

[00:00:00] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Welcome back to the Flex Diet Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Mike T. Nelson. And today on the podcast, I've got my friend Akshay, and we are talking all about everything from Arctic exploration to many days in complete darkness to why should you bother doing very hard things? And the program today is brought to you by learning how to do hard things via the [Physiologic Flexibility Certification](#).

It is open now, depending when you're listening to this until September 12th at midnight, 2022. So go to physiologicflexibility.com, and there you'll learn all about everything from cold exposure to heat. High-intensity interval training low, slow distance training, fuel systems all the way from ketones to carb loading and different breathing techniques.

Also, how does your body regulate oxygen and carbon dioxide? Again, the goal of all of those things of doing harder things such as getting into cold water or turning your shower towards cold is that you're training in the four pillars of homeostatic regulation in your body. And by doing that, you can become more resilient, increase your recovery ability, have more energy and just overall become more anti fragile.

Your physiology wants to take the path of efficiency. And there's definitely many times in places to do things that are harder. But what are those things? What is the payoff? And then how do you set them up to do them in a way where they're very progressive. If you go on any social media, the trend as always is what is the hardest thing you can do?

And what I've noticed from practice and reading, a lot of the research is that's probably not the best starting. you may work your way up to it, but it's definitely not the place to start. So go to physiologicflexibility.com for all the information there. It is open through now through September 12th, 2022. If you're listening to this podcast, after that time, you can still go to the same link and you can get on the wait list via the newsletter for the next time that it opens.

So enjoy this great conversation with Akshay. We talked, as I mentioned at the top of the show about how to do hard things, why you should, and he just really has a very fascinating story.

I originally got hooked up with him through Zach Bitter and we did some consulting calls. how to set up Akshay's nutrition because he is working to be the first solo Explorer to entirely cross the continent of Antarctica. So I'll link to the podcast that we did on Zach's program also. So I've worked with him on

nutrition to figure out what is the best nutrition approach in terms of, should you be ketogenic?

When should we increase carbohydrates, et . Because he is doing the Antarctic exploration crossing entirely unsupported, meaning he's going to be pulling all of his own gear with him, which adds a whole nother wrinkle into it, especially when you have to look at the weight of everything and the return on that investment.

So enjoy this great conversation with Akshay.

Welcome back to the flex diet podcast.

I'm here with Akshay who wrote a great book called Fearvana, which I highly recommend. And yeah, we're gonna talk about all sorts of things, but I would say the main theme is doing things that are uncomfortable and why you should do them. And I think you're the person to answer a lot of those questions.

[00:04:21] **Akshay Nanavati:** yes, sir. I keep chasing that edge for sure. And learn a lot from.

[00:04:24] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. And so you just recently got back from Iceland, is that correct?

[00:04:30] **Akshay Nanavati:** My most recent expedition was five days on in glacier and Iceland training with with the friend slash far more experienced polar Explorer, Lou Rudd and Wendy Sarrow, who were training me in some solo, polar exploration the tactics and skills and the strategies for solo polar exploration specifically.

And this is all leading up to a big trip at some point, correct?

Yes, sir. So this is all leading up to what will be 110 day 2,700 kilometer. That's 1700 miles solo seek ski crossing of the entire Antarctica. I'll be dragging a 400 pound sled for 10 to 12 hours a day for hundred and 10 days. When, what will be once accomplished the first ever purely human powered ski crossing with the continent.

Wow. That's just. My brain has a hard time even processing

that it's hard to, it's hard to fully understand it. Like when I shared this with people, like when we were in Iceland that had a documentary crew that come

out with me, cuz we're filming and telling a story about this and they, they've heard what I'm doing, but when they actually saw like a polar, we got stuck in a storm in Iceland.

And gnarly winds, just battering the tent. They came in the next day, saw our tent half buried, crawled into this tiny little tent and saw what life is like out there. You start to get a little bit for of a feel for it. And then we had a day in Iceland where I was dragging the sled for 12 hours.

I put seven rocks in my sled just to increase weight cuz you know, of course you'd of course I had to, of course you do

[00:05:55] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** that.

[00:05:56] **Akshay Nanavati:** when you just make it harder to increase the suffering exactly. To increase the level of hardship out there. And the prospect, when I was dragging. Sled, seven rocks up a heavy, like a, up a steep hill with full skin.

So skins are these things you put in the bottom of your skis, right? To get grip, full skins, and just going up there and fighting for every step and slushy snow. And the prospect of doing this for hundred and 10 days was horrifying.

[00:06:23] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** absolutely. What's your, what's your mindset at that point? What do you like, what do you think of, because I would imagine it's.

Easy to. So I always think of it as the, either the upward Ascension or the downward spiral and humans, myself included. It's very easy to get on the downward spiral and just ride that all the way to the bottom. absolutely. How do you try to not let your brain go in that direction?

[00:06:50] **Akshay Nanavati:** It's a great question.

And it's a constant battle. There, there was a moment on this particular day where I had climbed up the big hill and I thought I was pretty close to camp, maybe 30 minutes or so I look up my GPS and it turns out I'm still two and a half miles from camp, which in ski distance was like two hours or so so that I forget how long it took maybe an hour and a half to, by the end of the day, it was a 12 hour day.

And I had this moment of just like dejection for about 30 seconds of pure victim mode. Fuck this. I don't wanna be here. This sucks. And I can't imagine doing this for 10 days. And then I was like immediately. So talking about that downward spiral and then immediately having to. Temper that, stop feeling, sorry for yourself and just take that next step.

This is what you what brings me, there's many different like tactics that I use to navigate the pain cave as I like to call it. But in this particular moment, it was just often what I go to is remembering that this is why I am there for that moment. If I want it easy, I wouldn't ski 110 days across , Antarctica, the most hostile environment on the planet.

So those moments are the moments of pre transformation. Those moments are the experience of the divine. I They are what I am there for. So when they come, sometimes it sucks. You're in them. And the paint cave is really brutal. But remembering that this is what it's all about is a huge tool. I use to bring my back, bring myself back up that spiral, as you said, and I also just remember that I am blessed that I get to choose my suffer.

That's a luxury many in the world do not get, as I've been in the Marines. So I've been to war. I've worked with survivors, sex trafficking with former child soldiers and people in extreme poverty. So I've seen the darkness of the human condition and people born into hell on earth and they don't get to choose their suffering.

They're forced into it. It's a privilege. Yes. I suffer out on these places, but it's a privilege to get, to have that opportunity to go do it, and that often brings me back to you get to be here. And these places are stunning even sometimes when you're in a white out and it's this you literally can't see anything in front of you.

It the silence of it, the stillness of it, it taps into the human soul in a way that nothing else really does, and that's a privilege to go to those spaces, but you have to fight the dragon to O to open the doors to those treasures, right? So the struggle is the necessary vehicle to get to the rewards on the other side of them,

Yeah.

And that's one thing I've been thinking a lot more about probably the last, especially three years of doing a little bit more cardiovascular stuff, doing cold water immersion, doing a whole bunch of other different things of not necessarily flipping the script not necessarily lying to yourself, but exactly what you said.

Like I have the luxury to have a freezer that I converted into cold water that I get to choose to go into whenever I want, whatever temperature I want. I've actually controlled the environment to a high extent. Yeah. And I have the opportunity to do that versus uhoh something happened. I went down in a plane and now I'm stuck in, 37 degree water in the ocean.

Completely different scenario. Exactly. But when you're in that moment, though, when you get in, you. This still sucks though.

it still sucks. A hundred percent. Yeah. A hundred percent still sucks. Yeah, it absolutely does. And that's where you have to like, that's, that's where you have to find those different strategies and there's many different ways, right?

There's no sort of one size fits all way to navigate that pain cave. One of the things that I often like to do is when like a little while ago, I think this was a, when the pandemic first hit, I did a 50 mile run around at cul-de-sac. So a thousand loops around this, like just like little cul-de-sac literally a thousand loops.

