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MIKE ABRAMS: Welcome to the sixth episode of the "Talks at Google" Podcast, where great minds meet. I'm Mike and I'm here to help kick off this week's episode. "Talks at Google" brings the world's most influential thinkers, creators, makers, and doers all to one place. Every episode of this podcast is taken from a video that can be seen at YouTube.com/TalksatGoogle. When white supremacist Wade Michael Page murdered six people and wounded four in a Sikh temple in Wisconsin in 2012, Pardeep Kaleka was devastated. The Temple leader, now dead, was his father. Meanwhile, Arno Michaelis, a former skinhead and founder of one of the largest racist organizations in the world, had spent years of his life committing terrible acts in the name of white power. When he heard about the attacks, waves of guilt washing over him, he knew he had to take action and fight against the very crimes he used to commit.

[00:00:58] After the Oak Creek tragedy, Arno and Pardeep worked together to start an organization called Serve2Unite, which works with students to create inclusive, compassionate, and nonviolent climates in their schools and communities. Their story is one of triumph of love over hate, and of two men who breached a great divide to find compassion and forgiveness. Now here's Arno Michaelis and Pardeep Kaleka, the Gift of Our Wounds: A Sikh and a Former White Supremacist Find Forgiveness After Hate.
[applause] So, let's start at the beginning. So Arno, in the late '80s, early '90s, you were a founding member of what went on to become one of the largest hate groups in the country. Tell us about your experience in Milwaukee growing up, and that led to being involved in an organization like that.

ARNO MICHAELIS: What's interesting about my experience is that on paper I would have been like, the last kid you would think that would go that direction.

[00:02:03] When I was researching for my first book, I was talking to a lot of people who were in the gang with me and who had also gotten out, and in the process of doing that I was asking about their childhoods, asking about things that they've been through, and just about all of them had like, horrific childhoods. There was missing parents, there was physical abuse, there was poverty. In my case, I grew up in a nice house in a nice neighborhood, never went hungry, never took a beating, my parents were together, they both loved me very much. They let me know that all the time. In fact, all the adults in my life were, like, just showering me with affirmation and positivity. But I grew up in an alcoholic household, and my parents fought a lot, and my mom was always stressed out trying to keep things running. And my mom's misery was very plain to me. And instead of being a good kid and being like, "Hey, Mom, I love you, how can I help?"

[00:2:59] I would be, like, distancing myself from her, distancing myself from my dad, from all these adults who were supporting me,

which of course made me suffer mor and led me to start lashing out at other kids, which I quickly got like, a habit for. I got a habit for people being afraid of me, a habit for like, the thrill of teachers freaking out, of like, causing havoc in otherwise orderly places. And like any kind of substance abuse, what gets you high the first time is old hat ten times later. You got to keep escalating it. So my antisocial behavior escalated from being a bully on the school bus, to fights in the schoolyard, to breaking and entering, burglary, vandalism, fighting in the street. I started drinking myself when I was 14. The first time I drank, I drank until I passed out, and I drank like that for another 20 years. By the time I'm 16, I'm a full-blown alcoholic, I'm very conditioned to violence; it's like second nature to me. And hate is just another part of the thrill.

[00:04:00] Like just, "I hate the school, I hate the cops, I hate society, I hate the government." Like, it was just part of the habit that I was really addicted to. And so that's who I was when I heard white power, skinhead music. That was really fast and aggressive, which I loved. I was into punk before that, and I loved like, the hard-core, fast break stuff, kind of punk. And this was the same kind of music, but the lyrics were about race and nation and blood and soil, all these like, very seductive and romantic themes. And the same themes, really, that Adolf Hitler used to twist the mind of so many millions of Germans in World War II. Plus it really pissed people off. Like, nothing pisses people off like a swastika, and I was just really in the business of pissing people off. That's all I wanted to do. So my initial involvement in these white power skinhead hate groups was to get a rise out of people; it was to repulse civil society and to provoke hostility, to provoke fights.

[00:05:03] So that's what got me into it. Me and a couple friends started this white power skinhead gang in Milwaukee. I was already in punk bands and like, pretty acclimated to screaming loud and getting people crazy, so we started our own skinhead band. And we were like a magnet for pissed-off white kids, that just came from every direction to be part of what we were doing. And as we radiated hostility into the world, the world reflected it back to us, oftentimes in multiples. And within a few months, my best friend who I started the gang and the band with went to prison for shooting a kid who came into a drive-by at our house. Within a couple years, another very good friend of mine was shot and killed in a street fight as he was out practicing hate and violence as I had taught him to do. And rather than see these bad things happening as wake-up calls, we saw them as validation of our paranoid narrative.

[00:06:01] So rather than like, wake up and come to my senses when my friend got murdered, it wasn't his fault that he was out marching around with a swastika on his jacket and picking fights with people that led to the shooting that killed him, it was the Jews' fault for bringing all these black and brown people here. And so that whole way of thinking is this like, constant process of spinning whatever's happening in the world to suit your narrative. And it took a ton of

energy and really added to this growing sense of exhaustion that eventually let me out.

MIKE ABRAMS: Now, Pardeep, you had a different upbringing in Milwaukee. So talk about your time and really--I know you were a police officer for a while to where you are today. But really the growing up in Milwaukee and what it was like for you and your family.

PARDEEP KALEKA: Yeah, for us and our family, I came to the States when I was six years old. And I had sort of a typical--and now I want to use the word "typical" right now because I think the time and space that we exist in right now calls for a unity of just immigration, and immigration patterns, demographic change.

[00:07:08] And so I grew up as your typical immigrant. I came here when I was six, not a lot of money in our pockets. My dad had $10 in his pocket. I don't know, maybe $35 in his pocket. Probably a little bit more, but just scratching, clawing. We moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At that time in the 1980s, Milwaukee was a thriving city. Soon as we got here, there would be this sort of job exodus, employment exodus, in the city of Milwaukee that would lead to kind of an illegal economy. Just an economy--and there goes the crime rates, there goes drug raids, there goes shootings, homicides.

