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MBS ([00:00](#)):

Whatever country you're living in, perhaps like me, you're feeling that the divide between us and them is becoming sharper. The chasm between the Sneetches with stars and the Sneetches without stars. And if you're a Dr. Seuss fan you'll know exactly what I mean. Well, that chasm seems to be getting wider and deeper and more treacherous. Now, I've got a question for you, and it doesn't matter what game you're playing and it doesn't matter what side you're on. Why are we so invested in the failure of half our society? Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people share the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them and a book that has shaped them.



MBS ([00:49](#)):

My guest today, Indra Adnan, wrestles with that question, why are we so invested with the failure of half our society? Because she challenges the very way we do politics. She is an agent of change in the political space, and that means an agent of change in the wider world as well. And she's the author of a new book, *The Politics of Waking Up*. I really love that as a title. She lives in London, but she calls herself a global citizen, and with good reason.

Indra ([01:17](#)):

My family is split between Indonesia and Holland. I came from an Indonesian muslim family and a Dutch Catholic family. And to that extent, I've always had quite a broad perspective of trying to bridge things or trying to understand the world through, how do you bring it's disparate parts together?

MBS ([01:41](#)):

That was Indra's early life that installed in her the truth about what it takes to build or destroy those bridges.

Indra ([01:48](#)):

My early life was fairly marked by a number of really significant deaths. My brother died when I was 11 in a car crash, my mother had six or seven... It was not six, it was seven. She had seven brothers and sisters who all died of cancer while I was a teenager. And so very early on in my life my big question was, where does my power lie? What kind of power do I have to control circumstances or control my life? I had been a practicing Catholic until then, and I prayed to God fervently for the survival of my brother and failed. So my life quest, if you like, was to understand human agency. Who are we? What kind of control might we have over our lives? And how can we develop that? And of course, that led me eventually to politics, which is where I'm now most active.



MBS ([02:45](#)):

How do you define power? It's literally a potent word, but its definitions are often quite slippery. When you say one thing, I may think of another thing. How do you talk about power?

Indra ([02:57](#)):

Yeah. That's a good question. Power, I think, in the public sphere is too often seen as force or coercion, the power to make something happen. Maybe it's seen as power over others. So a coercive physical force. I've come to believe in power more as something which is agentic that perhaps has more elements of attraction in it. How do you develop your relationships with others so that through your relationships with others you can see things change? So Joseph Nye once described this essentially as soft power. I feel it's more than how he described it, which was really to talk about how a country attracts tourists or how it has influence over international relations. I think of soft power really as the power of your story or the power of the narrative that will change things for everyone that's included in that.

MBS ([04:01](#)):

Gosh, there's a lot there. I'm curious to know, Indra, if power and this kind of expanded idea of soft power is rooted in what's your story and what impact does your story have, what do you know now about telling stories?

Indra ([04:22](#)):

Yeah. I mean, really essentially, Michael, it's that if we look at how the public spaces ordered, for example, and maybe take into account that most of the institutions that we're taking part in some way, or that govern us in some way were designed by men in past centuries. What I've come to realize over this past 20 years or so, is that the story of our powerlessness as citizens, as ordinary people is maybe a fake one. Maybe it's something a little bit like... You



know the story of the elephant that was tethered at birth to a small tree by thin rope to one leg. And as a baby elephant, it really believed it couldn't move. But because they continued to be tied to the tree, no matter how large it grew, he always believed he only had that amount of power.

MBS ([05:35](#)):

Right.

Indra ([05:37](#)):

That's the point of the story. If that's the story in your head, that you're powerless and that we as citizens are powerless against the greater forces and that we need only a certain kind of person to govern us, to tell us what to do, then that is a story that changes everything.

MBS ([05:54](#)):

How do you help people change this story? Because the fable of the elephant tethered to the tree, and you just believe that this is the rules now. He can't escape the tree. On both sides of hard power, if you like, one side is where people like I stand, which is like, I'm a straight white, overeducated man and I have access to power. I feel like I do. And I have a story about, that's my right. And on the other side are people who feel have stories around powerlessness. I'm curious to know how you help people change stories on both sides of that conversation.

Indra ([06:40](#)):

Yeah. I mean, for me, there's sort of a waking up process, right? So at some point realizing that the power you think you have, maybe it hasn't created the outcomes that you hope they would.



