



Conscious Life presents

TRAUMA SUPER CONFERENCE

Psychedelics for trauma healing

Guest: Dr Pedram Shojai

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[00:00:09] Alex Howard

Welcome everyone to this interview, where I'm super excited to be talking with Dr Pedram Shojai. And in this interview, we're going to be exploring the role of psychedelics in trauma healing. And I think Pedram has a really good, measured, voice and perspective around this.

We'll talk about some of the potential, some of the magical things that ultimately can happen using psychedelics. But also some of the risks and how to make sure that it's being done in a safe way, and particularly having the support of a suitably qualified, skilled professional to hold the space and the process.

So to give you a little bit of Pedram's background, Dr Pedram Shojai is a man with many titles. He is the founder of theurbanmonk.com, co-founder of whole.tv, the New York Times bestselling author of *The Urban Monk*, *Rise and Shine*, *The Art of Stopping Time* and also of *Inner Alchemy*.

He is the producer and director of the movies, *Vitality*, *Origins*, and also *Prosperity*. He's also produced several documentary series like *Interconnected*, *Gateway to Health* and the upcoming *Exhausted* series.

In his spare time he's also a taoist abbot, a doctor of Oriental medicine, a kung fu world traveler and a fierce global green warrior; avid backpacker and devout alchemist and a Qigong master. And an old school Jedi biohacker working to preserve our natural world and wake us up to our full potential.

So firstly Pedram, welcome back. I always enjoy our conversations. Thanks for making some time.

Dr Pedram Shojai

Thanks for doing this. It's important work.

Alex Howard

All right, so you put something in the notes that you guys shared. I thought it was a really good place to start. You said, time doesn't heal, it conceals. And I think sometimes that can be a real frustration for people that they've been led to believe that time is a healer. And yet things that have

happened years ago are still really impacting them now. So maybe you could just unpack that statement a bit more.

[00:02:21] Dr Pedram Shojai

Yeah, it's a tough one. I mean, people were also led to believe that Santa Claus exists, right? So we face it, it's kind of an endemically charged thing that runs through our culture. But look, scar tissue forms in your physical body when you have an injury, and that scar tissue is just a little rougher. It's not as electrically conductive, and it's there to kind of patch up tissue that is no longer the same and it doesn't really kind of lay down the same way.

For emotional healing and emotional scarring. It just doesn't work the same way, even if you think it's going to scar over. These things they rest in the amygdala and the amygdala with the hippocampus and the way our brains recycle and re-loop traumas with memories, associated memories and feelings that evoke similar feelings or families of feelings around the original event, shall we call it.

They don't go away, and in my experience, they will be there and haunt you. And almost like little magnets pick up the filings along the way and continue to add to themselves in a way that will become obstructive to your day to day life and also, in a kind of a profound way, force you eventually to look at them.

I like to talk about this in the context of polarity. If you have a positive pole and a negative pole, what happens is that, first of all, they create a magnet, they create a dynamo, but then a positive will attract a negative and vice versa.

But if, let's just say I have an event that I construe as negative, and instead of engaging in that with, say, like a positive charge and going to it, to heal it, to mend it, I continue to avert and move away. What happens when you put two negative charges together? They continue to repel, right?

And what ends up happening is you end up shifting away, from running away from this trauma, but the more you do so, the more magnetic charge, the more almost like static you build between the original event and your aversion of the event until eventually lightning strikes.

You'll continue to bring similar people, similar events, similar circumstances into your life and wonder why this keeps happening to you. Chances are it's because you've moved away. You assumed time would heal it. You had a stiff upper lip, you changed your name, you started doing yoga, all the things that we do to avoid engaging in something that was painful or hurtful.

And lo and behold, 30 years later, this theme is recurring in your life. And so the moral of the story is, look, you just got to fix it. You got to fix it. You got to get after it, and you have to challenge yourself to understand that your life is no longer moving the way it should. And the flow of your life has now been compromised by this thing. As horrible as it was, that you cannot look away from anymore.

