



Conscious Life presents

ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

Introduction to breathwork for anxiety

Guest: Anthony Abbagnano

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[00:00:10] Alex Howard

Welcome everyone, to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with Anthony Abbagnano.

Firstly, Anthony, I want to welcome you and thank you for joining me.

Anthony Abbagnano

Thank you, Alex. It's a delight to be here.

Alex Howard

Anthony and I know each other quite well through some groups we've been in, but we've never actually interviewed together in this way. So I'm excited for the opportunity to explore a bit more about Anthony's work.

We're going to be talking about breathwork and particularly coming to some practical exercises towards the end which will really help bring this to life.

Just to give people a bit of Anthony's background, Anthony Abbagnano is a visionary thought leader, breath expert, and founder of the internationally accredited breathwork school, Alchemy of Breath, which is a 100,000 person online community dedicated to evolving collective consciousness.

He currently lives in Italy, it looks rather beautiful there today, I must say, where he co-founded Alchemy School of Healing Arts, and his wife, Amy Rachelle Abbagnano. ASHA supports breathwork, holistic practices, sustainability, growing food and building community.

Anthony, I feel like a good starting point would be just to say a little bit about how you see anxiety. When, either someone in a group you're running or someone you're working with one-on-one says, I have anxiety or I'm suffering from anxiety, what does that mean to you?

Anthony Abbagnano

Oh, boy. Just allowing the word to sit there can bring the feeling. And I think we all know what that's like. For me, it's in my belly, and I'm used to locating emotions and tensions and where they exist in the body because I believe that really helps us distribute it a bit and doesn't keep it all up here.

It's a tension that exists between a peaceful state of being and where I am now. And it's usually not about what's happening right now, it's about my perception of what's happening right now.

[00:02:25]

So that would be the most succinct way I could describe it.

I think perhaps one of the mistakes that we make about anxiety is that we try to get away from it and we try to get rid of it a bit like trauma. We're releasing it and trying to shake it off. But I don't really believe it works that way.

I believe it's there as an energy, and how can we respond to it in an able way? How can we transform it in some way? So if we consider it as an impersonal energy, and then how we might work with it? What would that look like? Then at least it opens the door to some kind of a possibility.

And Fritz Perls made a great quote, he said, "Anxiety is enthusiasm without the breath". It all begins with, if we're just thinking differently, if we're willing to think a little differently and consider that the opportunity is there to actually master that alchemy. Of changing it from something negative and soul destroying and really bad for our health, into something that, well, the stallion that we can saddle and ride rather than the one that's threatening us.

Alex Howard

And what I really like in what you're saying is, I think often when people experience anxiety, it feels like something to either get rid of or something to escape from. And of course, in the experience of doing that, what we're often then doing is we're trying to escape ourselves. We're trying to disconnect or to speed up or to get away from the experience.

And what I like in what you're saying is that actually the way to work with it is to work with it, not to try to get away from it.

Anthony Abbagnano

Yeah, exactly. The best way, and this is a little daunting at first thought, but the best way is to actually become intimate with it, not keep turning the other way. And the easiest way to become intimate with it is to use our breath.

So when I'm working with people, and obviously I'm an advocate of the breath, it's changed my life and I've seen it, gosh, I don't know how many millions of people we've breathed now who all enlightened themselves to another choice in life as a result of breathing consciously.

And it seems such a ridiculously simple thing that we could have overlooked our entire lives, but just that choice of giving my attention to my breath is actually half the task, just that choice.

And so reversing that tendency that we've had our whole lives of forgetting about it until we don't have enough or until we see a beautiful sight or we're scared to death or we're impacted by something, those are the times that we recognize that we're not breathing. We don't really recognize how much we are breathing and what that means.

Alex Howard

As you bring in the importance of breath, some people may have heard of breathwork, some people might not. Some people may not be familiar with the way that you're working with the breath. So

maybe just give us a little bit of context and frame around what breathwork is to you and how it can impact us.

[00:05:47] Anthony Abbagnano

Well, breathwork, when I use the term breathwork, I mean breath awareness. And so anybody who has a meditation practice or has even visited meditation as an option, will probably remember just focus on your breath being one of the first things that we do.