MBS ([06:59](#)):

Right.

Indra ([07:00](#)):

So right now, for example, despite the fact that you have a vote, you live in a democracy, every five years or four years you get to choose a party. If that was a good system of power, how is it that we're facing the crisis that we are? Where environmentally we're about to go over the cliff as a global civilization. How is it that there's so much inequality and poverty in this world? How is it that there's such a huge prevalence of mental health problems everywhere in the world that believes it has power and democracy? We're living in quite a toxic reality for ourselves, let alone the people that we might describe as underprivileged or less privileged than us, who are at the receiving end, the sharper end, maybe, of the kind of power that we've been experiencing.

Indra ([07:54](#)):

So I would say question, question. And for me, the strongest wake-up moment was the point of Brexit, which also coincided with the Trump election in the USA, where I saw huge amounts of people being persuaded that there was a division in our country that was so sharp that on a referendum, we come out just about 50, 50.

MBS ([08:26](#)):

Right.

Indra ([08:27](#)):

Here's a simple question about somehow we managed to come out at 50, 50. And this happens again and again. What is manipulating us? What is having this influence upon us that we can be so smartly divided against each other? And what is the effect of that division? Surely, if we are so divided against each



other, it's inevitable that we, as ordinary citizens, will feel powerless. We're always against. We're invested in the failure of half of our own country. It's an incredible reality we find ourselves in.

MBS ([09:03](#)):

I'm just not sure whether to find hope or despair in a comment like that, Indra, because there's part of me that thinks, look, we are well-educated people, or at least we have the possibility, the potential to be well-educated people. And yet we are manipulated, our social media bubbles amplify our beliefs so that division feels stronger rather than weaker. Where do you find hope in all of this? Rather than just kind of burying your head into something and despairing and throwing up your hands in the air and going, "It's too much."

Indra ([09:41](#)):

Well, let's go back to the story telling part of this.

MBS ([09:46](#)):

Yes.

Indra ([09:48](#)):

So in effect, in the UK and across Europe, in fact, I'm not sure about Australia. In the US quite similar, only 2% of people are members of political parties, right? So if you consider that, it's not really an issue of does that mean 98% of people are apathetic of politics? That's not really what I'm pointing at. What I'm pointing at is that 2% of the discourse is fed upon by the media. So most of us are really reading about an idea of power that comes from only 2% of people who have a certain attitude and a certain way of looking at the rest of us. So what I committed to doing was looking outside of that bubble, looking outside of the 2% media discourse and looking at the 98% and thinking, what is happening out there that we're not reading about?



Indra ([10:45](#)):

And in fact, over this last five years, which has been the work of the Daily Alternative, the alternative political platform that I now run, is to show me incredible amounts of ingenuity, innovation, connectedness. There's so much uprising, in fact, that shows me a clear direction of hope around civilizational evolution, but I'm not reading about that in the mainstream newspapers. And that for me is the shift that is possible at this moment for all of us to recognize that actually, in fact, for the last 20 years, we've been in a revolution of interconnectedness and information and availability and mobilizing. And that the fruits of this, we need to give them more attention. We need to develop new media systems that carry the better news, the good news about the development of human agency.

Indra ([11:46](#)):

And then you actually have a clear direction of hope, but you need to be patient with it. You need to know that these at the moment are small, what I call fractals, perfect tiny systems appearing all over the globe of communities. I call them cosmo local communities because they're definitely locally and globally connected. So that, in fact, more internet led, I would say, global set of resources is appearing in localities now. It's not small flat communities we're talking about, we're talking about rich ecologies of agency appearing at local level that are now appearing in the UK or across Australasia. They're in India, they're in Africa, they're in Europe. It's just a task, really, of getting them to see each other and working better together. I'm optimistic that it's possible.

MBS ([12:46](#)):

I mean, I subscribed, so I see some of those stories as well, and they are inspiring. They're basically local awesomeness and there's kind of ecologies evolving and changing. And I wonder about scale and reach and whether there'll always be a kind of undercurrent of cool stuff happening that keeps bumping



against the kind of bigger systems that seem pretty content in homeostasis and things not changing. Is there a way that things like this can really disrupt a bigger system? Or is it perpetually a kind of cool things happening around the edges?

