

Jerry: Hey, Khe. How are you? It's really good to meet you finally after following each other on Twitter for such a long time and really getting to know each other, but it's great to see you.

Khe Hy: Great to meet you as well. I'm honored and a little bit nervous.

Jerry: The honored, you don't have to worry so much about and the nervousness, everybody gets a little nervous so that's okay. Before we get started, I want you to just take a minute and introduce yourself.

Khe Hy: Great. My name is Khe Hy. I'm in Dumbo, Brooklyn right now. I grew up in New York City and right now I'm an entrepreneur and I'm the creator of Rad Reads. Rad Reads, it started as a passion project, and an email and newsletter. It's grown into a community, a global community of people who are, the way I describe it, unclenching their hearts and expanding their minds, and so I was really inspired by a lot of your work about radical self-inquiry. It wasn't created by design per se, but I just started putting it out there.

I had been in finance for 14 years and investing in hedge funds doing some of the similar work you were doing with flat iron and had a great career. Things were going well. I was promoted at a very young age to managing director, but I was comfortably numb. I wasn't unhappy but I wasn't happy. I was just "meh." It took me a little while, three or four years to gather the courage to leave. I left in 2015. I took some time to travel with my wife. I had a one-year old daughter. She was one at the time and got back and just started this writing, this newsletter and people just really started to resonate with people.

Now, fast forward a year, a year-and-a-half since that started, it's an email newsletter, it's a lot of my original writing. I'm the first entrepreneur and residence at Quartz where I write about productivity, work, the nature of work, work on some special projects. I organize events. I do a little bit of public speaking and actually a little bit of coaching to my ex-peers in hedge fund industry.

Jerry: I really relate and I know you know my story. The audience already knows my story. I'm not going to bore them with that again, but I really relate to the transition for you. I'll take you back, if you don't mind, to that feeling of numbness. The phrase that popped into my mind was, and actually I'm going to take his picture down so the audience can't see that, but that's all right. I'll show it to you.

This guy in black and white is Trungpa Rinpoche, the founder of Naropa who brought a particular lineage of Buddhist teachings to the west and he used to call that comfortable numbness, cocoon. It's so warm and cozy to be in a cocoon until we die because if we don't break out of it, we start to die. Knowing that about you and knowing a bit of your history, what would be really helpful for you to talk

through today in this chance?

Khe Hy: I think that there is one [inaudible 00:04:19] there with the cocoon and knowing that we die. My own mortality has always been something that I've struggled with so I would put that on the list but it actually is something I've had a better, deeper and [crosstalk 00:04:37].

Jerry: Why don't you tell me about that?

Khe Hy: Let's see.

Jerry: I clearly triggered something for you.

Khe Hy: Yes. The first nightmare that I can remember having as a child was ... It was a little bit like the beginning of Star Wars with the infinite stars going and there was some-

Jerry: Long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away.

Khe Hy: Exactly. Instead of the scrolling text, there was this abstract. I think it was like a pebble, but it was an abstraction of my mind. I was probably seven, eight, nine years old and it would just slowly move, drift away and then ultimately disappear. What it represented for me was that I was going to die and time is infinite. I've always been a very linear thinker, a computer science major, engineering, finance mindset, the type and secular.

Jerry: People who like the knowable universe.

Khe Hy: And control.

Jerry: And control. If I can right the right code and build the right spreadsheet, then the world is in my grasp. Go ahead.

Khe Hy: I couldn't come to grips with the fact that you do all this stuff in your life and then the light switch goes off and then you're propelled into this kind of infinite universe of time. That was a long time ago. Like I said, I was around seven, 10 years old. I never really verbalized that with anyone. My 20s and probably part of my 30s were very much the life hacker mindset. I gave a TED talk about this burpees, and speed reading, and audio books at two-and-a-half speed. There's just never enough time.

Jerry: You must be a huge fan of Tim Ferriss.

Khe Hy: Yes. I was just always sprinting. There's this quote, I think it's by Dan Harris and he said, "With one foot in the future and one foot in the past, you're pissing on the present."

