

# ***BREATH OF LIFE***

## ***THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS TALK***

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So, does everybody here have a navel? If you don't have a belly button, then I don't think that conscious breathing will help you. If you have a belly button, then you have the only prerequisite for success in Breathwork. If you have a navel, then you have all that you need to rid yourself of dis-ease—physical, emotional, or psychological.

Today I'd like to talk to you about unleashing the power of your breath. Today is about discovering, exploring, and developing the power and potential of conscious breathing. It's about tapping your innate healing abilities. So let's start.

I've only got about an hour and a half to give you the most important bits of breathwork, before we do a practice session. Breathwork is a method of self-healing and personal growth. It's a method of awakening to our highest potential, a way to renew and restore ourselves.

When I only have a short amount of time, I always wonder what is it that I can give people that will be most beneficial. And today is no exception. Usually, I would already know you, or know something about you, or what brought you to breathwork. I would already have a sense of your level of health, your degree of skill, and your purpose in training.

And normally, I work with people over a series of sessions, passing on a collection of skills, and exploring a number of exercises and techniques, individually suited to them and their needs. So this is a challenge for me—actually quite a good opportunity to start from the beginning.

So, we'll start with the “rebirthing technique.” We'll start with birth; because that's when most people learned how to breathe.

Does anybody here remember your birth? [No one raises their hand] And yet, everyone here carries the memory of birth in his or her body, in their cells, in their unconscious or subconscious mind.

Probably the reason that no one remembers his or her birth is because it was such a painful, frightening, traumatic event that you have blocked it from your memory! Just to remember it would be painful, never mind having to re-experience it.

And that is what rebirthing was originally about: remembering and re-experiencing your birth in order to identify any negative or limiting impressions or conclusions, and then changing them to positive ones.

Birth is a near death experience for most people. Think about it. You have life in the womb for nine months. You're floating. It's wonderful. You're insulated from all the harsh elements of the world. Everything you need is given to you automatically. Life is living through you.

You can't tell where you leave off and where your mother begins; where your source or the spark that created you ends and where you begin. The womb is quite an ecstatic place

for most people. And then it all comes to an end! Your world comes to an end, and you are forced into a new and strange world.

*[Here the fire alarm actually goes off! The group is forced to go to the nearest exit. We gather on the lawn until we are told to move to another building on the campus. This was such a perfect co-incidence... We were talking about being forced out of the womb, and at exactly that moment, the university fire alarm went off, and we had to move to a room in another building!]*

So, where were we? Wasn't that amazing! Isn't this amazing? How life plays out...! We were talking about birth, about being forced to leave the womb. When the contractions start, you are forced out of your environment, into another. It's as if your world comes to an end. It's a near death experience.

The only world you know is the world of the womb. You were protected, insulated from lights and sounds. But suddenly you're in a world that is completely different. The change in temperature alone is shocking. Inside your mother's body it was almost 100 degrees. Then you find yourself in an air-conditioned hospital room!

Your skin is very sensitive. All you has ever felt is the warm moist soft walls of the womb. Your ears have never heard loud sounds, except filtered thru the mother's body. Your eyes have never been exposed to the light of day—never mind bright hospital lights!

Suddenly the mother's heartbeat is gone, it seems that you are being torn from her loving shelter. Or she is kicking you out of her life! Suddenly there are bright lights and harsh sounds. Your raw delicate nervous system is bombarded with never before felt sensations: and these sensations are all very intense.

This experience causes a lot of tension in the body, and a lot of confusion in the mind. Yet, it is within this atmosphere that you learned to breathe. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the more comfortable you are when you are trying to learn something, the easier it is for you to learn it, and the better you will learn it.

If you are afraid, if you're tense, if you're upset, if you are suffering while you are trying to learn something, then naturally you are not going to learn it as well as you could. That's what happened to your breathing at birth. You never really had a chance to relax into it, or to explore it. You had to breathe or die!

So, our first introduction to breathing was at birth, and for most of us it was not an ideal situation, to say the least. You obviously learned to breathe enough to survive; otherwise you would not be here. But maybe the doctor had to slap or shake you into breathing. Maybe he rushed you, or somehow to force you to breathe.

I encounter this with people all the time in Rebirthing. It's as if they are waiting for me to slap them or shake them into breathing. And this for many people is part of the unconscious memory of birth; it is tied together with their original experience, and they act it out thru life in one way or another.

So, you are all doing something right when it comes to breathing, otherwise you wouldn't be alive here today. Everyone can walk, talk, cook, dance, or sing. But obviously, some people can do these things to an extent that raises it to the level of an art. Breathing is no exception to that.

Actually, just putting breathing on the same level of importance as eating, bathing, or brushing your teeth should make a lot of sense. So the better you breathe, the better your health will be. The more you breathe, the more alive you become. In India, and the East, the "science of breath" is an ancient thing.

Earlier, we were talking about Genesis, the first book in the bible. It reminds me of an event, an early experience I had in Catholic school (I'm still recovering from my Catholic education, none the less, I did survive it!)

