



Conscious Life presents

Returning the Nervous System to a Healthy Baseline

Guest - Aki Omori

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[00:00:09] Jaï Bristow

Hello and welcome back to this conference. My name is Jaï Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. And today I am very pleased to be welcoming back the wonderful Aki Omori. Welcome, Aki.

Aki Omori

Hi Jaï. Thank you for having me back.

Jaï Bristow

Of course. It's nice to have you here again. So you are a trauma therapist specializing in early trauma and CPTSD, and a somatic movement therapist and educator. And today we're going to be talking about global high intensity activation, known as GHIA.

Now, I must admit, I have no idea what that means. So do you want to get us started by just saying what GHIA actually is?

Aki Omori

Yes. Okay. I try to be as concise as I can be. The global high intensity activation. It's a bit mouthful, isn't it? Or sometimes we call it global high. It's like the whole body is in an activated state. And so there was a massive arousal that happened, but with a very little capacity to either self-regulate. Or if it's more to do with the early trauma, there was not enough help to help you regulate. And then people who had that can be stuck in that high state. So that's global high activation.

And there are different causes. I specialize in working with people with troubles with early history, so that's the area I am going to talk about today. But there are other causes, like things like electrocution or suffocation or near-drowning or... I also recently heard that drug-induced psychosis, that sort of thing, can also cause a global high, and then people can get stuck.

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And basically what happens in the very simplicity of the nervous system, because I see the body a lot more than just a nervous system. So there's a sympathetic nervous system. There's a stimulus, massive stimulus comes in and arousal.

So I'm just going to try to draw the line so that arousal goes up and it goes so high. So high that the part of their parasympathetic nervous system is going to initially go down, but then comes back up to put you in a more free state so you can cope. And then people are stuck here.

So what happened? The sympathetic nervous system is so high, and then on top of that, there is a parasympathetic dorsal vagal, if you like, and a dorsal state of the nervous system is there. So you are frozen, but right underneath that there is a really constantly, extremely high activation underneath. And people are trapped in this space.

Jaï Bristow

I can hear that. So it sounds like what it is, is like naturally, we have moments in life where we're going to be activated. Our system activated on alert. Like if we're doing exercise or if we're doing different things, then our system gets activated like this.

But it sounds like that often with traumatic events the system can get activated, but then normally what needs to happen is that it needs to come back down to baseline. It needs to re-regulate. But that what this GHIA is, is the getting activated and then getting stuck in this activation state.

Aki Omori

And also for people who can experience this, the cause happened at the beginning of life. So that's how people live. Some of us really struggle to... Struggle on a daily basis, and they're probably spending a lifetime looking for reasons, or explanations why that is. And we attach ourselves to different stories and scenarios and the reasons and things like that.

But I think if it's like a one-off event of trauma, then you can work with that. You can work with a trauma therapist or get some help, and then that is back to normal, like they had a car accident or something. But if you have global high activation underneath it, we are always looking at also working with that as well.

I think it probably relates to part of what we call the CPTSD. It's complex because that becomes more of the thing. So you can't just look at this thing. You also have to deal with this. I think it's a nice way of looking at it as that baseline. So your nervous system goes up and down, so there's arousal and you come back. Arousal. Come back.

I don't know how to put it. The healthy, balanced baseline might be here. So when you actually get activated, it could be an exercise or playing or something. Sorry, my lights. No lights going up. Going up and down. But when you come to the restful place, there's a baseline right here.

So you're able to rest, digest, and there's a repair that can happen and the renewal can happen. And then you rested enough, and then you're ready. Once you rested well, you slept well, and

you're back in a healthy activity. Going out to work. Going out to play. Go and play badminton. Whatever it is.

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But they're global high, people who have global high. So remember it went all the way up and then parasympathetic, even higher. The baseline comes to here, So they can never rest. So when they want to rest, because of their underlying high activation, underneath, they can never rest.

So there's constant exhaustion and all the time is wired. A bit buzzing. And often, I know it just from my own experience as well. Mine is getting better, but it takes a long time for that baseline to slowly shift, which I think is hopeful.

