5 Ways to Find Meaning and Trust in a Skeptical World – Jamie Wheal, Part 3 with Dave Asprey – #847

Announcer:

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Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. When Jamie Wheal comes on Bulletproof Radio, we always get into some mind-bending topics. He's a friend who specializes in neuroanthropology. He looks at the nitty-gritty between science and human potential with a lot of precision. That's why our interview about hedonic engineering ended up being a multi-episode miniseries for you, because it was more than would fit in one episode or fit in your head all at one time. We pull apart his book, Recapture the Rapture: Rethinking God, Sex, and Death in a World That's Lost Its Mind. We just couldn't get through all the cool stuff to talk about when he was on last time, so if you haven't heard the previous episodes with Jamie, you're missing out, and I'll do my best to get you caught up on this one.

In the first couple episodes, we looked at sex and we looked at Hedonic Yoga of Becoming and an interesting study he did with couples, looking at what happens physiologically to turn sex into something that is transformative. But that was only half the book. So this time we're going to look at death and God parts of the book, and, yes, a podcast about death, are we going to be super gothic? I was going to put on a studded collar with little chrome studs and black leather, but that would've probably been more for the last episode about hedonic sex, so that wouldn't be appropriate. But what I can tell you is that it's always tough to talk about death because I think the AI algorithms actually suppress that because people naturally shy away from it, but we're also talking about God. So what is the role of this in biohacking and in human consciousness? Well, I've got a guy who has paid some attention to that to us.

Well, if you missed the last two episodes, a real quick intro. Jamie was a founder of the international Flow Genome Project, of which I was, I believe, the first investor, and they research and train people for ultimate human performance. He looks at science and human potential, written a few books, and just an all-around interesting guy. Jamie, welcome back.

Jamie Wheal:

Oh, thanks for having me, Dave. Psyched to be here.

Dave:

All right. Let's go deep on your book. Choose Your Own Apocalypse, which is, by the way, the best name for a title. Tell me about the meaning crisis.

Tell me about the meaning crisis.

Jamie:

Yeah, well, I mean, I think we're all kind of living in it right now, but it sure feels like that the two pillars that have held up our contemporary Western consensus, let's just say, were organized religion, the longest-standing way that any person made sense of who am I, where am I, how did I get here, and what ought I do, and who are we, right? So that was almost always a very strong download from the religion into which you were born. Then on the other side, for the last 300-400 years, we've had this modern liberalism, this idea of rationality, science, evidence, five senses, as well as a kind of civic project of

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effectively all men and women are created equal and entitled to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness regardless of race, color, or creed, at least in theory.

What we've seen gradually but now suddenly all at once, kind of like how Hemingway was asked about going bankrupt, right, it was gradually and then suddenly and all at once, those two pillars have collapsed. The long-term Pew research trends and those kind of things tracking the demise of organized religion, that's fairly well-documented, people understand that. But we have reached an inflection point there where, for the first time ever in human history, more people don't belong to anything than belong to all the other things. That is a radical unmooring of who we are and how we identify. Then you're like, "Okay, so now that kind of puts us in the realm of Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris and the New Atheists." You're like, "Okay, God is dead, let's tap dance on his grave. Religion is the opiate of the masses, so we're all going to move into modernity and evidence-based rational atheism."

And it was like, "Well, not so fast," because we've also got this collapse in faith, and we're seeing it in this last 18 months. We're seeing it in deep scrutiny of the UN, of the CDC, of the WHO, deep scrutiny of transnational or international trade agreements, military alliances, all of the things. Now, being a globalist, especially if you look at YouTube comments, which is something you should probably never do, but if you do, you will see people sniffing and sneering at anybody who is attempting to say, "Hey, we all need to come up with coordinated anything, coordinated solutions, coordinated policies, coordinated legislations," because that all is being seen as a threat to the New World Order. Throw in we can't even trust the priest class of modern liberalism anymore. So you've got the Ivy League entrance scandals, you've got Oxycontin debacles with doctors no longer being ... 80% of heroin addicts all got their start on Oxy. The-

Dave:

And it turns out you should not blend that into your coffee.

Jamie:

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. That's needle-proof coffee. That's a different one.

Dave:

You're a bad man, Jamie. You're a bad man.

Jamie:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And so we are in this situation ... Throw in corporations, Goldman in the 2008 crisis. All high-achieving kids wanted to either get internships at McKinsey or Goldman. And you have The Big Short, Michael Lewis' book exposing exactly how double-dealing Goldman was there. They were in the 1MDB scandal. McKinsey helped Jacob Zuma, who just submitted to jail today, the former South-African leader. McKinsey fully conspired to just loot the South African treasury of billions of dollars with Zuma, and you're like, "Wait a second, these are all supposed to be the best and the brightest."

Dave:

But McKinsey did it with the best PowerPoints, so I can respect that, and anyone-

Jamie:

[crosstalk 00:06:14]-

Dave:

Anyone who trusts an investment banker gets what they deserve, I mean.

Jamie:

Yeah. Let's just throw up a two-by-two and workshop this, okay?

