



## Conscious Life presents

### Accessing States of consciousness with Breathwork

**Guest: Anthony Abbagnano**

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#### **[00:00:05] Meagen Gibson**

Welcome to this interview. I'm your host, Meagen Gibson. Today, I'm delighted to be speaking with Anthony Abbagnano, a renowned international speaker, breathwork expert, and the founder of Alchemy of Breath, a leading breathwork academy. He's practiced breathing techniques personally for over 40 years and has combined breathwork with areas like philosophy, spirituality, and psychology.

Anthony and his facilitation team have successfully taken breathwork into festivals, yoga spaces, the corporate world, prisons, the psychedelic society, hospitals, and to the dying. His dedication to self-growth, love for humanity, and expertise in breathwork make Anthony an influential figure in personal transformation and global healing, inspiring countless individuals to explore the power of breath.

Anthony, thank you so much for joining us today.

#### **Anthony Abbagnano**

What a pleasure it is to be with you again.

#### **Meagen Gibson**

For people that are unfamiliar with breathwork, can you help us understand why breathwork can be so powerful and create a state similar to that one might experience while taking psychedelics?

**[00:01:20] Anthony Abbagnano**

Thank you. Well, we are manipulating oxygen levels in the blood. I think what's significant in comparison or in connection with psychotropic or psychedelic experiences is that as we raise oxygen in the blood, we don't actually increase the oxygen flow to the brain. In fact, the frontal lobe gets less oxygen.

So you may, in simplistic terms, think of it as reducing our normal thought capacity. And I would assert that in the absence of that, there's a possibility for some other thinking, some other kind of contemplation which is far more right brain, far more spacious, far more out of logic and away from the things that we normally know. So it would end up being actually very similar to a psychedelic experience.

**Meagen Gibson**

That's a really interesting context because when engaged on purpose, because we don't want the blood to go away from our brain where we're trying to do things like operate a motor vehicle or act respond in an emergency situation.

But when we're contained and we're safe and doing engaging in something like breathwork, most of us - I'm going to speak for the room - want to think a little less. We're desperate to think a little less and turn our brains off and get more into our bodies and take a break from the monkey mind that's constantly going. I've never heard that context before of we're increasing oxygen, but taking it away from the thing that needs to quiet down.

**Anthony Abbagnano**

Yeah, exactly. And it's marvelous. I think anybody who's taken psychedelics would relate to a sense of miracle, a miraculous element that's there, the mystery and the miracle. And we see quite a lot of that with breathwork, too.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, I would love it if you said more about that, because I know that there's going to be a contingency of people who are in this conference and watching this content later for whom psychedelics are not a great choice for them for a variety of reasons, but they still want access to transformative potentials of psychedelic experiences.

And so outside of the oxygen factors, how does breathwork provide similar experiences of this expansive connectedness or connectedness?

**Anthony Abbagnano**

Well, when we untether from our preoccupations and the list that we've got to get back to and our normal thought patterns, if you can imagine just unleashing, and we can open to our imagination a great deal more. But I think there's something more fundamental that happens that can create these quantum moments with breathwork.

Apart from the fact that you're in control, you're choosing how long you're going to breathe for, how deep or rich your breath might be, and you're also deciding how connected each breath is with the last breath. And that's really where there's a great deal of difference.

**[00:04:30]**

So as long as you do that, you then begin to go into what might be called, like Krishnamurti would have called it, the unknown, freedom from the known. And when you're out of that field, then you're in this other limitless space, where things like time space continuum don't really exist. Sometimes people have hallucinations like they do with psychedelic or psychotropics.

And also, when we consider our ability as humans to reclaim our sentience, in other words, our feeling, the word 'sentida' comes from to feel, when we can allow ourselves to feel again and meet those feelings with our breath, that's when extraordinary things can happen, because we're not really used to doing that.

When we feel a strong emotion, we tend to stop breathing. If we panic, we hold our breath or we breathe very short breaths. If we're over emotional, over in love, over excited, whatever it might be, it's like we've got those clichés, right? "I caught my breath. I was so awed that I stopped breathing".

And so in normal life, this gets to be a real problem. In fact, the way that we navigate life, it's honestly safer not to feel, right? We get hurt and wounded, and we spend a lifetime creating protections and ways that we can navigate without really having to feel fully.

So a lot of the people that come to me are people who may be in their heads too much, business people, accountants, anything mathematical, very left-brained people. This is a great practice, breathwork.

