

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Andrew Holecek:** Take a very good look. What are you always doing? You're always working with your mind because that's all there is. Maybe it might behoove you to work with your mind a little bit more directly through the inner arts, through contemplation, through meditation, through things like dark retreat. Maybe you'll become a better researcher, scientist, human being when you better understand who you are and what the instrument is that you engage in your investigations.

[00:00:27] The lens of your investigation is your mind. Sharpen your mind, heighten your mind, become aware of your mind. It will benefit everything you do

[00:00:41] **Nate Hagens:** Today I'm joined by consciousness scholar and meditation practitioner Andrew Holecek for an in-depth look at our most important and accessible tool for navigating The Great Simplification, the human mind. Andrew Holecek is an interdisciplinary scholar practitioner in non-dual wisdom traditions and is actively involved in scientific research on what ended up being the main topic of today's conversation, dark retreat, with the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Institute for Advanced Consciousness Studies.

[00:01:14] He is also a research consultant for the cognitive neuroscience program at Northwestern University. Andrew is the author of many books and offers seminars internationally on meditation, lucid dreaming, death practices, and dark retreat. While these ideas are ancient, he believes these are urgently relevant given the stakes we face today.

[00:01:38] In our conversation, Andrew describes how in our era of light pollution, devices everywhere, and nonstop stimulation, many of us now constantly exist in

The Great Simplification

fragmented, distracted states of mind, which he calls darkness deficit disorder. Going to the roots of this problem, Andrew and I discuss the power of work that does not require fossil fuels or machines or even a light bulb in the form of what he calls dark retreats.

[00:02:10] Drawing from scholarship rooted in ancient traditions like Tibetan Buddhism, he details how meditative practices like dark retreat can help alleviate our suffering and enable us to better do the work needed to navigate our present moment. Importantly, and surprisingly to me, Andrew outlined how light itself, in contrast to darkness, relate to our behaviors of endless acquisition and consumption, and he invites us to remember the fact that for most of us, we're actually happiest the moment we stop wanting for more.

[00:02:47] As such, I hope this episode offers some insight into how our hunger for constant growth is an ineffective substitute for reflection and the understanding of our own minds. Before we begin, if you are enjoying this podcast, I invite you to subscribe to our Substack newsletter, where you can read more of the systems science underpinning the more-than-human predicament and where my team and I share written content related to The Great Simplification.

[00:03:15] You can find the link to subscribe in the show description. With that, please welcome Andrew Holecek. Andrew Holecek, welcome to The Great Simplification.

[00:03:28] **Andrew Holecek:** Nate, so great to be with you. Can't wait to simplify things.

[00:03:32] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, things, our world is horribly complex and complicated and all the things. So, As way of introduction, we have a mutual friend who knows a lot about your work and a lot about my work.

The Great Simplification

[00:03:48] I don't think you know too much about my work, but my work is shifting and, For the last 20 years, I've been focused on the biophysical macro of how does our system work and what's going to happen and how do today's events change it, and now I'm more and more interested in biophysical micro. Cool.

[00:04:11] Like, who are we gonna be? How are we gonna live? and, those such questions. And you are an interdisciplinary scholar and meditation practitioner who, I understand, has studied under Tibetan Buddhists and other non-dual wisdom traditions.

[00:04:31] **Andrew Holecek:** Mm-hmm.

[00:04:31] **Nate Hagens:** And you write extensively on the topics of lucid dreaming and death and meditation and darkness.

[00:04:40] So, with, such a segue, maybe we could start, what are some of the first things from modern culture that you unlearned?

[00:04:54] **Andrew Holecek:** Oh, what a great start. Yeah, the great unlearn. well, that the vast majority of what we take as axiomatic, as givens, and we can go from surface to depth pretty darn quick. The sense of externality, that there's an out there that's an illusion. Again, this ties into the non-dual thing. space, time, causality, very sense of self that we take as givens, axiomatic, those are constructs.

[00:05:26] They're made up. They're illusory in that sense. I mean, they appear. Illusion means that appearance is not in harmony with reality. And so it, it doesn't take a whole lot to go down the checklist and realize, I wouldn't say almost everything, but a great deal of what I was taught by my family of origin, by my teachers, by my colleagues and peers, is in fact fundamentally illusory.

The Great Simplification

[00:05:55] **Nate Hagens:** Well, first of all, you're like the fourth person that I've had on that has mentioned the word non-dual. Yeah. And I don't think I still understand that. Could you give me a brief unpacking of what that means and why it's important?

[00:06:08] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. Well, let's start with why it's important. It's important because this is the reason we suffer.

[00:06:14] You could very clearly argue that we suffer when appearance is not in harmony with reality. And so what appears is in fact a dualistic world. Again, this is given. I'm in here. You're out there. There is this world independent of me. There is a subject. There is an object. There is an inside and outside. And so non-duality is...

[00:06:33] Talk about the great simplification. Non-duality is, a return from the vast, complex, multitudinous display of things that we get lost in, and the healthy reduction to the essence of that display.

[00:06:47] **Nate Hagens:** Do other great apes have this dualism? Do ancient humans pre-agricultural revolution have this duality?

[00:06:58] And do babies born today? What are your thoughts on that?

[00:07:03] **Andrew Holecek:** There's a difference between a duality and non-duality. This is important because a duality is pre-personal. This is the non-dual, I should say a dual fusion of an infant that's fused with its mother, fused with its environment. That's an a-dualistic pre-personal relationship to reality.

[00:07:25] And so therefore, through the evolutionary journey, phylogenetically and then epigenetically, we evolve into this dualistic, you could even say metacognitive way of looking at things. And that can then lead to non-duality,

The Great Simplification

which is transpersonal. And so this is important because there's a lot of conflation around this.

[00:07:50] Oh, we have to return to the Garden of Eden. We have to retro-romanticize everything and go back to the good old days. no, that's a dual. We want to transcend that, but also include it and go into more transpersonal domains of realization, metacognitive domains, not precognitive in the pejorative sense.

[00:08:11] **Nate Hagens:** Did we have this all figured out back in the day, the wisdom traditions, and we just lost our way? Or like, what is this deep scholarly study of ancient wisdom traditions, concluded for you, if anything?

[00:08:27] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. Another good one. Well, on one level, yes, we forgot. The Rus- the Rosicrucians talked about it as the veil of forgetfulness.

[00:08:36] Plato, I mean, there's-- it's no exaggeration when Alfred North Whitehead said, you know, all of Western philosophy is but a series of footnotes to Plato, right? He was a colossus. And so one of his, great, teachings along this line is anamnesis, right? The, path of this is one of remembrance, recollection, return.

[00:08:57] and this is absolutely resonant with, so many of the non-dual traditions, you know, a, returning to this fundamental, reduction base of innate wholeness. And so in a very real way, yes, we forgot. and there's... We could really talk about this. Like, where did this forgetfulness come from?

[00:09:15] Well, it came from a type of, primordial trauma. you know, the Tibetans have a lot to say about the, source of this, amnesia, this forgetfulness. And that, you know, a lot of teachers then echo what Plato said, the essence of spiritual

The Great Simplification

practice is remembrance, retrieving, returning, retracting, back to this fundamental truth.

[00:09:38] From the dualistic display back to the essence. So this ties in very briefly, just a parenthetical interjection to your comment of what duality, not duality. Well, duality is when we get lost in the display. Non-duality is when we, come back to the essence. We lose the essence in the display. and so this is another way to talk about what happens.

[00:10:00] And this is, in fact, I would argue The Great Simplification is retreating from this display back to the unified essence.

[00:10:08] **Nate Hagens:** So the, juxtaposition between display and reality is manifesting in so many ways in our culture. There's the technology and money is the display versus energy materials, and the ecosystem is the reality.

[00:10:26] There is the social status of, you know, primates that try to get status by shows of conspicuous consumption and display, but they're not healthy for us or for our culture. I mean, there's a lot of ways that you could unpack your, summary statement there.

[00:10:47] **Andrew Holecek:** It's, it has tremendous explanatory power.

[00:10:49] A—and this is, you know, we were talking at the outside about how you transition from, macro to micro.

[00:10:55] **Nate Hagens:** I'm curious about that transition. Oh. I, still am a macro guy, but I feel like this is what we need to figure out en masse, starting with individuals, then larger groups, and then society. sorry to interrupt you.

[00:11:09] **Andrew Holecek:** no, it's a really important interruption because what is society composed of? Individuals. And so it's this marvelous mutual causality

The Great Simplification

between macro and micro. You know, the, iterative phenomenology between these two different iterations, instantiations of reality, the inside and the outside, the macro and the micro.

[00:11:28] And so therefore, they're not mutually exclusive. When, you're... You know, it says, you know this in Hermetic traditions, as above, so below. The Kalachakra Tantra, as within, so without. Chaos and complexity theory talk about universality and self-similarity. Reality is fundamentally recursive, reiterative.

[00:11:46] And this is actually no small thing because then when you're actually exploring one dimension of reality you're actually, upon close examination, discovering, different subtle, iterations of that. So this is one instance, for instance, in my own work when I work with meditation, dreams, and death.

[00:12:04] Well, they may seem not terribly connected, but they're intimately connected. They're basically, fundamental iterations of same underlying processes. Now this becomes super, super interesting because then what you can do is you can infer, you can triangulate your understanding. You can use one display to help you understand the other.

[00:12:23] We do it all the time. It's called a reciprocal hermeneutic. This is one of the ways we go about learning. So, again, I'll pause here because, boy, you're throwing out some really rich stuff here.

[00:12:33] **Nate Hagens:** I'm gonna throw one more geeky, nerdy quote and then I'll loop it back to the- I love this stuff. Well, yeah, I mean, I, our, friend probably knew that we would geek out on this stuff.

[00:12:44] So you mentioned Alfred North Whitehead. here's a quote that a viewer sent me after a recent podcast, from Whitehead. "The truth is that the brain is continuous with the body and the body is continuous with the rest of the natural

The Great Simplification

world. Human experience is an act of self-origination including the whole of nature but limited to the perspective of the focal region."

[00:13:11] **Andrew Holecek:** High five.

[00:13:12] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, so e- explain that to me using s- slightly, less obtuse language because that feels right to me.

[00:13:20] **Andrew Holecek:** Well, it, yeah, it certainly resonates with my own experience. Th- s- yeah, so yeah, th- first of all, the continuous kind of nature, right? From, brain to body to cosmos. You know, this is... Oh, there's, I'm trying to think of like frameworks that, that contextualize this to some extent and one that immediately comes to mind, and then we'll get back to this localization thing because this has to do perhaps with egoic structure and what ego actually is and, its relationship to all this.

