

Conscious Breathing: A Path to Freedom

The Estonia Training

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Part 1

Being Mindful of Thoughts, Feelings and Sensations, and Emotions

So, let's talk more about the three parts of this process. The first is awareness. And the awareness we are talking about is what the Buddha taught: mindfulness, being the watcher, the neutral observer, a detached witness, a non-judging presence.

This awareness is different than thinking: because we can be aware of our thinking. It's not talking to yourself, because you can be aware of this self-talk. Certainly it isn't judging: "I like this, I don't like that." "This is good, this is bad." "I should be feeling this...." It's about just being... It's about pure consciousness, pure awareness.

There is always something happening on the level of thought, feelings and sensations, and emotions. Those are the three levels that we can watch. Watch the pictures that pop up in your head. Watch the feelings and sensations that arise and pass, watch the emotions that come and go. And watch your reaction to these thoughts, feelings, and emotions).

So, you watch what you say to yourself, you observe the sensations in your body, not caring what they are. It doesn't matter. You are just the observer. Observing one thing is the same as observing another. This is meditation, the essence of meditation.

We are talking about dealing with our mind. We can point our mind in a certain direction. For example you can meditate on your breathing. Feel the breath come in, and feel it go out. Present moment awareness.

Breath Awareness

How do you know you are breathing? When you turn your attention inward, and focus on the awareness of your breathing, what do you see, what do you hear, what do you feel, what do you notice, what can you observe?

You can observe that the breath comes in, and that the breath goes out; and then you might observe that there is a pause. And then you observe the breath coming in again.... So the idea is to try to be fully present, awake, alert, attentive, to each breath. And you want to focus on the details of the experience.

Breathing is like listening to a symphony orchestra: 150 musicians, each one of them making their own sound, and together they makes beautiful music. You can focus on any particular instrument. So in breathing there are hundreds of sensations. You can focus on any one of them, the most obvious ones to start... and you can also get a sense of the breathing in wholeness...

So start by observing the most interesting aspect, the most enjoyable aspect, and then turn the breathing up a little bit. You see, its like listening to music on your stereo. If the music is too quiet then you can't hear it and it's hard to enjoy. But if it's too loud, even if it's your favorite music, if it's too loud, you can't enjoy it.

So you want to turn up the breathing, not too soft and not too strong, but strong enough so that it creates feelings and sensations that you can watch. So you need to breathe a little fuller than normal. Make the breaths a little bigger than normal, so that it's easy to notice the feelings and sensations that the breathing activates.

Close your eyes and breathe thru your nose. Can you feel the sensations of air at the tip of your nose? When the breath comes in, and when the breath comes out, focus on the tip of the nose, and notice the sensations there. Try to feel the details. Change the speed of the breath, make it faster or slower, and notice how the sensations change. Make it stronger or subtler, and notice how the sensations change.

So play with the breath while you are focusing on the sensations in your nose. Try many different speeds, volumes, intensities, and just observe the sensations in detail. And notice what sensations are in the background. So as you are breathing quickly in and out for example thru your nose, and you are focusing on the sensations there, maybe another sensation calls your attention: movement in your abdomen, movement in your chest.

Maybe the sensations of breathing movement in your chest or belly are more obvious. So let your attention got to that place. Let your attention go to the most obvious feeling or sensation caused by the movement of the breath.

Notching up the Breathing and Tracking Effort and Tension

Now keep making the breath stronger or faster until it is very obvious which part of your body calls for your attention, signals you to stop, to look, to notice!

Something moves in your belly when you breathe. Focus on that feeling, that movement. Or, breathe into your belly on purpose and make your belly move more with each breath. And then exaggerate those movements.

Is your jaw tight? Is your jaw relaxed? Is your throat open? Are your shoulders relaxed? Can you feel the breath in the back of your throat? Can you hear the breath inside of you? Noise coming from your throat? Is there a different sound on the inhale, and a different sound on the exhale? Can you exaggerate that sound? Can you make the sound louder?

Now breathe thru your mouth, and feel the air as it passes over your lips and your tongue, and the roof of your mouth. Feel those sensations. Try to magnify them. Heighten your sensitivity to them. As if you are listening very carefully... but on the feeling level... you are feeling very carefully.

Relax and soften your throat. Open something in the back of your jaw, in the back of your throat. When you find this, it should trigger a yawn. So you can do something with the back of your throat and your jaw to make a yawn happen. You can fake a yawn, and then a real yawn will happen.

Listen to the breath as you are yawning, and letting the breath move in and out. Find that yawning reflex. Open it, and breathe in and out while that yawning reflex is open. Relax your belly.

Relax the back of your jaw and open your throat. And breathe in and out during the yawn. If you make your eyes water, you are doing it right! You have found it! A very healthy reflex! Play with it. And breathe in and out while you play with it.

Yawning is one of those things that you've learned to block, to control, to hold. And so there are a lot of yawns waiting inside of you. There were so many times when it wasn't polite, or you didn't want to attract attention to yourself, and so you blocked it. Now all of those yawns are locked up inside of you, waiting for permission to come out.

You've had hundreds, thousands of yawns that you didn't do fully... You sort of half yawned. That's why when one person yawns someone else yawns. It's like unconscious permission. "Oh I guess its ok." So a yawn escapes. Invite a yawn!

And what you are doing to the back of your throat and your jaw is important. Feel what happens. And let what wants to happen, happen. Some movement wants to accompany the yawn. Like movement in your fingertips! Movement wants to happen in your spine, in your neck, your shoulders. See what wants to happen and cooperate with the yawn.

Some sound wants to happen with the yawn. Give that sound permission. So you are saying yes to something natural in you. Yawning is natural. But, we've been taught it's not polite. You couldn't draw attention to yourself. And so, guess what happens? You interfere with your healthy nature.

So you interfere with your nature on one level, you interfere with your nature on another level, another place another time. Soon you are interfering with everything that is natural and healthy in you. The process we are doing now moves us in the opposite direction from this. It is as if we have a soft animal called our body. And you have to let this soft animal love what it loves.

Some of the control is very good. There are times when I felt like slapping somebody, so it's good that I learned to control myself. Because they might have slapped me back! There were times when I wanted to tell somebody exactly what I thought of him or her. But I learned to control that. Because if the person was my boss, it's a good idea if I want my job... Or if I am afraid of hurting someone's feelings...

We have many excuses for interfering with our nature, of stopping ourselves. But this is not one of those times or places. We are going to develop a sacred space here, where we give ourselves permission, and we give each other permission, to feel what we need to feel, to express what we need to express, to move the way we want to move, and to breathe the way we need to breathe.

How We Use the Breath to Control Ourselves

One of the most natural things is breathing. And it's one of the things we've learned to control the most. For example you have to control it to speak. That's what speaking is: shaping the breath, giving the breath a certain shape and sound...

If you try not to cry, how do you do that? You hold your breath. You control your breath in order to control the crying. How do you stop yourself from laughing? You control your breath. You hold it.

If someone is about hit you, and you want to protect or defend yourself, you take in a breath, you hold your breath, and you make yourself hard. This helps you to resist pain, right? So we've learned to use our breath in many ways, unconsciously, automatically.

For example, you don't have to teach a little girl, and you don't have to teach an antelope in the wild, that if you want to hide, you hold your breath. Make your breath very quiet, because the tiger can sense you. So you become very still. And when you try to be still, you automatically hold your breath. No one has to teach us this. It's a reflex.

When you don't want to be heard or seen or noticed, you make your breath quiet. If you are afraid, you hold your breath. All those times in your life, you weren't trying to hold your breath, you weren't trying to control your breath. You were trying to do something else, and you unconsciously and automatically used your breath. That's why we want to bring consciousness to the breath.

And we want to bring consciousness to the body around your breath. Take in a long full breath. Inhale deliberately and fill yourself up completely. Feel yourself expand from side to side, front to back, top to bottom. Then relax and let the exhale happen.

Exploring the Limits to Your Breathing

Take a few long inhales like that, and try to feel the expansion in all directions. Your back expands. When you breath and expand side to side, it's as if you are spreading wings.

When you expand top to bottom, your belly fills up like a balloon, your collarbones lift up, and your ribs spread. Try to feel all that. What muscles do you use? Are you using muscles that you don't have to? Can you expand powerfully and yet effortlessly?

Can you open yourself and allow the breath to flow into you? Can you invite the breath into you, and let the breath open and stretch you? When it feels like you are full, are you really full? Or can you relax something and become even fuller?

What about emptying yourself? How empty can you make yourself of breath? Can you squeeze all the breath out? And yet, there is still some breath left inside of you. Can you squeeze all the breath out?

And then when you relax the squeezing, you notice that the breath comes in all by itself. You squeeze all the breath out, then when you relax, if your throat is open, if your mouth is open, the breath comes in all by itself.

And when you fill yourself up, when you are very, very full, then when you relax, the breath comes out all by itself. See if you can feel that.

Can you breathe just into your belly? Can you send breath down into your genitals? Can you breathe high in your chest? Which is more enjoyable, breathing in or breathing out? Which is easier: breathing in or breathing out?

What about the speed of breathing? How fast can you breathe in and out? Is it difficult? Can you breathe very quickly in and out, effortlessly? Is it hard? Is it easy? What gets tight when you try to breathe fast? What gets tired when you breathe fast?

Breathe fast until something gets tight or stuck or tired. And when you identify that place, breathe slowly and gently into that place. Bring relaxation to that place. Breathe gently into that place, with that place. Can you relax that place, and yet keep breathing? Or do you have to stop breathing to relax?

What about the sound of the breath, the shape of the breath...? How many different shapes are there? Can you make sounds like the wind? Can you make sounds like waves in the ocean? What is interesting? What is enjoyable? Explore that. Experiment.

How powerfully can you breathe? How gently can you breathe? If you breathe powerfully and you make yourself dizzy, are you afraid of being dizzy? When you breathe thru your mouth does your throat get dry?

Swara Yoga and Kum Nye

Right now, one of your nostrils is more open or more closed than the other. If you breathe thru one nostril, block one, and then block the other, and just see if there is a difference in how open each of those is. See how open or narrow the passage is.

That changes every forty-five minutes to two hours. It goes back and forth like a pendulum. That's been happening since the day you were born. Every forty five minutes to two hours, the breath swings back and forth. One nostril is more open or closed than the other.

There is a science of yoga that is built up around that single rhythm: Swara Yoga. Because when the left nostril is open, it's better to be involved in certain activities, and when the right nostril is open, it is better to be engaged in different activities.

And there is a certain time when they are exactly equal, when it's swinging back and forth and it's right in the middle. That's also a very special time.

If you breathe onto a mirror, you can see how big of a cloud of moisture you make with each nostril. There are yogis who have spent years meditating on this, on that single detail.

You can also breathe thru your nose, or thru your mouth. You can take one breath thru the nose, and then one thru your nose. You can breathe in the nose and out the mouth, or you can breathe in the mouth and out the nose.

Or you can breathe thru both the mouth and nose at the same time. You can exactly equalize the flow, so the stream of breath is divided equally in half. Half goes in and out the mouth and half goes in and out the nose. There is a whole science of yoga built on that: Kum Nye.

Combining Affirmations, Mantras, and Movement to Breathing

You can think of a word, like love or peace, health, freedom, aliveness. And each time you breathe, you repeat that word. You breathe that word. So with every breath that goes by, you are repeating a mantra. You can even repeat an entire phrase during the time of the inhale, and repeat an entire phrase during the time of the exhale.

For example, while you are inhaling, you can think “the power of God is within me” And while you are exhaling, you can think: “the love of God surrounds me.” So with each breath in and out, you have this phrase: “The power of God is within me, the love of God surrounds me.” You can invent any phrase. Every breath can be a prayer.

Suppose you want some quality or characteristic. You know you need to be more patient... You breathe in patience. You meditate on patience while you are breathing. You breathe in a patient way.

Maybe you need to relax more. And so while you are breathing, you are repeating: “I am relaxed, I am relaxing, I am relaxed.” And, you deliberately breathe in a way that feels relaxing, that sounds relaxing, that looks relaxing.

Maybe there is some part of your body that you can move each time you breathe. As you inhale you open your hands, and as you exhale you close your hands. So with each breath, the body is moving with the breath.

