



## Conscious Life presents

### Befriending Your Anxiety

**Guest: James Reeves**

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**[00:00:09] Jaï Bristow**

Hello, and welcome back to this event. My name is Jaï Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. Today, I am delighted to be welcoming the wonderful James Reeves. Welcome, James.

**James Reeves**

It's so lovely to be here with you, Jaï. Thanks so much for having me on.

**Jaï Bristow**

Thank you for joining us. You are the founder of Deep Rest, which is an online coaching, mentoring, and support platform for weary souls. Today, we are going to be talking about rest and anxiety.

Let's dive right in. Why do you think so many people are anxious today?

**James Reeves**

It's an interesting question, and I wonder whether we can ponder it between ourselves for a few moments. I have a question within the question, which is the focus. Of course, so many people have plugged into exploring the content of this conference because they're coming in here with anxiety.

But if we considered between us a couple of questions, firstly, I wonder, because we both might have a different answer to this, I wonder what the opposite of anxiety would be.

Or we might say, what are people coming here, what do they want? Because it's easy to focus on the anxiety, but I'm assuming that if you're listening to this, you'd like something else. Can I ask you, Jaï, just totally off the top of your head, what do you think would be the opposite of anxiety?

**Jaï Bristow**

The opposite of anxiety? Really good question. I guess for me, I'd be thinking about relaxation or peace. Relaxation is probably the word that most comes to mind.

**[00:01:49.24] James Reeves**

Yeah, sure. I might use a word like calm. Then for all of the audience members listening to this, have a muse for yourself. What would your word be? What would your opposite of anxiety be? Or perhaps another thing to ask yourself a moment is, what would you like to be experiencing in place of anxiety? What do you want? What do you want?

Then for all of us to do this, for me, for you Jaï, for anyone that's listening, as you contemplate that word calm, peace, relaxation, ease, well-being, centered, whatever it might be, what does that feel like? I'm being explicit. If you took a moment as you're listening to maybe close your eyes and just let that word play over inside you two or three times.

I'd like to be calm. I'd like to be peaceful. I'd like to find ease. I'd like to be relaxed. Then use your word, and as you say it to yourself two or three times inside, notice what happens in your body. How do you feel? What's that like? Do you get relaxed? Do you feel warm? Do you feel spacious? Do you suddenly feel like you want to lay down on your bed and sleep for 10 years? How does it feel?

Maybe now you've taken a bit of time to consider that. You and I, Jaï, we can have a bit of a conversation about why I'm asking about opposites and what that might mean for us.

I think the framework, and perhaps you could chime in a little here, is that a lot of people are experiencing anxiety. Particularly, I did this a few years ago for a program that I developed on a yoga website in partnership with another organization. We looked at what people were searching for within the platform. Yoga and yoga nidra, which is the specialty that I teach, which is teaching people how to rest and restore and be relaxed.

Yoga nidra and anxiety were the biggest search beyond yoga nidra for depression, and yoga nidra for sleep, which is such a big one. Anxiety was the biggest search on that. We know a lot of people are wanting to find some calm, relaxing way out of anxiety. But, Jaï, what do you think? What do you think is the answer to the question, why are people so anxious today? What's your sense of it? You're in this work. I'd love to hear.

**Jaï Bristow**

I am in this work, but I'm interviewing you, no, that's a cop-out. I don't know the environment we live in today is just... Everything's so amped up and switched on, whether it's social media or advertising or TV, our brains are much more active, and we have a lot more information thrown at us than I think we used to. So our nervous system gets stimulated much more easily, and we have fewer opportunities for our nervous system to reset and to come back to baseline than we used to. There's less contact with nature, and less contact with other people. That's what comes to my mind, but what comes to your mind, James?

**James Reeves**

Well, a similar story. Here's my take on it, this is playful, but perhaps for the audience and for the people tuning in, you can resonate with this. I don't think any of us have ever seen a billboard or an advert that says, Hey, you don't need this product, you're probably just fine without it. All you need to do is go home and have a nice relaxing time with your family members, or sit quietly in the woods for a couple of hours, and you'll realize that you're already full and complete and happy as you are. No, that doesn't make money, that doesn't get people in.

