



**Transcript – Mind, Buddha & Spirit with Dan Harris -  
#343**



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Dave Asprey: A quick question for all you hard working entrepreneurs putting in the hours while summer beckons. Has dealing with your day-to-day paperwork ever brought about feelings that resemble anything close to joy, satisfaction, or ease? I didn't think so. If you are ready for that to change my friends at Fresh Books are inviting you to try the ridiculously easy cloud accounting software that's a total joy to use. Yes. I just used the words easy, joy, and accounting in the same sentence.

Using FreshBooks it takes literally about 30 seconds to create and send a polished, professional looking invoice. You can link your Fresh Books account to your credit and debit card, so next time you expense that business lunch or tank of gas, it will show up automatically in your Fresh Books account. With 2 clicks Fresh Books can set you up to receive payments online which can seriously improve how quickly you get paid. To see all the ways Fresh Books can bring the joy by changing the way you feel about your paperwork, they're offering all Bulletproof Radio listeners an unrestricted 30 day free trial. To claim it just go to [FreshBooks.com/Bulletproof](https://FreshBooks.com/Bulletproof) and enter Bulletproof Radio in the, 'How did you hear about us?' Section. That's [FreshBooks.com/Bulletproof](https://FreshBooks.com/Bulletproof) and enter Bulletproof Radio.

Female Voiceover: Bulletproof Radio. A state of high performance.

Dave Asprey: You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's cool fact of the day is that meditation has amazing psychological benefits. Things like stress reduction and brain wave coherence. But you probably knew that. But what you probably didn't know is that studies also show that one of the physiological benefits is meditation can improve your sex life because it increases your libido, and it does it by boosting the sex hormone called DHEA, which is a precursor to things like testosterone that increase libido. Also that means you'll get better sex if you sit there and meditate. You wouldn't expect this, but it's true. I am living evidence of this. At least I like to think I am. Before we get into the show today ...

Male Voiceover: Looking for a career in tech? Maybe business, data, designer marketing? Trying to get that promotion or raise? To excel in your career, you need 21st century training and skills. General Assembly is the largest and most respected school worldwide for people seeking to grow their talents and master the marketplace. Whether it's learning remotely online or in person at one of their beautiful campuses, you can join the 350,000 people who have already gotten the training needed to propel careers in tech and business. More than 2,500 companies worldwide hire GA's graduate with 99% of graduates who participate in GA's career services, landing a new role in their field within 6 months of starting their job search. Take control of your talent and career now. Find out more at [GA.co/bullet](https://GA.co/bullet). That's [GA.co/bullet](https://GA.co/bullet). Enter the promo code, 'Bullet' to save on your first class, workshop, or event. That's [GA.co/bullet](https://GA.co/bullet). Code word, bullet.

Dave Asprey: I am wearing one of the many Bulletproof t-shirts today. Check out the t-shirt shop on [Bulletproof.com](https://Bulletproof.com). Whether it's coffee or butter that makes you happy, you can tell the world

what it is. The shirt I'm wearing is actually a picture of the caffeine molecule and it says, "Caffeine: My drug of choice". This is a replica, but better designed, than the very first t-shirt ever sold over the internet. In fact, it was the very first anything sold over the internet because way back in the early 90s, the first e-commerce on the planet was apparently out of my dorm room selling a t-shirt that said exactly these words. "I designed it in Corel Draw. If you remember that, you're at least 40.

All right. Today's guest is Dan Harris. Dan is an Emmy award winning co-anchor of Night Line and the weekend edition of Good Morning America. He is regularly on 20/20, World News Tonight with David Mirror, Good Morning America ABC Digital News and Radio, pretty much all over the place if you watch TV. Which most of us do. He's also had an amazing story where he goes and he covers some of the most incredible things. Things like natural disasters in Haiti, New Orleans; combat in Afghanistan, Israel, Gaza, the West Bank. He's been to Iraq 6 times, and he's on the show because he just wrote The New York Times best selling book, 'Ten Percent Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing my Edge, and Found Self Help That Actually Works'. He's even got an app designed to teach meditation to skeptics which Dan, makes me laugh like crazy. Welcome to the show.

Dan Harris: Thanks for having me. I don't know if you remember, but I did a story about you.

Dave Asprey: That is true. You did.

Dan Harris: I did a story about you, and I think it was pro vigil.

Dave Asprey: That was actually one of the very, very first national news things about Modafinil that I've ever seen. In fact I remember sitting in my backyard with you. We were meditating while they were filming, and my dog came up and sat on your feet if memory serves.

Dan Harris: I remember all of that except for the dog, but I like the dog part.

Dave Asprey: It was, I'm pretty sure he did. He likes to come and sit on your feet while you meditate. It's a strange thing, but it's a Dachshund thing. It's kind of funny. That was about 4 or 5 years ago I'd say. You've tamed the voice in your head since then. I think you were already working on it back then. At least you seemed like you knew how to meditate. Why did you decide to write the book?

Dan Harris: There's the long story, the medium story, the short story. I'll try to pack it in to the medium. I think the inciting event for me really was that I had a panic attack on national television back in 2004 on Good Morning America. I was reading the news headlines. I was the guy who comes on at the top of the hour and reads the headlines. I just, my heart started racing, my lungs seized up, my mouth dried up, my palms were sweating. I couldn't deal, and I couldn't breathe. I had to quit in the middle of my little news cast and toss it back to the main anchors of the show, Diane Sawyer and Charlie Gibson. That was embarrassing, but even more embarrassing was the back story.

I had, as you mentioned, I spent a lot of time in Iraq and other war zones as an ambitious young reporter. After 9/11 I was in Afghanistan, and Israel, and The West Bank, and Gaza. I got depressed after doing that, and did a very stupid thing which is I started to self medicate with recreational drugs like cocaine and ecstasy. After I had the panic attack I went to a doctor who was trying to get to the bottom of the problem and he asked me whether I did drugs, and I said, "Yeah." He pointed out that that was what caused the panic attack. It artificially raised the level of adrenaline in my brain and primed me to freak out. That kind of set me off on this long journey of trying to be less of an idiot. This is where I'm going to shorten, truncate things very dramatically.

It ultimately led me to meditation which I always thought was very, was totally ridiculous. Meant only for hippies, and freaks, and people who live in Yurts and wear little finger symbols, and are really into Cat Stevens, and crystals, and things like that. I wasn't entirely wrong about that, but I was wrong enough as I learned. I started discovering the science around meditation. That really changed my mind.