It's not like a one-off thing, but gradually. And it feels really good. A lot of things are beginning to make sense. Because it's all wired, so some people might come across as so intense all the time. You see, you meet people, you might experience yourself a bit like that. Life is a bit intense. It's a bit like, "whoa". The person is a bit much sometimes just to be around. There's just so much going on, you know.

Or some people might come across a bit spaced. It might be peaceful, but a bit spaced. There may be some cases of... Sometimes the cases when meditation and things like that cannot quite work with that part, is also part of that. So people just look like a bit spaced out, a bit Zen-like, but a bit dull. Or it could be really catatonic. Like, you just can't do anything.

You are basically in a collapsed, frozen, collapse state. So you see both, but also alternating in between so we can get up and they just do things. They're so intense and they can't rest. And then when they get just so exhausted, they might collapse. But collapse is not very restful.

Jaï Bristow

So I can really hear about how you were saying about the baseline for regular regulated people, say here. And that when people with GHIA, the whole baseline goes up into activation state. Even when they're in a rest state or trying to regulate their nervous system, they're still in this high intensity state, In this high intensity activation.

Of course it's going to play out in lots of different ways. And it might play out, like you said, with people who come across as very intense, having this very intense energy. And as you said, it's interesting that people can fluctuate. There's different symptoms. It's not always the same. It's not always very obvious because other times it can go into almost like a freeze state.

It sounds like there's some parallels with the trauma responses, That activated fight-flight-freeze states. And maybe it's not exactly that, but it sounds like there's these states people with GHIA can get into, which is difficult then to regulate.

[00:10:08] Aki Omori

So in a way, when you have global high, and then there's much less resiliency. Because of the high baseline, because of what's hiding underneath or what's covering it up. So it leaves them in a very vulnerable state in a way.

I can really see when I look back in my history, when I didn't know anything about the aspects of trauma that was playing up in my life. So any small stimulation. Stimulus comes in, comes along, and then because it's already high underneath, it feels like an emergency. All the lights come on. Everything comes on. So being able to cope.

Jaï Bristow

Yeah, no, I really hear that. For those who have it, then it's difficult. There's less resiliency, and the slightest anything, the slightest incident will activate even more. And so again, if regulated people are at a baseline here. Something happens, they might just blip or something big happens, they might have a slightly bigger thing.

But for those with GHIA, if they're already here and the slightest thing is sending them up here. And when you think a regular regulated person's baseline is here. It's literally very intense to experience that.

So I'm curious, Aki, if you can talk to us a bit about how we work with that? How do we work on regulating?

Aki Omori

Yeah, so there's something about this whole system is on. Comes on. Whenever we are addressing any case. The trauma incident or something, and then we can be aware. You can be aware, you got this global high is happening in the background because that's what you're also dealing with at the same time.

So just awareness is really good without actually going, "Oh, no". There are ways. There are so many of us finding ways and finding things that are really meaningful. Life is in the process of healing. It's just so meaningful and wonderful. I think there are different ways. And it's gradual, I think, because it's a whole body system. So all the time, just bringing it down little by little. Little by little.

So that's happening in the background while you're working on maybe other things, too. Okay, maybe I'll just tell you a little bit. This is a really simplest picture that I understood at the beginning of coming across global high intensity activation.

So there's an arousal, and then they have the nervous system. There's arousal, and it comes down. Back to normal, Baseline. But arousal comes up and then as it's beginning to come down... There's something about the people with GHIA, people with the global high intensity, that there's the luring to continue to go up again.

So see if you can see that. So the wave comes up and down. And then as it's beginning to come down, there's a next wave coming up already. And as that one is beginning to come down, there's

a next wave coming up. And then you keep catching on to that. It's like a cascade of getting more and more arousal. So that's the pattern we tend to invite in.

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It's actually really quite luring. Because the auto, the management style comes into play unless the new way is introduced. So this is one of the ways... I will do a short practice, I will just guide through the short practice at the end of this talk. Just to really do that, something I learned from one of my tutors.

So it goes up and it comes down. And then when you begin to come down, there's a temptation to follow the next wave going up. But there's a choice point to choose, just really noticing what's coming down. And then we learn to follow that instead of going up, cascading.

