



## Conscious Life presents

### The Power of Connectedness in Healing

Guest: Dr Rosalind Watts

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#### **[00:00:13] Meagen Gibson**

Hello, and welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, your conference co-host. Today, I'm speaking with Dr Rosalind Watts, a Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Lead for Imperial College London's psilocybin trial.

Dr Watts has been named one of the 50 most influential people in psychedelics, as well as one of the top 16 women shaping the future of psychedelics.

However, what sets Dr Watts apart is her focus on integration, harm reduction, and inclusion in the psychedelic space. Dr Watts builds tools and structures to foster connectedness after psychedelic experiences, finding inspiration for their design in nature. She co-founded the UK's first psychedelic integration group, and in 2022, launched ACER Integration, a global online integration community, where participants follow a 13-month process together to connect more deeply to the self, others, and nature. Dr Rosalind Watts, thank you so much for joining me today.

#### **Dr Rosalind Watts**

Thanks for having me.

#### **Meagen Gibson**

I would love to start with the background of just how you got interested in psychedelic research in the first place.

### **[00:01:20] Dr Rosalind Watts**

It feels like such a long time ago now, and it's all changed so much, it's interesting looking back. I was a clinical psychologist, or I am a clinical psychologist by training. Many years ago now, I was on maternity leave with my daughter. I had some time for the first time in a very long time, and I had some time for googling. I was googling psychedelic therapy, because one of my very best friends had suffered from depression, and had been to Peru to have some ayahuasca ceremonies.

It really helped her, and that had got me thinking when I have a bit of time, I'm going to Google that. So I did a bit of googling, and found that there was a psilocybin for depression trial happening down the road from where I live. I emailed them and said, do you need any help? I can come and make tea.

And they said, we need a sitter, we need an extra guide, when can you start? So I went and became a volunteer assistant guide in the Imperial psilocybin for depression trial. That's where the interest began.

It was very much as a psychologist looking for other effective tools rather than somebody who was themselves a psychedelic enthusiast.

### **Meagen Gibson**

It's interesting seeing you say that, having gone through two post-birth experiences myself, it's interesting both the clarity, the focus, and the curiosities that come up during that post-birth period of time, isn't it?

### **Dr Rosalind Watts**

Also because I was breastfeeding, I had so much prolactin, the hormone in my system. The idea of sitting with people who were going through these intense journeys, and just being able to be there in a... It's a very prolactin type of thing to do, it was perfect for the time. I also was so ready to get back into something. I found being on maternity leave and not having stimulation in terms of work stuff, after a while, I was ready for a little one day a week of going back in. It was very well-timed.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely, and there are so many overlaps that I hear, too. We should probably talk about what a sitter is, the vulnerable state that people are in, both as infants and also when we're having psychedelic experiences. Let's back up a little bit.

Psilocybin is what? And what is a sitter for somebody who's having a psychedelic experience?

### **Dr Rosalind Watts**

Psilocybin is the active component of magic mushrooms. When people consume psilocybin in a therapeutic setting, in a Western therapeutic setting, it's very different in indigenous ceremonies, where magic mushrooms have been used for a very, very long time. But in the Western context, it's usually synthetic, although studies are now starting to look at actual real organic mushrooms.

### **[00:04:37] Dr Rosalind Watts**

They take a couple of capsules and have about 6 hours of being deeply deeply... The analogy I tend to use is of a deep sea dive. You dive down from your usual consciousness where things make sense, into this deep waters of sometimes quite terrifying deep waters, but often very significant and important.

We can access layers of emotion that were oppressed otherwise. We go to those deep places within ourselves where we learn some lessons in a very visceral way. You need sitters because these experiences can be... You are so vulnerable because you lose all that sense... It's difficult even to go to the bathroom, you need someone to help you go. You're in a very, very deep state where the environment needs to be very, very controlled because if there was too much incoming stimulus, it could be problematic, and traumatic actually.