You can turn your head to the left while you inhale, and turn your head to the right as you exhale. You can look up while you’re inhaling and look down while you’re exhaling. Just find some way to move that is in harmony with the breath, something that is interesting, enjoyable. It might be very useful..

Being Creative and Imaginative in Your Practice

Maybe it's no coincidence, what you find enjoyable is actually good for you. If it's interesting and fun, it's actually useful and beneficial. When you think about it, that's exactly the way nature intended it. You can trust your natural pleasures, your urges, your intuition.

Be creative. You can exaggerate the breathing. Really expand and really relax. Expanding on the inhale, relaxing on the exhale; expanding on the inhale, relaxing on the exhale. Stretching on the inhale, melting on the exhale, stretching on the inhale, melting on the exhale.

You can think breath into your feet. You can imagine your feet expanding and relaxing with each breath, along with your lungs.

You can pull into you, something, with the breath. You can pull in a picture of something. You can send something to someone with the breath. Send them a thought, send them your love. Send them a picture of peace.

The breath is a bridge. The breath is a vehicle. It can carry information. It can connect you to people, places, and things. You can breathe light, your favorite color. Use your imagination: fill yourself with light when you breathe in.

Radiate light when you exhale. Nothing is stopping you. And when you practice it, it becomes a real thing. It soon becomes so real that other people see it, and other people feel it.

What's the most enjoyable way you can breathe? What's the most pleasurable rhythm, the most pleasurable sound, speed, volume, shape, location... Invent something. Invent a way of breathing that is continuous, rhythmic, conscious...

Don't let a single breath go by that you don't do consciously. You can generate a feeling. So with each breath, you can feel more... something, more love, more at peace, more excitement, more joy, more freedom.

When you breathe in, feel that you are charging yourself with energy, feel that you are pulling in energy, pulling in life, pulling in light, pulling in love, pulling in strength...

And then when you exhale, let it be a sigh of relief... as if all the work is done. A big exaggerated sigh of relief... luxurious... (give it an 'ahhh' shape, the sound of letting go.

Now forget about your breathing, and just feel your body from head to toe. Get a sense of your entire body as energy.

Then imagine your body expanding and relaxing with each breath... So that you are not just breathing into your body, but also the space around your body, as if there is a bubble of energy around you that gets bigger and relaxes with each breath. And with a long inhale, you can expand and you can fill the room.

These are all useful games. Games involving consciousness, relaxation, and breathing. You can breathe energy, not just air. You can always breathe more fully, more freely. You can find some place to send breath, to open, expand, relax.

And when you let go of the breath, you can let go of emotions, you can let go of negative thoughts, you can let go of a pain. And you just let go completely, and let whatever wants to leave you, let it flow out.

You can open all the doors and windows, and just let your spirit flow. You can fill yourself with God with each breath.

You can breathe love into the world with each breath.

There are really no limits to what you can conceive, what you can imagine... what you can choose to be. Choose to be free. Choose to feel safe.

Tell yourself:

“No matter what I think, no matter how I feel, I am free.”

“No matter what I think, no matter how I feel, I am safe.”

“No matter what I think no matter what I feel, I am ok.”

“No matter what anyone else has ever said about me, no matter how I might have thought about myself in the past, everything is possible.”

What's important? Focus on it while you breathe. Focus on it while you relax. Breathe more. Relax more. Gradually breathe more deeply, and practice relaxing more completely... breathe fully, relax completely.

Healing Emotional Scars

Make sure you breathe before and after each of these thoughts. Breathe while you think!
Breathe while you explore the feelings that come up in you.

Have you ever felt misunderstood?... That people didn't understand you... that people don't understand you?

[Breathe]

Have you ever felt that people misread your intentions? [Breathe] You intended one thing, and people didn't get it at all. You meant one thing, but somehow people didn't understand what you meant. They took it the wrong way. They misjudged you.

[Breathe]

Has anyone ever blamed you for something that you didn't do. Has anyone ever thought something about you that just wasn't true?

[Breathe]

What's the worst thing that anyone could ever accuse you of?

[Breathe]

What would be the most terrible thing that anyone could say to you?

[Breathe]

What is the most hurtful thing anyone has ever said to you? Your mother? Your father? Others? What's the most hurtful thing they ever said to you?

[Breathe]

What's the most terrible thing you've ever said to yourself?

[Breathe]

What's the most wonderful thing anyone has ever said to you?

[Breathe!]

What do you wish people would feel toward you?

[Breathe]

What's the most beautiful thing you can say to yourself?

[Breathe]

Creative Breathing: A Guided Breath Session

Our breathing connects us to our body, connects us to our mind, and it actually connects the mind to the body. It connects us to each other.

The breath that is in you now was in someone else a few minutes ago. The breath that is in you now will be in someone else in a few minutes. It's not a theory. It is a fact in reality. We share the same breath.

So the breath connects us to each other. And it connects us all to God, to the source of life. You can deny it, you can ignore it, you can avoid it, but it is what it is.

What possibilities exist for you? No matter what happened in your past, in the next moment anything is possible. So think about possibilities.

If you were going to use the next 2 days to accomplish something... To heal something... What would it be?

So I want you to catch this rhythm: [demonstrates 12 breaths per minute]

Imagine that each breath is a step, as if you were marching. Marching forward with power, with commitment, with will... not lazy... committed... Nothing can stop you.

You can put more force into the breathing, more power...

Breathe like you mean it.

Like your life depended on it... like you are making a statement...

And then take a long inhale and a big sigh.... Another long inhale and a big sigh...

As if all the work is done.... Ahhhh, and finally you can rest. It's a big breath and a big sigh... The end of a long journey. You've arrived. You can enjoy your success. You can finally rest.

All your life, you have been trying for something? What would it feel like to finally get what you've always wanted? How would you breathe at such a time? How would you feel in such a moment what would be the look on your face, what would you do with your body. Imagine it, and breathe in such a way.

How would you breathe if all your dreams started coming true?

How would you breathe if you had no fear?

How would you breathe if it was impossible to fail?

How would you breathe if you had no questions, no doubts?

How would you breathe in those moments, at those times? What feelings would you have in your body? What expression would you have on your face? How would your eyes look? How would you move?

Look at these thoughts, and breathe into the feelings they bring up:

I deserve pleasure.

[Breathe]

I deserve love.

[Breathe]

I deserve peace.

[breathe]

I accept myself completely.

[Breathe]

I let myself be.

[Breathe]

Finish these sentences:

If I am really honest with myself, I know I need to...

[Bresthe]

It's ok for me to...

[Breathe]

I deserve to be...

[Breasthe]

I am ready to...

[Breathe]

I am willing to let go of...

[Breathe]

I am willing to allow other people to...

[Breathe]

I am willing to allow myself to...

[Breathe]

Now just relax and feel....

And after some time, when you are ready, you can open your eyes and stretch, move, sit up... And share your experience with the person next to you.

Part 2

An Analogy to Help Understand the Process

You can look at this process as if you have a glass of water. And at the bottom is the mud. So when the glass is still all the mud settles to the bottom, and at the top the water is quite clear, and at the bottom its muddy.

So with this process, we begin to stir the water. And when you stir the water, the mud comes up and it fills the whole glass with dirty water. Then you begin to pour clean water in the glass, and the water comes out of the glass, it over flows.

So the clear water and the mud represent our conscious and unconscious mind. If you stop stirring the glass, or you stop pouring in clean water, the process stops,. And all the mud settles to the bottom, and we live on the surface where it's clear.

So we walk thru life trying not to disturb or shake the glass. Anyone or anything that stirs or shakes the glass brings that mud up to the surface. And so people avoid people and places and things that stirr it.

But gradually over a lifetime the water evaporates on the surface, and soon, there is nothing but mud. And there is no way to escape it. And then life becomes so unbearable that death begins to look attractive.

So it takes emotional courage to do this process. And you all must have it, or you wouldn't be here. But the habits of thinking and feeling can interfere with the process. So its as if our subconscious is working against us.

Something has to give. You have to drop your conscious intention, or you have to stop letting your unconscious mind control you. And that's why very often when you start the process, you consciously want to breathe, you want to relax, but then the subconscious fear or resistance takes over and you go unconscious.

Then the breathing gets smaller and smaller and disappears, or it gets harder and harder to relax. That's the unconscious trying to stay in control. So you have to keep coming back into the process.

And you do that in a very simple way: [Demonstarates a Cleansing Breath]. That wakes you up. It's a conscious choice to pull in life, to pour new fresh life into that glass.

A Map of the Process

I am going to draw a map of this process. You remember, I told you there were three parts to this process: Awareness, Relaxation, and Breathing. So as you engage in awareness, relaxation and breathing, you go more deeply into yourself.

We can say that here [see chart] is a center in ourselves, and here we are now, living on the surface. With awareness, you begin to move into that place—your center. With relaxation we fall into that place; and with breathing we move toward that place.

Anyone of those practices will take you there, but when all three are used together, you get there very quickly.

So we begin with circular breathing: active inhale, passive exhale. And as you practice that, you begin to go deeper. And the very first thing that you encounter is something like resistance to change. There is no real reason for it, other than our “habits of being” trying to stay in place.

In physics, they call that inertia, right? The law that says: “an object at rest tends to stay at rest, and an object in motion tends to stay in motion, unless acted on by an external force.”

So you have to overcome your inertia. And it takes something like effort. But very soon, once you are moving, it’s easier to stay with it. So you overcome this inertia with a bit of effort, until you have some momentum. Then you can ease off on the effort.

We could draw the picture this way too... instead of going deeper within us, we are going higher, toward the top of a mountain. From there you can see your whole life, you rise above all the problems, you get a clear perspective on your thoughts and feelings.

So it is interesting, the world is round, circular, and everything that takes place, takes place in cycles. Look at the universe, and you see circles and cycles and everywhere.

That’s why this breathing technique is so powerful: because it is in harmony with certain universal principles: circles and cycles.

And notice that the breathing also involves active and passive forces, “yin and yang:” another universal principle. And also rhythm... another universal principle... All these things are built into this breathing practice, and you will experience them in your process.

As you go deeper, you will encounter feelings and sensations. And these feelings and sensations can stop you. They capture your awareness. Or your mind tries to escape and avoid them. And you get stuck in these feelings, or you can’t get through them. And the reason you can’t get past them is because they are connected to some unconscious fear.

They cause you to become tense or tight. They stop you from breathing. And so the process stops, and you try to escape back to the surface. But these are simply physical sensations, but we think that these simple physical sensations are dangerous; we experience them as uncomfortable, and so they stop us.

But if you continue breathing and you continue relaxing, you will go deeper. You will get through them. You will pop out the other side into more freedom.

Self Talk and Choosing your Thoughts.

If you talk to yourself in a positive way at that point [of resistance], it makes it easier to accept these feelings: “ok, I surrender... let it be... I am ok...” “I can still relax even with these feelings...”

So you talk to yourself. “It’s safe to feel my feelings.” Just because I don’t feel them doesn’t mean they are not there. So all I am doing is I am feeling something that is already there, but have been suppressing. Feelings don’t go away, when we withdraw our awareness from them. But it seems that we are free of them when we are unconscious of them.

You can tell yourself anything. Thinking is infinite. I can think of an elephant, and my next thought can be a red coat, my next thought can be a BMW, my next thought can be a butterfly, my next thought can be my mother. There is no limit. I can think anything at any time. We need not let our mind put us in a limiting trap.

When you have an uncomfortable feeling, you automatically think something. But you can think anything. And depending on what you think, you are either going to help the process or stop the process.

So the practice is to choose. Think of a thought that will serve you. Develop the skill of changing your thoughts instead of letting your mind automatically follow a certain pattern and generate certain habitual thoughts.

Remember that the mind is mechanical. But you can choose to take control of the machine at anytime. You can begin to think your way out of suffering. That’s what psychotherapy is, right? You begin to change the way you think, and sure enough you can relieve your suffering.

You don’t need anyone to tell you whether a certain thought is pleasant or unpleasant, is high or low. It’s obvious. Which is more of a positive thought: something terrible is happening, or something wonderful is happening? It’s obvious. Who decides which of those thoughts you think? Who decides?