Why I decided to write the book was that I realized that there was at that time, this was around 2008, 2009, there was a lot of really interesting science, and there were a lot of really interesting people who were starting to get into meditation, but there weren't a lot of books that were designed for skeptics. A lot of the books had a background of pan flute music, or it felt like they did. Or it felt like you were being addressed as grasshopper. I wanted to write a book that had irony, and I share a lot of really embarrassing things about myself. I swear a lot, and I thought that would be maybe, I had an entrepreneurial itch, so that's why I did it.

Dave Asprey:

It's funny because I come from Silicon Valley. My grandmother met my grandfather on The Manhattan Project and she still subscribes to this day, she's 94, to The Skeptical Enquirer, which is like the original troll magazine like from the 1960s. If I mention meditation to her, she's kind of like, "Meh. Why would you do such a thing?" But there is some science behind it so kudos to figuring out how to talk to a group of people who can probably benefit from it.

I look at this, there's a group of people who think the glass is half full, and they've probably got pan flutes going. There's a group of people who think it's half empty, and they're the angry skeptics. Then there's well there's a glass and it's got stuff in it. You could think about it. There just isn't a big perspective on it. It's okay. Whatever. It seems like walking that middle is the most functional place to be. Would you agree with that given your path? Or are you one of those that's you should be in one direction versus the other?

Dan Harris:

No, I think I agree with that. I was really trying to find a way to speak to everybody, including the people. The glass half empty people. Or your grandmother. Or frankly, my mom. My mom is a scientist, who when I was like 8, sat me down and explained that not only is there no Santa Claus, but there is also no God. This is the type of house that I grew up in. I too, am a diet in the wall skeptic, but there's a difference between being skeptical and being cynical. Blinded by cynicism. I think that's where I was. Especially as it pertained to meditation.

Once you see the science, let me just say a few words about it, it's really in its early stages, and in danger at times of being hyped. But what I think we can say with real certainty is that the explosion of scientific research into meditation strongly suggests a long list of tantalizing health benefits, like lowering your blood pressure, boosting your immune system. Literally rewiring key parts of your brain that have to do with focus, and stress, and emotional activity, and compassion> I don't care how skeptical you are, once you hear this, it starts to, you start to get intrigued. I think there's a pretty good analogy to be made to physical exercise. Even if you're a skeptic, I think most people embrace physical exercise, know that physical exercise is good for you, whether you do it or not. That's where I think we're heading with meditation.

Dave Asprey: Great analogy. It seems like there's been a shift. I've been interested in meditation for the performance benefits for a very long time. I put it on my Linked In profile, at least 15 years ago. I put meditation and yoga at the end of the interests. In Silicon Valley that was kind of like people would look at you weird if they noticed it. It was like maybe 1 in 10 were like, "Yeah. I actually do something like that too," but most people, it was sort of like an admission of weakness. Has that changed? Do you think public perception has shifted?

Dan Harris: Yeah. I think it is shifting, but I can see how it would be seen as an admission of weakness. Just the way saying you go to a therapist would be seen as an admission of weakness.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dan Harris: Or probably was 15 years ago. Less so now. But we're in an era where Kobe Bryant, Michael Jordan, The New York Knicks, Novak Djokovic, 50 Cent, the lead singer of Weezer, Lina Dunham, Google, Twitter, Etna, George Stephanopoulos, Robin Roberts, Katie Perry, all of these founders of Twitter, you, all of these people that are aspirational figures who are, and are tough people, the US Marines, and the US Army, are all meditating, so I think it's hard to see it as a sign of weakness when you look at the crew of people who are now doing this. I think perceptions are shifting. I think that's really great because I think this is the next big public health revolution.

I'm excited about it not only because I think it will improve health overall, but also unlike past health revolutions like oral hygiene, which really happened after World War 2 as far as I understand, you know when the troops were told that they need to brush their teeth, oral hygiene or physical exercise which really started to happen in the last century too, those had health benefits, but they didn't really result in widespread behavioral change. I think meditation, I think if the current percentage of the population that currently engages in physical exercise starts to engage in mental exercise, think about the impact on bullying, on education, on parenting, on marriage, on politics, on journalism, on road rage. All of these aspects of our life. I think that's very exciting.

Dave Asprey: It's one of those things where people could be nicer to each other, 10% nicer comes from being 10% happier. Right? It's one of the reasons I talk about it really openly is that I was also very skeptical. Also, I was, I think the technical word is, I was pretty much an asshole a

lot of the time. It wasn't on purpose though, it was just like a lack of understanding, and probably a lack of training of the brain. I spent extensive amounts of time and money, 10 weeks with electrodes on my head to let me meditate better with feedback, and things like that. That's one of the things behind Bulletproof is like look. If you're not hungry all the time. If you don't have blood sugar crashes. If your brain is a little bit better organized you're less likely to flip off the guy in front of you in traffic. That triples when you do things like that.

Dan Harris:

That is exactly right. Especially for beginning meditator and I would count myself sort of in the beginning. The benefit is that you are less yanked around by your emotions. Most guys don't like talking about emotions, and I don't either, but you have them. Or as my friend Chris Cuomo, who is a news anchor on CNN says that he shifts gears between his 2 primary emotions which are rage and self pity. When you are unaware of these emotions, when you are unaware of the non stop conversation you are having with yourself it yanks you around, and that is why you do stupid shit, like lose your temper when it's strategically unwise in a professional context, or say the thing that ruins the next 48 hours of your marriage, or eat the 18th cookie, or whatever it is.

All the stuff that you don't want to be doing is because you are unaware of the voice in your head and are therefore yanked around by it. Meditation is just the building of an internal telescope that allows you to see what the activity of your mind so that it doesn't yank you around. Now there are a lot of other things that meditation can do, but I think for beginners that's the right way to think about it. It's not complicated. It's not mystical. It does not involve believing in anything, joining a group, wearing special outfits, sitting in a funny position. It's actually very simple. My sort of raison d'etre, my function on the planet now is to say this as clearly as possible, as loudly as possible, in as many places as possible, so that people start to see this as an option that is viable for them.

