

Creating Transitional Family With Breathwork Community

By Thomas Merton Brightman

To paraphrase Carl Jung, there is nothing more terrifying than facing one's own true self. Moving towards wholeness has many terrifying aspects of facing one's true self. A breathwork community can be a most useful friend to everyone's unconscious.

Regardless of my many community associations, I have inevitably been left alone, with spirit, with significant other, with remnants of my nuclear and origin families, or the residuals of professional and training communities. So, for me, community is important but also inevitably transitional. I give and take the best of each while I am in a community -- then, by choice or necessity, I move on.

It was not my separate striving that put me back on the path to wholeness, it was the safe support of many surrogate-family groups. My relatives did not have the skills or awareness to foster my recovery, even if they had wanted to assist. I needed surrogates and communities--however transitional their appearance in my life.

Many breathwork clients are in transition

As I look at demographics of my 3000 clients at Change of Heart Center, the majority do their work when they are in transition, not when they are in a comfort zone. What transition means for many is relationship change, separation, divorce, temporary estrangement from family and/or friends, etc. In these situations, people want a sense of community and/or surrogate family. Regular breathwork workshops provide this for many.

A typical room of breathers includes: someone grieving a death; a separated person; a divorced person; someone who never married; an orphan; a person who has just lost a job or is changing vocations; a person awakening to sexual abuse; a parent and a child working on their divisive issues; a caregiver that is burned out/depressed from meeting the needs of others to the exclusion of their own needs; a student from another country; a person with a terminal disease; etc. These are some of the categories of clients we see again and again. We also see many people in recovery from addiction.

The transition of recovery

In a transitional period of recovery, one's usual support groups are stripped away temporarily or permanently. Yet, safety and support are cornerstones of returning to wholeness as each person has more of themselves revealed over their lifetime. Those in transition need the best functions of family and community. They can each benefit from the sort of support and nurture that is available from a community or surrogate family who offers a safe connectedness. It is so important in recovery to not feel alone. It is also my belief that however transitional a community or surrogate family is for a person, that its positive aspects well-serve the individual in becoming an integral part of their next community.

Other groups of client characteristics include: those with mystical openings who don't feel safe sharing with those in their immediate surroundings; people wanting to enhance meditation practice; those wanting to 'be' more than 'do'; those who want a respite or mini-sabbatical from demands of family, job, etc.; beginning seekers wanting to be around kindred spirits that encourage rather than discount feelings and questions; those who have left organized religion but have strong spiritual calling.

These people can also benefit from the safe, nurturing, open-to-outcome, container that is breathwork. The most frequently stated, top-of-mind benefits for those that I have facilitated in breathwork is safety and sense of community-freedom to do what they feel they need to do without being questioned or controlled.

At the height of my twelve-step work I took great comfort in the fact that I could go to nearly any large community and find a twelve-step meeting on the day I needed it. Breathwork is not (yet) a household word. But, there is an evolving sense of community as practitioners throughout the world conduct increasingly frequent workshops and as breathers move about the world telling of their experiences.

Creating transitional family in workshops

As the universe continues to expand so we evolve and our community support takes new shape. I believe that people are not meant to be alone, but

in communities. Because I have facilitated a minimum of one Holotropic Breathwork workshop each month for over a decade, the therapeutic community-at-large and the breathwork alumni have an ongoing community. The faces change; the issues remain the same.

I bring this perspective into my practitioner work with breathwork. Even allowing for my own projections based on the importance of community in my own recovery, I discern repeatedly that community, transitional family, is important and often lacking in key life transitions. Therefore, my intent in my breathwork practice is to provide an ongoing community for a transitional membership, to provide a place to integrate while healing, to provide space for a surrogate family of varying dimensions.

We are not met to be alone.

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