



# THE FAT SUMMIT

*Separating Fat From Fiction*

## **Transcript:**

**Interview with Pedram Shojai**  
[well.org](http://well.org)

**Interview by Mark Hyman, MD**  
[drhyman.com](http://drhyman.com)

**Dr. Hyman:** Hi everybody. I'm here at The Fat Summit. Welcome again to another part of our Fat Summit. I'm here with my good friend, Pedram Shojai, who's an amazing guy, who's written a new book which is coming out soon called 'The Urban Monk.'. Which I want to read, because actually I struggle with the same things everybody else struggles with. Which is, how do you live a life with some balance? How do you live a life that's nourishing? How do you live a life where you can do the things you know are good for you, like eating well, exercising, sleeping well, all the things that we know make us feel good, and be productive, and happy, and thrive, with all the stuff we have to deal with every day? And all the pressures and stresses and... You've been a guiding light for me in helping to connect to ancient principles of wisdom. Your book, 'Rise and Shine' is a phenomenal book. And I mean, 'Urban Monk.' I just can't tell you how excited I'm to read that because I feel like I'm a monk in hiding. But it's actually how I became into medicine, was actually studying Buddhism and understanding the healing nature of practices that allow you to be awake, right? So it's all about connecting and being awake. So whether it's food that helps to be awake, or whether it's lifestyle practices or a meaning purpose, all those things are connected.

And you've done so much, Pedram. You've done so much to bring light and wisdom. You're a traditional Chinese practitioner. You've started something called Well.org. You're the editor of BeMore Magazine. You've written the 'Rise and Shine' book. You're producing some movies, and I've been in some of them. Origins, Vitality. And you're the co-host and creator of this amazing podcast which I want everybody to check out called Health Bridge, which is one of the top podcasts on iTunes. And you do it with a good friend of ours. Great doctor, Sara Gottfried is awesome. And I know you're doing some new TV shows, and you're up to so much great stuff. And I call you one of the light workers. You bring in light and wisdom and energy of how to live well into the world. And I'm just thrilled to have you as part of The Fat Summit. Because it's not just about what we're eating, it's like how we live, and how we manage our lives, and manage ourselves, and connect to thriving which is really what we all want.

So I want to hear a little bit about your path because I know it's a little different, interesting. And I almost went down that path. I actually studied Chinese in college, studied the theoretical foundations of Chinese medicine. And was going to go to China. I was fluent in Chinese and like, I chickened out. I was like, "I'm not going to a fascist country for my 20s," and like, being in a weird place. And thank God because I would have been in mercury poisoning probably even worse than I was. And I ended up going to medical school. But I want to hear about your journey, and how you got into all this, the Chinese medicine, and how these principles are guiding you.

**Pedram:** Sure, absolutely. Well first, it's an honor to be here. This is great. Always great to see you, Mark. This is fun because these conversations really are where we all need to kind of circle around to understand how to help ourselves in a really challenging world, right? Things are spinning, bolts are flying. And it's hard. We just don't have time to take care of ourselves, let alone get home and feed the kids right. So this is the world you and I stepped into. And we have a very similar background in recognizing the system and how it was broken. And then we kind of pivoted and went in slightly different directions. I was pre-med at UCLA. And I was interning, I was working really hard.

**Dr. Hyman:** See, I was pre-Buddhist. I was the Buddhist scholar. You were the pre-med student. We kind of like, crossed.

**Pedram:** We switched up, exactly. And it's just weird how the universe guides us, right? I was fast tracking my way into going to medical school. I was interning with some prominent docs and I just wasn't happy with what I was seeing in the hospital model. And I was looking down the barrel of living my attending's life. And I said, "God, this is, there is something missing here." And then I had found a Tai-Chi and Kung-Fu through just kind of sideline stuff that I was interested in. And I was fortunate enough to find a Daoist Kung Fu master who took under his wing, and basically showed me what's up in my 20s. And no, I didn't go to China, because all the good guys left China. They were either murdered and just a couple of them go out. And the Cultural Revolution wasn't pretty. And a lot of the stuff that's happening in China right now, like the...people are like, "Oh I went to the Shaolin Temple." That's kind of like Chinese Disney Land. That's not the way the Buddhist temple of Shaolin was. And so you had to find the right people to study with here.

I was fortunate enough to do so. And it changed my stars because I was given the opportunity to study with some of these individuals. And then it just made sense, because the martial art, the theoretical arts and the practice of the Chinese form of medicine really went hand in hand with herbalism and culinary arts. And it was too good. And so I said, "Alright. This is what I'm doing."

**Dr. Hyman:** Right. It's so interesting when you talk about the Chinese medicine, because, in China, the word for take your medicine is actually chi yao. Which means eat your medicine. So, and in China, they have a very rich tapestry of understanding the different medicinal properties of foods. You go to a meal and it's like actually being in a drug store. And I wrote this article once after I had this meal in Honk Kong called, food is pharmacology. Because everything in the meal had some medicinal property. Whether it was the ginkgo nuts, or whether it was the fish that I ate, whatever it was had some special property.

And they are very in tune with that, and how to use food as a healing tool because we don't do that in conventional medicine. We don't even think foods connected, except makes you gain weight if you eat too much. But other than that, there's no relationship to food. So how did that play a role in your thinking about how to work with people?

**Pedram:** There's a couple of restaurants in Los Angeles when I was in the throes of all this that changed my stars. And there was a Chinese doctor and an Ayurvedic doctor in two different restaurants. And you'd go in there and basically he'd come out and say, "How do you feel?" You're like, "What?" He's like, "Well, how you feel?" and...

