

The Hum Podcast

Episode 39: "I Have To Make Myself A Priority"

[Theme music fades in]

Andrea: I think I began to embrace change in whatever I did, and it pretty much makes you less fearful. It makes you less constrained by expectations that you think others have of you, but it's in fact, you're putting them on yourself thinking that you're going to make everyone happy.

[Music increases in volume]

Gilad: You're listening to The Hum.

[Music fades out]

Gilad: I accidentally hit the record button.

Andrea: What does that mean for us?

Gilad: It means that now we've transitioned from small talk into recorded small talk, so I think we're doing an episode of The Hum right now.

Andrea: All right, let's do this.

Gilad: I'm very nervous. Are you?

Andrea: I am not nervous. I'm just hoping I can talk for 35 minutes.

Gilad: I was actually hoping I would talk for 35 minutes, and you would ...

Andrea: Oh that would be better.

Gilad: I like taking up space. As much of it as I can.

Andrea: I don't mind listening. I'm a great listener.

Gilad: I think people want to hear about you though. And I've talked a lot. I talk too much sometimes. One time I took a trip to Vancouver with a friend of mine. He was driving the whole way, it took five days. We made stops here and there, sometimes longer than others, but I realized when we arrived in Vancouver that I was the only one talking in that car for the whole five days. And it drove me nuts. It drove him nuts, I'm sure more.

Andrea: Kind of reminds me of my mom when we did a road trip from El Salvador to Guatemala, and Antigua. She would talk for the whole trip, six hours. And everyone else would just listen, listen. My younger cousin, she's 13, would just gets so annoyed. And she'd just look at me, your mom talks so much.

Gilad: Why won't she stop talking?

Andrea: And then my aunt would tell me, your mom never used to talk this much. And I just said, I don't know. That's how I know her.

Gilad: You, though, I wouldn't peg you as much of a ... You talk, you express everything that you're going through. You're very honest with everyone in the room. But I wouldn't say you're a talker. Are you a talker?

Andrea: I wouldn't call myself a talker. I'm more of a listener type person. It's probably because everyone in my family's a talker, and so I just tend to be listening constantly to everyone.

Gilad: I'm happy we're talking about talking, because you actually just got back from a really unique experience not too long ago, just about two weeks ago or so. You went away and did a ten-day silent meditation retreat, which I mean, might be heaven for a non-talker like you. Can you tell me a little bit more about that experience? What are the rules around what you did and how was it for you?

Andrea: Yeah, so basically, like you said, it's a ten-day meditation retreat. And I didn't know exactly what I was getting into. I mean, you told me some general ideas and how you felt going through it. And for me, I had never really tried meditation or any specific techniques, so I was really open to what I was going to be learning. And so the way the everyday went, every day was scheduled. Every day was the same, no matter if it was a weekday or a weekend. Get up, or the bell rings at four in the morning. And the first thing you do, you don't eat breakfast you meditate for two hours until breakfast at 6:30.

Gilad: And guide me through meditation. Your eyes are closed. You're sitting.

Andrea: Yeah. So you're sitting on a mat or a cushion on the ground. Of course, if you have problems with your back or your legs they offer you a chair. But for me, I was sitting on the ground. And you have to keep your back and your neck straight the whole time. At least you're trying to do that. And so every part of meditation is coming out of the way you usually do things. So not just physically sitting straight and your neck straight, but also keeping your mind focused and not have it wander all the time.

Andrea: So it's a very much a mental and physical exercise. It's not just simply sitting down and closing your eyes. There is something to it. And yeah, so the silence is not only in meditation, but anywhere you go. You can't talk to anyone. I didn't speak with my roommate until we broke our silence. So the whole purpose is to really focus on yourself and whatever it is that you're going through. And try to be present with yourself, which I think when you're in a society like ours, everything is external, right? You're focusing on other things, whether it's your job, your family, your friends, everything is outside of you. And you don't really take the time to be with yourself. So I really appreciated that part for sure.

