

Looking into Breathwork

Live on Romanian TV

This fascinating conversation with Dan Brulé took place on TV6 in Bucharest, in April of 2013.

Here are some of the things that were discussed:

- Dan's background and some of his earliest breathing lessons
- Moments of Awakening to the spiritual power of the breath
- How a baby's natural breathing becomes inhibited
- Meeting with Yogi Ram Das (Dr. Richard Alpert) at Harvard University
- A breathing miracle: awakening thru a clinical death experience
- Personal transformation and the rebirthing experience
- The link between breathing patterns and psycho-spiritual states
- Turning a natural sigh of relief into a powerful healing technique
- Breathwork as practical therapy and a new healing profession

Bucharest TV6 Interview: Edited English Transcript (DB–Dan Brulé; P–Presenter; T–Translator)

P: Give us a little bit of information about yourself, the therapies, the power of the breath, and everything that you have been doing for the past thirty-something years. [LAUGHTER]

DB: I have always been attracted to the breath. Breathing has always been something that has fascinated me; even as a very small child in the first grade in Catholic school. Every Friday the priest would visit all of the classrooms – in our Catholic school we had nuns, sisters as teachers – and when the priest came to the class it was the only time that the sister (the nun) would sit with all the children. It was like WOW, she’s one of us! And he, the priest, was like God. And I can remember the first time...

T: Can I translate?

DB: Oh, you’re translating? [General laughter]

DB: ...and so the priest came and he talked about the first book in the Bible, *Genesis*, and he talked about how, in the beginning, “God took the dust of the earth and formed the body of man; and breathed into the nostrils of man the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

And you know what, for a small child with an active imagination that just seemed amazing. I got so excited about that idea; I couldn’t understand why everyone wasn’t excited. So God is breathing into me? The next breath I take, God is coming into me? Wow! I just couldn’t get away from that subject and I had so many questions about it. The priest just wanted to move along to the next topic, but that day something was awakened in me.

When you think about it, it is pretty amazing that you can go without food for weeks and without water for days, but just a few minutes without breath and terrible things happen. [Laughter] And so it just occurred to me that the better we breathe, the better is our connection to spirit. And then, you know, various things happen in life, and keep reminding you, keep waking you up.

P (through the translator): Tell us about an awakening moment in your mature life.

DB: Well, there was a string of moments. [Laughter] When I graduated from high school, I studied to be an x-ray technician; and for a beginning student the easiest x-rays to take are chest x-rays. So I was telling people to take in deep breaths and to hold their breath, ten or twenty times a day; and every time I told someone to take in a deep breath they would do it in a slightly different way! So I just began to observe breathing patterns.

That year was 1969. It was the year Ram Das, who was a Harvard professor, went to India and came back a yogi. He didn’t look like a Harvard professor: he was dressed in robes and he had mala beads and had shaved his head. I had had no exposure to yoga or spiritual things: I was in Catholic school. But I had always been interested in people who were out of the box, not ordinary; so I went to one of his talks. I was late – I was like the last person to come into the room. The room was packed with people, most of them sitting in the perfect yoga position for meditation.

I was still dressed in my green, surgical, hospital clothes.[General laughter]The whole atmosphere was so foreign to me! I wanted to escape but I couldn’t get out because they had closed the door behind me.

I was stuck! [Laughs] Ram Das spoke so slowly – it was torture for me because my mind was moving so quickly. I couldn't sit still in the yoga lotus position and I asked myself, 'What am I doing here?' And just then he looked straight at me. It's interesting, this was forty years ago but I remember the moment...

[Caller – presenter takes a call from a viewer]

P: So, he has two questions ...

T: The first question is about the babies. He says that today, in the class that you had, as well as previously, you mentioned that when babies are born, they breathe in the right way, in the right pattern, in the right rhythm and so on. When do you feel that they start breathing unnaturally?

DB: Actually, in small infants the respiratory muscles have not developed completely; and they are being breathed by the breath rather than doing the breathing themselves. A child's breathing begins to become unnatural only as the child begins to experience physical, emotional or psychological shocks or traumas.

So, every time a child experiences some pain [inhales sharply to demonstrate], the pain disturbs the breathing. And when children are expressing themselves naturally and spontaneously, moving and playing, they are often punished and made to feel guilty and made to feel shame, so they hold their breath.

They're told to sit still, to be quiet, not to cry. The only way a child can stop or control those things is by holding their breath. So depending on how enlightened our parents were, how much emotional freedom and safety we experienced, there will be degrees of interference in the flow of our spirit, our life force and therefore also our breath.

T: She [the presenter] wants to ask you something.

P (through the translator): It is said that young children up to the age of about seven are much more connected to spirit but that this connection weakens as they get older. Is this disconnection brought about by the electromagnetic waves of the world, or the way the brain develops and functions?

DB: Everything affects the breath: every thought we have can stop the breath; our posture affects the breath and, for example, when a little child makes a cute noise [mimics a child's play] and someone makes a big deal out of it [mimics an adult's voice], 'Oh, it's so cute! Oh, show your father! Oh, do it again' some weird thing can become a habit in their system. We model the behavior of the people around us.

