

The Great Simplification

Nate Hagens (00:00:02):

You're listening to The Great Simplification with Nate Hagens, that's me. On this show, we try to explore and simplify what's happening with energy, the economy, the environment, and our society. Together with scientists, experts, and leaders, this show is about understanding the bird's eye view of how everything fits together, where we go from here, and what we can do about it as a society and as individuals.

(00:00:33):

Today, we talk with my friend, Jamie Wheal. Jamie is a leading expert on the neuro-somatics of ultimate human performance, and in that role as the executive director of the Flow Genome Project. Jamie is also an author, educator, and backwoods expeditionary leadership coach, helping humans live up to their potential in this transitional time.

(00:00:57):

Jamie and I talk about the evolutionary importance of music as a coping mechanism, how our current university system in the USA is failing and doesn't prepare students for the coming decades, and how to find hope during this time of tumult. Jamie is quite a character and a super good person. I hope you enjoy this week's wide-ranging conversation. Jamie, my friend, how are you?

Jamie Wheal (00:01:34):

I'm doing well, man.

Nate Hagens (00:01:35):

So you don't know this story. But the first time that I heard of your name was when I was writing a college textbook for my Reality 101 class about the interconnection of money, and energy and climate change, and I wanted to call it Stealing Fire because it meant that we're stealing fire from future generations. And I Googled it, and then your name came up, and I was like, "Oh crap, that book has already been written."

(00:02:05):

But it turns out that book was not about climate change and money, and debt, and borrowing from the future, but about something quite different. I have both your books. They're quite marked up, Stealing Fire and Recapture the Rapture. Maybe, just

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to kick off here, you could give a very short summary of those two books and why did you write the second one, and maybe just a bit of reflection. And I have a ton of stuff I want to talk to you about as we've been talking recently on the phone.

Jamie Wheal (00:02:37):

Yeah, sure. So I mean, for me, *Stealing Fire* was just looking to validate the underground multi-thousand year game of cat and mouse between Prometheans, the folks that were literally stealing the fire of civilization consciousness, predominantly through non-ordinary states, so all the way back to the Eleusinian mysteries in Greece all the way forwards through the '60s and wacky projects like MK-Ultra all the way to the contemporary psychedelic renaissance, the evolution of Burning Man, the neuroscience revolution, all of these kinds of things.

(00:03:11):

It really just kind of a love letter to that underground story that has sort of underpinned so much of civilization and its development, but has often been pushed to the margins as either the realm of decadence hedonism, marginal culture, et cetera, and just to say, "Hey, look, this is actually happening," and the writing of that was 2015, 2016. It was prior to Michael Pollan's *How to Change Your Mind*. It was just legitimating and validating the role that a broad spectrum of non-ordinary states can play in seeding culture and civilization.

(00:03:50):

And then, *Recapture the Rapture* was effectively... So if *Stealing Fire* was sort of building a bridge from consensus reality on one side of the river, sort of mainstream Muggledom to a slightly more interesting, more dynamic and more volatile and problematic culture on the other side, the thesis there was to say, "Hey, this is always a back and forth between the rebels, the light bringers, the ones pushing the envelope, the Prometheans and the priests," the ones whether they were wearing black cassocks or literally Men on Black suits like the institutional authority looking to shut that stuff down.

(00:04:30):

And the thesis at the end of *Stealing Fire* was, "Hey, our only hope is to open source these, to use Eliade's term from back in the day, *Techniques of Ecstasy*. If we can open

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source these tools, then all humans have access to them, and then they can't get shut down by institutional authority. Then, so once we're across that river and we're into that domain, then Recapture the Rapture was the idea of, "Okay, what does it look like to start mapping some of that high ground? What does consciousness and culture look like as we progress from integrating non-ordinary peak states into our way of thinking, seeing, being, innovating, connecting, collaborating?"

(00:05:13):

And so that was very much a sense of, "Oh, the hour's late and the stakes are high," and we're in a tight spot. So it really does behoove us to figure out ways to address the meaning crisis that we are finding ourselves in and what might almost like the equivalent of blockchain for consciousness and culture. What is an open source framework that people could use to create a kind of decentralized bottoms up series of social and cultural movements that give us the inspiration and the healing and the collaboration in order to rally and do the things that we must in the coming decades?

Nate Hagens (00:05:57):

So I found Recapture the Rapture fascinating because it covered a lot of the topics that I write about from a wildly different perspective. And like I said, other than Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind*, I don't remember a book I had marked up as much as yours. You use very colorful and descriptive prose, and I've copied a bunch of quotes that I'm going to read from your book starting with the first topic I'd like to jam with you about a little bit. You've described yourself to me as an environmental anthropologist, looking at human history, used to teach college like I do. There's a quote in your book, "Culture is upstream of politics, but biology is upstream of them both." Can you describe that a little bit because I happen to agree?

Jamie Wheal (00:06:47):

Sure. Culture is upstream of politics was Andrew Breitbart of Breitbart News of fame, infamy. That was his original assessment. And Steve Bannon picked that up and ran with it and was basically saying, "If you want to win politically, you have to fight the culture wars proactively."

(00:07:05):

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And then there's just that sense of particularly in the last century, but obviously origins kind of back with Descartes and the rest of the Enlightenment folks, we have been on this multi-century project to separate ourselves from our animal natures that it's all about cogitation. We have broken our heritage as monkeys with clothes. We have infinite agency and choice and all of these kind of things.

(00:07:40):

And I think that might be overstating the case, and that there is an awful lot about our lives and how we function as tribal primates that is as basic and as genetically encoded and imprinted as any other animal in the animal kingdom.

(00:07:59):

And you can take examples from politics and tribalism to the role of oxytocin, not just as a trust and cuddle molecule, but as an ethnocentric tribal bonding one to all of the song and dance around sexuality, reproduction, mate selection, all of these kinds of things. You just take a look at how we operate, and I'm actually staggered and humbled by how little is arguably and uniquely human and not governed by remarkably predictable primate encoding.

Nate Hagens (00:08:33):

Yeah. I happen to agree. And that's the longest and the students' most favorite part of the course is the evolutionary psychology angle of steep discount rates, status, Keeping Up with the Joneses, addiction, hypernormal stimuli, cognitive biases, belief systems, group versus individual behavior, in-group/out-group biases, cultural evolution, all those things are central to the predicament we face.

(00:09:03):

I go so far as to say we don't so much face an environmental or energy or economic problem as much as we face a mismatch of human Stone Age minds in a modern culture. And so, I think what you wrote about there makes a ton of sense. There's a couple quotes that I'll queue up for you, "Doped up on dopamine, we feel better, but behave worse. Too much dopamine results in apophenia, which is that we perceive patterns and meaning and otherwise unconnected events and facts." And then when chronic stress due to social status loss, economic hardship, et cetera, we have low

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serotonin levels which results in a higher focus on the present and a revenge sort of spite sort of behavior.

(00:09:55):

So it becomes a positive feedback loop in a bad way. So is the response at the core level culture wide or starting with individuals to build up our serotonin levels or to defer the second marshmallow and reduce the prevalence of dopamine in our lives or from someone who's looked at peak flow, and physiology, and neuropsychology, what is your conclusions about that?

Jamie Wheal (00:10:21):

Yeah. Well, I think whether you're talking to Robert Sapolsky or Lisa Feldman Barrett or Andrew Huberman or any of our other friends and colleagues who are just geniuses and deeply studied in this space that the unsatisfying answer is it's complicated, and it depends. So rather than saying we need to exclusively monolithically up-regulate one thing or suppress or down-regulate another, it's much more all things in balance and range. So it's less, I mean, for sure... What is the word for it? Slot machine? Oh, limbic capitalism, I forget who coined that concept.