Gilad: Ten days of no reading, no writing, no eye contact with anyone. And I think I did the math because I did the same thing five years ago. I took part in this thing. I found it very hard. I found it very hard. Not in the spending time with myself, that part I was okay with. It was more just in the repetition every day. And I think you're awake for 16 hours of the day or something like that, and you're meditating for 12 of them. And I found it really, really hard. But I also found that it had a profound impact on my mental health as soon as I got out. Did you at all feel a mental shift coming out? I want to say almost like reintegrating back into the world.

Andrea: Reintegrating, yes, definitely. Because of the repetition you get used to things, right? Something, even though it's new eventually becomes a habit. And so when we had the opportunity to break our silence and you do that before they let you go or else a lot of people are in shock when they come back to society without breaking their silence first. So we had the opportunity to talk to people who just experienced the same thing you did. I got to speak with my roommate, but at first it wasn't that easy. I walked into the dining hall and everyone is just talking to each other like a school yard talk. And I was overwhelmed, felt like just a wave of chatter was coming my way, and I just wanted to go back outside into the woods and just be by myself because the silence was comforting at this point.

Andrea: A lot of the times silence can be awkward or it can be unnerving, but you get used to being with yourself in the silence that I honestly felt more comfortable in the silence. So I decided to just sit alone, eat my lunch, and then I went for a walk out in the woods and it was snowing heavily. But because of that and because everyone was busy talking, I was alone in the woods and that was really nice. But then at some point I had to talk. And then I was like, oh yeah, this is how I have a conversation. I almost forgot how it felt.

Gilad: Right. Yeah, because you hadn't done it for so long. What about life past this little compound that you're on? You leave the campsite and you come back to real life, interacting with your family, interacting with your colleagues, your friends, and just reintegrating yourself into, as you stated, a society that is so

external. What was that like for you? And focusing on your mental health, did you feel a shift in that part of your life?

Andrea: I was really excited to come back, and nervous at the same time because I knew all my loved ones would ask me questions about it. And no one except, I guess yourself, would understand what that experience was like. And I didn't want to give away too much because I personally really believe that it's something that everyone should experience themselves. So I was giving them general ideas. And for the first few days I felt still quite balanced. I was trying my best to keep the practice up at home.

Andrea: But yeah, when you go back into your normal ways, it's hard sometimes to remember how it feels like to just take the time for yourself. And I find that I was getting back into my old ways of reacting to things and not really listening to how I was feeling, or what my thoughts were in the moment. Just because you're so caught up with all these things outside of yourself. And so honestly, it takes discipline. And for me I have to make it a priority, right? I have to make myself a priority. And I think that goes with any mental health that you may be experiencing is that you need to put yourself first and really take the time for yourself in whatever way helps.

Gilad: I can't agree more. I mean, I want to talk about two things real quick. One, how much I agree with ... I think you mentioned reactive, I think you said something about being reactive. And so I remember my biggest takeaway when I came back from Vipassana, which is the ten-day silent meditation thing we did, was how much I recognized in my own life that I was very reactive to everything that was happening in my life and that I didn't need to be. So here's a good example. So one day I ride my motorcycle to work and I park outside real quick, real quick. I just have to run inside and get some surveys. And so I run upstairs to our desk, I grabbed the envelope of surveys and I'm running back down the stairs because I got to get to my bike.

Gilad: I think I'm also parked illegally. It's between four to six o'clock when you can't park. So I'm like, I'm just going to go in and get out. As I'm running down the stairs, I trip and all of the surveys, there's like 500 of them in this big envelope, go flying all over the stairwell. Normal me would be like, holy crap, fuck, I got to pick all this up. This is frustrating. And I would be reactive to it. I would say those things, and if anyone wants to pass me in the stairwell, I would probably be short with them. But rather I was just like, these fell all over the stairs. This is a frustrating situation, but I didn't react to it. I just knew I had to pick up the surveys. And then as I bend down to pick up the surveys the seam inside my jacket totally rips. Like [sound effect] rips. I can feel it tear. And I was like, damn the inside of my jacket tore, but I got to pick up the surveys.

