this will not change, then it creates suffering you know, so what they are saying is, everything when-- everything that has form or shape is inevitably will change. It is impermanent. So if you can truly see that it is impermanent, then you enjoy, you can rejoice what you have, knowing that you know, what you are having is temporary. So if-- even if you are you know, having a wonderful life right now, you may at some point get sick you know. When you experience that, then that becomes an opportunity for us to deepen compassion. You know, "I am sick," and that-- at that time you get to realize that there are a lot of people going through many terrible, difficult illness, for example, that invites ourselves to become more compassionate.

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HAEMIN SUNIM: And have open heart. So I think a difficulty in our lives are you know, great lessons, you know, it makes our spirit to become more mature.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: And how does the compassion arise from that? So, how do we exercise the compassion then?

HAEMIN SUNIM: So let's say we are in a very difficult situations, and if we are completely lost in that thoughts, feeling a victim, "I just didn't want it, it just happened to me, I feel like a victim, it's terrible." And if we just keep on thinking about ourselves only, and not really connecting to the bodily emotions, you know, things that is happening to you. In other words, if you just dwell on what happened in the past and continually regurgitate that thought over and over again, then you feel like you're a victim, and you cannot get out of it. However, if you begin to turn that attention to other people who are in the similar situations.

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HAEMIN SUNIM: then you begin to see that, you know, through the pain, you know, we actually connect. We can actually understand each other. This is the part of the life. And that makes us you know, stronger and allow us to break out of our egotistic shell.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: Talking about imperfection and perhaps there were times when, especially in January, it's very timely, everyone wants to be skinnier, has a list of New Year resolutions, and in the book you talk about "your existence is enough." But that's quite hard to embrace when the world is telling us that we could be better. And how do we navigate this because on the one hand, we should be happy with our existence. But on the other, it can get confusing when we all want to improve. Like, it's okay to have goals and want to be better, but where do you find the balance between the two?

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HAEMIN SUNIM: This is another excellent question. Okay. I think we are all imperfect, right? Would you agree? Yeah? Right. And I think it's good that we recognize some of our imperfection, and try to become better at it, you know, whatever that is. There is nothing wrong with it you know. However, just remind ourself, you know, can you remember the last time when you felt really peaceful and happy? Can you remember that? You know, it could be when you are in a vacation. You know, somewhere warm you know, or beautiful mountain, or in the company of your good friends, you know, whenever that is, you know in that time, what was the overall quality of your mind? You know, your mind at that time was--you were appreciating that particular present moment that you are experiencing.

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HAEMIN SUNIM: And there was no resistance to what is, you know, you are accepting as it is. You feel grateful for what is. Am I right? Yeah, yeah. So likewise, you know, the happiness that we are seeking is actually accepting as it is, you know, if we can be-- our heart becomes serene and become peaceful, and there is more space for us to embrace and become okay with what is. And of course, if we find some other problems in our life, then what happen is we are not content with the present moment. So our mind automatically escape, you know, we think about the future you know, and we regret what happened in the past. So while doing that, we are missing out the present moment. So let me just also talk about one interesting thing. When I first became a monk, I had this idealized image of perfect monk, right?

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HAEMIN SUNIM: So I was assigned to a you know, master, my mentor. And so I was hoping that my mentor will be this idealized, you know, perfect monk. But when I first met him, he wasn't anything like what I had in mind, you know, my idealized monk is very dedicated, serious, meditate really you know, hard, and then imparts very you know, wisdom and all that. But my mentor monk, master, he loves to make jokes.

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You know, he also has some temper, you know? He gets angry, you know, like, so, he wasn't exactly what I had in mind you know? And then at that time, what happened was, I, you know, had a close monk friend and we were ordained around the same time. So he invited me to his temple. So I went to his temple and I had dinner with him and his own master. So when I first met his master, he was exactly what I had in mind, you know? He was-- his mind was serene and serious and then, you know, meditate a lot and imparting all the wisdom, you know? So I was thinking, "Oh gosh, you know, I wish I can switch, you know? I wish I can, you know, change my mentor, you know?" So I was a little envious of him. And then ten years passed and then I met my friend again out on the street, accidentally.

