



Conscious Life presents

# ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

## The wisdom of the body

Guest: Aki Omori

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### **[00:00:10] Jaia Bristow**

Hello, and welcome back to this conference all about anxiety. My name is Jaia Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. And today I am delighted to be welcoming, Aki Omori.

Welcome, Aki.

### **Aki Omori**

Hi, Jaia. Thank you for having me.

### **Jaia Bristow**

Thank you for joining us.

So Aki is a yoga teacher and a somatic movement educator and a trauma therapist.

And so do you want to start by telling us a little bit, Aki, about what anxiety means to you? Because obviously it's a broad topic, and so in your line of work, how does anxiety come up and how do you work with that?

### **Aki Omori**

Yes, as soon as we hear the word anxiety, it makes me feel a little bit anxious. But then what is it? So my question is, some of the approaches that I have with anxiety, is just to find out what is going on there? When you say anxiety, what you call anxiety, what that might be? What is experience?

There might be association to particular thoughts or situations, but also in terms of the bodily experiences. And then as we focus into what it is, our relationship with, what we call anxiety, might begin to shift. That might actually give us a way into different ways of working with it.

### **Jaia Bristow**

I love that. I hear that it's a very personal approach that you take, where you know that anxiety, as I've spoken with some other experts, is often an alarm. And it's pointing at something that wants to be looked at.

And so I hear that you work very much, of course, with anxiety in the body and how it expresses itself. So do you want to speak a little bit more to that?

**[00:02:05] Aki Omori**

Yes, I think some people are readily available to access the body, depending on what they have done in their life. But sometimes people might not really have immediate access to the body. And therapists and educators, we are encouraging people to be more in contact with the body because the body is just as much as what we think we are.

But whatever people can have access, so how do you experience that? What's happening with you? And some people might say, oh, I don't know, it feels gaga. And then okay, what do you call gaga?

And so we have some of the points we can actually latch onto as their experience. And also there's the ownership of their experience, participation of their experience is also kind of calming. Instead of something is happening to them, like, oh, this is what I am experiencing, naming and then what gaga might be. And then we go into more details.

**Jaia Bristow**

And you work a lot with sensory awareness. So do you want to just explain what you mean by that and why that's important?

**Aki Omori**

Yeah, I think sensory awareness is very important.

So imagine that we have a central nervous system, like a brain, and a spinal cord. That's where a lot of processing happens. And also decision making happens as a result of it. But something feeds into the central nervous system, so if you can see in my action that it's coming somewhere from maybe the peripheral, the edges into your center.

So this is incoming information. So if I was to put my hand on your hand or something right now, and then your hand would experience my hand touching you. And then that information comes into the body, to the center, and then that's essentially information, that's incoming flow.

And then there's some process that happens in the center and then some decision. So you don't like the way I put my hand. You might respond by taking my hand off your hand.

So that's the motor response. Or you might like it, and then you might hold my hand or you might just enjoy the warmth of my hand. Do you understand?

So it's a different decision that comes out as a motor response, which is a movement response or the movement response could be breathing or could be a sound, there could be some kind of associated thinking. So the motor response could be buried. So that's the sensory, incoming flow. And outgoing is motor.

Sometimes when people have difficult experiences, either they were not being able to track their sensations or experiences. Also, when people pay attention to, say, a discomfort or the pain, it has a sharper, how could I say that? The sharper experience of the discomfort. So that enhances the more of the pain, the more of the discomfort.

**[00:06:08]**

Because what they're doing is a little bit more of it as if I'm looking at the pain, which is a motor action. Sensory is much gentler. So if you can really have the sensory experiences below the eye level, so the information is coming into the back of the brain, it's much softer.

**Jaia Bristow**

How does this tie into anxiety? How does this impact anxiety?

**Aki Omori**

I think I'm repeating maybe a little bit myself, but sometimes when people speak about anxiety, they might not exactly know what is happening, what they call anxiety. So we can ask the questions, so how do you experience anxiety? What do you notice right now?