**[00:05:53] James Reeves**

There is this whole modern marketing paradigm that's driven by creating anxiety, creating a desire for products. There is the information age that we're facing, as you rightly point out, which is so many people are just in this always on. The busyness thing. When we consider how many people will respond to the question, How are you? That's, busy, there's my badge of honor, there's my fitting in with the zeitgeist, in with the culture. I'm just busy. I'm always on.

It's very rare that someone might say to us, Oh, I just had a peaceful, spacious weekend, and I did nothing, because it's not a societal mark of achievement, that one.

Although I'm hoping that that might start to change soon. We're always on and we're flooded by information, and all of those natural gaps that we used to have in society, where we'd be waiting for a bath, or waiting for the kettle to boil, or waiting for the dinner to be done, where we might do something more peaceful and relaxing. We're just taking in more and more information.

Or we're looking anxiously at everyone else's lives and going, Oh my God, they're all keeping up, they seem to be coping fine, look at how lovely that person looked on Instagram today. So yes, I think we're suffering from a few different angles, but mostly there's just a lot coming in, and not enough time to stop and slow down and rest.

**Jai Bristow**

I think that's something myself and everyone listening can really relate to. It's like you say, there are no moments where we stop unless we're sleeping a lot of the time.

How would you then, as the founder of Deep Rest, help find these moments of rest and the ability to, outside of the, hopefully, if we're lucky, eight hours of sleep that we get a night, allow ourselves to reset and rest and look after ourselves in that way.

**James Reeves**

I'm really happy to offer a few suggestions. One of the things that I try to lean back from is dispensing lots of advice. I would imagine that there might be a number of people who are going to appear as part of this conference who are more authoritative and more certain as to what people need. I've been working with people for years, and I've got some ideas.

But, I think the answer to that question, for you, and for I, and for anybody listening comes back to what did, with us all in those first couple of minutes, what's your word? If your word is calm, or relaxed, or peaceful, or feeling centered, if it's coping, if it's resilience, whatever the word might be, that points to what you need to do as a solution for the anxiety in many ways.

Because if we keep focusing on the problem, then we're not moving our attention toward what we'd like. Perhaps the answer to that is, what brings us collectively, you, me, everyone that's listening, what brings us the word that we're looking for? I would imagine that the answer to what brings me relaxation isn't picking up your phone and taking in information every time you have a pause.

**[00:09:23] James Reeves**

I imagine it isn't spending, or looking at your diary and filling it to the gunnels with activity and things that you believe are going to make you happy, versus sectioning out some time to do the work that's important to you, to feel calm or to relax. That's going to look different for everybody.

It might be taking a needlework class, and sitting quietly and doing some sewing for a couple of hours every evening. It could be taking a walk in nature. It could be lying down on your bed and doing nothing. It could be going out with friends, if you're an extrovert, maybe what recovers you is being with other people.

There are so many possibilities, but I think when we get in touch with what we're looking to move toward, when we stop dialing in on I'm anxious.

I'll talk about this a bit more, and now I'm anxious about how anxious I am, and now I'm having anxious thoughts about how long I've been anxious, and whether I'm ever not going to be anxious. So we go.

Versus, What do I want? Okay, I realized that I'd like some peace. I'm going to start moving towards that. Then practically, and I think this is maybe opening into our next little bit to talk about, is what's in the way of us stopping and resting? Because to be honest with you, nobody's that stoked about hanging out with anxiety. If you're being anxious, the last thing you want to do is lay down and do nothing. I might talk about that a bit.

**Jaï Bristow**

I think that's so cool the way that you talk about there's not one magic solution for everyone, because each person's flavor of anxiety is a little different, and each person's answer to what the opposite of anxiety is, or what they're looking to get out of this is a little bit different. Yours and my words were different. There are many, many people listening to this, the words might be similar, but everyone has their own thing.

So you're supporting people in finding that, and offering a bunch of examples, but supporting people in finding what's true for them. As you say, it's difficult hanging out with our anxiety. So how do we do that? How do people who feel overwhelmed, stressed, and so anxious, and all these layers of anxiety, what's the first step in that situation?

**James Reeves**

Let me perhaps share with you all a viewpoint. I'm not saying this is the way, but I'm saying it's a way, or a possibility, which is if we're running full tilt through our lives, and we're not opting or reluctant for rest or relaxation, or all of those things, it could be driven by the feeling of anxiety. No one wants to feel it, no one wants to experience it.

