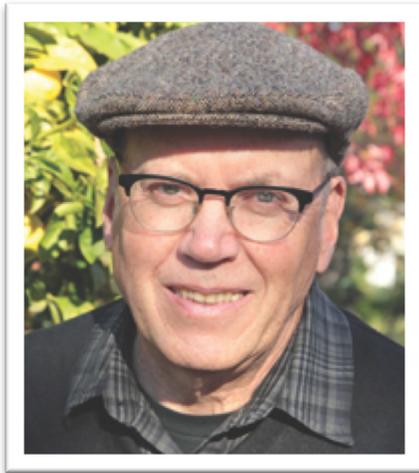


# ADDICTION

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## SUMMIT



### **Addiction, Mindfulness, Meditation, and Recovery** Guest: Kevin Griffin

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**Dr. Paul Thomas:** Hi, I'm Dr. Paul. Welcome to this episode of the Addiction Summit. I'm your host today, and it is my pleasure and privilege to introduce to you Kevin Griffin. He has authored several books. He's an author, teacher, leader in the mindful recovery movement. You still teach at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, correct?

**Kevin Griffin:** Yeah, that's kind of my home base.

**Dr. Thomas:** Fantastic. You co-founded the Buddhist Recovery Network, I understand.

**Kevin:** Yes, indeed.

**Dr. Thomas:** And you lead workshops, lectures, retreats. Your first book, or at least one of your big ones, was *One Breath at a Time: [Buddhism] and the 12 Steps*. The most recent two that I've been reading is *A Burning Desire* and then *Living Kindness: Buddhist Teachings for a Troubled World*.

**Kevin:** Great. Yeah.

**Dr. Thomas:** Well, thank you so much. I wonder; this is an Addiction Summit. I think our audience will be a lot of people who are struggling with addiction. A lot of people who are in recovery. And then a lot of people who have loved

ones who are struggling. My own story was cigarettes out of high school, food issues, alcohol became my big addiction. That was a battle for a long time. Thankfully, I've got 15 years in recovery.

I wonder if you might share with our audience maybe your journey as relates to addiction.

**Kevin:** Well, I guess in brief; you know how our stories can go on and on.

**Dr. Thomas:** Absolutely, yes.

**Kevin:** I really do relate my addiction to early depression and kind of drinking and using it to medicate around that. In a lot of ways, my worst behavior was early on. And then I just became kind of a maintenance drinker and druggier. Marijuana and beer. And as a musician, I was living in bars. So it was very convenient because intoxication was kind of part of the job description.

Like all of us, I had my ways of kind of staying in denial. If I could still be standing upright at 1 o'clock in the morning when we had our last set to play, then obviously I didn't have a real problem. You know?

**Dr. Thomas:** That's right. You survived an entire evening.

**Kevin:** Yes. So I really also see that; and I talk about this a lot in my writing. There was this kind of parallel search for something spiritual, some meaning. I started meditating actually long before I got sober. There was this kind of split personality that I find a lot of addicts have. There's a spiritual longing. And in other ways that it manifests. Creativity. Very positive ways that we manifest ourselves.

But it was kind of like this double personality; double life. And eventually, I kind of came to the end of all the denial and the evasions. There is a term called a spiritual bypass, where you try to solve your real-life problems through a spiritual solution. I thought I would meditate my problems away. And eventually I realized I had to confront them head on and really learn how to live.

So yeah, getting sober then was like starting over, as it is for most people. It was starting to learn how to live in a sort of normal way. As a musician, again, I kind of tried to have this alternative lifestyle that was going to be able to avoid all the difficult things like work and relationships and money.

**Dr. Thomas:** Were you able to get sober while you were still a practicing musician?

**Kevin:** Yes.

**Dr. Thomas:** That had to be hard. You were around it all the time, still.

**Kevin:** It wasn't.

**Dr. Thomas:** No?

**Kevin:** No. It's funny, when I got sober, it was over. That day, it ended. I woke up that day. And it was like, the accumulation of all the years of trying to solve the problems and trying to fight the problem. It finally fell away. I just was like, "I'm done."

So I had had to stay somewhat sober in bars for a couple of hours each night. So I knew how to do that; I just kept doing that. It's hard to explain. That's the one thing I think many of us think of as the miracle. How is it that that was removed? And I can't really explain it. But I was very fortunate.

Nonetheless, I also realized that my musical career, in my mid-30s, was not going anywhere. So I eventually went back to school, got into writing. And writing became my creative outlet as opposed to music.

**Dr. Thomas:** Yeah. I think for so many who struggle, finding that final ability or will or miracle to finally set it down, whether it's a drug, alcohol, or behavior, as you think back on that day for you, what factors led up to that moment? For you to be able to finally say, "I give. I surrender." Whatever happened for you to be able to let it go?

**Kevin:** I think there are innumerable factors. I really do. Kind of the Buddhist concept of karma. Of all these; some known, and some unknown things. I mean, everything from the good side of my parents, to my relationships; people who helped me. My girlfriend at the time was kind of pushing me.