And, depending on which of those thoughts you think, your experience is going to take a certain direction. But the problem is that a lot of our thoughts are unconscious. So when you get to strange or unusual feelings and sensations, if you want to continue the process

and go deeper, you have to consciously pull in a breath, expand, and relax. And then you will break through what Stan Grof calls “the sensory barrier.”

And then you will encounter something else: various emotions. Sometimes we don’t know what the emotion is, but it’s causing certain physical sensations, and all we notice are the physical sensations. And we are not sure what the emotion underneath is. But if you keep breathing, the emotion is going to reveal itself.

And all of the negative emotions can be reduced to a single one: fear. We might not experience it as fear, but if it is uncomfortable, if it stops us, it’s fear. At the deepest level there are only two emotions: fear and love. All the positive emotions are connected to love and all the negative emotions are connected to fear. It’s that simple.

And love is just unconditional acceptance. It’s a big “yes.” It’s opening. It’s expansive. And fear is a “no.” It’s contracting, closing... And you always know which of those you are experiencing.

The problem is that some of these emotions... we’ve learned or we believe are wrong, or dangerous, or they mean something about us. And so we don’t want to feel them. It’s normal. Just like it’s normal to try to avoid the mud at the bottom of the glass, and stay up on the surface where it feels like everything is ok.

But if you don’t shake yourself, if you don’t or stir yourself, than life will do it. And, isn’t it easier to learn to swim if you decide to do it, if you choose to do it, rather than when you accidentally fall out of boat in the middle of the ocean? To learn, you choose the place and time, you ask someone to help you; you move into the water gradually and you experiment.

You still have the fear, but you can manage it with your attention. It is much easier to learn to swim in that case. And if you ever fall out of a boat by accident, or your boat sinks, you can handle it. So this process is like that. You are choosing to learn what life will force you to learn some day, something you must learn one way or another.

Some people put off learning until the last few moments of life. And then at the last moment, I think people have a great “Ah ha! They discover that they need to be afraid of their feelings. They realize that they are ok, no matter what’s happening in their body. But then it’s too late! They’ve run out of juice. So, it’s better to learn the lessons as early as possible, and then live your life fully and freely.

So during your breathing session, you say yes to all your emotions. And when you say yes to them, when you breathe into them, when you relax into them, when you let them be... when you don’t fight with them, don’t resist them, don’t try to make them go away, then you go deeper.

On the surface we have dense physical sensations, then the next layer is emotions, and under the emotions are subtle thoughts—thoughts, ideas, beliefs... unconscious thoughts... old forgotten thoughts and beliefs.

Infancy Patterns

So for example, when you were a tiny infant, you were helpless. You had no power to move or resist. Someone could pick you up and throw you out the window, and you could do nothing about it. So really and truly, you were helpless.

And so for an infant to think and feel: “I am helpless,” it’s probably true. But 20 or 30 or 40 years later, it is not true anymore. And yet many people still hold those thoughts of helplessness. And those thoughts stop us from moving forward in life.

That’s one of the deepest beliefs, responsible for our most negative feelings and emotions: “I am helpless.” “It’s hopeless.” “There’s nothing I can do about it.” Most people don’t realize that they can do something about their emotions. You are a baby, and you are crying, and you are miserable, and unless or until someone comes and gives you what you want, you are stuck with your feelings.

No one here is an infant, yet those infant feelings and thoughts can still direct you and stop you. You may not consciously think that you are helpless, but your behavior, your reactions, show us that that’s what you believe.

“Life is a struggle.” That’s a thought that many people have carried in their unconscious since birth. And so in this process, you can act out that thought...you make the process a struggle. The process itself isn’t a struggle, but your belief that life is a struggle, causes you to create an experience that matches that thought.

So we can call this a picture of the human mind [see chart]. It’s a circle, but it’s an open circle, made of a dotted line. And in your mind you have a subconscious and a conscious portion. And in your mind, you have positive thoughts and you have negative thoughts. Positive thoughts create positive experiences, and negative thoughts create negative experiences.

And it doesn’t matter whether the thought is conscious or unconscious; it still has the same power. In fact the unconscious thoughts have more power to run you, because you don’t know that they are there. This process causes those negative or limiting thoughts to come up into your conscious awareness. And then you can change them into positive or liberating thoughts.

You have the thought: “I can’t do it.” You change that to “I can’t do it!” If you don’t change that thought, that thought becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. You have to change it: “I can.” “I am strong enough.” Choose whatever you need to in order to reverse or neutralize that negative thought.

There is a structure to this. The structure is that you have a certain thought, and that thought causes a certain emotion, and that emotion causes certain body sensations, and those body sensations strengthen the emotion, and that emotion strengthens the thought. So this structure [see chart] is shaped like a diamond, is a very basic structure in consciousness.

During the process you start breathing. You are opening and expanding, relaxing. And then you reach a certain point and you can't go any further. You start to contract again... until it gets so compressed, that life forces you to open again. Then you reach your maximum pleasure potential, and then you go back.

You just keep going thru the process like that: peaks and valleys, up cycles and down cycles—vascillating between pain and pleasure limits

And this structure is also connected to different kinds of growth. Your whole life is moving toward a certain point. Everything that happens is sending you toward this point. And then you reach this point, and there is a great “Ah ha!” Now you understand the purpose and the meaning of everything. Life has been coaching us toward something. And when you have this “Ah ha:” then your life expands. You grow.

The breath itself, the technique that we practice is shaped like this [diamond breath]. We keep repeating that breath, and at some point during the process your momentum is so strong... this place, our center, starts to pull us.

If you take two steps toward God, God takes three steps toward you. And at some point it seems that we can't stop. The process is just happening, and now you have no choice. You are moving toward one of those points of awakening.

Awareness becomes very important. And relaxation becomes very important. Because when you try to resist, it hurts. The closer you get to this point, the stronger the force is, the faster the movement is, and trying to stop the process is very painful.

Coaching and Assists in the First Few Sessions

When I first began doing sessions, the people that we were practicing on were also students. We all had the same training. We listened to the same teaching. And we just went off in pairs and traded sessions.

So for me, from the very beginning, it was process between equals. It wasn't that one person knew everything and the other person knew nothing. It was not a situation where: “I am the poor patient and you are the great therapist who is going to save me, fix me, set me free!”

But in some ways, that is what rebirthing has become. Instead of just a group of ordinary people helping each other, making our way along a new path... Now we have people who

have traveled that path very often, and they can act as guides. It's a natural evolution I think.

I wrote article on "The First Session" in 1980, because our assignment, when I was training with Leonard Orr, was that we had to give Rebirthing a new name. We had to invent a new name for it. We had to make up our own name for the process. The more different styles and approaches to Rebirthing, the better. Because then people could pick and choose, and find someone who's style or way fit their needs.

So this was a very good structure in the beginning, for the first sessions. And although people had spontaneous rebirth experiences, they weren't really guided rebirthing sessions.

But then people began to come to me for their first session, but had not been to the seminars that I had been to, or received the training that I had. So I needed to approach them differently than the fellow trainees I had been doing sessions with for a year or so. So, I began to ask myself, "where do we start?" "What is the most important thing?"

And so the first meeting was a kind of an orientation session: an introduction to breath awareness and conscious breathing. I would tell people to set aside at least two hours. During the first session, I would introduce them to the "Formula for Transformation," which was the first new name I created for Rebirthing. It was the title of my first seminar.

I was interested in transformation, and when I looked at the primary result of rebirthing, that was the best way I saw to describe it. One my early clients Judith Kravitz, actually went off and started a movement called Transformational Breath. So she learned rebirthing, gave it her own particular focus and style, and she gave it her own name.

And so, during the first session, I am teaching people the formula: what I think are the three key things, the most important things to learn, or to practice: Awareness—meditative awareness—where you simply watch your feelings, and watch your thoughts; observe your sensations, observe your reactions. That is so important. I think the most important thing in the beginning.

And equally important is the ability to relax. And then from this aware relaxed state, you begin to do something with the breath. So if you approach the breath without awareness, without practicing relaxation, it's not going to be as powerful or valuable. It will take longer to get results. It will create needless static, friction, stress, difficulties.

So during the first session, I am probing, testing. Can the person maintain awareness? Can they relax? Are there places in their body that are hard or tense, places where they contract? Are they doing things with their muscles that they are not aware of? Are they able to do something with the breath? So we explore and we experiment.

We might talk a little bit before the session. But I get everyone to lay down for their first session, to just relax and become aware of their inner world. Just begin to get them to

observe their thoughts, observe their feelings, their sensations, emotions. And as I observe them, I may point them out things I observe, or say something. Always with the intention or in the direction of accepting what is happening...

You observe something, and then you observe the reaction. You can train the person to make their reaction one of acceptance, self-acceptance. So when a person first lies down, you can see their nervousness, you can see their apprehension, their anxiety, their excitement. And you can also see any resistance...

There is no hurry. So if someone is late for a session. They were waiting for a bus, and they ran up the stairs. I let them spend some time lying down, just to get over that, to let that pass. And I also always begin by noticing my own thoughts: acknowledging and accepting my own feelings: "Oh this person is attractive," or "Oh I don't like this person."

I watch these judgments come and go. And I don't project those into the session. I simply observe and accept myself. And I get in touch with my own breathing. I relax and watch. Very often during a session, instead of giving a person instructions to breathe in a certain way, or to relax... I'll just do that for myself, and see if they don't respond automatically.

And so we start with conscious breathing, with bringing awareness to the breath itself. I encourage them to notice and sense their breathing, watch it, listen to it, feel it. Sort of heightening their sensitivity to the details of it. As they do that, I am also doing that in myself: I am watching each breath, trying to sense my breathing, and I am sort of looking at them thru an awareness of my own breathing.

A very simple instruction in the beginning is to just tell someone to "breathe more." Breathe a little more deliberately. And then see what they do with that. It will reveal something about them and their process. Do they dive right in? Do they show some confusion? Do they begin to put pressure on themselves to do it right? Or is there hardly any difference in what happens before and after I give them that instruction?

I encourage them to observe the movement and the flow of air. And, I observe the movement and flow of their breath. What muscles are they using? I encourage them to breathe more fully and freely, and have them notice how they do that, and what feelings and sensations they activate. And so the idea is to focus on the details.

Breathing consciously is a way to turn your attention inward. You will often see, during group sessions, that people are more concerned with what is happening around them and in other people, because they don't want to, or it is difficult for them to get into their own process.

But when we are doing an individual session, there isn't anything else for the person to focus on, and so they are stuck with their own feelings and sensations. And you can observe them trying to avoid or escape their own inner sensations, distracting themselves from what is coming up...

Or you can observe that they begin to feel something and you get the sense that they don't know what to do about what they are feeling. As if they have to do something about their feelings. And that might be their first lesson: "I don't have to do anything about my feelings." "My feelings don't mean anything about me."

And so we are getting practice at simply expanding and relaxing, and letting our feelings be the way they are. And for some people that might be the key to their entire healing process. They might start a process that could last for months or years: simply developing a new relationship to their feelings: breaking the automatic habit to control or suppress or react.

Then instead of getting pushed and pulled by their feelings, they learn to just breathe and relax and allow their feelings to flow. For some people that is an entirely new experience. It is a transformational lesson.

Engaging the Exhale: Learning to Let Go

Letting go takes practice. So to help them in their practice, I began to get them to engage in the exhale: to use the exhale, to begin to set the exhale free, snap it loose, to release it, to let it go and not control it. It's like a sigh of relief.

And you try to get them to release their muscle tension during that breath, to let go of their urge to control... And along with that they are going to let go of some of their fears. The idea is to get them to let go of their exhale quickly and completely. And then observe where they hold, how they hold back... Point out how and where they are holding on.

And so that might be their entire session, just getting them to practice so that they are good at letting go of the exhale. You sense and feel what is involved in letting go, and you guide them in that direction.

You can use the natural tendency of the muscles to do the work of the exhale. Encourage the person not to push or blow the air out on the exhale... What I mean is that when you inhale, your muscles stretch. And now you have created a potential force. Then when you relax, the elastic tendency of the muscles does the work of the exhale. When you stretch the muscle, it's like a rubber band, and when you relax and let go, it springs back.