**Dr. Hyman:** Not what you want to order, but how do you feel, right?

**Pedram:** Yeah. And so he'd talk to you for a minute and then you'd go, "You know I get a little snuffle. I'm tired. I'm this I'm that." And he'd go like, "Alright I got you." And he'd back and whip you up some medicine. And it was delicious, and it was nutritious, and it did it. But it really made me stop and look at what just happened and say, "Wait, what you are doing? Like, I want to know that." And so he was working as a physician and feeding his patrons in a way that was just earth shattering to my little, young brain who was trying look at macronutrients and basically, such a primitive degree of understanding of food when I was going through pre-med. And thank God for the IFM and some of the stuff that you guys are doing. But there's just very little education along those lines. It's tough. We don't even go there and it's...

**Dr. Hyman:** So the doctor should really be the chef, right?

**Pedram:** Yeah. Or at least work with one and understand and appreciate where that idea comes from so that we can have a much more holistic view of medicine, and food as medicine, and lifestyle as medicine. Because what you do every day really will dictate how your body is going to be able to cope with the stress, and deal with the toxins, and all the stuff that we have to deal with on the clinical side, once people broke it.

**Dr. Hyman:** Yeah. So going down into that path of how we take care of ourselves, you wrote this book called 'The Urban Monk'. And of course, the title is awesome. It makes me want to read it. And second, it's like about your journey of how you actually in your own life have come to understand how to create this balance. And so you never get there. It's like, if you're on a tightrope, you're never balanced. You're always getting in balance. And there's always a dance, right? So how did you come up with this concept and what did it teach you?

And what do you have to share with us about what you learned? And what is an urban monk?

**Pedram:** Well, an urban monk is someone who understands that they've got to stop running for the hills. What happened was I had the distinct luxury of being able to be a monk for four years and studying. And then going to the Himalayas and studying with different masters, Dalai Lama, Karmapa Lama, I did the tour, right? And I came back to Los Angeles, California, started a medical group, had every kind of doctor in three offices doing traditional healthcare. From pain management, psychiatry, all of it. And then I'm trying to teach what I had learned and take people on the journey that I had been on in busy Los Angeles lives. And I realized there is no way, right? For me, it was very luxurious to be able to go up and sit on my butt, and meditate for hours, and do my cultivation and all that. But a father who's running a business, and has to get home and make it to their kids birthday, a mother who misses yoga because her kid's soccer practice went late, and all the things that actually happen in reality down here are the lives that I was changed...

**Dr. Hyman:** Yeah, I also missed yoga, because I've got meetings. It's very frustrating.

**Pedram:** That's it. But see, then we feel guilty about missing yoga.

**Dr. Hyman:** Or this traffic. I've been a situation where I was rushing to get to yoga, and there was traffic, and I missed it. And it's like you're stressed out, rushing to go relax.

**Pedram:** Yeah, I got to tell you. When I was in college, I was late to a Tai-Chi class. And I was banging through stop signs and trying to...just racing to get to this Tai-chi class. And I almost hit a guy. And I stopped. I pulled over. I went, sat down and I looked at a park, and got the biggest Tai-Chi lesson of my life. That it's not about the class, it's about being in Tai-chi. I was in such a hurry to slow down that I had missed what Tai-Chi was about, right? And so these are the things that over 15, 20 years of clinical practice I realized. There's a fundamental distinction between ascetics and householders. And I grew up as an ascetic. As a monk, was you run out to the world, you go off, you contemplate God, you're enabled, you do your thing and that's your life. But householders live in the world and have responsibilities. And if you have so much as a rent, or a mortgage, or a car payment, or a cell phone bill, you've got to touch money, you got to deal with money. So you got to get okay with how you interact in the world. And most householders, who have tried to adopt ascetic principles, feel guilty about missing yoga, learn meditation but never do it and kick themselves over it.

We punish ourselves for not being able to live this other lifestyle that is completely unattainable for someone who's got responsibilities. So 'The Urban Monk' is about, look. The car in front of me is texting, and they are slowing down my day. Instead of getting pissed off about that, I'm going to take this as an opportunity to take a couple of breaths. The universe just gave me time to relax. I'm going to take my meditation with me. I'm going to understand that my life is my yoga, and this is how I operate. Because any other principle is wondering when the weekend is coming around, running off to Kripalu or Asselin or somewhere, thinking that's going to fix you. And so we're constantly thinking some sort of spiritual retreat or detox is going to change our lives. And it's not. It's our burden. It's how we live our lives, and how we can be fundamentally balanced here and now, and not think that you can offset the payment of this thing and catch up on some stress relief later. Later, if you think your tomorrow is going to look anything different than your today, you're in trouble. And so how can today be better?

**Dr. Hyman:** So it's not like getting to yoga, its being in yoga, right?

**Pedram:** That's it.

**Dr. Hyman:** Being in, that's right? And it's like you go to yoga to get in a state to be in your life. But you're saying you can actually manifest that who, the way you'll be in your life. It's interesting, but it's skipping a step which most of us think we need, which is one of the practices that actually help us get to where we want to be. But you're saying that your actual life can be the practice. It's how you are in every communication. It's how you wake up in the morning. It's how you drive. It's how you eat. It's how you be connected to the people around you. It's all those things that are in real time that are actually the playground for you to be connected with who you are, right?