[00:13:48] But, Spinoza intimated this, E- Einstein's favorite philosopher, and has a lot of traction to me. Someone suggested it in the quote from Whitehead, this dual aspect monism thing. which is again a little bit philosophical geek speak about looking at mind as really subtle body and looking at body as really gross mind.

[00:14:09] this then bespeaks again a more non-dualistic way. That's the monism thing, right? The monism thing suggests the non-duality. The dual aspect in kind of suggests the reconciliation or the balancing of the non-duality with the, with, dualistic principles because again, this worth, is worth throwing into the mix.

[00:14:29] You can't throw everything into one basket or the other, because this leads to all kinds of pathologies, all kinds of absolutisms. If, everything is thrown in the non-dual basket, that can be pro- can become problematic, the absolutistic end of it. And then conversely, if everything is thrown into the relative

The Great Simplification

basket, well, then you get this confused conditioned reality that's called samsara in the Western languaging.

[00:14:50] And so to me, it's... I, mention this because this is really important. it's what William Blake so beautifully talked about, is the cultivation of double vision, the capacity to honor, integrate, and incorporate both views of reality, the absolute and the relative, the, dualistic expression and its non-dual essence.

[00:15:08] This then becomes much more elegant, much more, holistic, systemic. I think that's really important.

[00:15:15] **Nate Hagens:** But it's not good for profits.

[00:15:17] **Andrew Holecek:** Depends on profits in what department. If you're talking about economic profits, no. I mean, what we're talking about here fundamentally will bankrupt normal government structures and economic structures, right?

[00:15:28] Because we're talking about an economy of consciousness now, an economy of mind. And, this is important because let me just say this on a pause, because v- when I heard, first heard about your podcast, I said, "Wow, this is really amazing, this Great Simplification thing." I would argue, and maybe we can come back to this because I'm kind of intimating it, is that one of the greatest, simplifications is simplifying this vast multitudeness, display into its, irreducible, essence.

[00:15:56] I think that's what liberation entails, that's what freedom entails, and that's what's worth talking about.

[00:16:01] **Nate Hagens:** So the label The Great Simplification h- has multiple meanings, but the main meaning is it's a play on Joseph Tainter's The Collapse of

The Great Simplification

Complex Civilizations, observation that we solve problems by adding complexity to a system, and adding complexity builds more nodes, and it has more energy and material needs.

[00:16:23] And at some point you can no longer build, complexity at the macro scale because there aren't enough energy and resources.

[00:16:31] **Andrew Holecek:** That's right.

[00:16:31] **Nate Hagens:** But what you're saying is A coincident, hopefully with a macro Great Simplification, we would do well to pair it with a micro writ large population scale simplification of our experience, and awareness and consciousness of the world.

[00:16:54] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah, spot on my friend. And it's like Gandhi allegedly, this is so cool. He died, you could put all his worldly possessions in a shoebox. I couldn't put my worldly possessions, look behind me, right? I, couldn't put my worldly possessions in three moving vans. and so if you understand, at least this is what the great wisdom traditions of I've come to understand them argue, that you already have...

[00:17:21] Now this is the Great Simplification. This is getting right to the quick. You already have everything you could possibly want because you have a beautiful mind and a good heart. And we should talk about this because I, can, I think relatively quickly point out that we often conflate material acquisitions and pursuits and, consumerism with underlying, kind of epistemic qualities that they're actually bringing about.

[00:17:46] So this may be worth talking about.

The Great Simplification

[00:17:48] **Nate Hagens:** Well, well, that, that's cultural writ large. I mean, we have, we're like hungry ghosts that are going through the motions- Yes ... buying things to fill holes that were-

[00:17:56] **Andrew Holecek:** Yes ...

[00:17:57] **Nate Hagens:** created partially from our culture, but also our upbringing. And it's like, click that button, you get the dopamine and the feeling for a second, but it's pretty much peaked at that moment.

[00:18:08] And once the box arrives, you're gonna need a new click to get the same feeling. Yeah. Please, unpack that.

[00:18:14] **Andrew Holecek:** This is a big deal. And, this is something again, so this is great. So instead of just You know, playing nice intellectual tennis, which is what we're doing, which I love, we can invite a very brief contemplation for you and for our listeners to see if this is in fact true for yourself.

[00:18:30] You know, you think you're happy when you get what you want, and hence, just like you said, you don't stop wanting, right? I need a bigger yacht. I need a bigger... I fill in the blank. Welcome to consumerism. And this is what I love, by the way, with that terrific podcast you did a while ago on the consumerism pyramid.

[00:18:49] I mean, that's what immediately drew me to your work. I said, "Wow, this is spot on." Okay, so we think we're happy when we get what we want, but take a close look. Is that really what's going on? Is appearance in harmony with reality? No. Underlying it all, take a good look at what you're feeling. What's the affect?

The Great Simplification

[00:19:05] What's going on within you? You're actually happy at the moment you stop wanting. This is huge. We confuse the satisfaction of desire with its temporary transcendence. And so if this is in fact the case, why not work with the underlying phenomenology? Why not work with the underlying process instead of depleting and killing this planet and everybody else on it in the relentless pursuit of acquisition, production?

[00:19:32] **Nate Hagens:** So I haven't heard it phrased that way before, and I've actually studied this concept from a neuroscience standpoint, but what you're saying is it's the, lack of the feeling of wanting which should really be the goal, and there's probably many ways to stop the wanting. One way is to click and buy the thing.

[00:19:52] That at least temporarily stops the wanting. But what are some other ways to stop the wanting?

[00:19:58] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. S- spiritual practice. This is why this is so... God, you're getting some good ones here, man. So this is in fact why this ties into a whole non-duality thing. Look at how many terms in the wisdom traditions for liberation are terms of cessation, negation, right?

[00:20:17] Nirvana, extinction. Nirodha, the rodha, cessation. Nirguna, nisprpancha, nirvikalpa, non-duality. Not, And so yes, what you say is you can keep, you continue to click and purchase and keep the traditional economies alive. And, this narrative, as you know, it's killing the effing planet, right? And all the things you stated from the outset.

[00:20:42] So you can either do that and live your life in the world of, substitute gratifications and authentic, gratifications, or again, you can look at the phenomenology of satisfaction, and discover for yourself, literally uncover,

The Great Simplification

discover that you simply have to stop. Just stop. And this is why, this is what meditation is.

[00:21:03] This is what dark retreat is, right? We haven't even touched that baby. I mean, dark retreat forces you to stop. But fundamentally, yes, what you're saying is instead of looking out, that's a dualistic way, instead of an outward bound vector, which will never satisfy because it's inauthentic. You know, you're eating the menu instead of the meal.

[00:21:24] Instead of getting full, you're just getting fat. This is the basis of all the different obesity epidemics. So instead of outward bound, inward bound. Sylvia Boorstein wrote a book by this, you know, by this title, Happiness Is An Inside Job. And so when you make this tectonic shift, right, this, shift from outer to inner, now you're looking in the right direction.

[00:21:48] Now you're looking towards the source. This is The Great Simplification. Now you're looking towards the reduction base of that which drives everything you do with your behaviors. So this is no small thing, right? Look within. Cease. The gate. Stop. And here it is. Here it is This is, the non-dual thing.

[00:22:08] What you're looking for is hiding in plain sight. So obvious you don't see it, so simple you don't believe it, so easy you don't trust it. That's non-dual maxim. It's right here, right now. You just have to discover it.

[00:22:22] **Nate Hagens:** Let, me ask you this, and this will conclude the, t-30-minute intro speed round of nerdiness, though we may not be able to escape that, given, your mind and, mine.

[00:22:35] **Andrew Holecek:** Sorry. I can't help myself.

The Great Simplification

[00:22:36] **Nate Hagens:** No, you're, hard not to like because you're incredibly erudite, but you are kinda also like a seventh grader. and it's an interesting combination there.

[00:22:46] **Andrew Holecek:** Hopefully I'll never grow up. That's my challenge.

[00:22:48] **Nate Hagens:** yeah. Well, I mean, it's clearly you're incredibly curious and passionate and obviously a lifelong learner on this stuff, a- as am I.

[00:22:58] On this stuff, though, I am, I'm really a child, and I'm, just curious. Yeah. And I see two or three steps ahead how critical this all is- to the coming cultural transition, so I'm just trying to learn. Beautiful. and, hopefully share my learning with, others. Let me ask you this, Andrew.

[00:23:23] do you believe that, of course there will be ups and downs and chaos, in the global, economy and how nations interact and the population and our consumption standards and the environment and all those things, but do you believe that there is this, inevitable upward sloping, curve with humans and greater consciousness?

[00:23:54] Like, is there this inevitable movement towards non-duality and awareness and, growing up as a species? Or is it just a fragile thing that we can just see the, ephemeral glitter of it right now and we need to move in that direction? Or is it just we're headed in that way no matter what?

[00:24:16] **Andrew Holecek:** I would like to believe and think that.

[00:24:20] this isn't just my own view, of course, right? Ken Wilber, who you may know, right? the great integralist.

[00:24:27] **Nate Hagens:** Know of him.

The Great Simplification

[00:24:29] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. He's a dear friend. his monumental, book, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution*, situates, a- as, many great thinkers have done over the, centuries, this, vector of, individual societal progression and evolution with greater degrees of, maturation and you could say sp- spiritual awakening.

[00:24:56] I, Is this naive? I mean, are we being, blind to the harsh realities of relative truth? maybe, but I, don't think so. I would, again, am I putting... Is this revelatory of a naive hope that I have for the future that we're gonna get through everything that's happening now? Especially as you know, I'm really big into this AI and everything that's happening around AI.

[00:25:23] I mean, we live in extraordinarily interesting times.

[00:25:25] **Nate Hagens:** One of the things you're best known for, is your work on darkness, Yeah ... and dark retreats. so in that realm, you've, you argued, my understanding is that you believe most people today suffer from a darkness deficit disorder. Yeah. And that doesn't mean just the people watching this podcast, but- Right

[00:25:49] you mean actual darkness. So can you tell us by what you mean by that, and what are the some, of the symptoms of darkness deficit?

[00:25:57] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. Yeah, So yeah, that's my new charter in, life, Nate, is to bring darkness into the world. And I really thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about this because I think it's interesting how this medicine or whatever you wanna call it, is kind of ancient practice is coming back to the modern world.

[00:26:15] So thank you for the segue into this. Yeah, darkness deficit disorder, my languaging for what it is that darkness itself represents, right? So this is

The Great Simplification

important. in addition to darkness, everything fundamentally can be seen as representative, symbolic. you can, again, this double vision thing. Blake talked about this very beautifully.

[00:26:36] Everything has a physical manifestation, expression, like with dreams. and yet with a proper vision, there's a deeper underlying perhaps symbolic expression of this. So darkness in this regard is, darkness deficit disorder is representative of a disorder of what darkness represents, a disorder of depth.

