



Navigating the living journey of grief

Guest: Said Dawlabani

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[00:00:09] Alex Howard

Welcome everyone to this interview where I am really excited to be talking with Said Dawlabani. Firstly, Said, welcome and thank you for joining me.

Said Dawlabani

Thank you for having me, Alex.

Alex Howard

I've been looking forward to this interview. I first met Said, it must have been 5, 6 years ago I think it was. We did an interview in Mill Valley just outside San Francisco, an interview around Said's work with evolutionary economics.

And Said's got an extensive background working, particularly with Don Beck, who was the creator of, or at least the developer of the ideas within Spiral Dynamics. So Said and I have had a little bit of contact also through the integral world over the years. And I noticed earlier this year that Said shared a post on Facebook that he'd written this book, *The Light of Ishtar*, which we're going to be talking a little bit about in this interview.

And perhaps we will say a little bit more in a moment, but Said's wife has been through an incredibly difficult journey. They've been on a difficult journey together. And we'll talk a bit about some of the details of that. But what really touched me in the book and what I feel is a really important part of the dialogue within this conference is the lived journey of going through something which is incredibly painful and difficult and traumatic, and the reality of that.

Because I think often when we talk about trauma, we can talk about it in neat ways, like trauma is something that happened in the past, or trauma meets these simple models of understanding it. And certainly in my life in my own way, and I think it's true for many people, that the struggles we have often are alive and they're difficult and they don't have neat and easy answers.

So I feel this is a very important interview. And Said and I talked a bit a few weeks ago, and I really appreciated some of the things which we'll come to. But I feel Said is also the voice of a lot of people I think that are watching this conference, that are battling and living with these challenges on a daily basis.

[00:02:28]

So welcome again. I really appreciate you being here. I know this is a sensitive and vulnerable subject we're talking about, so I really appreciate your willingness to have this conversation with me. Do you want to just give a little bit of a frame and a context to just the bare bones of the journey that you've been on over these recent years? And we can give folks that foundation, and then we'll travel from there.

Said Dawlabani

Sure. At about the year 2014 or so I noticed my wife, Elza, was experiencing some mild cognitive impairment. And at the time I didn't really think much of it, but her situation over the years started getting worse in the sense that her behavior was becoming somewhat noticeable with friends and colleagues, in her own work and matters of that nature.

We sought the help of the American medical community here. From neurologists, psychiatrists and everyone in between. And basically from the year 2014 onto the year 2018, we were told this was a very stubborn form of depression that is curable through different types of therapies.

Well in 4 years we went through 7 or 8 different therapists. We got opinions of 3 different neuropsychologists, and we're under the care of 3 different psychiatrists. And the simple things that I observed that were progressively getting worse had evaded any explanation from the medical community. Simple questions such as, Elza's been in therapy for 3 years, why hasn't her ability to speak in full sentences gotten any better? And to me, or to the medical community actually, that translated in their minds as failure in providing adequate service.

So over the years, that culminated with me being quite upset with the established medical community and I began to seek answers somewhere else. Long story short, in 2018, Elza thought she was experiencing symptoms of a stroke. So I rushed her to the hospital and after running certain CT scans, the doctor in the emergency room said there's no signs of a stroke, but there seems to be significant atrophy in the frontal and temporal lobe. And to me that was tragic as well as comforting. Tragic in the sense that there was confirmation this was something neurological that was progressive, and comforting in the sense that I wasn't going crazy in 4 years going to different people in the medical community who kept trying to convince us that this was nothing more than stubborn depression.

Long and short of it is, in 2018 Elza was diagnosed with the rare progressive brain disease called frontotemporal dementia, one of the several dementias, it's considered one of the really worse ones. She is coupled with primary progressive aphasia which has caused her to lose her ability to focus and to speak. And a possible, not confirmed yet, diagnosis of early onset Alzheimer's.

