



Conscious Life presents

Navigating Non-Ordinary States of Consciousness

Guest: Trish Blain

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[00:00:05] Alexander Beiner

Hi, everybody. I'm here with Trish Blain. Trish is a positive impact entrepreneur, international facilitator, and expert in non-ordinary skills and states of consciousness. She's the founder of Non-Ordinary, a new paradigm approach and platform offering community and training for paradigm-shifters.

She's also developed a unique framework called the Four Forces, through 30 years of experimentation and research, which demystifies mystical experiences and may have implications for psychedelic research. Trish, welcome.

Trish Blain

Hi, Ali. It's great to be here with you.

Alexander Beiner

Trish, you and I speak quite a lot. We've been working together in different capacities for a number of years, and you were a huge help and quite instrumental in my own preparation for this really innovative, psychedelic clinical trial I was part of, the DMT Extended-State trial.

And the reason I wanted to work with you was around your understanding of the different states of consciousness that we experience as human beings and how to move between them. That was something that I certainly needed help with for that process. And I think generally, when people are having psychedelic experiences, that's pretty key. So maybe you could talk a little bit about that to start with. What is the... Why is it important to be able to move between different states of consciousness?

[00:01:37] Trish Blain

I think of it as consciousness agility. The ability to be able to change states, and also recognize what state you're in. I think we often think of non-ordinary ecstatic experiences as something that's random or super-special, but we actually have the ability to navigate and move between these states.

There's a huge range of states of consciousness. So if you think of it more as a full technicolor experience of all sorts of different kinds of states that you can be in, there's a lot more nuance and a lot more controls. I think of them as levers that you can adjust in a helicopter where you can navigate and really choose what kind of experience you're having.

Alexander Beiner

I'd love to dive into that metaphor a little bit more. The difference between navigating our conscious experience of different states as a helicopter or as a plane. Why a helicopter? What's the metaphor there?

Trish Blain

We often think of something as having a destination. I'm trying to get to a state of oneness, or I'm trying to get to a non-ordinary state where I can get some information or a state of healing for trauma, for example. It's great to be able to have that destination and be able to know, "Okay, here's how I can invoke this state."

But even within the context of that state, there's other ways. Like when you were doing your trial, we talked about being able to interact with the beings there, for example, and being able to ask questions or have more agency while you're having the experience. I think of this helicopter... I came up with a framework called the Four Forces, and it's got four... I think of them as levers.

They're primary states of consciousness, but they're also ways that we can control and experience and change and impact how we experience reality. I love the helicopter analogy because you need both hands and both feet to be able to pilot a helicopter. It gives us... There's a lot more agility, ability to move. A lot more choices in direction when you have a helicopter versus the plane is from point A to point B.

If we start to think of it that way, it's not linear. It's a different shift. It's a paradigm shift to think of this more as a non-linear full experience of possibilities versus "I'm trying to get from point A to point B."

Alexander Beiner

One of the things I've found quite useful about your Four Forces model, which I'd love you to go into in a moment, is the distinction it makes between the different types of mystical experiences we can have. In a lot of psychedelic research, there's a focus on this thing called "the mystical experience", which is this sense of deep oneness with the universe.

But actually, when you dive into it, people report very, very, very diverse types of mystical experience. Could you talk a bit about how the Four Forces can help us make sense of that?

[00:04:49] Trish Blain

Yeah. Originally, I developed the Four Forces based on asking the question, "How do we create a better world?" I had an environmental store at the time, and I was finding that there were... I thought, "Well, it's a no-brainer, right? We're creating a better world."

But then all these different people would come into my environmental store and have different opinions about things and different versions of things. I thought, "Oh, my gosh. How are we ever going to come up with a single vision that we can all agree on?"

Of course, now in the world, there's a whole lot of polarity and fragmentation about what that would look like for us to have a better world. So I started to explore, what are the common denominators? What are the things that we can all agree on and say yes to.

And I found there were these four core desires, but they were so much more than desires. I found that they were actually... We wanted these things for our connection. We all want to love and be loved and belong. But at the same time, we also want to be unique and express ourselves and be an individual. So there's expression, is what I call that force.