Alex Howard

Well, I guess it's almost like with physical problems, often we take pharmaceuticals, and then they cause more symptoms, and we take more pharmaceuticals to deal with those symptoms. And it's

like as you're talking about that metaphor, it strikes me that we get more and more pull towards trying to fix the symptoms of trauma without really going to the core of what's actually going on.

[00:06:07] Dr Pedram Shojai

And that's exactly it. We live in a culture where we just want pain to go away, and we move away from pain. We avert pain as much as possible. That's why Advil sells off the shelves. That's why everyone's trying to sedate themselves in one way or another, whether it's alcohol, drugs, social media, but we don't want to engage in the things that cause psychological anguish, and we want to move away from them. But that's not how things heal.

That's the opposite of how things heal. But because our operating system is now oriented towards running away from the pain and we see everyone else doing it. We assume that that new normal is how things are supposed to be and I think that's led to the tragedy of our time.

As trauma is overwhelmingly apparent in people. The anxiety is over the moon here and if you look about how people who have harbored trauma, especially sexual trauma, are then become perpetually people that are pushing that into further generations. You look at an epidemic of trauma that's almost like a virology, right? So it's a virus that has to now offload itself into another and the only way that we allow that to exist is by harboring it and not looking at it.

The light of our attention, our inner vision is the healing agent. It is the alchemical transmutive agent. When looking at trauma, yet because we don't know how to do it, we end up with what we end up with which is guys like you and me on conferences having to talk about it because it's a mess. It's a mess right now.

One of the things which in recent years has had a new surge of interest and research around it is psychedelics and I'd love to hear some of your perspectives and thoughts around that.

Yeah I have a lot of strong opinions about it. I'm a fan of the psychedelics. I've been following Charlie Grob and Hyla Cass. This research has been going on for a long time. Stan Grof was doing amazing work in the 60s and then the industry got compromised. A lot of yahoos came in. There's some talk about how it was infiltrated by the CIA. I don't know about the conspiracy stuff but I do know that the scene was compromised and it went wild, wild west.

And in doing so the feds stepped in and said enough of this monkey business. They did absolutely throw the baby out with the bathwater. If you look at the science of psychedelics and psychedelic assisted therapies with professionals they're getting amazing results. Unbelievable transformative changes in one's life and we could talk about why that happens and then there's all the rest.

All of these would-be music festival shamans and douchebags and just a lot of abuse around the industry if you will. And there are some really good doctors trying to kind of build firewalls around that and say look, the evidence suggests that this works, don't ruin it again because we're trying to help people. And then there's the monkeys that are just in for a buck. I got guys that I hear about all the time writing Ketamine prescriptions to people, just say you have anxiety.

And so the abusive idiots are back and we will see in the next few years or so whether or not psychedelic medicine establishes the rightful foothold it deserves in trauma therapy or if the morons ruin it again. Everyone's a shaman all of a sudden.

[00:10:04] Alex Howard

One of the things that we'll come to in a little bit is how to be safe and what are some of these key principles that you're touching on there. But maybe we can talk a little bit about some of the options around psychedelics and also some of the mechanisms of how they can be helpful and how they can work.

Dr Pedram Shojai

So Ketamine in particular is a good place to start mostly because it's legal. And so Ketamine has kind of established itself as kind of the first foothold of legal psychedelic assisted therapy. Now, is it a true psychedelic? That can be argued.

But what Ketamine does is it instills whole brain integration. So say you have a problem and you're stuck on this problem and in your mind, the way the mind has crystallized, it's either I run away from home or I stay here and suffer. And that's all you got because your mind is locked into this kind of amygdala based trauma circuitry.

You do something like Ketamine, and again with supervision, with someone who knows how to kind of navigate those waters and all of a sudden you're like, oh well, look at that there's twenty-seven other options that I wasn't looking at from a bird's eye view and wow, I don't have to either run away from home or listen to mom. I could talk to her, I could... X, Y or Z. And so the way the brain starts to integrate and create new synaptic formations with this particular substance is very useful.

