



Conscious Life presents

ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

How to transform your sleep

Guest: Charlie Morley

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[00:00:10] Alex Howard

Welcome everyone to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with Charlie Morley. Firstly, Charlie, welcome and thank you for joining me.

Charlie Morley

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Alex Howard

So I've been aware of Charlie's work for a while, and we were at a conference with our publisher a few weeks ago and Charlie randomly just sat next to me and I think we slightly recognized each other so it was nice to make that connection. And I was really keen to get Charlie to come and be part of this event.

Just to give people a bit of Charlie's background. Charlie Morley is a Hay House author, Mindvalley coach and teacher of both lucid dreaming and mindfulness of dream and sleep.

He received traditional "authorization to teach" within the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism in 2008 and has since run workshops and retreats in over 20 countries.

In 2018, he was awarded a Winston Churchill Fellowship to grant research PTSD treatment in military veterans and continues to teach people with trauma affected sleep a set of practices called A Mindfulness of Dream & Sleep.

His 2021 book, *Wake Up to Sleep*, which I was enjoying getting into last night, is a practical guide to these practices.

Charlie, maybe as a starting point, I know you had a little bit of your own journey into this work with sleep, I know your original work around lucid dreaming. Maybe you can just say a little bit about how you found yourself on this path.

Charlie Morley

My path actually starts with nightmares. So the reason why I'm so passionate about helping people with nightmares, whether they're trauma or anxiety induced nightmares, is because that's really my genesis getting into this.

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So I was 17 years old, I got into lucid dreaming, which is the art of training the mind to recognize when you're dreaming. So you go, oh wow, I'm dreaming, and then you can choose what to do. So at 16/17 I was choosing to fly about and meet Pamela Anderson, that's showing my age, and then do all these kinds of things.

Alex Howard

That's the thing that was your priority at that age.

Charlie Morley

Yeah, I remember Pammy. It was. I think there's a new series about her life or something, so she's come back into my mind. So that's how old I am.

And I got into lucid dreaming. That was part of, I guess, a period of hedonism I had in my late teens before I got into Buddhism. I had loads of drugs and sex and gangs and so it was really quite a wild and dangerous time for me.

And it did get very dangerous. I had a drugs overdose and a full on near-death experience, which I think if I had it now, with the tools and some of the capacity to cope that I have now, it could be a really enlightening experience and it ended up being that way, but at the time it was traumatic, it was horrible. And I had really bad panic attacks afterwards and recurring nightmares for 4 months after the original overdose.

And I'd been reading in these lucid dreaming books that you could use lucid dreaming to cure nightmares. If you could become conscious within the nightmare, no, I'm not really back in that traumatic experience, I'm dreaming I'm back in the traumatic experience, you're then able to integrate the trauma or change the dream, or enter into the dream fearlessly. And that resets the brain's approach to that original traumatic event.

And I did manage to do that. It took about four or five lucid dreams, but one of them I managed to stay conscious and literally face the fear. And when I faced the fear, it transformed, literally transformed into this scene of paradise, and then I woke up and I never had the nightmares again.

And I don't think it really hit me how significant that was until many years later. But that was the starting point when I saw the power of lucid dreaming to cure nightmares.

And then after those wild years, I ended up, I think my obsessive personality then switched into an obsession around spirituality and clean living and the complete opposite. So I ended up getting really into Buddhism, ended up living in the Buddhist center for almost 8 years, training with Buddhist lamas, all this kind of stuff. And that was when I started getting really into the sleep and dream stuff, from the Buddhist tradition.

And then eventually my teacher asked me to start giving talks and I taught alongside him and then eventually by myself. And that was 13 years ago. So that's how I got into the sleep and dream stuff.

The work with the veterans and specializing in people with trauma or anxiety affect sleep, came around about 7 years ago when a veteran first came onto the course and managed to stop his nightmares through the practices that I was offering.