[00:26:56] A disorder of authenticity, intimacy, connectivity, and even simplicity. And because of this, right, this is huge, because of this loss of connectivity, depth, authenticity, this leads to immediately to a loss of empathy, compassion, basic goodness, right?

[00:27:14] **Nate Hagens:** But what, what does that, what does it mean, darkness deficit?

[00:27:17] Like, I don't have enough darkness in my 24 hours?

[00:27:20] **Andrew Holecek:** Well, both. Okay, so two things. So this, again, this is, balancing the literal and the metaphorical. So just literally light pollution, right? Yeah. let's just say a little bit about this. Literally light pollution. it's not Thomas Edison's fault, but you could, say the...

[00:27:36] And this is, you know, we live parenthetically in the Kali Yuga, the Dark Age. the Hindus talk about this. Ironically, I think the principal signature of the Dark Age, what makes it so dark, is its insidious nature, and this is runaway light that really accelerated with, Edison. Why? Well, this ties into what I said 20 minutes ago, because more than anything, what does light do when it violates the natural curfew of the night?

The Great Simplification

[00:28:01] It pulls us out and away from ourselves. Hence, we're always aiming outside.

[00:28:05] **Nate Hagens:** Like, like a moth is the angle with the moon. They, fly like they're going somewhere, and then they go into the flame.

[00:28:13] **Andrew Holecek:** Well, yeah, exactly. So we have a physical literal darkness deficit disorder with light pollution, which is increasing depending on whose studies you read anywhere from 3 to 6% a year.

[00:28:23] It's having massive deleterious effects on the ecosystem, on the biosystem, because the sy- the lights coming out, on so quickly, and you can see this through satellite data, that the biological systems don't have the, time to adapt.

[00:28:39] **Nate Hagens:** Well, what about not only the lights, like the, aerial view of the night sky is one thing, but what about in our bedroom?

[00:28:46] We're on our little phone with the lights from that. Is that also relevant?

[00:28:50] **Andrew Holecek:** 100%. It's all tied together. I mean, this, has to do with basic classic sleep hygiene, right? And the fact that if you, especially blue lights, you know, if you have too much light, but especially blue light, you know, it inhibits the release of the vampire hormone melatonin, and therefore it's vastly damaging, to our sleep.

[00:29:11] And so again, it's like the darkness deficit disorder is, you know, yeah, so it has a physical component. So it has a literal aspect. There's just way too much light in this world. And so I, just to show you, again, I mentioned this topic earlier, just to show you how profound and deep this goes, again, there's so much we can talk about here.

The Great Simplification

[00:29:29] You have the physical end of it. You have this kind of psychospiritual end of it, which we can talk about. That's the darkness deficit disorder in the ways I'm talking about. But then you have even the deepest metaphysical application of this, and I'll say this and then pause because I'm not sure you wanna go in- into these waters, but this is super bloody interesting to me.

[00:29:48] In many world wisdom traditions, light is masculine Darkness is feminine. And so what, when we look at all the iterations of light pollution, patriarchy is an iteration of light pollution. You don't think there's a problem in this world because there's too much patriarchal energy? And so things like dark retreat, it's a magnificent practice of rematriation.

[00:30:14] It's a highly feminine practice that balances. This is this... We had some stuff behind the scenes about this wonderful Greek framework of an angeiodromia. I can pause and see if you wanna go with that. I love this because this is a wonderful Western framework for like, okay, you want me to do what? You want me to go sit in the dark?

[00:30:32] Like WTF, like why would I do that? So before I go there, I'm throwing, a lot of noodles against the wall. Let me just see what sticks with what I just said. But to me, Nate, this is a really big deal because what happens then is this is incredibly compelling to me. At these levels, light doesn't reveal, light conceals.

[00:30:52] The principal signature of the Dark Ages, we're blinded by the light, and there's too much of it. And we hold it in, the palm of our hands, right? With these weapons of mass distraction that literally pull us out and apart from who we are. This is the basis of the meta-crisis, by the way. One distraction upon the next.

[00:31:12] One dismemberment upon the next. This is the iterative recursive expression of what collectively brings about the meta-crisis. And I have no doubt about it

The Great Simplification

[00:31:22] **Nate Hagens:** I have so many thoughts. So, so let me ask you this. so what you were talking about earlier, you mentioned a bunch of words that were not- Yeah, sorry

[00:31:32] Nirvana and a bunch of other ones. Right. So is, darkness the not, because there's nothing there- Yes ... and all the other things. And so this is ... Can you tie this into our dissatisfaction and hungry ghost, consumptive, fervor, and what sort of a mass diagnosis can you give, at the larger scale of society and the world?

[00:31:58] **Andrew Holecek:** Well, part of it is what I just said. Let me repeat this, 'cause I did glance through it quickly, but I think it's super important. But yeah, it's tying it into what I mentioned earlier. you know, I, look at dark practice now, which by the way has been around for thousands of years. it's nothing new.

[00:32:13] I'm just maybe reintroducing an ancient psycho-spiritual wisdom technology. But, the idea here is darkness is the addition of a tool designed for subtraction. Again, the theme of The Great Simplification, Meister Eckhart, "The soul does not grow by addition, but by subtraction." And so when you go into the dark, everything comes to a screeching halt.

[00:32:39] Everything is put on hold.

[00:32:41] **Nate Hagens:** So, so if you... Like, I had Anna Lembke on earlier this year, and she- Mm-hmm ... talked about dopamine addiction and how 14 days, but optimally 28 days for a technology fast can reset in the same way that you give up sugar and all of a sudden blueberries are sweet. What you're saying is at a macro level higher than that, that if you reset in darkness for I don't know how long, but then it resets all of those things, yes?

The Great Simplification

[00:33:06] **Andrew Holecek:** Yes. Yes. Spot on, my friend. It's a massive recalibration, a massive restorative process. and this is exactly what we're studying. So one of the really exciting things is, you know, I've been doing this for 30 years. I'm writing about it. But the really cool thing is I'm now engaged in a handful of really cool studies with a handful of amazing scientists from really cool institutions where we're studying all the stuff that I'm starting to riff on.

[00:33:33] Like, why is this ridiculous... Why is this practice so ridiculously transformative? Why does it work at so many levels, stripping about physical, recalibration and healing, psychological equilibration, spiritual, rebalancing? And so this is, amazing. The ROI, the return on investment, is ridiculous with this practice.

[00:33:55] And so understanding why is no small thing. But it has to do largely from the, Talk about simplicity. This is the ultimate simplicity because when you go into the dark, Nate, and then I'll pause The single best thing you can do is absolutely nothing. What's simpler than that? And it is through, again, this enforced cessation, negation, holding, you know, you're putting this, you're put into this straight jacket of sanity.

[00:34:25] It's through the simple act of cessation. Stop all the dismemberment, stop all the fracturing, stop all the distracting, etymologically, literally pulling apart. Stop pulling apart from yourself, from each other, from the planet. And just like when you fall asleep, you just stop and you start to heal. Just like what happens in deep dreamless sleep.

[00:34:48] Dark retreat just extends the night.

[00:34:51] **Nate Hagens:** Okay, so what does this mean in, in practice? I mean, you say it's incredibly simple. That I believe, but I also think simple and difficult because if you stop with... It's the same as g- you know, there's a dopamine

The Great Simplification

withdrawal, and, other withdrawal, and then you're faced with the hungry ghosts that have been driving your behavior with nowhere to go and no, no screens to distract you.

[00:35:16] So what is the actual practice, of a dark retreat, and what have you experimented with? What does a darkness retreat actually entail, and how would someone listening- Sure ... or a beginner go about first starting their practice?

[00:35:29] **Andrew Holecek:** So traditionally, one goes into a specially prepared cabin or cave for a certain period of time.

[00:35:36] **Nate Hagens:** Th- there are specially prepared caves?

[00:35:39] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. There's a, my dear friend, Scott Burman up in Oregon has a place called Sky Cave where you go in. They're, you know, they're cool in a certain sense. but yeah, so you go... Again, the earth is feminine, and this practice is feminine.

[00:35:56] **Nate Hagens:** I, gotta be honest with you, if I were to do a darkness retreat, I think I would prefer a cave over a room.

[00:36:03] I don't know why. Yeah. Maybe that's something, a primeval, impulse in me.

[00:36:08] **Andrew Holecek:** Well, you know, God, you, this is so interesting. What you just said is also worth, there's so many sidebars here, but here's an important one. This is one reason that people are, ineffably, simultaneously, magnetized and repulsed by this practice.

[00:36:23] Wonder, let's talk about why they're magnetized I have no doubt whatsoever that people are, ineffably magnetized towards this practice, because darkness represents primordial, elemental. This is interesting, Nate. You can make

The Great Simplification

light. You cannot make darkness. I mean, so many worlds' mythological traditions, darkness is the basis.

[00:36:45] It's the matrix. It's the origin. In the Big Bang, we don't know, but arguably a big bang probably came out of a background of dark silence. One doesn't know. So darkness represents this return, retreat, retraction to the reduction base, to originality, to wholeness. Because again, it, represents that quality.

[00:37:05] You don't have to do this in a cave. You can totally do it, and I actually brought one of these. You can get, you know, these masks that have these little pillows underneath where you can open your eyes underneath it. This is called Myhalos. There's another one called, Manta, another one called Mind- Mindfold.

[00:37:21] Started home with one of these guys. Wear it for, you know, anywhere from a couple minutes to a couple hours. I can tell, give you some specific instructions on how to do that. But basically, you know, at a certain point, there is some benefit to going into one of these specially prepared Kevin J. Caves.

[00:37:40] **Nate Hagens:** I'm gonna keep interrupting you just 'cause I have questions that I imagine my viewers would too.

[00:37:45] So, what about when people take a nap in the middle of the day, but there's some light coming through the shutters in their room, and it's really not fully dark? how does that little amount of light pollution-- Like, what is the difference between being ninety-five percent dark and a hundred percent dark, and why is that important?

[00:38:07] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. It's a big difference. And, this isn't to say that one is superior to the other. I think wonderfully is this notion of gray retreat. This is,-- This means several things. Now, one is weaving in and out Because for many

The Great Simplification

people, the dark is pretty intimidating. I mean, there's no effing way I'm gonna go in even for a day, let alone three days.

[00:38:27] So a gray retreat, is titrating it, working in and out, weaving in and out. And gray also literally refers to what you just mentioned. You can be in a room that's like 95%, sealed, and that in itself i- is actually quite revelatory. It, invites, what? A quality of, internality. It invites, interoceptive qualities.

[00:38:51] That in itself is very, helpful. And it's also here, this is the other thing, Nate, that, we're studying, like I alluded to, this is a highly idiosyncratic practice. it's different. people get really different things going into the dark. It-- What's the cliché jingle? You know, you may not get what you want, but you tend to get what you need.

