



Integration using the brain body connection

Guest: Anat Baniel

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[00:00:10] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of the Trauma Super Conference. Today I'm speaking with Anat Baniel, creator of Anat Baniel Method NeuroMovement, and the best selling author of two books, *Move Into Life* and *Kids Beyond Limits*.

Her work is supported by leading neuroscientists and is the subject of the documentary, *A Life Unbound*. World renowned in the field of special needs, she and the nearly 1000 practitioners that she has trained, have used NeuroMovement to help adults and children heal from physical, emotional and mental trauma.

Thank you so much for joining us, Anat.

Anat Baniel

I'm pleased to be here with you, Meagen.

Meagen Gibson

So I would love it if you could start by telling me what got you interested in working with people who've experienced trauma?

Anat Baniel

Actually, I didn't conceptualize it as being interested in people that have had experience with trauma. First of all, I was in grad school. I had a background in studying statistics and psychology and went to become a psychotherapist, clinical psychology in grad school. So I was interested in people who had emotional issues. But I didn't have the concept of trauma in my mind, basically.

And then after the 73 war in Israel I realized then that's when I got trauma in the sense of a whole population is in trauma and the neglect of attending to the trauma by the leaders. I mean, actually, because I served in the army but then I became a psychologist and worked as a psychologist for the Israeli Army. So that was very clear to me then, but it wasn't the concept. And what I wanted to do is work with people through movement and through sensation, because the training in psychology is lots and lots of words, and I was a dancer also.

[00:02:12] Meagen Gibson

Lots of thinking.

Anat Baniel

Yeah. And I wanted the immediacy of the sensation and the movement, and I was also always interested in the brain. I can't tell you where I got to that. And it was long before people talked of the brain, about the brain or brain plasticity.

Initially, I worked primarily with dancers, musicians, and high performers because that was my world. And then after a few years, the children with special needs came into my life. And that's when I got a distinction of trauma, both the trauma of whatever happened to them, like traumatic birth or accidents or mostly that kind of trauma, even though some issues are genetic disorders or autism that are not any specific trauma that we are aware of.

But then I started seeing that the parents are traumatized. And I realized that there's nothing addressing that. And then I looked at the kind of interventions that were done with people. In the beginning I was just like anybody who came to me I worked with them because I was fascinated with the work, and I knew the brain matters and I knew how to use movement and all that stuff.

So stroke survivors, mega trauma, and because I have a background in psychology I realized it's not just the loss of the movement of the arm or the delivery to speak. It's like today's Monday, and Tuesday you're not the person you were on Monday. Your life is different in a very, very dramatic way. And then I started becoming more aware of how the interventions went. And that's when trauma became a real distinction for me, because I realized that many of the interventions are trauma causing in their own right. So people are trying to help people with the best of intentions, but they're unaware that the intervention causes trauma.

And then I read *Trauma and Recovery*, the book, *Trauma and Recovery*. Have you ever read it? That was like the classic beginning of really putting sexual traumatization and war traumatization, it's just quite incredible. I have the good fortune to do a little bit of studying with her. And then it just kept evolving. And it wasn't until other people started talking about trauma that I had a path to put my ideas about trauma into. But my main path has always been the possibilities and opportunities through positive driving interaction with the human brain.

And obviously, when we want to recover from the trauma, we're really having to befriend the brain. So that's my story.

Meagen Gibson

I'm so glad I asked. It's a fascinating story.

And you mentioned very quickly the neuroplasticity of the brain and so I would love it if you talked a little bit more about what your method is and then how it integrates and understands the neuroplasticity of the brain and takes advantage of that. And what we know about that now.

Anat Baniel

Okay. And feel free to ask me questions along the way, because I can just go, as I told you.