And then the third is purpose. We want to have meaning. We want to have significance. We want to make sense of the world. And the fourth was the idea of growth, of tomorrow being better than today. Progress, newness, novelty.

So when I started to explore those, at the same time, I was having all of these spontaneous, what I would call ecstatic and non-ordinary experiences, just in a variety of different contexts. I had one standing in line at Starbucks. I noticed I had this very strong spiritual practice and also was having these experiences, and I thought... I started to notice that they were related.

As much as we want these four desires, I also found we don't know how to get them. As I cultivated those skills, ecstatic states started happening more. So I started to realize, "Oh, these are the levers. These are the things that give us access to these various states of consciousness."

What I found was a lot of people... Like you were just naming, they lean in to the idea of oneness and boundarylessness as the primary. The goal, to be in that state of oneness. But I found that was just one of four possible kinds of alternative states.

Even though there's the extremes of each of these four, there's lots of variations and lots of combinations of them. I see oneness as a connection, an ecstatic state, that if you go into just pure experiencing and there's no self. All self drops away. I see that as a deep state of consciousness or connection.

However, you can also have an experience where you are Godself. Where you are creator of the universe, and that's a very different feeling to it, but it's charged and it's equally non-ordinary, and it's equally valuable. It gives you a whole different perspective on life and the universe. I see that as an expression, ecstatic or a deep state or non-ordinary state, whatever words you want to put on it. There's lots of even terms we use for these things.

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Then purpose. I see it as about relationship purposes. How do we make sense and put things together? Order and meaning. Something like a psychedelic experience, I find that mushrooms are very related to this experience of interconnectedness, where you feel in relationship with everything in life and the web of life and the geometry of life and patterns. That would be... Have more of a purpose flavor to it. Which, again, is very different than just oneness, where there's no pattern, there's just beingness.

I think Eckhart Tolle talked about sitting on a park bench for two years just in bliss. There's just this sense of being, versus pattern and geometry. Then that brings us to the fourth experiential state, too, that I would say...

The ecstatic state of growth. People talk about kundalini awakenings. I had one in my mid-20s, and that's got a whole different flavor to it. It's got this sense of fire and pleasure and movement up the spine and very different, again, than sitting in a state of oneness. It's got a charge on it. I know when it happened to me, there was this feeling of such intense pleasure moving through every cell of my body.

But at the same time, it was so pleasurable. It was painful. It was so intense. It was like this feeling of fire. So very different experiences. And often people will have some combination of these. It's not like they're all by themselves. We have some variation, or you can even have an experience where one shifts into another and have it be much more fluid combination.

Alexander Beiner

Absolutely. I think it's just such an important thing to bring into the world of psychedelic science. I, in fact, wrote an essay last year where I quoted a lot of your work called *The Ego Doesn't Die*, which is a very provocative title, but around this idea of ego death and ego dissolution.

And part of what I was arguing is, using your model and then looking at the actual reports of people's mystical experiences. There's a few organizations who have collated reports of mystical experiences for the last few hundred years throughout history. And what you notice is exactly what you're saying.

It's not that everyone's going, "My mystical experience was I dissolved and became one with everything." You have, in fact, in many of them, all Four Forces at different moments. "First, I was one with everything, and then I had the booming voice of God telling me I had to become a sailor. And then I knew that's what I had to do. And this is my true expression of who I am. And then I felt this Kundalini..."

There was one, actually, in particular an example I found where it was fascinating because you could just track this person's experience where he had all of these different moments.

And so the reason I think it's so important to bring in is that people are having these varied experiences in psychedelic trials, in retreats, in their own explorations. And still in the psychedelic world, there is this idea that only connection, mystical experiences are "the mystical experience."

I'm very eager to broaden that out. One of the things I'm curious about is this idea that you talk about moving between these states, that we're experiencing them in day-to-day life as well. Could you talk about that a bit? How do we actually access perhaps less intense versions of these states, but as we're going through life?

