

EPISODE 1339

[INTRODUCTION]

“DK: I literally was standing at a street corner one day across the street from my office at Bremen, Lafayette in downtown Manhattan, and this voice came to me. I wasn't really spiritual at the time. This voice came through me that just said, “You've got to get out of here. You need to lead the opposite life in the opposite part of the world. And you've got to act right away.” So against all better judgment and helping to run this tech company that I thought I'd make 10 million or 20 million from or who knows what, I walked away.”

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FT: Welcome to So Money, everybody. I'm Farnoosh Torabi. We're kicking off the week with a deep dive into money mindset, and meditation, manifestation. Is there another M word we can throw into the mix? My guest is Dina Kaplan. She is founder of The Path, where she teaches meditation for the modern mind. She's taught thousands of people to meditate around the world and at festivals, including South by Southwest and Sundance.

Prior to founding The Path, Deena was Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of the tech startup blip.tv in web video. Before that, she was an Emmy Award-winning television news reporter for local NBC stations. She's worked at MTV News. She's worked at the White House. She was named one of Fortune Magazine's Most Powerful Women Entrepreneurs and Fast Company's Most Influential Women of Web 2.0. She gave that past life all up for her new journey bringing meditation into the mainstream.

Now truth be told, I do not meditate. I tried it. It's not for me. And so, Dina talks about how while meditating may not be for everybody, we can all learn how to raise consciousness, elevate awareness, and bring more money wealth, richness into our lives. Here is Dina Kaplan.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:02:25]

FT: Dina Kaplan, welcome to So Money. I am very excited for our conversation. I feel like it's going to relax me. It's going to relax me.

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DK: Heck yeah. And if I can relax someone doing a podcast about money and finance, then more power to me and to both of us.

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FT: Yes, this is going to be a different experience for listeners. We're going to talk about money, and meditation, money mindfulness, but also what you describe is kind of the economics behind things like meditating and Buddhism. And before we get to all of that, though, all the things that you're an expert in, let's talk about your journey. Dina, I was reading your bio online, and you're the founder of The Path, which teaches meditation for the modern mind, which we're going to get into very soon. But before that, you had a whole career in tech land, in tech startups. You were Chief Operating Officer of Blip.tv. Before that, you were an Emmy Award-winning television news reporter for local NBC stations. So you come from media. You come from tech. You come from the frenzied worlds, I should say, of media and tech, which maybe now, as I say it out loud, shouldn't surprise me that you were looking for a retreat from that. Because I know I definitely had my anxiety attacks working in New York City media. But tell me about your moment of discovery when you realized you're done with it and you wanted to go more intentionally into this path of meditation and mindfulness.

[00:03:52]

DK: Yeah, thank you so much. And I'm really excited to share this with everybody that is listening around the world. Because even if you're not specifically going to go into wellness, or meditation, a lot of people right now, we all know about the great resignation, are thinking about, "What is my purpose? What is my meaning?" And that meaning might be going into a different field that has nothing whatsoever to do with wellness.

And by the way, I also used to work in politics. My first job out of college was in the White House. So that wasn't in a nice, relaxing atmosphere. So yeah, so I went from the very frenzied, busy, stressful world of politics, into old media and TV, and then into new media, and tech, exactly as you say.

And what's funny about all of this, and perhaps you and your listeners can relate to this, is that I actually – I had a complicated job as COO and founder of a super-fast growing, fast moving tech startup in the very emerging space of web video at the time. But I actually figured out how to do my job. It was hard. I worked a ton of hours. But I figured that out over a number of years.

What I couldn't figure out how to do, and like I said perhaps many of you can relate, was I couldn't figure out how to be myself in that role. I kept living in the should. I kept doing what I thought I should do, which was to not rock the boat. I even had a hard time giving negative feedback to people that were working for me, my own team at that tech startup, which was called Blip. Because I just wanted everyone to like me. I was over-indexing on the likability factor.

And what I really lacked and what really hurt me was just the confidence to be myself and let the cards fall where they may. So what happened, as you're referring to, is that this all manifested into panic attacks. And it was pretty extreme. I don't know if you or your listeners have had them. But imagine, I would feel this tingling at the top of my head and then I would feel rushes, like racings of energy and tingles shooting through my body so intensely that I thought I was going to pass out. I thought I was going to faint.

