

**Lex Fridman Podcast #460 - Narendra Modi: Prime Minister of India - Power,  
Democracy, War & Peace**

Published - March 16, 2025

Transcribed by - [thepodtranscripts.com](https://thepodtranscripts.com)

## **Lex Fridman**

The following is a conversation with Narendra Modi, the prime Minister of India. It was one of the most moving conversations and experiences of my life. Allow me here to say a few words about it. Please skip ahead straight to our conversation, if you like. Narendra Modi's life story is incredible. He rose from poverty to lead a nation of 1.4 billion people, the biggest democracy in the world, where he won epic-scale elections for Prime Minister three times. As a leader, he fought for ideas that unite his nation of India, a nation that is composed of a large number of highly varied and disparate cultures and peoples, who have a long history marked by religious, social, and political frictions. He is known for taking decisive, at times controversial actions for which he is loved by hundreds of millions of people, and is also criticized by many. We discuss all of this at length in this conversation. On the world stage, he is respected as a peacemaker and friend by most major world leaders, even those whose nations are at war with each other, from the United States to China, to Ukraine and Russia, to Israel, Palestine and the Middle East, and everywhere else. Now, at this moment in history, it is clear, at least to me, that the flourishing of human civilization hangs in the balance, with several wars on the brink of escalation to regional and even global conflict, rising tensions between nuclear powers, technological developments from AI to nuclear fusion that aim to completely transform society and geopolitics as we know it, and of course, generally increasing political and cultural turmoil. So now more than ever, we need great leaders, great peacemakers who build bridges, not destroy them, who may preserve the identity of their nations, but still celebrate the common humanity of all of us, all people on earth. For this and many other reasons, this conversation with Prime Minister Modi was one of the most remarkable I've ever had. You may hear such words and think that I'm just enamored by power or access. No, never was, never will be. I do not idolize anyone, especially those in power. I'm generally skeptical of power, money, and fame because of their natural corrupting influence on the mind, the heart, the soul of a person. The whole point of all the conversations I've had in my life, on mic and off mic, is that I try to see and explore the full complexity of every human being, the good and the bad. I believe we're all the same in a deep fundamental sense, all capable of good, all capable of evil, all carry stories of pain and stories of hope. Whether you're a world leader or a truck driver, a coal miner, or a farmer in the American Midwest. And by the way, I will be talking to a lot of the latter kind of folk this year off mic, and maybe even on mic, as I travel the US and the world. My brief statements here about Narendra Modi are about both him as a leader, and especially him as a human being. In the extensive time I spent with him, I spoke with him off mic and on mic. It was a deeply personal human interaction characterized by warmth, kindness, humor, inner and outer peace, and absolute focus on the conversation between us in the present moment as if nothing else existed. I have heard from many people that he treats everyone he meets in this empathic way, no matter where they come from or what their position is in this world. So for those and many other reasons, this really was an incredible experience. I will never forget. Oh, and by the way, we make captions and voiceover audio tracks available in English, Hindi and other languages. You can also listen to the original mixed language version where I speak English and Prime Minister Modi speaks

Hindi. Separately, you can choose to turn on subtitles in your preferred language. On YouTube, you can switch between language audio tracks by clicking the settings gear icon and clicking audio track, and then selecting the language you prefer. For fully English overdub, select English. For fully Hindi overdub select Hindi, and to listen to the original mixed language version where I speak English and Prime Minister Modi speaks Hindi, please select Hindi Latin audio track, so you can listen either to a version that is all one language or to the original mixed language version with subtitles in your preferred language. The default is English overdub. Our thanks to ElevenLabs and a great team of translators, we do our best to bring the Prime Minister's voice to life with AI voice cloning in English. I promise that we will continue to work very hard to break down the barriers that language creates, and try to make these conversations as accessible as possible to everyone in the world. Anyway, let me pause one more time to say a big thank you. What a wild ride this life has been. It's an honor for me to be on it with all of you. I love you all. This is the Lex Fridman podcast, and now, dear friends, here's the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi. So, I should also say I'm fasting right now. It's been almost two days, 45 hours, so just water, no food in honor of this conversation, just to get in the right mindset, get into the spiritual level. I've read that you often fast for many days. Can you explain why you fast, and where does your mind go when you fast?

### **Narendra Modi**

First of all, I'm truly pleasantly surprised and honored that you're fasting, all the more because it feels like you're fasting as a tribute of respect for me. So, I express my deepest gratitude to you for doing this. In India, our religious traditions are actually a way of life. Our Supreme Court once gave a brilliant interpretation of Hinduism. They have stated that Hinduism is not about rituals or methods of worship, but rather it's a way of living, a philosophy that guides life itself. And in our scriptures, there is deep discussion on elevating the body, mind, intellect, soul, and humanity. They outline various paths, traditions, and systems to achieve this, and fasting is one of them, but fasting alone isn't everything. In India, whether you see it culturally or philosophically, sometimes I see that fasting is a way to cultivate discipline. If I put it in simple terms, or explain it to the viewers who are unfamiliar with India, it is a powerful tool to bring both the inner and outer self into balance. It shapes life in profound ways when you fast. You may have noticed, as you said, you've been fasting on water for two days. Every single one of your senses, especially smell, touch and taste, becomes highly sensitive. You may even notice the subtle aroma of water itself, something you probably never noticed before when drinking it. If someone walks past you carrying tea, you will catch its aroma just like you would with coffee. A small flower you've seen before, you will see it again today, but now you can perceive its details more vividly. Your senses become extra sharp, highly aware, and fully tuned in, and their capability to observe and to respond multiplies, and grows sharper. I have personally often experienced this. Another thing I've experienced is that fasting can greatly accelerate the thinking process, and can give a fresh perspective. You start thinking outside the box. I don't know if everyone experiences this, but I certainly do. Most people assume that fasting

simply means giving up food or not eating, but that's just the physical aspect of fasting. If someone is forced to go without food due to hardship with an empty stomach, can we call that fasting? Fasting is actually a scientific process. Whenever I fast for an extended period, I prepare my body in advance. For five to seven days before the fast, I follow various Ayurvedic practices and yoga practices, along with other traditional cleansing methods to internally reset my system. Before actually beginning the fast, I make sure to drink a lot of water, as much as possible. So, you could say that this detoxification process helps prepare my body in the best possible way. And once I begin fasting, for me, it's an act of devotion. For me, fasting is a form of self-discipline. For me personally, even while I go about doing my daily activities during a fast, my mind remains deeply introspective and focused inward, and that experience is profoundly transformative for me. My practice of fasting didn't come from reading books, listening to sermons, or following a tradition just because my family happened to have observed it. It came from my own personal experience. During my school days, there was a movement inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's vision, his vision of cow protection. The government had not enacted any laws at the time. At the time, people across the country observed a one-day fast by gathering in public places in silent protests. We were just kids, probably had just finished primary school. Something inside me said, "I should be part of this," and that was the first time in my life I experienced fasting. At such a young age, I felt neither hunger nor any desire for food. Instead, I felt a new awareness, a surge of energy within me. So, I became convinced that fasting is a science far beyond just skipping meals. It is something far greater than that. Then gradually, I refined my body and mind through various experiments. Over time, it became a long and disciplined journey for me, and one thing is certain. Fasting never slows me down. I work just as much as usual. Sometimes I even work more. And another fascinating thing I've noticed is that when I need to express my thoughts, I'm amazed at where they come from and how they flow. It's truly an incredible experience.

### **Lex Fridman**

So you still do meetings with world leaders, you still manage the affairs of India. You still carry out your role as a leader on the world stage, all fasted, and sometimes nine days?

### **Narendra Modi**

Well, this practice has a long historical context. I hope it may be interesting for those listening. There is an ancient tradition in India called Chaturmas. During the monsoon season, we know that the digestion tends to slow down, and so in this season, many people in India follow the practice of eating only a single meal within 24 hours. For me, this starts around mid-June and goes on until after Diwali around November. For about four to four and a half months, I follow this tradition of eating only once in 24 hours. Then comes the Navratri Festival in India, which usually falls in September or October. During this time, the whole country celebrates Durga Puja, a festival of strength, devotion, and spiritual discipline. This lasts for nine days. During this time, I completely abstain from food and only drink hot water. Although drinking hot water has always been a part of my daily routine, my

past lifestyle was such that I naturally developed this habit over time. Then in March or April, another Navratri occurs called Chaitra Navratri. This year, it will likely begin around March 31st. During this nine-day fast, I eat only one specific fruit, once a day. So for those nine days, if let's say I choose papaya, then for all nine days, I won't touch anything else. Just papaya. That too, I eat only once a day. That's how I follow my nine-day fasting routine. So there are numerous fasts I keep throughout the year, and this has become a deeply ingrained tradition in my life. Perhaps I can say that I've been following these practices for 50 to 55 years.

### **Lex Fridman**

Has there been times when you met with a world leader and completely fasted, and maybe what do they think about that? What do they think about your ability to do that kind of thing? And you're right, I should mention that from even my two days, my ability to be present, my ability to sense everything, sharply focus on this experience is elevated. But yes, is there stories with a world leader that maybe jumped to mind when you were fasted?

### **Narendra Modi**

Well, most of the time I don't even let people know about it. It's my personal matter, so I never publicized it, but people gradually started finding out. It became known only after I became Chief Minister and Prime Minister. Otherwise, it was purely personal. But now that it's out in the open, I don't mind sharing. If someone asks, I tell them so it might be useful to them, because it's not my personal property. It's my experience, and if that can help someone, why not share it? After all, my life has always been devoted to the well-being of others. For example, after I became Prime Minister, I had a bilateral meeting at the White House with President Obama, and he had also arranged a formal dinner. Then as discussions between the two governments progressed, someone said, "Please join us for dinner." To which another replied, "But the Prime Minister doesn't eat." This left them a bit concerned. How do you host the leader of such a major nation at the White House without serving food? When we sat down, they brought me a glass of hot water. I turned to President Obama and jokingly said, "Look, my dinner has arrived," as I placed the glass in front of me. Later when I visited again, he still remembered. He smiled and said, "Last time you were fasting, this time we're having lunch. Since you're not fasting, you'll have to eat twice as much."

### **Lex Fridman**

Let's go to the beginning. You rose from humble beginnings to lead the world's largest democracy. So, I think there's a lot of people for whom this is truly inspiring. Your family was a very modest means, and you grew up in a one-room house with a mud floor, your whole family living there. Tell me about your childhood. How did those humble beginnings shape your outlook on life?

## **Narendra Modi**

My birthplace is in Gujarat, specifically in North Gujarat, in Mehsana district, in a small town called Vadnagar. Historically, this town holds great significance, and so Vadnagar is where I was born and completed my early education. Looking at the world as I understand it today, I can reflect on my childhood and the unique environment I grew up in. My village had certain fascinating aspects, some of which are quite rare, even globally. When I was in school, there was an elder in our village who would regularly tell students, "Listen, kids, wherever you go, if you find a carved stone, or you find a stone with inscriptions on it or anything with engravings, bring it and place it in this corner of the school." Over time, my curiosity grew and I started to understand. I realized that my village had a rich and ancient history. Discussions at school often revealed more fascinating details about its past. Later I learned that China even made a film about it. I had read in a newspaper about a film that mentioned the Chinese philosopher Hiuen Tsang, who had spent a considerable amount of time in my village, having arrived there many centuries ago. Back then, it was a major center for Buddhist learning. That's how I first learned about it. And perhaps around the 1400s, it was a prominent Buddhist educational hub. There was a victory monument from the 12th century, a temple from the 17th century, and in the 16th century, two sisters, Tana and Riri, who were renowned musicians. As I uncovered these history traces, I grasped the depth of our heritage. So when I became chief minister, I initiated large-scale excavation projects. The findings from these very projects confirmed that thousands of Buddhist monks had at one time studied there. It was a place where Buddhist, Jain and Hindu traditions co-existed harmoniously, and for us, history wasn't just confined to books. Every stone spoke. Every wall had a story to tell, and so when we began the large-scale excavation work, we uncovered findings that hold immense historical significance. So far, they have discovered evidence dating back 2,800 years, proving that this city has remained unbroken and eternal for all those 2,800 years. They have discovered solid proof of how its development unfolded over these centuries. Now, an international-level museum has been established there, open to visitors, especially for archeology students. It has become a major area of study. So the place where I was born holds its own unique historical significance. I see it as my good fortune. Some things in life unfold beyond our understanding. Kashi became my realm of duty. Now, Kashi is also eternal. Kashi, also known as Benares, or Varanasi, is an eternal city that has remained vibrant and alive for centuries. Perhaps it was some divine design that led a boy born in Vadnagar to eventually make Kashi his realm of duty, living in the embrace of Mother Ganga. When I think about my family, my father, my mother, my siblings, my uncles, aunts, grandparents, we all grew up together in a small house. The place we lived was likely even smaller than where we are sitting now. There was no window, just a small door. That's where I was born. That's where I grew up. Now, when people talk about poverty, it's natural to discuss it in the context of public life, and by those standards, my early life was spent in extreme poverty, but we never really felt the burden of poverty. You see, someone who is used to wearing fine shoes will feel their absence when they don't have them. But for us, we had never worn shoes in our lives. So how would we even know that wearing shoes was a big deal? We weren't in a position to compare. That's just how we lived.

