



Conscious Life presents

ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

Inner inquiry as a tool for working with anxiety

Guest: Dominic Liber

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[00:00:10] Alex Howard

Welcome, everyone, to this interview where I'm really happy to be talking with Dom Liber.

Firstly, Dom, welcome and thank you for joining me.

Dominic Liber

Thanks, Alex. Great to be here with you.

Alex Howard

So we're going to be exploring anxiety from, I think, a really interesting perspective here. We'll be talking about it in the context of inquiry and really using inquiry as a way to get deeper into some of the lessons, some of the insights, and ultimately some of the deeper experience that can be behind anxiety.

Just to give people a little bit of Dom's background, Dominic is an author and Diamond Approach teacher working in the UK and South Africa, and teaching inquiry online.

He's a longtime student of the Diamond Approach, meditation, the Enneagram and inner world, and previously worked as an actuary in social impact investing.

His book, *Diving in the Inner Ocean* is the first to bring the profoundly transformational practice of inquiry from the Diamond Approach to a wider audience.

So Dom, maybe as a starting point, how does anxiety show up for people with inner work?

Dominic Liber

That's a great question, Alex. So anxiety really, when you think about it, is, and I'm talking here really about normal to average kinds of anxiety. So not severe clinical kinds of anxiety. But really it's a phenomenon, it's a feeling that human beings have.

And from the point of view of inquiry, just like any other experience, it's something that we have that we can be curious about and that we can find out about.

So anxiety is something that often brings people to inner work. They start working on themselves because they have anxiety and they want to get rid of it in some way.

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And oftentimes as they begin engaging in some kind of inner work, as we begin getting more in touch with ourselves, more in touch with our experience, we might start to notice that the anxieties might get more and not less. Actually getting in touch with our inner worlds and our feelings, and particularly in all the broad context of our lives, can bring anxieties more forward.

So this is a surprising thing. People can sometimes be surprised about that. But really it's an opening, because within the anxiety, the anxiety is telling us something interesting and in a way to really get the benefit of it, as you say, to discover the secrets and get to the treasures of it, we have to get beyond simply wanting to get rid of it.

Simply wanting to feel better and actually begin to wonder, okay, so how come? What is this anxiety? Actually, what even is it? And then as we start contemplating what it is, we might begin to wonder how come it's actually happening?

Alex Howard

Let's explore that idea of what anxiety is, but I think you make a really important point, which is that often we see anxiety as an enemy. We see anxiety as something to, in a sense, as you say, people are drawn to a path to fix the symptom of anxiety as opposed to seeing it as potentially a portal or a gateway.

Dominic Liber

Absolutely. So anxiety, like any other difficult emotion, any other reaction, hatred or fear or anxiety or sadness or all these things, it's there. It's something showing up in your inner world, and it's there for a reason. Something is making it happen.

So as much as it's an uncomfortable thing, and by definition, it is an uncomfortable thing that makes us want to get away from it in a way that's exactly what the reaction is there to do. Really, what we need to do is to turn towards it. To go, okay, maybe there is something that's making that happen. If I really want to get to the bottom of that or to resolve this anxiety beyond simply getting rid of the symptom, then I'm going to have to find out about that.

It's like having a pain in your arm. You can want to get rid of the pain. Sure, everybody wants to get rid of the pain. They don't want to feel the pain. But you need to understand what's going on with your arm so you can stop doing that, and then the pain will stop by itself.

So from that point of view, the anxiety is pointing to something. It's saying, have a look over here, find out what's going on here. And by doing that, by following that, by beginning to inquire into it, which is a very different approach, I would say, than a normal approach, then we can begin to discover something about it.

Alex Howard

So let's take a bit of a sidestep for a moment and let's open up this idea of inquiry. So from your perspective, what is the practice of inquiry?

[00:05:14] Dominic Liber

So inquiry is a very particular practice. And of course, there are many things that are called inquiry. And the inquiry that we use in the diamond approach is a very specific thing.

So inquiry, very simply, is a way of getting in touch with the immediacy of your experience and then exploring it to find out what's making it happen.