And for people who are already involved with psychedelics and enjoy them, I hear many of them tell me afterwards this was just like a psychedelic experience or a plant medicine experience, like an ayahuasca experience for me.

The similar visions can come, and perhaps after taking those psychotropics people are more disposed even to recognize and to turn towards that kind of experience rather than to turn away from it.

So the quantum moments that can happen. I mean, an example would be, I had a young lady who had an operation, an eye operation with the National Health Service in England. And she came out with that operation, and I saw I met her maybe six or seven weeks later, and she could not open her eye.

And so I asked her during this breathwork, and this was a breathwork in pairs where people were looking at each other. And I said, "Look, my request from you in this breathwork is just to use the eye you've got and to use it to see the eyes in front of you and just be with this person as you breathe".

And this is an incredibly intimate form of breathwork, first of all. We call it the mandala, and we do it in circles with many people. But she came out of that breathwork and her eye was restored. And

that was after her doctor said "Nothing can be done. There's nothing that we can do". Something had been apparently severed.

**[00:07:35]**

So she was then able, afterwards, she opened her eyes, afterwards, and in the share, she was, of course, amazed. "This is incredible. How could this possibly happen?". This is an instance or an example of when we actually have the courage to turn towards what we fear most, that it can dissolve.

And especially in the emotional or the psychic realms, also the spiritual realms, this is such a powerful practice. Another example was a couple, one of the first breathworks I ever did. They were in their 70s, and the lady came to me afterwards and she said, "My husband hasn't told me that he loved me for over 25 years, and today he told me that".

And that was her thank you just to let me know that. And we do say that couples that breathe together stay together. So it's a great way to journey in couples, too.

### **Meagen Gibson**

That's beautiful. Actually, it brings up one of the questions that I have further along, but let's go there. Which is, is there a big difference in experiencing breathwork when you're alone in the privacy of your own home, maybe you're attending an online group session or something, and then the difference of the power of a group setting when you're all in the same room with somebody?

### **Anthony Abbagnano**

Yes, there is. I wouldn't say it's better or worse, it's just different. And I would say about 70% of the people that I breathe like them both. And then there's about 25 or 30% that prefer one or the other. The nice thing if you're on your own is you can cry, you can shout, you can move, you can be completely free and uninhibited.

And of course, if you're the kind of person that needs that, to be in a group, in a physical group with other people, is perhaps a little bit scary, and people feel a bit like they've got to hang on, which is really not what you want in a breath session. You really want to be free. You want to really unchain yourself and let it go, let the breath take you wherever it wants to go.

That said, now, every Sunday, I do breathworks. My wife and I do breathworks. We call it Breathe the World. And in the morning, we breathe people from England through to New Zealand. And in the evening, we breathe people from England to Hawaii. And there are sometimes 500 people in the room breathing together. And the power of that is undeniable.

There's no question that even if you're in your own room, you're going to have a depth of experience that is absolutely extraordinary. And of course, there's a context. We are breathing the world, and we're doing our little bit to breathe some sense into the world.

But when you link together with 500 people in community who care and who focus on a theme together, like love or abundance or forgiveness or any of the many themes that we touch, things shift.

**[00:10:38]**

And then everybody helps each other with that afterwards. We have sharing afterwards, and everybody's helping each other understand what they might have experienced. It's a very beautiful, integrated experience.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I imagine, too, that everybody's individual experience is contextually different in little nuances, but the overarching experiences have a lot of similarities. And so I'm sure that there's ways that people can connect in those big similarities and also offer the unique idiosyncratic-ities of their own personal journey.

### **Anthony Abbagnano**

Yeah, that's absolutely true, Meagen. I know, I think it was Byron Katie that said, there are only three or four fundamental human conditions that we live in. The things like, I don't belong, I'm not good enough, I'm not lovable, and so on. And so that's really sitting underneath, I think, our human experience, our human condition.

And what I like to say is I believe that, I believe as humans, we want to experience unconditional love. We hear about it. We've heard about it, Agape, since we were little children. But I don't think we ever understood really what it meant. And so I like to introduce the concept to people that the journey to unconditional love means learning to love yourself in all your conditions.

So we're really seeking with Alchemy to understand not just the beauty and the light side, but to incorporate the dark side, too, and bringing those two sides together.

Indeed, looking at a dualistic world of war and conflict and having the approach of, "Okay, I want to stretch my embrace large enough to understand these two realities exist and not to go into denial, but to hold them in my own being as an individual, and then hopefully bring into some convergence as I get wiser, older, perhaps, and I use the breath more because, of course, the breath brings in what I call God, actually, the God of your understanding, because it is spirit...

