

The Healing Breath

a Journal of Breathwork Practice, Psychology and Spirituality

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WHAT IS BREATHWORK PRACTICE , PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY?

by
Tilke Platteel-Deur

Introduction

When I was a child and had any kind of pain, my mother used to tell me “Breathe darling, and relax.” She would hold me and stroke my whatever-was-hurting part and sing a little song for me. When I fell on my knee, the song would go:

*“Heal, heal little knee,
behind the mountain lives a man who can heal all little knees.
It’s gone now.
It’s gone now,
Hurrah!”*

Mostly it felt like a miracle – my mother’s magic worked!

Thinking back I realise that my mother, like all the mothers in this world, had an intuitive knowledge about how healing works. What’s more, she knew about how our thoughts influence our feelings. As children hurt themselves all the time, (and I was a real tree-climber) she must have done her little healing act and sung this little positive, healing song hundreds of times for me.

After I finished high school, in 1956, I wanted to follow my dream and go to the dancing academy in Rotterdam. My brother, who was quite intellectual in those days, had a lot of negative thoughts on the subject: a dancing academy would be perverse, dangerous to my spiritual well-being, etc. etc. He wanted me to go to university and to study like everybody else in the family. My father simply told him that if I had aspirations to ‘do wrong’ in, or with my life, I would do it anyway. He trusted my good intentions and, if I wanted to go there, I most definitely could.

I learned from both of my parents about trust, touch, healthy thoughts and the power of healing.

In the dancing academy, one of my principal subjects was modern dance, Martha Graham style. In this form of dance the movements are strongly connected with the breath. One uses the inhale to stretch the body and the exhale to contract it. In fact the exhale initiates the beginning of every movement. It is as if the inhale symbolises the intake of strength, power and presenting oneself in this world, whereas the exhale gives the opportunity to let the movement naturally evolve, and to express oneself and one’s emotions clearly.

One might think that having being brought up the way I had been, and having been thoroughly trained as a dancer for several years, I would have understood how breathing and thinking are connected. However, although I developed a much deeper

relationship with my body, my feelings and myself, I did not become conscious of that connection on a conscious level.

Isn't it amazing how I could "forget" all of that, and how I had to meet Rebirthing, get excited about it, and work hard on and with myself to rediscover this knowledge that lay deeply hidden inside me – the knowledge both of my parents gave me simply by giving me a warm and thoughtful education.

Breathwork Practice

Breathwork in some form or another has always been an essential part of all kinds of spiritual trainings. We find it in Buddhism and other eastern religions in meditation techniques. We find it in Christianity in the healing techniques. We find it in Yoga in the postures and in the movements. We find it in American Indian rituals. Breath was and still is a powerful tool to take us deeper into ourselves and to reach different states of consciousness.

The kind of Breathwork many people involved with some sort of therapy like to use today because of its effectiveness, is the connected breath. It has been called Rebirthing because of the possibilities it gives for remembering, among other things, details about one's birth. It is often called "Conscious Breathing" or "Conscious Connected Breathing". Both names describe the technique very well.

I prefer the name my colleague, Hans Mensink, and I gave it, "Holistic Integrative Breath Therapy®". We chose this name, which we registered in Europe in 1992, because we believe that it is not just the breath that is important.

- "Holistic" – because this kind of Breathwork effects the whole human being.
- "Integrative" – because of the integration of thoughts and judgements that confine us, and thus restrict us from flowing freely with life. And I think that this is even more important.
- "Breath" – because the breath is used as a means to make the connection between mind and body, thoughts and feelings, and because it is such an effective and powerful tool for getting the energy in the body to flow in such a way that we realise that we are in truth spiritual, unlimited beings.
- "Therapy" – simply because it has deep therapeutic effects on us.

Integrative Breath Therapy consists of 1001 ways to tempt our clients to say *Yes* to all the situations they said *No* to in the past, or, to put it differently: to integrate and embrace their old judgements.

Assumptions

The first principle I start with is this:

***Behind all the inner and outer judgements they may have,
human beings are – in their essence – good.***

Each of us carries within her or himself all the resources necessary to have a healthy, creative, fulfilled and happy life. Our goodness may be covered under layers of strange, maladjusted, or even bad behaviour – the kind of behaviour we normally would despise or at least consider not very practical.

I cannot work without this assumption.

If I do not believe in the basic ‘goodness’ of people, how can I ever have enough trust in myself or in someone else to be able to change or transform a certain behaviour, theirs or mine.

If I do not believe that we have all the resources necessary, how can I trust that we will be able to integrate what needs to be integrated?

Even more important, if I do not believe that people are basically good, how could I ever forgive others or myself for whatever went “wrong”? How could I come from a place called ‘Love’ while working with other people? In my opinion, this is the only place to come from while doing therapeutic work.

The second assumption I work with is this:

***Our deepest thoughts,
the ones that have become convictions,
do in fact create the way we perceive life in all its forms.***

These convictions create the way we think and feel about ourselves, the world and the people around us. They limit the flow of energy in our bodies and they restrict our freedom of choice.

This assumption helps me to take responsibility for myself, my thoughts and my actions. It takes the “blaming” out of my life. In the same way it helps my clients to take responsibility. If I did not start from this point, it would always be as if someone else would or could have power over me, hurt me, and so forth. It would seem as if I would always be the victim of circumstances.

The basic purpose of any kind of therapy is to help us to recognise our thought patterns: to make it possible for us to *feel* our thoughts, to find our way back to our own life energy, to create a context into which it is safe enough to integrate thoughts and feelings, and thus to bring us into contact with our spirituality and with the meaning of life.

It’s important to develop a personality that has access to power and creativity as well as to vulnerability and spirituality.

The connected breath is a wonderful tool for reaching this goal.

Connected Breathing

The beauty of using Breathwork in therapy is that therapists can't breathe for their clients. The clients are very obviously responsible for their own breath and therefore for their own feelings. Using the breath, and later on in the process, the connected breath is one of the simplest and at the same time one of the most powerful techniques there is. As I support my clients process of learning to become aware of their breath, they learn to become aware of their bodies and their feelings. They learn to listen to themselves and to have respect for what is going on. They learn that it is safe to feel, and that it is safe to feel in someone else's presence.

As soon as they grow accustomed to feeling the breath and to feeling their own energy system, I start to guide them into connecting the breath. A breathing pattern in which the inhale is connected to the exhale is circular, round. It has the tendency to bring exactly those thoughts and feelings to the surface, that are not "rounded up," not complete.

As I assume that a human being chooses a body in order to have life-experiences, I find it easy to see that life is about being lived completely and fully. As we live in a body, the only way to experience life is through our bodily senses. From birth and through growing up, events happen that are too painful for us at the time to feel and experience. In order *not* to feel the pain connected to those situations, we block the experience. We stop our breathing. We do not just block it in our minds. We also create a block in the body. We train ourselves to control with our breathing what we don't want to experience. This goes for the most happy and joyful feelings too: we can hardly stand them, and block them too by holding our breath. We become masters in suppressing feelings of any kind. Since breath produces a powerful connection between the body and the mind, between feeling and thinking, it is the tool par excellence for helping us solve these problems.

Everything that has been blocked in some moment in our lives *seems* to be "away," gone. In truth it is not gone at all. It simply is hidden somewhere in our subconscious, waiting for an opportunity to rise to the surface so that it can be finally experienced to its full extent, truly felt, and thus integrated.

Feeling such a "hidden feeling" to its natural end will often hurt as much as it hurt in the past when we had to suppress it. The difference is that we now have our breath to guide us through the experience. We are not "small" any more. With our breath we can create a context within which we can feel that we are bigger than the pain. We get the chance to feel through to completion, in safety, whatever we blocked in the past.

Technically, when we connect the breath the focus of attention is guided into the body. As the breath starts to unfold we meet all the "folds" that are in our way. You can say that the "folds" are the blockages in the mind and the body. We become aware of our physical sensations and the thoughts and emotions connected to them. These get more and more of our undivided attention, as we keep relaxing into what is happening. Focusing on our breathing helps us not to identify with what we are feeling or thinking. Focusing on our breathing and on relaxing also keeps us so occupied that our mind hardly gets a chance to judge or suppress anything. We don't have to drown in our feelings. We are able to breathe continuously whatever we think or feel and thus centre ourselves in "the here and now".

We start to notice that we are not our feelings and there is something in us that's "bigger" than all of our drama. We are enabled to observe what's happening from an aware ego position and to feel safe enough to be able to integrate our past hurts and pains. We stop feeling like victims. There is a deep sense of peace the moment we can let go of our judgements. Deep inside us we know that we made a connection with our own true being. This is the process we call ecstasy when consciousness frees itself from limiting thoughts, judgements and convictions and we are no longer identified with them. We are able to "stand by" and perceive. Our bodies don't lie. We can feel the truth. The blocked energy starts to flow freely again physically and mentally. New possibilities of choice occur. This process may happen very quietly or with a great sense of euphoria.

It is extremely important that the therapist takes good care that not too much material becomes activated at any one time and that there is ample opportunity to really work through the content of the thoughts involved, so that the new insights can be integrated into normal daily life. He/she should be a master in Breathwork and know how to use the volume and the "timbre" of the breath like you would use the volume control on a radio.

Therapy

The moment our breathing starts to unfold and to flow fully and freely our power to turn our thoughts into reality increases. Our power to create increases. This goes not just for our so-called positive, life-enhancing thoughts but also for the negative ones, the ones that limit our life quality. This is why it's so important to work on improving the quality of our thoughts, and the transformation of our acting.

Hal and Sidra Stone, psychologists in the US, have done significant and essential work with the development of the Voice Dialogue technique.¹ This technique is based on the Psychology of Selves. Through becoming acquainted with them and their work I finally got an intellectual framework into which to put everything I ever experienced in Breathwork. They define Consciousness not as a static state of being but as a process – a process of both perceiving *and* experiencing the different parts, sub-personalities or energy patterns out of which the psyche is formed. Each and every one of these parts has their own way of thinking, perceiving, feeling and acting. They are like real people with very different views of the world. The ego as the choice making and acting faculty in us is most often identified with one of these parts. This whole mechanism works so unconsciously that we don't even notice how we go through life proving that we are right in our so-called convictions.

