

Finding Your True North Through Yoga – Baron Baptiste – #991

Dave Asprey:

You're listening to The Human Upgrade with Dave Asprey. Thank you for taking some time today to listen to the show and to experience it with me, and if you're in my mentorship group, thank you for being here live and helping me ask the best questions. You can invest the next hour of your time in anything you want to do. You can listen to music, you can read a book, you can go for a walk. You can actually do all those things while you're going for a walk. You can listen to this episode, you can listen to one of the other almost thousand episodes that appeals to you. So, I'm going to keep telling you why you might want to consider today's show, and I'm also going to tell you why you should pick a different episode if this isn't the right one for you, because it's just not your thing, I get it.

Today, we're going to talk about inner transformation, which is a major part of being a biohacker. You can't just say, "Look, I'm ripped, I'm a ripped asshole," you technically want to be someone who is in the condition that you want, which doesn't always mean ripped. Ripped is actually hard to sustain, and biologically a state of being a little bit stressed. That hunted wolf look is not nearly as good as the satisfied wolf who has plenty of game look, but it's kind of sexier to have all those veins and whatever. So, maybe you want to be ripped for a short period, I totally support you on that, but maybe something else is important to you.

And we're going to talk specifically about yoga, and we're going to talk about how it got to be here, and what it does besides giving you some muscle, and some flexibility, and things like that, and it's with a guy who knows a thing or two about it. He started seriously studying yoga at age 12, and for 30 years, he's been teaching yoga at a very big scale. His name is Baron Baptiste, and what I like about him, he's trained in all the major traditions, before he started teaching in the late '80s, and he created Baptiste Power of Vinyasa Yoga in the mid '90s. And we're talking celebrities, Olympians, and the Baptiste Power Yoga Institute is a very, very big thing, if you're into yoga.

The reason I like it, is it's cross-lineage. When I began my yoga practice years ago, I didn't know the difference. I just knew you show up at the time, there's a class, and there's women's military yoga, which is also known as Ashtanga, where it's like, "You will do these series in this order!" And I'm like, "Ah, I don't know how to do this," and there's other playful... And I'm like, "There's lots of women in yoga pants in here, but I didn't break a sweat," right? And you just realize that there's very different sensations you get from these. So, someone who's like, "I've studied with every master from one discipline," versus someone who's learned from many disciplines and then brought it together, I feel like now is the time for a fusing of things, and that's why I wanted to have Baron Baptiste on, because he did that. Baron, welcome to the show, man.

Baron Baptiste:

So good to be here with you. Yeah, really good to be with you again.

Dave:

And of course, you're here-

Baron:

Well, first time on this show, but good to be with you again. Last time we were together in Arizona.

Dave:

We were- and a quick shout out to Joe Polish, a dear friend who runs The Genius Network, and he's actually been on the show. Really shocking, amazingly deep episode on addiction, and Joe's now a very just venerated marketing expert, and he's been an advisor and friend with his Genius Network for almost 10 years. So that's how I met you. I always like to give credit where credit's due, because you were on his stage and we got to chat afterwards, and it's like I always wanted to connect with you, so we got to do that.

Baron:

Yeah, so good.

Dave:

I want to start out with something that people might not know about you, unless maybe they've read one of your New York Times books or something, but you were the son of yoga nerds. So, tell me about being the child of yoga people, because there weren't that many of those back in the '70s and '80s.

Baron:

Yeah, yeah, really good. My parents opened the first yoga center in San Francisco in the early 1950s, like 1952, 1953, the first yoga center in San Francisco, and maybe at that point in time, there was just barely a handful in all of California. And they were really pioneers to yoga back then, and it was obviously before I was born, but I learned a lot of their experience as pioneers and what they were up against, but you said "yoga" back then, and people would say, "Well, wait, what flavor? Like yogurt, or?" It was something so esoteric and so foreign to people, even in a place like San Francisco. And my father started out as a bodybuilder, an early bodybuilder, natural. Back then, it was all natural, and he trained competitively, and he competed, and he became Mr. America runner-up. So, he tied for first place in 1948, I believe, and he was just someone who was always looking for... His mind was just so curious about how to optimize the human body, how to optimize human potential, how to optimize mindset, attitude.

Something he taught me early on, as a teenager, I'd be hanging out with my friends late at night, and I'd say, "I'm tired. I'm too tired to take out the garbage," or something, and he's like, "Look dude, you're a spiritual being. You're not a candle. Candles burn out. You burn a candle at both ends, a candle burns out. You're not a candle. Human beings are not a candle, they don't burn out. You are always regenerating, and you're always dying," and he said, "And you can direct that, you can direct that energy. So, if you're doing things that are depleting you, killing off your energy, bleeding out your vitality and your life force, then yeah, you're going to end up tired and like that."

But my dad and my mom, they really were pioneers about living principles that would make a real difference for people, alter people's lives. So yeah, my dad kind of shifted at a certain point from bodybuilding and more traditional Western physical culture, to Eastern teachings. His uncle was the public relations person for Yoga Nanda, he was a monk.

Dave:

Oh wow.

Baron:

And so, he kind of influenced my dad early on into Eastern kind of principles. So, my dad started adding meditation, and the mindfulness aspect of physical culture, and started integrating the two worlds of

West and East. And my dad then also started creating the physical yoga practices, integrating them with bodybuilding, and weight resistance training, like that.

Dave:

Wow. Frank Zane, who probably your dad knew, just was, or not just, but a couple years ago was on the show, and it was so fascinating. This guy was a super mindful being, he's like, "Yeah, I play the flute every day," and he was really pretty far along the personal development path, and we all have these mindsets, "Oh, if you're a bodybuilder, you're probably a meathead shooting up 'roids," and there certainly are those out there, "Dude, if you eat a calorie again or whatever, if you eat sugar," there's just a lot of anger at some levels. At other levels, there's a huge amount of physical awareness that leads to spiritual awareness. So, your dad was a super early adopter there, and he gave that to you. Is that why you wrote your book, by the way, kudos on the title, My Daddy is a Pretzel: Yoga for Parents and Kids, was that actually your story?

