



Conscious Life presents

The Power of the Pause

Guest: Darshana Avila

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[00:00:09] Jaï Bristow

Hello, and welcome to this conference. My name is Jaï Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. Today, I am very, very pleased to be welcoming back the fabulous Darshana Avila. Welcome, Darshana.

Darshana Avila

Thank you, Jaï. I'm very happy to be back with you and everybody as well.

Jaï Bristow

So Darshana, you are a somatic sex and intimacy educator, a trauma therapist, and one of the experts on Netflix's show, Sex, Love, and Goop.

Darshana Avila

That is correct.

Jaï Bristow

As someone who works with trauma and anxiety, these are words that we're hearing a lot these days. We have the Trauma Super Conference, the Anxiety Super Conference, the trending hashtags on Instagram, TikTok, and all the rest of it.

But if we take it to a very real level, on a day-to-day, what does it mean to have anxiety? How does that impact us?

Darshana Avila

That's a great question, and I'm not going to answer it from a clinical standpoint or anything like that. This is less about a diagnosis and more about speaking about and hopefully normalizing, the experience that many of us have, which is fundamentally, anxiety is a future trip.

It is a projection into something beyond the present moment, and a story that's attached to what is going to happen. What are the implications? How am I going to feel? How is this person going to feel? Will that other shoe drop? So to speak. The thing about our bodies, the thing about our nervous systems, is that when we think about particular experiences, whether past or future, in the

present moment our body is then physiologically experiencing the stress of that, the symptomology of that, if you will.

[00:02:03] Darshana Avila

Many of us experience anxiety as tension in our body. We might freeze, we might get very accelerated, we might feel our temperature shift. There are all these ways where the body is viscerally in the present, worried about, stressed about, projecting about, this future moment. That's what anxiety does to us.

It's why from a somatic lens, and in case that word is not known to anybody, we're speaking then about somatic is the body's experience, and the relationship between body and mind, and how we can inhabit our bodies, and use our bodies as a tool, a vast and intelligent tool, to help us navigate our experiences differently.

When we find ourselves feeling anxious, it's a great opportunity to do then some very simple and powerful resourcing through the body, to help us come back into the present moment fully.

Jaï Bristow

You talked about some of these somatic ways of experiencing anxiety, and then tools we can use to calm the nervous system. I'm wondering if you could start by talking about what symptoms to look out for, and what bodily responses to look out for to know that there's something not quite right, or something's flaring up.

Darshana Avila

It can be different for different people, so I'm going to speak from my own experience. I am someone who has definitely been on a journey with anxiety for much of my life. We could say that that's a big part of what would have inspired me down this path professionally.

When I get anxious, the biggest way, the biggest symptom, if you will, or tell that it's going on, is I get very sped up. That can look like a restlessness, where I start doing a million little things, instead of being able to still my body and focus on what's going on. I tend to find my heart rate accelerate, so sped up in that way as well. Even if I'm in a dialog, my speech might get notably accelerated, my pitch might go up. In my experience, anxiety is an up energy, and it's a busy go, go, go energy.

I know that when I'm in a more regulated and resourced state, there's a neutrality to that. There's a way where I can inhabit my back body differently, instead of being very forward and in my front body, if that makes sense, that phrase that I'm using.

The way that I catch on to, Oh, I'm feeling anxious right now, is often that speediness, that forward-moving energy that somehow feels disproportionate to the circumstances.

I think that piece is important to emphasize, because I don't, by any means, want to give a bad wrap to the energy of acceleration. That is a very necessary part of how we do life, we need to get up and go. We need to motivate ourselves in order to be available for so many wonderful things. But if the quality of that feels beyond our control, or if it feels we would rather be calm, quiet, settled, and that's not accessible to us at a given moment, that's a pretty clear sign that you're probably dealing with anxiety.

[00:05:42] Darshana Avila

So finding ways to counter that, to bring that regulated state back in, is a lot of what I spend my time supporting people that I work with doing. I do it for myself. Just the other day, I knew I had to have a delicate conversation with someone really dear to me, and I was avoiding it. It took me a good day to get through my anxious feelings, and my activated feelings, and ultimately, sit down and give myself some firm touch. That's one of my favorite things to do, to touch the periphery of our body, to give a little compression and containment. Really to say, and you might speak these words out loud or repeat them mentally, "Here I am and in this moment, I am safe, I am well."