When we no longer identify ourselves with one of these sub-personalities but become aware of them, we have the possibility of developing an Aware Ego that's in the process of becoming more and more conscious.

In their book "Embracing Our Selves" Hal and Sidra Stone say:

"We come into this world as unique human beings, each carrying our own "psychic fingerprint". At this essence level the infant is quite

¹ *Embracing Our Selves: Voice Dialogue Manual*, Marina del Rey, California: Devorss & Company, 1985.

defenceless and vulnerable. However it has the potential to develop any energy patterns or sub-personalities one can imagine, the total sum of which will be the individual personality we soon come to know.” (p. 12)

We all learn that we have to establish forms of control over the environment in order to survive and to protect our vulnerability. This is what forming a personality is all about. The stronger the personality becomes, the more we separate from our essence and, at the same time, from our capacity to be close and intimate with other people. Understanding this concept and the dramatic effects it has on the way we live our relationships can help us tremendously in refining our therapeutic work. In conflicts in relationship it often happens that one part of us ‘hooks into’ an opposite part of the person we’re dealing with, leaving us in total confusion about what’s happening.

For example; A couple drives in their car to a dinner party. He has come home from work very tired. Since he is not in contact with his vulnerability, he tries hard not to give in to his feeling of tiredness and instead behaves in a withdrawn way towards his wife. She responds unconsciously to his energy and starts to feel guilty without knowing why. She makes a mistake when giving him directions and he immediately gets angry with her. She feels like a small child, and even more guilty, and starts to cry. He gets furious. They both don’t know what’s happening to them.

Because most of our basic convictions originate from our early childhood, it’s clear this whole process has a lot to do with the part we call our inner child. This child feels that it has been hurt repeatedly in the past. We therefore have to develop ways to become aware of it, take responsibility for it, care for it and protect it in a way that also honours the “strong parts” in our personality.

With the Voice Dialogue technique we can talk with our different “voices” or energies and discover that they all have a positive purpose. Even when their behaviour is maladjusted or difficult, they all want to make a contribution to the personality as a whole and therefore should be respected. When they are accepted and honoured, the different voices will no longer be denied by us, but respected as vital parts.

Spirituality

As we use the breath and other techniques for integration we become increasingly enabled to get into contact with our essential being – the part in us that has access to our spirituality. Our creativity and our intuition become increasingly accessible, and so does our true power in life. We start to feel the beauty of being touched and feeling moved. Our true love starts to flow freely. We begin to live more intensely and with more intention. The yearning most of us have for higher meaning and purpose in life begins to become satisfied. This longing, this need for purpose, is as much an instinct as hunger, sexuality or thirst. We see it exploding in our world today. 1

What often seems to happen, however, is that people see the experience of spiritual energies as being identical with consciousness. The longer I work with the concept of the

1 Op.cit. p. 268.

Psychology of Selves the more I realise that spiritual energies are just that, a system of energy. These energies are extremely important to us because they bring us into contact with our life's purpose. They deserve to become well integrated in our personality. This means we become conscious of them, and we use and enjoy them but we are not in danger of misusing them through a "Guru Archetype".

It is just as important for the development of a more conscious and aware ego to discover and accept disowned energies that are not at all spiritual! If we do not deal with our instinctual energies we run the danger of becoming "sanctimonious" or hypocritical. If we "try" to be spiritual, we will have the tendency to judge whatever is not totally "spiritual".

As we are human beings living in a body our spirituality deserves to be grounded in our bodies, even in our lowest chakra. The lowest chakra is situated in our sacrum, our "holy" bone! That is where our spirituality should settle. We then can manifest our spirituality in the simple little things in our daily lives.

We often discover that apart from a very vulnerable child there is a magical child in us that still has access to the invisible. A child that never forgot where it came from. A child that never lost its connection with God.

About the Author

Tilke Platteel-Deur has been practicing and teaching Breathwork and the dynamics of relationship, since 1979. After intensive training in the Psychology of Selves with Hal and Sidra Stone, she incorporated the Voice Dialogue technique, as they developed it, into her work. Together with Hans Mensink she has created the Institute for Integrative Breath Therapy, (Das Institut für Ganzheitliche Integrative Atemtherapie). They offer a basic three year training and students have the option, after having worked at least a year as a practitioner, to take a fourth year to learn to become a trainer.

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BREATHWORK - THERAPY OF CHOICE FOR WHOM?

by
Jim Morningstar, Ph.D.

Is Breathwork a therapy? Breathwork is a broad rubric designating the use of a directed breathing process for healing or self improvement. As a form of Yoga it has been used for centuries for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual change and renewal.

Modern psychotherapy refers to a healing process contracted between a client and a trained health professional working from an established theoretical framework. Psychotherapy uses specified techniques to effect change in behavior, thinking and/or feeling states leading to more productive life and sense of well-being. Early forms of psychotherapy using the psychoanalytic model employed the projections of the patient onto the therapist (transference) as a major tool in understanding and giving feedback (interpretation) to the patient. Medical models of doctor/patient relationship and illness/health were assumed. Later developments in psychotherapy do not rely on the transference and interpretation tools. Many are more cognitive or behaviorally based, but they do retain the model of a professional contract for a specified change in feelings, thoughts and behavior.

Breathwork can, I believe, be effectively employed within the framework of some psychotherapies, but in itself goes beyond psychotherapy and is used in educational models, e.g. Yoga classes using a student/teacher relationship, physical healing arts e.g. massage or physical therapy for pain or stress reduction using a client/technician relationship, or a spiritual seeker model using a disciple/master relationship.

Breathwork is not under the domain of any one discipline or confined by a single model. My intent is to share my thoughts and experience of how it has been used within appropriate psychotherapy models and what are precautions and advantages to its usage with different conditions as seen from a traditional diagnostic model and an alternative diagnostic framework, and the differences between the two points of view.

Breathwork And Traditional Psychological Disorders

First let us look at the traditional diagnostic nomenclature. These diagnoses are divided into the organic disorders, related to specific lesions or physical causes and functional disorders for which there are no observable organic lesions. Most of my work has been with functional diagnosis.

The functional diagnosis are divided into psychoses displaying major mood or thought disorders, neuroses characterized by anxiety, personality disorders dealing with behavioral problems and situational adjustments arising from life challenges.

Thought Disorders

A major impairment of thought or mood refers to one which inhibits the individual from functional self-care. These are known as psychoses. I have had very little

experience or success in using Breathwork with those diagnosed with schizophrenia, a major thought disorder. Their terror of any breakthrough of real feelings and their defenses against this makes them unlikely volunteer candidates for this process. To try to require this treatment for them is antithetical to the philosophy of self-responsibility and flirting with the disaster of their further entrenching into their split.

Non-psychotic clients with schizoid tendencies may be more amenable. One ambulatory schizoid individual who was genuinely seeking change from his isolated monochromatic life continued to come for Rebirthing with me even though he would invariably go into tetany with a few breaths. He explained to me that even though it was painful, he actually felt alive in his body for the first time. The voluntary seeking of the Breathwork is critical here and the breathworker's sincerity, sensitivity and warmth are important. It is also critical to adjust your expectations for how much can be handled safely by someone so tenuously defended and to proceed with infinitesimal patience.

When thought disorder is combined with paranoid delusions there is the risk of striking out toward others when the perceived threat is increased as may happen by increasing their energy level or reducing their defenses. I would exercise great caution with Breathwork under these circumstances.

Mood Disorders

Major mood disorders, bi-polar or major depression are more likely to voluntarily try Breathwork. Here again we are dealing with very shaken defenses and Breathwork is a very powerful technique that can produce quite dramatic reactions if used to rip away their walls of fear. Again my experience is that adjusting ones expectations for speed of progress is critical. I would have great caution in raising the energy level of someone already in a manic state and myself would not use Breathwork with them until they were not so pressed. The propensity for their acting out and not grounding the increased energy is great, not just during but especially after the session. One needs to help them get safety and grounding firmly integrated. Breathwork has greatest potential with depression. It is well to note that the largest suicide risk is when the depression is lifting. It is most important to stay in contact with your client at this time. Underneath the feelings of worthlessness is great rage and this can be redirected to themselves when their energy is mobilized.

Anxiety States

I have much more experience with the anxiety states and Breathwork. Here is where Breathwork is an invaluable tool. Anxiety is marked by a sense of dread and uneasiness that does not have a logical focus. Thus there is a paralysis in taking any effective action to alleviate it. In Breathwork clients learn to consciously change their energy level, identify what physical and psychological indicators go with their fears, feel and express emotions underlying their fear, remember life situations leading to their trapped energy and address the people and circumstances involved in their original blockage. I have used Breathwork with everything from panic disorder, hyperventilation syndrome to more mild and generic anxiety states. Challenging the fears on their own grounds (the Breathwork session) rather than unexpectedly in their life starts building the all-important confidence that they are in charge of their life more and more.

States of combined depression and anxiety are likewise amenable to Breathwork. The tendency of the depressive to defend, however, through drowsiness in the Breathwork session makes the use of bioenergetic techniques very helpful in maintaining their energy level and keeping them consciously working with you. Getting the client in a focused grounded manner to hit, kick, twist or bite a towel, verbalize or make a sound can get them past the repressive drowsy state and aware enough of their underlying emotions to continue their breathing rhythm. Short of this you may get into the trap of feeling and expressing the depressed person's anger for them as they "sleep" through your Breathwork session.