I had met somebody who was sober, who was a musician. And the idea of AA became more both tangible and okay in my mind. People often ask me, "What is the key to recovery?" And my simple answer to that is that you have to have a really strong desire for it which is what people say in meetings. They say the ones who are successful are the ones who want it, not the ones who need it.

**Dr. Thomas:** Right.

**Kevin:** And in order to have that desire, there has to be a complete, as you said, surrender to the fact that this just doesn't work anymore. And finally, to answer your question, that's kind of what it was for me. I had tried everything. I had tried diet. I'd tried relationships. I'd tried meditation.

Ok, not everything. But I tried everything that I was willing to do. I'd been in therapy. I'd done a lot of things to try to solve my problems. Some of them off the wall. And just nothing had ever worked.

**Dr. Thomas:** I hear you. I was relapsing for a long time.

**Kevin:** Yeah. And technically, I never relapsed in the sense that once I got sober and made a commitment to sobriety, I didn't go back. I haven't gone back to drinking or using. But I see that I was fighting with it for many years, and I didn't even realize. I've discovered some old journals, and I was like, "Wow. I didn't realize I was trying to solve this problem for years beforehand." I sort of was in denial about the fact that it was a problem. But I see now that I did know it was a problem.

**Dr. Thomas:** Yeah. You started off by saying that we were self-medicating. I think that's so true for so many people for whatever their addiction is. You're trying to fill an emptiness, or heal a pain. Or just feel better.

In your first book, *A Burning Desire*, I think you probably addressed the desire issue. I wonder if you might share some insights from that book.

**Kevin:** Well, that's actually my worst title, unfortunately. I had a hard time finding a title. I took that title, actually, from the thing that people say at the end of every meeting. Where they say, "Does anybody have a burning desire to share?"

So in a way, it's not so much about desire and addiction. And that's mostly about higher power. But if you're asking about this question of desire, that's kind of the meeting point of Buddhism and the 12 steps because the Buddhist says that desire is the cause of our suffering. And of course, that's what the 12 steps are addressing. And I'm not sure the 12 steps have a very good way of addressing that, other than, "Do the steps and go to meetings. Stop drinking and using."

Whereas Buddhism offers us the practice of mindfulness, where we actually engage and feel the pain of desire. And as we know, pain is the key to letting go. If we don't feel the suffering, we'll just keep going on and doing it. Doing whatever the unskillful, unwise, destructive activity is.

So mindfulness is not really marketed in this way because the idea of, "Come and be mindful and feel your pain" doesn't sell. But that's really how it works at least initially. You have to be present for the feeling, because you're not going to let go, as they say, until you feel that pain. So that's really one of the key things that Buddhism and mindfulness meditation bring to recovery, is that engagement on that level.

**Dr. Thomas:** Yeah. In my addiction practice; I'm both a pediatrician and an addictionologist.

**Kevin:** Wow.

**Dr. Thomas:** In my addiction practice, once people start to really get it. And then of course, they have to start dealing with all those things they had been numbing from. Or life happens, and they have real issues. And I say, "You get to feel." But it doesn't make it easy. But it's part of the journey.

**Kevin:** Exactly. That's why there are 11 more steps after step one. Because learning to live with yourself. And just as you say, again people can have this idea. "Once I start drinking and using, then everything's going to be ok." But of course, it's just the opposite in the beginning. Wow, all that you were repressing, all that you were numbing, comes back. And now you know. This is why I was drinking and using. Now you have to learn to live which is, of course, what recovery is ultimately about. Learning to live fully. To feel everything.

**Dr. Thomas:** Yeah. And it's a beautiful life, folks. But I think of two things that happen. Some people talk of a pink cloud when they first get sober, or first get off of drugs. Their body just feels so much better, I think, they're just like, "Wow."

But then, there's this other side where you get to feel and you need to feel and work through some of those things. Can we move for a little while on a very tough topic? But you addressed it in your books, so I wanted to have you help our viewers. And that's this higher power concept.

For example, my son, who is again in recovery. And I think finally I see real surrender and there's that hope that, wow, he's really getting it. But his biggest struggle is this higher power thing. Trying to understand it. You talk about higher power of karma. Of mindfulness. Of wisdom. Of love. Maybe you could add some of your wisdom as you've sort of written and researched and thought about that.

**Kevin:** Yeah. It is a really tricky topic to talk about. And literally, that's why I wrote about it because it really does take sort of; you have to say a lot to make it make sense. That is, at least the way I view it because the sort of simplistic version of, "Just pray, and god will take care of things." That's easy to describe. Just get on your knees, turn it over. We just have these simplistic ideas.

But for me, it's actually very practical in a way. Let's just take it a little bit out of the spiritual and think about all the things that have power in the world. The weather has power. Well, you're in Hawaii. Volcanos have power. So the idea, first of all, that we're not in control. This is what step one is about.