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And then we started running retreats together and started combining the lucid dreaming work with breathwork, deep relaxation, yoga nidra and body work. And then we had a really complete system that was very effective, working with some of the most traumatized populations. And that's what the new book is about.

Alex Howard

I have so many questions I'd like to ask you about some of those pieces of the journey. Maybe we'll filter back to those a bit later.

But just to help lay this foundation, I'd like to talk a little bit about, from your perspective, how you see this relationship between trauma, sleep and anxiety. Because it's really interesting to me that, particularly with a lot of the interviews in the Trauma Super Conference, that in a sense part of your recognition was that to really understand sleep, we have to understand trauma.

Charlie Morley

Definitely. Sleep is the litmus test of mental health. I can't think of any mental health condition, like that phrase, but any mental health condition that does not impact sleep in some way. Sleep is the benchmark for mental health. We can see directly how sleep is impacted by mental health conditions and also how sleep creates and impacts those mental health conditions. It's become this loop.

So without doubt, one of the quickest ways to see the effect of trauma anxiety is on our sleep. And whether it's mild low level anxiety, which stops us falling asleep at night because we've got a racing mind or ruminating thoughts, whether it's the effects of serious trauma, where we might, as soon as we close our eyes and enter what's called the hypnagogic, that first stage of sleep, and these flashbacks come, which is very common for when we've recently experienced trauma.

So it seemed crazy to me that there wasn't more research directly linking the effects of trauma anxiety on sleep. There was a lot of medicalization of it. Oh, you've been through trauma or you're in this deep stage of anxiety, then let's medicate you for this to help black you out into sleep. That was completely missing the point, which was that the trauma and anxiety are dysregulating our nervous system. And it is a dysregulated nervous system that prevents us falling asleep. So my approach right from the beginning is to work with the nervous system.

Sleep hygiene tips like not looking at your phone before bed, having a hot bath, not having coffee after lunch, this kind of stuff, those are great and they can work quite well for some people, but if you have anything over a moderate level of stress, and over the past 2 and a half years who hasn't got more than a moderate level of stress, let alone people watching this conference who have, many of whom are almost certainly working with with anxiety and trauma, sleep hygiene tips don't really touch the side.

It's like offering someone a plaster when they've been in a car crash. We need a much more fundamental approach. Sleep hygiene is like dental hygiene. It's great for polishing up the teeth, but if you've got a feeling something more fundamental is required, and when we've been through a really traumatic event that has really affected us in the deep level, the root of the tooth, sleep hygiene stuff is ineffective. And if it was effective, we wouldn't have the epidemic of sleeplessness that we've got.

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So my approach is to work with the body. If you can regulate your nervous system, if you can move into deep parasympathetic dominance before sleep, sleep will happen naturally, as a natural phenomena. Which will happen in the absence of stresses that prevent it from occurring. Remove the stresses, sleep will happen naturally.

So a lot of what I teach isn't actually how to sleep well. It's how to regulate the nervous system. And then as an epiphenomenon, sleep will happen.

Alex Howard

Because of course, in a sense, what sleep is, is an act of surrender. It's a place where we go from being in the doing of our mind, to surrendering that.

Charlie Morley

Precisely. And if we have been through situations where we now can't trust our ability to surrender, we won't be able to fall asleep. And so much of that is true when people have worked with high levels of anxiety or trauma.

A lot of the veterans I work with, they can't close their eyes in a waking state meditation. They don't trust the world, some of them say themselves. They don't trust the world enough to allow them to close their eyes. Because with their eyes closed they can't defend themselves. It's that level of deep anxiety and trust and lack of trust around the world.

So if we can't close our eyes in a waking state meditation, how can we trust the world to allow ourselves to close our eyes and to sleep? So again, so much of this is about fundamentally learning to trust our bodies and trust the world enough to allow us to close our eyes and surrender into sleep.

Alex Howard

I wanted to touch on briefly some of the anxieties people have about sleep, just because I'm mindful of that. You said earlier, which I thought was a really important point, that in a sense, anxiety can cause us not to sleep, but then also not sleeping can cause us to have anxiety.