And then when you follow... This is so beautiful as an experience. This is so beautiful. But just following this wave all the way. All the way. It goes longer than you think. All the way. I do this with my clients a lot, and it's just really... Just a beautiful experience for both of us to really witness that. So just that way. And then over time, it's beginning to shift. That's one of the ways.

Jaï Bristow

No, it's really interesting to hear about how it works, How there's an automatic desire and pull to just keep going up and up and cascading up. And that it actually takes practice and work in some ways to get to that choice point and then go down. And I'm looking forward to the demonstration that you're going to give us shortly.

But before we get into that, I'm also curious. Because you've mentioned the waves, but you also work a lot with movement and touch in your work. So maybe you can say a little bit more about that and how that can be applied to regulating the system as well.

Aki Omori

So in my work, I really combine the approaches, like Somatic Experiencing and the gestures and dialog. But also I use a lot of touch and also movement in my sessions. And also I'm a movement educator, so they work together. So in the movement, we can really look at the state of the nervous system through...

This is one of the ways, but through the tissue tone. Like a tissue tone. So I've got this little tool here to show you for the tone. When I say tone, it's not the nervous system tone, but it's a tissue tone. So I have two balls here. One is really inflated and one is not so much. And then this, we call it low tone.

So this is more related to a more collapsed state. And it has a certain relationship with the gravity. So if I drop this... You can't really see where I'm dropping to. But if I drop this... Drop this, it collapses. It has more relationship to gravity, yet it's dissociated in a way that it doesn't have a clear relationship with the ground. So what we work with this is bringing back the tone.

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And when it's so inflated, it doesn't want to stay. If I just balance it, it has a very little relationship with the ground. Always up. So there's something about that. So it shows up in another... You know, the nervous system. More sympathetic, high tone sympathetic nervous system.

And what we want is... Something that we talked about alternating between an extreme state of intensity and the collapse. What's missing is what's in between. They alternate, as if there's nothing in between. But life moves more... You see people, maybe Peter Levine and other people use this. But life moves like this, right?

So there's a rhythm. Condensing and expanding. So through the movement and the touch, developmental movement and touch, is reinforcing. So if something is just so high tone, somehow we teach them, or gradually teach people to be able to drop down into the ground.

And if you have a low tone, we're going to just gradually pump them up. And also recognize their relationship with the ground again. When it's collapsed states like, "Oh, I'm really heavy collapsed". But you're actually not in a relationship even with the gravity or the ground.

And so that way we can begin to bring them up. And so there's something about the power of developmental movement, which is like an ABC of life. So whether it's a trauma or otherwise. It gives them the opportunity that includes their primitive reflexes too. But it gives opportunity to repattern their early experiences and then being able to reconnect with the life force. So it's really powerful. The development of movement patterns we go through all the way from embryology to pre-birth.

And then the birthing movement and then the movement... That developmental movement comes after birth. And to guide people through, to be really able to work with gravity. Relationship with gravity. Relationship with yourself. And the relationship with others and also the environment. So it's a very relational piece.

One of the known causes of the global high intensity activation is they interrupted or somehow their bonding didn't really quite happen. So developmental movement and touch actually really has the ability to... Capacity to bring back the bonding experience and re-experiencing the bonding experience with another person or the gravity. And bringing comfort into the underbody and the mind, and also re-establishing their safety. Experience of safety.

And so from that comfortable place, and there's safety and you're bonded, so your body tone is there. You have a sense of yourself, and you have a sense of the environment. And then from that place, we can come into more curiosity and a desire, and then resilience can be born. And I want to talk just a little bit about touch work.

So the touch works, a really gentle touch. We can also renegotiate the boundaries and permission, consent, and through the dialog and the somatic psychology way of just playing with the location and the conversation so that people are beginning to get the sense of empowerment through the boundaries.

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And also the touch. Once the touch is available. Really gentle, safe touch is very containing. And so they're containing and also through the touch. Because the touch gives you a sensation which is not coming from your movement, which is more doing something. Exercise and in a movement you're doing. It's a motor action. Whereas the sensory is the incoming flow that you receive from another.

