

Dave Asprey: Today's episode is recorded live, in-person. It's a really, really impactful episode. You're going to learn a new kind of meditation and you're going to hear fascinating stories from a spiritual teacher who has spent 40 plus years going up and going down and just learning great things. We're going to talk about the nature of the ego, we're going to talk about polyamory. We're going to talk about monogamy, and we're going to talk about all sorts of things that are going on inside your head. This is one of the deeper, more spiritual, more introspective interviews that I've done. You want to hear the whole thing.

Announcer: Bulletproof Radio, a state of high performance.

Dave Asprey: You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's cool fact of the day is that researchers have never been able to understand how the seeds of cancer survive and thrive in people over the course of decades. So we know that sometimes something happens that triggers cancer, but you don't see it for so long that there were things you could have done, but you didn't do anything about it because you didn't know. But scientists just found out that circulating tumor cells in breast cancer are different from other types of circulating cancer cells. So we're now zooming into cells or even sub-cellular things to understand the differences between what's happening. And what that means is that we'll soon be able to identify people who are likely to have breast cancer much earlier than we did before, because we now have this fine-grained ability to understand what's going on inside the human body. Which is way cool. So, these sorts of things may not ever hit the news, but these are the sort of things that absolutely shift the needle for your odds of living a very long time.

Or your odds of being able to find something that's happening way before you ever would have known it before. This kind of thing let us let go of, you know, being fearful and worrying about things, and just know, "Oh, we've got the science now." Before we get into today's show, I've got to talk about one of my favorite travel hacks, and something that I use every single time I fly. And it's the Bulletproof travel mug. We've tested hundreds of types of mugs, to find something that would safely let you carry hot, Bulletproof coffee, in your bag, next to your laptop without any fear of spilling. And we've got it. When I travel, I brew Bulletproof coffee beans in my room, using a little water kettle, and then I put butter and brain octane, or Instamix, which is just a powdered brain octane and butter. Into the mug, close the lid tightly, shake it, and it blends it up almost as good as using a blender.

Nothing beats a blender, even the Tibetans with their yak butter tea who can afford blenders, have blenders, because they're better than just shaking something up. But that said, the Bulletproof travel mug is a complete game changer because it never spills. And because it keeps your coffee hot for a very long time. So give it a shot, look at Bulletproof.com. Today's interview is recorded live in the Bay Area, at the Be Unlimited Event from the Bulletproof Training Institute. And today's guest is a well-known guy and a spiritual leader. His name is Genpo Roshi. Genpo, welcome to the show.

Genpo Roshi: Thank you, Dave. Thanks very much.

Dave Asprey: He's a Zen priest in both Soto and Rinzai schools of Zen Buddhism. And someone who's taken what he's learned over the course of many, many years of study and turned it into something called Big Mind, that he's lectured about globally. And has been working on, for just fascinating path that we're going to go through in our interview today. You'll learn how he got where he is and some things that you can do. Big Mind, also known as Big Heart, enables thousands of people to really have an awakening. And as you know, if you've listened to this show a long time, I traveled to Tibet to learn meditation from the masters. I hooked electrodes to my head. I've meditated in caves while fasting, and done all sorts of crazy stuff like that. In addition to hardcore science things because I believe that we are both emotions, and psychology, and spiritual, and chemistry, and electricity, and all those things all together.

And if you try to think your way outside of a feeling it never works. And if you try to feel your way outside of a thought it doesn't work either. So I'm fascinated by this stuff. And I'm really honored to have a chance to interview Genpo Roshi.

Genpo Roshi: Well thank you, and thank you for having me here. I'm honored.

Dave Asprey: I was particularly pleased when you accepted the invitation to speak to a group of a couple of hundred Bulletproof fans here at the Unlimited. And you just finished a talk on Big Mind, we're going to get there. But first, how did you get started, as someone who's done this much longer than almost any Westerner?

Genpo Roshi: Well, it actually started back in 1971. I was having difficulty in a relationship and I decided to take some time off from work. And I went out to the desert, Mohave Desert. I went out there with a couple of friends, one of them a very old friend, and his girlfriend. And while I was out there they took a hike, went off on their own. And so I climbed this mountain. And I went up to the top of this mountain and I was just sitting there and contemplating, "How could I mess up my life so much, at such a young age?" I was just 26 at that point. And I had a very nice childhood, there was no problems, I was into competitive swimming and water polo. And we won some titles, it was quite a wonderful childhood. And then by 26 I'm divorced already, I'm unhappy, in fact I'm feeling quite stuck. And so I went out there to find some space. And I started contemplating my life and as I was sitting there something happened to me.

I began to ask, where's home? I could see my VW camper parked out there, and I knew that was home temporarily for the few days we were there. And then home back in Long Beach, actually one block from where I'm living right now, after 45 years of leaving it. I'm leaving on Monday, though. And it hit me, it was almost like the universe just came in with a vengeance. And I become one with the cosmos. I realized I'm always home, never been any place but home. And everything made sense, everything became quite clear, and simple. And I became what you can say, one with the consciousness, one with the cosmos,

one with light, one with god, one with creator, one with all beings, one with all things. There was just absolute no separation or distinction between me and everything else. It was so profound it actually changed my life forever.

Dave Asprey: You grew up in a Jewish family, right?

Genpo Roshi: I did.