Baron:

Well, it's an animated book, right? A kid's book, and it's my son and I in that book going through a series of poses, and the story goes my son, Malachi in there was like, "Well, my daddy's a pretzel," and it was this lineage of yeah, from my dad to my son. So, it's kind of passed in the lineage along. And on the note of Frank Zane, yeah, my dad and Frank Zane were pretty close. Frank Zane always kind of considered my dad, he told me, he was like, he was always someone who was inspired by my dad's willingness to stand in the adversity of the early days, because even bodybuilding and weight training in the early days was considered pretty weird, and then especially the diet that went along with it. And I remember... Yeah.

Dave:

Oh, all the cottage cheese and stuff like that, and all that.

Baron:

Yeah, and full fat, and especially in the '70s, was it '80s? When low fat became a thing, and my dad was always about full fat, whole foods, like foods from the earth, what you teach. Yeah.

Dave:

Yeah. at a certain point, if you're paying attention to your physical form or your brain function, you end up at that, maybe you should eat the fat with the protein and it should be the right fat, and I've always wanted to, as a part of building the world of biohacking, it was we must have the bodybuilder knowledge set, we must have the yoga and Eastern spirituality mindset, and the anti-aging mindset, and the neuroscientists, and the pro-athlete, which is performance driven and different than a bodybuilder, or even a fitness competitor, right?

Because there's, "How do I look?" And then there's "How do I power lift?" And all those things, there's these unique viewpoints, but we circle around some universal truths, but when you bring people together, the cross-pollination's fantastic. And so, I didn't realize that, in that level of detail about your dad. I knew he was well-known in this, but I didn't know the Frank Zane connection, and that is fascinating, because who would've thought that we had that connection going back before most people listening to the show, even including me, were born, that all this was going on? Did he talk to you about where yoga came from before that in the US? Because it's a really fascinating story.

Baron:

My parents would go to India more, and I mean, I do know some of the history of how yoga was brought. Early on, it was Vivekananda, in the late 1800s, and is that what you're referring to, some of the early on? Yeah.

Dave:

Yeah, and it got mixed with gymnastics, right?

Baron:

Oh, right.

Dave:

And calisthenics.

Baron:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Dave:

So, that what we're doing as yoga in the West is not really what was happening in India, where maybe it was a little bit more mental and metaphysical, and then it got westernized. So, even in the late 1800s, early 1900s, somehow they brought in what you would do at whatever the gym was back then, and some of the poses that we have now are maybe not original lineage, but they work, and it evolves, like it's supposed to, right?

Baron:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, no, it's really good. Just a little bit about that, so what happened there, one of the fathers of modern Hatha yoga, the physical yoga, is Krishnamacharya, and he was the teacher of Iyengar, B.K.S. Iyengar, who's the father of Iyengar Yoga, and then Pattabhi Jois, which is kind of the father of the Ashtanga Yoga series.

And Krishnamacharya, I believe it was Mysore, and in Mysore, India, he had his yoga academy there, and he started teaching the royal family right there in Mysore, and the royal family brought over from Britain the Britain gymnastic coaches to teach their kids, the prince, and some of the royal family, and including even some of the security and the military, the gymnastics training. And Krishnamacharya met these British gymnastics coaches, and they started integrating, Krishnamacharya started learning from him, and they started learning from each other, and Krishnamacharya adopted quite a bit of the gymnastics and some of the calisthenics that were sourced from Britain, England. Yeah.

Dave:

So, we're both talking with a certain amount of familiarity with yoga. I mean, you've been doing it since you were born, basically, and I started when I was about 32 or something, and the woman who's my wife now, back then, we had just gotten to know each other but we weren't quite yet dating, and she said, "You should go to yoga," and I'm like, "I'm a Silicon Valley engineer. Yeah right," and she said, "Well, Dave, you need to go to yoga class with a really attractive yoga teacher," and I'm like, "What?" And she said, "Yeah, that way, you'll keep going to yoga." I'm like, "Okay."

It turns out that the yoga teacher I was gravitated towards was named Ken Graham. He was a young guy, and he's still teaching yoga to this day, and we ended up doing some work on how the vegan diet

was destroying his health, and to this day, he's still eating some full fat, instead of the trying to run eight classes a day on carrots. It doesn't work for most vegans. What's your take on that? I mean, nutrition has always been a part of Ayurveda, which is the origin, at least in part, of yoga practice. Is there a holier diet than another one?

Baron:

Well, I think a lot of the influence with vegetarianism comes from Hinduism, not necessarily directly from yoga.

Dave:

Got it.

Baron:

If you look at the classical yoga texts, there's not much about diet, and in fact, there's almost nothing about the physical [inaudible 00:15:01], the physical practice.

Dave:

Right. It's all meditation, right?

Baron:

All meditation, yeah. Spiritual discipline, spiritual practices. Yeah, nothing really much about physical. There's this one manuscript called the Hatha Yoga Pradipika. That's like a classic yoga text, and in there, it says something about, "Just be comfortable in your body, so that you can sit, so that you're comfortable sitting for meditation."

Dave:

So, eat bacon and chocolate? That's what I hear.

Baron:

Yeah. Yeah, so, and then, well, there certainly is that whole push, I mean, especially going back to before 1990s, this very vegetarian push around yoga. In fact, I was on the coaching staff of the Philadelphia Eagles, so I worked in the NFL, and I created whole alternative programs for the Eagles athletes. But I got interviewed by The Philadelphia Inquirer, this is in 1996 or '98, even maybe '99, something like '97 probably, but they interviewed me about diet and it was about vegetarianism, and I said that, "I love animals, I think they're delicious," and I happened to say that in the conversation. They took that, and really ran with that. I don't know if it was the headline, but it was almost like that, and my point in sharing that is, man, I got so much hate and flack.

Dave:

From the yoga community, the peaceful yoga community?

Baron:

Yeah, yeah, the peaceful, loving, totally accepting, all tolerant yoga mob. Yeah, they came for me.