And breath awareness, I mean it in the sense that there's a different breath style we can employ for every situation that we're confronted to or confronted with. The list is endless of choices that we've got.

Now I'll give some examples. If we're excited, we tend to breathe with shorter breaths. If we go towards panic, we get an even shorter breath. If we're meditating and we are calm, we'll notice that we breathe very softly and very gently. And the more we notice about the way that we're breathing, then the more empowered we become to actually reverse manipulate our conditions.

So if I'm feeling panicky and I breathe really slowly, then I calm down. Or if I'm feeling depressed or tired, if I do what we call a conscious, connected breath, which is what we do with the public in most of our sessions, that will uplift me, it will inspire me. I get inspired.

So there's a breath that we can use for everything, from making love, trying to go to sleep, trying to wake up, trying to focus, for stamina when we exercise. All different kinds of breath for different purposes. That's what I mean by breathwork. It's really breath awareness.

Alex Howard

It's interesting, as you're speaking I'm finding myself thinking that we can survive weeks without food, days without water, but only minutes without breath. And yet so much of the emphasis around health and wellbeing is around what we eat and how we move our body.

But there's often not so much... And even in practices like meditation, yoga, of course we're called back to the breath a lot, but there's not much real instruction about what that means. And it strikes me that actually it's at the heart of so many things, and yet often we're not talking about it.

Anthony Abbagnano

Yeah, exactly. I believe it's at the heart. Of course, I'm an advocate, so I believe it's at the heart of everything. And I also believe in a more psychological context or psychospiritual metaphysical context. It's actually in all the good books, the Bible and the Koran, and the Kabbalah, it's referred to as the supernatural, it's referred to as God, in whatever form that might be.

And so what does it look like in our lives? I mean, if we can't cope with what's going on right now, if it's getting to be all too much, perhaps a little bit of spirit can help. Perhaps something a bit more lofty can come into our awareness to really help us re-vision things and see that the box that we're living in does have a lid and we can actually lift it and climb out.

[00:08:56] Alex Howard

It also strikes me that one of the things that really sets up our breath is our traumas and our childhood experiences and the ways that life has impacted us. And in a sense, I guess in a way, it's one of the ways that those traumas live in us now because those patterns have been set up and how we're still breathing. Is that how you would also see it?

Anthony Abbagnano

Yeah. I believe that anxiety is born of trauma, of course. If I'm working with someone on that subject, I would always seek to understand from whence it came? What was its point of origin? And who is it that's feeling the anxiety?

So really to encourage someone to start seeing themselves as a composite of experiences and that parts theory. I think it's Michael White who speaks of it. So we understand that we are made up of several parts, and if we can accomplish that awareness, then we can start working with those parts, we can start communicating and orchestrating them.

I like to think of it as, if you go into a concert hall to watch a classical concert and you get in there early and everybody's got their instruments and they're all tuning, making sure they're sorted. The violinist has got his thing, and the piano has got his and the guitar and the drum and the bassoon, or whatever it might be. And if you listen to it, it's an absolute cacophony, but when the conductor walks in, all of a sudden everybody falls silent and he raises his baton, and then they, in unison, emit the most beautiful music that even now, the idea of it makes my skin tingle.

And then the question is, well, do we want to be the conductor of our own inner orchestra? Do we want to really take responsibility for finding out who those parts are and why they are the way they are and how we can lubricate the pathways of communication?

And breath is the most powerful tool that I've ever known for that. It's non-sequential. It can happen immediately. It can happen in quantum leaps rather than years of analysis or even years of meditation.

Alex Howard

It's a beautiful metaphor.

I know that in your work you talk about this idea of the alchemist, and in a sense, the journey we can go on with that. I'd love you to talk about that a little bit because I think it also joins up some of these bits here that we're opening up.

Anthony Abbagnano

Thank you. Well, the alchemist is the core of our work at Alchemy Breath. And in the past, it's always been the backbone of the training program of our Academy for people who want to become professional breathworkers.

