

## PEDRAM SHOJAI

### Urban Monk: Healing With Mind+Body+Spirit Practices

**Jason Prall:**

Pedram, thanks for joining me today.

**Pedram Shojai:**

Hey, great to see you. It's been a long time.

**Jason Prall:**

It has. Well, as we were chatting offline, you're shooting a couple of new projects, which is always good to see. You got some great content out there and I wanted to bring the audience back to some of your old content per se. You wrote a book called *The Urban Monk* and I love that title because it actually describes the issue that I've seen so well. Which is that we have these Eastern traditions and Eastern philosophies and the way that their practiced or the way that they have historically been practiced, the way that they still practice in the east. It's very hard to incorporate them in our Western lifestyles. Right? If you're a mother of two and you're working full time, how the heck are you supposed to be doing some of these things, 10, 12 hours a day like some of these Eastern traditions really practice?

**Jason Prall:**

So, with that, it's kind of the lead in, I guess, but I want to go back to your monk days. You actually did this formally as a monk. Tell me about that. What was that like and how long did you do that?

**Pedram Shojai:**

Formerly, I was a monk for four years, took coordination as a minister in that tradition. And it was pretty busy, right? It was pretty busy. Getting up, before the sun, lots of qigong, meditation, austerities, studying the I Ching, studying [foreign language 00:01:38] like all these kinds of weird Chinese things that I never even knew existed became a big part of my life. And a lot of, it was probably about 12, 14 hours a day of work in that capacity. And , a lot of time contemplating your existence, breathing down your navel. So, it's a very different cadence and it comes from a very different tradition to kind of hook into what you were saying

earlier is... Look, we're, we live in the world of householders, right. And these practices come from ascetic lineages and as an ascetic.

**Jason Prall:**

And what does that mean? What does that mean?

**Pedram Shojai:**

You've renounced the world, right? Like you're okay. You're a monk or nun and , buh-bye go, go, go contemplate God and do what you do. And we'll, take turns, making food and chopping wood and fetching water, but you're, this is what you do now. Right? And so a 90 minute yoga session seems like a whole hell of a lot to a busy mom bopping around trying to get her kids between camp and school or whatever. But if you had all day to do that 90 minutes, it's just space. It's nothing, right.

**Jason Prall:**

Right.

**Pedram Shojai:**

It's just a drop in the bucket. And so what I think happened sometime around the sixties is there was just a misread of all this stuff. You know, all these things come over the Beatles go over and bring the Maharishi.

**Pedram Shojai:**

And everyone's kind of jazzed on all this Eastern stuff and it all just kind of came in together and there's a baby bath water equation with it. Like if you're a guy with a job-job in India, you got time to stretch a little in the mornings and like do your devotional stuff and, come back and maybe meditate, but you got to feed you, you got to feed those kids. You got to make the work stuff happen and you got to be the husband and the dad, all of it. Right. And so the householders had a very different deal and the householders in the 99%, but what we're trying to emulate is what the 1% do in a culture that's even faster and crazier and more hectic than the traditional India where people also just have jobs.

**Pedram Shojai:**

Right. And so I think that mistranslations created a lot of stress for people. It's like, I feel like such a loser, cause I couldn't get up and do a thousand burpees and then, watch the sunrise and Instagram myself while doing it. And it's just, it's, it's insane. But we hold ourselves to these things because we haven't questioned it. And it's time to question everything, frankly.

**Jason Prall:**

Right! I totally agree. And, and this is what I love seeing is that there's actually an acknowledgement of this, right. That we can't do it the way they did it. And so we're, we're creating new ways. And I think we're sort of stumbling a bit in the process, but what we're finding our way and figuring out how to incorporate these practices and some of these philosophies into our Western world, because I think at the core, we understand that there's something extremely valuable where things like yoga and Qigong and Tai Chi and meditation and you name it. Right. So I love to see that we're continuing to incorporate this. I'd love to get into some of the philosophies that, that you picked up in your studies, right?

**Jason Prall:**

Because there's a couple aspects to these traditions and these, these lineages and these teachings, right? The one is the direct practice, which is essential. It cannot be ignored. It is where most of it comes from, but then there's also kind of these transmissions that come from the guru or what have you. And then there's also some reading and things as well. So what are some of the things that you picked up in, in the study of, of all these traditions that you've been working with that you think are really, really applicable to today's society in the west?