[00:07:58] And before long, we were caught in the hairs of trying to find a safe place to live. I remember my parents moving around quite a bit. We moved from the north side of Milwaukee to the east side of Milwaukee, east side of Milwaukee to the south side, west side. And really just going on this whole like, journey of trying to find a safe place to raise their kids. As I grew up, I grew up--there wasn't a lot of Punjabi people at that time, in the '80s. Especially not in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I think there was about four or five families. And that not having somebody or some people to call sort of your own led to this feeling of, I wasn't enough. Led to this feeling of, I'm not black enough to be black, I'm not Latino enough to be Latino, I'm not white enough to be white, I'm not American enough to call myself American and in a weird kind of way, I wasn't even Indian enough to call myself Indian.

[00:09:06] I can as, as a 42-year-old grown-up man, can kind of see the beauty in that now because all of that led to me being able to raise myself and me. But at that time, growing up, it really led to a sense of like, who am I, what am I? What do I represent? And that led to me saying, "Okay, you know what? I want to do something with my life that's gonna mean something to the country that gave me home." And I dreamt about being a police officer and became the first one in our family to graduate from college. Became a police officer in Milwaukee, and just really noticing some of the--as I was growing up I kind of thought the world to be black-and-white, right? We think in simple terms of, I can give back to the society if I can keep good people safe from bad folks.

[00:10:04] But we know the realities of policing are not that simple. There's a lot of gray, and over time that gray became too much to stomach, and so I became an educator working with at-risk high school youth in the same neighborhood that I was policing. The neighborhood that I was policing has a documentary about it. It's called "53206." It is one of the most violent neighborhoods in Milwaukee, so the entirety of my policing career was getting dope, getting guns, getting arrests, and throughout that entire five years I never wrote one parking ticket or one speeding ticket. It was really just running and gunning. And seeing that from that sense of police officer and then working as a teacher, you see a different level of intimacy,

[00:10:58] of now you're working with youth, attempting to try to work with them before they get into this life. And you get to know parents, and you get to know grandparents, and you have to develop relationships. Probably something that I should have done as a police officer anyways. But we didn't live in that culture of getting to know the neighborhood you were policing in. It was really just running, gunning, arresting, and that was that. And that was my life before August 5th.

MIKE ABRAMS: Well that's exactly what I want to get to. I think part of what connects you, and we'll get to your first meeting and how you guys became friends, but I think August 5, 2012 was a significant day. Do you mind sharing your experience on the day, what happened for everyone that doesn't know, and kind of what was going through your mind? And then Arno, I'll ask the same question to you after, too.

PARDEEP KALEKA: Sure, sure. So yeah, August 5th--and when I think back to August 5th, I mean it's August right now and we think about how warm it is, and I just think about how nice it was at that time to live in this world of sort of being oblivious,

[00:12:03] I would say, and taking things for granted. At that time, I was married, I had two kids, it was summer, summer vacation for us. Career was going great, we bought a house, my wife was working, and I thought that everything was just--we had achieved pretty much the American dream. My dad at that time was 65 years old, he basically collected one month of Social Security, and he was kind of joking around about it, and he was like, "When you turn a certain age in this country, they give you money, and they give you insurance, and things like that." So he was kind of just really celebrating it. And we at that time were really like, we've achieved. We've made it. The entire family has made it, right? From having a little bit of money and being immigrants, to saying "Okay, now both my sons are graduating school, I'm collecting Social Security," my dad had made it with the small businesses.

[00:13:01] And we were in the summer of that. And then this is when, on that August morning, a person who was part of the gang that Arno helped start, told us, in not so much words but with gunshots, that

we weren't entitled to that American dream. That that dream was not really meant for people like us. And he, that morning, took the lives of six people. One of those people was my father and Temple president, Satwant Singh Kaleka. And it was only the fortunate--I mean honestly--only the fortunate circumstances of my daughter forgetting something at the house that made us turn around and be 10 minutes late getting to the gurdwara, which we call the Sikh temple.

[00:14:00] And so--and even in the moment when I found out that there was a shooting at the temple and when it happened, there was mixed feelings that I had because once the police officer told me what's going on, I knew that both my parents were inside the temple. And I asked them, I said, "When did this happen?" And he says, "10 minutes ago it started. The scene is not secure." And at that time, all these different emotions start to come over you. And for those that have experienced trauma in their life or pain in their life, can kind of maybe resonate with this and say, okay, there's a feeling of relief. There's a feeling of relief, believe it or not, of like, okay, I'm not dead, I'm not inside there, and my children are not inside there. There's a feeling of guilt. The guilt being around, maybe I didn't do enough when I could have done enough.

[00:15:00] Maybe I just took things for granted and I settled into this domesticated life of, I have mine so, you know what? I don't got to worry about them. And all these other different emotions are happening at the same time: anger, frustration, helplessness, the "what if"s that haunt you. The "what if"s of like, would the police--and that day there was so much that we were not privy to, we were not given. And say, okay, you know what? We were finding out in real-time what was happening with our loved ones and not through law enforcement. We were finding out through Twitter. We were finding out through social media. What is going on with our loved ones? And the question that kept coming up to me was like, Would they do this if this demographic was not a small demographic to America? What if this demographic had a little bit more political power than our demographic?

[00:16:01] Would the police have gone in quicker if there was different folks, if it was a church rather than a temple? And that really eats at you. And I think that's been the part like--for me and Arno, that's been our inspiration. That's to say, you know what? Forgiveness is gonna look a lot like vengeance, and we're gonna be vengeful and say that nobody's gonna ever have to have this feeling of not being worth enough to save.

MIKE ABRAMS: And Arno, so what was your experience like when you heard that the group that you helped found was basically claiming responsibility for such a horrific act?

ARNO MICHAELIS: I'll never forget Sunday, August 5, 2012. In addition to being a former white supremacist, I'm a former I.T. consultant. I

don't like to talk about that as it's too traumatic, but I was actually doing I.T. work for a client that day down in Illinois.

[00:17:02] I'd work on weekends when I could because end-users aren't in my way and vice versa, and of course all servers are rebooting and progress bars are going, I'm just--I'm probably the only I.T. guy that ever did this, but I'm dicking around on social media and whatnot. And I remember a Twitter feed just that hashtag "SikhTempleShooting," and it's just pouring down my screen. And it's saying, you know, multiple gunmen, nobody knows how many are dead yet, Sikh temple in Wisconsin. And like so many people before August 5th, so many Americans, like, I had no idea who Sikhs were. I just, like, oh, those are the guys who drive the taxis with the thing on the back with the sword. But I didn't know anything about what Sikhi was about.

