

**Triggered Much? How to Avoid Extremes and Find Your Middle Ground – Sam Qurashi with Dave Asprey
– #786**

Announcer:

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Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today, we're going to be talking with Sam Qurashi. He's an unorthodox psychologist who says he walked away from a psychiatric residency at an addiction hospital, because he wanted to actually help people in a different way. So, he just sat down and said, "I'm going to interview experts that live beyond the frame of normal traditional psychology but are masters of mind." You guys see why I want to talk with him. There's a lot of commonalities in the way we think about things here.

He's now a writer and entrepreneur with a following of almost 700,000 on Instagram. He shares thoughts and concepts that can interrupt the psychological patterns that keep all of us trapped in mental loops that we don't know are happening but actually are happening. Today, I just want to talk with Sam about the lessons he's learned from those masters. So, we can summarize that and we can teach that to you in this episode.

It's good for emotional healing, but honestly, it's just good for self-awareness, which is the big thing. Because when you have programs running that you don't know about, they're there for a reason and it's just hard to see them. I think you're going to find that Sam is uniquely equipped to talk about this. Sam, welcome to the show.

Sam Qurashi:

Thank you, Dave. It's good to be here.

Dave:

Now, we connected over the summer, which was really fun. We connected. In fact, you're one of the few people I actually had a chance to meet in an appropriate social distance way and all of that. That hooked me up with your work. So, it's very interesting to interview someone who is also curating information from the masters and all of that. Given that you've interviewed so many people and you've studied the medical side of things, what is the number one thing that surprised the heck out of you after you stepped out of the traditional world and started looking around? All the things you've looked at, the top one?

Sam:

Well, okay. I think one of the biggest aha moments is discovering the two different types of schools in terms of learning. So, from everything, from everyone that I've learned from, there are two types of schools in terms of learning. One is you do the same thing over and over. But whenever you make a mistake, you stop and you start from the beginning, because you don't want to teach your muscles to do the wrong thing. You want to start from the beginning. That's one school.

The other school is you continuously do it. Even if you make a mistake, you don't stop. Because at the end of the day, it's about crafting a skeleton of what you're doing. And then you can always go back and iron it out. That was so interesting, because in a way they're opposing. They're very opposing when you think about it. Do you stop, or do you not stop? You can't do both at the same time. That

allowed me to come up with a model that I've been working on about liminalism, the middle ground. A lot of people live in extremes.

Dave:

Especially right now.

Sam:

Yes, the thing about extremes is if you live in an extreme, you're limited automatically. Think of it as a mountain. When you're at the top of the mountain in the middle ground, you can see both sides. But if you're on the bottom of one side, you can't see the other. The middle ground to a lot of people is basically the gray area. The middle ground is the... I guess it's shady. It's indecisive. It's untrustworthy. A lot of people assume that that's the case, but you see what lives to me, what lives between black and white is not gray. It's literally the entire color spectrum. Balance, focus, flexibility, options, choice, that lives in the middle ground.

You become a liaison to both sides. You become the person that can connect the ideas of both sides, whether that's on a social level or an internal level, mental level, because you would have different conflicting ideas anyway as a human being. So, having that liminalism concept of how to actually find that middle ground. To me, it's not this or that. The middle ground is, "What if it's this and that? What if two opposing forces can coexist? What if there's a way to connect them? What if it's this then that?" That's one of the things that came up with that concept of the two opposing schools of thought in terms of learning.

Dave:

So, how would I use that? I want to learn fast. I mean, Jim Kwik spin on multiple times. Is there a way to use that liminal idea to say, "All right. I'm going to choose. Do I keep practicing this thing that I suck at, or do I stop and change how I do it?"

Sam:

So, an example of the liminalistic concept of middle ground is not moving on from something too quickly. This is still a work in progress. I'm still just constantly tweaking it. But one thing that comes to mind based on what you just said or you asked is if you're trying something and it's not working, a lot of people that don't believe in something, they don't even give it a shot. If they do, they try, which is great, it doesn't work then they walk away.

The problem is there are two things that need to be addressed before you walk away or you might be missing out on something very valuable for you, whether it's a skill you want to learn or an actual behavior you want to adopt. Have you done it properly? Did I do it properly? Did I do it enough?

To give you an example, if I'm giving someone an antibiotic for five days and they're supposed to take it three times a day for five days. If they did it, okay. If they took two tabs, three times a day, and that's it. So, they took it beyond or they took it fewer, let's say they took one tab a day. They didn't do it properly. If they did it properly, but they didn't do it long enough, because they took two tablets, one tablet twice a day for three days, but they didn't take it for five days. They didn't do it long enough.

So, the question is, "Did you do it properly? Did you do it enough?" Enough could be many things, including, "Did you do it long enough?" If you haven't, then you might be walking away from something. These are two questions that are really important to be asked before you decide to walk away. Giving yourself the option to walk away while remaining where you are... Again, it feels like, "No, I

got to make a decision." It's important to have the option to walk away. I'll give you an example. Sometimes when you reach a point, like you have your own empire, you created your company. For me, let's say Instagram. Sometimes if I reach a point that I get a bit frustrated with something, you'd start to feel trapped.

So, what most people do is they try to push through that. But what most people feel the need to do but choose not to do but they can is give yourself permission to walk away from what you have done. Because the truth is if I just say, "You know what? I'm just going to walk away from Instagram," you just make that declaration verbally. Walk out of the room. What you just did is you gave yourself what you wanted. You wanted freedom, because you feel trapped in that moment. You created that illusion of walking away. You don't want to walk away.