[00:11:11] Trish Blain

I think it's really helpful. A couple of points here. One is it's really helpful to have a mental structure in which to understand what's happening. So one of the things that I was so confused by on my journey was that I was having these sexual relationship experiences where the other person and I would have this... Break open into this more ecstatic state.

And then the next day, the other person wouldn't remember what happened. They had total amnesia of the experience. I was like, "What the heck is happening?" And that happened a few times. And what I found was by having a... The reason that was happening was because there wasn't a mental... It was a state-based experience that didn't have any mental framework in which to put it.

What I found is by having a map of what is possible, that actually helps to invoke and to be able to navigate between the states because you have an understanding and there's a map that you can use.

Also, I found that when you're cultivating the different states, it's actually helpful. For example, oneness, I found when you go into that state of boundarylessness, it actually can be helpful for you to have a stronger sense of self in the midst of that, actually.

Even though you have the lever of being able to drop the sense of self and be in that state, I found that if you don't have a strong sense of self, or I call it the anchor point, then it can feel like you're going to die and you lose your breath or you feel like you're going to dissolve.

It can be quite terrifying, actually. We think of these states as really positive, but they actually can be quite jarring and scary also if you're not prepared for some of these experiences. Being able to identify where you are, and how you're moving.

The other thing is, I think we need to demystify it from the point of view of, these are skills that you can learn. For example, being able to drop your sense of self sounds very mystical.

But if you actually sit and just focus on the edges of you dissolving, for example, or... I call it opening your field and just allowing yourself to feel everything around you, that can start to invoke that state. There's skills that you can learn to be able to navigate. I don't see them as just...

I think psychedelics are super-important. I'm pro-using them. I've worked with you with them. But I also think we need to demystify it and that it's not just about the medicines, it's actually the medicines that inform what's possible. They're giving us access points, but we can actually then... I think of it, too, as giving us the address, or giving us the experiential teleportation to that.

But then we can visit now that we have that address. There's a lot of skills that you can cultivate depending on which state you're wanting to evoke.

[00:14:48] Alexander Beiner

Yeah, and it brings to mind a conversation that I had for this conference with Rick Strassman, the DMT researcher, where he said... Because DMT is obviously found in plants around the world, and we can ingest it, but it's also made by mammals. So we all are walking around with DMT in our bodies. And he was talking about, "Well, what's it for? Why do we make DMT?"

And he was hypothesizing that, well, if psychedelics are non-specific amplifiers in that they amplify our experience, maybe psychedelics are really just what he calls super-placebos. They're just super-placebos. And so we're walking around with DMT, and who knows what else in our bodies.

Could DMT be playing this super-placebo role of helping us access different states potentially even? I think that's quite an interesting hypothesis, right? Yeah, it ties in.

Trish Blain

No, I love that. I think what's also really helpful is to think of being able to layer and expand your states, too. So knowing which one to use. Which technique or skill or medicine do you want to use to get what effect? There's that placebo. There's a whole range of ways that we can start to access.

So things like dancing and movement can evoke more of that life-force and aliveness. But then if you add in and say, "Okay, I'm going to dissolve my edges, and while I'm doing that..." Now you can evoke and add in another layer. I love the idea that DMT, we're primed for it. This is part of our existence. It's coded in us to be able to have these experiences and access these states. We were built for it.

Alexander Beiner

Yes, Yeah. It is absolutely fascinating that we are full of DMT. What that also brings to mind for me is... The medical model of psychedelic therapy, where someone comes into a room and they lie down on a bed, often with an eye-mask on and headphones, and then they have two therapists sitting on either side.

That's the kind of, I'd say, stereotypical version of it. There's slight variations, but pretty much that's it. It really only selects for particular types of state that people can go into in some ways. Because let's say, for example, someone goes, "I'm just feeling this huge rush of energy, and I need to be outside on the grass, screaming at the sky and moving and dancing."

Trish Blain

Right.