[00:17:53] But I did know that because of who Sikhs were, because they were so visibly different than even other people of color in the States, I just had this sinking feeling that there was--that I had something to do with this. That my old ideology had something to do with this. There was like, white supremacy involved in one way or another, and very possibly like, directly motivating the shooter. So from my client's office--and by the way, this client is still a good friend and aware that I was doing this on billable time, but I recorded a video response to the shooting. And really just, first of all said how devastated I was to imagine people who have lost their fathers, two boys lost their mom. Like, there was a grandpa there who was killed. And really like, feeling that kind of suffering. I wanted to convey that in the video how dedicated I was to bearing witness to the suffering and also to bearing as much of it as I could.

[00:19:04] And then I went on about how when things like this happen, we really have to let compassion be our vengeance. We have to let what's most beautiful about our human experience, like, come to the rescue of the situation. And I went on a bit about how we really got to see each other, ourselves in each other, no matter what. If we're Democrats and Republicans, or if we're black and white, or we're rich and poor, whatever, we've still got to see that we're all human beings first and foremost. And then I went home and just glued myself to the media, and by the end of the night, it was revealed that the shooter was a white supremacist, an affiliated supremacist. They didn't say his name, so that night I lay awake all night wondering if this was somebody that I had recruited into that narrative who had just murdered six people, or if it was someone who I knew.

[00:20:03] The next morning it was--the guy's name was announced, his name was Wade Michael Page. They announced his background. He was kind of from Colorado originally, then North Carolina, and only recently Milwaukee. Even though so much of my time back in the hate group days was literally hazed by alcohol and I might have met this guy in person, they later revealed that he got radicalized while in the United States Army and came out of the Army in 1998 a full-blown

white power skinhead. I was able to kind of rule that out also that I didn't know this guy personally, but it didn't really change the urgency that I felt to respond, and the responsibility that I felt to help transform this atrocity into something that would actively counter hate and violence from that day forward.

[00:20:56]
MIKE ABRAMS: So now you two are very good friends now, but I would love to hear how you decided to meet the first time, what were the expectations going in, and what was it like meeting the first time coming from such different backgrounds in such a unique connection between you two?

PARDEEP KALEKA: Yeah, so after the shooting happened--my dad was temple president. He was president for 15 years, which is a long time, according to Sikh Indian politics, to be president of any church, synagogue, mosque, gurdwara. So I mean, his dream was basically to make a sanctuary where people, Sikhs, could come to. And within that time, he did. He fulfilled what he needed to do, and he died in the place that he helped build. No bigger martyrdom--we call it shaheedi, some people call it

[indistinct]--but no bigger sacrifice that a person can do than that. And in fact I had a lot of people who came up to me like, you know, don't feel bad, don't feel sad.

[00:22:02] You know, your dad did what he needed to do and no better death than to die that death of a martyr. With that said, that puts a lot of pressure on you as the oldest son. And puts a lot of pressure on what you need to do. So my personal grief, my personal feeling, could not actually start. I had to figure out logistics for other families who had lost their loved ones. Most of these families did not understand the culture of America. So I was old enough to understand the culture of America, how do we do funeral proceedings, who pays for what, the logistics of everything. How do we raise funds, this thing and that thing. So I felt my mind was just to dive into work. With that said, we basically put on a brave face for the world, right?

[00:23:00] But at the same time, I think I was faking it. I think I wasn't truly--like, I was still bitter. I was still upset. I was still gritting my teeth at every interview where they would talk about forgiveness. And I would be like, "Yeah, ugh. Yes. Let me talk about this." And that was my honest truth. I did a thing for law enforcement one time and I could barely get through the talk because I was so bitter. And when we were doing this, we were approached by every, like, you name it, gun rights to education to everything, immigration, xenophobia. And my inspiration to reach out to Arno was to figure out, like, okay, Why did this person do this? Like, we weren't getting answers. So, you know, the best person who can explain it is a person that has lived that lifestyle and has started that same organization.

[00:24:00] So to find out like, why somebody would do something like this. And I didn't know it at that time, but that would lead me to my own personal feeling. Arno is not only my friend and my brother. Arno is my counselor, my therapist. And that's a lot coming from a therapist. And I think--we talk every week and we talk about things that are unrelated to August 5th. We're genuinely friends, we're genuinely brothers. This man comes over to my house, babysits the kids, takes them out. And all of that to say, you really need to challenge--we need to challenge ourselves. And not to say that I'm not putting any blame on the Wade Pages of the world, but if I put all the blame and all the emphasis on the Wade Pages, the white supremacists, the other people in the world, then I continue to take my life for granted.

[00:25:01] And I think the biggest part of forgiveness is to say, you know what? Honestly, if this wouldn't have happened, you would have went on and you would have lived your life, and you wouldn't have appreciated every single conversation as much as you do now, every single relationship that you do now. You probably wouldn't tuck your kids in at night and hang around their bed for an hour and just sit there and watch them sleep because you would've took that for granted. You probably wouldn't have made love--no, sorry. Made love, you know, with a sense of appreciation! It's okay, we all know we do it. But in a way I think forgiveness was really just like, okay, I need to take control of my own personal life and our relationship definitely helped that.

MIKE ABRAMS: So when was the first meeting? Like, talk us through sitting down the first time.

PARDEEP KALEKA: So the first meeting--

[00:26:00] The first time we talked, we were both working for a global think tank called Against Violent Extremism. And I reached out--

ARNO MICHAELIS: Founded in part by Google Ideas, which is kind of [indistinct]--thank you!

PARDEEP KALEKA: Yeah, Google kind of put us together!

ARNO MICHAELIS: Yeah, exactly.

PARDEEP KALEKA: Yeah, that was our Tinder. Back then. Sorry, I don't even want to get in. So, first time we reached out, we connected in the same way that everybody kind of connects this these days, digitally, and then we texted, we talked. And just being able to talk to him and--was uplifting. Because I was getting to a point where reality was hitting. It was about two months after the shooting. Reality was really starting to set in. Dad's not coming home. These children are never gonna see their grandfather again. They--he had

two grandkids at the time; they would ask about him. And how do you explain this?

