



Conscious Life presents

TRAUMA SUPER CONFERENCE

Somatic early trauma healing

Guest: Aki Omori

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[00:00:09] Jaia Bristow

Hello and welcome back to this Trauma Super Conference. My name is Jaia Bristow and I'm one of your hosts. And today I am very pleased to be welcoming Aki Omori. Welcome, Aki.

Aki Omori

Hi, Jaia. Thank you for having me.

Jaia Bristow

Thank you for joining us today. So Aki Omori is a woman of many, many talents. She's a somatic early trauma therapist, a certified practitioner of NeuroAffective Relational Model, a Somatic Experiencing practitioner in training, a registered Somatic Movement educator and therapist, a certified teacher of Body Mind Centering, you have a diploma with integrative body work and movement therapy, you're a faculty member of Embody Move UK and a board member of the Body Mind Centering Association.

And on top of all of that, you've been a yoga teacher for over 20 years. And you train yoga teachers and therapists in your private clinic in London, offering sessions that integrate various somatic approaches to trauma from talking, movement, touch, online and in person.

So I am very grateful to be having you on board on this conference all about trauma, therefore, and I'm wondering if you could start by telling us a little bit about your work and how it relates to sort of working with early trauma and how the somatic element comes in, how you work. Tell me a bit about your work.

Aki Omori

Yeah, okay. Thank you. Thank you for the long introduction. I have been working as an educator for a long time, in one way or another, and then expanded into more therapeutic work. And in recent years, the last of the decade also, I have been poking my head around working with the trauma. And now I feel like that's just my main body of work in my private clinic.

So the context of early trauma, there's something about the early trauma I specialize in because I was already trained in developmental movement, infant developmental movement. So I kind of

understand and embodied understanding of how we begin life and how we affect it by the environment and how we respond, and that the environment is kind of a big part of the forming of the person.

[00:02:38]

So that understanding was already there. So when we say early trauma, in my understanding, the early trauma is more to do with what happened in the early history of the person and how that might be manifesting in your life as an adult. So there might be some repeating challenges, or the relational problems. Something like that is often the area it manifests because the early trauma affects the forming of the identity.

So something that might, I don't want to use the word wrong, but something that was a bit challenging in the environment. When I say environment, it could be anything from issues of the parents, that they had issues, or it could be something to do with a memory of the birth experiences, or surgical experiences, it could be anything.

And the cause could be something quite benign but just the person, the little person, experienced it as a challenge. They did not really get the kind of help they needed. Or there's not really the holding of that process the little person experienced and then that actually affects how they see themselves.

Jaia Bristow

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And we know through attachment theory, people are familiar with attachment theory, and things like that, how much our early environment impacts the way we relate as adults. And like you say, early environment can include, of course, we're impacted by what our parents have gone through and their own traumas are going to be played out with their kids because we're all human.

But there's also in our early environment, we don't just have parents, right? And I use the word parents. For others, it's caregivers of different types. We all have lots of different caregivers, whether it is parents, biological or non-biological, aunties, uncles, other family members, non-family members, friends, teachers, nannies, all kinds of different caregivers in our life. And not everyone is always very attuned.

And so trauma happens, or hurt happens, and then trauma, as many people who have watched these conferences now know, is formed not by the hurt itself, but by the holding environment around the hurt. So, like you say, something that might seem benign or small can create a trauma because when the nervous system gets activated, if there's not that holding environment to support the regulation, then that's when traumas occur.

And then once they've occurred, they can repeat and get worsened and have layers because every time they're activated, that can happen. So I'm curious about your experience or your work around the somatic element of trauma.

Aki Omori

Yeah, well, you know, Jaia, I could listen to you for a whole hour.

[00:06:07] Jaia Bristow

Well, we're here to listen to you, but thank you.

Aki Omori

I mean it's really wonderful that, you know, things are more informed and those little things are kind of taken more seriously and then we give time to process and so that's really great. The last 20 years or so, the work in trauma just dramatically developed. And so I'm really part of that kind of wave of movement, just one little droplet in a big movement. We are inching forward. We are all pioneers, part of the pioneers. That's kind of how I see it.