Coming into, what's the reality of here and now is an important step to pulling ourselves back from the anxiety, that already in my scenario had me future-tripping into, Oh, this conversation is going to be hard, it's going to be delicate, I don't want to hurt their feelings, I want to be well-received, and I'm afraid they might not. All these stories going on in my head, none of which is factual because they haven't happened yet.

The anxiety is so much about the stories we tell, and then the impact that has on our somatic experience. Our growth then, our healing, is how we see a story for what it is, use different tools, and cultivate skills that help us to regulate our body so that we can come back into presence.

Jaï Bristow

That makes a lot of sense, I appreciate the way you're talking about it, about the forward movement of being in the future, and telling ourselves stories, and then the impact that has on the body of being front of the body, and moving forward a lot of the time. And how a lot of managing, or coping, with those symptoms is coming back into the present, seeing what is factual and what isn't. Often the stories we tell ourselves aren't factual.

I'm wondering if you could say a little bit more about those stories we tell ourselves, how they create this anxiety, and how we can interrupt them.

Darshana Avila

A few basic things to speak about, and I'm sure that if not Dick Schwartz himself, I'm sure someone in this conference is talking about Internal Family Systems and parts work, so I won't belabor that. But I think it's important to acknowledge that all of us have distinct parts of our psyche, of our personality, and they have distinct experiences. That's one piece I want to offer as background context.

The other is that our brains are unequivocally hardwired for efficiency. They want to take the shortest route from A to B always. One of the ways that that happens, is much of what we are thinking and perceiving about a present-moment experience is being informed by past experiences. The memories that we have, the imprint that we have of something that once upon a time happened to us, that's a little bit similar to what's going on in the present moment, our brain is referencing that past scenario. It's pulling context from that into this present moment.

[00:09:16] Darshana Avila

That can be really, really helpful if you need to make a quick decision and react to something, and get out of the way of danger, for instance. Super, super helpful. If you're doing a repetitive task, great thing to have. Efficiency, yay.

Not so helpful, when we are in a new encounter. If I'm having a conversation with you, Jaï, and it feels a little bit familiar to that difficult conversation I had to have a few days ago, and I project a story onto you, that this is going to be hard, when your truth is, and this is all anecdotal, but I think this probably would be your truth, but you'd probably be like, Hey, Darshana, thanks for letting me know what's going on for you. I really want to talk about this. This is great, we're going to strengthen our relationship.

So the stories are really important to see for what they are, to not believe everything we think, and moreover, to interrogate it. And that word interrogate, I realize that that could be a bit of a strong one, but what would it be like to lovingly interrogate with compassion and curiosity toward our own self and our own story? Wait, is this true? Is this really, really true? Do I know that this is true?

And insert the benefit of the doubt here. And then from that place, it's a lot easier to ask questions about what's going on, which is often what's missing when we are in a state of anxiety, and we're really hooked into a story, we are believing it. We've bought into it, we're not questioning it. It is that false belief then that pulls the rest of us along into this activated anxious state.

If we can really grow that capacity, it happens in the blink of an eye. It's inserting that pause, Oh, wait a minute, wait a minute, maybe this isn't exactly what I think it is. Maybe it's not going to go down like I think it is. Could there be another scenario here? Is it possible that..? So when we can open the aperture a little wider to bring that curiosity into our experience and unwind the story, so much opens up from there.

Jaï Bristow

Absolutely. I love the way you talk about how anxiety, or that projecting, or being very quick, the way our brain takes those shortcuts is very useful in certain situations, but in others, depending on the context, less so. That lovingly interrogating, I think that's such a beautiful phrase, and taking the time to slow down and see, What is it I'm projecting?

Also recognizing, that it often comes from a situation that feels familiar, and that's why we're writing the end of the story, because we think we know what's going to happen already.