P: The children have the tendency to imitate the adults?

DB: Right, so we take on postures and habits that constrict the breathing and that block the flow of energy.

And that day in the Harvard bookstore with Ram Das, he gave me my first adult initiation, an awakening to spiritual breathing. I was uncomfortable; feeling out of place; I couldn't sit still and he seemed to sense that. He spoke directly to me, and even though it's been forty years, I remember exactly the

words he said. He was being so very conscious, eating grapes; but he didn't just eat the grapes, he looked at them; he put them in his mouth slowly; he chewed them slowly. It was driving me crazy!

In a way, children have very slow rhythms and internal rhythms are also very slow. Children feel things very deeply. We kind of rush through feelings and jump to the next one. And so all this stuff was coming up in me when Ram Das looked right at me and said: "You were born in this particular time, in this particular country, in this socio-economic setting, with your particular parents..."

I was waiting for him to finish the sentence, but he reached for a grape.. looked at it slowly... chewed it and swallowed it slowly. [laughter] And finally he said, "for a purpose,' and everything you do and everything that happens to you is grist for the mill of realizing that purpose."

Then he said, 'let's do this: when you inhale, think to yourself, "The power of God is within me" and when you exhale, think to yourself, "The grace of God surrounds me."And it started: breathing in – the power of God is within me; breathing out – the grace of God surrounds me. And I drove home and it wouldn't stop.

I couldn't take in a breath without thinking: the power of God is within me. I couldn't exhale without thinking: the grace of God surrounds me. And whenever I thought about God, I would breathe. And every time I breathed, I would think about God. In neuro-linguistic programming they would call that anchoring [laughs].

So, something happened on that day, and everything that had ever happened to me up until that time suddenly made sense in a way it had not before. And the next day when I went back to the work at the hospital, from that very day, magical, miracle things started to happen.

There was a sign on the bulletin board asking for volunteers who wanted to learn re-animation or Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR).I thought, 'yes, this is for me.'[Laughter] So I took the class and then, once I was certified, I was ready and waiting for someone to have a heart attack, even secretly hoping!

The system in the hospital was that a blue light would go off indicating an emergency; you would call this number and they would tell you which room to go to. So that became my passion: I would watch for that light and drop whatever I was doing –abandon the chest x-ray I was taking – and run, pushing the cart with all of the equipment and medicines into the room.

There might be five or eight people within a few minutes and because you only needed two or three, there was an unwritten rule that whoever was first into the room could stay in the room throughout the entire procedure.

DB: The very first person that I resuscitated was a man by the name of John Doherty– I'll remember him forever. When we went in, he was clinically dead: he wasn't breathing and he had no pulse. We jumped on him; we beat him, blew into him [demonstrates] and suddenly he woke up and blinked. He looked at me with the eyes of an infant –just this look, this stare – and I wanted to cry. I also wanted to laugh. I began to visit him in his room after that and we became very close. I felt like we had been through something really big, together.

P: Did he tell you any stories afterwards, following his experience?

DB: Yup. I became the only person that he felt comfortable talking to about it. No one could understand what he had experienced and neither his family nor his relatives, nor he himself for that matter, knew how to talk about it; and so I became the one person that he really could talk about it. [SIGH] I was totally hooked on the power, the spiritual power of breathing. I couldn't wait for the next person to have a heart attack. [Laughter]

You know, when you really love something, the universe gives you lots of opportunities to do it. So I would be in a restaurant, and someone would choke on food; I'm on an airplane, and someone has a heart attack; I'm at the beach having a family picnic, and someone's drowning. I even began to think maybe I'm bad luck. Other people said, 'Wow! We're so lucky you happened to be here.' I just loved rescuing people. [Dan sighs] but I was working on a very basic survival level.

P: At the basic, zero point.

DB: Yup. And after a few years we were exploring something like rebirthing but we didn't really know what was happening. We would just make people hyperventilate, then massage them and have them talk about what images they had and what emotions they experienced.

P: [Long interjection by presenter]

T: She just explained what hyperventilation is and how it happens.

DB: Ah ha. Then in 1976 a professor at the university, who was my mentor, introduced me to the rebirthing technique or method. Within 15 minutes, maybe even 10 minutes, of practicing this particular breathing pattern, everything inside me began to transform. I felt as if I was plugged into an electric outlet; my body began to vibrate and tingle; I began to laugh and cry as all the stress of my system began to get pumped out of my body. I felt so clear and so clean. My heart opened and I loved everyone!

P: [Long interjection by presenter] I just want to explain so you don't have to say the same thing over and over again that this is what someone who is perfectly healthy feels when they try this type of breathing.

DB: So that awakening of my own, say, of the spirit of breath in me, the energy of the breath in me, when it was awakened, my entire life changed. Everything about what I did changed; my job changed.

[Caller – presenter takes call from a viewer]

PRESENTER [in English]: So, we go on. She was enchanted.