When anxiety is associated with post traumatic stress such as from childhood sexual abuse, it is very important to help the client release not just recreate the trauma. Breathwork has also been invaluable in this area for me when combined with directed visualization. Clients must be helped to access their adult strength and not just collapse into the victimized child position during Breathwork. repeatedly encourage them to be with or even speak for their "injured child" rather than simply feel their feelings when they get overwhelming. We can recover and psychologically reenter situations that were abusive letting their child know that we are not going to abandon them there or let them fend for themselves. They can then speak as a protecting adult or give the voice to the child that they were incapable of at the time of the original trauma. Further they can take the child psychologically out of the abusive setting in their mind and bring them home to a current safe environment. This is all when the "child" part of them is ready to (a) leave the old setting and (b) trust the adult part of them. Breathwork helps ground this in the heart and guts and not just keep it as a nice fantasy. Breathwork surfaces the emotional body more powerfully than verbal or visualization techniques alone and helps integrate the heart and the head. I give assignments to daily consciously breathe and communicate with and listen to their inner child to help build a track record of trust. Also helpful is to have a daily reminder of their intention to heal, such as putting a picture of their inner child or a favorite childhood toy where they will see it regularly. This helps integrate the breathwork into life.

Personality Disorders

Personality disorders present a broad range of challenges. In this arena the advantage of Breathwork is that it takes the client to levels of the unconscious beneath their behavior patterns. The disadvantage is that if this is not handled appropriately, this unconscious material may spill over into more inappropriate behavior. The borderline personality is a prime example of presenting this possibility. Clear behavioral contracts can be useful when working with this high potential for acting out. It is important, however, not to get into a "critical parent" role, but to help them deal with the thoughts and feelings, e.g. shame, when they do not stay within the boundaries of their stated intentions. Some may touch in with your services only sporadically. This can provide a valuable resource for them even though it may challenge your criteria for effective behavior change. I have one such client who comes in for short periods every six months to a year and at present can tolerate little more. We serve in many ways.

Situational Disorders

When dealing with situational disorders or adjustment reactions, Breathwork has the potential to crack the illusion that the grief, sadness or anxiety is all about one event. This may be disconcerting for those wanting a quick fix. Breathwork, of course, can be adapted to handling situational anxiety. Sooner or later, I believe, following the guidance of the breath will take the serious applicant to deeper roots when they are underlying. As the breathworker or therapist our job is to point out the potential or possibilities for further work or deeper processing and be available should the client choose to pursue it, not to sell it to them or force it upon them.

Psychotropic Medications

Though I am not a great proponent of psychotropic medications, they may be useful if used judiciously as a bridge to help bring some clients back to a drug-free condition of self-care. I do not refuse to do Breathwork with someone on medications, but want to know what symptoms are being suppressed through their usage. In general the medications tend to mute the effectiveness of the Breathwork. The Breathwork, though, can diminish the length of time the client relies on the medications.

Bioenergetic Analysis

I use a form of Bioenergetic diagnosis in my therapy and Breathwork. I prefer it because it gives me a framework for interpreting not only psychological, emotional and behavioral cues but also character structure as reflected in body types. Bioenergetics also gives a developmental model of both health and illness, the strengths and weaknesses of each body type. Clear goals are presented for each body type along with exercises on the physical level to augment the mental and emotional work. Adding Breathwork to this form of therapy is a natural fit as free and easy breathing and a spiritual core are already main components of the theory. I have modified Alexander Lowen's typology to increase focus on the wellness components of each type and have added the indications for Breathwork with each type.

The Psychic Sensitive patterns developed pre- and postnatally are most concerned with basic safety in their bodies and their worlds. In the held fear state their basic belief is "The world is not a safe place." Their compensating belief is "I am a free spirit, unattached to the material." Their bodies are disjointed, frozen and unfocused; their breathing is minimal. Under any stress they split off. Breathwork helps them unlock their chest and free their breathing mechanism, gain more comfort with their bodies and move towards releasing their rage and fear. It is important for the breathworker not to give double messages or control covertly. Breathwork can help bring out their high vibrational qualities with safety, bring agility and responsiveness to their bodies and show more productively their sensitive artistic natures.

The Empathetic Nurturing patterns formed during the first year of life are concerned with the issue of deprivation/abandonment. In the held fear state they believe "I'll never get enough." Their compensating belief becomes "If I love enough, I'll be loved" or eventually "I'm self sufficient." Their bodies take on a posture of deprivation with a collapsed chest affording a shallow inhale and a breath by breath experience of

lack. Their pelvis is forward with knees locked, having learned to hold themselves up prematurely. They can also be tall and thin, looking undernourished. Though being oral and highly verbal, under stress they will tend to collapse. Breathwork helps them find their true source within so they can support themselves and their feeling of vitality. It is important for the breathworker to be there as a support but not to “do it for” the Empathetic Nurturer. The depletion and abandonment themes then fade and their empathetic qualities are shared with the world out of choice and pleasure rather than fear of loss.

The Inspirational Leader patterns, solidified during the first to third year of life, are focused on control issues in relationships. Having been either overpowered or seductively manipulated, their held fear position is “To give in to feeling is weak.” Their compensating belief is “I’m in control.” Their body reflects the identification with the controller in taking on either an inflated upper body, muscle-bound, overpowering appearance or a more evenly proportioned, approachable looking, but inwardly controlled style. Under stress they will try to control by rising above or manipulating seductively. Breathwork will help them release their exhale, start to trust and feel pleasure in their vulnerable feelings, and to eventually let go and surrender appropriately with others. The breathworker serves as a model for caring strength rather than struggle for control. Their head and heart working together bring out their loving leadership qualities and releases the old tyrannical control of the Inspirational Leader.

The Steadfast Supportive types, developed during the second to fourth year of life, struggle with freedom of expression issues. Squashed in their expression of the “bad me” and smothered with controlling guilt, their fear-based attitude is “No one appreciates me.” Their compensating belief becomes a martyr like position: “My struggle is noble.” Their bodies take on a squashed appearance, with a thick neck, pelvis tucked in, waist short and thick. Their muscles are under continual pressure. Since direct expression of anger is repressed, under stress they often provoke others in passive-aggressive ways. Breathwork helps them complete and release their exhale and shed their experience of being under continuous pressure to please. They are able to deal more directly with their anger. It is crucial that the breathworker avoid going into collusion with their struggle and end up struggling to help them feel better. The strengths of the Steadfast Supportive Type are their abilities to stay with challenges and be helpful to others. When their creative spirit is released, their helping no longer has hidden expectation attached. Their bodies show solid and enduring qualities, along with being truly tender and huggable.

The Gender Balanced patterns set in during the third to fifth year of life. Their theme is gender confusion. How do I safely express myself as a male or female? The held fear posture dictates “If I assert myself spontaneously, I will be rejected.” Trying to gain comfort with their dilemma of not being reinforced for their natural initiative, they adopt a compensatory belief that “My assertion is safer than others of my gender.” The males adopt a very passive, soft style, their bodies have a rounded exterior and a compliant expression. Their true strength is often cloaked with sarcasm and covert manipulation. The females take a very assertive stance, often very competitive with males. Their bodies show a split between upper being quite rigid and lower being more full and weak. Their jaw is characteristically tight. Under stress the males will tend to undermine and the females resort to attack. Breathwork addresses this male/female imbalance by helping to balance the inhale and the exhale, to gain safety in both their vulnerability and their

strength, and to accept safety in their sexual identity. The breathworker provides a new model of acceptance in this regard as they expose their deepest fears of rejection and punishment beneath the surface. As this happens their true potential for blending their male and female sides comes to blossom and they are able both to enjoy themselves as full, balanced humans and share this model with their world.

The Energetic Grounded types, formed during the fourth to sixth year, have as their theme disappointment in intimate relationships. Feeling a deep sense of rejection and betrayal from their initial attempts to relate as a sexual being to their parents, their slogan becomes “No one is going to hurt me again.” Their compensatory belief becomes “I am a loving person who no one understands.” Their bodies portray stiffening for the anticipated love rejection and are armored in the torso region and have a stiff back. Their eyes tend to be bright and they handle affairs of the world well. It is in maintaining intimate relationships that they falter. Under stress they express anger readily. Breathwork helps them integrate their exhale and inhale as well as their heart and their genitals. The breathworker, avoiding getting competitive with them, is able to handle their underlying anger without rejecting them. They begin to learn safety in vulnerability with others and let their natural attractive, alert, capable qualities be shared in healthy, whole relationships.

Comparison Of Traditional And Bioenergetic Diagnoses

The Bioenergetic framework accounts for the extreme cases described in the traditional diagnostic nomenclature. Schizophrenia is an extreme case of frozen Psychic Sensitivity. Depression is found in the collapsing of the Empathetic Nurturing and the inner morass of the Steadfast Supportive. Behavior disorders are typical of the Inspirational Leader who has not

integrated and is under high pressure. Anxiety is the hallmark of many of the types when beginning to deal with their basic themes before they identify and release the emerging fears deepest in their patterns. The difference in the Bioenergetic schema, however, is the their model includes a psychosocial etiology to suggest an approach to dealing with underlying causes not just a biological predisposition. Bioenergetic analysis also includes a continuum of

dysfunction to integration and illness to health for each type. The Bioenergetic approach gives a holistic plan for integration using body, mind, and spirit that is documented.

We all deal with the basic themes of safety, abundance, control, freedom of expression, sexual identity, and intimacy and can identify with the postures humans take toward them. Few want to be labeled psychotic or neurotic. When answering the question of with whom to use Breathwork, the diagnostic framework that is used will have a large bearing on your prognosis, treatment approach, and subsequent success. The label “psychotic” or even “neurotic” does not point to the way in or the way out of the stuckness for that individual. It tends to reinforce that position in the helping agent also.

Notice how hopeful, or fearful, you felt as a prospective practitioner when the diagnostic categories were being discussed from the traditional versus the alternative approach. I still would have caution in using Breathwork with the extreme frozen or held fear position in any of the Bioenergetic Types. I would calibrate my prognosis according

to the standards of individuals using this style of life defense who range from dysfunctional to very productive versus the standards of comparing the “severely mentally ill” to the general population. This helps me, the practitioner, to put their defensive patterns in the perspective of a continuum of wellness, and moving toward integration at their own individual rate, not one dictated by statistics or standards foreign to them.