Gilad: At that point I probably would have exploded. So I pick up all the surveys. It doesn't take me more than say three minutes, three or four minutes. Run outside, my bike is gone, it's towed, which is hundreds of dollars of fines. And at this point if my head wouldn't have exploded, I would've made sure that the ten nearest people to me, I would have ruptured their heads. I would have been so mad, but I wasn't. And I realized I'm passing through a frustrating situation and that's all it is. And it didn't require me to be frustrated. And I realized how much energy I put into being frustrated and how much energy I also put into being happy and into angry and sad.

Gilad: And not every moment calls for a reaction. And I don't want to seem like it was robotic, it's not like I was just, here is life and these are my feelings. But I was able to separate the two. Where reaction didn't always have to, or not every action needed my reaction. I was just more, maybe the right word is observant of the life that was unfolding before me. Did you find, are you still finding, because you're still fresh, you're like two weeks out. I'm five years out. Are you finding that at all?

Andrea: Yeah, so I think everyone can relate to a scenario where you're on the morning commute with thousands of other people on the TTC and so many things could trigger you, especially in the morning. Maybe you didn't get enough sleep, you didn't eat breakfast, but anything could set you off which could affect the rest of your day. And I'm sure we've all thought about even eight hours later after someone may have pushed you by accident, and you're like, ah, I didn't say sorry or you're so rude. And so you just start thinking about it, thinking about it and internalizing that. And that's the reaction that you're having for eight hours throughout the day and how that affects every part of your day. And how you have to realize that was just in the moment. Why are you prolonging this reaction that you had initially?

Andrea: And keep reminding yourself about it when it's just behind you there. And I think that when we react, we internalize a lot of things. But if like you're a situation where you were more observant and you understood, okay, this is just a temporary thing, it's not going to last forever. I just need to pick up these surveys. I need to just get my bike back. When you realize that there are more solutions than there are problems. And I think that we just focus on the problems all the time and don't realize there are solutions everywhere.

Gilad: I like the way you put that, because if someone accidentally knocks over into you in the morning and it's now 5 pm and you're still mad about it, you've prolonged a very tiny situation. Like that push now has lasted eight hours when it didn't have to. It could have just been in the moment. I'm glad you brought up the TTC, because the other thing I wanted to talk about, I mentioned I wanted to say two things, and how upsetting that experience can be in the morning. And this is not

an episode knocking our transit system. I think our transit system, despite its many flaws, connects us and transports us to wherever we need to be. But it can be a very exhausting experience. And I want to tie this conversation back into mental health.

Gilad: So you're on the show because we work together. We've worked together now for over two years I think. And you've also co-hosted a couple episodes on the podcast earlier this season. Anyway, welcome, welcome back. I don't think I said welcome back. But we've made some shifts here at work lately that been I think really important. And I'm really proud of them. And I think the shifts that we made at work can also serve as a model for other organizations in the city or to whoever's listening that has any voice or power wherever they work to be able to speak out about what they're about to hear. But we, last year, had a conversation around mental health at work .and we used to work, I think it was nine to five, and when we were coming in at nine, like everybody else, there was a stress in the office earlier on in the day. Whether or not we were open about it, you can tell that people were just showing up either tired or they weren't on fire, let's say, for the right reasons in the morning.

Gilad: And so we had a conversation around people's experience commuting to work. And we all found that most of us, or all of us, I don't know, were super stressed because we were coming in during rush hour on packed street cars or subways or buses. And by the time we get here, we were in a foul mood. And so we decided to cut that hour out. So we start work at 10, but we still get paid as if we're coming in at nine it's just our organization's now paying you to rest. And then rather than end the day at five, we now end the day at four but you're still getting paid for five, or as if you're working until five. So now you're getting paid two extra hours a day and you're only working for six hours. And now we've actually, this year we kept cutting, and so we cut the Friday out, which if you were working the Friday, we cut that out and you're still getting paid for it.

