

ROUND3

INTERVIEW WITH NASIR SOBHANI - FULL TRANSCRIPT

- Alex: First off, what was your first experience with anxiety? Tell me a bit that.
- Nas: Yeah, one of my first experiences about anxiety-
- Alex: Do you remember it?
- Nas: Recently so I've been reflecting a lot on anxiety actually and seeking professional help and going to therapy. I've realised that I've had anxiety since I was a kid, but it never actually became evident until I started actually digging in and kind of remember the past that some of the core causes for it. So I mean, I think the very first time that I realised that I was anxious about something was when I heard about one of our family friends and I was nine years old. She basically was just telling me how she ... because she was a kickboxer and she went and jumped in the air to do a roundhouse kick and when she landed wrong and dislocated her knee. And she was telling me how bad that pain was and it was the worst feeling she's ever had in her life and she couldn't ever deal with it. And she was screaming and yelling.
- Nas: And I remember hearing those stories and at the core of me, I started getting so stressed out and I worried because hearing the way she was talking about how hard and how painful it was freaked me out man. I know it sounds crazy, but I mean when you're 10 years old, 9 years old, hearing something like that, it really sent me out. So I remember I went to my mom later on, maybe like a week later, and I was still thinking about, I was like, "Mom, is this going to happen to me?" And then she's like, "No, don't worry, you're fine."
- Nas: So, I mean, I was able to have my anxiety alleviated by my mom's comfort of course. But, I mean, I only realised recently that that was one of my first moments of anxiety because with my anxiety comes a lot of safety seeking behaviours where I have to reassure and make sure things are okay or I'm a little bit worried that something is going to be off or something might happen unless I seek comfort or clearance by either asking or trying to get advice and stuff like that. And I do that to this day. But that was one of the very first times that I feel like I've done that. And that was about 20 some odd years ago. So it starts at a very interesting age and no one really understands how much of an impact that can have on your life.
- Nas: And I think it only really became a problem when I was, I think, 19 years old and I was living in Vanuatu. And that's when they consumed me for about a week. And I had just really, really gone, I think in my head, and I became an introvert

and I couldn't get out of this worry, and this fear, and this thought that had become so snowballed that it just started off merely as a small little spec of thought in my brain and then it became like an absolute mountain of idea or a worry that consumed my life and I couldn't get out of it. And so obviously I was able to get the answers and everything was all good, you know what I mean? So it's crazy how that happened. That was because I was getting tattooed and my very first tattoo in Vanuatu. And the way the tattoo artist ... the way he wanted to test whether or not the needle was working...

Nas: It wasn't really like a regular tattoo machine that you can just use it a shot. These guys use different sewing needles, ink from a pen, and string, and button, and AAA batteries and all that. And to see if that works, he actually just did a quick line on his leg and then without disinfecting anything, without doing anything, he just went straight into my hand. And I was just so naive and young. I didn't realise better at the time. And I was just really excited to get my first tattoo. I was like, "Yeah, whatever." And then he did it and then only a couple months later did it start becoming like a reality. Like, "Oh my God. That's what he did." And people that I would speak to, like the locals obviously, they weren't fully educated on stuff like that and being more of a newer country with a lot of, I think, knowledge yet to come.

Nas: And the places where I was still believing in things like black magic and all that stuff. So I think simply changing the needles and ensuring proper hygiene wasn't a priority. OHNS isn't something that you would have in Vanuatu time. I mean when some of the expats or the people who have been living there for awhile was telling me about how 85% of the country is diagnosed with hepatitis B and I remember the guy he had like, literally his eyes were so yellow and I know one of the symptoms of Hep B is jaundice, which means your liver is just not acting up. All these things, it was just crazy for me. And my mind was going crazy, bro. And, yeah, Then I started convincing myself. I'm like, "Oh my God, I've got it now."

Nas: And all of these things in my mind, just like I said it just ... because someone said one thing about 85% of the country has hepatitis B and it actually made me believe in him. For a solid week I was living in that fear and I was living in thought that I've got it. There was no chance I couldn't have got it. And considering my circumstance and the risk that I had undergone, it's quite high. Luckily being a Canadian citizen, it is mandatory in elementary school to have your Hep B vaccination. So luckily, you know what I mean? That could have saved me from getting it or could have not been a saviour and I would have never gotten it in the first place from that, but I never know really because I don't know if that guy's got it or not. But I mean that was my first real situation where I've had to deal with it.

Nas: But I mean now it's about everything, not just about health. I used to always think it was health anxiety. But it's actually just anxiety and it tries to latch on to anything. So whether it's relationship based, whether it's financial based, whether it's health based, it's just anxiety is being the umbrella and it's trying to just latch onto, I think, any situation that I'm going through in my life to try to take a hold of me. It's only starting to become clear recently that that's the case.

Alex: Before we get into where you're at now, which I'm very interested in as well. At the time when you were 19, how long did it take you to go to a doctor and be like, "Hey, man, I think I have me ..." Did that happen?

Nas: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So remember how I said it was basically like my last month there and then in the place that I was staying, in the village that I was living in, it was near the main port and in the port they had this one small clinic. And, yeah, after like a month, I was just getting more and more worried. And then my last week I was basically handicapped from fear. That's when I was like, "I've got to do it." And then so I took the test and they said it's going to take three days to find out. And so on my third day I basically ... yeah, it just ... that's done. And the last few days I would just spent so worried waiting for them to say you've got it. And then I finally got that test back. He was like, "you're good". And I was just so relieved, man. I had never been more relieved, but I was relieved for that situation alone. But little did I know my anxiety was still so serious that it was just waiting to find something else to get caught up about.