Charlie Morley

Absolutely.

Alex Howard

It's an interconnected loop.

So I think there's quite a lot of confusion that people have around how much sleep do we need. And one of the things I thought was really interesting in your book was you were talking about how some of the sleep patterns that we might have had genetically, might be different to our expectations these days. People waking up in the night and thinking there's something wrong, but maybe there's not.

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Maybe you can just speak to some of those core principles, like how much sleep we need? What do natural sleep cycles look like? In a sense, what is the healthy ideal that we are ultimately aiming towards?

Charlie Morley

Okay, so the current neuroscience is still advising 7 to 9 hours, but this is 7 to 9 hours of sleep per 24 hour period. It doesn't have to be all in one go. I think that's really crucial. But even on the National Sleep Foundation website, they don't put that. They write per night, and it isn't per night, per 24 hour period.

So, yes, if we could get 7 to 9 hours within a 24 hour period, that would be optimal health. Optimal sleep health. How many of us can actually do that? Very few.

So let's look at what we can do. If we can increase our sleep by just one hour. So let's say we're averaging, we're really struggling with our sleep. We're only averaging 4 hours a night, which a lot of the people I work with, that's what they're working with, 4 hours a night. If they can get their sleep to 5 hours a night, just 60 minutes extra, there can be massive changes to our physiological health. You can have a 30% boost in brainpower just by getting one extra hour of sleep.

How do we know this and how can we implement it? We know this actually from the huge social experiment that happens once or twice a year when the clocks go forward and back. 1.6 billion people across 12 different countries, I had this stupid notion that perhaps it was only England, that only Britain put the clocks forward and back, but of course it's loads of different countries.

Alex Howard

Not always at the same time, which is very confusing for those of us that do international work.

Charlie Morley

Exactly. Not always at the same time. And I believe America actually has chosen now not to change their clocks in the future. I think they had their last clock change a few months ago, or in some states anyway.

So on those days where we gain an extra hour in bed, so let's say it's just Britain, all of Britain gains an extra hour in bed, there is a 21% decrease in heart attacks the next day. That equals out to tens of thousands fewer people die from one extra hour of sleep. That's insane.

There's also a 15% drop in traffic road accidents. People aren't crashing their cars because they've had more sleep. This is huge. Even if you put that to 1.6 billion people, that's hundreds of thousands of lives are saved by giving people one extra hour of sleep. That's nuts.

And that really stuck in my head because asking people who are working with high levels of anxiety and trauma to get 9 hours sleep, is completely unrealistic. And almost giving them loads of sleep hygiene hacks to do, creates this set of props which makes us feel like, oh, sleep isn't natural unless I turn my phone off an hour before bed, unless I haven't had my last coffee before lunchtime I won't be able to sleep. It creates further anxiety, actually.

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But if you tell people that actually just one extra hour of sleep can have this fundamental change in your body and mind, that's way more accessible.

So in my approach, we aim to get 60 minutes extra sleep. So based on a six week course, the aim is by the end of the six week course to have at least one extra hour of sleep. And we usually manage to hit that.

And that extra hour of sleep doesn't have to be at night. Napping is really good for you as long as your nap is finished at least 6 hours before your intended bedtime. And as long as your nap isn't more than, they say 90 minutes, I'd say 60 minutes just to be safe.

Now, 10 years ago when I started this stuff, the jury was still out on napping. If you've got heavy insomnia, you shouldn't really nap, it messes with your circadian rhythms. It's to do with sleep pressure, which is the buildup of a certain chemical in the brain. And it takes about 6 hours for the sleep pressure to build up. So as long as your nap ends 6 hours before your intended bedtime, and as long as your nap is not much over 60 minutes, there are no contraindications to naps and naps are really, really good for you.

They did this one study, they gave people 8 hours sleep, and gave them a cognitive ability test. Then gave them 4 hours sleep, and gave them a cognitive ability test. Obviously, after 4 hours of sleep, they didn't do very well on the test, they only had 4 hours sleep.

