



## Conscious Life presents

### Building Trust in Your Self With Breathwork

Guest - Michael Stone

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#### **[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson**

Hello, and welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, your conference co-host. Today I'm speaking with Michael Stone. Michael attended his first breathwork session in 2005 and was blown away by the power of the breath. It was such a life-changing experience for him that he decided to focus his life around breathwork in support of world healing.

In 2018, he created Neurodynamic Breathwork Online in order to achieve his vision of allowing anybody in the world that wants to experience the benefits of expanded states of consciousness to be able to do so safely from the comfort of their own home.

In the last three years, he's facilitated over 800 online sessions of Neurodynamic Breathwork online with participants from over 120 countries. Michael Stone, thank you so much for joining me.

#### **Michael Stone**

Well, thank you for having me. I've been looking forward to this.

#### **Meagen Gibson**

So today we're going to talk about Neurodynamic Breathwork and how and why it works so well in transcending your past and working with trauma. And at the end of the session, you will give us a little breathwork taster session, which I'm very much looking forward to. So can we start by you telling us how you got into breathwork?

#### **Michael Stone**

Yes. I have to give you a little bit of my background. I basically have a science background. And when I grew up, I was always very good at stuff having to do with the logical mind, so to speak, where I had to figure things out. I did well in school. But other things I was struggling with, for instance, relationships.

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And I just couldn't figure out why I was having so much trouble. And especially since I was coming from the place of, "I can figure this out. I'm smart. Why can't I figure this out?" I was doing well in my life financially. I was doing well at work. But again, other things that were more heart-centered or for example, relationships, not so good at all.

And then at a certain point, I ended up going to South America. Well, it was actually about a relationship. I went there with a woman that I was hoping maybe she was the one, kind of thing. I just kept thinking, if I find the right person, it'll work. And when we went down there and we went out into the rainforest, we were given an opportunity to spend some time with a local shaman who invited us to do a religious ceremony with him.

And I said... I never just say yes to that. So I always go, "Okay, what's this all about?" So he goes, "It's very simple. I go out into the rainforest. I get a vine and a leaf. I mix it all up, you drink it, and you have this kind of experience".

So I'm going, "No freaking way. I'm a chemical engineer, scientist. You don't just mix stuff up like a witch's brew and drink it in the middle of nowhere". But the woman I went with said, "Oh, we got to do this. This sounds like so much fun".

So that was really a breakthrough for me because I would normally never do something spontaneously like that. At that moment, for whatever reason, I figured, "Okay, I'm down here. This is meant to be. Let's give it a roll. If I die, at least it's in a beautiful space. I've had a pretty good life. It's all going to be okay".

And as you probably can guess, the substance was ayahuasca. And I had this amazing experience where really, the first time in my life I felt safe in the world. I felt like the world was a safe place and I could really allow myself to be more open and vulnerable than I had been in the past.

So when I got back to the States, I'm going, "Okay, I'm not going down to Peru every week to have these kinds of experiences". So I said, "Okay, there's got to be another way to have them. The receptors are there in my brain".

And that's what ultimately brought me to breathwork. And my original breathwork that I tried was Holotropic Breathwork because I liked the way it was developed by Dr Stan Grof, who did it based on his experiences with LSD psychotherapy.

And then went... After that was banned, I went to look at how people could have the same kind of healing experiences without the substance. So he developed Holotropic Breathwork, which is a twelve-hour, all-day experience where you could actually access these, what he called "non-ordinary states of consciousness".

So I tried it, and had another amazing experience. I said, "Okay, this is for me". And started to do it regularly and actually, that was my first facilitation certification that I got just to facilitate Holotropic Breathwork workshops. And I started to really see, yes, this really works. Where you can actually use breath and music to quiet the ego mind and access these deeper parts of our psyche that really have all the answers that we need.