You need to have the music and the people, the trusted sitters there in a very carefully controlled environment. The only variable that is uncontrolled is where you go, and that gives you full freedom to go deeply, deeply into wherever this deep journey takes you.

If you're in an environment where any of the variables are uncontrolled, it's harder to go deep and really be with what comes up. The ideal sitters, I think, are able to just sit and hold space and not interfere. Very much like a midwife, we're going back to the analogies before of the vulnerabilities of people going through these experiences, and the important characteristic of caregivers, is an ability to hold space in a very safe, trusted way, very steadfast.

Not introducing anything that could be perturbing or problematic, but just there in case anything goes a bit wonky, which it can very often do. If people on these deep journeys are going into some very, very scary places, then you need to know that there is a sitter who can hold your hand if you need someone to hold your hand, or they can just be there for the incredible soothing that comes from a trusted other person. The importance of a sitter is great.

### **Meagen Gibson**

As you're speaking, it's occurring to me that I was doing some research yesterday, watching a video, and somebody was saying that some of the aspects of both shamans and sitters are not only protecting the experience that the person is having inside, so protecting them from falling, or like you said, if they need to go to the bathroom, they're protecting the person, but they're also protecting them from the outside.

Which is what you said, it's not just cultivating the internal experience in the room, but also just keeping out noises, other people, or interference. It also occurs to me how I imagine people needing the presence of a safe, reliable, un-enmeshed person in their lives through any difficult thing, and how hard it is to find people to be with us in our difficulty, discomfort, and struggle.

### **[00:08:29] Dr Rosalind Watts**

Absolutely. The biggest learning for me through the whole work in the psychedelic field has been that. That the incredible transformative role of having somebody hold space for you, and this unconditional positive regard, this non-judgmental presence that is just there saying, "Wherever you go is okay, I'm here to just watch and just be here, and you can talk to me when you need to, but I'm not going to in any way divert the course of your journey because I don't know what's right for you. You know."

The thing about psychedelic therapy is rather than there being some expert beyond, outside of yourself, that knows what's right for you, like a psychiatrist or a psychologist who thinks they know. The idea is that your own inner healing intelligence is given the space to speak to you. It's really powerful having people that will witness that, and hold space for that, but not try to interfere with it, or give us advice, or tell us what we should do. In our culture, I know that this is the case in the UK and in the US, the infrastructure of care has been so diminished over the last decades.

Neoliberalism has just eroded away our systems of community support and care. So accessing those village elders, aunties, uncles, the people beyond our own biological family, the role of the aunties and the uncles, the benign caring, more experienced people who can look on and say, "I'm just here for you." We don't have that. We have to pay therapists to access that support. It's a very particular relationship.

I think psychedelic therapy brings in the need for people to be there for us in a slightly different role to traditional therapy. A psychedelic session is 6 hours long, it requires people to be there in the traditional ways, it wasn't something that was paid for, this was a service that people, that medicine women and medicine men would give.

I'm hoping that psychedelic therapy can somehow help bring back to our culture the networks of care and support that we all need for navigating life. But we definitely need if we're going to introduce psychedelics into the West, we need to reinvigorate a fabric of care before they can safely be reintroduced.

### **Meagen Gibson**

On that note, I know a lot of your work has to do with integration in psychedelic research. We're talking about sitters and the therapist's role in psychedelic experiences is not being one of suggestibility, it's more of a presence and holding space. How does that work for integration? What is it? And what is the person's role in that, or the person who's having an experience?

### **Dr Rosalind Watts**

In the integration phase, it's the community role. In the psychedelic experience itself, there will be either a shaman, a facilitator, or a therapist who is holding that space. For the immediate integration, which is the day after, maybe a week after, it's appropriate for it to still be the person who held the session to provide that sense of follow-up. What did you experience? How are you feeling now? Making sure they're okay.