[00:39:13] And so for some people, me included, when it's completely 100% dark, this shifts things considerably because now there's no opportunity for distraction. There's no opportunity to literally be pulled out. I'm, actually somewhat, forced into the interior.

[00:39:35] **Nate Hagens:** Well, there would be an opportunity if you did a darkness retreat with others and you could talk.

[00:39:40] That would be a distraction.

[00:39:41] **Andrew Holecek:** Yes, exactly. And, there, there are too many that do, that Monk Taixia does it, the Daoist master, he does these sorts of things. I have not played with that personally.

[00:39:50] **Nate Hagens:** So yours are in silence as well?

[00:39:53] **Andrew Holecek:** Well, they're in silence and they- and they're solitary.

The Great Simplification

[00:39:55] **Nate Hagens:** It, almost sounds like a miniature prison sentence.

[00:39:58] **Andrew Holecek:** Yes, it is. it's a prison sentence for egoic structure. and this is where, again, I, will have to say something just a little bit about this context of Enantiodromia, because this will explain the method to this, madness, right? But the idea is, yes indeed, you shut everything down.

[00:40:18] You're invited and then forced within. And, then again, in all the stuff we've been talking about, you, start this magnificent process of discovery, uncovering, remembering, and returning to who you really are, right? Who we think we are is revealed by what we do. Who you really are is revealed when you just stop doing.

[00:40:44] And so when you're in the dark, you can no longer produce, you can no longer do the normal things you do. It's the pra- it's the process of practice of being and not doing. that's what makes it, by the way, so challenging. So you mentioned this, I'll come back to it. The, withdrawal part, there's definitely a detox involved here for sure.

[00:41:04] There's definitely, withdrawal pains that you go through at first for sure. It's part of the purification. It's part of the simplification process. It hurts to simplify.

[00:41:16] **Nate Hagens:** So let's just start, with this, and I want you to say the full retreat, what you do. Yeah. But let's say people bought the MyHalo or whatever brand of, those, goggles.

[00:41:28] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah, I have no market in this. It's-

[00:41:29] **Nate Hagens:** So if they bought that and they turned the lights off in the room and they laid down and put those on, at what point do you start feeling

The Great Simplification

that withdrawal? And is it your supposition that you would like people to do a two-hour initial experience and most people can't handle more than eight minutes?

[00:41:50] Or what's been your experience?

[00:41:52] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah, it depends on the person. It depends on how addicted to light they are.

[00:41:55] **Nate Hagens:** Well, not, just light though, but light- Movement ... light in, in quotes, right? Light is all the consumption and distractibility- And, yeah ... and everything, that is kind of the modern culture differential from our-

[00:42:10] **Andrew Holecek:** High five.

[00:42:10] Yeah. you just... So we talked about what darkness represents. You just hit the, what light represents. Right? Externality, superficiality, consolidation of identity and attention in the outdoors. Now again, there's nothing inherently wrong with that, for God's sakes. I'm, not saying we should all go blind.

[00:42:26] I'm saying balance.

[00:42:28] **Nate Hagens:** For billions of years, the sun provided light, half the day, and that's a good thing. So there's the... So that's the yin and the yang you're getting at, in, a little bit, right?

[00:42:40] **Andrew Holecek:** Yes. And so, okay, all right, now it's, so now I have to say this because you just introduced the Eastern analog to this enantiodromia principle.

[00:42:47] So, so indulge me for just a second. This is important. It's simple, but it will help you understand what you're doing in the dark and why, and it connects

The Great Simplification

both to the yin and yang you said just now, and a couple other things. Yin and yang, the Taoist principle, is, kind of the Eastern analog or expression of a, particular concept that I discovered in the last couple years that really floored me.

[00:43:11] It comes from Heraclitus. You know, he's the famous philosopher of flow, right? He's the dude that said you can't step into the same river twice. And so he was also really big into non-duality stuff, by the way, as were a lot of those, pre-Socratics. And so he and then Carl Jung, what a surprise, cl- he, Carl Jung jumped on so many of these amazing Greek, wisdom principles, talked about this wonderful notion of enantiodromia, E-N-A-N-T-I-O-D-R-O-M-I-A.

[00:43:37] I love the word. It's almost melody to me. And the word literally means running into the opposite or running counter to. And so what this does, and it's echoed by the, Taoist principle of yin and yang, is that if you take something to its extreme it flips into its opposite. This is really interesting.

[00:44:00] And so the logic here, and I thought about this just like, 'cause I was trying to figure this out myself in the dark. You know, I was trained really classically, in the Tibetan Buddhist approach, which is magnificent. I'm super, super grateful for it. But boy, there's a lot that the West has to contribute that, that these Eastern approaches don't touch.

[00:44:19] And so what I discovered, and this was a big deal, and this will help you understand what's going on in the dark. When you're in there for a little while, it can get challenging, right? To put it mildly, because it is a detox. You, are withdrawing. and we can come back to talk literally about that framework within the Hindu tradition of pratyahara, sense withdrawal.

[00:44:38] But the idea here is you're in there, I'm exaggerating just a teeny bit for purposes of time, but not much. You're in there and the past closes in on you.

The Great Simplification

The future closes in on you. It feels like the walls are closing in on you. It feels like the f- the ceiling is closing in on you. It feels like you're entering an effing tomb.

[00:44:57] And so what actually is happening here that's so brilliant, and this is what my experience bears out. I mean, you're in there and you are, you know, in a certain way you're, being crushed. You're being forced into what? The only thing there ever really is, which is the present moment.

[00:45:13] And so what happens, and I can at- attest to this in my own experience, is eventually you're crushed. You're, brought in, forced into the present moment to such an extent that it flips into its opposite. The, the extraordinarily con- or extraordinary constrictions actually flip into incredible openness.

[00:45:35] And so in my languaging, the tomb transforms into a womb. And I can't, resist saying a womb with the best view. A womb with a view. A womb with a view, sorry, couldn't resist, of who you really are when no one is looking. And so this is, this ties into exactly my experience in the dark. And then I'll pause because boy, this is, now we're getting deep.

[00:45:59] What happens in the dark is you... The darkness for me is the color of non-duality. There's that term again. And as you go into the dark, you're descending. The mind, the word in Tibetan is rangbop, R-A-N-G-B-O-P, which means the mind, it literally means self-fall. The mind is falling into itself. By the way, same thing happens in deep meditation.

[00:46:20] Same thing happens every night when you fall asleep. Same thing's gonna happen when you die. In the dark, the mind falls into itself. And as it falls into itself, and this is what we're studying with our scientists, you get this most incredible opportunity to explore the sedimentation levels of the unconscious mind The kind of archaeology of the unconscious mind.

The Great Simplification

[00:46:40] And so what happens here, in my experience and countless others bear this out, as you go down, instead of fracture upon fracture it's healing upon healing as all these dismemberments and fractures are naturally restored simply by the act that you can no longer break. And so as you're going down, you essentially realize, and I'm gonna pause, this is mind-blowing, Nate.

[00:47:03] You go in there and you realize that eventually, and I, can be very granular here. I can start at the top and take you all the way down to the bottom. But what happens is eventually you go down, you, go down so far into yourself that y- space is deconstructed. Time is deconstructed. Causality, which is contingent on space and time, is deconstructed.

[00:47:24] Self, which co-emerges with space-time causality, is deconstructed. And then what happens? You fall into a completely transpersonal, open, non-dual state of mind, and you realize this is the reduction base. I've just landed home. I've just returned to the ultimate simplification, which is this non-dual base.

[00:47:44] And so this practice more than any other, and again, on one level, this is just really intense inner work. It's, there's nothing special about this practice. It's just really intense inner work. It takes you down to this groundless ground pretty darn quickly because you can no longer break away from it.

[00:48:02] **Nate Hagens:** Okay, now I have so many questions.

[00:48:04] **Andrew Holecek:** Cool.

[00:48:05] **Nate Hagens:** So first of all, there's lots of meditation practices out here, in the world. I've been, had my, dipped my toes into Mahamudra. Oh, good for you. but it sounds like this one is kinda like high octane. You, like, you, shut out all other stimuli, and then you're kind of forced to meditate- Yes.

The Great Simplification

[00:48:34] Yes ... of sorts because there, you have no other way to go. I mean, even when I did Mahamudra, I have such a brain idea generator machine in my mind that it was hard to slow that sucker down, and I did eventually learn that I have that thing going constantly revving up ideas. But here it's like you have to get control of that.

[00:48:59] So my second question is- Is this once and done like, Ibogaine or do you have to do this for months or years in the dark to get to those lower levels?

[00:49:12] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah, this is so great. such great questions and comments, my friends. So spot on, you nailed it. And actually in the tradition, by this I mean the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, which probably I can't speak exhaustively with every other tradition, but they probably have the most to say about this practice because they've been doing it actively, fundamentally as a way, by the way, to prepare for the end of life.

[00:49:35] It's fundamentally a death prep practice. But in this tradition, it's, referred to as a forceful method of liberation. Exactly like you said. Why? Because darkness is uncompromising and non-negotiable. And what you said is so spot on. This is so great, man. It forces you to meditate. What does that really mean?

[00:49:54] Meditation is just an, developing a more sensitive, awake relationship to the contents of your mind. So dark retreat forces you to relate to your mind. Why? Hello, because there's nothing else. And this is where it ties into a dream. This is where it's very dreamlike. It forces you to relate to your mind, to meditate, because there's nothing else.

[00:50:16] And so this is why Rudy Gobert, right, who's kicking butt right now in the NBA fi- first round, right? Superstar and, Defensive Player of the Year. He's done this practice, and he came out and said something so spot on. This is so high five right. He said, "Dark retreat is meditation times a thousand." I mean,

The Great Simplification

yeah, maybe the n- the number is archetypal or, and, exaggerated a little bit, but I...

[00:50:38] in that really. It's just really concentrated, intense, accelerated meditation. Now let me say one last thing and then I'll pause. Now, you can join this statement, okay, dark retreat is meditation times a thousand- You can join this statement with a really brilliant statement by one of my root teachers, the, crazy sort of saint, Trungpa Rinpoche, when he said meditation isn't a sedative, it's a laxative.

[00:51:04] Well, if that's true, and you go into the dark in meditation, a dark retreat is meditation times a thousand, you're laxating times a thousand. And that is what I mean, and this is really important. The crap is gonna come up. It has to. It has to come up. And so when you're down there and you can no longer keep it down, right, by distracting yourself from it, this is where it's remarkably similar to psychedelics.

[00:51:29] Mi- literally, the word literally means mind manifesting. That's what psychedelic means. Dark retreat is a sober psychedelic. And when you're in there, depending again on the person, you're gonna purge, right? This shit is gonna come up, and it has to. And if you understand that, you know, whether, it's you going down, that's the Rangdrol thing, or it coming up, it doesn't matter.

