



The power of the exhale

Guest: Carolyn Sargentson

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[00:00:10] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagan Gibson, cohost of the Trauma Super Conference today. I'm speaking with Carolyn Sargentson, a coach who is in a lifelong exploration of her own nervous system and those of her treasured clients. As a former academic, yoga teacher, and museum curator, she loves to work between language and objects, mind and body, movement and stillness. She brings curiosity, tenderness and a light restorative touch to working with individual groups and group nervous systems, stories, movement, and breathing patterns, honoring the inner healer in each of her clients.

Thank you so much for joining me, Carolyn.

Carolyn Sargentson

It's a huge pleasure. Meagen. Great to see you.

Meagen Gibson

So, Carolyn, the Trauma Super Conference can be quite academic at times, and we're dealing with sometimes complex subjects that we try our best to bring into the practical application of people's everyday lives. And that's one of the main reasons I wanted to talk to you today. When you're working with clients, what is the really subtle cue you notice when you're approaching a place of reactivity and possible trauma, and how do you address it in a session?

Carolyn Sargentson

Wow, that's such a great question. Straight to it, Meagen. Yeah. So this is all about the field, I would say. This is all about how huge the field is and what's available for us to notice in the field. And I would say that we all have different ways of reading it, of sensing into the field. We all have life histories, right? Biographies. We all have our own toolkits, but also our own sensitivities. Our nervous systems are both the same and not the same. So mine's lived a different life to yours, for example.

So for me, there are all kinds of cues, and people speak really beautifully and poetically and scientifically about this. And for me, the breath is a really interesting one. And one of the cues that I've been focusing on a lot has been what is happening in the field when I'm noticing myself holding my breath a little bit or noticing that my client or, indeed, someone in the group of a group client project, has just kind of got to the top of the breath and something's stopping. There's a kind of, I don't know,

like an energetic contraction or a pausing or a holding. The system has stopped moving. You can kind of sense this. I've got jellyfish ideas coming to mind as I do this. This is going on in us within the field. And even on a screen, we all adapted so quickly, right? Well, some of us did. Some of us didn't, but for many of us, being on a screen is fine, and you can feel it and hear it on the phone, too. So it's not just an observation. It's a feeling that arises in me when I sense that you're holding your breath. So that's one noticing that I find really interesting.

[00:03:29] Meagen Gibson

It's interesting that you say that, too, because I know as someone who's experienced trauma, that when I'm in conversation with someone else, that watching them hold their breath, like having that completely subconscious reaction, right? It's not like people are constantly, you talk to them, and they go, gasp. It's just a very like stop. There's a pause, and that can be really triggering for me. And it's a place where my narrative coping mechanisms take over and start to fill in the stories of what I think that means.

Carolyn Sargentson

And that's just such a beautiful invitation to always start with our own attention to our own breath, isn't it? Because it's not going to work for us to try to help or simply be with someone else until we can really dwell in what that means for us, what it feels like, almost what kind of space is there, what kind of bandwidth is there for us to cope in that moment?

I was thinking only this morning, so it's interesting you've taken us here, but the bandwidth for developmental steps or for an exploration or for being in a difficult place a little longer, whatever it might be for us, it can contract in a heartbeat. And I mean that literally. And actually it can expand, perhaps not quite so quickly. But there is this, I'm definitely with this today, this kind of sense that there's always this movement going on.

And one of the things I would say, I really come at this through the coaching lens, as opposed to a therapist practice, just to be clear for your listeners and viewers, and one of the things that's really important, if you're working with, or you're just sitting with, being with someone in this role, is, can I read how wide their bandwidth is, how wide their developmental zone is, how broad their capacity is to be with themselves? And that's really tricky, because if you go in too hard or fast, just because either we're having a reaction or like you described, or because we think we know something which, of course, we never do, we're just living with that illusion all of the time. Performance anxiety for coaches.

Meagen Gibson

Right.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. There's a lot going on in this field of ours. I feel one of the things that coaches and certain kinds of coaching are really doing is bringing our attention to the subtlety of this, but also just the hugeness of what's available in there. If we just park it all behind us and just sit here like we're doing right now.