## **[00:12:02] Dr Rosalind Watts**

Then releasing them into the next phase, which is now around connecting to a community of people who understand this way of working, and making the most of peer support networks, which is more appropriate in this phase. Because the mechanism of action that I've most looked at is connectedness, how psychedelics can, not necessarily, they can help us feel more connected to ourselves, to other people, and to the living world around us.

If we have this sense of connectedness afterward, we want to connect with other people who have been through the same thing and share our stories, and we want to connect with the world around us. Often, psychedelics can bring these insights around beyond our own bubble. We get out of our own heads, our daily life, the stresses, the things we worry about, and we look at the bigger picture, and we want to be part of a solution, not the problem anymore.

We want to change our way of living, and we want to bring... We want to be able to live in a way that is more in line with that sense of everything being interconnected, to tread more lightly in the world, to nurture our relationships better. To take time away from the daily grind, I suppose. Psychedelic experiences can be that moment away from your daily life, looking at it and saying, "Aha, this is what's out of balance, this is what needs to change."

People come out of these experiences with so much motivation to make changes in their own lives, but also in their communities. A community integration process allows people to do so much more than just self-work, and personal work, it's also about that idea of when you climb the mountain, you see the view from the top, and then you come back down and you chop wood and carry water, and that's the integration.

In our culture, it's very focused on how we can make ourselves better, how we can optimize, and how we can be more efficient and successful. If the psychedelic community and integration models expand, it will help people to access, how can I bring this healing? How can I go and plant trees in my local area? How can I volunteer at the local soup kitchen? Those things, I think, are the most... They have so much potential, both for the people that we're working with, and planting trees is always a good thing, but also the psychological benefits to us as individuals of being in service are huge.

The psychedelic effects wear off, but being able to maintain them by being part of communities where we can give back to other people. One of the things that can, I think could be most positive for people is when new people come through the psychedelic path and are in that place of, wow, I had this experience, and people that have been there a little bit longer, being able to support them and provide some mentorship and help and say, "Hey, I can be there for you." That's also a lovely thing for the person offering it. Fellowships of support in the integration phase rather than individual experts offering one-on-one sessions is what I hope to see more of.

## **Meagen Gibson**

I love that idea too, because when we have big experiences, whether they're positive or negative, and whatever it is that facilitates that experience, oftentimes it shifts our perspective and the lens through which we see the world. Sometimes that lens then becomes our identity. It's important to have these stages of development in relationship to an experience, all connected to a person and

available to a person like you're saying. If you've just had an experience, or you've had one 5 years ago, or 10 years ago, or to have people that are at different paths along the way in their relationship to that big experience is just so vital.

### **[00:16:00] Dr Rosalind Watts**

That's such a good point you raised because I've been thinking a lot recently about the ego inflation that can happen with psychedelic use. I think it's really important that it's part of all the conversations around psychedelics because we're seeing more and more now in the psychedelic field, abuses of power, and problems with narcissism.

I think the field has to really look at, okay why is this shadow emerging? What's happening here? We see narcissism in all fields, but why does it seem to be amplified with psychedelics? I think one of the reasons is that when we first become involved in the psychedelic world, as you say there are these different phases.

I think phase one is often the honeymoon phase, which I myself was completely guilty of, becoming this total advocate for psychedelics. They're going to save everything, they're so amazing. Then you crash down to Earth afterwards, which is why, yes it's so important to have connection with people that are at different phases. That can ground us and say, "Yeah, you think it's going to save the world right now? Speak to me again in a few months and we'll see what you think then, or a few years," it sometimes takes years to realize that it's not a magic cure for everything.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Yes, it is helpful. I'm so glad that you brought connectedness up because you are the person who developed an entire connectedness scale. I want to bring that up because connectedness, I hear about that a lot.

I hear a lot about meaning-making when I'm talking to experts in psychedelics, and those sound very anecdotal, but you developed a way to actually measure. It's not just qualitative, but also, I think quantitative research around connectedness because it is so incredibly important, especially in psychedelic experiences. I would love if you told us a little bit about that.