**Pedram Shojai:**

Yeah. Well, I can say first off that I learned more about spirituality on the streets of India than I did in any Ashram. Just watching people die, watching the abject squalor that people lived in and watching the magnitude of the humanity that you witnessed with people and the kindness and the grace that you see that just lives in the kind of the ethos of that, of that community. It's really it's something exquisite, something I need my children to see, my youngest is five, we're getting there. Right. But, get them out there, get them to see it. So, there're things outside of the scripture, right? Like, I learned, I read a lot. I let her read all the Taoists cannon. I studied a lot of the classic, all the Chinese medical texts I've studied at all.

**Pedram Shojai:**

And I can tell you beyond a shadow of a doubt that, that will get you no more than 15% of the way there. You got to do the work, you have to do the work. Right. It's like swinging a golf club. You're going to read about it for two years. You're never, ever going to be able to do it. Right. And so what is Tai Chi? I can't explain, just here, here let's try it. Right. Let you tell me, what is Chi let's find it, let's breath to it. Let's move, where's the dan tien, we'll keep breathing down to your lower belly and you'll feel it, right. And so I think what we've become so abstract. Right. And, like we went to school and, we've all done things. I read a lot

of books and still do, but the more I get in my head, the less I feel and perceive the knowing the such ness of being that can only be conveyed through that transmission of practice.

**Pedram Shojai:**

And I think, look inherently, there's a lot of folks listening to this, so don't, don't take offense or do, but, we're, we're lazy, right? Our culture is lazy, and we have been bred to think that there's going to be some pills, some dude, some guru, some lover, someone's going to solve our problems. Right. And someone's going to, sweep in and everything's going to be okay. And that's just not, that's just not in line with how reality works. what we do is every single day, we take little steps in the right direction. We constantly water the right fields of the prefrontal cortex and the part of the brain that allows us to make better decisions. And over time you see our lives get better and better and better. Right. But it's not because of the hail Mary.

**Pedram Shojai:**

Right? Like we come from a culture that kind of Judeo-Christian even Islamic in some ways where it's like, the godfather goes to church on Sundays and asks for forgiveness for wakened people all week. And somehow he's just absolved. And it's like, that was sweet. let's go kill some people. Right. And it's just, we have a very weird relationship with sins and an imbalance. And we think that there's just one quick hail Mary that fixes it. And like, I'm not getting down on the Christian thing. I actually have a lot of very, very many years studying esoteric Christianity. And I very truly believe that, that's one of the more powerful paths to liberation. But I think that most people are, swirling in the toilet bowl of middleman religion, and being told what to think or what to believe or how to be, and, or having zero experience of the things that would actually transform them.

**Jason Prall:**

And that's just it, right? Like it, it actually comes down to you doing some of this, of this work. And even some of the most aligned Christians I know, they'll say that same thing. Like you've got to be doing this stuff, right. I mean, it has to be a part of who you are. I think one of the things that I'd love for you to discuss is how do we bring this stuff into our, into our day, into our modern world, because we don't have 15 hours. I can't, most people don't have the time or the inclination to go study the texts, learn what to do. Right. But we can watch a YouTube video and qigong, we can learn how to breathe. Right. How do I start? Like, that's the main thing? How do I start this process? If I'm at that point and I'm ready and willing to go, okay, cool. I'm in. what do I do?

**Pedram Shojai:**

A qigong set. I like qigong because the Western mind is already so abstract that sitting around meditating just is painful for a lot of people. I like the concept of qigong being, the coordination of eyes, mind, body, and breath. And so it's like pulling all your faculties together to be like, no dummy, look at this hand. Right. And you just keep doing it until the biofeedback loop kind of locks in and you're doing this thing. And all of a sudden you go away. I feel, I feel something. I feel different. I feel better. And look, I mean, I do it every day. Right? Like I was up, my alarm goes off at six.

**Pedram Shojai:**

I'm doing qigong for half an hour before I go work out. And you know, my kids know that, by eight o'clock, I've already done most of my personal practice. I still have stuff I do throughout the day, but I'll just, I'll put a little, like half an hour spacer in between calls and meetings and stuff, and I'll build it in. And I treat it like an appointment and I don't miss it, but I'll take that half hour in the middle of the day to do some stuff for me. And man it makes a world of difference.