Nate Hagens (00:10:57):

I've never heard that.

Jamie Wheal (00:11:00):

Right. Just that idea of just pushing our monkey buttons in our slot machine reward centers.

Nate Hagens (00:11:04):

Well, Sapolsky says that the unexpected reward is what drives our behavior, that if you maximize the uncertainty of the next event, whether a girlfriend will say yes or whether you'll get the 777, that is what our dopamine is at its maximum, when the uncertainty is at 50%. Limbic capitalism.

Jamie Wheal (00:11:25):

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Yeah. He calls that the magic of maybe, right? You get a 400x boost versus just a sure thing reward. And I think the simplest thing is to acknowledge that our neurotransmitters and endocrine balances back to us having the classic E.O. Wilson Paleolithic brains are out of whack, and they're not just out of whack because we sit inside and we don't get sunlight, and we don't move enough and we're eating processed foods. They're out of whack because our entire lives and digital-based interactions are all hyper-optimized via the kind of BJ Fogg School of behavioral habit manipulation, et cetera.

Nate Hagens (00:12:05):

So as an anthropologist, I know this is impossible to answer, but what's your speculation? Of course, dopamine is required for motivation and action in animals. But as a percentage of our daily routines as an average American versus 200 years ago, 500 years ago, 10,000 years ago, 100,00 years ago, dopamine has got to be a much larger portion of the neurotransmitter portfolio.

(00:12:36):

And how much is that due to culture? How much of is it due to technology, and how much is due to marketing? Yes, it's a complex answer, but I feel like we are so sucked into the dopamine vortex right now. And I think if we could have a better balance, a balance to neurotransmitter portfolio with oxytocin, serotonin and others, we would have a better cultural chance. But do you have any opinions on that?

Jamie Wheal (00:13:08):

Yeah. Well, actually, I'm reading a book right now. Anna Lembke is at the Stanford Addiction Center, and she's just written a book recently called Dopamine Nation, and she takes an interesting look at all of those things. And then fundamentally, I mean if you go back to Sapolsky's original work and that kind of stuff too, the idea is it's less that dopamine is a reward or feel good chemical. That's often how it gets represented in popular culture than it is more a sort of salience-enhancing and novelty-encouraging neurochemical.

(00:13:39):

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So salience just means it's relevant. You'll get a shot of dopamine if you hit the hot stove or you step over a rattlesnake. So it's not simply the pleasure button, but it is the fucking A remember this, this is really important, this can make you or break you.

Nate Hagens (00:13:52):

But we get that fucking A, this is important 24/7.

Jamie Wheal (00:13:55):

Exactly. In Lembke's research, where she gets into these cycles is it's really interesting. The classic kind of rat with the cocaine lever sort of experiment, but with humans as well, which is you will be at a baseline of dopaminergic release.

(00:14:14):

Then, when you spy or get a cue, the sort of Pavlovian conditioning of a reward that's coming, then your dopamine level actually drops until you get it. So it actually creates this instant kind of hunger or pang or deficit to close the deal and get your reward, right?

(00:14:33):

And so, there's all these micro-adjustments. And then when people end up in addictive behavioral loops, their dopamine ends up flat lining. So it's almost like, "I need my coffee in the morning to wake me up." And it's like, "No, you don't. What you are is you're addicted to caffeine, and you need your shot of coffee in the morning to return to baseline."

(00:14:52):

And we are doing the same thing with dopamine. So when we are over-indexed on dopamine saturation, we end up less satisfied, more anxious, and more cravings just to return to baselines, and it can take up to a month of abstinence from whatever the overstimulation is to get back to kind of a homeostatic baseline where natural things naturally intrigue us, stimulate us, and prompt us to seek more constructive novelty versus just maintaining the sickness by seeking out the next thing.

Nate Hagens (00:15:23):

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I've made videos and materials calling that phenomenon, the wanting is stronger than the having. And, ultimately, we are turning a 100 billion barrel of oil equivalents per year into microliters of dopamine with not a lot to show for it.

(00:15:42):

Okay. Decentralization top down versus bottom up, I know you have thoughts on this. To me, it seems there are a ton of trends pointing to decentralization. And, therefore, a bottom up approach to our cultural transition is essential. But I would argue or offer that all those trends are subservient to the mega-trend or the mega thing that's holding everything together, which is our financial system and geopolitical agreements which argue for the need to bend and not break on the decentralization theme. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Jamie Wheal (00:16:30):

Yeah. I mean this is the same answer as for dopamine and serotonin, which is it's complicated, and it depends. And it's basically the idea of some form of civic localized resilient community, is absolutely essential and has massively atrophied.

(00:16:49):

So from the whole Bowling Alone to Vivek Murthy's, I think it's Together is the name of his book, we are isolated, fragmented consumers living in suburbs that don't know our next door neighbors, et cetera, et cetera. And so 100% that is an atrophied skillset and social capacity that we need to massively boost.

(00:17:12):

And on the other hand, no man is an island, and everything's a multinational corporation at this point. So we can't ignore top down major coordinated policy decisions, legislation, distributions, and allocations of capital, trade agreements, military agreements, et cetera. That all has to happen too because the era of colonialism was the long litany of indigenous folks back to the landers, you name it, who either were always outside the system and then eventually got steamrolled captured, subjugated by that system, or attempted to leave the system, the '60s back-to-the-land movement or anything else and kind of couldn't.

(00:17:55):

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And if you really take a long arc of it, then you go back to everybody from the desert, Essenes getting hunted down by the Romans to the Cathars and the Spanish Inquisition. It's a high-risk prospect to be a thumb in the eye of Sauron, like Sauron's eye, especially now with everything from Google Earth and satellites to heat seeking imagery, you'll be found, there's no hiding anymore. So it's sort of on the one hand, we have to do this intentionally regressive move of back to local healthy tribalism. And on the other hand, we can't ignore the politics of empire.

Nate Hagens (00:18:38):

Well, that's what I've done, is created a barbell strategy on the one hand do advance policy, which is educating politicians and leaders about the decisions and macro interventions we're going to need in the coming decade and, on the other end, educate and inspire young people and maybe a broader general public towards a different sort of cultural trajectory.

(00:19:01):

And so, let's get to the heart of your book, the latest book, Recapture the Rapture, is about ethical cult building. I'm going to start with two quotes, one from Martin Luther King in your book, "If we are to have peace on Earth, our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation. And this means we must develop a world perspective." And then your quote, "Culty cults demand subjugation to the guru. Ethical cults seek to enhance the sovereignty of the individual while increasing the intelligence of the collective."

(00:19:36):

So I have a lot of thoughts on this because that is what I think needs to happen. In your book preceding that, you talk about the meaning crisis, that religion theology doesn't play the role that it has the last few centuries. Neoliberalism is waning in its ability to provide an outlet for everyone, that's the markets and institutions, even the academy.

(00:20:07):

I call that religion and economic growth because I think economic growth is waning. So what is the thing that will potentially give us meaning? And I know this is complex and

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nanced, but how can we create a movement of authentic behavior change and service of the greater good that provides meaning to people?

Jamie Wheal (00:20:33):

Yeah. And just to kind of build on that earlier, Breitbart riff, the sort of the old saying of nature abhors a vacuum, so does culture, and in the midst of this meaning crisis where we have had the erosion of organized traditional religions, but we've also had the erosion of belief in neoliberalism.

(00:20:54):

I mean, I think there was a recent essay in the Atlantic by a Columbia Business school professor saying, "Hey, man, even my business school students are seriously critiquing capitalism." And these are the guys that are coming and going from McKinsey and Goldman and everywhere else. I'm like, "Fuck. That's a bit of a bellwether."