And I know people in the industry that are using...so I know people that are doing that are part of clinical trials and are really experimenting with this, is now they're starting to use some of say, like the entheogens like psilocybin which opens up different kind of serotonergic circuitry and allows for you to have kind of an entheogenic, like a godlike experience. You start getting into kind of your intuitive pathways and we talk about why the rhizomal rhizosphere might have some really interesting kind of connections with our microbiome and our consciousness. There's all sorts of really interesting things happening around that.

But psilocybin has a very powerful therapeutic effect as well as demonstrated to be incredibly effective for depression. And so I now know people who are doing clinical trials where they're experimenting with say, psilocybin or MDMA or even LSD and then using Ketamine for the integration and then the kind of like psychological conversations that happen as you open and close the container. Again with some stunning, phenomenal, incredible results. I know someone who's listening to us right now is going to say, hell yeah, that's the magic bullet I was looking for finally.

And so the tendency in our culture is to say, oh yeah, psychedelics, something from outside of me put into me, fixes me. And so it's that kind of like biohacker, get me the right code and just fix this thing. I want to make sure that I speak to this in a way that is responsible in that, first off, psychedelics aren't that fun.

You do ayahuasca, you're praying to God and you're miserable and there are some very... it's a lot of suffering. It's not fun. And so where's the actual growth coming from? Is it the ayahuasca that's doing something to you or is it opening something in you that makes you have to face reality and

stand up to your fears and your limitations and accept the things that you might not have been willing to accept?

[00:14:09]

So it almost forces you to turn your gaze inward and do the heavy lifting in the work. So you know, you spend 12 hours retching on the ground and throwing up and pooping yourself and having a really uncomfortable experience and then the next day you're like, holy crap, I'm tired of pretending I'm a new man.

Was that you or the ayahuasca or maybe a combination of the two that did the work? And so I think it's very easy in our culture to practice idolatry, is to give the power of what just happened to substance A,B,C or Doctor X, Y or Z. And so I think a big part of this conversation has to do with you as an individual allowing the work to happen and engaging in the work and finally coming clean with yourself.

And I think that as these headlines start to go and then I go, that guy talked about psychedelics, I want to try it. You have to be careful not to be a shopper of this stuff and have a proper understanding of what your role in your healing has to be, must be, and if you go into it with that type of operating system, not only will you get in what you put out, you're not going to say, oh man, that was great, let's do it again, got any more ketamine. And so you start to give the power of your introspection and your personal evolution to this thing outside of you, which in the long run I think could also have deleterious effects.

Alex Howard

It's like part of what I'm hearing you say is that, using these experiences to have a significant impact that then needs to be integrated and processed and held in a certain way. Not trying to use them as a kind of regular way to sustain something in day to day life. There needs to be some sort of fundamental impact that's had, not just kind of almost, I need this to be able to make my life exciting or to try and feel a certain way

Dr Pedram Shojai

A hundred percent. And then there's the other side of that, which is, I'm a guy who grew up in LA and I can't tell you how many people I knew that would do drugs and alcohol on the weekends and go on some bender up in the desert or something and then come back and be detoxing.

So it's this pendulum swing that is also not a healthy operating system. And so I know a lot of people who will live their lives however they've been living them and then go have like a week of I love you kind of overextended long hugs at Burning Man and use that kind of transitory, transient experience to define who they are.

And now I'm a Burning Man guy and a music festival guy and all that kind of identity crap. But also use it as kind of a pressure release valve, but not necessarily get into the real healing they need to get into. Which is facing the trauma that came from dad beating them or being molested and all the other real stuff that tends to still get brushed under the rug because we don't want to deal with it.

[00:17:26] Alex Howard

What's the role that you see, Pedram, of a skillful facilitator or therapist in this work in terms of, I guess, A, assessing someone suitability for this work, but also in terms of integration and processing and avoiding exactly what you were just speaking about?

Dr Pedram Shojai

Yeah, I mean, listen, I don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater here, there are very well intentioned people who have studied psychology or psychiatry who understand the body of work that has led us to the place we've come to and understand the pitfalls and limitations. And she has OCD, but this guy's schizophrenic. And there are very serious areas where you don't want to administer psychedelics.