So this is where we are today. You can deduce that our lives have changed considerably in the last 5 or 6 years or so. And so this is where we are today. I am humbled by the experience that I've been through at this stage in my life. I'm not chasing unfair economic systems, trying to make them more conscious, I'm just focused on moving through life a day at a time. And that's where we are.

Alex Howard

And I think one of the things that I feel so important about in the story is, and I'm going to quote something you wrote in the book actually, I thought was really powerful that, 'how can a person process grief over any loss when the experience itself violates the loosest clinical definition of grief?'

The love of your life, also your business partner, someone you've spent a great deal of your adult life with is there, but not there.

[00:07:31]

And in a sense, we tend to talk about trauma or grief or something that's happened that we have to get over. But when one's living with that, which I think is a lot of people's experience in different ways, that makes it very difficult to process that in the ways that one would expect.

Said Dawlabani

How can someone process grief when most of the modern world, most psychotherapists, basically tell you that grief is a one event, in most cases, that allows for efficient processing of emotions and the 5 stages of grief that you go through? You process it, you move on, you get to the stage of acceptance, that's usually the toughest part, but sooner or later you move on with your life.

Well, this is not that. And the deeper I looked into really why I was grieving so deeply about what was going on with us, is that I realized this is a world that lives on the meritocracy of the mind. And what I was grieving is the loss of Elza's brilliant brain. Not only her brain, she had an incredible spiritual presence to her, she had a powerful feminine power presence to her. She animated this trio of me, her and Don Beck for almost two decades, and we were only able to accomplish the things we accomplished in the Middle East, in our earlier journey, trying to bring peace between Israelis and the Palestinians, due to Elza's unabashed determination to try to do something about the conflict.

And Don Deck wasn't going to do it without her. And I was like, okay, come along and do the supportive work, Don and I need to do this. And I initially moved into that space reluctantly, but then later realized, wow, this is really important. This is way more important than anything that I was doing at the time, which was being an executive in the real estate industry, building homes and living the American dream and thinking that that's what life was all about.

And so what I was grieving is the loss of that and to the secondary degree, the loss of the three of us coming together, the field that that created in order to accomplish extraordinary things. So along with Elza's initial decline, Don Beck has experienced some decline himself as well, physically and cognitively. And so it's been difficult to maintain, what I defined as, the parameters of a healthy, conscious life, less than 5 or 6 years ago.

So it's been quite difficult. I would've been happy if I were just anyone grieving a normal loss, I would have been happy going to a therapist and allow the chips fall where they may. But as I explained earlier, the entire medical community, including a therapeutic community here in the States, have shown that they really don't care as much about whether the nature of your decline is neurological, that had no cure, or is it something that we can try as much as we can to cure, knowing that in the background, this might not be curable.

So in order for me to help myself process the trauma and the grief that I was going through, I dabbled into areas that usually most people don't dabble into. And that is, as I described in my book, I woke up one night from a nightmare repeating Joseph Campbell's quotation, which is probably one of the most popular quotations of his work is, 'to follow my bliss, to follow your bliss.' And it came to me as an awakening. It came to me. I've discovered that my bliss was my ability to express myself through my writings.

[00:12:08]

And so it was through that that I was able to first begin to journal about where Elza I were, so being a witness to the events that were happening to us and taking it out of this objective and maybe seeing it from more of a, set your ego aside and see from an objective perspective. And then the dabbling into the myths, the in-depth psychology, the spirituality, the philosophy, it sort of rose on its own. I had to set my ego aside saying, in a very difficult way, trying to convince myself that the paradigm that existed for me 10, 15 years ago, no longer exists. What would happen if I set that aside, even if it's just temporarily, if I can, and see what life is about without it.

And it's because of that that I was able to transcend most of the things that my ego is attached to, although it was great work that Don Beck, Elza and I did over the last 15 years, the universe says, well, that was great, but the reality is there are certain things that you can't control and you have to transcend your ego that is attached to a certain outcome in order for you to understand it.

