**MODULE 3: THE PRACTICE OF CONSCIOUS BREATHING**

**LESSON 4: FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE A SESSION**

We know from our own experience, that every breathwork session is different. Many factors come into play that will determine where the session goes and what is experienced.

Five factors that influence a session:

* The Technique
* The Atmosphere
* The Teacher
* The Mind of the Breather
* And Something Else

1. **The Technique**.

Breath therapy is based upon many breathing approaches, style and practices, each having a different focus and effect. The foundation of breathwork practice lies in the ancient practices of Prana Yoga, Kriya Yoga and Chi Kung, as well as the more modern methods of rebirthing and Holotropic breathwork.

We can make use of several specific breathing techniques in Breath Therapy depending on:

* The level of health of the breather
* The degree of skill in a particular technique
* The purpose in training

Every technique has a specific and predictable result.

Depending on the above factors, one technique may make more sense than another.

At the beginning of a breathwork session, take some time to observe, do a bit of probing and experimenting to check the state of a person’s health, the degree of their skill, the amount of breath control and breath awareness that they have and the range and the scope of their breathing mechanism.

I begin by sitting with the person and noticing and observing, first of all, yourself. Take account of our own presence. Notice your own breath. Get a sense of your own presence and relax into your centre.

Then I begin to allow information from the other person to enter my awareness. I focus on the breathing and I notice…

* Where does the breath go?
* What moves?
* What does the breath touch?
* Is there a rhythm to the breathing?
* Is it chaotic, ragged?
* Is it deep?
* Is it shallow?
* Does the belly move?
* Does the chest move?
* Are their shoulders involved?
* Are their neck muscles tense?
* What is the expression on their face?
* Do they breathe through their nose or through their mouth?
* What does the breathing pattern tell me?
* If I had that breathing pattern, what emotions would be just under the surface?
* What would I be feeling if that was the way that I was breathing?

Gradually I will move towards a rational, logical decision about a technique or an intuitive or spontaneous urge to give the person an exercise or a test of some kind, some practice, some method.

It may be the basic technique of simply observing the breath, whether it be the technique of engaging the exhale (using the exhale to release tension, to relax, triggering that relaxation response via the exhale). It may be a “charging” of a part of the body or a “directing of flow of breath” into one part or another.

Any of these techniques will have a certain specific and predictable result. And during the process or the practice of Breath Therapy, we can move from one technique to another, from one exercise to another. And the process itself begins to become organic, quite natural.

Once you begin to apply a technique, then the work is done by the technique itself. There is little else to happen. A shift will occur, a movement will occur, an adjustment will occur, and the next step will be obvious.

**2. The Atmosphere**

The atmosphere in which the technique is practiced. That atmosphere is physical, it involves things like temperature, the comfort of the room, a soft floor, a comfortable chair, a ventilated room, a peaceful place.

And it also involves a psychic atmosphere. Is there tension in the room? It includes the group atmosphere. The people that are there create a certain atmosphere. You notice there are some places that are just charged with energy.

You can find sacred places on the earth where miracles have happened, where powerful events have occurred; and the energy of those events seems to hang in the air. You move into that atmosphere, and the atmosphere itself does something to you.

Certain people have a healing presence. And when you move into their bubble, when you are in their aura - in their influence, something happens to you. In a church, sacred places…There are atmospheres that are far more conducive to practicing Breath Therapy than others.

Obviously, you practice a certain technique… you practice it in the middle of a highway with cars coming… you are going to get a different effect than if you practice that technique in the peace and the comfort of your own home, or within the loving atmosphere of a like-minded group of individuals, or you practice it out in nature where the smell of flowers makes the experience more beautiful… or the cleanness of the air or the sound of a waterfall… Just the presence of life and nature around you, enhances the atmosphere.

Consciously choosing the atmosphere or consciously creating the atmosphere in which to practice Breath Therapy often has just as much effect or more effect than the technique itself.

**3. The Facilitator**

The presence of the teacher makes a big difference. The energy of the teacher whether actually physically present, or invited psychically or spiritually or mentally… The presence of the teacher adds a certain force to the session that is unmistakable.

Simply having another person there, a breathing guide, someone who has breathed their way through certain cycles, has relaxed and breathed in and out of certain spaces... Their presence creates an opportunity for you to breathe through those same things.

It makes your process easier when there is someone with you who has made the journey before.

And there is something to be said about the process of initiation. Since ancient times, when one human being absorbed a skill or mastered something… and they can pass that on to a student or someone else...

**4. The Mind of the Breather**

Everything that happens to you, everything that you experience, is quite dependent upon your mind: upon your attitudes, your beliefs, your thoughts, your intentions, your will, your ideas, your fantasies, your imagination, your interpretation, your perception. The mind is at work constantly.

And it is the mind that probably brought you to Breathwork, in one way or another. And it needs to be honoured, because the results you get from practicing Breath Therapy will depend upon… to a great degree… will depend upon your beliefs, your attitudes, your thoughts, what you think is possible, why you are doing something, the reason for practicing, your purpose in selecting a breathing technique. The mind is at work here.

Just as in life, what is happening in your mind has a great effect on the outcome. Certainly, this is true in Breathwork. There is a particular aspect of the mind that is, I think, required for Breathwork. We talk about this in our Formula for Transformation: that is “Meditative Awareness”.

There is a certain way of relating to the mind. Developing this ability to be the observer, the detached observer, the watcher… just noticing, just paying attention… not analysing, not trying to understand, not thinking, not rationalising… just being a witness is important.

The state of your consciousness of the breather will certainly make a big difference in the outcome of the techniques that you practice when you do Breathwork.

So, we have four Principles of Breath Therapy so far: The Technique, the Atmosphere, the Teacher, the Mind of the Breather, and there is a fifth principle. I don’t really have a name for this. I call it “something else”.

**5. Something Else**

There is another factor that without a doubt is present when working with the breath, despite the technique, the atmosphere the facilitator or the breather.

It could be called Grace - something beneficial that is just showered upon us for no apparent reason: not dependent upon deserving, or not in response to any request, or not the result of any effort. It’s grace, a mystical or magical factor…

You can get the technique wrong and still something wonderful can happen! You can practice the technique in a terrible atmosphere - the worst of situations - under terrible conditions, and still something wonderful can happen! You can learn the technique from a terrible teacher and still something wonderful can happen! You can practice the technique for all the wrong reasons - with the worst of intentions, and still something wonderful can happen!