Alexander Beiner

Now, the clinicians. Bless them. They would probably do their very best to make that possible. But most of the time, it's quite difficult to do that. So there's all these questions that it brings up about the different ways and practices to combine with psychedelics to actually allow people to have the full range of states they could experience.

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And the other thing that brought up for me that I wanted to ask you about was the different practices that go with these states, because you mentioned it a little bit. So Tantra, movement is not quite the same as sitting quietly meditating. So can you talk a little bit about how the Four Forces map onto different practices that we might do?

Trish Blain

Yeah. I think one of the skills of consciousness agility, I just want to name. When you're saying, for example, sitting in a room with two therapists, but you're wanting to move. One of the biggest skills that we can have with all of these states is the agility piece, where we can let it lead us. Let it lead us to what wants to happen, versus trying to control the experience.

It knows, and I think this speaks to a bigger piece here, which is at the core foundational level is that we're in relationship with life and all these beings, and we are a part of it. We're not separate. I think when we get into that Western mindset, sometimes we can be... Not sometimes. A lot of times we think of it much more linear and mechanicalistic. That's not the right word. Mechanic. Something like that word. Mechanical.

There's something about that that tends to control an experience that wants to bring us somewhere. It's why intention and setting is also so important because it's wanting to lead us somewhere, and we can then have agency and relationship with that experience to impact it. But at the core, even if we have these skills of agility, I still consciously choose to let the state bring me where it wants to bring me.

Then we can use it to evoke... Like if I'm feeling really down and depressed, I found that instead of... Or if somebody is having no energy and just feeling apathy and has no desire, sitting and meditating is still a great tool. But it's not going to bring alive, life-force and desire.

It's not going to shift you out of a state of depression or hopelessness. You need actually aliveness. You need growth. You need the movement in your body. So I see growth and this life-force as the animating force of our uniqueness. You can't feel desire if you don't have life-force moving.

Here's an example like doing Wim Hof breaths or Kundalini fire breaths or dancing or putting on music and just moving or going for a run. And what gets you charged up? There's even the practice of... I call it conscious ranting, where it's like, just let yourself say all the things that you hate about something or that you're fed up with.

That's got an aliveness to it that will actually activate the body rather than being, say, in a depressed state or in a down state. But say you want to be able to really calm your nervous system and relax and feel oneness and feel connected because you're feeling isolated and lonely, then going into...

Dropping in and meditating, being in a state of mindfulness, bringing yourself to your breath where you're more watching your breath versus using a charged breath. For example, that'll bring you

more into that state of peace and oneness. Allow yourself to dissolve and just have your boundaries drop away.

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Also, the senses in general for that being when you bring your attention, mindfulness, this is why I see it as a connection skill or connection practice. When you bring your attention to your senses and bring your awareness to just what you're experiencing and let everything else drop away, that brings you into that connection state.

And I think of expression more as perspective, where you can shift perspective. So one of the exercises you can play with is being able to choose to see the world from your Godself or from your soul self. I'll do a really simple exercise with people where I'll say, "Now share a story, a one-minute story about your childhood."

And so people share the story, and then I say, "Okay, now share it from the perspective of your little boy or little girl". And you're going to have a very different experience of that story and how they say it. Or "now switch and say that same story from your elder self, your soul self, your wise self, your Godself."

Those are gonna give you different experiences of that story. Well, that's the same thing. We can shift our perspective and get a different experience of what's happening in the moment, if we shift that... It's often even called reframing or shifting out of, say, powerlessness to, "Okay, I'm powerful, and so are you. What do we want to create?"

That would be even a perspective shift to shift out of powerlessness, for example. Then the fourth of purpose, I see that as relational. It's like taking the individual points of consciousness and now putting them together to create something more. Seeing... Being able to identify patterns is an important piece of that, systems thinking, the whole...

But some of the skills that you can do actually have more structure to them. Things like creating habits, having rituals. Rituals would be... Why rituals work is because you're invoking a field of something that's been repeated and developed its own energy, its own sense, its own being, and that helps you to get into that state.