A lot of times in relationships, the person storms out. If you give yourself the opportunity to walk away from something, you're giving yourself permission to remind yourself that you have choice to do it. That ties into something very important. You're choosing to do it. You chose to start this. You don't have to continue. Sometimes just reminding yourself that you don't have to continue takes away the pressure that allows you to continue and enjoy and be comfortable with it, if that makes sense.

Dave:

That's the, "I get to do it," versus "I have to do it," mindset, which is important. I'm looking at this both from an adult perspective and also from being a father. I look at my son who's 11. Man, he won't stop doing the Rubik's Cube. He's like, "I'm going to do it under 20 seconds. So, my average time is..." He wants to go to a competition. He's all in on that, but maybe a little bit less piano where he's also pretty good, right? We tend to flit from one thing to another thing when we're very young. We do it enough. Somehow, we get a signal.

But then there's another time when we do it, then we just give up, right? In my own life, I've wanted to understand okay, when I give up on something, it could be just because I suck at it. It's not natural for my brain to do that. It's just not a good use of energy. And then there are other things where I want it to be a practice. I'd say it should be, but there's a lot of judgment there. So, I want it to be a practice that I do, even if I suck at it, because it provides value for me. So, the frustration component is what we're really getting out there. So, how do you know if you're giving up because you're frustrated or giving up because you're done?

Sam:

That's a good question. One thing I would do is if you are frustrated, the idea is to work on the frustration. If you release the emotion of frustration, then you can truly see the lens, then you could truly see the reflection of that moment and be honest with yourself in that moment.

A lot of the tension that we carry in life basically comes from a moment of inauthenticity, of not telling the truth about something. We're resisting telling the truth. I actually really don't want to continue doing this. That's the truth. So, you end up staying in something you don't actually want to continue doing or staying in. But it's really about telling the truth. It's hard to tell the truth when you have emotions that are trapped. If you express the frustration and release it, then you can be honest.

Example of that one way is what I was mentioning in terms of storming out. Declare. You know what? I want to delete my Instagram account. It feels cathartic for me to say it, even though I know I'm not going to, but the saying it is a declaration and a reminder that I have the choice of doing that even if I wanted to, but I'm not going to do it.

Dave:

One of the really powerful things that I saw at Burning Man, a few years ago at the temple, people bring stuff like the baggage, stuff they want to let go of. There's memorials for dead people or things that they're just really in grief about. So, it's a pretty heavy experience to go into the temple. And then they burn it, which is an old shamanic right of just letting go of your stuff. It takes work to get stuff to Burning Man. I go there and there's this huge pile of books all arrayed against the base of it. They're the LSAT manuals to study for going to law school. On the cover of each one and in a marker says, "F you, mom and dad," one word per book. "I'm not going to law school."

That was someone who was running that program, the kind of programs that you talk about on your channel, saying, "Okay, I am choosing to stop doing this," but they had to deal with frustration. And then being pulled versus pushing themselves and saying, "I'm not going to let someone else push me. I'm going to push myself and do what I want to do." Any advice for avoiding the level of frustration that makes you haul 80 pounds of books worth 1,000 of dollars and burn them? How do you work on that frustration?

Sam:

Well, okay, it can be helpful to do that, but the question is, "Did you release the emotional impact of whatever emotional pain that you've been carrying regarding your parents?" That's the question. This can help.

Dave:

That's really clearly what was going on, right?

Sam:

Yeah. Does it really solve the problem? Did it actually solve the problem? But I think another thing to tackle here is doing the right thing is not enough. This also ties into the concept of liminalism. Doing the right thing is not enough. Doing the right thing for the right reason in the right way at the right time in the right state. So, in other words, if the reason for my success is to prove everyone that didn't believe in me, to prove them wrong, that I'm doing the right thing for the wrong reason, I'm using fuel, that's great. But I'm still tethered to the emotional pain that I've utilized. It's going to affect me. It's a wound that I haven't healed.

So, the idea is, "Am I doing this for the right reason, or am I doing this for the wrong reason?" Because doing the right thing for the wrong reason, we need to be a bit more meticulous with this stuff. Okay. So, am I doing this for the right reason? Am I doing this at the right time? Because sometimes you do it for the right reason but for the wrong time. It doesn't work and it's not fulfilling. We have a criteria to think about that is important to think about. That I'm working on crafting and tweaking, but this is an example. Am I doing it for the right reason? Am I doing it at the right time? Am I doing it in the right state?

Dave:

Have you found a way to help people shift that gear from, "Oh, I need to prove it to mom and dad," or "I need to prove it to the bullies or prove it to anyone," so it's more prove it to myself or just do it without proving anything? Is there a trick you've picked up in your journeys?

Sam:

If you work on releasing the emotional wounds that you have, this in itself ties into so much. If I'm frustrated and I'm not admitting that I'm frustrated, I'm always going to carry the frustration. Admitting it may not be enough. To just say it out loud is fantastic, but it may not be enough.

Again, and I guarantee that frustration is just the cover, the lid on a jar filled with a lot of other emotions. Because if I ask someone, "What are you feeling?" and they're saying, "I feel frustrated." They give themselves permission to go on a tangent and just go on a roll and just start to riff when I ask them, "What else do you feel?" Which is a question that usually people won't hear. Because when someone says, "I feel frustrated," that's it. It's never just one emotion. That emotion may actually be the top emotion, the umbrella emotion, where there's so much underneath.