And so someone who has the container for all that and knows how to kind of handle a crisis situation in some of these situations that come up more often than not and then is open minded enough to say, look, the crap that we have doesn't work. So let's try something new and let's try a different container and see if we can effectively get better results.

That's an open minded, scientifically based, reasonable human who is on your side. And I don't want to throw all of the would be shamans under the bus. I mean, listen, I've done ayahuasca and akitos in the jungle and took me a long time to find someone I trusted because a lot of these guys were just like tourist guys.

And so there's just also this whole class of people who...her name was Becky, and she had a bunch of trauma, but now she calls herself Starlight and learned how to bang on a drum, and somehow she's a shaman.

Alex Howard

I think we've all met someone like that.

Dr Pedram Shojai

We've all met her. Right, exactly. That's like 80% of the Santa Monica population. But that person, although, albeit well intentioned for the most part, may not have the capacity to hold you and hold space for you when you have finally come face to face with the fact that your father was raping you.

Like, real things that come up and these people don't necessarily have the training or the skill to do it, let alone then, I can't tell you how many stories I hear about people getting raped by shamans. Just incredible...and or psychiatrists who are douchebags. Let's not put it all on one side.

There's some really bad people that are exploiting traumatized people in this world. And so it's just you have to be very careful as well, because although this stuff is incredibly potent and transformative. Look, the best place for the devil to hide is right in the church.

I remember in Dharamshala, India, sitting there watching these roving bands of gangs and street dogs battling on the streets. And I couldn't understand how at the home of the Dalai Lama, there was this much shadow. And I learned that the shadow follows the light. The shadow will wrap itself

around the light. And so there's a lot of nasty people out there picking off wounded people who are looking for solutions and not necessarily discerning of who's going to be able to help them.

[00:20:55] Alex Howard

I think also there's something around that one has the experience, like there's an expansion or there's an insight, but then there's the processing and the meaning that we make from that. I guess just like if we have a traumatic experience, then we have to make it mean something.

And when we have these expansive or insightful experiences, we also have to make meaning. And I wonder what the role of the therapist or the psychiatrist or the psychologist or the person that's holding it? That's, I guess, quite important in terms of helping that integration and that meaning making.

Dr Pedram Shojai

Yeah and some would argue that we shouldn't work so hard at making meaning and life is meaningless, and that's okay. And some would argue that you have to create a container to contextualize that newfound meaning within the lesson of the trauma so that you can go full circle in the healing.

But these are higher order conversations that happen with intelligent humans who know what they're doing going in. Because if you don't and you're just doing it with some monkey and you don't tie those loose ends together, now you have a lot of kind of dissociative feelings, emotions, thoughts and the ego loves that stuff. And the ego will start to create an identity.

And now Becky becomes Stardust and some dude bro CEO did psychedelics twice, now is calling himself God. I mean, I've met guys that say I am God, after doing drugs a couple of times and have followings.

Here's a guy who's Temple trained monk who's been around the block, who has had humility beaten into me in the martial arts, watching these yahoos who have absolute psychological distress, dissociate from their own trauma and their own history. And create themselves as a new identity and get out there and basically get followers and take on the responsibility of healing someone else's trauma when they haven't even looked at their own.

Again, I don't want to be like Debbie Downer over here, but if we're here to help these people, then let's make sure that we help navigate them away from the douchebags and the wolves.

Alex Howard

Well, there's something also going back to what you said earlier about really remembering those lessons from the 60s and 70s where there was a lot of potential and then it went too far the wrong way and perhaps rightly, it got shut down.

It just got shut down too harshly and the pendulums swung too far. But there's something sacred and precious about the potential of what's happening that needs to be protected and needs to be held in a certain way.

[00:23:54] Dr Pedram Shojai

Listen, I couldn't agree more. I think the underlying energy or the kind of presumption of what these substances do is they offer you a glimpse into reality as it is, beyond its kind of crystallized form that's stuck in front of your eyes.