And then, understanding how does the world work. How do things work? If I act skillfully—this is kind of the language that Buddhists use a lot—skillfully because that keeps it out of the good or bad framework. If I do the next skillful thing, then things tend to move in a positive direction. And if I act unskillfully, things tend to move in a negative direction.

So that is basically a description of the law of karma. I can't get around that. I can't cheat that. That's how it works. If I drink and use, I get loaded. There's just no way that can not happen. I'm an alcoholic; worse things happen. That's how I see the law of karma is actually a power greater than ourselves. And if you look at all the major religions, most of what they're suggesting is that you try to live in harmony with the law of karma. That's what commandments are about. Precepts. All the kind of...

So when I turn it over to the law of karma, what it means to me is that instead of acting on my own impulse, or my own craving, I ask myself, "What are the karma consequences of this going to be?" And try to do the thing. Even though it doesn't feel right, it doesn't feel like what I want to do, I know that's what's going to be best.

So when we really look at step three; this is actually how people in the program live. As much as people talk about god as sometimes this sort of magical force that's going to fix things, the way the program works is it's a

program of action. It's not a program of prayer. It's not a program of god fixing me. It's a program of action.

That's why, after step three, when you turn it over, you have to write an inventory. If god was going to fix you, step three would be the last step. So it's really kind of a misunderstanding, I think, of what the language is talking about.

Another example of a power, love is a power. So I've been saying lately; I turn my will and my life over to the care of love. Well, that feels really good to say that. And I humbly ask love to remove my shortcomings. We all recognize that love is a very powerful force.

I actually think of it not as love is a higher power; but rather love and hate are a part of the same thing. They are powers. We can live by either one. "Higher" is questionable to me because love and hate, as I say, are really part of the same thing. They're just two sides of the same coin. Again, it's about me making choices.

So step three, in my mind, is not about a being up there kind of pulling the strings on me. It's about me living in harmony with the powers of the universe. Mindfulness is a power. I can be conscious, or can be unconscious. When I'm conscious, things tend to move in a good direction, and I tend to stay safe. There's a harmoniousness. When I'm unconscious, that's when I crash my car because I'm looking at my cell phone. That's just simple. That's a power right there.

So all of these things have powers. And it's sort of an odd thing, in terms of saying god is mindfulness. Although, I will say that the phrase god is love is a very common phrase. When I first heard that phrase, I thought it meant, there is a god, this being, who is loving. But now I just think love is god. It's a definition.

I think the hard part about the word god is that we think the word god is the name of someone. And when we can step out of that definition, it really opens up a whole lot of other possibilities. Not magical and not silly ones, like the doorknob is my higher power. But very sensible ones that actually give us clear guidance about how to live which is what we all want.

Yeah, we'd all love to have this god that fixed us and took care of all of our problems. But if that's not real, then what we really want is, how do you live? How do I make wise choices? So having some guidance, which is what a

spiritual path is, then gives us things to live in harmony with. So to me it's really about living in harmony with these powers of the universe.

**Dr. Thomas:** That's beautiful. I remember when I was trying to get sober, I was a church goer at the time. And I'd get on my knees, and I'd pray, "Relieve me of this bondage." I live on Oregon, and there was no alcohol available for purchase on Sundays. I would literally leave church and go dig through the trashcan sometimes to look for that bottle I'd thrown away in disgust, because it didn't happen. That was before I was a part of the 12-step process where you really get into action, as you say.

So thank you for reminding us of that. And also this fact that this god of your own understanding being something that is truly powerful, like love. Who doesn't understand love from the moment a baby is born, right, and they go to their mother's breast. There is a love relationship that's going right back and forth. It's a really good reminder.

**Kevin:** One other thing I'll say. I don't think you have to believe in anything to stay sober. And frankly, most of the time when people say, "I can't stay sober because I don't have a higher power." I think it's mostly an excuse. "Oh, I can't go to those meetings because they talk about god." Again, it's like, "Do you want it?" Forget it. Just skip the step. Just don't drink or use, no matter what, you know? And you'll work it out.

And I think sometimes members of programs exacerbate this by kind of saying, "You have to have to a god." It's like, "I don't know. Is that true?"

**Dr. Thomas:** I have a great story relating to that. In my first group, where I actually got sober, there was a fellow. Roger. If you're watching, thank you Roger. He always; anytime anybody mentioned god. And he had way more sobriety than I had. He was approaching 30 years when I got started. And he says, "I don't even believe in a god, and I'm still here." He was just a testament to the fact that you just need to plug into the process and do the work.

**Kevin:** Yep. For sure.

**Dr. Thomas:** Fantastic. So I wonder if you might speak on core struggles that people have who are either struggling with addictions or compulsive behaviors as they kind of try to go along this journey of recovery.

**Kevin:** To me, the core struggle is with our own emotions. The external reasons for relapse and for not being able to stay in your program; obviously

there's the craving itself. I think relationships are very often the cause of relapse, the conflict in relationships. But all of those things come down being with our own emotions, and not being overwhelmed by them.