And it's really focused on the inner journey. It's focused on identifying our biography and what the constriction points might have been in our childhood that created coping systems, behavioral coping systems, and winning systems to manage. A bit like that T shirt, 'Keep Calm and Carry On'. And at the same time, you've bitten a hole in your lip and you start to bleed.

[00:12:19]

So instead of creating conflict, the idea of the alchemist is to really look inside and create resolution that is, first of all, updated. Because when I was 6 years old and I coped with the situation, if I keep using a 6 year old logic to cope with that situation, it's not going to get me very far.

So we're going to upgrade and we're going to visit it from our functional adult self. And that means looking at who we were when things happened and finding ways to make contact with that part of who we are now that actually rules the roost.

I think I remember Terry Real saying once, "Do you want to sit in the back of the car and let the child stay in the driver's seat? Or do you want to be in harmony and have him sitting next to you and then at least you can have your own hands on the wheel?". So it's really about becoming the author of your life rather than letting someone else do it.

So for people who need to create life changes, people who feel stuck or dissatisfied, people who find that superficial joys and pleasures that we have aren't quite enough to make them feel deeply happy and they feel things like anxiety, then that alchemist program is the best way to really dig deep and to rewrite the biography that we want.

Alex Howard

I also find the word, 'alchemy' in itself quite interesting because really what you're talking about is transforming one thing into another thing. And I think sometimes people can feel that their biology or their biography has become their destiny. That the experiences that they've had, because it's always been that way, it's the way that it's always going to be.

I like the promise in a sense of just that idea of alchemy, that we can turn and transform what is painful and difficult into something else.

Anthony Abbagnano

That's so true. And also what fascinates me about it is it's not going to happen the way we think it's going to happen. It's actually going to happen outside the way we think it's going to happen. So really dealing with something quite fundamental, looking at our thought structures and making a commitment to allow them to shift so we can forge new neuron pathways instead of staying stuck in a rut.

Alex Howard

So somebody that is new to breathwork, I imagine also initially might be, okay, that's fine, I'm just going to change my breathing. But then also what's happening is, of course it becomes a gateway to access and feel those traumas, those emotions that we might not have metabolized or have been in touch with before.

How do you frame with people about how they approach that? And I guess what I'm really getting at is often we try to solve the problem in the way that it was created. And so if our relationship with ourselves has historically been quite harsh or quite pushy, that that's often the way I imagine people start meeting themselves in this place.

[00:15:33]

So I'm interested in how you set the foundation and how you encourage people to approach their breath in a way that's transformative in a way that is healing.

Anthony Abbagnano

I think you're absolutely right. People who have been brought up in a harsh environment tend to deal with their environment harshly. And if I've been treated as if I'm not worth anything, then I will continue to treat myself as if I'm not worth anything.

So how do we rewrite that? How do we actually get to that pivotal moment where the alchemy can occur? And when we breathe, first of all, we learn the art of being gentle with ourselves. And we breathe the way we live.

So when I breathe a group of people, you can see that person who's really efforting and struggling, and usually that will come to a culmination or a point where there'll be some kind of breakdown. Where somehow he'll stay, or she will stay present enough with it that there'll be a breakdown and then almost an immediate breakthrough.

But the whole principle of the Alchemy of Breath is breathing and feeling. And you mentioned the emotions that sometimes we don't want to visit and we take pills, we have sex, we go shopping, we watch TV, we do anything we can think of sometimes to avoid really feeling what's going on.

So alchemy is very much to me about allowing the feeling to be there without judgment, without needing it to change or trying to push it around, and just simply bringing the breath back to it so that the strongest emotions, especially the ones of shock and trauma that we have felt in the past, are moments when we lost our breath.

So if we approach this unconditionally and just allow the feelings to come and bring the breath to them and repair those two things, then a grander sense of repair can actually happen.

Alex Howard

It's funny, I've never heard repair used like that before. That's really good. It's like repair, like putting together those two pieces, which I guess is, in a sense, part of the trauma response. Or part of anxiety is the active disconnecting of those two pieces.

Anthony Abbagnano

Yeah and our birth is that first moment, isn't it? It's the most radical disconnect that we could have experienced.