Dave:

I'm just like, PETA stands for the "People Eating Tasty Animals," that's just what I thought it stood for, right?

Baron:

Yeah.

Dave:

And by the way, yes, I'm trolling animal rights activists and vegans right now, blatantly. Guys, it's not good for the animals, or the planet, or for you, and that's just how it is. And you want to be vegetarian, fine, you want to be vegan, just stop. So there, I said my bias, now we're done, and you can disagree with me and listen, or you can get angry and go away, and either one's okay. You got to pick your own path. And when you go away, you should definitely be doing... What yoga pose should people do when they're censoring other people who disagree with them? Is there an ideal pose for that?

Baron:

Headstand's a good one. Just turn them upside down. Turn it upside down.

Dave:

That's a good one.

Baron:

So, you hang out [inaudible 00:17:41].

Dave:

Yeah. So, when you cancel someone for saying something that's offensive to you, you should do a headstand as you're doing it? Okay, this is really important yoga advice. Thank you, Baron. I feel already enlightened by our conversation.

Baron:

It flushes the brain with lots of fresh blood, hopefully some new thinking, and yeah.

Dave:

What's that pose where you stick your head right up your ass? Is there a name for that one? Because they could do that one too.

Baron:

Yeah. I don't have the name for that one.

Dave:

I've been working on it for a long time-

Baron:

I think you just named it.

Dave:

... because people keep telling me to. They keep saying, "Dave, you should do this," I'm like, "I'm bending, I'm bending," but I don't quite have the spinal flexion, but I'll get there. I'll get there.

Baron:

Yeah, yeah.

Dave:

All right.

Baron:

Yeah, and then you get there and you realize there's nothing new there.

Dave:

Right. Exactly. Yeah, that's right. I was an asshole the whole time. No, now I'm up close and personal with that. Now, going back to something more useful for listeners, other than laughing, which is useful, and actually, there's a laughter yoga out there, right?

Baron:

Mm-hmm.

Dave:

But let's talk about sort of the beginner's guide to yoga. Name the top four or five styles, and the two words that describe, or three words. So, give me a grounding in the universe of yoga, as it is today.

Give me a grounding in the universe of yoga as it is today.

Baron:

I'm not a total expert on all the different styles like that, but there's yoga that's purely based on spiritual practice, you could say, and then there's the Hatha yoga, which is what I lean into, which is the physical practice where you get on a mat, maybe you turn up the heat, you go through a sequence of physical postures that can really contribute to general fitness, general preparedness in life, and cleansing, detoxification, [inaudible 00:19:44].

Dave:

And they're in order, right? Within your teachings, they're sequenced to do something, because the order is creating an effect in the body, and if you did them out of order, it wouldn't be the same. Just for people who've never done yoga, it actually matters, right?

Baron:

It really matters. Yeah, what we refer to is sequencing, and sequencing is a real thing. It's an art, it's a skill, and I've created a sequence that I call Journey Into Power. My book, Journey Into Power, is based on this sequence of postures, it's about 54 poses, and you go through these warmups, Sun Salutation warmups, and these more integrative postures that then also raise your body temperature. Then you move into standing balancing postures, into twists, and then into back bends, and forward folds, and hip

openers, and then what we call inversions, like the headstand, shoulder stands, handstands, where you turn upside down, basically reverse the flow. And the sequence has, yeah, a kind of order to it, from the warming up and the preparation, the mobilization of your body and sun salutations, into the balancing sequence is really powerful in creating equilibrium, right? Fortifying one's equilibrium with aging, it's one of the first things to go.

I think people living on devices all the time now too, that people's equilibrium is off. So, I think that kind of training's powerful. Back bending, the back bending postures, it's kind of counter gravity, the typical forward. Like folding forward, our shoulders are slumping toward our chest, we're caving in as we go through life in a surrendering to gravity, and the back bending has this reversing effect of sitting, it's the revers of sitting, and in a way, it has this opening. And when you go through this whole sequence, this order, it really leaves you just generally open, a new kind of freedom, power, vitality in your body, as you know, and it does something to the brain, the mind. It can really clear your head, and get you out of the head.

Dave:

I think I just came up with a really cool analogy for a yoga newbie. A yoga teacher's kind of like a DJ, right? So, the DJ is reading the crowd, and there's certain things that DJs... There's a drop where they're building things up, and then there's a drop, but then they have to choose the elements of the music that are going to make the crowd get into the state they're looking for, and it is an art, but there's also a science to it, which is why you can teach it, and a really experienced yoga teacher puts together a series of sequences, the same way a DJ puts together stuff to make the crowd do what they want, and it's never quite the same set.

And what I feel like you did with the Baptiste Methodology with your sequences, the way you've done it there, is you basically made a song that would be exceptionally popular, because people are like, "Wow, I do that, and I feel really good reliably." Meanwhile, though, you can go to lots of different places where there's DJs of various schools, and more House, or EDM or whatever, and you can enjoy those, but there are some big hits, and I think you've basically made one of those big hits, because it worked reliably. I don't know if that helps someone who's never done yoga, imagine why this kind of mystical, "What the heck are they doing? What do you mean twisting and bending, and whatever?" That's why, because it's to create the state.

In terms of the really mainstream stuff, if you were to go to some random yoga place, there's going to be Iyengar style, and I believe you did study some of that, and that's more precision, versus Ashtanga, which is more sort timing and doing it the same way. And then there's Vinyasa, which is softer, more kind of flowy and gentle, and then there's restorative yoga, which is more super Vinyasa with a lot of laying on bolsters. What am I missing, and is any of those characterizations wrong?

Baron:

No, no, I think you have it right. I think, yeah, Iyengar Yoga is known for its precision and alignment. So, bringing the body into alignment, and it's really a brilliant model and method. Most people are very just structurally out of balance, in ways they don't need to be. Certain things from accidents, or certain things genetically, certain postures, certain things that throw us off balance we maybe don't have control over, but there's a lot of imbalances we have control over, and Iyengar, when you pay attention to alignment.