So they allow you to question reality, which means questioning society, questioning authority, questioning the narrative and all of it, which I think is extremely relevant and useful, especially if you are stuck in like a situational type of depression or generalized anxiety disorder, where it's like, am I messed up or is the world messed up? I think that's a big part of where everyone's at right now is the world doesn't make any sense.

So is it me or is it the world? Am I trying to conform to a narrative that is just insane and blowing up upon itself? And do I need to just kind of step out and find who I am, which has incredible amount of credence? Or am I now in quacky shaman land and guilty of what I would think is the next kind of pandemic? Is this kind of energy of infantile magical thinking where I'm going to forgo all reason.

And now, because I've done two shamanic experiences and have a yoga class, I have this whole new identity. But I also, because I've taken on this macro of belief systems that comes with that believe the Earth is flat or alien sperm is in the vaccine, or all of the weird things that you hear.

Alex Howard

You're saying that alien sperm is not in the vaccine?

Dr Pedram Shojai

I am saying alien sperm is not in the vaccine. But you see these things and you go, how is it that would be and I had this with friends, kind of like hippie friends in Berkeley and Boulder. Over single issues like the vaccines go from extremely liberal to conservative and literally flip their entire identities because of these things that no longer reconcile with who they are.

And so they would just change their entire viewpoint on all things because of one or two things. And to me, when I see something like that, it's just, man, you haven't really thought your life through at all. You're just voting with the herd. And so that is a wonderful place for drugs. Break that shit up, man. You don't even think for yourself, right?

And so I think there's a lot of really interesting places where these types of therapies can help open people's consciousness to what's really going on and then question it. But you have to question as much as you question the IRS. You have to question alien sperm in the vaccine or the flat earth theory. And so people just go to these weird poles because they need a place to land.

Alex Howard

It's interesting that I just was reflecting as you're talking, because that place to land part of that here is who does one trust to be able to hold that space and to be able to do so safely? And of course, the places that typically we all kind of grew up to learn to trust was mainstream medicine. And yet there's places where in many of the conversations within this conference, for example, there are places where there are limitations, there's many amazing things in mainstream medicine

and there are places where a more functional approach, for example, has a more nuanced understanding of what's going on.

[00:27:35]

And so what becomes quite tricky is who are the people? I guess my question to you is if someone is watching this and is recognizing that psychedelics could be a helpful piece of their trauma healing jigsaw, and as you said earlier, it's not the thing that's going to fix everything, but a piece of that jigsaw.

How does one go about finding that person or that place? And perhaps what are some of the things they should prioritize in terms of looking like some of the values or the principles they should be looking for?

Dr Pedram Shojai

Yeah, I think A, there's just baseline training. There's a number of organizations that are doing this kind of training now and holding space. I would make sure that the individual's credentialed, obviously, and has done the work and any idiot with a medical degree can start administering ketamine because it's profitable. Is that the guy you want to see? No.

And so there's some organizations out there that have been at it for a long time. There's definitely a lot of drama and trauma around that as well. Like MAPS. Everyone talks about how good MAPS is. There's all sorts of scandal around the MAPS organization. There just is.

And for better or for worse, there's always good people and bad apples everywhere you go. And so I would interview someone that you are intending to do a journey with and say, do I trust this person? Do I feel comfortable with this person? First of all.

Does this person seem to have their own shit together? How about that? And I think that's also one of the issues with the kind of modern medical model is you have an obese cardiologist telling you to eat better because it's completely disconnected from the reality where he has to be the example of what he's preaching.

And so is this a happy person? Is this a sane person? And then what's the plan around it? And how do we structure a plan? Let's just say you have this bonfire event around psychedelics. What are we talking about before? What are we integrating after? What do I have to do in terms of lifestyle and behavior in my daily life? And what kind of practice do I need to also bring to the campfire so that I'm not turning my doctor into a guru. I'm not turning...practicing idolatry with the drug.

But I'm using that as a one off event to kind of clear out some of the cobwebs. So now I can have a conscious lifestyle that allows me to look backwards and heal while also living in the world and stay functional in a way that serves my family and my world.