Gilad: And the idea is to bring everyone onboard who works here into that same system. But now you are working, what is it, 24 hours a week, but you're getting paid for 40. But really what we're doing in those hours that you're not working is we're paying you to rest. And it's had, I think, an incredible impact here at our organization. Like last year when we started doing this our revenue more than tripled, or close to tripled, I don't remember, from previous years. We worked with more youth, we hired more staff, we started working in more areas like California and Northern Ontario. More people came to the festival. By every measurable impact everything grew, yet we worked less. And so I want to throw it back to you really quickly. How has that experience been like for you? Because it's very unique. It's a unique system, right? It's not very common that you get paid to rest. So what have you noticed in yourself or even in the office?

Andrea: I think that the impression that I get from everyone here at the office is that it's definitely helped the flow of their everyday lifestyle. It's given them a space for them to rest and to not feel stressed of, oh it's rush hour, or oh, I still need to do all these things in my day but it's already dark outside and everyone's going to be at the supermarket at this time. It's relieved some of those anticipated worries that I'm sure we all have after work, or just watching the clock waiting for five. And I think, like for myself too, it feels good to know that you still have a part of the day for yourself. Like you didn't just give your whole self just to your job for five days of the week and didn't really have much time for yourself to reboot, to refresh, to find a creative outlet outside of your job.

Gilad: And then in Finland they just elected this new incredible head of state and she made it, I think she made it or she's on her way to making it law or legal that everyone should be working four-day work weeks, and no more than six hours a day. And it's interesting because a lot of people ... I'm finding here in Toronto, people that I know in my network are like, holy crap, I wish we had that here. You can have it here. I mean, I don't think you need any level of government to make you have to do it. I think it just takes a bit of a shift, like a mental shift. I think organizations just need to start feeling comfortable understanding that they're paying people to rest. And so what I'm finding is we pay people well because we care about them.

Gilad: But we don't only care about you when you're here in the office. I care about you, or we care about you, all of the time. And so we care for you to spend time with your family and rest and just be more whole. Because I found that if we prioritize our staff's mental health and prioritize their lives, they in turn will prioritize the organization and its mission and the activities even more. And I found that, I found that that's actually the case. And there's much more that we do too, like unlimited sick days, unlimited vacation days. And we're not Google or Shopify or these huge tech firms with massive budgets. We're doing it with whatever little that we have, but we're doing it. And so we were talking before the mics came on just about something that I found interesting.

Gilad: So I had asked you, in your lived experience, in your day-to-day life, you're a person of color and a woman. And I hope you don't mind me saying this, but you can also be white passing. You could be white passing. And I am the same. I'm from the Middle East, but often get confused for white, like white, white, white. Which opens up all kinds of unique experiences for me, which I think I've talked about on the podcast before. It's this weird intersectionality where I'm not white but I look white, and so it opens up all these doors for people to talk to me in weird ways. I'm curious, for you, have you experienced stigma or racism being who you are?

Andrea: Right. So growing up, now whether I was aware of it or not, I would say generally speaking I didn't feel any discrimination or blatant discrimination. Maybe there was microaggressions, but like I said, perhaps I was not aware of it, or I never even knew what microaggressions were growing up. I mean, there were some comments more about my family's from El Salvador, and everyone hears bad things about El Salvador. There's a lot of misery, suffering. I mean there's a beautiful country, but of course people here will only hear about El Salvador when it makes the news. And as we know, the news is mostly bad news. And so of course some classmates, they have an idea of what El Salvador is. And so it was more about, not necessarily because I was a woman of color, but it was more about, oh, you're from El Salvador, you're from a third world country.

Andrea: It was more of a challenge of maybe my intellect or my heritage as it's not worthy enough. As someone who was Italian, let's say, from Europe. I kind of received more of that, I think, growing up, but not to a great extent. In high school this idea of being Latina was introduced to me. I didn't really call myself Latina, I guess until high school when I learned about the term. But at the same time people would say, oh, are you Spanish? Are you Mexican? People were pretty ignorant to how many countries make up Latin America. And so I personally wouldn't get offended. If someone called me Mexican I would say, well, I'm not Mexican. My parents are from El Salvador. I wouldn't really take offense to that because I know that they're just ignorant and they just need to be educated about, oh, there's other countries too that speak Spanish. And we're not all Spanish because Spanish people are from Spain.