Summary

In summary, Breathwork is not a psychotherapy, but can be very effectively used as an adjunct approach in some systems of psychotherapy that utilize a mind/body approach. Cautions and recommendations for the application of Breathwork are offered from my experience using both a traditional psychodiagnostic framework and from Bioenergetic analysis. The wholeness of the theoretical diagnostic approach is seen as influential not only to the categorization of candidates for Breathwork, but also to the expectations of the practitioner on how well they will do with it (prognosis) and the success of the treatment (outcome).

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IS BREATHWORK PROBLEM- OR SOLUTION-ORIENTED?

by
Wilfried Ehrmann, Ph.D

What is Breathwork really?

I ask myself this question again and again. When I began my personal experience with Breathwork, I was already familiar with various other therapeutic approaches. I asked this question then. I ask it even more frequently since I began to use breath-therapy with clients. So diverse are the ways the breath takes us, so diverse the processes in Breathwork sessions, so diverse the results and goals achieved ...

There are very few clear answers to this question in the existing professional literature which hardly gives breath-therapy any attention at all. It seems typical to me that Rebirthing is vaguely listed in the German handbook "Psychotherapy: Schools and Methods" in the appendix under distantly related and pedagogical approaches." In a chart that gives an overview of the main therapeutic methods in the book, Rebirthing shows up in a pale space in the background.

How can we find a more appropriate place for Breathwork in the vast field of therapy and personal growth? In this article, I am looking for a new perspective on Breathwork. My question is, what happens when we look at Breathwork through the paradigms of "problem-oriented versus solution-oriented" therapy and "long-term versus short-term" therapy?

1. Problem orientation

The roots of psychotherapy lie in the field of medicine. The first generation of psychoanalysts were all medical doctors. Clients all came with problems which had manifested on the physical level, and the search for a solution was the search for the roots of the problems in the client's life history, especially in childhood. These roots were understood in the context of the model of causality: in analogy to causes of diseases in the medical sense, which have to be identified to find the right cure, neuroses too are effects of causes. The task of the analysis was to detect these problems, bring them to consciousness and resolve them.

When breath-therapy began, some 80 years later, it had an extremely problem-oriented and causal structure – at least from this point of view: a life-history was taken to be a series of traumatic experiences which started at the latest with birth. In addition to that, problems stemming from the transpersonal realm – experiences from the prenatal period, former lifetimes etc. – were also considered to be influential forces (cf. Stan Grof, *The Cosmic Game: Explorations of the Frontiers of Human Consciousness*, State University of New York Press, 1998). The theory of emotional suppression (cf. Seth Bartlett, *Healing Compulsive Behaviour*, unpublished Manuscript, 1989) says – in accordance with many other theories in the field of body therapy – that emotionally highly charged experiences lead to overwhelming feelings which have to be suppressed

in order to maintain inner stability. It takes energy to suppress these emotional energies which reveal themselves in daily life in the form of inadequate emotional reactions and disturbances in perception during later development. In brief: traumatic experiences get solidified as energy blockages in the body; these cause problems in life which can be resolved by clearing the blockage, and this is done by means of the energy of the breath.

A therapy has to attain the realm of initial feelings to be successful. The deeper its access to the area of the earliest problems, the more successful it is. These locations cannot be found on a cognitive map but have to be traced back to the body memories of the body. Thus there is a logical progress from cognitive and verbal therapies to body-oriented and emotional therapies. Many clients come to Breathwork who have already learned to understand the history of their problems, but who have not gone so far as to re-experience them while it is this re-experiencing which brings final healing. (cf. Kylea Taylor, *The Breathwork Experience: Exploration and Healing in Nonordinary States of Consciousness*. Hanford Mead Publishers, 1994)

2. Solution-oriented short-term therapy

In contrast to the "uncovering" therapies described above which are long term methods, solution-oriented short-term therapies try to redirect attention from the past to the future. These approaches – many of them derived from Milton Erickson's hypnotherapy – usually focus on a clearly defined, concrete problem in order to connect it as precisely as possible with a solution. The focus gets narrowed down to the problem as the momentary state of being and the goal as the ideal state of being.

Understanding the past and the whole range of interconnections of a problem is of no interest here. On the contrary, the more you get into the background of a problem the more you get involved in it ("problem hypnosis"), thus sabotaging the solution ("Problems resolve when you stop doing more of the same and stop trying to find their roots"). The crucial point for improvement is to access the inner potential resources of the client that s/he needs to cope with her/his problem, and apply these to further changes in behaviour and attitudes which lead in the desired direction.

In this perspective, breath-therapy can also be seen as a solution-oriented approach. Usually problems which are brought by the client do not get analysed and understood in a cognitive way by reconstructing the history of their suppression but get handed over to the breathing process. Often a session goes like this: The client comes with a certain issue. We talk about it for a short time and work on the formulation of the goal of the breathing session in relationship to that problem, e.g. resolving an aching block in one part of the body by focussing the energy of the breath in this area or strengthening self esteem through recharging the belly area by consciously inhaling into this part of the body. The breath is meant to open up resources of energy which have not been utilised so far and which can now serve in resolving symptoms and patterns.

Breathwork has also proved itself effective as method for inducing states of trance and as an energetic support in work with visualisations of goals or results as it empowers the images. By moving away from distracting thoughts and stimuli from outside and relaxing physical tensions, new entrances into spaces of experience are opened up. These are said to have a specific connection to the image-oriented parts of the unconsciousness.

In particular, when the evolutionary older breathing centre in the limbic system, which is directed by the unconscious, starts to run the breathing process ("It is breathing me" – breath release), the connection channels to the visual right side of the brain are opened up easily.

The 'Hanneman-technique,' is one example of a school of Breathwork derived from Rebirthing which works explicitly in a solution-oriented way, and rejects dealing with problems as counterproductive.

3. Self-induced resources of transformation

When we compare the problem- and solution-oriented models we do not get definite results. Elements of both can be detected in breath-therapy but they do not fully encompass its potential.

In comparison with the problem-oriented model, we know that in Breathwork problems and their contexts (images from the past, and so forth) are evoked and become activated without any need to understand their history. In terms of the solution-oriented model, we see that the result of breath-therapy is that the potential for self-change is set in motion without any external induction by the therapist (e.g. through solution-oriented questions, techniques of pacing, leading, or reinforcement plans, etc.), and resources for solution and healing emerge spontaneously. In contrast to other approaches, these transforming energies are rarely induced externally. Rather, when a space is provided which protects and supports inner concentration, resources to deal with problems and to find new directions of problem-solving develop from within with very little influence on the part of the therapist.

In this way, goals can be attained which are situated much deeper than answers formulated by the conscious and controlling mind. These are the goals which come from the "soul" (cf. Joy Manné, *Soul Therapy*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California, 1997) and reside at a deep level of our being. They can only arise in a space of stillness and relaxation without guidance from outside. It follows that we experience these breathing sessions which we enter without expectations – whether problem-oriented or solution-oriented – as exceptionally deep and releasing. These are the times that both limiting and supportive material can rise from the feeling levels of our unconscious for final integration.

One participant in a seminar wanted to leave before the first breathing session because she felt a depression coming on and did not want to be seen in this state by the others. I suggested that she should just to feel the breath throughout the session, and in this way provide her body with ongoing positive feedback. She decided to stay in the group and entered the breathing session without expectations. For the first time in a breathing cycle she experienced her deep inner pain and could open up to deep feelings and tears. Afterwards she felt cleansed and liberated.

4. Transpersonal therapy

To describe breath-therapy as Transpersonal therapy (meta-therapy), does not mean that breath-therapy is superior to other forms of therapy but that it offers the possibility to transcend the problem-solution axis. Breath-therapy includes a range of therapeutic elements which come as much from a problem-oriented as from a solution-oriented perspective. The central effectiveness of Breathwork can be located in a realm beyond these alternatives.

In Breathwork most of the time results are best when there is no preoccupation with what ought or should happen, or with which problem is to be solved and what the solution should be. Breathwork does not require focussing on a predetermined theme or a direction of change that can be tested in a measurable way. What it needs is openness to an experience which is unstructured and not predetermined. As the breath enables changes on the most subtle level of inner sensations to be sensed in a physical way, the rigid behaviour structures that follow repeating loops all the time in normal experience become destabilised subversively (i.e. below the threshold of conscious control) so that, after a phase of discomfort new structures can be built up. This process is often experienced along with feelings of fear and confusion in the phase when patterns dissolve, and with feelings of relaxation and liberation in the phase of restructuring.

The experiences that come from freeing/liberating the breath are carried over into daily life in an indirect way, which means without being verbally and consciously addressed. It is often better to let a session end without any further discussion or rounding off. As the breathing process encompasses life/moves into life of its own nature, it is seldom necessary to build a cognitive bridge back into life. People frequently report changes in their general mood, a freer flow of feelings, a more open and relaxed view of the realities of life, or other similar experiences as a result of their breathwork.

The breathing process is in its essence oriented towards spontaneity, because it thrives best in a free space where whatever wants to come up may do so. What guides it is the body-soul-system, the unconscious. The therapist steps back as far as possible, because there is not much s/he can add to the development of the process except providing a safe environment. Even if s/he makes suggestions or interventions or gives guidance, the effects of these interventions cannot be foreseen. It is true that Breathwork is resource-oriented but goes beyond making available resources that already exist in that it makes available hitherto unknown resources. According to the reports of many people, the breath paves the way to enter the transpersonal field with resources that transcend the individual perspective.

This transpersonal space of self-experience is not accessible for every person in every situation in the same way. Sometimes a longer period of time is required to gradually tune in to and prepare for this transition. In one case the movement from the individual lifeline of feelings and thoughts to attaining a meta-perspective on the transpersonal level may occur in the first session. In other cases ten or more sessions are needed to find this opening. It is important to know that there is nothing to do or to accomplish in this space but that each process has its inner dynamics and meaning which has to be respected and which determines the point in time when a shift of levels may happen.