This is going all around. Cause I wanted to show people that look, you don't, even, if the gyms are closed, even a parks are closed. You don't have to depend on this. We can still create our world the way we wanted to be. But point is to say there was a moment in that run. I think I was like, I don't know, six hours in or something like that.

And I wasn't suffering as much as I wanted to yet. So I was literally hauling forth. I was like, bring on more pain. I was like going in this crazy space in my head that I was like, I want the devil to rise outta hell to attempt to destroy me so I can look him in the eye and bury him in his own blood.

Like that moment where I get to go to war with myself is the moment, so it's you're waiting for it. And when it shows up, that's when it brings up the smile, because this is what I've been seeking. But like you said, there's still moments where it absolutely sucks. Like I said, that I had that moment when I was in Iceland and just pure for 30 seconds or so just pure victim dejection, hating life didn't wanna be there.

but then you have to navigate that and bring yourself back into a place of stillness to choose how to transcend your mind and choose to be something more.

[00:11:11] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** I think it's good for someone, especially from all the crazy things you've done. To know that you're still fighting that battle because I think sometimes from the outside, looking in, people would be like, oh my God, he's done all these crazy things.

He's doing this next crazy thing. He must have all the answers. He's got it. Like completely figured out. Like he never has hard times and that's not true. It's just, you figured out ways to work through them, which I think is encouraging and empowering for other people who are, trying to do harder things

[00:11:42] **Akshay Nanavati:** in their.

And it, it was the same way for me. When I would see polar explorers, who've accomplished. Cuz every book you read about polar exploration, it's basically just a document of torture and misery. It's just like that's horrible constant. they're one of my favorite quotes about polar exploration is from absolutely cherry Gerard who wrote this book called the worst journey in the world, which the title in enough itself of summarized the nature of it.

But he says polar exploration is at once the cleanest and most isolated way of having a bad time, which has been device. I could not agree more like I've been blessed and experienced a lot. I've been in the Marines. I've spent 10 days in darkness. I've run ultra marathons, but not climb mountains in the Himalayas but nothing compares to the hardships of polar exploration, right?

The relentless suffering in my experience, at least in terms of voluntary suffering, like choosing, getting to choose it. And. When I see other poll explorers, I often think, oh, they don't have those hard moments. They're just like, they can handle it no matter what, but when you read the books, they go through those hard moments too.

And that's what that's to your point, which I think is such a valuable point. It's that it's not that we don't go through those moments that are really hard. And even in the normal world, I still struggle. I still have low moments. I'm human, and the differences that you've L I've practiced and practiced and practiced over and over again, and trained myself to transcend them.

And the more I play in those edges, the more I seek out that next hardship, the more I develop tools to transcend even in the normal world. And that transcendence is ultimately to me, like somebody that once asked me what is life about? And to me, if I had to summarize in one word is transcendence, and

that those spaces of suffering, I go there because of the transcendence, the suffering is just a means.

It's not the purpose. The purpose is what you experience when you find something in, in the human spirit to rise above it, to transcend it. And that is, it's, whatever our version of this it's God, it's the divine. It's like you tap into something that is so beyond you as one individual it's, you can't, it's hard to even put into words until you've been in that space, but it is a profound experience that in a way it's its own kind of addiction.

[00:13:39] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. I think it's fascinating how humans and physiology is almost like this duality wired where our physiology is definitely wired for survival and efficiency. So with my clients, people are like, oh why did they go and get fast food? And then don't, they know that's horrible for their system and all this stuff I'm like, but they're wired to do that.

Like subconsciously if you could get. 1500 calories for a dollar 75. And now you just push two buttons on your phone and it shows up at your door. Yeah. Like to your stone, age physiology. That's amazing. That's a huge amount of calories for very little effort. But then on the opposite side, you have this sort of desire and drive.

I think most people do to do things that you've never done before, which goes against all of your wiring of trying to be efficient. Like you're going to, whether it's a two K in a row or ultra-marathon events, whatever it is, there's this kind of weird desire to see where that edge is to see like how far, can I push it and still come out.

Okay. Which I always find. Both ends are just fascinating.

[00:14:51] **Akshay Nanavati:** yeah. I love that. You said that I talk a lot about dualities in my own work and I fear, the I of Fearvana in its in and of itself. Yeah. At a meta level is a duality, right? Like fear in Nirvana that are two seemingly contradictory concepts that I've come to learn over a lifetime worth of experiences are in fact complimentary and they can coexist as one.

So I love that you brought up the duality and I do think these like darkness and light life and death, these forces that we deem as polarizing is contradictory, they can play together as one. A perfect example was that see is seeing light in a dark room. When I spent 10 days in dark darkness, the brightest white light I've ever seen in my entire life was sitting in a dark room, and you see viscerally, you experience oneness of dualities coexisting. And that oneness is it's a very.

Spiritually enlightening experience. I believe that I don't believe enlightenment is a destination. I think it's a moment. And those moments to me are moments of enlightenment when you viscerally experience pure oneness of all these edges, to your point about the physiology, like on the one hand, even when you're out there in these places, you can see the need to survive the desire for comfort, because in those caveman days, comfort was not the norm. So we sought it. But yet there's that, that, that other side of you fighting for the next discomfort to get out the next day and go for another nine hour day after 12 hours, and it's this, it's the beautiful, it's beautiful to experience them coexisting.

[00:16:08] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. One of my favorite lyrics is from Andrew Schwab. Who's one of the lead singers of the band project, 86. And he has a quote in one of his songs that says, I, I fight to remain unbalanced. Which kind of goes against everything we're taught. So I, my bias of his belief is that. You're like balance is a myth.

And you want to try to be a little bit unbalanced because that's where all the cool stuff is.

[00:16:32] **Akshay Nanavati:** yeah. I couldn't agree with you more. I say this, even in the context of mental health, in my teachings fearvana that I think the biggest, this, the biggest mistake we make in the realm of mental health is that, is this kind of the state of homeostasis with no, with all harmony, right?

But you're gonna have shit in your head. You're gonna have doubt. You're gonna have fears. You're gonna have stress. You're gonna have anxiety and mental health to me is the acceptance of that. It's harmony attained through disharmony or, balance through imbalance and accepting that and embracing that is actually how you find peace.

So I love that quote. I hadn't heard that before, but I fully resonate with it and I'm playing on those edges of, the. Thing of being on the edge is you're not balanced. You're on the edge. so that's the nature of the edge. But when you play on those playgrounds you bring back like for me, because I get to go there.

The wisdom I learn on that edge allows me to come back and now do the work I do to help other people navigate their own version of darkness. Everybody's battling their own version of a polar storm, whatever it may be. And I, when you seek it actively, you gain wisdom that a book cannot teach you.

Don't me wrong, love reading, obviously. But knowledge is different from wisdom, right? Like knowledge to me is learning. Wisdom is experiencing and

there on those edges, do you gain a real world experience with the human soul that you can then use to guide others? And as well as of course yourself, through whatever life throws at.

[00:17:50] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. And there's been some arguments about even in the range of say mental health, right? So one of the models I like of that is called the in Tropic brain theory. And it's just that everybody's brain needs a certain amount of variability. And then if we have way too much variability, you may be schizophrenic or manic, bipolar.

If you have very little variability, you may be more on the autism type spectrum. And so their argument is that we can put all these kind of neurologic diseases in one quote unquote line by looking at the amount of variability. And the kind of the other argument with that is that it is our goal to really treat everyone all the way and push them all the way back into the center, or is it to.

Be more accepting of what is it they want to achieve in their life and appreciate the differences between yeah. One person and the next, and if we push everyone to be homogenous, do we, crush a lot of creative people and artists and, people who are on the spectrum and, on the fringes of that, which yeah, I think.

Super interesting discussion.

[00:18:55] **Akshay Nanavati:** That's interesting. Never heard that idea before. That's really fascinating,

[00:18:59] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** huh? Yeah. And I think about just the different people I know who are probably on those other ends of the spectrum it's refreshing to talk to 'em and see a different perspective that I probably would've never thought of in a million years.

yeah.