**Jason Prall:**

You think that's the biggest thing is that like, is to find that slot in the morning before the rest of your day sort of takes over and gets away from you. It's like, you really make that a priority in the beginning of the day.

**Pedram Shojai:**

Yeah. It's in the morning is where you set the tone for the rest of the day. So, I mean, if you just jump in the whitewater, your heart rate is up and you're tumbling and you're gasping for breath all day. So, you know the whitewater is coming, but go upstream a little bit, get in the still water and just kind of prep yourself. And when you hit the light water, you remember how to breathe with the stillness of the river and know that this is just another state of the river. I don't think if, I think it's very hard to master your life. If you just jump into your days without any sort of like mind, body spirit work, because the world is filled with distractions. I mean, as a matter of fact, the mediums through which we're communicating, the social media is, it's based on, what's called the attention economy.

**Pedram Shojai:**

Think about that. Your attention is the currency, right. That fuels it. And if your attention is on some feed up, down left, right. I don't know what you're looking at. Right? But if your attention is not on your breath, on your priorities, on your kids, on your spouse, on your world, then

your attention is being vamped into someone else's interests and being monetized into someone else's dream of reality. And you wonder why your life isn't working. If you can't grab that first thing in the morning and start driving you're in the passenger seat, and someone else has taken you places that, I promise you is in your best interest.

**Jason Prall:**

I totally agree. And I actually really love that, that you lean on qigong right. Compared to meditation. And I love meditation too. I think it's an essential practice that said if that's the only practice, I think we're missing a lot because when it comes to something like qigong, for example, the fact that it's taking us into the body, right? Like I remember the first time I felt my dantian and I was like, oh my God.

**Pedram Shojai:**

It exists.

**Jason Prall:**

Well, I thought I'd been living my entire life. Didn't realize I could feel that thing, that I'm feeling now. And then the fact that I can then cultivate it. And I actually have the power and the ability to increase this energy. It was actually a bit of sadness in that there was a bit of sadness because I thought, oh my gosh, what a waste. Right. I got been missing this. And I think that's meditation. Fantastic. That's amazing experience of meeting insights. It's done wonders. And it continues to do wonders. And I will continue to bring that in my practice. But it's these embodiment practices, I think we're so often missing. Right. And yoga has been one of these great ones that we've adopted here in the west pretty well. And yet it still falls in this line of exercise a little bit, right?

**Jason Prall:**

Like we're still kind of viewing it as stretching or some kind of exercise that we do to lose weight or to, what have you, and, or to fix an injury and qigong is this thing where it's, it's so subtle that most people at first, they're not feeling anything. They don't recognize what they're doing. They're just moving their hands, they are following, the movements of their teacher. It's something super slow and really weird and involves some shaking some times. And it's just kind of this awkward thing. We're not sure what to do with it because my injury still feels like my injury and maybe still stressed out the first time. Right.

**Jason Prall:**

And so how do you coach people in sort of this beginning states of qigong to recognize that value? because Like it's, it's not something like when you exercise for the first time and

you're sore and you're like, oh, I did something like I recognize something really happened. And look, some may feel something the first time they do chicken and they might feel better mentally, emotionally, physically, but I would venture to say, and from my experience that people that do qigong for the first time, they're like, huh, I guess that was fine. I feel okay. I'm not sure what happened there. So how do you, how do you get people to that point where they go, oh, there's my dantian or, oh, I felt this energy where I felt this chi is that what that is chi? So what'd you say?

**Pedram Shojai:**

Well, I mean, most people are borrowing energy from tomorrow to get through today. They're buying five hour energy, triple macchiatos, black tea, green tea. Because you think it's just, it's still the equation is a credit equation with caffeine and you're not going to get as much bang for your buck doing the real stuff. It's like, I it's almost like saying, okay, well, here's a green smoothie. Here's your first green smoothie. Are you, do you feel healthy? And you're like, no, keep drinking them. Right. And, and it's one of those things where the things that are actually good for you, you have to know that, there's some pretty good data on this, right. 6,000 years, billions of people all saying, this is cool.

**Pedram Shojai:**

I mean, that's kind of enough for me. Right? And then you start looking at the scientific studies and you know, there's many, many coming out now that justify what it is. But the way I see it as like, it's like watering a tomato plant 90 days now in the first week, you might see a sprout. You're like, oh my God, I feel something right. But you're not getting that fruit for 90 days.