Jerry: Amen, brother.

Khe Hy: I was pissing on the long portion of my adulthood, searching for that next thing on, and on, and on. That nightmare kept coming back and it wasn't actually until I started working with my coach ... You're my second coach where we did it for the first time, but my first coach, my IRL coach and I walked into her office for our first session and I was just agitated talking really quickly and talking about all these hacks and she said-

Jerry: You're talking at two-and-a-half times speed.

Khe Hy: Yes. My heart rate is elevating just sharing that with you.

Jerry: Good.

Khe Hy: She said, "Why are you in such a rush?" I said, "Well, we're all going to die soon someday so we better get cranking." She's like, "Okay, I know." Kind of how you just picked up on it. She picked up on it and she said, "I know where to begin with this guy." I've made progress with that struggle and a lot of it has been noticing behaviors that I did but a lot of it was, "What was that thing that I was looking for, that external validation?" There's a lot of tipping points but one of them really was an introduction to the work of Ernest Becker.

I'll admit, it's a heavy book and it takes a long time to read, but just the introduction shook me to my core where he states that this fear of our own death makes us want to live a heroic life. You try to create your immortality by building an amazing company, writing a book, having no ins of Twitter, whatever the metric is for heroism. At that time, this was before I really started the newsletter and the blogging. I said I was going to start a fintech company because I was a hedge fund guy.

Jerry: Makes sense.

Khe Hy: I knew computers. A plus B equals C. I had this moment with myself which was a combination with a lot of these conversations and reflections where I just said to myself, in my own head, "I don't really want to do finance anymore." There's the whole sunk cost fallacy, there's the expectation of, "Well, you can't just not do it. That's you. You're good at it."

Jerry: Was that your cocoon?

Khe Hy: My cocoon was I guess the ... I guess it was twofold. It was the comfort of financial stability and never having to really worry about money and I'm touching one right now. When I was an entrepreneur, I think about money a lot but never really having to think about money because I had a high-paying job. The second was

external validation. I felt good about my LinkedIn profile.

Jerry: You felt good about my LinkedIn profile?

Khe Hy: Yes.

Jerry: What was the problem? You had a great LinkedIn profile. Everything was good, right?

Khe Hy: Yeah. I was, let's see. Inability to be present.

Jerry: You were pissing on the present.

Khe Hy: I was pissing at the moment when I had the most precious gift of the presence, a child.

Jerry: What's her name?

Khe Hy: Her name is Soriya.

Jerry: What's your wife's name?

Khe Hy: Lisa. Just a side tangent on my wife is just an amazing supporter of everything. Just an amazing partner. She listens to so many of your podcasts during our car ... We drive to Pittsburgh a lot to visit family and so can I connect with Jerry? It's not always yes, but she's heard a lot of podcast by Osmosis, I guess. She too is a big fan. What was missing was your question, pissing on the present and not having real meaning in what I was doing. As an investor just moving money from column A to column B and people get wealthier institution, make a financial return but there wasn't ... I guess it comes back to the tombstone. I guess I keep bringing it back to the same thing is like-

Jerry: You keep bringing it back to death.

Khe Hy: On my tombstone did I want to be remembered for having generated a live or plus 700 basis points for X investors over my lifetime?

Jerry: What was the answer?

Khe Hy: There was more to it as well in the sense that I'm going to replay a lot of the concepts that I've learned from you was wearing the mask. There was the male patriarchal mask that where you always have the right answer. You know everything. You can control your [inaudible 00:14:37]. Showing emotion is weakness. There was that element. There wasn't a lot of love and care in the industry. Not that people were mean to each other but I really wanted to be in a

place where there was general genuine care between different business units and colleagues.

I say love and I don't say it tongue in cheek. That true caring for people as individuals and I think that I wasn't personally finding that and I wanted to bring that in my work every day genuine vulnerable connections with people and it's kind of you turn in your finance switch and then you turn it off when you got home and it gets confusing when you're doing that.

Jerry: In my parlance, the inside of you wasn't matching the outside of you.