[00:19:12] **Akshay Nanavati:** Yeah. I completely agree. And I, to your point, I think that's where we learn is, no matter how self-aware you are, you're trapped in your own lens of the world and you're not gonna see your blind spots. So to get those outside lenses, it expands your own frame and ultimately expands the collective consciousness.

[00:19:26] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. And speaking of expanding consciousness, you did 10 days in utter darkness, yeah. Explain a little bit about what is the setup and is it, are you literally just completely black for 10 days?

Like how do you eat a little bit of the. The framework and then why you would do such a thing.

[00:19:45] **Akshay Nanavati:** Sure. yeah. So this was actually the second time I've been a darkness retreat. The first time, seven days, this time was 10 days. It was just a few months ago. The

seven

[00:19:52] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** days wasn't hard enough,

[00:19:53] **Akshay Nanavati:** right? The it was I wanted to go deeper because the, in the seven days I had the most intense experiences on day six and like kind of the last day so this time I wanted to go deeper, I also entered over there.

Very, so I guess I'll start with the logistics and then why I went into it. So logistically yes. To your question about the darkness, you're in complete darkness for the full time 24 7, you literally cannot see your hand in front of you. It is. Pitch dark and the way it works, you go to these places where they're darkness retreat centers.

So they're set up to do this, cuz you people have asked me can't you just do this at home, but you can't because there'll be ambient light beyond other distractions. But even ambient light is part of the value of the darkness is your brain. They say starts to release DMT, one of the primary ingredients in ayahuasca

so you start experiencing hallucinogenic. Shows like light shows, which I viscerally experienced both times. Light as bright and as real as anything else you can see, and so the way the food worked is both times I chose to do just first time I did smoothies this time, I did a juice fast.

So twice a day, they would bring a juice in a double door system. They would open one door from the outside, put the juice, close it. And so that way it stays dark. So I did juice fast for about the eight and a half, eight days or so. And then the last 40 hours, I did just a pure water fast because I wanted to throw in some more suffering and the experience by adding hunger.

so eight days of juice fast. I was feeling hungry on day one. Especially when you're a polar Explorer, constantly trying to be fat, so I have that. I'm constantly trying to develop which a needless to say I lost some weight out there. Logistically. So you're eating the juices in the dark, everything completely in

the dark and why the first time I went in, because I had gone through this very challenging divorce.

And I ended up breaking my sobriety. I used to struggle with addiction, big time, sobered up and broke. And when I do anything, I do it pretty hard. I, when I broke, I'm talking like drinking, full bottle of vodka a day for five days straight kind of thing. That kind of that's how far I go when I've gone down that road.

So I didn't like that. I didn't like that version of me. And I had done a lot of hard stuff by then. I'd already written fear of Anna, done a lot of climbing mountains, ultra marathons. So I wanted to explore a different edge and darkness was, I stumbled into the concept. I had no idea.

This was a thing, darkness retreats. And I stumbled into this concept and it was very alluring because of the fact of how intense it would be and to experience stillness at that level. Stillness is something I think we. Fear. It's not a fear that if you ask somebody, what are you scared of?

I don't think most people would answer stillness, but the fact that we do everything to distract ourselves, as Carl Young, beautifully said, he said, people will do anything no matter how absurd to avoid confronting their own soul. And I think our world is a very clear depiction of that.

So to confront stillness at that level was very alluring to see what I would. But this time I went into the darkness with a very different reason, mind, body, and spirit. I was in a fantastic way. I went in not with a, to heal the past. It was more training for the future. I wanted to go practice solitude and train my mind and my brain for what's coming.

110 days I'll be the most isolated human being on the entire planet. The geographically, the most isolated human being and that level of solitude beyond being the first ever human power crossing, the continent will be the longest. Any human being has spent solo in a polar region. My friends keep joking.

They're like, dude, you're gonna come back so weird from that thing. I'm like probably you're gonna, I'm gonna be, I'm gonna be way weirder than I am now. . But I wanted to train my mind for that solitude. One of the other things I was doing in there, right before going in, I'd been studying method, acting quite intensely.

Like everything. I do go pretty hard into it. So I was going deep into studying how actors, especially the best method actors around specifically Daniel Day

Lewis. The greatest there is how he basically loses in his entire sense of identity to become the character he plays in the movie. If you think about the practical applications for us in personal growth, it's huge, right?

Can you shed one sense of your identity that you've attached yourself onto and become whoever you wanna become? And so I went into the darkness to practice and put the, put to use these. Things that I was learning. And I had moments in the darkness where I was saying phrases and sentences and having thoughts that I had never in my life thought before.

And I remember Daniel Day Lewis, one saying that when he gets into character, he has thoughts and feelings that are not his own, and method actors will dream as their character, not as themselves, which is so fascinating to me, how the mind can shed one identity and become another right. And so that's what I was doing in there was practicing.

And I was literally pacing back and forth on this yoga mat, just stream of consciousness, like shutting off thought and talking out loud to my, it was quite mad if there was a camera looking at me like an insane person, but, and I'm talking out loud and getting into this state and this fire would rise.

And I would see these lights in front of me. And I would say things that I've never said before, and it was surreal to build that. So that was the big, that was the reason why I went in, was to cultivate who I need to be to make this very daunting journey. That lies ahead of me.

[00:24:32] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Very fascinating. Why do you think there is visuals?

Obviously that could be from DMT, dimethyltryptamine or if even beyond that, why do you think the brain is generating that? I'm always been fascinated by that because we're. Depending on what you read, 60, 70% visual, like the amount of real estate dedicating the brain to visual processing, that's distributed, but it's a massive amount.

People who are deaf, a lot of times will rewire the visual cortex area of their brain to, to map sounds to it. So it just seems like it's this very inherent thing that we're so relied upon. And now it's like absent for 10

[00:25:11] **Akshay Nanavati:** days. Yeah. I studied a lot of this when I wrote Fearvana, cause I did a lot of research in neuroscience to write that.

And it's an interesting thing when I went into the darkness about this, because if you read Fearvana, everything is research based. And there was a time in my life where everything had to be defended by science. I gotta understand it. I gotta know it. I gotta find the answers and talking, coming back to duality.

If you look at science and spirituality or the practical and the mystical or whatever word you wanna call it, When it comes to the darkness, I'm sure there's a scientific reason, whether it be DMT or whatever else for the lights. I stopped asking the question of why it happens and just surrender to that.

It happens , because the version of me that when I wrote Fianna, very scientific, everything, practical, understanding it, like everything was research based as I, in my own evolution of the self I'm now embracing both sides of the duality and embracing the mysticism of the universe, if you will.

And the lights, There. It's just, it's weird because, and it's surreal to experience it because for example, too, one of the harder things dealing with the lights in the darkness was after about day four, it was very hard to sleep because imagine having transparent eyelids, every time you close your eyes, you're still seeing the same things as if they're open.

And I'm seeing those lights and often there's stimuli in the lights, there's things moving. So I'd be closing my eyes and I can't sleep because the stimuli is there. , and and very often, and my friend who did the darkness retreat, as well said, he experienced the same thing. So I have no idea why, but there'd be a flashing light that you'd see in your peripherals.

So you're trying to sleep and there's a flashing light here. There's things happening here. and it's surreal, and I just think the at least from a spiritual lens, the way I look at it is the lights have something to teach you. And very often in meditation, in the meditations, I would see things in the lights that were giving me answers to.

To questions. I had a conversation with what I would, what deemed to be God, I know that sound may sound crazy and we all have our own version of what God is. But I had a conversation with that. I was seeing lights of of shapes of like Kings and crowns and these different lights things during my meditations and these meditation must have lasted hours, and so I just, instead of trying to explain what that might be, where one version of me many years ago, would I just surrendered to the darkness and whatever it would reveal to me and allowed myself to take the lessons from that, if that makes sense.

[00:27:24] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. No, totally. I, even for myself, I think about that with some other experiences it's on one level, I want to know why.