And I was living and working in New York at the time. And I lived in absolute terror of passing out in the middle of a New York City intersection and then maybe **[inaudible 00:06:15]** and then having your cab roll over me. And then I wouldn't even look good for the funeral. So it's like this very macabre, very like panic and fear that was beginning to consume me. So much so that the last two years of helping to run the company when I was literally in the press every single day, speaking of fancy conferences. I was giving talks pretty much seven days a week. And I didn't tell anyone. Well, I shared with one person, but no one else. Not my best friend, my doctor, my parents. I didn't share with anyone that I couldn't walk by myself anywhere because I was consumed by panic attacks.

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FT: So you say – What I'm hearing is you had a fear of not being liked, being rejected. What did you think it meant to be liked? What was not – I mean, because I went through all of this. And so I really want to hear from you, because I want to make sense of what I was going through.

[00:07:09]

DK: Yeah. I'd love to talk about that. So for me, I have a very particular trigger around this. And I think you and many of your listeners might relate to this, although perhaps it wasn't this extreme. Or maybe it was even more. So as a little kid, I was this frizzy-haired, very non-cosmopolitan kid from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, originally. Family, super focused on education. And I was just not cool in any sense of that word. I was this nerdy, nice, kind of innocent kid.

And my parents, trying to do the right thing for me, sent me to summer camp with all of these very cosmopolitan girls from these faraway glamorous-sounding places like New York City or Los Angeles. And I was way in over my head. And what ended up happening is I got bullied really badly. And this was before we had that word. And before any kid would have known of any resources. So I just thought I was all alone and being the reject of this entire camp, and the counselors were in on it.

And honestly, I just started crying. It was bad. It was really bad. I'm almost getting emotional telling you this. And at the end of that summer, this is like maybe nine-year-old me, I made a vow to myself, and I said, "I am never going to be the reject again. I'm going to hone my social skills so finely that I will be popular for the rest of my life."

And then I did for better or worse. I studied the people that others gravitated towards. I studied how often they spoke. I studied their gestures. How close they stood to people. I studied everything about them and then I copied that and then I emulated it. And look, it worked. I was popular in college. I was popular.

I started off working at the White House, and I went to MTV News. And I was popular in DC. And I was popular in New York. I was always the girls surrounded by people organizing parties

and events and getting people to do things. And I was kind of the life of the party. But the problem is it was at the expense of ever really being myself.

So to really directly answer your question, I worried that being me, I would be rejected. And then I might even get fired at the company. I was constantly convinced I was about to get fired even though I was a co-founder of the company. And at some point, arguably one of the most essential people at the company. For a while, I probably was the most essential person at the company. But I still thought I was going to get fired.

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FT: So maybe the headline there is don't worry about being liked. Don't be afraid of being liked. Be afraid of being a fraud, right? You're being untruthful to yourself. And that does create a lot of anxiety. Because although you're the only one who's really in on it, the world doesn't know what's behind this. They think you're you. But you know the truth. And then carrying that burden every day, it's a lot. You will break.

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DK: Yeah, it's a lot. And people would whisper to my co-founders as the company became more prominent. And then I became more prominent as one of the very, very, very few women founders in tech in the country that anyone knew of, and probably the most prominent one in New York. I mean, I did a lot of things wrong, as I'm saying. But I was I was good at my job job and good at speaking with the press.

And so what happened is people would whisper to my co-founders that I didn't seem authentic. And they were right. And then the other thing that happened is that I lost a lot of power at the company. And I noticed that I stopped getting invited to meetings that I should have been at. And it was because people, they couldn't trust me, and they couldn't relate to me. We had – At three or four o'clock, everyone in the company would play a game. I don't know. It was Minecraft or something. And everyone would play. But I never played because I thought, "Oh, my God. I'm about to be fired. I should work. So I just worked through that hour." But it actually made – I was that person that no one could relate to. And it wasn't fun. And everyone will go out for coffee every day to La Colombe, which is awesome, and SOHO. And I never went because I

kept saying, “Wait. We have a coffee machine here. Like shouldn't everyone stay at work and be efficient?” I was that girl.

