

Moving Through Life's Pain with Our Own Breath

(6 pages of copy and 2 pages of addendums)

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Have you ever noticed that your life is still far from what you have envisioned? You have done much to move out of the fear of the past and the illusions of the future, yet you continue to feel unfulfilled and unable to be fully present in life. Tell the part of you that believes you deserve more to take a breath...and read on!

Our breath goes everywhere we go. We tend to overlook it, take it for granted and assume it to be fully present--until you lose it.

Breathing, simple and basic, can be a powerful tool for self-exploration and healing. Breath can transport you from a place of doing into a space of being. It just needs your time and attention. Read on to learn more about the dynamic potential of breathing and breath practices in the healing arts.

Breathing is an autonomous function. Yet, it is easily influenced by volition. When we experience a deep, unexpected sigh our body is demanding oxygen. Many of our attitudes and behaviors lead to restriction of body functions and one of the first to restrict is our breath. When we experience a deep, unexpected sigh, our body is telling us it isn't getting enough oxygen. How often do you sigh ?

Breath and life are inextricably intertwined—to the degree that when we shut down our breathing, we shut down our life force. Take a moment and just listen to your breath. Are the pace and depth shifting as you tune in? If your breath is not meeting your body's demands, merely listening may be all you need to do to recalibrate.

Breath and emotions

Count the ways that you hold your breath -- deprive yourself of oxygen, consciously or unconsciously? How do you feel when you are short of breath, out of breath, gasping for breath, or just breathing shallowly? You feel sluggish, anxious, fearful, tense, panicked and more. What other signals is your body giving you? Hands moist? Voice high? Shoulders up? Heart racing ?

Suppression of emotions leads to suppression of breathing. Strong emotions, conscious or unconscious, change our respiration. We all restrict breathing in response to issues such as

stress, fright, flight, guilt and shame. The connection of breath to emotion is so basic that we can open our emotions just by opening our breathing. We can be our own healer by using breath in ways that are responsive to body signals

Deeper breathing also promotes expression. Self-expression is a core of self-acceptance. Self-acceptance is important to self esteem. Fully conscious breathing is an effective way to foster high self esteem.

Working with breath is a psycho-physical event. It is an internal energetic massage that frees mental and physical restriction. Breathing moves energy as much as oxygen. It can move us from being stuck into letting go. Breathing can take us to the outer reaches of inner space.

Breathing through blocks

There are many issues that word and intellect will not resolve. Breathing helps to set aside intellect and words so that our body and breath may unite in a deep natural healing alliance, moving you through issues you may be unable to resolve through other verbal or emotional processing.

Body and breath connection promotes a sense of harmony, unity and congruence between external and internal worlds. Feelings of inter-relatedness and inter-connectedness can surface with breathing process.

Relationship healing

A grandfather, at age 77, used breathwork to reach resolution with relationships from which he had defended himself for nearly a lifetime. He came to call his experience with breathing his open-heart therapy.

A mother first did a breathwork workshop by herself. Then she brought a daughter, The daughter then brought her own child. In time, five family members across three generations attended a single breathwork session. They used breathwork to integrate a range of family-bound recovery issues.

One father used a breathwork workshop to introduce his two children from separate marriages--to each other. Often, parents use breathwork to intimately interact with their children, provide a setting for interpersonal disclosure and heal old wounds.

Couples frequently do a breathwork each year for their wedding anniversary as an intimate sharing, celebration, and deepening of their trust in each other's life process.

One mother reached a powerful closure with a deceased child. The child was a twin. She had never fully expressed her deep feelings of loss for this child. Using breathwork process she said good-bye in a way that allowed her to at last feel free and complete.

Still another mother processed her grief over the AIDS deaths of her two sons. Many process unresolved grief over the death of loved ones

Trauma healing

Incest, rape and other sexually abused victims use breathwork for releasing rage, rebuilding trust and experiencing safe, healing nurture. Among other things, survivors of ritual and cult abuse seek to re-establish their ability to be in a group without fear of abuse. Group breathing processes can provide a safe container for letting go of fear.