**Pedram:** That's it. And its two-prong, because then you say, "Okay well, I could do that but I'm not...."

**Dr. Hyman:** Don't I still get to go to yoga, no, because I want to go to yoga. Don't I get to go to yoga?

**Pedram:** Well, yoga is the cherry on top. If you get to go to yoga and yoga helps set-up the situation where you'll have the discipline to catch that. It's like flossing. If you go to a dentist and he says, "Hey you got decay all over your mouth. And we got to do all sorts of invasive stuff." Then you're like, "Oh I should start flossing." It's a little late, right? But if you flossed as you went, if

you had the spiritual hygiene, the mental psychological hygiene to just constantly be scanning to be like, "Hey what I'm I doing? Wow, I'm getting really revved up. What did Betty say that made me so angry? Like, what's happening?" And then we'll carry the stuff all day and then freak out. And then say, "Oh I need yoga," like I need a chill pill or a Quaalude. That's not what yoga is. That's not what meditation is. And so we've taken this very...

**Dr. Hyman:** So we need mental floss basically, right?

**Pedram:** Yeah, yeah. One of the metaphors that might be helpful here is if you imagined your mind as a desktop and you had 30 windows open and you're like, "Hey, you know my computer is kind of working slow and my Skype is hanging up," or whatever, oh, this is stress. And then you're going to double click meditation or double click yoga. And then you do some stuff and you feel a little better. Then you close it, you go back to 30 open windows, that's our life. We are as, I put it to you, that meditation and yoga should be the operating system that is constantly scanning saying, hey dude. You got 30 open windows. Why don't you save, close, save, close, save, close? Let's work on this one window. Let's stay focused on it. Let's get it done. Let's close it. Let's go stretch. Let's go take a nap. Then open the next window and get it done. Because we think that multitasking is a thing, when in effect, you can do one thing at a time and do it well. And use your meditation and your consciousness to just keep you mindful of the fact that there's too many windows opening and that's what's leading to the stress.

**Dr. Hyman:** How do you cultivate that level of attention and awareness if don't have practices that help you? What are those practices that help the urban monk to do that?

**Pedram:** Yeah, so it's a two-prong system. One is here are the actual meditation and yoga practices which will help you develop like a beachhead and have a better understanding of that state so that you could call on it when you need it, right? Having meditation come up when you're having a freak out is little too late. But being able to know where to be in meditation, and then letting that keep you just under the bar of freaking out is really where meditation's promise is and where it can serve you better. So yes, here's 10 minutes of practice every day and that will help develop the skills to help you along in your day. And then the second part is just having this framework to ask yourself throughout the day, and this came from one of my Zen masters, which is, we are always doing and we're not accustomed to being. We can't relax into being. So the one activity that you do is constantly ask yourself, what am I doing right now? And then whatever it is, just stop. And just rest for a second, and then re-engage in

what it is that you choose to do instead of the million things that you're trying to do simultaneously.

**Dr. Hyman:** So you're saying we are not human beings, we are human doings?

**Pedram:** Big time, big time. And it's exhausting because we spend most of our energy dragging around, trying to do too much, and riding the gas and the brakes simultaneously. And then we think that the coffee is what we need. We think that the sugar is what we need. We jump into solutions that are like swiping a credit card because we don't have enough cash in the pocket, not realizing that our expenditure of energy is from our mind just... all over the place.

**Dr. Hyman:** So here is the thing, though. I know you and I know me and I know we've learned a lot of tricks that become a habit, that allow us to stay more grounded, centered, focused, be productive, get a lot of prep done and still be happy, right? There is a way to do that. And we've managed to sort of ferret it out on our own through our own detective work. But you really kind of come up with some really amazing hacking techniques around how do you tweak the things that you can tweak, so that you can be more of an urban monk, right? If that's our aspiration, which is to be more inner light, more grounded and be able to make the right choices about food, about sleep, around exercise, around relationships. I mean like, I was talking to a friend of mine whose is a friend of ours. We saw her just recently and she's like, "You know I'm in this new relationship and like, I don't want to mess it up. I don't want to say the stupid thing." I'm like, "Yeah, you should just like, when you're going to have that say that stupid thing, just stop and like think, is this going to elevate your relationship or is it going to take it down?" And I'm like, "You get to decide." But there are some tools that you've ferreted out. I'd love to have you share them with us because I think it's, I want to know. Because I can struggle with the same things. I'm feeling very personally connected to this because I'm doing a lot. And I can do a lot but I'm also someone is going to be like, "Oh I don't want to do anything else." It's a lot.

**Pedram:** Yeah, I think your finger is right in the sore of humanity right now. So this is great. This is juicy stuff. It's, first of all. When someone tells me, hey, I ask them what the priorities are. And say, well fitness, and spirituality, and health, and all these types of things, and I say, "Great. Let me see your phone." Because I want to see where you've booked that into your calendar. Because what we tend to do is crowd our calendars with things that other people want or our business requires and all these other things. And then if we don't book in that time, whether it's a 15-minute spot, or an hour spot later in the day for self-care, of course, it's going to...so-and-so's going to call, we're going to go to dinner, we're just going to pass it up. So one of my hacks for busy people is book

an appointment with yourself. So that you can have it in your phone and you can say, "Oh right. Now it's time for me to do this thing. Don't let this crowd, don't let my life crowd out my self-care because then I'm going to feel suffocated and then I'm going to have to pull over to catch my breath." One of the things I do is every 25 minutes, my phones beeps, which means for five minutes it's time to do something. So I'll do 10 reps of five different things. I'll do some push-ups. I'll do some lunges, some squats. I'll do some breathing. I'll check in with myself. I'll drink some water. I'll run to the bathroom. I'll come back in. And I find that that 25 and five every half hour, it works tremendously well. Some people like to go...