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And then I was very happy, of course. I said, "Oh, it's so nice to see you. Long time, no see. How have you been, and how's your perfect master?" [laughter] And he said, "Oh, well, you know, I am no longer in touch with my master." I was very shocked. And he's not, you know, having any kind of contact with his master. I said, "Why? You know, your master is perfect." And he said that, "Because he was perfect, he demanded that all of his disciples to be perfect, too." He reprimand people, you know, if they are committing something that is not correct. So, they were feeling really bad about themselves, you know, all the time. So, he felt hurt and so, he left. At that time, I realized that my master wasn't bad at all, you know? [laughter] You know, the fact that he has a humor, it's a great quality, I realized.

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He doesn't take himself very seriously and he knows that he's imperfect because he's imperfect-- he knows he's imperfect, he's willing to forgive other people whose imperfect, you know? So, a lot of monks who have some trouble or have some scandal outside, they will all ended up coming to my temple and we are all living happily together because my master is, like, so forgiving. Anyway, and whenever he gets angry and he usually feels bad about it next day and he gives me pocket money, you know? So there are so many [laughter] so many wonderful qualities. So, I still get along with my master very well and I really respect my master. So, I think once we accept our imperfections, I think we become much more genuine person and we are willing to show our vulnerability. You know, when we show our vulnerable side, then I think we can meet another people in a much deeper and true in a way.

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And there, you can create much meaningful and deep relationship.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: You spoke about acceptance and accepting our imperfections, other people's imperfections and you speak about how that starts with self-care, self-love. So, can you tell us what you define self-care to be? And how it fits into acceptance?

HAEMIN SUNIM: Uh-hmm. Yeah. I talk about this in my first chapter of this book because while I was growing up, I was taught to be a good boy, you know? You know, I just wanted to make my parents very happy and proud. And I wanted to be a good student, too. So, I wanted to make my teacher to be happy and proud. And that I wanted to be a good friend, you know? I wanted to make my friends to be happy around me. So I wanted to please other people, you know?

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However, while I was doing it, I neglected myself. You know, I neglected the well-being of myself. Like for example, when I went to graduate school, I remember, because I was a "Yes, yes, yes." to everything, and in the group work, I ended up, you know, getting all the difficult work, you know? All the time, you know? So I was just assume that if I do one difficult work, maybe the other will do difficult work later. But it didn't happen like that, you know? Especially in the U.S. [laughter] So, I said, "Oh, I don't know what to do, you know, with this problem." So I was talking to my friend and then he told me that, "You have an obligation to be good to yourself first, you know?" So when we are being, you know, taking time to care of ourselves, you know, care about our physical or emotional well-being then, what happen is when we are happier, when we are healthier, then we can be nice to other people, you know?

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And the opposite is also true. If we just say "Yes, yes, yes." to everything and if you become overwhelmed and you become completely exhausted, then your relationship will suffer, you know? So, I think we have to learn to say "No." to some time, you know, to certain thing. But do it in a very compassionate way and so that you are not, you know, creating abrupt, you know, difficulty in a relationship.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: I'd like to shift gears a little bit and talk about depression. So, approximately one in four people in the U.K. will experience a mental health problem each year, and one in six report experiencing a common mental health problem in any given week. There is a chapter on depression in the book. So, it seems like a big challenge. How should we handle it? And, you know, how should we react to it when perhaps we're feeling depressed?

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HAEMIN SUNIM: Yeah, it's a big topic. And sometime we know the cause of our own depression but sometime we simply do not know why we feel that way. Maybe because our body is getting old and then to a certain change in our body we feel, you know, emotionally depressed. But sometimes we do know why we feel depressed. Like for example, if you have a very high hope, you know, you have a high expectation, high goal to achieve but if you look at your own reality, you are way down here. And so the distance between where you are and where you want to go is huge and you've been trying to go there very, you know, for many, many years. And yet you realize that I might not be able to get there. And then you, of course, feel very depressed.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: Uh-hmm.

HAEMIN SUNIM: If that is the case, then rather than setting really high bar, I would recommend that why don't you break it down and then look for something, you know, easier goal to achieve.