And I don't know about you, but I remember as a child I went to boarding school and feeling like this, not just despondence with the world, but almost like a despair. That, oh, I can't be me. I've got to be something other than me in order to get along and know other people. And I think that's really where the anxiety begins and the separation becomes reinforced.

So for someone who's anxious, I would be seeking to understand what would the process look like to gain an understanding of what the anxiety feels as a part of me? That part of me that's anxious, what is he experiencing? And how can I, as a functional adult in the present moment, minister to him in

some way? What bridges can I create for him to feel that he doesn't need to carry that load anymore, that I can rationally do it myself?

[00:19:04] Alex Howard

Say a bit more about how you do that, because I know that we're going to, in a sense, come at anxiety from a couple of different perspectives. Firstly, looking at some of these underlying patterns and how we can work with those differently. But also then we'll come a bit later to when anxiety arises, how can we actually be more responsive to it in that way?

So as you start to open up this idea of being able to recognize and make those connections and understand the ways that that's happened, how can we start to work with that, using the breath?

Anthony Abbagnano

Well, I think there are essentially three levels. And the first one is to cope. Because if you feel the pressure and the tightness in your chest and you start sweating and you're in that cycle of anxiety and you know it's coming on, then you need something quick that you can do in order to disperse the tension.

And so there's a breath pattern that we can use for that. And honestly, half of the journey is to decide to use that breath pattern. That's actually the first hurdle, is just to decide to use that breath pattern.

And then after that, the next level is to work with, how can we deal with that general sense of anxiety? I don't know if some people wake up in the morning with that grip in their belly or in their chest, life is back, I'm back in life again. How do we deal with that general vibration of tension that we carry?

And there's another very simple breath technique that we can use as a practice which helps really bring down our general anxiety levels and so we're more able to live a slightly less volatile existence.

And then underneath that, then the deepest work is really with something like the alchemist, where we really do go back and build bridges between the inner child, the person we once were, and the one that was wounded. And reinform these parts that we're here to protect them.

I've also understood something else in my own journey recently, that with inner child work, for people who are familiar with it, it's very tender and beautiful stuff. And once we've accomplished a reconnection with that little baby that we've got inside, that little baby also has a voice of infinite wisdom that it can share with us.

And we know that sometimes as parents, they say, oh, my gosh, my daughter, she just said something that was wise. And here I am, 42 and she's 3 and she's teaching me. And when we work it with ourselves in that way, then we can also be informed by that deep inner well of wisdom that exists in each of us.

Alex Howard

And in many ways, it's finding the ways to create the safety for those dialogues and for those explorations to happen. As you say, often we go in with these layers of judgment or these defensive places where we've learnt kind of...

[00:22:15]

I often think, in a sense, that our response to trauma is what saves us, but our response to trauma is often also what enslaves us. That we become trapped by that ultimately.

So as you're starting to build these connections, this understanding, how do you support people in doing that?

Anthony Abbagnano

Good question. I just want to respond to something you said because that was so interesting, something that saves us also enslaves us, because in response to that, what we tend to do is to find a narrative that we can use to cope with the world afterwards in the outer world. And then the narrative itself becomes a trap and we get stuck in the story.

So it gets to the point that almost the question is, do you want to stay in the story or do you want to work on it? Do you want a talk story, or do you actually want to work on it?

And I think that's the most fundamental question of all, because what happened when we were traumatized is we lost our choice. We had no choice. We had that, as van der Kolk says, we lobotomized. We have no power at all to make any range of choices other than to fight, freeze or flee.

So how can we introduce choice in that moment when we were choiceless? And that starts with that first choice, that I'm going to use my breath, and then we've created that crack in the door, that crack through which the light can come through. And then we can see what's in the room a little bit and understand that they aren't all monsters.

And what if anxiety is a completely impersonal form of energy? And what would it look like to use that energy to help us? And this is a bit like shadow work, which is something that we do a lot of in the alchemist as well. It's like there's so much power in anxiety. We're so alert. We're so fast thinking. We're so ready. We're hypertuned to everything that's going on. What if we employed it in a different way?