Alex: Why did it take you a month to get the checks?

Nas: Okay. So basically, why did it take me a month? It took me a month mostly because when I was younger I was really dumb. I wasn't really cautious or aware or really conscious about a lot of stuff. I was really carefree and I just went with the flow. So for me something like that didn't really make it a huge impact in my life. Obviously it happened and it took me six months to really get stressed out about it. But it only got stressed out because someone's like, "85% of the country has hep B, why do you do something like that?" Because I was telling them the story of how they tested the machine, like in a joke and laughing about it and then seeing them being serious kind of made me like, "Oh my God." And so I think within that month, I was going from being a little bit, I think, scared to really scared to severely scared.

Nas: And the more I ruminated, the worst it got and the worst it got, the more I started to ruminate. And so I think that's why it took me a month because the process was that long for me to get to that level. Now it won't take me a month. It will take me 24 hours, you know what I mean? Because I'm experienced in my anxiety, you know what I mean?

Alex: Yeah.

Nas: But it was, I mean, at first bro when it was happening, I was thinking I was going crazy. I was thinking all these thoughts and things that people don't really realise when they're first struck with anxiety because it's one of the weirdest feelings in the world because when you get hit with it or, not when you get hit with it, when you really experience it and it's very fresh for you and you don't really understand it, it messes with your mind man, where you start thinking you've got so many different issues, or you've got so many problems, or you've got so many demons or something and something's wrong with you. And yeah man, it's just a really crappy feeling. And anybody who has to go through anxiety, especially in the first few battles or bouts with an anxiety attack, my

heart goes out to them, man, because it's the worst feeling. Anxiety sucks already, but at least when you start having it more regularly, you're able to somewhat understand it. It doesn't make it better, but at least you're aware. Do you know what I mean?

Alex: Yeah.

Nas: Because now when I get it, I don't think I'm going crazy. Although, some of the thoughts can be somewhat insane. Like, "Why are you getting scared about something so simple?" But that's the thing that anxiety is just the master manipulator.

Alex: Do you think anxiety, in your case, happens more when you don't know if something's going to happen? Say, for example, getting hepatitis B or more when you know something is going to happen and you're just waiting for it to happen.

Nas: Well, you know what's funny man? I 100% think it's when I'm uncertain because when I know it's going to happen, like when I'm 100% sure, you know what I mean? I'm going to go to work, or I'm going to be giving a talk, or I'm going to go travel, or I'm doing an episode and all that jazz, somehow my body can go into, "All right, let's do this. It's going to work out." But when I don't know what's going to happen, I don't know what to expect in the sense that I don't know if it's true or not or something's false or not. And like I said, this is health anxiety that went onto relationship anxiety, that went onto financial anxiety to a whole bunch of different things. When it's uncertain, I think that's when I get the anxiety and that's what it is for me, man. I can go right now, bro.

Nas: And if you were telling me, "Nas, we're for doing a streets barber episode in Singapore tomorrow, grab your bags. We don't know what's going to happen, but we're just going to get picked up by an airport by a random guy we don't know what his name is." I'll be like, "Yo, dope. Shotgun." You know what I mean? That's the kind of guy I am. But if someone was to be like, something a little bit different in regards for something that I may get triggered or anxious about, like let's just say, going back to the health thing, I guess, because that's something that we've already discussed.

Nas: But like, "Hey, you might or might not have this thing because of a situation you were in." I'll be like, "Oh my God. Really?" I want to know the answer, until I get tested, until I figure it out. And there's nothing that I can really do about it until I get tested. I feel like if I was to get a certain sickness, for example, I think if I was to get it, I wouldn't be as anxious as if or compared to me not knowing whether I got it or not. You get me?

Alex: Yup. I feel you.

Nas: I feel like when life deals it's cards, I'm pretty resilient, bro, in what I can handle. But I mean, while the cards are getting dealt, that's when I'm like ...

Alex: Yeah. Like shaken.

Nas: Like stress it out, confused, don't know what's happening. It's a very, very weird concept bro.

Alex: So you say that your anxiety has evolved now that you've grown older and you've lived life, but you're still experiencing it. The subject matter changes. But how would you describe the feeling of it? Is it less intense or is it more intense?

Nas: No, it's probably more intense bro.

Alex: More intense now?

Nas: Yeah. I think that's because I haven't nipped it or try to work on it for so long. So the habits, and the insecurities, and the fears, and the thoughts, and the uncertainties, when those become like habitual, it becomes almost an addiction. And once it becomes an addiction, it just keeps happening. And the number of times that it happens compares to the number of times it doesn't happen is so much more than what it used to be. So it's ironic, even though I'm saying my heart goes out to people who are just having anxiety now and they don't know what it's like because it's very, very confusing and they feel like they're going crazy, it's funny that I'm saying that as a person who's actually getting more anxiety than I have in the past.

Nas: But I mean now that I'm actually learning and doing the proper actual signed space, medical based and obviously testimonials from different people with anxiety based, I guess, exercises, I think that it's very ... how do I say, I think it's very helpful and it's allowed me to kind of manage and understand it because anxieties are something you're going to cure. You get me?