[00:06:28] Meagen Gibson

I love that you named that it's an illusion because it is. And I would say the majority of my practice, and the way that this shows up, this wasn't what I was speaking to earlier, but the way that the majority of this shows up for me in the day to day, in the last couple of years especially, has been in my parenting relationship with my kids. And the phrase respond instead of react constantly. And sometimes that pause and that self regulation that I'm having with an incredibly reactive child, and I can match people's energy very, very quickly if I'm not super regulated myself. And there have been days and weeks where my practice on a daily basis is to just increase that window between my reaction and my response seconds.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. A second is a breakthrough, right?

Meagen Gibson

It really is.

Carolyn Sargentson

And it's a whole different responsiveness. That pause can be tiny. That pause between the in breath and the out breath, however, you think of that pause and feel the pause and experience it, it can be minuscule and yet everything.

Meagen Gibson

Yes. Absolutely.

Carolyn Sargentson

And these kids, they really know how to get in there. It must be the most challenging job.

Meagen Gibson

It has to be, right?

And we're wired for connection. And so many of our interviewers have said that. And so a lot of the time, what I'm remembering is that this tiny person is trying to connect and they're going to use any means necessary.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. Just if we can stay with the thinking brain, what's needed right now, not necessarily by the child, not necessarily by you, but actually, what does this moment need? What's needed right now? And it may be a lot less than we think. And it might be very different from what we think in reaction. And it's a life skill. I wish I could go back and do it all again, except that I don't.

Meagen Gibson

Right, I wouldn't want to. But if you could...

[00:08:51] Carolyn Sargentson

I think I'm done, nearly done with that. But yeah, I can look back at it all of the parenting and see the biggest lessons, and often doing nothing was the most important thing.

Meagen Gibson

To transition that into a more professional context, not that these don't all translate out, but that again has come up in my previous employment, there was this situation where I found myself constantly, because of old patterns of behavior and ways that we're raised in systems, I was always rescuing or always volunteering for things. And there were times in meetings and things where I would have to literally be to myself, just like, do not, you will be quiet. You may be asked to do this thing, but you're not going to make assumptions, and you're just going to do this, as you've been doing, in the meeting. You're just going to like, breathe through the urge to assume responsibility or to volunteer.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. And the world didn't stop, right, when you managed to do that, which is in a way, the biggest shock of all.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely.

Carolyn Sargentson

And what you're speaking to, I think, is the call to practice. And the call to practice with the smaller things first. Right? That's a classic coaching piece, in other practices as well. I don't go straight in for the really important one and try a new thing out. Right? Just rehearse. And often, actually, I would say, in the professional environment, we start rehearsing in the domestic environment, sometimes for some of us who have other people around who are willing to play with us, because we're really playing and experimenting and finding safety.

What happens if I do this? It's a very big question because it's really different. I've been tempted since childhood to do it this way, and then you try something different, and that's where we learn. That's the space where we learn.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. Sometimes we can see this word practice as like this big thing, these huge tasks that we have to take on, and I find myself slipping into that pattern of behavior and thought pattern as well where it's, well, I'm going to start meditating an hour every day. Right? And I finally gave up that mentality a few years ago with this like, what if I just inserted three more seconds between an action or a stimulus and a response? Like, what if I did that instead of committing to an hour of meditation a day which I will most certainly fail at?

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. Well, you're speaking to the quality of it, of the experience, and also you're speaking to tenderness for yourself, right? The inner critic can pummel us with any kind of imposed exercise that is internally set up to fail, in a sense. We're very hardwired to prove ourselves right. So actually doing

something that's going to work is not something that comes easily into the system, I'd say. I've seen it a lot in my experience working with my own coach. I am really committed to being right. It's scary.

[00:12:20] Meagen Gibson

Oh, gosh, I can relate to that. Because being right is such a fundamental factor to safety in our ancient brains that it's really crucial that I'd be right about specific things for my very survival. And now our baseline of safety is a little bit higher in modern society, what feels safe can often be projected onto other things. Am I safe in this role that I inhabit in my life, whether that be in my home or my work? And when that's threatened, I'm going to make sure to assert how right I am.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah, absolutely.

Meagen Gibson

And let's bring it back to the breath a little bit, too, because I sidelined us with my anecdotal evidence. When you notice in these situations, whether it be because you're trying to prove yourself right or because you're trying to self regulate so that you can be in that space, hold space for somebody else, hold space for conversations, what then do you tell people about their breath, noticing the in and the out about their own self regulation for the betterment of whatever they're holding?