Then later that day they gave the people who had only 4 hours sleep a one hour nap. After the one hour nap, they gave them the test again and the test results were pretty much the same as when they had 8 hours sleep.

Again, an incredibly optimistic piece of research. Because I know from my own sleeplessness, the main thing for me is lying in bed going, tomorrow is ruined, tomorrow is ruined. I won't be able to do well at work, my relationships will mess up, I'll be so irritable. Tomorrow's ruined. Tomorrow's not ruined if you can find a place to get a sneaky one hour nap in the next day, you can boost your cognitive ability levels to the same as if you had had 8 hours sleep the night before.

So, not all is lost. So I go for this golden 60 minutes. If you can get 9 hours of sleep a night or a day, brilliant. I celebrate you. But working with populations who are traumatized or working with high levels of anxiety is unrealistic. So let's look at a much more realistic approach, which is to work with this one extra hour.

There's also a great research done on NSDR, Non-Sleep Deep Rest, which is basically putting your feet up, lying down on a sofa or on the floor. You should be prone, lying down if you can, with your eyes closed. Just resting for 20, 30 minutes does brilliant stuff to the brain. Professor Huberman from Stanford has done loads of research on that.

And as you said, the sleep cycles themselves, there is no such thing as an average sleep cycle. Most people wake up four or five times a night based on an average 8 hour sleep cycle. Four or five times a night. But most people don't notice this. They're called micro awakenings, when maybe you're asleep and then you flip the pillow over to the cold side and then go back to sleep again. You are awake when you did that. That's an awakening. Most of us don't recognize those.

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Those who do recognize are usually in a state of hypervigilance, I'm awake again, and then they go into fight or flight, and then they really can't get back to sleep because they're awake again. If you know it's totally normal to wake up every 90 minutes and you go, oh yeah, I'm awake again 90 minutes later, and you can drop back asleep.

And then finally, the thing I think you were hinting to explore was the way we used to sleep before the Industrial Revolution was completely different. And you see people in non industrialized societies still sleeping this way. This kind of monophasic sleep cycle of a big 8 hour chunk that we aim for in the West, this mythological 8 hour sleep cycle is at experimental stage at best.

We've only been trying to do that for about 200, 250 years, and it was around the time of the Industrial Revolution. Before then, in pre-industrial England, the way they found this was in records of law courts, because a lot of crimes were committed in the gap between the first and the second sleep.

So these researchers start saying, first and second sleep. What are these references and why were these crimes being committed? Anyway, it turns out before the Industrial Revolution and literally since records began, which was only about 400 years before that, before they were writing down these kinds of things, we slept completely differently. People would, this depends on seasonal fluctuations, but people would fall asleep a couple of hours after sundown because no one could afford candles unless you are super rich.

So in Britain that might mean going to sleep at like 6pm, 8pm. You'd then sleep for like 3 or 4 hours till about midnight, let's say. Then you would wake up and do stuff. I mean, properly do stuff. Pubs would reopen for 2 hours in the middle of the night. People would milk their cows because they believed the milk was better at that time. People would have sex. They believe they're more fertile. There is some truth to that. There's even a 15th century prayer manual from Italy, they give you specific prayers to do in that 2 hour gap.

So this was a thing. This isn't theory. We know that people in Western Europe, and because of the imperial conquest that affected the sleeping patterns, a lot of the rest of the world slept in two big chunks. You'd sleep for about 3 or 4 hours, you'd wake up for about 2 hours and you would fall back asleep until sunrise, equaling out at about 7 to 9 hours, but crucially, with this 2 hour gap in the middle.

Fast forward to 2022, the most common form of insomnia is called sleep maintenance insomnia, and this is how it goes. The subject is able to fall asleep at their bedtime. 3 or 4 hours later, they wake up and feel completely awake for up to 2 hours. After a 2 hour period of wakefulness, they do have the ability to fall back to sleep usually. That is a description of the totally normal pre-industrial sleep cycle.