Indra ([13:32](#)):

I would say there is a way, and technology will play a large part in that. In the past, if you're looking back through the decades, you're right to say there's always been an interesting fringe. They've always been the outliers and the people that are kind of entertainers but they're hopeful and indefatigability. Right?

MBS ([13:59](#)):

That's a great word. Yeah.

Indra ([13:59](#)):

Yeah. I'm sure you know it, I certainly do. But the technology now is quite different. Now we have the possibility of connecting people. Let's just take this COVID period we've just been through, right? So we were all forced into our homes and logic would have it that that means we're so disconnected now and we're going to become antisocial. And almost society is at threats from the fact that we're now alienated and isolated in our own homes. Is that really the case? No. The phenomenon is that for the first time using almost entirely Zoom platform, sorry to advertise, people came together in extraordinary ways.

MBS ([14:38](#)):

Right.

Indra ([14:39](#)):

There were people not only having discussions, let's say the mutual aid groups that sprung up in neighborhoods. Able to talk to each other, discuss pithy



problems about how to deliver food to people who couldn't get out of their houses anymore. But also beginning to think and question the big issues, why are we in this situation? This was happening at neighborhood level, it was also happening at global level. I found myself over the course of this year in conversations with people in South Africa, in India, in the Middle East, who are doing similar responses and they're having quite similar feelings about, who am I? What is this? How does this connect to the bigger picture? And the weird thing about... Even you and I talking now, we're having an intimate conversation here. We're not having some cold... We're not ticking boxes, we're thinking through things together. And this is a very new phenomenon that has been accelerated over this past year.

MBS ([15:42](#)):

Yeah. Indra, your new book is called *The Politics of Waking Up*. What do you mean by waking up?

Indra ([15:52](#)):

It means many things to many people, but I'm referring specifically to the last 20 years where we moved radically from having a source of information that was almost entirely from above us. So we would hear things in a hierarchical way, from governments trickling down to us living in our communities, or from a library through a book, or from our tutors. That's how information came to us. And then suddenly, in a very short period of time, information became accessible to us in myriad forms. We could go and dig into other people's lives or read about other people's professions or hear about other people's perspective suddenly. That to me is a waking up moment. And not simply because we're getting more information, but in the process of that, we're able to make massive amounts of connections to people we barely know and hear their stories. Right?



Indra ([16:56](#)):

So Facebook was a game changer, obviously, but so was Google and Wikipedia and Instagram, all of these. The other aspect of it, Michael, that's so important is that we saw ourselves performing in a sort of public sphere in a way we've never done before.

MBS ([17:14](#)):

That's interesting.

Indra ([17:14](#)):

So we're not only watching others behaving, we're also watching ourselves. And we see ourselves as entities in this political dynamics that are being played out all over. It's a new public space and we're in it, right? Even people boringly taking selfies or telling stories about their pets, in a way it's them saying, "I'm here. I'm in the public space. You can comment on me. This is my performance." History will tell it as an extreme form of suddenly waking up to the reality of things and reality of ourselves. At the same time through this process, people suddenly beginning to see, where do I stand in this field?

Indra ([18:06](#)):

So the woke aspect of it is groups suddenly finding each other who share a new awareness of how did I get to be in this place I am? Why do I feel so disadvantaged? Ah, right? Now I'm beginning to get it. And there's another 100 people who get it the way I get it. And suddenly, these spikes, I call them spikes of wokeness that are trying to disrupt the whole field. But in fact, everyone is waking up. It's very uneven at the moment. And so there's a lot of reaction. There's a lot of, as you say, disruption. If you can find more people like you, then you will be able to have more of an impact on this public space. It's very uneven and it's a painful, chaotic space right now.



MBS ([18:58](#)):

And one of the things that I worry about is that my politics veer to the left and I get excited about alternative groups arising and connecting and finding ways of speaking truth to power and disrupting old forms of power. That's my politics and that's how I like to think. And everything that offers that alternative political world is offered to the more conservative, the more right wing, the more nationalistic. I'm wondering... I'm not even sure what my question is, Indra, other than to say, if it can happen to the side of the politics that I nod and agree with, it can happen and be a force on the other side of politics as well. The other force of politics. How do we worry about that, counter that, think about that, if at all?