The moment you ask that, you're like, "Well, I feel ashamed." What else? I feel frustrated. Here's the thing about asking, "What else?", instead of stopping with every emotion and this is one of the key takeaways for me in terms of whatever I'm exploring with emotional healing and everything related to all the experts, let me put it this way, why you feel doesn't matter. How you feel is everything. If you tell me, "I feel frustrated. I feel ashamed. I feel guilty. I feel resentful," it doesn't matter why you feel it, but a lot of people spend so much energy on the why. What matters is you feel it. So, when we get rid of that, the reason doesn't really matter, because the reason is nothing more than a trigger.

A lot of people get triggered over and over. Everybody's got life themes of different emotions that keep getting triggered in their life. If you get rid of the person that's triggering the frustration, I guarantee you, if you felt frustrated by someone and your answer was getting rid of them, I guarantee you, that's not going to be the last person to make you feel frustrated. Because you did not handle the frustration, you handled the trigger of the frustration. The trigger is a great way for you to identify what you need to work on, what you need to release and let go of. It's a great opportunity, but we just deal with how we feel by getting rid of the trigger, instead of dealing with the emotion that was triggered.

Dave:

The trick is to learn how to be non-triggered. It's a state that I've been working on a lot called equanimity. It's the ability to sit there and say, "There are many things happening that I don't like. There are many things happening that I like." Maybe there's a hurricane or an election or all sorts of bizarre responses to a virus, whatever. But to sit there and not feel strongly in any direction about it and just say, "I can handle this." Really resilience at its core is that state.

If your nervous system and your immune system are highly resilient, okay, I can observe a second, I can take a hit, but I don't have to overreact. But I will react enough in order to maintain the state that I want. I don't think I'm there yet, but I've made some progress, a little bit of neuroscience, a little bit of ancient knowledge, which is why I wanted to have you on, to be able to pick your brain about those kinds of things. Some of the other areas you've really dug in on that I think are really interesting are interviewing a pickpocket. What did you learn from a pickpocket?

Sam:

Well, before I get into that, there's something you mentioned. Would it be okay to comment on that?

Dave:

Yeah, sure.

Sam:

So, the idea of what you're mentioning, the words that popped into my head is awareness. That's one of the takeaways, awareness equals control. The more we are aware, when you develop awareness, suddenly, you have more resources and access to resources. Second is acceptance. That's a key ingredient in order for you to move on. What you're talking about is acceptance, you're accepting what's happening. The best way to move on from something is to accept it. A lot of people resist the existence of something or they're just so resentful to it existing. Now, if you are in Spain and you want to go to Italy, but you're in denial that you're in Spain, how can you ever get to Italy? The first thing is to accept where you are before moving on from it or you will never be able to get to where you want to go.

Another concept that came to mind is the idea of problems. This is one of the things I learned from one of my mentors. Problem is a mental construct. Nothing is a problem until you decide it is on some point, on some level. When you decide that something is a problem, that's where conflict and stress emerges. But if you decide whatever is happening right now is not a problem. I'm not going to call it a problem. We're going to call it anything else but a problem. If it's no longer a problem, there's no conflict. If there's no conflict, there's no stress. It's really about the language that we're using to call something.

I know a lot of people call a problem a challenge, but that's one way to reframe it. But when you call something a problem, you give it so much more power. In psycho linguistics, it's so important to identify the different languages, just like what you were mentioning about your son. Now, if you're like, "Okay, so I'd like him to explore other things." For example, let's say that was something that you're thinking about, maybe, maybe not. The language of possibility is always easier to accept than the language of necessity. Again, because language of necessity is a command.

Dave:

It also has a, "You're going to die. If you need it, you'll die." So, necessity is a fear state.

Sam:

Yes, but it also has the "have to" to it. You're telling someone else they have to do something. So, now, they feel they're forced. When the person is forced, you get resistance, you get tension, you get paralysis. And then they get into the panic mode internally, so they resist. But when you use the language of possibility instead of necessity, in other words, a suggestion versus a command, it's more of an invitation for the other person to play with the idea. Suddenly, it makes seem like it's their idea. All you did was you basically delivered it, you packaged it differently. It's the exact message, but the wrapping is different. That's the only thing that changes.

So, I'll get back to the pickpocket, but I just thought this would have been interesting to mention. So, one of the things that I love asking people, different experts is fear. It's the ultimate question I ask. So, I asked the pickpocket, "What are your thoughts on fear?" He said, "I believe that fear lives in the future." I asked him, "What do you mean?" He said, "Think about it. When you're in your home and you hear gunshots outside your home, you're no longer afraid of the gunshots. You're afraid of the gunman coming into your home. If they're already in your home, you're no longer afraid of them being in your home, you're afraid of them shooting you. If they're shooting you, you're no longer afraid of them shooting you, you're afraid of the shots."

So, in a way, what he was basically saying is fear is a never ending mirage that you keep chasing that never comes to fruition. So, that was one of the biggest aha moments. It's not necessarily about the method of pickpocketing as much as it's the mindset of looking at fear of something in the future that gives him permission to do what he does. That's the kind of lessons that I love learning from these

experts. It's not necessarily the technique. Even if I do learn the technique, there's something comes out.

So, when that interview was done, I sat down, I thought about what he said. I was like, "Okay, so if fear lives in the future and the future doesn't exist, then fear lives in a dimension that doesn't exist." That just blew my mind. This takes me to when I was with Wim Hof when we did the seven days. We talked about fear. We did 5 minutes on the first day ice bath; second day, 10 minutes; third day, 15. Fourth day, he decided for us to jump off a cliff actually, for the first time in my life. I've never jumped into water. I didn't tell anybody, because I was on the edge of the cliff. Talk about fear. It's in those moments of hesitation that the mind can stop you.