So I use the analogy of an ocean. Our inner world is like an ocean. All our thoughts and feelings and ideas and beliefs and sensations, and our very consciousness itself, these are all the ocean of our inner world. And with inquiry, what we want to do is dive into that ocean and begin to explore it.

And you can understand something about what makes inquiry particular by contrasting it with some other ways of engaging the inner world. So one of those is meditation mindfulness, something that people know a lot of people engage with, and it's become very popular.

So what's mindfulness like? Mindfulness in a way is like lowering yourself down into the ocean, looking around, see what's there and just hanging out there. And you see the fish go by and you see the plants over there, and you become aware of them, and you learn to let them go.

So you cultivate this interesting relationship with your inner world whereby you become aware of more than you might have been aware of, and you learn to be aware of it and not to totally run with it. You can feel it, you can see it, you can let it go and you know that it changes. So that's an amazing benefit mindfulness can bring up. So that's one way.

Another way of working with the inner world is like going out on a boat, peering down over the side and seeing the kind of things that happen and then going back onto the shore and talking about them. Sometimes certain kinds of therapy are like that. We go, we sit down with the therapist, talk about what happened yesterday and what's it about and we speculate, like what might be the connection with the childhood and all of this kind of thing. And that can be very useful, very insightful.

Now with inquiry, what we want to do is we bring both of those together in a certain way. So what we do, we dive into the inner world, we get in touch with our feelings, our thoughts, with the immediacy of mindfulness. Like it's right there. It's what's happening in the moment.

And as we're with it in that moment, we begin exploring it and articulating it and verbalizing it in a way that you don't do in meditation, in a way that you might do in more talking kind or journaling kind of approach, but that is rooted in the experience that's happening as it's happening. And that's the key.

So then what you're doing, it's like you're following, you see some little fish, and then you actually follow it. You see, where does it go? Where does it take me? What's it doing? What's it about? What's making that happen? And by doing that, you can actually really begin to understand what's going on in your inner world. And it can take you deeper and deeper into the layers of what it's really about.

Alex Howard

And of course, part of what's important in what you're describing, is that it's not just a cognitive looking at something and describing it. It's actually a dropping into it. And so in a sense, what we're doing is going from a place of what we think we know about something to actually discovering what may be going on that's deeper.

[00:08:43] Dominic Liber

100%. That's exactly it. So that's the difference between sitting in the boat on top of the water and going, oh, well, I think it's this, and I think it's that. It's like, no, no. You're feeling it, and as you're feeling it, you're feeling it in your body, you're sensing it in your body, you're feeling all the memories perhaps that come up, and you're able to feel it and describe it and know it from what's happening right there as it's happening live.

And the amazing thing that then begins to happen is that as you recognize and begin to articulate what's happening, not in a, well, I think it's this, I think I might be feeling anxious, I think it might be about that. No, you're feeling the anxiety. You sense it in your belly. You sense this contraction, this feeling of butterflies in your tummy. It's very immediate.

And as you're staying with that and sensing into it, you can begin to wonder, well, what is this about? What's this like? And that will begin to reveal itself in a very immediate way. As you say, it's not a speculation, it's not a mental process. It's a live discovery in the moment.

Alex Howard

I think what's also often the case is, in the state of anxiety, there is a feeling of lack of support, lack of ground. We need to try and think our way somehow to a feeling of okayness or to a feeling of safety. And it often feels like that there is an absence of ground, there's an absence of wisdom, and there's an absence of holding.

So maybe you can say a little bit about the experience of moving from that mental place in relationship to actually opening up to wisdom beyond that.

Dominic Liber

Beautiful question. You point to one of the core features of anxiety. So if we think about anxiety, often what's going on there, we're up in our minds thinking about, trying to be like, what if? And this and that, and a whole thing going on up there.

And it's a general thing inquiry, when we notice we're getting very into our minds, you've got to wonder how come? What else is going on in my experience? What am I feeling? What am I sensing?

Now to inquire in a powerful way, in a transformative way, we need to include all of these layers of our experience. Our mind and our recognition and the meanings and the ideas. We need to be in touch with the feelings, our heart. What are the feelings, the effects, the emotions that are there?