Khe Hy: Absolutely.

Jerry: With this year long break and then the launch of Rad Reads and really the new life you've created for yourself, you move closer towards alignment and congruity. I want to bring your attention to something. You're with me?

Khe Hy: I'm with you.

Jerry: We keep describing this as something that's going on in the past and when we were communication via email, I asked you to give some thought on some of the things that you would want to talk to. I'm going to read to you some lines from that. You said, "As a solo entrepreneur I'm really scared," and then you listed a bunch of things to be scared about like should I take external capital or grow a team, but I just want you to hold on this notion, "As a solo entrepreneur, I'm really scared." You relate to that feeling. I mean those are your words. Second item, and I love that you listed these as items.

Khe Hy: Then you're a thinker.

Jerry: "My wife doesn't get my best energy. My personal energy waterfall seems to be self, fitness meditation self-care, work, daughter, wife, loosely in that order. I preach a lot about what's important but not urgent. I find that challenging to implement. Lastly presence. Despite the healthy meditation and reflective practice, I'm still always, always thinking about ideas and people in my network, ways to improve." Hearing your words, read back to you, thinking about that somewhat speed it up breathless description, what occurs to you?

Khe Hy: The first layer that it always seems to come back to is a fear of financial worry. That is in a way how I tricked myself in that personal waterfall where you can always say, "I can do a little bit more work," and so I can put off these other important people in my life, person in my life because we need to eat, we need shelter.

Jerry: Now I'm going to cause a little cognitive dissonance. Bring your attention to your breath. I want you to notice something. Where is your voice in your body? It's three

or four different places it can be. Where is your voice?

Khe Hy: It's higher pitched, I guess.

Jerry: I want you too consciously bring your voice down into the bottom of your diaphragm. You feel the difference?

Khe Hy: Yeah.

Jerry: Now, tell me again about this quote, "fear of financial worry." That was the phrase that you used. What two words jumped out at you? Fear of financial worry?

Khe Hy: Worry?

Jerry: Worry and fear are related. Bring your attention to the fact that you live in a world of hedge funds and finance. Even today, you're an entrepreneur and residence at Quartz, early stage venture firm. That previous world was dissatisfying to you. Is that right?

Khe Hy: Yeah.

Jerry: You made this change and you broke out of the comfortable numbness that you were in. Comfortable I imagine financially. Uncomfortable in other ways. Here we are comfortable but still a bit uncomfortable. Is that right?

Khe Hy: Yeah.

Jerry: It's possible, Khe that the issue isn't changing the outer surface of where you do what you do. The issue may be a little bit deeper. Does that have resonance? I love life hackers because you all think that if you add coconut oil and grass-fed butter to your coffee, somehow you're going to smooth out the addiction of caffeine. You all think that suffering is just something that needs to be figured out and then what, made to go away. If I can only figure out a balance between all of these things then Lisa will be happy. Does this have resonance?

Khe Hy: Yeah. It does. I think doing the breathing.

Jerry: Good. Slow it down.

Khe Hy: I might not directly answer your question but I'm going to share the first thought that comes to mind.

Jerry: Even better. First thought, best thought. Go ahead.

Khe Hy: As a finance person, the metrics of doing well, professionally were relative clear,

promotions and bonuses and all that stuff. As a sole entrepreneur especially in a ... With not a clearly defined product or business that's figuring it out as I go along. The metrics, I don't even know what they are. I see if I play back my inner monologue where I'm not being the present husband that I want to be is that I'm trying to, A, figure out what the metric is and the, B, get it.

Jerry: What's the true answer? Not what's the correct answer, what's the true answer?

Khe Hy: Does it fucking matter.

Jerry: There are no metrics. That's the trick. That's the falsity. You don't measure your life's passage and metrics. I haven't ever done this before but I'm going to ask you to read about something and I'm going to pass it to you now. I'm going to give you ... It's a Word document.

Khe Hy: Okay.

Jerry: What I'd like you to do is read that slowly from that belly in your stomach place, from that voice in your belly place.