Alex: Yeah.

Nas: It's something that you can live with, and it's something you can cope, and it's something you know how to deal with and work with and the more you do that, the better it gets. Everybody in this world, bro, has anxiety. Every single person. Anxiety's a part of human DNA. It's part of the mind. Since we were, I guess cavemen, it's about fight or flight, you know what I mean? Like, "Am I going to stay there or am I going to run away?" And so when something comes up and there's a possible threat, their reaction to that threat is part of human nature. You know what I mean? If something was to happen, we want to deal with it. If there's a threat, we try to deal with it. We want to protect ourselves, you know what I mean?

Nas: And so some people's ability to manage the threat will be stronger than other people who have higher anxiety issues. So people who can manage the threat just are able to better cope with anxiety. And when I started to learn that, it made me feel a lot better and almost a little bit, I don't want to say, normal because I'm not going to say people who have anxiety are not normal, but it's easy to feel like you're not normal when you're scared about everything that happens or certain things that happen. You're just like, "Why can't I be like everyone else?" But you are like everyone else, man. There's just things that

your brain doesn't respond as easily or quick to compared to someone you know who doesn't have higher anxiety about a certain issue.

Alex: Great. In terms of the exercises you are mentioning what has helped you personally? And so yeah, how do you deal with it or what have you seen that has helped manage anxiety-

Nas: Yeah. Yeah. Word. Well, I mean straight up mindfulness, you know what I mean? And mindfulness I used to always think was like sitting, meditating, doing stuff. But mindfulness is just being mindful and what does that mean? Being present and how do you be present? I mean you can literally do so many different things to be present. You can either breathe and just focus on your breath because at that moment you're just breathing and focusing on your breath. You're not going to be focusing on your thoughts that you're anxious about or you could stop and try to listen to all the different sounds because if you're going to be listening to all the different sounds around you, you're going to be listening to what's happening.

Nas: But then you can take it up a notch and you can actually go and do some exercise. You can change your environment because if you're going to get up and get out of that rut of feeling anxious in your thoughts and you're actually like, "All right, I'm going to hit the gym and I'm going to do stuff." And you're really mindful, and present, and aware of the fact that you're at the gym, then you're going to be not focusing so much on your anxious thoughts. Then you can do other stuff like talk to a friend, you can watch a movie, you can go for a walk, you can try to listen to a song. And what I do, bro, is I cut hair.

Nas: When I'm feeling anxious, I love to cut hair because it's a form of mindfulness for me, bro, because I get so involved and I'm passionate about giving someone a haircut that I find that if I really put my energies into focusing on the haircut, man, I feel so much better. But, bro, there are times where my anxiety can actually overpower me in the process of a haircut. But that's because I'm letting my anxiety and my thoughts overpower the fact that I'm kind of be present and aware. And this is something that I love so much, but there's a quote saying that, "When you are mindful that you're not being mindful, that is a form of mindfulness." Isn't that crazy?

Nas: So when you're aware that your thoughts are actually not of the present moment and you're thinking of something else and you actually recognise that, that's a form of mindfulness. You're like, "Oh shoot, there goes my thoughts again." You know what I mean? That's a step. And if you keep doing that over and over, sure enough your brain is going to become stronger, and you're going to recognise things a little bit better, and you'll be able to do it more often than not, and for longer.

Nas: So you can stop and be present for like 10 seconds and then your mind will go away and then you'd be like, "Oh shit, my mind's going away again." And then you can stop and be present for another 20 seconds, and then 20 seconds becomes two minutes, and two minutes becomes 10 minutes. All you're doing is a staying. Someone told me some beautiful thing. They're like saying, "A song

isn't just really good if you like it just because it's good." I know that sounds crazy, the way I explained that, but what I'm trying to say is this, if you're listening to a song yeah and you're like, "Man, this is so good." And you can't say this has never happened to you bro, but I'm pretty sure we've all been able to experience a moment of euphoria where like, "Man, this is such a good song." And you're so happy and it's a feeling you can't really explain. You've got goosebumps, you just feel so elevated, it's a high, you know what I mean? You're just like, "What is it?"

Nas: But why is it that every single person doesn't get the same reaction from that song? The reason is because when that song actually touches you, and you're really involved at that moment, and you're really listening to that song, and nothing else, that is mindfulness because what's happening is, it's not the fact that you love the song, it's the fact that you're so present and you're not thinking of anything else. And that can go with everything else bro, that can go with hanging out with certain people at a certain time having a certain laugh. It's because you're so present. That could be with enjoying a certain meal at a certain time at a certain restaurant, but that's not because of the food it's because you're being so present.

Nas: It could be with a certain loved one. It's not about the person per se, because you're not always that happy. But there are specific times where you're just feeling more happy than other times and that's because you're so present. So it has nothing to do with the externals. It's actually all the internal. It's depending on whether or not and how present you actually are. So if you can be present and embrace every single moments in life, you're always going to be so happy and in a state of euphoria. Now is that easy? Hell no. So is that what mindfulness and practising mindfulness can hopefully achieve? Absolutely. So that is something I'm trying to focus on a lot. You know what I mean?

Alex: I think about people who are anxious and they almost sometimes feel a pressure to be less anxious, right? So the idea that they need to be less anxious makes them more anxious, do you know what I mean?