T: She actually took one of your workshops last time when you were in Romania. She couldn't come now as she's just had a baby. She was actually saying that she is observing the baby and that the baby actually breathes, as you said, in a natural way.

DB: Look at how true this is. The simplest things are always the most powerful. The most basic things are always the most powerful. And what is simpler, more basic, than breathing? It's literally right under our nose and while we're looking for complicated solutions, we overlook the power of the breath. We underestimate the power of the breath. And that's something that life never allowed me to do.

In observing breathing and working with thousands and thousands of people, something revealed itself to me: every emotional state has a corresponding breathing pattern; every psychological state has an associated breathing pattern; every chemical or physiological state and every spiritual state has a specific breathing pattern or quality associated with it.

We can observe this very easily because the way we breathe when we're peaceful, calm and relaxed is very different from the way we breathe when we're upset, angry and afraid. So when our psychological, psycho-spiritual, or emotional state changes the breathing reflects and expresses that change. A dramatic change will cause a dramatic change in the breathing and subtle changes will cause more subtle effects. The real magic is that if it works in one direction, it should work in the other direction.

So, if every time I go from one psychological state to another psychological state my breathing pattern changes, then that means that if I change my breathing pattern I can move from one psychological state to another. And just as oil and water cannot mix, I cannot be in an agitated emotional state and breathe in a relaxing manner at the same time.

So what we've been doing, others and I who are fascinated and passionate about this, is working and playing with this connection. We have identified certain breathing reflexes, certain breathing patterns or habits that, when you are able to identify them, you have a tool with which to unravel particular states. There are certain ways of breathing that are connected to very high sublime spiritual states and you can breathe in ways that force your system into certain states.

P: So is it about associating a certain breathing technique with a specific emotional state so that the technique will induce the particular state when you apply it?

DB: Exactly, that's how it works. Whether we want to or not or whether we like to or not, by falling into certain breathing habits we cultivate a tendency towards certain emotions and psychological states. And so it's very exciting that you can identify certain breathing reflexes that alter distressing emotional and psychological states for the better, and you train them into your system.

For example, let's look at something which everyone can recognize – it's not really a technique or an exercise, it's actually a reflex –the sigh of relief [DB demonstrates]. When you are in a state of pain and the pain goes away, this breath comes by itself. When the pain has you in its grips and you contract yourself against the pain and breathe shallowly, the breath is stuck. But when the pain goes away, you automatically release the breath and feel the relief of letting go.

You don't make it happen; you don't think about it, when you move from a state of pain to a state of no pain the breath naturally reflects and expresses that change. So what we're teaching people is not to wait until the pain goes away before they release the breath but to practice releasing the breath while they're in pain.

Because something is very obvious and it is this: have you ever seen anyone who is in terrible pain breathe in long, relaxing, even breaths? People who are in pain breathe in ragged or faint and shallow breaths: the inhalation is seldom very deep and the exhalation never completely releases. But if you could breathe as if you're relaxed when you're in pain, something would have to happen to the pain.

It's like oil and water. You cannot breathe like that and be stuck in pain. And you can't be stuck in pain and breathe like that. It's oil and water. They don't mix. So by mastering that reflexive breath you can pull yourself, move yourself, out of pain. So we teach people to practice that, to practice it when you already feel good, so then you can actually use it when you need it.

It is possible to fall out of a boat into the water and learn how to swim. But it is very difficult to learn how to swim in such a case. So you go to a swimming pool and you practice in knee-deep and waist-deep water so that if you ever fall out of a boat, it's not that big of a problem.

This is an exercise that anyone can start practicing; you don't need a teacher and you don't need an expert. We all know what a sigh of relief looks like, sounds like, and feels like. So the idea is to make it an exercise. Use it like a technique – and then watch the magic you can make in your life.

What typically happens when somebody says something that offends us or even insults us? Something inside us goes tight and hard, and out of that pain, we react. We insult *them*! We offend *them*. Or we defend ourselves. But we can do something different. We can breathe in deeply and exhale fully.

P: So we change the energy of the moment? [General laughter]

DB: We can transform the energy in the room, exactly! It's like a ping-pong game that we decide not to continue playing! So the other player hits the ball and it hops all the way across the table and off the other side. End of game! [Laughs] Michelle can tell you about the newly established and now officially registered Romanian Breathworkers Association.

[Long stretch in Romanian between translator and presenter]

T: We just gave a little bit of an introduction about the association and about the program and the workshop that is ongoing, and we shared some more information about it.

DB: Breathwork is a new healing modality. You can use the breath to heal emotional things, psychological things, and physical things. It's the most holistic approach that we could imagine! The breath is the bridge between the body and the mind. And so, when you make changes in the breathing you cause changes in the mind and body.

This practitioner-coach training is a one-year training, but in a year you can become one of the most powerful healers on the planet! And you don't need any special skills or training outside of breathwork. If you're a counselor or a psychotherapist, a body worker or an energy worker, you can be better at those things when you use breathing.