In order to trigger that relaxation/release response, we need to create a little extra stretch. Which means that their inhale needs to be fuller, deeper, bigger... And when they do that unconsciously or automatically, point that out to them. Get them to notice the expansion, and to do it more consciously.

If someone is going to blow out a candle, or blow up a balloon, they automatically take a deeper breath. And so when you encourage people to give themselves a big sigh of relief, they will automatically talk in a deeper breath. So then you get them to be more

conscious of the action of their muscles while breathing in. And to begin to do it more deliberately, more actively.

Charging the Heart and Focusing on the Throat and Belly

And so now we are into the next lesson, which I call “Charging the Heart.” You are encouraging the person to deliberately pull in more energy. So I give them ideas like “you are feeding yourself... “you are charging yourself with energy,” “pulling in life, light...” I get them to create a little extra stretch on the inhale, so they can open more spaces to breathe into.

And I watch for a ceiling on the breath. Very often, a person takes in a breath, and they go so far.... As if they are hitting something. And you can sense it, that there is a lot more room to expand, but somehow they are not going into that potential.... So I’ll shift them back into relaxation and back into awareness.

I am listening to the sound of the breath... And now it seems that when I wrote this article 20 years ago... I have become aware of a lot more of what I wasn’t aware of then. Now I am much more conscious of what people do with the muscles of the forehead and the muscles of the jaw... listening to the sound of breath as it comes thru the throat...

I get people to find that reflex: the yawning reflex. Because something opens and expands when a person yawns. They have a natural urge to stretch. So I try to get them to trigger those normal body reflexes to support the process.

In the first session, I really want to be aware of where the breathing goes, and where it doesn’t go, what moves when you breathe and what doesn’t move. So I probe and test to see if a person has an ability to breathe into their belly. And I might coach them in various ways to wake that part up, to get energy into that part of the body.

I have them experiment with breathing through the nose and breathing through the mouth, and see how that changes the color of their skin, what it does to their tension and relaxation.... And then we move into the connected rhythm, that is circular connected breathing. It may just arise spontaneously. Without even talking about it, they begin to breathe in that connected rhythm. So this is the classic rebirthing technique.

A lot of the things that I do leading up to it, are just things that I noticed in different people’s sessions, that happened just before the breathing became free. So, instead of just getting a person to lie down and begin the connected breathing, which is what we did in the beginning... we just laid down and got right into it!

Now in the first session, I like to play around with the elements of the practice, and see if there isn’t something that will naturally trigger the process. Then we just allow and encourage it. And as they move into their process, we refine and adjust the breathing rhythm.

The person sort of eases very naturally into the process. Lots of times when I was working with people, I would notice that they were “doing” the process. They knew what it was about: active inhale... passive exhale...no pauses... no gaps...

They would begin to practice it [breathing]. And I would notice that they needed to relax their jaw. [breathing] And as soon as they relaxed their jaw, the breathing changed, and they went deeper into the process.

So I learned to get people to focus on that right a way, to get it out of the way... one less thing to interfere with the process. I’ve also become very conscious of tension in the neck and the shoulders, which is all connected to the jaw.

Two Ways to Enter the Process

So there are two ways to get into energy breathing: which is the essence of rebirthing. It’s the key lesson in Rebirthing: learning to breathe energy. There are two ways to get into this energy.

You can just keep pulling in more breath, keep inviting and activating it... [breathing] If you keep breathing like that, the energy is going to increase in your body.

And the other way is to just relax. Then something opens, something softens, and then the energy begins to move.

So we use those two ways: the active way, and the passive way. In the ideal rebirthing session, you have both those forces working: active, passive, active, passive, active passive.

The mistake that most beginners make, is that they breathe too much and don’t relax enough, or they relax so much that they stop breathing. So it is a game of finding that perfect balance. And that is also the resulting state: something like an “energized calm” or a “dynamic relaxation.”

That’s when the real magic happens: when there is this combination of active dynamic energy, and relaxed peaceful stillness. Most people give up one for the other. But the magic happens when those two things come together.

So we are encouraging people to get into a breathing rhythm that has that quality of active energy and also relaxation; it’s smooth and easy yet strong and powerful. And you watch what disturbs the rhythm. And you encourage the person to notice what interferes with the rhythm.

So when they get into the rhythm, I’ll make sure that they know by saying: “Ah, that’s it... you’ve got it... that’s the way... keep doing that... perfect... beautiful...”

By then, they are usually very responsive, so I can make fine tuning adjustments to their breathing. I might demonstrate... give them a sound, a speed, a volume, a rhythm... Then I am just sort of guiding them in that direction... of active inhale and passive exhale... a smooth connection... where they are breathing fully and freely, and everything is open and soft.

Some people like the excitement of the work. They like the effort. [breathing] They like getting into an intense process. So they are revealing something about their personality, what they enjoy or what they need, or how they relate to themselves, their habits and patterns and tendencies.

Other people sort of disappear into laziness. They go into this passive state. And we need to keep putting them back into the breathing process. If they go too far in the direction of passiveness...

It's like that Zen story of the master standing beside the road and people come asking how to get home. And he says: "Just follow this road and stay to the left, stay to the left." Someone else comes and he says: "Stay to the right, stay to the right."

And the disciple asks which is the correct way, to the left or to the right? And the master says, "well for those people who are too far to the right, I tell them go left, and to those who are too far to the left, I tell them go right."

So you get an intuitive sense from doing a lot of sessions and observing a lot of people. There may be people that you need to push and there may be people that you need to remind to slow down and be gentle.... So the same process can seem to be opposite from one to another.

Varying the Breathing Rhythm and Speed

But there are only several ways of varying the breathing rhythm. You can breathe fast and shallow [breathing], which is very useful when you are experiencing something intense.

You can breathe fast and deep [breathing], when you are trying to get the person to wake up, to get out of unconsciousness, to activate the energy, to stay in their body.

Or you can breathe slow and deep [breathing], which is a good way to breathe when something very pleasurable is happening. You breathe slow and deep, to really feel and enjoy and deeply absorb the pleasure.

So I always want to make sure that people have a really good idea of the technique. I wrote this article in 1980. I'll pass it out here, but I didn't make enough copies, so at lunch I'll need to make more.

The following article comes from a guided group session. Someone took notes while I was talking, and so I thought: “Wow, that’s a pretty good set of notes!” It’s something you can use for ideas on what to say, and how to guide a rebirthing technique.

The Rebirthing Technique

The Breathwork method called the Rebirthing can be defined or described in this way: “conscious, connected, circular, rhythmic, energy breathing.”

It is also called the “Circular Rhythm” or Connected Breathing.” It is the art of breathing energy as well as air. Here in a nutshell are the key elements of the practice: the “how to’s and what not’s of the process.

1. The inhale is active and the exhale is passive.
2. There are no pauses or gaps between the breaths.
3. Breathe in and out the same passage.

An active inhale means that you pull the breath in. Passive exhale means you simply let the breath out. Breathing through the same channel means that you breathe either in and out the nose or in and out the mouth: but not in the nose and out the mouth.

The breathing should take the form or pattern of a smooth steady uninterrupted flow of breath, like a wheel turning... Making the inhale active and the exhale passive acts to merge opposites: polarities like yin and yang... above and below... male and female... within and without... past and future...

Why “Conscious” Breathing?

Consciousness is the latest development in evolution: it is our greatest tool for survival. For the most part, breathing is automatic and unconscious. Your unconscious breathing habits, patterns and tendencies are not necessarily natural or optimal. Conscious breathing allows us to correct unhealthy or dysfunctional ways of breathing.

Conscious breathing allows us to take over from the machine. With conscious breathing, we can deliberately give the breath a certain quality: we can breathe with a specific intention. We can increase our aliveness and joy, peace and power: we can reduce our pain and tension, anxiety and stress.

Why “Connected” Breathing?

Connections in life are vital. We are intimately connected to life, to nature, to each other, and to reality. The mind is connected to the body. Emotions, chemistry, physiology, psychology, are all part of a unified whole, and they are all connected to the breathing. Eliminating pauses, gaps, and breaks in the breathing gives us a sense of wholeness, and a direct experience of this oneness or unity of spirit, mind, and body.

Why “Circular” Breathing?

Circles and cycles are fundamental patterns or structures of life and the universe. Existence is rife with them. Nature is based on them. A technique should be in harmony with nature, life and the universe. Connections and completion are expressed by circles and cycles.

Why “Rhythmic” Breathing?

Rhythm is another fundamental universal principle. Building it into the technique assures us that what we are doing with the breath is in harmony with “what is” naturally happening in the universe and in life.

Why “Energy” Breathing?

Everything is an expression of energy, a form of energy. We are energy beings. This energy can be called prana, chi, ki, life force, or spirit. It is the animating principle of life. It is the “breath within the breath.”

Changes occur on the energy level before they are expressed physically. By developing awareness and control of this energy, we can stay ahead of illness. And we can take a more creative and formative role in the events and changes, the conditions and circumstances of our lives. Mastering our relationship to this life energy makes us captains of our ship and masters of our fate.

While breathing in this connected circular rhythm, stay awake, aware. Watch your thoughts. Pay attention to the sensations in your body. Don’t judge or analyze or think (that is different than simply observing or being conscious and aware.)

Simply feel your feelings. Allow and accept whatever happens in you, without acting on it, or reacting to it. Don’t judge or censor your feelings. Turn every thought, every reaction, into another conscious inhale, and another releasing exhale. Get out of the way. Let this “something else” have its way with you! Surrender. Let go.

After several minutes of connected breathing, the “energy experience” begins. This energy is called prana or chi or ki. Allow this energy to come up, to move, and to take over your body. Use every inhale to draw in more energy, and use every exhale to relax into the energy.

Keep letting go into the experience. Don’t try to control the energy. You can always relax more. Keep relaxing with each exhale. Pay attention to tightness in your muscles. Deliberately release this tension with each breath. Keep expanding with each inhale

Various “symptoms” will come and go throughout the process: like dizziness, tremors, vibrations, sensations of heat, cold, spontaneous laughter, crying, primal sounds, emotional releases, memories, images, insights, etc.

Simply allow and observe these things along the way of this inner journey. Don't let any of these things interfere with, or interrupt the breathing rhythm, or your relaxation. Don't let them send you into thoughts and judgments. . Simply breathe and relax into each new feeling, sensation, and emotion.

Think "soft and open, soft and open" "expand and relax, expand and release" "pull in and let go, pull in and let go" Keep your jaw, neck, shoulders, hands, back, belly, legs relaxed. Keep your throat open and your chest loose. Don't be afraid of the unknown, or of losing control.

You are surrendering to a higher part of yourself. Say "yes" to everything that happens inside of you. Send love to all parts of yourself. Practice Forgiveness and Gratitude.

Just breathe, in and out, without stopping, holding, pushing, forcing, avoiding, or resisting... It helps to give the inhale an "oohh" shape; and to give the exhale has an "aahh" shape.

Remember that under every emotion, behind every emotion, is love, is peace, is joy. Keep moving through everything, all the levels, until you arrive at your "Highest Center." Touch the deepest part of yourself. Then come back, bringing with you the essence of that center.

Be renewed by the experience, moment to moment. Find simple ways to share and express this divine light of love.

Part 3

Focusing on the Details of the Technique

I want people to have a really good understanding of the technique. And so for me the definition of the technique is also a description of the technique:

It is conscious, connected circular, rhythmic, energy breathing. It's also called the circular rhythm, the connected breathing rhythm, or conscious energy breathing.

The inhale is active, the exhale is passive. You consciously pull the inhale in, and you deliberately let the exhale go. There are no pauses or gaps between the breaths. The inhale connects to the exhale. The exhale merges with the next inhale. The next inhale just turns around and becomes an exhale, that exhale blends into the next inhale.

So each breath is connected to the next, and is connected to the last, in a continuous stream of breaths. At some point it's not so much of an "in and out," or an "up and down." It's more of a "round and round."

Why Rhythmic?

Rhythm is one of those universal forces. It's fundamental. The rhythm of day and night, the tides, the seasons, your heartbeat. Life functions in rhythms. So we build rhythm into the technique.