And that's really essentially what I did, is Iyengar was one of my primary teachers, and one thing I borrowed from him is the rigor to a body alignment, and then what I call it in my methodology, is True North Alignment. So, we practice these principles, a body of principles. There's five organizing principles

of True North Alignment, and the idea is you're coming into your North, your True North physically, and the first organizing principle is more attitude. It's like create the physical foundation, be intentional in creating the physical foundation of your body. So, for instance, where are your feet? Even right now where you're standing or you're sitting, where are your feet, and how are your feet just splayed out, or your hips? So, you'd be intentional in how you sit, your natural lumbar curve, be intentional in your overall form and foundation of your body, and be up to something bigger than yourself.

So, you've got this growth kind of attitude, and the second organizing principle of True North Alignment is called Sthira, Sukham, Asanam, And the word "Sthira" means "stability," and "Sukham" is "freedom" or "relaxed." So, you create stability in the body, and then also freedom, and you're looking for that in each pose, you're looking for that in general when you walk off the yoga mat into the world, into your life like that, but we practice principles more than poses, is what I like to say. It's like we don't practice poses, we practice principles, and then the principles give substance to the form. Yeah.

Dave:

So, what are your five organizing principles? You mentioned building a foundation. What are the other four around True North Alignment?

Baron:

Yeah, so be intentional in creating the physical foundation, and be up to something bigger than yourself, than stability and freedom, and then the third organizing principle is what I call The Five Pillars, which is Drishti. So, it's your eye gaze. You create a soft gaze, it's your focus. You use your physical eyes to put your attention to one point. It's an amazing brain training, and it's also meditative. So, it's an open eye meditative thing. When you're going through the physical poses, you're setting your eyes to a point, and you move point to point with your eyes.

The second pillar is Ujjayi breath. So, Pranayama is the yoga breathing. We do a deep, it's a diaphragmatic breath, a controlled breath. You keep your belly firm, and you're breathing more through the upper torso part of the body, and from the throat, and you breathe through the nose.

And then the third pillar there is Tapas, which is heat. So, there's a natural heat, Tapas in yoga. You've probably had this experience. So, there's the outer temperature of a room that if it exceeds your body temperature, then you'll sweat, but Tapas is more of the internal heat. When you've got that Drishti, that focus, and you've got the breath, the controlled breath, and then you've got the movement, what we call [inaudible 00:28:16], the controlled movements and flow, the friction and the flow it creates this heat, this natural Tapas. It's a cleansing, purifying kind of heat. It's the kind of heat too, something happens to the brain. There's some part of the brain that gets, maybe you know about this, but when you're in heat, your body hits a certain temperature, it hits a relaxation response.

Dave:

Oh, it's some vagal thing.

Baron:

Yeah. Yeah.

Dave:

Saunas will do it too, but it's unrelated to all the heat shock protein, and all that stuff people are talking about.

Baron:

Yeah, exactly, and it has this general relaxation response, your nervous system, and-

Dave:

The vasodilation thing. Yeah.

Baron:

Yeah, yeah, and then the increase of circulation. So, and then the last two are in the true organizing principles of True North Alignment, so coming into your center is total body integration. So, we organize all the peripheral parts of the body, we organize them into the center and core, the spine line, the center line core. So, you're always in this dance of integration, and then from integration, the last organizing principle is full expression. So, the force moves out from the core. From the center, the force moves out, beams out kind thing. Yeah.

Dave:

It's really funny, anytime I get to talk with a yoga teacher or a spiritual teacher, and I've probably been to maybe like 800 or a thousand yoga classes over the years, right? So, I've heard a selection of them. What you always end up doing is whether you're in a monastery in Tibet, or whatever, there's always this language to try and explain feelings that don't really have words to them like, "Bring the force and power out of your third nipple," and you're like, "What? I don't even have a third nipple. What are you talking about?" And we're trying to make up words for a felt state, and what I believe yoga is doing in general, much like a meditation teacher, you're [inaudible 00:30:29], you're creating an energetic state, right?

And one of the things that I appreciate very specifically about your practice, is that many yoga teachers don't even talk about gaze versus eyes open and eyes closed. And since Ujjayi, which is a form of breathing that lets you kind of sound like a sea shell, it's something I've talked about in terms of my sleep training, it'll knock you out if you need to go to sleep. But there's all these other breaths that are a part of yoga, and breathwork has entered its own thing with Stan Grof and holotropic breathing, and you get Wim Hof, and all these breathing things, those are all kind of yogic and ancient lineage spinoffs.

But the gaze, which is a part of your yoga programs, it's maybe not equally important, but maybe in some cases, more important. And I teach people this, during neurofeedback stuff at 40 Years of Zen, "Oh, if you close your eyes and you put your gaze here, something entirely different happens, than if you look down." So, when you're doing a pose, the idea that part of the pose is the hardness or softness, what does it even mean, of your gaze and where it's directed? But you address it in language that I think connects with people really well, and it's a super subtle thing.

But it's so important that if you fast forward three years from now, there'll probably be some people going, "Well, I used to be a breathwork trainer, and before that, I was an urban Ayahuasca shaman, because I did it three times, and now I'm a gaze practitioner, and I'm just going to teach you to look up into the left," and it'll be like this kind of absurd junk food distillation of a yogic practice. And I believe you incorporated that very well in what you're doing, so congratulations, because it's really hard to even put words to what you're doing. It's neat. Okay, so you have gaze, you have breath, and now there's the Ujjayi breath itself, but there's a bunch of other holding your nostril stuff. What's your take on that?

Baron:

Yeah, like the Nadi Shodhana, where you close off one nostril, you breathe in, you hold the opposite, opposite nostril breathing. I mean, and there's a lot. Yeah, there's the Kapalabhati breathing, that fire breath, like... Some of them, like the Kapalabhati, that fire breath is more exciting. It excites the system, it arouses the system. They have different effects. That alternate nostril breathing can be very calming.

Dave:

It knocks me out when I do it. Yeah.