[00:51:52] These are metaphors for directionality. The stuff has to come up because if it doesn't come up, this, undigested, unprocessed, unconscious material, which by the way, neuroscientists will tell you minimum ninety-five percent of what we do is dictated by these unconscious processes. This is in fact how you can bring all this unconscious refuse into conscious awareness.

[00:52:17] Process of individuation, as Jung referred to it. So I'll pause because my gosh, there's so much to say here, but this is really important because now you

The Great Simplification

know, okay, whoa, life is short. What can I do to extract the essence in the shortest possible time? Nothing has transformed me more than dark retreat.

[00:52:34] But also, I have to say this at the outset, the reason I'm writing the book, or wrote the book actually, and I'm doing the science, is just as much to keep people out as it is to invite the properly prepared and inspired people in. Because if you don't go into this big medicine properly, just like with a psychedelic, you can overdose But here, what are you overdosing on?

[00:52:54] Yourself. You can overdose on yourself. And so therefore getting the dosage right, how much of you can you handle? T.S. Eliot, "Humankind cannot bear very much reality." How much of yourself can you handle? Well, when you're in the dark, you start to realize, oh my goodness, I spend the vast majority of my life trying to dilute the content of my experience and trying to run away from myself.

[00:53:19] I'm basically distracting myself un- to death. And when you're in the dark, hello, you can't do that anymore. And so therefore you come face to face with who you really are when you can't run.

[00:53:33] **Nate Hagens:** What does that mean you, you wanna keep people out?

[00:53:37] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah, because, you know, we're seeing this already. some of the podcasts and some of the documentaries and some of the stuff that's coming out, it's not like-

[00:53:46] **Nate Hagens:** Oh, it's, actually, it's, actually co-opting this in, service of light, but it's a gimmicky thing that's darkness, but it, defeats the, goal of what you're trying to espouse.

The Great Simplification

[00:53:59] **Andrew Holecek:** 100%. it's goth, it's cool, it's hip, it's the new flavor on the block, and people are gonna be like, "Oh, let's just try this dark thing." It will crush you. It can crush you. and so I say this right at the outset, oh my gosh, it's not like I have the triple A gold standard for God sakes . There's so many ways to do this practice.

[00:54:19] **Nate Hagens:** Well, and, you're, still, you've mentioned several times we're doing the scientists, my scientists are doing this. Yeah. So you're testing this now

[00:54:28] **Andrew Holecek:** We are working, with people out of... I, mean, I can name names, I can name institutions. We're going at this. We got... This is so cool, Nate. So we're going after it with the support of the tradition, by the way.

[00:54:39] Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche wrote the foreword to my book. He's a colossus in this world. And then, you know, the trick with me right now is I have to... You know, there's just so much happening in the world of science around this stuff because it's so bloody interesting. The capacity to study, just bear, just briefly, I mean, you know, the whole active inference predictive process thing, the work of Karl Friston.

[00:55:01] If you haven't had him on, you gotta bring this guy on. Dark retreat is, one of the most fantastic ways to reveal not merely the archeology of, consciousness, but the architecture of consciousness using free energy principles and predictive coding. So this stuff is ridiculously interesting to the scientists.

[00:55:19] **Nate Hagens:** So how long are your... You offer dark retreats, for people. How long are those?

The Great Simplification

[00:55:26] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah, I'm not a guide, but I have really very wonderful trusted friends. I can put them in the liner notes. You can post them if you want. I think it's super important where you go. I have, no investment in any of this.

[00:55:37] I'm not invested in any retreat center. But I think where you go is important, having a good guide is important, doing it right is important because, like I mentioned a few minutes ago, Nate, just like with psychedelics, this is big medicine.

[00:55:49] **Nate Hagens:** Well, yeah, I would be pretty hesitant to have an overdose of Nate Hagens, at the moment.

[00:55:58] **Andrew Holecek:** That's like, dude, that's so, so sadly spot on, right?

[00:56:03] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[00:56:03] **Andrew Holecek:** So here's what you do, man. So what do you do? What do you do? You microdose, you drip, you titrate.

[00:56:08] **Nate Hagens:** Like for a half hour with those goggles on.

[00:56:10] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah, exactly. I wouldn't even s- here's the way I play with it. Th- this is just, this is a little guide.

[00:56:15] But what I do is... Okay, we'll do it together. We're gonna do our first dark retreat together, all of us, right? I'm gonna invite you to close your eyes for 4.9 seconds. So you're gonna see where I'm going with this. Okay, here we go

[00:56:38] First dark retreat over. I can do that. That's no big deal. Okay, for purposes of time, maybe we won't take the next steps, but the next step would be 49 seconds. Right? Okay. You can do it. We won't do it for purposes of time. 49 seconds. I can do 49 seconds. Okay, 4.9 minutes. I can do 4.9 minutes.

The Great Simplification

[00:57:00] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[00:57:01] **Andrew Holecek:** 49 minutes?

[00:57:02] Eh, maybe. And so what do you do? It's just like, it's just like climbing to Everest. My God, you know, you go slow.

[00:57:08] **Nate Hagens:** What's the longest you've ever done?

[00:57:10] **Andrew Holecek:** You know, I, don't ... Last year I went in for a month. It's one of the longer ones.

[00:57:17] **Nate Hagens:** One month with no lights?

[00:57:18] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:57:19] **Nate Hagens:** No lights at all? Not checking your phone in the middle of it?

[00:57:23] **Andrew Holecek:** No, nothing. No, nothing. But see, I've done it for so long.

[00:57:27] **Nate Hagens:** You, lived for 30 days in darkness?

[00:57:30] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah, it's no big deal. You know, you do it long enough, Nate, it's, again, it's not that big a deal. I won't say the longest I ever did it because, dark retreat is a little bit about breaking metrics and measurements.

[00:57:43] And part of what's been a little bit unfortunate now is people coming out and posting, "Oh, I've done 50 days. I've done 100 days." Who cares?

The Great Simplification

[00:57:51] **Nate Hagens:** Who cares? But let me ask you this You're a pretty active curious monkey mind and your erudite, like what was the flood of conversations going on? And did those quiet down after day 16?

[00:58:09] **Andrew Holecek:** Oh, yeah. No, after day two.

[00:58:11] **Nate Hagens:** After day two?

[00:58:12] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. Again, this is, I have to be a little careful here.

[00:58:15] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, you're not recommending that people do a 30-day- No ... retreat.

[00:58:19] **Andrew Holecek:** Start

[00:58:20] **Nate Hagens:** with five minutes. But, go on.

[00:58:21] **Andrew Holecek:** Sorry. Yeah, And so the reason this is no big deal-

[00:58:26] **Nate Hagens:** Well, you're a scientist. You're experimenting on yourself, so that's understandable.

[00:58:30] **Andrew Holecek:** Well, plus I've been doing it, I've been doing it for 30 years, right? And, here's the in- this is interesting. The, Tibetan word for meditation, is G-O-M, gom. It literally translates as to become familiar with. That's really interesting. Meditation is about becoming familiar with who you are not.

[00:58:51] In this case, becoming familiar with darkness. And now this is the key, right? Darkness is, fundamentally doing nothing. The darkness is neutral. It's just acting as a metaphysical mirror. And so when you're in there, basically, you know, I've done it for so long, and that's why going in for these seemingly long periods

The Great Simplification

of time is just no big, deal at all because I've become really familiar with the dark, which means I've become really familiar with my mind and my heart and my unconscious mind because I spent so much time with it, allowing it to come up.

[00:59:27] **Nate Hagens:** So you have had an overdose of Andrew Holecek, and come to terms with it- Oh, for sure. Many days ... and now actually look forward to

[00:59:36] **Andrew Holecek:** it. I can't wait to go back at this point.

[00:59:38] **Nate Hagens:** So let, me ask you about that. So, somehow in the last five years I have become

[00:59:48] Rather than averting it, I look forward to going for a two-hour bike ride. Everything else, no. Like lifting weights, it's a chore. Meditating, I know I'm supposed to do it, I don't wanna do it. I had to get to a point with biking that I'm like, "No, I really want to do that." Yeah. So you look forward to moments of darkness because it's like a palate cleanser or an oil change or a low carbon oil change, in your life.

[01:00:15] **Andrew Holecek:** 100%. It's a realignment. It's a realignment. What, happens, and this is also, this is an amazing thing about the darkness. If it's related to properly, there's no such thing as a failure. Everything in this practice is revelatory. If, you can't stay in and you gotta come out, that's revelatory. If you're having problems at the front end, that's revelatory.

[01:00:37] So I mention this and then I'll pause 'cause I, is when I go in, because I've done it so long, and by the way, I have a daily practice. In addition to my masks in my study behind, well, actually over there, I've got a, little five by six section of my basement cordoned off where I go in for an hour plus every single day.

The Great Simplification

[01:00:55] **Nate Hagens:** Your, the Holocek coffin.

[01:00:58] **Andrew Holecek:** It's a Holocek, it's the inner observatory, more powerful than the Webb telescope. but let me just say this, you know, when I go in and I'm still having a bit of a hard time, the only time that ever actually happens anymore is at the beginning, and that's when I realize the degree of my difficulty is the degree that I've become misaligned over the last X amount of years.

[01:01:20] **Nate Hagens:** You, you had, residual light pollution from the modern world.

[01:01:25] **Andrew Holecek:** Exactly. And so the discord, right? There's this dissonance, right? I'm still, I'm a fully nut in my body. I'm speedy. You know, my, I do spend a lot of time in my head. this practice almost forces you into your body. and so it takes a while to unwind, drop into my body.

[01:01:43] That in itself is revelatory. It's like, whoa, I've really kind of got a little bit disconnected over these last months.

[01:01:49] **Nate Hagens:** So let me bring this back to the, cultural, malaise that, people don't know what's coming, but I think their nervous systems do, and they feel that something is off. And, let me tie it back to that.

[01:02:05] So I understand, that in your new book, Total Eclipse of the Mind, you state that sight, and therefore being in the light, has a lot of influence on our egos. So maybe you could briefly, unpack what an ego is and how it shapes who we are and how we see the world. And then w- what happens to the ego when we let go of our sight in, in these darkness experiences?

[01:02:34] **Andrew Holecek:** This is another really super rich topic. ego is a necessary but insufficient form of development. I think Eckhart totally says it

The Great Simplification

beautifully. No Maybe I say this, I can't remember. which is even more funny. Right? ego's just an arrested form of development. Eckhart Tolle, this is the other quote that was coming to mind.

[01:03:01] He did say this, and I, like this definition. "Ego is exclusive identification with form." I really like that. So one brief comment about this. ego is, a really necessary part of human evolution. It's a... If we didn't have egoic structure, we wouldn't be here talking about the nature of egoic structure.