What we are doing with the breath should be in harmony with what is naturally taking place in life and in the universe. You are not doing anything artificial. You are making use of universal principles.

Why Circular?

Everywhere in life there are circles and cycles. Nature is based on them. There are up cycles and down cycles. Planets circling the sun, electrons orbiting a nucleus, your blood is circulating and cycling through your system...

Why Connected? Connections are vital to life. Ultimately, everything is one. Opposites merge into the same essence and being. We are all connected. Everything in life is connected. And so we eliminate any pauses or gaps or breaks or separations in the breathing cycle. We connect inhale and exhale.

Merging the Inner breath (spirit/energy) with the Outer breath (air)

Rebirthing is the merging of the outer breath with the inner breath. The outer breath is air, and the inner breath is spirit. When we connect the inhale to the exhale in a continuous rhythm; lots of other things come together. People report that their connection to life becomes stronger... they strengthen their connection to themselves and others...

The outer breath is air—atmospheric air; and the inner breath is spirit, energy, or life force. So we start out by breathing air, but when you enter this intuitive rhythm, the breath begins to flow in harmony with how the energy or spirit wants to flow.

A peak moment during a rebirthing session is when spirit or the energy of life takes over the process. The breath begins to breathe you! In the beginning you were breathing the breath, then when this energy is awakened, the breath breathes you. And that's when we begin to feel this deep connection, this oneness....

The mind and body come together. You feel your connection to life. You feel your connection to others, to nature, to God, to reality. And there is this unity of being that occurs. This principle of connection is so important. Because it breaks the disharmony between body, mind, and spirit, which is the main cause of most of our problems.

Active and Passive

And then there is this principle of the active and passive elements. Yin and yang, another universal principle: north-south, male-female, active-passive. That's one of the reasons that the technique is so powerful. It's because it's in harmony with these universal principles: yin and yang, circles and cycles, rhythm and balance...

Conscious Awareness: the First Step and the Constant Practice

So when breathing in this connected circular rhythm, you need to stay awake, to be as conscious as possible. You can sometimes see in a person whether they are conscious or not. But sometimes you can't tell. Sometimes they may be extremely conscious of something that is happening, yet it doesn't look like they are aware of anything. On the outside it can look like they are unconscious, yet on the inside, they are in touch with something deep and powerful.

Conscious Awareness has to be a constant element in the process. Watching your thoughts, paying attention to the sensations in the body. And it's pure consciousness: it's not judging or analyzing, or trying to understand. This is all mental activity, and conscious awareness is a level deeper than that.

Consciousness is able to observe this mental activity: thinking, judging, remembering, comparing...

The Energy Experience

After some time, the energy experience begins. A person is breathing in a rhythm and relaxing, and suddenly, or gradually, the energy starts to come.

Some people, as soon as the energy comes, they are fascinated by it. It is so interesting, unusual, and pleasurable. And for other people, it's frightening. It's so unusual, and they don't know what it is or what is happening. So their reflex is to contract.

And you can see that: their breathing gets interrupted. So you might get the person to explore their reactions at that point. Remind them of the basic elements of the process: smooth out the rhythm. Consciously expand and deliberately relax when the energy is awakened.

Allow this energy to move on its own. Allow it to take over your body. Actually invite it, welcome it. For many people, this is the opposite of their usual reaction. So it is really important that they notice that: that their reaction is to stop it, to control it, suppress it, avoid it. And instead, encourage them to surrender to it, embrace it. Say yes to it, allow it.

Breathe in a way that expresses a "yes" to the energy. Breathe in a way that sounds and looks and feels as if you are welcoming the energy, allowing it, surrendering to it. Let your instructions be direct and specific: "Don't do anything about the energy." "Don't try to control what's happening inside of you." "Don't judge anything, don't censor anything"

Observing the Reactions of the Mind

If you have an emotional reaction to this energy, or a physical reaction, allow them to happen. If the mind reacts, turn every thought into another breath. Turn every reaction into another breath. Bring your attention and your intention to giving yourself another conscious inhale and another relaxed exhale.

All these various symptoms can come during the process: dizziness, dry throat, shaking, vibrations, sensations of heat, cold, tightness, heaviness, lightness; spontaneous laughing, spontaneous crying.

Most people's mind jumps right at that point. They react: "Is this ok?" "Is it safe?" "Is it normal?" "Should it be happening?" "Do I stop myself? I shouldn't cry." "I want to laugh but I don't have a good reason, so I guess I shouldn't laugh."

So I encourage any primal sounds. Encourage any emotional releases. Memories will come, images will come. People have insights: "Ah ha! Wow!" Simply observe all these things along the way. Encourage this as an inner journey. You are letting all these things come and go like scenery from the window of a train.

It's like moving through the countryside. You move past mountains, past rivers, over hills. And you just watch: "Oh here comes a hill. Oh, there goes a hill." Just being an observer, but keeping the movement of the breath constant. Let the momentum continue. It's very much like trying to stop a train at some point: it takes tremendous effort. And you can see it in people: they are struggling to stop the train.

So you encourage them: "Just keep relaxing." "Use the exhale." "Notice what you are doing with your muscles." "Relax your jaw." Release the tension from your shoulders." "Keep expanding with each inhale." "Breathe into each new sensation." "Relax with each new passing feeling."

Making Use of Breath Sounds

I encourage people to breathe thru the mouth and give the inhale an "oooh" shape, and to give the exhale an "ahhh" shape. [demonstrates breathing] It gives them a sense of actively inhaling, like they are feeding themselves. Picture sucking through a straw. And the exhale is an "ahhh..." the sound of letting go.

And then I have them thinking: "soft and open, open and soft. Open and soft, soft and open." "Expand and relax, expand and release." "Pull in and let go. Pull in and let go." I give them those phrases, when they get lost or stuck. And I remind them to say "yes" to whatever is happening in their process!

I loved it when I first came to Moscow and I learned that "dah" means yes. How perfect that is! It fit the sound of the breath just right. And the same word in Estonian? "Yahhh!" Right, that "D" isn't there. Nothing has to open, it's already open... yes... yahhh...

I want to mention about listening to this thing that happens in people's throat. I didn't mention it earlier. [demonstrates] Do you hear that? You'll hear that often. So what's happening with their energy in that case? Something closes, then it opens, closes, then opens.

That sound is the sound of opening, which means something must have already closed. We need to find what that is and keep it open. So then it's more like this [demonstrates breathing] instead of this [demonstrates breathing]

So saying yes, yes to everything. All your feelings, all your reactions, all the sensations, all the emotions, all parts of yourself. Yes is like love.

Forgiveness and Gratitude

And remember the two healing emotions: forgiveness and gratitude. They are two of the basic aspects of love. Both of these emotions create a heart opening. And when your heart opens, something beautiful always flows to you and flows from you.

I give people very specific applications for forgiveness during a session: “Forgive yourself—for being so hard on yourself. Forgive yourself for being lazy... Forgive yourself for the pain that you’ve caused yourself... Forgive others...”

When people are breathing in this rhythm and the energy is flowing, it’s a perfect time to bring to mind certain uncomfortable events, painful situations, or disturbing experiences, maybe some current issue they are working on...

Just bring that problem into the light of love, acceptance, open hearted awareness. You don’t have to do anything else. The way that you are breathing, the way that you are expanding and relaxing... the way you are saying yes to everything: you are exposing that problem to this light, this energy, this loving forgiveness, gratitude... and very often the problem simply dissolves.

They’ve been holding back their love in that case. And now they are focusing on that situation, while they are feeling the flow of their own love, and they have an insight. They heal something.

Tracking Tensions and Contractions

I keep my attention on the breather’s face and body: their forehead, neck, jaw, shoulders; watching for tension in the spine, in the belly. When they are having different memories, different parts of their body will contract. So I am encouraging them to relax and keep their throat open. When a strong feeling comes, the throat tightens right up. And if they are aware of it, they can stay ahead of it, and then it doesn’t contract as much.

They can easily become lost in their thoughts, emotions, or feelings, and not notice that tightness has come in, that contractions are occurring. And by the time they realize it: “khhggg!” They’ve close right up. That’s like putting a kink or twist in a fire hose. The flow is interrupted, pressure builds up, and the process becomes painful.

The person thinks that the pain is coming from the memory, or the feeling, or the emotion, but it is really coming because of the reaction—the contraction. You can observe them holding their breath, and tightening their body in some way.

The breath-holding and tension is the cause of the discomfort—or at least it aggravates and magnifies it. And so at that time it is very important to keep the breath moving and to deliberately relax those places. And if you can stay ahead of it, all the better. Once you are stuck in the middle of it, there is no way out except to breathe and relax. Fighting, forcing will not help.

Instructions and Advice During a Session

We need to remember not to be afraid of the unknown. Don't be afraid of losing control. Surrendering is the short cut. So you tell yourself or you tell your client whatever they need to hear to allow them to relax and surrender.

They might need to hear that they are ok, that they are being healed, that a higher part of them is taking over... Use whatever will allow them to surrender to what is happening in them. Sometimes giving them specific instructions: "relax your jaw, relax your tongue, relax your throat."

When they are totally overwhelmed, they don't know what is in and what is out. They are stuck. So just breathe in their ear. And you remember that during intensity, a little gentle rhythm is very useful. [breathing] And then a cleansing breath. [breathing] Help them get through by guiding them back into a smooth gentle rhythm.

Again, you can encourage them, telling them whatever they need to hear that will help them. I remind them that, "under every emotion is love, behind every emotion is peace." "So just keep moving, until you get thru to the other side."

So in the first session, I'll bring everything together, teaching them this cleansing breath. I might have them put one hand on their chest, one hand on their belly. Get them to focus on the expansion from front-to-back, side-to-side, top-to-bottom. Take in a full inhale, a give themselves a big sigh of relief.

And watching that when they take a deep breath, that they are not doing this with their shoulders [raising them up toward ears]: not using muscles that they don't have to, working harder than they need to.

When I am guiding them into the session, I may have them focus their awareness and follow the path that the breath takes when it comes into them: relaxing and expanding those passages.

Creating a space between the teeth, which opens the jaw a little more... Finding and activating the yawning reflex in the back of the throat, to open and soften it...

Allowing the breath to open and expand the chest to create more space for itself: and at the same time, opening and expanding the chest so the breath can come in and fill that space.

So when you pull in, the breath itself will open you. And if you open yourself, the breath will come in. It's like this beautiful dance. You are opening yourself, allowing the breath to come in: and you are pulling the breath in, allowing the breath to open you. Allow that opening to take place wherever the breath can go. And allow the breath to go wherever there is an opening.

Creating Pleasure

That cleansing breath sort of pulls everything together in the technique. You let them find an enjoyable sound, an enjoyable shape: focusing on a place where they enjoy the feelings of expansion, where they can create a pleasurable feeling.

And this becomes a really powerful resource. Just one or two of these cleansing breaths, and you can let go of something, you can change your focus, you can refresh yourself, release something, intensify a positive feeling, or just create pleasure.

One of the things that people come out of a session with is this ability to create pleasure in the middle of any situation. Regardless of what's happening, they have this ability to contact organic pleasure.

So in the end of the session, I'll tell them: "forget about the breathing." Or at different points during the process, I'll tell them to forget about the breathing, and: "just focus on feeling and relaxing."

After they have been actively breathing for a while, I'll encourage them to "Let the breath come and go the way it wants, when it wants, how it wants. Just forget about it." And then, very often, then the person will relax more deeply for the first time! Without realizing it, they have been trying too hard, and when they back off on the breathing, bliss comes.

When they forget about the breathing, when they get out of the way of the process, something in them will let go, and you can hear and see a big breath come by itself. When that happens, make sure that they notice it. Point it out: "Ahhh, that was a good deep breath!"

And the person feels: "Hey, I didn't even do it. It happened by itself! So then they get a sense of it, and then they can repeat that breath with the same quality. And they can accomplish more with less effort.

You can also begin to get them to explore as many aspects and levels of the breathing as possible. So I'll instruct people to find some pleasurable aspect of the breathing: something that they naturally enjoy, some particular point in the breathing cycle, a particular feeling at some point in the phase of the inhale or the exhale.