**[00:05:09] Meagen Gibson**

I love this story. Yeah, I absolutely love it. And I've heard it before, and I never get tired of it because I relate to it so much. Because even if you have a non-ordinary state or you achieve one, it's unsustainable for you to be taking ayahuasca every week.

And there's a lot of parts that go... I've never taken ayahuasca, but I've heard from many people that there's a lot of preparation in a ceremony like that. And as you said... I would love it if you came back to it just for a minute and expanded on the fact that the receptors for us to have these experiences are there all the time.

**Michael Stone**

Ultimately, if you have the experiences, the receptors have to be there or you wouldn't have them. And the question is, how do you access it? And in our everyday, normal state of consciousness, with our ego mind chit-chatting and stuff, we don't really have the capability to access those deeper parts of our psyches where the healing happens, so to speak.

And there's other pathways, for instance, meditation, where you can also quiet the ego mind. But I was never much good at meditation. My mind is too crazy.

But breathwork, where you can actually... In breathwork, there's physiological changes that happen, and also in psychedelics. In some ways when they do brain scans, you can see very similar changes where it actually physiologically supports the quieting of the mind. So it works very well for people with active chit-chat minds like me, to actually get to those spaces.

**Meagen Gibson**

I think a lot of people with trauma experience and trauma histories that are on a trauma healing path can really relate to that. I know that I struggled for the better part of 20 years to meditate. And I would get moderately annoyed with anyone that suggested that I should meditate because they were clearly not in here and didn't know what I was up against for quieting my mind.

And we know now that there are lots of people who don't have that inner dialog and don't have the internal chatter. And so it might be easier for them to drop into those kinds of states of consciousness.

But for those of us with a little bit of, not necessarily, monkey mind. But just more anxious, more attuned towards safety and alertness, breathwork, from what I'm hearing, is a really great way, safe way for us to physiologically put ourselves into that state where we can access those.

**Michael Stone**

Exactly. And then once you start getting used to accessing them, you start to strengthen that neural pathway, and it gets easier to go into them in your everyday life, too. Once you really make it into a practice, whether it's breathwork or some other ways to really access these deeper parts of our psyche.

**[00:07:58] Meagen Gibson**

It's funny, because as you're talking about that, I'm thinking about one of the things that I always rely on when I'm trying to remind myself that I can learn new things with my brain and my body is... I watch videos of skateboarders.

I don't know if you've ever been to a skateboarding park, but you see a bunch of young people try something 100 times, and they fail 100 times. And then they nail it once, and then they've got it. And that reminds me of our brain pathways all the time.

We often, especially as adults, get in this rigid mindset where we don't want to try new things that we're not automatically good at. We don't want to try hard things that we're not automatically good at, and we definitely don't want to try anything that we don't understand the benefits of before we actually do it.

And so I love something like this, which is not necessarily easy, but easy to get into. Easy to try for the first time. There's a very low risk involved, right?

**Michael Stone**

And interestingly enough, when I was growing up, the science at that point said, at a certain point, you can't grow new neural pathways. And so it was like, once you get to a certain age, forget about it. That's the old saying. Like, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" kind of thing.

And science has totally changed on that now. As you're aware from all the other interviews that you've done and all the other speakers, we can change to the day we die. We can create new neural pathways. It's totally possible.

And it's really about exposing ourselves to new things, allowing ourselves to not stay in a comfort zone. And people that come into our breathwork, sometimes they're 75, 80 years old, and they still have amazing experiences and shifts in their lives.

**Meagen Gibson**

I love that. It's inspiring. All right, so I would love it if you could tell us about an example of how breathwork has helped you personally, working through some of your own childhood trauma.

**Michael Stone**

Sure. Many times we have experiences as children where we make certain decisions. Where we create certain belief systems for ourselves, and we don't even remember it because we were so young. And the first step in taking a step out of that is first being aware of how they were first created so you can then shift them.

And when I grew up, what I was noticing was that one of the most important things in my life was being liked. It was almost like a life or death thing, and I had no idea why that was. So I would really try to make myself into the person where someone would like me because it was so important to me.