Our mother worked incredibly hard. My father, too. He was extremely hardworking, and he was also extremely disciplined. Every morning around 4:00 or 4:30 AM he would leave the house, walk long distances, visit several temples, and then reach his shop. He wore traditional leather shoes, handmade in the village. The shoes were very tough and sturdy, making a distinct tock, tock, tock sound when he walked. People in the village used to say that they could tell the time just by hearing his footsteps. "Oh, yes," they would say, "Mr. Damodar is on his way." Such was his discipline. He worked tirelessly, late into the night. Our mother too, ensured that we never felt the struggles of our circumstances, but despite everything, these challenging circumstances of living in scarcity never left a mark on our minds. I remember in school, the idea of wearing shoes never even crossed my mind. One day, while I was on my way to school, I ran into my uncle on the way he saw me and was surprised, "Hey, you go to school like this, without shoes?" So at that time, he bought me a pair of canvas shoes and made me wear them. Back then, they must have cost around 10 or 12 rupees. But here's the thing. They were white canvas shoes, and they would quickly get stained. So what did I do? In the evening, after school was over, I would stay back for a while. I would go from classroom to classroom, collecting leftover pieces of chalk that the teachers had discarded. I would take the pieces of chalk home, soak them in water, mix them into a paste and polish my canvas shoes with it, making them bright white again. For me, those shoes were a treasured possession, a symbol of great wealth, and I don't exactly know why, but from childhood, our mother was extremely particular about cleanliness. Perhaps that's where we inherited that habit, too. Not sure how I picked up the habit of dressing neatly, but it's been there since childhood. Whatever I wore, I made sure it looked proper. Back then, as you can imagine, we didn't have any arrangements for ironing clothes. So instead, I would heat up water in a copper pot, hold it with tongs, and press my clothes myself. Then I'd head off to school. That's how I lived, and I found joy in it. We never thought about being poor, or judged about how others lived or what their struggles were. We lived carefree, enjoying whatever little we had and kept working hard. Never once did we complain about these things. And all these aspects of my life, whether you call it fortune or misfortune, unfolded in such a way in politics that they started coming to light. Because when I was taking my oath as Chief Minister, TV reporters went to my village, questioned my childhood friends, went to capture videos of my home. That's when people started asking, "Who is this and what background he is coming from?" Before that, very few knew much about my life. That's just how my journey has been. My mother possessed an innate spirit of caring for others' well-being. It was woven into the very fabric of her being. She possessed knowledge of traditional remedies and healing practices, and would treat children with these home remedies. Every morning before sunrise, around five o'clock, she would start treating them, so all the children and their parents would gather at our home, little children crying, and we had to wake up early because of it. And we had to wake up early because of it. Meanwhile, my mother would continue treating them with care. This spirit of service, in a way, was nurtured through these experiences. A sense of empathy for society, the desire to do good for others, these values were instilled in me from my family. I believe that my life has been shaped by my mother, my father, my teachers, and the environment I grew up in.

**Lex Fridman**

There's a lot of young people listening to this that are truly inspired by your story. From those humble beginnings to the leader of the biggest democracy in the world, what can you tell to those young folks who are struggling, who are lost in the world, who are trying to find their way? What advice could you give them?

**Narendra Modi**

I want to tell all the young people the following. No matter how dark the night may seem, it is still just night, and morning is bound to come. That's why we need patience and self-confidence. Yes, the challenges are real, but I am not defined by my circumstances. I am here for a purpose, sent by a higher power, and I am not alone. The one who sent me is always with me. This unwavering faith should always remain within us. Difficulties are a test of endurance. They are not meant to defeat me. Hardships exist to make me stronger, helping me grow and improve, not to leave me feeling hopeless or discouraged. Personally, I see every crisis, every challenge as an opportunity. So, to all young people, I say, have patience. There are no shortcuts in life. At our railway stations, there hangs a sign for those who habitually cross the tracks instead of using the bridge, it reads, "Shortcut will cut you short." I would tell young people the same, shortcut will cut you short. There are no shortcuts in life. Patience and perseverance are essential. Whatever responsibility we are given, we must pour our heart into it. We should live it with passion. Enjoy the journey and find fulfillment in it. I truly believe that if this mindset is cultivated, it transforms life. Similarly, abundance alone is not enough. There is no guarantee of success. Even a wealthy person who indulges in comfort and idleness will eventually wither away. Instead, he must decide, "Yes, I may have resources around me, but I must use my abilities to grow them further. I must contribute more to society with my own strength. Even if I am in a good position, there is still so much more to do. Even if I am not in a good position, there is still so much work to do." That's what I believe. I have also noticed that some people tend to think, "I've learned enough. That's it." But one should never let the student within them die. Learning should never stop. I believe that as long as I am alive, I must have a purpose. Perhaps I exist to keep learning, to keep growing. Now, my mother tongue is Gujarati, and we were not very familiar with the Hindi language, nor did we know how to speak it eloquently or communicate effectively. But as a child, I used to sit at my father's tea shop, and at that young age, I got the chance to meet so many people. And every time, I learned something from them, I observed their ways of speaking, their expressions. These things taught me a lot, even though I wasn't in a position to apply it then, I thought, "If I ever get the chance, why not? Why shouldn't I present myself well?" So, I believe the desire to learn should always remain alive. And another thing I've observed is that most people dream about achieving something or becoming someone. They set big targets and when they fall short, they feel disappointed. That's why whenever I get a chance to talk to my friends, I tell them, instead of dreaming about getting and becoming, dream of doing something. If you focus on doing something, and let's say your goal is to reach 10, but you make it to eight, you won't feel discouraged. You'll still work toward 10 with determination. But if your dream is



only to become something and it doesn't happen, even your achievements may feel like a burden. That's why we must adjust our mindset in life. Instead of thinking about what I got or didn't get, the mindset should be what can I give? Because true contentment doesn't bloom on its own. It grows from the depth of what you give.

### **Lex Fridman**

And I should say that this young kid, one of the things I've dreamed of doing is to do this very thing, to talk to you today. So, this is very surreal. At 17, another fascinating part of your life. You left home and spent two years roaming in the Himalayas, searching for purpose, for deeper truth, for God. So, not much is known about this period of your life. You lived a nomadic, minimalist existence, very much like a yogi, often sleeping without a roof over your head. What are some memorable spiritual moments, rituals, experiences from that time?

### **Narendra Modi**

It seems like you've put in a lot of effort. Look, I don't usually talk much about this, but I can share a few external aspects of it. I grew up in a very small town. Our life was all about being part of a community. We lived among people, surrounded by them. That was just how life was. There was a library in the village, and I used to go there often to read books. Whenever I read something from the books, I often found myself feeling inspired, thinking, "Why shouldn't I shape my own life like that?" That desire was always there. When I used to read about Swami Vivekananda or read about Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, I would often wonder, "How did they live? How did they build such remarkable lives?" And for that, I constantly experimented on myself. Most of my experiments were physical in nature, testing my body's limits. For example, where I lived, winters weren't too harsh, but December nights could get quite cold. But still, at night, the cold would bite. It was natural. So, sometimes I would decide to sleep outside in the open with nothing to cover myself, just to see how my body endures the cold. So, from a very young age, I would often experiment with my body, and this became a regular thing for me. For me, going to the library, reading extensively, visiting the pond, washing the family's clothes, and swimming became part of my routine. Swimming was my main physical activity. All of these things were deeply connected to my life. Later as I read Vivekananda, I became even more drawn to his teachings. One time I read about Swami Vivekananda, his mother was ill. So, he went to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa for guidance. He would argue with him, debate with him. In his early days, he would often argue with him, questioning everything intellectually. He said, "My mother is sick. If I were earning, I could take better care of her." Sri Ramakrishna said, "Don't bother me with all this. Go to Goddess Kali. She is there. Ask her for what you need." And so, Swami Vivekananda went and sat before Goddess Kali's idol for hours, and he immersed himself into deep meditation. After a few hours when he returned, Ramakrishna asked him, "So, did you request the goddess?" Swami Vivekananda replied, "No, I didn't." Ramakrishna said, "Go again tomorrow. She will fulfill your request. Ask her." He went the next day and then again the day after. But each time, he found himself unable to ask for anything. His mother was

unwell and he needed help, but when he sat before Goddess Kali, he was completely absorbed in her presence, and yet he could not bring himself to ask for anything. Each time he returned empty-handed. He told Sri Ramakrishna, "I came back empty-handed. I didn't ask for anything." To stand before the divine goddess and not be able to ask for anything, that moment, that experience lit a flame inside him. There was a spark in his life. And from that came the spirit of giving. I believe that perhaps that small incident in Vivekananda's life left an impression on me too. The thought of, "What can I give to the world?" Maybe true contentment comes from giving. If my heart is only filled with the hunger to receive, that hunger will never end. And within that realization came the idea of Shiva and living being as one. If you wish to serve Shiva, serve all living beings. Recognize the unity between the divine and the living. True non-duality is experience through this realization. I would often lose myself in such thoughts. My mind naturally drifting in that direction. I remember an incident in the neighborhood where we lived, just outside there was a Lord Shiva temple. One day a saint came to stay there. So, that saint used to engage in meditation and spiritual practices. I started feeling drawn to him thinking perhaps he possessed some spiritual energy. I had only read about Swami Vivekananda, never seen such figures in real life. During Navratri, he was fasting and he had placed sorghum grains on his hand, a common tradition in our culture. In a way, sprouting seeds on your palms and sleeping like that for nine or 10 days, it was a kind of spiritual vow, and this saint was observing it. During those same days, my maternal uncle's family was preparing for my aunt's wedding. Everyone from my home was going to my uncle's house for the wedding. Now, for any child, visiting an uncle's house is always exciting. But I told my family, "I'm not going. I'll stay here and I will take care of Swamiji. Since he has these grains on his hand, he can't eat or drink, so I will take care of him." So, as a child, I chose not to attend the wedding. I stayed back serving Swamiji instead. Somehow my mind was naturally drawn in that direction. At times, whenever soldiers from my village came home during their holidays, they would walk around in their uniforms with such pride. I would run behind them all day thinking, "Look at them. They are serving the nation." So, there was always a strong feeling inside me to do something meaningful. I didn't fully understand what it would be, and I didn't have a roadmap. There was a hunger within me, a deep longing to understand life, to explore its meaning. So, I just set out and began the journey. During my time in the mission, I came across remarkable saints. They showered me with love and blessings. Among them, I formed a special bond with Swami Atmasthanandji. He lived for nearly 100 years, a life full of wisdom and service. In his final years, I deeply wished for him to stay with me at the Prime Minister's residence, but his responsibilities were vast and he couldn't come. However, back when I was chief minister, he used to visit and I was fortunate to receive his blessings and guidance. He once looked at me and said, "Why have you come here? You have a greater purpose to fulfill. Is your priority your own well-being? Or is it the welfare of society? Whatever Swami Vivekananda said was for the betterment of society. He said you are meant to serve others." So, I remember feeling a bit disheartened at that moment. I had come seeking guidance, but all I got were words. So, I continued on my journey, wandering from place to place. I spent time in the Himalayas embracing the solitude of the mountains.

I met many remarkable individuals along the way. Some were great ascetics, people who had renounced everything, but still my mind remained restless. Perhaps it was my age of curiosity, of wanting to learn, to understand. It was a new experience, a world shaped by the mountains, by ice, by the towering snow-covered peaks. But all of this played a huge role in shaping me. It strengthened me from within and enabled me to discover my inner power. Practicing meditation, waking up in the sacred pre-dawn hours, bathing in the cold, serving people with devotion and naturally tending to elderly saints became a seamless part of who I was. Once, a natural calamity struck the region, and I immediately devoted myself to helping the villagers. So, these were the saints and spiritual masters with whom I stayed from time to time. I never remained in one place for long, I kept moving, constantly wandering. That was the kind of life I lived.

### **Lex Fridman**

And for people who don't know, that moment in the Ramakrishna Mission Ashram with the monk, Swami Atmasthananda, as you mentioned, he helped steer you towards a life of service. So, there's another possible life that could have been where you take Sannyasa, you give away everything, and you're a monk. So, we could have had a monk, Narendra Modi, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and he helped you take the decision to live a life of service at every scale

### **Narendra Modi**

From the outside, people may call me a leader. Some call me the prime minister. Others call me the chief minister, and that's how they see me from their perspective. But deep within, there is only an unwavering spiritual commitment. The Modi, who lovingly helped his mother care for children during their treatments, tending to them with patience and compassion. The Modi who wandered through the Himalayas. And the Modi who now works from this seat of responsibility. They are all tied together by the same inner consistency. Every action is dedicated to serving others. People may see a stark difference between a saint and a leader, but to me, there is no real difference. Yes, the attire changes, the way of life changes. The words spoken throughout the day shift and the nature of work evolves. But the core of my being remains unchanged, carrying out every responsibility with the same sense of calm, focus, and dedication.