So could it be that there are millions of misdiagnosed insomniacs who aren't insomniacs at all? They are simply reflecting a much more anthropologically natural sleep cycle than the rest of us who are trying to blackout out for 8 hours. That's nuts.

And yet most doctors, through no fault of their own, don't know about this because you get 2 hours on sleep. My sister's just become a doctor and she confirmed in 6 hours training she had 2 hours on sleep.

[00:19:13] Alex Howard

6 years training, she had 2 hours sleep.

Charlie Morley

Sorry, 6 years training, 2 hours on sleep.

Alex Howard

Doctors training for 6 hours makes me nervous.

Charlie Morley

It's a very quick course nowadays.

So through no fault of their own, we go to the doctors when we have nightmares, they want to medicalize us. We go and we say, we've got this weird sleeping pattern where we are awake for 2 hours in the middle of the night. Oh, that's terrible. Take these meds or have this sleep hygiene course, which doesn't really work.

So that's why the first pillar in the book and the first foundation of the stuff that I teach is sleep awareness. Learn about sleep. The history of sleep. Your history of sleep. I want to know, did you have childhood nightmares? Do you wake up in the middle of the night? How many times do you get up to pee? Do you have anxious thoughts when you fall asleep? Empower yourself with the knowledge of how you sleep and then you can start making changes to it.

Alex Howard

And also, I think what's important in what you're saying is that there are individual differences. Say, for example, my wife and I, my wife goes to bed 2 hours before I go. Partly because I need less sleep than she does. But also partly, I'm someone that really needs that time to wind down and potter in the evenings where she just wants to go to bed and also she's up earlier.

So it's like finding the way to honor and understand and to build our life around what our body needs rather than to bend our body in a sense to what our life needs.

Charlie Morley

Yes, that is such a good example, Alex.

So let's look at the training we do for our bodies. Maybe we go and we do sports, or we go to the gym and stuff like that. And we might schedule in, I need to do this, some cardio then weights then this or whatever, I've got no time for sport this week. How often do we do that with sleep? How often do we actually look at our week and schedule in our sleep times?

Right, I'm going to wake up earlier that day so I can go back to bed. And I also maybe I can't make that dinner date. Maybe actually I can't do that. Maybe I need to come in early to go to bed. We don't do that. Sleep is always sacrificed for most people. Sleep is the first thing to be sacrificed over social commitments and sport and stuff like that. I think we need to flip this a little bit more.

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For example, if last night my dog had been up all night being sick, she wasn't, she was asleep, but that sometimes happens, and I hadn't got to sleep until 4 in the morning, I would have emailed you before I went to sleep saying, sorry, I can't make our 11:00 appointment. Because I know that I wouldn't have had enough sleep by the time I meet you. I know that I'm going to sleep first.

Now, of course, it's very privileged to be able to do this, but I'm just using it as an example of how most of the time sleep is a thing we push out, when actually sleep is the thing we should push into because everything, even just an extra hour can really transform the way we interact with the world.

Alex Howard

Charlie, you said something earlier that I thought was really interesting. You said that sleep is, I think, something like the litmus test of our mental and emotional health. I'm slightly paraphrasing.

And what I really like about that is the recognition that really what's happening at night is a set of information about what's going on in the rest of our lives.

And therefore, what you're saying is that to really address sleep, we have to address those other elements. So walk us through a little bit of what some of those pieces might be, particularly in the context of the trauma you mentioned earlier, and how you go about identifying what it is that we may need to work with.

Charlie Morley

So again, I go back to the body. If we can release anxiety, stress and trauma through the body or release integrate during the day, sleep will happen naturally at night.

A lot of the things I'd recommend people to do are techniques that integrate the energy of the nervous system. And you do them in the daytime. Good sleep begins not half an hour before bed when you decide to switch off your phone and put on your red light spectacles people are wearing nowadays, and stuff like that so they can still stay on the laptop, it begins during the daytime.