[00:27:00] It's tough to explain. My mom was a widow. It's like, we're figuring out all this stuff and it's like, okay, after the inspiration of cameras and things being there and you getting to put on--and it is a privilege to be able to put on a brave face for the world, right? There's a sense of purpose to that. Then reality hits, and you go back home. In the loneliness, first thing you think about is a shooting. First thing you think about when you go to sleep, or when you wake up in the morning, is what just happened? Did I just dream this? Did this really just happen to us? And really like, the world happening to you is a victimizing place. Think that the world can just happen to you, and not happen for you, is a sense of like, oh, my God, what can I do about this? So reaching out to Arno and hearing his voice, and just the first time talking, we decided to sit down and really just conversate face-to-face.

[00:28:03] When we decided to do that, I was still gauging from my experience with him over the phone or via text, whether he was still a white supremacist. Whether he was--whether a person could really go from being a white supremacist to not having that ideology. Or whether it was just so ingrained within us that somebody could not separate themselves from that. I'm still gauging this, and I'm asking him like, "Where do you want to go out to eat?" And I swear if he would've said, "I want to go get beer and brats," or like, "I want to go to a tavern," because Milwaukee is full of taverns--

ARNO MICHAELIS: For sauerkraut and Wienerschnitzel.

PARDEEP KALEKA: If he would have talked like that, I would have been like, "Oh, bro, I got to watch the kids." I would've put the whole kid excuse on. But he says, "I want to--I like Thai food. Do you like Thai food?" I was like, "Yeah, yeah. I can do Thai food. Cool."

[00:29:01] In the back of my mind it was really thinking, man, he must have changed because white people can barely handle spicy food. Let alone white supremacists, I know they can't handle spicy food.

ARNO MICHAELIS: It's true.

PARDEEP KALEKA: So that sort of helped ease my, okay, we're gonna do this. But as the weeks started to move along and we started to get towards that date of meeting, I started to tell my wife and my mother and other family members, and they would oftentimes be like, you lost your mind. Something's going on with you. Don't do this. These people can't change. And as much as, like--change is the most inevitable thing in life. Things are gonna change. We have to navigate that change, that's how you all stay relevant in the work that you do, that's how we all stay relevant. But with that said, a lot of people think that change can't happen for certain people.

[00:29:55] And I was just like, we have a faith here who believes--Sikhi actually is based in the principle of oneness and that change will happen, right? But they're telling me, no, this person hasn't changed and can't change. And as much as I didn't want to like, believe it, it starts to seep at your soul. And so it starts to seep, and say, well, maybe they might be right. Maybe something is going on with me. I might be a little crazy because I do hang around and hug the kids longer than I should. People don't normally do this. They don't just hang out with their kids and just, like, I want to hold you, I want to love you, right? So I started--maybe this person hasn't changed. And through all that--me and Arno say it all the time. Through all your fears, be courageous. Just keep testing it. Be courageous. Be courageous. The thing that you sometimes don't want to do is what you should be doing. Try to say "yes" more than you say "no." Obviously there are things that you want to say "no" to, but be courageous.

[00:31:00] And so, just keep going in that sort of intention, that spirit of being courageous. We find ourselves at this restaurant together. And the first time that I saw him, I was like, What am I gonna say to this person? What do I really want to know? What am I gonna ask? I get all this other stuff is going on, but now you're face-to-face. What am I really gonna ask him? To my surprise, he was kind of thinking the same way. He was kind of like, What do I say to this person who just lost their father? "I'm sorry"? "I'm sorry" would seem kind of hollow at this point of, I helped to start this organization that this guy belonged to and now I'm sitting here and I'm facing the consequences of actions that I thought that I put way back there. But knowing that I really can't--you can't like--stuff that we have done in the past we still have to be accountable for.

[00:32:04] Forgiveness doesn't mean that we just move on and go forward with our life without ever going back there and saying, you know what? There's some wounds, there's some stuff back there. I think, sometimes you can say well, time heals all wounds. That's the biggest crock of shit I've ever heard. Like, who made that saying? Time does not heal all wounds. In fact sometimes time makes them worse. Especially on an infected wound. Yes, we will go on with our life and we'll make--if you've got something wrong we can pad around that and we can maneuver our life around that. But if you're still moving your life around that, this is still the focus. That wound is still the focus. Yeah, you've gone on but you haven't removed it. And that's the thing. Wounds do not heal with time.

[00:33:00] They heal with time, they heal with purpose, they heal with forgiveness, they heal with a sense of consciousness. They heal with honoring pain. And that's the first time that we met. That's who I met. I met a person who said, "Listen, we're gonna honor this pain. We're gonna be conscious about what this pain is from. We're gonna take control of our lives." And that's how healing wounds really happens. It's not just about time. It's about consciousness, it's about forgiveness, it's about purpose.

ARNO MICHAELIS: There was actually a physical wound that Pardeep incurred about a week before that actually was our icebreaker. So, like Par said, I was freaked out going to meet him. I was really honored for the ability to just offer myself in service to Pardeep and to his community and to his family.

[00:34:00] I was excited about that, but at the same time, I'm intimidated. Like, where do I even begin? Just like Par said, like, What do you even say? "Hey, I'm Arno. Sorry about your dad." Nothing I could have thought of seemed right, and I'm rarely at a loss for words, as you may have gathered. But at the time I was just like, I didn't know what to say. I get in there early, I get to the restaurant, and this restaurant is like, my jam. I'm known to eat here like, five days a week. I'm a curry fiend. I no longer drink, so I get a buzz through chili. That's how I get messed up. And this is some of the spiciest food I've had on the planet Earth, and I love it that way. And I know the owners, I know the chefs, I know the servers, they're all friends of mine. And where I look back to my past and a lot of my hate and my violence came from, like, a fear of my vulnerabilities.

[00:34:55] Since I started meditating in 2009 and really like, studied how my mind works and how human emotion works, I've really just become very open in my vulnerabilities, which means I go to pieces at a drop of a hat. After the Sikh temple shooting, I was doing media for like, eight to ten hours a day, and it was at a point where I was transitioning from the I.T. career to a career as a speaker and an author. Things were really rough for me financially. And all the sudden, the eyes of the entire world are upon me. I'm doing CNN, MSNBC, "New York Times," "LA Times," Norwegian newspapers, Australian radio, everything in between. And I'm grateful I had this opportunity to bring a message of compassion and an opportunity to like, expose the toxicity of the white supremacist narrative and say all this stuff, but at the same time, the part of me that hates myself, the part of me that will never forgive myself for what I've done and who I've hurt, is saying, "Yeah Arno, go sell some books. Go get some speaking gigs."