Alex Howard

Also, I'm still sitting with what you said earlier, the Fritz Perls quote, that anxiety is enthusiasm without breath. It's so great. Because that's really what you're saying there, that there is potential, that there's energy, that there's power that's there, but it's, in a sense, that power is stagnant or it's stuck or it's frozen because we're not letting it move through our body when we're not breathing through it.

Anthony Abbagnano

Exactly. And the breath is the system that I use.

Alex Howard

So let's come a bit more towards the practical side of this. And I realize that the way you laid out those levels, it might actually be that starting with responding to anxiety as it arises might be better than working with the underlying. I don't mind which exercise you'd like to do first, but let's move towards how do we actually work with this?

[00:25:26] Anthony Abbagnano

Okay, so we'll take the top two levels because the deeper level is one that requires coursework and study and real dedication. Let's deal with the coping mechanism that we might need if the pressure is just getting too great. That's a really straightforward and simple one.

We're going to breathe through the nose, and we're going to essentially breathe a shorter inbreath than our outbreath. And the key here is to extend the outbreath for just as long as we can. So if it takes us a count of 4 to breathe in, 1 2 3 4 and then if we can extend to 8 on the outbreath we're already doing well.

And actually what's happening at the same time, the secret is you're counting and as you're counting you're beginning to dislodge the anxiety just by making a fresh choice. You're making your second choice now. First I'm going to breathe, now I'm even going to count when I breathe. And so we're beginning to actually replace that concern and consternation with something that brings possibility and expansion.

Then what we can do is we can extend that 8 to 9 and then 10 and then 11 and then 12, and with practice you can get it up to 30. And when you do that on your exhale you can also play with making sounds like a hum, something like that. And you can also close your ears and make a humming sound and that increases the vibration in your own head and helps you calm down everything and it also activates your vagus nerve, which of course is critical if we're feeling anxious. That vagus nerve is what we need to start bringing to purpose.

So let's try 10 breaths together. We'll count in for 4 and then we'll count out for 8. And then I'll go up next breath to 9 and next breath to 10, next breath to 11, next breath to 12. And feel free if you're watching this to make that noise if you want to on the way out. The only thing is if you close your ears you won't hear me counting. So just do as best you can and make it as long as you can. Make that exhale as long as you can.

So let's just take a breath to settle.

And now inhale 1 2 3 4.

Exhale, 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8.

Inhale 1 2 3 4.

Exhale for 9, 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9.

Inhale 1 2 3 4.

Exhale for 10, 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.

Inhale 1 2 3 4.

Exhale for 11, 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11.

Inhale 1 2 3 4.

And last time exhale for 12. 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 and 12 and relax.

[00:30:03]

Just take a moment and notice anything that's different. Now, often a response I get is, I couldn't breathe long enough and I want to be anxious about that.

Alex Howard

You noticed that I was running out about 6 or 7.

Anthony Abbagnano

Yeah. Well one of the prerequisites, what I normally do, and we have an anxiety course and it's made very clear there I am subscribing to thinking differently and measuring differently. So it's not how many times I fail, it's how many times I succeed. And how many times I can pick myself up again rather than how many times I fall.

We just went through something very quickly there. It would take a couple of days really to embed it as a proper system. And you'll find that whenever you feel or perceive someone else's intention or a victim triangle, drama triangle situation occurring in your life, that you begin to immediately employ that breath.

Alex Howard

It's interesting, I just want to respond, as I was breathing as you were doing it, what I also noticed is how much more grounded I feel. I wasn't going in feeling anxious into the exercise, so it wasn't like I was going from high anxiety to balance. What I noticed is going from feeling relatively in the moment to feeling much more embodied, like I'm much more aware of my body on the chair, I feel more present to you and to the moment. So I definitely feel a movement in my state.

Anthony Abbagnano

Yeah. Thank you for saying that. And that's the difference that we get to notice. If we can just do that with 5 breaths or, how many do we do? 8 to 12. 5 breaths, 5 cycles of breath.

That's the other thing Fritz Perl said, is if you can breathe less than 6 times in a minute, you can't be anxious. So really, that's the key. It's just to slow it down.