Khe Hy: The whole thing?

Jerry: The whole thing.

Khe Hy: "All I do know is as we age, the weight of our unsorted baggage becomes heavier, much heavier. With each passing year, the price of our refusal to do that sorting rises higher and higher. Maybe I'd cut myself loose one too many times dependent on my unflinching magic act once too often drifted that little bit too far from the smoke and mirrors holding me together or I just got old, old enough to know better.

Whatever the reason, I'd found myself once again stranded in the middle of nowhere but this time the euphoria and delusions that kept me alive and running had grind to a halt. Long ago, the defenses I built to withstand the stress of my childhood to save what I had of myself have lived their usefulness. I've become an abuser of their one's life saving powers. I relied on them to wrongly isolate myself, see all my alienation, cut me off from life, control others and contain my emotions to a damaging degree. Now the bill collector is knocking and his payment will be in tears. In all psychological wars, it's never over. There's just this day, this time and hesitant belief in your own ability to change," Bruce Springsteen, Born to Run.

Jerry: How do you feel reading that?

Khe Hy: It's similar feeling to when I read the parts of the Tao teaching. When I asked, it's like, "Did I write that?" or did the person on my head, the person who read my brain scan write that. The first thing that jumped out was defenses I built to withstand the stress of my childhood.

Jerry: Your wish for the metrics is your magic act. It's your illusion and we love it but it's a defense that you built to withstand your childhood. We talked about the masks and the references that I've made to mask. Behind that mask is another mask and behind that mask is another mask and behind that mask is yet another mask. We wear all those mask to protect ourselves and as Springsteen talks about, there comes a point when the unsorted baggage of our life knocks on the door if you will to mix the metaphor and the bill collector comes and their payment is in tears.

The answer doesn't lie in figuring out what the metric is in order for you to be present for your wife. The present for your life to stop pissing on the now. The clue is to understand what it is that you're so damn afraid of. What are you afraid of, Khe?

Khe Hy: I'm afraid of not having done something that matter.

Jerry: You're afraid of dying an unlived life.

Khe Hy: Yeah.

Jerry: Does that resonate?

Khe Hy: It does but I think that ... I don't even know what it is that I want. Yes, I am afraid of that but I can't pin, I can't ... I don't know what that would even mean and so I think I'm more afraid of not knowing what ... It's like a double afraid. It's not like having lived a meaningful life, but not knowing what a meaningful life even means. I guess it feels like a double whammy in that regards.

Jerry: You fast forward to your death and that little boy who had that dream, seeing his essence, his consciousness perhaps in this endless, timeless horizon and realizing that at some point this current incarnation will no longer exist and the fear is that at that moment in time, the meaningful life will not have been lived. Compounding that fear is the current crazy making sensation that you don't even know what it is that you're not living.

Khe Hy: Yes.

Jerry: What are you not experiencing while you're so worried about not knowing what a meaningful life is? Your life as it is right now. Soriya's life, Lisa's life right there, right now, right in front of you. There is no outside. There is no outside, there is no place other than this place right now. See, I love Dan Harris' 10% Happier book. Dan



Harris is a great friend. The challenge with that quote, the other half of that quote is that there is no past and there is no future, there is only the present.

Speaker 3: Did you book this room? We're just going to jump in to A but I'm letting you know if we need to come over.

Khe Hy: Okay, thanks.

Jerry: There is no past. There is no future, there is only the present. When all you are doing is fixated on what will happen and hopefully at the end of the future, it'll have it meaningful, you'll have missed. In the pursuit of the metrics, you'll have missed the happiness that the metrics have designed to deliver.

Khe Hy: Kind of corner yourself. I feel that.

Jerry: All in the bid to be afraid and you thought for sure, it had to do with working in the hedge fund industry but here you are. You've got financial security and you've created a great job for yourself and yet the knowing sense that it's not perfect is still there. What do we do with this?