And I think science is a very good tool for trying to figure that out. , but at the same point, the further I've gotten down that path, the more you realize of how limited it can be in answering certain questions. and then you add in the amount of resource time, based on what we currently know, et cetera.

Yeah. It's never ending. Yeah. So I think of it as again, like two, two paths that are similar and for myself, it's okay, can I try to understand the research as the best I can to figure it out? But can I also, like you said, not have that completely hinder what my experience of something would be exactly.

Cause I think you can get so caught up logically that I think it can actually inhibit or, maybe it changes the. Filtering mechanism in your brain who knows what actually happens, but I think it can alter some of the experiences and maybe even tone them down compared to what they could be.

Yeah. But then you also start sounding like a crazy person too. You're like, what are you a scientist? Or are you doing the science thing or are you're way over here doing what are you doing?

[00:28:39] **Akshay Nanavati:** yeah, no I get it. It's and it's this fa.... Yeah, I completely get it. And I get, I get called crazy all the time, as you might imagine, but I do.

So that's why I think the duality can coexist. And I think sometimes people do have a hard time with that. If I share something based on research, it makes sense to someone's logical brain. If I say something like, I don't know why this works, but you should go spend 10 days in darkness that doesn't, like it doesn't click as well if it doesn't have that, but I. Because, I'd always struggled with that. I would always ask questions too. Like when I went into the darkness the first time, I struggled a lot with survivors Guild from the war and I've always felt like, why do I get this life?

I remember once I did 167 mile run across Liberia to help raise funds, to build a school out there, it was just under a marathon a day for a week. And on the first day the marathon, the run, I met these two kids blessing and Emmanuel were their names. And one of the kids had lost his mother in the war.

His father left, he was staying with the other kid. One of them wanted to go to med school. The other wanted to go to vocational training school. The odds of

that happening were damn near zero, right? They live in a village and Liberia. And after that run, I was just running in like the only thing that separates me and that kid is I was born to great parents in India, and I've lived a fantastic life as a result of that. I've been blessed with a million times more opportunities, simply as a result of because where I was born. And then I look at like the war, my friend got killed with an I eed. Whereas when I was in Iraq, my vehicle drove over an active bomb, but didn't explode.

And when you ask you try to ask the questions, why does that happen? There? It's you can never answer that, yeah. And so in the darkness, I surrender to look, it is beyond me. If there is a grand plan, I have no idea what it is. I don't know why I deserve to live when they did not, why deserve what I've done.

And I can't answer those questions. So I guess the way I'm going with this is to say starting at that really big picture level, it allowed me to surrender to the mysticism because I have no idea why. And the more I would dive into it, the more I felt guilty, the more I felt like unworthy until I had to say, I don't know why, but I can accept what I've got.

And at least use this life that I have now been gifted to do something meaningful with it. You know what I mean? That helped me accept the unknowns that we just can't ever answer.

[00:30:42] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. I think of it as there's useful questions and useless questions, and sometimes we. Plague our brain trying to answer questions.

It can't ever really be answered. Yeah. For weird reasons. And it's very easy to go down those paths. So one thing I always try to do similar is would I ever even be able to get an answer to that question? And if it's probably not, it's not so useful doesn't mean that I'll never end up down that path, but then it goes back to what you were saying, why are you here?

What are the things that I can do right now? I don't know why ended up with these circumstances. I think we could all look back on our life and think of many circumstances that went one way or could have gone the other way. And it's just, you end up with the. Decision on a day to day basis. Okay. I don't really know why I'm here, how I got here compared to other people, but this is the direction I'm gonna go.

And these are the decisions I'm gonna make based on it. Exactly.

[00:31:38] **Akshay Nanavati:** Exactly. Moving forward. What can I do with it? Yeah. Yeah.

[00:31:41] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** And the stillness thing is really interesting also, cause like years ago, when I first started hearing about like flow tanks, probably God, probably eight years ago. Now my first thought was.

That sounds like a horrible idea. Like I wanna be locked in this thing for, at the time was 90 minutes with only thinking about whatever thoughts come up with me. So most of the time you're in, some type of salt, the temperature is about the same as your skin temperature. It's very dark. So you're trying to remove a lot of your senses.

Yeah. And then I realized, oh shit, that's probably why I should do it. Damn it exactly.

[00:32:17] **Akshay Nanavati:** exactly.

[00:32:17] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** And even just doing that for the first time for 90 minutes, the longest I've ever done is two hours and it's very useful, but it's also one of those things until I was confronted with it. I would've never, I would've never said it's something that I was fearful of doing.

Yeah. It's a weird unconscious thing. Like you always think of, like I'm afraid of Heights or other things where there could be more physical damage, but I'm probably not gonna drown in here. I'm gonna be safe. Everything's gonna be fine. But there's. I found for me, there was a lot of hesitation of oh, this sounds like a horrible idea.

yeah, I

[00:32:53] **Akshay Nanavati:** can understand. And I think it would be for most people. It was for me even going into the darkness the second time, it wasn't, I was scared. I was scared. That level of stillness is quite daunting. And when you're, when you're that still with yourself, whether it be in a deprivation tank or going into darkness, like you are inevitably gonna open doors into your soul that you've never opened before.

, cause you're distracting yourself from in life. And so when you open those doors, you don't know what's going to show up. Not only is the journey there, very challenging, but you don't know what's gonna show up. And what shows up is either it could be like the darkest stuff or just heavenly in blissful, but you

have to face whatever rises out of the doors, and that's partly why the why I believe it's such a profound journey that everybody should, anybody should go on and get so much value from. Because as Carl Young said, one of my other favorite quotes from his is until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call fate.

and these experiences bring that unconscious to the conscious surface. So now you can decide what to do with it, cuz it's there and it's controlling us all the time. But now you can bring it to the surface and choose how you interact with it, what to do with it and how it directs your life as you move forward.

[00:34:00] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. You had mentioned DMT in ayahuasca. Do you think that could also be another tool for kind of opening those unconscious doorways for I personally

[00:34:10] **Akshay Nanavati:** good or bad? Yeah. I personally haven't done ayahuasca, so I can't testify to that experience. I have tried MDMA and I do think there is a place for those.

I had, I know a lot of people, a ton of people, a lot of my friends have done psychedelics and they find it immensely valuable. Many of them have navigated PTSD addiction, stuff like that from it. So I do think it has its place, but I also think we have to be a little careful as human beings because I think.

To some degree, we're looking for shortcuts for enlightenment now, and that's a fine line. You wanna tread I can go into 10 days of darkness and experience as hallucinogenic a trip than I would on, doing an iowaska journey, but you have to sit through 10 days of frigging darkness.

Versus I don't mean to say it. So in, in this way, but popping a pill, like just doing the one thing to get it. So I just think in, in the overwhelming, now we see it everywhere. And I think, again, it has a place. I think it can really help people with mental health and a lot of stuff people are struggling with.

But I just think we gotta be careful because if I look at society as a whole, we tend to look for shortcuts to everything. And that's not a helpful mindset. Like it's not about just doing the hardest thing for the hardest thing. Like you wanna work smart and work hard of course. When we're trying to look for the easiest path, even to enlightenment, we're missing a lot on the journey.

And and we, and I just think there's like a fine line that everyone has to figure out on their own where that line is. But I do think that, like Aubrey Marcus, a

friend of mine after I was on his show, he went and did a darkness retreat. After I told him about the seven days he went and did it and he's done IASA and this, that, and the other thing.

And he said, he's experience, he, from my understanding, his experience in the darkness was more profound than even all of those other things that he experienced. So I think going those more intense routes will because you earned it now with the suffering. It's even when I run ultra marathons, know, the first couple hours or whatever, first few hours, you're just getting the flow, but then you hit that moment.

That moment when it sucks that moment you're in the paint cave, the moment of transcendence. And often to me, it's I had to earn the right to get to that moment. But because you can't, you won't hit that moment in the first hour, first two first five, whatever it may be. But when you Gett there won yeah, it varies depending on where somebody is on there, on their fitness journey it'll come later.