And we need to be in touch with the very immediate sensations in our bodies, because all of these things, every reaction, every feeling, every state of consciousness will show up with some kind of sensation, both at the level of the body, like just sensing the body in a certain way. And then as we learn to sense more subtly, some kind of more qualitative sensation. Like you just described, anxiety, a feeling of no ground.

That's a qualitative sensation. It's not like you look down there and the ground is gone. The ground is there, but the feeling that you have, the sensation that you have is like there's no ground or there's nothing down there, or I'm sort of suspended over a cliff or over a chasm.

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So in our inquiry with anxiety, that's what we want to do. We want to notice the mind, see what it's getting busy with, feel the feelings, and then sense the very immediate sensations and find out about those.

Alex Howard

Well, in a sense, what you're saying is, when you say find out about them, what we're doing is we're discovering what's actually true. Because this idea, taking that example, there's no ground, in that state of anxiety that feels true. Like there's no holding, there's no support. But what you're saying is that actually in the process of inquiring into that experience, we may discover something else to be true.

Dominic Liber

Various things can happen. So that's one thing that can happen for sure. We also might get to find out what is the experience of no ground?

So there are various things that actually, as we begin to inquire into the anxiety, various layers we might begin to discover.

So one of them, as you're kind of getting in touch with this, you feel into the sense of anxiety, you might notice it has to do with some circumstance. Maybe it's something going on in your life or something that might go on in your life. So there's a connection with your life, and that's very important. We don't want to dismiss that. That's part of the story.

And then you can ask yourself, okay, so that might happen. That's the thing I'm anxious about. So when I think about that happening, I bring that to mind, what happens here? What is it that I start feeling and sensing? And as you say, oftentimes there's the feeling like there's no ground.

And I guess part of the meaning, the sense of that is it feels like I won't be okay in that experience. I can't land there. I can't actually let that be real. If that's real, if that's really what happens, it's going to be a disaster. Something terrible is going to happen.

And as you say, when we begin to sense that in our felt sense, in our body and in that more subtle level, we often start to feel very palpably, like something missing in the lower half of the body. So you might feel it in your solar plexus, in your belly, your pelvis, your legs, your feet, these kinds of sensations of being on shaky ground or there being no ground, all those kinds of sensations might begin to arise.

And then we can begin to notice that actually what's happening is, I'm not able to land in that experience, that feeling of there being no ground. And then the interesting question is, okay, how come? What is that? What's that like actually? Let me find out about that experience.

So I'm kind of bridging off here, but it really points to something fundamental about inquiry, which is that inquiry, you said earlier, we're interested in the truth of the experience. So inquiry is open to any experience. We don't want to fix it. We don't want to change it. All we want to do is find out what's actually going on, what's true there.

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And that may mean entering into finding ourselves, coming to experiences where we would have gone, oh hell, no way, I can't do this, I don't want to feel this, I don't want to experience that. And be willing to go, well, how come? What's so bad about that? And let me see, let me find out.

Alex Howard

One of my experiences early on in learning the practice of inquiry was the difference between what I thought I knew to be true and what was actually true.

And what I mean by that is, often if we've done a certain amount of talking therapy or psychotherapeutic work, we have a lot of ideas about our experience. We have stories, we have frameworks, we have explanations. And I think sometimes we can be quite quick to dismiss the immediacy of our experience for perhaps the comfort of those stories or the familiarity of those stories.

Could you say something about the importance of going beyond what our mind is, the stories that we have or the analysis we might previously have made, to get to this place of deeper exploration?

Dominic Liber

Actually, I see a lot of people who have done a lot of therapy and done a lot of trauma therapy, as you say, they know that feeling. They might go, okay, I know that feeling. I know what that feeling is. I know where it comes from, that's my trauma being activated or that's my this being activated. Or people can go into the neuroscience, they go, well, that's my amygdala being activated. All of that might be true.

So it's not about dismissing any of that knowledge. That knowledge is fine. But the question is, as you said, in the immediacy of the experience, what is that actually like? What can you tell about it from within having that actual experience itself? What are the immediate sensations of it?

Because when you just put a label around it like that, you put the label around it and you set it aside. It's like, oh, there's nothing else to find out there. And that, I'm afraid, is never true. Never.