If we take it like a basic tenet of mindfulness and we say, Well, we're learning to be mindful around our breath, I'm watching my breath and then a thought comes in, and I get lost in the thought, then I come back to my breath, and I'm thinking, and breath, and thinking, and breath, and thinking, and breath.

**[00:12:39] James Reeves**

The idea of anchoring around something like the breath is that we're starting to get a bit of distance and dispassion from the mind. We're beginning to get a bit of separation, recognizing that thoughts are passing by and I'm not my thoughts. That's the second stage of it. It's not concentration as it just seems, it's also about getting distance and dispassion.

You're sitting there and you're trying some mindfulness practice, and these thoughts keep coming around that are anxiety-based. Gosh, what's going to happen with such and such? Or I wonder what so-and-so is going to do? Or Gosh, do you think you're secure in your job? Because there's been some rumors of redundancy echoing around the company, and I don't need that in my life right now. Whatever it might be, the anxious thoughts are there.

And the basic tenet of mindfulness would say, let's move away from that and come back to the breath. But this is what interests me, is that along with the MBSR, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction techniques, there is often a reading of the poem by Rumi, called The Guest House, which is very well known. I have a copy of it here. I'm going to read out a little piece of it, not all of it.

But part of Rumi's advice as to how to be alive, how to be a human being, and how to cope with being alive, is to welcome our feelings, emotions, thoughts, and beliefs.

He says, Welcome and entertain them all, even if they're a crowd of sorrows who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture. Still treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

It's this idea that we are learning to befriend our thoughts and our feelings, which is a little bit different from that distancing. Or maybe it's something to add to it, which is we need to learn to take perspective, to start with, from our thoughts, but we also need to learn to listen to them.

Because what's driving anxiety, I would say for 90% of the people who are listening to this, is some core perceptions that were learned, likely in early years, that are probably rooted around, I'm not good enough, I've got to keep up, I won't be enough as I am. And those core beliefs are running the show.

That may be a bit of a stretch for some of you who are listening to this and who maybe haven't done that deep work. But I've been doing this with individuals for many years. And working with people through the resilience program I run, or working one-to-one as a therapist or a coach. What is driving almost everyone's stuff, be it anxiety, or call it another one, anything you like, there's normally some sense that there's something wrong with me in here, and something about some core wounds, or core traumas.

If anxiety is no longer the enemy, if we're reframing it as Rumi suggests could this be a guide? It's another line from his poem, this could be a guide from beyond. What's this showing me or telling me about my life? Can I walk you through a little bit, Jaï, and go through the practice?

**Jaï Bristow**

Of course. Yes, please.

**[00:16:20] James Reeves**

For everyone that is listening, firstly, we did a bit of sensation, I asked you, what does the feeling of what you want look like? That rest, relaxation, or peaceful, calm. But we can start to notice what does anxiety feel like in our body. Is it a racing heart? Is it palpitations or cold sweats? Is it a sense of wanting to run out of the room? Is it chronic tension in our gut that's giving us digestive problems? There are so many possibilities. But the tendency is to want to run from those feelings.

Who wants to feel tension in their gut or heart racing away? No one wants to feel that. Yet, this is what I've noticed, if you're listening live, you can try this for a moment as I'm talking. How would it be for a moment to, with great love, curiosity, and tenderness, turn towards anxiety and say, Oh, hello, hi. I understand that you've been trying to get through to me for a while. I understand that you've got something that you need to show me or tell me. I understand that even if you're a bit confused if maybe it's not the best wisdom, I understand there might be some wisdom in you. I understand that you might be here to tell me something, or show me something.

That is a very different framework. It's a very loving framework. It's a very warm and attentive way of saying, now there's another possibility. If I can stop avoiding, and running around, and being busy and exacerbating my anxiety, if I can befriend it, if I can ask it, What are you here to show me or tell me? Who are you?

When you ask that question, you might see yourself at four years old, or you might get the very surface level of anxiety saying, Well, you need to leave your job, things are really... You feel under threat. You can stay with anxiety and say, Oh, why? Tell me more. What's going on? And you go down and down with more love and more curiosity, and you start to get the sense of, What is this really here for?

Now I don't have to get rid of it, but the paradox is the more you befriend it, the more it will settle down. That's my take on something a bit more hopeful, and also that's maybe counter to other ideas that we can rid ourselves of anxiety, or that it's an enemy, or it's a problem.