The breath shows us through direct experience how inexhaustible the levels of the universe are and how uniquely they manifest themselves in each of us. Therapeutic work based on the breath is so rich in variety that it can never be definitively connected with any one level of experience. Rather we discover that each experience with the breath sends us off on a journey which lets us move from fixed points to limitless vastness, from immovable tracks to new clarity, from complexities to insights.

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ONLY ONE BREATH: BUDDHIST BREATHWORK AND THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS¹

by
Joy Manné, Ph.D.

*“There is only one breath,
even though it has in itself infinite variety,
and infinite power.”*

I. Introduction and Scene-setting

The Buddha was probably born in the fifth century BC – some say a century earlier, some a century later. The India he was born into was going through a time of political and social transition: what had been a predominantly rural economy with wealth measured in kind was giving way to cities and a money economy.² In religions too, this was a time of transition.³ The Buddhist texts attest to many different forms of religion being practised at the time. Some people chose to practice the most severe and desperate forms of asceticism. Some belonged to religions involving various forms of sacrifice and fire worship.⁴ Many different forms of meditation were practised. There was a lot of variety and a lot of choice, and a great deal of interest in the religious quest.⁵

There was also a lot of competition for followers. Teachers competed through public debates with regard to their methods and the benefits that practising these methods

¹ This paper is based on the Buddhist texts in Pali. It was presented as a lecture at the Mystics and Scientists Conference, ‘Breath of Life,’ April, 1998 and is available on tape from The Scientific and Medical Network, Gibliston Mill, Colinsburgh, Leven, Fife KY9 1JS, Scotland. Tel. +44 1333 340492.

Transliteration policy. Following David Brazier’s logic (1995) (but not all of his choices), I have chosen the transliterations for the Pali terms that seem to me most likely to become standard Anglicised terms. I have used my knowledge of English pronunciation as well as of Pali to make my choices: sometimes English pronunciation naturally makes a vowel longer although English does not mark this vowel, while in Pali a long vowel is a different letter from a short vowel. This is a difficult issue and I fear my solutions will not be accepted by all Buddhist scholars. As Buddhism becomes increasingly practised in the West, its terminology will become increasingly understood and the words to describe it will become absorbed into English. This has already happened for *karma* and *Nirvana* and will continue to happen for many other terms. I hope my choices are coherent.

Technical terms. As Buddhist Psychology and Psychotherapy are growing specialisations, I’ve given the technical terms in Pali following their translations in the text or in footnotes.

I thank my husband, Professor Johannes Bronkhorst, for his useful suggestions.

² Warder, 1970:30f.

³ Manné, 1990:83f.

⁴ Manné, forthcoming ii.

⁵ Manné, 1990:83f.

would bring. Convincing arguments could persuade their competitor's followers to convert and gain them the support of kings.¹

The Buddhist texts attest the particular issues that were central to the debates and to the religious quest of that time. Perhaps the most important issue was the nature of Enlightenment and how it could be achieved. In Popperian terms, it was the Buddha's problem situation.² It is important to remember that the Buddha developed his Teaching and his method against a particular sociocultural and religious background. That background was the context for and influenced the development of his Teaching just as our sociocultural and religious background is the context for and influences the way we understand his Teaching and practice his method today.

The Buddha defined the purpose of his Teaching as "bringing an end to Suffering" and his form of Enlightenment consisted in "coming to the end of Suffering." To achieve this goal, he taught many exercises and practices. I'd like to emphasise that first and foremost he taught morality (*sila*).³ He taught that Enlightenment is not possible without the strictest adherence to ethical practice. I emphasise this here, because later I will be concerned with the relationship between the Buddha's breathing method and contemporary psychotherapy, and, most unfortunately, in much contemporary psychotherapy there is no recognition of the importance of morality and ethics.⁴

In the introduction to the *Anapanasati Sutta*,⁵ the famous sutta, or text, on Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing, the Buddha acknowledges that among the monks there are specialists in various aspects of his Teaching. Some are immersed in the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: body, feeling, states of mind and abstract mental objects;⁶ some in the Four Right Kinds of Striving, namely, striving for the non-arising of bad, unwholesome *dharmas* that have not arisen, the abandoning (of those) that have arisen, the arising of wholesome *dharmas* that have not (yet) arisen, and the establishment of wholesome *dharmas* that have arisen;⁷ some in the Four Bases for Spiritual (Psychic) Power: desire to act, strength, states of mind and investigation;⁸ some in the Five Faculties: faith, strength, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom;⁹ some in the Five Powers, which are identical with the Five Faculties;¹⁰ some in the Seven Factors of Awakening: mindfulness, discrimination of *dhamma*, strength, joy, concentration and equanimity;¹¹ some in the Noble Eightfold Path of Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Striving, Right Mindfulness, Right

¹ Manné, 1990, 1992.

² Manné, 1986:125; see also Gombrich, 1988, Chapter 2.

³ See also Gombrich, 1996.

⁴ But for exceptions see Brazier, 1995; Manné, 1997 i, Taylor, 1995.

⁵ MN Sutta 118.

⁶ *Satipatthana: kaya, vedana, states of mind/thoughts/volitions = citta, dhamma.* (Translations after Hamilton, 1996.)

⁷ *Sammappadhana.*

⁸ *Iddhipadas: chanda, viriya, citta, vimamsa.* The *iddhis* are the following shamanic powers: "being one, he becomes many; he makes himself invisible, goes through mountains, walls, space; into the earth; travels through sky, touches sun and moon, travels to Brahma world." (Manné, forthcoming ii 1999)

⁹ *Indriyas: saddha, viriya, sati, samadhi, pañña.*

¹⁰ *Bala:* same as *indriyas*

¹¹ *Sattani bojjhangani: sati, dhamma-vicaya, viriya, piti, samadhi, upekha.*

Concentration;¹ some in the development of loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity,² some in the meditation on foulness;³ some in the perception of impermanence;⁴ and some in Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing – *Anapanasati*. We see from this list⁵ that Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing – *Anapanasati* – is one among many practices in which a bhikkhu could specialise in his quest for Enlightenment.

While not all of the above specialisations lead to Enlightenment, Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing does. It is basic to several specialisations that lead to Enlightenment (but not to all).⁶ It specifically brings to fulfilment the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Seven Factors of Awakening, and Release through Knowledge.⁷ The phrase ‘Release through Knowledge’ designates the achievement of Enlightenment.

What experiences did the Buddha’s Breathing meditation evoke? What problems occurred in its practice? Were there supportive techniques taught alongside it? Was further guidance given? For whom did this practice succeed, for whom fail? There are no answers at all to these very interesting questions in the Canonical texts but the commentaries are interesting.

II. Anapanasati: the Buddhist Breathing Meditation

The famous description of the Buddhist Breathing exercises occurs several times in the Pali Canon,⁸ most notably in the *Mindfulness of In- and Out- Breathing Sutta* (*Anapanasati Sutta*, MN, sutta 118⁹). Mindfulness of breathing concerns much more than observation and awareness of breathing as the text below shows. The Buddha is speaking,

And how, bhikkhus, is mindfulness of breathing developed? How does it become very fruitful and deserving of great praise?

This is how. A monk goes into the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an uninhabited place. He sits cross-legged with his body erect and generates mindfulness. Being mindful he breathes in and being mindful he breathes out.

1. As he breathes in a long breath he recognises “I am breathing in a long breath.” As he breathes out a long breath, he recognises “I am breathing out a long breath.”
2. As he breathes in a short breath he recognises “I am breathing in a short breath.” As he breathes out a short breath, he recognises “I am breathing out a short breath.”
3. He trains himself: “I will breathe in experiencing my whole body.” “I will breathe out experiencing my whole body.”

¹ *Ariya atthangika magga*: Right view, thought, speech, action, livelihood, striving, mindfulness, concentration.

² *Metta, karuna, mudita, upekha*.

³ *asubha*.

⁴ *anicca*.

⁵ See Bronkhorst (1985), Gethin (1992) for studies on this list.

⁶ See also SN V 329f and Gethin, 1992:56-59, 283.

⁷ *Paññavimutti*.

⁸ SN V 321 = Vin III 70 where it is inserted into a reproach from the Buddha to the monks that suicide is unseemly MN I 425f, Sutta 62.

⁹ A *sutta* is a discourse.

4. He trains himself: “I will breathe in calming bodily activity.” “I will breathe out calming bodily activity.”¹
5. He trains himself: “I will breathe in experiencing joy.” “I will breathe out experiencing joy.”
6. He trains himself: “I will breathe in experiencing well-being.” “I will breathe out experiencing well-being.”
7. He trains himself: “I will breathe in experiencing mental activity.” “I will breathe out experiencing mental activity.”
8. He trains himself: “I will breathe in calming mental activity.” “I will breathe out calming mental activity.”
9. He trains himself: “I will breathe in experiencing mind.” “I will breathe out experiencing mind.”
10. He trains himself: “I will breathe in pleasing the mind.” “I will breathe out pleasing the mind.”
11. He trains himself: “I will breathe in concentrating the mind.” “I will breathe out concentrating the mind.”
12. He trains himself: “I will breathe in releasing the mind.” “I will breathe out releasing the mind.”
13. He trains himself: “I will breathe in observing impermanence.” “I will breathe out observing impermanence.”
14. He trains himself: “I will breathe in observing freedom from passion.” “I will breathe out observing freedom from passion.”
15. He trains himself: “I will breathe in observing cessation.” “I will breathe out observing cessation.”
16. He trains himself: “I will breathe in observing renunciation.” “I will breathe out observing renunciation.”²

The monk is to practise the breathing meditations in a state of consciousness that is ardent, mindful and aware.

This practice leads to the development of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness³ (*Satipatthana*). The First Foundation which comprises the full observation of the nature of the body is developed through exercises 1-4; the second, the full observation of the nature of feelings including the feeling of breathing in and out, through exercises 5-8; the third, the full observation of the mind, through exercises 9-12 – and here the Buddha points out that an inattentive and unmindful person is not able to do this meditation; and the fourth, the contemplation of *dhammas*: mental states or mind objects or abstract mental objects, through exercises 13-16. The development of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness leads in its turn to the development of the Seven Factors of Awakening: mindfulness, discrimination of *dhammas*, strength, joy, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity. This in its turn leads to Release through Knowledge.