[01:03:21] If you didn't have the capacity to provisionally separate self from other, which is what ego does developmentally, we wouldn't have immune systems. We wouldn't have the ability to separate antigen from antibody. We would die. So we need the capacity provisionally to separate self from other. We need to know which mouth to bring the fork, for one thing.

[01:03:46] The issue is, a devolu- or an evolutionary driver, right, towards egoic structure becomes a devolutionary retardant if we don't u- understand that ego, is just a necessary but insufficient stage in human e- evolution. And so then what we need to do, and this is important in my estimation, and I'll tie it into the dark, we have to engage in this kind of Hegelian notion of transcend but include.

[01:04:13] There's nothing wrong with ego. It's like saying, "Oh, you know, I'm gonna, I'm gonna kill age 19," you know, when you grow to age 20. No. You transcend but include age 19 when you turn age 20. So on the second spiritual path, you always have recourse to act as a 19-year-old. You always have recourse to ego.

[01:04:32] You're just no longer exclusively identified with it. That's the problem. It's constipated, arrested development

[01:04:41] **Nate Hagens:** Do non-human primates have ego?

The Great Simplification

[01:04:44] **Andrew Holecek:** This is a, very, much an open question, and it depends on how far down the chain you go. So there's been a lot of studies on, this sort of thing using mirrors, as you know, both with primates and also, developmentally, with children.

[01:05:00] That up until a certain age, and it depends on the kid, usually around age two, you know, you put a red dot on their nose– Yeah ... and they don't notice any difference. You've heard these things. And so is that, the same as, developing egoic structure? Not necessarily. but it's, an in- intimation of it.

[01:05:17] And so how that applies to human evolution anthropologically, developmentally, I have to be a little cautious here because I'm not a scientist in that domain. but self-sense in the metacognitive, so this ties into the whole, metacognition thing.

[01:05:32] **Nate Hagens:** Which is thinking about how we think.

[01:05:35] **Andrew Holecek:** Exactly. It's knowing that we know. And, this, is something that we can say something about because primates do not have this capacity as we do. And this is iterated in their literal anatomical structure. I mean, this is all part of the frontal cortex, which they don't have.

[01:05:53] **Nate Hagens:** So, so getting back to the ego thing, and you talked about arrested development at a certain age.

[01:05:59] So there, would there be presumably a correlation between the people, the humans in today's world or in any time period who, have the biggest egos, would have the most trouble, with a darkness retreat?

The Great Simplification

[01:06:21] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. High five. High five, my friend. Exactly right. So this is a major contraindication, but right off the bat, dark retreat tends to self-select.

[01:06:32] Someone with a big ego is gonna say, "This is ridiculous. I'm not even gonna think about it."

[01:06:38] **Nate Hagens:** Well, they, may say that, but their underlying physiological reaction would probably be fear.

[01:06:44] **Andrew Holecek:** Oh, 100%. 1000%. Because when you're going into the dark you're going into an acid bath where you go extracurricular. And this is how it happens that's so bloody cool.

[01:06:54] Sounds great, right? Sign me up. So what happens is, this is really, interesting, and again, this is after 29 years of doing this, you know, like going in is like, wow, this is interesting, and studying it and coming out and going back in and studying it. What I've discovered is, what goes in, and this, applies both to, to exogenous daily life, and then also more endogenous, dark retreat experiences, is we're always echolocating, whether we know it or not.

[01:07:22] People know what echolocation is from bats who ping with their thing, sonar with whales and whatnot. It is basically a way to, identify our space-time coordinates, to identify our very sense of self in relation to other. We're always echolocating. Well, when I go on here, and you'll see where I'm going with this, to echolocate is to ego-locate.

[01:07:45] And so when you go into the dark, you can't echolocate in your normal ways because the out there isn't out there in your normal way. There's nothing to echolocate off of. I, I-- That's not entirely true because you can still bump into

The Great Simplification

walls, right? But this comes back to the sight thing, which we definitely have to come back to.

[01:08:03] You can't see the same way. In fact, you can't see at all. I mean, it is beyond black. Let's just get this right out. You can't see shit. And so you can't echolocate in your normal way. And then sooner or later, because you can't, because we situate ourselves, this is the non-duality thing We situate, differentiate sense of self in counter distinction and opposition to other.

[01:08:25] And so when other is taken away, when outside is removed in the dark, you can't echolocate in your conventional ways. And because you can't echolocate, you can't ego locate, and ego structure starts to fall apart. And so because of this is the challenging aspect of it, right? Because you start to realize especially ego is contraction.

[01:08:44] That's the other thing I didn't really get back to. My favorite definition of ego is contraction onto form. And so when you're in the dark, you can't contract onto form in your normal ways. You can't echolocate. So ego structure eventually starts to dissolve. And this is not particularly pleasant. This is the detox.

[01:09:03] This is the acid bath. But if you understand this, just like, just again, this is no different from deep meditation. This is no different from having a bad trip or a good trip in psychedelics. You can have a good psychedelic trip. You have to die. You have to let go of egoic structure, or you can have a really challenging trip.

[01:09:21] So I'll pause, but, and then let me come back. I have to say something about sight, but let me pause to see if this is hitting a spot for you.

[01:09:28] **Nate Hagens:** Oh, it is. I just am gonna have too many questions for the time allotted. I'm just, I'm trying to do a good job, encapsulating your work. I'm

The Great Simplification

trying to be helpful for the audience, and I'm also trying to, like, anticipate how this might be applied in my own life, all simultaneously.

[01:09:47] So, I've heard the word in the past ego death. Is that what you meant?

[01:09:54] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah, I do mean that, but I, this is important because ego's not a thing. It's like, okay, we gotta get rid of the ego. We gotta kill the ego. No, you don't. You just have to see through it. Okay. The double vision thing. You know, Pema Chodron.

[01:10:06] Ego's just a funny way of looking at things. So when you talk about ego, ego death, that's a little dramatic. That's a little gone. I would say ego transcendence. And see, this again, this is important. Just like age 20 doesn't kill age 19, when you transcend the ego, you always have access to it. That's the include part.

[01:10:30] That's why it's not ego death. It's ego transcendence. You transcend this funny way of looking at the world in terms of self and other, but you can always come back to it as a skillful means in relation, with the capacity to communicate with others who still exclusively identify with that level of development. And this is what the great teachers do.

[01:10:51] The ones who don't teach all that well are the ones that get high altitude sickness, that they, speak from such a lofty level of psychospiritual development that, that, mere mortals still with strong egoic structure just can't relate to them. So there's nothing wrong with ego.

[01:11:07] **Nate Hagens:** So are there any individuals who should not engage in dark retreat, and what are the risks or goals that— Yeah

[01:11:13] that people should be aware of?

The Great Simplification

[01:11:15] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah, there are some people who shouldn't do it. So there's a, in my book there's a whole chapter, where I had extensive consultations with physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, ophthalmologists And so there's a lot. anybody who has, again, I won't be exhaustive, but you know, medicinally, if you have diabetes, if you have sleep apnea, if you've got narcolepsy, if you've got, you know, kinda classic disorders, where medications are problematic, it's not for you.

[01:11:46] Or this doesn't mean you can't do it at home, by the way. This is also the really important thing. Anybody, I mean, you got eyes? Close 'em. You're doing a dark retreat. Anybody can do that. It's extended one, two, three days that we're talking about here.

[01:11:59] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[01:12:00] **Andrew Holecek:** So psychologically, this is important. Anybody who has, dissociative tendencies, depersonalization, derealization disorders, dissociative identity disorder, psychotic dispositions, schizophrenic dispositions, obviously claustrophobia, nyctophobia, fear of the dark, classic things where people, they just tend to self-select.

[01:12:23] They just go, "There's just no way I'm doing that."

[01:12:25] **Nate Hagens:** What was the word that's fear of the dark?

[01:12:28] **Andrew Holecek:** Nyctophobia.

[01:12:29] **Nate Hagens:** Don't we all have that to some degree? Yeah. And isn't that a, an evolutionary thing?

The Great Simplification

[01:12:34] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. It's a developmental thing. and why? Why is that? Because darkness, this is so... I talk about higher aspect and lower aspect darkness.

[01:12:43] Higher aspect darkness is what I was referring to earlier. You know, authenticity, depth, originality, creativity. Lower aspect darkness is, I mean, just look at the dictionary for the synonyms for darkness. You know, evil, death, destruction, right? Fear. So the reason we have this in relationship to darkness is fear.

[01:13:02] It's like you said, we didn't really get back to this. We're always afraid of the unknown. Look below any experience of fear or anxiety, right? And it's based on our, we don't know. And so when you're in the dark or you're relating to the dark, we're afraid because- We're facing our fears ... we're facing our fears.

[01:13:19] And so again, my friend, you wanna grow in this life, man? You wanna grow in this life?

[01:13:23] **Nate Hagens:** You gotta face your fears.

[01:13:25] **Andrew Holecek:** Don't just follow your bliss. Thank you, Joseph Campbell. If you just follow your bliss, welcome to the cocaine. You're just gonna get blissed out. Welcome to the new age. You wanna really grow in this precious life?

[01:13:35] My dear friend Pema Chödrön's made a career out of this. Follow your fear. Why? Because fear is the affective expression of ignorance. This is what you really want to unearth. You want to unearth ignorance. And un- and ignorance is like, it's so ubiquitous, it's like a fish living in water. We don't see that we don't see because it is so ubiquitous.

The Great Simplification

[01:13:55] But what you can do is you can identify the affective expression of that ignorance, which is fear, and this is what the darkness represents. And so when you're going in there, I mean, first, I have to say, Nate, when I first went in there— In all honesty, I was pretty much fearless, even though I had the traditional frameworks, I had no idea what was going to happen.

[01:14:14] So the other contraindication, and menopause and ping and all kinds of doodles, the only people that should not do this practice are the thrill-seekers. The spiritual thrill-seekers. The, "Oh, I, you know, I read this thing in, a sports magazine," right? Literally, I'm not exaggerating. "Oh, you know, he conquered K2," you know, the second-largest peak in the world.

[01:14:32] His next conquest was gonna be seven days in the dark. Are you kidding me? So that type of thrill-seeker, spiritual seek— I mean, spiritual thrill-seeker, that's a major contraindication because then, yeah, you'll cross the finish line bruised and beaten. It's, but you're just gonna have a stronger ego, not a softened ego.

[01:14:51] You gotta come out... This is not a tough guy practice. This is a soft... You're gonna come out a smoothie. You're gonna come in, you're gonna go in there rock hard, mate, and you're gonna come out smoothie Nate, right? You're gonna come out a soft guy. So the darkness is gonna do its little acid bath thing on you, and you're gonna come out a softy.