I think so many of us struggle with depression, with anxiety, bipolar. A lot of talk these days about trauma and the effect of trauma. All of that means we can't live with how we feel. This is sort of what this whole range of problems and solutions in our culture are about—the opioid crisis, the use of antidepressants, and of course the recovery programs. It's all about, to me, being able to manage or live with our feelings.

And I don't think that just being sober, being clean, or working the 12 steps is really enough of a solution for most of us. I think most people need a broad ranging approach. Most people who struggle with these kinds of issues need a broad ranging approach to their lives. And just be in recovery. I call it the full court press. I work a program, I have a serious meditation practice. When I need therapy, I have a therapist. And I've taken antidepressants when I really felt I needed them. I need to make sure I'm getting enough exercise.

And of course working out my relationship issues. That's been probably the number one focus of my whole recovery, is relationships once I got clean. My sponsor once said to me; "Your problem was not booze and alcohol. It was relationships. It was women." So when we say a core issue, there's a core issue, and then there are all the things that feed into it. Or feed out of it, I should say, that need to be taken care of.

This is one of the reasons why I get frustrated with the one-size fits all answer to recovery. "The 12 steps, that's all you need." Or, "just do this medication." "Just get therapy." The treatment centers, they want to pitch one thing. And the addiction researchers, they're trying to come up with a drug that will get us off the drugs. And the 12-step people are like, "No, you just need a god."

And I believe that it's all good. It's all useful. But that we should draw on everything we can. I don't offer one solution. I offer what I have to offer, but I don't suggest, "This should be enough. Just come meditate with me, and forget all that other stuff." I don't trust that.

**Dr. Thomas:** Yeah. Thank you for saying that. I will want to get back to the meditation part, because that's where you have such expertise. But folks, if you're watching this, and you've tried any or some of these things we're talking about, whether it's a 12-step program, you've been to treatment or not, you're seeing an addiction specialist or not. You may be on medication for

depression, anxiety, ADD/ADHD, you name it. Or you're on opioids for real pain.

“Real” I would put in quotation marks, because my opioid addiction clinic almost everyone as we wean them off their opioids their pain gets better, surprise, surprise. When you take a lot of opioids, you develop new opiate receptors, and then you feel pain more intensely. So it's kind of a real tricky thing.

But in the *Addiction Spectrum* book that I write, we cover that whole aspect. Whether you're in a 12-step program or you've come through a treatment center, you need to heal the entire body. And that's from your diet, to stress reduction, to making sure you're getting your nutrients, your sleep, your exercise. And this aspect you bring up, Kevin, of community, relationships, is so key. We neglect that because it's the hardest thing, I think, for us to work on.

My wife and I raised 9 or 10 kids, depending how you count kids. You know what I'm talking about. We brought one over to go to college, which is why I say 9 or 10. Most adopted. Those stresses. Those relationship stresses. And we went to counseling. I remember one counselor said, “You've got to use the assumption of goodwill. If my person is not acting lovingly towards me, they might be hurting.” And when you think about somebody in that way, you're a lot more gentle and loving instead of responding in a reactive way.

But do take us onto a little bit of the mindfulness part. This is an area I'm not good at. And you've written and studied and taught. I'd be interested in having you share with our viewers how to go about that.

**Kevin:** Yeah. Well, like everything else that's of value, it's really founded in commitment and showing up. Meditation isn't a magic bullet. It takes time and commitment and engagement. One of my suggestions; well, first of all I'll say there are so many resources for meditation. You have the apps, like Insight Timer and Headspace. A lot of people are using them, and those are great ways to get started.

I do suggest to people that once you get started and you learn the technique of meditation, you turn off the app and just sit with your own inner experience. My website, [KevinGriffin.net](http://KevinGriffin.net), for what it's worth, has got some guided meditations on it and links to other things where you get lots of resources in that regard.

But I think, as I say, the showing up is the key thing. So one of the things I say at the end of my retreats, when I'm encouraging people to carry on their practice, is to just try doing 90 sittings in 90 days. And people who have been to a 12-step program know that that's what people say when you go to a program. Go to 90 meetings in 90 days.

So there are a couple of things that are key to really getting started with meditation. One is to understand that you're not trying to stop thinking. People often get this idea in their mind that, "Oh, if I'm sitting down and I'm trying to pay attention to my breath and I start thinking, then I'm doing it wrong. I'm not getting it." Thinking is part of the process. We're always coming back from thinking. It's just a normal part of the process.

Rather than stopping thinking, we're trying to change our relationship to thinking so that we don't necessarily believe every thought. And we start to observe the kind of patterns and see, "Oh, look at how much time I spend fanaticizing. Or I spend so much time judging or resenting." And we kind of are able to step back a little bit. But we're not going to turn off the thoughts. So that's one thing. Maybe number one to get people going.