And I'm not answering the question just immediately, but I just really want to say that some people would just write a book and some people come up with modalities and they were able to articulate everything. But there are lots and lots of people who are dedicating their work, and the clinical work on a daily basis. But I really would like to see this bigger movement of every single droplet that creates this wave.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. I sometimes like to talk about the ripple effect. In fact, I'm developing a course, an online course, which is looking at power, privilege, and prejudice dynamics, so systemic power dynamics around gender, race, sexuality, all those kinds of things. And looking at how often when things are so ingrained in a system, and trauma really is, it can feel really overwhelming and we can feel really helpless and powerless in the face of such a big systemic issue.

But like you're saying, if everyone starts contributing these little drops, it has this ripple effect and then the ripples start connecting and we can, together, and this is why I love working on these conferences, because together, pooling all our resources and our knowledge and having these different modalities and better understanding, then we can start to create positive change in ourselves and in our environments, which will then impact other people that we're in contact with.

Aki Omori

Yeah, I think it's really great the work you do and all the social justice and all this inclusivity and equality in those things. I am in the process, also, myself of just becoming aware of what that might be, what my story might be, working alongside other people. And then their stories have been clearer, say black people, white people, in a kind of white society, that sort of thing. I'm neither. I'm not even like a second generation. I was not born in the UK, I'm based in the UK, but I'm an immigrant.

So what is my story? So I'm really, very much in the process of finding my story right now. So thank you for bringing that. And also becoming aware. You know, this is something we have been accepting, whether it's kind of systemic issues or like really personal issues, certain things are protected so that we don't have to feel certain things that have the tone and conscious of the tone of could be a bodily sensation of danger or shame or something.

So that's where the somatic comes in, I guess. It's not just conceptual. My own personal history, the journey has taken a long time. My therapeutic process might take forever because my system

was so well protected. For me to access my authentic truth, because there was a lot of shame and I didn't even know what shame felt like.

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So when I was able to gradually come out, allowing that part to really come out, and then have been more compassionate and understanding of why I felt like that and then that part is beginning to be really part of making who I am. So it took a long time for me to really get here. I'm slightly kind of digressing from where the somatic comes in, which I can talk about in a minute, but because of my history it's really difficult.

So something like spiritual practice, like yoga and meditation, mindfulness, all these things, were really serving me just to be more present and embodied. But then there was always something that was missing that could not penetrate that protected barrier, the kind of internal system was so protected. You see it in a family system, the certain patterns are protected, just so you can't penetrate it because something is high at stake. And so my own internal... So part of me still struggled, just not knowing what it was, and then I had to go find a therapy, psychotherapy, and so I'm kind of going a little bit more into that.

But then, even then, I could feel there was something going on but while we were talking, I still could not really access it. And then I came across the work of Peter Levine, Dr Peter Levine, and even the trauma work had created my way in to connect that part of me. And then there's a lot of the little by little process. So it just took me a long time. And it is funny, isn't it, I guess I'm one of the kind of wounded healers.

Jaia Bristow

I think there's a lot of wounded healers in the world. Thank you so much for sharing your own experience around that and I think you're bringing in a really important point, that can often get overlooked in this kind of work, is that protective mechanism which can be, like you say, impenetrable, almost.

And so we hear about all these trauma healing modalities, like you say, there's mindfulness, there's different types of meditation and Qigong and different types of body work and breathing work, and there's all these things that exist and they're all fantastic, wonderful modalities and they all involve tuning into oneself and connecting to oneself and feeling things.

But sometimes it can be really hard to feel things for those who have trauma because our bodies have learnt to protect us from feeling. It's a natural human response to avoid feeling pain, discomfort, shame. Shame is a really paralyzing, difficult emotion to feel. Guilt. All these different emotions can come up. And so our bodies protect us, or our psyches protect us, from feeling them.

And all kinds of things can happen from different types of disassociation and all of these kinds of things. So I'm curious both in your journey and in your work how you said the trauma work and Peter Levine's work and all these things have supported you. But how were you able to sort of honor that protecting part of yourself without just hammering through it but also actually being able to reconnect with yourself and do this kind of somatic work?

[00:14:01] Aki Omori

So I think the process is really different from these individuals and that needs to be really honored and respected and also that's the fun of weaving the process for each person. There's something that you said kind of touched me in different places to inspire me to sort of speak about a few things. But even in the somatic movement work that I was involved in, and while it was so fantastic, but because my own internal environment was not particularly safe to feel those things that come up.