I think it's a byproduct of our modern lives as we were talking about, but it's also here for a reason. If you had no anxiety, or if you had none of that feedback information saying something was wrong, you wouldn't make it through a day in life. We need that feedback to help us change and engage in life.

**Jai Bristow**

That's beautiful. I love so much what you're sharing because there's someone in my life who often talks about anxiety as an alarm bell, saying that something wants to be felt. It's just pointing you towards something, and that's exactly what you're saying.

What I find beautiful in what you're saying, is that you're recognizing anxiety is a byproduct of life. When anxiety shows up, the last thing we want to do is sit in the anxiety, and our tendency is to get rid of it. Yet if we get curious and start with the body, start with a somatic approach, and get curious, what does anxiety feel like? And what is it that I would like to feel like instead?

Then, what is this anxiety pointing towards? What's happening underneath this? What is the root cause of this? What is the feeling, or the messaging, or the belief that's happening below that? Is it

that I'm not good enough? Is it that I'm going to fail? Is it that I'm rejected? Is it that I'm unlovable? All this stuff, all the core wounds, traumas and stuff.

### **[00:20:58] Jaï Bristow**

The more we get curious, and the more we understand, the more it eases. It's not about getting rid of it, it's not about sitting with it, it's about allowing it to be a message, and getting curious about what that message is, in order to settle more fully with it.

### **James Reeves**

It is that. Can I give one personal story, and then a couple of anecdotes about people I've worked with? My personal one, I love being very real, raw, and honest about this stuff. This is personal for me. I'm going through something quite difficult at the moment. I may have to go to court, and move through dividing some assets, it's a property that I own with somebody, and we can't agree, that person wants to keep the property, and I want to sell it. No one wants to go through that, definitely not someone who runs Deep Rest and likes to have peace in their lives. Yet it needs to be done to move life forward.

I was sitting last night. I have two young kids, and life's busy, the kids weren't with me last night, and I had a rare few hours to myself. I sat down on my bed, and let's say it was anxiety, but some feelings came and sat with me. A bit like if you sit in a comfy room somewhere and there's a cat, the cat's going to come and sit on your lap if it's friendly and you're friendly.

So these feelings come and sit on my lap. And initially, they felt really, Oh God, I don't want to feel this. I felt anxious, I felt distressed, I was worried about the future. There were lots of thoughts and ruminations around it. There were thoughts about the impact on the wider implications for the people in my life that I love. As I stayed with it, there was this message that came to me this isn't the way.

Now, if I took that message, this isn't the way, on its face value, I might have said, Oh well, I shouldn't carry on with this action I'm taking. But I stayed with that and I inquired into that, a quiet inner knowing voice, this isn't the way. Tell me more, what do you mean? What are you here to show me or tell me?

As I got really in touch with that sense, it was not that the external choices I was taking were wrong, but my internal disposition was wrong about it in the sense of I was getting very attached to the results. I was getting very worried about the outcome, I was getting very future-focused on, Oh, if this happens, then...

The message was, that the way is to just take every day as a new day, to go slowly and gently, to take a step at a time, and to do it as best you can with love, whilst holding good boundaries. When I heard that, and when I fell into that, I had a lovely long sleep. That's what I mean, everybody, by befriending, by welcoming.

I have two clients that pop to mind, but maybe a simple share about one of them who had tremendous amounts of anxiety. This is to make another point around, do we get distance? Do we get away from anxiety? Or do we get up close and personal because it could be mistakenly taken on from what I'm sharing is, Oh you need to sit in your anxiety and it's yucky, but you'll get through it.

**[00:24:40] James Reeves**

But what changed for this person who described they'd been meditating for 20 years, they'd been using mindfulness for 20 years, they were interested in maybe going the next bit of the journey. Could they take a program with me that I run that's a 90-day resilience program? Their experience coming out of the other side of that was to say, Well, I realize now how anxiety for me is a messenger, and I also realize how I am not my anxiety, how it's something that moves through me.

I learned to sit quietly and rest with a disposition where I don't need to know, I don't need to be involved in the mind. I don't even need to keep coming back to my breath. I have found a very simple way of resting as watchful consciousness, sentient awareness, however, you want to describe it. Now I have this relationship where when anxiety comes, it can sit on my lap. Also, I'm able to get distance and perspective from it.