Darshana Avila

Right, it's like the parts that I mentioned earlier, they have their strategies for coping, they have their strategies for surviving. And we develop these when we're young. If you, and I'm going to use my own experiences. I grew up with a lot of volatility, I grew up with two very loving and also very dysfunctional parents. People-pleasing is definitely in my schema. If I take care of you, I'm going to hopefully be able to control the overall calm in the environment is a strategy that I adopted very early on.

If I'm competent and I get out ahead of everything and I'm trying to make life easier for people around me, I'm going to in turn feel better. I internalized that belief very, very young in a totally unconscious and subconscious way. And that can play out now, if I have a need, if I have a

boundary that I am wavering to make known, to communicate to a friend, to a partner, to someone near and dear to me in the present moment, and I catch on to my people-pleasing tendencies of wanting to take care of their needs above my own, that I notice often by the feeling of anxiety that's going on, because it doesn't feel good to me to do that.

[00:13:37] Darshana Avila

I get into that accelerated, tight, speedy place, it's tension, it's stress and strain. I wear this little aura ring on my finger that tells me where my heart rate's at, and my stress levels are at, and I'll notice they go up when I'm sitting still even because my heart rate's going. It's like that's an opportunity for me to both... It's this meeting point of the story I'm telling, because I have this strategy, and this story that's deeply embedded from my young self, it's the story I'm telling, it's how it's impacting my body. If I can, and you used the phrase, and I'm sure I've used it, slow down.

Even the way I'm talking about it now, I notice myself getting a bit sped up. So much of what we're doing is really learning to slow ourselves down enough to notice. Because when we notice, we're introducing choice. I notice this is happening, I have a choice. What do I want to do here? Do I want to keep feeding this pattern? Do I want to keep buying into the story, and keep this stressed-out physiological state in my body?

Or do I want to pause, insert something resourcing here, that could be, Hey, I'm going to go for a walk. Hey, I'm going to do that soothing self-touch. Hey, I'm going to listen to a guided meditation that helps me drop in. I'm going to journal. I'm going to talk to a friend. I'm going to hug my pet. This list could go on and on and on. What am I going to do right here, right now to help step out of that spin cycle and bring myself into the present moment?

The slowing down, while very, very simple is not easy, and we could talk about this for ages upon ages, because the collective culture of capitalism, and of grind culture, as we hear that phrase used a lot, hustle culture. Everything about the systems of oppression, and the powers that be, that we are existing inside of, really reinforces the speed up, go, go, go, do, do, do, because we are less connected then to what's really going on in the present moment.

I'm not claiming that slowing down is an easy capacity to cultivate. I recognize the work that it takes having done it myself, and I've been spending my days supporting other people doing it. It's maybe one of the most meaningful things any of us can do for our own healing, and in service to our collective healing as well.

Jaï Bristow

Absolutely. I'm so, so glad you mentioned that it can be very difficult because that was going to be my question because you talk about how often these patterns that we have, that anxiety is pointing to, are patterns that developed in our childhood based on our primary caregivers, or incidents that happen to us, or trauma, or all those things. That's where our patterns come from. And anxiety, like you mentioned, is pointing out those patterns.

You mentioned slowing down and taking a pause, and those are very beneficial. But the question is, how? Like you said, it's not easy. How do we start to cultivate that ability to slow down and insert the pause where we can bring in some resourcing tools?

[00:17:01] Darshana Avila

What we all have an opportunity to do, and I do mean this, all of us, regardless of any of the particularities of our circumstances, we all have the opportunity to learn what are the variables. What are the factors that contribute to a felt sense of safety? And how do I bring that about for myself?

Because anxiety is rooted in an experience of feeling unsafe in some way, shape, or form. That's what's underlying it. This feels dangerous, this feels risky, I might be under threat of harm, and so that speeds up that anxiety. So space to feel into what supports me to actually feel safe. Is it having... And this is where some of the very things that in childhood we are often handed. We're handed our cute stuffed animal, we're handed our blanky, we're handed the sippy cup of the thing we like to drink out of.

While that might seem incredibly infantile, these are really basic and fundamental things that because we are animals, because we need help regulating our nervous systems. That's what co-regulation is about, when regulation happens between two or more beings, we can't always do it for ourselves.