(00:21:12):

So into that vacuum of who are we, why are we, what is the good, the true and the beautiful, who's the other or the enemy to be triumphed over or the adversary, I mean, these are just the basic plot points of kind of culture architecture.

(00:21:29):

What we're seeing is obviously the rise in all sorts of toxic and pathological options, including populism, nativism, all the isms and schisms. So my sense is that if we're really saying, "Hey, humans, in general, need to as rapidly and efficiently as possible mend our trauma to get to the point where we're not just reacting and smacking each other back and forth," so let's discharge the incredibly tightly wound nature and reactivity that we're currently in.

(00:22:12):

And if we are, in fact, to remember the better angels of our nature, some form of inspiration and some form of deference to a higher good so that we can bond together in higher trust, more altruistic, more effective collaboration, you're basically looking at sort of nothing shy of a church 3.0, right? I mean, what does it look like for us to create rituals and techniques of ecstasy, batch forgiveness, which is I think it has always been a key part of almost any religious faith, service and forgiveness.

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Nate Hagens (00:22:50):

Batch forgiveness, what is that?

Jamie Wheal (00:22:52):

Yeah, batch. Well, so if you think of trauma, which is all the rage is a topic these days... I mean, Bessel van der Kolk's *Body Keeps the Score* has just popped back onto the bestseller list after years of being published and that kind of thing. Everybody is all about triggers and traumas and feelings and this and that, which is broadly healthy until it's not.

(00:23:14):

And you can super roughly divide trauma into two different categories. One is kind of macro trauma, like an adverse life event, like a broken bone or the psychosocial equivalent of that. A specific moment in time, it happened and you spend periods of time after recovering, and you're never quite back to normal. But then there's also microtrauma, which is us sitting at our desk, us freaking out during COVID, us getting into flame wars on social media, all the little tiny things.

(00:23:48):

And there's nothing specific. So this is less I broke my bone than it is, I've been sitting in a chair for three years. And now, my back's fucked. So it's that kind of microtrauma, and we are experiencing boatloads of both. And I think teasing those apart so that... Because we don't have the time to all sit in a circle passing a talking stick to hash out every single one of our real or imagined slights or places we feel hard done by, et cetera. So one of the interesting things that for some reason spacing on Dunbar's first name.

Nate Hagens (00:24:22):

Robin.

Jamie Wheal (00:24:22):

Okay. Robin Dunbar of the Dunbar number at Oxford, he has done studies with the San Bushmen in the Kalahari and has found that they engage in trance dance or

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ecstatic collective celebration more often, not less often during times of social stress and strife.

(00:24:43):

So they literally use it as kind of batch forgiveness. They use it as a groove and reconciliation committee instead of a truth and reconciliation committee. They're like, "Let's get our yayas out. Let's drum. Let's get ourselves into a non-ordinary trance state. Let's do it together." And then afterwards, the things that were getting on my nerves about you just aren't so much, and we can flush our collective nervous systems and psyches from that. So that feels super-duper important and absolutely explicitly missing right now from our social discourse.

Nate Hagens (00:25:20):

If you wrote about batch forgiveness in your book, I must have missed it, but when you said it, I thought you were going to say confession or something like that. But music and trance and drums is something that I thought was really... I don't know a lot about that anthropologically, although Jonathan Haidt who I know writes in his book, *The Righteous Mind*, that one of the few ways to switch to the hive mind in humans is, one, is being in nature and another is raves and deep music with a bass beat, and another is psychedelics.

(00:25:58):

But I guess what you're saying is that those yayas or the drum beat trance collective experience, maybe that suppressed or released dopamine and replaced it with something oxytocin or some more bonding thing. How central is music as a coping mechanism to the micro and macro-traumas? Music, either just listening to music or music in a group setting where you're listening to something loud and thumpy, et cetera. I know very little about this, but it feels right to me. But how would that be conserved is another thing I don't understand evolutionarily?

Jamie Wheal (00:26:41):

Meaning conserved, meaning just passed from generation to generation?

Nate Hagens (00:26:45):

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Yup. I mean, not culturally, but genetically. If we respond to a deep... I went to one rave once in Montreal, and it was amazing. I felt ecstasy almost just... I didn't do drugs or anything. I had a couple beers, but it was just 500 people in this Montreal bar bouncing to this music. I've never quite felt anything like that before.

Jamie Wheal (00:27:08):

Well, I mean, look, I think there's actually some interesting chicken and egg conversations there because like Daniel Levitin, who's at McGill has written, *This Is Your Brain on Music*, and it's a fascinating study. One of his core theses is music actually predates language that the earliest bone flutes are something like 50,000 years old, and that obviously percussive instruments predated those by however meaningful chunk of time that was, and that quite possibly, we were almost using that before we're using our palate and vocal cords to communicate sophisticated language.

(00:27:42):

And if you look at Ghanaian West African rhythms and things like that, the call and response, the literal "jungle drums" where they were literally communicating war, peace, birth, celebration, gathering points, danger, all of those things via music, both over distance, but also in intimate settings like around the campfire. There is a profound, I mean, everybody's got a heartbeat. We all grew in the womb listening to the... wub wub, wub wub, wub wub.

Nate Hagens (00:28:11):

My God, I never thought of that.

Jamie Wheal (00:28:13):

Well, I mean literally and that bodily beat like the duh, duh, duh, duh, duh, that's called the Heartbeat of Africa. And it's literally the precursor to the Rolling Stones doing "Not Fade Away" all the way to the Grateful Dead, all the way to every bit of EDM you've ever heard.

(00:28:29):

So rather than thinking of it as us, we're innovating a new social technology, and there's an app for it, it's much more sort of psycho-archeology. We're just unearthing

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something that not only predates language and arguably was one of the engines of emerging hominid culture and communication and coordination. It let us stay up at night to ward off predators. It let us coordinate for hunts. It let us engage in mating rituals and all these things.

(00:28:56):

But it actually goes to almost kind of brain stem and, again, limbic patterning in our system. So the deepest rhythms are trance-inducing because they go straight into the brain, and they discombobulate via syncopation and poly rhythm, right? And it's why Vodun has such funky-ass beats because the point is you cannot listen to them with your executive function, prefrontal cortex, beta wave activity. It just drags you into alpha and theta. And as George Clinton and Parliament-Funkadelic once said, "You free your mind, and your ass will follow."

Nate Hagens (00:29:31):

Vodun, I've never heard of. George Clinton, the song about Atomic Dog or whatever, that I remember. So do your knowledge about music and what you just described, does that change personally how you use or listen or engage with music in your own life especially as someone who's working full-time on the metacrisis and trying to build communitas and a movement on these things, it's got to be a lot of stress in your life because we're exposed to these things 24/7?

Jamie Wheal (00:30:04):

Well, as Alice Walker said, she titled a collection of her poem, she said, "Hard times call for furious dancing." And that's 100% true, right? I mean, basically, the more grief and trauma and conflict and uncertainty that we are trying to process, the more essential, truly cathartic, reset reboot the nervous system peak states are.

(00:30:31):

So the obvious one that where everybody's familiar with is orgasm. You have that kind of whatever. I forget this four Kinsey stages, but they're sort of pre-something, arousal, climax, and then whatever the refractory period is, right?

(00:30:43):

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And so that energetic neurological experience of flatline to arousal, to peak, release, defrag, reboot is non-negotiable for us processing all that accumulated micro-PTSD, and even with enough of a neurological and neurochemical saturated state also, to go back and actually maybe excavate and/or mend some of the deeper wounds, some of the macro-PTSD, and that's MAPS's work with MDMA therapy in veterans and PTSD and those kind of things.