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FT: I'm the co-founder. I'm paying the bills.

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DK: I was no fun.

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FT: No, I totally relate to what you're saying. And so I'm guessing that you were yearning for some peace in your life. And you found it. But tell us about that part of the journey that you, at some point, said, “I'm done with this.” And what happened then?

[00:11:26]

DK: Yes. So it was not a pro and con list. It was not a thoughtful thing. I literally was standing at a street corner one day across the street from my office at Bremen, Lafayette in downtown Manhattan. And this voice came to me. I wasn't really spiritual at the time. This voice came through me that just said, “You've got to get out of here. You need to lead the opposite life in the opposite part of the world. And you've got to act right away.”

So against all better judgment and helping oping to run this tech company that I thought I'd make 10 million or 20 million from or who knows what, I walked away. I walked away. I booked a flight to Asia. And I flew six days later. And I didn't know how or why I did this. I just knew I had to get away.

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FT: You say a voice. Was it your voice? Was it a feeling that then now in retrospect you're like, “It said something to me.” And that's why you call it a voice? But like can you talk about that a

little bit more? Because what I want people to be able to recognize this when it happens to them, too.

[00:12:21]

DK: Yeah. And I write about this now and teach this. So I love this topic. I know now, as a teacher of mindfulness and meditation, that this was the voice of intuition. And quite honestly, it saved me. It might have saved my life. I was not in a healthy place with these panic attacks that were happening absolutely constantly and just pushing down every natural aspect of my personality. At the time being the frenetic – People called me the Tasmanian devil, which I think I took as a compliment, which was not really a compliment.

So yeah, at the time, it was this voice that it felt like it just came through me. And it wasn't that voice that says go get a Coffee Heath Bar Crunch ice cream, or stay up late and watch that 10th episode of Mad Men or whatever, some TV show that you're enjoying. It wasn't that voice that's like, "Oh, do this bad thing," that isn't helpful. This was the voice of, "This is what you must do. This was what I must do." I had no question about it. I had to get out of there. And I followed it. And it was the best thing I have ever done in my entire life.

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FT: Did you cry? Because I'll tell you, the moments in my life where I feel so moved to do something quite profound or big, like a life-changing move, like applying to journalism school when I knew no one was going to be down for that conversation in the Torabi household. My parents would be like, "I'm sorry. What? You need to go make money. Journalism is a hobby."

And yet, as I was filling out those applications, my essays that asked you like, "What's your why? Why do you want to—" It was like tear-stained, these tear-stained essays that I was putting in the Manila envelopes sending off to these New York addresses. And I thought to myself, "I think this means I really want to do this. I'm so moved. I can't even control the emotions."

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DK: Oh my gosh! I love that. Okay, so truth be told, I am definitely a crier. I cry at an emotional advertisement on television. And that film, like Ratatouille, was losing it. But no, I didn't cry at all. And there's another critical moment where I had this huge, huge, huge life shift that we'll probably talk about very, very shortly. Because this is kind of the second half of this story. There was no crying. There was no pro and con list.

I mean, remember, I'm the COO of this company. I am running finance. I am like hardcore having to be analytical. There was nothing analytical about this. There was nothing logical. It was here is what I must do. Okay. Perfect. No crying. I'm going to take this ship of Dina founder, whatever, that was always heading to the left. And I'm going to turn it at 180 degrees. And I'm going to go to the right. And it was just, this is what I'm doing next with my life, with my body, and with everything that I have.

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FT: The world is a better place because you made that decision. I want to talk about the impact you're making in the world. But first, maybe we could take a step back and talk a little bit about what you mean. Earlier I said this, that you describe it as the economics of mindfulness, the economics of meditation. Can you expand on that for us?

[00:15:26]

DK: So I love this topic, because what I think people don't realize is that if you put Buddhism into a category like religion, like Christianity, or Judaism, or being a Muslim, anything along those lines, which you can, or some people believe Buddhism is just a philosophy, and that you can live with it while being Christian, or Jewish, or anything else. But if you put it into that religious category, I think it's really important for you and for your listeners to know that, traditionally, there have been institutions around religion. We know that in Catholicism, this was the case.