Number two is, yes, it's great if you can sit for a sustained period of time for 20 minutes or 30 minutes or something. But if you don't have time, or in the beginning, especially if you're just too restless to do that. You sit for a minute. You sit for three minutes. You sit for five minutes. And you kind of build up. Just like going to the gym. You don't go into the gym and start lifting 500 pounds. You don't build up for a marathon by running 26 miles. You start off slow. You build yourself up.

So just be easy. Take your time with it. But the important thing is the daily commitment. I have a commitment that I'm going to sit in meditation every day. Not for any particular period of time. But I'm going to sit. And there are days when I sit down, and I take one breath. And I go, "That's all I have time for today." But I showed up. And I'm sustaining it.

Because we know; just like recovery. Recovery is not perfect every day, right? We do stupid things. We yell at somebody. Whatever. But we don't drink or use, no matter what. And that's the thing. So for me, I show up in my meditation spot, no matter what.

**Dr. Thomas:** Do you have a time of day that you do that? Or a particular place?

**Kevin:** I think it's best to sit in the morning if you can before your day gets away from you. It's really hard to stop in the middle of your day and go, "Ok, now I'm going to do nothing." Start the day. Have your coffee, or whatever. Even coffee can be a little; but you sit with whatever.

Just kind of start your day and establish that. So it's really, keep it simple.

The third thing I would say. I forgot the other two, but you can rewind the tape and listen to the other two. Showing up, making a commitment to do it every day. Don't worry about how long. The third thing is, if you can find a group to sit with, a community. Again, just like recovery, it really supports your meditation practice to have people to share it with.

There are many just meditation groups around these days. The Buddhist Recovery Network lists many meetings where people meditate together and then share about their recovery. And sometimes they'll read from a book or listen to a tape.

So community, like a once a week community, really helps to sustain it. You hear some other voices. Those are the keys to me.

**Dr. Thomas:** Ok. Don't worry about the thoughts that come through your head; just acknowledge them and let them pass. And pick a time and do it, preferably first thing in the morning. And if you can find a supportive group, even if it's once a week, that will reinforce and sort of keep you perhaps advancing in your skill set.

**Kevin:** Yeah. Again, community, just as you said, is so important. We live in this culture that's very individually oriented. And you're supposed to be able to solve all your own problems. You're supposed to be able to figure things out for yourself and pull yourself up by the bootstraps and all that nonsense. None of that really works. We need each other.

It's actually; people feel a totally different kind of energy, if you will, when they meditate in a group. There's kind of something that supports it and makes it feel deeper.

**Dr. Thomas:** Yeah. A loving connection, it sounds like.

**Kevin:** Yep. Exactly.

**Dr. Thomas:** I always shied away from that, because I was guilty of thinking, “I can’t stop my thoughts, so I won’t be able to meditate.” So I’m going to have to give it a whirl.

**Kevin:** Yep.

**Dr. Thomas:** So in your latest book, *Living Kindness*, you speak of love, tolerance, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity. I think you start off, I was looking at it before we started our interview, with talking about loving yourself. Maybe you can speak a little bit to that. Because I think those of us who have been in addiction, that’s something we lose. We sort of beat up on ourselves. We’ve lost that ability to love ourselves.

**Kevin:** Yeah. Mostly my interest in that idea is how we define loving ourselves because I think that when people say they don’t love themselves, what they usually mean is that they know that they do unskillful things at times. They know their own history; that they’ve harmed people. They know all the mistakes they’ve made in their life. So they’re kind of grading themselves, and saying, “I haven’t earned love. I don’t deserve love.”

The Buddhist view is that you don’t earn love. All beings deserve love. If you're alive, you deserve love. But love doesn’t mean approval, or even liking. It really means care. It means caring for yourself, and caring for others.

I really like this idea; what it opens up for me is it makes it easier to think of self-love and love of others. The classic phrase in the Buddhist texts say that our love should be like a mother protects her child with her life.

Now, when I talk about this, I say, “You don’t always like your children.” Sometimes your children really tick you off, and they behave really badly. But you still feed them breakfast. You still clothe them. You still take care of them. So in the same way for ourselves. Even if I think, “Ugh, I’m being such an idiot.” I still take care of myself. And when I did not love myself was when I was in active addiction because that addiction itself was not taking care of myself.

So that’s how I define love. Not as, “I think I’m a really great person and I’ve done all kinds of nice things.” I can always undercut every evaluation of myself. I can always find a flaw in there. But just to say, I do love myself because I meditated today. I had a healthy breakfast. I’m going to get some exercise. I’m doing work that I care about.

Love is there. This is kind of part of my strategy, to try to make things a little simpler. Get them down to something more basic.

**Dr. Thomas:** Yeah. I think if you're watching this and you're struggling with this area, think about this. Would you treat someone that you loved the same way you're treating yourself? Because a lot of times, we're so hard on ourselves, even way harsher than we ever would be to somebody we cared about. So care about yourself.

Perhaps you can speak to something that I think is also really important, and that's forgiveness. I know you've written about that.