In the first grade, we were going through... they were introducing the bible to us, I remember it vividly. The nun picked something to read: "*In the beginning God formed man from the dust of the earth, and breathed into the nostrils of man the breath of life, and man became a living soul.*"

Something hit me, something lit up in me. I was a five year old child and I didn't want to turn the page. I was so thrilled, so excited! I couldn't understand why everybody wasn't excited. I was thinking: "Wait a minute, if God breathed into us in the beginning, then He must still be breathing into us now. This breath, and this one, and the next breath... God breathing into me!"

I think I went into some kind of ecstatic trance! Finally, the nun tapped me on the head and tried to calm me down. She said: "Now Daniel, enough. Let's turn the page, let's get on to something else." But something clicked inside of me on that day, but after some time it faded and I didn't give it any more thought.

I realize now, as I look back on my life, that so many events in my life were tied to that original insight in some way.

Kids do things... Notice what children do instinctively. They run, they jump, they laugh, they cry. At the drop of a hat, they do these things. Notice, all these things: laughing, crying, moving: they stimulate breathing. It is no coincidence.

As we get older, culture teaches us to do less and less of these things. We are conditioned, programmed away from them. We begin to feel that these things are not acceptable. You are forced to sit down, sit still, and shut up. Therefore, you are not spontaneously triggering your breathing anymore.

You are taught to control your emotions, therefore the breath isn't activating itself thru extreme laughter or weeping any more. The more civilized we get, the less we breathe, the fewer opportunities there are for the breath to spontaneously move and do its naturally healing work.

Did you know that in Hawaii, they used the term “haoli” to describe the white Europeans. It means “breathless one.” They noticed that the up-tight missionaries didn’t breathe!

Even yawning... in our culture, even yawning is suppressed... We are taught to block and stifle our yawn [demonstrates inhibited yawn]. And people call that a yawn! What ever happened to this? [demonstrates juicy full body yawn]

We have been conditioned away from some very normal, very healthy, very natural breathing responses because of society and culture, and so on. I mean you better have a “good reason” to laugh or cry, otherwise you can’t do it!

When you are a little child and someone says: “don’t touch that!” When you stop yourself, you also hold your breath. If you have some intense feeling, anger for example, against some gigantic person; you are so small, you don’t dare vent it—*notice the language: “vent” your anger*—because they can step on you, crush you, easily overpower and hurt you. So you don’t dare express it.

So, how do you keep those feelings in? The answer is: by holding your breath. How do you keep pain out? By holding your breath. And so at the same time that we are being socially conditioned to abandon spontaneous expression, we are also being conditioned to stifle ourselves and to inhibit our breathing mechanism.

By the time you are into your adult years, the things that have become “normal,” maybe are not at all natural... Like getting sick, getting old, and even dying. Maybe those things aren’t natural at all. Maybe they happen because our spirit was broken, because the breathing system—the breathing mechanism—was disturbed, disrupted, damaged, inhibited, or not allowed to develop naturally.

So my work has been to get people to open up their breathing system, to discover some of the power and potential of breathwork; to take some of the inhibitions off of the breathing mechanism, to point out some of the habits and patterns and emotional reactions that stifle the breath...

[Someone yawns.]

Thank you! Yes! I encourage people to yawn. You know, the greatest complement that anyone can give to me is to yawn while I am talking. I love it. So please, yawn more. And enjoy your yawn!

Have you ever noticed that when one person yawns, very soon, someone else will yawn? Why is that? I mean everyone knows it; we all laugh, because we know it happens. But why is that? It’s because the reflex is waiting to happen in all of us, and as soon as one person yawns, something inside us says “it’s OK.”

We wait to yawn until our body demands it. When, in and of itself, it is a great thing to do. Research will soon show that yawning changes brain chemistry. It has benefits beyond what we think at the moment.

Why wait until a yawn comes by itself? Everyone can trigger a yawn. You do something with the back of your jaw, your throat, and you can make a yawn happen. You know how to trigger it. It's a great pleasurable, healthy thing to do just for the heck of it.

[Several people yawn.]

Thank you, thank you! So, I'll tell you what, I'm going to put on the board, as I think of them, I will put what I think are important things to take away with you tonight.

So the first is YAWNING. If you yawned every five minutes for three hours, those three hours would give you enough to write about in your personal growth journal for a week. It's that powerful. It really is, and you just have to try it to see.

It's no coincidence that we have this yawning reflex. What exactly does it do? What's happening when we yawn? It's something very healthy, something very powerful, very important—biologically, chemically, emotionally, energetically, and spiritually.

So, yawn to your heart's content! Yawn beyond the level of need, beyond the demand caused by a surplus of something or a lack of something—which is the only time people yawn now. It is quite an exciting discovery to see what happens when you move the yawning reflex off of the level of demand onto the level of “extra, optional, luxury.” Play with that.

Now I'm thinking about what is important. What else should I do? So, I'll jump into the practice here, and I'll tell you the three things that I teach everyone who comes to me for individual sessions, or who attends any of my seminars: Awareness, Relaxation, and Breath Control.