Alex Howard

What I think is also really an important part of this journey as well is that the journey to that place of acceptance wasn't a bypass around the difficult feelings and emotions, it was a journey through those feelings.

One of the things that struck me in the book was obviously a lot of the work that you, Elza and Don were doing was fighting injustice. There are some powerful, I also should say to people, the book is written by you, but it also includes excerpts from Elza's writing as well. And she also writes of that. And I said to you last time we spoke that I particularly liked the moment where you really allowed yourself to have your rage and your anger at Don, and there was a bit about Ken Wilber's bald head that made me laugh out loud. But say a bit about that embracing of just the truth of how you were feeling and why that was important.

Said Dawlabani

Well, I call that my journey into the dark night of the soul. And if you've listened to many of the spiritual teachers out there, that is really a very sacred journey that begins when signs begin, the universe begins to show you signs of what lies beyond the identity that you created for yourself. And so suddenly the things that you've known stop making sense. Repeating the same task, expecting old results doesn't make sense anymore. And suddenly the world starts collapsing on you piece by piece.

And initially my reaction to that, because I'm a man of the world, I don't live on a mountain top meditating all the time. There was tremendous attachment to the things that we held near and dear and thinking that it was all conscious pursuits. You were absolutely right in the sense that we were looking to fix injustice everywhere it existed. And as noble as that is, it also adds to your ego.

And so when you begin to see it all go away, or at least in my case, I looked to blame those who are responsible to tell us to do that was all okay. And so I talk about how my transformation in my own journey, into my own light of the soul began initially with me blaming the gods, blaming the universe, trying to bargain. I followed the 5 stages of grief without even knowing that it was a natural process that occurred. So I blamed, from the hugest net I can cast, blaming the gods of the universe. And when that reality didn't yield, I resorted to the gods in physical form.

And so one being feeling anger, the first person I projected on was Clare Graves. He tempted us into following his teachings and that's really what attracted Elza and I to do the work. And as if that wasn't

enough, it was Don, and again this is just me tapping into spiritual answers that I need to have me convinced that this issue was far greater than what my ego can understand or tap into the greater forces that could provide me an explanation.

[00:17:27]

Sadly, it all showed up in blame and anger and examining the faults of everyone else except mine. But the culmination of that was that night of fit of anger towards Graves, Beck and Wilber was just an all out, this is not what this is supposed to be about. How dare you lead Elza into the forbidden territory of trying to fix the patriarchy in the Middle East when the gods have decided a long time ago that that's forbidden territory. And so I had to understand it from that perspective in order for me to come to the space. That night was the straw that broke the camel's back. And I'll talk about what followed.

What followed was a dream that I had. And I'm a believer in dream analysis through therapy and that's what Elza used to do whenever her and I would have an archetypal dream, we would analyze it the next day. And without a doubt that night I had an archetypal dream that Graves and I were kindred souls. And we were just sitting in his office behind my desk, in my executive swivel chair and just shooting the breeze and smiling and looking out. And I woke up the next day and for the first time in months I felt like there was a sense of freedom, a sense of peace, a sense of ability to say, wow, all that has been clamoring at me, had disappeared. And it was then that I began to really process my own emotions. It was then that I began to realize that all that was due to the limitations of my own ego.

Alex Howard

There's something that I think is so important, that one can know that as an idea but to feel that in one's heart you have to embrace all that you feel. You have to let yourself have the rage, the anger, the frustration to find that place of deeper acceptance.

Said Dawlabani

Yes, absolutely. I'm not saying that that was the magical night that it all went away. There remains triggers, although they're far and few in between, there are still triggers that sent me on an anger fit that I can't control, but they're less guttural than they used to be. They come with the understanding that I'm in a different space where I was in 2018.

Alex Howard

I think also part of what's been so important about this is we're talking about a living unfolding story, and as part of that one can have that place of deeper acceptance, but there's also still the place of having to live with the day to day reality and the frustrations.