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And so rather than feeling that I am a huge failure, you know, you can turn it around and say, "I do make--my life is full of success." You know, it can be very little thing but you can do it little by little. And you can also, if you are, like, seriously depressed, then I think it is important that you look and seek out professional help from a, you know, doctor but if you are feeling little bit blue once in a while, then, you know, I think it is important that we move our body. You know, we often think that we can-- if by just thinking about positive thing, maybe we can change our mind, but our mind and body is so closely interconnected. So, if you're feeling little bit depressed or little bit blue, then I suggest that, you know, why don't you go out and take a walk in beautiful nature? You know, and so if you look at a bird or, you know, flowers, or, you know, green lawn or whatever.

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Then, a sky, you know, you can get out of this, you know, perpetual, you know, negative, you know, thinking loop. You know what I mean? You know, so, by paying attention to what is happening in front of you, you can become less self-obsessed, you know?

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: I'd like to know how many people in the room meditate say, daily? Sometimes? Okay. At least once a month. Okay. So, we have some enthusiasts in the room. I'd like to, if I may, read a passage from the book about meditation. "The true nature of our mind is like the sky. Our thoughts are like clouds. Our emotions, like lightning. And the sky accepts them all equally, watching as they shift and move across it. The weather of thoughts and emotions rises and passes away, but the sky remains the same. Clear, luminous, open."

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It's a really wonderful passage. But it's hard to get into that state where it really feels like the clouds and the lightning are moving in and out. And how do we get there? I guess, it's obviously, there's an element of regular practice, but what advice do you have for us meditation enthusiasts?

HAEMIN SUNIM: Hmm, very good, very good. I was deeply touched and very happy that you guys are into meditation. That is really wonderful. But I was-- I'm also hoping that you guys can take a, you know, step more and do a little bit deeper meditation. That is, we can meditate just to feel good about ourselves, you know? To understand about our, you know, thinking mind and things like that. But you can also go, you know, a step farther.

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You know, that is, what is that which knows? You know, we know everything, right? Do you-- are you aware that I am here, right? So then what is that which is aware of "Haemin Sunim is here"? You see what I mean, yeah? We only pay attention to the, you know, object, you know, the object of awareness but can we pay attention to awareness itself? You know, can you become aware of your own awareness? From that awareness, you know, feel the awareness I will say, everything rises and disappears, you know? It can be your good feeling or negative thoughts, you know, whatever that is. It arises and disappears. However, this awareness feel, you know, it never moves. It never disappears. Can you stop being aware?

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Can you try, let's say, for the next 3 minutes, can you say, "For the next 3 minutes, I will-- I have decided not to be aware." Can you do that? And even if you close your eyes and, you know, close your ears, you will become aware that "Oh, I don't see anything." You know, you will become aware that there is nothing, you know? Awareness is still happening, you see what I mean? Whether you like it or not. But whatever the object you become aware of, it comes and goes. It's impermanent. However, that which is aware, it stays. That is a deeper meditation.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: How do we get there?

HAEMIN SUNIM: The truth is we are already there. You know, we just have to simply see what is already there. You know, we don't try to be aware, right? When you look at me, do you try to say, "Okay, I'm going to try to be aware of what is happening in front of me?"

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No, it just happen automatically, right? So it is already there, this awareness. It follows everywhere, you know? Even when you are, you know, dreaming, you know, you are aware. This awareness, you can never escape. So to speak, right? But do you have any memory of this awareness being born? Do you have any memory of the birth of your awareness? No, we don't. You know, awareness is ever present. You know, It was never born and therefore it will never die.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: But you have to tune into it somehow--

HAEMIN SUNIM: Yeah.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: And that's attention?

HAEMIN SUNIM: Yeah, just to become aware of your own awareness.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: How much of that is, for example, paying attention to your breathing? Because I find that in a meditation practice, it starts with the simplest way of becoming aware is being aware of your breath because it's a way of bringing your mind back.