[01:15:08] You're gonna open, open, that's the fundamental underlying narrative of the whole thing that we haven't hit on at all is openness. Meditation, another definition of meditation, I, mentioned several. My favorite, meditation is habituation to openness. And when you go into the dark, initially you contract because it's like a cold plunge.

The Great Simplification

[01:15:31] our s- our data shows about 90% of the people when they hit the dark, fight, fight, flight, freeze, fawn response. They contract. But eventually, if, you're doing it right, so to speak, you surrender. Just like a good psychedelic trip. What's the, best ingredient for success in a psychedelic trip?

[01:15:49] Trust. Surrender And eventually when you trust and surrender, what are you gonna do? You're gonna let go. You're gonna die. You're gonna open. And as you open, as Rumi put it, the wider rings of being, that's when the magic starts.

[01:16:03] **Nate Hagens:** So, so let me circle back to, to my, work on this, which there- Yeah, please

[01:16:09] there on the surface aren't a lot of direct linkages, but under the surface, in the, gray area, there are quite a few. So a lot of my work focuses on how our psychological biases might hinder our efforts to navigate a future with less material throughput and predictably probably more societal disruptions.

[01:16:32] So how could learning to be comfortable facing our fears, including fear of darkness, such as what happens during the dark retreats, help us better face the unknown and uncertainty of, both the present moment and the coming decades?

[01:16:48] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. Oh, this is, great. This is terrific. This is translational work, you know, bringing this esoteric stuff into exoteric application.

[01:16:56] Because this is so great, Nate, and, I realize I'm not being patronizing here, because meditation isn't the point. Dark retreat isn't the point. Psychedelics isn't the point. The point is life. The point is how are you gonna negotiate these really challenging life situations? And so when you're going into the dark, I intimated this with a meditation times a thousand thing, it's just life concentrate.

The Great Simplification

[01:17:21] I mean, really, it's another metaphor for it. It's just really concentrated life. And so you will learn more about yourself, who you are and who you are not, in the shortest possible time in this type of practice. Why? Because you can't get away from yourself. You can't dilute yourself. You can't distract.

[01:17:38] And so as you do this, right, what does it say in the temp- Temple of Apollo, Delphi? "Know thyself." When you come to know who you really are and you come to know the nature of your relative self, not your absolute self, but your relative self sense that's built on fear, right? Here's my sweet little doggy.

[01:17:58] Tashi, come up here. Don't bark, sweetie. Come on up.

[01:18:01] **Nate Hagens:** Frank is next door, otherwise they could greet each other. So,

[01:18:04] **Andrew Holecek:** no. Can you see him? He's just the sweetest dog. There he is. Tashi, you're the best doggy in the world. So he is the best dog in the world. He's my little Bodhisattva. So when you go into the dark, to become familiar with yourself, whether it's right out of the gates or whether, you're in there for a while and you really start to come undone, you're gonna come up against this, infrastructure, this bedrock, this relative bedrock of fear, and you're gonna establish a relationship to it.

[01:18:34] You're gonna open to it. You're gonna befriend it, and in so doing, you're gonna become fearless, not by getting rid of it, but by going through it. And so by understanding the, basic, ingredients of fear and realizing that, oh my gosh, the vast majority of my life, again, is designed to run away from this fear, well, then you start to see...

[01:18:56] You're starting to see it at a profound, intimate, existential level, but you start to see the ubiquity, the universality of the fear principle. You know this. I

The Great Simplification

mean, shit, you can market, you can campaign on this stuff. I mean, you can get elected on this shit, right? Fear sells because it, reifies.

[01:19:14] You know, fear, this is... Fear reifies. Fear reifies the future, anger reifies the past, passion reifies the present. And so when you're going into the dark, correlative to this opening thing in geek speak is the process of de-reification. Everything is coming undone. And then eventually what this means is you're gonna deconstruct space, time, causality, self, and co-emergent with all that is fear.

[01:19:41] You're gonna deconstruct this thing called fear

[01:19:44] **Nate Hagens:** And if you are successful in doing that, when there are demagogues or whoever, or YouTube algorithms that are pitching fear because of presumably your experience with, self-observation in darkness or whatever other, method, you will be less susceptible to fear.

[01:20:06] **Andrew Holecek:** Meditation. 100%. You will start to relate to it instead of from it, because relating from it is no relationship at all, and therefore you're gonna replace reactivity with response ability. Now you're going to be able to respond. You're still gonna feel it. You're still gonna notice this contraction. And I promise you, look, I, if we had more time, I would do it here.

[01:20:27] I could do a little thing that would freak your people out, and I'm gonna sh- I could show you very quickly how this fear is at the matrix of the relative self sense right now. And so you start to understand this, and you'll feel... Whenever you feel this fear, you're gonna feel what? You're gonna feel a contraction.

[01:20:42] And as you feel this contraction, you're gonna replace it with this immediate antidote of openness. Don't get rid of the contraction, just like you don't get rid of ego. Ego is an archetype of contraction. Open to it. And so

The Great Simplification

therefore, when you enter the political arena, you enter the intellectual arena, you enter whatever arena, these human aspects are gonna come up.

[01:21:02] But because you developed a spacious relationship to your own interiority, you're no longer going to react. You're going to respond. You're going to relate to this fear, and therefore you're gonna be much more effective in communicating from an open space of kindness and love instead of defensive and offensive strategies.

[01:21:19] It's huge.

[01:21:21] **Nate Hagens:** I, see it. let me extend that to another major theme for me currently right now- Okay ... is exploring how we might heal some of our social fracturing through the shedding of our social identities and a refocus on connecting in real life with fellow community members on a more fundamental human level.

[01:21:43] So how do you think a dark practice or a dark retreat might aid in that shedding and rehumanization process?

[01:21:51] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. That's so beautiful. God, these are great questions, man. So You s- connect naturally when you stop disconnecting. And so this is another... You can replace disconnect with distract. what did Lama Rinpoche say?

[01:22:11] You know, to, end distraction is to end samsara. To end disconnection is to end samsara. And so when you go... And whether it's any inner work, so yes, we're using archetypally the dark thing, but again, it's t- there's nothing special about the dark. It's just really concentrated, intense inner work. You stop disconnecting, running, distracting, you're naturally gonna start to connect.

The Great Simplification

[01:22:35] And so as you connect by stopping the disconnect to self, when you go down, this is the most amazing, beautiful thing. This is an Enneadromia thing. You go down, you connect, y- you know, you, go so fully into yourself in the dark, it transforms into other. It transforms into the universe. This is amazing.

[01:22:56] I mean, you go into the... You go in there, the deepest levels of dark retreat, you go in there to die. You go in there and you discover you're nothing. And as the... Like what did, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj said so beautifully. You know, "Wisdom tells me I am nothing. Love tells me I am everything. Between these two, my life floats."

[01:23:19] And so you go into the dark, you're gonna, you're gonna, you're gonna turn into no thing. But that no thing, because it's fake news, right? That no thing then flips into everything. You become the universe. And then from that, anybody in psychedelic experience will do this. Deep meditation will do this. It happens in a certain way every night when you fall asleep.

[01:23:39] When you realize that you are everything, then when you come out, it's like Ramana Maharshi said so beautifully when he was asked, "How do we best help others?" You remember what he said? What others? What others? There are no others. This is the illusion of duality. This is the translational aspect of duality, non-duality.

[01:24:00] You know, there is no other. There is no out there. Even Wheeler said this, student of Einstein, there is no other. So you go so fully into yourself like a Möbius strip. This is the genius of it. You go so fully into yourself, you disappear, you become the cosmos. And then from that, what happens, Nate?

[01:24:18] Naturally, spontaneously, love, wisdom, kindness, compassion, spontaneously. You go out to serve others because you realize there are no others. You're serving yourself.

The Great Simplification

[01:24:31] **Nate Hagens:** Thomas Edison might be rolling in his grave. so this is, this has been both enjoyable and, has got me thinking. and you know in the next two days I'm gonna take those, goggles on and, and give it a, spin.

[01:24:50] **Andrew Holecek:** Goes it.

[01:24:51] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. Yeah. but let me just ask you this before I ask- Yeah ... my closing, questions- Oh, okay ... I ask all my guests. What if someone who is, a longtime f- watcher of this podcast and has learned a lot about climate change and energy deple- depletion and geopolitics and biodiversity and evolutionary biology, they hear this conversation and they're like, "That's just woo.

[01:25:20] Why is that relevant?" Right. Now, I don't think that. I actually see the interconnectors between your story and mine, but what would you say to someone that, that had that reaction?

[01:25:31] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. Yeah, that's great. Again, I love it, Well, I would say take a very good look. You know, the unexamined life, Socrates, right?

[01:25:39] The unexamined life is not worth living. Take a very good look What are you always doing? Whether you know it or not, whether you're awake to it or not, what are you always doing? You're always working with your mind. Hard stop, because that's all there is. You're always working with your mind. And so when we talk about The Great Simplification, I animated this a while back, healthy reductionism, healthy simplification to these fundamental root principles that you're always working with your mind.

[01:26:09] And so this is, this ties into like, you know, you think you're happy when you get what you want. No, you're simply happy because you just stopped wanting. Look deeper. So the people that may say this is just woo, well, why? Tell

The Great Simplification

me why you think it's woo, and then look very deeply. Is it true? Don't take my word for it.

[01:26:26] Are you always working with your mind? Gosh, you know, I guess you're right. Well, maybe it might behoove you to work with your mind a little bit more directly through the inner arts, through contemplation, through meditation, through things like dark retreat. And again, dark retreat is just really intense meditation.

[01:26:42] That's all it is.

[01:26:43] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[01:26:44] **Andrew Holecek:** And then come out and see what happens when you do this very profound inner first person exploration and see what happens to your being. See how, in fact, you might be able to do better science. You might be able to do better anthropology, better AI. Interesting a lot, and not a lot of AI people are really...

[01:27:01] The tech people are really into this dark stuff, by the way, parenthetically. You know, maybe you'll become a better researcher, scientist, human being when you better understand who you are and what the instrument is that you engage in your investigations The lens of your investigation is your mind.

[01:27:20] Sharpen your mind, heighten your mind, become aware of your mind. It will benefit everything you do

[01:27:27] **Nate Hagens:** Can you speculate for me, fast-forward five or 10 years and there is this ego transcendence in a meaningful percentage of the population, whether through, darkness practice or meditation or psychedelics or whatever-

The Great Simplification

[01:27:43] **Andrew Holecek:** LSD in a water system.

[01:27:45] I think, Leary had it,

[01:27:46] **Nate Hagens:** right? Right. that reference I did understand. Yeah ... the... What could you see happening? Like, in a group of humans, if you have one or two of them, Yeah ... being able to have this experience versus 90% of them, does that change the social interaction- Yes ... of that group?