Andrea: So it was just about educating. And of course you can't educate everyone, but you try as best you can. But I would know other classmates of Latin descent, they would feel offended when someone would call them Mexican, because there are stereotypes. Just like there are stereotypes of Salvadorians, there's stereotypes of Mexicans. And of course many of them are negative stereotypes, so they would feel offended. But I really don't think it does anyone justice to react in a bad way when someone may have just honestly made a mistake. Whether they're trying to insult you, you shouldn't feel insulted. You should just say, well, there's nothing wrong with being Mexican, I think.

Gilad: I shift. I shift all the time. Half of me agrees with what you just said. They're ignorant, they don't know. And then the other time, I really want to teach people that what you just said was really messed up. And next time you say that to a person who's much less patient than I am, you might be in a lot more trouble. I'm trying to help you by teaching you. And then of course there's other times where I'm like, it's not my job to teach you, teach yourself. And you see it.

Gilad: I think it's happening a lot right now too with the coronavirus that's spreading around. I'm seeing a lot of racism towards the Chinese population. And again it's

that subtle type of, I always call it the delicious Canadian blend of racism, where it's not, I hate insert cultural group. It's more just, was that thing that person just said racist? Like mindfuck racist. That's what happens here in Canada and I'm finding it's happening a lot right now within the Chinese community as well. It's frustrating. It's frustrating. You also mentioned your mom, you grew up with a single mother. But also your mom came here as an immigrant. And she had a bit of a different experience from you. Is that correct?

Andrea: So for the longest time I didn't really perhaps ask my mom, how is it or how has your experience been as an immigrant woman from El Salvador? And it was only lately that I started to understand some of the things that she would do or feel when someone would ask her something. I can put a couple examples. She's at that point where when someone asks her where she's from, because she has an accent, so English is not her first language, she makes them guess. Almost like she's playing a game. Like just guess. Where do you think that I'm from, that you're asking me where I'm from? And so she plays this game. And I can never understand because I'm like, why would you do that? Why would you prolong that interaction? Just get it over with.

Andrea: But she's like, well I've been here for 30 years and the first thing you say to me is, where are you from? I can understand that you're having a conversation and it comes up, but that can't possibly be the the first thing that you ask me. I don't know you, you don't know me. How could that be something that you just ask me out of nowhere as if I'm not from here. As if I look strange and don't belong here. And so I just slowly started to understand what she meant by that, and why she does or responds the way she does. And then another example I can put is, why she speaks English sometimes. So to give context, my mom always speaks Spanish to my brother and I growing up and still does. But there are certain instances where she changes to English and my brother and I become like, we look at each other like, why is she just speaking English now?

Andrea: What's going on? And for the longest time I thought, oh, it's because you don't have to be ashamed that you speak Spanish. There's thousands of language being spoken in the GTA and in Toronto, you don't have to be ashamed. And she's like, well, it's not that I'm ashamed of speaking Spanish, it's that she, I think, wants to avoid encounters where people are suspecting her actions because they don't know what she's saying. Or she doesn't want to be followed or she doesn't want to be misinterpreted or get that question. Oh, go back to where you came from. Learn English. Where we've seen many videos from the US where people would get harassed because we're speaking another language other than English.

Gilad: And to be clear, it happens here too.

Andrea: Oh yeah, it happens here as well. And again, I didn't think about that. I just thought she'd be comfortable. I kept telling her, you should feel this, way without truly understanding. Well, she's been here for 30 years and she knows the ways that people are, even though they may have the best intentions. It just makes her feel uncomfortable, so she does it.

Gilad: Very tricky. Very tricky. I mean, I grew up with a mom who said ... My mom was much more outward with that. I actually grew up with a single mom. She was much more outward with the word different thing, instead of trying to assimilate us. Like from the very beginnings of our lives I'm this one year old and my mom was like, you're Jewish, the world hates you. And I'm like, I need milk. I'm a baby. I had different goals than her at the time, I was a baby. I just wanted to be a baby. And her goals was to instill in me from a very young age that I was different. And growing up I always felt that. I always felt this difference. And there'd be times where life happens and you're not understanding in the moment that you're being treated in a certain way because they also feel you're different.