And so, if you are a priest, or let's say you're a rabbi in the Jewish tradition, you're not out there holding out a hat hoping that your congregants or people walking down the street are going to put some coins in there to keep you alive. There's been the Catholic church that has supported you, or your congregation, if you're a rabbi, that supports you.

So if you're out there teaching mindfulness, teaching Buddhism, teaching any of these wonderful practices that can help keep people from the state that I was in, it may be a little bit help you with the bursting into tears emotional side. There's no institution behind you. And so you must, and I say this, and you're not seeing me now. But my hands are up, and fists are raised, and I'm smiling a big smile, you must charge people. And you should charge people with a great amount of joy, because you are going to change their lives.

And this is what people need now. I mean, people are feeling a lot of emotion, sadness, loneliness, anxiety. I'm sure people have read all the stats about this, and the people losing it in airplanes, etc., etc. So what can help them? Meditation can help them. The Buddhist path and learning about the Buddhist Buddha's way with the Eightfold Path about how to live with more happiness, and freedom, and ease. This really is the path, literally, away from suffering, and towards happiness, and freedom and ease.

And so if you're helping people with this, then you'll help them earn more money. You'll help them be better partners, spouses, friends, colleagues, whatever it is. And so I say with incredible conviction and delight, if you're teaching meditation, which, for example, I do, you should charge people. And you should charge people a lot if you do a good job, because you're going to change their lives. And there's absolutely no harm in that.

So what I resist is I've had people invite me to go and speak in Asia, for example, or in Abu Dhabi. And I'll say, "Okay, great. That sounds interesting. What's the cost?" And they'll send some snarky note. Like, "What? You're spreading Buddhism. don't you want to do this for free?" And I'll say, "No." And they'll say, "Okay. We'll pay your way." I'm like, "Okay. But do you pay rent?" And they'll say, "I do." And I'll say, "Well, I have to pay for my housing, too. So how are you going to support that?" And there's no freaking shame in that.

And likewise, if you want to learn meditation, or learn Buddhism, you should not expect or want this person to do that for free. You should want to support them so that they can do this either as a side hobby, or full time and know that you're enabling this person to help you and hundreds, and thousands, and maybe tens or hundreds of thousands of other people. And this is something you should feel great about doing.

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FT: See. Now, here I thought you were going to talk about the economics of mindfulness in the sense that when we are more mindful, when we do meditate when we raise consciousness, that it can lead to more wealth, which I think you would agree with. So let's talk about that. Let's talk about the other side of this coin, which is, Dina, how have you seen the manifestation of wealth through mindfulness and meditation and raising the consciousness?

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DK: Oh my gosh! This is a great topic. Because, actually, I can start by saying that many of the top people in Wall Street, Ray Dalio, the people running all the top hedge funds, they all meditate. Because here's the thing, if you go back to look at me, the girl helping to run that tech company, I had meetings filling out my schedule, as probably you and many of your listeners can relate to. I probably had six or seven meetings a day. I was on boards. I was on board to advisors. I was on committees of this and that. My whole schedule was just – I mean, it was bananas during the day, which is why I had to work all night to catch up on emails and everything else. But none of that was strategic.

So I would accept calls with people that didn't serve me. I would join boards of advisers that didn't help me or my company. So I was my best friend. I always say, “We're running really fast. But it might be in the wrong direction.” So I was super “busy”. But I was busy doing what a great famous Lama calls irresponsibilities, or busy work, which is filling up – Or let's call it active laziness. So it was busy, but it was a lazy kind of busy because it wasn't strategic.

What mindfulness and all the types of meditation give you is that ability to, first of all, be really strategic with what you're doing, but also to know if you're heading in the right direction. So it's both of those. Where do I want to go? And what's the most strategic way to get there?