Nas: Yeah, yeah. Well, of course, man, there's a theory they called the pink elephant where it's like, "Don't think about a pink elephant." And then all you can do is think about a pink elephant. Shit man. Let's go back to biblical times, man, like, "Don't eat the apple from the tree. You know what I mean? And you're going to do it. So if you're told not to be anxious, you're just going to be anxious. It's like, man, when people used to tell me, "Yo Nas, don't do drugs." Like, "Screw off. All right, thanks man." How can I not do drugs? Just don't do it. It's like, "All right, I appreciate that. That's really, really helpful advice. You've really helped me. I'm sober now." But I mean trying to empathise and understand and recognise all right, it's not about don't get high. It's not about don't get anxious. Accept your anxiety as is. Know that you're anxious, but try to be mindful. Try to bring yourself out of those thoughts by thinking of other things like the present moment.

Nas: So it's not about don't be anxious, be you, but try not to be in the past or the present, but be in the ... Sorry, the past or the future, but be in the present

moment. And if you're present moment is anxiety ridden, then try to do something that's going to try to get your mind off those anxious thoughts by focusing on your breath and your breath alone and try to really, really just listen and feel your breath. If you can't really breathe properly because you're kind of hyperventilating from anxiety, then try to sit there in silence and try to listen to all the different sounds around. If you can't really hear anything because your mind is going crazy, then try to see how many cracks you can see in the wall. See how many lines there are on the floor. Try to find out how many different colours there are on a shoe or on a car. You know what I mean?

Nas: Do anything you can at that present moment to get your mind off those anxiety ridden thoughts and bring yourself to a present moment and that's what you should focus on. So rather than being told not to do it, try to ... It's like someone saying, "Yo, don't eat chocolates. It's unhealthy." Instead of saying, "Don't eat chocolates." Be like, "Hey, why don't you drink more water and eat more fruits and eat more veggies?" Try not to say what they should not do, but try to encourage them on what they should do. So don't tell someone not to be anxious, try to help them out by giving advice on what can alleviate anxieties. And I'll tell you this right now, bro, drugs and alcohol are not the damn answer. I don't think I'd be where I am now if I had stopped drinking, and smoking, and using drugs recreationally at a long, long time ago. Sorry, a long, long time ago.

Nas: I feel like my level of anxiety is at like a level eight now, eight out of ten of course. I think they got raised by like four or five points, let's just say, because of my excessive drug and alcohol use. You know what I mean? But it's a temporary fix, but not a longterm solution. And yeah, it may drown you out for that temporary feeling. But then when you're high, you're going to forget about it because you're so present in a way. I know it's kind of ironic because you're not really pricing when you're high, but you can't really feel or think about much else.

Nas: And once you're not high, you're just going to get anxious. So all you're going to do is go back to it and that stuff just messes with the chemicals and the chemistry in the brain, bro, straight up. It doesn't allow you to really function or deal with it in a healthy and positive way. So at the age of 23, when I sobered up, I spent almost 15 years of my life just being so distracted and actually never being present and always using anything I could to not experience emotions because emotions to me were too stressful because I was anxious all the time. So when I finally sobered up, I felt like I finally started feeling things. And so by feeling things, it was like, "Whoa, my God, what is this?" But it was just thoughts. It was just emotions. Regular emotions, regular thoughts. But for me it was too intense because I felt like I'd never really got to experience real thoughts and real emotions for such a long period of time because I was constantly high.

Alex: Yeah. How would you describe having a strong mental wellbeing?

Nas: Oh, bro, it's the greatest superpower, man. Shit. I'm telling you right now, if anybody could ask me, "What's your biggest superpower or what's the superpower you wish you could have?" It's just to be mentally resilient dude. It's not to fly, it's not to be invisible, it's not to stretch, it's not to turn back time, it's

not to do any of that because I mean if you're meant to be resilient, bro, and if you've got like a strong mental will or mental capacity, then you're literally unstoppable. There's another thing that's going to stop you. You could be in jail for your whole life, but if you're free mentally, bro, then it doesn't matter what's holding you back because sometimes you could be free in an open desert and if you're stuck in your mind, bro, you're just basically in a dungeon of life. So I think that's probably the most important thing that I'm trying to achieve in and get to, is to be free of self.

Alex: And you think a big part of that is being present and being mindful?

Nas: Yeah, definitely man. And also I know it sounds cheesy, but straight up being grateful and having gratitude because I've been looking at it like this recently, man, it's helped me a lot, but I'm grateful that I've got anxiety, man. I'm grateful that I'm going through these things because I feel that I'm able to now relate more so with people that I'm actually helping out on the streets because I bumped through with drug addiction and I've been able to really relate to people who have gone through drug addiction, were some of the people that I've met on the streets, yeah.

Nas: So for me to have anxiety, I'm able to, I think, understand and empathise more so than just a random person from some organisation who is like, "Listen, it's okay, you're going to be fine." But not actually knowing how hard it really is. So I'm blessed bro. I'm really blessed to have this wonderful, wonderful speed bump that's been affecting my happiness for so many years that's now actually becoming a motivation for me to not only change, but to want to help and understand and do whatever I can to allow others to really see a different side to this whole thing that they call mental illness, I guess.