Baron:

On the brain. Yeah, right? Like if you're in an upset, if you find yourself stressed out, or in some kind of upset, just through your day, if you just stop and do the alternate nostril breathing, it has a way of just settling the muddy waters, the upset, and the muddy waters of the mind, it just settles things down. I don't know what it does physiologically exactly, but you probably have that experience with that kind of breath, the power of it.

There's no question, and when you add Drishti, the gaze, I mean, to your point on that, with the breath, something else happens. I don't know what it triggers in the brain exactly, but it alters one's experience of life in the moment, it alters the experience of their own body. Often, people have the experience of actually coming into... Again, here I'm talking some yoga speak, but you have this experience of getting grounded in your body. Suddenly, you feel your feet on the floor, you're aware of your bones, your muscles, your stance, and you naturally want to stand taller, because you just have this body awareness, not a concept, but you're actually in the experience of it, that the gaze and the breath, yeah, it creates that connection.

Dave:

And even then, it creates that connection, what does that even mean? And the bottom line is, I don't know, go try and do what the yoga teacher says. And by the way, how many yoga studios are there, where there are teachers you've trained? It's pretty big scale. How many teachers have you trained?

Baron:

Oh yeah, I've trained 30, 40,000. Yeah.

Dave:

So, kind of a big deal in the world of yoga, right?

Baron:

Yeah, yeah.

Dave:

So, when someone finds one of your yoga studios, just do what the teacher says, right? And then all of a sudden, you'll feel this weird thing, and I'm saying this from experience, I didn't even know that your body could do that, and I didn't know this state was possible, so clearly, I wouldn't know the name for it, and then your yoga teacher says, "Oh, that's the grounded connected state." Well, there you go, now you know what it is, right? And there's digital ways or whatever to do it, or you can listen to a meditation application, or go eat some mushrooms or whatever you do, but you realize there's states

you didn't know about, and there must be a name for them, and maybe if you can use the right name, then you can talk about it with someone. And so, that's what your yoga teacher's job is to do.

Baron:

Yeah, and important is to find a teacher, you may have to try a few to find the one that you resonate with, that inspires you. The right teacher is important, and different teachers, different people are attracted to different teachers, so I think that's really important. I also think a yoga practice often can be the missing ingredient for people. They're doing all the different types of modalities of health, fitness, training, diet, and it's working pretty well, perhaps, or something just seems off, and often I hear, "I added yoga practice to my routine and regimen, and it just shifted everything for me." It's a very different way of working your creature, your body, mind, breath integration. Yeah.

Dave:

How many times a week does someone need to do yoga to start seeing the benefits? And before we answer, Joe Polish, who introduced us, the guy's been on the show and a dear friend, he a few years ago just said, "Look, I'm doing yoga every day, no matter what." I think it was for 90 days, and he said it was one of the most transformative things he ever did, and if he was traveling, he would hire a yoga teacher to show up, and you could just see him changing as a human being. So, is it daily for 90, or is there the lazy man's version of that? So, walk me through frequency of yoga.

Baron:

Yeah. Okay. So, more classical, if you're getting trained in India more classically, they're going to say six days a week. You take Saturdays off. That's classic. I always would say if you're newer to it, you want to actually do it more frequently for a while, to build the kind of foundation, the base, and the openness, and also get some skillfulness in the movement. So, I would do it more, even three to five times a week. I think that if you add it in once a week, twice a week, it's going to be beneficial. I think it also has to do with what results you want. I often would say to people in one of my studios in Boston, I had a big sign when you walked in and it said, "If you want some good results, come one to three times a week. If you want a life transformation, come six days a week."

Dave:

I did five to six days a week for the first year or two of learning yoga, I think mostly because I was bored. And yeah, I was bored, and I had just separated from a relationship, it was way, way back, and so, I'm like, "I don't have that much of a social life right now. "I have a bunch of friends, but they're all off doing whatever." So, every day after work, I would just go do yoga with different teachers, and yeah, it was physically really transformative, and I would just keep finding, "Oh my god, there's a muscle in my calf. I had no idea there was a muscle there, and I didn't know my shoulder had that," and it's like all these control systems throughout my body woke up, and am I typical that way, or was I just really, really poorly connected to my body?

Baron:

I think that's pretty typical, and look, I bet even you were probably walking into that yoga studio, yoga practice, more aware than general people, so.

Dave:

No.

Baron:

No? No, you weren't?

Dave:

Not back then.

Baron:

No, most people when they walk into my classes, most people are pretty disconnected, disassociated from their bodies, and I think the one powerful benefit is exactly what you described. You start really getting more intimately connected to your body, and just your body structure, and your muscles, and in a different unique kind of way than you'd get from CrossFit, or more conventional gym weight training or resistance training, and I think that different than Pilates, very different outcome, even though there's similarities, but they're very unique and different. And I think that, but now how often, so fast forward, so you don't practice five or six days a week now, but going through that period was probably a good education in a lot of ways, I'd imagine.

Dave:

Oh, it was fantastic, and it still affects my movement. I can still put a leg behind my head. I'm only at 28% of my expected lifespan of at least 180 years, but if as a 6'4" guy who's weighed 300 pounds and couldn't touch my toes, that's damned amazing. Of course, nutritionally, I might have an advantage because I know a thing or two, and I've had more collagen than most people and made it into a billion dollar business. So, everyone knows about collagen now, and there's all kinds of brands, so it became a category. I do believe eating that for, well, more than 14 years matters, because the half-life of collagen in your body is seven years. So, what that means is that if you start doing yoga now, and you start eating bone broth and collagen, seven years from now, half of your connective tissue will have been replaced with higher quality collagen, right?

Baron:

Wow. Amazing. Yeah.

Dave:

But if you start going on a vegan diet, which is collagen deficient, and deficient in the amino acids to make really good connective tissue, and you're trying to build muscle and whatever else, seven years from now, even though you might be bendier, the quality of your fascia and your connective tissue may be lower than it would've been if you'd eaten collagen. So, I think that's part of my path, and that weird dance between foundations of having enough minerals, having the right kinds of building blocks, and then yoga being the stimulus that tells the body what you want it to do.