So the minute you do that, you shut down the process from unfolding. So what we need to do is go, okay, I'm feeling into this. This feels familiar, like some kind of anxiety. And as we sense into it as it actually is, it may begin to reveal all sorts of things to us.

Now, you mentioned connections with stuff that we've seen in therapy and things that we know about our childhood, I want to say something about that. Because as we come to this experience, for example, you feel like, oh, I'm going to lose my job, I might lose my job. That might be what happens. And then as I feel into that, I feel anxious. I don't know what's going to happen at the meeting tomorrow. All this kind of anxiety around. It feels like no ground.

And as I begin to feel into that feeling, at some point, many things might begin to arise. And one of them is you begin to get in touch with young parts of yourself. So we start getting in touch with, actually, I feel like a little kid. I feel like I'm standing outside the headmaster's office and I'm about to get into serious trouble. So what we see is that those present day events within our psyche, within our consciousness connect back to these earlier, younger events.

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And then you realize, well, part of why I feel so terrified and so anxious about the situation is that I'm actually relating to it, feeling myself to be a little 6 year old kid who genuinely didn't have what it took to navigate this situation.

So our inquiry will bring these things to the surface, not as mental things like, oh yeah, I remember maybe it was that thing about when I was at school. No. It will come to light because as you're feeling into the experience, that feeling will emerge. Suddenly you'll feel it in a very vivid, palpable way. And you will know for sure, it doesn't matter what anybody says you're like, yeah, I feel like the 6 year old and it's exactly that event.

Alex Howard

Can you say a little about, in a sense, the place that we are inquiring into? We could call it true nature. There's different words or phrases we could use for it. But in a sense, part of how I understand the practice of inquiry is moving from a place of me in my rational egoic, known self, to gradually find a deeper place of connection with something beyond that.

And I think to speak a little bit to that would also help orient, in a sense, where we're moving to with the practice.

Dominic Liber

Yeah, sure. So when I'm in a situation in my life that challenges my sense of grounding, I feel like I can't be in it. The anxiety is bringing that up. That's not going to be okay.

Now, we could say, within our true nature, within our being, just like a quality that every human being has is the capacity to be in life. To be in situations, to feel grounded. I'm sure everybody can recognize some situation where they felt, yeah, it's okay. I can be here. I can land here. I can be grounded in this situation.

So that's a capacity, that's a quality. We can call it our essence, our true nature. The point is that it's an inherent part of being a human being.

Now, what we see is that the degree to which that is integrated, the way in which, as an adult we're able to access that quality, is conditioned by our history. So all the things that happened to us in our formative years have created patterns about where we can find ground. Like what's okay? What is the situation that I can allow? And what's the situation that, oh my God, actually, that's not going to be okay, that's going to be terrible.

So we have all of that history and that shaping within us. We now understand the neuroscience of that and how all that shaping builds up in the brain. And really what we're doing is just bringing to light the way that our ability to land is limited, and is limited by these past experiences and by these ideas that we have about things.

And by bringing ourselves over and over to that edge, as we inquire into, okay, here's something that makes me anxious. So rather than going, that's the problem. I don't want to feel anxious. We can go, okay, so what is this experience? What's happening here? Or what is this touching inside me that makes it feel like I can't land here, I can't be with this, I won't be okay?

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And by going into that, we will get in touch with that history, with those young places, and we can understand the specific thing that felt unsupported. There was some particular thing, something within us or something going on around us that felt like we couldn't land with it.

And by seeing through that, bringing that into light, into consciousness, that piece of history can dissolve. That's what happens. It actually literally just melts away when we fully, completely see the whole thing. And then we realize, oh, okay. Well, sure. It felt like I couldn't do this. It felt like this would be the end of the world, actually, is it? Well, I don't feel like a kid anymore. In this moment I don't feel like a child anymore. I don't feel like there's no ground. I don't really feel much of anything right now. It's an interesting moment.

And we stay with that and we go, oh, okay, but I feel like I can be here. I can be here. And what's happened in going with that process and staying with it, allowing it to unfold, is our capacity for simply being here. The places in which we can find ground has now expanded. And that thing that was a limitation, that particular limitation is gone.