(00:31:20):

If you put yourself in these neurological states where you're saturated with safety, security, and belonging, then you can actually take some of those traumatized memories off your shelf, rework them, reformat them, overwrite them as it were in therapeutic dialogue and that kind of thing. And then, you put them back on the shelf, and they're different memories now. So it does feel essential. It's a part of our kind of psychosocial hygiene of how do we keep on keeping on without just getting ground down by the stressors of our world.

Nate Hagens (00:31:51):

So I listen to music a lot. And just thinking about it, the last time I danced with people was probably 20 years ago at a Midwest wedding. I did the white guy dance, but I dance all the time by myself with my dogs. I just crank the music, and I kind of boogie around and the dogs dance with me. And maybe, I'm doing that, not because, "Hey, that would be fun," but maybe I'm subconsciously doing that to de-stress and heal a little. I don't know. I hadn't thought about it, but I do that a lot.

Jamie Wheal (00:32:24):

Oh, well, actually, we'd done an expedition course in the Utah canyons at the end of October, and then flew straight to LA to go to the Dead & Company. So this is John Mayer playing guitar with those guys at the Hollywood Bowl. So it was at their Halloween shows.

(00:32:39):

And I took a dear friend and former SEAL Team 6 commander with me, and this was his first show. He'd only ever gone to a couple of U2 shows back in the day, probably

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before Annapolis. That was it. All he'd seen was completely scripted, big stadium show twice with one band.

(00:32:55):

So for him to get a taste of a Grateful Dead show was very different. And he looked over at me and he's like, "Oh, you're dancing your ass off." And I was like, "Dude, you don't dance because you feel great. And this is a celebration. You dance to work the kinks out."

(00:33:09):

It's, literally, you allow the music sonically acoustically to move through you at high volume, high fidelity. And you would let those sound waves work out the kinks. And for him, I mean, I just said it because that's just feels like what everybody does at those shows. That's part of that ecstatic psychedelic collective ritual that has emerged over 50 years of that subculture. But for him, that was a revelation. He's like, "Oh, you mean you don't have to feel awesome and then dance? You can actually dance to feel awesome?" And so, that is a super helpful reverse.

Nate Hagens (00:33:45):

That would be a learning experience for me too. And I'm just wondering, people dance and listen to music because they like it. I have no idea. Is there any musical therapy for trauma?

Jamie Wheal (00:33:58):

Oh, hugely.

Nate Hagens (00:34:00):

Really? Okay.

Jamie Wheal (00:34:01):

Oh, massively.

Nate Hagens (00:34:01):

So that's a thing.

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Jamie Wheal (00:34:03):

That's not only a thing, and there's for sure just straight up music and movement trauma specialists. But even very explicitly, there's currently a huge upgrade to the sonic components, to psychedelic therapies because for a long time, it was... I don't know when this was formed. I suppose it was in the '60s, and then continued in the underground, which was like you put on your headphones, you lie on a couch, you listen to classical music, or maybe you listen to something vaguely world music with gongs and chimes, and they're like, "Hmm, I think the music is the wallpaper of our minds."

(00:34:42):

And so, it absolutely shape... It becomes a carrier wave for any interior subjective experience. And now, in the last 18 to 24 months, there's been a huge uptick in, well, wait a second, this is so central. We should update the therapeutic playlists for any of the MDMA or psilocybin therapies at Johns Hopkins and Imperial University and at all of these places because they're 100% realizing the centrality of it to the patient's experience.

Nate Hagens (00:35:12):

So getting back to something serious, not that music isn't serious, but this is really why I reached out to you or why I asked Daniel to introduce us. So in my materials, and I had sent you my book, but I don't expect that you've read it. But in there, we talk about the agenda of the gene, that the gene is not our friend, but that we don't have to live by the dictates of what our great grandcestors bequeathed us on all this Stone Age mind, and a modern culture.

(00:35:46):

It's very similar to what I think you did a podcast with Scott Barry Kaufman talked about transcending our evolved wiring into behaving as different humans. And it's what you called your own podcast, homegrown humans. And it all is revolving around this idea that we're the first... I mean, I'm paraphrase the way that I think about it.

(00:36:10):

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We're the first generation of our species to be able to understand the meta crisis, how everything fits together, energy, economy, anthropology, neuroscience, debt, climate change, biodiversity, individual versus collective behavior, all of it.

(00:36:24):

And so, here's how I think about ethical cult building. You have these binary questions, "Did you take the red pill or not?" The red pill being, do you understand or can you squint and see how all this stuff fits together and that we are in an unbelievable pickle culturally from economic, ecological, trust, political, all kinds of negative risks are on our doorstep.

(00:36:54):

Do you understand those things generally? Then, the next question is, do you have wider boundary empathy and ethics? In other words, once you learn about how dire our situation is, do you go to buy guns and knives and canned goods and just try to defend your own castle or do you have a wider boundary code of ethics that you care about your community, other species, other people that come after us?

(00:37:22):

And then, the third thing, which is why I am so attracted to your work, is can you change your neurophysiology, your psychology to be a better human while taking all this stuff on board, being able to defer the second marshmallow, defer gratification. I think you use the words clean up your own house in order to be able to help the greater good.

(00:37:52):

I think that's spot on. And to be honest, I'm not sure that I have cleaned up my own house because I'm so busy doing this sort of stuff on the macro interventions, which is why I lean on you because you seem to have a lot of this figured out because you're a wilderness guide and kite surfer and you lead outward bound sorts of things that that's the core part missing.

(00:38:14):

I teach my students all of the science and how this stuff fits together. But at the end, there's this, how do we transcend our cultural cul-de-sac of how we behave into

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something deeper and more aligned with the future? So what do you think about all that?

Jamie Wheal (00:38:35):

Well, that's the shoemaker's children having no shoes, right? That's always the challenge of being called with a mission that sometimes feels bigger or more important than self-care.

Nate Hagens (00:38:46):

I mean, just to be blunt, that is how I've felt the last year or two, is the mission is bigger than my own self-care. And I know it's a marathon, not a sprint. So I have to reread the last chapter of your book and go hang out with you in Arizona more because it is a balance. You have to be kind to yourself. But expand on that a little bit. You had another term coming alive as opposed to staying alive, I think you say.

Jamie Wheal (00:39:12):

Yeah. I mean, look, I think all of this are fingers in the dike, that the amount of disruption and challenge throughout human history, but also our turn in the barrel, is better than anybody's best laid plans.

(00:39:27):

And that's where what we were talking about with music, not just the actual sonic or acoustic factors of it, but the community aspect of it is we cannot do this by ourselves. And despite having a passion built my life around access to wild places and gravity sports and sharing those times with people I love, and having access to regular celebratory music and all those things, I get dropped to my knees on a regular basis as recently as two days ago, I'm driving to town to get an extension cord because there's going to be a hard freeze, and we have to protect some things from freezing.

(00:40:06):

And I am just in the pit of gloom being like, "Fuck me, man. This is all a bit much." In fact, I just finished reading that Vaclav Smil Grand Transitions book. And there'd been one or two other articles coming across my desk at the time that were just extra specially Tripoli bleak and not just the bleak because you can always have found

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somebody, some doomsayer. And for the last decades, they've never been on a short supply.

(00:40:33):

But now, the number of mainstream folks that are saying those things. So my sense is that part of the beauty of music is the idea of community and shared suffering, and that in the community of shared suffering, we actually end up with a shot at redemption. And there are multiple, multiple times where I and I think this experience isn't unique, have been dropped to our knees and actually undone.

(00:41:05):

I don't have any more capacity for me to pick myself up off the ground. And that's when the most profound and beautiful thing happens, whether it's the musician or the songwriter or the band or the audience, or it's all of them together pulses with this energy of our redemption songs. And there, you are covered in snot absolutely despondent on your knees, unable to take another step.