Carolyn Sargentson

Well, there are a couple of things that I might do before doing that, and I might not even do that. So the first thing I would do, and this is where the 3 seconds are actually huge, I will, first of all, make sure that I'm not anymore holding, so I will release. So that's just like, okay, right. I noticed, and in the noticing the top of my in breath got caught, so I'm not going to be in service of anything useful until I can release the catch in myself. And of course, these seconds feel big, but it's not a lot of time that it takes with practice.

And then what I might do with the client is rather than going in with here's what I suggest you do here, I might go in and I might say, what are you noticing right now? And that might actually be... I mean it depends on the client relationship and also on the field in that moment. So that might be too much for some clients because it throws something onto them at a moment where they're catching their breath, so they may not be able to cope with that. So there's a context for all these conversations and interventions. Right. So it will depend. There are some clients where that would feel very strong for them and others who would, partly because we've practiced together for a while, know what that invitation really was.

So if I wasn't going to ask them to notice for themselves, I could alternatively and gently say, would it be okay if I made an observation? And at this point we're really slowing it all down. You can probably hear, I'm beginning to hear my voice, I'm slowing down with this in myself, even just describing it to you. And I'm going more in. Because this is delicate work, right? And it could be that nothing happens more than a little bit of noticing. It really depends on that client's window. What Dan Siegel would call the window of tolerance is obviously what I'm talking about. We all have different names for it, but we're all talking about the same thing I think, these days especially, right?

[00:15:57]

So I might say, if I get permission to notice something, just, would I be right in suggesting, funny going to right, I want to suggest that you might be holding your breath a little bit or shortening your breath a little bit. Can you just look into that and share what's happening for you right now? And again, you might get a no on that. And it will be a somatic no. It's probably not going to be a verbal no.

So as someone who's been on the yoga mat face to face in person teaching for many decades, some people don't want to be touched. And that's fine. Yoga teachers, when I grew up as a baby yoga person and then a baby yoga teacher, teachers were right in there. And I really hold that with me. The Sanskrit, the notion of ahimsa, do no harm. It's more important to do no harm than make an intervention. Coaches really need to pay attention to that, I think. It is more important to do no harm than it is to have an egoic intervention with somebody.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. Especially considering, I'm sorry to interrupt, especially with the breath as well. I just saw something earlier from somebody who said that sometimes these somatic invitations, these somatic practices, aren't serving to you because of all of your... It's just not the right time, right?

Carolyn Sargentson

Absolutely.

Meagen Gibson

I'm sure everybody watching has had the experience where somebody is really dysregulated. And we say something like take a deep breath. And I have to laugh when I say it.

Carolyn Sargentson

It actually might be the complete opposite of what they need.

Meagen Gibson

Exactly right?

Carolyn Sargentson

And you know that, right. Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

And nothing feels more impossible. Or calm down! It's out of our reach at that moment, and it denies the functionality of the biology at work that is out of our control, trying to create a response and trying to create the regulation. Now it might be mis-wired biology and something that does not function in a way that serves us that we want to work on and rewire, but it does have a function outside of our conscious control in the moment that it's happening, right?

[00:18:23] Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. Absolutely. And that's lovely to bring us to this, because I learned as a yoga teacher, working with both body and breath in physical, three-dimensional, complicated space, with much energy in the room and with teacher trainees also, I do much less of that now, partly because of the pandemic, but, people on the yoga mat are so vulnerable on the yoga mat, they make themselves so vulnerable. It's such an extraordinary thing to work with people on a mat, I think. And my starting place is that everything about them is highly functional. This is what holds their lives together, right? So me going in and saying, what's going on in your right shoulder or your left ear, or why is that foot flopping about in shavasana and the other foot is rigidly up like that? None of that, I would suggest, is really helpful.

And one of the things I thought about a lot this year when working at the Moment Institute with David Drake, who's my trainer in the whole coaching and narrative field, was the idea that if we work as wounded healers, it's all messed up. That ultimately we work on ourselves, we clean up our acts, and then maybe, and it's only a maybe, we might have the gift of helping activate somebody else's inner healer for themselves so that they can just begin that process that the system yearns for, but that we don't get to be the immature child magician waving wands at. And that's the delicacy of it. Just noticing someone holding their breath, well, you might be able to go in with a touch somewhere lightly with someone if you knew them well and you had permission, and you might just notice and keep it to yourself for a year.