Indra ([20:01](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I'm not entirely clear, Michael, if you've ever had a spiritual experience of life, which kind of unifies everything. And you're more inclined to think of these two phenomenon as two parts of a political field and then ask yourself, what is the difference between them? And how can we really be truly for the people if we are saying only half the people? Are we truly for all of us if we are discounting half of us? Actually, this is a very good lead into the piece of the book-

MBS ([20:50](#)):

It's perfect.

Indra ([20:52](#)):

... I'm going to read.

MBS ([20:52](#)):

It is a perfect segue.



Indra ([20:54](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([20:55](#)):

So tell us about the book that you've chosen.

Indra ([20:59](#)):

Okay. So it's called Theory of Everything, and here we are.

MBS ([21:03](#)):

A bold title. Beautiful.

Indra ([21:06](#)):

A nice modest title. [inaudible 00:21:08]...

MBS ([21:08](#)):

Exactly.

Indra ([21:10](#)):

... by a philosopher called Ken Wilber. I forgot [inaudible 00:21:14] name at the bottom. Just to give you a bit of a run-up to it, I think I described to you how I had such life altering challenges when I was young and how, in fact, in my teens and early twenties I was sort of making up my own belief system because I had dropped Christianity and with the sort of raging at God for letting me down in a childlike way, I would say, but was sort of making up my own belief system. But then I visited my home country, Indonesia, and I became a Buddhist. I realized that all the things I was trying to put together as pieces of a puzzle were in fact Buddhism. And so I was part of a global Buddhist movement called the movement for culture, education, and peace for a good 15 years. And in that



time I had a whale of a time, actually, developing ideas of human agency coming from the inside.

MBS ([22:14](#)):

Beautiful.

Indra ([22:14](#)):

Just like, who are you? How do you develop your own power? As this is a Buddhist sort of idea of growth. But I was beginning to sense the outside, this Buddhist bubble. There was something else that I wasn't really taking into account, and that's the world where politics had rained over the public space. How does my Buddhism and relate to my politics? I couldn't actually make sense of it. And I went to do my master's degree in politics quite late in my late twenties, early thirties, and found a lot of language I could not integrate into my own language. So I then started to live in these two worlds, my Buddhist world, my political world. And that's when I came across Ken Wilber for the first time, literally somebody who was listening to my musings in something tanky sort of events.

MBS ([23:07](#)):

You sort of connected while... Yeah.

Indra ([23:08](#)):

Yes. Said, "I think you should be reading Ken Wilber." And so I took this book with me on holiday. I remember thinking, "I'll never read this book on holiday," but in fact, I ended up reading it on the beach. I couldn't put it down because it's sort of made sense of everything. It pulled very, very disparate things together into what I call a four-quadrant model.



MBS ([23:33](#)):

That's right.

Indra ([23:33](#)):

So the four-quadrant model, if you remember, I think you've known Ken Wilber in the past.

MBS ([23:37](#)):

A little. Yeah.

Indra ([23:39](#)):

It says that every phenomenon can be seen through the lens of these four quadrants. So the upper quadrant is everything to do with the individual and the lower two quadrants, everything to do with the public space. So there's a relationship between the individual and the public space. And then the left part of the four quadrants is the internal aspect of that and the right is the external aspect of it. So you have these four different quadrants. I'm saying this because that's what's described in the book before I read the two pages.

MBS ([24:14](#)):

Perfect.

Indra ([24:14](#)):

Right? So what Ken Wilber is saying is there's a relationship between our individual internal capacities and the actions that we take, right? So one is related to the other. So it's because of our internal capacities that we take these actions, right? And the actions that we take-



MBS ([24:35](#)):

So internal is consciousness, external is behavior in terms of that individualistic level.

Indra ([24:40](#)):

Yeah. And that the public space level, at the collective level let's say, the internal is culture.

MBS ([24:47](#)):

Right.

Indra ([24:48](#)):

What are our values that are prevalent?

MBS ([24:49](#)):

What are we? Yeah.

Indra ([24:51](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([24:51](#)):

Yeah.

Indra ([24:53](#)):

And on the right-hand side is the structure.

MBS ([24:55](#)):

Right. Systems. Yeah.



Indra ([24:56](#)):

Given these values, what have we created? So our politics, obviously, really, you can see it most clearly in the bottom right hand there.

MBS ([25:05](#)):

Right.