But that doesn't mean that as adults, we always need another person there, and this is where we get to mature. We can reach for some of these very same things, have a weighted blanket, a soft pillow, or a stuffed animal, or something with a texture and a size that when you hold it close to you, it feels soothing. Have that cup of your chamomile tea, or whatever it is that introduces and really signals to you through your senses, the smell of it, the taste of it, the ritual of making the cup of tea. All of these things that we can do that can help us to shift our state.

It might be that you have a dedicated space in your home, an altar set up, or a favorite chair that you begin to train yourself to. I'm emphasizing that word train in the very Pavlovian way, that through repetition, reinforcement, and reminding ourselves through certain cues, whether they're auditory, visual, smells, or what have you, it cues you to, Oh, I'm safe here and now.

Noticing where your body is in space and time, that is basically the most fundamental somatic practice out there, is called orienting. Where am I? I look around, I look to the left, I look to the right, I look high, I look low. I take in my physical space, even if it's a space that I'm used to occupying all the time. This is about helping the most primitive part of your brain, that lizard brain, as it's often referred to as a colloquial phrase. It's helping that animal brain to make sure nobody's coming to get me, no one jumping out of the corners.

You could do that orienting inwardly, you could close your eyes and you could scan your body. I mentioned earlier, you could listen to a guided meditation, a body scan, a yoga Nidra practice, and a million different things that are so readily available. We have an abundance of resources in that way available to us.

I'm really going off the cuff, offering a wide array of things that we might do. But what it comes down to, to loop it back is finding out what it is that works for you. What introduces that feeling of safety, that feeling of comfort for you, so that you can begin to practice.

[00:20:54] Darshana Avila

Maybe you hang out with it for a minute, and that is where your threshold's at, and you give yourself a minute of regulation, but you keep doing that. Then before you know what a minute is 2 minutes, and 2 minutes is 10 minutes, and 10 minutes is 20 minutes. The way you're walking through life is with a different baseline around your sense of safety, your sense of presence, how you inhabit your body, and how you navigate your environment.

This is, in my experience, one of the most powerful ways that we can confront our anxious tendencies, and the anxiety in us, is to really, through our bodies, train ourselves to acknowledge that safety is here.

We're not young people in these dysfunctional experiences that we were once upon a time. We're adults here and now, creating new experiences, and having access to new resources that we can use when we need it, in the present moments, that we get to have different experiences and show up in our lives, and in our relationships in ways that feel really healthy.

Jaï Bristow

I think that's such a beautiful framing, that framing around safety. That finding tools and resources that help us find safety in the here and now, in this body, and that can support us in our journey with anxiety. You said the phrase, just hang out with it for a minute, and that becomes 2 minutes, then 10 minutes, 20 minutes. What do you mean exactly by the it?

Darshana Avila

The it is... Thank that's a really great question. When we are used to a baseline of dysregulation, when we're used to feeling anxious all the time, that becomes our norm. So even an objectively healthy alternative can feel threatening to us, can feel inaccessible to us. So to sit in that felt experience of safety, of calm, of quiet, might feel like more than we can do, when we're used to the adrenaline, when we're used to the buzz, when we're used to the go, go, go.

So when I say sit with it, the it would be whatever resourcing practice, tool, or support you're exploring with, the stuffed animal, the weighted blanket, the altar space, the guided meditation, whatever it might be, quality not quantity, and repetition, repetition, repetition.

Let those mantras infiltrate, please, because in the beginning, you might sit still for a minute and be crawling out of your seat by the end of that, and thus you're engaging with the anxious tendencies and patterning all over again. Okay, sit for a minute. You don't have to instantaneously force yourself to have a 20-minute marathon.

Over time, when you repeat a high-quality, but maybe shorter duration practice, it's going to naturally start to expand. It will, over time get longer, and the quantity will begin to catch up to the quality. You don't have to force that.

I think that there is a very understandable misunderstanding in this quality versus quantity dynamic. Why it's understandable is culturally so much of what we have been taught is more, more, more, do more, become more, have more, be more productive, be more capable. So we then apply that same, honestly, very aggressive and even violent mentality toward our healing, toward our resourcing, because we've internalized this from our capitalist, white supremacist dominant culture. We have to call this what it is.