**Dr. Hyman:** And in 10 hours, that's 50 minutes.

**Pedram:** Yeah. It's a 50-minute hour with 10 minutes of self-love. You've moved around. You've used your legs. You've pumped your blood. And effectively what that does is, it gets the blood flowing so that your brain doesn't feel like is decelerating. It doesn't feel like you're getting foggy which means I'm not going to go opt for caffeine, which is like a credit card swipe of energy. And then I have this weird blood sugar variance because now I've got my cortisol levels off and I need sugar and I'm all stuff that you talk about. So if I can stay moving all day, then my body starts to come back to life. My metabolic rate is higher. I'm breathing. I'm caring for myself. And guess what? All the productivity studies show that you're better anyways. So that's...

**Dr. Hyman:** I noticed that you actually are standing. And I'm sitting for this interview. And I'm like, "I've got to get on that." And I have a table but I have to rearrange my office. But you have your life designed, set up for this. So your camera is at a certain level, you already figured it out. And I think it's such a key concept. I actually have sort of thought of it but not really designed it perfectly for that. And I'm learning from you. And I wrote a book called, 'The 10-day Detox Guide'. And one of the chapters is on design. One of the days is design. How do you design your life to create automatic wellness, right? So you don't have to think about it. I don't have to think about what I'm going to eat because I know my drawer is full of all the good stuff. I know the stuff is at home. I know where I'm going, and I know how to manage my food for the day. I've got that down. I know how to design my life for exercise. I know what equipment I need. I bring my yoga clothes and my running shoes. I know how to do that. But there are things I don't do, like I sit too much. Or I may not...the sleep thing. I'm not always perfect at it because I'm running all over the place, different time zones. And it's sometimes hard for me. So I think there are tools that you've kind of figured out that actually make it work.

**Pedram:** Yeah and I've pressure tested it in lives like my own and your own. Because I came down from the hills and I elected to become a householder. This means, I've got a wife, a child, another baby coming any minute now. And the sleepless nights. And I run well.org. I have a very busy world and I travel and do a lot of stuff. You're probably busier than I am by choice. You're out there and it's hard to keep up with the...and if you live in a place like Manhattan, for instance, it's just always alive and buzzing. So how do you factor in a deceleration protocol into your evenings? So I have an app on my computer that's called f.lux switches...it filters out the blue light so that at least I'm not bathing my brain in blue light, which stimulates my consciousness to go get food at night. And then we do things like candle light as often as we can in the evening, to just bring a different energy into the evening, to get into a deceleration process so that that ritual helps the brain shut down all those windows and go to bed. And actually do a progressive relaxation after. Get into bed, read, kiss honey goodnight whatever. I'll just quickly relax my whole body and count down from 10 to 1. And boom, I'm out. And then I'll put in what I want. I don't even put in a problem that I want my subconscious to work on while I'm sleeping because I got so much going on. Either my conscious mind is going to up tripping on it or I'm just going to put it back into the super computer and let it work it out while I let my body rest. So there's a lot of hacks that over 20 years I've found work for every, and I'm not...you and I hang out. I'm super hippy dippy guy, right? I hang out. We have 2,200 companies that we do corporate wellness for and I hang out with a lot of normal, stressed out people. And I've tested this stuff with normal, stressed out people and it works. It's so easy to be enlightened in an ashram, right? No one's bothering you.

**Dr. Hyman:** You know what Ram Dass says. He says, "If you're think you're enlightened, just go home for Thanksgiving."

**Pedram:** That's it. Get in LA traffic and be late for a meeting. And understand that you can't get there in time. So now what? That's where your meditation...

**Dr. Hyman:** I think this is...and you things you mentioned like candle lights. Like I did that last night. I had candle lights on. I had my wood stove on. It was cold. I sat by the woodstove and just hang out with friends. It was like, quiet. I slept like a baby last night. And I took a bath and just had that wind-down. I wasn't on emailing. And be like, "I have a..." some of you got an email, another email; I just have to not respond to everything. You don't have to respond to every stupid thought you have. You don't have to respond to every email or phone call because the inputs are crazy. So you have to take that. But there's like other stuff where it's actually a little trickier to do. And I think that's where we're all at the edge of finding out how to do that. And one of them is our thoughts, right? And I think that's what gets into trouble is like, what is the

meaning that we have attached to that thought? Oh, like, I'm going to be late. Or such and such is going to happen. Or, we're afraid of whatever is happening instead of realizing that everything is going to work out. That was an epiphany from me which is everything is going to work out. Or someone quits or someone moves. We had a doctor leave Cleveland clinic. And like, okay. He's going to live his life. Instead of freaking out, and like, how can you do this to the patients? We have 1200 people on the waiting list. And what am I going to do? And there's no doctors trained and we can't find anybody. I'm like, "Okay, it's the right thing." And so magically, this woman shows up who's this highly skilled, highly trained doctor who's so excited to be passionately part of what we're doing. And I'm like, "Awesome." And I see that over and over again. And the more you invite that. And it may not always turn out like you want but it actually turns out. And I think once we sort of get that into our head, that our thoughts are creating all our suffering, that's a big liberation.