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HAEMIN SUNIM: Exactly. I mean, it's an excellent practice. If we can just bring our mind to our you know, breath. It has so many benefits. You know, first thing is our body feels better, right? As we are taking a deep breath, what happen? We feel much more relaxed, our heart will start to slow down, and we feel a different part of our mind becomes more relaxed and has space. And also, as we breathe, you know, pay attention to our breath, we are bringing our mind into the present moment, you know? When we bring our mind to the present moment, there is, you know, no more attachment to what happened in the past, no more anxiety about what's going to happen in the future.

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Also when your mind becomes empty and quiet, that's where the creativity comes. You know, if you want to be creative, notice that usually you have this creative idea when you are not constantly thinking. You know, you might be thinking a lot and then give yourself some one hour of rest time while you're walking around in a park or something or taking a shower and then all of sudden what happen? Boom, I have a new idea, right? So when we do not you know, have a lot of thoughts, when our mind become very quiet, we have this creativity. Another benefit is when the breath itself does not have any form, you know?

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: Uh-hmm.

HAEMIN SUNIM: Breath doesn't have any form, right? Can you capture any form of a breath? No, because it's formless. Because we are, you know, paying attention to what is formless, which is very close to awareness, you know?

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Awareness does not have any form or shape. So it is very good entry point to become aware of your awareness.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: With that, I would like to hand it over to Googlers to ask some questions.

PERSON: Hey, thank you for being here. I just wanted to ask, because obviously the scenarios that you were touching on, you know, cancer, losing a child, something like that. What if that is the present and that's, you know, we're focusing on the present but the present sucks? I mean, I agree with letting go of the past and not looking to the future, but I think it's harder to do if there's actually something going on in the present that doesn't deserve focus, maybe? Or drags us down? What do we do?

HAEMIN SUNIM: Right, right. First of all, my heart goes out to you and you're in a very difficult situation, especially when your child is sick. It's a really daunting thing.

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Or, you yourself have some kind of illness. What I would say is this, you know. If you are carefully examine your body, or examine your mind, you know, you will notice that you are not sick 24 hours. You know what I mean? Even if you are sick, even if you have an illness, you are not sick 24 hours a day. But what's troubling you is whenever you have a thought of illness, you know, whenever, "Gosh, I have an illness, I don't know what to do." You know, then that thought trigger this depression or depressive emotions. So realize that when you are little bit in a difficult situation, maybe it is the, you know, thought that keeps thinking about it again and again that is causing the problem.

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You know, and but sometime we do forget, and then we watch TV and watch some funny episode of sitcom or something, then we can laugh, you know, because our mind is not dwelling on that thought. So as the thought we momentarily not dwelling on, then we don't-- we can appreciate what is happening in spite of this. Like for example, I remember I was in a difficult situation where I had a fan, you know, in Korea who really liked me obsessively. And tried to follow me around and show up on every single talk that I was giving. And I was little bit, you know, scared, you know, this person was almost stalker, right? Whenever I thought about her, you know, I was feeling little bit depressed because, you know, this person is projecting a lot of, you know, this person's emotion onto me.

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And if I do not, you know, tell or satisfy this person's needs, then this person goes online, and ended up, you know, saying all the negative things about me, and then making people believe, you know, this person's testimony. But whenever I was thinking about her, I realized that my mind became very depressed. However, when I was not thinking about her, I realized that I was okay. So the very source of suffering was a thought, I realized, you know. What is making us feel really depressed and angry is, you know, whether we dwell on that, you know, thought. So if we can just bring our mind to present moment, what is really happening right in front of us, you know, you can have a cup of tea with your best friend, or you can be, you know, listening to inspiring talk.

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Then you don't have to think about those kind of problems, you see what I mean? So I would say that, you know, pay more attention to present moment, you know, even more.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: More questions?

PERSON: I have a question on whether you have any suggestions. I know you've talked a lot about individual practice to be more present and more aware. As a family with children and with your partner, is there any practices that you think could help as a family? The whole family.



HAEMIN SUNIM: Okay. You know, when you are living with many children and you have a very demanding job and when you go back you have a partner waiting for you, then it's very difficult for us to have a sense of calmness, you know, in everyday activity. So what I usually suggest is, see if you can still carve out little bit of time, even if it's five minutes a day or ten minutes a day.