I can't spend six years in therapy. Nobody can. And so most people, because they assume that's the deal, they lock it away and they just move on. They're going to, you know, eventually I'm going to deal with this. There's no better time than yesterday to deal with it.

[00:30:42]

I think, to kind of dance around your question a little bit, you have to interview the person. You have to look at their credentials and you have to trust that they are coming from a place of wisdom and knowledge and kind of open heart caring, which is an important part of it.

But they also understand what constitutes an emergency and what to do in the event of a crisis. I don't condone doing this in the huts and the jungles. There's just a lot I've seen that's gone wrong there. And so we have a very good opportunity right now in the West to take the best of our science and the best of the traditions.

And also one more thing I'll say to this because it's come up a lot, is ayahuasca, is a female energy. A lot of the early shamanic traditions had female shamanesses as part of the traditions. And yet again this entire industry of kind of psychedelics and psychedelic therapy I think has been hijacked by Silicon Valley dude bros and they're turning it into a very kind of masculine type of thing and I don't think the world needs any more of that.

And I don't think the solution set to our problems is more kind of left brain, masculine, ego driven therapeutics. And so be very mindful of where these individuals are coming from. It's a bunch of white dudes that are talking about Native American medicine. And there's nothing wrong with being a white dude, but are they being respectful of the tradition they're pulling through or allegedly have espoused?

Alex Howard

And I really appreciate your measured perspective around it because it feels like there's a lot that's really exciting but there's also a lot that can go wrong. And in a sense it's one treading this path carefully. And I was thinking you were talking about people wanting to do things like in the Amazon or whatever, so I want to do it kind of natural and I often think so do you want to go to the dentist natural?

Does that mean that you're not going to use anything that science has to offer? You're not going to use any painkillers when you're having your tooth taken out? There's something about really bringing the best of that traditional practices with what science has to offer us as well.

Dr Pedram Shojai

Oh yeah, and look, I was in the jungles. I went and explored all this stuff in the early 90s, looking at the stuff way before it was cool and it was just amazing to me. Oh yeah, that guy, yeah, he rapes a lot of girls but it wasn't like a throw them in jail or beat him up or hang them in the village square. It was like, oh, he's kind of a rapey shaman.

Who in their right mind would hear that and go to that guy? And he had a line out the door and so I think that as much as kind of the Western medical model has been usurped by drugs and is kind of limited and stuck in its thinking and not really getting results with trauma, obviously.

The Eastern side and the infantile magical thinking and just the weirdness is equally as pervasive and maybe even more harmful. I'd rather have no results than have the kind of experiences some of these people are having and getting further traumatized. And so somewhere in the middle is a

rational conversation that can be had without the kind of polarization. And that's where I've seen people get exquisite results.

[00:34:23] Alex Howard

Yeah, that's beautiful. One other thing I wanted to touch on is you talk about the warriors path for trauma and in a sense the capacity of how to, I guess, die to ourselves. And I'm curious as to just because of course one pathway to that is through psychedelics or other pathways as well. But just like to hear you speak a little bit about that.

Dr Pedram Shojai

Yeah, I mean, look, when I tried dimethyltryptamine, it's like toad medicine, and I've had, I think Terrence McKenna said this, you need to read three to five thousand books before you try ayahuasca. That is not a Saturday night kind of drug. And so dimethyltryptamine is the same way. It's very intense. And I tried it with a shaman who was also a medical doctor and I did my homework and all this, but literally within the first fifteen seconds it became abundantly clear that I was going to suffer as immensely as I've ever suffered in my life if I kept fighting this.

And I had to die to it. I had to release and let go. And that's when the experience happens. And so what is that? What is that? What is death? Who's dying? Why are we so afraid of it? And I think that that, it's something that's just really missing in our culture, and it's something that is very pervasive.

So when I'm in Varanasi, sitting in the boneyards with the Shaivites, they're contemplating their own existence by contemplating death. It seems kind of grim, but there's a real therapeutic value to that.