[00:36:03] And it sucked. At Thursday that week I had a nervous breakdown. I just like, lost it for hours of just sobbing and all I wanted to do was go back to bouncing servers, and if it would bring those six people back. But that's obviously not gonna happen. It's impossible. And so I just had to cope. And the following Sunday, exactly one week after the shooting, I was invited to come speak at a vigil, and I did like a really quick three-minute bit. And a guy from the Sikh Coalition came up to me, Jagjit Singh, and he said, he thanked me. He was like, "Hey man, I saw you on media all week. This talk was amazing. Like, thank you for your voice. It means the world to us." And I was just floored that I could be part of his healing process. And then again I'm starting to get teary-eyed. And I go to

pieces. And I'm just like, "I wish there was more Sikhs here, I hope more Sikhs come to the country."

[00:37:02] I was just, like, so in awe of the Sikh community. And really just, I wanted more Sikhs everywhere. Our society, we've got to Sikh it up. That's what we need. And as I'm telling him this, I'm like, bawling, I'm gushing tears, I got snot flying everywhere. And dude's got this really--he's got this beautiful, tight silk turban on and he's got this beautiful, really expensive-looking silk suit. And he comes and gives me a hug. I'm like, "No, I'm getting snot on your suit, I'm really sorry." And he's like, "No dude, don't even worry about it, man. It's cool. It's all good." And like, that was so uplifting to me. And again, I'm like, okay, this dude's community was assaulted. He's comforting me. Like, what does that tell you? Especially coming from this narrative saying, white people are superior. We're the superior race. Blah, blah, blah. Who's superior in that interaction? Jagjit is far and away the superior human being.

[00:37:59] So going forward from there, I kind of got my shit together but going to meet Pardeep, all this stuff was coming back again. And I was really intimidated to meet him. So I go in there, I get in there early, I'm talking to my friends Kang and Mary, the servers, and Par comes in. And he sees me talking to them. Kang and Mary are Asian, go figure, at a Thai restaurant. Par is like, "Oh, well he's talking with some Asians, so that's good."

PARDEEP KALEKA: Yeah.

ARNO MICHAELIS: It looks like they're like, genuine friends so that's a good sign.

PARDEEP KALEKA: He hasn't been them up yet.

ARNO MICHAELIS: Yeah, he hasn't attacked anybody. And he walks in, and he's got this piece of tape above his eye. And I'm like, I'm still into like, rough stuff. I love MMA, things like that. I'm too fragile to do it anymore, but the first thing I thought seeing Par with this tape above his eye is, he looks like a fighter. And Par is pretty built; he's got that fighter build. And he comes walking in and rather than say, "Hey, I'm Arno. Sorry about your dad." I'm just like, "Dude, what happened to your eye? Did you get into a brawl or something?"

[00:39:01] Par goes on to tell me that a week earlier, he's bathing his son and daughter, and his wife's at work. His daughter is seven, his son was four. And his daughter is like, getting to the stage as a little kid of like, being self-conscious about being naked. So she's like, "Dad, when I'm taking a bath, like, don't look at me." And Par is like, he wants to oblige his daughter, but he also needs to get everywhere or his wife's gonna let him have it if he's not scrubbing her down right. So he's scrubbing while looking away, but he's got to peek, and like, make sure he's getting everywhere, and then peek

away. Scrub, scrub, peek, peek away. In the corner of the bathtub he's got one of them shower organizers, it's like spring-loaded. It goes between the bathtub corner of the ceiling and you got little like, shelves where you put your shampoo and whatnot. And hanging off these shelves are these little loofah hooks. And Par's wife Priti is like, "Par, you got to get rid of those hooks. Like, somebody's gonna lose an eye or something. It's really dangerous."

[00:40:01] And Par, like many husbands, is like, "Yeah sure, oh, yeah. I'll get to it, honey." He never gets to it. So as he's scrubbing and peeking and scrubbing and peeking, he looks away and the hook goes right into his eye. Like a hot knife through butter. Just like, through the white of his eye and then out above his eyebrow like a fishhook. Just, whoop! And so Par has got his face attached to this contraption. And he pulls the springs to get it out he like comes up like this, and he's holding it. "What the hell am I gonna do?" And his daughter Amaris starts freaking out, and screaming, and she grabs and starts yanking on it.

PARDEEP KALEKA: I could hear my eye throbbing like I was like, the eyeball is gonna come out, baby girl.

ARNO MICHAELIS: Fortunately, Pardeep is an ex-police officer, he's very cool under pressure, so as Amaris is hauling on this hook, Pardeep's like, "Baby girl, you've got to let go of the hook."

[00:40:58] And so she lets go and he gets up, he goes to the mirror, he kind of takes it out the way it comes in, blood goes flying everywhere. "Okay kids, get dressed. We're going to urgent care." There's an urgent care a couple blocks away. He puts the towel over his eye, he's got a 4-year-old Jay in one arm, he's got the phone and the towel here. Amaris is hanging on his belt. He calls his wife as he's walking to urgent care. "Hey honey, yeah, you know that hook in the bath? You're going to say 'I told you so,' but yeah, it went in my eye." She's like, "You idiot." So he gets to urgent care, comes walking in, they're like "Nope, nope, nope. You've got to go to the emergency room. We can't help you here."

PARDEEP KALEKA: We don't see those.

ARNO MICHAELIS: Yep. So just then, Priti gets there. Once again, probably called you an idiot.

PARDEEP KALEKA: Oh yeah.

ARNO MICHAELIS: I told you so, maybe.

PARDEEP KALEKA: Oh yeah.

ARNO MICHAELIS: Takes him to the real doctor, and they take the hook out. The doctor's like, "Pardeep, you are one of the luckiest people

I've ever met in my life." Par's like, "I don't really feel very lucky."

[00:42:00] And the doctor goes, "If it would have been 2 millimeters the other way, you'd have a glass eye." But as it was, his eye was okay, but it tore the muscle that kept his eyelid up. So like, in true Punjabi fabulousness, he tapes his eyelid up so he can see, and then he's got to like, manually blink by bringing his bottom eyelid up when they eye gets dry. And so he tells me this story, and I'm just like all y'all where I'm just like, ugh! I'm like literally squirming and like, feeling his pain. And this empathy that I have for the suffering he went through like, on the spot just like, broke the ice. On both sides. And for me also I'm like, an almost fatal klutz. Like, I am my own worst enemy. I have over 20 concussions and probably half of them were self-induced. And so when he's telling me about his klutziness, I'm like, this is my guy! Like, we've been separated at birth!