**Jason Prall:**

Right.

**Pedram Shojai:**

And everyday you get a little closer, you have a little bit more faith that this is working, but when you first plant a seed and start watering it, you're like wet dirt.

**Jason Prall:**

Right.

**Pedram Shojai:**

Right? And so you got to understand that the rhythms of nature are such, right? I mean, it's just a grandpa knew this grandma knew this we've just become so separate from our planet. And the rhythms of like how the natural world does things that we want instant gratification.

**Pedram Shojai:**

Because we were promised instant gratification by Tony, the tiger and whoever the hell else was there to usurp our attention as kids. Right? And so we are part of, part of what we got to do around this, is bring our attention and our power back from that as well. And understand that, look, what? I'm not doing qigong for today. I'm doing, qigong every day for the rest of my life. And it's not one of these, like why don't I just, pull up for my selfie and, take my little Instagram victory lap, and then go back to not doing my diet and not doing my qigong, like I felt good for a day. Now let's get tequila. ? And so the entire operating system has to shift. We come from an operating system where we look at these as kind of cute fancy replacements to Quaaludes uppers and downers.

**Pedram Shojai:**

And that's where we've been usurped. These are the things that we do every day. And occasionally, if you're trying to like, drive your family home on like some highway at three in the morning and you got to stay up or your family dies, take the upper, right. But you don't live on that crap. You take that crap once in a while to get in and out of a bad situation. And so the entire thing has been kind of flipped because look, no, you don't have to pay for qigong, do you? As a matter of fact, you look at some of the most potent studies on anti-aging and longevity that involve the kind of expression of the NF-kappa B gene. And what it does is it suppressing that will get cytokine storms to, to relax. It will suppress cytokine activity, which is inflammation is the mother of all disease.

**Pedram Shojai:**

The drug companies have been trying unsuccessfully for years to find a miracle drug that does this very thing. We know what it is. We know how to trigger it. And we know what triggers it, mind-body practice. We can't sell that. So it doesn't even make the headlines, but like literally the fountain of youth through the genetic switch pathways of your top level, inflammatory modulation pathways, we already know that qigong and yoga and some of these practices will fix, Yet. That requires you to like, do something. So, I'm sorry, that's, that's too much [inaudible 00:19:28]. Tell me what else I need to do. I'm not going to do that. And so the entire operating system is just spun because we've been trained to become consumers and buy products that would not even come close to supplanting the efficacy of this God

given power and right. That we have to heal ourselves and rejuvenate our bodies. It's like living in the matrix, actually. It's kind of crazy,

**Jason Prall:**

Right? Yeah. It's, I couldn't agree more. And one of the things that I think is interesting is that we have all these new modalities. We have all these new substances even, right. We've got psychedelics, there's all this, there's a movement here happening that I think is outside that old paradigm, right? This, this big Pharma, even this sort of supplement paradigm that, that isn't wrong. But I think we were recognizing the limitations of it, right? So we're, we're really just exploring and trying to find these new methods of ways of being. And so as we're kind of entering, but I feel it really does feel like a new paradigm, at least in the west. What are some of the things that you're looking to? What are you exploring right now as part of your sort of continuous practice of awakening and deepening your own spiritual connection, your own mind-body connection, your own health, happiness, purpose, passion, all those things that we're all looking for.

**Pedram Shojai:**

Yeah. That's a great question. It's a big question. I'll start with the psychedelic stuff, because we know we just did a 10 part series on healing trauma. Some of the best results I've ever seen is coming out of psychedelic psychotherapy and some of these clinics, I mean, ketamine is legal, MDMA and still Simon are in trials. But I mean, I personally work with people that create video fractals that put people in psychedelic experiences without a single adjusted thing. I mean, for people that are delivering infoceuticals and, just energy with information that are turning around a lot of things. Right?

**Jason Prall:**

Right.

**Pedram Shojai:**

And it's been incredible to watch on that front because you know, most people aren't hanging out with the Dalai Lama or doing the weird Taoists stuff that I did. And so a lot of my film content is really more kind of mainstream to kind of help mainstream viewers understand that there's hope.