Baron:

Yeah. It makes a lot of sense to me. So, early in my 20s, I would practice yoga very vigorous, like Ashtanga, Iyengar, Bikram, I would do three hours a day, five, six days a week, and I did that for maybe 10 years, and during that period of time, I went through some different diet phases. I was macrobiotic for a while, I did Natural Hygiene, vegetarian, I did macrobiotic, then I went just vegetarian, went vegan, raw, and I was [inaudible 00:42:10].

Dave:

Me too. Vegan and raw here too, so yeah.

Baron:

Oh yeah. Yeah, but what started to happen with the intensity of my yoga practice, my joints started coming apart. I was in a lot of pain, and the only antidote I really had at that time was, "Okay, I must be still eating too many toxins somehow. It's sneaking in somewhere, or it's the water, the air, maybe."

Dave:

Lack of kale.

Baron:

Yeah, not enough kale, something, and not somehow, I was trying to alter my yoga practice without losing the intensity. So, I was always trying to correct there, but something was missing, and at a certain point, I was talking to my father about it, and he actually opened up about it, he's like, "Baron, you were very small," but he was a fruitarian for two years. He went through these phases of total, then raw veganism, all that, and he said he started losing his teeth, he started coming apart. And so, he really went back to his old bodybuilding days of eating goat. We had a farm out in Sonoma County and he raised goats, and sheep, and chickens, and ducks, and goose, and all that.

So, we went, and that's what I remembered more. So, I went back to my childhood diet, which is more animal, real live animals, and I'll tell you, within a few months, I started immediately feeling better. I had severe sciatica down both legs, and when I just altered my diet and brought in some just intentional animal products, and I still kept my plant-based stuff, but it was night and day, actually, the level of strength, and even it was showing up on my yoga mat. I had much more vitality, strength, endurance, all of it. Yeah.

Dave:

You're not going to make that heat, that internal energetic heat you're talking about if your body's just not getting what it needs to build the furnace that makes the heat, right? It's really interesting that your dad went through that fruitarian thing where, "Well, the plants want you to eat their fruit to reproduce, therefore, is really healthy for you." One of my friends is in the carnivore movement, I'm like, "You know, a piece or two of fruit, good for you." Eating a ton of fruit every day because you like it, I don't think that works. I know, because I tried it. Even if you're eating a lot of meat, and you're exercising all the time, maybe, but for most of us, if you eat six pieces of fruit and rib eyes all day, it's not going to be the same thing as doing nose to tail, grass fed, and a little bit more balanced.

So, I'm with you there, and it varies individually. I do feel for yoga teachers. I've talked to dozens of them over the years who go, "Well, I want to be more spiritual. I became a yoga teacher because I wanted to evolve as a human and I wanted to serve others," which is probably your classical, someone who signs up for your 30 or 40,000 person teacher trainings, right? But then, "Well, I also had to start restricting my diet," much like you did, much like so many of us did, and as a teacher, it's not like they're going to one class a day, they're doing six classes a day, plus their own practice. This is pro athlete level output, but they're not eating like pro athletes, they're eating salads, and wondering why they're tired, and why they're floaty, and "Yeah, I was pretty good at corpse pose today." Well, it's because there's not enough calories, and there's not enough fat or enough protein.

And so, just a genuine heartfelt for any yoga teacher out there, if you're trying to do yoga on cucumber juice, it's not a long-term sustainable strategy to evolve yourself. I don't think our bodies will let us do what we could do if you do that, and you're talking with a couple guys who've kind of been there. It sounds like your dad was too, and so you got to do what works for you, but just be experimental. Any other words of advice for your students on nutrition? What do you teach them in class?

Baron:

Well, I think that there's no evidence that being vegan or vegetarian makes you a kinder person.

Dave:

Yeah. Big yeah.

Baron:

I know plenty of nasty vegans, as I know some nasty meat eaters.

Dave:

Exactly.

Baron:

So, I think that people can often get caught up in the form, and I think Hitler was a vegetarian, and the Dalai Lama eats meat. It's like there's these contrasting... It's kind of-

Dave:

[inaudible 00:46:55].

Baron:

Yeah, and I think that there's something though about, like what you pointed to, being in your own self-discovery and really experimenting, and I like experimenting, like doing without something as much as, and then when you add something in, just add one thing in.

Dave:

So smart.

Baron:

Yeah, to see maybe dairy's just not good for you, so just try no dairy for a week or two weeks. I don't know what you would say, for how long, but take it out, see how you feel.

Dave:

A week or two. Yeah.

Baron:

Yeah, and then put it back in, and if that's not it, and then take something else out, and maybe try putting meat in, and notice if you're in some kind of dogmatic kind of thinking or ideology, which is always going to be disconnected from your real life experience. Yeah.

Dave:

Let's talk about life experience a little bit. There are a lot of spiritual gurus and yoga teachers who end up having some sexual dalliances, right? I'm not actually going to... There's one Buddhist monk who's been on the show who's very open about that, but there's lots of others, even some famous yoga people who've had those things happen, and it almost seems like it's a trope, right? You get any guru, there's going to be something like that, and whether it happens, sometimes yes it does.

Other times, it feels like there can just be angry take down energy that maybe there isn't a lot of evidence for it, but either way, it just seems to happen, and people think, "Oh, these yoga teachers, these spiritual people are on a pedestal," but you've been out there talking about drug use, and talking about business falling out, and divorces, and things like that. Why do you think those things are public for you? Did you intentionally make them public, or is this just like paparazzi following you around?

Baron:

I was always clear early on, I didn't want to be anybody's guru.

Dave:

It's annoying. Yeah, you don't want to do that.

Baron:

Yeah, and people just will kind of put you on a pedestal regardless. So, I've always been in the practice of just kicking the stool out from underneath my feet, doing it for me, so no one else has to.

Dave:

Good for you.