So often, unconsciously, subconsciously, unconsciously, what I was feeling, there was a sense of shame and discomfort and also the people who were holding... So there was kind of hidden hypervigilance within myself but also the people who are holding might not necessarily have the capacity to hold that person's, or guide that person's, process.

Or if it's more educational settings, sometimes they have to draw some kind of boundary to not go too much into the therapeutic process. So, you know, and then one needs to seek the individual process, the individual therapy and things like that, but just my own... So there was also a fear around somebody having some kind of traumatic, even small, process. And then the person who is educated might not be able to meet them because of their own kind of fear.

Jaia Bristow

And when you talk about people not being able to... Either not being trauma informed or not being attuned to the person and not being able to hold space for them, is that like in sort of present day, adult times?

Aki Omori

It's that kind of present day, adult education setting. It could be a yoga class or it could be that as well. But not everybody is trying to hold that space for the process.

Jaia Bristow

Right. So, like you say, when people aren't particularly attuned, whether it's a yoga teacher or a therapist, and you'd hope therapists are more attuned, or anyone else, then of course it can reactivate or bring back up these childhood traumas, is what I'm hearing you say?

Aki Omori

Yeah, it makes you feel really scared. They go back to the shell or the splitting happens again. So it's just some form of retraumatization or something. But because I didn't know what was happening with myself and, also, as I said, my own internal environment was not safe.

Jaia Bristow

Can you say more about that? What do you mean by that?

Aki Omori

So the internal environment, so there's some sensations. It could be the sensation, really, I'm experiencing is associated or kind of linked or coupled with a sense of, say, shame or something

embarrassing. In my case, often, probably was like a really, kind of, hidden level of shame, I think. So I cannot really process it and it really can affect somebody's relationship with others when that happens, as well.

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Personally, then, I just noticed that and then I needed to go and have more trauma work. And then I think it's a big ask for people who teach yoga and everything just to really be all around that and everything. Then, just if it's an educational setting and then the person probably needs to go and have individual therapy or something. But there's just a little bit of kind of setting, but at least there's a kind of awareness around it.

And I think another one is more kind of transparent also, you know, the people are a bit scared of what's happening to somebody else. I had one in a group work and there was one person who fell over against the glass. The glass didn't break, but it made a noise. So the sound was a little bit dramatic. So everybody was slightly taken back. And then there were teachers who just come in and say, oh, don't worry, we're just going to carry on.

But everybody was a bit like this, and carrying on, and then that somebody was attended, the person who fell was attended, but still. And then another tutor came in and said, hey, how are you guys feeling? You alright? And then we all went, ahh. Like really small things like that. And there's something in the elephant, or whatever, is kind of named.

Jaia Bristow

And, I think, I really appreciate in what you're saying how you really see that trauma isn't always the big things. People think trauma is these big events and that's what creates trauma, but there's big events, there's small events, there's medium events. But like you say, the holding environment is not just what creates the trauma, but also what can retraumatize and add layers to the trauma and perpetuate the trauma.

Whereas if a holding environment is safe and supportive, then immediately it can assist and support not just breaking the cycle of repeating trauma, but also beginning to heal trauma, right? So like you say, that example of something that appears so innocuous, someone fell into a thing, there was no major injuries, but it made a loud noise, everyone's nervous systems got activated slightly and was like, okay, what's going on?

And then you have one response, which is, it's fine, let's move on and ignore it and dismiss what's going on, which can, of course, anyone who's had that experience of having been dismissed as a child or anytime, which many of us have, anyone who has trauma linked to that, to having their nervous system activated and being told it's fine, it's like the way we tell kids, don't cry, you're fine, rather than, hey, are you alright? What's going on? And so that can reactivate something.

And then you have this other response where people's like, okay, how is everyone doing? Is everyone okay? What's needed? And it's just more attuned. And again, this is something I teach, I talk about, is that how, how I said at the beginning, things happen, life happens, hurts happen, physical, emotional, we get traumatized, we get retraumatized, based on the holding environment, as you're saying, and we can also heal based on that environment.

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And if everyone's a little more attuned to their own environment and to what's going on for other people, then that can support that. And I also hear, as you say, that when we have a lot of trauma, it can be difficult to be attuned. And it's a big ask to ask everyone to be trauma informed, for all yoga teachers and anyone working with people to be fully trauma informed.