Yeah. The functionality of it... I believed for a very long time, and a lot believe it to be true in coaching as well, that we really have to... You know, we're not teaching people at all, and we're not helping people go from bad breathing to good breathing. There's just breathing. We're either breathing or we're not breathing.

And, yeah, we can get caught up in narratives of, yes, this is both voluntary and involuntary. Isn't it interesting? Let's go and read lots of books about breath. All fine. But ultimately, the body is being breathed all of the time. And the question is, can we form a sensitive relationship with that in ourselves in some kind of way that brings insight that might help us integrate more, path to wholeness might be a little easier if we could be with our own breath, but a lot of it is just being with. A lot of life is acceptance rather than action, I would say.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. You said so many things. I actually was taking notes, and this notion of, like, we're not wounded healers out in the world trying to assert our kind of wisdom on other people. We're healing ourselves, and we might have the opportunity to activate someone else's inner healer. It's just such a beautiful way in context. It reminded me of a situation this summer where I had a really, really difficult interaction with a family member and gave myself so much grace around my body's reaction to it and was completely like, my body went into just absolute chaos and yet was able to, I probably didn't take a deep breath for three or four days honestly.

Carolyn Sargentson

I can believe it.

Meagen Gibson

My breath was super shallow. My stomach was upset, but had such grace around it and was able to just, kind of, forgive my body is not the right word, but understand that there was a purpose to that,

that it was out of my control and just kind of had a dialogue with my body. And my body was like, what we need from you right now is to be still and you're not going to need a ton of breath for that. And I was kind of making up my own stories about it. But it was just, like, just be still, like you're literally doing a ton of work on the inside right now, processing all of this emotionally, and it has physical repercussions, and just be still. And I was like, okay, this breath that I have the capacity to get right now is enough for now.

[00:23:33] Carolyn Sargentson

It's everything. That's so beautiful. Meagen. Yeah. You're taking me to a memory of being with my coach on the phone, as we work together by phone, and I can't remember what presented itself, and there was something in my system that presented itself after we'd meditated our way in together to open the container and all of that. And she just said, Is there any grief in your system? Had I left it to my brain, I'd have gone, no, I'm done with all that. No, I'm fine. Absolutely not. Five minutes later, I was lying on the floor with my phone to my ear weeping, in that very physical way of weeping, all body, embodied weeping, it's fantastic practice, with the safety of her voice and presence and tremendous holding.

And I learned something really important after many, many years of body work, embodiment, breath, all of this, which was that if I could be in a safe space and actually let that emotion come, let that be processed by my body, my body knew exactly what to do. And what actually often we do, because the brain is running the show rather than the system allowing itself to recalibrate, it's a hard working thing, the brain, right? It's trying to do its bit. The amount of effort that we put into holding something at bay is phenomenal.

I came back to that again just recently. I was just feeling exhausted. I've just had a big move and a big life event, lots of emotion. I thought I'm expending at least as much energy keeping the exhaustion at bay as the exhaustion is presenting with, so why don't I just go and lie down for half an hour. And my body just recharged itself until bedtime. And the rest of it is just accepting that this is a particularly tiring time where rest is required. I have the privilege of being able to do that, right? I do have the privilege to be able to do that.

Meagen Gibson

I'm so glad that you named grief, because I think culturally, we look at grief as just death, like of a physical form, of a relationship, and I'm sure that you might share this experience as well, but I've come to understand in the last five years that grief is so much larger than that. It applies to so much more than that. And I have grieved more living people in the last five years than I think I've grieved people in my entire life. And there's often a lot of grief... The situation this summer, and I was naming it, and I actually was rereading the book of one of our other contributors, Hilary Jacobs Hendel, and going through some of the exercises in her book, and literally had this book to guide me through this horrible experience that was happening. And I was able to name it right away, I was just like, this is grief, whereas before I would not have known, I would have been like, gosh, I feel like this reaction is really out of proportion with what happened, but was able to really name it as what it was, which is what it felt like, which was deep, deep grief.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. You know what, in the programs that we deliver at the Moment Institute, the one that I've just been involved with, we work with four different areas. One is grief, and I think actually it was the biggest and most meaningful piece for our participants. I can't speak for them, but that would be my

observation. We also talked about trauma. We talked about attachment patterns, and we talked about shadow.