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So what that means is, you know, rather than getting off at your regular bus station, you can get off like three stop, you know, before, and then you can maybe enjoy walking back home while listening to your favorite song. So, you know, carving out just, you know, having this intention to care about myself first. You can go to your favorite coffee shop and while you are, you know, enjoying coffee or tea, you can, you know, you can have a more relaxed time and checking in, you know, with my mind and my body. Or you can go to your favorite bookshop. You know, whenever I go to bookshop and see an empty chair, I'm so happy. You know, I go sit there and read and this gives me a downtime. And then when I go to, you know, back to your home or go back to your work, then you can go back with your refreshed mind.

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And also, in your daily activity with your, you know, family member, what I would suggest is, you know, rather than thinking that we already know about our family member, we often think that "I already know, you know, everything there is to know about my boyfriend, girlfriend, husband and wife, or my children." Then what happen is we stop asking question. You know, we are not curious about what happened to their lives. But the thing is we always change, you know, we are changing. You know, our children are changing, our husband or partner are changing. So if we approach to your family member with sense of, you know, curiosity and humility that you don't know everything there is to know then you can have a deeper conversation. You can ask, "Oh, how have you been, you know, today? What is going on?" And then it is also important to share not just the fact, you know, people often just say, "Oh, what time are you getting home?" "7:00." "What did you have dinner?" "I had chicken teriyaki." You know.

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This like a fact, you just ask, you know. However, I think it is important that we also ask how we are feeling, you know, which is a deeper, you know, self, you know. How are you feeling? You know. So, allowing some time for us to unpack our own feeling and feeling that the other person is really hearing me out, it can create deeper bond.

PERSON: Hello, thank you for being here today. There's a kind of like a situation that I find puzzling in general, which is on one hand, the-- I mean, I buy into the power of vulnerability, the importance of embracing imperfections, of knowing them, etcetera. On the other hand, I have the feeling that the world, and especially social media, while it can be a great medium for knowledge etcetera, there is this race towards perfection and only actually depicting what's perfect.

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When you look at people today on social media, I mean, no one really puts their picture when they're feeling ill or bad, or when they're arguing with their partner. It's all like, ah, happy, clappy, peppy. And I find it really puzzling because I think it's antinomic. What would be your advice to maybe, especially the younger ones that are going to experience more and more social pressure on media, and to still keep that philosophy of loving imperfections? Thank you.

HAEMIN SUNIM: You know, I was in Canada, near Vancouver. I was invited to give a talk there. And then after, you know, the event, I drove up, you know, with my friend and I heard there's a beautiful mountain. If you just walk about four hours and you will see snowcapped mountain with beautiful lake. So, you know, I decided to go there.

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So I went there, but what I did not know was that while climbing up, going up, up, up, there were a lot of flies. You know the bugs, flies? You know, and so for the last four hours, as I was going up, I would have to do this, you know. I have to do this, like constantly because there were so many flies and bugs around me. And then once I get to that, you know, beautiful scenic spot, I was very happy but at the same time I was extremely hungry, you know, and exhausted, you know. However, when I took the photo, I was smiling, you know. And then, as if there was no bug, as if there was no exhaustion, as if there was no hunger, you know. So when you see, you know, a very happy face on your friend's, you know, Facebook entry or Twitter or other social media, Instagram or YouTube, just remind yourself that, you know, maybe this person was fighting off the flies, you know, for the last four hours.

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And suffering from the exhaustion and hunger. So I think, you know, having that awareness helps, you know, quite a bit. And also, you know, rather than comparing ourselves with somebody who is doing a lot better, because it would be always, you know, somebody who's always, you know, doing better than you, you know, I was advised I remember we have to compare ourselves to our old us, right? So like for example, I remember in Korea, you know, the richest person in Korea is the owner of Samsung. You know the Samsung, right? And so I thought that "Wow, this guy must be really rich." And then one day I was reading a newspaper article. And it ranked the wealth of, you know, different people in the world, and he ranked like, 170-something. And then I realized that even he, if he was to, you know, compare himself, that he would feel, "Oh gosh, I only made it, you know, 170-something."