Dave:

I can only say this because of my career in Silicon Valley, right? Then there are some really smart people who are investment bankers and work for McKinsey, but the organizations do sometimes things, you're like, "How is this possible?"

Jamie:

Yeah. So long-

Dave:

What you're saying, though, is we don't trust the things we used to trust.

Jamie:

There's no more Walter Cronkite, right? There's no more sane ... There's not even, up until very recently and probably still not for most people because everything's so fractured, not even an address from the Oval Office, right? There's nothing that anybody can take as singularly factual and shared truth. Then that's leading us to fracture. So rather than shaking off both of those earlier versions, meaning 1.0 in organized religion, meaning 2.0 modern liberalism, rather than us standing up and saying, "Okay, we got to do this together," we're getting sucked to fundamentalism. People are doubling down on belief systems and not just religious ones, right? QAnon, which you were alluding to earlier, is another one, Plandemic. Any belief system where people are doubling and tripling down in the face of contravening evidence, that's happening, and so is nihilism, where people are just giving up knowing anything at all or the fact that anything is actually ever truly knowable, and we see the rise in diseases and despair and all the accompanying rudderlessness. So we're in a tight spot, and it's not happening in a vacuum, right?

Dave:

Well, let me ask you this. What about people who live in Africa or the Middle East? How are they included in all of this? Because it seems like in the West ... The case you make in the book is that you pretty much go into denial or anxiety, you become more and more polarized, you join a tribe, and you exclude and expel everything else. But we have a whole bunch of people who came online in the last five, 10 years. Do the rules change when you look at it globally?

Jamie:

I mean, that's a great question. I think that for the bottom literally almost half of humanity, this is just a champagne problem, to be discussing meaning and whether it's going well or not.

Dave:

Like, "What's for lunch?"

Jamie:

Yeah. There's just some very bottom of the Maslow's hierarchy kind of things that have to get done and aren't getting resolved in a meaningful way. On the other hand, if you go to Johannesburg, if you go to Lagos, if you go to any gathering of people who have access to global information and news, their critiques of post-European colonialism are generally way more informed than most Republican congressmen, I'll tell you that much, because they've been living on the sharp end of 400 years of colonialism and neoliberalism so that their experiences-

Dave:

There you go. You made it political, man. You mentioned Republicans, so now everyone has to be tribalized.

Jamie:

Exactly.

Dave:

All right. If that comment was either really attractive or really offensive to you, you should probably stop listening to now. Just enjoy the next episode. I'm just kidding.

Jamie:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. No.

Dave:

The reason I said that, though, it seems like it's really hard for people to be in the middle. I did this thing on Instagram, and I came out as being VI-curious, vaccine industry curious. I'm like, "Hey, an mRNA vaccine for a cardiovascular disease that was tested to be safe over seven years would be really interesting to me because that's a thing that's likely to have an effect on a huge number of people, and I would very strongly consider something like that." But that means that to the hardcore vaccine promiscuous crowd, as in, "I'll let anyone stick anything in me without any standards," well, how dare you say it would take enough testing? You should sign up for it right now. It's like I'm not promiscuous enough. Then there's the no vaccine, "Even with 100 years of evidence would I ever consider any one of those things," the very extreme.

The tribalism and polarization you're talking about, I'm in the middle. I think most people are in the middle on a lot of these things, and they see the shrill, angry vegans who sound exactly like the shrill, angry keto forever. They're the same thing, and the very extreme liberals sound exactly like the very extreme conservatives. So how much of this is actually just quiet people in the middle being, "Could you idiots just shut up on both ends? We want to just live our lives." Do you have data or a sense of that?

Jamie:

Well, there was an interesting study on this, so it's not specific to your answer, but it kind of gives us a peek under the hood at the dynamics, which is ... It was a study out of Australia on dark triad and authoritarian personality traits, and they took three different populations, one social justice, one outright white identitarian, and one center progressive-ish. The center folks, the moderate middle that you're speaking to, didn't score at all on authoritarianism, Machiavellianism, narcissism, or psychopathy. So they were generally decent people, live and let live folks. But both extremes did. Both extremes were

off the charts. And you're like, "Oh, okay, so this is Yeats', 'The best lack all conviction while the worst are filled with passionate intensity.'" You're like, "Wow, you really do have a bunch of not-that-nice people hijacking the mic and creating increased schisms for power."

Then the people next to them are like, "Well, I believe in the things you're giving lip service to, and that could be a really meaningful thing like patriotism or a really meaningful thing like social and racial justice. I believe in those things." So you're the one shouting the loudest about them, and then I look over here and I see the people who are being painted as my enemies, and there's this scary-ass no man's land in the middle that's just tank traps and mines and mortar shells. The more we get fractionalized, the higher cost, higher risk taking a runner across that no man's land to find mutuality is. So if it feels like the other is so profoundly strange and other and typically even bad or evil, I have to huddle even closer to the wack-nuts on my team, and those wack-nuts are actually bad actors. So we've lost the proverbial Walter Cronkites, we've lost the FDRs, the sort of soothing voices of trustworthy authority, and as a result, we're getting swayed and pulled apart by demagogues.