Baron:

And with that said, I still get plenty of trolling or hating, and there's a lot of envy and jealousy in the kind of wellness yoga world.

Dave:

Yeah, so much.

Baron:

And people love to see a falling star or a falling light, and get on that bandwagon, but I think there's something in humans that are quick to put people on a pedestal. So, what I've seen over the years, and you've seen it as well, I'm sure, is that you see these gurus who a lot of them prop themselves up as having-

Dave:

That's a warning sign.

Baron:

... the wisdom, the answer, and that's always a warning sign. I can listen to someone without getting caught up in them, but I don't think everyone can. I think a lot of people get caught up in putting

someone on a... And we do it to entertainers, and rock stars, and celebrities, and gurus are no different, and I think that it's a trap, though. It's a trap because eventually, they're going to disappoint you. I always used to say most of those yogis or gurus walking around in the orange robes, they've got no underwear, no panties on underneath and don't get too close, because if you don't want to get touched, because I think that they're human, and even if they've tapped into something, some kind of wisdom or some kind of enlightenment, they've still got their human side, and I think it's important to know that, because yeah, expectations are always a setup for disappointment.

Dave:

It's nice, and you can be really grateful to have a chance to serve millions of people, and that's where I like to remain, but once you start saying, "Oh, look at me, I'm doing that," it's like a slippery slope for your personal happiness as well. Did you follow that, or have you always been like this because you got the right yoga training since you were 12?

Baron:

I think from a pretty young age, I watched people around me, including my dad, who was a guru, and other gurus, and I watched how people would get glossy eyed and this kind of adoration, and I was like, "I don't want to be on the other end of that." I remember being 10 years old in India, with my parents going to different ashrams up in Rishikesh, and in the Himalayas, and seeing these Western yogis, devotees with their gurus, and it was like they get such into this hypnotic kind of trance, and they get lost in it, and okay. And though for me, it was always a red flag, and I was just clear, "Okay, maybe that's some people's jam. That's not mine. I don't want to be on either end of that spectrum. I don't want to be the total devotee follower, and I also don't want to be the guru."

Dave:

Wow.

Baron:

It's just not my jam. Yeah.

Dave:

You figured it out early. One of my teachers, and I would cite which one if I remembered which one exactly taught me this, but they talked about that and they said, "Look, when you rely on a guru to reach a certain state, that's awesome, because you got to the state, but if you don't learn how to put yourself in that state, that guru's going to die, and then you'll be completely abandoned, and you'll be unable to access the state that you've come to rely on." So, by definition, you have to be your own guru. You have to learn how to do that over time, and that's a lot of biohacking to change the environment around you and inside of you, so you have control, and yoga fits right into that, because that's what you want to do, is be like you're in control, not whoever you put on a pedestal as your guru.

Baron:

Yeah, yeah, exactly. Give your power away to no one would be my advice. Give your power away to no one, and be able to take the best from different teachers and different methods, but my focus has been for many years is teaching principles, teaching a methodology, rather than just being the teacher over here. So, it then also becomes scalable. Others can learn that methodology, and how to teach and lead

others in that methodology, and it's scalable like that. So, I've been more someone who develops leaders, than followers. Yeah.

Dave:

All right. Now, I've got to ask the tough questions.

Baron:

Yeah, bring it.

Dave:

So, has yoga teaching evolved, and is it better or worse with this sort of like, "Oh, if I feel anything other than perfect, I'm not safe," kind of mindset?

Baron:

Yeah, I mean, just to go back to the '80s and '90s, it was much-

Dave:

It was different.

Baron:

It was very different, much more hands-on assisting poses, and some teachers had reputations of being whatever you'd want to call them, just slutty, gropers, or things like that. Typically though, they would get called out.

Dave:

A groper's going to get caught right away.

Baron:

Yeah.

Dave:

I think this is more about consensual post-class with multiple students, whether it's a male or female teacher. I'm not calling out either one.

Baron:

Yeah. I mean, I think that in the long run, it doesn't work, but when that's your work environment and-

Dave:

Exactly.

Baron:

... you're living there, most people I know who own yoga studios, or a lot of the bigger name yoga teachers, they've met their partners, their spouses in their yoga spaces, in their classrooms, mostly. I mean, my ex-wife, we met at Rancho La Puerta, the Golden Door. We were both teachers, but she was

taking my class. She'd come to my class all the time, and then when I was teaching in LA she'd come take my class, and then we ended up marrying and having three beautiful boys together, and I don't regret that.

And then another girlfriend I had for eight years, I met in my class, and it kind of goes like that, but I'll say in general, I got to the place where I was like, "I'm not going to do that." I stopped dating and meeting people to hang out with in my programs and trainings. I just separated the two worlds. That seemed the smarter way to go, but I think that now more than ever, whether in the classroom, if you're hands-on assisting people, the better practice is to ask, say, "Hey, do you want me to assist or not?" Different studios have different protocols for that. You could put a little sticker or something at the front of the mat if you don't want to be touched, like that. I mean, at a certain point, I don't know. Yeah, I stopped doing hands-on assisting quite a few years ago. I want to say 10, 12 years ago, I just stopped all hands-on assisting.

Dave:

It makes sense at a certain level because you also become a target, like you said, for people who have the envy and whatever. I can say that sometimes some of the hands-on the assists I got, I'm like, "I had no idea that I wasn't inner rotating my leg the right way," and until someone grabs your damn thigh and twists it in, and goes, "No, like that," and you're like, "Oh my god, I can touch my nose!" It kind of mattered for my practice, and I sort of feel sad that some yoga teachers will be walking around and going, "I don't know if I can help people the way that I'm supposed to help them, because someone in the room might be triggered by me putting my hand on their shoulder blades," right? So, I'm hopeful that there's good communication protocols-

Baron:

Yeah. It's definitely a changed world.

Dave:

All right.

Baron:

Who knows if it'll stay like that, but right now, especially if you're a male teacher, better not to touch too much, but I'd say whether you're male or female. Yeah.