Dave:

You know who's really good at that is Tony Robbins. The reason that people are feeling so crazy during Unleash The Power Within, his big event is they have the walk on coals thing. For most people, you look at that, and every fiber in your body says, "If you walk on coals, you'll die." You get that burst of fear, but then you do it anyway. And then you feel an elation. The thing about jumping, at the Bulletproof Conference, the last one we did live, we had a three story jump, like a stunt man onto a big pillow.

In order to have the control it takes to be able to jump off of something, which is completely biologically abnormal, what it is in my understanding of it and I want to compare that with what you learn from the pickpocket or from Wim is that your body will send you a signal that you're going to die. You realize this signal is not true, and you choose to step in and take control, right? You overcome that fear. That is basically liberation. Is that what your pickpocket is doing? I mean, is this a dopamine hit because he didn't get caught each time?

Sam:

Well, it's definitely a way for him to give himself permission to step into the unknown. Because if fear lives in the future, I control the present moment. Obviously, mindfulness is very important in terms of basically handling the present moment, being present. That's why mindfulness works. Basically, lowering cortisol, deactivating the amygdala, activating the hippocampus, increasing the number of telomerases, which lengthens the telomeres. There's a lot of research on that. It's about being present, but it's also about pushing through. If you minimize the amount of time that it takes from the moment you feel the fear and the moment you take action, you're automatically conditioning your brain to basically accept your leadership in that moment. So, Tony Robbins does talk about that.

One of the things that I remember, the thing comes to mind is if you want to start working out in the morning, make sure that your shoes are right next to the bed. So, you get up, slip your feet in the shoes, and start running. By the time the mind realizes what you've done, it's already too late to stop you. That's exactly what I did on the edge of the cliff. I immediately jumped. The mind didn't really realize what I did until it was too late, hit the water. My first thought was, "The water was colder than the ice bath." It was summer. I just swam out, dried up, and then thought of what just happened. I analyzed what was happening at the edge of the cliff. I remembered what the pickpocket said.

In that moment, what I did was I was asking myself, "Okay, so fear lives in the future. The future doesn't exist but fear just visited me in the present moment. So, if I jump, I'm actually racing fear into the future. If I get there first, I'm obliterating the fear." Basically, racing it back into its home, which is the future. That's how I was looking at it. In addition to the action as well, there's the idea of the duration.

Think of a snake, okay? If I fear snakes and I'm exposed to a snake and I start feeling what I'm feeling, the longer I'm exposed to the snake... This is what systematic desensitization is about. The

longer I'm exposed to the snake without the snake harming me, the more evidence I am gathering that the snake isn't dangerous. There is a very distinct difference between fear and danger, because most of the things we fear right now are not actually dangerous.

Dave:

One of the practices that I've made is if I recognize that I have a fear of something, I go do it, always. Fear is a sign that there's something wrong, unless it's something that's clearly... Jumping into a volcano, that's not fear. That's just death avoidance. If it's going to kill you or harm you, you don't do it. If it has a small chance of harming you, you do it every day. It's called being alive. You drive. Safety first. No, actually, if safety was first, you don't go anywhere.

Sam:

Yeah, that's true.

Dave:

Safety isn't first. It's never first. Getting shit done is first. Getting shit done and not dying and not having a great chance of being hurt is what comes first for all humans. They just don't recognize that when they get caught up in the fear of thinking. So, the practice though, for me, has led me to all sorts of things like fasting in a cave for four days, because I realized I was afraid of being alone and I was afraid of being hungry. I did this in 2008. That's the basis for my new book on fasting. Fastest Way is what it's called. The reason people don't even practice intermittent fasting is fear of being hungry.

So, the idea of, "Okay, which fears are justified?", because all fears are real, right? Because they are feelings. Some fears are justified, like fear of being bitten by a rattlesnake, but the fear may be much higher than the actual statistical likelihood. You can go hiking in the desert, just watch where you step and you're not going to get bitten. But if you walk around constantly shaking because you might get bitten, then you've got a problem going on. It feels like exercising fear is like jumping off a cliff, fear of cold, right? These are very visceral, primal fears.

There's a theory called perceptual load theory that has a lot of legs behind it, looking at just what in the world is taking up your energy. It can be noises in your environment, random reflections. All those decisions all at the same time, they're draining for you. So, if you're in a chaotic environment and then you've got to make a whole bunch of decisions that don't matter, it's a big problem. I was fortunate in that the very first time I ever did neurofeedback sometime in the mid-90s, I had the electrodes hooked up to my head for the first time. I was just starting to do a very primitive Pac Man game controlled by my brain.

I'm at a chiropractor's office who had. This is the only guy in Silicon Valley who had neurofeedback at the time. His phone rings. As soon as the phone rings, all my brainwaves just go completely nuts. He goes, "See your brainwave there?" I go, "What do you mean?" He goes, "Did you see what it did?" He said, "That was what an interrupt did for you." I went into full on fight or flight mode, because the way I was raised, someone's ringing, quick, someone run to the phone, pick it up before they hang up, and all this weird programming crap that I didn't even think about. I'm like, "Wait a minute, interruptions like that aren't good for me."

Even back then, I turned off all my alerts. So, I don't see email alerts. I don't see calendar alerts, not anymore, because they just keep bothering me. I'm just going to look at what time it is if I want to. I quit wearing a watch, because I can consciously look at the time or I can just unconsciously constantly worry about it. So, it's about removing those micro things to create space.