So through touch, your sensory awareness of your body self is really enhanced. And then we have a chance to really reattune with each other, which is incredibly healing for people who have not really had that opportunity to really feel. Just even like I had a client. I was holding clients, putting my hands around the shoulders or something.

And then she just happened to roll her head. So her head rested on my wrist the other day, on my arm. And she was just such an incredibly dysregulated person, normally can't stop. But as soon as I use my touch, she goes into serenity. And then she just rolled her head and rested. And then she said to me, "Is it okay if I rest my head here for a moment?". And I went, "Of course".

And then that is incredibly healing. So something that the person had never experienced as a young person, we get to have. And also just supporting somebody from underneath. Some people with early trauma speak about, there was a sense of falling into a void because there was nobody to really show you, to catch you.

You were alone and neglecting something, but just having somebody really supporting you from underneath and then you are able to really yield. And it's just a massive, massive global shift that happens in our body. So in just enforcing this implicit acceptance of bonding in a pre-verbal state, and just to say that you exist, your needs matter and you are loved. Those messages can really come through in that interaction.

And then at the same time having the dialog to really support the person, to recognize that as an adult self as well. So anyway, I just wanted to talk a little bit about the attachment movement and its power and benefits in working with global high or early developmental trauma.

Jaï Bristow

Thank you for bringing that piece in. No, I really hear how important it is and how healing it can be for people who have early developmental trauma, which is very much associated with GHIA. And that often had a lack of holding, a lack of support, a lack of literally physical holding. How healing that can be, to have that movement, that touch, that support, that holding later on in life as part of a therapeutic process.

Aki Omori

Just really renegotiating, repatterning, but also just recognizing. Being able to recognize that life force that is within. That it's nurtured in that time. So it's a shift in a global sense of self, global experience of oneself. So global, working on the local. There's always global things.

[00:26:48] Jaï Bristow

Thank you. Thank you for bringing that piece in. Is there anything else you wanted to add before we go into the demonstration for the regulating exercises?

Aki Omori

I think it's just important. Just because of the practice I'm sharing, which I got from one of my tutors. It's something that is so simple and you can also take it on yourself. And if you really feel that you're one of us with global high intensity activation, you can actually take this on board and practice.

I have been offering this on a weekly basis to a group of people, and there's so many people actually came back to me and said how much they felt the difference. I didn't tell them what it was, but they had their own experience and came back. Sorry, just lights coming in.

So what I mean to say is the importance of you coming on board for your own healing process. And then if you go and see a therapist or coach or whoever you work with, whatever they offer can be utilized. So you might feel really helpless, but working through the unhelpful self-talk part of it and regulation and everything. But really be part of your own healing and then you can really team-up.

I think this is really important. Healing doesn't happen until the person turns that corner. So the internal environment is safer. Maybe you can employ... I use a little bit of parts work like IFS, that sort of thing as well to really help you come to have a peaceful environment. Enough so that you can actually be on board.

Jaï Bristow

Yeah, no, I really appreciate that piece because I think it is really important to take responsibility and become autonomous to some degree around one's healing journey. And that doesn't mean doing it all yourself. But it means taking, initiating what's needed and keeping the threads of your own journey. Because no one knows you as much as you know you.

No one knows oneself as much as each individual knows more about themselves. And I think it's true in all different ways. And then, especially if you're seeing different healers, different practitioners, different therapists, and trying different modalities. Then you can see the thread of what's working for you. So I really appreciate you bringing that piece in.

Aki Omori

Yeah, I think because it really makes a difference. And if you feel like finding yourself, there's a part of you that is not somehow, not willing to be on your side to work on yourself. And then instead of totally identifying with that part of you, you can come in with a curiosity. What is this part?

Jaï Bristow

Yeah.

[00:30:07] Aki Omori

And then a path could open up. So it's not like I'm responsible. But it's not like ignoring the part that doesn't want to. So we can be really curious. So we can include that part to be in a room with curiosity, and then the path would just go forward.

Jaï Bristow

Yes. I'm aware of time. So do we want to go into the demonstration now?

Aki Omori

Okay, great. So this exercise I was given by a tutor on the Somatic Experiencing called Leal Keen, and she called it Three Steps Down. So it's going to be maybe slightly my version, not exactly how she might have shared it with us. But it's just exercise for lowering global high activation and really helpful over a long period of time.