The first is Awareness: breath awareness. It is the art of witnessing, observing. And this turns out to be a very ancient meditative technique. The Buddha taught it.

The legend goes that he was a wealthy prince. He had everything in the world, and he let all that go, and he traveled the known world in search of the cause and the cure for suffering. He tried everything, every practice, every technique.

He finally got to the point where he felt that he had tried everything, been everywhere. There was nothing else to do. And so he just sat under a big beautiful tree, and began to watch his breath, and to witness his passing thoughts, feelings and sensations.

And that's how it happened, that's when he became enlightened! He was practicing awareness—breath awareness. And later when people came to him and asked him: “What were you doing when you became enlightened?” He said: “I was watching my breath.”

This has become the practice, a Buddhist tradition, called Insight Meditation. There's a center in Bare, Massachusetts that teaches it. It's a wonderful place to go and sit, to do

nothing but watch your breath, for days or weeks. If you do that, you will discover hidden parts of yourself, and you will shed a lot of psychological baggage.

Awareness is a very powerful thing. When you practice it, you begin to notice things about yourself, you'll learn things about your breath that you didn't know, things about your mind that you never noticed. There are a lot of extra benefits.

Practicing breath awareness puts you into something of a different state, a special state that allows you to derive more from the breathing exercises than if you weren't in this meditative state.

Breath is a very subtle thing. It is actually... I think it falls right on the line between spirit and matter. It is the subtlest form of matter that we can play with: the breath, air, gas. And it is also in a way, the thickest or densest form of spirit, if you will.

So when you play with the breath, you are playing with energy. And you will soon find yourself able to move from one state to another, and to transform yourself.

Breathing is a great way for very materialistic people to grasp a sense of the spiritual. And it is a very powerful way for spiritual people to become more grounded and at home in their physical body and the physical universe.

Notice that breathing techniques are used in hypnosis, for stress, for pain control; they are used by athletes and artists. We have all heard these clichés: "If you're angry, stop and take a few breaths." If you're upset, "stop and take a few breaths." If you have something important to say: "take a breath first."

We know these things; they're sort of intuitive. But in our culture, they haven't been set up in a structured way as they have in China, Japan, or India, where breathing exercises have been developed into an art and a science.

So just watch your breath. Let's spend a few minutes right now. Notice your breath going in and out. Try to discover some of the details.

What moves when you breathe?

What muscles do you use?

What sensations are created?

Where does the breath go?

What does it touch?

How does it feel?

How does it sound?

Try to enrich the breathing experience by simple observation of the details. That in itself is so tremendously powerful. You'll discover something that you didn't know, and you'll get one of those "ah ha" moments. You'll have an inspiration!

Look at the language. It's no coincidence. To be "inspired;" "inspiration;" to "expire;" "expiration;" "respiration;" "to conspire..." The secret of life is hidden in plain sight in the language.

The Latin word spiritus refers to "the animating principle of life." I think in Greek, it was Ruach: "the breath within the breath." In India, it's called "prana." In China it's called "Chi." In Japan it's called "Ki." In Africa it's called "Num." The Polynesians call it "Ha."

If you look into the language of almost any ancient culture, the word for breath is synonymous with the word for energy, life, soul, or spirit. It is so obvious, and yet we take it for granted. We underestimate it; we overlook it.

That is why I am involved in breathing. I'm the kind of guy that... my keys are right in my hand or my sunglasses are right on my head, and yet I am looking for them! I was a "spiritual seeker," and I was looking everywhere for the secret of life... But duh, it turned out to be right under my nose! It's breathing!

If you are breathing, you're alive. If you stop breathing you die. How basic can it get! You know, for some people, the obvious things are the last things that they discover. And I'm the first one when it comes to that. And so, please, become more aware of your breath and breathing!

So, the first thing we practice is awareness. And the second part of the three-part formula, is RELAXATION.

There are a number of important reasons for this. One of them being... on the surface, the physical level, we talk about air: chemistry, carbon dioxide, oxygen, metabolic waste, toxins... air, muscles, and all that... that's one level of breathing.

Another level is the level of energy: chi, ki, prana, something in the air, under the air, behind the air, or symbolized by the air. I refer to it as "breath energy." It is very subtle. You can't move it with your muscles. You move it with your mind.

If your muscles are tense when you breathe, this energy cannot flow. If I make a fist [demonstrates], you can see what it does to the circulation of blood [hand goes white]. If I relax my hand, the color comes back: the circulation is restored.

So, on a subtler level, if I have slight tension throughout my body, the energy can't get in to the cracks and crevices. When I relax and become soft and open enough, the spaces between my cells open up, and the prana, the energy can get in there. Also, any energy that is suppressed or locked in the cells can be released.

So tension/relaxation is a real critical aspect of breathwork. Now everybody can relax already. But how quickly can you relax? How deeply can you relax? In the face of what situations and under what circumstances can you relax? Now we start to go "hmm."



It's one thing to relax when your bills are paid and the heat is on in your house, the kids are healthy and safe, you have money in the bank, and everything is right with the world, you feel rested, loved... Aahh... It's easy to relax then! It's another thing to relax when the proverbial poop hits the fan, when something terrible is happening, when a train-like experience comes crashing into your life.