[00:24:54] Darshana Avila

And so if we're putting that same pressure on ourselves, or if we're putting that same pressure on the people around us, because this is really one to watch out for, in the standards we hold our dear ones to, and the judgments, and the expectations we bring into our relationships. If we're judging ourselves harshly, or pushing ourselves harshly, chances are good we're also doing that with others around us. We have opportunities to really see that for what it is, and be more compassionate and realistic.

That's why I'm emphasizing small doses, let the quality of it be the more important thing, and then over time, the quantity or the duration will catch up, if you stay consistent with the repetition.

Jai Bristow

I'm so, so glad you brought that piece in, because I think there's often a misconception that it's not easy, but that when our nervous system is relaxed, it will feel immediately good, and it will feel normal. But like you say, for so many of us, our norm is to have a very dysregulated system, so taking the time to just sit, or to do breathing exercises, or to relax our system is quite confronting. I really appreciate the way you talk about that, and say, Take your time and one minute, start with a minute, because the more, more, more... and a lot of people with anxiety also have perfectionist tendencies.

Darshana Avila

Oh, yeah, we do.

Jai Bristow

I have to get it perfect, I have to be top of my class in my healing journey. I have to immediately do an hour of meditation, and an hour and a half of yoga and this, that, and the other. Actually, that's impossible for a lot of our systems, so thank you so much for...

Darshana Avila

Now, I'm going to say something, that might seem a little bit diametrically opposed, but I think I can make this make sense. Quality not quantity, true. Also true that things take the time that they take. The decelerating from that more anxious frenetic pace that is the baseline, it's not instantaneous.

Something else that I have noticed, and I really like to emphasize this for myself, and invite others to, is to be mindful of your transitions. Oftentimes, part of that internalized belief is that, Okay, right now I'm running 16 errands, and I'm on a conference call, and I'm picking up my kids from school, and a million things, and now I'm going to sit down and meditate and be all Zen and peaceful. That is not realistic for the vast majority of us.

To have that one minute of peace and calm, you might need 10 minutes or 15 minutes, or whatever it takes, to decelerate and to transition from what you've been doing. I see it constantly how few of us acknowledge the very fundamental reality that transitions matter and take time. We are not robots. We don't instantaneously pivot from one thing, to the next, to the next, much as we might try, much as we might feel like that's what we're doing in the world.

[00:28:16] Darshana Avila

Physiologically, emotionally, and spiritually, that is not what we're wired for. We need to give credence to the value of tending to a transition well, in order to be embodying this kinder, gentler way, and to unwind the imprints that anxiety, grind culture, and all of this have in our beings.

What that looks like for me, for instance, with my daily practices, I meditate most days, but there is about a 10-minute ramp up, at least, to me being anywhere close to what many of us would associate with a meditative state. That's just giving myself a chance to burn off some of the frenetic energy, to do some breathing practices that really physiologically help to slow me down, to bring me into a state where some calm and quiet truly feel accessible to me. I don't just sit down at my altar and boom, I'm in gear.

Some meditators do describe that as their experience. People who really, really cultivate a long, still, silent practice with many, many years of attending to that. I don't live that life, I live a pretty frenetic life in many ways, but I balance that with this being woven into my day in and day out.

I've got to mind my transitions then as I get there because it's not an instantaneous thing. I want to invite that piece into the equation as well. You don't have to go for these long meditative, calm, and marathon periods necessarily, but you also can't expect that you're going to instantaneously drop into that precious minute. So it's like a both and.

Jaï Bristow

I think that's another super important point. I'm a big fan of what I call micro pauses. When I'm running my 16 errands a day, suddenly, if I'm midway in the supermarket and I just, Ahhhh, notice that I've got that accelerated feeling that you were talking about, and take a breather where I am, and then continue with my day. Or between tasks, just taking a few minutes to come back to myself before the next task.

Or when I'm doing lots of interviews in one day, for example, making sure I have 15, 20 minutes before to be with myself. Or in social situations, the same thing, if I'm seeing one friend and then another friend afterwards, and then going to that birthday party afterwards, or whatever it is, making sure I have 15, 20 minutes between people to re-regulate.