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And it really created a lot of havoc in my life. It created problems with my relationships. I couldn't hang on to money because when I got money, I would give it to people so they'd like me or invest in projects or people. "Please, this is an amazing project. I just need a little bit of money. I'd be so grateful." You know, that kind of thing.

But it wasn't doing it from a logical perspective, like it was a good investment. It was because I wanted to be liked. So it really was creating a lot of issues with me really being the person that I ultimately wanted to be in my life.

And then in one of my breathwork sessions... And this is one thing that happens where you go back into your childhood and remember things that you'd completely forgotten. They were buried in your unconscious mind. And I went back to a time that I had no conscious memory of.

But when I was about one and a half years old. And my mother was always... I was a first-born child, so she was always there with me every day. She was taking care of me. If I cried, she would come. You can't talk much when you're one and a half years old. A few words. And so I always felt very safe.

And then one day, when I was one and a half years old, something happened, and I cried, and she wasn't there. She didn't come. And I cried harder, and she didn't come. And I cried harder and started yelling. She didn't come. And ultimately some other person came in who I had never seen before going, "Oh my God, what happened?"

And what had happened was that my baby sister was born. And she had to go to the hospital to have her, and there were some complications. So she was gone for about a week. But in my mind at that point, I made a decision.

And what that decision was was that, a) I'm unlovable in some way, or there's something wrong with me, or else why wouldn't she be here with me? Why is she gone? And b) that "I need to be really careful about being close to people because they'll abandon me". I felt abandoned. I felt abandoned. I felt scared, and I felt unlovable. Even though a week later, my mom came back.

But that stuck with me. It was drilled into my brain, and even when I got older, that was still impacting me. And that was why it was so important for me to be a people-pleaser, because I wanted to make sure they wouldn't abandon me. And that they'd like me and that it made me feel like I was lovable, basically. I mean, that was the hole inside me I was trying to fill.

And then in one of my breathwork sessions, when I went back to this experience and saw it for what it was. I went through this whole thing where I felt fear. I felt abandoned. I felt all that stuff and brought it to consciousness.

And then when it came out of the breathwork experience, "Oh, my God, that's where this has all come from". Because I had no idea before then, but once you bring it to consciousness, you can start to work with it.

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And so the first step in me working with it, I said, "Well, I have these thinking patterns about unlovability.. Is it really true?". So I'm going, "This is a decision an 18-month year old kid made. Is it really accurate?"

And when I started to look back, I said, "It's not true at all". I started to really bring to consciousness all the times when... My mother changed my diaper a gazillion times. All this stuff I hadn't been thinking about where I really felt safe growing up. Where we went on vacations every year. Where there was always food for me. I was always taken care of.

And I said, "It's totally not true even". So I've been basing my entire life on this unconscious thinking pattern that was based on a lie, basically. But it was a decision that was the best decision I can make when I was a year and a half years old. I just didn't have the resources to really take a step back and see it through an accurate lens of what was going on.

Once I started to go on that road, I could start to really shift. And it doesn't happen overnight. It's not just about an insight. Once you get the insight, you have to work. And you have to start really every day working on creating and strengthening these new neural pathways. Where I started saying to myself every morning, "I am lovable. I am not abandoned. I am worthy".

So these were these new thinking patterns. And once I started to say that, my brain started to search for evidence for that. And there was a ton of evidence that that was true. That my brain was completely blocking out because of these decisions I'd made. So everything really started to shift.

And it wasn't just that, because it started to really open up my whole life in a very different way. Because I really started shifting from a perspective of, "The world is unsafe. So I have to take from it what I can and protect myself". I started to shift. "Well, what is it that really makes me happy?"

Because I wasn't happy. It didn't make me happy to try to create this safety feeling that never really stayed. It would go away. Then I'd have to go for it again and again and again. And what I really saw for myself... And again, I was continuing to do breathwork and do my own inner work, because for me it wasn't about what I could take from life.