And so now, I also, against all better judgment, run a company. But I run a company that is mindful, and I am mindful about my time. So if there's a call request that comes in or to join a committee, a board, whatever it is, rather than just saying, “Yes,” and then plodding along through three years of quarterly calls, I'll actually think, “Is this something I want to do? Is this something that serves me? Is this something that serves my company?” So that I can literally

work two-thirds less time before done, be happier, be thoughtful and be more strategic? So there's a very, very, very clear tie-in between mindfulness and wealth creation.

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FT: Well, what you just did was you presented us with questions that we should ask ourselves, which will raise consciousness and provide clarity. And for those listening like myself, who have tried meditating, I'm not totally hung up on it. But I think I will keep trying, and I will just someday maybe get there. But in the meantime, I think there is also something to be said about just making sure that you are having your own awareness of your priorities of your goals. That is not meditation, but it is being more aware.

And so you presented us with some questions earlier. What else? What else should we be asking ourselves daily, actively if we are in the pursuit of being more productive, attracting more opportunities into our lives that align with our values and our financial goals?

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DK: I'm so glad you brought up awareness. This is really just about awareness. And if you have different ways of getting there, then you can get there in different ways. And by the way, meditation doesn't just have to be sitting. I know a lot of people have anxiety –

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FT: People do it on the subway.

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DK: Yeah. And I worked with a lot of people that have trauma that's stored in their body that they might not even be aware of. They need to move. They need to walk. And so you can do a walking meditation. You can even shake out your trauma. That's actually a really helpful thing to do. But all of this is about cultivating awareness. And so I'll even invite you right now to do something that I just thought of myself, which is like a peripheral eye meditation.

So I invite you to open up your peripheral vision. Even do it right now. And just look from the corners of both of your eyes and see what's in your field of vision. And even doing this really quick exercise, we can see that it's so easy to live our days with blinders on, which is only seeing like literally what's right in front of us. We have an incredible depth of vision that's available to us. So this is literally, and it's also a bit of a metaphor.

So I think one thing to do, because a lot of people are so stressed right now, that they can act badly. Perhaps you've seen this in your life, even in the last 24 hours, whether it's a barista, a friend, a loved one, whatever it is. So I like to – If that ever happens, I like to think about my mind as just being as wide and vast as the sky. So think about the sky over the whole entire earth. And then you can think of that moment, let's say a barista, or someone just snaps at you. You can think of that as a little rainstorm over like, let's say, a small part of Ohio or something like that. A very small part of your mind that doesn't even talk about New Zealand, or Bangladesh, or all of the expanse that your mind is creating.

And with that, you can allow that little rainstorm to happen and a tiny percentage and point of your mind. And then just hold it. Bring a loving awareness to. Perhaps this person is stressed. Perhaps they've trauma from their childhood. Most likely, this snapping, whatever negative energy, has nothing to do with you. And you can just move on with your day. So those are two kind of little exercise that you can do.

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FT: I love that. As you spoke, I was imagining listeners. Because they write to me and they tell me how they listen to the show a lot of times. It's when they're exercising or walking their pets. And I just imagine them looking over in the corners of their eyes as they were listening to this show. So I don't know. Listeners, what do you think of that? DM me.

You know what I saw? I'm in my bedroom. So I saw like my husband's sweater hanging on a chair. And as I look to my right, I saw my neighbor's house, which they just moved in, and I haven't met them yet. So maybe that was a reminder for me to say hello.

Dina, we don't have a whole lot of time left. But I do want to talk about The Path, your company. And as I said earlier, it teaches meditation for the modern mind. What is the modern mind? Where are our heads at right now?

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DK: So I think we need help. And I can give some advice on that. I think that people are really – They're really having a tough time. So if you are just know, wherever you are, or wherever you are in the world, that you're not alone.

So another tip I would give, which might be very counterintuitive, if you're running a company, or you're a founder, or you're managing a big division, but make sure you have fun every day. Life is not about suffering. There is no cries. There's no golden ticket, like from the Willy Wonka world, that you're given if you've suffered the most in your life. Like, “Okay, I am first in line for heaven,” or whatever you believe in happens.

So we're honestly meant to have fun. We're animals, like camels, and panda bears, all the other animals out there. And you always see if you go to the zoo, or you're going to Africa, you see these animals out in the wild. They're having fun, right? They're playing. They're enjoying themselves. So whatever fun is for you.