The Tibetans and the Bardos... a lot of the traditions that have been around longer than, say, the American vibe, have a very different perspective on death. And they understand that the part of you that's dying is probably the part of you you don't need so much.

And I think what's happened in the west and how we kind of identify as individuals and individuate as young adults into who we say we are, I'm like a doctor person, I'm an accountant person and all these kind of edifices that we keep up so that we know what to talk about at cocktail parties.

I don't think that's necessarily beneficial in this healing process and around trauma. And I think we spoke to this a little bit. Is okay my name is Jack, and I had some trauma in the war, and I also had some trauma growing up because my dad was tough. But I don't talk about that, and that's who I am.

And then Jack goes and has some sort of transformative experience and dies to that history, dies to the walls. He allows the walls to get torn down, if you will, so that he can kind of flush and clear and reset himself, but not maybe the morning of, but I'd say by afternoon or lunch the next day Jack is already starting to construct his new identity because he's terrified of the annihilation and how empty it feels to not have a storefront in the world that we live in.

And that storefront, usually Jack is now Shaman Jack or Debbie is Stardust or whatever it is. We take on these new identities in order to feel safe and avoid annihilation. But then those new

identities quickly help us mask the trauma, redefine it and not integrate it, but bury it away within a different context and still keep us from avoiding facing pain and healing.

[00:38:34]

I think that is something I see a lot of that needs to be addressed in this trauma conversation. Is it's okay to not know who you are? It's okay to be confused about where you're going. It's okay. All of it's okay.

Alex Howard

Yeah. It's almost like the breakthrough at one stage, the thing that's kind of the next formation, the breakthrough at one stage becomes the limitation of the block at the next stage.

That it's like we let go of something and something new happened, but now we're identified with that, which then just becomes another block. The trouble, I think, sometimes is because we've been through this cycle of change, we now think this is it. And there's almost more rigidity in that new identity.

Dr Pedram Shojai

Yeah, I think it's even more dangerous. And this is where I'm kind of famously an anti-guru. Like, I studied with a lot of folks, but I just think that the gurus are very dangerous because everyone's looking for a guru. But this is one of the, within this context, this is one of the places where the guru makes a lot of sense, because as soon as Jack starts trying to find another branch to swing to, to find safe haven.

The guru kicks his ass and keeps him in the discomfort and forces him to grow. And I think that having these kind of campfire bonfire events around transformation and then going back to your day job and starting to congeal around a new identity or to kind of redefine the parameters of who you say you are and bury it again, that's why people aren't getting better.

Alex Howard

And I guess in many ways, it takes a great deal of courage to not know who you are and to find ways to be in relationships and be in the world in a place of unknowingness or unfoldment. And that's often not an easy place to be.

Dr Pedram Shojai

It's terrifying and the challenge of it is it's a lot better place to be than your trauma, but you just know your trauma well enough, so it's easier to live in the discomfort than be in the psychological, spiritual, unknowing discomfort, which is the reality of, who the hell am I on this random rock on some random kind of spiral galaxy in the middle of I don't know what.

It's too big. So then I come back and say, I'm Jack the accountant, and, yeah, I'm a veteran. And I have to define myself around these really solid tentpole identity items just so I can order lunch today. Those, I think, kind of operating system issues without being addressed also help us harbor our trauma and keep us from getting any better.

[00:41:35] Alex Howard

Yeah that's super true. Pedram, we're out of time. But people that want to find out more about you and your work, where's the best place to go? And also what's some of what they can find.

Dr Pedram Shojai

Sure. theurbanmonk.com, got eight books and a bunch of courses that I've done over the years. Retreats are coming back, I hear.

Alex Howard

I hear that too. They're coming back. Coming back into fashion. Right?

Dr Pedram Shojai

Coming back into fashion, people in rooms sneezing on each other. How it used to be. So qigong retreats, meditation retreats have done those over the years. And then I have a streaming platform that is all around health and wellness and a lot of the film projects that I've done over the years called bpossible.com. I mean, between those places see, this guy talks a lot.

Alex Howard

Awesome. Pedram, thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Dr Pedram Shojai

Thank you, it was a pleasure.