Inspire means to bring in spirit. So you know what it's like when you're inspired, you feel like, buoyant and creative and, "Wow, what's next?", enthusiastic about life. And that's what I see happen when people breathe, especially together and also alone, too.

We do one to one work, too, which is very powerful and more specific and targeted to an individual situation. And again, you get these instances where people... I had psychotherapists of 25 years practice come to one breath session and go, "Oh, my gosh, my supervisor in my therapy myself, I haven't moved this for 15 years. And in one hour, it's all of a sudden dislodged and free to be dealt with and discharged and released".

So I think that's the quantum element that I'm talking about is this awareness of bringing in this something from the universe, the cosmic code, whatever you might want to call it, and aligning it with my conscious will to be present and to breathe, and then also accessing this subconscious archive that can be reformed, not just by my conscious will, but by something supernatural.

**[00:13:54]**

I remember Bruce Lipton said that 95% of the choices we make are actually made from our subconscious, which has a much higher processing power than our conscious mind. So if we can align that subconscious with that 5% of will to just breathe, just unconditionally breathe and be here and then open to some supernatural force, that's when the miracles really happen.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. And you said something a little earlier I want to come back to, which is just the beauty of being able to hold two things that seem to be in drastic contrast. I was just speaking to my kids about that yesterday.

And I think we're normally walking around in the world holding on to whichever one we prefer and denying the other one. And the ability to be in a session with a bunch of people who are, as you said, having the undercurrent that goes underneath our sessions, those four big things that we're all universally struggling with, and then open ourselves up to heal those because that's where all that conflict comes from is...

I know you said you were just with entrepreneurs this weekend. It's the example of, "I am really powerful and brilliant and can create all these things", and the paradox being, "I'm also totally scared I'm going to lose it all". And there's always both things happening for everyone, no matter what they're doing, isn't it?

**Anthony Abbagnano**

Yeah, absolutely. I mean the juxtaposition of enormous wealth when I'm breathing a room full of, I don't know, billions of dollars of wealth and witnessing the tenderness and the timidity and the poorness, in a way, of heart, and how when that's opened, things come to balance.

And of course, with something like, if wealthy people want to change the world, what a beautiful way to drop into their heart and understand what's going on underneath this surface that we usually navigate in life.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. And I want to talk about the recovery after a breathwork session because when we're talking about psychedelics or things that are going to change our state, there's definitely maybe a longer, higher window of recovery necessary after we're taking psychedelics.

And so what does it look like when you're doing breathwork, how quickly can you return to normal life? Or not that you might want to, you might want to stay in your state afterwards. But is there anything to consider there for people?

**Anthony Abbagnano**

Yeah, I think, first of all, historically, it was our dear Stan Grof who brought holotropic breathwork to the world as a result of working with LSD and noticing that people on the way back would use

different breath patterns in order to prolong the experience. And then that's how holotropic was actually born. Himself and his wife, Christina, took it forwards from there, and still it exists and it thrives today.

**[00:16:56]**

And so I think there are similarities in the sense that, honestly, the more self-protection you can create afterwards, you don't want to get on a bicycle or chop vegetables with a sharp knife or get back into traffic or into the stream of life quite right away. I often say to people online, "Go hug a tree", or if we're in a room, "Hug three people" and we do exercises to ground.

Of course, because if people have traveled to see me and they're going to go back into the world, I want to make sure that they're safe and they're not too woozy or airy. But honestly, to get the most benefit, I think two things are really good. Take a pen and paper or some crayons and something to draw on.

The visual image I find even stronger than written words after a breathwork, because each time you look at it in the future, you'll see it from a different perspective, and it will mean something different. So I think that's one of the richest ways to conclude a breathwork, and then to create as much space as you can afterwards. Solitary time afterwards is a good thing.

And I think one of the... I remember this because I used to take psychedelics, and I took ayahuasca back in the 90s as well. So I know the fantastical nature and the speed of download of data that you get can also be quite worrying for some people.

I've worked with a psychedelic society in England for several years, and I help a lot of people who've had experiences that have been just too much to handle, from mild cases to psychotic cases of people not being well for months afterwards. And you can also use the breath for that.

So it's not just using the breath to have an out-of-body experience or to enter the breath state. It's also using the breath to integrate a psychedelic experience. And that will be more of a calming, steady, soft, gentle breath through the nose. And that will help people integrate.