### **Dr Rosalind Watts**

Thank you for that question, yes. The connectedness, in the first trial that I worked on, was the one where I was the volunteer on my maternity leave. I interviewed the participants about their experiences with psilocybin for depression. And they talked a lot about connectedness, which is where the connectedness measure came from, that research, and from their account. It was a small sample, but it was so powerful, this sense that in depression, they were very disconnected from themselves, the other people in the world around them, and the psilocybin experience to help them connect to themselves, others, and the world around them.

That three-factor model of connectedness seems so robust. I think it's not just people with depression who feel disconnected, it's all of us in the Western culture. The connectedness measure came from the themes of that research. Then it was validated by a team at Imperial who

looked at large data sets and did a validation study to make sure that the measure was a reliable and valid measure. Essentially, we came up with this from factor analysis, this three-factor model was established statistically, which is great.

### **[00:19:09] Dr Rosalind Watts**

We came up with these three subtypes of connectedness. The connectedness to self is really about connectedness to emotion. The idea of connecting to self, we might think, that's the last thing we need in our culture, more connecting to self. We don't need any more connection to the ego self, definitely not, or the identity self, but we do need more connection to our emotions. Because we live in a very, as Iain McGilchrist would talk about, a very left-brain culture, which is very rational, thing-based, and materialistic, and we have a specific measurable.

We have lost sight of the more embodied, abstract living world and way of being. We have all been taught, and raised in Western education to... It's all about how we think, how we can perform, and how we can compete. And the idea of a more relational web of life, and our embodied visceral selves has been lost. I think so much of our anguish and suffering comes down to the same thing, about the repression of emotions, because we don't have in our culture ways of expressing emotion. We don't have ways of releasing it together. We go around these heads on sticks, pretending to be okay, the world from the neck down is just lost.

Psychedelics are so amazing at helping people feel their bodies because psychedelics can for people who have never really been able to experience embodied visceral feelings, which most of us haven't really been trained to do or allowed to do, we've repressed them, numbed them, shut them down. Our culture has this incredible bounty of ways to numb and distract, and such a poverty of ways to feel. Psychedelics can really... People often say, "I feel this really intense feeling in my left leg or my throat," or they'll feel these... The things they feel, they'll feel it in their bodies.

The connection in the connectedness scale is really about being able to experience embodied emotions, senses, and body feelings. Then that comes about not just through psychedelic work, but through anything that helps us come out of our mind and into our body, we start to wake up our frozen cells.

It can be really hard at first, it can be really challenging. That's why psychedelic therapy can be really destabilizing, because when you suddenly go from existing in the world of the mind and rationality to having these eruptions of feelings and bursting into tears on a Wednesday lunchtime, and waves of emotion that have been held down, we can feel very raw, and very sensitive.

We need a community around us to help us say, "No, it's okay, make space, go lie down, listen to some music, get those tears out, those tears that's the healing." And listening to the lessons of the body as well. It's not just crying the tears, but it's listening to the tears, and what they're trying to say. That's the connection to self, is this embodied visceral connection to self.

The connection to others is... it's not just about... It's about feeling welcome with others. It's about how we live in our minds, in terms of how other people see us, if that makes sense. What's our internal representation of how welcome we are amongst others? It's also about our actual relationships with not just friends, family, and loved ones, but also humanity everywhere and strangers. Our ability to connect with global humanity too.

**[00:23:19] Dr Rosalind Watts**

And then connection to the world is around connecting to nature, connecting to a spiritual principle, potentially connecting to a sense of universal love, and connecting to purpose, and a connection to a sense that everything is interconnected, which is obviously very... All of those principles are the hippie, slightly woo-woo ideas but in our research, we found that this idea of... We didn't know whether to call it, connection to world, or connection to universe, because it is this very much this expanding lens of connecting to everything.

I'm glad that we have the measure now, and I'm very grateful for those who validated it, because now we can use this measure with really some quite out there ideas in all research studies, where otherwise the universal love, spirituality, interconnectedness would probably not be approached, or asked about.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, it's fascinating. As you were talking, you said the P-word, which I want to come back to, which was purpose. I was thinking about this the other day, about the language that I hear people using around psychedelic experiences of connectedness and meaning-making.