And this is what really leads us into the other breath pattern, which is one that many of us know already, which is called the coherence breath. And this was developed by the HeartMath Institute in California. And it's such a simple breath. It's a 5 second inhale and a 5 second exhale, but to be practiced three times a day, in the beginning, in the middle of the day and at the end of the day and on an empty tummy.

And if we do that, you find, I found within the second day, every time I felt a little disturbed, I just go back to my coherence breath. I then found after about two weeks that it became, instead of my go to breath, it became my come from breath. I was just breathing like that all the time. If I was in a meeting and bored, or waiting to speak, or a supermarket queue, or a traffic light, whatever it might have been, I would just breathe in for 5 and out 5.

[00:33:02]

And its physical benefit is that it increases our HRV, our heart rate variability, which is our heart's ability to respond to different situations. So we could call it heart agility, if you will. And it also makes us coherent. It makes us coherent with each other, too.

So if you are in a couple and you want to experience an intimate moment, looking into each other's eyes and simply breathing 5 breaths at 5 seconds in and 5 seconds out, things begin to shift. Sometimes you get a bit uncomfortable, too.

And then to even create more intimacy, then we would breathe through the mouth together like that. So you can actually feel each other that much more present. There's so many ways to use the breath that's the other exercise to remember, is just to do 5 seconds in, 5 seconds out, five minutes and three times a day.

Alex Howard

And one of the tendencies that people can have, I think with doing breathwork, is the tendency, you spoke to briefly a moment ago, to try and do it right. Like they have ideas of what they think should be happening or what shouldn't be happening.

And I know this often comes up for people with meditation that if one gives exercises around breath, sometimes it almost becomes an obstacle because there's so much story about the doing it right or doing it wrong.

So maybe you can just say a bit about how to be with that and whether there is a right or wrong, which I'm assuming that there is, but it's not to be held in a rigid way.

Anthony Abbagnano

Well, that's such a big thing that you've mentioned, because that feeling of right or wrong is so important to us as humans. We're so frightened of being wrong and we're terrified of being wrong. And that might manifest also as grandiosity because we overcome that fear of being wrong by insisting that we're right. And we know what it's like to be around people who need to be right, it's disturbing.

So what we do with alchemy is, any intellectual process or any thought that's coming up in the mind that is cyclical or is stopping us being fully present, I would ask you to ask yourself how that feels. So that might be resistance, it might be frustration because I'm not getting it right, it might be ego because I am getting it right but why isn't something happening?

All of those questions, I would say, well, how does it feel? And they go, well, it doesn't feel nice. Are you willing to feel it more and breathe? Because that actually is what becomes the doorway through which you can go.

As long as you're prepared to transform a mental notion or a mental process, and understand what emotion it brings up for you, and then notice in the body where that emotion lies and breathe thinking of that place with the intention of bringing your breath there, then something quite magical can occur.

[00:36:18] Alex Howard

It's going back to what you said a little bit earlier, which is this idea of repairing, of putting together, in a sense, whatever is happening in our experience and bringing that to the breath.

Anthony Abbagnano

Yeah, absolutely. And as a therapist, what I teach all my students is that we're broken. As human beings we are broken. And Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall and Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, and all the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't put him together again. And to me, that 's telling me that actually we're the ones who can put ourselves back together.

So words like 'repair' and words like 'remember' to make membership again with once our pristine origin. As these wonderful human beings that we were when we were innocent little children, is really what it's about.

Alex Howard

What I'm hearing you say is that there is learning a method, and I'm sure there's nuance to the method. And as one gets more capable and practices more, there's more learning that can come. So there is, it's not so much a right and a wrong way, but there is guidance towards developing more capacity and more skill in what you're saying. But the trick is to hold that lightly. The trick is not to use that as a weapon to beat oneself up.

Anthony Abbagnano

Yeah, that's so true. There is no right or wrong. All we're doing is we're breathing.

I mean, when we do the conscious connected breath, the only technical aspect is to connect the breath. So it's always a permanent sound of breathing. And it's like (breathing demonstration) and that's it. That's all we get to do. No expectations, no needs, no projections, no thought loops. Just keep doing that and keep showing up and wait, wait. And that means give your attention.