Dave Asprey: Now, did this have anything to do with any religious upbringing, any spiritual experience you had before, or just clearly out of the blue?

Genpo Roshi: Just completely out of the blue, I had no religious training. My father was basically agnostic, he had left the Jewish tradition when he was 10, when he moved from Poland to America. My grandfather had given it up, and so my father obviously gave it up. My mother was more atheistic, she also came from a Jewish background. Her parents came over around the 1900s from Russia and Poland. But they didn't have any religious training either. But I have a long line of rabbis and rebbes on both sides of my ancestry, both my father's side and mother's side. So when you say did it have anything to do with your religious upbringing, no, nothing to do with my religious upbringing. Probably something to do with my heritage, though, and my genes.

Dave Asprey: I'm glad you said that, I was going to ask you that. Especially Judaism is one of the religious traditions that focuses more on the maternal side of things. It's one of the more matriarchal face. And when you look at even some of the Christian side there's always the maternal side where mitochondria comes from. And in my conversations with Native American shamans, they just flat out said, "Dave, there's some things you're never going to do because you're white." So, is there some, maybe some lineage, spiritual linkage there in your understanding?

Genpo Roshi: I think so. You know, I've had the great privilege of getting to know Rabbi Zalman Schachter [Shalomi]. I went to see him about 2003 after I discovered this process, which I called the Big Mind, and now call Big Mind Big Heart process. Because I had heard that my grandfather's brother was his first spiritual mentor. He called him his midwife. He said that my grandfather's brother was the one who really turned him on to deep spirituality. And so we got to share things together, and he was a Merzel, like myself.

Dave Asprey: What's a Merzel?

Genpo Roshi: My last name.

Dave Asprey: Okay. Your official last name, right?

Genpo Roshi: That's my official last name, yeah.

Dave Asprey: Okay. So you're sitting here, and you haven't been raised with deep spiritual traditions, although it might have been in your lineage. You're on a mountain by yourself, friends are out hiking, and everything dissolves. Did that scare the crap out of you?

Genpo Roshi: No. It didn't. I think if I had known what was to come, it would have. But I had no clue, I'm just sitting there, kind of naïve and innocent, and all of the sudden, it all happened. It was a great awakening. And actually whatever I realized then, is still happening now, 46 or so years later. Only thing is, it's clarified more. Things are clearly and of course, I've matured a little bit since I was 26. But the realization, the awakening was basically the same. In fact, very recently, just January of this year 2017, I was with my partner, we were in the mountains. And I said to her, I said, "Charlotte, you know I realize that I may have disowned a very important voice, that being the light." Because it was so profound and so amazing for me back then, that I actually felt I needed to distance myself from the experience. Because in that experience I was totally, in a way, identified with being god, the creator, and all creations.

And it was kind of, you could say, inflating of ego. So, I started to actually, not consciously but unconsciously, I began to disown that voice and distance myself from it. What I said to her, I said, "If the light is disowned, I bet the dark is also disowned." So I said, "I know that I need some guidance here." And she's a psychotherapist, she's been in spiritual practice for 20 years, she's a great human being. I said, "I'm going to ask you, would you guide me through these two voices? But you have to make a promise to me, and that promise is, I know that once I become one with the light again, I'm going to be completely drunk in that light. I'm going to be completely addicted to that light. I know me, I love being in the light, I love being god, I love being all that." And I said, "It's going to take something to get me back to just being Genpo or Dennis."

Dave Asprey: So you were actually a little afraid then?

Genpo Roshi: I was a little afraid.

Dave Asprey: That you'd fall into that and not be able to come back?

Genpo Roshi: Exactly. So I owned my fear.

Dave Asprey: And how long ago was it?

Genpo Roshi: January.

Dave Asprey: Okay, very recent.

Genpo Roshi: Very recent. She looked me straight in the eye and she said to me, "You got to make me a promise." "Okay, what is it?" "When I ask to go to the opposite of the light, you do what I say."

Dave Asprey: That's a big promise.

Genpo Roshi: And I said, "Wow, that was strong." It brings tears to my eyes now, because it was so powerful. And I said, "I agree, I will do that, I promise." So she then had me speak from the voice of the light. And just as I knew would happen, I became one with the light and I was blinded by the light. I was so powerful it was actually scary for her. It was a very scary moment. All this power and blinded in that I couldn't see anything else, it was just light. That's all there was, I was one with the light. So she did as she had promised and she said, "Okay, now I'd like to speak to your opposite." Because that's the way I teach it. And I said, "Okay." And she said, "Let me speak to the opposite, the dark, but also disowned." And so we went to the dark, also disowned, and I know she was relieved. Because when I went to the dark, there was something more human about it. But it wasn't very nice.

Dave Asprey: Sure.

Genpo Roshi: The dark, and it was a shadow. So we went through that, and then we owned that voice. And actually the dark owned became not frightening at all, and not evil at all, not mad at all. But simply the awakened state. There is no other in that dark, you're simply in great emptiness, the great void. So, I was there, okay. And then she did the next step, she said, "Okay, now let me speak to the apex of the light and the dark," meaning that which [crosstalk] within me. That which embraces the two, the light and the dark, and transcends it. So we went to the apex. And by then acknowledged that I was both the light and the dark, like the yin and yang symbol. And within my dark there was some light, and within my light there was some dark, and I was the two as one. And I could embrace them. But then that evening went on, and we noticed that I couldn't come back to Genpo.