What occurs to me is that those all feel very expansive, whereas I think when people hear purpose, it gets very capitalist and commercialist. Purpose is like, what value do you bring to a commercial? That's where people sometimes get sidelined, they're like, what's my purpose? How am I going to get rich?

Whereas connectedness and meaning-making, when you funnel those two things into purpose, it becomes so much bigger, expansive, more inclusive of all the ways that you show up, and are valued and seen by the people in your life, and how you contribute to the world. It's just a beautiful reframing for me.

**Dr Rosalind Watts**

Once the lens is there, it feels like quite a... The connectedness lens has some good practical value in all sorts of different fields. We've been looking at eco-anxiety recently, and how the framework of connectedness could be supportive for people suffering from eco-anxiety. But it's relevant for all sorts of different... It's relevant for everyone, we all need to reconnect.

**Meagen Gibson**

What do we know about how psychedelics exactly improve or impact our sense of connectedness? What is actually happening?

**Dr Rosalind Watts**

We don't have loads of quantitative research on it yet. We have more qualitative research, and case studies, and stories, and people's accounts. There is a little bit of quantitative research that does show that in the psilocybin for depression trial, the second one that we did the connectedness scale was used. Connectedness across all three domains did increase significantly after psilocybin.



### **[00:26:40] Dr Rosalind Watts**

Compared to a control group of people that had the same therapy, they didn't have psilocybin. Their connectedness scores went up a little bit, but not nearly as much, so there was a significant difference. This is interesting because both groups' depression scores went down not significantly differently.

Both of their depression scores, both groups went down, and there was not a significant difference between the groups. The connectedness score was significantly different, which is interesting. Also survey studies of people using psychedelics in retreat centers, this is quite a large sample. The connectedness scores went up across all three. That doesn't tell you much about why, but when you speak to people and they tell you about their experiences, it feels...

The only way I can really describe what they seem to be describing is with an image, which is that we really live in these small prison ego minds. It's like that, it's like a closed-in, existing in here. And then the connectedness to emotions, and then other people, and then the world, and then everything is like this ever-expanding lens. Our worlds just get bigger.

I guess, psychedelics are very good disruptors, they're very good at disrupting entrenched patterns. Our ways of seeing the world which we get very trapped in, and stuck in, can be opened up and our frame of reference gets bigger. I guess as well that psychedelics make us more open.

We know that the openness, the personality characteristic openness, which personality characteristics are meant to stay the same, they're meant to be unchanging. But we know the openness does increase through psychedelic use, or it can. I think it's also that opening up, and that allowing more in, having more empathy perhaps as well.

Often people in psychedelic experiences do... There is just that connection to emotion that's been put away, and that's sometimes a connection to fear, and shame, and anger, but also a connection to love. And so there's something... Connectiveness and love are overlapping and similar because to connect to things means to be in relationship, which means to not be separate from anymore.

There is this opening up of the heart to allow more in. We can be very forgiving after psychedelic experiences, and very much more able to let go of the rigid structures and the rigid stories that we held on to. So there's a softening that happens, not always, it has to be said, that they're not inherently benign psychedelics. They're amplifiers, and they very much amplify the container and the intentions of the setting. So they can also be used to do the absolute opposite.

But when they're used with the intention of healing and connection because that's so often what people want when they're suffering from whatever. All of us, we all thirst for more connection. When they're used with that in mind, they can soften us, and open us up in that way.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I'm glad that you mentioned that, it's not always, but that's with intention what we're going for. We do a lot of work at Conscious Life around trauma, and trauma healing, and things like that. One of the things that people talk about a lot is the seven Cs, of which I can't remember all of them right now, put myself the spot.