[00:27:32]

And since going through that process with a group of people and with David, at the end of that, whatever's going on feels like one of those and sometimes two of them, because shadow's a trickster and will run into most of the others, and two of them could get together and make it a little bit more challenging. So there are no four single compartments.

But I find just having a connection with those really helps because I go, oh, yeah. grief is in me again. What's it doing here? What does it want to say? What's it got for me?

I was very touched by what you said about grieving the living. I turned 61 this year, and I'm grieving what I never was and what I now will never be, whilst also becoming everything that I'm becoming, right, with light and all of that, but there's a lot of shedding and letting go. And that grieving for the self, I think, is something that we might all attend to, and we'll have to at some point. And it's very telling, and it's freeing, eventually.

Another thing that we say is grief will process us until it's done with us. It just keeps going. So actually, grief, particularly, is one to pay attention to, I would say.

Meagen Gibson

I like that reframing, too, because we always talk about, like, we're processing grief, but really, grief is processing us.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah, grief is definitely, I would say, just as I am being breathed rather than I am breathing, just as I'm not angry, but anger is arising, all that kind of stuff, but to really live it, it is a reframe. It is a big reframe. And yeah, I salute you on your grief work, because honestly, I think, apart from anything else, it's a fantastic investment in your future.

Meagen Gibson

Well, you speak so much to that, and we've talked about that pause a lot. And I think that the key to grief is that pause as well, training ourselves for that pause and not constantly coping and compartmentalizing away. And you spoke to that exhaustion piece. I'm sure that tons of the people watching and listening to this have had the experience in the last two years where they're just coping and not able to let in everything that they're feeling and experiencing, just the volume of what all of us have experienced in the last two years, not to name all of the other stuff to have the audacity to keep happening, right, like we're dealing with a global pandemic, and then also people were still losing jobs, or losing loved ones, or becoming sick, it's the both and of the last two years. And so I'm not even sure where I was going with that, but just kind of naming it.

Carolyn Sargentson

Well, I just want to pick it up, if I may, Meagen, because I think where we might go with that, even if it's only for a moment, is, you're talking about the functionality of just keeping it at bay. And if we can

know that that's what we're doing in this moment, and honor that, and just simply know that, it kind of makes sense.

[00:31:09]

You were talking about that bodily reaction that you had with your family. It can be really confusing, I think very disorienting. Disorientation is something I feel is a really difficult thing for us to cope with in moments where something is happening in us that we don't understand. Maybe we can't name it. Maybe we have this really strong instinct to kind of go through it or to push it back. We may be in a stress response of the classic kinds. It can be all those things. And just to know that we are holding everything at bay because that's all we can do is, in itself, I would say, a profound insight. And we wait, and we wait, because we can't process it. You can't make a mental plane decision. I've read the grief book. I'm going to process that today.

It will keep coming back until we can. And I'm glad you said that, because it's kind of just pausing me to check in with. I'm not saying that when grief shows up, we lie down on the carpet wherever we are and get into it.

Meagen Gibson

We can just surrender right away.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. And it can take years. And for many people, it's never possible. Maybe that's our job is to bring a little bit of kindness and presence as we live in this world where we seem to be creating as much trauma as we are attending to how to help with it. Crazy times, right?

Meagen Gibson

I think if I had not been in the middle of producing a trauma conference when I had that difficult situation with the family member, I don't think I would have had as much grace with myself as I needed to have in that moment because I felt like I've done a lot of work. I've got this thing figured out. I know how to handle anything, right? I'm resilient and strong. And so when this just massive wave of grief and disorientation came through, I was like, oh, we do not figure this out. There is no finish line. This is an experience that we get to practice over and over again.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. And maybe we feel more and more and more. I love your kind of owning up to the entitlement piece there Meagen.

Meagen Gibson

Totally. Totally. The arrogance of, like, I talk to experts about this all day long.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. Exactly.

[00:33:45] Meagen Gibson

I've been in therapy. I have read all of the books in existence. This won't catch me off guard. Wow.