I was the apex and I was the light and the dark, but I had a very hard time speaking as Genpo. She said, "Do you notice you keep talking as the apex, and you're not speaking as my boyfriend, my lover?"

Dave Asprey: How could she tell the difference?

Genpo Roshi: Well, because I was talking about Genpo.

Dave Asprey: You're talking about yourself in the third person, right.

Genpo Roshi: The third person. Like [inaudible] used to do, the speaker, the speaker, right? And I realized she's right. I didn't sleep that whole night. I was, there was so much energy going. We were in Maui, we were right on the ocean. So I stayed up all night, meditated. And I realized something I had never realized to that extent before, and that is that we are, for all eternity, kind of stuck in this flicker back and forth of light and dark, as beings of light and dark. And we have lifetime, after lifetime, after lifetime, of going back and forth and the flickers are

so fast we're not aware of them. But actually that's what we are, we're made up of light and dark. And that's who we are, and it just goes on. So the good news is that we live for all eternity, the bad news is, that we're stuck in this internal, I call it the Endless Knot, or the Endless Loop of light and dark.

Dave Asprey: Now, when I was learning some things about Tibetan Buddhism in Nepal and Tibet, the teaching there was that it isn't ... You are alive for all eternity but if you reach a state of full enlightenment that stops. In your understanding of things?

Genpo Roshi: Well, if you want to go there and become a non-returner, that is possible. I've been there and had that possibility. But as a Buddhi [Zatfa] in the Zen tradition, but I believe most Tibetan tradition, too. [Mihiyana], the idea is you make a vow to return endlessly to liberate all sentient beings. And I've made that vow more times than we could ever count.

Dave Asprey: It's an act of service.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah. So, I had made a choice, a conscious choice not to pass over that, and just keep returning as a person who is there to awaken other beings.

Dave Asprey: How long do you think you'll live in this body?

Genpo Roshi: Well, I hate to limit it, but I've had this sense, at least till 94.

Dave Asprey: At least till 94, all right.

Genpo Roshi: But I don't want to end it, I mean, I'm not trying to limit it and put some kind of cap on it. But I've just had this intuition for a very long time, probably 40 some years, that I'll at least live till 94.

Dave Asprey: That's a nice number.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, I can live with it. I'm 73 now.

Dave Asprey: You've got another long while to do some good work.

Genpo Roshi: Yep.

Dave Asprey: All right, now I'm going to ask you a crazy question. When I was at, let's see if I can remember the name ... It was Kopan Monastery in Nepal. They had some, what do they call them? Holy remnants, like a jawbone of one of the masters of that place, that was still making pearls. They described how they burned his body for three days and it wouldn't burn, and all sort of things like that. So, when you pass are you going to have pearls come out of your jawbone?

Genpo Roshi: I hope not.

Dave Asprey: I was hoping you'd say that.

Genpo Roshi: No, I have no clue. You know, it's an interesting thing, and I think it's an important thing, and that is the way I look at it, I said before when we were just kind of talking. I said, "I've changed the way I meditate." Or we can call it meditation, the way I sit. So for 40 years I sat a very Zazen style of meditation. Cross-legged, full or half lotus, and so on. And I sat with back up straight, upright, and a little bit stiff and not always comfortable. And meditated what we call [Zhicataza] which is just sitting, or [Kohan] which are riddles and puzzles that we answer, and so forth. Sometimes with an intention, and very often no intention or no goal. But at some point I became very stressed. And the stress was right here in my chest, and I couldn't get it out. No matter how I meditated, or how long I meditated, the stress was there.

And I'd gone through quite a big ordeal in 2011, which I'm sure you're aware of and probably many are. And it was stressful. I basically lost everything including my name, my reputation, everything. And it stressed me, because I lost loved ones, you know, I created a hell in a way.

Dave Asprey: Do you want to talk about that story a little bit?

Genpo Roshi: I'll talk about that, but I want to get to this first. So, I had to find a way to release that stress in me. So it was like I didn't have much choice, I had to find a way to release it. So I discovered a way of meditating, and I'm just going to share that if you don't mind.

Dave Asprey: Please.

Genpo Roshi: With our listeners, because anybody can do it. And it simply takes all the kind of, I don't know, judgment out of meditation, preference out of meditation. I sit in a chair, comfortable chair. Sometimes an easy chair, sometimes a chair just like we're sitting in right now. Whatever is available in a hotel room, wherever I am. But I sit in a chair, I don't cross my legs anymore in the lotus style, because I find that it creates tension. So I sit with legs about shoulder width apart on the ground, and I put my hands in a comfortable position on my lap or on the arm of the chair, or in a mudra. What we call the cosmic or universal mudra. But we don't have a need to go into that.

Dave Asprey: A mudra, just for people listening today, this is a finger position that can affect your nervous system.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, it allows the circulation of energy to flow in a closed circuit, so it's not an open circuit. Okay, so I'll sit that way and then I sit leaning back against the chair, which is forbidden in Zen tradition. And I find that I really recommend people sitting back against the chair, relaxing the shoulder, relaxing the jaw muscles, relaxing the teeth. Relaxing everything in the body, releasing any tension. Just finding space and a release of all tension in the body. And just rest

the arms and relax. Then I discover, I started with a few deep breaths, the way I was taught, usually three. I went to 10 and I found that 10 was often enough and very often, not enough. So I've now increased it but there's no rule to this, there's no right way of doing it, of 20 deep breaths.