### **[00:30:30] Meagen Gibson**

A lot of them are connectedness, creativity, curiosity, the ability to find calm, and things like that. Those are all very, very much inaccessible to people who are suffering from trauma, and suffering from this closed-down system, which is all built-in self-safety. It's all a mechanism from which to protect ourselves.

But when you talk about openness, that's what makes my heart smile. It's like cultivating a possibility, and being able to touch those characteristics, being able to remember what it feels like to play, have curiosity, and feel connection.

It's like a spark that can ignite a fire. If I can make an analogy because those are the things when we reflect on our life that make our life matter, not how safe we were. We don't reflect upon, gosh, I felt really safe and never took a single risk in my whole life. But we spend so much energy doing that. But if we can say, gosh, I was so connected and curious, and I'm proud of the way I was able to play, and always look for new experiences, and things like that. It's not a small thing to reignite that openness, is it?

### **Dr Rosalind Watts**

So true. I think that maybe the safety that we need in order to be able to be playful and curious and not risk averse always, and holding ourselves away, is the relational safety. When we feel that we've got the relational safety, then we can co-regulate with others, then it's so much easier to take risks because we know that there's going to be support.

I think psychedelic therapy is one model where the relational safety is absolutely inbuilt. It's completely unethical to give anybody a psychedelic experience without a very high degree of relational trust. There's something about the intensity of the experiences they bring, where they bring with us, bring with them, the need for relational safety. You can't explore...

It's like the whole attachment thing, you need a safe base from which to explore. We need to create those cultural attachments to safe people. I think in this we can find, I hope that there... I think there will be a whole... There is a whole fabric of kind, wisdom, and care in our communities that we haven't even explored yet. Which I think often can come from older people, people who have maybe retired, worked for a long time, seen a lot. Not all older people will want to be there to support others.

But there's that generativity in the Erikson stages of development. Often there's a state of generativity, where older people want to support younger people. I think that when we're thinking about that relational safety, we need to help people who've had traumatic experiences in their lives, engage with psychedelic therapy safely, so that they can feel that safety. I don't think it necessarily comes from a one-off therapist, or a one-off shaman, because of the amount of abuse that we see.

### **[00:33:45] Dr Rosalind Watts**

And also this Western idea of it being one expert that has all the answers. I think that we need to find ways that our communities can find the safe pairs of hands, the safe people, to really provide that relational safety. Because I think when we've had experiences of trauma, we need such a high degree of safety to be able to go through, whether it's psychedelic therapy, or just to go through life right now.

I mean, life at the moment is incredibly challenging, and it's going to continue to be incredibly challenging with so many crises around us. So, relational safety is the thing that preoccupies me the most, and how we can find new ways to find that relational trust, so that people can go through psychedelics, and everything else that they need to go through right now.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Coming back to integration for a second, I wanted to touch on that as risk mitigation. Because one of the lenses and perspectives that I wanted to talk to people about psychedelics, was through addiction and alcohol abuse, substance use disorder, and things like that.

Because from one perspective, I can see why people are skeptical of like, wait a minute, someone who's suffering from addiction is then going to take psychedelics? How does that work? What is the risk of dependency on psychedelics? Also on the dependency for it to feel that connection? The difference between state chasing, and being able to take a different stage of development, perhaps, in your healing, as it were?

### **Dr Rosalind Watts**

Yeah, absolutely. Initially, I think when I first started working in psychedelics, I thought that psychedelics were going to be great for everything. Of course, they can have incredible outcomes with people with addiction, iboga and so many other ways of working can be so profoundly healing. And sometimes can break through a lifetime of trying rehab and trying everything, and then suddenly there's this reset experience and things can really shift.

But I have seen so much overuse of psychedelics themselves. But absolutely, rather than having ongoing medicine experiences, where you are becoming addicted to having the feeling of connectedness and having the feeling of catharsis. Even people who drink ayahuasca a lot, and they're going back because they want to purge and get it all out, and then they go back to the behaviors that they are going to need to purge later.