And when you do that the, everything else until there has been earning that moment, that's the way I look at it. And so I think that you don't wanna lose the suffering to get there.

[00:36:24] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. I agree similar about psychedelics. I I've done, I was a couple times, and we might probably go back in Costa Rica and do it again in, in January.

And I think the same thing I think it has a great potential in the right set, in setting and for the right group of people to be extremely profound, but at the same. Breath. I'm also incredibly nervous about wider acceptance because I don't think at least in the culture of the us, like you said, where everything, everybody wants everything now.

And they hear from someone that oh, I did this, whatever it was ceremony. And I got this revelation and they don't look into all the pros and cons and maybe they're not ready to see some of the things that they may see, I don't think they've prepared just mentally for what might happen.

And that makes me like really nervous. It's because you may see some stuff that you may not want to know about, or maybe you're not prepared to handle. And especially if you're doing it on. A one off thing with who knows what with, very little integration, the ceremony, all that stuff aside.

The couple ones I've done, everything went great. Everything was amazing. But whew, I could see like how so many things could have gone. So sideways, so fast in a different, set and setting. Yeah. One of the people who went through it, I asked her the next morning, I said, how did it go?

And I, I was quote, unquote awake for the whole, part that she went through. She's oh yeah, I died and then, came back and it turned out to be a very beneficial experience for her. But I just, yeah, I just think about some of the harder things that have happened there and because you can get there so fast.

Yeah. You, it lends itself to people who want the answer now. Exactly. So that's what makes me really. Nervous as it becomes more, widely accepted. We have almost zero container to talk about it much less regulate it much less, make sure everything is in place.

[00:38:26] **Akshay Nanavati:** I understand what you mean.

And I completely agree. And I think that's another thing is the integration after, yeah. Like your point, you mentioned integration and I, and because it's not just going, doing the magical experience and you get all these insights, but then you gotta even the darkness, I had so many profound lessons.

I was journaling in the dark. I filled up four journals, but if I don't come back and put that to use. What difference does it make? Yeah. And I think that's another part that I think is missing from all of this is like all cool. I had this blissful journey, but then in a way that can become its own addictive kind of, and I know people will just go back and do AKA's journeys over and over and over and over again, because that's now the thing, instead of recognizing like that's the doorway to the work.

But even for me, the darkness was an entry, but the real work starts when I get out of the darkness, I went there to experience a Mahas to open some doors, but now the real work starts. And if you're just going to seek it's like that seminar effect, the seminar junky, he just wants to go feel, it feels really good going to that seminar and over again, everybody's dancing.

But when you come back, the normal CF life hits, right? Like the darkness hits the pain hits, then what, and I think that is the key. There is navigating post the experience as well, and integrating it into applying it into your craft into your life, whatever it may be.

[00:39:31] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. And I know even after the second time I did ayahuasca and it was in Costa Rica.

And even six months after somebody came to me and said, Hey, we got the perfect set in setting. We'll pay for it. Boom. You can show up, everything will be there, no travel. Do you wanna do it again? I'd be like, no, I'm still working on shit from six months ago. Yeah. And I heard the story of a, an acquaintance and she had done it, I think three different times in different locations.

And each time she got the same message, and I'm thinking maybe that's the thing you should work on. Then it seems to me like you're skirting the thing and it shows up again. Yeah. Sometimes like Ryan Holiday's, a book, the obstacle is the way, yeah. Sometimes that is the path, but that's the hard part. Like I think even the best case scenario, you get the correct message, but. No one's ever gonna do the work for you. So it's are you at a point where you're willing to do the work now that you got the message and that's, nobody wants to hear that.

It's just like exercise, training, attrition. Exactly. It's like I often joked that you could be Oprah Winfrey. You could have someone, you could hire a coach that could show up at your door every day. Professional chef make all your food, you could make it as easy as possible, but at the end of the day, she still has to eat the food.

She still has to lift the weight. It's no one's ever gonna be able to do that. That for you, and some people are just. They want a cool message, but I don't know if they're ready to do any of the work then at that point. Yeah.

[00:41:00] **Akshay Nanavati:** And I think that's what makes it so hard too, is that not only doing the work, but you don't do the work once and you're magically solved to the point about coming back to that.

I story, right? It's I've done a lot of hard shit, like a lot of hard endurance work, but it doesn't mean that the next time I don't do it that hard. Moment's not gonna show up. You don't do the work once and magically, you've now solved life, right? like you, your mind is still gonna take you to new places.

You're still gonna have to battle it. You're still gonna have to go through those struggles. And I was having a conversation with my mom about this the other day that, you'll have one day where you've conquered sort of one thing you were struggling with. And then it shows up again and you're like, damnit.

I thought I had this figured out, and it's not that's not how it works. There's always something. And that relentlessness of it. Is I think where some people struggle, but, and that's the key is like the very essence of what I do in Fearvana is like the core mantra is suffer.

Once you develop a positive relationship to suffering, to struggle to that work, it's the most important skill to master because if you can suffer if you can suffer with a smile, you'll be able to handle life. Not only when it punches you in your face, but when you're doing the conscious work for your own craft to attain mastery and growth at that craft, whatever it may be, it's going to be hard, right?

So if you can fall in love with that process, no matter how hard it is you will get whatever it is you want. Ultimately, why do we do anything right? You can put it under the umbrella of happiness, fulfillment, inner peace, whatever terminology you want to use. The ability to suffer well will lead you there.

And that's about falling in love with that work. And look, I'm not perfect at it either. And I wanna make that very clear. There are days when it's hard, man, and it sucks. And you just I wish this was easy. And then you have to fight that again. And it's the human experience, but it's like constantly battling that and embracing that process.

[00:42:35] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. One of the terms I like is just the violent consistency of doing the next thing. And that's just never consistency. It's just never gonna stop. You hit whatever goal you're gonna wanna do the next thing or go in a different direction. And even with not so much now with clients, but 10 years ago with clients, I would always kind of screen them a lot more for language.

And it would always be interesting to say, okay you came to me, but this goal, let's say you put in six months of work, you magically hit that goal. What do you wanna do next? And my little weed out question was if they couldn't think of anything next, I was like, ah, because they put this thing up on a pedestal and once they hit it, they think, once I did the 4 0 5, my life is magically gonna work or I make a million dollars or I lose 10 pounds or whatever.

Yeah. And then you talk to people who have done those things and they're like, yeah, it was cool. I wanted to do it. It was great. But no, I wanna do this next thing, right? Yeah. I think we glamorize our own goals in our head and think that other people will be impressed by it. And most of the time they just, they don't care and that's totally fine.

But I think realizing that it's something that you wanna do intrinsically just because you want to do it. That's good enough. Like you're good then.

[00:43:45] **Akshay Nanavati:** And to your point, whenever you get there, wherever the, there is, I've lost the 10 pounds, the million dollars, there'll be new problems. One of my launches is progress is not the elimination of problems.

Progress is the creation of new problems, better problems. Yeah, exactly. You wanna have up level your problems, when you are making \$0 at a startup, you have problems when you're making a hundred million dollars, you have problems. They're just different. So I think, but I think, yeah, to your point, we live in a culture that frames that I'll be happy when I get there.

Yeah. And if you live with that mentality, I love that weed out question. You're setting yourself up for misery because you're gonna get there and being like, oh shit, something's still up. There's still a new problem. And then you're just constantly on this hamster wheel of misery, instead of just embracing the constant like evolution.

Because if you fall in love with the problems on the other side of every problem is a new solution is a new awakening is a new opportunity, right? So I'm looking for the next problem to solve because I know it will lead me to a next stage of my growth and that journey. Is the, is like one of my favorite quotes is from Vince Lombardi, who said, I firmly believe any man's finest hour.

The greatest fulfillment to all he holds dear is that moment when he has worked his heart out in good cause and lies, exhausted on the field of battle.