And what happens at those times? People do one of two things: they either freeze, which is not a very useful response; or in a crisis, you'll see people running around like chickens with their heads cut off. Those are the two extremes.

The person who can relax in those situations becomes the one who can think clearly and then do something to make the situation better. So relaxing is a very critical thing. You are about to cross the street and a car almost hits you. Your heart starts pounding, you get sweaty palms, and your knees shake.

Ten minutes later, your heart is still beating fast. Two hours later you're still upset and telling your family about it. Three days later, you're still feeling the effects. You haven't recovered from the shock. You are still experiencing subtle tension left over from it.

There's no reason why you can't recover from any kind of trauma very quickly. There's no reason why you can't accelerate any recovery process. Breathing is an incredible way to totally recover from things like that. And with practice, you can completely recover from just about any kind of trauma in just a few moments!

Once you have a few breathing sessions under your belt, there's no reason why you should ever experience upset for more than a minute a few minutes. So the third thing then, the third part of this formula is CONSCIOUS BREATHING or breath control.

“Breath control” is a generic term. If you open a book on yoga, you'll probably find something like this: “inhale for the count of four, hold for the count of eight, exhale for the count of twelve.” In other words, you learn some form of breath control or regulated breathing. And often, the purpose is relaxation: breath control for the purpose of relaxation.

We talked about the “relaxation response,” earlier... Most people who have had any kind of training in relaxation, have probably been taught to control their breathing in order to relax. For example people are taught to let the breath out very slowly... a long exhale thru pursed lips...

I have what many people in the relaxation business would say is a radical approach to using the breath for relaxation. They often resist it at first. But I happen to have ten thousand people who have practiced it with dramatic results; and so I have a great deal of confidence in it.

This direct experience is much more authentic than information taken from a book and simply repeating it—which is a lot of what has been happening with relaxation, and even yoga.

And now it is happening in breathwork. People have been repeating and passing on some things, and yet they haven't gotten a real and deep internal experience of it. So they go thru the motions. They parrot someone else's words and pass it off as teaching. Real teaching arises naturally and organically from the inside out.

Tai Chi is a great example of that. I'm sure that some ancient master was sitting in meditation, and the energy of life started to move in him. He allowed his body to be moved by the energy. And people looked at him and said: "Wow, isn't that beautiful! Isn't that fantastic! I want to do that." And so they copied the motions and worked from the outside in, instead of contacting the energy directly, and expressing it from the inside out.

A lot of yoga has been passed on that way, and relaxation techniques are now being passed on that way too. So the only way I can see to really make it come from the inside out, is to support people in developing the ability within themselves, let them do it and see it for themselves.

So here's the classic way to use the breath to relax: You're told to make your exhale longer [demonstrating a long slow exhale]. If you do that, you can feel yourself sort of relaxing... As you are exhaling, you can feel yourself settling down. I'm not saying that it doesn't work. I know it works. And you don't have to take my word for it: you can try it.

Why doesn't everyone just do that right now? Take in a big breath, and then let the breath out slowly. Purse your lips, so you limit the size of the stream, and stretch your exhale out to 5 or ten seconds. Gradually let it out, paying attention to how you feel while you do that. Let's do that right now.

So you can feel a kind of settling. It happens, it works. It has worked for thousands of years for thousands of people. But in order to slow your breath down, you have to use control, you have to create some kind of tension. That is the opposite of relaxation. If I relax completely, the breath just falls out of me, flies out of me [demonstrates a releasing exhale].

For me to make the exhale last long and slow, I have to half hold and half let go. So I'm not relaxing completely. I am holding on and letting go at the same time. I'm doing a little of both. I'm relaxing yet I'm holding on. I'm holding some of the breath back and letting some of the breath out. It's not complete relaxation. It's not a total letting go.

Relaxation happens when you release the breath, when you let the breath go quickly and completely. [demonstrates the force of gravity with a shoe] So you see it just falls out of my hand when I let go. It's not this: [demonstrates slowly placing the shoe to the floor]. That's controlling it. It works. But when you truly let the breath go [demonstrates letting go] something deep in the system relaxes and releases.

And that brings up another universal response or phenomenon: you get home after a hard day of work. You've been fighting traffic, you've been really busy, hectic, yada yada yada. You finally get home and sit down in your favorite chair... at your own kitchen table, TV,

fireplace, whatever. You sit back and relax. And what happens? [Demonstrates a big soothing sigh of relief]

You didn't make it happen. It just happens. Yet it is no coincidence. It's not an accident. It is a natural reflex. That kind of breath (call it a "coming home breath") expresses itself, naturally, automatically at certain times, in certain moments. You don't think about it. It just happens.

But why wait? Why not turn that natural spontaneous sigh of relief into a conscious exercise, into a deliberate technique? Why not do it consciously? [Demonstrates] It doesn't take but a few seconds. [Demonstrates again]

Notice that it is a dramatic sigh of release. You're snapping the exhale loose. You are not blowing it out [demonstrates blowing exhale out]. You're letting it out [demonstrates]. It also happens if you are bored [demonstrates]. You know, the system itself uses it to vent something. We do it unconsciously. Why not turn it into a conscious technique?