(00:41:33):

And the collective power, the collective dignity, the collective joy, the collective testimony of like, "Yes, this too, and we're dancing anyway," that becomes essential. So to me, we cannot do this alone. And that's not just a platitude. Actually, it's logistics. We can't all replicate the tools, capacities, and resources we need, but we can't... Both external and internal material like solar and wells and food and tool bonds and maker spaces and that kind of stuff, but also psychological, we're all going to get dropped to our knees through this process.

(00:42:15):

And I always think of Trans-Atlantic sailing races, something like that is a metaphor. The idea is you don't all have to stay awake all the time. You take turns taking watch through stormy seas, and all you need is one person at the wheel while everyone else can recover, and then we take turns. And that to me feels super, super important because when you talked about that coming alive and staying alive, that was a riff on E.B. White, the author of *Charlotte's Web*.

Nate Hagens (00:42:46):

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I have that quote from your book written down, "I rise in the morning, torn between a desire to save the world and a desire to savor the world. This makes it hard to plan the day."

Jamie Wheal (00:42:56):

Yeah, which it totally does. And I didn't mention the next sentence, which is even better because he like, "Then I realized, in fact, that the savoring must come first because if there was nothing worth savoring, there would be nothing to save." And to me, that's the beautiful, "Okay, let's pick ourselves back up," because we are, even the very nature of your courses that you're teaching, our mind benders never really... No humans ever have been able to lay out all those factors of existence in quite that explicit way, the sort of objectify classifications, categories, quantified analysis, interdependencies, complexity math, and to say, "This is the whole enchilada of energy and food and population and economics and carrying capacities and this and that."

(00:43:46):

We haven't been able to do that. And at the same time, that very same whizzbang, techno-industrial civil society that has created the very conditions that led to the personal growth explosion, the me generation, the human development, all of these things that lets us wake up to the highest potentials of ourselves, the coming alive and gay rights and women's rights and trans rights, and increasing egalitarianism and even animal rights and all these things to say "Yes, yay, yay, yay, goodness, truth and beauty for all of us forever."

(00:44:23):

At the same time, we are being rudely reacquainted with the staying alive arc especially in the developed West. I mean, other chunks of the world have never had the luxury of not being acquainted with this, right? But for us, for the first time in a while, at least half a century, maybe 75 years or more, really since the conclusion of World War II, we've been in a consumer padded cocoon of an anomalous Pax Americana. And so the staying alive part is like, "Wait, I just woke up to all my limitless potentials and all the potentials of a society where we can all live our hashtag best life."

(00:45:02):

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And at the same time, we realizing I'm getting the fucking bill that's coming due for a civilization that might be massively overextended and about to go tits-up. And that's schizophrenic back and forth between I'm overwhelmed with gratitude and joy and infinite possibility versus I'm terrified staring in the windshield of what's coming at us at light speed. That's a kind of dislocation that I think most of us are struggling with on a daily basis.

Nate Hagens (00:45:32):

I completely agree. And let me offer a little one or two anecdotes there. You brought up my class and the interdisciplinary synthesis, and it took me 20 years to put that together. The reason I think it works is because we have 25 students in a circle, and they're hearing all this mind-bending stuff, but they're processing it as a tribe that spends 100 hours together during three or four months. Just the fact talking to someone else that understands and cares about these things and has somewhat of a plan, that is, I can feel it, my cortisol is declining. And I have a natural human response to community even though you're six states south of me.

(00:46:24):

And so, I do think somehow if we're able to scale that, I have this chat group that I put together six or seven years ago with 38 systems ecologists, well-known people. And so I don't have anyone really locally to talk about these things. So I've found my tribe on the internet kind of, but, ultimately, that's kind of a non-starter because ultimately locally is going to be where things really matter.

(00:46:53):

But my question to you, and maybe you could offer some information on what you're trying to do right now, is how do we take this wide boundary empathy that we are at a cultural transition and we need to help with a recognition of the facts or even somewhat fluency in what's going on? And this homegrown humans, transcend, get your house in order, coming alive sort of neurophysiology, how do you package that together and scale it so that it's not just one community in Texas that's living that way, but maybe there's 3000 communities that are starting to change how they think, because this all makes sense to us, but meanwhile, the S&P-500 is at all time highs and all these cryptocurrency, metaverse, memes and various other, as you refer to,

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rapture ideologies, make it sound like the story we're telling is kind of fringe and not real. It will become real pretty quick to a lot of people. But it may happen seven years from now without any warning. How do we get the communitas scaled before that? Is it possible? What are your hopes? What are you working on in that direction?

Jamie Wheal (00:48:13):

Yeah. I mean, look, and again, this is that Vaclav Smil assessment. He's like, "Okay, let's just see how we're doing so far on the whole decarbonization thing here." Here's where it was in Paris and before, and here's where we are now. And we're at 1.3%, if max, sort of improvement net. There's been a whole bunch of growth, and there's been a whole bunch of expansion in renewables and this and that, but it's been outpaced by more fossil fuel burn and this and that.

(00:48:38):

It's like, "So this is actually how we're doing, not the next product launch or the next thing." So if you basically just realize, "Okay, we are highly efficient," which basically means stubborn and lazy, so we do not change unless we absolutely, positively, positively, triple absolutely have to. So that appears to be what we're doing right now.

Nate Hagens (00:48:59):

Except for people that understand our message and understand that we will not change as a culture, that gives them a little bit of cognitive, emotional boost to change individually ahead of time.

Jamie Wheal (00:49:12):

I mean, my unfiltered, not like what's my talking point to close a keynote with, but my unfiltered sense is actually we're in for a world of hurt, and it's the kind of Pompeii effect. And Pompeii always haunted me as a kid because you'd see those pictures and you'd be like, "Why the fuck didn't you get out of town?" That thing was blowing for weeks.

(00:49:31):

That said that I think some truly global collective awakening, it's probably slim-ons unless there's some deus ex machina kind of thing like second coming, raptures, UFOs,

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whatever. Unless there's something we cannot predict from here, it's unlikely via our own collective intelligence-

Nate Hagens (00:49:50):

I agree.

Jamie Wheal (00:49:51):

... to just be a light switch that all just suddenly happens and we get the Kumbaya bug. So what it means is, I think the simplest... not the simplest, but the most honest thing that I could offer is if this generation starts thinking a meditation of we are the generation of the arc, we are building like a time capsule, the one they found under that Robert E. Lee statue.

(00:50:16):

We are literally building time capsules of consciousness and culture that we are dedicating to our future generations not yet born, and that we start expanding our sense of who we are because if I am just me, the biographic me who grew up in the Pax Americana conditioned to be a rational, egotistical consumer identity, like, "I am me. I can do anything I want. I can live, be, and hang with anybody I want. I can make my life constantly again and again and again. I can put it up on social media. And anything I want, I can buy. And everything I buy has the salvific promise of curing my dandruff, or my chronic halitosis, or granting me success status, whatever it would be," that is a wickedly fragile and dysfunctional self-sense.

(00:51:12):

And if instead we go back to some form of seven generation consciousness, literally three generations behind me, who was my father and my grandfather and my great-grandfather that got that torch to me and three generations ahead of me, who are my children and my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren that I am living on behalf of, that actually buffers our psychological distress.

(00:51:39):

And there's been lots of studies where they've done psychological studies of children who are aware of their generations. And if they're aware of three or more generations, they're less prone to anxiety and depression in middle school and high school. They

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have higher SAT scores. They have higher college attendance and graduation rates, better bounce back from adverse life events, all these things.