Alex Howard

In a sense, what you're saying is, that which we are seeking, what we feel is missing, or particularly in a state of anxiety, the sense that there's a deficiency or there's something that's not there, is actually within us. In a sense, really, the issue is our disconnection from that.

Dominic Liber

Exactly. It's our disconnection from it, the way that we have been disconnected from it through our history. What's needed is simply just to bring that to light.

And when we see that, oh yeah, well, that's how I felt as a kid. Of course I felt like that. Who wouldn't? What 6 year old wouldn't feel like that? When we see that, we realize, yeah, I can land, I can be here. And that being here, that which can be solid and can land and can just be here, suddenly it's there, and it's just you. It's just your nature. It's not a question anymore.

Alex Howard

So I want to track back a little bit to the beginning of someone working with the practice of inquiry, particularly if part of their motivation towards it is anxiety. Because I think one of the key characteristics of anxiety is that fight or flight quality, which is that we want to get away, we want to escape.

And so in a sense, the invitation of inquiry is almost the direct opposite towards the instinct. The instinct is, I want to speed up, I want to run away, I want to escape the experience. And really, what you're saying is that the only way to truly address it is to go through it, not away from it. But that moment or that place takes courage, doesn't it? It takes a certain willingness.

And really my question is, I'm particularly curious, what do you notice working with students that helps them move towards as opposed to moving away from?

[00:26:04] Dominic Liber

I'll say a couple of things. First thing, backing up a little bit, you said that the only way to really work with it. And I do want to say that it's not the only way.

Alex Howard

Yes, thank you. Fair point.

Dominic Liber

Inquiry is for sure one extremely powerful way to work with it. And for very intense or debilitating kinds of anxiety, we actually may need other tools to manage it and contain it. And we really do need to limit and there are all kinds of things we need to do as intervention.

Alex Howard

I'm glad you clarified that.

Dominic Liber

It's good to make space for those.

Really with the anxiety, this is the same with anything inquiry, the kind of movement we want to try to find, see if there can be a movement is, is there something in you that can go, okay, I'm having this experience, some part of me is feeling totally anxious and terrified, can I be curious about that? Can I recognize that this is an experience that's arising in me and turn towards it and at least want to find out a bit about that part? What's going on for me?

So if we can make that movement and to begin to find that with a kind of friendly interest. So this is something I talk a lot about in the book, is finding that orientation of a friendly interest to just be warm and interested.

Imagine you're sitting down with your friend who's freaking out and totally anxious about something, what would you do? You say, okay, hey, come sit with me tell me about it. Let's find out what's going on. So that's one thing, we need to try and find that orientation.

And the other thing is we need, at least for a while, to be willing to park the external circumstances. Because often what happens with anxiety, it will be linked to something going on. Even though the deeper roots of it are inside you, people often will experience it as it's out there. It's something out there.

So you need to be willing to go, okay, it might be something out there. There is something out there. I want to turn inside, and rather than just trying to manage my circumstances out there or figure out what to do to manage the things out there, I'm going to turn to the experience myself and find out what's going on here. So that movement is to actually begin inquiring and to not just take at face value that the way I'm feeling is 100% the way it is.

Alex Howard

You said something I think that's really important. I'm mapping it back a bit to my own experiences as well. But one of the, I think, the most difficult things with anxiety, is anxiety about anxiety. Particularly if

we take it to the point of the more extreme if someone's having states of panic or panic attacks, often the fear of it is the very fuel that will drive and perpetuate the cycle.

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And what you said is, in a sense, changing the relationship that we have to the anxiety. I think you used the word curiosity, like meeting it from a point of curiosity. I'd love to hear you say a little bit more about how that change in relationship towards the experience in and of itself can impact the experience.

Dominic Liber

Well, when we're totally identified with the experience, we're just totally in it and lost in it, then it's very difficult. We just believe it. We take it at face value, and then we're caught trying to go with the reaction. And really what we need to do is, there's a couple of techniques, the kind of things that we can use.