A firefighter processed the death of his partner. Another dealt with the death of a rescued child. Shock trauma, psychiatric, surgical and other medical professionals use breathwork to deal with the stress of being in helping fields that are very demanding and leave them with release needs of their own. An 18 year-old, sentenced to prison for a first-time drug violation came to a breathwork with his father. They jointly used breathwork process to process their fear and anger.

People in transitions such as job loss, grief, divorce, bankruptcy and mid-life crisis often use breathwork to cope with the unknown aspects of endings, beginnings and uncertainties.

The sense of community that evolves when Breathwork is done regularly in a workshop setting can serve as a surrogate family for important life transitions.

Physical healing

Cancer survivors struggling with chemotherapy, surgery and feelings of separation use breathing exercises for self-nurturing and emotional release. Other people that are preparing for and/or recovering from surgery use breath process to deal with aspects of surgery that are emotionally and physically intrusive.

HIV Positive individuals find breathing exercises and breathwork workshops a helpful way of releasing emotional issues that sap their already weakened immune system.

Spiritual healing

Many who have experienced mystical openings use breathing workshops as a safe place to process, discuss and integrate their unique experience. Our society often tends to judge those that other cultures celebrate as God intoxicants. Breathwork is a nonjudgmental process for doing deep self-exploration when your internal process seems extra-ordinary. Breathing is often a gateway to reuniting people with their sense of a spiritual center.

Ministers, priests, nuns, deacons, teachers, divinity students, and others have used breathwork for spiritual celebration, recovery from institutional abuses and spiritual emergence.

Vocational Healing

Therapists and counselors use breathing as a way to do their work so that they can stay out of the way of their clients by continuing to process personal issues. Therapists who serve AIDS clients, as well as, hospice workers have used breathwork to process emotions around such feeling based vocations.

Retiring military intelligence officers utilized the breathwork process to assist re-integration into civilian life. Surrendering to breath is a powerful way to rebuild trust in self and others.

Taking care of ourselves prepares us to take care of others. Healing oneself needs to precede or coincide with our attempts to assist others with their healing. Breathing practices are effective ways to tend to our own vital selves—first!

We all experience voluntary and involuntary situations that trigger our stress response and dramatically impact our breathing. Yet, one does not have to be a trained yogi to have some control over breathing. Conscious breathing assists each of us to handle difficult situations. **Life is not an emergency.**

Rebirthing

Breathing often leads us back to the experience of our own physical birth--particularly if we do breathwork over an extended period. Birth is one of those times in which we receive profound imprints. By definition, imprints do not diminish over time. Since birth often involves hyperventilation and prolonged holding of breath, it is not unusual that breathing starts birth memories. People working with breath report experiencing emotions and images that reach beyond their biographical recall into birth, the womb and the realms of the spiritual.

One confirmation of the deep nature of the birth regression sometimes reached during breathing practices, is the Babinski Reflex. When adults are tested for this reflex while deeply regressed, they respond to the reflex test as if they were infants. Children's toes splay outward. The toes of an adult curl downward. During deep birth regression, your adult toes will splay outward as if you were again your child self.

Breathing practices permit access to many levels of human consciousness. In his book, **The Adventure of Self Discovery**, Stanislav Grof, M.D., offers a complete cartography of the levels of consciousness accessed with Holotropic Breathwork.

Breathing Practices

We can do it on our own—through just paying attention to our breath, or through specific meditative breathing or breath and movement practices from such traditions as yoga (bastrika) and Chinese Medicine (Qi Gong). Chanting, including recently re-popularized

Gregorian Chanting is as much a breathing practice as it is music. Chants alter breathing. Singing, chanting, toning and sound mantras each involve, enhance and direct breathing.