So they might come up with lots of thoughts, but these are thoughts, associated thoughts. So it could be where the experience is perhaps, in the body? If it's not too much for them. So they can locate, I'm feeling a little bit tightness around the chest or tightness in my belly, or I feel a little bit more constricted or just those things.

And then we can start asking a little bit more about what their experience is. And then we need to distract people a little bit so that they don't go into too much into it, distract a little bit.

**Jaia Bristow**

Interesting. So what I'm hearing is that really the focus in the work that you're doing, is to come back into the body and it's to really feel what's going on in the body and to really receive that sensory information that you're talking about and notice the reactions that we have in response to that. So I think that's what you were calling, the motor reactions.

So rather than anxiety just being like, oh, I'm worried about my exam tomorrow, or I'm worried about my new job or I'm stressed or I haven't done my food shop for this week, and I don't know how I'm going to manage or I'm broke right now and I need to buy a new computer.

It's like, okay, what is it that you're actually feeling? What's actually going on for you? Not, what are all your thoughts? But bringing the energy down and being like, it feels like a clamp in my chest or I feel this churning in my stomach or I feel tension in my shoulders or whatever it is.

So that's what I'm hearing, is it's really about coming into the body and feeling what's going on from there rather than getting caught up in the racing thoughts?

**Aki Omori**

Yeah, you did that very well, actually.

**Jaia Bristow**

I have a lot of personal experience with anxiety.

**[00:09:19] Aki Omori**

I think it's part of life. I think it is part of life anyway.

But there's something, there's some that think, oh, I'm going to have to buy... I'm so broke and what am I going to do? So a lot of the thought association is not necessarily based in here and now, is it? It may be a future projection or just something related to the past as well.

So just coming into the body actually really brings us back into here and now. I'm sure you're familiar with that idea.

And it's just so hard to do sometimes. I guess that's why we work together. So there is somebody accompanying you in that process to really support you and hold you in that space. And then if you're going off, I might not really tell people to come back or there's actually a moment like that too.

But just to point out, when we speak about this, your mind goes there. So part of my job is to mirror what's happening in the person so that they're beginning to also recognize their patterns of behavior or patterns of their behavior in that. And then being able to see that, and then there might be the opportunity of making different choices that might be more supportive.

And also there's something about, there are types of anxiety that might be an immediate association, but when you really look into it or sometimes look into it, it might not be necessarily be to do with what they are speaking about a lot of the time. And some kind of reflection of something that happened way back is playing up.

Because what's happening in life is representing something that associates, unconsciously associated to something that happened in the past. So a red flag comes up. And then as soon as the red flag comes up, because it's so fast, that part of the brain is really fast, we just get tumbled along with that. So part of my work is to just slow down that process if the red flag is up.

I'm going to add a little bit more. Also the type of anxiety similar to what I just said, but the red flag might not associate with anything concrete. It's just the kind of feeling of dread. It might not really have anything to do with being broke or an exam or anything. Those things might add to that, but just so you wake up feeling dread.

And that could be something to do with some early experiences. And so that's the kind of area that I work with. And we never necessarily, not never, we might not actually find out what happened. When we look into the history sometimes there's telltale signs or say abandonment or abuse or that kind of thing. But sometimes just a memory of that, just the familiar state that people come to.

And it's to really recognize being able to name inner bodily sensations. Or it could be something that they're accessible, as I said earlier, like gaga or that feels really like a train going really fast off the edge of the cliff or whatever it is, that they can access the description at that point and aggressively might be able to the point when they feel calm enough, safe enough, and then they might be able to name it in the body more.

But just to really recognize it and then also recognizing that there is actually no immediate danger or something to really worry about right now. So if something happens really early, it often messes up with the timeline.

**[00:14:07] Jaia Bristow**

And it's interesting what you're saying, when I gave those examples of racing thoughts and you were mentioning how most of the time anxiety is either about the future or the past. So it's like worrying about something that hasn't happened yet or ruminating over something that happened that we wish we could change.

And so these exercises of feeling the senses in the body, of coming back to the body, really help ground us in the present moment and realize that we're not in immediate danger right now.