[00:42:58] So we sat down and we split some squash curry, spiciness level seven I believe.

PARDEEP KALEKA: Oh yeah.

ARNO MICHAELIS: It was pretty banging.

PARDEEP KALEKA: We got drunk.

ARNO MICHAELIS: We were actually drinking tea all night. We got buzzed on the spices though, for sure. We were pretty buzzed. And I remember we met at 6:00 p.m. and the restaurant closes at 9:00. And it was almost 10:00 when Kang's like, "Arno, we closed like 45 minutes ago. Could you guys wrap it up?" It was amazing. We just had this brilliant discussion that was so open, and throughout this conversation I have to remind myself, I'm like, Dude, you're sitting here talking to this dude because one of your old guys murdered his dad. Because Par was so down to Earth, and so genuine, and so friendly. We just had the most amazing talk. And as we talked, we saw we had so much more in common than different. Even though we're born on opposite sides of the planet, our family stories are the polar opposite.

[00:43:56] His family scrapped and clawed to achieve the American dream over 30 years. I was born with the American dream handed to me on a silver platter. All I had to do was execute, and I spent my whole life like, getting away from it. But as we sat and talked, like, commonality after commonality after commonality appeared, to the point of where he was saying his daughter's seven, I'm like, when my daughter was seven, she had this thing with her socks. And you put her socks on and if that seam was like, cocked--you know what I'm saying. If it's cocked like one way or the other over her toes, she'd just be like this and like, just freeze and not go anywhere. You got to take her shoes off, put the socks back on. And I'm telling him

that and he's like, "Dude, my daughter does that!" We're talking about our dads. And like, Par's dad like, would never pay anybody to fix nothing. Whether he knows how to fix it or not, he's says, "Ah, I'm gonna fix this." This results in him having the lawn mower in pieces on the living room carpet in the middle of winter, much to his mother's horror. And my dad did the exact same thing. So after all these commonalities, like, that was really where the idea for Serve 2 Unite was born.

[00:45:00] And we walked out of there like, right away, we are gonna work together. We're gonna be doing something together from this point forward.

MIKE ABRAMS: So, I want to get to Serve 2 Unite, but we do have two mics, so we'll get to audience questions so if people want to start lining up. But talk to us about Serve 2 Unite, how you founded it and kind of what's the message of your foundation.

PARDEEP KALEKA: Sure. So Serve 2 Unite was founded in response to the Sikh temple shootings on August 5th, and what we saw at that time in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, and it's still happening right now, is we were seeing a lot of demographic change. And we saw a lot of people uncomfortable with this demographic change. And as we've been--for the last six years that we've been traveling, we've been able to go to many communities around the United States, small towns who are uncomfortable with this demographic change. And so Serve 2 Unite was really just to sort of respond to that.

[00:45:55] And eventually what it started to do was, in the spirit of intentions, sometimes intentions take you into different spheres. And we started to get into conversations about, okay, how do we bring school communities together? How do we broad communities together? How do we bring global communities together? And that's really where Serve 2 Unite--like, it is an organization but it's much more a calling, and it's a calling not to like, say, you know what? Serve 2 Unite, unite meaning like, oneness. We, as human beings, have to understand, and the principles of Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Judaism, all those faiths, that we are connected at a spiritual level. And it makes no sense to read anything else into any Scriptures that closes you off rather than opens you up to that fundamental truth. And so that's what Serve 2 Unite was, is. And we are privileged to be able to go to different communities, and school communities, and being able to address some of the rift that exists right now.

[00:47:01]

ARNO MICHAELIS: What we do specifically in schools is we do arts-driven service learning and global engagement. So, we ask our students what issues in society they want to address, and then we facilitate service-learning projects, often involving the arts, to solve those problems. So our students have addressed things like

community police relations, Islamophobia, religious intolerance, racism, homophobia, homelessness, human trafficking, genocide prevention, Holocaust education. And we do this in conjunction with a really amazing roster of people we call global mentors, who are people from all over the world, some former violent extremists like myself, some survivors like Pardeep, all of whom have amazing stories and do amazing work in their own spheres. We connect them live with our students via Google Hangout. And our students are then like, inspired by that story and also like, advised in a really practical sense about how to best carry out these service projects.

[00:48:01] Dydine Umunyana is a dear friend of ours and who's also appeared on Google Talks. A survivor of the Rwandan genocide is one of our best global mentors. And she helps make all this kind of stuff happen.

PERSON: Do you want to start?

PERSON: Yeah. Thank you so much for coming. I really appreciate you coming and sharing your story. Arno, you describe an adolescence that is very hateful and violent, but at the time of August 5th, your first reaction is compassion. As maybe an insight as to how that transformation happens to other people in white supremacy orgs like, what was your story? How did that transition happen? And how did you escape that life?

ARNO MICHAELIS: That's an awesome question. The very quick answer to how I got out of the movement was exhaustion. It was exhausting doing that constant spin, it was exhausting cutting myself off from culture and media that I had once taken for granted. What was most exhausting was when people who I claimed to hate treated me with kindness.

[00:48:57] And I was very fortunate that during my seven-year span in hate groups, there were times when a Jewish boss, a lesbian supervisor, Black and Latino coworkers treated me with kindness when I least deserved it. And I think this is crucial to say in our political climate today. In treating me with kindness, they were actively defying everything that I was about. Everything I did back then was meant to provoke hatred, it was meant to provoke hostility. If the hate was directed at me, all the better. So when people got angry at me and they wanted to fight, I was like, yes! Let the aggression flow! Like, that's what I'm trying to make happen. So the people who treated me with kindness were like, no no. You're not making the rules here. I'm making the rules. And the rules are, this is how human beings treat each other. If you grow up, like, you can live in this world where you're not terrified of everyone, and that's what got me out. I was very fortunate also, like, within a couple years of leaving this white power skinhead life, I started going to rave parties.