Alex: Aside from drugs and alcohol, is there anything else that contributed negatively to your anxiety, did you say?

Nas: Yeah. Yeah, I think anything that wasn't really lifting my spirit bro. And what doesn't lift your spirit? Anything really material like, yeah, helping someone out, people can say that's material, but what it does for them isn't really material. It's actually something far, far more than just a physical, or a mental, or emotional kind of gratification. It's like a spiritual thing, you know what I mean? And I don't mean a religious thing. I'm talking about spiritual higher. Spiritual higher is something that's unexplainable. So if something doesn't lift your spirits and I think doing negative things, or acting in a negative way, or not really contributing, or filling your destiny, or your cause, or your role, or your purpose in life, not really taking care of yourself mentally, emotionally, physically, or even spiritually, or trying your best to take care of others mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Nas: I think that is probably stuff that really contributed to my anxiety. Like me getting high all the time, that didn't really help anyone, especially myself. I wasn't really doing anything for mankind. And I think that trying to focus more on the spirit and how you can lift that through acts of service and doing more of the good deeds and all that stuff is going to help so much more man. I feel my

anxieties are a lot less intense when I'm trying my best to be the most positive and happy person that I can be.

Nas: And sometimes that's the hardest thing I could ever do bro because I don't want to just get out of my bed because I'm so anxious. But if I force myself to try my best to make one other person happy and not for the selfish reasons of, oh, so I can feel happy, but because I truly want them to actually have a smile on their face because of our encounter or interaction. That definitely helps me. Even if it's just a one times out of ten where I could actually feel something, hey man, it's better than not feeling better at all.

Alex: Great. That's a really good answer man. How important is community in terms of helping with anxiety, would you say?

Nas: I mean, shit, a community is just basically a bigger family bro. So I think it's very important. So if you've got your family's back and they've got yours, then shit, you know what I mean? That's such a feeling of comfort and I think ... how do I say, not only comfort, but it's also like inspiring and it can help encourage and push you more to wanting to be the best version of yourself. So if you've got the community's back and if you're doing everything you can to ensure the community's thriving and you're doing your best to fulfil your role and to benefit the community within your own capacity, I mean, that's just going to kind of give you a sense of purpose in life, man, and you'll be able to wake up feeling purpose. And when you have purpose, you're not just going to feel like you're not important enough and that you can't do anything to help yourself because you've got a responsibility now and that responsibility is to really be of service to others.

Nas: So, I mean, sometimes that also helps me out with my anxieties when I kind of just take myself out of my own head and realise how important my responsibility is for other people's sake, not just from mine. So I take the energy and the shifting and the attention off of me. And when I do that, I feel more motivated I think to help out someone else because when it's not about me and it's about someone else, it's like, "Okay, I really got to do it." And, yeah, that does stuff again for my anxiety. It's crazy man. It's probably the best drug out there. Straight up.

Nas: And I keep saying that, but being of benefit to someone else, man, and being selfless, bro, is unexplainable and there's nothing you can do to kind of tell me otherwise, bro. Straight up. I've done everything I could. I have been on medication, I've been on drugs, done retreats, gone to doctors, counselling. I'm not saying none of that stuff is not going to help, but the best feeling and the most sustainable feeling has always been serving someone else from the core of my heart. Being as selfless and genuine as possible.

Alex: A lot of the times I think guys find it difficult, especially to kind of talk to people about their anxiety or even admit that they have, I suppose, due to they're embarrassed by it will, but where do you think that kind of stigma comes from or why do you think they feel embarrassed to talk about it?

Nas: Well, I had that feeling before man. I'm not going to lie. And that even happened to one of my ... when I was telling you about relationship anxiety, man, it kind of started with that. I was feeling so anxious, and stressed out, and in my head, and I didn't want to kind of show myself that I wasn't this confident macho man. So the fact that I couldn't really do that, even made me more anxious because I was trying so hard to bottle all my thoughts, and my feelings, and my insecurities because I never wanted to show weakness to someone else when it's such an Alpha male dominated society, where it's like, man this, man that, you know what I mean? We're the hunters, you know what I mean? We're the breadwinners. We're the ones who bring home ... And I know that's not the case, especially now in 2019.

Nas: And in reality, straight up, women are way, way, way, way, way better than men anyways. I'm not going to lie, you know what I mean? But what I kind of say is in a way women like to let us feel important, you know what I mean? Which make us feel even more important. And it's been the case for thousands and thousands of years bro. So I think in such a male dominated society for a man to show weakness, it's as if like they're the weak ones in the pack. And whether it's a human scale, or the animal kingdom, or whatever it is, when you're the weak one of the pack bro, you're not needed, you're not wanted. You're exiled, you're banned, you're the lowest part of the food chain. You know what I mean? You're not even worthy enough.

Nas: It's always the gorilla who's the strongest who's got all the female gorillas and the kids. It's always a lion who's the strongest that has all the female lions. You know what I mean? It's always the male that is able to dominate everything. So by showing signs of weakness, by talking about the fact that you're not doing well mentally, by expressing any form of insecurity or doubt, is just gonna allow yourself to potentially come across as being the weak one of the link, weak one of the pack.