And again, that area of control, what can we control and what can't we control. And what you were saying about really naming the body sensations helps as well, to come back to the present moment, to create that space between the racing thoughts and what's actually happening right here, right now.

And I love the descriptions you give of the ways people can name what they're feeling, like gaga or a train going off a cliff. So it's not having to name necessarily emotions and use words. It doesn't have to be rational and logical what you're feeling. It's just what comes to you, what feels the most descriptive to your sensations in the moment.

**Aki Omori**

And also I think it prevents from somebody, the facilitator or the therapist, facilitator if it's a group work, or the therapist not to interpret their words too much. So it's not interpreting or avoiding misattunement. So I'm going to use the one they used to speak about their experience.

So there's something about their own ownership is coming back, of their own sensations and their own experiences. So it prevents some kind of, I don't know, the dependency. It's like a therapist and facilitator taking on so much pressure. I'm going to have to sort their life out. No, I'm just really helping their process to do their work. So the power remains in the person or the students in the room.

**Jaia Bristow**

So it's really holding space and mirroring what's being said rather than fixing or changing.

And it's interesting because you're talking a lot about one-on-one work with therapists or group facilitators or things, but I think this is very true for anyone wanting to support someone with anxiety.

So if they're feeling anxious, sometimes what they need is not to be fixed, but just to be mirrored, to have space held, to have their words repeated back. And that can be really supportive to someone going through a difficult time.

**Aki Omori**

Yes.

**Jaia Bristow**

I'm also curious, because you're talking about, again, working with a therapist and working groups, but what are some practical things and exercises that people can do themselves to manage anxiety and racing thoughts?

## **[00:17:18] Aki Omori**

I guess there are lots of different things people can do when they feel the anxiety. One of the main ones is just maybe just pause. To slow down if there is a feeling of the rushing, particularly the slowing down. And of course, it's really difficult to do.

And then maybe something really simple to do is, breathing is one of the things to do. You take a breath and you exhale from the mouth, I would say. Really slowly and length in exhalation. So a simple exercise like that takes your mind off so you have some task in hand. So you just do that a few times and just notice something has changed.

And the important thing, I think, for us to make change is choosing what's happening and what's working. So in that moment, you might still feel a little bit anxiety, but you might also feel a tiny bit of like, well, I feel a little bit different, I feel a little bit better or whatever it is, and then latch onto that. That choice making.

And if you feel anxiety, you feel more collapsed in, more like a collapse and energyless sort of thing, and then maybe just bringing awareness to let your eyes follow whatever they follow. Just bringing awareness back out into the room. Being aware of the real extremities, like the fingertips and toes and the surface of the body. Meeting the body so that it brings you back a little bit out in the room.

That's one of the things I might actually say to people. Or just really look at something, paying attention. A really simple thing like if you're in a really collapsed state, I'm looking at this cup over here and it's white and it's got yellow and the shape is like this. Or you might just hold it in your hands and feel the object so that brings you back more out into the world. So if you're really kind of collapsed.

But if you're really rushing, slowing down, taking a long breath out, that might be really helpful. Or just go and literally, just really move the body, that might be helpful.

There are lots of different things we can do, but I feel what I can offer is that maybe when you're feeling really stuck, like you're going to be stuck in anxiety forever because it keeps happening and everything, feeling a little bit hopeless, I'll never get better. And then just when you feel like that, just acknowledging that, but also, we're never stuck. It's not possible for a human being to be completely stuck. We might feel that we're stuck.

So just somewhere having the benefit of the doubt, that, no, we're just looking for just a tiny little crack, it might not be visible, to break through something. So I think that keeps it going.

When I had a really difficult time many years ago, I felt like it really sucked. And I was on a retreat with a Tibetan Rinpoche and everyone was talking at more like a doctrine practice, like a high practice and everything, getting more theoretical and all these Tibetan words flying around. And then there were about 200 people on a retreat and then me feeling completely lost and they're stuck in my anxiety.