Dave:

So what do we do about it? As biohackers, as human performance experts, we're getting pulled in multiple directions to join the latest cults or the latest identity and things like that. All right, so let's say that I agree with you. We have a meaning crisis. What is there to be done? What does history have to teach us? What does science have to teach us?

Jamie:

Yeah, well, I mean, I think at my heart, and this is largely informed by my wife, who's a Montessori educator for her whole career, is Maria Montessori's educational philosophy, which is not that different than Abe Maslow's psychological philosophies but kind of like left to our own devices, we're generally good and we generally want to move towards growth and wholeness. So if we can declutter the dysfunctional things and we can make healthy, positive choices more readily available and supported, most people will choose to do the right thing. If we think, "Okay, the whole modern liberalism with no belief, the nihilism, that's going too far to one guardrail. Doubling down on ancient beliefs with no justification or brand new ones that are just as fact-challenged, into fundamentalism, that's not helping us." So what would meaning 3.0 look like, which would basically be like the Linux or the blockchain of culture-building, right?

Could we do something like IDEO's Human-Centered Design Toolkit, which is basically saying ... IDEO is that famous design firm that came out of Stanford. I'm sure you're deeply familiar with them, and they, after a while, were like, "Hey, we design computer mice. We design kick-ass office chairs. We do all these things, but, actually, our super-secret sauce is the way we go about designing things." Then they created this Human-Centered Design Toolkit that they shared globally for free and said if you were a community in Ghana, in Delhi, in Sao Paulo, in wherever, and you got a hard problem like clean drinking water or how to educate your kids or electric power and solar energy, whatever it is, here's a great way to come up with better decisions and creations. So that was kind of the thesis of the book, is WWID, what would IDEO do to solve this meaning crisis? If we want it to be available to as many people as possible, God bless you for doing all the high-end, high-dollar biohacking, but we've actually got to dial back the clock and say, "Bottom four billion has got to be cheap or free."

Dave:

Yeah. We got to know the mechanisms so we can make it available, right?

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Jamie:

Yeah, and that's true. I think that's one of the most interesting things about the psychedelic renaissance, for instance, is that it creates a specific, reproducible, and predictable state more or less on demand, which in proximity to high-tech measurement devices, then lets us look under the hood of that known state. Then we can actually measure and track it, and then we're no longer beholden or wed to that specific key to fit in the lock. We're like, "Oh, this is the serotonin system," or, "Oh, this is prefrontal cortical activity or a default mode network." As soon as we get to the level of our actual bodies and brains, we're no longer having to get wrapped around the axles of taboos, superstitions, customs, and aversions around which ways we get in. It's just us, and there's probably three to six or 10 ways to reproduce that same effect, and that feels like a very important democratization of this stuff.

Dave:

And what's the effect that you're reproducing? I'm not sure that I got there. I mean, getting people to not naturally or automatically recoil from something that they don't like, that's tough. That's low-level neurological stuff. It's not a conscious choice. You feel aversion to something, you feel version whether you can think whether you should feel aversion.

Jamie:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, I mean, if we go to the opposite side, if you take a look at something like MDMA PTSD therapy, let's just say that the folks that have been selected and screened for those studies have generally been extra banged up by life and adverse events, child abuse, sexual trauma, war trauma, whatever it would be.

Dave:

PTSD is no fun.

Jamie:

Yeah. And what they have reported in their own experiences is, hey, with that molecule in their brains and bodies, they feel ... And what the scientists have tracked who are conducting the studies is higher serotonin, higher oxytocin, higher prolactin, these kinds of things. Those things typically create a state of security, enoughness, connection, trust, and that's trust and enoughness that they can then connect with a therapist so that they're no longer feeling isolated. It's also a trust that they're able to go into their own catalog of memories and neurophysiological stress or trauma, like Bessel van der Kolk's The Body Keeps the Score. You go into that body that holds the residue of all those negative life events, and they're able to take out those memories, discuss them trustingly and connectedly with a therapist, and then they're able to rework them, and then they're able to put them back into their memory banks, however that happens, and they're overwritten with a slightly more expansive, more resourced relationship to it.

If you take that, there was a study at Oxford University on, effectively, isolation, it's loss of status and control. How do groups of people do in stressful times? It's typically decreases in serotonin, decreases in dopamine, decreases in oxytocin that basically leave people vengeful, paranoid, prone to conspiratorial thinking, prone to being mean and less altruistic. So you're just kind of like, "Okay, it's not that this is all just reduced to our neurochemistry. We're complex creatures. We're psychosocial biological beings." But on the other hand, down at that level of the stack, those things are consistently happening, and they give us a signature of high trust and connected and able to withstand a lot of hard hits or separated, isolated, and anti-social.