Dave Asprey:

If you could have told me 20 years ago that I could turn off the voice in my head, I would have given anything to do it because it was kind of a mean son of a bitch, right. I have done that. Like I don't actually have a voice in my head anymore. After a lot of meditation, and breathing, and also some of the computer driven stuff that I do. People have a hard time believing it, but it's possible. There isn't something, like the harsh critic, all that stuff that was really a core part of the anxiety that I used to have. It just goes away. But I think the vast majority of people, when you say that, even that the voice in their head can go away, they also experience some fear from that. Did you go through that as your, okay I want to get in charge of this voice in my head, but if I'm in charge then I'm responsible. Did you have like a reflexive, what if it's not safe kind of moment?

Dan Harris:

Well I have a bunch of things to say about that. I think it's totally intriguing that you feel like the voice in your head has gone away. That is definitely not the case for me. I retain the capacity to be a schmuck, so that's why I like the whole 10% thing because it is my way of counter programming against the reckless over promising that you see in the self help industry generally. By which I'm not referring to you, I'm just referring to the sort of, the power of positive thinking people.

Dave Asprey: You haven't levitated yet either?

Dan Harris: No. I have not. But I did have concerns about meditation because I thought it would make me lose my edge. I thought that this internal son of a bitch was the reason for any success I had enjoyed in my life. I think a lot of people have these feelings, and this is one of the main things I am working on over the course of the book. The thing I am kind of struggling with, and what I've come to is that it's okay to have stress. It's okay to worry. It's okay to criticize yourself. It's that we tend to make our suffering worse than it needs to be.

What meditation or mindfulness allows you to do is to draw the line between useful constructive anguish, and useless rumination. If you are going to try to be great at anything yeah, there is going to be some mental churn and anguish at times. Some worries. Some plotting. Some planning. Some strategizing. Some stress, but you know, on the 17th time that you're pulling out all of the awful ramifications of some business problem that has arisen, maybe ask yourself, this is something my meditation teacher counsels, maybe ask yourself a very simple question. Is this useful? That is mindfulness in action. Your ability to do that is vastly improved through learning the simple exercise of meditation.

Dave Asprey: In your book you write about how Peter Jennings told you to cover faith in America. You just said you don't have to wear clothes. You don't have to belong to an organization. Those are usually aspects of faith. How did covering the evangelical movement in America effect your perspective on meditation?

Dan Harris: That happened. Peter pulled me aside and said that he wanted me to start covering faith and spirituality for ABC News. That happened way before I started meditating or even thought it was an option. I didn't want to do it. I was like, "Dude, don't make me do this." I was raised in the People's Republic of Massachusetts. As I said, both of my parents are scientists. I don't know. I said my mother is a scientist, but both of my parents are scientists. My wife is a scientist. I did have a Bar Mitzvah, but only for the money. I was not at all spiritually inclined, but it was very useful for me covering religion for a couple of reasons.

1 is I realized how sort of reflexively, how ignorant I was about what faith actually is and the role it plays in people's lives. I was kind of reflexively judgmental. 2, is I saw the value of having a world view that transcends your own narrow interests. There is an expression that we are always, when you're never looking up, you're always looking around. While I don't believe, per se, or I am respectfully agnostic about the Jesus story for example.

Was he the son of God who rose from the dead? I haven't seen any evidence of that, but none the less, people who are active believers have a time every Sunday morning at 11, they're going to church and they're thinking about things from a broader perspective. They're thinking outside of their own narrow interests. That is really useful. That is what I took away from covering faith and spirituality even though I didn't join a church or anything like that. But I just will say because the kind of meditation that I practice, and I believe this is true for you, but you can correct me if I'm wrong, is Buddhist meditation. Now I believe you spent some time in Tibet.

- Dave Asprey: Yeah. Nepal and Tibet. I learned at a monastery there.
- Dan Harris: Yeah. I think actually in some ways the kind of the root of your whole coffee, part of the Tibet and coffee mixture.
- Dave Asprey: The Tibetan yak butter tea. That's right. That's how Bulletproof Coffee came about.
- Dan Harris: Yes. I'm remembering some of my time with you. I think that Buddhism can be practiced as a religion with lots of deities, and prostration, and belief in metaphysical claims. It's one of the only religions that I know of where the more fundamentalist you get, the less metaphysical you get. If you look at what the Buddha actually said, he was not talking that much. He was not making that many metaphysical claims. He did not claim to be a god. He had no explanation for the origins of the universe. He did talk about reincarnation and sort of minor deities and things like that, but he specifically said, "You can take or leave that stuff." Really what he was doing was giving you an exercise regime for the mind. As has often been said, "Buddhism is not something to believe in. It's something to do." In that spirit I have become a Buddhist, although I would also call myself an atheist.
- Dave Asprey: That is actually a really powerful way of expressing it. I use the Buddhist attempts to explain feelings in the body all the time when I'm meditating, or doing the things that I do. I think that it's very hard for me to say, "Well, okay. In order to let go of whatever that emotion is that would make me act like a total jerk, step 1 is open the heart, and step 2 is envision a purple field." There aren't words to express a physical manifestation of an emotion in the body, so I think a lot of the Buddhist writings are, "Envision the Buddha sitting on a 42 petal lotus."
- It's their idea of trying to create the feeling in your mind of it because it's very hard to communicate between 2 people. Even 2 people who meditate. "You know that one thing you do when you do that one thing?" There's just no language for it. Thousands of years of trying and writing all sorts of rolled up manuscripts, they still are struggling with that as far as I could tell, but there is something about paying attention to those feelings, and then learning to take them from one place to another. I found that I was okay with breathing exercises that were more Hindu based, like Art of Living stuff.
- Which I did with a lot of entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley for 5 years, but then I really connected when I was doing the Buddhist thing with computers telling me when my brain was doing it right. It was like rubber bumpers for meditation for me was when I found like, oh. Now that one feeling that I was trying to get to that I didn't know I was trying to get to. I got there. It was the number 7 on the screen kind of thing. That I believe is the future of meditation. Have you done any of that kind of stuff? Heart rate variability and any of the feedback based meditations?
- Dan Harris: I have a friend named Judd Brewer who is a really interesting guy. You might want to take a look at him. He's got a book coming out in the next couple of months. I don't remember the title, but Dr. Juddson Brewer. Formerly of Yale. Now the head of research at the University

of Massachusetts Center for Mindfulness.