And I'll explain it to you, that's why I'm listening. And that is you take air in through the nose, nostrils, breathe in very deeply and expand the abdomen quite full. Fill it up and then breathe out through the mouth as if you're breathing through a very thin straw, and very slow and very long with lips puckered. And pull in the abdomen as if you're pulling in the balloon in the abdomen. And at the very end, the first time, just kind of cough a little bit. Get it all out. Then allow the in breath to come naturally, when it comes. And then breathe in again very deep and very slow, filling the abdomen completely up, expanding the balloon or the ball of our belly. And then again through the mouth.

Dave Asprey: When you say long exhale, are you talking 30 seconds long?

Genpo Roshi: At least.

Dave Asprey: Okay.

Genpo Roshi: Sometimes more like a minute, but don't force it, but as long as you can. And then again, breathe in. And this count, each time we exhale, the first one, second two, three, and count up to 20. If you lose track just start over, it doesn't matter. It's not an exercise in that way. It's just to get the breathing so we get all the oxygen out and we start replacing the oxygen. And also the diaphragm and the abdomen take over, and the breathing becomes very natural and very organic. Where I'm not breathing any longer, breathing is breathing. So the breath itself is breathing, there's no doer, there's no one there doing it. Then it takes over and after about 20 breaths, it can be longer, shorter, whatever works. There's no hardcore rule to this. Be creative, be inventive. But then after about 20 breaths, or when you feel like it, then only breathe through the nose. And just allow the breath to take over, so you're not pushing it, you're not forcing it any longer.

Now, this is an important thing. Have no preference of how you sit. Don't have a preference for awake or asleep, aware or unaware, conscious over unconscious, attentive over inattentive.

Dave Asprey: So no judgment of any flavor?

Genpo Roshi: No judgment and no preference. And if you have a preference don't have a preference about having no preference. If you have a judgment, don't judge the fact that you judged your sitting and say, "Oh that was bad, or that was no good, or I preferred it." Don't judge it, don't have a preference. Allow yourself, if you

get sleepy to fall asleep. Now I forgot one thing. Hold your head slightly down, if your chin is too high you'll get whiplash if you fall asleep.

Dave Asprey: In fact, you can cause serious damage, I know people who've done that.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah. So you want to have your head slightly down, so if you fall asleep, and you might, and there's nothing wrong with it, your head will just fall deeper down, that's all that will happen. It's the secret to sleeping when you meditate. Okay.

Dave Asprey: Did you just piss off half the meditation teachers on the planet?

Genpo Roshi: Oh, probably all. You know in 1976 I was opposite four great Zen masters, and I was very young, of course, in 76. And there were four great masters opposite me and they slept the whole time, and I judged them. I thought, "What's wrong with these guys? There sitting so poorly, they're sleeping all the time." And then I realized, no they're relaxed. So what I'm teaching is how, I call it the Art of Relaxation, how to truly relax right down to a cellular level. So no judgment for being awake over asleep, for attentive or inattentive. And just allow whatever arises to be there, without the judgment, without the evaluation. And you'll relax more and more. And I guarantee anybody can do this. And what's the most difficult is knowing that it is okay to fall asleep. Because most meditations teach you, never fall asleep. And everybody's sitting there trying so hard to be awake that everybody's falling asleep.

At this point I don't even fall asleep anymore, it's rare that I get to fall asleep. Now, what I do is I do it when I wake up at night. So it doesn't matter, last night was 1:00, sometimes it's 2:00, sometimes it's 3:00.

Dave Asprey: Do you sit up? Or do you do it laying down?

Genpo Roshi: I put on my sweats, I go to my chair, and I sit in a chair. I do not do it lying down. I think it's very important to be upright. You can learn to meditate lying down, it doesn't have the same effect. The kundalini, the energy doesn't go up the spine as well. So you want to be sitting upright, but not stiff and not erect. But just straight and relaxed.

Dave Asprey: There's a book I read, 10 plus years ago, blew me away. I think Tibetan Sleep Yoga or something like that? Or sleep meditation. And the foreword is what sticks in my mind, I can't say I did all the exercise, but the guy said, "Look, this is not my first time on this planet and I'm just too busy with my day life, so I don't meditate anymore. I do all my meditation while I'm asleep." I was like, "I want to be that guy." So apparently you can do some things while you're asleep. I'm not there, by a long shot but-

Genpo Roshi: You can do a lot when you're asleep. I find that I love this way of sitting. In fact, maybe I'm a little addicted right now. It's so blissful, I call it silk-like [Samadi]. I'm somewhere between alive and dead, awake and unawake, conscious and

unconscious. My girlfriend, Charlotte, she'll come over and check if I'm still breathing sometimes. Or check to see if I've got a pulse, because I seem quite dead. It's such a deep state and it's so relaxing. And it's so blissful, it's so beautiful. And then during the day I don't worry about it. Now, I don't believe that meditation makes you a better person. I don't believe anything makes you a better person, you just have to be a better person, you know?

Dave Asprey: Full accountability.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, full accountability. You can't expect that if you meditate, now I'm a great person, I'm better than other people. You know, I'm more awake, and I'm more conscious, and I'm spiritual, that's a trap.