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If we can adjust those ... And that's where we ended up talking about sexuality last time, was because Rick Doblin had shared with me, the founder of MAPS conducting those MDMA studies, he's like, "The closest analog we've found to this really positive therapeutic experience with MDMA has been the post-orgasmic state." So that's just one avenue. You're like, "Oh my goodness." We know that folks that are being cooped up in their homes for a year and a half that have been just doom-scrolling their news feeds and getting sucked into MSNBC and FOX as dueling shout-boxes, we know that sucks. We know we end up less resourceful and generally shittier, for ourselves and each other. We also know how we can begin modifying that, where we can discharge ... This is Robert Sapolsky's stuff at Stanford, right? He wrote that famous book, Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers. We've got lots of ulcers. We're all suffering micro-PTSD, and many of us have hits of macro-PTSD. If we have ways to discharge that, if we have ways to get back to zero, just level balance, then we have a chance to live forwards giving it our best shot, not forever dragging anchors behind us.

Dave:

In traditional societies, they didn't have therapists, but they had elders and they had the local medicine person who would likely deal with some altered state trauma thing as some sort of plant medicine, sometimes doing both at the same time, and then drumming rituals, rituals that have meaning, that actually cause healing, rites of passage and things like that. Do you see those coming back?

Jamie:

Well, I think that's the entire fun project we have. This book is 50/50, neuroanthropology, like let's look to the past, see what customs and habits we've done being these wacky tribal primates that we are, but also bring a level of neuroscience to understanding why those things have worked, and then forward-facing is the culture architecture part. Now, we know that stuff. Now, we know what the Lego blocks look like. How do we lay them in interesting, creative, joyful, productive combinations going forwards? So, to your point, Roger Walsh, who's at UC Davis, he's an MD/PhD, both physician and anthropologist, has done some fascinating work on monophasic and polyphasic cultures. Monophasic is one channel. That's effectively the Western world post the Enlightenment, so what I can see, touch, taste, think, or feel, five senses, that's it, empiricism, versus polyphasic cultures, meaning we welcome and regularly experience trance, possession, visitations, vision quests, you name it, dreams, a whole much wider spectrum of consciousness that we consider valid information streams, basically.

The question now is how do we get back to a postmodern polyphasic culture, where we crank open the channels, we open the rusted radio knobs, and start being able to pick up a wider range of body brain inputs, our neurophysiology, as well as the information that comes in those? So, for instance, our monophasic culture of the Western world is typically tired, wired, and stressed. That's how we often feel. It's hyperactive beta wave activity, super focused executive function and default mode network rumination, poor air exchange, often a lot of persistent fight/flight stress, neurochemistry, norepinephrine, cortisol, all the things that are great for fleeing the tiger and rot your bones and eat you alive if you're staying awake at 3:00 AM rehashing a conversation with your boss or a Twitter war you're in the middle of, so all of those kind of things.

Much of the biohacking movement, everything from intermittent fasting to hot and cold contrast therapies to all of these things, is attempting to pry open that window and saying, "We want to feel more." We don't want just to live in 72 degrees perma-climate with infinite calories. We want to go hungry. We want to binge. We want to be freezing. We want to be sweating our balls off. We want to do all these things because there's just an intuition that, in fact, that is healthier. So if we can build in culture architectural, if we can build in the rituals that used to carry us forward so that we can change

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the radio dial on a regular basis, then we end up with more range and resiliency in our bodies and brains but also in our minds and hearts.

There was a study of Haitian voodoo practitioners, and, interestingly, once a year, they would have these periodic voodoo ceremonies with possession and trance, and you could literally just go hog-wild and lose your minds. This was Wade Davis' research, I think, that in those communities, there was zero clinical cases of psychosis. So it was like, "Here's a cultural container. Get your ya-yas out. Go nuts, literally. And then ... you've scratched that itch. You're good to go." Robin Dunbar at Oxford University's done something with the San bushmen in the Kalahari and have found that they engage trance dances, but they do the trance dance more and more often when there's higher social friction and conflict. So you're like, "Oh, so this is cultural medicine. This actually works. We can literally sweat our prayers." You've got a groove and reconciliation community baked into your social structures.

Dave:

It's interesting. Robert Cialdini, when he came on and talked about influence recently, I don't think we got into it in the interview, but in his book, he talks about how when people make music together, even just singing together, things like that, it makes them way less combative and way more likely to influence each other positively, which is really cool. And what-

Jamie:

Yeah, I think it's why the CIA had a file on Bob Marley.

Dave:

Yeah. I can see why. I mean, hey, good God, he used cannabis. Who would've imagined? Oh, did you hear the news today? Amazon's going to stop testing its workers for cannabis.

Jamie:

Hmm.

Dave:

Yeah. Only 20 years too late, guys. All right. In your book, you talk about omeganism or ... Yeah, omeganism, omegaism. Okay. How do we get from where our conversation is now to the point? Because that's kind of where you're going with all this, is this new idea. What is it?

Jamie:

Yeah. Well, it's actually an old idea. It's Teilhard de Chardin's concept that, hey ... And he was an early 20th century paleontologist and Jesuit theologian, but he was so scary to the church that they basically banned and suppressed all of his writings until after he died and shipped his ass off to China. So he was one of those sketchy Jesuits who were on the borderline of heresy. But his idea was he's like, "Hey, the same way that we have the biosphere or even the atmosphere, we also have something called the noosphere, which is our shared realm of collective mind. This is back in the 1920s, so this was a very strange concept. All they had was radio and telegraph, right?