Dave Asprey: Oh cool. I would love to meet him.

Dan Harris: He is a great guy. He is a friend and he is a neuroscientist, one of the top neuroscientists. There's this whole cadre of neuroscientists who have been looking at the effect that meditation has on the brain. What Judd has been working on is, first he did it in fMRIs, but those are hard. Those are very expensive. Those are the big tubes you get into, and they look at blood flow in the brain. Then he moved to something less expensive involving EEG, so sort of electrodes on your head, which you had referenced before, which and that gives you, the meditator, real time feedback on what you are doing.

I had a rather embarrassing experience where I went and did it and it was saying that I was meditating incorrectly. It was basically saying that I was a shitty meditator. It was really embarrassing, and frustrating, and demoralizing. That night, the day I had that experience with Judd in his rig, his EEG rig, I went to dinner with both Judd and a guy named Joseph Goldstein who is my meditation teacher, and Judd's meditation teacher. We're at dinner and I say to Joseph Mann, "Look I did this thing. I was in Judd's EEG machine. It told me I was meditating incorrectly." Joseph said, "It said the same thing to me."

What I have taken that to mean is that meditation is so, we know so little about the mind, and the brain, and the interconnection between the 2, and what's happening when you meditate. What kind of meditation does what. That I am really intrigued with neuro-feedback, and getting people to meditate correctly, and stop wasting their time. I just have some fundamental questions about how doable it is. But I suspect you have more fully formed opinions than I do.

Dave Asprey: I have been doing it, well 10 weeks of my life I've had electrodes on. I opened a neuro-feedback institute earlier this year. I've been before that working with a variety of partners on making it happen, but it's very different than most of the like, "Let's look at this." It's all directed by you. Brock will you hand me my spider hat thing? In fact, I'm so convinced on this, and we won't spend the rest of the show talking about this. I'll just mention it. This is like a clinical grade, 24 channel thing. Let me see if I can hold it up so you can see it better.

Dan Harris: Yeah. I can see it.

Dave Asprey: Every one of the people who works at Bulletproof gets access to neuro-feedback as part of our employee performance management because it makes them happier. All of my direct reports get the 5 day intensive, it's basically 10 hours a day of focused work with neuro-feedback like this and a couple of other systems in order to give your brain the 2 aspects of Buddhist meditation that we know about, which is higher alpha and higher level of synchrony. It's completely, that's why the voice in my head behaves itself in the best possible way.

It's one of those things where there's so much that you read about, and there's so much opportunity right now in neuro-feedback. There's \$300 devices and all these things. I am

not convinced that we know enough to say, "This is the perfect optimal state," but I think there are clusters of people who have been studying, mostly meditators, or people who just naturally are profoundly happy, or just have other unusual skills. Or they have pockets of information, but we haven't shared it all with all the neuroscientists.

Partly that's because there has been a lot of look at pathology, and not a lot of look at why does this person have superpowers? Right. They can be in the middle of a tornado, and they're like, "Isn't that a beautiful tornado? Yeah I might die, but it's a beautiful tornado." There's some kind of a thing that they're doing in their brain that I want to learn. I don't know that I've learned it all the way, but for me to have my own progress I thought it was important to have neuroscientists working directly with me who are very focused on that, so it's been a big focus in the last year.

Dan Harris: I agree. I think there is an enormous amount of potential. I am incredibly intrigued by the idea of neuro-feedback. I'd love to learn more about what you're doing.

Dave Asprey: We can do that after the show. Yeah.

Dan Harris: Sure. It's just to my mind it seems tricky, but I think it will be done, and it will be huge. The other thing I was going to say about the, you were talking before about pathology.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dan Harris: The history of our understanding of the mind, a scientific understanding of the mind, the history of neuroscience, and psychology, and psychiatry has really been looking at disorder, dysfunction. We're now moving into an era where science is looking at well being. Positive mental states and how to cultivate those. The lesson here, whether you're interested in neuroscience or not, the lesson for you as a human being, is that your mind is trainable. That is a huge headline and available to anybody. Things you don't like about yourself, you can't magically make them go away, but over time you can reduce the likelihood that you will be an asshole, or that you will be impatient, or that you will be cruel to yourself. All of these things you can work on through meditation. That is just enormous. I think the role for neuro-feedback in that is just Earth shatteringly interesting. I look forward to whatever comes.

Dave Asprey: I would love to have the opportunity to interview your neuroscientist friend as well as your meditation teacher if they would be up for that. Anyone who is exploring the mind, whether they are doing it by sitting in a cave looking at a wall for 20 years and looking at what happens. Will they look at the wall or are they doing it with every kind of medical sensor known to man? It's all, the most important area of exploration that we have right now, there's Mars, and then there's inside our own heads. Otherwise we have done a lot of stuff. Do you see a role for meditation or any of the sort of self help side of things that you have investigated for kids in high school or younger? What is your take on that?

Dan Harris: Yes. Yes. Yes. For sure. I think this is an incredibly promising area. We're already starting to see a lot of work being done in schools. We're seeing some studies of these students and

the preliminary results from what I can tell are really promising. Both as it pertains to behavior in the classroom, and performance in the classroom. Academic performance, so focus, grades, and behavior. I don't have all of my data at my fingertips, and I think it's definitely in its germinal stages, but very, very promising. The tricky part is, and this is very tricky.

We are already seeing some push back because some parents, especially in areas where you have high levels of religiosity don't like the idea of meditation being brought in because they believe correctly that it's derived from eastern religions. It's derived, depending on what kind of meditation you're teaching, either from Hinduism or from Buddhism. They are correct about that, except for they are incorrect, in my view that the way that it's currently being taught has some religious overtones.

I don't think it does. I think it's been stripped almost entirely of almost in every case of metaphysical claims in religious lingo, and is really just about these exercises for your brain. It is no more, meditation is no more mindfulness, which is the fruit of Buddhist meditation, is no more Buddhist than algebra which is an Arabic word, is a Muslim thing. It is a fundamental. It's a law of the universe. It's just something that happens to be described well by the Buddhist.

Dave Asprey: I was looking for that example and I came up with tobacco, which is a Native American sacrament or you smoke it everyday. It's not a religious act anymore, but it once was.

Dan Harris: Yes. Absolutely.

Dave Asprey: Were you bullied in high school?

