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time, smartphones have proliferated society. Do you think they add another hurdle to liberation from delusion, considering what they're doing to our attention spans – always being on with notifications?

R.W.: I think one reason meditation retreats are becoming more popular is because they allow you to get off the grid. At most retreats, you're encouraged to leave your smartphone at the desk. When I go on retreat, I'm totally out of touch with the

world. But even daily meditation, if you focus on the problem, can make you less enslaved to your electronic devices.

One thing mindfulness meditation can do in general is make you more aware of how little subtle feelings tug at you and govern your behavior and your thoughts. So like when you're doing work and suddenly you have this urge

to check in with Twitter or Facebook, or do some online shopping, if you meditate, you are more likely to recognize the feelings that are at work.

First of all, there's a feeling of aversion to the work itself. Maybe you've gotten to a difficult part in some writing you're doing so it doesn't feel good to keep writing, and then there's the craving, the attraction of Twitter or Facebook, and if you become aware of those feelings before following their guidance, you have the option of just sitting there and experiencing and observing them until their power lessens.

And this is true of self-discipline in general. In fact, there are studies that show this approach to something like quitting cigarette smoking can be very effective. Once you feel the urge, observe the urge in a meditative way, until its power weakens, which isn't the same as pushing the urge away. Ironically, it starts with accepting the urge, at least enough to get close to it, without following its guidance.

E.G.: At Street Roots, we cover social justice

issues in a very left-leaning city, being in Portland, and there's been a sort of collective anxiety here since the election. How can someone use mindfulness to kind of calm that anxiety when stressors are external, and in some ways very real?

R.W.: I think daily meditation allows you to endure the Trump era with somewhat more equanimity – now there may be such a thing as too much equanimity – in other words, if you quit fighting the things that you think are worth fighting.

In my own case, that is just not a danger. I think, if anything, a more common problem is overreacting to Trump's provocations, often in ways that play into his hands and confirm his narrative that everyone hates him and holds his followers in contempt and so on.

In fact, I just started a site called MindfulResistance.net. We're putting out a weekly newsletter. It's not for meditators only, but it is premised on the idea that the kind of mindset meditation cultivates, a mindset of very clear vision and awareness without overreacting emotionally to things, can be helpful in combatting Trumpism.

I also think being aware of how the world is perceived by Trump supporters can be very helpful. That's called cognitive empathy, as distinguished from the kind of feel-your-pain emotional empathy. It's just a matter of perspective taking. I think the more we understand the various reasons, and I think there are a lot of reasons that people voted for Trump, the better we will be able to make it less likely that someone like him will be president again.

I think meditation is good for cognitive empathy because it can weaken the emotional obstacles to seeing things from the point of view of somebody who is in the other tribe, so to speak. And I think one thing we shouldn't lose sight of is the people who voted for Trump have grievances, and some of them are not imagined.

Globalization, technological change – these things have complicated a lot of people's lives, and we need to think of ways to address the problems they create. I think the more time we can spend doing that

thinking, the better, and if we spend too much time overreacting to Trump's daily provocations, we won't have time to do that.

E.G.: It almost seems like he kind of plays into some of those hunter-gatherer brain tendencies, especially with tribalism, as you mentioned.

R.W.: Totally, I think this is a big problem with the world, whether it's like sectarian conflict, Sunni-Shia, or national conflict, U.S.-North Korea – or ideological conflict in America. It's what you could call the psychology of tribalism and the cognitive biases that entails, and I think it inflicts both sides.

I think anyone on either side who thinks the other side is the *entire* problem is deluded. I think almost all of us have spread fake news. I know I have sometimes retweeted things without really carefully examining the information I was spreading, and the reason I did it is because it felt good to do it. It was information that reflected badly on the other tribe, or on Trump, and again, I think mindfulness meditation can make you a little more aware of when you are being pulled into something like that by your feelings, and it can help you step back and ask yourself, wait a second, do I really want to retweet this? And if everybody on both sides did this, America would be a massively better place.

E.G.: Anything else you'd like to add for anyone who might be interested in reading your book?

R.W.: What you hear most about mindfulness meditation, that it's good therapy and can help you deal with anxiety and stress and so on, is true in my view. But I think it's also true that this therapeutic view of meditation can be the first step toward a deeper kind of exploration that is philosophical and even spiritual in nature. In the book, I tried to provide enough information about the Buddhist philosophy that is the context of Buddhist meditation to help people who are so inclined explore that path.

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ROBERT WRIGHT

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