[00:44:52] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. I like that. Yeah. Yeah. And what's, we see this a lot in fitness, especially with body comp, but I'm in this like working with clients early on that, oh man, if I just lose, the 25 pounds, I'm gonna be happy and no, like when they hit their goal and they weren't happy at all, and so one of my little phrases I tell people is you can't hate yourself lean, right? If you, there, there's, we've convoluted both issues together. It's if you wanna feel better about yourself and you have some things you need to work with, then by all means, go to a psychologist, go something down that path.

If you wanna get leaner or it's a performance goal, then work with someone in that direction. And there's a huge amount of crossover. But I think a lot of people are like I was just 20 pounds leaner. I'd be happier. Eh, probably not like just work on being happier now and still work on your other goal.

Exactly. That's fine. But they're a little bit different. I think we've thrown 'em all into one big mess. yeah,

[00:45:45] **Akshay Nanavati:** I totally agree. I understand what you mean. So what

[00:45:48] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** are some ways that we can suffer better for like someone who's listening to this? Or okay. You've almost convinced me that I should do some harder stuff, but what would be some of your tips to suffer?

[00:45:59] **Akshay Nanavati:** I think the first step I would say is don't demonize the the emotion you're experiencing. So what I mean by that is when we hear words, like fear, stress, anxiety, nobody thinks of these as positive words. Yeah. And we think of them as negative. And that to me is the very basis of the foundation with the, of the problem that we are dealing with is our negative relationship.

And I'll give you an example. I was working with the client ones, who he was flying to Iceland to go on a vacation on his own, nothing extreme, just a nice vacation Iceland, but he was scared. And he, was working with me. So he heard about all the crazy things I was doing. and he was like what's wrong with me?

Why am I scared going to Iceland alone when climb mountains and all that kind of things. But the thing is, my brain has just developed different references over time. I wasn't always like this. I used to be scared of Ferris wheels when I was a kid, not even like a roller coaster, a Ferris wheel scared me.

So I've developed over time. This, my brain has different references that now a solo trip to Iceland won't scare me. I have to push that edge a little further to, to warrant that emotion. So his problem wasn't the fear. It was, he was judging himself for the fear. So that step one is let go of the judgment.

You're gonna see a ton of people say, and you see this in the biggest names in personal development, be fearless. They'll talk about overcoming anxiety, overcoming stress. We, the word stress is so demonized, right? Eliminated. Now there is such a thing as too much stress. It's the duality again, with stress, you gotta balance it with recovery and so on and so forth.

Stress in enough itself is not the enemy. So when you accept that, okay, I'm feeling scared. I sh I don't need to beat myself up for this fear. Like I get scared sometimes sitting in a, I live in a very safe place in Scottsdale in Arizona. And

sometimes I'll be sitting in the room in my house alone and suddenly fear will show up.

Now that's crazy. Considering the things that I do, I've done very intense things, but I don't. The thing is I don't care when fear shows up, I'm more scared of going on a date than I am of than a standing in a polar storm in Antarctica. Literally that's I, my friends will always laugh about it.

They're like, dude, you do the most insane things. But texting a girl on a dating app terrifies, you like anxiety in the stomach. But the thing is now I'm at a point where I don't judge that fear. I don't care that it's there. I don't have to be embarrassed to admit it. It's there. Cool. You do you, right?

As if it's a separate entity, once we accept that it's entity, then you start practicing. Okay. This thing is there, but this is not who I. This is a big mistake we all do is we identify with the emotion. I like people say I am depressed. I have depression. And it becomes their very self identity.

Instead of saying, look, my brain's going through this from state from a time to time, but I am not my brain. My brain is not me. So this is one of my core mantras that I say a lot is you are not your thoughts. You're not your feelings. You're not your experiences. You are the thinker of your thoughts, the feeler of your feelings and the experiencer of your experiences.

I like that. There's a space between what is and who you choose to be outside of what is. So once you accept this fear is here. This pain is here. Okay, but this is not me. I don't have to define myself with this. Got it. Now I can create a bit of space, right? And neuroscience is actually shown that simply by labeling the emotion, it actually reduces activity, the emotional parts of your brain.

It increases activity and the part of your brain related focus and awareness. So you're essentially separating yourself from that emotion, right? I'm feeling fear, but this is not who I am. Got it. What do I do with this now? Now you actually have to put it just to step into the arena. As I said, I was scared of Ferris wheels.

Today. I go into polar in, Antarctica. That didn't happen overnight. I worked that ladder of risk one inch at a time. So step into it a little bit like ultimately, and this is the key part, nothing. I say nothing you say no book is ever going to take away from the fact that you're going to have to step into the discomfort like, and then, and that, but I think sometimes we think, if I hear this podcast or read this book, then it'll be good.

I'll be gold. And that's not we talked about this, right? You're gonna have to, at some point, step into the arena, whatever your arena may be. Once. And so these previous tools are just to help you navigate the emotions of it. Then you gotta step into the battlefield and work your way up, right?

If we use running as an analogy, you're not gonna run an ultra marathon. Your first thing, maybe go for a one K, maybe go for a two K five, whatever it may be, but push a little bit into the point where you want to be at a point where one part of you wants to quit. And the other wants to fight. Like you want to feel that war with yourself when you feel that you're in the right space, you're in the moment, and doing it incrementally will allow you to consciously navigate that instead of just surrendering to it.

Okay. I'm there. Now, this really sucks. I don't want to be here, but now I know this is what I was actually striving for. This is what it's about. Once you do that, and then you go to battle with yourself once and you've come back from that battle. What's really important is also how you talk to yourself.

After what we often miss out on doing is celebrating and acknowledging ourselves for the win. So confidence happens, not just there's, confidence is doing the hard thing and surviving it, but the other part of developing confidence is actually acknowledging you did that thing. How you talk to yourself.

Like I used to be a point in my life when I would run 10 miles and just be pissed off. I didn't run 12. I would run 15 and be pissed off. I didn't run 20. That's a miserable way to live. And you're constantly pissed off at yourself and you're not actually growing from it. So now I celebrate the victory.

So when you've put down the hard thing, awesome, I'm celebrating this victory and this is not participation trophy. You're not like, you're not like jumping for joy over, over the top. Like I ran a mile, you're just at least pausing to acknowledge it. Even if it's just a quick pause, then you move on to the next fight.

So after every run now, like I might run three mile three, three hours. And if there'll be a small part of me still thinking, should I have gone four? And then, but I'll be like, you went three hours. Tomorrow, you'll get, so I'll at least pause for, even if it's a minute, but it's an intrinsic pause.

It's an intrinsic reward. I'm literally, you can think of it. Like the way I think of it is I'm consciously injecting or increasing dopamine in my brain. Like I'm

telling my brain to feel good. Like it's on the, a good analogy I like to give is when you're training a dog, you give a dog a treat when he does the right behavior, right?

If I go pee outside, here's a treat. Treat your brain the same way with an intrinsic treat. Nice job. Same thing, dogs love it. You did a good job boiling, wagging their tail and all that kinda stuff. Treat your brain the same way. Okay. Nice job. You did this thing. So now you're teaching your brain.

This is the right behavior. Then you keep stacking the wins and you keep stacking the wins and it starts building you up into someone better, someone stronger, someone you fall more in love with and over time you'll continue pursuing that. And then the key is also pursuing whatever your worthy struggle is.

People hear me, it's I repeatedly stress. I'm not saying everybody's gotta go ski across Antarctica or go into a polar storm to find, enlightenment or even 10 days of darkness to find your peace or your path, whatever your worthy struggle is. It could be playing chess, writing movies playing the guitar, any worthy any path is going to have hard moments.

So these are just some strategies to get you on your path, but do it on your worthy struggle. Because if it's your worthy struggle, you will have that fuel to, to drive you. I love it because this is my path. And my battle. If you told me to do this, like for chess, I would hate it. I'd be miserable.