So try it now. Take in a breath and then just "let" the breath out. Just set it free. And notice something subtle but important. Focus on your throat. Listen to this [Demonstrates scratchy breath sound]. My throat is tight.

If I do this [Demonstrates open soft breath sound] my throat is open. That soft open sound is what happens when you yawn. What a co-ink-a-dink! When you yawn, your jaw and throat open in a way that it normally doesn't open.

Doing this might even make you dizzy: relaxing your jaw, opening your throat while at the same time moving the breath freely in and out thru that opening. You might feel some weird feelings when you practice this. That's a good sign!

It's like a person with emphysema or COPD... if you sit very still, you don't have any problem breathing. As long as you are not creating any stress or increasing your metabolic demand, you don't notice that you have a breathing problem. But as soon as you get up, as soon as you begin to move, work play, then you begin to huff and puff, and struggle with your breath.

God forbid that a person with that kind of breathing problem has to run up a flight of stairs! They wouldn't be able to keep up with the sudden demand, and they would experience some real discomfort in their body. So it's not until their system is stressed do they realize: "hey something's wrong with my breathing."

As long as you're sitting still, you never know anything is wrong with your breathing. You go on for thirty, forty years, barely breathing, avoiding all kinds of stress, and think: "I am fine. My breathing is fine." Huh? You call that living? You call that breathing?

Anyway, when most people yawn... they don't even stretch to make a sound, especially if someone is looking. In that case, the first thing they do is cover it up. [demonstrates stifling]

a yawn] Which is like saying, “Oh I shouldn’t be alive.” “Oh, this shouldn’t be happening.” “It’s not polite, not appropriate.” Who said? Why?

If a little kid is in school (me for example) and dares to allow a big natural full-body yawn, what is likely to happen? The teacher is bound to say something—and not something that encourages that natural healthy reflex.

I think there’s an unwritten law about yawning on elevators... Maybe the first thirty years that elevators were used, they had signs that said “no breathing on elevators.” Or maybe everyone just held their breath in fear, riding on those new-fangled things!

Anyway, I dare you to get on a crowded elevator and see if anyone ever enjoys a big luxurious yawn! Everybody is holding their breath! I have done this research for many years, and I find that it’s true. You will never see anyone (except possibly one of my students) giving themselves a full body yawn.

Yawn now. And when we do, allow yourself to stretch... This is one way that many people yawn [demonstrates inhibited yawn] They don’t even let it happen; they stifle it. The second way is that they freeze: [demonstrates nothing moving]. You open and stretch, but no air is moving.

So I say combine those two things, so you open and stretch, and also let the breath go in and out [demonstrates]. It’s magical! It is truly magical. You may get dizzy, you may feel funny. All kinds of weird things may happen just from yawning and breathing!

Well that means that something is amuck in your system, otherwise you wouldn’t get those symptoms. Just like you shouldn’t get short of breath just by getting out of your chair, or you shouldn’t get out of breath just from going up a short flight of stairs. That means that something is amuck in your system.

So, it’s a neat thing [*and very healthy too*] to practice: yawning and breathing, at the same time. And then just see... “Oh interesting feelings.” “Hmm, I’m getting dizzy.” Are you afraid of being dizzy? Are you afraid of what’s going to happen if you get comfortable with being dizzy? Who knows? But it enlightens you to a lot of what’s happening inside of you [*or waiting to happen!*]

So the third thing [*in the formula*] is “Breath Control.” Control the inhale, not the exhale. Don’t control the exhale. In beginning your practice of breath control, start with the inhale, and leave the exhale alone.

Let gravity do the exhaling for you. Let the elastic tendency in your muscles do the exhaling for you. Let atmospheric pressure do the exhaling for you. The exhale requires no effort on your part. It requires no participation on your part. Let the exhale happen by itself.

Fill yourself up on the inhale... control the inhale. [Demonstrates]. Now, I am full. The muscles have been stretched. I have a lot of internal pressure. And so when I relax and stop

inhaling, the exhale happens. I don't have to become involved in it. This exercise will begin to trigger a true "relaxation response."

That exhale, letting that exhale go. Then you can begin to build on that practice. For example you have a pain, you have muscular tension...when you let the breath go, you let that part relax.

You are beginning to invent your own yoga—which is how yoga came about by the way—somebody invented it. And people have invented many different schools of yoga. Why shouldn't everyone have their own school of yoga? Yoga is science. Be your own scientist. Yoga is a subjective internal art. And if you discover something that really works, you can share it. And who knows, maybe people will flock to you, to learn it!

So...OK. These are the three things. And I call this a formula—a formula for transformation. It came about because of what I learned with EST and TM, and all the other self-improvement and personal growth methods that I studied.

When I look at what causes or triggers transformation, I see these three coming up again and again. If you are truly transformed by a technique, by a movement, by a religious experience, by anything, then one or all three of these things is at play.