[00:50:01] So I'm a man of extremes. I go from extreme hate and violence to extreme peace and love. So a couple years out from

beating people up because of the color of their skin, I'm on the Southside of Chicago at 4:00 in the morning on a Sunday shaking my ass to house music with 4,000 people of every possible ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background on the planet Earth, and loving every minute of it. And the people in the rave scene--I used to have swastikas back on me still, like this whole arm was a big pile of swastikas. And people were just like, it doesn't matter where you were. It matters where you are. And we accept you, you're forgiven, like unconditionally, on the spot. That was really a huge part of my re-humanizing. It was a huge part of my learning and growth. I was still being very self-destructive, I was-- I added profuse drug use to my profuse drinking, and selling drugs for a while. But it was definitely a big step forward.

[00:51:01] And so that--I actually, I quit drinking, that was another big step forward. Brought some more challenges because without alcohol to numb my past, it almost consumed me again. Fortunately my daughter led me out of that. And I started writing in 2007. Writing's a really powerful process. I started meditating in 2009. And my meditation practice is really what empowers me to do everything I'm doing. I think without it I wouldn't be able to. So that was really how I got from being where I was to where I am now.

PERSON: Thank you.

ARNO MICHAELIS: Thank you.

PERSON: Thanks for being here and sharing your story. For those of us who are inspired by the themes of empathy and understanding different perspectives, what do you see as the role that technology can play in that? So those of us who work on Google products or the many Google products that exist in some capacity or another, do you see there's a way that any products could be different to sort of help with the concept of empathy and helping each other understand each other's perspectives?

[00:52:03]

PARDEEP KALEKA: Yeah, yeah. Great question. And we are right now, and I think technology is something that's gonna be part of our lives going forward. It's not something we can put sort of back in and say, well you know what, we want to engage in human contact like we are doing right now. With that said, I think there's a lot to be said for the benefits of technology. I'm a therapist now and I see a lot of clients who have had very traumatic pasts and who have a lot of suicidal ideation. Homicidal ideation. One of the things--one of the tools that actually, believe it or not, keeps them living and keeps them connected to the world is the virtual world. Now, we have to be careful in our algorithms and not sidelining a person who is miserable towards more misery. So actively challenging the silo that someone exists in, having them critically think, those things we can all do.

[00:53:01] But don't underestimate your power with technology in keeping somebody from committing a horrible act against themselves or somebody else. One of the first things that--I forget the name of the shooter in Sandy Hook, but--

ARNO MICHAELIS: Adam Lanza.

PARDEEP KALEKA: Adam Lanza. One of the first things he did was he put a bullet through his computer. And so once you start to do that, those are threads of humanity. And threads of humanity--the more threads to humanity that you have, the more stable you can be. The more of a support structure you can have. So the more dangerous person is a person who feels rejected and isolated. A rejection, whether it's real or whether it's conceived through self-persecution, paranoia, is real to that person. And we have to understand that first and foremost.

[00:54:00] The next school shooter--and I hate to say it in this way to assume that there's gonna be next one--but the school year is gonna start up soon, is most likely feeling rejected. Most likely feeling isolated. And that could be for real things like something could be happening, or it could be just the delusions or the chemical imbalance that that person has. But technology goes a long way as far as making a person not feel like they're by themselves. With any good thing, it can be the flip side and we can go really bad and make them feel even more isolated and more, so--I don't know if that answers your question.

PERSON: Yeah, it does. Thank you.

PERSON: Hi, thanks for sharing your story. That was really powerful. It resonated with me on multiple different levels. One of which is I actually worked at Google Ideas--

ARNO MICHAELIS: Right on.

PERSON: It's super cool to hear that you're from Against Violent Extremism.

[00:55:02] I guess my question is similar to the last one but there are a lot of debates about free speech and technology and what role tech companies or platforms should say. And you talk about rejection and feeling isolated but there's also obviously like, radicalization happens in communities and I guess I'm just curious what your general thoughts are.

ARNO MICHAELIS: And thank you once again. Honestly the Against Violent Extremism network, beyond just connecting Par and I, has been like, the backbone of Serve 2 Unite. Many of our global mentors have been connected with us through the Against Violent Extremism network. And I've been doing counter-violent extremism work like,

internationally since the Summit Against Violent Extremism in the summer of '11 which Google Ideas made happen. So that was huge. Following up on the technology thing, and as Par mentioned, the toothpaste is out of the tube.

[00:56:02] It's not going back in, that's just the way it is. And technology can be immensely empowering, or it can be insidiously evil. Fire can burn down your house, or it can keep you alive in the winter when it's freezing. It's just how we employ it that really makes a difference. And as far as technology and free speech go, I think--I'm a huge proponent of free speech. I love the First Amendment. I think it's probably one of the best things about the United States of America. I am very much opposed to legislation against hate speech. I think it has never accomplished less hate. The countries like England, and Germany, and Sweden where hate speech is disallowed have like, huge problems with far-right gangs because what it does is it validates the victimhood narrative of this gang.

[00:56:57] So if I'm in the U.K. and I'm like, "I can't even say this word without them oppressing me and putting me in jail," like, that's a means of recruitment. It's a means of like, cultivating the white victimhood that's at the base of all that. And that goes if you're talking about Islamist groups or whatever. Like, there's no violent extremism narrative that doesn't revolve around the sense of oppression. And whether that oppression is real or imagined is completely beside the point. It's real to the people who feel it. And without that sense of oppression, they're not gonna be angry enough to hurt people. So when the government is actively adding to the oppression by saying, "Hey, you can’t say this word without going to jail." That's what--it helps hate groups grow. That being said, being a proponent of free speech as I am, I think if we love free speech, and I love how the ACLU works in this regard, the more you love free speech, the more responsible you should be with your speech.

[00:57:55] If the government isn't gonna say "You can't say this and you can say that," it's up to you to have the personal responsibility to say, "I'm not gonna yell 'Fire!' right now in this crowded venue because it would cause a stampede and someone could get hurt." Like, that's my responsibility as someone who enjoys the benefits of the First Amendment, is to be extra responsible and mindful with my language. It's not the polar opposite, which is what we see. "Free speech, rah rah rah!" They want to say all the most offensive things they can. To me, it's shirking--it's not showing any gratitude for your ability to speak freely. So I think our--being responsible, being mindful is really important in a technological sense, I think technology companies like Google--and you guys have done an amazing job at this--need to be very aware of the power that the platform carries.