**Pedram:** It's a game changer. And let's geek-out for a quick second. Our friend Daniel Amen will probably appreciate this, is, there's also something that happens when you start to access the part of the brain that lights up during meditation, where this pre-frontal cortex, which just happens to also be the third eye of the ancient. So these guys were on to something somehow. As we start meditating, studies show that the neuronal, the cortical density of this part of the brain starts to increase. And so we're talking about higher moral reasoning, cognitive thought, and the negation of impulses. This part of the brain specifically. So now, the pumpkin pie is in front of me. I know I shouldn't, but I do. You end up doing things that are against what you thought you said you wanted to do and those things come back and haunt you. Why? And so creating a cushion of vitality, so that when the doctor says, "I'm leaving," the panic button part of you is like, "Oh my God, the sky is falling." And if you have enough, if you've paid forward enough energy to your meditation and your discipline so that this part of the brain triggers and says, "I know your impulse is to panic, but it's going to be alright," what happens is you start to roll with the punches and you start to triage things in the way a Zen master would. And you don't have to move up to the hills to do it. You just have to tap into that discipline of allowing yourself to know what's happening. And just being aware. You're like; this is the part of me that panics. I'm just going to take a couple of breaths. And a great hack is just lower diaphragmatic breathing because it takes us back to parasympathetic rest and digest, nervous system functionality. And then when you do that, suddenly the parts of your brain that are panicking just...the blood flow starts to shift to other parts that make you go, "Oh no, it's going to be alright." Of course, it's going to be alright. It's always alright. What? Got it.

**Dr. Hyman:** We are still here right?

**Pedram:** Yeah, yeah.

**Dr. Hyman:** And if we are not, then well, it doesn't matter anyway.

**Pedram:** Right, that's it. That's it. And so having that level of comfort in understanding that comes from learning how you operate and not running around like a crazy person all the time, which is how we think we are better. Multi-tasking is nonsense. Grabbing a bite is terrible. So just curating your day. Like what you were talking about with environmental designs. It's like, I block out time for lunch. I block out at least 15 minutes after lunch to just rest and digest. I found that it makes me better. I block out time for myself. Therefore when I'm here, I'm here. I'm here with my Mark Hyman right now. We're in a conversation. I'm not thinking about my bills, I'm not thinking about what my wife said. I'm here.

**Dr. Hyman:** Right, that's all it is. That makes life a lot juicier and more fun, right? But you know what? One of the things that I find difficult is that when you don't eat well, it's hard to be awake. I wrote this book, 'The Ultra Mind Solution' and the basic concept there is, if your brain is not working, why don't you try to fix your body because they're connected? And yes, your mind can affect your body but it's also goes the other way. And that if you're eating like crap, you're going to feel like crap and you're going to be foggy, and unfocused, and can't be present, and can't slow down your thinking. You can't organize your life. You can't...all those things you want to do. So how does eating play a role for you in this in terms of energy? And how do you think about managing that? Because I think that's a big problem for a lot of people.

**Pedram:** Yeah, I got to say, over the years I've had all these people come to me and say, "Hey I want you to teach me Chi Gong so I can have more energy," holding a bag of coke in their hand. I'm like, "I can't help you." Like, if you don't...

**Dr. Hyman:** Unless they just hold the coke as they're doing Tai-Chi and they are like...

**Pedram:** Yeah if they levitate it, then I'm in. And I'll just look at him and say, "Look, if you don't understand that you are what you eat principle, and then Tai-Chi isn't going to help you because you're missing what is the foundation of your energy system which is food." So food should turn into energy. It should turn into nutrients and phytonutrients and all things that power your cells. And what I've seen too much of lately, and you could attest to this better than any, is that now food is now becoming a burden more than it's becoming a fuel source. Because people have all sorts of funky, leaky gut, and autoimmunity, and food

allergies and all sort of things that then turn the immune system. And it becomes like a war in the gut. And so now I'm investing more energy on this burrito I had instead of just grabbing it, breaking it down, turning it into energy and fueling my life. Now I go to go backward and deal with my immune system, dealing with the friend or foe, kind of food aversion thing. And so, if you're not eating food that your body would have recognized as food from the very start, if it didn't come from nature, if it's got ingredients you can't pronounce, if it has synthetic chemicals that your body doesn't really know what to do with, what you're doing is, you're basically, it's like the TSA. People are going through this airport line and every single person is getting flagged and searched. It's just like, "Holy crap, way is this talking so long." Your experience of travel sucks now, right? And that's what's happening in our guts. That's what's happening with food. And so if you learn how to eat correctly and eat foods that your body will recognize as fuel sources, and readily grab, and take, and bring out your cells, and fuel your life, that's when then, you could reinvest that energy into greater and greater things, too...

**Dr. Hyman:** It's foundational, right? You have to clean up the garbage before you can get organized. It's like you can't even get to that step. I don't know if you think this way but I think you have to get your attention straight, and your desire, and your motivation. But then you have to clean up your diet because if you don't do that, the rest of it is very challenging. It's hard. So how have you done that? And what's your urban monk recipe for that?

**Pedram:** Sure. They kind of go hand in hand too because as I get better at my conscious awareness, I get better at being monkey-no when I see a food I should eat. So it helps to be able to negate impulses and it also helps to have vitality to have some cash in the bank, to then feel better, and start rolling with it. So first principle I just mentioned, which is just eat natural food. Eat food that comes from the earth and use that as a fuel source. But if you're in a one-down position, what I've been doing a lot with the urban monk students is basically saying, "What does grandma make you when you're sick?" Soup. And so I've been working a lot with soups and putting in medicinal foods and having...soups is like pre-digested. So it just helps that thing along. And then you could go repair your gut lining. And you could just start getting energy out of food again. And then, don't spend that energy on some demolition derby. Reinvest it in your life. I don't...people are too busy for me to ask them to do anything else. What I look at is swaps. And be like, "Okay, let's look at what you're doing. Let's take this and exchange this amount of time and energy with this other thing. And let's see how you feel." And then we get some profit out that department and then we can reinvest it on other parts of people's lives. And in doing so, it's not this big ask. It's just little swaps that suddenly just start to turn the lights back on from that flickering light of health that we're all suffering

from. Because the environment is so filled with toxins and the food is so crappy.