Indra ([25:06](#)):

Yeah. So when you can pull these things together and you have a sense that as you develop, it develops. Right? So the way you're looking at the world is to do with how you're developing your internal self and the behavior that you do within the structure and within the culture. So there's a way of looking as everything is interconnected, but you can't miss out any of the bits because if you're ignoring the culture, you don't understand the impact it's having on you as an individual. If you're ignoring the structure, you don't see how it prohibits certain kinds of actions. You have to look at them all, right? So...

MBS ([25:48](#)):

Right. It's like a four-sided Mobius strip. It's all the same thing and it's all different at the same time or something.

Indra ([25:55](#)):

No, exactly that. And it really causes you to check yourself. When you think you have a really clear opinion on something, you'd ask yourself, where might I be now on the quadrant and what sort of... Wilber call some stages of development which is tricky. That's the tricky part because it looks like a hierarchy or a ladder, but actually, it's about yourself. Constantly evolve, and can I get any further? Is there an opportunity to look at all of this by growing myself, in fact?



MBS ([26:31](#)):

And how did you come to choose two pages? Because Wilber's work is very dense, provocative. He's a philosopher, so it's a philosophical tome that you're reading from. How did you come to pick two for us?

Indra ([26:44](#)):

Well, on the opening page it says, A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality. Nice one, Ken. So I just went to the chapter that talked about politics.

MBS ([26:59](#)):

Perfect.

Indra ([27:02](#)):

I mean, literally I thought, okay, give me the politics. And interestingly, it's chapter five and politics comes under a title that's called The Real World, right?

MBS ([27:15](#)):

I love that.

Indra ([27:15](#)):

So suddenly, the real world. And I think that for me, that's helpful because there is a world of imagination, a world of story. There's a world of feeling affects, how we experience new things. And the real world is sort of how it appears perhaps in a more materialistic way and that's our shared language mostly, isn't it?

MBS ([27:43](#)):

And part of what I'm already excited to hear is that one of the points of resistance to the work you might be talking about is people go, "Yeah, but that's not connected to the real world." And you're like, "No, let me show you how it's



connected to the real world." So, Indra, let me introduce you formally as you read this. Indra Adnan, author of the new book, *The Politics of Waking Up*, is reading from Ken Wilber's philosophical tome, *A Theory of Everything*.

Indra ([28:17](#)):

In the last chapter of *Up From Eden*, I made the observation that when it comes to the cause of human suffering, liberals tend to believe in exterior causes, whereas conservatives tend to believe in interior causes. That is if an individual is suffering, the typical liberal tends to blame external social institutions. If you're poor, it's because you are oppressed by society. Whereas the typical conservative tempts to blame internal factors. You are poor because you are lazy. Thus, the liberal recommends exterior social interventions. Redistribute the wealth, change social institutions so that they can produce fairer outcomes, evenly slice the economic pie, aim for equality among all. The typical conservative recommends that we instill family values, demand that individuals assume more responsibility for themselves. Tighten up slack moral standards, often by embracing traditional religious values, encourage a work ethic, reward achievement, and so on.

Indra ([29:29](#)):

In other words, the typical liberal believes mostly in right-hand causation. This is according to the integral four-quadrant model. The typical conservative believes mostly in left-hand causation. Don't let the terminology of the quadrants confuse you. The political left believes in right-hand causation, the political right believes in left-hand causation. Had I been thinking of political theory when I arranged the quadrants, I would probably have aligned them to match. The important point is that the first step towards integral politics that unites the best of liberal and conservative is to recognize that both the interior quadrants and the exterior quadrants are equally real and important. We consequently must address both interior factors, values, meaning morals, the development of



consciousness and exterior factors. Economic conditions, material wellbeing, technological advance, social safety net, environment.

Indra ([30:37](#)):

In short, a truly integral politics would emphasize both interior development and exterior development. Let us therefore focus for a moment on the area of interior consciousness development. This is after all the hardest part for liberals to accept because the discussion of stages or levels of anything, including consciousness, is deeply antagonistic to most liberals who believe that all such judgments are racist, sexist, marginalizing, and so on. The typical liberal, and I am one, recall does not believe in interior causation or sometimes even in interiors for that matter. The typical liberal epistemology, e.g., John Locke, imagines that the mind is a tabula rasa, a blank slate that is filled with pictures of the external world. If something is wrong with the interior, if you are suffering, it is because something is first wrong with the exterior, the social institutions, because your interior comes from the exterior.