**00:41:04**

You see what I mean? So we shouldn't do that, you know. Rather, we should become proud of, you know, how much we have achieved so far, you know, for the last 10 years or 15 years, how much we have grown, you know, spiritually, emotionally, also career-wise.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: I think we'll take one last question.

PERSON: I have.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: Oh, sorry. Yes.

PERSON: I think we can learn a lot, definitely, and apply a lot to our lives. I'm just thinking like, if we take this idea of being content and being constantly present in our world to the extreme, and let's say everyone became like a Buddhist monk, right, or close to that. Like, what would happen? Because like, a lot of the stuff that we do is because the problems we have, the things that bugs us, the ambitions and insecurities that drives us.

**00:41:58**

So how do you view like, being content with ourselves and really enjoying the life, versus like, our obligation towards like, society or civilization to progress it by constantly like, seeing the bugs, right? And trying to, you know, get rid of them or put them, you know, aside or make them not bite you, right? Rather than being content that they are around you and just ignoring them?

HAEMIN SUNIM: You know, by connecting to the present moment, you know, and being mindful of what's going on, it doesn't mean that you become lazy, you know. It doesn't mean that you become, I don't care about the world, you know. I think being content actually allows us to engage in our work in a much, you know, proficient way. You know, when you are happy, notice that you can actually respond quickly, you know. There is a space for you to tolerate annoyances of other people because you find much more peaceful at heart.

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The opposite is the problem. That is, if your heart is closed off and feeling that you're completely isolated and you are thinking about what happened in the past, while ignoring the bug that is coming up right now, then I think this can become, you know, a problem. Your stress level is already up and, you know, feeling like a victim because I have another work that I have to do. So, I would say that, you know, just being mindful doesn't mean that you become like a corpse, you know. Instead, you can actually respond much more compassionately, much quickly, to the demands or difficulty of other people's having.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: One last question in the back there.

PERSON: Thank you for being here.

**00:43:59**

So we have a mindfulness meditation community here at Google. And there's a lot of people who are, I think, trying to get into a daily practice. So I'm really curious to hear what is your take on the benefits of a daily practice? And also maybe some practical tips around how to establish one because I think it's quite hard in the beginning. And it takes a while to get the benefits or to kind of start feeling the impact. So if you have any kind of, tips on how to best get into that kind of a routine.

HAEMIN SUNIM: Right, right. Well, I would say that if you are interested in mindfulness meditation and you want to get into that, "I don't know how to do that," then the first thing I would say is, you know, make a- have a very low expectation, you know. So rather than say, "Oh, I'm gonna sit quietly for the next 20 minutes without any thinking and then paying attention fully to my breath," just reduce. Like, scale back. And say that, "Well, I'm gonna spend next two minutes." You know.

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See if we can-- if I can just sit quietly and enjoy my breath, you know. And if you accomplish like two minutes, then you can say, "Oh, I'll do two minutes and thirty seconds." And then slowly you can increase it. So you don't have to say you know, "I'm going to somehow bliss out" you know. "And if I'm not, then maybe I'm a failure." You know, but that is not the case. Meditation isn't so much to get to a certain state of our mind, rather whether we can mindful of whatever the state we are in. So if we can be mindful of, "Oh, I feel frustrated because nothing is happening. Or I feel, you know, wasting of my time because I'm not focusing." Then become mindful of that thought, you know. "Oh, I just had that frustration thought. Hmm, interesting." You know what I mean? "Oh, I had that frustration, you know, feeling. Oh, interesting." This is mindfulness. So I would-- that would be my answer.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: Thank you. So I should say gam sa ham nida.

**00:46:00**

HAEMIN SUNIM: Yes, gam sa ham nida.

SHIFALI MUDUMBA: Thanks so much everyone for joining, and please join me in thanking Haemin, sorry, for a really wonderful session. Thank you so much.

HAEMIN SUNIM: Thank you.

J.J.: Thanks for listening. If you have any feedback about this or any other episode, we would love to hear from you. You can visit [G.co/TalksatGoogle/podcastfeedback](https://www.google.com/talksatgoogle/podcastfeedback) to leave your comments. To

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