I'll give you an example. I had one young man who had a ayahuasca experience and came out suicidal. He just felt so out of sorts. "I don't belong in this world anymore. Nobody understands me. I don't belong". All of those conditions that Byron Katie mentions.

And so we just literally worked with a coherence breath, which is a five-second in, five-second out breath through the nose. That's all we did for three months. And I worked with him for the first five days, and then I left him for one day to do it on his own. Three times a day, he was asked to do it, and he didn't. He fell immediately.

So we came back in to doing it again together until he was able to manage one day on, one day off without me, and then two days. And then in little steps, we were able to build his confidence that he had a discipline, he had a sense of accomplishment, and he could begin to acknowledge something about himself that was worthy of living.

**[00:19:54]**

And we just started off with a tiniest seed, but that's all it took. And gradually, we could build to the point where three months later, he's a healthy, young, beautiful, young, functioning man. He teaches meditation, so he can now go help other people again.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Good. That's beautiful. And you made a good point, too, that there are a lot of people who have difficult overwhelming experiences in psychedelics. Some of that can be because of what they see or what they feel, and some of that can just be what you said, which is the overwhelm.

Every single person I've heard describe a psychedelic experience says that there's absolutely no way that their brain could process the amount of information and then actually translate that into language and then be able to communicate that to anyone. It's such an insurmountable amount of experience and that the brain just can't remember and process it.

It sounds like breathwork is a really great way to integrate any psychedelic experience, whether you had a great trip or you had a terrible one or you were just overwhelmed, or you had too much information.

### **Anthony Abbagnano**

Yeah, absolutely. Actually, I think it's the best way I know of to integrate any overwhelm is the breath, whether it's in a psychedelic state or not. And also during the psychedelic journey, if you're feeling overwhelmed, just come back to your breath. Come back to five seconds in, five seconds out.

Sometimes, in my own experience with psychedelics, you look around for something solid, and it's not there. You're looking for something normal, but it's all moving. I'm looking at my hand and I see through it. And so all my points of reference have left me and the practical quality of hallucination, where it's much more complex than the mind could ever conceive.

If you look at Alex Gray's work, who's a wonderful psychedelic artist, and...But that's just the beginning of it. That's one still image. But these are all moving, and it's all getting more and more complex, and unfolding, and expanding. And wow, take a breath. Yeah, because in my own experience, I remember, the last time I took ayahuasca, it was so unbelievably beautiful that I thought I didn't deserve to see such beauty. And I felt like I was dying.

I felt like "I cannot bring this back to the world, it is so exquisite. I'm not meant to even see this and live". And I thought I was dying. And I got more and more close to this death moment. And then I realized I hadn't breathed. I was like, "Haaa..." And then, of course, everything came back to some perspective again.

So I really recommend for people who have had difficulty and want to experience it again, take your breath with you. Develop some breath practices that you can take with you. And the same for people who are in high anxiety or have panic attacks, put your breath practice in place now, and it will become your automatic go-to.



Even if you feel the slightest anxiety, the first signs, like a sweaty palm or a raised heartbeat, if you make a make breath your practice, if you get intimacy with your breath, then you can draw upon it when you need to.

### **[00:23:07] Meagen Gibson**

It's such incredibly simple instruction, but it's so wise because we often look for solutions to problems after we have them. Instead of preparing for the inevitable difficulties of life. We all will face challenges and you're absolutely right, practice the thing you'll need so that when you need it, you have it. Don't wait until you need it to try to get hold of that skill.

And so with that, I would love it. I know that you've agreed to give everybody a taste of what a breathwork session with you might feel like. And so I'm going to let you take it from here if you're ready.

### **Anthony Abbagnano**

Okay. Well, what I'd like to do is to show you the breath that we use for our Sunday breathes and all our live breathes that we do, which is a conscious connected breath, which is possibly what you've already heard about during this experience of all these incredible people that are coming to talk to you.

So I'd like to show you the way that we do it. And then I'd like to give you a more simple practice to consider as we go through this whole summit together. And then I'll be back to give you some little five or 10 minute breath experiences each day. So make sure you check back for those, and they'll be in sequence. So we'll be building towards something, and you'll have a chance to get some traction and some movement.

The conscious connected breath that we do looks and sounds like this, and you'll notice that more energy is actually put into the inhalation than the exhalation.

So let's do this together. Try it five times with me.