**Dr. Hyman:** So you're more like little fixes, little changes that people can do that are bite-sized, that sort of slowly, incrementally, sort of build a foundation of lifestyle habits and how people thrive?

**Pedram:** Yeah. I've been telling people they need to change their behavior in their lifestyle until I was blue in the face. And that's hard to do because I'm a brown guy. Being able to just say, "Hey, you should just change your behavior." If we did that America wouldn't be in obesity, diabetes crisis in a lot of ways because we all know we should eat better. So it's too big, it's too heavy of a lift. It's too big of an ask for a lot of people. And some people just do it. I shaved my head and became a monk. And sure, power to the people that will just do it all. But for people that are just in that energy poverty state, in that enthusiasm bankruptcy what I say is, "Look, let's just swap out that one thing for another. Let's eke out a little bit of efficiency there and let's build from there." And then suddenly, as the cellular metabolism starts getting better, as mitochondria can fire, as the body starts doing what it can do better, then you have the energy and the will to keep going. And then it starts to work.

**Dr. Hyman:** I think that works and I think that some people use that. And I find that for a lot of people, the connection between what they're eating and how they are living and they feel is just so remote. They don't understand that there is a connection. And so what I often will do is like invite people for a very short time to do a radical change. If you just change everything for a few days, like 10 days, how good you feel. And people...I can do anything for 10 days. And they do it and they are like, "Oh my God. I feel so different." And so that level of awakening around the connection between what you eat and how you feel, that motivates people to start to make more permanent changes. And then, you know, as a fact it just stings but you actually really have a more sustainable like jolt of, "Oh my God, I..." Because it's incremental. There's a joke we use in sort of functional medicine which is if you're standing on a tack, it take a lot of aspirin to make it feel better, right? So you got to take the...deal with the cause. And the second rule is if you're standing on two tacks, taking one of them out doesn't make you 50% better. So if you're drinking a six pack of coke every day, but you're starting with a little broccoli, it might not work. Even though broccoli is good or your salmon plus you'll have your bag of Oreo cookies every night with your salmon, you're not going to get the benefit unless you really let your body reset. And I think that's what excites me about your work because it's like you're chunking down things that people...like building blocks so that they can build the tools to actually do this. They have to build the foundation as well. So that's key.

**Pedram:** Yeah and one of...what I've done is I've experimented in sprints where we say, "Okay for 30 days or 100 days," which is my preference. But a lot of people have a hard time with 100 days. I'm a Kung Fu guy, right? For me, it's sure. I haven't had any grains or alcohol...

**Dr. Hyman:** I was studying how to remove this pebble from your hand for seven years?

**Pedram:** Right, exactly. Some of us are just wired differently.

**Dr. Hyman:** That was my favorite show, Kung Fu. That was my favorite show.

**Pedram:** Yeah, it was great. It's timeless.

**Dr. Hyman:** Grasshopper.

**Pedram:** And so, that's the discipline, though. It's like, "Hey, just do it. Do what it takes." But what I'll ask as in diet, exercise, sleep, and mindset, to find the biggest tack in each of those categories and find a healthy swap for one thing in each of those for 30 days or 100 days. And I found life-changing, miraculous things happen with people. Because my challenge is if you cleaned up your diet, but you didn't sleep, how much better is your health going to get? If you did Cross fit 100 hours a week, but you're going through a divorce, how much better is your health going to get? And so if you don't look at the entirety of our being, there's little eddies; there's little corners where things can still stay fundamentally imbalanced and really challenge our overall health, which is a big challenge. Because look, you know better than any. Stress is the biggest killer. It's so hard to deal with health when everyone is so stressed out. And so yeah, you take away the physiological burden through diet. You help the sleep a little better. And at a certain point, you've got to talk about the elephant in the room and be like, "Okay, you're running your life in a way where you're constantly burning it on both ends. And your body just can't keep up with your demands. And so, how can we look at this? How can we hack your lifestyle so that the stress isn't basically taking 30% of the energy off the top so that your bodies have a fighting chance?"

**Dr. Hyman:** How do you deal with that? What do you do and what do you tell people to do? Because I think that's a big thing. And I struggle with it and I try to have it mostly be in the attitude because that's...I've learned that stress is not actually a thing. It's a response to a thing. It's a response to some real or imagined threat to your body or ego. So maybe say a saber-toothed tiger is chasing you or it could be you're thinking your wife is mad at you or you think she's

sleeping with somebody else. But she's really not but you have this thought about it. And it creates the same response, right? So, how do you recommend that people start to deal with this?

**Pedram:** Yeah, I go kind of far with some of it because I like to re-calibrate the stress bucket. I've done wilderness survival. I've been out in the lions in Africa, and it's...when you realize that it's about food, water, shelter and fire and those are needs, everything else is a want. And so, understanding how to just doing things that help you understand that the small stuff is small, really help us understand and have a perceptual shift in understanding what can constitute a life-threatening emergency and what is just office talk. And so that on the front end kind of leads the charge. But then look, I don't need to make up some new Pedram meditation. Meditation has been pretty good for 6,000 years. And everyone's is trying to do a 2.0, 3.0.

**Dr. Hyman:** You're not going patent your meditation technique?

**Pedram:** That's what happens. That's exactly what keeps happening. Like these dudes came over in the 60s, they were like, "Here is this thing that's worked for 6,000 years and it's the same thing that's worked for 6,000 years." And everyone is like, "Okay well what's new?" And you're like, "No, why don't you do the thing that's worked for 6,000 years because it still works?" And it's like this weird capitalistic type of thing where new, or better, or more it just...just breathe. Just relax into your breath. That's what works. It's been working and suddenly we think we're different. And physiologically, it's still works. And so all you got to do is do it. And people say, "Well, it's too hard." And I say, "Well I tried flying a fighter jet and that was kind of hard. But with practice, you get better at things and it doesn't take long."