And in the middle of this highly philosophical practice, I raised a hand and said, I feel really stuck in this. I can't even get to the topic that you're talking about. And the Rinpoche very kindly paused everything and just really looked at me from the stage and looked at me and said, you might sometimes feel like I'm really stuck, like a brick wall everywhere, but you will always get through, penetrate through this. You just need to remember that.

**[00:21:58]**

And that's what I'm also offering. And also really helpful to think of, for me to just remember that moment if I'm feeling stuck. And then I did come through, because I think it's an illusion that we feel stuck. We're imagining we are stuck. It's real, it feels real, but it's not true.

So just really remembering. And so sometimes to remember something, there's somebody who is really helpful for you or something that makes you feel good, distract yourself, is also really helpful.

And the way I work with the clients and also in group sessions, if the room is beginning to feel a little bit in one way or another, I would take them in a different direction to regulate the whole room. If people are getting just too excited or something, I'm going to bring them to calm down.

So give something to calm them down. And then if they begin to collapse and then I'm going to give them something, I might throw a colorful ball or something. And then people laugh and then the room changes. So we are always shifting.

### **Jaia Bristow**

And I really hear that in the examples you've given and the stories you shared, that element of, even when we feel like this is going to last forever, there is no change, I am stuck like this, that there's always shift.

And so that's why sometimes when it's all feeling overwhelming, just taking a breath and coming to your body and then taking another breath and just noticing even the slightest shift, like you said at the beginning, is aware. And then just focusing in that because then we see that we are fluid, that things are moving, that we're not stuck.

Again, and that's true individually in ourselves and in groups, like the energy of groups, how one person might say or do something which will impact the whole energy of the group. Or like you say, if you can feel that someone or a group is feeling very tired, or very serious or very low, then you can make someone laugh. Or if the energy is very high and excitable, then there's ways to ground more.

And so it's creating that balance and noticing that things are constantly moving and fluid, and that we're not stuck in just one, either thought pattern or emotion or state of being.

### **Aki Omori**

Yes, exactly. And it's actually nice to name it. So when I feel in a group, the room shifted something, oh, the room has changed. My teacher used to word it like, the mind of the room has changed. Because people are feeling it, but when somebody names it, people can acknowledge more consciously and that's really helpful. And that's what I do also with the clients.

So it's really observation, witnessing the person. And then when people collapse a little bit the rest is coming back and their skin feels really different. When the state changes, the skin feels different, the color changes or the eyes change. And my experience of them change. So I'm going to reflect that to them and then they're here, the reflection of it. So it becomes more affirmed in their experiences too.

### **Jaia Bristow**

Fantastic.

## **[00:25:38] Aki Omori**

And another thing is that when we go into the body, but sometimes when we go in the body, often people feel really stuck here, there's a choked feeling or tightness here. And sometimes the way to do it is not to stay there for too long. So we do it in a portion, like a little portion.

And then we're going to distract them, or distract them as in, so what else is going on? So I have a pain here, tension. And the pain here, it's getting worse. And then I have this tightness here. Just noticing what else is going on there. What is in between us or what's underneath there? Or is there anywhere in your body that feels easy and comfortable or even pleasurable or pleasant?

But sometimes, depending on the state people are in, pleasant or pleasurable is like far, far, fetched. So then we look for something neutral where there's no pain. There is one usually. But there is also resistance to go there.

So there is a part of the participation in that feeling of the stuckness is that we are also unconsciously choosing to stay with a difficulty and the pain because it feels like there's an alarm of unsafeness and a difficulty, so that we learn to look out for the danger.

So we are kind of stuck in a survival for the state. So that's just a habit that we learnt to protect ourselves and everything. But we need to also expand the habits vocabulary.

Okay, let's just take our mind off, there might be resistance to it, and then renaming that. Okay, of course there's a resistance, let's just go a little bit to somewhere else.

Or sometimes I might really have to ask, okay, let's just don't think about it. Just do it. Depending on whom I'm working with. And okay my right little finger feels easy. Okay. And then people go, okay, there's nothing.