So cultivating rituals will help you with that state. Also, things like rhythm. Something that has a regular... Rather than floaty music, having something that has a rhythm will start to help you get into those states. So those are just some... I mean, there's lots of ways you can cultivate those.

And I also want to mention that these states are also strategies we have. We tend to like one or two of them a lot more than the others, and then we cultivate them as our everyday state. And we don't realize that. We think this is normal, but there's a lot of variety. We tend to gravitate.

Somebody who is a doer and always wants to focus on getting stuff done is gravitating more to a growth... Growth states, versus somebody who's like, "I just want peace and calm and I want harmony in my environment." There's a preference happening. I think it's really important, too, to challenge ourselves to have full access to all of them rather than just the ones that we are preferring.

[00:24:34] Alexander Beiner

Absolutely. There's so much that I want to pick up on. Something that's just coming to me as you're talking is... A few guests have talked about perspectivism, which is the worldview that many indigenous cultures who use psychedelics hold, which is that the way to know something is to become it. So the shaman becomes a bird.

But whereas in the West, we're like, "No, watch the bird for a long time and see what it does and write about it." We have different models. But what strikes me about what you're talking about is, it is really all based on what you call "consciousness agility."

There's this flexibility, this agility moving between different ways of seeing and ways of seeing, feels very important because it also takes us right back to where this all began with psychedelics is in those cultures that knew how to do that.

The example you gave about... For example, someone who's depressed. The actual clinical advice, at least here in the UK, very often is... I think from a CBT model, cognitive behavior therapy is like, "Get up and go and do something. Go outside, even if you achieve something small, like going to your mailbox and putting something... Check it or do these things. And that is going to start to help you feel better."

It might not be the only thing, but I find it very interesting that there is somewhat of an understanding, even in the Western clinical model of that. But they don't go quite far enough often. They don't say, "Hey, you know what? Breathe, move your body, dance."

It would be very rare that you would find a doctor to say, "You need to scream at the heavens", or "You need to be in a beautiful samadhi bliss state because you're just so stressed out right now." And it makes me think about the future of psychedelic medicine.

About people directing future patients, clients, towards experiences that will give them what they're looking for, like you mentioned. Mushrooms, perhaps for purpose and direction in life, and then 5-MeO-DMT, perhaps for a deep sense of connection.

And of course, what I wanted to ask you about next was that these experiences for many people in the world aren't drug-induced. They just happen, right? There's a proportion of the population... It's fairly sizable, who at some point or often have these spontaneous experiences.

It'd be interesting to hear just a bit about that and what you've learned from that, from just the fact that we can have these experiences without the drugs.

Trish Blain

Yeah. I would say that in order to create the world that we all are longing for, right now, there's a lot of focus on everything that's going crazy in the world a bit. There's a lot of chaos. There's a lot of uncertainty as to what's going to happen.

I see this ability to be able to navigate states as primary to us being able to build a different kind of world. The world that really aligns with what we're deeply wanting and desiring, including... A lot of

the people on this call have gone to the trauma and healing summits from Conscious Life. There's an emotional agility in being able to navigate your nervous system.

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There's a lot of cultures, like you were naming that this is built in. But we think of it as mystical, or these ancient cultures have these abilities that have been lost. But it's really even knowing that that's a possibility and then bringing your attention to it and practicing and learning how to do it.

It is a skill that can be cultivated. Even though they're happening... I had a lot of spontaneous ones happen, but then I got really super-curious as to, "Well, how did that happen? Why did that happen? How can I make that happen or choose to make that happen?"

Even that shift of perspective, you were just naming, of being able to be the bird. People often think, "Well, I don't know how to do that."

But I'm like, "Also, have you ever tried?"

We're often like, "Well, that's crazy."

I'm like, "Well, try it."

"Well, what do you mean? I don't know how to do it."

"Well, try it. Put yourself into the bird."

I think there needs to be a cultivation of experimentation. That how it works for you is going to be different than how it works for me also. But you can figure out how to do it.

But you have to try. You have to actually play with it and experience it and maybe feel a little silly while you're trying to be the bird. In our Western world, it's like, "That's crazy."