Nas: And when I was in that relationship, I remember I was trying so hard. Finally, I broke down and when I broke down, she was just like, "I miss that confident man that you use to be." And when she said that that made me even worse bro. That put me in a worse cycle. And she's like, "Yeah ..." It was as if a lot of pressure for me to be someone that I know I can be, but almost so much pressure that I can't be who I also am as well at times and that's just this, I'm a boy and a man at heart sometimes. Sometimes my heart is broken and I feel so vulnerable and I need the love bro, so I can also be that very strong dominant man, if you will to, you know what I mean?

Nas: So there needs to be a healthy balance man. Otherwise, that's pure craziness. If you're always sad or if you're always ... well, I can't say if you're always happy. I mean that's something we're trying to aim for, but I think if you're always happy, you're not actually always happy, you're just always accepting. Does that make sense? And so when you're accepting whatever situation you're in, you're never going to be sad or happy, you'll just be. And I think that's actual true happiness.

Alex: Great. So I guess when someone else is feeling that pressure that you experienced as well, right? What would you say to them? Should they be afraid of being vulnerable?

Nas: No way because I think by being scared of being more vulnerable, man, just makes you more vulnerable and more scared. And then it's kind of going back to that thing where you're like, when people tell you, don't be anxious, isn't that putting pressure on you? Man, just be. If you're vulnerable, be vulnerable. If you're anxious, be anxious. If you're happy, be happy. If you're sad, be sad. But accept everything as it is and just know it's going to come and go. It's going to come and go. It's going to come and go and nothing lasts. The only thing that's certain in life is death.

Nas: Other than that, there's no one thing in this world that we can 100% guarantee is going to happen, or is going to last, or is going to always be. So at the end of the day, man, the second you start to accept, that's when you find true joy. And someone told me this beautiful story of a guy asking a monk, he goes to the monk ... because the monk was really happy, right? And this guy comes up to the monk and says, "Hey, I just really want to be happy. I just want happiness." And the monk looks at him and says, "Okay, first you need to forget the I because your I is ego, then you need to neglect the wants because the wants is desire and all you're left with is happiness." So that's something that I keep trying to tell myself every day. Forget your ego and forget your desire and all you're going to left with is contentment man because if you're not attaching yourself to anything, then how can you actually be sad.

Alex: So through doing the streets barber stories and cutting everyone's head, naturally you've had the encounter to hear other people's stories and hear what they have going through. What has that experience, I guess, taught you about mental health that you maybe didn't know before going into it.

Nas: With my streets barber stories and stuff like that or this specific episode story?

Alex: Oh, well just-

Nas: All the stories?

Alex: Yeah. Just the the encounter of going and cutting people's hair and meeting people who are down on their luck.

Nas: Yeah. Fair enough. Well, I mean, I think you don't want [crosstalk 00:41:08]-

Alex: Or if there's any specific things. Yeah.

Nas: I'm trying to think bro. I mean, besides the fact that I think everyone obviously has a story, but like truly, truly, if you take the time to listen without trying to just butt in or say your own opinions or views and just actually just want to hear them out, you realise that whatever the struggle is, everyone has something to deal with. So I think that, let's just say someone had lost their whole family in a

freak car accident, but then another person stubbed their toe.

Nas: Now, okay, I know this is a very, very drastic example, but what I'm trying to say is if that person who stubbed their toe, that was the worst thing that happened to them and they had to deal with that and they don't know of anything worse. Okay? That was the worst thing that's happened to them. And they had to deal with something that they didn't like because it was the worst thing that they've ever encountered. Now the person who lost their whole family in a car accident, that was the worst thing that probably happened to them and they don't know of anything worse because that's the worst thing that's happened to them. So I don't think it matters what the person's gone through, but everyone's had to kind of go through something that was very hard for them.

Nas: And I think once you recognise that, it doesn't matter because everyone's trying to compete about, "Yeah, well my life is harder than yours." Or, "I had to go through this harder than you did." Or it's the other way around. We're like, "My house is bigger than yours." Or this and this. It's always a competition and once we try to break that competition of, "Oh yeah, I've got anxiety and it's probably way worse than you because you're only getting anxious about this, this and this. But I get anxiety about that, that and that. So obviously my anxiety is worse." No, it's not. It's not worse. To me and them, we're both having anxiety, we're both having to deal with something, whatever it may be. And that's something that I'm able to have empathy about because then it's not like I feel more empathetic people who've gone through harder stuff than other people because what I'm doing is

Nas: I'm relating their issues to mine and I'm not actually looking at the fact that they've gone through something that's made it hard for them to either wake up in the morning, or smile, or get past with a smile on their face thinking, "Oh, it's no big deal." And so that's something that I realised that a lot of people on the streets, they've gone through different reasons to put them on the streets, but however big or small, it's impacted them enough to get to that level sometimes, you know what I mean? If it's obviously by self choice, sometimes people don't actually have a choice and they're just on the streets because they have no other outlet, or place of security, or they can't feel safe in a home. And there's obviously different reasons, but I think everyone is tested within their own capacity, bro.

Nas: And I look at people who have gone through things that I think to everyday people would be like, "Damn, that guy's gone through a lot." I look at those people as the strongest because that means like their capacity is so high and they've been blessed with such strength that they've had to go through all these trials and tribulations. But knowing that they can come out of it because we're not ever going to be tested beyond our capacity bro. There's no chance.

Alex: What do you think is like the power in sharing these stories. So we documented these stories and showing them to the public, what do you think the potential is there? Or what are you trying to achieve in sharing their stories?