But it was more about what could I bring to life? What could I contribute? And all these gifts that I've been given as I was growing up and having these experiences. And looking at life more from a perspective of each moment, "What is life asking from me? And what can I contribute?"

Just to take a step back for a second, just to show how crazy these childhood thinking patterns can be... When I was in my mid-20s, my father died in a plane crash. And it was a commercial plane crash, American Airlines, everybody died. And my thinking pattern... The first thing that I thought, which is completely crazy, is "Why is he abandoning me?"

That's how strong it was. When obviously he wasn't abandoning me. It wasn't like he chose to die in a plane crash. So it's just so pervasive. And it's like you're in this water, you're in this sea. And it's like a fish swimming in water and not realizing it's swimming in water.

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So it can be incredibly powerful. And it's also incredible, and even more powerful, when you actually see it for what it is and can move beyond it. Once I saw this and I started to shift my perspective about bringing things to life, it really changed everything.

It changed my relationships. Because instead of clinging to the other person to make myself feel worthy, I came to it from "What can I bring to this relationship right now? How can I support the other person to expand and grow?"

And it's almost like living two lives. Before starting to do my inner work.... And breathwork is a huge piece of that. And then after doing my inner work.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I love this story. Every part of it. Related deeply to so many things that you said. And would you say that the breathwork... And I think I know your answer, but I'll let you answer it. Is it more important for the insight part or more important for the work part, or is it both?

### **Michael Stone**

Well, first of all, it's critical in terms of first actually going into your past and really seeing things that your brain has been blocking from you because of your belief systems, because it's really hard to get to those places. You can do it with psychedelics, too. There are other pathways.

But breathwork is a very safe way to do it where you're really totally in control of the situation. And for many people, they're not interested in putting substances into their body. And that's one thing I love about breathwork. It's organic.

And from my perspective, if you can have experiences like this, from just breathing to music, you're supposed to have them. Or else they wouldn't be available to you. Evolution wouldn't make them available for you to have. And so that's the first step.

But afterwards, after the breathwork, it's more about the integration portion of it. The embodiment portion of it. Gaining the new neural pathways is more something that you will do on your own after the breathwork. And from time to time, you'll get more insights in breathwork. Oh, I could be doing this to really get a more effective embodiment. Or maybe I can try this instead of that or whatever. So it's a support, but you really do have to do the work yourself.

And it's really about consistency and repetition. Those are really two of the golden keys of creating these new neural pathways. And it's not something you can do for one or two days, and then all of a sudden it's like this magic pill. But it's like the first step is the most critical in opening up the possibility for you to then really do your own work on a consistent basis and create these huge shifts in your life.

**[00:20:33] Meagen Gibson**

So we've kind of talked about it. We've talked about the experiences you've had. But what are the different types of experiences that other people might be expecting to have or could have during a typical Neuro Breathwork session?

**Michael Stone**

There's actually a very wide range of experiences. And that's what's really fun about it, because every experience is different. And there's various types of breathwork that are based on different principles. And the one that I ultimately developed, I call Neurodynamic Breathwork. And part of the reason I created it in the structure that I did was to make it effective with trauma, and it's what I call non-directive.

So in other words, it's all about the facilitator not guiding or pushing the experience in any way. It's all designed for the facilitator to hold space for the person and to be this clear mirror for them to feel safe and to bring up their own experiences from their own psyche. From their own, what I call inner guiding intelligence, in the same way that I did.

No one told me, "Go back to your childhood. Do this and that" when I was having my experience. It was coming up from within, because my psyche knew that that was what I needed to experience in that moment. It was basically developed as a modality of self-empowerment. And one of the unfortunate side-effects of trauma is that we lose trust in ourselves.

That was the same thing that happened to me. I didn't believe that I could really take care of myself. That I needed to be liked by other people in order to feel good about myself.