So there is a certain set of practices, deep relaxation, slow, deep breathing, and a practice called Breath-Body-Mind, which is like a form of medicalized Qigong, which if you do those for 20 minutes during the day, if you can do a 20 minute yoga nidra session and a 20 minute session of either, coherent breathing and/or Breath-Body-Mind, at any time, 11:00 in the morning, if you like, this has such a powerful effect on our nervous system that at night sleep will happen easier and you will stay asleep for longer.

It's based on this thing called the parasympathetic drive. In fact, pretty much all my work, I guess, is based on the parasympathetic drive if I think about it.

The parasympathetic drive is like this, imagine an electric car. You've got this electric car battery and you got to charge it up. The parasympathetic drive is like the relaxation battery in the brain. And the reason people tend to sleep better on holiday, unless you go on holiday with loads of kids and stuff like that, is because you might be doing more relaxing things on holiday than you do in your everyday life.

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And every time you do anything relaxing, you have a little zap. You charge up the battery of the parasympathetic drive, every time. Sit down on the sofa or relax in the sun on holiday, you charge up the parasympathetic drive.

And by the time you go to sleep at night, the amount of charge that's in that parasympathetic drive dictates how quickly you fall asleep and how long you'll stay asleep for. So it directly affects sleep.

So what we discovered was if you could get people to intentionally spend one hour a day in deep parasympathetic dominance, through things like yoga nidra, which is a practice of lying down meditation. If anyone's done a physical yoga class, you might know at the end they ask you to go into corpse pose, Savasana.

Alex Howard

My favorite pose, funnily enough.

Charlie Morley

It's everyone's favorite because this is the best bit. I'll just lay down and have a little nap for 2 minutes. Yoga nidra is like half an hour of that. So it's none of the physical stuff. It's like the yoga of sleep. Nidra means sleep in Sanskrit.

So deep relaxation, what Professor Huberman would call NSDR, Non Sleep Deep Rest. 20 minutes of that is like 20 minutes of plugging in the parasympathetic drive battery directly to the main, charging up so that when you go to sleep at night that can download and allows you to sleep better. So if you can be doing 20 minutes of that.

And then also another way to charge up the parasympathetic drive is slow, deep breathing. One of the most interesting points of research I came across with the book was the fact that we breathe really frickin fast. Average breath rate in 2020, and I'm reflecting this now because I'm excited to tell you about all this stuff, is about 15 to 20 breaths a minute. That's a normal, average breath rate.

The average breath rate in 1939 was 4.5 breaths a minute. So our grandparents breathe 75% slower than we breathe today. Even back in the 80s when I was born, the average breath rate was 7.5 breaths a minute. So what has happened in the last 30 to 40 years to more than double the average breath rate?

Where the research stops because they don't want to make speculation, but if you look at the rise in rates of certain cancers, obesity, diabetes, strokes, they rise at the same level as our breath rate. This is scary.

And the researchers who have looked into this, such as Stephen Elliott and Professor Gerbarg and Dr Richard Brown from Harvard Medical School, they pioneered this Breath-Body-Mind thing, Breath-Body-Mind program, which is really good. There is a direct correlation to fast breathing and the release of cortisol into the bloodstream and fight or flight sympathetic activation.

So essentially any time we breathe at more than 10 breaths a minute, we are in low sympathetic dominance. Any time we breathe over 15 breaths a minute, we're moving into chronic, sympathetic

dominance, which means we can make an audacious claim, audacious statement, in fact. The vast majority of the world's population are in a constant state of low level fight or flight, with all of the cortisol releasing chemicals that that brings with it, simply because of the way they breathe.

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And there's a lot of, I don't know if I'm completely with this, but there are a lot of researchers now pointing towards the epidemic of sleeplessness could be as simple as the fact we're breathing too fast, collectively. Because when you get people to slow down their breath, even just 30 minutes a day, the effect on sleep is very, very quick and very, very noticeable.