Now, I did that through the mouth for a number of reasons. First, because you get more oxygen more quickly. Secondly, because it's less comfortable, so you pay attention to what you're doing. And thirdly, because as we open our mouth to breathe, we get a little bit more vulnerable. We begin to open more to our emotional realms.

Normally, you should be breathing through your nose, and it's really important that you know that. So don't go around your day or around town whatever it is, breathing through your mouth, especially when you're asleep. It's very important that you breathe through your nose.

So in exceptional circumstances, and during these breath sessions, we do breathe through the mouth. And that's what we do for somewhere between half an hour and two hours, depending on what the occasion might look like. A private breathwork session might last longer than an hour, it might be an hour and a half, and then we'll breathe a bit, stop a bit, breathe a bit, stop a bit.

**[00:25:55]**

And you may have noticed that it's charging; there's something happening in that moment after you've taken those five breaths, there's a little disorientation, a little like, "Hang on, it doesn't feel...". Some people feel a little dizzy, it doesn't feel too comfortable. "My throat gets dry", and you hear this sort of thing a lot. Actually, things will settle. And of course, you are leaving your comfort zone.

So if you can just accept it and breathe into that discomfort and learn to associate your breath with the feeling of discomfort, you've already crossed the first threshold, which is about learning how to feel and breathe. And then you're going to uncover all kinds of emotions that may want to flow. And again, the lesson is to feel and breathe. If we can breathe and feel, we can feel and heal. And that's one of the biggest aspects about breathwork.

So the practice I'd love to - and there's more to discover, you're going to have to come closer to discover all the other aspects in this little word "breath", there is a universe, there's magnificence. There's things that you would never imagine that you could discover. So welcome to opening the door to that world. And today for a breath practice... Okay, let me see.

I think today we'll try something gentle, but something that might make you inquisitive. So it might make you want to go a little bit deeper and understand how you could actually use the breath. So I think we will, we'll try the conscious connected breath. I just want to say if you have any strong medical conditions, I'm going to ask you to breathe through the nose and gently, and don't worry about connecting the breath.

And for those of you that have health and are not taking strong medications, then you can join me. And if at any time you feel it's uncomfortable, then please just settle your breath and notice. Go into stillness and notice what's happening in your body. Okay?

So let's begin. I'm going to breathe with you, and we're going to probably just do two minutes for now just to keep it to reasonable levels, and then we'll pause and be in stillness just for maybe 30 seconds so you can notice what might be different. Okay, let's go.

And then you can let your breath return to your nose, maybe close your eyes and drop it to stillness. What do you notice? Is there a pulse? Is there anything different at all that's going on in your body? What do you feel in your head? Or your face? Or your extremities, in your fingers or your hands?

Just let this happen as you watch it. Breathe through your nose, just gently, no need to connect your breath anymore. And this is the beginning of a breath journey, feeling the dry throat, feeling any of those symptoms that you might feel as you bring on massive quantities of oxygen, consciously becoming aware of it.

Maybe you are already experiencing the edge of something disproportionately different because you are on the edge of something to discover that perhaps you've never known before.

So as you do this practice, and you'll be doing it with me again during this week, you can breathe into trust. You can breathe into trusting that the breath is benign, the breath is your benefactor. The breath is something supernatural that's coming to help you.

**[00:31:30**

And as we go through our week together, we'll be exploring other ways to use it to calm yourself if you're too energized or to energize yourself if you're feeling lazy.

What I would leave you with today is perhaps a little bit of homework is to notice the different conditions that you're in and how you're breathing. Just begin to notice the breath in all the ways that you live your life.

When you're hungry, when you're full, when you're making love, when you're walking, when you're exerting yourself, if you're straining yourself in some way, just to notice what's going on, because if you can collect all of those and archive them, then you'll know how to breathe to correct other ways that you might be feeling.

So when you're ready, you can come back to the room around you again and be sure to be gentle with yourself for the next 15 or 20 minutes. Don't go leaning too far out the window or drive a car or anything like that. Make sure that you feel stable and strong and safe.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Anthony, thank you so much for being with us today and leading everybody through a little breathwork example. If people want to find out more about you and the type of breathwork that you do, how can they do that?

### **Anthony Abbagnano**

You can find us at [alchemyofbreath.com](http://alchemyofbreath.com) and you're very welcome. Join us on Sundays. We do other little workshops and things, lots of free offerings that we do, and we'd love to help you learn how to use the breath in positive ways for your life.