There is a range of popularized breathing practices: Holotropic Breathwork, Integrative Breathwork, Conscious Breathing, Transformational Breathing, Rebirthing, Chanting, Yoga, Qi Gong, and more. Each uses breath at its core. Breathing techniques can be directed or be completely left open to outcome.

Breath practices are an experiential way to bridge the psychological and spiritual self. Breathwork is one of many evolving disciplines encompassed by a transpersonal worldview. This is a viewing point from which an individual experiences a sense of self as extending beyond the usual bounds of ego identity.

Facilitated breathing

There is great health value waiting for those who choose to learn about ways to work with the breath. Public libraries have volumes on breathing techniques. Workshops routinely offer to teach breathing process. It all seems very simple and safe. **I would, however, discourage applying many breathing techniques without the guidance of someone trained in each practice.**

Breath is much more powerful than it appears and it deserves respect and care. It can be counterproductive to make deep personal material active when alone. Ask about contraindications for any breathing practice before you experience it. Take responsibility for your safety. Do not give away your power of choice. Breath practices are rather homeopathic in that they intensify and exaggerate symptoms as a way of disclosing root causes.

Used individually or experienced in a group, breathing is a healing tool to use in taking accountability for our physical and emotional health. Choose a method that feels safe and empowers you--not the facilitator. I believe that passively doing a process in which someone else controls the outcome can reinforce victim patterns and create dependency. Facilitation at its best can provide the safety to encourage the depth of surrender that accompanies most inner journeys.

Breathing processes each have written principles. Yet, in practice, they tend to vary in application from practitioner to practitioner and setting to setting. There are few reliable controls despite considerable efforts by many teachers to establish professional standards and ethical codes.

It is wise to shop for the degree of safety and ethical practices that allow you to feel comfortable during deep process. Psychic and physical safety are a prerequisite to deep surrender with breath or any other growth process. Ask practitioners for a written code of ethics and standards of professional practice. Consult the book, [The Ethics of Caring](#), by Kylea Taylor, 1995, about working with people in nonordinary states of consciousness

Often, “breathers” simply want to randomly explore their inner worlds. They want a safe container in which they can fully be themselves. They ask for the freedom to direct their search while having the security of a trained facilitator for the times that they get into unfamiliar territory.

Spiritual Emergence

Breathing can be used to effect profound changes in consciousness. Some of the earliest baptisms conducted by the Essenes held people under water causing a degree of suffocation. This altered the person’s state of consciousness. Deep connected breathing, prolonged holding of the breath or combinations thereof, all induce non-ordinary states of consciousness. The breathing practices available to you, particularly those facilitated by a skilled practitioner, can open you to very satisfying and invigorating realms of spiritual awareness. You are left feeling free and clear.

Highly observable breathing changes may also come naturally with what is commonly called spiritual emergence. The breathing patterns and dramatic flow of energy experienced in giving birth can induce these same changes. An intense, spontaneous flow of Kundalini or spiritual energy rises up the spine. It is quite unsettling when experienced as a surprise. Even with understanding, it can be frightening—but is a doorway to expanded consciousness. This initiation, often accompanied by natural breathing changes, can be supported through breathing practices.

Spiritual Emergence occurs quite frequently and is often viewed as a spiritual emergency. It is now supported by a national volunteer network--**SEN**. Breathing practitioners constitute a large number of these volunteers. Call the Spiritual Emergence Network at 408-426-0902 or write to 930 Mission Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060-3653. SEN has a hotline, a newsletter and other publications. SEN is one source of information on the Kundalini experience.

Do it!

Books on breathing provide menus or maps for self exploration. Yet, we do not eat the menu when we go to a restaurant—we eat the meal. Your actual breathwork journey is not a map that someone else can chart. It is not a meal someone else can prepare or consume. You and your breath will chart your own way.