Indra ([31:49](#)):

But what if the interior has its own stages of growth and development, and is not simply imported from the external world? If a genuinely integral politics depends upon including both interior development and exterior development, then it would behoove us to look carefully at these interior stages of consciousness unfolding. In books such as *Integral Psychology*, I've correlated over 100 developmental models of consciousness, West and East, ancient and modern, which help to give us very solid picture of the stages of development of the subjective realm, not as a rigid series of unalterable levels, but as a general guide to the possible waves of consciousness unfolding. If the first step towards an integral politics is to combine the interior and the exterior, the left hand and the right hand, the subjective and the objective, the second step is to



understand that there are stages of the subjective. Stages, that is, of consciousness evolution.

Indra ([32:59](#)):

To help elucidate these stages, we can use any of the more reputable maps of interior developments, such as those of Jane Loevinger, Robert Keegan, Clare Graves, William Torbert, Suzanne Cock-Greuter, or Beck and Cowan's Spiral Dynamics. For this simplified overview, I will use just three broad stages. Pre-conventional, which is egocentric, conventional, which is socialcentric, and post-conventional, which is worldcentric. The traditional conservative ideology is rooted in a conventional mythic-membership, sociocentric wave of development. Its values tend to be grounded in a mythic religious orientation, such as the Bible, it usually emphasizes family values and patriotism. It is strongly socialcentric, and therefore often ethnocentric, with roots as well in aristocratic and hierarchical social values and a tendency towards patriarchy and militarism.

Indra ([34:03](#)):

This type of mythic-membership and civic virtue dominated cultural consciousness from approximately 1,000 BCE to the enlightenment in the West, whereupon a fundamentally new average mode of consciousness, the rational egoic (post-conventional, worldcentric, orange meme) emerged on an influential scale, bringing with it a new mode of politics, ideology namely, liberalism. I think I'm going to stop there because I can see that... That was about two pages, just under.

MBS ([34:40](#)):

That's great. I mean, I secretly want you to keep reading for about another hour and a half because you read beautifully and it's helping me understand his points of view. And it's so interesting to notice in myself, who would identify as



a liberal, my bias towards... I focus on external irregularities and like, how do I change the system? And at the same time, part of my work is in the world of self-development and self-growth and the like, but I will downplay that in order to have my bias towards, it's a system that needs to change. So resonant for me to understand my bias in hearing that. What about these pages in particular struck a chord for you, Indra?

Indra ([35:34](#)):

Well, first of all, one's always awed by Wilber's ability to really integrate so many different-

MBS ([35:44](#)):

I know.

Indra ([35:46](#)):

... schools of thought. So he hasn't just come up with this as an idea of his own. It's not like, oh, I think. It's that he's read so extensively.

MBS ([35:56](#)):

First of all, I'd just [inaudible 00:35:57] together a hundred psychological models [inaudible 00:35:59] and then do a hundred models on society and then a hundred models on systems.

Indra ([36:04](#)):

Exactly.

MBS ([36:04](#)):

And I'm going to put them all into a book.



Indra ([36:08](#)):

Exactly. And that was just his first one, right?

MBS ([36:10](#)):

Right.

Indra ([36:10](#)):

And he's written scores of books since then. He's the most prolific, an incredibly integrated mind. So something awesome, first of all, pulled me towards it, but just that there was a logic, really, that... This spoke specifically to my family, for example. I live in a family where my sisters vote differently from me. How on earth did that happen?

MBS ([36:41](#)):

Right.

Indra ([36:41](#)):

We grew up in the same circumstances and I was pulled more towards a progressive left thinking way of being mostly because early on, I became interested in power. I was thinking consciously about agency, whereas my sisters were more inclined to vote without thinking much about politics at all, more inclined to vote for a conservative candidate because they were more concerned with hard work and people doing the best they can with what they've got and thinking that that is a system of fairness. Sort of meritocracy arises from effort.