**Dr. Hyman:** Yeah, it takes a little longer to learn how fly a fighter jet than to meditate.

**Pedram:** To your point, then great. Then stress shouldn't saddle people. If you spent 10 days doing 15 minutes a morning, you'll fundamentally feel differently and really understand that you never want to go back. But we'll spend 10 days in our lives sucking wind, and being stressed, and freaking out, and then 10 days later we are the same person.

**Dr. Hyman:** Yeah, there's a great app I like to use probably on a plane, or when I'm traveling when I just want to drop in, and my mind is spinning, and there's so much going on, and now it's hard for me to slow down. I put on my headphones. And then I'll turn on this head space app and it just takes you through a guided meditation. In 10 minutes, you're like, you're in. And I'm like, it's so

great. I did this the other day on the plane. I was coming back from a long trip. And I've been to Minneapolis in the morning, and Seattle in the afternoon, and I flew back to New York that night. And it was in one day, doing three talks and I was like, "I need to just come down." And I just put it on and all of a sudden I was in this state. And the plane was like half an hour late taking off and I was like in this blissed out state and it's not that hard. We can make it complicated; we can think we have to be a meditation hall somewhere in the mountains. But we can be on a plane with the announcements going off, we got our headphones on, you can still go in. And I think that's the beauty of it. You don't have to be...what you're saying is be in your life and you can still practice this.

**Pedram:** Yeah, that right there is the urban monk manifesto is stop running for the heels. Stop thinking you need to be dressed in Lululemon to do yoga. Stop thinking you need to be in some...

**Dr. Hyman:** I like my Lululemon yoga pants.

**Pedram:** Sure, but you can't stand up on your lecture to do it. And so backstage what do you do? It's just drop in, hang out...a lot of the way I look at this is, when people have too many things to do and too little time, I call it time compression syndrome. And if you and I had nothing to do today but to just hang out, it's not that stressful of a day. You probably have 50 more of these. And I've got lights on camera, sets and we are filming all day. And so all those events in the timeline make it more stressful. So how do you stop time, so that you can step out of that compressed time and let your physiology drink from infinity? And I put it to you that the easiest way to do that is through the breath. It's just stop and breath to your lower abdomen and just step into the mindful observance of your breath for even two minutes. And it stops that compressed time, the walls start caving in. You gather yourself and you're like, "Alright, I got this."

**Dr. Hyman:** It's true. I have a friend, we usually take walks and this person walks so slow, painfully slow. And at first I was like, "This is annoying." I'm always walking and going somewhere and doing something and I'm like, "This is crazy. I'm going crazy." And then I just started like, "Okay I'm surrendering to it. I'm just going to walk slowly." And we just walk slowly when we are together and it's the most amazing thing. I notice what's around me, I notice the trees, and I notice people. I feel differently. I experienced the space in between everything and all I did was walk slow. And it was the greatest...oh God, you're such an idiot Mark. Like what....

**Pedram:** But that's profound because what happened is you and that individual had different time signatures. And so you were like, "Hey, I'm out of phase with

this person and they're annoying me." So you had two choices. One is I'm going to run circles around you. Or two is I'm going to step into your time signature and see if that's any different. And that's great.

**Dr. Hyman:** It was so awesome. I'm like, "Wow. Like this is revolutionary for me." It's like, walk slow. Walk slow, just be in the walking. Be in...Don't be going somewhere or getting somewhere or going to some place, which is what I'm usually doing. But it was just like, even if we are going someplace, we just take more time. We just walked slowly into a concert. It was like we walked 20 blocks, but it was super slow. And I was like wow, this is like... I felt like I just had hours where I always feel like that is the time compression pressure syndrome. I know exactly what you're talking about. It's so cool and I think your book is just full of great tips like that. I can't wait to get my hands on it. If you give me a free galley, I'll help you get this out because I think this is the piece. Helping them to eat better, or exercise, or change their lifestyle. How the heck do you do that? It's not easy for most of us. It sounds good, we want to do it. We have the right intention, but there's got to be a way that we design our experience so that it actually that can work. And that's really what's you're talking about. And it's awesome.

**Pedram:** Thank you. The measure twice and cut once phenomenon is something. We all think more is better, we think faster is better, we think slow is stupid. It's the way of our society and we start to just ramp up to the point where then we're less effective when we're less present. And so if you walk slower and went up and gave your talk, is that going to be a better talk? And modulating where your consciousness is and how fast it's going, that right there, that's heavy stuff. And that right there is you tapping into way deeper elements of Mark Hymen that you had access to, but your busy fast-paced life was precluding you from observing, right? And so that's exactly that space. I love the fact that you brought that up and you've had that because that's the space. And you've found that because you had the wherewithal to just stop and not punch that guy or either be like, "Screw you it, I'm not walking with you."

**Dr. Hyman:** That's annoying, would you please hurry up? Like...and it was funny. There was something we were late for. And all of a sudden he started walking fast. And I was like, "Hey what's going on?" And he's like, "Don't get any ideas." He's like, "You can walk fast." That was very funny, but I was so grateful for that gift because I didn't even know. I didn't know. I just thought being efficient or getting exercise or whatever it was. And I didn't have to get exercise when I was walking. I could just walk. And that's essentially the Buddhist teaching, right? When you're walking, walk. When you're eating, eat. When you're sleeping, sleep, when you love, love. Whatever it is. When you're

peeing, pee. It was just like being at the urinal with your cell phone texting. I see people doing that. And it's like, "Okay." And it's...