And also to do the work in themselves, as you say, you had lots of shame in you. It was very difficult to do your own healing journey, let alone be sensitive to other people's environment. So it's like we can see what's needed and we can also see why it's so difficult to get there.

Aki Omori

Yes, I think you just put it so beautifully. I think there's something about a parent or like a caregiver and the children, when something happens, if the caregiver is sort of like, don't worry about it, and then that part of you is never recognized and seen, and then there's some kind of split that happens, and then you just go on as if nothing had happened, but there's already fragmentation happening there.

But if the caregiver just stops to say hey, and then everyone goes, well, the child or children goes, ahh, that's all we sometimes kind of need. Kind of slightly uncomfortable about the trauma informed, what that means. If it's just a cognitive understanding, which is a good start, understanding is a really good start. But if the person has their own embodied experience of that and then there's something about their attunement and empathy and compassion, understanding, and also less fear around that process of being with another, that's something.

Jaia Bristow

So what I'm hearing in what you're sharing, I think there's a few different elements, but one of the things that I'm hearing is how, first of all, it makes me want to celebrate everyone who's showing up and listening to these talks. Because what you're sharing is the importance of connecting to oneself and doing one's own work, will then support us to be more attuned to other people, once we learn to be more in tune with ourselves.

So maybe you can tell me a bit more about, again, in your line of work, how you support people in being more in tune or attuned to themselves?

Aki Omori

Welcoming everything, whatever comes up, just welcome, be kind of curious and welcoming everything. Group work and individual work are very different. The group work, I don't know, just sort of a little acknowledgment, but also knowing my own limit as a person who is holding a group, we say, okay, create a safe space for everybody. I don't think it is always possible.

But then, physically, we can just look and say we are safe. We can name those things. But if their internal environment, coming back to the internal environment, if they have some kind of old stories playing up in their head or something, then that can never be completely controlled by whoever is holding the space. But I acknowledge my own limits to that. But whatever comes up, say just allow, welcome and allow.

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And then just somehow they're supporting, maybe sometimes it's more towards a kind of containing because it might not feel safe enough for the person to really allow that process to take place. Just noticing if it is the right space for the person, or the persons, and sometimes it is the right place, so becoming like a group process. And everybody kind of feels regulated and better for it, as well.

And also others watching and then how that person is really taken care of and how the group is taking care and then that is really regulating for the people. So that way maybe I work in a group process because I don't know, I can't be prepared for everything, but I'll just meet it in each moment when it comes up. Because if you try to control, you get just even more nervous.

And also I try to, in a group process, and also the individual process as well, I try to provide resources first. So if you're beginning to be a little bit spaced out, do this. So we just do it right at the beginning of the session. What is it like? Just really simple things like they're feeling their bones and the ground or some form orienting, or do something. So they have something to do for themselves first.

But also I really see that happening. Also I'm here, so this is becoming not my job, but we're working together, so more kind of autonomy in a person. So that's another thing. So just giving them some tools to really deal with. But sometimes if you sort of say too much of this might happen, then it usually happens. When people talk about trauma and people begin to remember their trauma, as well. So this is just a constant dance.

Jaia Bristow

Yeah, and I think that's really beautiful, that idea of a dance, as you say, the constant dance. Especially because you work so much with movement, right, which I'd love to hear more about in a second. But I just really want to appreciate the way that you create safe spaces by, number one, recognizing your own limits. So it's not saying here I am, an expert on everything, I can handle everything.

You're acknowledging your own limits and in so doing actually creates a safe space because when someone claims to have... I'm always mistrustful of people who say that they can do everything and anything and handle any situation. It's also that I really hear how important it is to name what might arise so that people are prepared, so that things aren't as scary and it's not like, what's going on?

It's saying things might happen. And also being careful not to be too leading and not say, this will happen. Or even being careful not to be too specific about what might happen, because that might then, you know, people will... When people say don't think of an elephant, then everyone starts thinking about an elephant.

Aki Omori

Yeah.

[00:29:02] Jaia Bristow

And so, yeah, I think there's something really precious and important and empowering and healing about holding a space and creating a safe space by honoring everyone in the space, whether it's just working on an individual level. So, two of you in the space or working in a group level with lots in the space, honoring who you are, your own journey, your own limits, whilst also recognizing that when you're facilitating, then maybe less vulnerable than when you're not.