### **Lex Fridman**

Another part of your life of who you are is you've spoken your whole life about putting your nation of India above all else. When you were eight, you joined the RSS, which espouses the idea of Hindu nationalism. Can you tell me about RSS and what impact they had on who you are and the development of your political ideas?

### **Narendra Modi**

Ever since childhood, I always had the habit of staying engaged in something or the other. I remember there was a man named Makoshi. I don't quite recall his full name. I think he was

part of the service group, Makoshi Soni or something like that. He used to carry a small drum-like instrument called the Tambourine with him, and he used to sing patriotic songs in his deep, powerful voice. Whenever he came to our village, he would hold programs in different places. I would run after him like a crazy fan just to listen to his songs. I would spend entire nights listening to their patriotic songs. I enjoyed it. I don't even know why, but I just did. In our village, there was a branch of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, where we played sports and sang patriotic songs. Something about those songs touched me deeply. They stirred something inside me, and that's how I eventually became part of the RSS. One of the core values that were instilled in us at RSS was, whatever you do, do it with a purpose. Even while studying, study with the goal of learning enough to contribute to the nation. Even when you exercise, do it with the purpose of strengthening your body to serve the nation. This is what we were taught. And today, RSS is a massive organization. It is now nearing its 100th anniversary. Such a massive volunteer organization likely doesn't exist anywhere else in the world. Millions of people are connected to it, but understanding RSS is not that simple. One must make an effort to truly grasp the nature of its work. More than anything, the RSS provides you with a clear direction toward what can truly be called a purpose in life. Secondly, the nation is everything, and serving the people is akin to serving God. This is what has been said since the Vedic Era. What our sages have said, what Vivekananda said and what the RSS echoes. A volunteer is told that the inspiration he gains from RSS is not just about attending the one-hour session or wearing the uniform. What matters is what you do for society. And today, inspired by that spirit, many initiatives are thriving. Like some volunteers established an organization called Seva Bharati. This organization serves the slums and settlements where the poorest people live, which they call service communities. To my knowledge, they run approximately 125,000 service projects without any government assistance, solely through community support. They spend time there, teach the children, care for their health, instill good values and work towards improving cleanliness in these communities. Running 125,000 social service projects is no small feat. Similarly, some volunteers nurtured by RSS are dedicated to serving tribal communities through Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram. They live among the tribal people, working for their welfare. They have established over 70,000 one-teacher schools in remote tribal regions. There are also some people in America who show their support for this cause and contribute donations of about \$10 or \$15. And they say, "Skip a Coca-Cola this month. Don't drink Coca-Cola and donate that money to a one-teacher school instead." Now, imagine 70,000 one-teacher schools dedicated to educating tribal children. Some volunteers have founded Vidya Bharati to revolutionize education. Today they run nearly 25,000 schools educating around 3 million students, and I believe that millions of students have benefited from this initiative, receiving quality education at an incredibly low cost. Alongside education, values are prioritized, and students remain grounded, learning skills so they don't become a burden on society. That is in every aspect of life, whether it's women, youth, or even laborers, the RSS has played a role. In terms of membership size, if I may say so, we have the Indian Labor Union. It has around 50,000 unions with millions of members across the country. Perhaps in terms of scale, there is no bigger labor union in the

world. But what's interesting is the approach they take. Historically, leftist ideologies have fueled labor movements worldwide. And what has been their slogan? "Workers of the world unite." The message was clear. Unite first and then we'll deal with everything else. But what do the labor unions run by RSS-trained volunteers believe in? They say, "Workers unite the world." Others say, "Workers of the world unite." And we say, "Workers unite the world." It may seem like just a small shift in words, but it represents a huge ideological transformation. The volunteers who come from the RSS follow their own interests, nature and inclination, and in doing so, they strengthen and promote these kinds of activities. When you observe these initiatives, you'll see how over the past 100 years, the RSS has dedicated itself with the discipline and devotion of a seeker staying away from the glare of mainstream attention. I feel blessed to gain life's values from such a sacred organization. Through the RSS, I found a life of purpose. Then I was fortunate to spend some time among the saints, which gave me a strong spiritual foundation. I found discipline and a life of purpose. And through the guidance of saints, I gained spiritual grounding. Swami Atmasthananda and others like him have held my hand throughout my journey, constantly guiding me at every step. The teachings of Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Vivekananda, and the service-driven philosophy of the RSS have played a crucial role in shaping me.

### **Lex Fridman**

But they've also helped push the idea of India. What is the idea that unifies India? What is India as a nation? What is the foundational idea that unites all of these disparate worlds and communities and cultures? What would it be?

### **Narendra Modi**

Look, India is a cultural identity. It is a civilization that dates back thousands of years. Consider the vastness of India, over 100 languages, thousands of dialects. India is so diverse that we have a saying that every 20 miles, the language changes, customs change, cuisine changes, even clothing styles shift from region to region. From the south to the north, you will see immense diversity across the country. But if you dig a little deeper, you will find a common thread. For example, the stories of Lord Ram can be heard everywhere in India. His name echoes in every corner of the country. But if you look closely from Tamil Nadu to Jammu and Kashmir, you will always find people whose names include Ram in some form. In Gujarat, he might be called Rambhai. In Tamil Nadu, Ramachandra, and in Maharashtra, Rambhau. This unique cultural bond is what unites India as one civilization. Take something as simple as bathing in water. We have a ritual where all the rivers of India are remembered. They chant, "I am bathing with the waters of all these rivers: Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu, Kaveri." It's a sentiment that unites a nation, and we have a long tradition of making such resolutions at the beginning of important events and rituals. And the resolution itself can present a historical record. And in so doing serve as a way of collecting and preserving historical data. It has been an incredibly unique system, guided meticulously by our scriptures. When someone makes a resolution, performs a Puja, or even during weddings, we start by invoking the entire

universe, beginning with Jambudweep, Bharatkhand, Aryavrat, and gradually narrow it down to the village, then mentioning the specific family, and finally, we invoke the family deity. This practice is still alive, happening daily in every corner of India, but sadly, the Western and global models began viewing nations only as administrative systems. India, however, has had a variety of administrative systems throughout history, many systems were fragmented, scattered and varied across regions. Kings and rulers were numerous, but India's unity lay in cultural bonds. Pilgrimage traditions played a key role in preserving this unity. Shankaracharya established the four pilgrimage sites. Even today, millions of people travel from one place to another for pilgrimage. In Kashi, you'll find people who bring water from Rameshwaram to Kashi and take water from Kashi to Rameshwaram. Even if you look at our Hindu calendar, you'll find so many things across the country that you can't even imagine.

### **Lex Fridman**

If we look at the historical foundation of modern India, along with yourself, Mahatma Gandhi is one of the most important humans to have ever lived, but certainly one of the most important humans to the history of India. What do you admire about Mahatma Gandhi?

### **Narendra Modi**

As I had mentioned before, I was born in Gujarat, and Gujarati is my mother tongue. Mahatma Gandhi was also born in Gujarat. His native language was Gujarati too. He pursued a career as an attorney and lived overseas for several years. He had plenty of great opportunities, but the deep sense of duty within him, along with the values instilled by his family, led him to give up all comforts and devote his life to serving the people of India. He joined the struggle for India's independence, and to this day, he continues to deeply influence the life of every Indian in some way. Mahatma Gandhi tried to live by his principles and practiced what he preached. For example, he strongly advocated for cleanliness and practiced it- He strongly advocated for cleanliness and practiced it himself, and he made it a point to discuss cleanliness wherever he went. Another key factor to consider is India's fight for independence. India was ruled by the Mughals, the British, and several other foreign powers. Despite being bound by the shackles of colonial rule for centuries, the flame of independence burned brightly in every corner and nook of India, never fading, always fueling the desire for freedom. Millions of people sacrificed their lives so the light of freedom could shine on India. They laid down their lives for freedom, sacrificing their youth behind prison walls. Mahatma Gandhi also fought for India's independence, but in his own way, indeed the other freedom fighters were brave warriors and devoted sons of Mother India. They came, they fought and their martyrdom immortalized them, and they did indeed have a lasting impact. But it was Mahatma Gandhi who awakened the nation, leading a mass movement fueled by truth and he wove even a sweeper into the very fabric of the freedom struggle. He told teachers their work was part of the freedom struggle. He told the people spinning thread and weaving clothes, they were freedom fighters. He told those tending to lepers that their service was a step toward India's freedom. He viewed every task as a vital

thread in the fabric of India's independence movement, and this transformed India's common man into a soldier in the quest for freedom. Gandhi forged a mass movement so immense that the British could never fully grasp it. The British never imagined that a pinch of salt from the Dandi March could spark a massive revolution, and he made it happen. And his life, presence, style, mannerisms all left a profound impact, and I have seen many of his stories evolve into timeless legends. I recall an incident from a Roundtable Conference. Yeah, I believe he was attending a Roundtable Conference. He was supposed to meet King George at the Buckingham Palace draped in his breechcloth. Mahatma Gandhi made his way to the palace. Many people were amazed that he had showed up in that attire to meet the King. Gandhi remarked he didn't need to wear a lot of clothes. He said, "Your king is wearing enough clothes for the both of us." This was the whimsical charm of his nature. Mahatma Gandhi possessed many remarkable qualities. His call for unity and recognition of the people's strength still resonates with me. In everything I do, I strive to include the common man and to ensure the participation of as many as possible. I don't believe in leaving everything to the government. I am a firm believer in the power of social change.

### **Lex Fridman**

So he was probably one of the greatest leaders of the 20th century. You are one of the greatest leaders of the 21st century. Those two centuries are very different, and you have been masterful in the game, in the art of geopolitics. So let me ask you, you have found a balance. So when negotiating on the world stage with super-powerful nations, is it better to be loved or feared? It seems like you are a masterclass of being loved by everybody, but everybody knows and feels the strength, so finding that balance. Can you speak to that balance?

### **Narendra Modi**

First and foremost, I don't think this is a fair comparison. Mahatma Gandhi wasn't just a 20th-century leader. His relevance transcends centuries. Mahatma Gandhi's legacy will last for centuries to come, and he remains relevant to date. As far as I am concerned, I have a responsibility to fulfill, yet the weight of that responsibility pales in comparison to my country. I am nowhere near as great as my country, and my strength lies not in my name, but in the backing of 1.4 billion Indians and thousands of years of timeless culture and heritage. So wherever I go, I carry with me the essence of thousands of years of Vedic tradition, the timeless teachings of Swami Vivekananda, and the blessings, dreams and aspirations of 1.4 billion Indians. When I shake hands with a world leader, it's not Modi, but 1.4 billion Indians doing so. So this isn't my strength at all. It is rather the strength of India. You see, I recall something that happened all the way back in 2013. It was when my party declared I would be their prime ministerial candidate. My critics often tried to corner me on one point. It became a topic of widespread discussion, Modi is nothing more than a state leader. What does he know of foreign policy? Does he even understand global geopolitics? This was on everyone's lips, and I was asked this question in every interview. I gave a very well-thought-out answer at the time. I said, "I won't lay out my entire foreign policy in an

interview, nor is it needed.” That said, India will neither allow itself to be looked down upon, nor will it ever look up to anyone. India will now see eye-to-eye with her counterparts. This was my belief in 2013, and it still lies at the heart of my foreign policy. For me, the country always comes first. However, to belittle someone or speaking ill of others is neither part of my cultural values nor my traditions. Moreover, our culture upholds and advocates for the welfare of mankind. India has always championed the ideas of global peace and brotherhood. For centuries, we have envisioned the world as one big family. Our noble ancestors envisaged the welfare of the whole world and universe, and that’s why you must have noticed, the nature of our conversations as well as the ideas that I have presented on the global stage, which are rooted in respect and positivity. For example, I spoke about the environment in one of my speeches. I proposed the concept of one sun, one world, one grid. During the COVID pandemic, I delivered a speech at the G20 summit. I put forth the vision of one health, where humans and nature would live in harmony, and I have always worked towards this. We hosted the G20 Summit with the motto, One Earth, One Family, One Future. We have inherited this timeless wisdom and it’s our duty to share it with the world. To give you an example, I have advocated for embracing renewable energy. We founded the International Solar Alliance with the motto, One Sun, One World, One Grid. Even when it comes to global healthcare, I had proposed One Earth, One Health. This initiative extends not only to humans, but also to all flora and fauna. I have always aimed to initiate efforts that foster global well-being, and the global community needs to join hands to accomplish that. We must also understand that the world has become one small village today. No country can thrive in isolation. Today we all depend upon one another. No one can make it far by themselves. That is why you must learn to synchronize with everyone and everyone else must learn to synchronize with you. That’s the only way to propel this initiative forward. Organizations like the United Nations came into being after the First World War, but they failed to evolve with the times, and this inability to adapt has sparked a global debate on their relevance.