**Pedram:** Yeah, and that's it. That's you live in the busy world, so you see it all the time. You know what? It just doesn't make us better. It makes us crazier and it makes us...it makes me if I start going there; I'm not the spouse I want to be. I'm not the dad I want to be. I'm not...I deserve it to my world to slow down and be a little bit more conscious and methodical about everything that I do. And that guy is way more relaxed. That guy doesn't need as much coffee. That guy doesn't reach for sugar because he's out of sorts. And he checks in with himself more often. And so what I did was look I spent the last 20 years dealing with real people in real situations. What I did with this book was just lay out a gestalt that's not this like, go find a guru and do things that are absolutely unattainable for normal people. It's practical wisdom for real life people. How to bring it back and have experiences like the one that you just shared, which is really profound because you found a different channel. You found another gear in the Mark Hymen car, right? Where you are like, "Wow, I could go between first gear and fifth gear. There's other place."

**Dr. Hyman:** My friends go, "You got like two gears, neutral and fifth gear." I'm like, "Yeah, I kind..." And I laugh, but it's finding another way to be right? And I think the thing you just dropped is a big nugget and you jumped right over it. Which is, you want to be a better dad. You want to be a better spouse. You want...there is a sense of meaning or purpose that's connecting you to why you want to do these things. Because why exercise, why live better, why meditate, why do anything? It's not for the sake of those things. It's because it's connecting to something that matters to you. Something that means something that elevates who you are, and brings you joy, and pleasure, or fun, or happiness, or peace, or whatever it is you're looking for. And so, I think that's the take-home message which you've been sharing, which is, how do you connect to your purpose and meaning? And then everything else starts to fall into place. Could you just share for a minute or two about that? And then we'll wrap up.

**Pedram:** Yeah, thank you. That's the good stuff right there. Because my legacy as a dad is way more important than how many more blog posts I can crank out this week. And so, what I do is I look at it and it's like a life garden. And what would be the five plants, the six plants in your life garden that you need to equally water so that you don't have the regret where you're lying on your deathbed thinking, God; I should have spent more time with my family. Wow, I really prioritized the wrong things. So just looking at what's important to you in life. And what I do every day is, I'll just look at my life garden and be like, "Okay, I just came back from a book tour in New York and like spin, spin, spin. So I'm taking two days off to take the kids to Disney Land and spend some

quality time with my wife so that I could water that plant." So that I could keep balance in my life. So I don't go through these weird sparks of creating fundamental imbalance and separating. So that there's lightning strike of some tumultuous discharge where now I have to get into a fight or go to marriage counseling, and "Oh God. I gotta bail the kid out of jail." Or all the things that happen when we let things get out of in front of us. And so maintaining that balance and living the life that we can live here now with that really I think will offset tremendous stress down the line. But we don't stop and walk slow. So we don't think that way. And then we wonder why we ended up in trouble. So that really is the nuts and bolts of all of it.

Is look at your life, look at where the values in your life are? And look at your phone and see where you book those into your calendar. Look at how you're living your life wondering when you're going to get that in. If it's not in your schedule, what you did is you voted for imbalance. And so schedule timing for yourself, your family, your practice and your exercise so that you don't have those regrets. And then life gets kind of cool.

**Dr. Hyman:** Right, it's true. And it's all about connecting to that. And I think that it's not about a destination, it's just about the process. Because you never really get there, but it's always like...it's just a dance. I was at a friend's house the other night and there was this great kid who's a family friend, he's 18. He just came back for a few days from college. He's a freshman, and he's struggling. And I looked at him and I laugh. I'm like, "He's in it." And I'm like, "You know, we are all in it. Like, don't think because I'm like 55 that I'm not in it because I'm in it. And we are all in it. And it's forever." But you just get more skills, more talented, more tools and more connected. And I think I just leave everybody with a thought that this is all great. But one of the key teachings in the Buddhist tradition, it's not just the teaching of what to do, it's actually the community. And I think we are, you and I are, a part of a larger community that we are all connected to. But that's the thing that's absent for so many people that makes all this work. And it can be a community of your family. It can be a community of friends. It can be a community at work. But building that community for you is really critical to actually supporting those changes. So if you're hanging out with everybody who's eating at McDonald's or who's watching TV all day and who's not really connected to the things that matter, you need to change that up.

**Pedram:** Yeah, you are what you eat applies to everything in your life including your friends. And so if you have drinks the guys every Tuesday night, and that's what you do, take a couple of them and just say, "Hey look for a month, instead of drinks, why don't we go to the gym together and see how that goes?" And the guys who fall off won't be there. But you can just, every single little

piece of your life; you could bring your friends with you or move on. But using community is critically important, because it's hard. The peer pressure gets us. And so being with people that inspire us and encourage us really does make a difference.

**Dr. Hyman:** So Pedram, tell us about what you're up to next? Where do we find you? What are you working on that you're excited about? And we talked about 'The Urban Monk.' But how, like how do we get into your world?

**Pedram:** Sure. So [theurbanmonk.com](http://theurbanmonk.com) is for that book which is coming now. And then I'm the founder of [well.org](http://well.org), and we have the last movie, *Origins*, that you were in. We have our next movie on conscious capitalism, coming this year. And we are, you spend your money with the good guys, you will see a world that will manifest in front of you that is healthier and safer. And so I'm doing this for my kids' kids. [Well.org](http://Well.org) is where I live. 'The Urban Monk' is the new book, and I'm just active. I'm serving. I love what I do.

**Dr. Hyman:** Alright, it has been great to talk to you. Awesome conversation. Thank you.

**Pedram:** Thank you.