Indra ([37:25](#)):

So I was just very impressed by the way that you could explain that away so easily. That there was emphasis towards the outside or towards the inside that has been exploited by a political system that thrives actually on opposition. So



it's not politics itself which is toxic, it is the party political system which has structured our differences to become oppositional. So even internally if you think about it, you delve into it a little bit like we were beginning do just then, is that we're almost divided internally. Our external self is divided against our internal self, almost. I have this inclination when I think this, but I have that inclination when I think that. And Brexit and Trump and other things were are a masterful at exploiting those differences and creating in effect kind of chaos amongst the people that leaves them dependent on the hierarchy to sort the mess out. And the media is very complicit in this, not knowingly necessarily.

Indra ([38:34](#)):

I'm not accusing them of being malicious, but they play into this idea of where's all the energy? The energy is in the opposition. Is it calling people out knowing who the enemy is? That's where the energy comes from and that's the business model. That's what sells newspapers. So now we are living in that world where our confusion turns us against ourselves and against each other, and leaves us dependent on a hierarchy of power, which clearly is so disconnected from real people's needs and their real resources, so that we've become just pieces of a machine to fit into the growth economy that is destroying our planet. Yeah.

MBS ([39:21](#)):

Indra, as I think about your comment in particular about the way we're manipulated to form sides and hearing Wilber's work helps me understand that, but just from the little I understand about neuroscience, I think there's one part of my primitive brain that goes, look, I like my tribe. I've got the Dunbar's number, which is like 150 people is about it, and I can cope with that and everybody else's other to me. Is there a way that this sense of division just is a fundamental leap biological thing? And this idea of integration both at an individual level, but also at a more collective level, just remains fantasies that you and I dream about.



Indra ([40:16](#)):

Every question you ask, Michael, opens up this world of possible responses, but let me try and take them as simply as I can. I think there's a lot of truth in what you say. The human condition is dual, isn't it? We look at everything as dualistic. So night, day, near, far, short, long, black, white. That's how we've arranged it, right? But the question is, what can we do as human beings? And what is our inclination as human beings to bridge the divide? Right? So I think I would make the claim that it's specifically a feminine attribute to always be trying to bring things together, to create family where there is disparate islands of experience, to build networks in the community so that your child can grow up safely.

Indra ([41:18](#)):

It's an inclination, right? And the inclination to bring people together will always be a movement towards integration, but always meet on the road, endless distinctions that are dual, right? So even as you're bringing things together, you're making distinctions all the time. So I think you're right that there is always this dualistic aspect, but I would say this also, alongside that, there's constant desire and inclination to bring things together. So there's the both, and one could be a more young sort of masculine energy, want to be a more female energy. I would say because of the history of our public space, there's not enough of the female energy present in our political design. So, particularly bad in the UK, we have a first past the post system where winner takes all with every election. There isn't any room for proportionality.

Indra ([42:26](#)):

But I would say even in community building, for example, there's the people who were always trying to hive off and find their own little group within the bigger group. And there's the people are always trying to bring us together,



make sure that we're moving coherently forward without anyone getting left behind. Both of those things are there.

MBS ([42:43](#)):

Indra, we're almost done. We have seriously only just started scratching the surface. Maybe I can ask you this. Is there a force of change that you've noticed, a particular story that you've got excited about recently that you're like, that's a cool thing to notice, to see that it's blooming and thriving and flourishing somewhere that you could share with us? I feel like we should end on a high note.

Indra ([43:17](#)):

Yeah. I mean, in a way there's too many and I think I described two that the Daily Alternative, we're producing a blog a day on innovations that we see happening. Hard to choose one, but maybe best to focus on, the phenomenon of people coming together at a community level. And that's how spontaneous that is and how it's been growing. So let me describe to you a movement called neighborocracy in India.

MBS ([43:56](#)):

Beautiful.

Indra ([43:57](#)):

When I was looking for... Just have my antenna up about how people are coming together at neighborhood level, I found this movement called neighborocracy, where groups of 12 households are coming together. No, excuse me. In most cases they're groups of 20 households coming together in parts of India, including what we would describe here as the slums of India, where each household has taken upon themselves to represent one of the sustainability goals of the United Nations. Now, that sounds crazy, but it's true.



So one household has taken on being responsible for the poverty in their neighborhood. Another one has become responsible for the environmental conditions in their neighborhood. And they come together as small parliaments regularly.

MBS ([45:04](#)):

That's great.