Dave:

Permission is always good like, "Hey, is it okay for me to adjust you?" And that seems pretty healthy to me, but hey, what do I know? And clearly, in your case, anyone who's at the top of their field, different rules apply. And there's also a power dynamic thing when it's you versus if it's your yoga teacher, you go to yoga once a week and then you say, "Hey, let's have coffee," I think that's actually acceptable, right? But I guess it depends on your own boundaries and all.

Baron:

Yeah.

Dave:

What happens if you're injured, overweight, or have some limitations, and you go into a yoga class? What is that like?

Baron:

Yeah, no, completely, it's scale. You scale, you modify, you adapt. If you have injuries, it really could be some of the most tremendous physical therapy. Can be, not always, but it can be, because it's so whole body movement. One thing I have sometimes against traditional physical therapy is it so isolated, and there's something about the whole body moving through its full range of motion and integration, through full range of motion, integrate, and you repeat this and it has a lot of therapeutic effect, but injuries can be great teachers.

So, you get on a yoga mat and you're moving through these poses, and you adapt the movements, you stay just above the pain, or you develop a kind of consciousness. So, your injuries can be great teachers too, that you learn a lot about your body, but absolutely, yes, you can adapt. I've worked with people with severe brain trauma, MS, I've worked on a lot of programs for people with MS. I've worked with veterans, I've worked with every kind of [inaudible 01:00:52], physical trauma, loss of limbs, and the answer is yes. It's pretty amazing to see how it can light up people who have been so limited, because of whether it's accidents, or something like MS, or brain trauma, how yoga practice can be such a phenomenal add in.

Dave:

It really can be, and there's something else that it does too, it lets you get over yourself, right? I used to have a body image of weighing 300 pounds, and so, I'm over being concerned about stuff like that, in part because I think I have a pretty rocking body right now, but even when I was looking pretty good, but I still kind of felt like I was heavy. But you go to a yoga class, and you do Crow Pose for the first time, I promise you, you're going to face plant, and you're going to do it in front of a dozen or two dozen people, and they're all going to laugh, and you're going to laugh too, because they're all doing it too. Until there's those two people in the class that are like, "Look, I'm doing a one-armed Crow Pose, and I'm scratching myself with my foot," and you're like, "Jerk," and then pretty soon, you end up learning how to do that.

So, I think there's something about doing yoga in community that just allows you to be playful and laugh at yourself and realize that everyone else is laughing at their own selves too, and that maybe doesn't get stated often enough, but doing things as a group is powerful, which is why I think it's awesome that you're teaching teachers to go out and build those communities. But you also do virtual stuff, which is really cool.

Dave:

People can go to baptisteyoga.com, and just check all that stuff out, and yeah.

Baron:

I also have a lot of videos on YouTube, Baron Baptiste on YouTube.

Dave:

Okay, so just go to your YouTube channel?

Baron:

Yeah.

Dave:

Okay.

Baron:

I got an abundance of great yoga practices, meditations, content. Yeah.

Dave:

I'm just going to encourage people, yeah, check out YouTube, look at the virtual stuff. The biggest thing you can do is go to one of your studios, or a studio with one of the teachers you've taught, and just do yoga in front of people. You'll just realize something different happened there.

Any other words of wisdom for people who are listening? These are biohackers, they're curious about themselves. What should they know that I didn't ask you?

Baron:

Three things that are in yoga that is a powerful practice is, well, Buddhas said there are three roots to suffering. It's attachment, delusion, and resistance. Why I bring those three points up, attachment, delusion and resistance, is there's something about just getting on a yoga mat, and people often say, "Well, tell me about what's it like if I come to a Baptiste yoga class?" Or "Can you tell me about it?" And I'm like, "Well, are you available? What are you doing tomorrow morning at 9:00 AM? Because really, the only way to really know is to just show up and do it, and find out for yourself."

But I think what you'll discover is there is this attachment to things. I often, maybe you've had this experience too, but it's like things release you. Stresses, whether in your mind, or even tensions in your body, stress in your body, it's like these things we're kind of attached to or attached to us, have a way of dropping off, letting us go. So, there's some suffering right there.

And then delusion, to me, is just too much overthinking life, worry, stresses, living in the head. Yoga is a way of taking us out of the head, and through the Drishti, the gaze, the breath, the movement, the sweat. It has a way of relaxing you in a way that you come out of your head, and you come out, I like calling it out here. You're in here in your head, or you're out here. You walk off the yoga mat, and suddenly, you see people, and you actually see them, or you suddenly you see the birds, and the flowers, and you're just more out here with life, and rather than in the delusion in the head.

And then the third, the resistance, you just have the experience of less resistance, and you walk a little more in balance from center. You have a sense of center, and less resistance, more flow, more momentum that you bring from your yoga practice into your life. Yeah. So, do the thing, and as Emerson said, "Do the thing, and you will have the power." I say just do it, and try it. Just commit to doing it 10 times, 10 times over 15, 16 days, and see how it went for you, yeah, and determine then. Yeah.

Dave:

Love that advice. Baron, thanks for taking the time to be on the show today. I know you're a busy guy, and it's really hard to train 40,000 people in something, and you're writing books, and doing all kinds of stuff. You have an Emmy. So, you can tell you still have great passion for yoga and self-improvement, and I always appreciate when we get a chance to talk, so thank you.

Baron:

Thank you for having me, and I really just admire your work and your contribution to health and well-being, and-

Dave:

Thank you.

Baron:

... personal development, really. Thank you. Yeah.

Dave:

Likewise, my friend. Guys, baptisteyoga.com, if you'd like to learn more. Every show, you'll notice I kind of mention a link where you can learn more about whatever that person's working on, because if this show resonated with you, seriously, go to yoga class. There's a directory on there, and you can do it. And if you're going, "This one wasn't for me," then just learn the stuff you care about, and that would make me happy and grateful, and then I get to go into a flow state through service to others, the same way that Baron does. We went either way, and so do you. So, thank you so much, and thank you Upgrade Collective for hanging out in the live audience, and helping me ask good questions. See you all soon.