Awareness for example: if you suddenly become aware of something important that you weren't aware of before, your whole life can change because of the new awareness. It's going to cause a real transformation. You suddenly see something that you didn't see before...now a transformation begins. You understand something...

You simply become aware of something you weren't aware of before, and it causes you to re-think and re-identify yourself in a way. I see that as a factor in every transformation that has ever taken place. And I challenge anyone to come up with a transformation where either a new awareness or a change in awareness wasn't part of the transformation.

Another thing involved in every transformation is relaxation, letting go, or surrender: "Let go and let God." If you go for surgery, what have you done? You have surrendered to what the doctor has advised. You let something be done to you. And then when it's over, you're better. Sometimes.

In some way, every transformation has something to do with letting go. You relax in a moment or in a situation where before you had not or could not. And due to that, a transformation can occur. You give up trying, and decide to relax, and then something comes to you.

Surrender is an aspect of every religious philosophy or spiritual practice. When you surrender to something, that's another way of saying you are relaxing into it. So relaxation is part of every transformation.

And the third thing is breath control. Something changes in the way you breathe when you go through a transformation. You hear people say: “I breathe easier now that xzy has happened.

People are transformed when they have a sudden or great “Inspiration!” You know, a great “ah hah!” The breath is intimately tied to transformation. So these three things together—awareness, relaxation, and breathing—come together into what I call a Formula for Transformation.

Now let me talk about the body and breathing. So we don’t have to get too esoteric. You can connect breathwork to some very obvious and practical things. This is how we are set up here (using blackboard) This is the diaphragm. Give or take. The diaphragm is the biggest muscle in the body.

Hmm, the biggest muscle in the body... When you inhale, the air comes in and it pushes the diaphragm down. So on a deep inhale-- I’m exaggerating the anatomy here, but on a deep inhale, the diaphragm is like that [flattened]. Then when you exhale, the air goes out and the diaphragm comes up and looks like this. [Dome shaped]

Dose everyone follow me so far? Now when the diaphragm goes down--I’m inhaling, and the diaphragm is going down, the belly pops out. When you exhale, the belly goes in and the diaphragm goes up. A sort of wave happens in the body when you do abdominal, or diaphragmatic breathing.

Now here is a theory: this range of motion that the diaphragm has, the excursion rate, as it’s talked about in medical circles, is very important. I am convinced, and I don’t think it would take too much scientific research to confirm, that the greater the excursion rate of your diaphragm, the healthier you tend to be.

And people whose excursion rate is limited, so that the diaphragm is probably flat all the time, and maybe has a little ripple in it when they breathe, are not very healthy—have little vitality.

Somebody whose diaphragm sits way up high on the exhale, in that dome shape, and can really be flattened on the inhale, then bounce back on the exhale—this is a very healthy person.

So, I exhale all my air out, and yet there is a certain amount of air left in the lungs. This is called residual volume. It’s the amount of air that’s left in your lungs after you exhale: residual volume, what’s left over. Well, the greater the residual volume you have, the less reserve capacity you have.

In other words, if the diaphragm sits very high at the end of the exhale, there’s a very low residual volume. If you have a high residual volume, then when you inhale, it’s like adding fresh water to a glass that is already three fourths filled with old stale water.

But if you have a very low residual volume, then it's like adding water to a glass that is almost empty... You end up with a full glass of nearly pure water. So the point is to empty yourself on each exhale.

People who walk around with a high residual volume, they have a lot of pollution in their system. It's hanging around chronically. So the nerves are constantly being stimulated, to the point that they soon get numb to things, they get de-sensitized to things.

The greater your reserve capacity is, the greater potential you have for dealing with sudden energy demands, the easier your system can handle shocks and traumas. And it's like anything else, if you have a certain reserve capacity, and suddenly you are struck with a great demand, you can handle it.

And if you don't have a lot of reserve capacity, the slightest thing will irritate you, the slightest thing will cause you to get sick, the slightest thing will disturb or interfere with your immune system, because you are borderline in terms of available energy.

All this has to do with how empty you can make yourself after an exhale. If you look at all the exercises in yoga, they sort of train you to become very empty after the exhale.

One exercise is to empty your self... squeeze all the breath out, and then hang out with that emptiness for a while [postpone the inhale]. It's a very good exercise, and it produces some very healthy benefits

There's another connection: in martial arts, you notice that all the forceful movements, breaking bricks, and that sort of thing, are normally connected to the exhale. No coincidence, because if you exhale quickly, the diaphragm comes up quickly. And the diaphragm is like a pump.

You have a tube [*the torso*] and the diaphragm is like a valve or pump. So when you exhale quickly, your diaphragm moves up quickly, and it draws energy up from the earth. When I exhale, my feet get more firmly planted in the ground. Now it's harder to knock me over.

And if I continue to do that, I root myself more and more into the earth. So this breathing is doing something on an energy level too. Connected to martial arts, it means we are influencing our "chi" with breathing. So breathwork has importance on other levels besides the purely mechanical or physiological level.