Dan Harris: A little bit. Yeah. Both directions. I was a little bit of a bully in elementary school. I remember my friend Larry and I got in trouble because we thought it was very funny in the winter to, all the little kids wore hats with pom poms on the top. We would grab the pom and throw it as far as we could in the air. We got in trouble for that. Then in junior high I got pretty badly bullied by this guy. This was like straight out of a movie. Mugsy Malone. His name was Mugsy Malone. I remember I was a bit of a wise as still. A bit of a wise ass. I remember telling, he was sort of making fun of me for being Jewish, although I'm only half Jewish. I explained to him that Jesus was a Jew. He Charlie-horsed me and I had to crawl to class crying. Mugsy Malone went on to be the secretary of education in Massachusetts.

Dave Asprey: Wow. Even with that name, that's impressive.

Dan Harris: His nickname was Mugsy. His name is Matthew. He grew up to be a really smart, nice man. Yes. I definitely was. I captured some bullying on both sides of the spectrum. Why do you ask?

Dave Asprey: I'm asking because I've experienced, a lot of people when they do meditation, a lot of the anxiety actually comes up from that. We were just talking about high school. It made me think of it. Because we get that programming early in life. If you just feel threatened by

whatever bullying environment, you find years later that you're replicating that, and then when you start a practice of mindfulness, you start realizing that I'm still defending myself against these absolutely stupid threats, because they aren't threats anymore. Did that come up with you in your meditation practice? Or the sources of your anxiety? Or was it more kind of Iraq kind of stuff?

Dan Harris:

You know, so it is very common, and I think probably quite healthy as long it's not too much, for your anxieties and maybe even some traumas to come up when you quiet the mind. When you stop, when you get off the hamster wheel, and you are just right there with whatever is happening in your mind, I think some of these things are going to surface. Interestingly for me, not a lot of that has happened. That could mean 1 of 2 things.

Either I am a terrible meditator. Which is entirely possible. Or that I have had a really charmed life. I was raised by 2 loving parents who are still together. I have a very happy marriage. A beautiful kid. An amazing career. I was born on third base. I'm aware of that and very grateful for it. I certainly get a lot of self criticism that comes up. A lot of self judgement, so some unpleasant stuff, but not a lot of Mahler music playing in the backdrop of my particular psyche. But I think it is ery, very common.

For the average meditator I would argue if that happens, as long as it's not in the realm of psychopathology, like where you're hearing voices that are telling you to do bad things. That's okay. In fact, it can be a sign of progress. However I think you should, if this is happening and becoming worrisome to you, I think you should work with an experienced meditation teacher and/or a psychiatrist, or psychologist.

Dave Asprey:

Very well put. I believe that if we teach meditation to younger kids, just for people listening, there is a large audience, I don't mean a religious attempt at all. No candles. No white robes. None of that stuff. Just like hey, pay attention. The way I teach my kids. Take a deep breath in. Where is the emotion in your body? Just breathe out now. Are you feeling some emotions? Tell me about them. Draw me a picture of the emotions. Just paying attention to what they are instead of reacting to them shifts the framing.

I think if we teach kids that we would see less bullying, and less of the high school violence, and even middle school violence that we're seeing now. When you get into that situation as a kid, your brain isn't done. It's a very young brain. It's like training a puppy. Puppies, they still pee on the rug and they do whatever. Eventually they become either service dogs or they become like the dog that tears up the furniture, or the dog that bites all the other dogs.

My brain was probably closer to the dog that bites all the other dogs. Now it's relatively service dog like. You nailed it exactly. The brain can be trained. I kind of do look at it like a dog. It's an animal thing. It is an animal. It's part of our meat. When you look at all of the things you have done, what has been the single most effective meditation for you Dan?

Dan Harris:

Let me just say first of all that I totally agree with you. Everything you said, I do think that it is, it could be very fruitful to teach to young people, and they obviously have it appears, the

malleability although what modern neuroscience is showing is that the brain can change and is changing all the time. The question is are you going to be in control of those changes or are you going to let them happen willy nilly?

I wouldn't say there's one kind. People ask me all the time, "What meditation do you do?" It's a little bit of a tricky answer. I guess the answer would be mindfulness meditation. What does that actually mean? Mindfulness meditation is derived from Buddhism. That's what we teach on this Ten Percent Happier app that I've just started. Actually we share a venture capitalist. Gus Ty. Who invested in your company, is an investor in my company.

Dave Asprey: How did I not know that? I've known Gus for many years. Oh my gosh.

Dan Harris: Well he's a new person in my life. He's been a phenomenally helpful individual. I am new to business. We just raised our capital 6, 8 months ago. Gus was really, he wrote one of the biggest checks. He's been incredibly helpful. Really. He's a special guy. Let's just say that. He loves you.

Dave Asprey: Thanks for connecting those dots because I know Ten Percent Happier is one of their companies, but I just connected the title of your book with the company. Oh my goodness. Okay. Basically this is a Sandhill Road venture capital company. The first guys to invest in Starbucks and Jamba juice. They invested in you, you said 6 months ago?

Dan Harris: 6 to 8 months ago.

Dave Asprey: 6 to 8 months. Okay. It's been probably a year and a half for Bulletproof. I've known Gus for definitely more than 10 years. He sits on my board of directors. What a small world. I did not make that connection. My bad.

Dan Harris: He is really bullish on your business. He really likes you personally. You've come up a bunch of times in our conversations. Just to answer your question, on the app we teach mindfulness meditation. Secular mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness. What is mindfulness? Mindfulness is the ability to know what is happening in your head right now without getting carried away by it. That is really the fruit. Mindfulness and focus which are related. That's really the fruit of secular meditation. That's what we're teaching on the app.

I guess in my own personal practice though, I as I said before, I am a little bit more interested in Buddhist meditation. Mindfulness is derived from Buddhist meditation. Some people get a little hinky about Buddhism because they think it's a religion. And as I said before in some, in many places it is practiced as a religion, but I think you can practice it without it being religious. Depending on what you mean by religious.

Mindfulness meditation has been hugely useful for me. Why? For the reasons that we've just discussed. It's that we all have this voice in our head. It's constantly yammering at us. Has us wanting stuff. Not wanting stuff. Thinking about the past or thinking about the future to the detriment of whatever is happening right now. Comparing ourselves to people. Judging other people. Judging ourselves. When you're unaware of this chaos of

your own mind, my friend Sam Harris says that when he thinks about the voice in his head, he feels like he had been hijacked by the most boring person alive who says the same shit over and over. Sam is right.