Gilad: You just normalize it. You normalize that it's normal that people will just pronounce your name wrong. And I'm sure you probably get that with Andrea. You probably get Andrea a lot. I get my name mispronounced all the time and you normalize it, you just create it as a normal thing. And you forget these lessons that your parents are telling you that you're different. Something, it was just at the festival this past year, that really funny experience. So our closing night film, God bless the filmmaker, I'm not going to name who it is. I spent the whole day with this man, took him to our office, took him out for lunch, really spent a lot of time getting to know him. And he's aQn incredible person. And this is no fault of his own, but he comes up on stage and it's before his film plays. And he goes up and he's like, before the film starts I just really want to thank JAYU, and that's another word that gets mispronounced all the time is jah-yu, jay-yu, jamalyu, whatever it is.

Gilad: But he's like, I just really want to thank JAYU. So he got that right. They took me around today, I spent time, I got to see some of the work they do. And I just really want to thank their executive director Guyote for ... And you're laughing out of the mic, you're really holding back a laugh as I look at you. He just doesn't want to thank Guyote. And I look around, I remember I was with Kimahli, the executive director of Rainbow Railroad.

Gilad: I'm trying to take him to his seat and I look at Kimahli and I'm like, who's Guyote? And he's like, your Guyote. And for the director, I think all he knew is my name just started with G, and the rest of it was weird. And so he just went with Guyote. And we laugh and it's hilarious, but it's really not that hard. It's just five letters. Just really take the time to know my name. It's something that I had been

really hung up on is just really taking the time to understand how to pronounce someone else's name. Just because it's easier for you to say it one way, it's actually an injustice to the person when you speak that way.

Andrea: Yeah. You make them feel more different or like, oh, your name's not normal. Let me pronounce it this way because it's easier and you'll be able to get by. It's like, that's not right. Why should I say change for you?

Gilad: Yeah, it sucks. It sucks when you call me by the wrong thing. And actually a few days before that when we had our opening night reception, I think the first thing I did when I went up on the mic, I said, hi everyone, my name is Gilad. It's not Glen or Gillette or Jilat, it's Gilad. And that happened five days before the Guyote thing. But Guyote, I got to hand it to him, super creative. Super creative. I've heard it all. I've heard everything, but I've never heard Guyote. I've never once heard Guyote.

Gilad: So we've got five minutes left here. I'm going to ask you a question that I never asked you earlier, and maybe I can answer first. And if you're stumped, I'll ask you first. You ever have a moment in your life where you realize that you're doing something, or you are this type of person, or you believe a certain thing, or you hold certain ideals because of a really profound moment in your childhood that shaped you? Do you get what I'm asking?

Andrea: Like if I have that moment?

Gilad: Do you ever have that moment where you realize as an adult, holy shit, I just connected the dots? I understand why I'm this way because of this other thing.

Andrea: Yes. I think that, I mean I can't narrow it down to one moment. I've had many moments where I've realized, oh, this is why I'm in this situation right now or I'm feeling this way is because of this, because of that. I mean, I could give an example. Back in 2012, I want to say, or 2013, I pretty much my best friend for seven years didn't want to be friends anymore. And so when you're young you're like, oh, things are going to be forever, we're going to be best friends forever. Nothing's going to change no matter what. And then it was really hard on me. It was really hard.

Gilad: It's like a breakup.

Andrea: Yeah, it's like a breakup. Like my first breakup, I guess let's say. And so you start thinking about why am I taking it so hard? There were signs, it's not like it came out of nowhere. And you realize that things change, and it's this idea of change. I think that moment, or at least that experience made me realize that nothing is

permanent, but change is good. It could be good for you. There's a reason why this happened.