**Kevin:** Yeah. Again, my engagement with that; I don't know if it's simplistic. But I think it's Jack Cornfield who says something like, "Forgiveness is the admission that you'll never be able to change the past." And that's not an accurate quote. You can probably Google Jack Cornfield, forgiveness, and you'll find it.

It's basically saying; that's over. You have to let that go. Let me say what Kevin Griffin says, rather than what Jack Cornfield says. First of all there are several levels of forgiveness. There's forgiving others. There's forgiving ourselves. And there's forgiving ourselves for harming others and forgiving ourselves from harming ourselves.

I guess the way I think of it is; what does it mean if I'm not forgiving? I don't know if I have the words for this right now.

**Dr. Thomas:** Would that be like holding onto resentment?

**Kevin:** Right. Holding onto resentment. The basic idea is when I'm holding onto resentment about someone else, it doesn't harm them; it harms me. And that is the essence of forgiveness of others. We're actually, if we consider them our enemy, that's why we have resentment. Then we're giving them what they want. Is one of the things that Buddha says that I've been quoting a lot lately.

When we hate someone else, we're hurting ourselves, which is what our enemy wants. So it accomplishes just the opposite. Forgiving doesn't mean, "It's ok what you did." It means, "I'm not going to hold hatred in my heart." It's really about my own experience of that anger. That person might be dead. And I'm carrying around the pain.

Again, this comes back to mindfulness. If you're mindful of what your thoughts are, and what your feelings are, then you see what they are producing. You realize that thought and that feeling are creating pain in yourself. It's not that you say that it's ok. And they should be let off the hook because the fact is, you can't let someone off the hook. Their karma is their karma. That's one of the phrases. All beings are the heirs of their own karma. You can't change someone else's karma. So even if you forgive them totally, they might still have to go to jail.

Forgiving ourselves I think is the harder one because we walk around with the wounds from our past. The regret is one of those things that as you get older, you start to really see the complications of regret.

So I'll say that my way of dealing with regret—and this isn't quite forgiveness, but I think it gets to it—is to say to myself, "Look, where you are right now. Look what your life is." I can go back 30, 40, even 50 years and say, "If I hadn't done that then maybe..." And I'll ask myself, "Maybe what? Where could I be in my life that would be better? I could probably have made more money. Maybe I could have been a rock and roll star. Then I'd probably be dead."

I kind of go through the scenarios. What could I have done in the past that would have made my life today better? And anybody who is sober for any period of time is going to have a hard time imagining a better life.

And finally, I think not forgiving yourself is a kind of narcissism, a kind of egotism. Like, I am this most bad person. I am worse than anybody. And if you go to enough meetings, you realize you kind of fall in the middle. Most of us fall in the middle. We screwed up in a lot of ways. But other people screwed up worse, and other people screwed up less.

You realize I'm just another human being, another flawed human being. I happen to have a couple of extra flaws as an addict, but I'm not really that special. I'm just not. I'm not Hitler. I'm just not that bad.

So again, to me, I take these kinds of simple approaches to kind of asking these questions. Am I that bad? Honestly.

**Dr. Thomas:** I've been reminded by so many that the harder things we've had to deal with, those very things are the things that give us the greatest opportunity for growth. I think, Kevin, you and I have both lived that, right? We know that to be true.

**Kevin:** Absolutely. And you do really see that people who live in a really privileged way, where they never have to face problems. This is the spoiled child who grows up. That was one of my problems. I grew up a little bit too privileged, so I didn't know how to live. When I had problems, it took me—I only started to learn how to live when I got sober and realized, "Problems are meant to be dealt with, not avoided." And that's when you start to grow, and life really expands and gets rich and worthwhile.

**Dr. Thomas:** Yeah. I was raised by parents who are amazing problem solvers. So I kind of went through life thinking I could solve anything. And then of course, when I stumbled on my own addiction, which I couldn't seem to solve, I was really in a pickle. I just didn't know what to do with myself.

You speak and write about non-attachments. Wondering of that plays into this at all, helping us kind of move on and move forward spiritually.

**Kevin:** Well, of course, non-attachment. It operates at every stage of a spiritual path. First of all, obviously, addiction is a form of attachment. And using language, people should understand this is Buddhist language because in Western psychology, attachment is considered a healthy thing. In terms of attachment between the parent and child, and if we don't have that, we're kind of adrift. I'm not a psychologist, so I don't know much about that. But I'd like to make that little sidebar so people don't get confused.

Attachment in Buddhism is seen as when you're trying to hold onto something that's not permanent. So you're inevitably going to lose it. And in that losing, you're going to suffer. You're going to struggle. So one of the daily reflections the Buddha recommends is reflecting on how everything isn't permanent. Everything keeps changing.

Of course, that brings you more into an immediate experience of life to say, "This is the only time I'm going to have this moment, the only time I'm going to have this experience." And to really enjoy it.