### **Lex Fridman**

You have spoken about, you have the experience, you have the skill, you have the geopolitical leverage to be the biggest peacemaker in the world today, on the world stage, and there’s several wars going on. Can you maybe explain how you approach the process of making peace, helping make peace between two warring nations, for example, Russia and Ukraine?

### **Narendra Modi**

Well, I represent the country that is the land of Lord Buddha. I represent the country that is the land of Mahatma Gandhi. These are the great souls whose teachings, words, actions, and behavior are entirely dedicated to peace. And that is why culturally and historically our background is so strong that whenever we speak of peace, the world listens to us. Because India is the land of Gautam Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi and Indians aren’t hardwired to espouse strife and conflict. We espouse harmony instead. We seek neither to wage war



against nature, nor to foster strife among nations. We stand for peace and wherever we can act as peacemakers, we have gladly embraced that responsibility. Returning to your example, I have a close relationship with Russia and Ukraine alike. I can sit with President Putin and say that this is not the time for war, and I can also tell President Zelensky in a friendly way that brother, regardless of how many people stand with you in the world, there will never be a resolution on the battlefield. The resolution will only come when both Ukraine and Russia come to the negotiating table. Ukraine may hold countless discussions with their allies, but it will bear no fruit. Discussions must include both parties instead. Initially, it was challenging to find peace, but now the current situation presents an opportunity for meaningful and productive talks between Ukraine and Russia. There has been a lot of suffering. Even the global south has suffered. The world has been grappling with a food, fuel and fertilizer crisis. So the global community should unite in the pursuit of peace. As for me, I have always maintained that I stand with peace. I am not neutral. I have a stance and that is peace, and peace is what I strive for.

### **Lex Fridman**

Another difficult historic relationship and conflict is between India and Pakistan, it's one of the most tense conflicts in the world, two nuclear powers with strong ideological differences. You are a great peacemaker. Looking out into the future as a visionary, what do you see as the path for friendship, for peace, for good relations between India and Pakistan?

### **Narendra Modi**

I would like to delve into periods of our history the world may be unfamiliar with. Before 1947, during the struggle for independence, everyone was fighting side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder, and the nation was eagerly waiting to celebrate the freedom, the joy of independence. Now, we could have a lengthy discussion on what led to the events that unfolded, but the fact remains that the policymakers of the time agreed to India's partition and they agreed to the Muslim side's demand of carving out a separate nation. With hearts weighed down by grief and silent tears, Indians embraced this painful reality. However, what unfolded was an immediate heartbreaking saga of bloodshed. Trains filled with bloodied, wounded people and corpses started arriving from Pakistan. It was a harrowing sight. After getting their own way, we expected them to live and let live and yet, they chose not to foster a harmonious coexistence. Time and again, they decided to be at odds with India. They have waged a proxy war against us. Don't mistake this for ideology. What kind of ideology thrives on bloodshed and the export of terror, and we are not the sole victims of this menace. Wherever terror strikes in the world, the trail somehow leads to Pakistan. Let's take the September 11th attacks, for example. The main mastermind behind it, Osama bin Laden, where did he eventually emerge from? He had taken refuge in Pakistan. The world has recognized that in a way terrorism and the terrorist mindset are deeply rooted in Pakistan. Today, it stands as an epicenter of turmoil, not just for India but for the world. And we have repeatedly asked them what good can come from this path? We have urged them to abandon the path of state-sponsored terrorism for good, "What do you hope to gain by

surrendering your nation to lawless forces?" I even personally traveled to Lahore in the pursuit of peace. When I became Prime Minister, I specially invited Pakistan to my swearing-in ceremony so we could turn over a new leaf. Yet, every noble attempt at fostering peace was met with hostility and betrayal. We sincerely hope that wisdom prevails upon them and they choose the path of peace. I believe even the people of Pakistan long for peace because even they must be weary of living in strife and unrest, they must have grown weary of relentless terror where even innocent children are killed and countless lives are destroyed.

**Lex Fridman**

Is there some memorable stories from your past attempts to try to improve relations with Pakistan that could guide the path forward into the future?

**Narendra Modi**

Like I mentioned, my first attempt at improving bilateral relations was when I invited my Pakistani counterpart to my swearing-in. It was a gesture of goodwill. It was a diplomatic gesture unlike any in decades. The very people who once questioned my approach to foreign policy were taken aback when they learned I had invited all SAARC heads of state and our then president, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee beautifully captured that historic gesture in his memoir. This was a testament to how clear and confident India's foreign policy had become. This sent a clear message to the world about India's commitment to peace and harmony, but we didn't get the desired outcome.

**Lex Fridman**

Maybe to ask a little bit of a lighter question, who has the better cricket team, India or Pakistan? The two teams have an epic rivalry on the pitch and more seriously, given the geopolitical tensions that you spoke to, what role do sports and cricket and football play in fostering better relations?

**Narendra Modi**

I think sports have the power to energize the entire world. The spirit of sports brings people together across different nations. That's why I would never want to see sports being discredited. I truly believe that sports play a major role in human evolution. They're not just games, they connect people on a deeper level. Now, coming to the question of who's better and who's not, when it comes to techniques in sports, I'm not an expert. Only those who specialize in the technical aspects can judge which techniques are superior and who the best players really are. But sometimes the results speak for themselves. Just a few days ago, India and Pakistan played a match. The result reveals, which is the better team. That's how we know.

**Lex Fridman**

Yeah. I've watched this series called The Greatest Rivalry, India versus Pakistan, that describes so many incredible players, so many incredible games. It's always beautiful to see a great rivalry. You've also spoken about football. Football is very popular in India. So another tough question, who is the greatest football player of all time? We've got Messi, Pele, Maradona, Cristiano Ronaldo, Zidane, who do you think is the greatest football player to have ever played?

**Narendra Modi**

It's absolutely true that many regions in India have a strong football culture. Our women's football team is performing really well and the men's team is also making great progress. But if we talk about the past, back in the 1980s, one name that always stood out was Maradona. For that generation, he was seen as a true hero, and if you ask today's generation, they'll immediately mention Messi. Now that you've asked, another interesting memory just came to mind. There's a state in India called Madhya Pradesh, right in the center. There's a district called Shahdol, a completely tribal region where a large tribal community resides. I really enjoy interacting with people from such communities, especially the self-help groups run by tribal women. So I decided to visit them and have a conversation. But when I got there, I noticed something fascinating. Around 80 to 100 young boys, kids and even some older youth all dressed in sports uniforms standing together. Naturally, I walked over to them. So I asked them, "Where are you all from?" And they replied, "We're from mini Brazil." I was surprised and said, "What do you mean by mini Brazil?" They said, "That's what people call our village." Curious, I asked, "Why do they call it mini Brazil?" They explained, "In our village, football has been played for four generations. Nearly 80 national level players have come from here. Our entire village is dedicated to football." They also told me when we host our annual football match, nearly 20,000 to 25,000 spectators come from nearby villages to watch. I see the growing craze for football in India these days as a positive sign because it not only fuels passion, but also builds true team spirit.

**Lex Fridman**

Yeah, football is one of the great sports that unites not just India, the whole world, and that just shows the power of what sport can do. You recently visited the United States and reinvigorated your friendship with Donald Trump. What do you like about Donald Trump as a friend, as a leader?

**Narendra Modi**

I'd like to share with you an event that stands out in my memory. Perhaps from that, you'll get a better understanding of the point I'm trying to convey. For example, we had an event in Houston, Howdy Modi. Both President Trump and I were there and the entire stadium was completely packed. A massive crowd at an event in the US is a huge moment. While packed stadiums are common in sports, this was extraordinary for a political rally. The Indian diaspora had gathered in large numbers. Both of us delivered speeches and he sat down

below listening to me speak. Now, that's his humility. The President of the United States sitting in the audience while I spoke from the stage, that was a remarkable gesture on his part. After finishing my speech, I stepped down and as we all know, security in the US is extremely strict and thorough. The level of scrutiny there is on a completely different level. I went over to thank him and casually said, "If you don't mind, why don't we take a lap around the stadium? There are so many people here. Let's walk, wave and greet them." In American life, it's almost impossible for the President to walk into a crowd of thousands, but without even a moment's hesitation, he agreed and started walking with me. His entire security detail was thrown off guard, but for me that moment was truly touching. It showed me that this man had courage. He makes his own decisions, but also he trusted me and my lead in that moment enough to have walked with me into the crowd. It was that sense of mutual trust, a strong bond between us that I truly witnessed on that day and the way I saw President Trump that day walking into a crowd of thousands without even asking security, it was truly amazing. And if you watch the video now, you'll be amazed. When he was shot during the recent campaign, I saw the same resilient and determined President Trump, the one who walked hand-in-hand with me in that stadium. Even after being shot, he remained unwaveringly dedicated to America. His life was for his nation. His reflection showed his America First spirit, just as I believe in nation first. I stand for India first and that's why we connect so well. These are the things that truly resonate. And I believe that across the world politicians are covered so much by the media that people mostly perceive each other through its lens. People rarely get the chance to truly meet or personally know one another and perhaps third-party intervention is the real cause of tensions. When I visited him in the White House for the first time, there was already a lot written about President Trump in the media. At that time, he was still new to office and the world had a rather different perception of him. Even I had been briefed in many different ways before meeting him, but to my surprise, the very moment I stepped into the White House, he broke all formal protocols right away. And then, he personally took me on a tour of the White House. As he showed me around, I noticed something striking, he wasn't holding any notes or cue cards, nor was anyone accompanying him to assist. He pointed things out himself. "This is where Abraham Lincoln lived," he said. He even explained why the courtroom was designed so long. He would point at the table and tell me which President signed here and on what date. I found that incredibly impressive. It showed how much he honored the Presidency and how respectful and deeply connected he was to America's history. I could feel that. And he spoke to me freely, discussing many things openly. That was my experience from our first meeting. Later, when his first term ended, and President Biden won, four years passed, but during that time whenever someone we both knew met him, and this must have happened dozens of times, he would say, "Modi is my friend, convey my regards." That kind of gesture is rare. Even though we didn't meet physically for years, our direct and indirect communication, our closeness and the trust between us remained unshaken.

**Lex Fridman**

He said that you're a much tougher, much better negotiator than he is. He said this recently when you visited. What do you think of him as a negotiator and what do you think he meant about you being a great negotiator?

**Narendra Modi**

Now, that's not something I can comment on. Since it's his graciousness and humility, it is very kind of him that he openly appreciates me on various occasions and in different contexts. But about negotiation, I always put my country's interests first. That's why in every forum, I speak up for India's interest, not to harm anyone but in a positive manner and because of that, no one takes offense. People know that if Modi is present, he will strongly advocate for these things. After all, the people of India have given me this responsibility. For me, my nation is my high command and I will always honor their will.

**Lex Fridman**

You've also had a bunch of productive meetings with several other folks on your visit to the United States, Elon Musk, JD Vance, Tulsi Gabbard, Vivek Ramaswamy. What are some things that stood out from those meetings? Maybe key takeaways, key memories.

**Narendra Modi**

Look, I can say this, I have observed President Trump both during his first term and now in his second run. This time, he seems far more prepared than before. He has a clear roadmap in his mind with well-defined steps, each one designed to lead him toward his goals. I also had the chance to meet members of his team, and I truly believe he has put together a strong, capable group and with such a strong team, I feel they are fully capable of implementing President Trump's vision based on my interactions with them. I met several people, Tulsi Gabbard, Vivek Ramaswamy, Elon Musk, and there was a family-like atmosphere, everyone had come with their families. As for Elon Musk, I have known him since my time as chief minister. He was there with his family and children, so naturally the atmosphere felt warm and friendly. Of course, we had discussions and we talked about many different topics. Now, with his DOGE mission, he is incredibly excited about how it's progressing and honestly, it makes me happy too because when I took office in 2014, I wanted to free my country from the deep-rooted issues and harmful practices that have crept in, and I'll continue striving to eliminate as many of them as I possibly can. For example, after I took office in 2014, I observed that back then we weren't part of many global discussions, not like how President Trump and DOGE are being talked about today. But let me give you an example so you can see the kind of work that was done. I noticed that the benefits of certain government schemes, especially welfare programs, were being exploited by so many people who never even existed in real life... ... who never even existed in real life. There were ghost names, pensions being issued to fake people. Widow pensions were being granted even before marriages took place, and disability pensions were given without any real disabilities. Then I launched a scrutiny process, and you'll be shocked to

know what we found. A hundred million people, a hundred million people, that's a hundred million fake or duplicate names that I removed from the system. And because of that, we saved massive amount of money. Then I introduced direct benefit transfer, ensuring that every rupee sent from Delhi reached the rightful person without leakage. As a result, my country saved nearly 3 trillion rupees that would have otherwise ended up in the wrong hands. Just because of direct benefit transfer through technology, we eliminated middlemen, ensuring transparency in the system. I also introduced the GeM portal for government purchases, which has helped save both time and money. It has increased competition and improved quality. In India, we had an overwhelming burden of compliances. I eliminated 40,000 unnecessary compliances, and removed nearly 1500 outdated laws that served no purpose. So in a way, my efforts have been about freeing governance from unnecessary dominance and inefficiency. And naturally, when bold changes happen, just like DOGE's mission, they become a topic of discussion worldwide.