The Chinese say that we are a merging of heavenly and earthly energies. So, you can breathe in a circular pattern, and consciously circulate energy inside of you. You can move energy up the back and down the front.

When you do this, you are drawing energy up from the earth into you, and you are drawing energy down from heaven into you; and they are mixing. You are the product of those two energies in the Chinese tradition.

You can also connect breathing to meditation and visualization. You can imagine that as you are breathing in, you are drawing light into you; and as you breathing out, you are getting rid of darkness, negativity. You can use your imagination together with the breath: it's a very powerful thing.

Any questions so far? Yes.

***Q. Does it make any difference whether you breathe through your nose or your mouth?***

As you know, the nose is meant to breathe through. It has hairs that filter dust, it has tissues lining the passages that moisten and condition the air. It also has structures that spiral the air. So normally, you should breathe through your nose.

But, if you begin to run, whether you like it or not, unless you have done serious training, you're going to need to breathe through your mouth. If you awaken powerful emotions, you're going to breathe through your mouth. Have you ever tried to laugh or cry thru your nose? Or even sing or speak thru your nose?

So there are times when one or the other is required. And the breath itself will tell you whether to breathe through your nose or your mouth. If there is one lesson that I would like everyone to get, it's to learn to breathe from the breath itself.

I believe that the breath is alive, and it has intelligence—it is a manifestation of intelligent life. And you can learn about yourself and life directly from the breath. And so, the first step is to watch your breath, to see what your breath does by itself. And begin to cooperate with it, rather than lay some artificial exercise onto it.

Let's talk about emotions for a minute. When you're afraid, you're breath is up here. [Demonstrates]. And when you're in a panic: "I can't breathe, I...I...can't....!" You've seen people in that state, and when you do, you naturally try to calm down, even the words we use, "calm down."

They are holding their breath and holding themselves way up here, [*off balance, ungrounded*]. They can't take in a breath because they haven't let the breath out. So you try to get them to calm "down." Most people avoid that [*state*].

They wouldn't ever want to be trapped up here [*demonstrates panic posture*] they would never let themselves become that afraid. They are more comfortable with something on the other end, like: [Demonstrates anger] With anger, the breath is pressed down here.

So, if you empty your self, you get into... something else. These two extremes: empty and full, are fun to play with, and we play with them at all my workshops, because people's breathing can get stuck in different places.

We're going to take ten deep breaths very quickly, like this [Demonstrates]. OK, everybody do that. Go.



Now you see, I was able to pick out three people... let's say that this is the breath [Drawing a wave using the blackboard]. This is the inhale [uphill side of the wave], very deep, as big as possible.

Some people just did this [Illustrates turning below the peak]. A couple of people just did this [Illustrates pushing past peak or crest of wave]. Where are you on this scale? It is no coincidence. I can tell a lot about your personality by watching you take a few breaths.

And that's a scary thing about breathing techniques. You can look at the expression on a person's face, and you can tell something about them—if they're happy or sad or whatever. You can listen to the tone of the person's voice and you can also draw some conclusions about them. Look at their posture and you can tell some things.

We are consciously and unconsciously reading people by these things all the time. You can also ask the person a question, and they might give you an answer, allowing you to learn some things about them.

Well, breathing patterns are like fingerprints. Your breathing pattern is different from everybody else's. And you can learn to read breathing patterns. And it can often give you better information than facial expressions, posture... and better than many psychological questionnaires. Because, we've learned to disguise these things.

When I was a child, entering high school, a nun gave me a book on handwriting analysis. And as I was looking through the book, I realized: "wow!" You can look at my handwriting and know all these things about me! So I changed my handwriting! I didn't want people to know what was going on inside of me! If they knew, they'd put me in jail!

Facial expressions, well we've been socially conditioned...if you're a bank clerk, and you think that the person at the counter is an asshole, excuse me, you still have to smile, and act polite and say thank you... that is you want to keep your job.

So we've learned how to hide our thoughts and feelings. Facial expressions are not true indicators anymore. Posture is no exception. You know, we get into weird contorted unnatural postures because we are trying to hide or project some part of our personality. We don't want to show fear, or we want to make a good impression.

And so all those things aren't good indicators of what is real and true in each moment. But very few people have learned to disguise their breathing. No one in this room has worked on their breath enough to alter what it's saying about you.

The way you breathe says a lot about the way you look at life. How you breathe says a lot about how you live. Your relationship to life is reflected in your relationship to your breath. Your breathing reveals some of your deepest issues, and the truth of your being in each moment.

Your breathing constantly reflects and expresses your emotions. The way you breathe when you are afraid is different than the way you breathe when you're angry. The way you breathe when you're in the middle of an orgasm is different than the way you breathe when you're trying to solve a math problem.

The way you breathe when someone is calling you a stupid jerk is different than the way you breathe when somebody says: "you're wonderful, I love you." But at those times, we don't look at our breath: we're focused on other things.

The way you breathe when you are in pain... And some people here may have already made that observation... the way you breathe when you're in pain is different than the way you breathe when you're not in pain.