PARDEEP KALEKA: Just to piggyback on that real quick.

[00:58:57] The First Amendment and the Second Amendment came out in times when, what types of guns did we have? What type of free press did we have? What type of speech did we have? If we think about it in terms of like, the current situation that we're in, we're thinking about speech, press, weapons, and thinking as far as like, we can do weapons of mass destruction or words of mass destruction, or words of mass togetherness or weapons of mass togetherness. So it's just completely amplified. And so, I mean, this is where--you guys are the experts in this kind of field. But we need to get to a place where a person is not elected because they have the most social media followers. We have celebrities who don't say the smartest things, but yet they get 1 million retweets. We have celebrity stardom, and it's like, when is it that we get the voice back to the people who are actually leaders and thought leaders in these fields? Great question.

[01:00:08]

MIKE ABRAMS: We have time for a very, very quick one.

PERSON: Perfect. Thank you so much for being here and sharing the story of forgiveness. I think I really needed it. So I'm Googler, I'm an MBA intern, and I go to school in Charlottesville. So when I heard you saying August 5th, August 5th, I kept thinking August 12th because I was there when Heather was murdered. And it's a wound every year, right? This year I'm gonna be our Vice President of Diversity at Darden, and I've had people messaging and calling and saying like, what do I do, because it feels like wound has been ripped again. And so I'm curious what advice you all have for me to share with my peers in the community down in Charlottesville about like, how we move on when hundreds of people like you were there protesting hate, and we might not have the ability to sit and have a conversation as you all are having, so what advice do I give to my peers and to my community when I go back? Today's the last day by the way, but hopefully I'll be back here in May. So what advice would you give me?

PARDEEP KALEKA: Advice for that I would give anyone this just to honor that pain.

[01:01:02] I think in our country's history there has been this--sort of an appetite to move forward without honoring pain from the past. And like I said before, we can build a society around wounds, sure we can. But until we actually like, address the wound that exists there, by honoring it, we don't really remove it from--we don't move forward because we all know that it's there. We all know that it's there because we can't have conversations around race without somebody getting uncomfortable. That uncomfortability speaks to, hey, you know what? There's something still there that needs to be addressed. So, I'm sorry for what happened on August 12th and Heather Heyer, and really like, her life needs to be honored. One of the saddest things that I saw was from social media was like, whether white allies should be honored.

[01:02:01] And I'm like, how is this even a conversation? How are we getting to the point in society that we are actually having a conversation on whether a person who lost her life, as a martyr, is a life worth honoring? And so I thank you for speaking up. Realize that you are her voice.

ARNO MICHAELIS: I think it's really--and again, I'm so grateful for your dedication to bring about a society where everyone is valued and included. And I bear witness to the pain that you're feeling over what happened to Heather and over all the other violence that happened that day. In that spirit, I want to empower you and everyone you work with to truly defy hate and violence. And in all candor, in all frankness.

[01:03:02] Some people not understanding that, help to contribute to what happened in Charlottesville. There's a lot of people who rightfully believe that going out and punching Nazis--and we can somehow like, out-hate them or hate them out of existence, and it feeds them. It's the best gift you can give them. It doesn't defy them. You're actually putty in their hands when you respond to them with any kind of aggression because that's what they're trying to provoke. In Serve 2 Unite, we work with kids from second grade through college, and every year we have a peace summit where we get all our students together in one spot. The first year we did this, we had over 400 students from second grade through college in historic Turner's Ballroom in Milwaukee. They spent the day doing collaborative art projects, and networking, and sharing their service projects they did all year. We had music and food, it was a lot of fun. And the last thing that day was our second and third graders from Esquela Fratney who were this absolutely gorgeous, diverse spectrum of ethnicities and backgrounds up on stage, little tiny kids.

[01:04:07] And they taught the whole crowd to sing a song of peace called "Shalom," where the verse is in Hebrew and the chorus is in Arabic. And you sing it in a round, and pretty soon we have 400 kids from second grade through college of every possible background you can imagine, singing about peace in Hebrew and Arabic after spending the day together loving each other, seeing each other's humanity, valuing each other, collaborating to solve problems in society. And as this is going on, I'm thinking to myself, this is a white supremacist's worst nightmare. And this is how we respond to hate crime. This is what you get--if you want to come and shoot up a temple? You want to come drive a car into people? You want to commit this kind of violence and hatred? This is how we're gonna respond. And if everybody would get on board with that kind of response, I shit you not, we can put an end to white power rallies.

[01:05:03] I have a blog at MyLifeAfterHate.com. I have an article there, "How To Smash Neo-Nazi Events." I implore you to read that and share it. I really think that showing the beauty and power of diversity winning in the marketplace of ideas is how we defeat hate.

And it's really important to not let yourself play their game and not to let them make the rules.

PARDEEP KALEKA: Real quick, the response has to be so much stronger than the action committed. And with that said, when August 5th happened and one of the producers for a show asked me one time, "Pardeep, why do you say the shooter's name?" There are so many people, survivors, that he interviewed and he's like, "They don't ever say the shooter's name." I said, and I told him, I said, "Quite honestly, I want to remind the Wade Michael Pages of the world that are out there, that are watching this that what happens when you do something like this, because you're hateful, because whatever you believe in, because you're miserable, you think that you're gonna make other people miserable.

[01:06:06] But this made us stronger." This made us better and this made us--the response was so much stronger that I wanted to remind--and that's the greatest violence prevention technique that you can use, is make the response so much stronger than the action committed, and say, well, look at. Look at what happened because of what you did. Then think twice about what you're about to do. When we're miserable because of the response, or because of the action committed, then the shooter or the person committing violence has won.

PERSON: Thank you so much.

PARDEEP KALEKA: You're welcome.

ARNO MICHAELIS: Thank you.

MIKE ABRAMS: Guys, thank you for being here. We have copies of your book in the back so they will have copies if you want to buy one and they'll autograph it for you. And thanks for your time.
[applause]

PARDEEP KALEKA: Thank you guys.

MIKE ABRAMS: Thanks for listening.

[01:06:59] If you have any feedback about this or any other episode, we'd love to hear from you. You can visit G.co/TalksatGoogle/PodcastFeedback to leave your comments. To discover more incredible content, you can always find us online at YouTube.com/TalksatGoogle. Or via our Twitter handle @GoogleTalks. Talk soon.