Maybe we can talk about this a little bit more, but it's about being able to be with and embody, and also not just embody, because that gets used a lot, not be with the sensations, but feel into the emotions, experience them as guests and messengers, get to the roots of what's this trying to show me and tell me through deep self-inquiry. That's one way.

And then the other is to get distance, to be able to have perspective to know ourselves as the observer in which anxiety appears.

**Jaï Bristow**

I think the cat metaphor is really beautiful in that. You can have the cat come and sit on your lap, and you can be close to it, and you can befriend it, but you are not the cat. You are not the anxiety. You are not the emotions themselves. They can come and visit you, you can be close to them, and you can also maintain some disidentification from them, as you're saying, which I think is important.

**James Reeves**

Yeah, assuming, and this is for most cats, sorry to judge all the cats out there, but there's that thing of often they'll come and sit on your lap when it's dinner time, or close to dinner time. And were you to not feed the cat, they just carry on, and then they might come into your face and do that thing where they rub their tail over it. And it's like, Yeah, it's definitely past five o'clock. It's time for my food.

So in the same way when we don't listen to our anxiety because we get busy, because no one's ever oriented us to this. For many of the listeners, you were lucky if at school someone taught you about listening to yourself, and being in touch with emotions, that they might have something to show you.

Most of my upbringing, and for many of us, was, Well, don't feel that, emotions are dangerous. Or emotions are lesser or lower or somehow to be avoided. Also, there are good emotions and bad emotions. Love is fine, you can be warm and generous, and you can be appreciative and grateful. But don't be angry, don't feel sorrow, don't be depressed. That's just, Oh, they're all yucky. But they're all just things that need to be resolved in us.



**[00:28:05] James Reeves**

That anxiety might be that cat, and I'm framing it in a very positive way, saying, feed me, feed me. But really, that's what anxiety is doing, it's going, I've got some important information for you that I need for you to know, and we need to befriend it and get to know it.

**Jaï Bristow**

Yeah, just like cats. Cats love attention, and it's very much on their own timeline and not necessarily on yours when it's demanding attention, and then other times it will go and do its own thing. I think it's a very beautiful analogy.

**James Reeves**

You asked back there, how do we rest when we're feeling anxious? Part of it is that befriending. Part of it is learning to get dispassionate or distance. This is a basic premise of almost all of the work I do. If you come and learn about teaching yoga nidra with me, if you come through one of my programs... I just had this conversation with a client a couple of days ago. When we consider, maybe the first thing to do is to calm down, slow down, is to listen to that word that we all explored right at the beginning of our time together, which is, what do you want?

If you want to feel calm or peaceful, I think you better start doing that, what helps you feel calm and peaceful? Practically in your life what are the answers to those things? As we start to feel our nervous system beginning to settle down, as we're not focusing on the problem, but we're working towards the solution, we start to feel, go from woahhhh, to ahhhh. But the idea might be then, oh, great, we're done, now I no longer feel anxious, I feel calm, I feel peaceful. But from that calm and peaceful place, we can start inquiring into anxiety. Why are you here? What are you here to show me? How old are you? What's the story? For everyone listening, it will be different.

But I can sincerely and honestly say to you, perhaps with some support, because sometimes people can't do this on their own, perhaps in your own way, and I honestly believe we need to do both those things. We need to work with ourselves, and sometimes we need the help of someone else. That's why therapy is big all around the world.

But through one way or another, you're going to start to get to what's driving the anxiety, what's really behind it. I'm not saying it's going to be easy because anxiety may have a message for you that you've not been wanting to hear, which is, Oh, you need to make a change in your life. You need to do something that is more in keeping with your personality profile, which is you're an introvert and you're doing this engaging work that's too much for you.

Or, the situation that you're in at the moment, it's not right for you. Well, that might be a relationship, or it may be some other circumstance that you need to change. There may be some action that anxiety is asking you to take. If you're not listening to it, it will keep coming around, and around, and around. What we get as the messenger may not be what we want to hear, but going back to Rumi's words, still treat each guest honorably, they may be clearing you out for some new delight.

**Jaï Bristow**

Beautiful.

**[00:31:35] James Reeves**

When we get that, it's a poem that's been peddled all around the world for good reason, when we really get that, Wow, okay, if I listen to this and it makes me even more anxious to think that I might need to, say, resign from the work that I do, or make a different choice for myself around how, and in what way do I show up in my primary relationships. Or whatever it might be. But as I listen to that and I get the message, anxiety goes, Oh, thank goodness, and it settles right down.