The earliest division of this text is as in Table I.

¹ The first part of the sutta is elaborated in the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta* (DN Sutta 22) and the *Satipatthana Sutta* (MN Suttas 10, 119).

² MNIII 82f (Sutta 118).

³ See Gethin, 1992, Chapter 1.

TABLE 1. *Anapanasati* and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness

| Four Foundations of Mindfulness | Anapanasati |
|---|--|
| 1. Observing the nature of the body | 1 As he breathes in a long breath he recognises, “I am breathing in a long breath.” As he breathes out a long breath, he recognises ... 2 ... a short breath 3 He trains himself, “I will breathe in experiencing my whole body.” “I will breathe out experiencing my whole body.” 4 ... calming bodily activity... |
| 2. Observing the nature of feelings, including the feeling of breathing in and out. | 5 ... experiencing joy... 6 ... experiencing well-being ... 7 ... experiencing mental activity... 8 ... calming mental activity... |
| 3. Observing mind. | 9 ... experiencing mind. ... 10 ... pleasing the mind... 11 ... concentrating the mind ... 12 ... releasing the mind ... |
| 4. Contemplation of <i>Dhammas</i> | 13 ... observing impermanence... 14 ... observing freedom from passion ... 15 ... observing cessation ... 16 ... observing renunciation. |

There are very interesting early texts which elaborate the meditations on the body and on other elements found here.¹

I believe that we cannot today practise the various methods handed down in the Buddhist texts in the way that the Buddha practised and taught them unless this happens “by accident,” and even then we can never know. We do not know whether the Buddha actually taught the breathing meditation that has been handed down through the texts. We do not know much about the way his followers practised the meditation, and in any case the method of practice surely evolved over time and varied with individual practitioners and teachers, just as it does today. Besides that, we live in vastly different times. We think in an almost completely different vocabulary except for the simplest terminology. We have had Freud and Jung, Reich and Lowen, meditation teachers from various Buddhist traditions, and contemporary Breathwork of various kinds.² There are elements in the Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing meditation that the texts and commentaries explain to us in one way, and that we in our contemporary meditation practices and psychotherapies are very likely to use in a different way because we live here and now.³ Nevertheless, it seems to me that the contemporary Breathwork that I practise can evoke experiences which are comparable with what is evoked in this Buddhist breathing meditation.

¹ E.g. DN Sutta 22; MN Suttas 10, 119.

² For information contact the International Breathwork Foundation. The address is at the end of this article.

³ See Brazier (1995, 1997), Epstein (1995), Kawai (1996), Manné (1997 i).

These exercises cover the main realms of therapy and personal growth as we know them today. The first two exercises (1-2) correspond to contemporary Breathwork Therapy. Others who have found the breath basic in therapy and personal and spiritual development include Donald Winnicott (a Freudian analyst),¹ Wilhelm Reich, Alexander Lowen (who created Bioenergetics), Leonard Orr, the founder of Rebirthing, Sondra Ray, Phil Laut and Jim Leonard (founders of Vivation), Gay Hendricks, Gunnel Minett, Jim Morningstar, myself and many others who use Conscious Breathing Techniques. Exercises (3-4) in the Buddhist Breathing Meditation correspond to contemporary body therapies, a rapidly increasing field. All of the therapists and methods above are involved, as are Autogenic Training, Biofeedback, Eugene Gendlin's Focusing method, and other similar techniques. Exercises (5-8) correspond to therapy of the emotions. Again, all of the therapists and methods above are involved in healing work with the emotions, as are the innumerable techniques of Positive Thinking and Creative Visualisation available today. Exercises 7-8/9 correspond to all forms of analysis and psychotherapy, and all the body therapies. Where Gestalt has been to some extent against the mind, these exercises may be considered anti-Gestalt, or at least against those elements in Gestalt which are unfavourable to the exploration of the mind element. The Buddhist meditation sends us "into our head!" so that we can better sort it out.

Exercises 10 – 12, and 9 also, correspond to what Maslow called 'Peak Experiences.'² This is the realm of Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology, and certainly of Rebirthing and Conscious Breathing Techniques. Exercises 13-16 may in contemporary parlance also be called Transpersonal experiences, Peak experiences or Satori.

I have mapped out correspondences in Table 2, below.

I will come back to this subject.

¹ My friend Merkel Sender, a senior educational psychologist, has reminded me how important the symbolism of "in" and "out" is in psychoanalysis and in cognitive development. The in-breath can be compared to Freud's oral stage and the out-breath can be compared to Freud's anal stage and each of these will carry some of the symbolism of that stage. In Kleinian terms, "in" can be the bad breast that gives too much milk and threatens the infant; "out" can be the infant screaming in protest. Further, with regard to education and learning: learning concerns taking in, and is therefore comparable to the in-breath; processing and communicating are ways of giving out and therefore comparable to the out-breath. Bruner's theory of turn-taking can also be related to this in-out symbolism. Undoubtedly this is a fruitful field for any analyst or educator who is interested in including Breathwork among her/his skills.

² See Maslow, 1968, 1971.

TABLE 2 *Anapanasati* and Contemporary Therapies

| Contemporary Therapy | Buddhist Breathing Meditation |
|---|---|
| Breathing therapy : Winnicott (Freudian), Reich (Reichian), Bioenergetics (Lowen), Rebirthing (Orr, Ray, Leonard, Laut, Morningstar), Conscious Breathing Techniques (Hendricks, Manné, etc.) | 1. As he breathes in a long breath he recognises that he is breathing in a long breath; as he breathes out ... 2. ... a short breath ... |
| Body Therapies e.g. Reich, Lowen, Rebirthing, Autogenic Training, Gendlin's 'Focusing,' the new field of Somatics | 3. He trains himself to breathe in and out experiencing his whole body 4. ... calming bodily activity |
| Positive Emotions All contemporary therapies and Positive Thinking techniques, etc. | 5. ... experiencing joy ... 6. ... experiencing well-being |
| Mind All forms of analysis and psychotherapy; all the new methods of personal growth and spiritual development, all the body therapies. | 7. ... experiencing mental processes ... 8. ... calming mental processes ... 9. ... experiencing (his) mind |
| Peak Experiences Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology, Reichian, BioEnergetics, Rebirthing, Conscious Breathing Techniques | 10 ... in pleasing the mind ... 11 ... concentrating the mind... 12 ... releasing the mind... |
| Enlightenment (not only according to the Buddhist definition) Transpersonal Psychology, Peak Experiences, Satori | 13 ... observing impermanence ... 14 ... observing freedom from passion ... 15 ... observing cessation... 16 ... observing renunciation. |

III. Explanations from the commentaries

Understanding the method of the Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing Meditation is not simple. The text only provides an outline. If we aspire to practise in the way the Buddha taught, we need more information. The information closest to the Buddha's time is found in the ancient Buddhist commentaries, *Patisambhidamagga – The Path of Discrimination* and *Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification*.¹

Patisambhidamagga, a Canonical commentary

The *Patisambhidamagga, The Path of Discrimination*, is a Canonical commentary attributed to Sariputta,² one of the Buddha's most respected disciples. The section on the Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing meditation is considered very early indeed,

¹ See von Hinüber, §§ 120, 245-250 for the relationship between these texts.

² Norman, 1983 : 87.

possibly going back to the third century BC.¹ It may even go back earlier as breathing meditations are attested from a very early time. The Jains, who precede the Buddhists, had a meditation which involved stopping the breath² and the Buddha practised a meditation that involved stopping the breath before he attained Enlightenment when he was still experimenting with different purported paths to Enlightenment.³

What particularly concerns *Patisambhidamagga*? Sariputta was a famous Abhidharmist: an analyser⁴ and lister of phenomena or *dhammas*. *Patisambhidamagga* is concerned with the elements of knowledge that arise through the breathing meditation, concentration and what disturbs it, and techniques for observing the breath.

Patisambhidamagga tells us that Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing leads to over two hundred (different) kinds of knowledge. Among these two hundred kinds of knowledge, are the eight kinds of knowledge of the obstacles and benefits to concentration. All of these obstacles and benefits are feelings or behaviours that are familiar to us in our contemporary everyday life. There is nothing strange or incomprehensible to us among them. We can discover them all in ourselves, arising and ceasing, each day, both obstacles, and benefits, as we concentrate on our ordinary and special tasks and activities. The obstacles are experiences that come up when we start to become conscious, take our lives more seriously, commit ourselves to our personal and spiritual development, and practice whatever form of meditation or spiritual practice we choose, or whatever forms of therapy. They stand between us and the state of consciousness that necessary for success in mindfulness of breathing: being ardent, mindful and aware.

The obstacles are addiction to sensuality, ill-will, obstinacy and rigidity, agitation, doubt, ignorance, boredom and all unprofitable ideas; the benefits are renunciation of sensuality, good will, perception, equanimity, analysis of ideas, knowledge, gladness, and profitable ideas. Table 2 shows that each benefit is a means of overcoming an obstacle.

¹ Warder, 1982, xxxix; but see von Hinüber who finds Warder's arguments speculative, and prefers the 2nd century AD as the period when this text was composed.

² See Bronkhorst, 1993, Part II, Chapter III, Part III, Chapters VII & VIII. I am grateful to my husband Johannes Bronkhorst for drawing my attention to this.

³ Bronkhorst, 1993, Part I, Chapter I. MN I 243.

⁴ Enlightenment is also a cognitive state. See Manné, 1986.