That space, you can use for personal development. You can use to start a company, write a book, podcasts, have an Instagram channel with 700,000 followers, et cetera, which is you've done amongst many other things. But that's something that I feel like right now, turning off the news is probably the biggest way to remove those triggers, because they're just saying the same thing over and over. Half of it is crap anyway.

Sam:

Yeah. There's something about time that you said that really resonated with me. You were talking about not wearing a watch. I think this is very important for people to understand the fact that when you do not have time constraints, not only will the activity as long as you're focused on it be more fulfilling, you will do a better job at it. You're going to be more present, which means your amygdala will be activated. The hippocampus will be activated. You will be more in the flow state. The thing is no longer caring about time while you're doing something. You can create a big time constraint but not know about it. Okay, so two hours, but I'm not going to look at anything. I'm just going to focus on this.

Sometimes there are things that require us to give it not the time we want to give it but the time it actually needs. When you look at children as an example, the fun they have comes from several things. But two of them that come to mind is the lack of purpose, doing something for the fun of it, instead of having to objectify every little thing. Being very focused like I want to do this because these are my outcomes and this is what I need to do. There's a lot of computing going on, instead of I just want to have fun. I just want to do this and enjoy this book. Enjoy this experience.

We reached a point, Dave, that a lot of people are objectifying watching movies. They automatically calculate a couple of points to talk about at the end of the movie, instead of just looking at the movie and enjoying and immersing themselves. They objectify fun. They objectify pleasure, instead of just having it, instead of just experiencing it. Children do not have purpose when they do something. They just do it for the fun of it. They don't think of time. When time doesn't exist, the stress that distracts us from enjoying the experience disappears as well.

Dave:

What did you learn by interviewing a cold reader? What is a cold reader?

Sam:

Oh, okay, cold reading. Cold reading is probably one of the fastest ways to build rapport, but one of the things about it, Ian Rowland is the top cold reader. He was interviewed by the BBC. He blew everyone away by convincing everyone he was a psychic. He convinced people that he was a psychic not because he was, but because there were techniques that enabled that to happen.

Dave:

Basically, a mentalist is another word for a cold reader. What is he doing?

Sam:

Well, there are different ways of doing it, but one is they're basically extracting information while they're actually communicating with you without you noticing. At the end of the day, what they're doing is they're using that information and bringing it up. You're blown away by the fact that they brought it up. Now, there are people that they would hire other people to get that information from these people

and bring it to them. They would feed it into their earpieces. They're like, "Okay, I'm just hearing a letter right now. This ghost that is connecting with me right now, his name is..." And then you go through that.

You throw a word, a name. You know exactly who it is, but you're playing the part that gets the person to believe that it is real. The power of that stems from again, giving yourself permission to make mistakes and making it acceptable by the audience. So, if I'm really struggling because I'm connecting with someone on a different dimension right now, so I may get this wrong by framing it that way. People will forgive your mistakes, but when you say something, that will blow them away. That's without you even getting information from anyone. It's all about hits and misses.

When you communicate, people will remember the hits, because they're amazing. They will forgive the misses, especially if you blow beyond or past the misses very quickly. Verbal distortion and cold reading is really about constantly blurting information with certainty. You bulldoze over your mistakes. Because if I'm saying, "You're thinking of someone. I'm sensing there's this man coming up. You're thinking of a man. No, I'm actually thinking of a woman." It's like, "Yeah, yes, yes." I'm thinking of masculine energy. She's a woman that has masculine energy. You go in that direction.

So, automatically, you're using what the person is saying. It is one of the interesting exercises in pushing through the fear of saying something inaccurately and continuously pushing through it, because what ends up happening is you develop a certainty in what you say regardless. It's not about teaching yourself to lie, but it's an interesting way of basically, navigating through a conversation where you don't focus on the flaws.

Something that the pickpocket was saying is when he was expecting his second child, he said, "I couldn't wait for the first time my child falls down." I asked him, "What do you mean by that?" He said, "Well, when a child falls down for the first time, they don't have a point of reference on how to react. So, their point of reference is the parent." Depending on what the parent does, if the parent panics, they panic, they cry. If the parent goes, "Hey, Jimmy, come on, get up. Everything's fine." His thought or the way he's looking at it is he doesn't believe that that changes as we get older.

He said, "If I'm doing a magic trick on stage and a card falls down as I'm actually demonstrating, people aren't going to react to the card falling down. They're going to look at me waiting for my reaction. Based on how I react, they're going to react. So, if I just move on, people will forget. But if I focus on it, pick it up and say, 'You should have seen me practice.' I just created a neon frame on failure. Now everybody would remember." But if you move on, everyone forgets. The thing is we tether ourselves and we tether everyone because of our reaction. So, we have a lot more control towards other people's reactions based on our reaction. So, that ties into the idea of certainty.

Dave:

Yeah, the idea of a kid falling down, I just tell my kids, "Look, here's how you learn by falling down." So, the way you learn to walk is it hurts to hit the ground. You do it enough times, you don't do it. That's why we actually look for times when we failed at something we're working on, because it's like, "Great. I was doing something I don't know how to do yet." I've done my best to reframe that. Most parents, if you hear a smacking wet sound and you see a skull on tile, you're like, "Oh, man." But even then, kids are made out of rubber. The vast majority of the time they're okay in ways that seem miraculous. But yeah, so it's parental downloads of panic states that aren't merited. Your pickpocket overcame his fear. These cold readers and I was very interested that you interviewed one.