We have to listen to what's here, but if we're running full tilt and we're very conscious of going, Oh, I just want to be rid of anxiety, then we don't get rid of it, but when we're willing to turn towards it, and we do, we get some freedom from it.

**Jaï Bristow**

That's great. This idea of anxiety as a messenger, or the cat as a messenger, as it were in this case, is that idea of listening to what the messages are. Including the fact that they might be messages we don't necessarily want to hear, and that that in itself can start a whole internal process. Again, what you're not saying is just sit, be anxious, grit through it, and bear through it. It's like, get curious, understand it, befriend it, welcome it.

We've talked about it can be difficult to do that because our natural response can be to go into distraction and to reject it, sometimes it can be really, really intense as well.

Do you have any advice or strategies for when it's that super intense? I'm about to go to a job interview, I'm about to go on a date, I'm about to go to a family gathering, something... Or I'm at a family gathering and it's all very overwhelming and intense, in those moments where...

Because what I'm hearing is we're talking more about anxiety in general, and when it comes in, and how to befriend it, and keep the cat fed and happy and have a relationship with it. But what about those moments when it peaks when it's really intense? What do we do then?

**James Reeves**

Yeah, sure. The bathroom is always a good option, isn't it? Excuse me a moment. To go and find a quiet moment and close your eyes and go inside and say, Oh hello anxiety, here you are again, I see you're intense right now. And be with it in a very simple way.

There are, of course, a gazillion things you can do. A quick Google will suffice. You don't need to hear it from James Reeves at Deep Rest, but I'll give you a few options for sure. To slow your out-breath down. To feel your feet on the ground. To rescue the part of you that might be dissociating and drifting off out of the room, and call that back in with tenderness. To have a sense of, amidst the uprising anxiety, a sense of deep love and inner connection with oneself. I sincerely think that those things are developed over time.

I'm not that confident in the idea of quick fixes. I think they can help. I think we can do some breathing techniques, we can do some tricks, definitely feeling our feet on the ground, extending our exhalation, reminding ourselves that we're good enough, or that we're okay as we are. All of those self-soothing techniques are in some ways, unconsciously speaking to that part of us that's triggered when we're anxious.

**[00:35:27] James Reeves**

But I do think that the constructive work that we do on a daily basis is very helpful. I've got someone I'm working with at the moment who I've seen on and off for many years who I first helped work through flight anxiety. We used something called Wolpe's systematic desensitization to help them bring their nervous system down from the absolute terror of flying, all the way to being able to increasingly meet the anxiety and the fear. They went on that flight and sent me a message from America where they flew to. They said, Oh, my God, it worked, that was great. I used to be a 10, I was like a 4 on the plane. Yeah, I was a bit like, oooh.

That really helped, and we did some constructive work together. We're now talking about the broader schema of where the roots of all of this stuff coming from. The proposition was from this person, I've got 4 weeks, I've got a conference coming up and I need to be on my A game, and right now I'm freaking out, and I need some help.

My honest response was, firstly, if you're freaking out and you're looking to make a solution from that freaking out place, if we're anxious and we want a quick fix, we're acting out of anxiety. It comes back to that question, what do you want? If you want to feel relaxed, what would relaxed do about this? What would calm do in this situation? What am I doing? What are you doing to start to develop these qualities and capacities in your life? Because our brain wires up for that. That's an inoculation that happens slowly over time.

I think the more that we're putting in these little pockets of relaxation and rest, which I'd love to give us some suggestions on in a moment, we are building up tolerance for these peak moments. When you look at the neuroscience of this from people like Rick Hanson, it's essentially said that we need to be mildly inoculated against difficult things every day. We need to have an almost constant tone of calm and well-being in our nervous systems and accept that occasionally, we'll get a spike.

But if the question that you're asking is, how do we deal with a spike, isn't contextualized with this regular inoculation with being restful and calm and occasionally having mild to moderately difficult things to challenge our nervous system, then I think when the spike comes, we're probably going to get taken down by it. We will be overwhelmed.

When we're doing this work of slowly building up our resilience and constantly moving towards little moments of calm and ease within our day, then we've got some chance, because in that spike, we also know calm and ease. Does that make sense?