And so when people start to go into these breathwork sessions and these neurodynamic sessions that I've developed, and start to see that these things that are coming up from their inner guidance... First of all, a) they can handle them because they don't get brought up unless they're ready to experience them. Otherwise, something else will be brought up.

But that they really can see that the experiences are valid and that when they take them out into their lives, they do make a difference. They start to regain that trust in their own ability to take care of themselves and to really move forward effectively in life and to be able to work with whatever life throws at them, basically.

And to be able to look inside and find the answers instead of depending on the outside world to make you happy or to provide what you need, basically. So that's really one of the underlying principles of the breathwork that I developed and some of the experiences that people have.

And this is, again.. I'm a bit of a science geek. So I don't go by just anecdotes or whatever. I do surveys of hundreds or thousands of people. So 89% say they get some or major relief from anxiety. 84% from trauma, which I was very happy to see because that was one of my goals.

75% get better access to, I call it inner guiding intelligence. Some people call it source or higher self or intuitive self or whatever. 67% get some or major relief from depression. 61% get increased connection to intuition. People get greater self-awareness, feel more in their body, feel more calm and peaceful in life. So all of those things are available.



**[00:23:59]**

And many times people get these intense, powerful body releases. Because every time we suppress an emotion into our body, there's always this kind of bio-energetic blockage that's there. And it's one of the few modalities, breathwork, where it really gives you physical, emotional and spiritual health all at the same time.

You get these physical releases of this energy that's stuck in your body that many times can keep you feeling exhausted every day. Or so much of your body energy is working on suppressing stuff. You know, psychological, in terms of you changing your beliefs and definitions.

And spiritual, and one of the more common experiences is where people feel more connected. More connected to themselves, more connected to the planet, more connected to life. More connected just to everything that there is out in the universe and feel less separate.

So it really works on all three levels very powerfully. And that's what I really love. And it's all about the breath. It's just amazing, actually. So all of those experiences are available and you get what you need in breathwork. It isn't like...

And the way that I set this up is you don't go in with this, "Okay, I'm going to resolve this today". Because your ego mind has no idea what you're ready to work on. And so it's always like, "Just let go of intentions. Let go of expectations. Let your breath and the music work together to allow your inner guidance to bring you the experience that you need today.

It may be a very relaxing experience. It may be a very intense experience where you get these intense body releases. You may get these visuals where you go back to childhood. You may get a feeling connected to the universe. But whatever it is, it's exactly the experience that you need".

So again, the whole thing is around trusting yourself and regaining that... In the case of trauma, regaining that trust that you may have lost in childhood from some of these experiences. So that's one of the principles.

And other people, if they do trust themselves already, that's totally fine. But it's a practice then. Trust and surrender. Trust and surrender. And when you start to learn how to surrender more deeply into the breathwork process. It's like breathwork reflects life, reflects breathwork.

You can also start to surrender more deeply into life itself. Where you can be more present in the moment to really appreciate what life has to offer, instead of living your life in your head and always looking to the past or looking into the future. And letting go of the judgments of things that are happening and comparing your everyday moment and just being really in the presence of the beauty of life. And that's other things that people, when they really make this into a practice, report also.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I love it. All right. I think that is a fantastic place for us to kick off a little breathwork sampler, if you will. So Michael set us up and let us know what to expect and about how long we'll be.

**[00:27:08] Michael Stone**

So what I'm going to do now is... And again, the sessions that I've created, they're 1-hour breathing sessions. But today we're just going to do a teeny little taster. So this isn't really... The idea is not to push you into this deep experience. It's more about giving you a sense of what even breathing for a fairly short period, getting more air through your system, how it can really shift even just your state of being.

We're going to do about eight minutes of breathing. And so I'm just going to talk for a few minutes about how to do the breath and get you going. And then we'll do eight minutes of breathing. I won't talk during the eight minutes, of course, because that's how this is designed. And it's really about just looking at the before and after. Has it made any difference? For example, do you feel more relaxed and just opening yourself up to whatever the experience is?