[01:28:05] **Andrew Holecek:** Yes.

[01:28:06] **Nate Hagens:** And have you seen that?

[01:28:07] **Andrew Holecek:** Well, the, you know, there, there was a highly controversial book that came out 30 years ago called The Maharishi Effect, that speculated... The science was pretty s- weak, sloppy. But Richie Davidson and his colleagues now at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Center for the Investigation of Healthy Minds, they're actually doing, some really interesting work along this sort of thing.

[01:28:27] That what happens when individuals reach certain almost tipping points that can collectively then have benefit, you know, society, societally and whatnot. In a materialistic worldview, this is woo. This just is like, this is just new age bullshit. But not in a world that's... We- let's go to Iain McGilchrist again.

[01:28:49] not in a world that's made of mind, not in a world that's made out of heart, mind, spirit. In that world, what you do with your mind is inextricably interconnected to what happens in the matrix of mind at large, Huxley's term.

[01:29:04] **Nate Hagens:** Right.

The Great Simplification

[01:29:04] **Andrew Holecek:** And so therefore, when you're doing your work, this is the bodhisattva ideal, with a deeper understanding that the reality of, Nobody's ever experienced matter, by the way. Matter's just the label we append to the regularity of experience. This world is not made of matter. When you understand the fundamental matrix of reality is heart, mind, spirit, what I do with my heart, mind, spirit has a benefit on the world. and so yeah, I would say something along those lines.

[01:29:32] And therefore, the, you know, the kind of research, more controversial stuff, Rupert Sheldrake stuff, a little bit more controversial. He's explored this to some extent, but there is some really cool things happening in this arena.

[01:29:43] **Nate Hagens:** So, thank you so much for this, erudite whirlwind. if you have a few more minutes, there are some standard questions- Oh, yeah.

[01:29:52] No, I'm just... This, is still fun ... I, ask my, guests. So what can someone, listening to this episode do now, today, this week, or this month to generally, help address the issues, discussed in this podcast writ large, or is it all up to politicians and leaders?

[01:30:11] **Andrew Holecek:** You got eyes? Close them You got to microdose.

[01:30:16] You, this is a great thing about this sober psychedelic. You can microdose in the blink of an eye. Close your eyes, connect, feel. This, is a practice of feeling, man. connect.

[01:30:29] **Nate Hagens:** Once again, for clarity, when we did the 4.9 seconds and I closed my eyes here, the viewers can't see, but I have two big, industrial studio lamps here on my face.

The Great Simplification

[01:30:42] Yeah, I know ... so if I'm closing my eyes now, it's not true darkness. So again, it's important to wear those goggles or, be in a totally dark room or something like that, and that matters, right?

[01:30:53] **Andrew Holecek:** Yes, I do believe it does. But again, I- in the spirit of gray retreat, in the spirit of titration, the, gradual approach, you can just start with what you just did.

[01:31:04] But yes, exactly. The w- the masks help because you can open your eyes underneath them and it's pretty pitch black. Stepping into a closet, you know, gives new meaning to the term closet meditator. My teacher originally 30 years ago, that's what he suggested. Go into your closet. Yeah. Your full... The reason I mention this is because there's something, it's quite lovely.

[01:31:24] It's q- believe it or not, it's quite sensual when your whole body is immersed, the full Monty effect. When your whole body is immersed in darkness, it's quite interesting because darkness does penetrate the skin. Within a millimeter or two, by the way, your, it's pitch black inside your body. People usually don't think that.

[01:31:40] It, your body is pitch black inside, right? So when you go into the dark, you, and you, and your whole body is, pulled away from this, light, you'll feel it. So yeah, just start with that. And pay attention, by the way, when you go to sleep. Every night you enter a mini dark retreat. I mean, every night is an opportunity to explore some, many of these, principles and practices in the dark of the night.

[01:32:04] **Nate Hagens:** But for many of us, especially me, I'm asleep within two minutes of me laying down, so the, darkness retreat is pretty short, and then I'm into dreamland. so getting back to my closing questions, we have a lot of young people, surprisingly, that, watch this platform. Oh, wonderful. What specific general advice, life advice do you have for young humans in their teens and 20s

The Great Simplification

who become aware of the economic, environmental constraints, of the global economy?

[01:32:38] And it may or may not have to do with meditation or darkness, just general, considered advice from a lifetime of experience. Yeah.

[01:32:46] **Andrew Holecek:** Question authority Be true to yourself. Trust the thread of your experience. And yeah, just my heart. I mean, this is a population where my heart really breaks these days.

[01:33:02] And sidebar, interestingly, we're doing some studies with the darkness around disenfranchised youth around this for detox. But yeah, I would say don't be afraid to, yeah, just that. Don't be afraid to question authority, to trust your own inner wisdom. And I'll say something here. This is something that I wish I would have been told 70 years ago, not 70, 60 years ago, 50 years ago, is maybe look at the way you ask your questions.

[01:33:31] And so what I'm saying here is very personal. For many, years, I kept thinking, you know, what should I do with my life? What should I do with my life? So I pursued all these careers and I did all this shit. And then I realized, it actually came to me in the dark. So I realized I've been asking all the wrong questions in my life.

[01:33:48] It's not like, what am I going to, what should I do with my life? What does life want to do with me? What does life want to do through me? So this is the egoic thing. Get out of your way. Trust your heart. Trust your experience. And what does life want to do through you? Become a servant of reality. Become a servant of that voice.

[01:34:09] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you for that. What do you care most about in the world, Andrew?

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[01:34:15] **Andrew Holecek:** Ooh.

[01:34:22] Oh, so many things, but authenticity. I keep coming back. What the Buddha said really rings with me. suffering, discontent. How can we alleviate suffering and discontent? To me, that's what it's all about, and to me, it comes with understanding, with knowledge and wisdom, understanding who we are. so yeah, what I care most about is, the alleviation of suffering born of misunderstanding, not knowing.

[01:34:52] **Nate Hagens:** If you could wave a magic wand and there was no personal recourse to your decision, what is one thing you would do to improve the future of humanity and the biosphere?

[01:35:10] **Andrew Holecek:** It may seem paradoxical, but maybe pay more attention to the present Pay more attention to the present. It, may seem facile and dismissive, but one thing I've learned, again, especially since we're situating some of this stuff in the dark, just take care of the present moment and everything else will take care of itself.

[01:35:33] So I would, say just, yeah, be true. And again, interiority, interoceptive trust. Trust the present moment. Trust yourself.

[01:35:41] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, a couple years ago I would've pushed back on that answer, but I now understand it, better, Yeah ... because it's, our inability to be in the present moment that contributes to the crisis that we're in, I, think.

[01:35:54] **Andrew Holecek:** 100%. I mean, this is the distract pulling apart thing that starts with pulling apart from the present moment, and we just keep pulling and ripping, and you've got the meta-crisis.

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[01:36:04] **Nate Hagens:** So does a darkness practice, enable people to be more in the present generally in their life when the lights are on?

[01:36:15] **Andrew Holecek:** Yes, I think so. Because you know, the, that there's a, magnificent type of memory, when you're introduced to the truth, the, it tends to stay with you. It's like when you have a... I haven't had a near-death experience, but you only need one and it'll change your life forever. I have had hyper lucid dreams that are more lu-lucid than this.

[01:36:39] They will change your life forever. Why? Because they're so real, they're so foundational. And so for me, deep meditation, again, within the context of dark, it's so true. It's so real that it stays with you, and transforms, for me, everything I do in my waking state. Yeah.

[01:37:01] **Nate Hagens:** So, this has been really interesting, and, personally, valuable to me.

[01:37:13] what, sort of research questions are driving you right now? I mean, I know you just finished your book, and you're doing retreats and other things, but you're a scientist- Yeah ... and you're curious, like what are the couple things that you are most passionate about looking into and discovering in the rest of this year?

[01:37:31] **Andrew Holecek:** Yeah. You're so kind. we're doing some really interesting stuff like I alluded to, Nate, around the study, both phenomenological in terms of just questionnaires and the like, and also more hard, data collection around what's happening in the dark. why is this practice so transformative? There's, very, little data on it, and so we're doing some really cool stuff that, I think can help understand, 'cause people are gonna listen and they go, "This is really weird practice, man."

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[01:38:04] You know, again, you want me to do what?" So yeah, I can fly by lamps, I can give you a phenomenological personal history of all these sorts of things. But there's something about And again, I work a lot with scientists now. I'm really coming to so respect these people. I mean, they're amazing. Their integrity, their depth, their rigor.

[01:38:22] And so to bring that traction into substantiating the transformative power of this really quirky meditation really excites me. You know, it's like, well, people are going to go, now I get it. Okay, now I understand why you might want me to close my eyes and engage in this really unusual practice. So that excites the beans out of me right now.

[01:38:44] **Nate Hagens:** Any closing comments for people watching or listening who either understand and agree with what you've laid out here or are very curious about it?

[01:38:54] **Andrew Holecek:** You know, I think we've covered some really rich terrain thanks to your incredible questions. I mean, boy, you're very gifted at what you do, Nate. And so I don't think there's anything more that I could add outside of just remember that all this stuff is in the service of life.

[01:39:10] And all of it, I think we're very like-minded. And this excites me to get someone like you because when I first, you know, people send me your stuff, I'm going, okay, this is really cool. But like, would we actually have anything to talk about? Well, it turns out we do have some really cool things to talk about.

[01:39:25] And so the cross-pollination of ideas, of insights, I love what you do because the near enemy of what I do as a navel gazer is just getting lost in deep inner space. And so for me, translational meditation, translational spirituality, translational research, how do we take this otherwise super esoteric stuff and bring it into the world to help this world that's in a heap of hurt?

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[01:39:52] It's all hands on deck time, man. And so, yeah, something like that.

[01:39:58] **Nate Hagens:** Hear,

[01:39:58] **Andrew Holecek:** So thank you for the opportunity. It's just been such a delight. You've steered this crazy ship in some really cool directions.

[01:40:04] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you for your continued work and for your time today

[01:40:07] **Andrew Holecek:** and

[01:40:08] **Nate Hagens:** to be continued,

[01:40:08] **Andrew Holecek:** my friend. Likewise. To be continued.

[01:40:10] Super fun. Thank you, Nate.

[01:40:12] **Nate Hagens:** If you'd like to learn more about this episode, please visit thegreatsimplification.com for references and show notes. From there, you can also join our high-low community and subscribe to our Substack newsletter. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media, and produced by Misty Stinnett and Lizzie Sirianni.

[01:40:34] Our production team also includes Leslie Batlutz, Brady Heien, Julia Maxwell, Gabriella Sleiman, and Grace Brunfeld. Thank you for listening, and we'll see you on the next episode.