Let's maybe touch on a little bit on, you touched on it briefly earlier, but the interactions with the medical community, what you call in the book, 'the health care industrial complex'. In a sense, at times absence of empathy and compassion and being too quick to make diagnoses and too quick to follow and not question diagnoses. Maybe say a bit about that piece as well.

[00:21:12] Said Dawlabani

Yes. Well our first experience examining what's going on with Elza came with our first visit to a research neurologist at the local research institute here, a renowned institute in Southern California. Who basically administered some standardized testing for her to see if there's cognitive decline that might indicate any neurological disorders, primarily progressive neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's. And at the end of that he concluded that although there is some atrophy of brain tissue, it's not a source of concern. And recommended that we see a neuropsychologist who could prescribe therapy treatments.

But at the bottom of that 4 page report in the fine print, it mentions things that only came back to me after the diagnosis in that emergency room was made 4 years later. What the atrophy could mean is a list of things. And one of those things on there was primary progressive aphasia and frontotemporal dementia. Well, you don't read the fine print. You just listen to what the renowned neurologist says. So we took his advice. We went to the neuropsychologist who also ran a battery of tests and determined that Elza's therapeutic needs were not being addressed adequately and put us through the rigor of going through a specialized psychiatrist who recommended a psychologist.

Said Dawlabani

And so long story short, my indication on whether Elza was progressing in her therapy or not was, is she happier? Can she focus? And has her ability to speak gotten any better? Because by 2017 she was barely able to compose a sentence. And our neurologists kept dissuading us from the idea that this was a neurological issue.

So we kept changing doctors thinking that someone would think outside the box. And I finally came to the realization that this is an unspoken reality for them. If you're familiar with the Spiral Dynamics model, the green value system has taken over psychotherapy, and humanitarian psychology, humanistic psychology prevails. It doesn't matter what your genes say, it doesn't matter what heredity says. When 50 years ago, one of Graves' most famous quotes was, 'what determines psychology is the lottery of the brain'. And that the lottery of the brain in a lot of cases carries certain genetic markings that research cannot cure, the most recent advances in genetics cannot address. And not once was that brought up with the medical community.

The last neurologist we went to, which was the third within our healthcare system. We had to wait 4 months to see him because he was apparently the most prominent neurologist. And we waited for the appointment and we were there in less than 15 minutes. The minute he sat Elza down he gave her the same exact tests, the same exact sheets as the two other neurologists gave her to examine whether her issue was a progressive neurological issue. And after he asked her a few questions, she was hesitant in giving answers, but she gave the right answers. And immediately after giving the correct answers, he sort of closes his laptop and says, this is a therapy issue. Her memory is fine. I'm like, excuse me. We waited for this appointment for 4 months. Are you telling me all neurodegenerative diseases are related to memory?

Alex Howard

Just to interrupt you, I just want to really speak to this moment because I think many people have had this frustration of instinctively, either for themselves or for the person that they're caring for, instinctively intuitively, maybe even logically they know that something's not right. They know that something's wrong and they're not getting understood. They're not getting listened to. And particularly diagnoses tend to just follow people around. But once someone has given a diagnosis,

the danger is everyone else looks at the diagnosis and it's almost like a confirmation bias. They look for the evidence to confirm what they're already seeing.

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And I'm really happy we're talking, obviously not happy that you've been through the experience, but I'm happy we're having a conversation about this because I think it's a rarely talked about, but incredibly frustrating and difficult thing.

Said Dawlabani

And I think you're absolutely right. There seems to be a theme in the industry that you are not to violate another prominent physician's diagnosis. If you do so you will be ostracized from the entire medical practice. And although I don't have an actual confirmation of that, that seems to be the repeating theme with us that followed us for 4 years.

And so after that experience with that neurologist, it was the emptiest feeling I've had in a long time, it was a punch in the gut. I decided this is nothing but a false journey into what promises to be a return to how things used to be. And these are nothing more than hectors.