The idea of being able to mine through someone's small behaviors and their psychology and their words and their facial expressions to be able to appear like you know way more than you do, that's a really unique form of social engineering, where you can make someone believe stuff. You've interviewed a social engineer. By the way, I am a former computer hacker. I am trained in social

engineering. In fact, I made you wear the hat you're wearing today, you wouldn't have. Talk to me about social engineering. You've also interviewed a hypnotist. So, talk to me about how people are gaining control over other people's behavior in a way that the people aren't aware of.

Sam:

So, when it comes to social engineering, one of my favorites is... This ties into a lot, because it's about the four questions you need to answer in the mind of the person to target the person you're bumping. The moment you answer these four, you build rapport instantly. It's such a simplistic way of looking at it, but really what people are after is they want to feel safe. You talked about something about safety and safety can trap us.

To me, I look at safety and comfort as two different things. I break through fear because of safety, but I'm trapped by the fear because of comfort. So, to me, comfort and safety are two different things really. I think we need to feel safe as a platform to operate from, but the comfort is what keeps us trapped rather than safety. But with what you're saying, what you asked about the social engineering, four questions whenever you approach anybody.

One question is, "What does he want?" If I'm walking up to a stranger, the stranger is going to ask four questions in their mind and answering the question and the prospects. Like copywriting, this is the same. You're answering the question in the person you're targeting. So, the first question is, "What does he want?" Second, "Who is he?" Who is he? What does he want? Is he a threat? How long is this going to take? These are the four questions to answer. Now, to answer the questions in the most elegant way, in the fastest way possible, this is the art. So, here was an interesting question that I received and I tried to figure out the answer, how can I answer all four questions in the mind of someone without saying a word?

Dave:

Are those four questions the same for most people?

Sam:

For most people, they want to know, "Who is this stranger that's coming my way? What do they want from me? How long is this going to take? Are they a threat?" over and over and over. You answer those four, because if you think about it, who is he? What does he want? It's because they want to know that you're not going to violate them. You're not going to attack them. You're not a threat. It's an indirect way of asking, "Is he a threat?", but it's more specific.

In terms of time, how long is this going to take, because you don't want to feel trapped. You don't feel limited or restricted from pursuing your goal in that moment, if you're in the street. You want to make sure that you can actually do what you want to do. Is the person going to threaten my time, threaten my goal, stand in my way, or attack me? These are really what's happening.

But if you break down the questions and answer each one individually and find a way to answer that, then suddenly, you are basically covering all angles. So, the question is, "How can I answer all four without saying a single word and provide those four answers to a group of people without even approaching them and getting them to approach me?"

Dave:

So how do you do that?

Sam:

So, for example, let's say, I'm in London. I'm walking, let's say, an Oxford Street. I have a map. I'm looking confused. Now, it's very quick. People aren't going to even think about it. I'm looking confused. I'm anxious, and I'm worried. I look last. One, who am I? A tourist. What do I want? Directions. Am I a threat? I can't even figure out where I am and where I want to go. Of course, I'm not a threat. Number four, how much time is it going to take? As long as it takes to give me the directions, which could take more than a few seconds. So, automatically, you will have so many people approaching you just by that.

I've shared this. I mean, anybody can try this. If you do that on the streets, you're going to see that. It makes perfect sense, but people don't think about that. That's one of the things that I loved about social engineering. It's very easy to make someone feel safe the moment you appear anxious. Because when you appear anxious not in a threatening way, you induce vulnerability in yourself. You appear vulnerable. That induces empathy in the other person automatically.

So, if I wanted information from someone, let's say, I wanted someone to help me with something. There were different exercises that we've done. It was a very interesting exercise. I went to the supermarket. I wanted to buy tampons. That was one of the tests. I need to ask a woman on, "What type of tampon does she use?" It's a private question. How would you do that? So, the thing is I looked confused. The premise is I arrived with my girlfriend.

Dave:

She asked you to go buy some stuff. Yeah.

Sam:

Then we lost the luggage. I had to appear anxious. What I did to induce that and you can do that. Somehow, it puts you in that state, when you put your hand behind the back of your neck and you start rubbing that. It actually puts you in that state, but you also are perceived anxious and uncomfortable and vulnerable and you're not in control, which makes you non-threatening and people empathize. Not only that the woman next to me talked to me, she grabbed my arm. She comforted me. She started touching my back and my shoulder. She invaded my space, which makes it okay, but that wasn't the purpose. The purpose was for her to answer that question. The question was so easy to answer, because I'm so non-threatening.

This is a big takeaway for people in general. If you want to build rapport, the real key is eliminating threat. If you appear non-threatening, that changes the game completely. All you need to do is make the person in front of you feel safe. Suddenly, it's a lot easier to connect, to communicate, to influence, to do whatever you want to do.

Adam Bloom's known as the joke doctor. He's one of the people that I interviewed. He's the joke doctor in the UK, because comedians go to him for him to tweak their bits, their sketches. So, he would just basically fix it for them and tweak it. I interviewed him about comedy and the psychology of comedy. What's interesting to tie that in is he talks about something that I would phrase as melodic asymmetry. So, for something to be funny, it has to be asymmetrical. So, it sounds wise.

So, for example, ba, bum, ba, bum, ba, bum, ba, bum, that's not funny. But ba, bum, ba, bum, bum, bum, bum, that's funny, because it's interrupting. You're interrupting the pattern that the person is receiving. It creates that surprise, that shock. Automatically, that shock gets people to be surprised. It's really the surprise, the punch line in comedies. People are expecting something going in one way, and then suddenly, it shifts. So, to tie that in with asymmetry, it reminded me of physiological postural asymmetry.