Andrea: And I think I began to embrace change in whatever I did. And it pretty much makes you less fearful. It makes you less constrained by expectations that you think others have of you. But it's in fact you're putting on yourself thinking that you're going to make everyone happy, except yourself. And so I think it is quite liberating when I realized how, well, things change all the time. And it's okay. That's just the way things are. And so, yeah, I think maybe that was a moment. And then I realize it's because of all of these trying to control everything so that it stays the same. And when you try doing that, because it's impossible, it affects your mood, it affects how you feel, it affects how you behave with other people.

Gilad: Interesting. I was thinking about, and I had this realization the other day when I was with my wife. And I'm going to share this because we were just talking about singles, our single mothers. And so when I was really young, like eight years old, it's a very personal story by the way, so I'm going to try to get it out as quick as I can. When I was really young, eight years old and my sister was five, my parents were married, living here in Toronto or in North York, which is Toronto I guess. And my dad went on this trip back to the homeland to visit his father, my grandpa who was passing away. And so he went for 10 days and then he extended for another 10 days, and extended for another 10 days, and another 10 days. And in the process of all these extensions, the bank calls my mom and is like, you haven't been making mortgage payments in God knows how long.

Gilad: And my dad always did all the banking, and so my mom had no idea. And it basically came to the point that they took possession of the house and kicked us out. And meanwhile, he's denying all of this stuff, and time's passing and passing and passing. And eventually he admits to it. So what ended up happening is he committed fraud to the tune of like hundreds of thousands of dollars, took everything and left. Left us, left his whole family behind. And so my poor mom, who at this point could barely speak English, had never been working, had two kids to raise. And I remember as children we bounced around constantly from rental to rental, to rental, to rental, to rental, to rental. We were basically homeless for a very long time, from the age of 8 until maybe, I don't know, like 14, 15. Until my mom, bless her soul, finally was able to put a down payment on another house and restarted her life.

Gilad: But I was thinking about, we offer this program at JAYU, the iAM program where we work with all these underserved youth. And I think at the core of the program is this mentorship that we offer them. We connect youth with artist mentors who help them express themselves through the arts and develop artistic skills. And we really just try to instill in them this idea that they can be confident creative leaders, they just need a bit of guidance. And the other day I was

thinking about, man, it would've been so nice to have that as a kid growing up because I never did. I never did. And I'm so grateful to my mom for having gone and worked and all that, but I never grew up with a mentor, I realized. I never had a mentor growing up. I never had a male figure in my life try to guide me.

Gilad: And through conversations with my wife, I'm not saying that was the only reason that the iAM program started, but in a way it is. It was a very profound realization a few days ago that was something that needed to exist so that kids don't pass through life without mentors in their life. And it's interesting because maybe we could take this back full circle. Like with Vipassana I was able to realize in those 10 days while I was meditating and not right away because with Vipassana you're supposed to let a thought come in your head and let it go. But you learn so much about yourself in the process of not trying to think about yourself.

Gilad: And I just found it really profound that you can connect sometimes this really obscure thing that happens to you in your childhood to who you are now as an adult. And how complicated we are as people and how layered we are as people. Honestly like an onion, like you just keep peeling back and back and back and back. But when you find those connections and you say, I'm this way because of that thing, or I'm that way because of that thing, it's just such a profound thing.

Andrea: Yeah. And it's amazing because literally me and you are sitting across from each other and everything that we've experienced in our life has led us to this moment, has made us who we are at this very moment. And though it seems simple to say that, you just think about everything that you've gone through and how you just came through it. It passed. You achieved. Just by being in this moment you've accomplished so much. And so I think it's beautiful when you have that opportunity to then pay it forward and make someone else feel as though they have a chance to get by and feel confident to do so. Yeah.

Gilad: Thank you for this conversation. And I agree. I'm just going to say I agree. And thank you.

[Theme music fades in]

Andrea: All right, thanks for having me.

[Music fades out]

Gilad: This podcast is edited and produced by Brandon Fragomeni and Alex Castellani. Our associate producer is Ron Ma. If you enjoyed this podcast, help us make more of them by donating whatever you can. Visit us online at jayu.ca/donate.