Dave Asprey: But you could say that coffee makes you a better person, right?

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, and I do my Bulletproof before I met you. Before I even knew about Bulletproof I started doing it. It was actually recommended by a doctor friend of mine.

Dave Asprey: Really?

Genpo Roshi: Yeah. Now, she happens to be alternative, but she is a doctor.

Dave Asprey: A long time ago, wow.

Genpo Roshi: Well, not a long time ago, about six months.

Dave Asprey: Okay cool, got it. So she probably heard about it through Bulletproof. Because I think I'm the first one to do that.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, she turned me on to your product. And what I do is I have my own, I'm going to give you mine.

Dave Asprey: Yeah, tell me how you do it?

Genpo Roshi: Okay, so here's what I do. I take my organic coffee and I make it strong, I like strong coffee. I only have one cup, in the morning. I put in a little cacao.

Dave Asprey: I love cacao, we make that.

Genpo Roshi: Powdered cacao. I put in some of that, small teaspoon, and then I put in about a teaspoon or more of the Bulletproof.

Dave Asprey: The Brain Octane?

Genpo Roshi: The Brain Octane. I heat up some almond milk, or some almond whatever, hazel nut milk. And I'll heat that up and put that in and that's my coffee in the morning.

Dave Asprey: And you blend it up?

Genpo Roshi: Well, I don't blend it, I just mix it. And what I find is it keeps me going all day. I'm not trying to put a plug in for your product, but I use it. And I love it.

Dave Asprey: One of the things that we found in the 40 Years of Zen, the Neurofeedback Center that I run is that people who are doing intense personal development. Like meditative states with feedback, when they have Brain Octane they can do about two times more of it before they hit the wall. And various other things that enhance mitochondria, as long as your mitochondria are making energy and electrons, if your energy is going into meditation, more energy equals ... I don't want to say ease, because it's still work to go into some states, but it's just what you have what it takes to get into the state. And certainly for me there's a quantifiable difference. A quantifiable one and you can measure it in brain waves.

Genpo Roshi: Well, I didn't bring my Bulletproof because I'm traveling and I didn't check in any luggage. And I didn't bring my cacao, and I missed it.

Dave Asprey: Well we'll make it for you here.

Genpo Roshi: Okay thank you.

Dave Asprey: I know at the conference we do have some real Bulletproof, we'll get you a little three ounce bottle.

Genpo Roshi: I had some for lunch.

Dave Asprey: Okay, good so we hooked you up, good. It's interesting that you came across that. And it's something that I've become more aware of in my own path. I was always kind of interested in this stuff, but also come from a very skeptical, very science, engineering driven family. Atheist kind of a background. And I noticed that I weighed 300 pounds and I was pretty quick to anger. I would say not a very nice person. And as I started working on this stuff, it was very hard to go into the meditative states, or to follow a practice when I was eating the wrong stuff. Or when my biology just wasn't working. So the better I was able to treat my body, the more effective and efficient my practice became. And I've learned that it's possible to eat hot dogs and cheese whiz all day long and to meditate, it's just an incredible amount of effort. And if I save the effort, I can probably go deeper

So for me that's part of what lets me do all the things I can do, is to ... I don't even know how to say which comes first, the body or mind? But I do know that if the body's there the mind seems to work better.

Genpo Roshi: Well, you know, I'm not sure there's any difference, I think they're one thing, right, the body and mind.

Dave Asprey: Correct.

Genpo Roshi: We make that distinction. But of course they're interconnected, and what comes first, who knows? Because it is body/mind. I've even stopped using it as two words. I just put it together body/mind in my books.

Dave Asprey: Yeah, it is, I would say that's the most accurate way you could describe it. In the recent book that I wrote, which is about mitochondria, and specifically it's called *Headstrong*. You look at a distributed network of a quadrillion ancient bacteria inside your body, they're all sensory networks, they're connecting electromagnetically to the world around you. And we actually know they do that now, versus we theorized or there's a mystical thing to it. We know what they respond to. And so they roll up all the signal and then it comes into your nerves. And all those roll up into nerve plexuses, then those roll up into different parts of the brain, we get our pattern matching systems and all that. And when you look at that system, where did the brain begin or end? I think it ends, at least if you are looking at a boundary around the body, it ends at a subcellular organelle, that's in every cell in your body except red blood cells, basically.

Genpo Roshi: Well, I totally agree with that actually. What I'm saying about this way of meditating is it's getting down to that cellular level and allowing everything to move. You know, I know you know this but I'll say it for our listeners that may not know it. When energy is stuck, that's where all our difficulties come. And what acupuncture, and acupressure, and shiatsu, and all that's about is moving that energy. And we can move it actually just putting your hands there, or near the person, you can also do it mentally. But it's about a movement of energy that's stuck. So what I had to find was a way to unstick myself, and that's why I came up with this meditation. Because when you relax that deeply, it also allows you not only to relax on a cellular level, but facing one's own death, it's not a scary process anymore. I do it every night, I die every night. So why should I be afraid of death, you know?

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Genpo Roshi: You can actually go to this place where ... We have a saying in Buddhism, it's called, "Gata, gata, paragata, parasamgata, bodhi svaha." It's a chant at the end of the heart sutra. And gata, gata means gone, gone. Paragata means have gone. Parasamgata means have already gone. Bodhi is awakened. Svaha,

yippee. So gone, gone, have already gone, have already gone. Awakened, yippee! That's what we did today.