So, for example, one of the fastest ways to appear vulnerable is to be asymmetrical. So, if I'm looking at you now and I tilt my head, I just tilt my head. Automatically, it puts the person in front of me at ease, because what that means is, I'm off balance. I am not in control in this moment. I'm not in a good stance for me to attack you. This is putting my guard down or letting my guard down actually.

So, which reminds me of something that the samurai taught me in Japan when I did sword fighting, tension eliminates balance. Every time he wanted to push me, it was so easy, because I was resisting him and I was tensed instead of being relaxed. This ties into what you said about resistance and acceptance when we talked about that intention and have to. I don't know if you've heard about the coconut story. I think it's a tribe. I'm not sure where. They basically carve the coconut, carve out a piece, empty it and put the treat inside. The open-

Dave:

It's a trap, yeah, for the monkey.

Sam:

It's a trap. Yeah, they basically bury it.

Dave:

Works on raccoons too.

Sam:

It's basically big enough for the monkey's hand to go in, but not big enough for the fist to come out. The moment that happens, automatically, the monkey panics, because he sees the hunter approaching and he tenses up. He starts trying to pull his hand while making a fist. It's the fear that tenses him up. All he had to do was acceptance. The thing is resistance is what keeps us trapped. Acceptance is what sets us free. I believe that we are all trapped. We all have monkeys with hands trapped in coconuts, thousands of monkeys in so many different ways, basically. We just need to start to chill, relax and start letting go and accepting, but yeah.

Dave:

Sometimes you just have to experience it. A while ago, I did an urban escape, an invasion training after... My friend Neil Strauss before we became friends, he'd written a book called *Emergency*, a fantastic book about this. I got to try this. It's a spy school. But man, having a dozen bounty hunters hunting for you while you're trying to do a mission, you learn so much about tension and fear and how much is in your head and how to social engineer things. It was a really intense three days, but I realized that I would completely lose it. It actually wasn't a bounty hunter. It was just some random dude walking around, because you're so triggered.

By the end of the day, I really understood a lot more about watching someone who knew what they were doing or didn't. That was one of those many experiences where I said, "I'm going to do something I'm afraid of." Yeah, it's empowering to know how to pick a lock or whatever. But the real thing was to learn how to walk through town when you have no money and get stuff done and make people not look at you. They talk about something called the gray man, which is someone who's just unnoticeable. I am a terrible gray man, because I'm 6'4. I will always be the most threatening guy in the room, because I'm usually the biggest and relatively fit.

So, our automatic processing says, "Okay, who would be the one most likely to be able to stop me if you have a bad intent?" Or if someone had a bad intent and you're just a fearful person, you're like, "Whoever's the biggest and strongest is probably the one that could punch you the hardest." So, this is very primal. People aren't thinking that, but just automatically, our threat assessment works that way. The biggest opponent is the one you should probably focus on the most. I saw that what happens with the gray man, where I'm walking in Santa Monica at the end of the day. I've managed to walk past five or six bounty hunters. I did it, because I couldn't just be nondescript.

So, I put on a red hat, fake little ponytail. I walked carrying a cigarette, shaking like I was jonesing. I looked like a complete drug user walking in Santa Monica in the middle of the promenade, that really nice mall there. Ten feet around me, no one will come near me. They walk right past you, because they can't see you, because you're invisible.

The guy who sees me is a cameraman for National Geographic, because they had a supermodel who's in the class with us. He's like, "Oh, there's Dave." I'm like, "God, cameraman." They see through everything, because they don't focus the way normal people do. But he told them and then one of their gray men, one of the bounty hunters is like, "I don't know how he did it. The guy was invisible. He walked right up to me, and I couldn't see him." Because he knew how to be nondescript to the point where he just walks up and hey, Dave. I'm like, "How did you stand here? I should have been able to see you and run away." But-

Sam:

Wow.

Dave:

... to this day, I don't understand it. But there's so much going on that we aren't aware of in our own thing, in our own presentation. You just talked about so many of those, which I think is really valuable for people. How you show up, it's not how you dress. I also learned push a baby buggy around. Anyone who's a couple, anyone who has a child with them, pretty much, you're a non-threat, right? But you see a gang of four young men, pretty much they're a threat.

Sam:

Because they cause trouble.

Dave:

I know I did when I was a young guy, right? So, there's all kinds of interesting social mixing and things like that, that have to do with masculine energy, feminine energy. I feel like it is not well studied except maybe amongst spies and some other things. But the set of people you've interviewed and you talked about on your Instagram channel are fascinating, because you've really sat down and said, "What's going on under the covers?"

I want to switch a little bit to the way you approach Instagram. You ask a ton of questions, mostly just quotes and questions. You start these conversations. You've developed a huge following that way. What are you doing there in terms of just these quotes? How does it turn into the conversation that regularly happens on your page? It's unusual.

Sam:

Well, everything on Instagram is based on everything I've learned, all the connections I've made, all the insights. It's like the juice pretty much in terms of the ideas, the concepts. Obviously, the quotes are original. Some quotes are similar to something that people have heard. The idea is you may have heard something similar, but you're like, "I've never heard it described that way."

Dave:

The world of personal development has been around for thousands of years. There aren't that many radically new ideas.

Sam:

Yeah, yeah.

Dave:

It's okay if they sound similar to something-

Sam:

That's true. That's true.

Dave:

... you said once.