**Pedram Shojai:**

And then, kind of help them find their way you start talking about, Dantians and the Bagua you've lost 99% of them. And, and culturally, I mean, like I chose the Chinese stuff because I, I kind of gravitated towards it, but like the Chinese haven't been cool for a while, right? Like,

culturally, the government has been horrific and they're the major polluters and all this, and they're killing and subjugating people and, and the voice of dissent. And so there's ancient Chinese wisdom. Then there's the Chinese government with subjugates, the perfectly fine Chinese people who are now, getting in a propaganda loop and, in India kind of like sidestep that. So Indian yoga became cool, but Indian yoga also got blended with calisthenics in the 18 hundreds. And what we see today is we call yoga is basically like British workout regimen for colonials who were, stuck in some like some posts and, whatever Dharamsala.

**Pedram Shojai:**

And so, the old practices of the Asanas is, and some of the things that are there are profound. And I think what to your question, what's coming is there's going to be a very profound shift in consciousness and it is going to accelerate every month, going forward, it's already happening. The drum is beating. There's a meeting about three, four years ago at one of the major environmental conferences where two or three of the key players came in and, they're waiting for the usual like, okay, here's what we got to do to fix the planet. And they basically were like, it's over, we lost go home, enjoy your children. You got maybe 10 years walked off stage. And it just created this wave of activity in a fear. It was like, what do you mean? What do you mean? I thought it like shook people awake.

**Pedram Shojai:**

I think every single fire, every single drought, every single riot, every single hurricane, every single reminder that the planet is now like shaking us off, like a fever is going to draw us to becoming more conscious and aware and understanding who we truly are. Dude, I kid you not. I looked at my daughter last week and thought to myself, is she the last generation on this planet? Like, will I ever have a granddaughter? Will I ever know what it's like? Will she ever be able to? And it's just, it was so heart wrenching to understand that we are actually there within 50 to a hundred years, maybe sooner of that being an inevitable thing. And you start seeing all these like, guys, why are all the billionaires trying to get to space?

**Pedram Shojai:**

They're not here to save planet earth. You know, Amazon is messing it up. Right. And so why are they trying to get out of here? Cause they know they, they blew it. We blew it. And now the champions of industry are Leah. It's almost like a sci-fi flick. Right? And so these things are now starting to accelerate spiritual awakening and people at a velocity that I haven't seen for some time. And the dark forces are also trying to grab their minds and polarize them and have them, wave their flags and punch each other. Right. So it's a time of great disinformation and it's a time of great liberation. So are you going to look within for answers or are you going to look outside for someone to tell you what to do think, be, feel how to vote. Right. And it's all coming to a head right now and I can't think of a better time to wake up.

**Jason Prall:**

Yeah. it's funny. This is, it feels like there's such a bifurcation happening, right. Like we're really at that moment where we can go left or right. And I've got a shaman friend from Peru and he says, it's time to wake up. Yes or yes. Right. Like, that's it, there, there is no choice at this point we're, we're now at that point. And, and it's like, if we can keep denying it, right. And it's only going to continue to cause more suffering. And so it just becomes more and more apparent. I think the more you look and I guess that's the thing, that's what this summit is all about. It's, it's initiating, it's trying to kickstart this, this awakening, which is nothing more than just doing, doing this little bit of work every day, looking within figuring out who am I, what's going on.

**Jason Prall:**

Who do I want to be? What do I want, how do I want to be? Right. And I think that's, that's one of the things I'd love for you to talk about is this idea of being versus doing. Cause we come from a culture that is all about doing. And, and a lot of times when we're trying to, for good reason, trying to fix ourselves, trying to make improvements, the first thought or the first action is what do I do to fix this change. And so how can we shift our thinking in what is it, what am I talking about here? When I even mentioned this idea of being in and trying to be different, what does that even look like?

**Pedram Shojai:**

It's again, it's very, very hard to talk about these abstract concepts and make linguistic distinctions. When you haven't spent at least a thousand hours breathing and listening to the silence to establish a connection with the part of you that just is. And so again, I think what happens is we have this disintermediation of information from the body of work, that information came from. So, you get these like monk guys that are sitting there on a rock, looking happy. And so, the Western scholar guy comes in and says, wow, what do you know that I don't know. And, he only comes from a frame of reference of knowledge and thought analysis says, give me all your scripts. We're going to translate them and study them. And that's such a small percentage of their day-to-day life. They're not smiling because they read the scripts.