The yogis had a secret. And they've been teaching it for thousands of years: every psychological state, every emotional state, has a corresponding breathing pattern. One affects the other. Change one and you change the other. It's a two-way street.

That means that you can turn those states around with your breath. If you want to be calm, breathe a certain way. You want to be upset? Breathe a certain way. You want to be happy? Breathe a certain way. You want to have pain? Breathe a certain way.

You can use breathing techniques to put yourself into or take yourself out of any psychological or emotional state. You may already be doing that intuitively or unconsciously.

It's exciting when you discover that you can actually gain control over something that you thought was beyond your ability to control. It's quite exciting to find that you have more choice in how you can be in each moment.

Somebody steps on your toe, you don't have to punch them in the nose. There's a little bit of space there to choose how you respond, how you react. By learning to control your breathing, you develop the ability to respond this way or that way.

I was in the military and my job was rescuing people...I have been rescuing people as long as I can remember. But anyway...I noticed that when someone suddenly become afraid, they held their breath. I observed this again and again, in myself and in others.

But it never made sense to me. Because everything I studied about the body and about the human system is that it was meant to survive. It shouldn't have this unnatural, unhealthy habit. We need to think clearly in those moments, and holding the breath does not support that. To think clearly, you need to feed your brain oxygen.

And if you need to move, you can't be holding your breath because that makes you rigid. So where did this reflex come from? Why do people hold their breath when they are afraid? Does anyone know? I'm still wondering, but I know it doesn't belong there. Yes?

***Participant: Well, if you hold very still, maybe somebody won't see you.***

Yes, if I'm very still, I'll be OK! Yes. Many animals use that as a survival tactic. That's a very good observation. And that observation will help you to remember to breathe when others won't. If you notice, "geeze, I ain't been breathing," hopefully, what you will then do, is breathe!

***Q: What about snoring?***

People who snore... hmmm... When I taught CPR, I loved talking about this because I wanted to put some of the complicated medical stuff into laymen's terms. And so I looked up the medical explanation for things like hiccups, sneezing, yawning, snoring, and so on. And I played with those things in myself quite a bit. Snoring happens when the tongue relaxes and partially blocks the airway.

In doing CPR, the first thing you do is put the person on their back and tilt their head back [Demonstrates]. This lifts the jaw and it pulls the back of the tongue away from the throat. When your tongue is relaxed, the tongue interferes with the flow of air, and makes that snoring noise.

Sometimes the tongue can completely block the airway when snoring [Demonstrates]. And after a few minutes, something happens inside of them to get them to breathe again. (Many people suffer from frequent periods of sleep apnea. And it can lead to many problems.)

Now, no one stays awake at night making sure that they breathe. Something takes care of that, and you trust that it is on the job. You go to sleep at night and you know that...if I stop breathing, something will happen to restore it. ...Wouldn't it be great if you could observe what it is?

I don't mean just when you go to bed at night, but I mean in life in general. What if you could use the breath as a bridge? What if you could follow the breath like a thread that leads you to the source of your life?

Where does your breath come from? Where does it go inside of you? What does it touch? What does it move? When you begin to observe your breath, and become more aware of the details in your breathing, you find yourself moving along a spiritual path. It's no coincidence: the breath is a spiritual force, a living energy that permeates and surrounds the body.

So what can we call that urge to breathe? Let's call it the life urge. You don't notice, you take it for granted. But when you breathe consciously, you strengthen it. When you are asleep, it is on guard. If you stop breathing, something in the brain says: "Hey, wake up, cough, turn over, do something!"

And it gets louder and louder, until it makes you move or do something. And, we may not respond until the signal is very strong. So, we want to become more conscious of the subtle

cues. That means becoming more conscious of the details in the breathing, during your waking hours.

What if your breathing has been functioning at a fraction of its full potential? What if without realizing it, many things are interfering with the flow of breath, energy, life in you? What if that has been true for most of your life? What if what you think is “normal” is actually far from natural?

Maybe many illnesses are actually the result of poor breathing habits and patterns? Very few people connect the illnesses and issues to something like inefficient breathing. We look for the cause out there, but really the problem is right under your nose.

When I get up in the morning, the first thing that I do when I wake up is I just sort of feel what’s happening with my breath. If I notice anything unusual: some restriction, some limitation or inhibition in the breathing, or the need to use more effort than usual, then I make it a point to restore full free breathing before going forward with my day.

And so if I have anything beginning to happen in my system, like a cold coming on, I can get rid of it in just a few minutes of conscious breathing. I haven’t had a cold since 1976; not the flu, not the sniffles—nothing like a cold. And I am certain that it is connected to breath awareness and conscious energy breathing.

If you do not sense an imbalance or an interference in the breathing, then things can develop in your system, and you can end up dealing with something for days or weeks instead of minutes or hours.

And so, you need to practice breath awareness, you need to practice relaxation, and you need to practice conscious breathing. If you do, you will develop incredible healing abilities. You will access extraordinary creative energies.

No one can do it for you. It requires focused attention, and daily practice. Breathwork is the most powerful mind-body healing method available to you. Take advantage of it!

Thank you for your attention. We will take a short break, and then we will practice.