Dave:

He saw the future, that guy.

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Jamie:

He really did, and he was like, "Hey, there's going to be, at some point, this collected hive mind where we're all plugged in together." Beautifully, kind of interestingly, he's like, "It's not going to be just dissolving into the void. We're not just going to lose ourselves in some totalitarian mindfuck. It's like every special snowflake's going to stay special, and we're going to turn into a mountain of snow, and that is going to be some phase change in human experience." He thought it was going to be so profound that he even called that process Christogenesis, which is literally that all people connected together for the first time ever would literally become the body of Christ at the end of time, which is a theological concept, but we can unpack it in practical terms, too.

Dave:

Some people probably haven't heard of his work, and, frankly, I can't say his name right. Say it one more time.

Jamie:

Teilhard de Chardin.

Dave:

Teilhard ... It's the de Chardin. Any French word, even though I live in Canada, it just comes out of my mouth sounding like I just ate marbles, so apologies. My auditory processing machinery isn't that strong. So de Chardin. I've read a bunch of his stuff, and it's actually made its way into cyberpunk and a lot of science fiction. There are entire novels where they describe the reach of the local Internet as the noosphere, so-

Jamie:

Exactly.

Dave:

If you're in space and you're beyond where you can talk to the planet, oh, you're out of its noosphere, and the closer you are, the higher bandwidth you have, the more connected you are to the consciousness there. We're kind of building that system, I think. That's been part of my career. How do we do long distance high-speed networking?

Jamie:

Exactly.

Dave:

But it's not plugged into our heads. Are you saying that we're going to want to go with Elon Musk's Neuralink kind of thing?

Jamie:

Well, funnily enough, I was just at a dinner on the future of religion last night with some of his business partners, the Founders Fund. They were talking about the move-

Dave:

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I know those guys, yeah.

Jamie:

The move to-

Dave:

Was this Peter Thiel or ...

Jamie:

It was Luke Nosek and some other guys.

Dave:

Oh, Luke.

Jamie:

Yeah.

Dave:

I knew Luke when he was 22. He was a roommate of a friend of mine's in Santa Cruz.

Jamie:

Uh-huh (affirmative). Yeah.

Dave:

Hey, Luke.

Jamie:

Yeah, yeah. Cool. But his whole premise of why they would go to Mars was to create a 10-minute gap between the fucking Internet that's wrecking Earth, and I was like, "Holy shit, that's a long way. You couldn't maybe just unplug your router?" But, no, I mean, yes, obviously, all the things are going to keep getting explored, and Bryan Johnson's Kernel and Elon's Neuralink and all that kind of stuff, but I think we're already there. We already have a smartphone in our hand, and we have technologically-mediated telepathy. I can ping a friend, and within seconds anywhere on the planet, boom, they have my idea or thought. Seven of the top 10 companies in the world right now are all about stitching up our noosphere, about creating a shared meshwork, and it just happens to have silicon bits and bytes at-

Dave:

I sure hope there's consent in there somewhere.

Jamie:

Well, I mean, these are the questions, right? So Teilhard was actually not a sunny optimist about this. He's like, "This is in no way a layer." He goes, "And, in fact, there's going to be three intersecting trends, and they're going to conspire at the last minute," which is the carrying capacity of the planet, which is pretty prescient for a dude in the 1920s. There's not a lot of shared consensus that far back.

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Dave:

He didn't think his way into this stuff. He was feeling his way into it. The best futurists, in my opinion, are seeing something before it happens.

Jamie:

Yeah.

Dave:

They're not thinking of it. Therefore, it happens.

Jamie:

Yeah. Then, fundamentally, Dumbledore's Army versus the Death Eaters. He's like, "There's going to be people that are drawn towards this global humanist project being lived by love, and there's going to be people that aren't and that are resisting it and digging in their heels and looking to smash and grab." He goes, "They're going to criss-cross at that last point." The omega is the opposite of alpha. Alpha was in the beginning, right, our whole Judeo-Christian time's arrow kind of thing. His idea was, "Well, what does the end look like?" He's like, "And it's going to come down to the absolute wire, and that's what's going to make it so profound and meaningful." You think about that, you're like, "Okay, well, we've seen" ... Everybody knows that George Lucas ported Joseph Campbell's hero's journey into Star Wars and that kind of stuff. But you're like, "Actually, we might have all been living Teilhard's omega story," because at the last minute, at the 11th hour against all odds, a small band of rebel misfits defeats evil in the empire and creates peace through the universe. You're like, "That's everything."

Dave:

If we're living that, I hope I'm just an Ewok. That'd be so relaxing.

Jamie:

If you could peace out in the old growth ... I think you've got some up in British Columbia, man. You definitely got some.

Dave:

Yeah. They're cutting them down right now. The last one percent of old growth just got ... The British Columbia government just approved them to be logged. There's people getting arrested right now. If any of you guys are listening, you bastards, stop cutting down those trees. They're old. Let them be. All right, there we go, PSA.