In the Diamond Approach we use a practice called, Practice of Presence, sensing your arms and legs. So one of the things we do is, okay, I'm having an intense reaction, so you've got to have the understanding. You've got to actually understand, okay, yes, I'm having a reaction, and I'm going to work on it. I'm not just going to go with it. If you don't have that orientation at all you can't really begin. So you need that orientation.

Once you've got that orientation, you can go, okay, I'm having a very intense feeling here, let me sense my arms and legs. Let me stay present with it so that I am not just completely running with it.

And oftentimes you'll find if you just go, okay, can I feel my feet? Let me just feel my feet. Can I check in and sense the sensations of my feet? Okay, yeah, there they are. And funny enough, especially with anxiety, tuning into the sensations of the lower body is really helpful. Because like I said, we're so busy up here, but actually a lot of what's going on is further down. So you need to actually get in touch with those sensations.

And as we're doing that, there is at least some part of us, some tiny little part of us that isn't 100% bought into it. And then we can begin to inquire and you can begin to go, okay, so what's this like? How am I experiencing it? Let me actually just describe the sensations. Well, it feels like my belly is twisted up in a knot. You just begin to actually sense into the immediacy of the experience.

Like you said, anxiety can become, what's the word? It's like a vicious circle, something that gets tight and then you get anxious about getting anxious, and it gets tighter and tighter and tighter. All we can do is recognize that. The minute you really see that, okay, that's what's going on, and just getting anxious about the anxiety and you start sensing yourself, something can begin to shift.

Alex Howard

I think also part of the challenge can be that people can have ways of working with anxiety. Perhaps it might be meditative practice, it might be therapeutic work, it may be the practice of inquiry, and they can think what they're doing is not working because they still have anxiety. They have this idea that you do a thing and that fixes it. I'd love you to speak a little bit about, is that realistic? Or what is a healthy progression of effective work with anxiety?

[00:32:41] Dominic Liber

Yeah, that's a beautiful question. The truth is that, if we just think about the inner work, the inner journey, the kind of things that bring up anxiety. You said, lack of support, we feel a lack of support. But we can feel a lack of support about all kinds of things. Experiences we feel we can't land in.

You might feel it in relation to your sense of grounding, but another day you might be working on something to do with your mind, maybe you do lots of mindfulness meditation, and suddenly your mind is empty. And then you get totally anxious because your mind is empty because there's no thoughts there. And how the hell am I going to function? That might happen.

Or you do some work on your heart and your heart opens up and then you get anxious about, oh my God, there's all this love. I feel love for everybody. What the hell am I going to do? How is that going to work?

So every step we can take along the spiritual journey or the inner journey or any kind of personal development journey that you're on, any significant step in it that brings about something very different from what you've known before, for some people that will make them anxious. And the anxiety is something they will need to recognize and work through. The anxiety is not a problem.

So you wake up one day, you feel terribly anxious. You're like, jeez, I've been feeling great for the last couple of years, and now there's this feeling of anxiety. And you inquire into it, and you go, oh, why am I so anxious? And you realize, I feel like there's no one here. There's just no one here in my experience. There's nothing here. You've been reading all these spiritual texts about the nothingness, and then one day you wake up and it's here and you get terribly upset. There's nothing here.

So, it's not a problem. The anxiety is simply pointing to something happening in your experience that you need to clarify, you need to get in touch with. And as you do that, you feel like, okay there's nobody here. And, well, I can be with that. Seems like I can be here. Seems like even though there's no me here, I'm here. And I can still move and look, I can still go and go to work or do whatever I need to do.

I just use that as one example, but it can be anything from right at the very beginning of the journey to right at the very deep reaches of the journey.

The point is, always with inquiry, you just want to be open to it. There's an anxiety showing up, that's interesting. Let me find out about it.

Alex Howard

I think it'd be helpful, Dom, towards this final section, to get a bit more specific about the actual mechanics of the practice of inquiry

So, inquiry as a practice people can do with another person, but it's also a practice one can do with themselves. Just maybe walk us through a little bit of some of the specifics of, if someone feels inspired by what you're talking about, what do they actually do with that? And obviously, we'll talk at the end of some resources people can find, but how does one start?