### **Lex Fridman**

You and Xi Jinping have considered each other friends. How can that friendship be reinvigorated to help de-escalate some of the recent tensions, and resume dialogue and cooperation with China?

### **Narendra Modi**

Look, the relationship between India and China isn't something new. Both nations have ancient cultures and civilizations. Even in the modern world, they play a significant role. If you look at historical records, for centuries, India and China have learned from each other. Together, they have always contributed to the global good in some way. Old records suggest that at one point India and China alone accounted for more than 50% of the world's GDP. That's how massive India's contribution was. And I believe our ties have been extremely strong, with deep cultural connections. If we look back centuries, there's no real history of conflict between us. It has always been about learning from each other and understanding one another. At one time, Buddhism had a profound influence in China, and that philosophy originally came from here. Our relationship should remain just as strong in the future. It should continue to grow. Of course, differences are natural. When two neighboring countries exist, occasional disagreements are bound to happen. Even within a family, not everything is always perfect. But our focus is to ensure that these differences don't turn into disputes. That's what we actively work toward. Instead of discord, we emphasize dialogue, because only through dialogue can we build a stable cooperative relationship that serves the best interests of both nations. It is true that there have been ongoing border disputes between us. And in 2020, the incidents along the border created significant tensions between our countries. However, after my recent meeting with President Xi, we have seen a return to normalcy at the border. We are now working to restore conditions to how they were before 2020. Slowly but surely, trust, enthusiasm, and energy will return. But of course, it will take some time, since there's been a five-year gap. Our cooperation isn't just beneficial, it's also essential for global stability and prosperity. And since the 21st

century is Asia's century, we want India and China to compete in a healthy and natural way. Competition is not a bad thing, but it should never turn into conflict.

**Lex Fridman**

The world is worried about a brewing global war. The tensions between China and the United States, in Ukraine, Russia and Europe, in Israel, the Middle East. What can you say about how we in the 21st century can avoid a global war, avoid an escalation towards more conflict, more war?

**Narendra Modi**

Look, COVID exposed the limitations of every nation. No matter how much we consider ourselves as a great nation, no matter how progressive we think we are, or how scientifically advanced we believe we've become, everyone has their own way of looking at things. In the end, we all found ourselves on the same ground. Every country in the world faced this reality. At that time, it felt like the world would learn from it, that we would move toward a more unified world. Just as a geopolitical order emerged after World War II, many thought something similar would happen post-COVID. But unfortunately, instead of moving towards peace, the world became even more fragmented, ushering in a period of uncertainty, and the wars have only made it worse. I believe that modern wars are no longer just about resources or interests. Today I see so many kinds of conflicts happening. Physical battles often get discussed. Struggles are happening in every domain. International organizations that were once powerful have become almost irrelevant. No real reforms are happening. Institutions, like the UN, are failing to fulfill their roles. People, who disregard international laws and rules, continue to act freely, and no one can stop them. In such situations, the prudent choice for everyone is to let go of conflict and move toward cooperation. And a development-driven approach is the way forward. Expansionism will not work. As I've said before, the world is interdependent and interconnected. Every nation needs one another, no one can stand alone. And from all the different forums I attend, one thing is clear: Everyone is deeply worried about these conflicts. We can only hope that peace is restored very soon.

**Lex Fridman**

I'm not very good at this.

**Narendra Modi**

You keep looking at your watch.

**Lex Fridman**

No, no, no. I barely know what I'm doing, Prime Minister. I'm not very good at this. Okay. You've been... through your career and through your life, you have seen a lot of difficult situations in the history of India. One of them, the 2002 Gujarat riots, they're one of the most challenging periods of modern Indian history, when there was violence between Hindu

and Muslim citizens of the Gujarat that led to over 1000 deaths. It revealed the intensity of religious tensions in the region. You were, as you mentioned, chief minister of Gujarat at the time. Looking back, what lessons do you draw from that time? And we should also say that India's independent Supreme Court upheld twice, in '12 and '22, that you had no involvement in the violence of the 2002 Gujarat riots. But I was wondering if you could speak to the broad lessons you draw from that time?

### **Narendra Modi**

Look, regarding your first point, when you humbly said that you don't know what you're doing, that you're not good at this, I disagree and personally feel you've put in tremendous care. You've done extensive research and have dived deeply into every small detail. So I think you've done very well, and all the efforts you've put in during our conversation and in all your conversations are appreciated. And rather than simply interviewing me, I feel you're trying to deeply understand India. That's why I strongly feel there's genuine honesty in your sincere effort to uncover the truth. And for that sincere approach, I genuinely congratulate you.

### **Lex Fridman**

Thank you.

### **Narendra Modi**

Regarding the earlier events that you mentioned, like the 2002 riots in Gujarat, I'd like to paint you a clearer picture of the 12 to 15 months leading up to that, so you can fully understand the atmosphere of that time. For instance, take December 24, 1999, roughly three years earlier, an Indian flight from Kathmandu to Delhi was hijacked, redirected to Afghanistan and landed in Kandahar. Hundreds of Indian passengers were held hostage. It caused massive turmoil across India as people faced life and death uncertainty. Then, in the year 2000, the Red Fort in Delhi was attacked by terrorists. Yet another crisis struck the nation, intensifying fear and turmoil. On September 11th, 2001, the Twin Towers in America faced a devastating terror attack, once again shocking the entire world. Because ultimately, the people behind these attacks are driven by a similar mindset. Then in October 2001, terrorists attacked the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly. Soon after, on December 13th, 2001, India's parliament was targeted. Within just eight to 10 months, these major global terrorist attacks took place, violent incidents that led to bloodshed and the loss of innocent lives. In such a tense environment, even the smallest spark can ignite unrest. The situation had already become extremely volatile. In such times, suddenly, on October 7th, 2001, I was given the responsibility of becoming chief minister of Gujarat. This was an enormous challenge. At that time, Gujarat was recovering from a devastating earthquake, the largest of the previous century, which had left thousands dead. My first major task as chief minister was overseeing the rehabilitation of survivors. This was a crucial task, and from day one after my oath, I immersed myself in it. I was a person who had absolutely no prior experience with government. I had never been part of any administration, never even



served in government before. I had never contested an election, never even been a state representative. For the first time in my life, I had to face elections. On February 24, 2002, I became a state representative, an elected representative for the first time. And it was only around February 24th, 25th, or 26th that I stepped into the Gujarat Assembly for the very first time. On February 27th, 2002, we were seated in the Assembly for the budget session. And that same day, it had been just three days since I'd become a state representative, when suddenly the horrific Godhra incident occurred. It was a tragedy of unimaginable magnitude, people were burned alive. You can imagine, against the backdrop of incidents like the Kandahar hijacking, the attack on parliament, or even 9/11, and then to have so many people killed and burned alive, you can imagine how tense and volatile the situation was. Of course, this was tragic for everyone. Everyone prefers peace. The perception that these were the biggest riots ever is actually misinformation. If you review the data from before 2002, you will see that Gujarat faced frequent riots. Curfews were constantly being imposed somewhere. Communal violence could erupt over trivial issues, like kite flying contests or even minor bicycle collisions. Before 2002, Gujarat witnessed over 250 significant riots. The riots in 1969 lasted nearly six months. So there was a long history, long before I was in the picture. But that one tragic incident in 2002 became a sparking point, leading some people towards violence. Yet, the judiciary thoroughly investigated the matter. At that time, our political opponents were in power, and naturally they wanted all allegations against us to stick. Despite their relentless efforts, the judiciary analyzed the situation meticulously twice and ultimately found us completely innocent. Those who were truly responsible have faced justice from the courts. But the most important thing is, in Gujarat, where riots used to happen some way or the other every year, but after 2002, in 22 years, there hasn't been a single major riot in Gujarat. Gujarat remains completely peaceful. Our approach has always been to avoid World Bank politics. Instead, our mantra has been, together with everyone, development for all, trust from all, and efforts by everyone. We've shifted away from the politics of appeasement to the politics of aspiration. Because of this, anyone who wishes to contribute joins us willingly. We've continuously strived to turn Gujarat into a well-developed state. And today, Gujarat is actively contributing toward building a developed India as well.

### **Lex Fridman**

A lot of people love you. I've got to hear from a lot of them. But there is also people who criticize you, including from the media. And folks in the media have criticized you over this 2002 Gujarat riots. What's your relationship like with criticism? How do you deal with critics? How do you deal with criticism coming from the media or in your own inner circle or just in your own life?

### **Narendra Modi**

Look, regarding what you said about criticism and how I deal with it, if I had to summarize in one sentence, I welcome it. I have a strong belief that criticism is the soul of democracy. If democracy truly runs in your veins, you must embrace it. In our scriptures it's said, always

keep your critics close. Critics should be your nearest companions, because through genuine criticism, you can improve quickly, and work democratically with better insights. In fact, I believe we should have more criticism and it should be sharp and well-informed. But my real complaint is that nowadays what we see isn't real criticism. Genuine criticism requires thorough study, in-depth research and careful analysis. It demands finding the truth from falsehoods. Today, people look for shortcuts, avoid proper research and skip deep analysis. Instead of identifying genuine weaknesses, they jump straight to accusations. There's a big difference between allegations and criticism. The references you're giving, they are allegations, not criticism. For a strong democracy, genuine criticism is necessary. Allegations benefit no one, they just cause unnecessary conflicts. That's why I always welcome criticism openly. And whenever false accusations arise, I calmly continue serving my country with complete dedication.

### **Lex Fridman**

Yeah, the thing you speak of is very important to me because I admire great journalism. And unfortunately, in modern day, a lot of journalists seek clickbait headlines, make accusations, because they operate under incentive, because they want the headline, the cheap shot. I think there is room and desire and hunger for great journalists, and that requires deep understanding. And it saddens me how often... I don't think I'm very good at this, but one of the reasons I really wanted to talk to you is because I don't see enough high effort, deep dive research. I don't know how many books I've read. I've read a lot in preparing, just to experience, just to try to understand. It requires a lot of preparation, a lot of work, and I would love to see great journalists do that more. And from that place, you can criticize. From that place, you can really investigate the complexity of a situation, of people in power; their strengths, their flaws, the mistakes they have made. But that requires great, great, great preparation. So I wish there was more of that, of great journalism.

### **Narendra Modi**

Yes. Clear, well-directed and specific criticism genuinely helps in the process of effective policymaking. It leads to a clear-cut policy vision. I specifically pay close attention to such constructive criticism. In fact, I actively welcome it. Regarding your point about journalistic headlines, if someone's attracted by catchy headlines or plays with words, I honestly don't mind that much. But when there's a deliberate agenda behind the actions and the truth is deliberately ignored, that can cause damage that lasts for decades. If someone focuses on pleasing their readers or viewers with attractive headlines, maybe we can compromise a little. But if there's a hidden motive, or if things are intentionally twisted to serve an agenda, that's a serious issue worth worrying about.

### **Lex Fridman**

And in that, the truth suffers, I think.

**Narendra Modi**

I remember once in London, I was invited to give a speech at an event organized by a Gujarati newspaper there. So during my speech, I casually said, since it was an event attended by journalists, "What kind of journalism should we have? Should it be like a fly or a bee?" I explained, "A fly sits on dirt and spreads the dirt around, but a bee lands on flowers, collects nectar, and then shares that sweetness everywhere. Yet if something wrong occurs, the bee can sting so powerfully that you'd have to hide your face for three days straight." However, some people selectively picked up just half of my analogy and created a huge controversy out of it. Honestly, was I being negative about anyone? Not at all. I was simply highlighting the incredible strength of a bee, that even its small sting can leave such an impact that can make someone hide their face for days. You can't show your face. That's the power journalism should have. But unfortunately, some people prefer the fly approach instead.

**Lex Fridman**

I now have a new life goal of becoming the bee. You mentioned democracy, and not knowing much about government until 2002, but from 2002 to today, you won eight elections that I could count. So many of the elections, over 800 million people vote in India. What does it take to win an election like that, and to win an election of 1.4 billion people where you get to represent those people, the biggest democracy in the world?