I encourage them to explore some pleasurable sensation connected to the movement, the expansion, the release of the breath... And then to magnify it, intensify it, exaggerate it. I encourage them to maximize their enjoyment of each breath. I instruct them to breathe in a way that's most pleasurable, most interesting. In this way, we get them to trust their own intuition, their own natural instincts.

How much pleasure can you give yourself with each breath?

Part 4

The Five Principles of Breath Therapy

The first principle is the atmosphere.

The external environment, as well as the emotional atmosphere... the energetic atmosphere... the psychological atmosphere... and the physical atmosphere. Is the room comfortable? Is it warm, dry, soft, quiet... The first principle is about creating a nice space, a safe container.

For example at Lilleoru, the Babaji Ashram, I can rely on the atmosphere to do some of the healing almost by itself. The other night at Lilleoru, I was focusing on creating a certain space, an atmosphere of love, something sacred, a space of allowing...

And I felt how creating this type of atmosphere within myself, that my personal presence had a power to add something to the outer atmosphere, to enhance it.

There are certain places in the world that are powerful energetic places... you can just sit in one of those places, and something happens in you. The place is so powerful.

Or there are certain communities, groups of people who create a certain energetic atmosphere, where one feels "it's ok for me to be just how I am, to feel what I need to feel. It's safe here."

So I am very conscious of that: of creating an environment, an atmosphere, a space, a sacred space where healing and growth, awakening can take place...

The second principle is the technique.

If you breathe in a certain way, you are going to cause a certain thing to happen, regardless of the atmosphere. So the technique can be just as powerful as the atmosphere. And when you are good at the technique, you can do it in the most difficult or negative atmospheres—which is very useful by the way—because then you become a change agent. You have the power to change the atmosphere. And that brings us to the third principle.

The third principle is the presence of the teacher/coach/facilitator/guide.

Your personal presence makes a big difference in what happens in other people. Water only rises to its own level. What is open in you creates a space for that same thing to open in someone else. If you are unconscious of something, it's difficult for the other person to become aware of it. If you are afraid of something, if you resist something, it's hard for the other person to feel safe and relaxed.

The fourth principle is the mind of the breather.

We spend a lot of time working on this principle, because when the energy begins to flow, it is going to take the shape and form of the thoughts and beliefs and images that you hold.

We do a number of processes to explore what you hold in consciousness: “What is your intention? What do you want to get out of the session? What are your thoughts and ideas about yourself? What do you believe is possible? What are you willing to receive? What do you desire?”

The fifth Principle is “something else.”

This is a mystical factor, a magical factor, like grace. It comes like a blessing from above. You cannot earn it, you cannot work to deserve it. You cannot resist it. It just comes... for no reason, for any reason. And it comes to saints and sinners alike.

I am conscious of those five principles all the time when I am working. I am trying to maintain a certain inner atmosphere. I am trying to create a certain psychological, emotional, energetic atmosphere... of unconditional love... of freedom and safety...

I am also keenly focused on the breathing and the elements of the technique: always trying to make a person's skill at the process a little bit better, a little more perfect.

I am always trying to be conscious of the other person's inner world, watching for clues to what is occurring in their consciousness. This is difficult sometimes, because we have learned to hide our true feelings (even from ourselves). When we are afraid, we don't show it. When we are excited, we control it. When we are angry, we block it.

Whenever you get a sense of that happening inside the person, and you see that they are doing something to escape or avoid or suppress... fighting with it... trying to control it... You need to bring that to light. Alert them to their pattern, their reaction, and give them permission to let themselves be exactly how they are in each moment.

Breath Therapy Defined

The way I define Breath Therapy is that there are two levels to it.

1. The breath itself, the breathing mechanism has been damaged, injured. And it needs to be healed, fixed, or improved, in order to regain its original power. The fact is that, in almost everyone without exception, the breathing has become inhibited, blocked; it is not functioning fully, as nature intended. And during certain key moments, even small flaws can create tremendous dysfunction.

So getting the breath to be free and full and natural and open: this is the first level of Breath Therapy. Getting the person to breathe as nature intended, instead of the way that

limiting habits or external negative forces have shaped it. To heal the inhibitions on the breathing mechanism brought on by early life fears and trauma.

2. The second level of Breath Therapy is that once the breathing has been restored, once the breathing is allowed to flow fully and freely, and naturally... then the breath itself becomes a therapeutic tool. So first you heal the breathing mechanism, the breathing system, and then you use the breath to heal everything else.

And so with Breath Therapy as I teach and practice it, is that you can use the body and the breath to heal the mind and emotions; and you can use the mind and the breath to heal the body and emotions.

Observing and Guiding the Breath

In directing the breath or observing the breath... in the practice of breath therapy... I mentioned earlier that you can vary the breathing in a number of ways: fast or slow, big breaths or small breaths... You can also vary the location: breathing high in the chest, low in the belly. Creating expansion and relaxation in the back, the sides, and so on.

You can also vary the shape and the sound of the breath: shape the stream of breath. A big round stream of breath shaped like an “oh.” I can hear the “oh” on the outside, but I can also internalize that shape and sound. And that shape and sound will activate different parts of you, different levels of your being.

Every time I change the shape of the stream, it changes the sound. And each individual shape and sound gives the stream of breath a different quality. And the breath can find its way into different places. It can light up different areas of the body. It can access a different levels... trigger different emotions... generate a different range of sensations.

You can also combine thought with the breath. So that with every breath you are focused on a certain thought: “relax... strength... safety... freedom...” So with every breath, you think that word. And every time you think about that word, it causes you to breathe.

You can generate a certain feeling. So that with each breath you are focused on a certain feeling... a certain sound, a certain picture, a certain emotion, a certain movement. Every time you breathe, you are creating some movement inside of you. So then the process becomes very rich, with multiple layers and levels.

So you are bringing in the breath and you are also bringing in a picture, a thought, a feeling, an emotion, a sound, a word, a movement... And then the process is so rich. And yet it can be very subtle.

You can be experiencing a beautiful feeling, and you then express or reflect that feeling with the breath: you can breathe in a way that matches, enhances, strengthens the feeling

A Simple Exercise from Gay Hendricks

Gay Hendricks teaches this very simple movement: when you exhale, your head drops and your spine curls. And when you inhale, your head comes up and you arch your back. The movement of the breath and the movement of the body come together.

This same movement happens in the embryo in the womb. It is expressing a primal pulse of energy. It is like a wave happening in the body... It is a very pleasurable movement. You can exaggerate it, or you can make it very subtle.

Sufi Techniques and Inventing Exercises and Meditations

The Sufis have a lot of techniques where they combine movement and breath; or they combine a thought or an intention and the breath. [exercise] Bowing the head in a quick and extreme way, bending from the waist up and down while exhaling, and thinking: "I empty my mind." You can imagine dumping out a garbage can! [breathing]

So you might invent something: a unique combination of an image, a thought, a sound, a movement, and the breath. You encourage your clients to do the same: just find what's enjoyable and interesting, and play with it.

Then when the person comes back for their next session: "Show me what you've been doing." "Tell me about what you've been thinking and feeling." "How have you been using the breath?" "What kinds of feelings and sensations have you been producing or generating, stimulating, activating?" "What have you been experimenting with? "What have you noticed?" "What results have you been getting?"

Dealing with Fear and Discomfort

I often send people in the opposite direction of what they've been doing by habit, because very often what people think is pleasurable, the direction that they think is toward pleasure, it's really away from something they fear. So I might turn them around and send them right back in the opposite direction, to face what it is they are unconsciously avoiding.

And of course, bowing to uncomfot is ok too. For example the classic dry throat. In fact, this is something that passes with practice and skill at relaxation. But a person may complain: "I can't breathe through my mouth, because when I breathe through my mouth, my throat gets dry. That feeling of a dry throat is uncomfortable and I don't want to feel it."

So I tell them: "It's ok. It's ok to swallow, to wet your whistle." And then go back to breathing thru your mouth again.

If people come and show me what they've been doing, and they are very active: we might make the session about being totally passive, extremely gentle... Or I see that someone is

afraid of intensity, but they say: “Oh no, it just feels good to breathe slowly and shallowly”

And of course their breathing is very subtle in a visible way, as if they don't want to disturb anything in themselves: they don't want to make any waves; they don't want to shake anything up. And they are right. It does feel good to avoid all that. It feels safe and comfortable to avoid disturbing any feelings, to be very still, quiet.. and barely breathing... ahhh...

But wouldn't it be wonderful to get that same feeling of peace and comfort in the middle of intensity? Isn't it useful to be able to access that peaceful calm place even when uncomfortable feelings come over you?

The only way to do it is to deliberately go into that intensity and then in the middle of it, find your comfort. Don't avoid the intensity to feel comfortable. And don't leave the comfort behind in order to feel the intensity.

All right, let's breathe.

Part 5

The Story of the Butterfly and the Two Kinds of Suffering

On the way here, on the plane, I took some notes on the vomit bag! I think I told this story already to some people, I forgot where I heard it, but I'll tell it again. It's about this guy who is wandering thru his nature garden, and comes upon a butterfly trying to break out of its cocoon. He thought: "What a great opportunity. I'll get to see a butterfly be born!"

He watched it try to spread its wings to break the cocoon open. He watched for an hour, two hours, three hours. It seemed stuck, so he thought he would help it a little bit by prying open the cocoon a little, to make it easier for the butterfly to get out.

Finally the butterfly came out, and he watched it walk around the garden, but it never flew. And in talking to a biologist later, he discovered, he found out, that this stress that the butterfly puts on itself is meant to send blood out to the wings. And without this struggle... by taking away the stress, he prevented the butterfly from ever flying!

So I have learned that there are two kinds of suffering: one kind of suffering leads to more suffering, and the other kind leads to growth.

One of the things I've learned is that everything that happens to you is required for your process of self-realization. And this was a difficult realization for me, because all my life I have been a healer, working to take away people's suffering. If someone is sad, I try to console them, if they are angry, I try to calm them down, if they are in pain, I try to take the pain away.

So, I suddenly wondered: "Wow, how many butterflies have I prevented from flying?" So the lesson for me is that there are no mistakes in the universe. Think about that for a minute: there are no mistakes in the universe. If it happened, it means that it should have happened. If it is happening, it means that it should be happening.

The practice of breathwork often means being able to sit with people thru their pain. And I am speaking of psycho-spiritual pain as well as physical pain: the kind of pain that a caterpillar goes thru when it is becoming a butterfly. And it means being able to sit with people through their joy.

And this comes only when we have learned to sit with ourselves through our own pain and through our own joy, without reacting, without trying to change anything, or fix anything, or cling to anything.

The Difference Between Mining and Shopping

The breathing process that we are going to do tonight reminds me of the difference between mining and shopping. When you go shopping, everything is arranged on the shelves neatly, and you can go right to what you want. Mining is different: you may have to sift thru a thousand shovels of dirt before you get to one shovel of gold.

It would be nice if everything that was waiting to be discovered within us, was just neatly lined up on shelves and labeled, and we could just collect it up. But it is much more like mining than it is shopping.

In mining, there are tons of dirt for every ounce of gold. So in your process, you might have to go thru a lot of useless or dirty junk before you get to something really useful or precious.

The most important tool is attention, is awareness. Practice this ability to be able to feel the details of your inner experience. And be able to notice when you resist something, because resistance creates the kind of suffering that leads to more suffering.

Making and Holding Space with the Breath

So without changing your position, without moving your bodies at all, begin to sense your breathing.

Now gently and slowly fill yourself with breath. And feel where the breath meets the pressure of resistance.

Notice that point where you need to exert a bit of effort to breathe against that pressure, it in order to continue the expansion.

Try to create the expansion in all directions: top-to-bottom, side-to-side, and front-to-back. Notice when and where it requires some effort to accomplish the expansion.

Gradually, slowly, carefully inhale, and sense the expansion... And notice when this expansion encounters resistance or pressure... And notice the force that it takes to breathe and expand against that pressure.

Then let go and exhale. Rest for a few seconds, then close your eyes and take a long, slow, deep breath, filling yourself up completely.

Imagine that your body is a room in which all your organs live. You want to make this room bigger, so that all the organs aren't packed together or congested. You are creating more space inside of you.