Like I don't care, whatever the thing may be, because that's not my worthy struggle. So you gotta pursue these lanes and pursue the suffering, the pathway of struggle on your mission, on your path, whatever it may be and keep doing it. And you'll, that's what life is, that's, the life is ultimately like the core essence of Fearvana is helping people develop a positive relationship to suffering so they can find live and love their worthy struggle.

That's a life, right? Find live and love your path. I call it a worthy struggle because it will be a struggle, but it's your worthy one, and also very consciously, I don't use the word passion. Like I think passion is good for what you have. I have great passion for my craft, but sometimes when you say follow your passion, especially when I speak to younger kids, it conveys this notion.

If I follow my passion, everything will be sunshine and rainbow and every day will be beautiful. And we know it's not like that, right? Half passion for your

craft, but that's why I term it worthy struggle and words have power, right? The words you use help shape your experience of life in your relationship to reality.

That's why I used that word specifically. I

[00:53:32] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** love that and I've even them in the past, probably three to four years changed how I do feedback for clients. So I look at what their expectation is, and I want them at the end to be more intrinsically motivated and not. Necessarily to just impress me. And that may be independent sometimes of performance, even though they're literally paying me for performance.

So a friend of ours, she was over here. It was probably a year ago and she was asking me, she's how do you give feedback on clients? If it's online how soon should you do it? Should it be within the same day, the same hour? I looked at her and I'm like, if you were my client, I would actually wait three days before I would tell you anything.

And she just looked horrified and I'm like, exactly. Cuz you would do it to impress me. I want you to do it. And then that's some handholding and there's a process with that. I get it. Yeah. But eventually I want you to do it because youth believe it's the thing to do. Yeah. So sometimes I'll even just put on their like they'll hit a PR and I'm like, Hey congrats, you did the thing, like independent of their performance.

Like you showed up, did the thing, you put your butt in the seat, you did the thing because. That's the skillset you're gonna be able to transfer like exactly throughout your life, day in

[00:54:45] **Akshay Nanavati:** and day out. Yeah. And Dr. Carol Dweck talks about that in mindset, right? Yes. The growth mindset is cultivated by praising effort, not not the result.

So I love that celebrating that you did the thing, to your point also about For pleasing other people. I think, we often say don't care what other people think and I get it, but human beings were also wired to care what other people think. Yes. So I think that's another thing where instead of trying to fight what is, accept what is and use it, like not looking like a shit bag in front of somebody else can be a huge motivator to drive you.

Now. I'm not saying that's gonna be your only motivator, right? Like people have asked me, would you ski cross Antarctica? Have nobody knew.

Absolutely. Would a hundred percent have thought about it. I'm conscious. So it shouldn't be your only motivator. But once in a while, it can be a powerful tool to get you through that next moment on the pain cave, like I'll like, let's say what a post on social media that I'm gonna do this thing.

And I'm like about to quit or something. How will I announce this? I'll look like a piece of shit to the world. That can be a useful tool in that moment of a pain cave. And this is again where it comes to the there's many different weapons to fight those battles. This is just one that you can consciously activate.

[00:55:47] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. And the part about identity I think is huge because I remember. Several years ago doing front squats, just in my garage gym. And my goal was to relearn how to front squat. Cause I had a bunch of hip pain and a bunch of stuff going on. And I remember I was just doing 95 pounds for reps, went up to one 15 and eh, my hip felt a little weird.

And I remember this little voice in my head being like, what are you doing? You don't even have a 45 pound plate on each side. This is horrible. What's going on? And I'm like, what? This makes no sense. Like no one gives a shit. What I front squat. I'm not doing this as a professional. No one even knows I'm doing this right now.

Yeah. But there's that little, that kind of ego part of your brain. That's and this wasn't even the goal. It wasn't a one hour attempt or anything like that. Yeah. And I realized that. It was more or less. My identity was of pushing me back in that direction. Yeah. And so even with clients, like just looking at how they, they phrase stuff, so I may point 'em out and say, okay, you're not someone who is, and you're someone who does front squats or, whatever the thing is like exactly what you were saying.

Yeah. So they can not have their identity. So wrapped up into the thing that they're doing. Cause it's very hard to change course at that point then too, if something comes

[00:57:02] **Akshay Nanavati:** up exactly. And when you start to recognize how malleable the identity is, you start to release the attachment to it. And a lot of method actors talk about this.

They recognize how malleable their own self is and you can ultimately, and there's there. It's there's. It can be a double edged sword because it can freak you out when you realize everything you think you know about reality. And the self is just construct that is inherently real, but I think it's a benefit if you recognize

that it can actually be then reconstructed, and that's the value, one of the things to your point about those zoomed voices in the head.

When I was in the darkness, I started giving names and characters to all the different voices. And which was a I never thought about this tool, the darkness, and it was a game changing tool that I continue to practice and apply this day. For example, anytime I have a voice saying this is too hard for you, you're weak or anything like that.

Like anything countering my own strength. I called it Banin I love the dark night series. So ban is the is the counter to, to my strength. Anytime I have a voice about that ego, what will this look like to other people? I call it Xerxes from Creon, so I had these characters and by doing this, it was a really valuable exercise because it allowed me to disidentify from that thought as me and recognize it as a different, almost like you and me are having a conversation.

I'm having a very, a conversation with this other character in my head, and I am someone different. And by doing that, I could disidentify from that voice and ultimately choose who I wanna be outside of it, yeah. It was a pretty cool practice that I started incorporating in the darkness. And I've continued to apply since

[00:58:25] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** I think there isn't there a whole branch of psychology that does that has people identify the different thoughts. They have to depersonalize them and file 'em in different parts of the brain. But I could be wrong on that. Perhaps.

[00:58:36] **Akshay Nanavati:** I, one of my friends was sharing this with, he was mentioning that movie there's that Disney movie Inside out the Pixar movie. Oh yeah.

Yeah. where it's actually a very well done movie. I saw just outta curiosity. And it was like, it has the, there, the characters are emotions, right? There's guilt, there's anger. And I read about it that even they actually studied neuroscience to to create that. And it's very well done because it also doesn't demonize the neg the quote, unquote negative emotions, which I think a lot of people do.

And it look, guilt has its place. Sadness has its place. They're not bad emotions. They're just emotions, so you can, to your point, you can file characters, you can name emotions, however you wanna do it. For me, I'm not naming the emotions specifically because those are very fluid and they're crazy.

So I'm naming it more in terms of voice that has a, has its own persona to it, and that persona is a different identity than me than the highest version of me that I want to be.

[00:59:25] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. And I also like what you're saying about just taking an incremental pathway to build up to whatever it is, because especially now it's very easy to look at.

I always think of like X games, athletes, and people do crazy. Like one of the guys really like is Travis Stra, right? First person, I think never do a back flip on a motorcycle and you see them do crazy stuff and you see them pull off the event that people thought was, impossible.

What you don't see is all the preparation and the intermediate steps, the phone pith built in his backyard, like how much time and thought and yeah, preparation went into it. It looks crazy, but you talk to them, they're like, yeah, I'm a little apprehensive about it, but it wasn't a stupid thing they were doing.

Like they had incrementally raised it up so high over, months to sometimes years to, to the outsider the thing looks crazy. And a lot of times it is like the first time it's ever been done, what, whatever it is. But I think. We miss all those incremental steps and all the thought and preparation and everything that went into it ahead of time.

[01:00:27] **Akshay Nanavati:** Yeah. That relentless work. And that's where you like, that's where again, that's where the work lies. That's where everything lies. It's in that just day to day to day to day. But falling in love with that process is how you can sustain it. Bringing yourself back into the presence of it.

Cuz if you let your mind, it's like running an ultra. If you're running on the first hour and thinking about hour 24, you're gonna keep fine. You're not gonna, if I think on day 110 and I'm on day one in Antarctica, there's no way my mind's gonna break. So you gotta bring it back that this is the thing right here, and you're gonna have to keep bringing it back.