**Narendra Modi**

Well, I've been actively involved in politics for years. Before stepping into active politics, my focus was primarily on organizational work. This also included managing elections and strategizing campaigns, so that was where I dedicated my time. For 24 years, the people of Gujarat and India have placed their trust in me to lead with unwavering dedication and a deep sense of duty. I try to fulfill the sacred duty entrusted to me by the people I revere as divine. I remain committed to honoring their trust, ensuring it never falters. And they see me for what I truly am. My government is committed to ensuring welfare schemes reach every citizen. Every scheme must reach its intended beneficiaries. Every beneficiary must be treated equally. No one should face discrimination on caste, creed, faith, wealth, or ideology. We must strive to ensure the well-being and prosperity of everyone. This way, even those not directly benefiting, never feel left out or treated unfairly. They find comfort in knowing they too will benefit in due course. This fosters a deep sense of trust, and trust is the cornerstone of my governance model. Secondly, my governance flows beyond the ebb and flow of elections. My governance is rooted in the people, not the polls. It is committed to the well-being of my citizens and the greater good of the nation. As you may know, I had once set out on a quest for spiritual awakening, so now I revere my nation as the Divine itself, and I now revere the people as a manifestation of the Divine. Like a devoted priest, my heart is set on serving the people. I don't distance myself from the people. I live among them as one of them. And I tell everyone I work with, if you work hard, I will work harder. People see this and it builds trust. Besides, I have no conflicts of interest. I have no friends

or relatives who stand to gain from the position I hold. The common man appreciates this lack of vested interests, and that's probably just one reason why. Moreover, I come from a party with millions of dedicated volunteers. Volunteers who are completely devoted to the welfare of India and its citizens. They have had no stake whatsoever in politics. They've held no title, nor strayed where influence holds sway. My party is blessed with millions of volunteers who work tirelessly. I am proud to belong to the world's largest political party, and it's not like my party has been around forever. It reflects the hard work of millions of volunteers. Their selfless service is widely recognized and valued by the community. It fortifies people's trust in the BJP, echoed in the election results. I never tallied our election triumphs, but we have had people's blessings.

### **Lex Fridman**

I was wondering if you could speak to the incredible logistics, that blew my mind, of running the elections in India. So there's a lot of interesting anecdotes that arise, for example, that no voter should be more than two kilometers away from a polling station. The result of that is you have these stories, of voting machines having to be carried to remote regions of India, is really incredible. Just every single voter counts, and the machinery of having 600 plus million people vote. Is there some anecdote you could speak to that is particularly impressive to you? Or maybe you could speak generally to the logistics of what it makes to run an election that big, a democracy that big.

### **Narendra Modi**

First and foremost, I am truly grateful for your insightful question. Anyone who believes in democracy should listen to what I'm about to share with you. We often discuss election results, but all the behind the scenes work is overlooked. Let's take the recently concluded 2024 general elections as an example. There were 980 million registered voters. Each of those voters had a registered ID, and all the necessary details in a vast database. And this number is twice the entire population of North America. It even surpasses the total population of the entire European Union. Out of the 980 million registered voters, 646 million people ventured out, and braved the intense heat of May, determined to cast their votes. Temperatures soared to 40 degrees in some areas, yet they chose to go, and the size of this voter base is double the population of the United States. We had more than a million polling booths. Can you fathom all the manpower involved in this? My country has more than 2,500 registered political parties. This staggering figure, with such a vast array of political parties, has the power to leave the entire world in awe. My country has more than 900 round-the-clock news channels. There are over 5,000 newspapers published daily. They each play a role in upholding democracy in their own way. Even the humblest villagers here embrace technology with remarkable swiftness. While some other countries take months to declare election results, we announced the results within a day, despite the mind-boggling number of voters. And you were spot on in saying that even the remotest villages have polling stations. We even use helicopters to transport polling stations. I believe Arunachal Pradesh has the highest altitude polling booth on record. In Gujarat, a

polling booth was set up in the Gir Forest for just one voter, who was in the middle of nowhere, but we ensured a polling booth was set up for them. All I mean to say... .. ensure the polling booth was set up for them. All I mean to say is that we truly leave no stone unturned in our unwavering commitment to strengthening democracy, ensuring that we are always fully prepared and election ready no matter the circumstances. I firmly believe that India's Election Commission sets a global standard as a benchmark for conducting free and fair elections. It is the Apex decision-maker. This in itself is such a remarkable story that the world's top universities should consider it a case study. They should analyze the management behind it as a valuable learning example. Given the sheer number of voters, can you truly grasp the immense depth of political awareness? All of this will make for an excellent case study for the younger generation worldwide.

### **Lex Fridman**

To me, I love democracy. This is one of the main reasons I love the United States, but there's just nothing quite as beautiful as democracy when it functions in India. Like you said, 900 million people registered to vote. It really is a case study. It's beautiful to see that many people come together willingly, passionately casting a vote for some person to represent them like they're putting their heart in that. It's really important for a person to feel like their voice is going to be heard. It's beautiful. Speaking of which, you are loved by a lot of people. You are one of the most powerful humans in the world. Do you sometimes think about whether this much power has a corrupting effect on your mind, especially across the many years that you've been in power?

### **Narendra Modi**

Well, I don't think the word powerful quite reflects the journey of my life. I can never claim to be powerful. For all I am is a humble servant, I even identify myself as not the Prime Minister, but the prime servant, and service is the guiding principle of my work ethic. As far as power is concerned, it is something I have never bothered about. I entered politics not to play power games, but to serve. Rather than seeking power, I stay committed to doing and getting work done. I am more focused on productivity than power. I have always dedicated myself to serving the people. I have always devoted myself to bringing about a positive change in their lives.

### **Lex Fridman**

Like you mentioned, you work a lot. You give your whole soul to your work. Do you ever get lonely?

### **Narendra Modi**

Look, I never experience loneliness because I am an ardent believer in the philosophy of one plus one, and this philosophy of one plus one is aligned with my moral compass, and whenever I am asked to elaborate on this outlook, I say, the first one represents Modi and the other one represents the Almighty. I am never alone for he is always there to keep me

company. This is just how I function. Having wholeheartedly embraced the ideals of Swami Vivekananda, I firmly believe that service to mankind is service to God. For me, the nation itself is divine and mankind is a reflection of the divine. I walk this path with the conviction that serving the people is serving the divine. That's why the very notion of struggling with loneliness has never even remotely crossed my mind. Like at the time of pandemic, with the lockdown and traveling restrictions in place, I came up with a way to make the most of my time. I designed a governance model that operated seamlessly through videoconferencing. I kept myself occupied with remote work and virtual meetings. Another thing I did was to connect with the people I had worked with throughout my life. Among my party's volunteers nationwide, I made a list of those who were 70 and older. Some of the volunteers had very humble beginnings and came from very modest backgrounds. I personally called every volunteer aged 70 and above. I made it a point to inquire about their health and their family's well-being. I inquired about how their area was coping. I asked these questions to make sure they were doing well. This allowed me to build rapport with them, and we would go down the memory lane. They were touched that the Prime Minister would check on them in the pandemic. I made around 40 calls every day without fail. I carried on with this throughout the pandemic. It gave me the chance to reconnect and relive old memories with familiar faces. Loneliness is never a concern for me, as I always find ways to stay engaged, and I have long been at peace with myself. The time I spent in the Himalayas have helped me develop this.

### **Lex Fridman**

I've heard from many people that you are the hardest worker they know. What's your philosophy behind that? Maybe you put in crazy hours every single day. Do you ever get tired? What's your source of strength and perseverance through all of that?

### **Narendra Modi**

Look, first of all, I don't believe I'm the only one working. I look at the people around me and always think these people work harder than I do. When I think about farmers, I realize how hard they work. They toil and sweat under the open sky day after day. When I look at our country's soldiers, I think about how many hours someone spends working tirelessly in snow, deserts, or even underwater day and night. When I see a laborer, I think about how hard they're working. I always think about how hard our mothers and sisters work in every family for the happiness of the family. They're the first to wake up and the last to go to bed, taking care of everyone in the family, while also managing social responsibilities. Thinking of all this, I'm in awe of how hard people work. So I think, "How can I sleep? How can I relax?" So naturally the motivation is right in front of my eyes. Those very things around me keep me motivated. Secondly, my responsibilities keep pushing me forward. The responsibilities entrusted to me by my fellow citizens always remind me that I'm not here to enjoy privileges. I will always give it my absolute best. Perhaps there are a couple of things I may not accomplish, but there will never be a lack of effort or hard work from me. When I was campaigning in 2014, I had made a promise first in Gujarat and later across India. I promised

my fellow citizens that I will never fall behind in hard work for my country. Secondly, I promised I would never act with bad intentions, and thirdly, I vowed I'd never do anything for personal gain. Today it's been 24 years. For such a long period, the people have entrusted me as head of government. I've continuously held myself to these three standards, and I still live by them today. My inspiration comes from serving 1.4 billion people from understanding and fulfilling their aspirations and addressing their needs. I'm always determined to do as much as I can, work as hard as possible. Even today, my energy remains just as strong.

### **Lex Fridman**

Me as an engineer, as a person who loves mathematics, I have to ask Srinivasa Ramanujan is an Indian mathematician from a century ago. He's widely considered to be one of the greatest mathematicians of all time. Self-taught, grew up in poverty. You have often spoken about him. What do you find inspiring about him?

### **Narendra Modi**

Look, I deeply respect him, and everyone in my country respects him as well, because I strongly believe there's a deep connection between science and spirituality. If you closely observe many scientifically advanced minds, you'll find they're often spiritually advanced too. They're not disconnected from spirituality. Srinivasa Ramanujan once said that his mathematical ideas came from the goddess he worshiped, meaning ideas emerge from spiritual discipline, and discipline is more than just hard work. It means fully devoting yourself to a task and completely immersing yourself into it so much that you become one with your work. You see, the more open we are to new and different sources of knowledge, the more new ideas we'll have. I think it's important for us to clearly understand the difference between information and knowledge. Some people mistakenly confuse information with knowledge, carrying around large amounts of information, but I don't believe information alone equals knowledge. Knowledge is something deeper. It gradually evolves through processing, reflection and understanding. Recognizing this difference is important in how we handle both.

### **Lex Fridman**

You have a reputation for being a decisive leader. So can you walk me through on this topic of ideas, how you make decisions? What's your process? So for instance, when facing a high stakes choice with no clear precedence, a lot of uncertainty, having to balance input, how do you make decisions?

### **Narendra Modi**

There are many factors to my decision making. First, I'm perhaps the only politician in India who has stayed overnight in around 85 to 90% of the districts across the country. This was before my current role. I used to travel extensively. I learned a lot from those experiences. They gave me firsthand knowledge of the ground realities and grassroots level issues, not something asked or heard or learned merely from books. Secondly, from a governance

perspective, I carry no baggage of any kind. I don't carry any baggage that weighs me down or forces me to act a certain way. Thirdly, I have a simple yardstick for decisions. My country first. I always question if what I'm doing harms my nation in any way. Additionally, Mahatma Gandhi once said that, if you're ever unsure when making a decision, think of the poorest person's face. Remember them and ask yourself, "Will this help them?" Then your decision will be right. That wisdom always guides me, remembering ordinary citizens and considering how my actions affect them. Another factor in my approach is that I'm very well-connected in my administration. My officials know this well and probably feel overwhelmed by it, by the fact that my information channels are numerous and are very active. Because of that, I receive lots of insights from various sources. So when someone comes to brief me, that's not my only source of information. I always have additional perspectives available to me. Another thing, I maintain a learner's mindset. Suppose I'm not familiar with something and an official explains it to me. I approach them like a student and ask, "Can you clarify this? How does it work? Then what happens next and how?" Whenever I have different information, I deliberately play devil's advocate and ask challenging questions. I thoroughly analyze the issue from multiple angles, hoping that careful evaluation will yield something valuable. Then once I converge toward a decision or action that is worth taking, I share the idea informally with like-minded people just to gauge their reactions and see how they respond, gathering insights and feedback before moving forward, until finally, I have a strong conviction that my decision is right. This entire decision-making process doesn't actually take much time. My speed is very fast. Let me share an example. How did I make decisions during COVID? I had Nobel Prize winners advising me, giving countless economic examples from around the world. They'd say, "This country is doing this, that country did that. You should do it too." Renowned economists constantly bombarded me with suggestions. Political parties pressured me relentlessly, urging me to spend huge amounts of money, but I didn't act immediately. I paused and reflected. What exactly should I do? Then considering the unique conditions of my own country, I made a clear decision. I wouldn't let the poor sleep hungry. I wouldn't allow social tensions to arise over basic daily needs. These core principles guided my approach. The entire world was in lockdown. Global economies were collapsing. Everyone pressured me to empty the treasury, print more currency and flood money everywhere, but I decided that this was not the right economic route to follow. And so instead, the path I chose, after carefully listening to experts, understanding their opinions without opposing them and combining their advice with my own country's situation and my personal experiences, created a system that worked effectively. As a result, when the whole world suffered from severe inflation immediately after COVID, India did not. Today, my country is steadily advancing at a rapid pace, emerging as one of the fastest growing major economies in the world. The main reason is that during that crisis, with patience and discipline, I resisted the temptation to apply every global theory blindly. We didn't worry about what newspapers would say, whether they'd praise or criticize. Ignoring all that, I stayed focused on basic fundamentals, and by doing so, we succeeded and kept moving ahead. So ultimately, my economy benefited as well. My approach has always been to stay focused on these



fundamentals. Another strength is my risk-taking capacity. I don't worry about potential losses for myself. If something is right for my country, for the people, I'm always prepared to take the risk. Secondly, I take ownership of my decisions. If something goes wrong, I don't ship blame to others. I stand up, take responsibility, and own the outcome. When you take ownership, your team also becomes deeply committed. They know this person won't let us down, won't abandon us. He'll always stand with us because they see I'm making honest decisions, not for myself, but for the nation. I've openly told the country from the start, I'm human. I can make mistakes, but I won't act with bad intentions. People remember those words clearly. Even if something doesn't go as planned, they trust that Modi's intentions were right. They think he probably meant to do something good even if it didn't work out. So society sees and accepts me just as I am.