**Pedram Shojai:**

They're smiling because they did the work all day. They're smiling because they already know who they are because they've been breathing to the core of their being and found that Dantian and followed the bread crumbs in to the source of infinity. And that's why they're smiling. Right. That's why they're smiling. And I just think that again, we've disintermediated that we've mistaken the map for the terrain, right? There's a million ways to say this. And I

couldn't emphasize more at this juncture that if you're not doing the work, and again, I'm not like, do the Pedram method. Like that's all BS. Right? Do whatever work is meaningful to you, but do it. And don't just do it once and tell your friends, you did it because you know, now you do yoga. So you're more likely to get laid, right? Like all this weird, like personal identity stuff.

**Pedram Shojai:**

Do it And don't tell anybody, do it and keep doing it. And one day people are going to say like, yo, Jason, what are you doing, man? You look really good. You are like, yeah I've been doing some yoga. Really? That stuff's not weird? I feel great. And the more times you just light up someone's day by being who you are by having drank that nectar and started to glow from the inside out, the more we stand a chance, right? The more humanity is going to, wake up too upon itself. But talking about it, man, it didn't work.

**Jason Prall:**

Well. And that's just it too, right? What, we're all kind of looking for just from a human standpoint, from a day to day living standpoint, we're looking for better financial security. We're looking for better relationships. We're looking for just, just more ease, more grace, more, more wellbeing. Right. And those are the things I noticed. Start showing up as you do this inner work. And it's not with the intention necessarily of trying to solve this problem or that problem, although that that can be effective.

**Jason Prall:**

I noticed these things just start happening almost like I'm not doing them or that I'm not playing a role. Right. It's like, they're just starting to being given to me. And, and this is the thing that I've noticed that I continue to notice, and this, this became the driver for me eventually. I was like, oh, this is how easy life gets to be. And, I'm just on the beginning track here, what a beautiful outcome this is. And, and so I guess with that, we chatted a little bit for, I know you're doing, you just finished, you're finishing a Sid documentary series or a film on conscious parenting.

**Jason Prall:**

How do you bring this to kids? How do you bring this into the younger generation? Because they seem, and I've gotten just a really, really little one, but the ones that are 7, 8, 12, 15, even 20, they seem different. I don't know what it is, but I look at some of these kids and I'm like that wasn't me at 15. I consider myself a pretty good guy. I did things pretty good, but these kids are blowing me away. And, I think things are changing both from a parenting

perspective. And there's just something about these unique beings that are coming into the world. How do we foster this new way of being in these little ones?

**Pedram Shojai:**

I think a lot of, at least our parents' generation was like, all right, well, I'm going to push this forward into your generation, run with it, son. You know, it's too late for me now. And I think that has to stop now. My kids know a Jedi breathing is because I do it with them. Not because I tell them what it is. We do Jedi breathing every day. Right? My kids, I don't force them to do qigong, but they know what it is because they see their dad do it right. When I tell them to do something that I'm not willing to jump in and do myself. It's Laughable. So the question is how can we be the people that they need to see in their lives to model and emulate in a way?

**Pedram Shojai:**

And it forces us to get up off our asses, clear the cobwebs, and really step through our own just trauma and gunk and inertia to step into a greater expression of our lives so that we truly be the light on their path. Right. But if we're not going to do it, the world's going to veer them into directions that are pretty predictably, not wholesome. Right. And so, whether I feel like it or not, I'm up doing it in the mornings because it's not just for me.

**Jason Prall:**

And that's just it, right? Like the more you do this work, the more you realize it's for not only the people that are around me, but it's for all beings. Right. And that's a realization I think that cannot be recognized unless it comes from within, right. It's something that really sparks. And again, I don't say that from someone who's stabilized this in my system, but I've tasted it. I've seen it. And it's enough to keep me doing this work. And I know it's the same for you. So Pedram, that's a great place to leave it. Tell people where they can find more of your stuff.

**Pedram Shojai:**

[theurbanmonk.com](http://theurbanmonk.com) or [whole.tv](http://whole.tv), WHOLE.

**Jason Prall:**

Beautiful. Pedram, Thanks so much for joining me. Appreciate it. Thanks for doing this. All right. Thanks everybody. We'll see you on the next one.