[00:05:44]

It will serve us to talk, somewhere along the line, at how we recover from trauma, how trauma is inflicted but then the process of recovery from trauma. And there's some magnificent people doing magnificent work in this field. So my thought was that if we want to know how trauma happens, we need to know how successful growth and development happens. Because trauma smacks it down at any level of life. It can be in utero, it can be shortly after birth, childhood, adulthood, anywhere along the line, we can smack the process basically, we can traumatize the system.

And it's really important to understand, first of all, the brain manages and organizes movement and thought and feelings and all that stuff. And the baby from conception on, it's a massive process of differentiation and integration. The differentiation of the cells, the separation to three layers of cells, the formation of the nervous system, the formation of the inner organs, everything, the growth of the bones. It's a massive, massive, massive, massive process of differentiation, that then integrates into forms that then can function.

And the functionality is very independent on the brain. The brain does that process probably more than any other individual organ and continues doing it, or potentially can continue doing it, throughout life, in the intensity that, I believe it can be pretty close to the initial intensity of childhood.

So the idea is that we learn to... We are born with a lot of processes that are working, the vegetative nervous system and all that stuff. But anything that we do as adults that associates with the voluntary system, is formed. So it starts from not being there, and then there is, whatever. And it gets to the point that it's there. It gets to the point that the child can say, Mama. It gets to the point that you can move your head like that and not lose balance.

Everything, it's amazing, everything eventually is learned. And the learning requires a massive differentiation and support of that process. For this process to be successful, because we're going to be talking about trauma, the system has to have sufficient safety, both in reality, in the experience of itself. In my understanding, the primary factor, or mechanism that drives this process of growth, is movement and the sensation that's associated with movement. In the formation of the sense of self, the formation of perception of space, the me versus not me, the identification, creating visual constancy, that means that you look at the objects and as they get further or closer, they don't change in size. That means that in your world, you impose order, the brain imposes order on itself and on the outside world. And if you take away movement the process is gone. I mean, if you really take away movement, we're dead.

Meagen Gibson

That's the definition of stillness.

Anat Baniel

Well, I don't know about stillness because when we sit still and meditate, we still have minute little movements going on, adjusting for balance. We're talking of quadrillion connections in the brain. It's huge. It's a massive system. It's so miraculous how it works. And it really is built to learn and to optimize itself. It's really built to do good. So if we give it the conditions to do well, it does better and better.

Just throwing it in, trauma impacts everything, and it impacts the brain, it literally impacts the structure of the brain. Our brain responds to our experiences all the time. It's not like, oh, if I go to

class, my brain will wake up. Most of those changes and connections don't go anywhere to make anything new or different, necessarily. But it can do that. So the idea is, how can we drive the system intentionally to do the kind of successful processes that healthy children do to begin with? Because we have to heal. And the healing, wherever there is injury, from my understanding, it's always a movement forward. Knowing what happened to oneself is extremely important, creating a story that makes sense, validating it. And, you know that is incredibly important in the process.

[00:11:35]

And what I bring in is the formation of the new, the creation of the new. There is somewhere else for you or for me or for the person, literally new possibilities, new ways of feeling, new ways of sensing, not a different sensory system, but new experiences of strength, of power. I mean, I can say a brief story. There was a child that, actually a known practitioner, but anyway, he had an assistant working for him and she had a boy and he was about 6 years old and his grandmother died. And he was very close to grandmother. It was very hard, I wouldn't even say traumatizing, this depends on how the family handled it, but it was definitely very hard and very challenging.

And his teacher in school, and he was in first grade, wasn't very comfortable with a crying child and a sad child, so at a certain point she told him that it's time to stop crying and he needs to be a big boy and whatever. And the child just caved in, also posturally. Anyway, I was asked to see him, and I saw the boy, the sweetest little thing, delicate. He wasn't like a macho little boy, he was a delicate boy. And the way he stood, and that was probably there before the grandmother died, did not provide him with much power. And I don't mean just psychological, I mean literally the sense, the feeling of power.

Meagen Gibson

Physicality of space in the world.