When you are unaware of this, it yanks you around. It's why you find yourself with your hand in the fridge when you're not hungry, or you're saying something stupid that you later regret. Or you're checking your e-mail in the middle of a conversation with your kids. That really has been what has changed my life. I jokingly use the term ten percent happier, again just as kind of a joke, but what I now have come to believe is that the ten percent compounds annually. That you get better and better at this skill. There really is no ceiling. It's not like physical exercise where you are limited by your body. The mind has, is limitless in many ways. You can get better, and better, and better at this. It only gets more interesting.

Dave Asprey: As you've been doing this secular practice, have you ever had a spiritual experience during meditation?

Dan Harris: Well it depends how you define spiritual right?

Dave Asprey: It does.

Dan Harris: Spiritual has a lot of connotations that I am not personally comfortable with, like metaphysical connotation. By which, by metaphysical I mean stuff you can't prove. But if you think about spiritual as dropping the borders of the ego. Where you're not so tightly confined by this Stalinist in your head, then yes. All the time. There's one simple little exercise. I don't know if you're friends with Sam Harris. He's a neuroscientist and leading atheist, but also an acting meditator and he is the one who connected me with my teacher Joseph Goldstein.

Dave Asprey: Oh wow.

Dan Harris: Sam talks. He has a book called 'Waking Up'. It's a really great book. He talks about this exercise. He recommends this exercise in his book, which is actually based on an exercise in another book. I'm referencing a lot of books here before I actually tell you what the exercise is. The other book is called 'On Having No Head'. 'On Having No Head' is the name of the book. Okay. The exercise sounded to me, a little silly at first. Over time it has become incredibly meaningful to me. This is the silly part.

From your perspective everybody in the world has a head. But you do not. You can't see your own head. You see everybody else's head, but you don't see your own head. If you just imagine yourself in a state of headlessness all that is left is the world. There is no you. This you that is like the center point of your life. That is always wanting, and not wanting, and not caring, needs all of this care, and feeding, and is worrying all the time. But if you just drop that for a second and realize that actually if you look around it's just the world.

What is looking out? This yawning chasm of pure knowing to get a little heavy with you. It's

just this knowing faculty of the mind. That is a spiritual experience. Right there. Easily and perennially available, and spiritual in that it shaves down the ego. The ego is, one could argue, the source of all of your unhappiness.

Dave Asprey: Changing your frame of reference here. Perception is really profound. I've been looking for ways to make that happen quickly, and to be able to share it with other people. At the Bulletproof Conference this year on September 23 in Pasadena, yes that was a blatant plug.

Dan Harris: Can I just say that I have no problem with blatant plugs? Just for the record.

Dave Asprey: Well I appreciate that. Plus it's my show. I can plug whatever I want. You know what I mean.

Dan Harris: Yes. Amen.

Dave Asprey: Here is what we are doing though that is totally in line with this. This is something that actually we are putting together in the lab where I am interviewing at right now. It's an experience for people who come to the conference. They put on virtual reality goggles. They are fed a real time video feed from a camera, but the camera is mounted up behind their head. All of a sudden instead of looking out through your eyes, you are looking out through the camera at the back of yourself. Then you go through a little obstacle course. You play yourself like a video game.

Instantly your sense of self moves from oh no I'm trapped in this head, to I am outside of this body looking down, and your level of awareness goes up. Your skin tingles. You have all these interesting feelings. The only problem is that if you're prone to dis-associative states you're not allowed to do it because it might be bad for you, so we have a waiver and a little warning there. But it's exactly what you just described there.

Dan Harris: I love that.

Dave Asprey: Taking the eyes out of the head and putting them behind the head so that you're not in your head anymore. The veil comes down. It's so cool.

Dan Harris: Absolutely. I think that's a brilliant thing that you're describing. It just really points to the fact that this expression of, "I'm in my head so much." Being in your head. Being self conscious is what makes it impossible to access the zone in sports, or to focus on your work because you're so worried about whatever shit you are worried about. Or so focused on feeding whatever addiction you have, like cigarettes, or food, or whatever. Or it makes it impossible to get up and dance at your daughter's wedding. Exercises like the one you just described are incredibly useful. Meditation which requires a little bit more time, but not that much more time, is just a way to get you there.

Dave Asprey: Very well said. Do you do breathing exercises in conjunction with your meditation?

Dan Harris: I don't, but I'm very open to them. I've heard very powerful arguments. You talked about

the Art of Living. Is that Sri Sri Ravi Shankar?

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dan Harris: I think so. I know the scientist who is another person you should think about having on your podcast. I'm embarrassingly spacing on her name. It will come to be in a second, but she is a big devotee of, she's at Stanford University. She's a head of research at the center for compassion at, Emma Seppala is her name. Emma Seppala.

Dave Asprey: We'll get her on the show too. This is awesome.

Dan Harris: She is great. I can help you book this podcast in her pertuity if you would like.

Dave Asprey: Thank you. I would like.

Dan Harris: She is a big believer in breathing exercises. There appear to be a number of studies that show it really works. I'm very open minded and intrigued about it. Before, you may have some things to say about that, but before it leaves my mind let me just extend an invitation because I would, and this is a sincere one and I will follow up with your folks on this. I just started a few months ago a little Ten Percent Happier podcast. I'm new to the game. I'm nowhere near at your level, but I would love to have you on because you've been asking me great questions and letting me yammer on about my own crap, but I would love to reverse it and have you on, and ask you a bunch of questions. Think about it.

Dave Asprey: I would be honored to be a guest, and that was a great plug. Ten Percent Happier podcast. Dan's new podcast. You say you're new to the game, but let's face it, you've been on national news more times than just about 99, actually I don't know how many 9s to do, but almost any human being ever.

Dan Harris: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: I'm pretty sure you know how to interview and how to roll a pretty nice podcast. I'd be honored to be on. I think for people listening to the show, here is what they don't tell you about podcasting. Interviewing is a skill and an art. I would give myself maybe a 5 out of a 10. Dan has spent his life doing it, so he knows how to interview people and how to get the story in a way that I have yet to even experience. You're going to have a good listening experience. I can say that not having listened to your show, but just knowing your skills in your craft. I'm actually excited to be on.