Alex Howard

You called it in the book, 'The High Priestess of False Hope'. I thought that was a really powerful frame to put on it.

Said Dawlabani

Well, that came from, after we pretty much exhausted the network of our health care organization, Elza's primary care physician says, look, you've pretty much exhausted all resources that we have. Maybe it's time for you to go outside the network. And that's what we did. He recommended someone who's in private practice, a brilliant young psychiatrist. And we thought, well, since it's going to be private pay, I can ask her questions that she's maybe not beholden to a certain insurance requirements to answer differently or things of that nature.

And surely enough she threw out the diagnosis that everybody was working with for the previous 3 years and changed Elza's diagnosis from major depressive disorder to type 1 bipolar. And so I began to breathe a sigh of relief as we began to see some progress. But then within a few short months, all the progress that was made was reversed. And then the doctor changed the diagnosis from bipolar type 1 to bipolar type 2 and treating for either didn't show any promise. And so that's when I confronted her about this being neurological.

Alex Howard

Which I think is also another important point I just want to highlight here, which is that until one gets an accurate diagnosis, you can't put in place the right treatment pathway. And in a sense that's, I think part of the frustration, but it's also the importance of people battling and fighting to get the right diagnosis, because otherwise you're spending energy and hope and time and money doing intervention that is just not going to be effective.

[00:29:45] Said Dawlabani

What we did after that is I sought the advice of someone who is an outsider to our health care community. A person who Elza and I would have not met if it weren't for her work with Don in the Middle East. And he was a friend of a friend who is a practicing neuropsychologist in Upper state New York, who practically wrote the desk reference for neuropsychology. And he had heard of the work that Elza and Don were doing in Israel and Palestine and our friend said, you can call him anytime you want.

And surely enough, we called that individual and after I described Elza's symptoms on the phone to him, he said, I'm afraid this is not an issue that could be resolved in therapy. And that's when we first heard the term primary progressive aphasia, and I asked what it could be related to. And that's when he mentioned frontotemporal dementia. And so all this happened while we were still in treatment with 'The High Priestess of False Hope'.

So after her second diagnosis of bipolar 2 failed, I confronted her with this. I said, 'we have a friend, and I told her what his credentials were, who thinks that this is aphasia. Why haven't you and your colleagues mentioned this?'. And her standard answer was just like everyone else's, 'this person is not licensed to practice medicine in California, and I wouldn't listen to him'.

And so after her diagnosis and me repeatedly asking about, well, have you considered other alternatives that are based in neurology, not psychology and psychiatry? And she kept evading the right answer till Elza had reversed all the progress that she had made under her care. And that's when she realized that even her treatment has failed and that's when she placed a referral to the neurology institute which eventually confirmed the diagnosis that was made in the emergency room completely by accident, by someone who wasn't familiar with the narrative of what had happened in the last 4 years. There was an emergency room physician who was just looking at some CT scans of the brain.

Alex Howard

He wasn't blinded by the previous narrative and just the confirmation bias of, I'm just going to look for the evidence that supports what I'm saying.

Said Dawlabani

Yeah, exactly. He wasn't afraid of being reprimanded by the highest rated neurologist in San Diego, he was just doing his emergency room diagnosis, which ultimately turned out to be the right diagnosis.

So that run around, throughout that whole period of time the hero archetype in me always put his best foot forward, and by the time the diagnosis was made I was completely exhausted. I was at a place where someone, or another subpersonality, or another self needed to take over to bring this whole thing together. And that's when I began to really try to set aside everything about even thinking about what a return to what life used to be like pre 2014, and began to deal with the reality the way it is.

Alex Howard

I think what's also important to add into this as well is that, I think it's only because of your significant business and intellectual capacity, let's say, from previous things in your life, that you had the determination and the capacity to keep pushing and challenging to get the diagnosis. We could still be here 2, 3 years later and still not have that clarity. And I wonder what helped you keep pushing

when you just kept getting these walls of ignorance, honestly. For others in the same situation with someone that they love or they themselves, and they know they haven't got the clarity, what helps you keep pushing through?