(00:51:56):

So it's not just kind of nice lip service. It's that sense of "No. Oh, if it's just me pinballing through the universe as a fragment, as an atomized self," we're going to get smoked.

(00:52:09):

But if we can expand and buffer who I am and on whose behalf am I suffering or thriving, then, we have the capacity to do the thing that every displaced people have always done, whether it's the Ashkenazi or the Roma or the Kurds or the Uyghurs, the Tibetans, any people who have gone through intergenerational dislocation and oppression have always naturally done that.

(00:52:39):

I might not get to the Promised Land, but I keep on walking in the hopes that my children might. And that to me feels like basically getting out of a chronic awareness of just like it's me now and every itch I have to scratch. In fact, there was a New York Times article that embodied this totally. It was basically that everybody is basically an irritated Karen looking to call the manager on civilization right now. And you realize, "Ooh, there's nobody on the other end of that phone anymore, and we better get over ourselves and get into, we're doing this for the long game, even if I don't get my instant gratification out of it."

Nate Hagens (00:53:20):

I read this the other day. Denmark is the happiest country on earth, but they dug into that a little bit. And there's half of the questionnaire that they do on the World Values Survey or something like that, is about your community and your health and how secure you feel and various physical things, but the other half is your expectations and how do these things meet your expectations? And it turns out that Denmark has among the lowest expectations in the world. So they're meeting them. So they don't smile a lot. They're not depressed, but they go around in their lot in life a little bit curmudgeonly. Therefore, their expectations are easily met, which makes them happy.

(00:54:10):

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And this goes full circle back to the limbic capitalism and Sapolsky and unexpected reward is if we... I mean, I've already grieved for the future that our culture expects. And therefore, what I think is going to happen in the future is much different than the average person. So I've already lowered my expectations, which means I can find a joy and, wow, things are better than I expected, even though most people will think what I'm predicting is or expecting is depressing or a world of hurt, as you say.

(00:54:43):

So I'm just wondering if lowering your expectations generally is a helpful thing, or does that cause you to have less dopamine and stay in your basement and watch Netflix over and over?

Jamie Wheal (00:54:54):

I'm always most comfortable with managing dialectics versus assigning, putting all the weight on one side or the other of a polarity. So the dialectic is back to Admiral James Stockdale, and that Stockdale paradox that was popularized decades ago. But that idea of it's not lower expectations so then you're never disappointed because then you will just end up in a depressed non-agent state.

Nate Hagens (00:55:19):

Right.

Jamie Wheal (00:55:19):

And we actually need to be fully rallied nor is it to be a Pollyanna. And Jim Stockdale, for anybody that hasn't heard this before, was the highest ranking POW in Vietnam. And so he presided over the camps, but he also, for nine years, was in for the most beatings and the most hot sort of singled out attention.

(00:55:37):

And he realized over time that the pessimist in the POW camps died, which is not surprising because they were depressed and lost their will to live. But he said the optimist died almost as often. And that was because they set some Pollyanna escape, like the boys will be home for Christmas or July the Fourth, or whatever it would be as their hope. And when the hope proved fragile or falsified, then they collapsed. And so

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his point, the paradox of the Stockdale paradox is you have to be ruthlessly realistic about present realities.

Nate Hagens (00:56:12):

Which is why I'm teaching my course. I mean, we can maybe skip to your "getting your house in order" and "coming alive" without understanding any of the problems, but I think we completely have to see the map and the road ahead of us and then come alive. And I totally agree with you, too much pessimism, too much optimism are both going to be problematic. We need to open our eyes, see the path, roll up our sleeves and start to live differently. What are you doing professionally now and what are your hopes and dreams for the next few years with your efforts to shift society on a better path?

Jamie Wheal (00:56:48):

Well, I mean, we're just doing our best to lead leaders. So in the sense that we know at the folks that have been drawn to our work and do trainings, whether it's digital trainings or in-person adventure trainings or whatever it would be with us-

Nate Hagens (00:57:03):

When you say our, what do you mean by that?

Jamie Wheal (00:57:05):

So the Flow Genome Project is the organization, Curt Cronin is that Team Six, former retired commander who is our executive director, and then the rest of the folks in our organization. And our commitment is attempting to fundamentally be on the front end of research and training of transformational leadership and to do it in a really clean way.

(00:57:32):

So think of basically Navy SEALs buds for the apocalypse. How do you get people with the psychological tools and communication skills that work? How do you give people the lived experiences of resiliency, coordination challenge, but also celebration, also culture and support? It's not agro. It's not Tough Mudder and Spartan races, but we do do fun and intense embodied things, and then hopefully helping that

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propagate and helping each of those people going back and then standing up or reinvigorating the communities that they're a part of because I think it's the Wendell Berry thing where he says that beautiful phrase like, "Be joyful though you have considered all the facts."

(00:58:15):

And so, our organization is a 10th of the size of what it could be if we were just peddling the bliss codes for people. You're blowing their minds. And they are. They're in the book. They're featured as a death rebirth protocol. And that is the most humbling, awe-inspiring, accessible ways to shoot the moon and initiate ourselves in each other into what arguably was always the domain of the esoteric traditions like the Eleusinian mysteries. But you can't give that to people who are wanting the joy on this side of complexity.

(00:58:54):

They're just wanting the pretty lights. They're wanting the dopamine high. They're wanting the instant gratification. You have to drag them through considering all the facts, the tragedy. And then and only then are we sort of effectively worthy of holding that much joy because it's tempered and balanced by the stakes and our commitment to our fellow man, fellow humans, the least of our brothers and sisters.

(00:59:22):

And so much of the personal growth, self-help, biohacking space is all pre-tragic. It's I want mine now and I've been raised and conditioned to believe I can have anything I want. And then, so everything works out for me. And then, you get dragged into the tragic phase, which is happening with social justice. It's happening with the alt-right which is this, I got sold a bill of goods, and then nothing works out.

(00:59:46):

And you get tons of demagogues, rallying people facing that tragic phase. And they're like, "We'll, go back to the pre-tragic. You deserve what you want. We deserve what you want, and it's their fault we don't have it." So you get this nosing into the tragic and then being led by demagogues back into a false pre-tragic. And what we really need is we need the transformational leaders like the Mandelas and the Gandhis and the Kings who said, "Hey, this is what it is."

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(01:00:13):

It's always been this way. We're not going to lie to you. But there is dignity. There is hope. There is possibility on the other side of that. And that's the post-tragic radical hope. That's the satyagraha that Gandhi talked about. That's the soul force that MLK talked about.

(01:00:31):

And to me, you can get there by talking about it, but only kind of. And arguably, and the whole reason I wrote Recapture the Rapture was like, "Here's the cheat codes to initiate ourselves and each other into being a twice born human, the dying before you die like I am absolved of any delusions that it's happily ever afters. I know the stakes and I choose this life with all of its complexity, with all of its tragedy, with all of its uncertainty to be a light unto others." And if we can do that, then we have a chance.

Nate Hagens (01:01:07):

So if your Recapture the Rapture book had the cheat codes on just how to be joyful, it might have done as well as your first book, Stealing Fire, but you had all the heavy stuff before that on meaning and cultural triage and everything. And a lot of people do not want to hear about what's coming because it's too painful.

(01:01:34):

And so, I think that that recent movie, Don't Look Up, probably validated some of your reaction to the second book, not selling as many copies as the first one because people don't want to hear this. They want feel good things, but not everyone. There are a lot of people that are the walking worried, that know something is horribly wrong in our culture. They want an explanation for that, and they want something to do.