And if there's enough pleasant feeling in my little finger on my right hand or something, and then if they go in between, people might begin to feel something a little bit more moderate, because what we're looking for is what happens in between the two.

So depending on the person, but they might be able to name I'm feeling a little bit more neutral now in between, or feel a little bit okay. Okay, that's there, but this is also there.

Or sometimes people say, I had a client say, my feet and legs are fine. All the difficulty is up here, my feet and legs are fine. And I'm just asking them to stay with the feet and legs a little bit more where there's no drama. There's nothing happening, there's no drama. It's not important. What is it?

Because people are wanting to stay where there's an alarm going and there's a drama there, and they get more and more anxiety levels going up and they're getting more stressed or something. Let's go somewhere where there isn't a drama.

## **Jaia Bristow**

And I love what you're sharing because it's really the element of choice. And choice can really help with anxiety when we feel like we have a choice.

Sometimes the choice is what causes the anxiety, but in this case, it's really helpful feeling like, as you said before, naming what you're feeling and then naming when something shifts and noticing that



and then having the choice to, once we notice what's going on in our body, that we don't have to go where it's the most extreme, where it's the most painful. There'll be parts of our body that are calling our attention the loudest. And just the part that's calling the loudest, doesn't mean that that's what needs it the most.

**[00:29:59]**

And that one way to regulate ourselves is actually to go to an area that feels, where there's not a lot of pain or discomfort. And so focusing on, there's lots of mindfulness practices that are offered across this conference where sometimes people focus on the breath, sometimes people focus on different things.

But just finding an area in your body which feels safe and comfortable, if it feels there's pleasure, then fantastic, if there's not, just neutrality, and just focusing on that a bit can really help in regulating and again, coming into the body and making the body feel like a safe place to be.

**Aki Omori**

Yeah, exactly. Sometimes we can laugh, if it's just been such a serious session or something and then, with this client working with, it's like, oh, there's no drama there. And there's an ownership of them choosing the drama over peace.

**Jaia Bristow**

And it's interesting that they recognize that they were like, oh, it's not important there's no drama. All the intensity and sensations are going on up here. And it's like that, but that's why it's interesting to go down there.

So you're offering some mindful movement sessions as part of this workshop that's part of this conference as well. So do you want to tell us a little bit about those and how this work ties in with that?

**Aki Omori**

So I just give some guidance for people to start noticing something. Just noticing, like even information, the information as in sensation, information that is telling you that your body exists. And then allowing the movement to maybe initiate from the sensations.

And then usually when people go into that, I can't always speak for 100% of the people, and what I mean by that is if that is not your experience, then your experience is valid. I'm just really saying that. If this one doesn't work, just maybe modify it or look for something else that works for you.

Being really self centered in a good sense, because we can, as a facilitator, sorry, I'm slightly diverting, but as a facilitator, we can never guarantee a sense of safety for everybody. But that doesn't mean your experience, the individual experiences, are not valid, it's not working for you. I mean, no, you have your experience, and that's really important. And there may be another opportunity for that person to find another way in. So don't just put up with what's offered. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work.

But anyway, my session is going to guide in a way that there's the sense of the body and the different ways of knowing the body in relation to the Earth, relation to your center, relation to the space. And

then just let's move the body. Come with just an open mind and curiosity just to move as little or as much as you like.

**[00:33:50]**

So whatever I'm demonstrating, because it's not form based, whatever I'm presenting might not be what you do. You do your thing and I just offer my witnessing from over here in front of the camera, but I'm with you.

**Jaia Bristow**

Wonderful. Well, thank you so much for your time today, Aki. How can people find out more about you and your work?

**Aki Omori**

I have a humble website [akiomori.com](http://akiomori.com) and usually all the events that I teach should go there.

And then also the contact details, there's a way you can contact me if people are looking for more one-to-one sessions.

And if you're interested in working with me as a facilitator for an event, you can contact me through my website.

**Jaia Bristow**

Fantastic thank you so much for your time today.

**Aki Omori**

Thank you, Jaia. Thank you.