I have one child; not as ambitious as you. The whole experience of raising a child; I have some nieces and nephews and friends who have small children now. And I remember how difficult it is when children are really small. But it's also this incredibly precious time. And if you're in a rush to get through that, you're going to be really sorry that you missed it.

That's kind of the opposite of attachment. But attachment, what we call desire and aversion, again are two sides of the same thing. I'm trying to hold onto this experience, but then there's another experience I'm trying to get rid of. And the mindfulness approach is just can I be fully with whatever is happening.

Because what is life? It's only what's here, right now, in this instant. So anytime we're trying to hold onto something, maintain something, there's going to be a sense of loss. And we have to be prepared for that, in a way. I think Buddhist practice psychically prepares you, ultimately, for all loss. Including your own death, which is the ultimate loss. At least, in our terms.

If we don't understand that our parents are going to die, or even that our children might get sick and might die. If that happens, we think the world has turned upside down, and how could this happen? And I'm not suggesting that we should all go around planning for the worst. But just understanding it really changes our experience of life.

I think one of the most painful things for people is to not understand why things are happening. And the simple fact that everything keeps changing really helps you to cope with a lot of the loss and a lot of things that happen in our lives. "Oh my god, my children are leaving. My partner is sick. Why is this happening?" This is part of nature.

It's like the weather. I don't say, "Why is it raining? It's making everything wet." It's nature. So even though I don't like getting wet and going outside, it's very different if I was like, "Oh my god, this water is falling from the sky! What's going on?" That would be really upsetting. I don't know if that makes sense.

**Dr. Thomas:** No, it does. I think in our addiction—or at least, I'll speak for myself. I wanted to have everything be just so. So controlling. How my world was going to be. And of course, like you said with nature and other humans, it doesn't always play out that way. I just love the way you speak about just being in the moment. That was something I never did.

I was future tripping to be a doctor someday. Then I was going to do this someday, and that someday. Or I was nervous about past. And never in the present. And that's where the magic happens. Or the joy. Or the love. Is right here and now, for us watching this summit together. Right? We're having a moment. Kevin, I'm just so grateful that you're sharing all these concepts with us.

I think, before I give you an opportunity for your last thoughts, speak a little bit about just kindness as it relates to one another and the world. I think that's sort of something that's important.

**Kevin:** Yeah, so thank you for mentioning my new book, *Living Kindness*. It's actually the first of my books that's not directed specifically to a recovery audience. There are reasons for that. But obviously, the idea of love and compassion is central to recovery anyway.

I guess it fundamentally comes back to this question of how we create suffering in ourselves. We have choices. It's one of my favorite phrases from the 12-step world. We have choices today. We have choices if we are awake and aware. We have choices what we do with our mind.

So I remember having dinner with some friends recently. One friend who is not in recovery, and not a Buddhist. Just a friend. And I said something about having compassion for billionaires. And she's like, "They don't deserve compassion. Those people, they're doing this and that." I thought, "I understand what you're saying. And I don't like what certain people do economically and how they harm the world. But first of all, I know that everyone suffers. And I also know that if I walk around hating people, I suffer."

So the idea of living kindness is; can I take this concept. In Buddhism there's a big emphasis on meditating on loving kindness. And I felt like that was a limited idea. It's one thing to sit at home in your protected environment and just think loving thoughts. That doesn't accomplish very much.

To go out in the world—and I don't mean to shake everybody's hand and give money away. I mean, when you're driving along and that person cuts you off. How you react to that creates your experience in that moment. And to recognize that that person is probably lost in their own story, or their own anxiety, or their own stress, is much more helpful to me than it is to go roll down my window and give them the finger. You know?

We're living at this time of tremendous conflict in our world. And there's a lot to people out there, they're on TV, that I can resent. And I have my feelings about them. And I don't pretend that I don't. But I try to keep that in balance. Just remember; what's the endgame of all of this? Where are we really going with all of this? Where does hatred really lead?

And the famous line from the Dhammapada says, “Hatred will never cease by hatred. By love alone, will hatred cease.” And that’s the ancient and eternal law. And that’s the Gandhian ideal, the Kaninan ideal. And it’s a pretty powerful belief to live by. And I don’t pretend to be able to embody that in every moment. But it’s my guiding principle. And I think it’s a principle for recovery. It’s a principle for life.

**Dr. Thomas:** So, maybe as your closing thoughts, how do we develop our loving kindness? Exercise that muscle. Make it a bigger part of our lives.

**Kevin:** Well, you won’t be surprised that I say that meditation is really, really helpful in this. When we practice meditation and we’re able to calm the surface agitation, what we discover inside ourselves is love. When you take away all the noise, all the self-centered thinking, all the worries, what’s inside us is love. And when we see that, so often I’ve seen people—and I had this experience early in my practice. So often we see people come out of a retreat, or come out of a workshop with an attitude that they remember that they really love people. And that’s what’s really important.