[00:36:03] Dominic Liber

Really, remember what I said at the beginning? It's about getting in touch with your inner world and exploring it. So that's the big question. I mean, the big orientation of the practice.

So the first thing you need to do is to get in touch. And one way you can do that is by, what we call checking in. So you actually begin to wonder what's here? Where am I? What's going on with me? What's happening over here right now?

And that may mean beginning to check into different levels of your experience. Like what's going on in my life? What kind of circumstances are happening? Relationships or work or life circumstances, like what's going on?

And then, how am I feeling? What kind of feelings are around? And what kind of feelings are here right now? What kind of sensations? So that's more the belly. What am I sensing? Sensing in my body? A headache, the anxiety, I feel light and bubbly in my heart, so what's that? And what's on my mind? Like, how's my mind? How's my energy?

So in that practice of checking in, you are lowering yourself down into the ocean, into the inner world, and you're just looking around to go, what's here? Where am I? Am I over a kelp forest or floating by a coral reef? What's here? That's the first step. So begin to see where you are.

Then as you see where you are, you might find you might begin to wonder, well, what feels important? What am I curious about? What do I need to know about? And these questions, I give them as questions, of course, they're not questions with right or wrong answers. They're more just contemplating attitudes. Like, okay, well, here I am. I think I want to go swimming down there. So there's that feeling of, I'm feeling a bit sad today. Let me find out about that. So you find where you want to go.

The next stage of the process, you might actually begin to get closer to a particular element of your experience and to find out more about what it is. So this is like getting closer to that coral reef and actually describing what's there. Well, it feels like this. What's it about? How do I experience it? You're just taking the time to hang out with your experience and let itself reveal itself to you, see what you can say about it. So that's a big part of it.

And another part of it is, then as you begin to see what it is, you begin to wonder, what's making that happen? Okay, I know what this feeling or this emotion is, but what's making me sad? Why am I experiencing that? Or what's making me happy? What's that about? So we enter into the experience, and then we begin to explore it to see what it is or what it's about.

And then there's a third element that's very important, which is, as you do that, the experience doesn't stay fixed. Things begin to move, to flow. So maybe it gets more intense, or maybe it changes. Or maybe you recognize there's some young part of me here. And then you see, well, how does that affect me? What happens when I see that? You say, oh, actually, I feel very loving, very kind and tender towards that little part of me.

Or maybe you identify your inner critic. You recognize, oh, there's your inner critic that's yelling at you and making you feel terrible. And as you recognize that, you go, well, I actually don't feel like that shit anymore today, thanks. You can keep it to yourself.

[00:39:53]

So the point is that there is this dynamic flow and engagement in the experience. And then in a way, you're back to, okay, so where am I now? Where am I? What is this? How does it affect me?

And it's not a formula. The inquiry is not formulaic like the kind of inquiry where it's like ask this question, then this question. It's not like that. It's really like free diving in your experience. You just go diving. And these different kinds of questions are really just different ways that your curiosity might come out as you encounter whatever it is that you're encountering.

Alex Howard

So really, in a sense, what it is, is a process of discovery.

Dominic Liber

Yeah. Totally fresh, totally new. You're diving into this particular territory as if you've never seen it before, and you're letting it, inviting it to reveal itself to you.

And as you do that, there is it, that little thing, that little something over there that you never really looked at before. And it turns out as you go feeling into it, it becomes a doorway. It's a whole other world.

So the inner world is incredibly rich like that. Oftentimes people say, oh, I can't believe I'm back with my mother issue or this is coming up again. Or I've been working on myself for 10 years, and I still feel like a little kid. These are not problems.

If you can, like we were saying earlier, if you can suspend your ideas about it and be willing to see it and feel it fresh, every time, honestly, every inquiry I do to this day, what unfolds surprises me. You always end up going, oh my God, I never expected that. Never. So if you're fresh with your experience, it will always be fresh.

Alex Howard

For people that are here primarily because of anxiety, maybe a good ending point is to say a little about the potential of the journey that one can go on.

And I'll map it back to my own experience. Some of my own motivations towards my own inner path were some health issues, but also anxiety as part of that picture. And I remember thinking in those early years, if I could just be free of anxiety, then it would make this work worth it.