And letting people know what may arise, what may not, and just that it's all okay, is what I'm hearing in what you're saying, because reactions are going to happen. But that sort of attuned responsiveness to different reactions, to different emotions that arise, rather than saying this is what's expected, this is how it should be, and this is how it shouldn't be. It's, as you say, it's just accepting and attuning to each individual situation, knowing that you're not sure what's going to arise for the people, you're not sure what's going to arise for yourself at times, I'm sure, and that's part of the work.

Now, I'm mindful of time, but I'd love to hear a bit more about your movement work within all of this and yeah, your movement work and, maybe, we talked a bit off camera about how life moves and I know that's something that's alive for you right now.

Aki Omori

So how life moves. There is this image that I use on my website and the lovely design, I just created this image, and there's a seedling within a tube and it's shooting. So the stem is kind of growing up towards the sun, and then the root is finding its way to the earth. So there was an experiment by a scientist like 150 years ago or something, so I just got it from the book and different inspirations, but there's something about, that's how our life moves.

So whatever the environment, we adapt to the restrictions of the environment, but life is still moving. That's the life force expression. And then as the restriction of the tube is beginning to disappear, as soon as that, it moves towards the sun, and then the roots. So underneath all this, like whatever their obstacles and traumatic experiences and everything, but just really recognizing, or just remembering, the presence of the life force.

So that really kind of holds my therapeutic space very much. So even working with a client who cannot really see that, it doesn't really feel like that, because what they see is the obstacles and the restrictions and also some kind of psychological identity that is associated with this restricted, compromised setting. But then we can hold that larger image, the larger picture, for them while they're going through their removal of the obstacle and they're really appreciating the obstacle that protected, you know, maybe protected it from like, I don't know, the cold weather or something, whatever it is.

So everything is an expression of life and the movement, the gesture we use, and then also moving through. Sometimes in somatic experiencing as well, other modalities use the movement to complete something. What is this, when I do this, what's the message? What's serving? Or when it's like this? Or let's just go in there and just hide. Okay, just do the hiding without kind of going into the regression. Because then you are identifying too much with the helpless, young part.

So just remembering you are here with me as an adult in this body, just playing, and then the movement really shows, more than the words can express. And also when we're in the movement,

and then also having the kind of progression from the movement, sometimes I use drawing before they can be put into words. Quickly trying to go into the words, sometimes we also lose the essence and then old persona can take over. So let's just take a little bit of movement. We use the drawings, or I use anything, the many modalities.

[00:34:17] Jaia Bristow

Beautiful. I love that. I love the idea that the life force will always find a way and sometimes we don't see it, sometimes we really see all the restrictions and constraints, but there is a part of us, just like in nature, that's reaching for the sun and reaching for the soil. And I love the way you talk about movement and drawing and that there are so many modalities to get in touch with what needs to be worked on or what's flowing without having to use words. Words are great if people are able to and if there's not, I love that you use all these other modalities.

Aki, thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciate it. Despite a few tech glitches and internet cut outs, we've managed to have a really fantastic conversation. So how can people find out more about you and your work?

Aki Omori

You can just go to my website. And I see clients individually, online, and also if you're in London, I have one to one in person so I can use my touch work to help regulate, and the movement. Touch work is great, just pushing the time a little bit, touch work is also great because that's how we grew, right?

Just part of changing the pattern is just really encouraging of what's happening, welcome what's happening, but also there's a time of inhibition, inhibiting the habit so that the parts of the body can find another pathway. So the touch work and the talking work, I work really differently for each person to support their process. So it's on the website, and be in touch.

Jaia Bristow

Amazing. And the website is?

Aki Omori

[Akiomori.com](https://www.akiomori.com). Sorry, I should have said. [Akiomori.com](https://www.akiomori.com).

Jaia Bristow

Wonderful. Thank you so much. And, yeah, I love having chats with you about all these modalities that we don't hear so much about, touch, movement, drawing, words. And that they all work together and looking at early childhood stuff and how it's appearing now using these modalities sounds really powerful. So I encourage everyone to go check out your work. And thank you once again.

Aki Omori

Great. Thank you, Jaia.