So let's start by talking about the breath. And basically the breathing technique is as follows. You want to breathe fully and deeply. So when you breathe in, your belly expands. When you breathe out, it goes back to normal and in and out through the mouth.

And in the longer sessions, we start with mouth-breathing. But many times as it gets deeper into the session, people switch to nose-breathing or whatever. But you want to start with mouth-breathing for two reasons. One is it allows you to move more air, and at the beginning that helps quiet the mind.

And the second thing is that whenever you're in a release state in your life, like if you're angry or crying, you automatically switch to mouth-breathing. So it gives yourself permission to release. So you want to start with the mouth-breathing, full and deep.

And in the regular sessions, I ask people to breathe a little bit faster than normal. But for this one, I would say breathe at normal pace. Basically, you don't have to breathe faster, just full and deep. Make it an enjoyable breath and just at a normal rhythm like you normally breathe in everyday life. And just focus on the breath.

And there'll be music that you'll be listening to. And this is an eyes closed experience. So you want to just have your eyes closed all the way through. And if you want, you can grab an eye mask or whatever. Either way is fine.

You can do this sitting up in a chair. Most people are probably sitting up right now. If you feel more comfortable, you can also lay down. Either one's fine. And just let go of any expectations, let go of any judgments, and just breathe and enjoy. And let whatever wants to happen to happen. All right, so let me share the music here. Give me one moment.

Okay, here we go. All right, so at this point, everyone can just close your eyes. Bring your attention inside. Maybe take one deep breath, just let it out. Let a little sound out. Like "Aaah".

Let go of what happened earlier today and what's going to happen later. And during the session, just allow whatever wants to happen to happen. And your body may want to even make little sounds or move around a little bit. And if it does, it's totally fine.

**[00:31:31]**

And now bringing your attention to the breath and deepening the breath. Starting to take full, deep breaths in and out of the mouth. Breathing fully and deeply. Deeply and fully. Fully and deeply. You can just breathe at a normal rhythm. Make it a full, deep, but enjoyable breath where your belly expands on the in-breath and goes back to normal on the out-breath. Breathing fully and deeply. Deeply and fully.

And now breathing in a way where there are no gaps, where you're always breathing in or breathing out. Just creating a wonderful circle of breath. Staying with the breath. Staying with the breath.

And also, if you just want to pause for one moment, if you do want to wear a headset. Forgot to say that. That's just to hear the music better. That's awesome. You want to listen to it in a place where you can get a pretty decent sound quality in the next eight minutes.

So breathing fully and deeply now. Deeply and fully. Fully and deeply. Staying with the breath. Staying with the breath. Now just again, letting go of any desire to have this experience be any specific way and just surrendering to the process. And in a moment, the music will begin.

If you haven't already done so. Slowing down the breath to a normal rhythm. Breathing gently now. Being in a place of stillness and presence. Maybe keeping your eyes closed for a few more moments. Being with yourself. And just noticing... Does your body feel any different than it did ten minutes ago? Is your mind even a little more quiet?

When you're ready, just open your eyes, maybe take one last breath and bring yourself back into the outside world. Thank you for that.

One last thing I want to say is that if anybody wants to give neurodynamic breathwork a try... We're offering everybody a free session. It's an online experience with groups of anywhere from 50 to 250 people from around the world. Usually we have at least ten countries represented. We do them five times a week. And you can see the link at the... Where are they going to see the link, Meagen?

### **Meagen Gibson**

They'll see it both in your session, and then they can always contact us at customer service for the link as well.

### **Michael Stone**

Ok great. [Breathworkonline.com/free](https://breathworkonline.com/free).

### **Meagen Gibson**

Exactly. Michael Stone, that was fantastic. Thank you so much. And you've already told everybody where they can find more of you and your work, so I thank you so much. Thanks for joining us.

**Michael Stone**

Thank you for having me on the summit.