But over time, that motivation really changed, and the sincere curiosity about the truth and about the potential of that journey, in a sense, became a whole new motivation.

And I'm interested just to hear a little bit about that change that people can go on. Because I think often we come into inner work to fix the problem, but hopefully that isn't the reason that we stay in that work.

[00:42:59] Dominic Liber

That's great. And let me ask you, do you still experience the anxieties that you experienced at the beginning in the same way?

Alex Howard

Not in the same way, no. I would say my day to day anxiety is much less. But there's still the potential, and certainly in those deeper places, there's absolutely still anxiety. But I think the relationship to it is definitely different.

Dominic Liber

Exactly. So we often come in, most people start the work wanting to fix the problem. And there's really nothing wrong with that. That's totally normal. If you feel a lot of anxiety, it's totally normal not to want to feel anxiety.

Engaging in the inquiry and getting to the bottom of what causes anxiety, the understanding of what it is, as you said, over time, begins to shift our relationship to it.

So I think the change happens in two ways. The first is that it genuinely is possible to bring to light these young, early structures that really are what make most of the anxiety so challenging. And that's a very long-term process. They come up, I can say in my own experience, every so often you get in touch with another layer. Oh, yeah, I haven't felt into that layer, that which happened in my first month or something. So that can happen.

And at least in my experience, and I see with my students, as you work through some of those structures, they genuinely dissolve. That particular piece that used to get triggered, doesn't. It actually doesn't. So it is totally true that you can work through some of these things to the degree that they are literally gone. They just are not present in your awareness anymore. So I think that's worth saying.

It's also worth saying that the very deeper reaches, the deeper in the Diamond Approach, the path keeps unfolding. Well, Hameed has been at it for what? I don't know, his whole lifetime, and he's still discovering new things. As we discover new things, we find new issues, new kinds of anxieties can surface.

So it's not that anxiety ever goes away, but once you've worked through that process once or twice or five times or ten times, and you know, okay, I can go into that feeling, I can follow it all the way to its root, it feels terrible, and as I'm with it, it opens up and something changes and dissolves, little by little, you start to build the trust that that can happen.

And in time, as you say, that totally changes your relationship to it, because more and more you realize, okay, it's just experience. Whatever it is, however intense it is, it's experience. And I can actually allow it. I can let it happen. I can go into it. I can find out what makes it feel so challenging, and it will open up.

We also discover that with each of these difficult experiences, as we enter into the doorway of it, often, the inner treasures that are discovered are just astonishing, so wonderful. So in time, we just become less and less interested in just getting rid of the problem.

[00:46:30]

As you said, it's the adventure itself, the love of the adventure, the love of discovering what's true, the love of discovering what we really are, the literally infinite potential of a human being. What a human being actually is, is just astonishing. And going through a few anxieties along the way to discover those treasures eventually just seems a price worth paying, I think.

Alex Howard

It's a beautiful place to end.

Dom, people want to find out more about your work, first, I want to recommend your book, *Diving in the Inner Ocean*, which I think is a great way of bringing together much of what we've been talking about today, but also say a bit more about where people can find you online and also some of what they can discover.

Dominic Liber

Yeah, sure. The book is really a very practical step by step to exactly the kind of process that we were talking about now in that little overview of the process I gave. The book really breaks it down in detail.

And I really wanted to give people the practical how to inquire, because Hameed has written an amazing book called *Spacecruiser inquiry*, but it's not a beginner's book.

Alex Howard

It's certainly not.

Dominic Liber

It's not even a book I think for people who have been doing the work for many years. There's something about just the practical orientation to it. So I really would read the book. It will really help you get a sense of what the practice is.

And then I also offer some inquiry courses. There's a website, dive-in.life where you can go and find out about those and register for those. And there are some online resources there like guided practices that are useful for people.

And I teach Diamond Approach groups as well, as you mentioned, and you can find out all that on my domliber.com website, and of course on the main [Diamond Approach](https://diamondapproach.org) website there's tons of stuff there.

Alex Howard

Fantastic. I've really enjoyed our time. Thank you so much.

Dominic Liber

Thanks, Alex. Thanks for having me here.