So again, what I suggest people do, is for 30 minutes a day, slow their breath down to at least below 10 breaths a minute, and if they can to exactly, well, 5.1 breaths a minute is the optimal human breath rate.

That was another crazy thing when I was researching the book. How can there be an optimal human breath rate? Come on, we're all so different. Some of us are big, some of us are small. Small lungs, big lungs. Turns out there is.

For 90% of the world's population who are beneath six foot tall, breathing at 5.1 breaths a minute optimizes everything in the human body. Heart rate variability, blood flow, blood pressure, alpha power, alpha brain waves. Everything that can be measured is optimized when you breathe at 5 breaths a minute. So there is an optimal breath rate.

And if you can spend at least 20 to 40 minutes during the day breathing at 5 breaths a minute, it has a powerful effect on the parasympathetic drive, allowing you to sleep much deeper and for much longer at night.

So a lot of this stuff is actually not sleep practices. They're practices that regulate the nervous system, that as a side effect lead to you sleeping better, which is really good for this summit. People working with anxiety, whether your sleep is affected or not, wow, the effect of coherent breathing, which is that 5 breaths a minute practice, on anxiety is profound. And yet most of us have just never heard of this.

In America, for whom breathing's quite big, and Pat and Richard are doing really great work through Breath-Body-Mind, with first responders, with veterans associations but in the UK it's not so well known.

And anyway, all these things you can find on my website and download free yoga nidra stuff and free chimes to do the breathing with. But, slow, deep breathing, non-sleep deep rest, if you get an hour of that in a day, sleep will change at night.

Alex Howard

One of the other things that you said in the book that I thought was really important as well was the importance of working with the body. That the talking therapies, of course have their place and can be helpful, but sleep is not something that happens in the mind. In a sense, sleep is coming into the body.

So maybe just also develop what you were just saying, the importance of that connectedness and that groundedness in the body.

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[00:30:21] Charlie Morley

So the one thing that we don't have, that I don't teach when working with people with high levels of anxiety or trauma, is standard mindfulness meditation.

Asking someone with high levels of anxiety or trauma to sit alone in silence for 20 minutes, for some people that's a one way ticket to trigger-ville. It's like all the demons are going to pop up. So far, far better is asking us to work with the body.

Now, how does yoga nidra work with the body? This lying down form of meditation? Almost all yoga nidra is led by audio. So you'll have headphones in or you'll be playing it on a speaker or something. So first of all, that means there's someone with you. You're not alone in silence. There's someone with you guiding you.

Secondly, a large part of yoga nidra is essentially a body scan. It's about focusing on certain parts of the body, focusing, releasing, breathing out, focusing, releasing, breathing out. So it's a complete somatic awareness practice, much more than it is a mental cognitive practice, like some mindfulness practices might be.

And when we do the Breath-Body-Mind stuff, which is the slow, deep breathing, we also add in a set of movements which are essentially Qigong movements, but because this has been medicalized, they refer to them as mindful movement upon the breath. And then you do them and you're like, wait, I've done these in Qigong class.

Movements like this, very easy breathing here and breathing out 2 3 4. They can be done seated, they can be done with people with different abilities. But the reason that working with the body and the breath seem to be so good in integrating anxiety trauma is because of dissociation and disembodiedness, which are two of these big side effects of traumatic events. The feeling of not being fully present and also of not knowing where your body ends.

If our body has been violated, if our boundaries have been crossed in any way, then actually this sense of not knowing where our body ends is quite common for people working with trauma. So one of the first things we do is called body tapping where we just tap every part of the body like that, which is a really good way of showing where my body begins and ends and also a really good way to stimulate the skin, the biggest organ in the body.

And then we move on to the breathing, and not just slowly breathing, but with movement. So we're learning to synchronize our body with our breath, which helps to counteract the sense of, often there can be a sense of it manifests almost as what seems to be clumsiness. And it's not clumsiness.