Try to keep that space open, even as you exhale and release the breath .

Create space in yourself with the inhale, and then try to hold that open space while you exhale.

Create expansion on the inhale, and try to retain some of that expansion while you empty yourself of air.

It looks something like this [demonstrating] When I inhale, I fill up both my chest and my belly. Then I hold my chest expanded, and exhale from the belly. Don't let your chest collapse. [demonstrating] Don't lose the space that you created.

Try that for a few minutes: create space throughout the breathing cavity with the inhale. Then hold the space open in the chest while you exhale and empty yourself from the belly.

Feel that space open, and then gradually relax. Relax, and somehow hold that space open. In the beginning, you are going to find yourself using muscles. But you can gradually relax the muscles and still maintain the space.

Put your hands on each side, over your lower ribs. And when you breathe in, feel them expand.

Then as you empty the air out of yourself, try to keep some of the expansion there. Your ribs expand from side to side like wings.

Experiment with those sensations. Wings you can open and spread...then relax and manage to remain open and expanded.

Put your fingers on your collarbone and sternum, and when you inhale, feel your collarbones rising up to meet your chin, and feel your sternum projecting outward. Then when you exhale, relax but hold that space.

After a few extreme breaths, let everything go, and just feel.

Then do it again. Expand everywhere... then hold the expansion in your upper chest while you exhale from the belly.

You are inhaling slowly, so that you can feel the details of expansion; and feel where you have to push against pressure to continue expanding.

If you are breathing thru your nose, imagine your nasal passages expanding and opening like lungs. As you are inhaling, feel your throat open and expand.

And get the idea that every cell is breathing. As you are taking in this long slow inhale, you are imagining every cell breathing in and filling up.

Notice all the places in your body where you can't create this feeling of expansion. Are there any places that are not allowing the breath to expand into them?

Focus on the area high up on your sides, in the area of your armpits; and as you inhale, feel that you are creating a space, a hollow there under your arms.

Many of us have been taught to not take up too much space, or to be quiet and not disturb others. And as children, in an attempt to do this, we contracted energetically. This contraction creates congestion in our system. And now we want to create expansion in our system.

This is like preparing the vessel. You want to invite infinite spirit to come into you, so you have to create more room inside of you!

When you inhale, allow the expansion all the way down to your genitals and anus (to the perineum). Deliberately press the breath low, as if your body is a pear shaped sac of water...

When we were children we would fill rubber balloons with water and throw them at each other. We'd put the balloon on the faucet, and when you turned on the water, you could see the balloon filling from the bottom up. First creating a bulge at the bottom.

Let your body be like a balloon being filled with water when you breathe in. The bottom of the balloon will fill bulge out first, stretching the bottom of the balloon. Then it will begin to fill from the bottom up.

So the body is a room in which the organs need space to breathe. Make the walls of this room soft and flexible, sensitive, giving, allowing...

Allow some sounds to happen with the in-breath and the out-breath. Any sounds that want to happen, let them happen.

Unexpressed impulses do not go away. They remain in your system like pollution. So, are there any unexpressed emotions in you? Any unexpressed communications?

We all suffer from this. When you are a child and you are told to be quiet... How many times is a child told to be quiet? And we think it's normal, to be constantly telling our children to be quiet and still.

And so, in order to be "good," she somehow has to contract herself energetically. "Ah what a good child!" You've learned to choke off your spirit; you've learned how to stop the life from moving in you." Now you are like all the adults around you. You have become "adulterated." No spontaneity, constantly controlling, civilized... but lacking spirit.

Remember to observe your breath when you are listening and when you are talking from now on. In the middle of a conversation, remember the breath. Become conscious of how you are using it. Or when you are listening to someone, bring in the awareness of your breathing. You are still be listening, but you are also aware of your breathing.

Many times, during a conversation, we don't really listen; we are thinking about or preparing what we will say when the other person stops talking. And it looks like we are listening. So you can listen thru an awareness of your breathing.

Or at least from time to time, just remember that you are breathing. If you make this a habit, you will be strengthening your connection to your own life force.

Exploring Subtleties in the Throat when Breathing

Here is an exercise in noticing subtleties in the throat. The difference between “ah” and “hah,” the difference between “aahhh” and “hhaahh.” Feel what’s different in your throat when you make those two sounds. Listen and feel what happens to the breath. This is a very subtle difference, but an important difference in terms of energy.

You can make those same two sounds without using your voice, just your breath. If you whisper the “aahh” sound, it sounds like something is closed, and then it opens.

With the sound “hhhaahhh,” something is already open, and nothing has to open before the breath can come through. What is it that is open? What is it that you do to change between “ah” and “hah?”

What is that? Feel how soft the “hhahh” feels... and how there is something sharp or hard about the “ahh.” If you do it as a whisper, you can really feel the difference.

Many times in listening to people breathe... I hear them do this [demonstrating breath sounds of closing the throat]. Can you hear that something closes and opens, closes and opens? When you take it away, it sounds more like this. [demonstrating soft open throat and breath sounds] There is not a door opening and closing, closing and opening with each breath.

So you want to find that door, and leave it open. Because when you become afraid, that door wants to slam shut [demonstrating constricted throat]. And when powerful emotions come, the same thing happens: the throat contracts and blocks the flow of emotions.

And so if you have already practiced keeping that door open and soft, then when fear comes [demonstrating moving breath, circular rhythm] the breath can move, and the energy of fear can flow out of you.

But if the door closes [demonstrating choking off of the throat, and the panic induced freezing of the breath. Now you are stuck in the fear. The fear has you in its grip. And this might be the same fear that a caterpillar feels when it’s becoming a butterfly.

Continuos Breathing

Now forget about holding the expansion. Breathe in and out continuously, as if you are one of those revolving doors that they have in a typical hotel or department store. Someone can come in and someone can go out at the same time while the door is revolving.

What a great invention. You don't have to open and close the door: the door is round and open. And people can just flow thru in either direction at the same time.

We breathe in this way because in any given moment, something may want to come into you and something may want to come out of you. So you are breathing in a circle, and focusing on keeping the door open and revolving throughout the process.

Throat open... chest open... any other spaces you can find... open them. Look for any places that you hold or keep shut by habit. Your jaw... How many people have constant tension in their jaw...?

Almost everyone... From all those years of controlling and being careful... making sure that nothing comes out that you don't want to come out. Now you are including your jaw in that opening... soften your jaw...

The inhale is a "hhhaahhh," and the exhale is a "hhhaahhh..."

Feel your whole body soft as you breathe. How much tension do you hold in your belly... in your genital area... in your hips... lower back...? People often contract around the belly... trying to maintain a waistline...! Forget about your waistline. Let it expand and relax while you breathe in.

Breathing into the Chest and the Back

Some people, when they breathe deeply, they pop out their chest and throw there shoulders back, causing the shoulders blades to come together in the back. In order to create an opening or expansion in the chest, they create a closing or contracting in the back.

Get a feeling of your shoulder blades... get a sense of them. (Some of you may have laid down too soon. You should be sitting up.) But even lying down, you can feel your shoulder blades... and when you inhale, let your back open and expand. Let your shoulder blades move apart, away from the spine.

In the classic military posture, when you throw your shoulders back, your shoulder blades come together near the spine. This prevents expansion in the back. Your lungs are not just in the front half of you: your lungs also fill the back half.

Create a sense of expansion back there. Your shoulder blades are like wings. They should be spreading when you inhale, like wings.

Lengthening the Spine as you Breathe

Often there is a collapsing that happens on the exhale. This is easier to explore if you are sitting up, but you can also do it lying down.

When you inhale, feel yourself getting longer... expanding your spine from top to bottom. And then when you exhale, deliberately make your spine even longer. Lengthen your neck and spine as you exhale.

So as you inhale, you can feel yourself stretching taller, then when you exhale, you deliberately continue to stretch and lengthen your spine and your neck. So imagine getting taller with each exhale. That is different than collapsing on the exhale.

Experiment. Let yourself collapse on the exhale. If you are lying down, you can't collapse your spine because gravity is not working. But when you are sitting up and you collapse, you can feel the force of gravity compressing your spine... maybe creating some unnatural curve...

In the effort of standing straight, people can take away the natural curve of the spine. So you want to get a sense of that natural curve of the spine. One way is to imagine that you are hanging from a string that comes out the top of your head; as if you are suspended by this string at the top of your head.

Experiment with your breathing. Feel the subtle differences. On the inhale you create real actual expansion. You feel the actual feelings of expansion while you inhale; and then as you exhale, you imagine continuing to expand... getting longer... getting taller...

Expand from side to side and front to back, as well as top to bottom... as if when you inhale, you are expanding like a balloon, like a bubble... building up pressure...

Bring your attention to any places where the expansion is being prevented. There is a certain point when you are completely full, when you can't seem to physically expand anymore... and if you try to expand more, you create muscle tension...

A tight muscle is like a wall, like a board. And so, your effort actually prevents more expansion. So when you reach that point of maximum expansion, imagine the bubble bursting, and all that energy escaping and expanding out...

Soon you are breathing beyond your body. The space around your body is expanding and relaxing along with your lungs and body....

The spiritual part of breathing is learning to breathe energy and not just air. That requires conscious awareness and the ability to feel.

Using your Imagination Creatively

Use your imagination. When most people think of imagination, they think only of pictures. Imagine an elephant, and there it is: a picture in your mind. But you can also imagine feelings.

Imagine a feeling of expansion... Imagine a feeling of peace... Imagine a feeling of love... Imagine a feeling of joy. Your body does not know the difference between a real event and an imagined event. If you imagine something terrible, your body is going to react as if something terrible is really happening.

If you imagine ecstasy, your body is going to respond in a way to receive or accept this ecstasy. Almost everything that we dream of and desire: like peace or enlightenment... these things are not... They are not like a static event that happens once and that's it. These things are really more like a dynamic moment-to-moment process.

Enlightenment and Love

Enlightenment isn't something you achieve some day. It's not like now you are unenlightened, but after you meditate for ten years, then suddenly you're enlightened; and then from that point on, you will be enlightened. It doesn't work that way. Enlightenment is a constant conscious moment-to-moment dynamic process.

That's what love is: it's something that you have to generate. It's not something that falls on you... comes into you from the outside somewhere. It's an energy that you generate. And if you are not feeling it, it's because you are not generating it.

It's a choice. As the Course in Miracles teaches, in every moment, there is the opportunity: "I could choose peace instead of this." What a great thing to remember! In any given moment in life... if you are upset or angry... you have that thought: "I could choose peace instead of this." And that's all there is to it. That's all that's required!

Just let go of what you are holding on to: your anger... your doubt... your confusion... Those are choices. And in any moment, you can choose something else. But then comes the shock: in the next moment, you have to choose it again... and in the next moment you have to choose it again...

That's why in all the spiritual teachings, it is said that if you really want enlightenment, you have to put your entire heart, mind, and body into the process. It has to be a full time commitment, otherwise don't even bother.

Some people actually believe that being religious or spiritual means going to church on Sunday, and the rest of the week it doesn't matter what they do.

You see, it is an internal process. And the space in which the process needs to occur is already being filled by habits. It's like space in your computer. You try to install a new program, and you get a message that there is not enough space. You have to delete some files before you can load a new program.

Look at how many useless programs are operating in your bio-computer. Most of the space is used up by useless thinking... totally useless thinking! Thinking just keeps happening constantly.

And if you honestly look at your thinking, you can see that the biggest portion of it is totally unnecessary and serves no useful lasting purpose. It is just wasting space in your computer.

You can begin to delete files. If you notice yourself reacting out of habit, or feeling anything other than peace... feeling anything other than love... why waste those moments?

What's most important? What do you want to feel more than anything else? Just begin to choose to feel it. Remember what is most important, especially when you are totally caught up in automatic reactions... lost in your mind... or caught up in a stream of thoughts...

Using the Breath to Interrupt Negative Patterns

That is when the breath can be like a wedge. You can use it to interrupt your patterns. You can keep a door open with it. If you can just maintain an opening... some of this useless stuff will just escape by itself. If you leave the barn door open, the cows and horses will wander out. You don't have to kick them out to make room.