Jamie Wheal (01:02:01):

And they want trustworthy. They want somebody who still has their head on straight to guide them through the crevasses and the rockfall because, right now, there's this arising of rapture ideologies, and whether that's anti-vax or QAnon or New World ordered and the Davos Great Reset or some unholy mixing and matching of all three plus some others. You end up with people who are showing up of like, "Oh, I was just

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like you. I was a sheeple. I was a basic. I was muggle. And then, I got red-pilled or did my own research or fill in the blank. And now, I'm here to tell you what's really going on and who the bad guy is, and whether that's Fauci or Gates or Biden or whomever."

(01:02:43):

And those aren't safe either, but more and more people are being drawn to them simply because they are acknowledging something's terribly wrong and nothing is as it seems. So it's voices of sanity who can guide through high consequence terrain, feel more needed than ever.

Nate Hagens (01:03:00):

Well, I think I'm a voice of sanity, but I've spent 20 years understanding the problems and I don't know the answers still. I know the directions of the answers we're going to have to use less material throughput in coming decades, possibly significantly less. We're going to have to replace some of our technological fancy gadgets with real social interaction and community.

(01:03:25):

We're going to have to spend more time in nature, those sorts of things. But what you just said reminded me of a dinner conversation I had two years ago with three mid-60 year old kind of friends locally, and they'd watched my Earth Day talk and they're like, "Nate, we have spent our whole life oblivious to this, and now we have 10 or 15 years left. Tell us what to do. We want to do something of meaning. We want to do the right thing with how much time we have left.

(01:03:58):

And we feel like our entire life up until this moment has been wasted." One was a real estate developer, one did software. And I was driving home and I was thinking, "God, that was so profound." I don't know exactly what to tell them, but I wonder how many millions of people there are around the country that are feeling that exact same thing.

(01:04:17):

What can I do relative to the magnitude of the risks that we face that will give me meaning?" And so that's why this whole conversation is coalescing around that. And we're probably running out of bandwidth and time here today. But do you have a

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couple three recommendations for listeners that anyone listening to this podcast is certainly quite fluent in the metacrisis and the human predicament.

(01:04:48):

But from your perspective, what advice would you give an individual or a member of a community to get started on a couple three things down this path towards meaning, towards coming alive, towards getting your house in order, et cetera?

Jamie Wheal (01:05:04):

Well, I mean, I think the first is get your house in order quite literally, because if you are following conversations like this, you are probably already in the leading one to 10% of your family, your community, your neighborhood, whatever it would be, just trying to wrap your head around this stuff, which means if you are, then, you're going to have people looking to you for what to do next.

(01:05:24):

And that becomes schizophrenic as well. If you're on the front lines of fighting the good fight, and no matter what stake you put in the ground, you've decided it's art. So I'm going to do parades and puppets, or I'm going to write songs and poems or you've decided it's policy, it doesn't matter. You can take your pick of a thousand different potential solutions. Your attentions are going to become increasingly divided if you are unsure about food, clothing, shelter, safety, security for your family and the people you love, and many, many good-hearted people, especially on the progressive side of things, but less and less so. I mean it's eroding on both sides now, is, "Well, I wouldn't want to do that kind of stuff because that would make me a nuthatch Duck Dynasty prepper."

(01:06:03):

And you're like, "So I'm not going to be those guys, so I'm not going to do anything, so I'm going to double down on some meta systemic global Hail Mary or nothing." And that's not sustainable. So I would say do the 80/20. What is the 20% of the things that you absolutely should do just as a self-reliant human for your home, for your water, for your power, for your food supply, for your neighborhood connections, all that kind of stuff?

(01:06:25):

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Go do that now post-haste without apology and without fear that you need to strap on a tinfoil hat, go do that because that's what a reliable, responsible person does to not be another victim and to actually be available to be on the front lines to help.

(01:06:39):

Once you've done that, then come back to the front lines and put your stake in the ground. What is yours to do? And it all needs to get done so there's no panic there. And where is the intersection of your talent and your trauma? Where do you feel the wound of the world? Most acutely, it could be animal rights, it could be childcare and education. It could be sexual abuse and family violence. It could be environment. Again, it could be policy. Where do you feel it like this is wrong and I know it's wrong because I've actually had that wounding?

(01:07:12):

And then where's your talent? Where do you have the ability to do something other than just be one more body in the street? And if there is a place where those things overlap, that's where you will find passion with your purpose.

(01:07:23):

So ultimately, once you've put your house in order and found that thin overlap, basically seek novelty, make art and help out. So the seek novelty is like how do we avoid the black dog of doom, despair and oppression?

(01:07:40):

Well, we are wired to seek novelty. So go and find that which is new. It could be sunrises and sunsets and shooting stars and full moons. It could be trees in bloom. It could be a puppy playing. It could be a new country or a new relationship or a new conversation, new music. Novelty's easy and it's abundant, but we just get in ruts.

(01:07:58):

So seek it because we'll feel better. Make art, do anything that rails against the second law of thermodynamics and just organizes matters slightly into slightly more good, slightly more true, slightly more beautiful to say, "We were here. We existed." And whether that's a garden or a sculpture or a song or a business startup or raising a family, make art.

(01:08:23):

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And then, if you've got seeking novelty and making art roughly figured out, then help out. Share the fruits of either of those things with anybody that's still struggling finding them. And this is how we keep on keeping on.

Nate Hagens (01:08:39):

I love it. I found a quote this morning that I'm putting in an essay of mine, and I just think it's appropriate, so I'm going to read it here. This is from Steve Jobs commencement speech, believe it or not. "Sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick. Don't lose faith. I'm convinced that the only thing that kept me going was that I loved what I did. You've got to find what you love. And that is as true for your work as it is for your lovers.

(01:09:04):

Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it. And like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking until you find it. Don't settle.

(01:09:26):

For the past 33 years, I've looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself, 'If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I'm about to do today?' And whatever the answer has been no for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something," which is your coming alive.

Jamie Wheal (01:09:42):

Yeah, because I mean, A, yeah, no, neat, super cool, super inspiring and absolutely circa 2000 Steve Jobs, think different, and for a graduation speech and to play the devil's advocate on that is like, "Fucking hell, man." That was the last 75 years. If we didn't figure that out, then we're not going to get another crack at it. We've never had a period of such stability and obscene abundance ever before or again likely unless we get it with cold fusion or something else amazing because Carol Dweck, everybody

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knows her, Stanford professor, wrote the book on mindsets, fixed mindset and growth mindsets.

(01:10:17):

And everybody's like, "Of course I'm a growth mindset." And all those silly closed-minded people are fixed mindsets. But then she wrote a piece in the Atlantic four or five years ago on particularly millennials showing up with a very strong sense of fixed mindsets towards their work and towards their relationships.

(01:10:33):

And the insidious way that the fixed mind set showed up in those is I expect my company, I expect my job to fulfill my everything, and I expect myself to get out of bed absolutely fired up every day no matter what. And if work is ever a drudgery, it's the company's fault for not being inspiring enough to smooth it all out for me. And the same thing with romantic partners.

(01:10:54):

I expect you to be my absolute one and all and everything and help me along my path to self-actualization. And David Brooks wrote about this, how marriage has continued to raise the bar on what you expect of partners and all these kind of things. And in some respects, it's like, "Suck it up, fat kids, the party's over." And what we actually need is not these beautiful airy fairy, what's my inner purpose, and is it being fulfilled 24/7?

(01:11:17):

It's expedition behavior. And expedition behavior comes out of the National Outdoor Leadership School, the kind of outward bound sort of McKinsey of mountaineering and guiding. And EB, as they call it, expedition behavior, is how well do you hang in the shit? What happens when you're cold and hungry or it's dark and it's late, or you're on sketchy terrain and are you pitching shelters and are you cooking food and are you looking out for yourself and are you looking out for your group mates? And how do you handle conflict and how do you handle adversity?