Dave Asprey: Wow. That's what you did today at the Be Unlimited event for people.

Genpo Roshi: Yes, yes.

Dave Asprey: Okay, you walked me through the whole thing. It's interesting, another guest, this was Neil Strauss, who's a well-known author and a friend. And an amazing human being, I know I make some people mad, he's the guy who wrote "The Game". But he's demonstrated an amazing amount of personal growth and I got to be friends with him. And he's a guy I really respect because he's willing to be humble. And I think I pushed his buttons when I said, "Really, I don't feel fear the way I did before." Because of what you just said there. Like when you've faced death. I don't want to die, I'm not looking to die, but the things that would have made me tense up and be very reactive and go straight to the ego, I don't feel like I have those buttons pushed. I mean, if you put my hand in a burning fire, okay, I'm going to have a visceral pain response, and I'm going to be afraid of the pain. But it's not the deep visceral fear.

And I'm not entirely sure how I arrived at that state other than lots of neural feedback and resetting neurological responses I didn't like. How did you get to that point of experiencing death every single night?

Genpo Roshi: Well, like I said, this particular thing happened in the last six years.

Dave Asprey: That was just the last six years, okay.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, that was the last six years. In fact, over probably the last four and a half years, it took me two years to kind of come up ... I started almost the beginning of 2011 looking for another way. And it took me a while to discover this.

Dave Asprey: Let's talk about what happened in 2011. You mentioned that earlier.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, a lot happened in 20 ... a whole new chapter of my life. You know, I'd been teaching Zen for a long time. I started this in 71, I began teaching by the time I was, well it was 1978, so I think I was probably 20, I don't know, 27, 28, something like that. Maybe a little older. And in 2011 I left a Blackberry, a new one that I just downloaded at home, on my desk. And I took off for Europe to do this event with 400 students for, I don't know, I think it was 10 days. And like always I called home when I landed there, and my wife said, "You forgot something." I said, "What'd I forget?" She said, "Your Blackberry." And I said, "No, I have my Blackberry." She said, "Well, there's a Blackberry here, and it says 'Let's meet up, and make love.'" I go, "Shit."

Dave Asprey: Uh-oh.

Genpo Roshi: Uh-oh. That was the new Blackberry. And so, I came out with it, I just ... "It's true." I got very angry, of course, I was very upset. I said some not nice things, to her, but we're great friends now. But I was very upset, but who was I upset with? Me, right? But I couldn't own it immediately, but I was facing all these students that were there in this island off the ... It's called Ameland, it's off the Netherlands, in the North Sea. And I just had to come out with it, I said, "Some of you know, but most of you don't know, and I've been very dishonest and I've cheated on my wife. I had a couple of lovers. And I haven't been a very good role model." The whole thing came out. And my life crumbled, basically. My reputation, it wasn't the first time, so a bunch of Zen teachers, in fact, 66 signed a petition that I shouldn't teach anymore, at least for a year. And I said, "Listen, I need to be accountable to myself. And I need to work on myself because I've got some shadows that I'm aware of.

"And I'm not going to be accountable to you, I'm going to be accountable to myself, and my higher authority, and to my therapist, and my mentors." And I went deeply into my own shadows and where I'd gone off. And where I had disowned a lot of voices, particularly the one who feels entitled. I talked about that today. Where I felt because I was giving so much and I was there in service full-time, 24/7, without a rest, without a leave, no sabbatical for 40 something years. I felt entitled to a little fun, a little relaxation. But it was not appropriate. And I didn't have appropriate boundaries. So I started to look at the importance of boundaries, the importance of honesty, the importance of integrity, and all these. And I'd been through quite a transition these last six and a half years. It's been an amazing thing. It's like when you go through cancer, which I've also been through in 2003, you most likely say, "You know it was the best thing that ever happened to me, but I certainly wouldn't wish it on anybody. And I wouldn't want to go through it again."

That's kind of what my works about, if I can help some people avoid making these same mistakes. In getting sucked up in the power and the ego-tripping that I got caught up in. Because I got caught up, and I was drunk in my own power.

Dave Asprey: It seems like that's a common pitfall for spiritual leaders. You wouldn't be the first spiritual leader to have a few girlfriends, or to drive gold Rolls Royce's, or whatever the particular vice is. I've seen it in the yoga community, I've seen it with other meditation teachers. Is this all spiritual ego stuff? Is there more to it, is this old trauma?

Genpo Roshi: Okay, well I did talk a lot about this, I'm happy to repeat.

Dave Asprey: Because our listeners didn't hear your main talk.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, so I'm going to repeat some of it today because this was a very interesting question people ask. There are stages of development, okay. And I name five stages.

Dave Asprey: The Ericksonian Stages of Adult Development?

Genpo Roshi: No, these are Zen.

Dave Asprey: Japanese Zen, yeah.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, it's the Japanese, it's actually Chinese.

Dave Asprey: Chinese Zen, yeah.