Carolyn Sargentson

And there we go again. Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

Humbling in a necessary way. It was fantastic.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. For me in my experience, my versions of that, the thing that holds me, if you like, an orientation, is my community, and I'm really privileged and fortunate to have one because my coaching peers, my colleagues, we all hold space for each other. It is one of those places to live that, I think wow, I am really fortunate to be held this strongly.

And I think what you said also speaks to resilience and the kind of changing way we're thinking about that. For me, it's very much, and this is not rocket science, and it's not mine, but resilience is not about bad things never happening again. It's about something happening and being able to be more in respond than react, or maybe in react and then respond, and we're with ourselves on it. But it's that, how can we come back to the center, stand in the eye of the storm, if you like? How can we get back to somewhere that feels like we're on? For me it's this line. This is really important to me. Other people have a different expression of that for themselves.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, for me, it's if I'm remaining curious and not closed off, I know I'm building resilience. That's it.

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. Absolutely. Wonderful.

Meagen Gibson

Well, I know that you have an exercise that you wanted to take us through, so I would love if we did that. We talk all about the breath, we might as well...

Carolyn Sargentson

Yeah. Let's do a little bit of breath for people. Our conversation that leads to this was around, do you want to read books about breath, or do you want to really explore breath? And for me, it's always, let's just breathe together for a little bit. So let's see if we can come up with something helpful for people.

So just finding yourself in your chair, or wherever you are if you're watching this right now. Switching towards noticing your breathing, rather than whatever it was you were noticing a moment or two ago, just going into that with yourself. And perhaps just beginning to distinguish as you let the breathing happen between the in breath and the out breath.

[00:36:42]

So how do you know your in breathing and out breathing? What's different about that experience on the in breath and on the out breath? And go safely with this. Keep safe with yourself, and just do as little or as much as you feel called to do, just taking anything that's useful for you and discarding the rest. Just know that your breathing is your sovereign breath. It's your birthright. It's personal, it's unique, and it's functional, and it's yours. If you're sitting here right now, you haven't been breathing wrong.

And then if you'd like to, you could just begin to lengthen each side of the breath. And by side, I mean the in breath on one side and the out breath on the other. Notice your response to the invitation. That's all it is, an invitation. And if you're resistant, that could be a year of exploration that's just around that noticing. If you're cooperative with it, that could be equally a year of investigation around that. So just noticing your internal response and whether you want to breathe a little longer on each side of the breath or not.

And if I ask you whether you'd like to breathe a little longer on the in breath and the out breath, do you breathe in more air to make it go on for longer? Or do you slow down your breath to make it go on for longer? No right answers is the mantra for this practice.

I just want to float a thought in here. Nothing in our lived experience is unrelated to the breath. Whatever we did, whatever happened to us, however we operate in the world, we're breathing when these things happen.

What happens if we meet ourselves in our breath?

And might you like, as we breathe along the in breath and the out breath together, just at your pace, in your own rhythm, might you like just to notice the pause between the in breath and the out breath and between the out breath and the in breath?

Instead of bringing a muscular action to the pause to stop something or to wait somewhere, might we define the pause as simply the moment where there is neither in breath or out breath happening. It's just a moment. It could be absolutely tiny, where the in breath has finished itself and the out breath hasn't started itself.

If you want to go a little further, and it's your choice, see whether you might like to stay with the end of the in breath until it's truly done with you, maybe slowing it down until it ends all by itself, and just letting the out breath come. Just do that for a couple of rounds of the breath where your focus is on the end of the in breath. Is there's more space there than you might have had before? Always just letting the out breath come.

And the next time you go around, when you get to the end of the out breath, maybe the same inquiry might be interesting for you. You have a choice if you want to do this, of course. As you come to the end of your out breath, can you just slow yourself with that until it ends itself through you? Staying with that for the next couple of cycles of the breath, allowing the out breath to truly finish itself, knowing when it's done.

And then another couple of observations, if you'd like them. When you next breathe in and you breathe a beautiful long in breath to exactly where you're ready to be with the ending of it, just notice the energy of the beginning of the out breath, its speed, its quality, its energy. What does the

beginning of the out breath feel like? What does the whole body feel like each time you come round and your out breath begins itself again?

[00:44:09]

And then maybe you can bring the same inquiry to the beginning of the in breath next time you come around. When does the beginning of the beginning of the in breath come? What's the very first sign in your system? How does it feel? Its speed, its quality, anything else that you're noticing for yourself.