**Jaï Bristow**

Yeah, amazing. I'm curious because the way you're talking about it is basically building a relationship with anxiety. The more we build a relationship with it, and the more we can befriend it and welcome it, the more that we can not be controlled by it. That we're not identified with it and we're not running away from it. We're not sitting in it. We are not it. We have a relationship with it. We recognize it.

We also have a relationship with calm, relaxation, and peace, and all these words that people might have chosen at the beginning, and even when we're in peak anxiety, we can still recognize that we are not just anxiety, we are not just anxious in these moments, and that there's these pockets that

we've cultivated. And so it sounds very much like a relationship over time, which can help us in those moments where it's particularly difficult, as well as across our lifespan in general.

**[00:39:25] James Reeves**

Yes.

**Jaï Bristow**

That leads me to the question, do you believe, therefore, that... Because you talked about how the more we do that, the more anxiety can ease within us. Do you believe that it's possible to ever be completely free of anxiety, to live an anxiety-free life?

**James Reeves**

I do and I don't. If you're listening to this, I would imagine that there can be some hopelessness, some helplessness, some overwhelm. I've worked with plenty of people and I've run public programs as well with people suffering from anxiety. I've seen the feedback. It's quite debilitating. If that's the case for you, there is some hope in the sense of if you can entertain, if this is a new proposition to you, the befriending possibility, and if you seek some support, you could get support from me. There are lots of other people out there who might be able to help you with that anxiety. You can go on your own journey as well.

But you can start to know what's at the roots of it, and it will settle down. I've seen this time and time again. I'm thinking of someone else who had real chronic health anxiety. This may be a big stretch for some of you, but this person came in saying that they had a lot of health anxiety around heart problems, that they'd been having checkups, and that there was an arithmetic quality to their heart. That's not the scientific term, it's not coming to me right now. But there was essentially a problem that they were having with their heart.

We spent three months moving through this program and a few more sessions together. What was really in that was a broken heart, was really a very lovely man, the sweetest guy, a really lovely guy who thought that he was a bad person, and had been through so much in his life, that as I was listening, I was thinking, Wow, this person has responded beautifully to some incredible challenges in life and upbringing and parenting. They felt terrible about themselves.

In a very simple way, as they started to have that reflected to them, and were also able to begin to see it for themselves, all of those anxieties fell away, along with the heart problem itself. In some ways, it was a tremendously deep lack of self-love.

Who's to say what's underneath your anxiety? But I can tell you with personal experience and confidence, and also with real love in my heart, that whatever it is, however scary it seems, you'll be able to befriend it. As you do, you'll move through it and you'll be able to meet it and you'll start to change your relationship with it.

Two things will happen, it will go from ooooooh to ahhhh, and it won't be with you all of the time. When it does come around, it will be a whisper, not a shout. If you've done the work and you go, Oh, look, there's this feeling again? What are you here to show me again today? The anxiety says, I was just checking in with you because you keep saying that you're going to change the way you do this thing in your life, or you're going to maybe change your job, or do something differently and you don't seem to be doing that right now, so I just thought we'd check in, or whatever it may be.

**[00:43:00] James Reeves**

For this person I was talking about, we've circled around over the last couple of years, and I've seen them a couple of times. It's been that same thing of ultimately that person going, Oh, yeah, okay, it's this thing again that I'm not meeting myself with love and kindness. That's the welcoming piece.

I think there is a way that we can befriend anxiety that means it's not front and foremost in our lives. Yet it's also a noble and instructive visitor that just like any other guest, like tiredness, for example, how many people just take it and push on with an extra cup of coffee? But tiredness is very noble and instructive and beautiful as a messenger, and it says, You need to stop doing so much. But so many people aren't listening to that. I've had too many coffees in a day, and I know that definitely spikes my anxiety.

There is hope, I think any of you who are tuning into this, that you start to consider what your word is. Start to then consider how you can bring that into your life. It could be learning to lay down and listen to yoga nidra, which was one of the things that transformed my life in terms of knowing how to calm my nervous system and befriend and meet these emotions that I'm talking about.

That's something that you can do with me. You come and research into the [Deep Rest website](#) and discover something about some of the different offerings I have, and come and do some weekly practices with me to set that up in your life. You could do whatever it is that brings you that sense of ease. But as you start to inquire into that, what do I really want? Where do I want to head? You're actually pointing towards something that I think we all want.