Dan Harris: Well thank you because I am going to bug you about that. The thing about podcasting that's interesting though, is actually the amateurs have an advantage because, and I may be wrong about this, but let me just advance the theory and then you can swat it away. I was born and raised for more than 20 years in network news. I have this very formal way about me.

Often professional interviewers aren't even listening to the answers because they're so

wrapped up in thinking about what the next question they are going to ask is. A guy like you is just like literally having a conversation. It's maybe not, it's pretty polished, but it's maybe not as polished as Charlie Rose. That's not what podcast listeners want. They want authenticity. They want a real conversation and a real exchange between 2 minds, or however many minds are on the podcast. I would say you're well above a 5, and that's because maybe you're not measuring it in the right way.

Dave Asprey:

I am grateful for the compliment. I don't listen to very many podcasts. Partly because my commute is through the garden that raises the roof of my family. My morning commute has nothing to do, but there is at least a quarter of a million podcasts right now. When you listen to a lot of them, you take apart the ones that just don't have production quality where the sound quality is good enough to be respectful of the listeners.

People have no idea. There is studio lighting. There is 3 cameras focused on me. There are 2 audio things. We do audio engineering and all that so it sounds good. Because it is painful to listen to people with bad audio. But even then, there are so many of these where people don't have anything to say, but they feel obligated to talk. I think this is the ego that you're talking about there. If you are doing a podcast that has a point, that is there to deliver something, it has more in common with the news. You are there to deliver something. You are doing what you are trained to do.

Your style of interview will be different, but I find the signal to noise ratio in the world podcasting is very, it's not very good. There is a lot of noise out there and not a lot of signal. You have been pretty well trained to deliver a signal, and it sounds like now you're training is going to be less in your head when you're doing it, and to be a little bit more flowing than you normally would if you had a teleprompter telling you the next question, the next question.

Brother I'm totally just guessing all that. I've been interviewed by you. You didn't have teleprompters. You were at my house when you interviewed me. You did a cool segment. I don't know how you do your craft, but the questions you asked me there were probing. They were intelligent. You listened to the answers. You asked the right following questions. That ability to be linear seems to be lacking in some podcasts. It's one that I'm working on, but I don't want to be too linear because like you said, then it comes off as programmatic, and it wouldn't be fun to listen to. Then what's the point, right?

Dan Harris:

You actually, you totally nailed what the challenges are for somebody like me in getting into podcasting. It's really about dropping some of the artifice and pretense that comes with sitting at a desk with all these lights. Talking into a camera with a million unseen viewers on the other side of it which is a very surreal thing to do, and to be more like the Dan that chit chats with his wife or with his friends. That has been a bit of a process. I really think that there is a connection between good interviewing and meditation.

Dave Asprey:

Oh heck yeah.

Dan Harris:

That meditation just allows you, it trains you over time to be right there with whatever is

happening, so not so caught up in planning the next question or whatever point you want to make so that I'm listening to you talk. I am able to recall the 3 or 4 things that you said that I want to respond to. Or when I'm doing a podcast, I can have a plan. When I'm the interviewer. I'm the interviewer on my own podcast. I can have a plan for the way I want things to go, but I am totally willing to throw that plan out based on what the interviewee says and just go down whatever tributary that person wants to lead me down.

Dave Asprey:

It's pretty amazing. I hadn't thought of it like that, but yeah. In order to do well on stage as a public speaker, I used to come into that when I started doing this, I was in a complete state of panic. I would go into a flow state which was really helpful. In my early days of public speaking. After I did the meditation and all this other stuff I got to the point where I have the low level awareness to okay maybe there's a hostile question in the audience. Maybe there is not. Maybe the slides are working right, or maybe there is a technical error, or maybe they just gave me half the time I had.

None of it makes me feel like I'm going to die anymore. It's that fear thing. Because my fear response is trained. It's like the police dog. You can hear a gun fire and it doesn't jump up and cower. To be able to sit there and hear whatever the next question is. Maybe I decided not to go that route. There isn't the visceral response that I would have had before. Oh no. What if I don't go there? Maybe I will die. Or maybe no one will like me. You go down these incredible spirals. It will be the end of Bulletproof radio. People will make fun of me. No one will like me.

All that stuff that would have been there in my head is just like oh. I'm going to do this and either one of these is okay. That frees up so much mitochondrial capacity to then listen, and to be present. Very well put. I hadn't thought of it that way. Thank you for that.

Dan Harris:

You know there is a Buddhist term for what you just described. It's like these little movies we make. It's called Prapanca. P-R-A-P-A-N-C-A. Which means, and this is an amazing, it's amazing that the Buddhists came up with a phrase like this. It literally means the imperialistic tendency of mind, which is that we, a data point arises. Like you have a moment of fear. Then you automatically, it colonizes the whole future. You're like okay. I asked a question that I'm not sure is the right question. The guest is going to hate me. The audience is going to hate me. It's going to be the end of Bulletproof Radio. I'm going to be living on the street somewhere. That happens in a second.

Dave Asprey:

Exactly.

Dan Harris:

I have a 1 and a half year old. He won't brush his teeth. It's like he won't brush his teeth. He's never going to brush his teeth. He's going to have meth mouth. He's never going to have a job. It's like that happens immediately. We live our whole lives with this going on. We don't even know what's happening. Now I'm sure your listeners are sort of nodding their head because this happens to everybody, but the beauty and the value of meditation, of having this self awareness, mindfulness, is that you can catch that and get off the train earlier before you go kick the dog or whatever it is that you do when you get frustrated.

Dave Asprey:

We talked about being in your head. That whole thing happens almost outside of your head. It's unconscious. You feel the emotion, but the steps that led up to it, unless you're watching them, you're not going to see them. Then you're just like okay I feel this way. There must be a reason. Then you make up a story about the reason which is clearly the dog's fault, so you should kick the dog. It doesn't make you feel better.

I had an experience when I first got into the personal development side of things. I had been through a rough divorce. I lost the \$6 million I made when I was 26. Which okay, those are a couple of the big WHO stressors. I was at a personal growth retreat. The people leading it were saying, "Well Dave, there's got to be some feelings in there." Yeah. There's a feeling. I'm angry. They're like, "No, there's other feelings in there." I'm like, "No, there's not." I spent 2 days going through this argument all in my head. Nope. Angry. Nothing. Anger. Finally they did some things that just made me feel uncomfortable. I've got to leave now. No. There's something. Finally this lady looks at me and she goes, "Okay do you feel anything in your body?" I go, "Yeah. There's something in my stomach." She looks me right in the eyes and she goes, "Do you know what that is? That's called fear." I looked at her and I go, "Really?"