When we've experienced really strong trauma, the link between the movements of our body and our brain can sometimes get a little bit skewed. So it can manifest in a sense of a disembodied mental, almost clumsiness, which can actually lead to quite a lot of shame for some people, but it's completely natural. It's completely normal, and we can reprogram ourselves with that. And the easiest way is through some body movements too.

Also all the stuff on bilateral stimulation. Now any time EMDR is used, any time you go left, right, left, right, that can be in drumming, that can be in boxing, that can be in dancing on the spot like that. It can be in running, Zen running. Big movement now in meditative running practices. Really good ways to come back into our body and know where our body begins and ends.

[00:33:44] Alex Howard

We're almost out of time, Charlie, I want to ask where people can find out more about your work, but just before that, I'd love you to speak to what's the potential for healing?

Because I think sometimes people who've had sleep issues for many years that have tried different pieces, and my hope is that part of what you've spoken to might help them recognize how some of those approaches haven't been enough. For example, they've just done lots of sleep hygiene or they've just done lots of talking therapy, and that's not been enough. But what's the potential for healing sleep issues if someone has this more integrated framework to work with?

Charlie Morley

I'm really confident this framework works well. I've worked with some of the most highly traumatized populations, and one of the studies we did, 55 people, all of whom were card carrying PTSD survivors, people working with PTSD. And when we work with these groups and we have the techniques analyzed, like an independent evaluation, we had 87% of people reported improved sleep quality by the end of the 6 week course.

So we know from the academic point of view, this approach works, but far more than that, I've seen it work. I've seen people who are averaging 3 or 4 hours sleep a night. When they are asleep and they've got terrible nightmares, night terrors, sleep paralysis, projected demons coming in and stuff like that. This stuff can directly counteract that. It works, but it has to be this approach of working with the body and the nervous system.

However bad your sleep is, it is not that forever. We have been sleeping, the body knows how to sleep. Again, it is a natural phenomena which will occur in the absence of stresses that prevent it from occurring. Sleep hygiene does not remove the stresses. Mindfulness meditation, I lived in a Buddhist center for 8 years, I should be promoting this, but no, not for trauma anxiety, it doesn't remove those stresses.

We need to work with the breath, we need to work with the body, and we need to work with this parasympathetic drive response. If we do that, we can regain our birthright, which is good sleep. We can learn to sleep again. We can learn to relax again. It is not chronic. It doesn't have to be that way forever. That I know for sure.

Alex Howard

That's awesome.

For people that want to find out more about you and your work, where's the best place to go and some of what they can find? Obviously, also to speak to again, *Wake Up to Sleep* is a great resource, but what else can people find?

Charlie Morley

So that new book has got the whole 6 week course in it, but if you go to my website, charliemorley.com, you'll see the courses coming up. So I'm doing in-person courses again this year.

[00:36:22]

We've got two veterans courses coming up. So any veterans or veterans family members who are watching this, the courses are always free for veterans and veterans family members. So we've got a few online courses coming up.

We've also got in-person retreats based on the new book. So these will be sleep and dream retreats. All of this you can find through [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) and on my [website](#).

The main thing I'd say is, come and try it. The worst that can happen is nothing. The best that can happen is something.

All of the resources for the yoga nidra that I mentioned, the yoga nidra audio tracks and the breathing tracks, people are thinking, how do I slow my breath for 5 breaths a minute? Usually with an audio track, to chimes go up and down. They're all for free. They're all on my website, charliemorley.com/wakeuptosleep. Under the resources you'll find them all.

Try it. This is something we do ourselves. Our sleep occurs in the body. Our body belongs to us. And our ability to sleep better begins the moment we take charge of that, we take responsibility.

Alex Howard

Fantastic. Charlie, thank you so much. I really enjoyed our conversation and recommend people check out the book and your work and I look forward to collaborating together again in the future at some point soon.

Charlie Morley

Cool. Thank you, Alex. It's been a pleasure.