Breath is a dynamic path leading to spiritual and physical empowerment. You possess the breath power to transform inner knowledge into conscious life enhancing actions. Take a deep breath. Begin your quest.

- The End -

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Please consider putting the following list adjacent to the feature article. List is boxed in bold type below:

Kylea Taylor, in her book titled: The Breathwork Experience, ISBN # 0-9643158-0-7, 1994, Hanford Mead Publishers, has crystallized a list of ten primary opportunities available in breathwork.

- 1.The opportunity to enter nonordinary states of consciousness to seek healing and wisdom using a natural, non-addictive method;**
- 2.The opportunity for a direct experience of one's higher power;**
- 3.The opportunity to experience self-empowerment by using one's own breath for profound healing;**
- 4.The opportunity for physical and emotional catharsis of stress and trauma by resolving past issues;**
- 5.The opportunity for bonding with others through the group sharing and the sitter/breather partnership; (participants usually work in pairs)**

6. The opportunity to deal with themes of death and surrender which are powerful issues for addicts because of drug overdoses, abortions, HIV/AIDS and other serious illnesses, crime, and encounters with the criminal justice system;

7. The opportunity to experience a retreat period of inner reflection which provides balance to our often highly structured, active lives;

8. The opportunity to get in touch with the body, to re-associate what has been dissociated, including feelings of pleasure and unfelt, unresolved traumas;

9. The opportunity of permission for sound and movement, which facilitates self-expression and self-trust; and,

10. The opportunity for insight, understanding, and acceptance of accountability for our life and actions.

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Breathing exercise to be used as an addendum to the story!

Here is a relaxing and centering breathing exercise that you may wish to do without supervision. Sit or lie down. Place yourself in a comfortable, open body position -- arms to your sides, legs not crossed. Close your eyes. Take two deep breaths and fully exhale on each breath.

Now, let's begin the breathing practice. Counting silently in your mind, take in a breath on the count of 6. Hold the inhale for a count of 3. Exhale on a count of 6. Hold at the end of the exhale for a count of 3. Do three repetitions at this 6-3-6-3 count. This is not a lot of oxygen so it may feel uncomfortable. It's o.k. that everyone counts differently.

Next, breathe in on a count of 9. Hold the inhale for a count of 3. Exhale on a count of 9. Hold at the end of the exhale for a count of 3. Do three repetitions at the 9-3-9-3 count. This may feel more normal.

Then breathe in on a count of 12. Hold the inhale for a count of 3. Exhale on a count of 12. Hold for a count of 3. Do Three repetitions at 12-3-12-3. This may be more oxygen than some of you are used to breathing. For others this will feel like a normal breath. Exhale fully. Push out all the breath on each exhale just before the hold of a 3 count.

Now, do three repetitions of this same pattern of breathing at 15-3-15-3, then at 18, followed by 21 and finally at 24. There are seven steps from a count of 6-3-6-3 to a count of 24-3-24-3.

On the longer counts, the first inhale may seem difficult. The second will be easier. By the third, you will have found your rhythm for that count.

Everyone's count will be different. However, each inhale and exhale combination will take longer. Each total breath cycle will take in more oxygen and exhale more carbon dioxide. You will finish the practice in a state of calm that is deeper than your state of being before the exercise. You will be using more of your body's breathing capacity by doing such an exercise.

Your breath is with you everywhere you go. All you need to do when you want to feel more peace and calm is to close your eyes, open your body posture, sit or lie down and do this practice.

In the more relaxed state at the end of this breathing practice, take in the slowest and fullest inhale that you can--without counting. Then exhale as slowly and fully as you can without a count. Then, at the end of the exhale do nothing. Do not consciously inhale. Do not hold your breath. Do nothing. Just wait for the body to breathe you. It will.

Notice your state of being in this quiet space between the breaths. Do three of these slow, full inhales and slow complete exhales. Let your body breathe you when it is ready. The space between the breaths is a special place.

Happy Breathing! Thomas