TABLE 3 Eight Kinds of Knowledge of Obstacles and Benefits to Concentration¹

| Obstacles (<i>Paripantha</i>) | Benefits (<i>Upakara</i>) |
|--|---|
| <i>Addiction to sensuality</i> (kamacchando) | Renunciation (of sensuality) (<i>Nekkhamma</i>) |
| Ill-will (<i>byapado</i>) | Good will (<i>abyapado</i>) |
| <i>Obstinacy and rigidity</i> (thinamiddham) | Perception (<i>alokasañña</i>) |
| <i>Agitation</i> (uddhaccam) | Equanimity (<i>avikkhepo</i>) |
| Doubt (<i>vicikicca</i>) | <i>Analysis of ideas</i> (dhammavavatthanam) |
| Ignorance (<i>avijja</i>) | Knowledge (<i>Ñāṇa</i>) |
| <i>Boredom</i> (arati) | <i>Gladness</i> (pamojjam) |
| <i>All unprofitable ideas</i> (Sabbe akusala dhamma) | <i>All profitable ideas</i> (Sabbe kusala dhamma) |

As well as diagnosing psychological obstacles that may arise through the practice of Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing, *Patisambhidamagga* diagnoses the obstacles to concentration that occur through the action of breathing. Awareness of the breathing can be distracted through following the breath in and out of the body, through longing for the in-breath or the out-breath, and through being distracted by the in- or out-breath. It can also be distracted when one of the breaths causes gasping for the other, or when one of the breaths distracts the mind from concentration on the place of entry of the breath on the nostril, or where sensations at the place of entry of the breath on the nostril distract the mind from concentrating on the breathing. Awareness can be disturbed where in-breath changes to out-breath, and vice versa. It can be distracted, too, through running after the past or through longing for the future. If awareness is dull, it becomes distracted by laziness; if it is overexerted it becomes agitated; if it is over-straining it becomes disturbed by desire; if it is unfocussed it is attacked by ill-will. Under these circumstances, the mind and the body become violent, shake and throb. We can understand from this that the mind may be overcome by emotions and that these will then affect the body. Concentration, mindfulness and restraint are remedies against these disturbances.

The ancient Buddhists did not have the language of psychotherapy but they did have a diagnostic ‘breath language’² of their own in which to describe the process. What they describe is familiar to us. Their various ways of being distracted can easily be understood in psychotherapeutic terms: ‘following’ corresponds to seeking after, being dissatisfied, not being in one’s own breath-space; ‘longing’ – wanting something we don’t have; ‘gasping’ – being unable to breath, usually because of emotions; ‘sensations’ – bodily feelings of whatever kind that lead to discomfort; ‘changes’ – events that require us to adapt; ‘running after the past or future’ – not living in the present; ‘dullness’ – not being able to see one’s way out of a problem; ‘laziness’ – not doing the necessary work to

¹ Tr. p. 164.

² See my 1997 series of articles in on Breath Language.

make progress; ‘over-exertion’ – trying too hard; ‘over-straining’ – hung up on something, wanting something too much; ‘ill-will’ – feeling destructive. Concentration, mindfulness and restraints are remedies against our present kinds of suffering too.

Expressed in beautiful similes, the *Patisambhidamagga* teaches us techniques for observing the breath that bring the mind to concentration. One should not watch the breath entering and leaving the body because that involves giving attention to more than one element and this causes concentration to become disturbed. One should watch the place on the nostril where the breaths enter and leave the body in the same way as a man watches a saw when he is cutting wood: he watches the place where the saw touches the wood, and not the forward and backwards movements of the saw!

From awareness of the lengths of the breaths, the Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing meditation continues to awareness of the body supported by the breathing. The *Patisambhidamagga* teaches us that there are two aspects to the body: the mental and the physical. While doing this part of the breathing meditation various body-phenomena may arise, such as bending in all directions, shaking, agitation, vibrating and trembling. The meditator works to calm these. Eventually the mind and the body are calm, and after a lot of effort, the meditator – if s/he is successful – gets to the good bits: joy, well-being, objectivity, stability, freedom from greed, hatred and delusion, perceiving impermanence, letting go and Enlightenment.

It is interesting how closely related these breathing-induced phenomena are to what can happen in a contemporary Rebirthing or Conscious Breathing session. I will say more about that below, but first it is useful to look at what the great commentator Buddhaghosa adds to our knowledge of how the Buddha’s breathing meditation was practised – at least in his time, if not before then.

The Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa

Buddhaghosa is a fifth century commentator. This means that he lived almost 1000 years after the Buddha. Besides editing many commentaries, he wrote his own work, the *Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification*, which is a “compendium of Buddhist doctrine and metaphysics,” and a “manual for meditation masters.”¹ In *Visuddhimagga* we find also a commentary on the section on Mindfulness of In- and Out Breathing in the *Patisambhidamagga*.²

What particularly concerns Buddhaghosa with regard to the breathing meditation? He gives guidance on the appropriate environment in which to do it. He is concerned with method and technique with regard to the correct body posture, whether the meditation should begin with an in- or an out-breath – the Pali can be understood either way, how to work with the body-breath-mind relationship, how the meditation should be learned including the role of the meditation teacher, techniques for developing concentration, and phenomena that are concomitant on practising this meditation including the disappearance of the breath and the appearance of imagery.

¹ Norman, 1983:120f.

² See Warder, 1982, xlii. See also von Hinüber, 1996: 60. All references to the translation below are to paragraph numbers in Chapter VIII of Ñanamoli’s translation.

Buddhaghosa tells us that the meditation subject of Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing is held highest by Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas and their disciples:¹ it is a very important meditation subject. He emphasises the need for a secluded place for this meditation so that the mind is not distracted.² He speaks of the importance of a stable and comfortable posture, one that is

peaceful and tends neither to idleness nor to agitation, (with) thighs fully locked, ... the upper part of the body erect with the eighteen backbones resting end to end,” [because] “when (the meditator) is seated like this, his skin, flesh and sinews are not twisted, and so the feelings that would arise moment by moment if they were twisted do not arise.”³

The posture of the body has to support the mind in its quest for concentration, and should not be distracting. Freud had the same idea, although he advocated a different posture!⁴

Buddhaghosa wonders whether the meditation should start with the in-breath or with the out-breath. He makes a case for the out-breath on the grounds that

when an infant comes out from the mother’s womb, first the wind from within goes out and subsequently the wind from without enters in with fine dust, strikes the palate and is extinguished [with the infant’s sneezing].⁵

Buddhaghosa explains carefully what is meant by “a long breath” and “a short breath:” in an elephant or a snake’s body, the breath has a long way to go, while in a dog’s or hare’s body, the breath has but a short way to go!⁶ He explains that awareness should discern the beginning, the middle and the end of the breath. Problems can arise with discerning any of these aspects.⁷ The task is to experience the body and to calm its activities, in particular the disturbances described in the *Patisambhidamagga*. In his efforts to calm the mind so as to be able to observe his breathing, the meditator may go through a period of strained breathing, so that he is forced to breath through his mouth, or the breathing may be so subtle as to be difficult to discern. This happens because before he learns to observe his breathing, he is unable to give his attention to the subject of calming the body.⁸ The same happens in contemporary Conscious Breathing Techniques.

Buddhaghosa explains that through this meditation one may enter progressively into the four trance states (*jhanas*).⁹ Conscious Breathing Techniques lead to a variety of trance states.

How is this meditation to be learned? Buddhaghosa is clear. First of all one should do everything that has to be done to develop moral practice and ethical living (*silas*), and then one finds a teacher.¹⁰

¹ Vism 269, see also 284.

² Vism 269, tr. §153.

³ Vism 271, tr. §160.

⁴ See also Epstein, 114 and Manné, 1997 i.

⁵ Vism 272, tr. §164.

⁶ Vism 272, tr. §165.

⁷ Vism 273f, tr. §172.

⁸ Vism 275.

⁹ Vism 275.

¹⁰ Vism 277.

The meditation subject is developed in stages. Parts 1-4 are for beginners. Parts 5-16 are for meditators who have attained trance states through the practice of parts 1-4.¹ The meditator starts by using counting because this makes it easier to concentrate. This is the method:

When counting, he should not stop short of five or go beyond ten or make any break in the series. By stopping short of five his thoughts get excited in the cramped space, like a herd of cattle shut in a cramped pen. By going beyond ten, his thoughts take the number [rather than the breaths] for their support. By making a break in the series he wonders if the meditation subject has reached completion or not. So he should do his counting without those faults.

When counting, he should at first do it slowly, as a grain measurer does. For a grain measurer having filled his measure, says 'One,' and empties it, and then refilling it, he goes on saying 'One, one' while removing any rubbish he may have noticed. And the same with 'Two, two,' and so on. So taking the in-breath or the out-breath, whichever appears [most plainly], he should begin with 'One, one,' and count up to 'Ten, ten,' noting each as it occurs.

As he does his counting in this way, the in-breaths and out-breaths become evident to him as they enter in and issue out. Then he can leave off counting slowly (late), like a grain measurer, and he can count quickly, [that is, early,] as a cowherd does. For a skilled cowherd takes pebbles in his pocket and goes to the cow pen in the morning, whip in hand; sitting on the bar of the gate, prodding the cows in the back, he counts each one as it reaches the gate saying, 'One, two', dropping a pebble for each. And the cows of the herd, which have been spending the three watches of the night uncomfortably in the cramped space, come out quickly in parties, jostling each other as they escape. So he counts quickly (early) 'Three, four, five' and so on up to ten. In this way the in-breaths, and out-breaths, which had already become evident to him while he counted them in the former way, now keep moving along quickly.²

Buddhaghosa explains that the purpose of counting is to help to unify the mind, as a rudder helps to steady a boat. It is a device for settling mindfulness on the in-breaths and out-breaths as objects by preventing the dissipation of thoughts. The need for counting stops when mindfulness remains settled on the in-breaths and out-breaths as its object.

The meditator develops skill in the counting technique and becomes able to observe his breath just as it gets to the beginning of the nostril.³ A further technical note tells us, "Those in-breaths and out-breaths occur striking the tip of the nose in a long-nosed man and the upper lip in a short-nosed man."⁴ Evidently it helps to know one's nose size if one wants to do this meditation successfully!