If you do it often enough, you will find a significant change, but in small doses. Like a small dose is creating, small dots creating a large shape, something like that. Okay, so I'd like each of you to just find a place that feels comfortable. You can be seated, you can lie down, but find yourself in a comfortable position. And then just settle there for a moment.

And then begin by just turning your attention. Just gentle, keep your eyes soft, but turning your attention inward into the sensation of this global high activation in your system. And it is often experienced as an electrical buzzing. Or it could be manifest in different ways. Maybe some tightness. Just give yourself time to notice that. And once you have identified this sensation of global high activation in your body, just simply, just rest your attention on it.

Just resting your attention on it without trying to change it. We don't need to change anything. Just being curious about it and then noticing. And then see if or how it might spontaneously change when you pay attention to it. Nothing might happen, but just resting your attention on it for a while.

And then within a minute or two, the level of activation will go down a little bit. It's very important to pay very close attention often because this step down can be very subtle, almost imperceptible.

It could show up in a little bit of deeper breath, or some releasing the tension in a part of your body. Or the perception that the electrical sensation became just slightly less dense. Or it could be something else for you.

And when you notice that the global high activation lowered, bring all your attention to what it feels like in your body when the activation is just a little bit, tiny bit lower. What is the sensation in your body when the activation downshifts? Where do you feel the sensation? Where else in your body responds to this very slight lowering of the activation? And then keep paying attention to this sensation of what it's like.

There is less activation in your body. Before too long, the activation will lower just a little bit more. And then you just continue to pay attention to what it's like in your body. When the activation goes a little bit lower. Really notice it.

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Are there places that feel calmer? How does the rest of your body respond to this increased sense of calmness? Soon the activation will lower again. Downshift again.

So we have done three steps down. And after you have gone through three steps down, you can repeat the exercise if you wish, or by then you might feel pretty low. But if you continue to follow this down shifting wave, you might also notice the parts of you beginning to release.

It really surprised me when I first tried it. Something else that I never knew. There was a tension that was letting go. And then my voice changed and there's something... And then I was calmer for the three days. Following three days.

So every time when you complete this exercise, you will resolve a small amount of the global high activation in your system. And then, in the words of Leal Keen who wrote these Three Steps Down, "This exercise practiced faithfully", she writes, "over long periods of time, can really have significant results".

Jaï Bristow

Thank you for sharing that with us. I'm curious because I don't know if I have GHIA, but I do have ADHD. And I know for a lot of people with trauma or things like that, it can be very difficult to sit still and pay attention to one thing in that way.

So I was wondering if you had anything to say about that, about actually doing the exercise and bringing oneself to paying attention and turning inwards if one has a very activated state.

Aki Omori

Yeah, I really resonate with that. Just with my own, because I have the tendency for ADHD as well. So maybe try often enough at different times and then sometimes it will stick. Maybe not every time.

Sometimes resorting a little bit to the movement might be a helpful one for you because things kind of walk up. And also when we are resting on... Just resting your attention on something, it could be a bit of a hyper-focused moment. I don't know. But you can just really just be with that.

So your session might be a little bit shorter, but if you... I'm sure it varies to each person, but I'm sure when you notice, just get intrigued about just a little downshifting and a following. You're beginning to also feel intrigued, but also beginning to feel some sense of relief, which your body self would welcome.

So that's what I can say. But I'm just reassuring you that it works somehow because I have it. I'm quite ADHD, although I'm not diagnosed for it, but I have everything and I have global high. This is such an accessible exercise, so I recommend it.

[00:41:45] Jaï Bristow

Thank you so much for your time today, Aki. How can people find out more about you and your work?

Aki Omori

Yeah, just go to my website, akiomori.com. And if you're after having sessions with me and it goes to the therapy section of that. I do in person and Zoom now. And also I have Instagram, [@akisomatic](https://www.instagram.com/akisomatic), and I just put some exercise and information, things like that.

Jaï Bristow

Amazing.

Aki Omori

Great. Thank you. Good to see you, Jaï.