This is maybe a really great place to sum up and tie something together. In 2019, I published a book called *The Book of Rest*. It's a book about resting and it's about stopping. In it are these messages to befriend, to welcome, to recognize that restlessness is part of resting, that unpleasant feelings and emotions may arise as you learn to stop and rest.

But the principle message of the book that goes round and round is that myself, you, Jai, and anyone here that's listening has part of them that has always been okay, and will always be okay.

I taught a retreat last week in the Netherlands. On the first night of the retreat, I asked this one simple question. Just sit quietly for a few minutes and notice what's not changing. The sounds, the thoughts, the sensations, the emotions, the images, the memories, all of that stuff is changing. What's not changing here? Within 10 minutes, I then asked the participants to sit together and talk about it.

One woman, and it moves me to tears as I describe it, one woman who had been having a really hard time in her life said, in those 10 minutes, I realized that there's something here that's undamaged. I've been certain that I've got all of this trauma and I'm having this really difficult time. And I realized that there's something in me that I've always known, it's always been here, that I probably most intimately knew as a child, that I do get back in touch with when everything stops and slows down, that's always felt okay. I'm so happy.

**[00:46:53] James Reeves**

I jokingly said, Great, well, you're done, man. You don't need to do the next five days of retreat.

But it's in you. If you're listening to this and someone else in that retreat said to me, I came to an event with you last year, and this promise of this unchanging stillness that you keep talking about is very alluring, but I've never experienced it. That's why I'm here on retreat.

Some people will get access to it easily. Others of you will have to go on a journey. But everybody has that sentience within them that is outside of the anxiety that is calm and steady and at ease. That is your birthright. It's not for the special few, it's not for the enlightened masters, they definitely deepened into it and taught out of it.

But your own awakening is right there waiting for you. All you need to do is ask that question, what's unchanging? What stays the same whilst everything else in my experience changes? You'll reasonably quickly come to understanding that, Yeah, there's this place that's always okay. If you know that, then anxiety will never overwhelm you.

**Jaï Bristow**

Amazing. Thank you so much for that, James. For those who would like to go on that journey of understanding that more fully with you, how can people find out more about you and your work?

**James Reeves**

My website, which is permanently under construction. There's the professional face of James, author of a book on Deep Rest, and there's the reality of me, which is I love to live what I talk about and teach. I don't have a highly-organized website. I don't have a profile that's out there. You'll not find much of me on Instagram or Facebook or any of those places. You'd be lucky if you get a reply off me on WhatsApp because I like to do what I do, which is resting.

But on the [Deep Rest website](#), if you Google Deep Rest, I think that should come up. You can put in James Reeves Deep Rest. There's a coaching section on my website, and you can book a one-to-one appointment with me through the timetable there.

You can explore a resilience program that I run, which is a 90-day coaching program where you work with me personally so we can get to the roots of that anxiety. You go through this process that I've been talking about of really going through those understandings, like going from ohhhh to ahhhh, then being able to inquire into our anxiety and what's driving it, and then to find that perspective and that stillness.

That is beautiful work to see people go on that journey, and that's the core of what I'm offering these days. Then if that feels like, Oh, that's quite big and quite scary. I'm not ready to sit with you, strange man who seems to be all very interested in these things I've been trying to get away from.

If that's more your take on things, or you'd like to dip your toe in the water, I run a weekly online session called Find Your Calm. Which hopefully, calm may at least point towards your word. It's about taking an hour journey with me each week where we explore a theme. As part of that, we do a little opening, and rest practice. I talk a little bit about the theme, and then we do a half-hour rest-based practice.

**[00:50:29] James Reeves**

I would say if you came and did that for 2-3 months, you might start to have a much deeper relationship with that word that I asked you about all the way at the beginning of our time together. There are just a few possibilities.

**Jaï Bristow**

Incredible. Thank you so much. I interviewed you for another Conscious Life event where we talked about deep rest and yoga nidra, how to get into a state of deep rest, and how that can support with trauma and trauma healing. I recommend people check that out on the Conscious Life platform as well.

Thank you so much for your time today, James. Sorry, we don't have more of it, but I've enjoyed this conversation.

**James Reeves**

It's been lovely to sit with you as ever. Thank you so much for your invitation.