Genpo Roshi: So the first stage is when we have our first awakening, our first opening, our first glimpse of something bigger, higher, greater. We call it a Buddha awakening. And then we actually do our best to enter a practice where we begin to embody that. We begin to actualize the wisdom of the Buddha and we get into devotional practice. And we meditate and we do prostrations, and we do all kinds of practices, chanting, and so on. Prayers, etc. And that goes on, eventually we go through what we call Great Doubt. It means we do everything that we're supposed to do, we get it all right. And our life's still screwed up, we're still not completely happy. We have happiness, we go through periods ... I mean the first year of my own awakening I was incredibly happy. But then I went through the whole devotional thing, and practicing under a teacher. And going through, you know what that's like, to go through that. And it wasn't so happy, I wasn't so happy. It was a difficult practice. I trained with him for 24 years.

But around 1986, after I had been already a successor, and been given the title of [Mahabarachana] Buddha, in the line of the Buddha, which happened in 1980. In 1986 I went through great doubt. So it started the end of 85 and went on to the beginning of 86. Where I started to question everything. I questioned my teacher's happiness, my own happiness. I questioned reality. I questioned what I had really experienced, what I had really gained, what I had really learned. And it all came up for question, everything. I doubted everything. Going through that and getting to a place of owning great doubt, there was a great awakening. Something opens up much deeper than it had opened up in 71, this was 86 so about, what is that? 15 years later. This awakening we call, third level, third stage, it's the absolute, where we become one. We become the absolute reality. At this place there is no relative existence.

There is no fear, there's no suffering, there's no self, there's no other. This is what I call not just Buddha-hood, but along with Buddha-hood comes ego-hood. And a lot of us spiritual teachers get caught here. Because in this place, if you ask somebody in this place, and I know a lot of people in this place, and I've helped work with some people who've gone through this after me. At this place if you say to them, "What about your ego?" "I have no ego. I'm egoless." Now, that's the most egotistical place we can be. But we get caught there.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Genpo Roshi: Now, when you're before that stage, you can see how silly it is. After that stage, you can see how silly it is. But when you're in it, it's reality. And in fact, you're kind of not even receptive to any feedback because you're a Knower, you have become enlightened, you have become the authority, the authority figure. You are greatly enlightened, and you know it. You know I have no ego, I've lost my ego, I'm completely egoless.

Dave Asprey: Which is a big trap.

Genpo Roshi: It's a huge trap, and all I want to do is help liberate all sentient human beings. That's all I want to, my whole life is just about that. So of course there's a shadow, the dark. It comes in, and it comes in with a vengeance. Because we see there's no ego, we act as if there's no cause and effect. As if there's no Karma. You can never be completely free of Karma, Karma is always a factor. You can think you're free, but you never are. So, the danger of third stage, and we shouldn't avoid it, we have to go through it. But we should hurry through it as quickly as possible. I was stuck there from 86 to really 2011. I could say 94, because I had my first decline, or descent of the mountain in 94. But it wasn't complete. I was still about 5,000 feet off sea level.

Dave Asprey: What are the next two stages?

Genpo Roshi: Okay, so there are two stages prior to great enlightenment, and then there are two stages after. The first one is where we fall. We descend the mountain. We let go of being enlightened. We let go of that. At this stage we begin the integration process of the self. The contracted self. In this case Dennis Merzel, or Genpo. We begin that process of integrating all the shadows, we begin the process of integrating the fears and the angers, and all the things that are the poisons. We begin that process. We think we've arrived at that point, that's the danger now. We think we have fallen to sea level, we think we have come back down off the mountain. We think we're at fifth stage. So, fifth stage is a further descent. A more complete descent, where everything is shattered. In the fourth stage we actually enter a place where we truly become dysfunctional without our ego. And we see the need for ego.

We need an aware ego, we need a healthy ego, we need an awakened ego, but we still need an ego. Because when we're in that place, we're very dysfunctional. And I was very dysfunctional for about a good year. From June of 86, to about 87.

Dave Asprey: A lot of people listening might not understand what the ego is, or what the nature of the ego is. Do you have a short answer for that?

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, basically the voice what we're mostly in is the ego. Now, hopefully it's not so unconscious and it becomes a more aware ego, a more awakened ego, a more mature ego. But basically it's what we present to the world, who we are, we present that to the world. And the ego has a bad name. We give it a bad rap

when we say, "Oh, I'm so egotistical." That's the negative, or that's the disowned part. When it's aware, it actually becomes our final authority. It's the one that has to say, "Okay, this is appropriate, and this is inappropriate. This is right action, the is wrong action." And it depends on one's position, time, place and amount. What's appropriate, what's not appropriate. There are no rules.

Dave Asprey: In my own practice I've started looking at the ego as the system that keeps the meat alive.

Genpo Roshi: It keeps it all going, yeah.

Dave Asprey: It's the operating system for the body, basically. And it very much wants you to not die, and it's willing to lie, cheat, steal. It also very much wants to propagate the species, which would involve having sex. It wants you to probably eat everything, so you don't starve to death. And a lot of these behaviors that are, even breathing is an ego act.

Genpo Roshi: That's right.

Dave Asprey: It's driven by something that's not you. Is that an accurate way of thinking about it.

Genpo Roshi: I think that's very accurate. But I would say, that's an ego that's not yet owned, and embodied, and aware. Because that's why it gets a bad rap. Because it will do all these things just for the sake of survival. I would say that we can mature and have a healthy ego where it's not so egocentric, and becomes a little more altruistic, a little more giving. Which you're doing, I know that's what's really motivating you, is to offer that. So, there's an aware ego, but we shouldn't forget that there's also unaware ego. And we don't want to disown that and say, "I don't have that anymore."