It was because I was so in my head that I had this story that's like there's no reason for me to be afraid right now. Therefore that feeling is not fear. Therefore you should ignore it because it's noise. For me, the biggest part of learning to be a good podcaster or to just be a good CEO, or a good husband, has been to learn there's great value in paying attention to all the weird stuff that's happening and then figuring out why it's happening. Not making up a story about why it's happening. But actually watching it to see why it's happening. Then going back and figuring where did that, in my view of the world, where did that bad programming come from that's causing that for no good reason? And then, and this has been my biggest challenge, how do you reset the programming so it doesn't happen anymore?

Rather training the dog to sit still, it's like another level beyond that, so there isn't the impulse in the first place. That's a powerful thing, and that's where very advanced meditation from many different paths can lead you, and where some psychologists can lead you too. It's been the most fun thing to explore I've ever thought of because I was such an asshole because I was always acting on that, and I just didn't know it. Right.

Dan Harris:

Yeah. I mean I think what you're talking about is enlightenment. What meditation in the shallow end of the pool, the my level. I've only been doing it for like 7 years is really about being self aware enough so that you're not triggered by blindly by your patterns or by external stimuli. But enlightenment in the Buddhist conception is that you uproot all negative tendencies, and that it's a step wise progression. There are these very detailed maps in the various Buddhist schools from how you get from what they call an uninstructed world-ling, so basically me.

To step, to having a set of experiences that have been mapped out for millennia that ultimately culminate allegedly. I say that. I want to put emphasis on that because I have not seen any evidence for it, but allegedly culminate in the complete uprooting of greed,

hatred, and confusion. Or to use your expression you deprogram and the bug is gone.

Dave Asprey:

I believe there is something to that. The definition of enlightenment that I work with is when you have full control and awareness of all aspects of your biology, which sounds kind of small, but if you have knowledge of what every cell in your body is doing. Every mitochondria, all these sensors for the world around you, you realize that the world is nothing like what you thought it was. Because you have actually grown that level of awareness. That's where I'm working. Just growing awareness.

When you grow awareness it automatically makes you less of an asshole. You're nicer to people around you and you're more in a position, and you have more desire to serve other people. I could be entirely wrong on all of this, but I am happier along the way. I would like to think I am more than 10 percent happier than I used to be. It seems to be working, but I'll tell you when I'm 180.

Dan Harris:

Nice. Excellent.

Dave Asprey:

Now Dan we are coming up on the end of the show, and there is a question I have asked everyone. You have a very unique set of experiences having visited all of these churches and all of these war zones. Having been on TV for so long. If someone came to you tomorrow, given everything that you know, and said, "Look I want to perform better at everything I do. I want to kick more ass in life. What are the 3 most important things I need to know?" What would you tell them?

Dan Harris:

Look none of this is going to be surprising, but the 3, I would say 4 things that are like the basic recipe for human flourishing are the basic bodily, I'll keep it the 3, the basic bodily maintenance like exercise, and diet, and sleep. Because without that you can't function. And I know you are interested in lots of hacks around those areas. I'm open to that too. But you've got to figure that out. 2 is great relationships in your life.

We are social animals. Without good relationships we go crazy. The quickest, you listen to John McCain he says, "The worst part about being a POW was not the beatings, it was solitary confinement." We need to have good relationships in our life. I think the third which for far too long has been ignored is mental training. All of the meditation that we've talked about for these last few minutes. Those are the 3 things I would recommend as sort of a path to excellence and happiness in your life.

Dave Asprey:

Beautiful answers. Where can people find out more about your book, about your app, about your company, and any other place you want to send them?

Dan Harris:

Thank you for letting me shamelessly plug. I really do appreciate that, although this has been fun on every conceivable level, but I also appreciate the plug.

Dave Asprey:

Of course.

Dan Harris:

The book you can get it anywhere. Amazon. Whatever. It's called 'Ten Percent Happier'. The



app is right now it's in the Apple app store. We're working on an Android version. If you don't have an Apple device you can get it at [TenPercentHappier.com](http://TenPercentHappier.com). I would love to hear from you or your users about the app because we're really sort of at the beginning stages. We're a start up. I love hearing from people if you hit me on Twitter @DanBHarris. Tell me what you think of the thing.

It's free to start with. You can check it out, and download it, and try it for a couple of days. What we do that we think is interesting is that we everyday, everyday you get video and audio. Every time you use the thing. And you can skip the video if you don't want to do it. Everyday either you get me for a couple of minutes chit chatting with a meditation teacher and asking all of the obnoxious questions you might have. Then it goes right into a guided meditation. The other thing we do that is different is we give you a coach. Like a real human being that you can text with through the app and ask any question you have. That person is a real human being and an experienced meditator who can help you out.

Then if you want to listen to the podcast it's available everywhere that podcasts are available. Like I said, I love hearing from people who use this stuff. Read the book, or listen to the podcast, or use the app. In particular I like hearing where I am going wrong and what I should fix. If you hit me on Twitter that's the one social medium where I actually do read the comments.

Dave Asprey: Thank you Dan.

Dan Harris: Huge pleasure being on here, and I'm going to hold you to letting me turn the tables on you. Thank you and it won't be the end.

Dave Asprey: You're very welcome. If you enjoyed today's episode you know what to do. Go pick up a copy of 'Ten Percent Happier'. Dan is an interesting guy. If you saw that original piece on Modafinal or Providual and me that I am sure we have linked to on the website, that was actually Dan at my house. Years ago he flew out from New York with a camera crew to film. What a small world. What a fascinating world that here we are about 5 years later talking on a podcast, and I get to interview you. Never would have imagined. Super cool. I look forward to hanging out again.

Dan Harris: Thank you sir.

Male Voiceover: Thanks for watching. Don't miss out. To keep getting great videos like this that help you kick more ass at life, subscribe to the Bulletproof YouTube channel at [BulletproofExec.com/YouTube](http://BulletproofExec.com/YouTube). Stay Bulletproof.