Having an integration community around you where everyone keeps an eye on everyone else, and it's like, well, how often are you going back? Actually, are you integrating each experience? Maybe don't have another deep dive until you've actually worked with the lessons from the last one, and made the changes to your daily life. That's the boring stuff.

### **Dr Rosalind Watts**

The psychedelic experience is the exciting, I mean, it's often terrifying, but it can be the big amplified thing. There can be a lot of heightened sense of, everything's going to change,

everything's going to be different, but it's the daily changes that really make a difference in the end.

### **[00:37:20] Dr Rosalind Watts**

I know so many people in the psychedelic field who have had so many big experiences, and I wonder whether the people around them would look at them and say, oh, this person is really living their life better as a result of these 10 years of frequent ceremonies. Or whether actually, the people around them would say, I think maybe they were nicer before. I think it's often the latter. So repeated, amplified big ecstatic experiences can be harmful without the checks and balances of a community around you.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. As we talk about integration and community, for people who are listening at home, how do you recommend people go? Because although most psychedelics are illegal, and can only be done in a therapeutic setting legally here in the States, and in different modalities abroad, there is a lot of recreational underground use. Regardless of the container, in the setting in which somebody had a psychedelic experience, if they're looking for an integration community, if they're looking for support, what are your recommendations?

### **Dr Rosalind Watts**

I guess most places now, many places now, have got some psychedelic society, or some psychedelic integration circle that they can join. They can also join their online integration circles that people can join, too. Of course, they could come to ACER, which is my full-time job now. It's a paid community, pay per month, and it's for a year.

It's working with the cycles of nature, working with a framework called the Twelve Trees, where every month we have a different theme that we work on. We work on... Every theme is... The theme is encapsulated by a different tree with a different theme. The community works on this with guided imagery meditations and music, music integration practices, breathwork, and sharing circles, and the whole community infrastructure for really taking a year to really go deep.

One of the key aspects of it is that when people have been through the 12 trees, they can stay on for a second cycle, and share some of the practices and tools with their local community for free, so offering this to other people. Also some of the people who go through, then can apply to become Sharing Circle facilitators within our team.

It's very much a model of deepening your practice as you go through, and integrating yourself, learning the lessons of the trees. All the lessons of the trees are about connectedness, so connecting to self, others, and nature is the first year. And then year two is outagration, which is about offering the gifts back. So integration and then outagration, and starting to help people create little hubs of connectedness in their local communities.

### **[00:40:39] Dr Rosalind Watts**

Not necessarily based on psychedelics, but just based on nature service, planting trees, sharing circles, and providing spaces where people can talk to each other in a real, open, and honest way, where they'll be supported. People can look at the [ACER integration](#) website. We're starting a new cycle soon, so people can apply, we're starting the next one in May, and then we'll take on another cohort in November.

Then beyond that, I guess, psychedelic integration one-on-one, that's something that we don't do, psychedelic one-on-one therapy sessions within [ACER](#). But if people are feeling that they've had a psychedelic session where they've felt some quite intense stuff come up, and they need to work one-to-one with a therapist, there are lots of directories now.

The Institute of Psychedelic Therapy in the UK is a directory of psychedelic integration therapists who work all over the place. [ICEERS](#) do a lot of work around integration too.

The other thing, of course, is that if people have had a difficult experience with... They have experienced harm, which is really quite common. There is an organization called [SHINE Collective](#) in the US, which works with survivors of harm, psychedelic harm.

There's Psyaware, an organization just starting in the UK for the same thing. There is the [Sacred Plant Alliance](#) and a few other organizations that are working with people that have been through really horrific experiences. I guess the main thing, I would say is to find the others.

If people have been through psychedelic clinical trials, there's an organization called [PsyPAN](#) global, which is getting the participants of psychedelic trials together after they've been through the trial, so they can make friends with each other, support each other.