Khe Hy: That's where I'm lost because I had the coaches, I've done the meditation, the journaling, the writing. I laugh because I share my journey and try to be helpful and inspiring to others and see what lessons they can take. I've been looking back. It's like, "Wow, these are the things that I think ... " Maybe that's the wrong construct is that there is something you should be doing.

Jerry: Yes. Here is some advice for you. It's a poem called Lost by David Wagoner, Lost. "Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you are not lost. Wherever you are is called here. And you must treat it as a powerful stranger. Must ask it permission to know it and be known. The forest breathes. Listen. It has answers. I have made this place around you. If you leave it, you may come back again, saying here. No two trees are the same to Raven. No two branches are the same to Wren. If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you, you are surely lost. If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you, you are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows where you are. You must let it find you."

The answer is to stand still. The answer to being present is to stand still. Listen and breathe. Catch Soriya in a smile. Catch the little tear glistening in Lisa's eye. Catch the smell of Soriya when you've just given her a fresh bath or when she snuggles next to you and says, "Daddy, read me a book." Tell me about the metrics then. Tell me about the hacks then.

Khe Hy: It doesn't matter.

Jerry: It doesn't matter. There is no perfect place out there to get to. There is only here.

Khe Hy: How do you reconcile that with ... Forget entrepreneurship, just work where there's only I guess the disconnect between only here and obviously when you're doing some work it's for some future benefit.

Jerry: Is it? I'll tell you a story. I had a hard night last night. I had a migraine. I grew up with migraines. My migraines are psychosomatic meaning that there's always something to them. In this case, I've been working these last couple of days with my deep profound sense of anger and rage which I often pretend doesn't exist but I've come to understand, it's Hulk-like. It sits on my left shoulder ready to swing in to action, Hulk Smash and Hulk has been really, really agitated these last few days.

So much so that this morning when I was boxing, I had to stop and vomit, not once but twice because I was hitting the bag so hard. Finally when the boxing coaches said, "Get in the ring," because you could see where I was, and I started hitting a friend of mine who was wearing all sorts of protective gear, I may have cracked a rib and in the final blow that I threw, I burst into tears and collapsed on the ground, in the bottom of the ring and burst into tears.

That was 7:30, 8:00 this morning. Now, that guy was a mess. This was guy with you, we just had an awesome coaching session because I was here with you and that guy who was in such pain this morning, I love and honor him but the work in the present is healing. You're not a long-term coaching client. There's no remuneration going back and forth. You're not paying for anything. Sure, I guess we're creating a podcast and someday, but who knows. I mean maybe I'll screw up the recording of this. I don't give a fuck.

Being here with you reminding you of what Soriya smells like after a bath. Remember when she would nozzle into your shoulder and put her to bed. My daughter is 24. I will never forget that feeling of holding her entire body in my hand. The awesome fear, and fragility, and possibility, implicit and all of that. Being here with you brought all of that back to me and I don't have a migraine anymore.

Khe Hy: Score.

Jerry: Tell me again work being for the future.

Khe Hy: I think the biggest change that I've seen in my work from the hedge fund to Rad Reads is when I write the pieces come out of me, the writing comes out of me. When I host events, it's just friends. I'm just there full of love and I feel that 80% of the time. 20% of the time, it's like in the quote that you had me read, the bill collector is coming. Maybe it's this belief that can be enjoyable. It can't all be enjoyable.

Jerry: Listen, Khe. You got to get serious. You've got to get down to work. What's the

matter with you? Work is a four letter word. You can't actually enjoy every single moment unless you're building towards something other than the moment that you're in. It's not just fear but there is that voice. You're breathing shallowly. You know that voice, don't you? Listen-

Khe Hy: It comes back to the meaning.

Jerry: This is brilliant. This is great [inaudible 00:42:39]. We substitute the pursuit of money for the pursuit of meaning. Money no longer becomes a defense against annihilation, meaning becomes a defense against annihilation.

Khe Hy: You nailed it. You feel almost back at square one.

Jerry: That guy that I quoted before, Trungpa Rinpoche coined the term spiritual materialism, spiritual materialism. I'm going to go through life collecting all sort of Namaste like moments because not me. I don't go through life collecting Mercedes Benz or Rolex watches. It's the same fucking thing. It's all a defense against annihilation.