[00:34:13] Said Dawlabani

Well, a couple of things. First, I'm a researcher by the very nature of the work that I do with economics and just the nature of the business that I've been engaged in my whole life. I research everything. And I'm a believer in science. I do believe in finding answers to the secrets of the universe, as the orange system is known to be, through research and scientific methods that research and development, all the things that transcends subjective opinions about these things. And so I've researched everything possible. And I looked into possible misdiagnosis on issues like this and what doctors could be missing.

The other aspect of this is both of my brothers, my older brother and my younger brother are doctors, and so I reached out to them. And my older brother knows how to navigate the medical system and manipulate it to my advantage. And he let me in on some of these secrets on how to get our insurance company, for example, to be able to cover a treatment that wouldn't normally be covered. And my younger brother was head of research at a pediatrics division in the hospital. When I told him I wasn't convinced of the current diagnosis that was being told, that we were being told, he decided that he was going to come and visit and gather all of Elza's records, including her CT scans, MRIs and her PET scans and the history of treatment and the list of her medications. And he convened a hospital wide meeting basically saying, 'look, this is my sister in-law. Please don't feel like you're limited to what you might be afraid of a hospital administrator to do or any insurance company to do. I want your full, honest opinion on this'.

So having access to these things enabled me to look beyond the narrative that was developed through our health care system here, that this was a treatable diagnosis. And by the time my younger brother got back to me, he said, 'I'm sorry her condition is so advanced. There's nothing we can do'. And to me that was a wake up call that really started me thinking into how deceptive the entire medical community is, especially when it comes to issues of neurodegeneration where the medical community knows there is no cure for. And they perpetuate the myth that this is curable, maybe for some unspoken purpose, to collect as much of the insurance benefits as possible. And then when the truth comes, like I say in the book, they're like cockroaches in white lab coats that're carried to their hiding places. They're nowhere to be found.

Alex Howard

And there's something about the importance of self advocating, like being willing to take on that battle. And in a sense, sometimes it, of course it's not always like this, but sometimes it really is like you're going to war. You're having to get a stronger argument as you can. You're having to get the best advice that you can, the best professionals on your side that you can. And I think it only adds to the trauma and the frustration of you're already dealing with something incredibly difficult and now you've got this extra layer on top.

And I wonder what you'd, obviously it's a journey that's still being lived, but at least having now got that clarity, what would you say to folks that are watching this that are still on that journey to get clarity, to help them keep pushing for that?

[00:38:33] Said Dawlabani

Well, I would say try to get as much of an outside opinion, professional opinion, on the conditions that you're dealing with as much as you can. From my experience, this is really a systemic problem, and you're really fighting a system that is not set up for prevention and issues of whole care. They're really set up to cater to insurance costs, to give you minimum possible service, and to avoid having you exhaust every penny of your benefits. It's just the entire experience left a really bad taste in my mouth as far as dealing with the entire medical community.

And so here I am dealing with a huge system that thinks in those terms. And on the other side, I have two or three people that are on my side that are saying, well, no, this is wrong. And so imagine the size of the battle. This is a David versus Goliath kind of deal. And so the battle is uphill. But I encourage people from pursuing it, I encourage people from getting second opinions, even if it costs a little more money, outside your own insurance network, just to get yourself some peace of mind.

I would go to a non-conventional therapist if it's an issue of deep trauma that doesn't resolve. I would seek alternative therapy. I would consult with other aspects that I discussed in my book, tap into my spirituality, tap into other realms that are not necessarily traditional medicine. Those are the things that help me, and I hope with me talking about them that triggers some interest in your viewers to pursue.

Alex Howard

And I think what's also, I'm really keen to highlight here that these journeys are happening simultaneously. There's the journey of taking a spiritual lens and letting your ego be battered to pieces in a sense, and the potential for awakening that comes from that. Whilst at the same time getting up and having to take on these battles with the medical complex. And it's not an either or and it's not a neat, tidy journey that you do this piece and you package that piece away and then you do this piece. It's following your inner compass along the way of just, what's the thing that's most important to give my attention to today?