**Lex Fridman**

You gave a powerful speech on AI a few weeks ago at the AI Summit in France. In it you spoke about the talent pool for AI engineers in India. I think it's probably one of the biggest pools of brilliant engineers in the world. So how can India become the leader in the space of AI? Currently lags behind the United States. What does it take for India to start winning and leading the world in AI?

**Narendra Modi**

One thing I'm about to say might sound strong, and it may even upset some people, but since you've asked, I'll speak openly from my heart. No matter what the world does with AI, it will remain incomplete without India. I'm making this statement very responsibly. Tell me, you've heard my speech at the AI Summit in Paris on global cooperation. What do you think? Can anyone develop AI entirely on their own? What is your perspective on this?

**Lex Fridman**

You gave, actually, in your speech a brilliant example of the positive impact of AI and the limitations of AI. I think the example you gave is when you ask it to generate an image of a person writing with their left hand-

**Narendra Modi**

Left hand.

**Lex Fridman**

... it's always going to generate a person writing with their right hand. So in that way, the West creating an AI system where India is not part of that process is always going to generate the person with the right hand is an essential part of what the world is historically, but especially in the 21st century.

**Narendra Modi**

I agree. I believe AI development is fundamentally a collaboration. Everyone involved supports one another through shared experiences and learning. India isn't just developing theoretical AI models. It is actively working on and bringing to life AI-driven applications for very specific use cases to ensure that GPU access is available to every section of society. We have already created a unique marketplace-based model to ensure its broad accessibility. A significant mindset shift is taking place in India, though historical influences, traditional government procedures or the lack of strong support infrastructure made us appear as lagging behind to others. Take 5G for example. The world initially believed we were far behind, but once we started, we became the fastest nation globally to roll out comprehensive 5G networks. Recently, an American company executive visited me and shared his experiences about this very fact. He told me that if I were to advertise in the US for engineers, I would only receive enough applicants to fill a single room at best. But if I do the same in India, even a football field wouldn't be enough to hold them. This indicates that India has access to an extraordinarily vast pool of talent, and that's our greatest strength. After all, artificial intelligence is fundamentally powered, shaped, and guided by human intelligence. Without genuine human intelligence, AI can't thrive or progress sustainably, and that real intelligence exists abundantly in India's youth and talent pool, and I believe that's our greatest asset.

**Lex Fridman**

But also if you look, many of the top tech leaders, first of all, tech talent, but tech leaders in the US are of Indian origin, Sundar Pichai, Satya Nadella, Aravind Srinivas. You've met with some of them. What spirit of their Indian origins do you think they carry in them that enables them to be so successful?

**Narendra Modi**

Look, Indian culture emphasizes that there should be equal respect for the place where you're born and the place where you work. There should be no difference. As much as there is dedication to the land of birth, there should be the same sense of dedication to the land of work. You should always give your best wherever you are. Because of these rich cultural values, every Indian strives to give their best effort, regardless of their role or position. They don't wait until they're in senior roles, even in smaller roles. Secondly, they never get involved in anything questionable or unethical. They tend to remain dedicated to what's right and ethical. Their nature is collaborative. They easily get along with others, eventually for success. Just having knowledge isn't enough. The ability to work effectively as part of a team matters significantly more. Understanding people and harnessing their abilities is an incredibly valuable skill. Generally, people raised in India, especially those coming from joint families and brought up in an open society, find it easier to lead complex tasks and large teams effectively. That's why today, in major corporations across the globe, you'll find Indians holding key leadership positions. The problem-solving abilities, along with the analytical thinking of Indian professionals are truly exceptional. I believe this capability is so

strong, it makes Indians globally competitive and extremely valuable on the international stage. This is the reason why in fields like innovation, entrepreneurship, startups and boardrooms, you'll find Indians achieving extraordinary results everywhere. Take our space sector, for example. Previously, it was entirely government-controlled, but just a couple of years ago, I opened it up to the private sector, and now we already have 200 startups working in space technology. Moreover, our missions like Chandrayaan are extremely cost-effective. India's Chandrayaan mission costs less than what Hollywood spends making a single blockbuster film. So when the world sees how cost-effective our work is, they naturally think why not partner with India? This automatically generates respect for Indian talent globally. I believe this is a hallmark of our civilizational ethos.

**Lex Fridman**

You spoke about this human intelligence. Do you worry that AI, artificial intelligence, will replace us humans?

**Narendra Modi**

It's true that in every era, a competitive atmosphere was created between technology and humanity. At times, it was even portrayed as conflict. It was often portrayed as if technology would challenge human existence itself. But every time, as technology advanced, humans adapted and stayed a step ahead. It has always been the case. After all, it is humans who find the best ways to use technology to their advantage. I believe that with AI, humans are now being forced to reflect on what it truly means to be human. This is the real power of AI. Because of the way AI functions, it has challenged how we perceive work itself. But human imagination is the fuel. AI can create many things based on that, and in the future it may achieve even more. Still, I firmly believe that no technology can ever replace the boundless creativity and imagination of the human mind.

**Lex Fridman**

I agree with you. It does make me and a lot of people wonder what makes humans special because it seems that there's a lot that makes humans special. The imagination, the creativity, the consciousness, the ability to be afraid, to love, to dream, to think outside of the box, outside of the box of the box of the box, take risks, all of those things.

**Narendra Modi**

Now, look, humans have an innate ability to care for each other, the natural tendency to be concerned about one another. Now, can someone tell me, is AI capable of this?

**Lex Fridman**

This is one of the big open questions of the 21st century. Every year you host the Pariksha Pe Charcha where you interact directly with young students and give them advice on how to prepare for exams. I watched a bunch of them. So you give advice on how to succeed in exams, how to manage stress, all those kinds of things. Can you explain at a high level the

different exams that students in India need to take in their education journey and why it's so stressful?

### **Narendra Modi**

By and large, a strange mindset has developed in society today. Even schools measure their success by students' rankings. Families too feel pride when their child achieves a high rank because they believe it improves their educational and social status. This mentality has resulted in increased pressure on children. Kids also began feeling that their entire lives depend on 10th and 12th grade exams. We've introduced significant changes in our new education policy to address this issue. But until those changes take effect on the ground, I feel another responsibility. If our children face challenges, it's my duty to listen to them, understand them, and ease their burden. In a way, when I conduct Pariksha Pe Charcha, I get insights directly from the students, understand their parents' mindset, as well as the perspectives of people in the educational field. So these discussions don't just benefit the students. They benefit me too. Exams are valuable for assessing knowledge in a specific domain, but they can't become the sole measure of someone's overall potential. Many people may not score high academically, yet can hit a century in cricket because that's where their true strength lies. When the focus shifts to actual learning, scores tend to naturally improve. I remember when I was a student, I had a teacher whose learning techniques still greatly appeal to me today. He would give us children specific instructions. To one child he would say, "Tomorrow, bring exactly 10 chickpeas from home." To another, he might request, "Bring 15 grains of rice. No more. No less." A third child could be told, "Bring 21 mung beans. Precisely that number." Different students got different quantities and varieties. So each child would think, "I need to get exactly 10." Counting them at home helped them memorize numbers naturally. Then they'd learn what chickpeas were, and after returning to school, they'd pool it all. The teacher would then ask, "Take out 10 chickpeas, three chickpeas, two mung beans—" ... take out 10 chickpeas, three chickpeas, two mung beans. This way children learned math and could identify chickpeas and mung beans effortlessly. I'm talking about early childhood education here. Such learning techniques educate children without burdening them, and we've incorporated similar methods into our new education policy. When I was in school, I observed one of my teachers using an innovative idea. On his very first day, he placed a diary on the table and said, "Whoever arrives earliest each morning will write one sentence in this diary along with their name." The next student would then need to write a related sentence. At first, I'd rush to school very early every day. Why? So that I could write the first sentence. I once wrote something like, "Today's sunrise was magnificent. It filled me with energy." I'd write my name and whoever arrived after me had to write something connected to the sunrise as well. After a few days, I realized my creativity wasn't improving much from this. Why? Because I'd arrived with the fixed thought already in mind and simply write it down. So I decided I'd start going last instead. What happened then was that I'd read what others had written first and then try to give my very best. As a result, my creativity began to improve even more. Sometimes teachers do these small simple activities that greatly impact your life. These experiences

combined with my own background in organizational work, made human resource development a key area of focus for me. That's why I engage with children through events once or twice each year and over time, these efforts have resulted in a book that's benefiting thousands of children serving as a valuable reference for them.

**Lex Fridman**

Can you speak a little bit more by way of advice to students of how to be successful on their path in their career, how to find the career and how to find success in India and just to all the people across the world who find inspiration in your words?

**Narendra Modi**

I believe that whatever task you get, if you perform that task with complete dedication and sincerity, they inevitably become an expert sooner or later, and their enhanced capabilities open doors to success. While working, one must continually strive to improve their skills and should never underestimate their ability to learn. When someone constantly neglects their learning ability, they limit their growth, but those who look beyond their tasks and observe what others around them are doing, their capacity can double or even triple. To young people I'd say this clearly, there's no need to feel discouraged. There's certainly some task out there destined just for you. Don't worry. Focus on enhancing your skills and opportunities will come. You may think, "I wanted to be a doctor, but became a teacher. My life is wasted." Thinking like that won't help you at all. All right, you didn't become a doctor, but as a teacher, you can shape 100 doctors. If you had become a doctor, you'd serve only your patients. But now, as a teacher, you can inspire students to fulfill their dreams of becoming doctors so that both you and your students can together serve millions of patients. Then he gains a new perspective on life. "I couldn't become a doctor so I was miserable and I was unhappy being a teacher, but now I realize as a teacher, I can create doctors." Connecting your life to a greater purpose brings a sense of inspiration and meaning. I have always believed that God has given everyone unique capabilities. Never lose faith in your own abilities. You should always maintain trust in your own abilities. Keep believing in yourself and trust that when the opportunity comes, you'll perform and you'll succeed. That confidence makes a person deliver results.

**Lex Fridman**

How do those students deal with stress, with struggle, with difficulties along that path?

**Narendra Modi**

Parents must first understand that life is not just about taking exams. Families should understand that their children aren't trophies meant to be displayed or models to show off in society. It's not about saying, "Look, my kid scores so high." Parents really need to stop using their kids just as status symbols. Secondly, students should always keep themselves well-prepared beforehand. Only then can they appear for exams feeling stress-free and confident. They should have complete trust in themselves and their abilities. Sometimes I

see students panic over the smallest issues during exams. They take papers or other things, and when their pen suddenly stops working causing anxiety, sometimes they feel uneasy thinking, "Oh no, I don't like sitting next to this person." If the bench wobbles, their whole attention goes there, indicating self-doubt. Those lacking confidence constantly keep looking for distractions. But if you are confident and have genuinely worked hard, just take a minute, take some deep breaths, relax your mind and refocus your attention calmly. Slowly read through the questions and allocate your time systematically. "I have this amount of time I'll dedicate these minutes per question." In my experience, students who regularly practice writing test papers can easily overcome such situations without any trouble at all.

### **Lex Fridman**

And you said, "Always focus on learning." What's your approach to learning? What advice can you give on how to learn best, not just when you're young, throughout your life?

### **Narendra Modi**

Let me share a personal example with you. I used to learn a lot from reading, but these days, more and more, I learn by being fully present. Whenever I meet someone, I am fully present in the moment. I give them my full attention. This complete focus allows me to grasp new concepts quickly. When I'm with you, I'm fully present, grounded in the moment. No calls or messages can pull me away from this moment with you. I am fully present focused on the here and now. That's why I always believe this is a habit everyone should embrace. It will sharpen your mind and improve your learning ability. Besides, knowledge alone cannot light the way. You must immerse yourself in the flow of practice. You cannot master driving merely by reading the life stories of great drivers. You must get behind the wheel and take the road yourself. You must dare to take risks. You can never master the road if fear of accident or death holds you back. I truly believe that those who live in the present are the ones who live their life to the fullest. That's because they know that every moment lived has already slipped into the past. So you must embrace the moment before it fades into the past. Otherwise, chasing the future only turns the present into the past. It's not a trade worth making. Most people stress so much about the future that their present quietly slips away. Before they know it the moment has already faded into the past.

### **Lex Fridman**

Yeah, I've heard a lot of stories of you having meetings with people and it's usually all the distractions, there's no distractions. It's just two human beings just like this and just focused on the moment and the interaction. That's a really beautiful thing. And today really is a gift that you would give that focus to me, so thank you. Let me ask maybe a difficult, maybe a human question. Do you contemplate your mortality? Are you afraid of death?