It's, as you say, in this very capitalistic do, do, do society, we're not always taught that we need that time for our nervous system to settle before we can do the next thing.

Darshana Avila

Yeah, to the contrary, some people experience intense shame, guilt, and anxiety at the thought of not constantly doing, because that's what we've internalized. This is important stuff, learning to honor transitions and to give ourselves a little more space, that's deep, and I would even say radical work. So let's not... I don't want to downplay.

Jaï Bristow

100%. And like you say, it's not easy, it's hard to do, and yet it's so vital, find what works for you, and honor the transitions. It's not easy finding those moments where even if it's short moments to slow down and pause, and cultivating things over time that help you gradually calm the system, get back to a baseline, so that then you can notice when you're activated. Whereas if you're always activated, it's hard to see.

[00:32:26] Darshana Avila

It's again, the pause, exactly that. The pause is what allows us the noticing. The noticing is what allows us the loving interrogation. What's true here? What script am I running? What story am I bought into? Is this present moment fact, or am I on a future trip, or am I stuck in the past, or some blend of the two, most likely?

That's where all of this comes together. The training ourselves to have a different physical experience also is going to directly impact our emotional, mental, and spiritual experience. None of these things are separate from the other.

I appreciate what you said because that's like recentering, why are we talking about these things? It's not to say that's simply, poof, you meditate, or you are still, and thus you are not anxious. This is how all of that comes together, is by bringing ourselves into presence, and into a more relaxed and receptive state where a pause is available, that choice point opens up.

Another thing that happens in the pause... A big part of the work that I do, is I do hands-on erotic therapeutic work with clients. One of the first things that I introduce to my clients is the word pause, and how we're going to use that in our session space together when touch is happening, when arousal might be present. The word pause is something that people who are on my table know that they can say that word, and what's going to happen is instantaneously, whatever I'm doing, it's going to get still. No more motion is going to happen.

I'm not going to speak any words, basically stopping any additional inputs from coming into that person's experience. Time and time again, what people reflect to me when they call a pause, often they're not calling it because something is wrong, they're calling it because they want to just savor a little something about their experience.

Pausing then becomes also a conduit to enjoying more of what's there. Slowing down so that you're able to take it in, take in the pleasure, feel the gratitude, and recognize all that's wonderful. When we're in that sped-up anxious state as a default, think about how much is getting missed. So again, a feather in the cap of slower, a feather in the cap of pause, is how much more appreciation we get to have it, and how much more we can take in about the goodness of what's going on around us.

It's not only about catching and intercepting these projections of negativity, it's also about being more available to the positive, to what's really good, and resourcing, and nourishing in the here and now.

Jaï Bristow

Amazing. I think that's so beautiful the way you talk about that, that it's not only if you're getting over-stimulated and triggered, or activated, or your inner trauma response, then a pause can help you come back down. It's also, Oh, I'm enjoying it and I don't want to miss out. Talking about all these different situations, it's very useful in our day-to-day life to cultivate these things for work, and relationships in general, and everyday life.

[00:35:59] Jaï Bristow

But also, like you say, in erotic situations, the power of the pause is incredible. As you were talking, I could feel my whole body and nervous system relaxing just listening to you describe the ability to say pause.

Darshana Avila

I see it with my clients all the time, but again, I'll use my experience, when I'm having a really deep, delicious lovemaking session, even if it's moving at a faster pace, invariably, I am going to want moments of slowness. Because when I slow down, there's all these more subtle internal sensations that I get to then be available to noticing.

Instead of always operating more on that faster-paced, stronger friction, more externalized. I'm not knocking any of this from a sexual standpoint, by the way. Have the sex you want to be having, that is what I'm a big stand for. But if we're going to introduce this into the conversation, it's like, there's a lot to be said for when we can slow down to notice other dimensions of our experience, and really then be available to savor it. What that does for us, how that adds dimensionality to whatever we're up to, and how that can feed us in different ways. I think this is an important inclusion, we can look at and take in everything that we're discussing here today from a standpoint of how to mitigate, let's say, discomfort or displeasure.

But the other side of that coin is how do we enhance comfort? How do we expand pleasure? Both of those lenses are equally valid. And why not also look at this then, it's not just how do I manage my anxiety? It's how do I become more available? What's good?