Indra ([45:04](#)):

And within that, right? This is even more beautiful. There's a children's parliament, there's a midterm parliament, and there's an adults' parliament. So in each of these groups, there are three levels of parliament where they're all describing the SDGs, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Now, you think, what a lovely idea? How amazing? You get kids talking about how they would improve the poverty in their area and adults also. What is really extraordinary is that these exist. There's a thousand of them and they exist all the way up to the national level. And there is, in India, a children's parliament prime minister, right?

MBS ([45:46](#)):

Right.

Indra ([45:48](#)):

And she gets media attention. She speaks on behalf of the children of India around how to move India towards the social development goals, which as you probably know right now, is not the main way that the political establishment has been going, right?

MBS ([46:05](#)):

[inaudible 00:46:05].



Indra ([46:05](#)):

So it's in contrast to, and it's a challenge to the mainstream politics of India. And this is not alone. These neighborhood parliaments are appearing all over the world in this really complex way because people are so informed. With a mobile phone, that's almost as much as they need. So I hope that's enough of the story for you, Michael.

MBS ([46:27](#)):

That's a great story. Oh, it's wonderful.

Indra ([46:30](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([46:31](#)):

The final question I'd love to... it's a broad one, so you can take it however you wish, which is, is there anything that needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me?

Indra ([46:45](#)):

Usually, I can spring right to that answer, but I'll be honest. This has been a great conversation, Michael. I think you've asked a lot of the right questions.

MBS ([46:56](#)):

Fantastic.

Indra ([46:59](#)):

What I would invite everyone to do, when they think about politics, they think about power. Is instead of really thinking about how to fix the problems, to really enter into that space of, what do I imagine the future could be? And then to own that piece of your imagination, or own your imagination for the future



and share that story of what you're dreaming of with others. And that is the real source of the new politics that would be fitting for this era of us all waking up.

MBS ([47:36](#)):

Yeah. Wake up, wake up, wake up, wake up, wake up. I know that's the title, well, some of the title of Indra's book, but it's really what I'm taking from this interview. It's what I'm trying to get shaken into me to try and really get it to land. I mean, it's so interesting, the bridge that got built in this conversation from a book of philosophy and it's... Wilber is not an easy read, but building that out to a philosophy of activism, a way of showing up and doing things in the world. And I think with Wilber's insistence on connecting to the world, that makes that call to activism so real. In that model that Indra shared, the very unmodestly named all quadrants, all levels and say, the all encompassing model of the universe, I find it so tempting to keep retreating to that top left-hand quadrant.

MBS ([48:41](#)):

That's the individual interior one, it's a self-help quadrant. It's about me and it's about my development and it's about my values and it's about my psychology and it's about my growth. And that's just not enough. That's just not enough anymore. And nor is it enough to claim your side, the right or the left, and then claim some moral righteousness that goes with that. I think part of what's so brilliant about Wilber's work and Indra's work that is influenced by that, is it's encompassing. It's taking it all in and trying to figure it all out. Now, there is no easy answer here, obviously, but I'm going to say yes to Indra's invitation at the end of our conversation, which was to start dreaming of the future with others. It's the dreaming and it's the future and it's the others. It's all of that that makes it such a powerful invitation. And I hope you'll take that up as well.



MBS ([49:42](#)):

If you're interested in learning more about Indra, there's her new book out, of course, you'll find her personal website at Indraadnan.global, that's I-N-D-R-A-A-D-N-A-N.global. And then her political work, and this is a newsletter I subscribe to, is thealternative.org.uk. And it's an inspiring website and newsletter hearing stories of activism and change, and really, of people dreaming of the future with others. And of course, I want to say thank you to you for listening to the podcast, listening the whole way through. If you're loving it, do join the free community. It's the Duke Humfrey's, named after one of the cool libraries at Oxford University, that library where all the good stuff was kept. And we have good stuff as well.

MBS ([50:32](#)):

We have transcripts, we have additional interviews that haven't been released, we have some goodies that you can download. It's totally free to join. We'd love to have you there if you're up for the game. And of course, the podcast grows by word of mouth and by people looking at reviews. So if you wanted to mention this episode about bigger picture of society and activism and politics and going beyond what's comfortable for you, then I'd appreciate that for sure. And of course, a rating on your podcast app is always deeply appreciated. I'm MBS, and you're awesome and you're doing great.