Jamie:

Yeah. I mean, there's nothing to be said on that. There is a question as to ... And if anybody hasn't read Richard Powers' book, it won the Pulitzer, called Overstory, it is a beautiful, beautiful reflection on trees and old growth trees and everything else, but just [crosstalk 00:33:16]-

Dave:

Okay. Let's pause for a second there. If you listen to Bulletproof Radio, you've probably heard me say that reading or listening to fiction, not nonfiction, for 20 minutes a day even a couple times a week noticeably changes your brain in a beneficial way. It's a performance enhancer. If you want to listen to

an incredible story, Overstory is the way to do it. And if you're on with Upgrade Collective, that's bonus point homework for you guys, Overstory. Just Google it. Just an incredible book. You will not believe how good that is. So thank you for bringing that up.

Jamie:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. The other one that I recommend in junction I just finished. Because I agree with you, my brain, trying to wrestle with the world, just gets beaten into the dirt over time. It's just there's so much and there's no relief from-

Dave:

That's just a lack of coffee, man. [inaudible 00:34:04].

Jamie:

But shifting gears into fictive narratives, like a ripping yarn, a beautiful story, is so soothing. Another book that I'd super recommend on this front is called The Ministry for the Future, and it was Obama-

Dave:

Oh, wow.

Jamie:

It was his top book for 2020. Tristan Harris, who you probably know as well, had recommended it to me, and it's basically the next 40 years and what actually happens. The guy who wrote it is a Hugo and Nebula award-winner, so he's a banging science fiction writer. But he is also a part of some-

Dave:

That's a great book.

Jamie:

... sustainable think tanks, and so it maps. The next 40 years pulls no punches. It actually starts with a mass casualty heat event in India, where 20 million people die. So the American West, with our heat dome, we've just been glimpsing similar things, and it just [crosstalk 00:34:55]-

Dave:

It's a little dark. Man, the description of people dying in a heat dome is pretty brutal. Kim Stanley Robinson writes some pretty gruesome stuff. But, yep, it's also one worth doing. So you guys can be like, "Here's these two uber-nerd biohackers talking about a science-fiction book and a Pulitzer Prize-winning book." Some of these books have thinking in them that you're not going to get anywhere else. That's really cool. There's a new kind of short-term apocalyptic climate change-based, I don't know, futurist books. There's a specific name for this subgenre. I forget what it's called.

Jamie:

I mean, some folks have been calling it hopepunk, which I kind of-

Dave:

Hopepunk versus-

Jamie:

Hopepunk, which I like, yeah.

Dave:

I kind of like that. So I think it's worth your time to look at one of those books. I would probably put Overstory as the one that's more inspiring and will make you love trees more. Ministry for the Future is quite dark, but it is worth reading.

Jamie:

The first half is, for sure.

Dave:

Yeah. Yeah.

Jamie:

Yeah.

Dave:

Good point. So there you go, a couple of big reading recommendations that aren't from the author. But, of course, you might also at the same time want to check out Jamie's new book because he's going deep on all this stuff. What I appreciate is that you're willing to go deep and quote people from hundreds of years ago, so you're doing your deep research. Then you're saying, "All right, what's in common over this?" This is a technique that shockingly works better than doing it all from scratch. That's even why my book, Game Changers ... I'm like, "Let me ask 500 people the same three questions. What do they agree on? I'll probably do that because that's just easier than trying to figure it all out yourself." You came up, after all of the research you did, both the hard science as well as looking at traditions and looking at various cultures, and you said there's really five techniques, and that's what it all comes down to. What are the five techniques?

Jamie:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. So this gets us into the culture architecture, like what are the good Lego blocks and can we build fun things with them? These aren't the only five, and you could absolutely have your own list and make a case. But the ones that seem to come up again and again were respiration, embodiment, sexuality, substances, and music. If you look at any culture's core transformation engines, like how did that given group of people reliably access inspiration, so peak states, healing, and connection, and how did they do that stably or consistently over time, those five show up again and again. Now, they might not have been on the front door of the courthouse. They might not have been in the newspaper. But if you look under the hood of almost all traditions around the world, they're playing with several of them at a time and often all of them.

Once we know that, then we're like, "Okay, now" ... A., they're all shrouded in taboos, and rather than being like, "Oh, that's sketchy territory, that's volatile and controversial, we shouldn't go there," I think you actually look at that and you're like, "Oh, precisely because they have so many tripwires and land lines around them shows you that there was something potent there to protect."

Effectively no civilization worth its salt didn't have strong taboos around what are permitted states of consciousness, what do we do with our drive to procreate and how do you control and modulate sexual impulse, how do we relate to our bodies and use our bodies to shift our states and discharge trauma, and what do we do when we get together and, as you said, or Cialdini's point of what happens when we make a joyful sound together, what happens when ... Because it can go mob mentality or it can go church, and so how we gather has also always been a very closely-modulated thing. So, for instance, you could have music to support Apollonian order, like army marches and church hymns, because those were reinforcing the social norm. But you-

Dave:

In other words, any polka, right?