Dave Asprey: I think that the only time you don't have an ego is when you die.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah. And I'm not even sure then.

Dave Asprey: Okay, that's an interesting point, I don't know that answer to that.

Genpo Roshi: I just don't know. You know, the thing that I see is that if we come from the apex, from this place where we own the fact that there's a self, or an ego, and there's no self, and no ego, and we can't remain in either one forever. We go back and forth, like I was saying about light and dark. We fluctuate back and forth. From the apex we can see and be aware when I'm coming from an unhealthy place, and an unwise place, or when I'm coming aligned with wisdom and compassion, from a healthy and mature place. And we actually can monitor ourselves and come from this aware place.

Dave Asprey: What do you think about celibacy? Some practices teach it, some don't.

Genpo Roshi: Okay, I've tried it, I did some years of celibacy. Maybe for some people at some time if they want to do it, it might be a good thing. I don't think it really affects or hinders the fact of our energy. I don't think it destroys energy, like some say. But I will say this, that sex and sexual relations can be very problematic. And so, there may be an appropriate time for celibacy. If we're not married and we're not in a relationship maybe. There's also appropriate relationships, and I think ... I don't ask anybody to be celibate, I never have. In the 45 years of teaching I never asked anybody to be celibate, I never will. I've tried it, I wouldn't ask anybody to do it.

Dave Asprey: What about monogamy?

Genpo Roshi: Monogamy, I'm in a place where I believe in monogamy at this point.

Dave Asprey: You practice it pretty vigorously?

Genpo Roshi: Let me say where I'm at with my partner. We have an agreement and I trust her implicitly and I think she trust me implicitly. We're always honest, okay? So, if one of us is not monogamous, we trust the other is going to say it. And we'll work on it, we'll work with it. It's not saying it's out of the question, but we'll work with that energy because we both know that energy could come up. And we're both in roles, and she works with some very, very attractive men. She's a psychotherapist, spiritual teacher. I work with some beautiful women. I could happen, I doubt it. At this point in my life, I don't see it happening again. I see the relationship being one of honesty and integrity and one of monogamy. But I'm not saying it's right for everybody.

Dave Asprey: So, there's a difference between monogamy with dishonesty, and monogamy with honesty. And even within a monogamous relationship if there's honesty and something that isn't monogamous happens, it's a different place.

Genpo Roshi: I think so, I think my trouble was that I was dishonest. I lied, I betrayed my wife. I lied to her and that was the real problem. Had I been courageous enough to be completely open and honest, maybe this wouldn't have happened. I'm not saying it was bad that it happened because it was a great gift.

Dave Asprey: It was a teaching thing.

Genpo Roshi: It was a definite teaching thing. But I would say, to me at this point, transparency and honesty is more important than monogamy. But I'm not in a place where I would play with that again. But I'm also 73.

Dave Asprey: One of the reason I was asking is, I have a lot of friends who are experimenting with polyamory, and non-monogamy and things like that. And the vast majority of them have a really good time, as you would expect. But also, emotionally it seems to take a pretty heavy toll. Because even if they're practicing the honesty,

a lot of the ego behaviors or just natural emotions creep in. And it seems like it's a bit of a struggle.

Genpo Roshi: That age is a struggle.

Dave Asprey: Well said, it was for me that's for sure.

Genpo Roshi: It's a struggle, I mean I really struggled with this until really the last six, seven years.

Dave Asprey: I appreciate you being real honest and open so we can talk about that, I think that can have some value for people listening.

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, thank you Dave.

Dave Asprey: If someone came to you tomorrow, and they said, "Genpo, given everything that you've learned, everything you've experienced in and out of your spiritual practice, I want to perform better as a human being at everything I do. What are the three most important pieces of advice you have for me?" What would you offer them?

Genpo Roshi: Well, one is to own every voice that we become aware of as much as possible, and it's opposite. So, like today what we did is, we owned the awake and intelligent mind, but we also went to the unawake and stupid mind. And own them both. Because there's a lot of freedom when we own the so-called negative, the ones that we don't like. So that's one. Be kinder, more compassionate, more giving, and more trusting. And have respect for those that maybe are a little older, a little more mature. And be open and receptive and take care of those that may be a little further behind where one is in their life in their practice, and in their evolving or maturity. And have great respect and faith. And come from a place of great faith, but not disowning doubt. Have doubt in your faith and have faith in your doubt, in your questioning. Because it's very important to question everything, to doubt everything. It's also important to come from a place of faith. I think bottom line is great faith.

Dave Asprey: Well, thank you very much for being on Bulletproof Radio. It's been an honor and a pleasure. Where can people find out more about your books? Anywhere you'd like to send them to learn more?

Genpo Roshi: Yeah, well Bigmind.org. That's easy B-I-G-M-I-N-D.org. Everything's there. Also Genporoshi@me.com is my email and people can write me. And we have events, we've got some events in September in Utah. We've got some other events later on in the year, one in Maui in December. So people can just go to Bigmind.org and find out about us. I have a new book out, that came out just about a year ago called Spitting out the Bones. And it's my 45-year journey where I tried my best to be as honest and straightforward and transparent as I can with my rises and falls and my successes and failures.

Dave Asprey: Beautiful, well thanks again.

Genpo Roshi: You're very welcome, and thank you, David.