Anat Baniel

And it's very specific but I'm not going into detail about that because that's not what we're talking about.

And so I looked at the boy and I said to the mother, the first thing you do is you change him into another class because this teacher is traumatizing for your son. She's not a bad woman, but he's not the one that she should learn over his back. I said, just go and gently move into another class, find a good teacher, find one that's more loving and accepting and embracing. And she did that, actually.

And then I started working with the boy. And the way I worked to get to break and to discover ways to move and stand and organize himself dynamically so he's powerful. And the whole trajectory of this boy's life changed.

So it's always the movement for the sense of potency and power and freedom that comes from the process of a positive brain change, positive neuroplasticity. That's how I encapsulate my work in the context of trauma.

Meagen Gibson

And in the example that you gave, what I'm hearing, and please correct me if I'm wrong or making assumptions, but the grandmother, a tight, close knit relationship, his relationship with that teacher might have been fine until one of his safe people in his life that gave him security and strength, was

missing. And then that plus having an abrasive or not so nurturing teacher would make you collapse, like your safe person, somebody that has nurtured you has gone, your own personal way that you move in the world is just a little bit more sensitive or a little bit more meeker, maybe, if we're struggling for words to describe that type of personality in the world.

[00:15:30]

But by changing what you can about the situation, first, that new teacher establishes, here is a safe, nurturing person. We're going to change your environment to be more safe and nurturing so that your nervous system can feel at home in this place. And then we're going to teach you how to actually embody space and how to move in a way and to carry yourself in a way and to feel the world around you in a way that is empowering both literally and figuratively as you're thinking about it. I'm going to take up space, and I'm going to have my feet on the ground, and I'm going to stand with my head held tall. I don't know what your instructions were to him specifically, I'd love it if you walk me through them. But is that what I'm hearing from you?

Anat Baniel

You're definitely hearing.... I agree with you. There are a couple of answers that I want to... One is, I'll call it layering. Trauma can be like one traumatic event, one massive thing that happens. Or trauma can be layered. They can be a host of circumstances that together make it so the system basically can't handle the excessive stress. And the recovery is also multidimensional, multidirectional and layered. And there are some things that we need, it's absolutely, I believe, true across the board. The loss of a sense of safety, fundamental sense of safety, is an element, an important element. The loss of a sense of power and control is very important. And another thing is the loss of connection or connectivity with the self, and the other is a result or is due to the circumstances.

So I'll say two things here. The boy was suffering, the mother was very loving, there was no question. Sometimes it's also a question of skill. But let's just talk about the classroom, so I don't have to make it too complex. I'm sure you know that a huge part of trauma, or a trauma on top of a trauma or part of the layering, when the person that was traumatized is either not seeing their horror, let's just call it that, or invalidated or ridiculed or turning them into the enemy because they endanger the traumatizer, so making you crazy or a liar. But even if people are not doing anything actively negative or malevolent, maybe the most important elements in our life is to be seen. But seen, not just with the eyes, seen with the heart, seen with the feeling, seen with the hearing, being validated.

And over the years, and you asked me about that before so I'll say a few words about it when it's time, one of the conclusions I arrived at, over many years of work, and over work with children anywhere from age 5 days to whatever we call a child, and then with adults all the way to their 90s, but mostly I got it with the kids. Because the kids come with the parents and they come with the doctors that say this, and the prognosis and the diagnosis, and they're little and they have to grow or they're not going to make it. They have to develop. And I saw how a child is born and then at some point between 0 to 5, let's say, or 7 usually, unless later on it's an accident or something, the whole social system, the loving social system all wants to fix the child.

So all of a sudden, and I'm going to say a pretty kind of crude, in a crude way, the child has a job. The job is to get well and to satisfy the understandable needs and desires on behalf of the child, for the child to do well. And in the effort to fix the child so many not great things can be done. Because the moment we want to fix another, if I want to fix you, I disconnect from you. I believe these are two mutually... What's the word?