Said Dawlabani

So along this journey what I realized is there's no map to it. There is no certain guide to guide you through it. You take it a day at a time. And you really don't know what the medical community is going to throw in your way, you don't know what the universe is going to throw in your way, you don't know if you're going to be able to meditate on issues that need to be resolved, that you need to bring yourself up to a higher level of spiritual understanding to accept. All these things are constantly battling with the situation to have it take shape, and it's like you're almost helpless in giving a direction.

You talk about surrender, this was the place of surrender for me. It's that I can't control anything and let the higher powers take charge of this and see where they may lead me. After a while, you learn that surrender is quite a peaceful place to be.

Alex Howard

I'm mindful of time, but I'd love to also just to talk a little bit about, towards the end of the book you say that a friend recently asked if I processed grief and you answered, 'I'll let you know when I get there'. And I thought that was beautiful because I think again, a lot of people's experiences, it's not something you deal with and you put it in a box. It's an unfolding journey.

[00:42:57] Said Dawlabani

It absolutely is. And you talk about trauma a lot in your series of talks, Alex, and to me, trauma appears in different forms to different people. And although, as I said before, this is the kind of trauma that has really annihilated everything I have known for 15, 16 years and had sent me on a solemn journey to search for new answers.

Recovery is not the same for everyone. It all depends on your past experience. It depends on your cognitive abilities, your spiritual abilities, what your experience was in tapping into things that have made you happier, have helped you overcome things in the past.

Acceptance, I could never say that I will ever get there. Accepting the nondual nature of life and death are the same. You can't get into any higher level of realization than that. And so I work my way back from that. There's no difference between the work that Elza, Don and I were doing in saving the Middle East to really being the caregiver for my ill wife. Not that nonduality makes it a lot easier for me to accept where we are but acceptance is never final. They were constantly triggered.

And like the other day, I was looking through our closet and I talked about when I first met Elza and she was wearing a miniskirt, and I ran into that miniskirt as I'm shuffling, and I completely broke down. Those triggers show up in the least places you expect them. But then you have to learn to, okay, well, that's just another small lesson in my progress towards a final state that might never be reached. A final state called acceptance.

So that's been my journey but by no measure do I consider myself someone who has reached that final stage of acceptance and happiness. It's a work in progress and very likely will continue to be a work in progress for many years to come.

Alex Howard

What I really hear you say is acceptance is not a destination, it's a journey, it's a practice that one lives.

Said Dawlabani

It absolutely is. And I've learned that it is a journey that the universe might throw certain complications on that road on that journey, and you have to learn to accept it.

Alex Howard

I really want to recommend that people check out your book, *The Light of Ishtar*. I think it's a powerful book. And I'm so grateful for you being willing to come and have this conversation. I know it's a very sensitive conversation. Is there anything you want to share in closing?

Said Dawlabani

I would tell people who seem to be into the spiritual community and working with therapy, to explore other areas of their lives that they might have substituted spirituality and therapy for. That there is a totality of life and to me today, is appearing to be in the smallest things. I derive pleasure from just taking care of my garden or cleaning my own backyard from dog poop.

[00:46:56] Alex Howard

I do that in mine as well.

Said Dawlabani

I talk about nonduality, I put that at the same level as speaking to a conference of the top financial global leaders in the world just a couple of years ago. They're both the same. And so my recommendation is tap into other abilities that you have in order for you to become well adjusted and happy. That'll be my advice. That's what got me to write the book and helps me process much of the trauma that I've experienced since 2014.

Alex Howard

Wonderful. Said, thank you so much. I really appreciate your openness and willingness to do this dialogue. Thank you so much.

Said Dawlabani

Thank you, Alex, for putting this beautiful series on. It's very informative and very heart touching.