Just find other people who have been through a similar experience, whether it's a trial or retreat, and find your community. It's in those conversations, and that holding each other accountable for making these changes. That having a buddy that can keep you accountable, having a monthly call saying, hey, remember your intentions? How's that going? I think it's that, it's that ongoing process of remembering the lessons, coming back to them, coming back to the connectedness. How am I living up to this every day? And knowing that integration is a lifelong thing.

In the ACER cycle, we have these twelve trees framework, but it's a spiral not a circle, because you go around it once, and then you go around it again, and the idea is that you keep going around it forever, and then you go backwards and forwards, and backwards and forwards, but that this is a life's work, ultimately.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely, it's beautiful. Thank you for giving us all those resources. You brought up something, the last point that I want to talk about before I let you go, which is that there are lots of different modalities to reach non-ordinary states of consciousness, and touch back into what a psychedelic experience can give you. Which is music, and meditation, and mindfulness practices, and breathwork, all of those things. If you could just talk for a minute about the importance of those, and the accessibility of those, and how they can help in people's integration.

**[00:44:05] Dr Rosalind Watts**

Yes so important, I'm so glad there is this interest in psychedelic therapy because so often that can open the door to these other practices, which can be more effective for some people, and more appropriate for many people.

Breathwork is incredible, holotropic breathwork was developed by Stan Grof when LSD was made illegal. I think for many people this approach is more suitable. You're in a bit more control, you do the breathing exercise, and there's loud music, and you have somebody sitting with you, and you can control how deep you go because at any point you can just breathe a little bit less deeply.

Rather than taking psilocybin capsules where you're just potentially... There's like a tsunami wave that you have to just surrender to. With holotropic breathwork, you can go deep, and then a bit more shallow, and then a bit more deep, and go in gently, which might mean that you retain the lessons better. In our culture, we often think that more is better, go for the big experience, I think the gentler experiences can be more retainable. People hold on to them more. So breathwork can be amazing.

I think also meditation, we all know that meditation is so good for us, but it can be really, really hard to develop a meditation practice, especially when we're really stressed and overwhelmed, it's hard to quiet the mind. But I really like dynamic meditation processes, where you move the body around a bit first.

And dancing, we've started doing dancing within ACER, regular dancing, not to look good, but just to shake off everything. I think anything that's really embodied and gets you moving, and then you can sit and breathe together. Anything that you do as a group, and anything with an embodied aspect, and anything with music.

The music helps you really tune into the emotion and access deep emotions that are otherwise difficult to access. The movement helps you come out of your mind, the default mode network, and into your body. Being with other people, whether it's online or in person, creates a feel that amplifies the experience, but also provides us with support, because we can talk to each other afterwards.

We know that wherever we go, breathwork can take people to some very intense places. People often relive their birth experiences, which can be really scary, or just take you to some very, very deep emotions, but knowing that you can speak to others afterward is everything.

The elements of music, community, doing it together, and embodiment, I think is a magic combination. Our culture needs these experiences because we have lost those traditions. That's springing up all over the place, dancing, breathwork, dynamic forms of meditation, and so many. Also just getting together for music. After COVID, a lot of us, we don't gather anymore, but revitalizing community gatherings for music, dancing, and singing together is also lovely.

**[00:47:11] Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. Ros, thank you very much, this has been wonderful, I want you to give everybody the URL for your organization one more time before I let you go.

**Dr Rosalind Watts**

Thank you, Meagen. Thank you for having me. So ACER Integration, it stands for accept, connect, embody, restore. It's a year-long community process, all online with breathwork, music meditations, sharing circles, and a lovely community of people. We have lots of therapists who do the process, but it's also open to anyone who's integrating either psychedelics, or just other ways of working, that wants to feel more connected to themselves, other people, and the world around them. It's based around nature, it's based around the twelve trees, and this idea of seasonal growth, the winters, and summers. You can look on the website, [ACER Integration](#), to learn more about it. We are accepting people now for the new cycle that's starting in May.

**Meagen Gibson**

Fantastic. Dr Rosalind Watts thank you so much for being with me today.

**Dr Rosalind Watts**

Thank you Meagen.