Like I had moments in the darkness where, especially in the last day where I missed time, like in my mind, I thought it was like ready to the documentary crew was gonna come let me out. And I thought it was gonna happen like around now. And then like looking back, I realized that I was way off. What I thought was actually early morning when they were supposed to come get me was actually night.

And so in my mind, I kept thinking, why aren't they coming? Why are they coming? Then I'd have to navigate that. Okay. Bring it back to the present. They'll come. When they come, who cares? And I'll be present for maybe an hour, however long. I don't have a sense of time. And then it would show up again.

So the thing is you have to keep bringing it back. This is also why meditation. When people think with meditation, your goal is to silence the mind. And if you don't, you're failing at it. That's not it. The goal should be bringing your back your mind back to silence because you, nobody, even the greatest monk is gonna have a silent mind forever, right?

Like the monk you're gonna, you're gonna have silence. Then it'll chit chatter and wander, bring it back, chit chatter, wander, bring it back. And that's the goal. You're training yourself to bring it back into the noun in that presence. And that's how you stay into the relentless grind that it takes to not just attain mastery at your craft, but even live a more blissful and happy life.

[01:01:59] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. I like that about meditation. I think it's, you're actually training the transit. You're training the transition to realize in the awareness to go, oh, whoop. Yep. I want out that direction. That's okay. I'm not gonna, have any judgment. I'm just gonna come back to exactly the present. We did a mindset retreat with a buddy of mine, Dr.

Ben house. It's his dad is is a Zen priest, Mr. Kim. And so we're all excited. The first time we did this probably four years ago and we get there and I purposely didn't wanna know anything about it ahead of time. Cause I didn't wanna bias myself in any direction. I'm like, we're already gonna be there for two and a half days.

And so we get there and he is okay, so here's what you do. You sit in this position, you have a nice soft gaze there. And if any thoughts come into your mind, you just acknowledge him and then let him go. Okay, what else? He goes, that's it now practice? And I'm like, that's it? He's that's it?

Yeah. That's, he's that's basically it he's and how long do we practice for he's rest of your life,

[01:02:54] **Akshay Nanavati:** I love that. You're like, oh, OK. OK. that's awesome. Yep. yeah. Awesome. Like anything, the more you do it, but like on day nine and the darkness, I would immediately get into meditation and have stillness, and eventually would wander, but for a long time it was pretty still.

So that anything you get better at it, the more you do it.

[01:03:13] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. And I would imagine you just have so many reps built upon reps in that environment also. So it's almost like you're in a weird way. You're definitely pushing yourself, but yet you're trying to. R the data a little bit in your favor by removing other stimulus at the

[01:03:30] **Akshay Nanavati:** same time.

Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah.

[01:03:34] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Awesome. And then last question. Do you have any updates on when potentially you're doing the Antarctica trip? I know you said that off camera. We had a little bit of a delay with some stuff with the finger and other things going

[01:03:46] **Akshay Nanavati:** on. Yeah. I was supposed to go to Antarctica for a different trip this year.

I was supposed to do a 50 day solo trip this year. That's right. This was a, Daunting in its own, right? 50 days along it was actually a training trip for the bigger one. But because if my frost bin finger, I lost my finger to frostbite in Antarctica. I was on an expedition last year in Antarctica, and I got frostbite on actually three fingers, but these two are the worst.

This one I obviously lost my right ring finger here. Lost the tip. So because the frost bit and wound is still very fresh. I didn't get the permit to go back to Antarctica which I, completely respect and understand the decision that was made there. So now I'm gonna be doing a long solo trip in Norway in February, which gives me a little bit more time to heal, but I also need a long solo trip under my belt in order to not just have that practice mentally, physically, spiritually, but also to get the permit, to do the full crossing, which will then be next year.

So that's the game plan is to do a long solo trip in Norway. And then next November, it's like just over a year. To nice. And it the fear lives within me constantly, there is a constant constant anxiety, constant fear, constant. Like this gawing itch that cannot be scratched until I reach that destination.

And it's a hell of a prospect. It's gonna be one hell of a journey. And I don't know if I'll make it, but I'm gonna give my all to, to to making it happen.

[01:05:01] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah, that's awesome. And so where can people find more about the book and all your information? How can they support you? Find out more about all the stuff you got going on.

[01:05:10] **Akshay Nanavati:** Thank you for asking. You can find me on fearvana.com. . I'm also on Instagram at fearvana. And the book is available on Amazon, in Kindle, paperback, and audible, all the profits from the book go to charity. We've supported, survivors as ex trafficking to building schools, to former child soldiers, many different groups and also on fearvana.com

we were talking about strategies to navigate the pain cave. I have a thing on there, which is I just remembered 25 different strategies to navigate the pain cave. So that's all on there. And it's just a collection of life experience, not research as well, but literally everyone that I've put to use over different battles that I've faced mentally, physically, and spiritually.

So hopefully that might be helpful as well.

[01:05:49] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Cool. Awesome. Yeah, I would highly encourage people to pick up the book and check out all your stuff. And your Instagram is also very motivating too. It's not just rah. Look at me what I'm doing. It's very motivational and very purposeful, which I think is really.

Really nice. And it's thank you. People can take away lessons from it that they can apply to their life, even if they're not doing something that crazy. And yeah, it is also cool to see all the crazy stuff and see what's

[01:06:16] **Akshay Nanavati:** possible too. absolutely. I think it expands our references, right? Like it's the four minute mile kind of thing when, and expands your references for what you can do, cuz if one person can do it, we all can't.

So

[01:06:26] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** yeah, I thought of that. I'm like sitting in cold water, it's like 45 degrees. I'm like, huh? Other crazy guys out there getting ready to go across Antarctica, this and that part.

[01:06:36] **Akshay Nanavati:** I'm glad. I'm glad I was able to help in that moment. yeah, those references are invaluable. That's why I study from people who are constantly doing hard things and it's oh wait, think about that moment.

Now it can push me one step further.

[01:06:48] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. Awesome. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it. Thank you my friend.

[01:06:52] **Akshay Nanavati:** Thank you so much for having me. It's been a pleasure.

[01:06:53] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. Thank you.

Thank you so much to Akshay for coming on to the podcast today. Really appreciate his time. I would highly recommend you check out his book. FearVana it's really good. It's very well done. He's got a lot of great science, personal experience practical knowledge in there.

And as you said on the podcast it's going to a good cause he donates all the profits of the book to different organizations. Make sure to check him out on Instagram and keep tabs on what he's doing next. Really appreciate him sharing everything today. And as I mentioned, the physiologic flexibility certification is open right now.

If you wanna learn about what are some of the benefits to doing hard things, such as cold water, immersion sauna, maybe you're gonna torture yourself by doing running or on the concept. Two row. Even to extremes such as when might be a good time to do a ketogenic diet. When should you carb load, are there different supplements that can help with that?

What about all the different breathing techniques? When should I be doing certain types of techniques? What is the basis in physiology for them? So we break down the idea of training your body's four pillars of homeostatic regulators. What each one of those look like and based on the current research, So we go really deep into the research on say cold water, immersion heat, and many others.

And then at the end, I give you 40 explicit action items so that you know what to do with each one of those areas. So a lot of times in certifications, I think that's an area that gets lost. You're either missing the context or the actual science or you're not really sure what to do with that inform.

So I wanted to have all three of those parts and similar how I designed the flex diet certification,

which

[01:08:46] **Dr Mike T Nelson:** is the level one and the phys flex cert, which you can think of as a level two, that includes the context, the big picture, why training homeostatic regulators is a good idea. And that's an evolving process.

And then the four interventions based on lots of great science and then the explicit action items and how to set them up for yourself, or if you're training other clients. So go to physiologicflexibility.com for all the information. It is open now through midnight on September 12th, 2022. Thank you so much for listening greatly.

Appreciate it. Thank you Akshay for all your time, make sure to check out his stuff too. And if you find someone who could. Helped with this podcast please send it along to them and any, and all reviews are greatly welcomed. Thank you so much. Have a wonderful day. We'll talk to you next week.