Nas: Man, just sharing stories of hope, bro. Letting everyone know that no one's

alone. You know what I mean? Sometimes people think they're alone with certain issues and problems that they've had to go through. You know what I mean? Once you can hear someone's story and relate to them and be like, "Damn, okay, that guy went through that, so I'm not alone." Maybe can give you a form of hope because if you look at the stories, you can see that the haircut, and the conversation, and the chat always kind of turns the person around generally. It's not staged, it's not fake. We're just grabbing pure raw footage.

Nas: And seeing someone go through such a change is a beautiful thing and it's through the haircut, but it's also like a form of hope. They're telling us about the stories of how they had to deal with certain situations, but they've been able to come out, even if they're still on the streets, they're still looking at things in a very positive way. So I think not only is it just giving people hope, but it's also giving a voice to the voiceless. But sometimes we forget about a lot of the people that are kind of here for ... because they're on the streets and we walked by them like they're just statues or rocks from the side of the road that don't really exist or have no life.

Alex: Great. What do you think that you can still do as a collective to change that stigma that still exists. The stigma that your ex girlfriend had, and other people. What can we do as a collective to help kind of make it more accepted that anxiety is all around us and that's not something to judge someone for.

Nas: Can you hear me?

Alex: I can hear you. Yeah.

Nas: Sorry. Sorry. What can we do to change that? I think what we've been doing in the past few years, it's been great. We've been doing a lot of stuff or are raising mental health in the past few years in creating positive outlets and avenues for people to really express themselves and talk about certain things that are really, really special and dear to their hearts and helping people really come out and express their fear, express their anger, express their trauma, and creating healthy environments for people to kind of view. So I think what we're doing is a good thing as a society so far, but it's the continue and not give up. And I think the more we kind of focus on breaking that old almost barbaric way of thinking that, "Don't talk about your problem and men are robots and women are the ones who are emotional and always doing like that."

Nas: Then I think if we can start drifting and realising that everyone's got a story, everyone's got thoughts, everyone's got issues and aligning them, let's talk about it in a judgement free healthy space, it's going to really help change a lot of things in the future, man, like a lot of abuse and a lot of problems that I've been able to see that a lot of inmates that have come from traumas and issues in their upbringing because they haven't really been able to express it and deal with it. And then said just kind of like keep it within themselves than retaliate and react in ways that are harmful to not only them, but to society. So I think there's this thing that we kind of do in the streets barber movement and really, really push mental health because it's affected, not only myself, but some members of the team and people that we cut on the daily.

Nas: So being like it's very, very close to all our hearts and we're kind of push it and bring more awareness about it as well. And the reason why I've come out talking about it so much is because people see numbers on my Instagram thinking that, "Oh, this guy's got status. He's perfect. He's a superhero." Or whatever, you know what I mean? But little do they know, man, I look at these people who are telling me I'm a superhero thinking, "Man, I wish I was like them because they don't seem to have problems." So it's an interesting world. And by me talking about it, maybe I can get on their level and they can be like, "Oh this guy, he's not only like me, I'm probably better than him. So, yeah, it's just to basically breakdown horrible stigmas by being open about it.

Alex: Has your rise in, let's say celebrity, increased Instagram followers or followers in general? How has that changed your anxiety?

Nas: Oh man, it's increased it bro. Shit. But first of all, when someone says celebrity to me, it just makes me go green because I don't even --

Alex: I'm sorry I had to use the word.

Nas: And then it's all good. I mean that's, it's just how it is though. But not saying it's how it is in regards to that's what I am, it's just how it is that people would think that based on a blue tick or numbers, but I'm just saying the fact that the numbers come and then the people that reach out and the stuff that's expected from me, it's just a lot of pressure, man. It just builds up and on, and on, and on and I'm just overwhelmed at times where I'm like, "Shit, what am I supposed to do bro?" I got people hitting me up from overseas, like 60 year old people from Wisconsin and America being like, "Bro, I've got an opiate addiction. How can I get off? I just watched a documentary about how you got over drugs, can you give me some advice? I've got five grandkids and I really want to come back to them before I lose everyone." And I'm just like, "What the hell!"

Nas: That pressure for me is just like, "What am I supposed to tell them?" I had to go get help. I had to go to rehab. I had to do the hard yards and I'll tell them what basically I did. And that's just like go to rehab really. Those are trained professional counsellors who deal with addiction and I had to go through that. It's not like I'm a trained professional counsellor. I'm someone who actually went through the programme and was able to come out, luckily on the positive side of things. So I mean in just saying that that's one thing, but then also I never want to make it seem like I'm too important for anyone. So I'm always trying my best to reach out and positively show love to people who contact me as well. So a lot of my time was just spent on Instagram and Facebook responding to messages, and DMs, and all these different things. And it consumes you, you know what I mean?

Nas: And then different organisations and brands and centres and all these people reaching out like "Nas, can we have you here?" "Can we do this?" "Can you come and get haircuts?" And I'm just like, "Oh my God." And so everything just keeps going in circles bro. I'm getting anxious just thinking about it. You know what I mean? I was supposed to have a day off today, but have I had a day off? Hell no

bro because I'm just too busy doing 14 different things, but that's the beauty. It's a responsibility at the same time because I rather have these 14 different things than not have anything to do at all. So I guess when I said it gives me more anxiety, I don't want to say it gives me more anxiety because I feel like I've got anxiety. It puts a lot of pressure, you know what I mean? On certain things that I'm trying to cope and be mindful about, and be gracious about, and grateful about. Sorry. And just accept it as it is.