That word attention comes from attended, which means to wait. So I'm going to breathe and I'm going to wait unconditionally and see what happens.

Alex Howard

Just to be explicit about the instructions of the connected breath. So it looks like it's a breath through the mouth with the mouth open as opposed to... Is that right?

Anthony Abbagnano

Yeah. We use the mouth open for three reasons, because it brings in more oxygen more quickly, it's uncomfortable, so we remember to keep doing it and it makes us more vulnerable.

Alex Howard

Interesting.

[00:38:54] Anthony Abbagnano

But you can do it through the nose. And my advice is please don't do it unsupervised. Please don't just start doing it, especially standing up or in a traffic jam. You really want, the breath state is an altered state. And you can imagine you don't want to do it if you're in any precarious situation.

And there are also counter indications to doing it which are important to know, like glaucoma and bipolar and schizophrenia and heart disease and high blood pressure, even pregnancy they say not to breathe. And I do breathe with people who have those conditions but I want to keep a close eye on that.

Alex Howard

Yes. In a safe container.

So what you're really saying is that if one is experiencing anxiety, that the practice we did earlier is a really good starting point of growing the outbreath a little bit and just doing that in a very sensible way.

Anthony Abbagnano

Yeah, that's absolutely right. And remember, are you willing to think differently and are you willing to measure differently? Are you willing to measure the changes that you make rather than the shortfall, the fit gap? If you're willing to do that, then you really have the tools that you need.

Alex Howard

Fantastic. I'm going to ask you how people can find out more about your work, but I'd love you to say a few words about what the potential is here because I think often people have tried many different things sometimes along their healing journey. And I often think the real trick is to find the right piece at the right time.

And I'm curious as to people that have found their way to your work and have learned to work with the breath, how that's impacted on perhaps sometimes many years of anxiety?

Anthony Abbagnano

Well, I think the best way to remember what we need to learn is to become a teacher of what we need to learn. So the people who come to us to study to become professionals with this work are people who really just are not satisfied with life the way it's happening and are willing to say that it's my choice that it's happening that way, and I can make another choice to change it.

And anxiety is something that I just feel so much empathy for people who suffer from anxiety because the reasons are endless. The list of reasons is not shrinking, it's only growing. Those outside forces that condition us and depress it and beat us down. The best way that I can deal with that as a human being is to become the creator and not the sufferer.

And just that choice to breathe is that choice to step into the role of becoming the creator of what I want. So I think every time that we feel the reminders and the sadness that's out there in the world that brings us down, we get to ask ourselves, am I going to waste a moment not doing something about this or am I going to move towards becoming a creator? Just for my own life.

[00:42:07]

And I think one of the principles of my training is that, and if you go to, we've got hundreds of facilitators around the world now, almost 1000. And if you went to any one of them, it will be a completely different experience because they've done their inner work, they've done a deep dive into their own psyche and they've seen all the things that they need to love about themselves and have found difficult in the past. And they're learning to do that.

And when they then go out to help someone else breathe, they're authentic, they're present, and they can help someone go through their own distress to come out the other side into the light. And my standard is I want my facilitators to be present enough to be with someone in the last moments of their life and to hold that space too. That's the standard that we really want.

Alex Howard

That's beautiful.

For people that want to find out more about you and your work, what's the best place to do that and what's some of what they can find?

Anthony Abbagnano

There's lots to be found on alchemyofbreath.com and we have a special course that I've designed and recorded myself on anxiety, which is a 10-day course.

We have regular breaths. On Sundays we have a morning breath and an evening breath every Sunday that's free. And people are welcome to come and join that. That's a half hour of breathing and community. We call it Breathe the World. And you can access that by going to our website.

And we also have, of course, The Alchemist, which we're launching for the public very shortly next month. So if you're interested in that, just let us know and we'll be sure to bring you into the first cohort.

Alex Howard

Fantastic. It's been a real pleasure. Thank you so much. I've really enjoyed our conversation.

Anthony Abbagnano

Thanks, Alex. It's a pleasure. And happy to be here as best I can.