[00:20:53] Meagen Gibson

No, I think you were on the right track. Mutually exclusive. Yeah, once you're trying to fix someone, you're not seeing them.

Anat Baniel

Because in order to help someone get new options, new possibilities, for their brain to wake up and say, get all that richness of information with which it can invent the new inner context, I can now use my hands that I couldn't because I lost X amount of part of my brain. Or emotionally I now can relate to other people's, blah blah blah. It's new. It's not going back to what was there before. There is no past to go to and there's not really a future to go to now. So we can only work now and connect now.

And it took years because it's like, I knew it was not great, but it takes time to evolve and refine and make it accessible to myself and then later to other people.

So I can talk about nine, what I call essentials, and each one is a friend of the brain, I call it the brain vitamins. And what it really does, it creates conditions that wake up the brain and tend to get it to resume the process of self formation, growth and invention of itself.

So a traumatized person, what happens to our identity to the sense of self really gets crushed. And it's not our true self but it derails us from our normal path where we would have... It's like an exuberant child and something horrible happened and it's like a dark cloud, and also the path of life completely changes. So what can we do if we're not going to make somebody who can't do something, do something, or lose certain abilities or certain emotional universe? We can't make it be there. We can't force it to be there. So we have to provide conditions for it to form itself within the cells continuously.

Meagen Gibson

I definitely want you to name them. I want to pause just for a second to clarify because it's so interesting because you keep making a distinction between somebody who's had a trauma injury, of more of an emotional or an environmental factor, and then somebody who suffers something like a stroke or a brain trauma.

And the way that we treat those two kinds of different ends of the spectrum is so fascinating. Because somebody who's had a stroke or something, we give them the therapies and the tools and we train them how to retrain their brain. We're going to give them the therapies or the tools.

Anat Baniel

You make some assumptions, but a lot of the therapies and the rehabilitation, the classic way, the traditional ways of doing it, impacts the brain, but it doesn't give the brain a very good opportunity to reform the lost functions. That's number one. This is where I come in and I say, oh my God. I mean, the way the therapy is done, it puts a ceiling of how much people will actually get back or to a new level of functioning. By the way, this work is not just for traumatized people. I work with the schools in Canada, with the school district. It potentiates us, it potentiates our learning, it opens for many possibilities.

But another big mistake is to think, oh you had a stroke, then we have to fix your arm. The emotional trauma is phenomenal. The whole system is traumatized, but the brain always has to put order in the disorder and make sense out of the nonsense. That's basically the job of the brain. So when it loses a

part of itself, it swells, things die, cells die, and so on, it still has to put order in the disorder and make sense out of the nonsense. And it's also true for somebody who was traumatized.

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So the question is, what kind of order will it do? And what kind of sense will it make of the nonsense? So what are we providing to the person who needs to heal? Or what are we providing for that brain? And what is the timing that we do it? I've worked with a few strokes in adults, many in their 60s or whatever they were, one of them was 48 and a couple were in the early 60s, and they happened to have known about me before. So I got to start working with them within a couple, or 3 days of the trauma, the stroke. And all of them got 100% functioning back, 100% functioning back.

And it's like it's unheard of at this level of... Because I jumped in before the brain had time to rearrange itself around the existing present time situation. And I gave it input, created conditions where it had something to work with rather than settle into what it's experiencing. Because the brain learns its experience, it doesn't learn what we want it to learn, it learns what it is experiencing. And that's one of the things that is really understood by people like Peter Levine or the wonderful people that we know are working on trauma. And it's really pretty absent of real understanding in the medical and rehabilitation work, and education or schools and stuff like that, it's not really understood.

We need to intentionally step in as quickly as we can and then provide the conditions that really support the brain to rebuild itself.

Meagen Gibson

As it's making sense in new ways of what's going on.