### **Narendra Modi**

Can I ask you a question instead?

**Lex Fridman**

Sure.

**Narendra Modi**

I have a very interesting question. Life and death are two sides of a coin, but which of the two is more certain?

**Lex Fridman**

Death.

**Narendra Modi**

Exactly. Now, with that out of the way, we know for a fact that life itself is a whispered promise of death, and yet life is also destined to flourish. So again, in the dance of life and death, only death is certain, so why fear what is certain? That's why you must embrace life instead of fretting over death. That's how life will evolve and flourish, for it is uncertain. That's why you must commit to enriching, refining and elevating your life so you can live fully and with a purpose before death comes knocking. That's why you must let go of the fear of death. After all, death is inevitable and there's no use worrying about when it will arrive. It will arrive when it's meant to.

**Lex Fridman**

What gives you hope about the future? Not just of India, but all of human civilization, all of us humans here on earth?

**Narendra Modi**

Well, I am an optimist at heart. Pessimism and negativity are simply not ingrained in my mindset. They don't align with the way I think. That's why I always gravitate toward the bright side instead. If we take a moment to reflect on the history of mankind, we see the incredible crisis humans have overcome with resilience and strength. We also see the major changes humanity has embraced to evolve with the times, and this continuous transformation has carried on for millennia. In every era, it is in human nature to adapt to the ever-flowing current of change. And while our progress has gone through cycles of ups and downs, it is those people who can break free from the constraints of these historical cycles and outdated thinking patterns. It is they who can help humanity achieve extraordinary positive breakthroughs with an unshackled speed and grace transcending the limitations of the old way of doing things by embracing change.

**Lex Fridman**

In this moment, I was wondering if you could guide me perhaps through a Hindu prayer or meditation for a few moments. I learned, I'm trying to learn the Gayatri Mantra. In my fast I was trying to do the chants. Perhaps I could try chanting. You could tell me about the importance of this mantra and maybe others in your life, in your spirituality? Should I try?

**Narendra Modi**

Yes, please.

**Lex Fridman**

[foreign language 02:58:34]. How did I do? It's okay?

**Narendra Modi**

You did great. [foreign language 02:58:58]. This mantra is dedicated to the radiant power of the sun and is considered a powerful tool for spiritual enlightenment. Many mantras in Hindu philosophy are deeply intertwined in some intricate and interesting ways with science and nature, each woven into different facets of life. Chanting mantras on a daily basis brings profound and lasting benefits.

**Lex Fridman**

In your own spirituality and your quiet moments, when you are with God, where does your mind go? What role do mantras play when you're fasting, when you're just alone with yourself?

**Narendra Modi**

The word meditation has been overused to the point that it feels like a cliché. In Indian languages, we usually refer to it as dhyān. If I associate dhyān to meditation, it might seem burdensome to some. One might think, "This is too difficult. I'm not an enlightened being." But it's not rocket science. It just means freeing yourself from distraction. For example, even when you're in class, your mind wanders to recess. All you think about is lunch, not the lesson. Meditation is simply being present in the moment. I recall an incident from my time living in the Himalayas. There I encountered this wise sage. He taught me a simple practical technique. It was nothing spiritual. There are several little streams in the Himalayas. He positioned a large leaf to catch water from one of those streams and placed an upside down bowl below so water would drip rhythmically from the leaf onto the bowl. He asked me to focus only on the dripping water, ignoring all other sounds. "Ignore the chirping birds and the soft rustle of the breeze." He would place the leaf and I would meditate there for hours. I felt my mind slowly tuning into the rhythmic sounds of the water droplets falling onto the bowl like a melody guiding me into deep focus. And it's not like I was chanting mantras or reciting God's name. I like to call it the divine resonance. It was by tuning into that divine resonance that I learned the art of concentration. This practice slowly evolved into meditation. Sometimes you happen to stay at a fancy hotel, you get a lavish, luxurious room. The decor is impeccable and you have been wholeheartedly fasting, but there's a dripping faucet in the bathroom. That faint sound is enough to make a luxurious room feel worthless. At times, we realize the value of concentration in life's inner journey. We come to appreciate the difference a little bit of concentration can make. One very interesting concept comes to mind from our scriptures. Since we spoke about life and death, I would like to quote a mantra, [foreign language 03:03:28]. In other words, all life is part of a complete circle, and



this mantra emphasizes the path to achieve that completeness. Similarly, Hindus never focus solely on individual well-being. [foreign language 03:03:52]. In other words, we wish for the well-being and prosperity of all. [foreign language 03:04:00]. This mantra encompasses the idea of universal well-being and prosperity. And you know how this mantra ends? [foreign language 03:04:13]. Every Hindu mantra ends on the same note. Peace, peace, peace. These ancient and powerful rituals born in India have emerged from thousands of years of the spiritual practice of sages. They connect us to the essence of life.

**Lex Fridman**

[foreign language 03:04:40]. Thank you for this honor. Thank you for this incredible conversation. Thank you for welcoming me to India, and I can't wait to break the fast with some Indian food tomorrow. Thank you so much, Prime Minister. This was an honor.

**Narendra Modi**

I am thankful for the opportunity to have this conversation with you. After fasting for two days I recommend you ease into eating slowly and I hope you reap great benefits from this fasting experience. I've explored several new realms of thought for the first time ever with you today. I had long kept those thoughts tucked away within myself, but today you brought those thoughts to light. I hope [inaudible 03:05:30].

**Lex Fridman**

Thank you.

**Narendra Modi**

I hope your viewers may enjoy this. It was a great pleasure speaking with you. Thank you.

**Lex Fridman**

Thank you. Thank you for listening to this conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. And now, let me ask you some questions and try reflect on and articulate some things I've been thinking about. If you would like to submit questions or get in touch with me for whatever reason, go to [lexfridman.com/contact](https://lexfridman.com/contact). First, let me give a shout out to the amazing team around the Prime Minister. Everyone was super kind, excellent at what they do, efficient, great communication, and just great people all around. And since I spoke English and Prime Minister Modi spoke Hindi, I have to comment on the interpreter who was doing simultaneous interpreting for both of us. She was absolutely amazing. I can't sing her enough praises. From the equipment used to the quality of the translation, to just the human touch of it all. And in general, my travels around Delhi and India revealed to me some early glimpses of what felt like another world, almost like another planet, different culturally from anything I've experienced before. A chaos of human interactions, out there, big dynamic personalities and characters. Obviously, India's composed of many distinct subcultures and Delhi represents just one slice. Much like neither New York or Texas or Iowa alone represent America. They're all different flavors of America. On my visit, I walked

around and rode rickshaws everywhere, just aimlessly wandering the streets, looking to talk to people about life. Of course, like many places on earth, there are always some people, especially those that have something to sell, who will at first see me as a tourist, a foreign traveler, one with some money to spend. Like always, I avoided such shallow interactions and went straight past the small talk to the meaningful conversations. Shooting the shit about what they love, what they fear, what kind of hardship and triumph they've experienced in their lives. I think the cool thing about people anywhere on earth is they quickly do see the real you past the facades that strangers put up for each other, if you're vulnerable and honest enough to let them. And I tried to do just that and I should say that for the most part, everyone was super kind in the genuine human way. Even when they didn't speak English, it was always easy to understand. Probably more than any other peoples I've interacted with in India, people's eyes, faces, body language, all communicate a lot of information, a lot of emotion, not reserved at all. When I traveled through Eastern Europe, for example, in contrast, reading a person is much tougher. The meme does have some truth to it. There's often a protective layer between the heart of the person and the outside world. In India, it's all there on full display. So I had a lot of epic conversations and interactions as I walked around Delhi for a couple of weeks. In general, on the topic of reading people, I do believe the eyes can often say more than words can. We humans are a fascinating bunch. There really is a deep turbulent ocean behind the surface waves we show the world. In some sense, what I try to do in conversations, on and off the mic, is to get to that depth. Anyway, the few weeks I spent in India were a magical experience. Traffic alone was a wild time, like the world's most difficult test for self-driving cars. It reminded me of watching nature documentary videos of swarms of fish when it's thousands of them swimming around at insane speeds, seemingly in complete chaos. And yet when looking at the big picture of it it all works like a perfectly tuned orchestra. I will, most certainly, travel around India with my friend Paul Rosalie in the near future, maybe with some other friends all around from the north of India to the south. Now, allow me to also comment about one of the books that first drew me toward India and to its deep history of philosophical and spiritual traditions. The book is Siddhartha by Hermann Hesse. I first read most of Hesse's major work as a teenager, but then reread them again through the years. It first found me, Siddhartha, when I was immersed in a very different kind of literature of Dostoevsky, Camus, Kafka, Orwell, Hemingway, Kerouac, Steinbeck and so on. Many of these explore the same human condition that puzzled me when I was a young man and still puzzles me today, even more so. But Siddhartha was my introduction to the Eastern way of looking at these puzzles. It was written by Hermann Hesse. And by the way, please allow me this pronunciation of his last name. I've heard some people say Hesse, but my whole life I've always said Hesse. So, anyway, it was written by Hermann Hesse, a German-Swiss Nobel Prize winning writer during one of the darkest periods of his own life. His marriage was failing, World War I has shattered his pacifist ideals and he suffered from debilitating headaches, insomnia, and depression. During this period, he began psychoanalysis with Carl Jung, which, in part, led him to explore Eastern philosophies as a way to heal his fractured psyche. Hesse immersed himself in translations of ancient Hindu and Buddhist

texts studying the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. And so, the writing of *Siddhartha* was in itself, for him, a journey that paralleled that of the main character in the book. Hesse started writing the book in 1919 and finished three years later experiencing an extensive psychological crisis in the middle. The book follows Siddhartha, a young man in ancient India, as he leaves behind wealth and comfort to search for meaning. You can feel his personal struggle in every page. Siddhartha's restlessness, his dissatisfaction with conventional wisdom, his need to find truth, the direct experience. Again, the book wasn't simply a philosophical exploration for Hesse, it was psychological survival. He was writing his way out of suffering and towards his own enlightenment. I won't go into a deep analysis of the book here, but I will mention two key lessons I took away and carry with me to this day. First lesson comes from the scene in the book that to me is one of the great scenes in all of literature. Siddhartha is sitting by a river just listening, and in that river he hears all of life. All sounds, all voices, all of time, past, present, future, flowing together as one. That scene gave me the experience and the notion that while in some grounded human sense, the linear arrow of time does exist. In another sense, time is a kind of illusion that, in fact, everything exists simultaneously. That our lives are both momentary and eternal. It is hard to describe these ideas with words. I think they must be experienced as personal revelations. I'm reminded of the fish story that David Foster Wallace, another one of my favorite writers, described in a commencement speech 20 years ago. The story goes, "Two young fish are swimming along when they encounter an older fish swimming the opposite way. The older fish nods and says, 'Morning boys, how's the water?' The young fish swim on, and eventually one turns to the other and asks, 'What the hell is water?'" The illusion of the forward progress of time is water in this metaphor. As humans, we're fully immersed in it, but enlightenment, in part, involves being able to step back and get a glimpse at another deeper perspective on reality where all things are inextricably interconnected across both time and space. Another key lesson from the novel that was especially formative to me as a young man was that one should not blindly follow others or learn about the world exclusively through books. But rather forge your own path and thrust yourself into the world where the lessons of life can only be learned by experiencing them directly. And every experience, both positive and negative, mistakes, suffering and even seemingly wasted time is all an essential part of growth. To this point, Hesse draws a distinction between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge can be taught by others. Wisdom can only be gathered through experiencing the full mess of life yourself. In other words, the path to understanding isn't through rejection of the world, but through complete immersion in it. Those are my early steps in seeing the world through the lens of Eastern philosophy. But many of Hesse's books had an impact on me. I would recommend to read *Demian*, when you are younger, *Steppenwolf*, when you are older, *Siddhartha* throughout your life, especially in moments of crisis, and *The Glass Bead Game* if you want to take on Hesse's magnum opus, that rigorously explores the ways the human mind and human civilization can engage in the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and meaning. But *Siddhartha* is the only one I've returned to more than twice. In my own life, when faced with a difficult situation, I often return to the moment in the book when Siddhartha is asked what skills he possesses, and his answer is

simply, "I can think, I can wait, I can fast." Let me elaborate. Indeed, for the first part, "I can think." As Marcus Aurelius said, "The quality of your life is determined by the quality of your thoughts." For the second part, "I can wait." Patience and waiting often is indeed the optimal decision when facing a problem. Time does bring clarity and depth of understanding. For the third part, "I can fast." When needed, being able to live and flourish with less is a prerequisite of being free when the mind, the body, and society all are trying to put you in cages. All right, friends, now sadly, our time together in this episode has come to a close. As always, thank you for being here and thank you for your support through the years. Let me leave you with a few words from the Bhagavad Gita. "He who experiences the unity of life, sees his own self in all beings and all beings in his own self and looks unto everything with an impartial eye." Thank you for listening. I hope to see you next time.