But I had a spontaneous experience walking down the streets of New York City, where I was suddenly every person at the same time. Like multi-point consciousness, where... It was the feeling, too... Or I've had another similar experience where I was... The idea of a flock, where I was flock consciousness, but then every bird in the flock.

There's all these different... We don't even realize that there's these different levers that we can play with. Until we actually bring our attention to it and try it, it's going to be random. I would say, if you're hearing about some of these incredible and wonderful things that other cultures have done, go ahead and try it even before...

You don't even have to study it so much as like, "Oh, how would I do that? Let me try an experiment. How would I be a bird right now?" It's amazing what can happen when you do that, when suddenly it's not as complicated, I think, as we make it.

[00:30:22] Alexander Beiner

I love that idea. I think children instinctively know that. It's not far-fetched for a six-year-old to be like, "I can imagine what it's like being a bird". And get into that mindset, but we lose it over time. So the last thing I wanted to ask you about is, you've been involved very deeply in lots of different personal growth and spiritual worlds for a long time.

You're aware of, and we've worked together in the psychedelic world. But I'm very interested in your perspective as someone coming into the psychedelic world and observing it from perhaps a more neutral perspective than me, for example, who's been in it for so long.

Considering all your work, what do you think are some of the practices or approaches that might be worth integrating into the psychedelic world, whether that's clinically or in retreat centers or whatever it might be?

Trish Blain

Yeah, great question. I want to make one point for what you were saying about the kid just a moment ago, about these states. And it feels related to what the practices are that we want to bring in, too, which is... We often think of imagination as something we're trying to get rid of in the process of having non-ordinary experiences.

I actually see imagination as the vehicle of these states of consciousness. If you're imagining yourself as a bird, imagining is actually powerful... It's the vehicle that all of these non-ordinary states come in. To not dismiss the imaginal. To not dismiss imagination, but rather use it and say, "Okay, if I'm imagining this..." To lean into that and be like, "Well, what if this is real? What does that mean?" And really follow that.

Having said that... I think some of the practices, there's a lot of analyzing and analytics around, "Did it do this or this?" or "Did it get the goal?", or "Did it achieve what we wanted it?" I think it also speaks to what we were talking about earlier, that being able to follow what wants to happen in that session, to not be attached to a particular outcome.

We don't know what the route is that's going to get us... The route, meaning the path. We don't know what the path is going to be to get to the root of what's going on or to even break open. We think of it often as healing as something that I'm trying to repair, versus healing being revealing something that's even greater than we could have imagined. Or healing being the way of getting what we want that the trauma just showed us that we weren't able to get. Or the way that we don't want to get that thing.

If we reframe it as everything that's coming up. Everything that's being worked with, every trauma, every... What we label as negative emotions. If we start to really see those as, "Oh, it's information. It's telling me something. Let me invite it in and work with it."

I think there's... I haven't personally done any clinical work with psychedelics, either... I'm not a therapist, so I wouldn't do it because I'm not a therapist, but also even as a client in those conditions. But I think there's a lot of value there. It's not about throwing the baby out with the bathwater, but then being able to be more agile. Being able to be more flexible. Being able to

follow what wants to happen. Creating settings that maybe do allow for more movement or more variety of experience.

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Not being... Framing the whole thing even as more of an exploration of what's possible rather than even the frame of healing sometimes can be limited. It's like opening it up and allowing that emergence more... Seems to me from just what I've heard in talking to my clients and your description of the world, too.

That's really where I think the best possibility is to break it open a bit. Western thinking is we want to limit it, we want to control it so that we can get a certain outcome. But then you're limiting yourself to just that outcome. How do we set these things up in a way that allows for more emergence? Would be the question, the inquiry that I would be asking.

Alexander Beiner

Lovely. Yeah, that feels like a really nice question to end on and a lovely open-ended question, which is a very psychedelic-type question, in my view. Nice and open-ended and twisty. Trish, thank you so much. This has been wonderful.

Trish Blain

Yeah, thank you so much. Always a pleasure.