Anat Baniel

Yeah. A rape victim. We all know that people get raped but to go through it, it's like the hour before, the minute after it's like, how do you put yourself together again? And you will put yourself together again, but the question is how? And that's where we talk about trauma and recovery from trauma. That's where we have magnificent opportunities because most people get traumatized, it just seems to be life.

Meagen Gibson

All right. So I do want to hear the nine essentials for positive brain changes. Give it to me.

Anat Baniel

Okay. So just remember, my work is in the context of movement. I call it movement is the language of the brain, and we can use it to communicate with the brain in really profitable ways. And I just want to make an umbrella statement that all of the essentials are supported and get more and more supported by current neuroscience research. In the application I go to those principles, not from doing work in neuroscience, but I extracted it from observing what I did and how it works.

So I said, what about what I do works? And I knew it's the brain so I extracted the essentials from my observations and awareness of what I'm doing and the outcomes. And then I went to look if the neuroscientists have already realized it, and it was started about 20 years ago, and that's when all this magnificent research started coming. So it was so wonderful and liberating for me, and validating.

And also because of my scientific background, but I chose to go the clinical path. So other people are doing all the research work, and they're amazing researchers out there.

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The first one is movement, but not any. So movement is great as long as it's not injurious. So it's better and it can help and so on. But to wake up the brain, to really get into massive self building and invention and creation, it's movement with attention to the feeling of self as you move. So it's not so much this movement or that movement, it's as you move, you move, in a sense, the purpose of the movement is to give you an opportunity to feel and sense yourself. That's what newborns do. First they have involuntary movement but then they lay in the crib and they do this. And they don't know yet it's their arm, they don't know it's their hands, it's just like this really interesting toy or thing.

So moving to the tension, you can do it anywhere, you can do it when you make your coffee or when you take your walk or if you're going to exercise in the gym and you're going to weight lift and you do the movement of the weight lifting, either without weight, just the weight of your arms or your legs, and you feel and you pay attention to different parts of your body, because, of course, the brain has to organize the whole system all the time.

So when you do that, the changes are so rapid. We don't have time for this interview, but I sometimes do a 3, 4, 5 minute movement experience for people. And it's just like, wow, it's just like magic. It's really powerful. I love it. And I keep being interested in doing it because it works with people. It's magic. I feel like I'm cheating because the changes happen so fast and from my point of view I do very little.

So with it, a really good essential to come, is slow. So usually people try to do things fast to get good at doing them. But it's really reversing how the brain works. We slow down. There's time to feel, there's time to sense, there's time to become aware. And you give the brain time. And in slowing down I have gotten people to do things that they were practicing or trying to do for 10 years, 15 years, like martial artists, people like that. And I just slowed them down. And then I put a few of the other essentials in, and in 30 minutes they are able to do something they have invested 10/15 years in.

Musicians, I work with orchestras and some of the world's top musicians, classical musicians, mostly. And working with musicians is amazing because they are so used to differentiation, the brain is a genius in differentiation, but in the auditory area. And many of them are clumsy when it comes to movement, they're not very good at inner movement, they're busy.

Meagen Gibson

Coordinated otherwise.

Anat Baniel

No, it's not like they're not coordinated, but they're not like in the gym and lifting weights, but they have this brain that is a really high level capacity to notice differences and get the information from that. So when I move into a movement with them, they just respond, not just get rid of... Because they come to me if they have a shoulder injury, and I work with some orchestras that had lots of musicians and peers that couldn't play and so on because of the repetitive movement injury. But when we do that, the pain goes away, which is a great thing, but the quality of the music just pops a few notches up. And I'm talking about some of the... You pay a lot of money to go to a concert. And here I am, little me, but I happen to hear changes in the quality of the music so I can use it. And then once I feel it, it

gives such powerful, positive feedback to the system, to the brain. And emotionally, all the right hormones and endorphins and everything comes up. They just changed it because they now play the way they want to hear the music. So it's a wonderful cycle.