Nas: And so when I stopped putting so much emphasis on, "Oh my God. What am I going to do, but just do it, that's when it gets a lot easier. So whether ... sorry, whether or not I got the followers on Instagram, or I got people reaching out, or doing all these things and if it was to all stop tomorrow, bro, straight up I'm telling you right now, I wouldn't stop wanting to give haircuts and helping people out. So reality of the fact is that these numbers don't really mean shit to me, bro. Yeah, my ego is a little bit happy from it here and there. At times I'm like, yeah, wicked. But deep down man, I don't really care man, and I shouldn't care, and I don't want to care. So that's what I'm saying. I can be 80 years old and all that shit just going to go over my head and it's not going to be important anymore.

Nas: And there's going to be another person who's doing a thousand times better things than I am, but I'll still be doing what I've been doing. And that's trying to help people through a simple act of just hearing them out, making them feel happy, and giving them a cool haircut. So that's just my role bro. That's what I'm doing.

Alex: Would you spend less time on social media if you could? Do you spend less time?

Nas: Yeah now I do. In the past few months I closed the APP and then I've put it on my last page of my apps on my phone and I used to sign out of it actually at times. So I don't just ... because habitually when it's on your front page you just click it without realising and you're just scrolling through your home page. But now I have to actually work to get onto it. And I think down the line because I don't really have a personal one bro. I don't have a personal account. It's more just a street barber page. So I think down the line, what I'm hoping to do is have a few other people that are on the team just kind of manage my accounts so I don't have to worry about being on it as much, but at the same time, not like pull back and neglect the positive stories and the vibes that come from it because I mean the whole streets barber page is supposed to be for a place to derive inspiration.

Nas: So I mean if I neglect that, then what's the purpose of the page? So I don't want to neglect the purpose of the page, but maybe if I can kind of step away from Instagram or Facebook as much as I have to at the moment, which is a way of not actually being mindful because when you're so involved in somewhere else, you're not actually being present of what's going on around you. You're involved in like a fake world that's inside of the screen. So that's another thing. That's why I don't like being on social media so much because it doesn't really allow me to be mindful.

- Alex: Yeah. What would you say to someone that sees your Instagram follow a number and that makes them anxious because they don't have that many and say they want to be like you.
- Nas: Fair enough. Well first I'll be like, "So do you want to be anxious?" And they're like, "I'm already anxious." I'm like, "Cool. All right. Do you want to be anxious about everything else? I mean, about everything." "But I am anxious about everything." "Okay, cool. So then you are like me." And if they say, "I'm not anxious about everything." I'm like, "All right, cool. Then are you sure you want to be like me?" At the end of the day it shouldn't make somebody anxious. Anxiety is just a thing that, it's just in me. It's going to come and go. As I said, it's because it's definitely getting ... I have more anxiety now. It doesn't mean that it's getting worse, if that makes sense. I know I didn't make that clear in the beginning, but I have a lot more anxiety now, but because I'm understanding ways to cope and deal with it, it's not as crippling as it used to be.
- Nas: And so if someone sees my Instagram followers and feels insecure or has doubts, I'll try to put myself down on the real level with them and just be like, "It doesn't really do much man. It's just numbers at the end of the day." I'm not financially set off because of it. I still have to pay my bills. I still have to go through my same routine in life. The only real difference at the moment of what it can do for me is I'll be walking down the street and someone will be like, "Hey man, you're that guy." And they'll want to take a photo. In reality, that's what it is. And if someone is feeling insecure that they don't get that love, then I'll just whip out my phone and say, "Hey man, can I get a photo?" You know what I mean? So that's where it's at.
- Alex: Great. What do you think that anyone who reads this can do essentially today, tomorrow, just to help support someone with that they know with anxiety or depression?
- Nas: Try to empathise, man, and just understand that this person doesn't want to be like this. No one wakes up saying I want to be depressed. No one wakes up saying I want to be anxious. But if they can have someone who comes to them and isn't trying to make them feel guilty or bad for being a certain way when they don't want to be like that and just try to ask them, "What do you need? What do you want?" And try to be selfless in wanting to help the person out.
- Nas: I think that could come a long way for certain people. And sometimes people don't want to talk about this stuff, so don't force it out of them, but encourage them and give them a safe space to want to talk about this stuff. Or at the end of the day, you know what? Instead of like kind of ask them to open up to you, you can share events like what we've got going on March 5th with the streets barber stories. Stories can heal or like there's going to be plenty of the campaigns and events and nights where it's going to be talking about people with mental health issues or kind of bring awareness out.
- Nas: And if you could kind of share that with them, whether it's involved with the streets barber crew or not, I think allowing people who are going through that

stuff, showing them that there is avenues and there's places for them to relate and kind of be on the same vibe with other people going through similar stuff and give also from a comfort as well. So that's what I think and also, man, if anybody's hearing this and they don't have someone telling them that they're going to be fine, just take it from me, man, everything is going to be all right. Straight up. It always works out and you and I, whoever's listening to this as well, knows that's the case. So just have faith, man. Everything always works out.