Jamie:

Yeah, polkas. Hell, yeah. But you couldn't have Woodstock and Elvis because that gets sketchy, right? You can have sexuality for procreation because we want to expand our numbers, but you couldn't have sexuality for transcendence because that you're starting to run around the priest class, right? You can have substances ... This is well-established, and I know you know this whole world. But if you look at Western capitalist society, basically, caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol became our holy trinity because caffeine and nicotine helped us-

Dave:

Amen.

Jamie:

Right? Helped us stay awake and work longer, harder and alcohol helped us take the edge off that when we had to sleep. But cannabinoids, psychedelics, anything else, mm-mm (negative), no way, don't do those because that might cause you to question the system that we're a part of. So bottom line is those are the big five, respiration, how we change our breath, embodiment ... And specifically I took a cut at pain, pleasure, the endocannabinoid system, and, effectively, the vagal nerve, but, basically, our core brain stem activities and our autonomic regulators.

Dave:

When you play with that, you pretty soon realize that you're living in your body but you're not the same as your body, which I think is a part of all of this.

Jamie:

Yeah. And it sets us up. As soon as you get decently good at playing with the nobs and levers of those states or of those categories, you realize, "Wow, I can change the channel on my radio and I can experience a really fascinating range of consciousness." There are specific zip codes, there's specific crosshairs, where you get very interesting things happening most of the time. So that would be, for instance, if you're engaging in any form of breath work, whether it's hyperventilation, like holotropic breath work, or it's super slow, profound, pronounced vagal breathing where you double the length of your exhales to inhales and are signaling your whole body to power down or you're even swapping gases, like scuba divers, and you're changing out the oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon dioxide blends, you can radically change consciousness.

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The same with pleasure and pain stimulation, particularly when combined with sexual arousal, because, typically, if you look in the animal kingdom, sexuality is painful and brutish and short. So there's a ton of anandamide, there's a ton of endorphins, there's all sorts of things that accompany what is otherwise a quite violent and painful act. It gets to the point where you're like, "Oh, within plus or minus 90 seconds of orgasm, all pain gets rewired as pleasure," and you're like, "Okay, that's really interesting." How do we navigate that? Music is a huge amplifier, and substances to prime what other elements of your stack are either missing, not available by some other mechanism, or desirable. So that kind of gets us to the dying part, right? Do you want to dive into that?

Dave:

I want to get into dying, but I think there's a recipe that goes beyond just those five. I just want to say something, too. Everyone has been trained, mostly by reductionist thinking and, really, by big pharma, it's a conspiracy, to think that there's one thing that's the cause and there's one thing to do. There is zero evidence that anything has one solution or that only one thing is a solution to something. That's something that you tease out with science, and it's easier if there's one, and it's a lot easier to run double-blind placebo-controlled trials if you're not tracking 500 different variables. By the way, how many placebo-controlled trials have you seen that track for the phase of the moon as a variable? None of them. But they say, "We controlled all variables." No, you didn't. You just forgot because you didn't think it mattered. So there's all sorts of weird things.

But what you did is you said there's five things, and this doesn't mean that if you go out and you're like, "I'm going to get laid every night, I'm just going to focus on the sexuality thing, and I'll get embodied, someone will tie me up at the same time," there you go. You're not doing all five. But when you talk about the recipe for these things in your book, there's actually about nine things in it. Do they have to be in order, or is it just they have to all be present?

Jamie:

Well, go ahead and read them. Let's hear the roll call.

Dave:

Okay. So the first one, super-saturate your body and brain. What does that one mean?

Jamie:

Well, that was ... I think the rest of it was with endorphins, dopamine-

Dave:

With endorphins, okay.

Jamie:

Right? It was with all the pleasure-enhancing, state-inducing-

Dave:

All those things, okay.

Jamie:

... neurochemicals.

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Dave:

And then you talk about optimizing your endocannabinoid system, which means, what, take a bong hit? Is that what you're saying there?

Jamie:

Right? I mean, it's also responsible from runner's high, and this also shows up in post-orgasm, so however you get there.

Dave:

So the orgasm could do it. Yeah, pot doesn't ... THC is not my friend. It just doesn't do much for me. That's why I did not smoke before I went on Joe Rogan's show. I'm like, "I would give the worst interview of my life if I did that. I'd be an idiot."

Jamie:

Yeah. Although I think it's massively underused as an intentional medicinal, where-

Dave:

Yeah, I could see that.

Jamie:

If people could take the time, and edibles are notorious for people overshooting the mark, but if you can find the appropriate strain ... And people are getting way smarter and better about this. There was an FBI stash from the 1920s, so before the Marijuana Prohibition Act of 1932 or '36, whenever that was, and it was full Prohibition. They just discovered in the last five years a whole bunch of vials and tinctures and all this kinds of stuff, and their knowledge of cannabinoids back then was off the charts. They had so much more precise variations of strains to human clinical conditions and diseases, all these kind of things. It just got eclipsed in Prohibition. So we're kind of getting back there a little bit, and-

Dave:

Yeah, there's-

Jamie:

... were you able to tune it in your system, it's advantageous.