Khe Hy: That nightmare.

Jerry: That nightmare. You my friend, have to learn to follow what happens to that essence as it disappears into the timeless horizon.

Khe Hy: Is it just acceptance? I know not to fight it or maybe the cognitive dissonance in me knows not to fight it. I'm probably still fighting it.

Jerry: What is the feeling behind your question? Jerry, what's the answer? Jerry, what's the answer? Jerry, what's the answer?

Khe Hy: Isn't that the point of this podcast?

Jerry: Yeah, to give answers. What's the metric? What's the hack?

Khe Hy: There's just the present moment.

Jerry: There's just the present moment. You know what's at the end where the essence disappears into timelessness? The thing you've been looking for, presence. Maybe the reason it's so hard for you to find is because you're scared of having it so rather than face the fear of actually being present to your life, you construct materialistic means to be present to your life.

Khe Hy: Which is that spiritual materialism. It's like hedge fund. It feels so good but that unsettling feeling is still there.

Jerry: Yes.

Khe Hy: It's not as powerful.

Jerry: Right.

Khe Hy: It's not as loud but it's still there.

Jerry: Because it's spiritual materialism. It's hacking materialism. This is good. This is really good because breaking through cocoon life is really hard and our impulses to always go into cocoon. We break out of the cocoon and we go back into the cocoon. Wait, it's like breathing. In and out, in and out. That is the spiritual practice of our life. That is our life. There's an old Buddhist saying which is, "Before enlightenment chop wood carry water. After enlightenment chop wood carry water." Life is chop wood carry water. There is no hacking our way from chopping wood and carrying water. There is only the present. Trust me, I tried. I try still to this day, but you're always going to come back to it.

Khe Hy: How do you re-center as you're trying?

Jerry: One way is to connect with someone else. The power of compassion. I don't do what I do for some distant future. I do what I do for the moment in which I see a young man whom I admire from afar, who nervously looks to me for guidance and I feel a connection across Skype to this young guy in Brooklyn. That's what I do to center myself.

Khe Hy: It comes full circle because it's the work.

Jerry: It's the work with a capital W.

Khe Hy: Air quotes.

Jerry: Yes, with a capital W. It's the work of our lives. It's a sacred, sacred act. I don't care if you do the work in a hedge fund or a bakery or a startup, or a nonprofit, you're just as capable of pursuing spiritual materialism there as you are in finding meaning in whatever the work is. Is that helpful?

Khe Hy: I'm a bit loss for words but I'm processing. It's like the hacker in me is processing it. If X then Y but no, not Y, back to W.

Jerry: Beautiful. A word of advice on that. Keep noticing the hacker mindset kicking in. Eventually the hacker mindset will ... The impulse to that mindset will diminish overtime. Then you can love it and blow it a kiss and tell that it's okay. Here's your homework. I want you to read to your daughter tonight and I don't want you to read something that's going to improve her language skills or any such fucking

nonsense. I want you to make her laugh. How old is she now, three?

Khe Hy: Three.

Jerry: What's her favorite book?

Khe Hy: Right now it's Nanette's Baguette.

Jerry: Nice. I want you to snuggle with her, I want you to read that book and then I want you to sit with Lisa and take a breath. Do you think you can do that?

Khe Hy: I'm laughing because in my mind, I'm thinking if I had to write out a 700-word blog post, that would actually be easier.

Jerry: I know. So does she. I got you on that one.

Khe Hy: Yeah.

Jerry: I want to thank you for inviting me into your heart.

Khe Hy: Thank you, Jerry. I'm a bit lost for words, but just the feeling is mutual. The amount of respect that I have for your work and really even before we met, it has meaningfully, meaningfully changed my life so thank you for that and know that your work, forget the quotes, forget the capitalization, just the work is really something special that impacts people.

Jerry: Thank you for sharing that. I will take that compliment in and take that gratitude in. It does help me, so thank you.