Conscious Breathing can be a way to interrupt your negative or limiting patterns. How many times have we gotten upset, and then afterward looked back and said: "Oh, boy, why did I do that?" This is actually a good thing. But it's easy to negate it by beating yourself up.

Waking up More Often, as well as Sooner

So I look back and I think: “Ahhgh!” Someone said something or did something, and this unconsciousness woke up inside of me. I became impatient or irritated or violent or cruel. And then afterwards I realize: “Ok, look what I did.” Well, that’s enough! Awareness is enough. I don’t need to then say: “What’s wrong with me? How could I be so stupid! Am I ever going to wake up? Damn, I’m so stupid!”

In my process, that is exactly how it happened. Anger was my way of life. It was my response to anything that didn’t go my way. But I began to wake up afterwards and look back and go: “Gosh, look at that: I was angry again.” The more often that I woke up and looked back, and didn’t get angry at myself for getting angry, then some healing took place.

But before that, when I noticed that I got angry, I would get angry at myself for getting angry. So I cleared that up by practicing loving kindness toward myself—especially when I didn’t deserve it!

And an amazing thing happened... in the middle of being angry... well, not quite... in the beginning, maybe it was several hours or days, after I became angry, I would look back and regret it.

Then I would wake up sooner and sooner. Sometimes 20 or 30 minutes afterward, I would already be going: “ahhh I lost it...” Then, I’d wake up right after I did it: Driving my car... somebody cuts me off: and instantly: “!@#\$%! You son of b...ch! And in the next moment, I would wake up.. A moment after it happened, there I was, awake to my reaction.

And then with practice, I began to wake up in the middle of the anger. “Wow, look at this, I am being angry!” In the middle of it, some part of me woke up! Attention... Awareness... And then the real miracle happens... The moment the anger arises... as the anger comes... already even before it hits, I am aware of it coming!

Anger and Spirituality

And then an interesting thing came to my awareness: my urge was to stop it. Of course! That is the whole point: to not be angry. If I felt myself getting angry: I would stop the anger, because that was the “spiritual” thing to do. And people noticed: “Wow! Dan is becoming so spiritual.”

Except for the two or three people who knew me very well.... And when no one else was looking... they knew the real Dan... My family: “Oh sure, you are so spiritual with everybody else: but with us, you’re an asshole!”

And so then, the process seemed to be insane, because when the anger arose, I said: “Great! The hell with it! Let it come! Be really angry! Enthusiastically angry! Really go for it! Squeeze all the juice out of it that I could! I began to enjoy my anger—with everyone!

When you mix enjoyment with anger... suddenly there is humor! The anger turns into laughter! But when we try to stop the anger, it turns into cancer, arthritis, heart attacks. Or it turns into subtle manipulation of others...

We never lose the ability to act angry. I learned that with my children. They did something totally stupid, totally terrible... And of course the job of the father is to correct them: “You shouldn’t do that!” So I had to act as if I was angry with them. And at first it worked, because I am a good actor: “Don’t touch that!” “Put that down!” “What did your mother tell you?”

And they would listen to me. But then they started to feel something amiss... And at one point, my younger son... he had an advantage... I made all my mistakes with my first son, so with my second son, I had grown and I had learned, and I had taken a vow of harmlessness... He saw through the act of my anger, and I couldn’t use it anymore!

My Vow of Non-Violence and the Ufa Mugging

Part of my Buddhist practice, was to dare to be harmless. If people know that you have taken a vow of harmlessness... and people knew... they knew that they could do anything to me, and I wouldn’t hurt them.

I couldn’t even feel anger toward them. So they stole from me. They had nothing to worry about. Before my vow, they knew I would kill them, so they didn’t do anything.

I took this vow of harmlessness in 1984. And I graduated in 1994. So I completed my harmlessness training. And I graduated in Ufa. I was at an “avia kassa,” I was buying an Aeroflot ticket, and I needed to change dollars into rubbles. So I went to this “abmyen valuta” place...

There were several guys hanging around there, and I exchanged a thousand dollars in cash. And as I was leaving the building, I was approaching the door, and I could feel a crowd rushing up behind me... And it seemed like these three or four guys decided to leave at the same time I did...

But in the next moment, I started to feel this familiar something in the back of my neck, the hairs standing up. And for a moment, I hesitated to push the door open. I felt as if some part of me knew that something was about to happen, and I didn't want to open the door.

But I had no rational idea or understanding: "What is this hesitation? Why? What?" And I also felt the movement of these guys behind me, and I felt that I should keep moving... not to block the way, or hold up the people behind me...

But then, as soon as I opened the door, as soon as I put my hand on the handle... these guys pushed me thru the door. Suddenly I had both arms pinned... someone had both of my arms in a grip.

And they had this doorway system where you opened one door, walked thru a short hall to the left or right, and then went out another door. And as I opened the first door, there two other guys in my face. They were pulling me as the others behind were pushing me.

I've had a lot of martial arts training. And there are so many reflexes... In a moment like that, they all just come up. But in that moment, I was helpless. It was an ambush. And I also remembered my vow.

And so I became soft. And they pressed me against the wall... I felt a punch here, and a punch there, a knee, an elbow... And I am feeling all of these things happening in slow motion... In very slow motion, and with extreme clarity and in great detail...

I felt this hand come into my pants pocket and take my money. And another hand goes with big fat fingers goes into my jacket pocket, and out comes my ticket and my passport!

For a moment I had the feeling of great respect—these guys were good! They were so quick, and they worked as a team. I never had a chance. You can't help but acknowledge skill and experience.

Then a final dizzying blow to the back of my head, and I am on the floor... And suddenly something in me said: "You're going to let this happen? No passport? Not ticket back home? No money?" People are beating you and you are letting it happen?

And just when this "No" started to come, I felt this final blow to my head... And I got very dizzy, and my legs didn't work. I collapsed and felt them all rush out past me. I was on the floor. I remembered the picture of the hands coming in and taking my money and

my passport... And I thought: "I have to do something! Don't just lay here! Get that stuff back!"

So I was suddenly up and on my feet, and I am stumbling out the door. One guy was running this way, and two guys were running that way; and another guy, a big fat guy was running this way. He had my passport.

The guy with my money was small and fast. So I thought: "If I am going to chase someone, I should chase someone that I can catch. I don't think I can catch that guy: he's running too fast. So in a moment, I decide: "ok, I am going after the fat guy and my passport!"

I turned and started to run down the stairs. It was a cold and icy Russian winter day. And there were quite a few people on the street, hanging around in front of the building, talking. And as I started my chase, someone stuck out a foot, and I tripped and fell down the stairs!

He was part of the team! I hit the ground face first, My forehead cracked the ice on the street. It was like a wake up call! It was as if an alarm went off! All the anger I ever felt came up in that instant! I woke up in a rage!

I thought about killing the guy who tripped me, but I was on a mission to catch the fat fingered guy running down the street. And then all I wanted to do was keep moving. I rolled onto my feet and headed after my passport. I didn't even look back at who tripped me.

For a moment I thought of killing whoever tripped me. He was the one who was going to get all my rage; he was going to pay, and suffer for all his friends!

But as I rolled down the steps, I had momentum, so I just kept going. And I chased that fat guy. There was ice and snow on the street. As he ran to the end of the building, I was catching up to him. And when he tried to go around the corner he fell. He slipped and fell.

And by this time, I was coming up on him very fast, and I suddenly remembered my vow. And I thought, well, what are you going to do when you catch him? Are you really going to kill him? And the answer was: "no" or more like "I don't know."

And just then life answered the question and solved the problem. He fell and I just plowed into him. I fell on top of him with all my weight and with my hard parts making contact. I fell on him with my elbows and my knees. And I had all this momentum.

It wasn't me hitting him. It was physics, it was momentum. It was gravity. I had no anger. I had no rage. I had no intention to hurt him. I just had momentum. And he felt that momentum!

In the next moment after I slammed into him and he made this noise, this grunt thump noise, and I heard the wind get knocked out of him... And in the next moment I had this question: "What now?" "Am I going to beat him?" "Am I going to strangle him?" I had no answer! What now? If he begins to fight me, I'm going to have to let him beat me up again! What was I thinking? What a stupid idea to chase this guy!

But instead, suddenly I saw his hand with my passport, and it was shaking... He was giving me my passport! "Vot, voy passport!" All I could do was scream "Thank you!" I grabbed my passport and ran. And in my passport I still had \$500.

So I managed to leave Ufa. I got back to the United States without a penny in my pocket, not a penny. People asked me: "How was your trip to Russia?" Ah, it was great! Oh, and by the way, I am not harmless anymore!

I felt like I graduated, because my primal rage completely took over my being, and it didn't control me. It was a great sense of victory.

You can do the same process using a little bit of resistance. It doesn't have to be a big thing. A little bit of resistance... a little contraction... a little closing... You can breathe and relax past that, thru that... And you will be a little freer, a little more liberated.

And during the breathing session, you will have a lot of opportunities. Feelings come up inside of you, and your reaction is to fight: "Go away! Get out! Go back!" If instead you surrender... keep your momentum... and something just happens perfectly by itself.

And there is great freedom! Something that was unacceptable... you somehow learn to accept it, to be conscious and flow with it... and in that acceptance is this spiritual promise... of freedom and bliss.

Everything that you resist is a door to your own freedom! So you feel that hesitancy about opening the door and letting this thing happen... Just choose. No one is really going to beat you up. You are laying here breathing. It is all happening in your mind, inside of you.

But if you do the work there, the situation in your world will somehow magically change. If you don't do the inner work, the outer world is going to be your school. So do your inner work or life will give you a rude awakening!

Reality, Vontrol, and Being Right

And notice this: that reality does not wait for your permission to be what it is. Reality is what it is, whether you like it, whether you don't like it, whether it feels good, whether it doesn't feel good, whether you think it should be different, or whether you think it shouldn't happen. Reality doesn't care! You waste a lot of energy by resisting reality, by arguing with reality.

And you can be 100% right! People shouldn't attack others. People shouldn't steal one's money. People shouldn't be violent. But what is the reality? What is real? What is true? Is it true that people shouldn't be violent, and shouldn't be criminals? Is that really true? Our minds, or some people will say yes that's true: there shouldn't be criminals. There shouldn't be violence...

But ask this question: What's real? Are there criminals? Is there violence? What is the reality? That's why surrendering is such a powerful spiritual principle. You are surrendering to reality, surrendering to whatever is—anger, love... whatever is, is what it is. It doesn't matter whether you agree or not.

The ego has gotten very good at controlling reality. But it is an illusion. We can control some parts of it for some of the time. But ultimately, reality is what it is, and we make ourselves suffer when we resist it.

That's the lesson. So whatever your internal reality is in the moment... what real choice do you have but to surrender to it? If you have pain, and you fight the pain, you make the pain worse. You feed it. If you breathe and relax, if you accept it and flow with it, something else happens.

So we are going to play some music. We will breathe, and we will go on an inner journey.

We begin a certain way, a very specific way:

The inhale is active. You do it. You make it happen. You pull it in. Active inhale. Use a sound, sound that sounds active, as if you are charging yourself with energy. [demonstrating] You can hear that: it's a strong inhale.

The exhale is passive. It happens by itself. You just set it free. Don't let the exhale out slowly. Don't control the exhale. Let the exhale out all at once, quickly and completely.

So, I can hear the door of your throat opening and closing... Don't do that.... Hahh...yes, that's perfect.

Don't hold the breath for a moment before you exhale. You want to let the inhale turn around and become an exhale without a pause.

It's a circular rhythm. It can be a small circle [demonstrating] or it can be a big circle. [demonstrating] But as soon as the exhale is finished, start the next inhale right away. And let the inhale just turn around and become the exhale without the slightest hesitation.

And just let the music take you. If you find that a certain part of the music has rhythm, breathe in rhythm to the music.

Once you begin breathing, keep the breath moving in and out constantly. Don't hold the breath.

There will be many unusual physical sensations in your body... strange feelings... maybe strong emotions... Expand, open and surrender to them. Breathe into them. Relax into them.

Every exhale, you are relaxing and letting go. Every inhale you are choosing life. You are saying yes. Every exhale, you are surrendering to life. Saying yes. Saying yes.

Music...