Sam:

That's true. Yeah, fair enough. Yeah, but there are people that constantly rip off quotes and label them as theirs. But in general, the quotes are based on that. So, to me, the best way to trigger a change is to create an interruption, but how do you create an interruption that does not cause stress? How do you create an interruption that is gentle, that is a way to get people to reflect? There are two ways, statements and questions. Sometimes I write a question quote, but that's very rare, but I did a few. Those really triggered people in a positive way, because it's a quote and a question at the same time.

What I usually do is I write a quote, and then I ask a question underneath it. It starts the conversation, people start talking about it. But questions are the fastest way to redirect someone's attention. If there's one thing that's really important about whether it's the social engineering or the gray man concept that you talked about or pickpocketing, pickpocketing is really about attention management. You learn how to manage attention, what you can do is protect yourself from being distracted. You can learn how to interrupt other people's patterns in order for them to be distracted from whatever is keeping them trapped.

There's so many powerful benefits to just learning how to master attention management. So, redirecting focus through questions, interrupting people's attention by distracting them through a question, opening loops. There are two ways of opening a loop in someone's mind. It's the thought that needs to be resolved. So, when I ask a question, I'm opening a loop. Now, I'm keeping people in that loop, but it's a good loop, because it's a loop of them getting to focus on something within themselves they've been ignoring by being distracted on social media or distracted in so many other ways.

Again, the quotes, the statements and the questions are all about creating awareness. You create awareness, you reclaim control. You reclaim choice. So, I received so many private DMs from people that were suicidal, that had suicidal thoughts that no longer do from a single video, from a single quote or single question. People that were self-harming constantly, slicing their forearms.

Dave:

Cutters and things. Yeah.

Sam:

Yeah. They stopped. What that shows me is the power of a quote, the power of a question, the power of the word. We underestimate the power of what we can say or what we can write to make someone feel good or make someone feel bad. One of the problems really is peers. A lot of people, especially teenagers right now, surrounding themselves with the group of peers that they think are cool but damage their own self-esteem.

The truth of the matter is one of the quotes that I wrote... I mean, I sat down to break down the idea of, "What's the ideal peer?" Because we got three types of peers. You got the social peers, the peers that you surround yourself with physically. You got the social media peers, the digital peers, which are the peers that you connect with online or the people you watch and follow. So, if I'm watching Tony Robbins, I'm watching Dave Asprey, I'm watching Gary Vee every day, these are my peers. We don't think about that. And then you have the mental peers, the people that you keep thinking of.

Now, the problem is a lot of people are trapped thinking of people that they resent, that they are still holding a grudge against. If you're thinking of these people in the past, they're no longer in your life but you're still thinking about them, they are your peers whether you like it or not. You're going to start mirroring them. They're triggering you constantly. So, we need to really think about the peers that we have, that we're choosing to have. Those are the three layers. Just to get back to that quote, make sure you surround yourself with people that make you doubt your limitations. Don't surround yourself with people that make you doubt yourself if we keep it super simple.

Dave:

Yeah, that's the friend upgrade. If you find that there are people like that, you just have to say, "I'm going to get some new friends." You just create some distance there. It's a tough thing to do, but really, the core of what I do with neurofeedback and 40 years of Zen is what you're talking about there. Just helping people understand if you're constantly thinking of some negative situation in the past, it doesn't hurt the other person who hurts you. So, what are the steps to do the emotional healing in order to stop doing that automatically?

Sometimes it's physical. You got to have enough energy in the brain and all that, but usually, it comes down to forgiveness, right? You have to forgive the person. You don't have to call them and tell them you forgive them, but you just have to do the act inside of you that turns off the thought. The name for that act is forgiveness. It's just a state. It is a state that I didn't really know how to achieve until a computer showed me. This is exactly what it feels like in your heart or in your gut or wherever you feel it. Oh, I can replicate the state, because it turns out it's pretty easy to say, "Oh, yeah, I've let that go a long time ago," but you're still thinking about it. When you let it go, you stop thinking about it. If you don't think about it, you don't care about it anymore. Oh, yeah, that happened a while ago.

So, for me, I've gone through every single one of those that I know about and there's some I don't know about. I've consciously in meditative states and neurofeedback states and heart rate variability states gone through and just let it go to the point that very little of my operating system is consumed by that, which allows me to be more conscious, more present. I think in a strange way, some of the things that you're posting on your Instagram channel are helping people do the same thing. You're just putting good stuff up that makes people assess this. No, wait a minute, maybe I can let that go.

I think you're doing some really powerful work there. I wanted to get inside your head a little bit and figure out, "How are you thinking about it?" It's because you've talked to all these people. You've studied the psychology side of things, but you've also talked to a bunch of people who are doing it in non-traditional ways in order to get around all these invisible barriers people have. So, nice work, Sam. I appreciate it. Your Instagram channel, samqurashi, Q-U-R-A-S-H-I, just all run together. That should be easy to find. If you search, samq, I think you're probably the first one that comes up, because you've got a lot of followers.

Sam:

Thank you. Thank you, Dave.

Dave:

If you guys like today's episode, well, maybe you want to try following Sam and see if you like what he's got. I thought he had a lot of really valuable stuff on his channel. It's something where you can see in the comments that it's making a difference. It is possible to use social media for good. I like to think I'm doing the same thing as well. It's also possible to use it to create fear, to create wants and shame and all sorts of other bad things. So, be conscious of who your peers are, including your peers on social media, the peers in your life and things like that. It's a powerful lesson that Sam just taught us. Have a wonderful day.