(01:11:45):

So I would say there's going to be a huge focusing into not how clever are we, not how many followers do we have on Instagram and not are we getting in touch with our

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inner dolphins and life purpose, but just what is our expedition behavior going through volatile and uncertain terrain together?

(01:12:03):

And how well can we hang because we both know a bunch of really smart people that decohere at the slightest interruption to their lives and their surroundings, right? In which case, I don't care how many decimals you can calculate pi to in your head, bro. You're a basket case and dead weight going up over this mountain pass, right? So I think expedition behavior, can we actually, not decohere do we get stronger when things get harder? And can we source from deep wells, deep reservoirs of resilience, optimism, and care and concern for each other? I think that trumps everything else in the fancy waistcoats, existential scholasticism category.

Nate Hagens (01:12:46):

That was profound. I will offer that I spent 45 minutes this morning corralling my 17 chickens into the inner shed because it's going to be 18 below zero. And had I not done that, they would've frozen to that tonight. So that was a miniature farm expedition behavior.

(01:13:02):

So last question, how can we, maybe you or I but just we as a culture, potentially change the education system so that young people can be aware of the science of how everything fits together, but also have skills, like you say, EB, expedition behavior, both psychological, physical resilience, maybe be a MacGyver of various things, be generalists as opposed to the reductionist kind of teaching young people trivia that mattered the last 40 years sort of thing, and not preparing young people for the future that you and I foresee?

(01:13:47):

Do you have any insights into changing the education system or applying your leadership training that you're working on towards young people? And I know you have a personal history with Montessori type of school and philosophy. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Jamie Wheal (01:14:10):

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I mean, yeah, gajillions, right? So I mean most recently helped the Acton Business School, the MBA school that's here based in Austin. It was founded by a friend and mentor, Jeff Sandefer, who was on the Harvard Business School Board, a Harvard Business School alum. And he's sought to recreate the HBS classrooms in Austin, but do it for a purely entrepreneurially focused degree.

(01:14:30):

And he built it around the hero's journey. It's the one that Jordan Peterson identified as the only graduate curriculum that he would support or endorse. And the founders asked our organization to help design some of their kind of bootcamps and trainings for those folks.

(01:14:46):

And on the other hand, we've done stuff down in the high school levels all the way down to three to five year olds in Montessori when our own kids were down at that age. So we've paid attention to progressive and alternative education from Montessori to Waldorf to Reggio Emilia to Sudbury schools and the kind of whole spectrum.

(01:15:04):

And for a long, long, long time, it was absolutely capped by college admissions. So you could be as progressive and innovative as you wanted in preschool and even in elementary school. And most high functioning families would be willing to play along, particularly if the advocacy was backed by a mom who wanted their little creative spirit to not get crushed by industrial schooling and a disconnected dad who didn't give a shit would stroke the checks. Gross cliches there, but there it goes.

(01:15:30):

And then by the time you get to eighth grade, you're getting increasing pressure on, "But what's the ROI? What's the outcome? Are they still going to get into Princeton or Harvard or whatever?" And then by the time you get into high school alternative programs, 90% of them became last chance schools, not first hope schools. So you ended up with a degraded student population that actually could never deliver on the vision because they were damaged goods.

(01:15:54):

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They had been rattling around all sorts of different experiences. Now, one thing, I mean, it's a bunch of things that COVID has done, but the last two years has effectively compressed most horizon lines. And this is true for the metaverse and all these movements of remote work and virtual presencing and all these kind of things. It's basically taken 2030 and just shoved it into our faces.

(01:16:15):

And so, that compression of a decade of change, just out of necessity, one of those things is the absolute bottom has dropped out the value proposition of high ticket college education. You mean you suckered us to pay 50,000 bucks for tuition and we got on campus for seven or eight days and you went remote on us? And now, no one's getting the refund? And this could be Khan Academy or YouTube? That emperor has no clothes moment, I don't think that higher ed comes back from it.

(01:16:49):

You will still have the Ivy Leagues. You will still have the Caltechs and the Stanfords and the handful of schools that will be beyond reproach with huge endowments and impeccable global reputations. But the middle is just going to be utterly hollowed out.

(01:17:04):

And I think with it more and more, otherwise, mainstream parents are going to be willing and even interested in not going into six-figure debt for undergraduate pieces of paper that are clearly worthless.

Nate Hagens (01:17:18):

So where are all those people in the middle going to go who are 17, 18, 19, 20?

Jamie Wheal (01:17:23):

Well, exactly. So that said, that was the rate limiter. There was an absolute cap on how innovative you could get at ages 10 to 18 if it still all came down to SATs and competitive college admissions.

(01:17:39):

But now that, that is potentially cracking and you're at a stage where, I mean, if I could... It's a weird irony that our own children both have gone through or are going through four-year college educations after homeschooling after Montessori and

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everything else because we were completely willing to be like, "Look, we'll stake you 250K for your young adult entrepreneurial stuff. Consider us the family bank and let's not have you go to college," and for different reasons, athletics and other stuff they wanted to go.

(01:18:05):

But I think that kind of a thing, once you have that, which is instead of college tuition, consider staking entrepreneurial ventures, consider helping your children set up if that's even a possibility for you with income levels and that kind of stuff, consider it. And then once you do that, you're much more into the kind of school of life stuff, which is much more like that Acton Business School, which is a one-year MBA intensive, and they literally have to go door to door and sell stuff. They have to learn stuff.

(01:18:33):

Maria Montessori's adolescent education was called Erdkinder, Earth-child, and it was a working farm including farm stalls for farmers' markets and all these kind of things. And I think that that whole notion of I need to memorize the periodic table or learn abstract calculus, which is a vestige of post-Sputnik science fear in America or trigonometry because of the surveying boom in the 19th century of the American West, vestigial relics of our curriculum will get changed.

Nate Hagens (01:19:04):

And we don't know where food comes from.

Jamie Wheal (01:19:06):

Yeah, or the trees that are outside the window of the classroom I'm in studying biology. And, again, compression of 2030 to right now, the ripping the Band-Aid off the false value proposition of mid-tier college education and the replacement of give me life skills and give me... I mean, a bunch of info marketers are skipping college now and they're millionaires by their mid-20s.

(01:19:31):

So there there's been lots of cracks in this foundation of higher ed. And I think as the whole thing comes down, it's going to create a lot more space for pragmatic training,

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fundamentally vocational training, which used to have a bad rap, but it actually becomes very important.

Nate Hagens (01:19:49):

Jamie, so appreciative of your time. Do you have any final thoughts or words of advice to our listeners?

Jamie Wheal (01:19:57):

Yeah. I mean, I think the biggest is what is the capacity for radical hope? That is essential. And it's not whistling past the graveyard hope. It's not thinking that crossing our fingers and that whether it's a vaccine or whether it's a Bitcoin spike or whatever it would be that we're hoping is going to save it or solve it. Probably isn't.

(01:20:19):

One of our colleagues at Burners Without Borders has talked about the idea of the long disaster. We're in the long disaster. It's a knock on concatenation of events that really won't end from weather events to political events, to epidemiology, to macro economy and ecology.

(01:20:35):

So let's wrap our heads around this is a long disaster, and let's find the radical hope, the durable hope. That is something to believe in that is in a future we can't see from here. And let's do this not just for ourselves, but on behalf of our children and our children's children, and source from a place of resilience, and durability, and service.

Nate Hagens (01:21:00):

I believe in friendship, nature, dogs, learning and sharing. And I have some other beliefs too, but I deeply care about the future. I know you do as well. And thank you for all your work, and to be continued, I'm sure, my friend.

Jamie Wheal (01:21:16):

Absolutely, man. Great to chat.

Nate Hagens (01:21:18):

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