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So movement with attention to the feeling of self. That's the main part there. Then slow. The next one is subtlety. It all goes with a group of things, a reduction of force. The more intense stimulus, the less we can perceive an addition or reduction in the amount of stimulation. The source of information for the brain is the perception of differences in the flow of stimulation.

So when I say, where does the brain get information? It's a hope in understanding. So people say stimulation. I say yes, but insufficient, necessary conditions, insufficient. The brain, in a sense, generates the information. Without stimulation it doesn't have anything to work with and it drives the system crazy. There's experiments in psychology they did many years ago where they try to clean out as much variability in stimulation as possible. And people, if you keep them long enough, they really go psychotic. The brain just can't anchor itself in anything. It's not a good thing.

But in doing, so working with athletes or top dancers and all of them have certain limitations. One leg higher than the other, or I can shoot a ball into the basket, you say?

Meagen Gibson

Yeah.

Anat Baniel

I was translating from Hebrew.

And doesn't work as necessary. And I can do it from the right side but when I go from the left side, I don't do as well. But we depend on noticing, and it's not necessarily conscious, most of it is subconscious, but that's what the brain works with. It's like an information cookie monster.

A very powerful way to help wake up the brain, actually, to very massive learning, is to reduce the intensity. This is so counterintuitive because people feel like if I go faster, I go harder and I do it and then feel the pain and feel the burn and all that stuff. And the brain doesn't work like a mechanical system. More force doesn't necessarily give more outcomes. So it's really a quest on us as humans to evolve, to go above the more primitive, automatic lower brain centers, less differentiated and allow and see how subtlety, I call this essential subtlety, is really important for impacting the brain in a positive way. And of course, the brain is me. If my brain is working well, I'm working well or better. So that's the third one.

The fourth one is variation. And that's a very well known one. And usually people, when they talk about variation or variability, they think I ride the bike and then I will take a singing lesson and then I'll do this and then I'll do that, which is fine. It's perfectly fine. And it's definitely useful.

There is another kind of variability that actually has, in my experience, the greatest potency for our own growth and healing. And that's doing the same thing in different ways. So very quickly, because what is variation? Variations are differences. So we have control intentionally bringing in the differences that the brain is going to notice.

[00:37:53]

I had a musician, a world class cellist in one of the famous quartets, and he came to me because he could barely play anymore, he was in so much pain. And he had a very rigid training and you could see it in the way he sat and so on. So it's amazing, a genius musician to play so well given how he was trained, let's put it this way. And there's something very traumatizing by its nature when you take a young living child and give them a cello and restrict them powerfully to do it the right way. It's like fixing again. And the brain is so brilliant that it manages to do it but then the price is paid, the price is paid, the price is paid for the way we got to learn to do it.

And I had only one session with him, I was traveling, and I only had one session with him in Germany. And so I didn't have time to do my usual longer process. And I think, okay, how can I make a difference for this man? And I asked him to take a really simple thing, which is like the twinkle twinkle, it's twinkle, twinkle, little star and play it for me. And he was like, shocked. That was a big variation. I mean, he is having concerts all over the world and asking to play this silly little thing.

And I asked him, I told him, I know you're a wonderful musician, but if you don't mind just for now. And he said yes. And I said, could you please play badly for me? And he froze. Never in his life had he ever tried to play something badly. And he just couldn't do it, literally. He was stopped. I said, do you teach little children? He said, yes. I said, do they play badly sometimes? He said, yes. I said, can you remember one of them? He said, yes. I said anything. And I had him go one way, second way, third way, fourth way. The fifth way, he couldn't think of anything. I said, four is enough. And I said, now, go play.

And not only he was pain free, the quality, because I had him play the same thing he played before, we did the baseline and then... So variations are very, very powerful. I use it all the time because variations, the human body and biologically, we generate variations all the time. People don't know that. It seems like it's the same.

So variations are almost like breathing. Without variations we wouldn't know what to do. So we can do it intentionally.