Then maybe letting those observations go and allowing yourself just to be with the full cycle of the breath, an in breath, a moment when there is no in breath and no out breath, then an out breath, and the moment of no out breath and no in breath yet. Just note for yourself, how is that experience for you right now? Is there anything calling for your attention? Any observations you'd like to note down for yourself?

And then let's just try and play with a little bit of dissonance, if there's time, Meagen, to go on a little further. I just want to come back to that idea of the breath being held, catching in the breath. Just see how you feel about engaging with this again, staying safe. If you know this isn't for you, just take care of yourself, and sit it out. What makes you catch your breath, what makes the in breath halt? Just maybe even do it if you're okay to do it and it's safe to do it.

Notice how it feels to stop at the top of the in breath. And remember, if you can, a relatively safe moment when that happened, if there is one for you. So I'm thinking actually of not so much taking people into something that's difficult, it's not my intention, maybe somebody threw you a surprise birthday party, maybe the phone rang about something that was good news, and you heard someone's voice. Just that moment of anticipation.

So when you hold your breath, or when the breath catches in you, when the breath is held, what are we waiting for just there? What's the feeling? It might be excitement. It could be dread, could be a shock, could be a surprise, could be a thrill. Top of the roller coaster. Just pauses right before it goes down the other side really fast.

I'm just going back for myself towards the idea of the coaching field, noticing that someone else might be holding their breath. Am I waiting for something to change, to shift in me or in somebody else? Am I waiting for something external to myself to happen, to free me to breathe again? Am I waiting to resource myself right here with whatever I need to be able to release into the out breath? What am I not able to do right here? What do I need right here?

As you breathe and sit with this practice, and I think Meagen would identify with this too in what she said earlier, I can spend two weeks with a held breath, so it might not be a catch in the moment, but it could be a pattern or just a constriction that we're with so we can have time to ask ourselves these questions. What am I waiting for? What do I need? How am I going to release into the out breath?

What's coming up for you as you explore this with us? Is there any insight you want to make a note of? Anything that feels helpful or new in your awareness?

And maybe I might close the practice just by making an observation. Sometimes we're not ready for the action that's possible with the in breath, with the resourcing of the in breath, the inspiration, the yang energy, if you like, the influx of oxygen. If we're not emotionally ready for that, we might well pause.

[00:50:21]

And the invitation here might be to be in the out breath. Maybe not just one, but the two weeks worth of them or the two minutes worth of them, although it can happen with one breath. Can I resource myself on my out breath by connecting with my deepest sense of safety in this moment? Is there a place I could go right now as I breathe out and back into my body? The body may well just breathe out with you and relax itself. We say in yoga, the last third of the out breath is where the muscular release is available. Maybe there's some emotional release available there, as we breathe out, that might resource ourselves.

And then either on the next in breath or maybe in two weeks time, maybe we're ready for the in breath that can carry us into action and keep going into an out breath, without that holding and catching and pausing, which is just an invitation to notice, right?

So I'm going to leave us just with the thought that the out breath is just as much of a resource as the in breath. It allows ourselves a quietness, as the parasympathetic nervous system calms. We all know that a longer out breath helps that, that we might then ourselves go into a place of more conscious safety, and resource there until we're ready for what can come with the next in breath.

Meagen, I'm going to stop there, leave it there, if that's enough for folk.

Meagen Gibson

I think that's wonderful. And I don't want to say anything, except for thank you for being with us, Carolyn.

Carolyn Sargentson

Thank you. It's always such a pleasure. Thank you, Meagen.

Meagen Gibson

If people are interested in finding out more about you and your work, where can they do that?

Carolyn Sargentson

They can find me at carolynsargentsonconsulting.com, which is where my coaching business lives. They can find me on the faculty at the Moment Institute, supporting David Drake's work there, in the coaching field, pushing the edges there a little bit. And if people are curious about working with me, I'll be launching a program called Tuning In, which will start in January. That will be a program of exploring how we tune into our own nervous systems, how we resource ourselves, how we work in this kind of way, but also quite playfully, actually, with some embodiment practice and lots of investigation around somatic consent and all kinds of things.

Thank you.

Meagen Gibson

Thank you so much for being with us.

[00:53:33] Carolyn Sargentson

Pleasure. Thanks, Meagen. Well done for all you're doing. It's a gift.