Jaï Bristow

I think that's fantastic the way you talk about that. Again, it's both, the two sides of the coin mitigating the more negative asides, and the enhancing leaning into pleasure. I also really appreciate the way that that pause is something that can be done with oneself and with other people.

Darshana Avila

Absolutely.

Jaï Bristow

We've talked a lot about different practices and tools that people can use, figuring out what works for them, to get to a point where we can slow down enough to recognize when we want to introduce that pause. How about once we've got to that point and we're able to pause, whether it's with ourselves, pausing between tasks, taking the time to do our practices, saying pause to another person when we're in relation, whatever that looks like. Again, whether it's because we're getting activated or because we're enjoying and we want to slow down and savor.

Once we get to that point, then what?

Darshana Avila

Then what I feel becomes a really wide open field of possibility, because the then what, could be, Okay, I notice that I need this, I notice that I want this. If it's just me, myself, and I going through my day, that might translate into me... And this happens lightning fast, I'm going to take three deep, slow breaths before I move on to the next thing. The pause introduces choice, it introduces

options. That's a very empowering place to be, where we're more centered in our own agency, then because I can choose, do I instantaneously go from A to B, or do I have that moment where I'm breathing and looking around and noticing my surroundings? Do I use that as an opportunity to intentionally, consciously invite some gratitude into my moment?

[00:39:53] Darshana Avila

If it's an interpersonal moment, if I'm with a partner, maybe what I want is some eye contact to be like, Hey, hi, here we are together, whether that's in a sexual context, or any other context. It's that we get to choose what would feel most affirming right now, what would be a source of nourishment right now. So the then what? Is that we open up to all of that. Earlier, we spoke about finding what works for you, from the standpoint of resourcing, we all then have this opportunity to find what works for us. I don't know why I put that in air quotes.

But in terms of what's going to be available right here and now that feels the most uplifting, that gives me the greatest sense of calm, connection, whatever it might be, that I'm looking for in that moment. The ways that we can come at that are so very many.

Jai Bristow

You spoke earlier about how in that pause, that's when we can bring in that loving interrogation. That's the questioning, what is it I want? What is it I need right now? With all these other practices we bring in, that becomes more available to us to even have those questions and find those answers. I love that piece you're saying around choice, and the importance of choice.

Darshana Avila

It's good stuff.

Jai Bristow

Beautiful. Is there anything else you wanted to add today around this topic before we come to an end?

Darshana Avila

What I want to say is to be an invitation for us to be more compassionate toward the presence of anxiety in ourselves and others. We're so often in a dominant cultural way, we're quick to pathologize, and we're quick to make these things very personal and individual. There is something wrong with you if you feel anxious. And the reality is that we exist in a world, and in a culture, that is reinforcing this anxiousness at every turn. It's deep work, it's big work, and it's powerful work to pursue our own healing. That's one thing I want to say.

The other is that it takes the time that it takes. Be mindful of not pushing and grinding on yourself about your healing journey. This is an echo of something we said earlier, because I speak from the experience of unequivocally having done that many times over, pursued my healing like it was my job, which ultimately is very antithetical to what is healing for us, what is nourishing for us.

So an invitation to more compassion is where I'd love to end, that there's not something fundamentally wrong with you. You are not failing at being human if you're navigating anxiety and doing your slow work of healing. You get to take the time that you need to take with your journey.

[00:43:03] Jaï Bristow

I love that. I love this idea because it reflects everything else you said about taking the time you need, figuring out what works for you, slowing down, and the power of these pauses. Thank you so much for your time today.

Darshana Avila

It's really my pleasure.

Jaï Bristow

How can people find out more about you and your work?

Darshana Avila

The best way is to hop over to my website, darshanaavila.com. I have a [YouTube channel](#) where there's regular content that's also Darshana Avila. I'm far less present on other social media platforms in this chapter of my life for the sake of managing my own anxiety. Please come on over and see, I've got courses that you could snatch up right away. I do private work, and group work. There are lots of different ways to engage.

Jaï Bristow

Incredible. Thank you so, so much. I love this conversation.

Darshana Avila

So good to be with you, Jaï. Thank you.