The next one is enthusiasm. And enthusiasm in the sense of generosity of spirit. Being able to notice and find changes in yourself or in the other, it depends what we're talking about. So if I work with you and you come with a big thing like that, and you want that thing to either go away or be really different. And I work with you for 30, 45 minutes, and this thing is still kind of there, but it has something in it, the ability to notice it and to delight in it internally, to be delighted.

I worked with a large group of parents, now online, and they call it the pot of gold. One pot of gold, another pot of gold because we can only be in the here and now, and we all know this in meditation, but this is the practice of it in a different way. So it's not before, it's not after, it's now. And it's different. Oh my God, I have a brain, it changes, I'm doing a little bit better, I'm turning my head one degree better, or I'm not quite as upset or I'm able to go and talk to the salesperson in the store, or I'm willing to have dinner with a friend.

And when we do that to ourselves or for someone else with whom we are interacting and supporting, the acceleration of outcomes is enormous. And of course, I learned that through the parents, some parents got really delighted and they weren't like, I don't allow anybody to clap hands or say, good boy, because that means if they didn't do it, they were bad boys, it's just internal. It's just like, yummy.

You just delight in it. And the communication goes from brain to brain. We are just like we're one brain. You and I right now, one brain for now.

[00:42:24]

And then there are flexible goals. Goals are really good. They're important. People kill themselves trying to get the goal right away. Because I say to people, if you could, you would anyway, so it wouldn't be a goal. It would be an intention. And it's my intention to talk to you right now. But it's not a goal. So a goal, very important, it organizes our direction in life, it's a good thing, however, it's how we go about it.

And flexible goals are so important, because also in the process of trying to achieve your goal, you allow many, many more, much more input to the system that could support in figuring out how to do it or how to get there. Whereas if we put on blinders very often it makes we don't get there. That's very, very important.

And then there is imagination and dreams. Imagination is an extremely powerful use of the brain. I doubt that maybe other animals do it in a more rudimentary way, but the ability to play a whole piano sonata and practice it and play better afterwards. The ability to imagine is phenomenal. And I bring it into the work, and I use it directly in the movement stuff to imagine. Really every one of my essentials is a skill, so you get better at it. You do it, you get better, you do it, you get better, and you accelerate your brain, you up your brain's potency. You literally get a better brain. And that's what Michael Merzenich said about my work. He's the guy who started the brain plasticity stuff in the 80s. He said that this work, these essentials help brains become stronger, better brains.

And night dreams are fun, but we need a dream, to have a life, we need a dream. And it can be anything. It doesn't matter. It can be a garden in your backyard or it can be going out into outer space. I don't have at all a dream to go to outer space. And I watch these people take 20 years and billions of dollars and enormous human intelligence to go out to outer space for initially 3 minutes or something. And I think it's magnificent. And, of course, by inventing, they invent a lot of other things on the way, and it can be very useful to humanity and so on and so forth.

And the last one is awareness. Awareness is a skill. For me awareness is not a state of mind. It's a thing we do and we can get better and better. So, like all the mythologies of stories about the top martial artists, like if you watch a Bruce Lee movie, he walks and somebody crawls behind him to hit him and he can feel it. You see, he senses it and he knows what to do, and he turns around and it's perfect timing. And it could be 17 people doing it, and he can still do it. It's remarkable awareness.

Now, this is manifested in actual movement like that. But awareness is the ability to know that I know, to know that I see and so on and so forth. And I also say that awareness is learning. So when we do something that's new, one of the ways to not have to go back through the process again and again and repeat it a million times, is if we really take a minute or two or three to really just become aware of different aspects of it, not trying to save it, not getting all cringed up.

And all those nine essentials and shifting from the idea of fixing to connecting is a magnificent way, in my experience, for people to shed the trauma. You don't erase it, but it's almost like you grow out of it and you move to a different place. Now, under really severe conditions, we may regress to it. The brain does not lose what it had, it can always regress to earlier configurations. But the more and the fuller and the longer, it will take more and more real abusive stresses to push us back. But also then it's easier to come back out.