Dave:

There's a company called LEVEL Blends. I invested in them a few years ago because they were looking at, very specifically, your ... I think it was your genetics, and they were looking at specific strains and extraction techniques to figure out if you look like this and you take this strain, you extract it this way, it'll have this predictive effective. Because the problem is a lot of people try it, it's like, "Oh, it doesn't work," or, "CBD doesn't work." But it's like, "Well, yeah." That's like saying food doesn't work, but you might have to try some different foods to see which ones work to cut out the guesswork. So I love what you're saying there. We lost all of that medicinal knowledge, same as we're losing a lot of medical knowledge right now through oppression of doctors.

Jamie:

Yeah. And so to stoners, I would say, "Not so fast," because what you've done is you've over-indexed your endocannabinoid system. So, actually, you're not getting the natural healthy range that you would. You just pinned it. It's like taking testosterone, right? As a result, your nuts shrink. If you're high all the time, then it doesn't do the thing it's supposed to do, the same with caffeine, anything we adapt to. But to people who are like, "Oh, I'm not a stoner," I'd say, actually, think again, and, actually, consider really titrated, almost acupuncture use specifically around precipitating these states, not as a daily habit, not as anything else, once in a blue moon, once a week, once a month, once a year, whatever. But consider it because the endocannabinoid system is so profoundly impactful on our entire nervous system and physiology. So that would be the next step.

Dave:

Okay. Your third one was entrain your brain out of beta wave executive functioning. Certainly, with all the neuroscience stuff at 40 Years, that's something I understand, but a lot of people don't have entrainment systems available on-demand. So how do normal people get their brains entrained out of beta?

Jamie:

Well, look, I mean, the simplest is close your eyes and breathe slowly out your nose, and you'll probably drop down into alpha.

Dave:

But bonus points if you put your eyes and your attention on the middle of your forehead with your eyes closed. If I had electrodes on your head, you'd go into alpha. It's really not that hard. You'll drop your beta that way.

Jamie:

Yeah.

Dave:

Deep slow breath, eyes closed, look at your third eye.

Jamie:

Yeah. And, actually, our buddy at Stanford, Andrew Huberman, has talked about even shifting of eye gaze. So you did one which was focused on up into your brain, and he noticed a similar relaxation effect if you go to 10 and two-

Dave:

Oh, interesting.

Jamie:

... and you go to soft-focused peripheral vision and nasal breathing also massively [crosstalk 00:47:43]-

Dave:

With your eyes open?

Jamie:

Yes, eyes open. And so to your point about it's never just one thing, it's like, "Well, which button am I pushing right now?" It's like, "It's all of it. It's us. It's us." So this is more like how do we play the symphony of ourself?

Dave:

So that's a cheap and easy way to do it. Then number five, reset your brainstem. Was it vagal nerve stimulation? What does that mean?

Jamie:

Yeah, well, actually, let's stay a sec on the delta-

Dave:

Okay. Or on beta.

Jamie:

... or on the EEGs, right, on brainwaves. Interestingly, our friends at Advanced Brain Monitoring discovered this by accident because somebody was at a lunch break and had one of their, whatever it was, 36-channel headsets on. Maybe it was even 100-

Dave:

Probably 24s, yeah.

Jamie:

24s, or even maybe it was the 100-plus ones. But, in any event, somebody was eating dark chocolate and they were still hooked up to the machine, and, apparently, dark chocolate meaningfully induces you over into gamma, temporary gamma wave activity.

Dave:

I believe it.

Jamie:

So you're like, "Okay, neat." So that's the high, super flashy, eureka, pattern recognition moments and certain advanced Tibetan meditators, right, generally not most of us most of the time.

Dave:

The Tibetan chocolate meditation is my favorite.

Jamie:

Dude, that's your next bulletproof coffee? You can be like chocolate suppositories. So then you can go below alpha into theta, and theta is the one where most of us only ... It's so relaxed that most of us are drifting. We nod off to sleep and pass through it.

Dave:

It's the daydream state, right?

Jamie:

It's the daydream state. It's the hypnogogic state of I'm lying on my bed and I jolt myself awake because I thought I just stepped off a curb or something, right? But if you can actually stay lucid during that, it's a very expansive place. Then below that, .1 hertz to the four hertz, and we touched on this last time, is delta. Delta, that's a hop and a skip from brain dead, from flat-line EEG.

Dave:

It's where growth hormone happens and all the low-level operating stuff.

Jamie:

Yeah. And there's tons of research that's coming out of sleep research showing how important it is overnight. But you can also access it when you're conscious, especially ... Now, you can either spend your 40 Years of Zen, right? You can do the long-term lineage path. Or you can look at nitrous oxide, ketamine, or electrical stimulation to the cranial nerve. Any of those will also get you into those zones. Okay. So now we can hit the next one.

Dave:

All right. So we reset our brainstem that way. Or, no, that was still getting out of beta, and what's the brainstem reset part of the recipe?

Jamie:

Well, that is just a seeming correlate.

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