I was telling my mom this a couple weeks ago when she was stressed about moving. And she said, “I don't want to have fun. I just want to read.” But that's great. You can read if you want to read. You can go for a walk.

[00:26:31]

FT: Yeah. Fun is not like dancing on a bar top. I think that's what I thought fun always meant. It meant like taking risks, being wild. And it's not my personality, at least not anymore. And so define your own fun. Like fun is not what you just see in The Bridesmaids movie. You know? It's a big world of fun out there. Find your fun.

[00:26:53]

DK: Yeah. I mean, I actually just decided to start studying astrophysics. Don't even ask. But that's fun. Like, yeah, I love learning. So yeah, I just got a book, and I'm signing up for a course. And yeah, it can be fun to learn. Have fun in whatever way you want. But if you are in the business world, I would say that, obviously, if you're managing a team, which you probably are, then your employees, as you know, are your most valuable asset.

And so I think that part of this path is about bringing compassion to every interaction. There's something called the Buddha mind, which is not how we're naturally wired. So don't worry if you're not. But it's something we can train ourselves to cultivate. Just knowing, especially now how much stress people are under and how much anxiety there is in the world.

And so it's about that choice. No matter what you're hit with, it's that choice to choose to bring compassion to your interactions. To choose to know that when people act badly, 99.9% of the time it has nothing to do with you. It's just something going on in that person's life, probably from their past even. So it's just this choice to bring compassion to all of the interactions.

I mean, you want to be wise. And if you need to fire someone, you got to fire someone. But in your interactions, it's just a way to bring more ease into your day, into your life, and to create a better corporate culture. So I think these things are all important.

So in terms of what the path does, it's funny, we – So during the pandemic, we had to do a huge shift, because we were doing weekly meditations in-person in New York. And we were doing monthly social events around meditation. All of this was in-person. And we ended up shifting. We had a teacher training program, but we brought it online. And honestly, honestly, it is a better program.

So we have this extraordinary teacher training program now that, actually a lot of people in business, we've had founders of public companies, founders and CEOs of public companies join us, investment bankers, entrepreneurs still growing and scaling their company, their companies. But, really, serious, big consumer brands join us. So some people do it to learn about the Buddhist path. To learn how to become happier. To learn how to reduce anxiety. Some people just joined to be in a happy, supportive group of people. And other people want to learn to guide meditation for their team or company. Or if they're a coach or therapist, they just want to add those skills to the skills they already have. Or even if you're a parent, to learn how

to guide your kids, or your parents perhaps, in meditation. So we brought that online. That's really, really, really exciting. And yeah, so that's a wonderful thing that we do that I'm really proud of.

And then we have a Mela retreat, which is really designed for people like yourself and your listeners, with big impact, with whatever they're doing. Whether you're running a company, a nonprofit, you're an activist, an author, whatever it is, or you're just starting out in business, finance, entertainment. But we bring together people with impact and put them on an actual retreat, but we make it fun. Rather than my first retreat I went on, which had no soap, and no toilet paper, and no air conditioning, and it was 110 degrees.

Mela, which is it's at the path.com/melaapply? Mela is fun, and it's beautiful. And we throw concerts every night. And we do walking meditation. We go hiking in the morning. So those are the main things. But we're increasingly getting a lot of requests for corporate meditation. So I love doing that, hosting retreats for corporations, or just doing online meditations for teams, or for people as well. Really helping people to not be like myself, the person stuffing down my personality and having panic attacks. Yeah. So really, I'm at this point of just wanting to pay it forward and help people.

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FT: What a half hour, I have to say. I'm looking forward to these walking meditations now. I think that's more my speed. That's definitely my speed.

Dina Kaplan, thank you so much for sharing your journey with us. And we'll be sure to check out all of your offerings. Wishing you a great week.

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DK: Farnoosh, thank you so much. And enjoy those walking meditations. That's 100% of meditation and 100% valid.

[OUTRO]

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FT: Thanks so much to Dina for joining us. To learn more about The Path and Dina, go to the path.com. Thanks so much for tuning in. And I hope your day is so money.

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