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So it's very important. Part of my understanding, an important part of healing is not just moving out of the pain and the difficulty, but being willing to go back there intentionally, experience it for 10/15 seconds and then get back to the new place. Then we get the bridge and we have a say in the bridge. That's it.

Meagen Gibson

It's fantastic. And it's fascinating to me that awareness is the last step, because going back to what you said earlier about some of the ways that we can feel trauma and the manifestation of that being not seen, and going from fixing to connecting. And especially in yourself, all of these steps I can see enabling you to have some agency around going from trying to fix yourself or fix anybody else in order to get into connecting. Trying to understand what that experience was communicating to you and your brain, and then changing what that communication is, so that you can then have a sense of autonomous seen-ness. I just made up a word, but we're going to go with it.

Anat Baniel

That's perfect.

Meagen Gibson

Fascinating. And I love every aspect of that. Especially the parts where we're slowing down. How many of us could just benefit from slowing down?

Anat Baniel

Yeah, absolutely.

Meagen Gibson

Where can people find out more about you and your work?

Anat Baniel

Okay. So we have a website, anatbanielmethod.com

I have a podcast, I stopped doing it during the pandemic, but we have close to 40, what do you call it?

Meagen Gibson

Episodes?

Anat Baniel

Episodes. I've had episodes on each essential, and I've had guests like Jill Bolte Taylor and other wonderful Rick Hanson, who also happens to be friends and colleagues. So the podcast can be a great source of information.

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YouTube, [Anat Baniel channel](#). There's lots and lots of videos, short videos of work. Most of it is children, but also a little bit of adults.

And I have two books, *Move Into Life: The Nine Essentials for Lifelong Vitality*, and the other one is *Kids Beyond Limits*, which is about children.

And on the website I'm going to be doing, starting next year, public workshops, online neural movement workshops. And also if people just sign up for the newsletter, we have in November, December, I don't remember, but soon we're going to have a healing fest with learning strategies, where for a week people are going to get a 5 day workshop that they can try for free, do it for free, in vitality, antiaging and wellbeing. There's a lot of movement lessons, there are lectures, there's some experiential stuff. Mike Merzenich was there and talked to the group for an hour and so on. And it really can be transformational.

Meagen Gibson

I can see how it would be. And what you've outlined, obviously, I'm super interested in getting more engaged in it myself, but also it feels very accessible. Your application of them and the way that you take people through them is what we would come to you for but it's such an accessible model.

Anat Baniel

I have programs. I have a whole body-brain fitness program. It's 24 movement lessons focusing on breathing, sitting, balance and general, get your whole body in yourself kind of thing. And I have back pain and sclerosis, I have advanced balance for people to do more advanced stuff. People who do the work are gradual, but as you evolve more and more, your skillfulness and your complexity, the ability to do complex stuff, we do very, very athletic, almost acrobatic movement lessons. But we don't start with acrobatics. We start with people where they are, not where they wish they were.

Meagen Gibson

Well, it's always fascinating to me, too, to find people that are very fit and then ask them to do a simple balance exercise and see how fit they are and how connected they are in their space in the world.

Anat Baniel

Because, remember, it's all differentiation and refinement. If you have just chunky blocks to build, but you can't build a very elaborate structure. But if you differentiate, you can build this or that or this or that. I mean, there's a lot of freedom.

Really for me, part of what I love about this work, my work, is the sense of freedom. There's just so much freedom. It's freedom in thought, it's cognitive freedom, it's more and more emotional. The emotional one tends to be trickier, because the emotional one hijacks us so powerfully. Successful therapy is a process of massive emotional differentiation and integration.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. Anat Baniel, thank you very much for being with us today.

[00:53:13] Anat Baniel

Thank you, Meagen. You are delightful and I had a wonderful time with you and thank you for the opportunity.