It’s so easy for us to get caught up in our daily stresses and frustrations and resentments and responsibilities and lose touch with that core connection that we feel both with people that we know and care about and in a broader sense, with all of humanity and in Buddhist terms, all beings. The only way we can kind of touch that is when we can quiet things down.

I go on retreats. I teach retreats. And retreats are a place where you can really get to some stillness. It’s hard, just in a daily practice. But even in daily practice, many times, you can drop into a place. Just for a moment; you touch something where you remember, “Right. This is who I really am. This is who I really want to be.”

That then is both an experience, but it’s also an insight. And you can’t hold onto an experience because experiences are impermanent. They’re just feelings that come and go. But you can try and live the insight. So that’s what living kindness is, trying to embrace this idea. Embrace these experiences, and bring them into our lives in a meaningful way.

**Dr. Thomas:** I’m still struggling with; I love myself. I’m stuck in this addiction, or I’m such a bad person because I’ve done these things. Help me. How do I break through and be able to love myself?

**Kevin:** Well, I think you've got to just; it starts with the behavioral level. This is how the program works. Buddhism tends to be more of a cognitive work, although it has a big behavioral element. But we start with the internal meditation. Recovery starts more with behavior. And I think because the thinking is so polluted at that point, we have to start acting as if.

We show up for meetings. We show up for our responsibilities. We start doing the things that we know; I don't like the word should, but in this case it applies. The things we know we should do. And we develop; through our actions we start to see, "Oh, right. I'm not a bad person."

On the one hand; yes, I believe that we all deserve love. But in order to have a sense of that esteem, we have to do, as they say, esteemable acts. For me, I think it is, you begin on that basic level. On the level of just acting. Taking the skillful steps.

And this follows the program as well. Over time, you start to do the inner work. And when you get to step six and seven, removing the shortcomings, that's when maybe the butterfly comes out of the caterpillar. Then step 11 is when meditation starts in the traditional model.

So it kind of makes sense that the steps are saying the same thing. We have to do this external work, and the self-examination begins with inventory. And by the 11<sup>th</sup> step, we're able to really start to go inside and start to heal internally. But it's a process. And I think you have to do the things that are practical to begin with.

**Dr. Thomas:** Perfect. Folks, you have to do the work. I'll remind you of the three frogs, who were sitting on a log, and one of them makes a decision. He's going to jump in the water. How many are left on the log? Well, there are three because a decision is not action. You need to actually jump in the water.

We are encouraging you to get in touch with Kevin Griffin through his work, through his books. You've given us a website. And strong encouragement here to find a 12-step program or something like that will give you a guideline for that action piece. That's where some of us are lost. What do I do? Just jump in.

Kevin, if you wouldn't mind sharing how people can get in touch with you. Also, I didn't give you that last chance for your parting thoughts of wisdom.

**Kevin:** First of all; KevinGriffin.net. All my books and things are on there. My schedule, because I teach retreats and events all over the country. My mailing list. You can email me directly through that website. I try to respond to all emails I get. So lots of resources on there.

I don't know what other parting thoughts to say. When put on the spot of wisdom, I'm like, well.

**Dr. Thomas:** I've got books full of wisdom.

**Kevin:** Yeah. I do think it's just so important for us to take those practical steps that we can do today. The wisdom of one day at a time. My first book is titled *One Breath at a Time*. It's just; do what you can now. Do what you can today.

I always had this idea that I had to have the big change. The big break. The big something was going to happen. And it never happened. And just showing up little by little. People ask me; how do you write a book? I say, "Well, you sit down, and you type." You start with one idea, one sentence. You start typing, and you see what comes next. And you do that every day. And if you can write some words every day, eventually it builds up into a book. It's nothing magical. It's not like you download the book into your head and offload it.

It's just to me, that simple life. I think, again, it's hard for addicts because we want excitement. We want thrill. We want it all now. And to be able to just settle down. Take it easy. Do what you can today.

**Dr. Thomas:** So as a former musician, playing in bars with all that excitement, how would you compare your life today now that you're just an author, doing this Buddhism meditation. It sounds so calm and boring. How would you compare your life today to that glorious music world?

**Kevin:** I actually performed last week at a Buddhist center.

**Dr. Thomas:** Fantastic

**Kevin:** It was really fun. Afterwards, I really wanted to do something crazy. It doesn't really make me happy. Happiness in Buddhist terms actually is peace. The Buddha says the highest form of happiness is peace.

For addicts, we have to learn the difference between peace and boredom. Serenity is not boredom. So my life is way better. I'm way happier because

there was never enough There's never enough fame. There was never enough applause. There were never enough drinks and drugs.

**Dr. Thomas:** Yep. There you have it folks. I'm with you, Kevin. I feel the same way. I was chasing a high. Chasing relief. Chasing fame, fortune, whatever I was chasing. Now you just let it all come and be. And it's so much better.

I think you so much. For our viewers, I thank you. And keep doing your amazing work.

**Kevin:** Thank you so much for having me. It was great talking to you, Paul.