The meditator may have problems discerning the beginning, middle and end of the breath. Even if he can discern these, he should not follow the breath into and out of the body as this leads to disturbance, as we have already learned from *Patisambhidamagga*. How are we to understand "following the breath in and out of the body?" Buddhaghosa explains: "The navel is the beginning of the wind issuing out, the heart is its middle and the nose-tip is its end. The nose-tip is the beginning of the wind

¹ Vism 277, tr. 186.

² Vism 278f, tr. 190-192.

³ Vism 280, tr. §195.

⁴ Vism 283f, tr. §210.

entering in, the heart is its middle and the navel its end.”¹ So if our attention gets drawn to our navel or our heart, we risk being distracted. What has to be observed is the place that the in-breaths and out-breaths come and go. Mindfulness is directed at the nose tip. Attention is not given to the in-breaths and out-breaths as they approach and recede, though the meditator is aware of them as they do so. During a session of Conscious Breathing Techniques, when we have our attention on our belly (navel) or our heart, our focus is our feelings, we are involved with them, and they may overwhelm us until we have worked through the experience that underlies them and integrated it.

Interesting altered states of consciousness can occur through counting: “when the bodily disturbance has been stilled by the gradual cessation of gross in-breaths and out-breaths, then both the body and the mind become light: the physical body is as though it were ready to leap up into the air.”² Altered states of consciousness that involve unusual physical and mental experiences and sensations are well-known in contemporary breathwork.

One problem in this meditation is that the breath can become more subtle at each higher stage, until the point where it is no longer manifest:³ it can disappear. What is the bhikkhu to do at this point? He should not get up to consult his teacher or do anything else that might disturb his process. Instead the technique is as follows:

The bhikkhu should recognise the unmanifest state of the meditation subject and consider thus: ‘Where do these in-breaths and out-breaths exist? Where do they not? In whom do they exist? In whom not?’ Then, as he considers thus, he finds that they do not exist in one inside the mother’s womb, or in those drowned in water, or likewise in unconscious beings, or in the dead, or in those attained to the fourth jhana [trance state], or in those born into a fine-material or immaterial existence, or in those attained to cessation [of perception and feeling]. So he should apostrophize himself thus: ‘You with all your wisdom are certainly not inside a mother’s womb, or drowned in water or in the unconscious existence or dead or attained to the fourth jhana or born into the fine-material or immaterial existence or attained to cessation. Those in-breaths and out-breaths are actually existent in you, only you are not able to discern them because your understanding is dull.’ Then fixing his mind on the place normally touched by the breaths, he should give his attention to that. (Vism, 283, tr. §209)

If meditation is successful, i.e. if concentration is achieved, a sign produced by perception will occur. This sign is an altered state of consciousness. It is different for different people and may be a feeling (a light touch like cotton or silk, a rough touch like silk-cotton seeds) or an image (e.g. a star, a cluster of gems or pearls, a lotus flower, a chariot wheel, the moon or sun’s disk).⁴ Altered states of consciousness that involve similar sensations and visions are a well-known phenomenon in contemporary breathwork. The meditator should inform his teacher about the sign. The teacher, however, should not validate it, nor should he discuss it, or enter into its meaning, or whether it is real or not⁵ – we should perhaps ask ourselves whether contemporary

¹ Vism 280, tr. §197.

² Vism 282, tr. §205.

³ Vism 283, tr. §208.

⁴ Vism 285, tr. § 215f.

⁵ Vism 287, tr. §218f.

breathworkers should be equally detached and discrete. The meditator should cultivate the sign, and will, through it, achieve the trance states (*jhanas*).¹

My means of these meditations the meditator attains arahantship: he becomes Enlightened. Arahantship attained this way permits the bhikkhu to choose the moment of his death. Other meditation subjects do not necessarily permit this.²

In contemporary Conscious Breathing Techniques, too, body position can be important, as can the length or shortness of the breath. I am not aware that counting is ever used in this Breathwork. The location of the breath in the body, however, is significant, the breath may disappear,³ and various phenomena and trance states occur.

IV. Explanation from a contemporary teacher

The commentaries exist because the Canonical texts need further explanation. There is no elaboration in text on the Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing meditation regarding what the meditator is supposed to do at each stage, nor does it describe what is likely to happen to him as he practises it. The commentaries take up these points. Their style is succinct and can be rather difficult to understand and thus also to translate, and they assume the basic knowledge of the informed practitioner of their time. It is interesting and useful to look at what Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk, contemporary meditation teacher and commentarist has said about this meditation, and how he has adapted the various parts of it to meet contemporary needs. Many people think he is an arahant – a fully Enlightened being. I will discuss his book, *Breath! You are Alive: Sutta on the Full Awareness of Breathing*. I myself have not studied with him. I've chosen him because of his evident wisdom and compassion, and his beautiful writing.

What particularly concerns Thich Nhat Hanh? He is concerned with the role of the body in the breath-body-mind relationship, the mental formations or what the mind produces, applying the exercises to daily life, and Oneness.

For Thich Nhat Hanh, breath, mind and body are in relationship. The breath is the means to come into the present moment.⁴ The mind is the breath, and both the action of breathing and the process of awareness of breathing are aspects of the body.⁵ Awareness of the breathing, therefore, is awareness of the whole body: “Breathing is the vehicle that brings us home to our body,” he says.⁶ As the breath, mind and body are interactive processes, we can use our breath to calm our body⁷ and this calmness will also calm the mind.⁸ Concentration comes about when the mind and the breath are one.⁹

Thich Nhat Hanh recognises the importance of the body in spiritual practice and the fact that this is often overlooked. He says,

¹ Vism 286, tr. §222.

² Vism 292, tr. §242, see MN I 426.

³ Taylor, 1991.

⁴ P. 41.

⁵ Pp. 23-27.

⁶ P. 45.

⁷ P. 49.

⁸ P. 50f.

⁹ p. 65.

You may think somehow that being aware of your body is not an important spiritual practice, but that is not correct. Any physiological, psychological, or physical phenomenon can be a door to full realisation. (p. 48)

Meditations based on the body are surprisingly abundant in the Buddhist texts. I think this has to do with the importance for effective meditation practice of grounding which is the basis of being present in the moment, in consensus reality, as opposed to being lost in the mind and its various fantasies. The body is an excellent instrument for grounding.¹ The common expression, “having one’s feet on the ground,” tells us that.

How should we be aware of our body? Thich Nhat Hanh advises us not to blame it, but rather to “embrace our wounded body.”² With regard to breathing in relationship to the body, he says,

Right mindfulness is a ray of light that recognises the different parts of our body, helps us become acquainted with them, and shows us how to take care of them. ... Medical research confirms that to show this kind of care to the different parts of our body is an important part of healing.” (p. 47, cf. p. 49)

He suggests breathing with awareness of all the parts of the body,

You can lie down and guide yourself in this meditation, “Breathing in, I am aware of my eyes. Breathing out, I smile to my eyes,” and then do the same for the other parts of your body.”

This is a gratitude exercise,³ and the themes of gratitude and of taking a positive approach so appreciated in modern psychotherapy run all through this book.

Thich Nhat Hanh is positive, too, about feelings. “Our feelings are us,” he says. The purpose of the Breathing exercises 4 – 8 is that we go back to our feelings and that through these we develop joy and well-being and transform suffering.⁴ “If we have an unpleasant feeling,

we take that feeling in our arms like a mother holding her crying baby. The “mother” is mindfulness and the “crying baby” is the unpleasant feeling. Mindfulness and conscious breathing are able to calm the feeling. If we do not hold the unpleasant feeling in our arms but allow it just to remain in us, it will continue to make us suffer. “Breathing in, I touch the unpleasant feeling in me. Breathing out, I touch the unpleasant feeling in me. (p. 57)

Instead of turning ourselves into a battlefield, we accept what we are experiencing with compassion, non-violence, and the light of awareness. It is, in any case, easier for a mind that is peaceful and happy to become concentrated than for a mind filled with sorrow or anxiety. Thich Nhat Hanh takes an energy approach to feelings. Good feelings produce nourishing energy. Difficult feelings need transforming through the light of awareness and through conscious breathing.⁵

¹ Manné, 1997: Chapter 12.

² P. 45.

³ Compare Manné, 1997, Chapter 7.

⁴ P. 24f.

⁵ P. 57-59.

Mental processes are the objects of Breathing exercises 9-12 and here again Thich Nhat Hanh takes an energy approach:

To identify a mental formation with the help of conscious breathing means to recognise, embrace and become one with that mental formation, because the subject that is recognising, embracing and becoming one with the mental formation is the energy of mindfulness.¹

Here, mindfulness is the energy that transforms mental formations or processes for the better.²

He recommends that we cultivate particular mental processes (he uses the term “mental formations”) such as “love, understanding, compassion, joy, knowing right from wrong, the ability to listen to others, non-violence, and the willingness to overcome ignorance, aversion, and attachment. ... [and] destructive traits, such as anger, despair, suspicion, pride, and other mental formations that cause us suffering.” Mental processes like “faith, compassion, goodness, equanimity, liberty, and so on” are the basis of happiness, and “we only need to touch .. and water (them) with conscious breathing for them to manifest.” His technique for releasing the mind is to locate the knots that bind the mind to the past or to the future, or to latent desires or anger. “Looking deeply at the nature of mental formations such as fear, anger, anxiety, and so on brings about the understanding that will liberate us.”³ No contemporary therapist of whatever tendency could disagree with this.

For the last part of the exercise, 13-16, his interpretations are classical: mind and its object are the same; everything is in the mind, but everything that exists is impermanent, including the breathing. Perceiving impermanence leads to understanding how all things are “inter-conditioned” and that there is “no separate, independent self.”⁴ Without passion or attachment, we see that everything is disintegrating, and so we give up holding on to anything, and we become free.

With regard to method and technique, Thich Nhat Hanh says that there is no need to practise the exercises in sequence; one can take any one of the exercises and practice it for months.⁵ He illustrates how we can apply these exercises in daily life as we perform our daily routines and use them as a means to stop unnecessary thinking, and the fears, anxieties, insomnia, bad dreams, headaches and so forth that it gives rise to and to prevent disturbing and unpeaceful thoughts from inhabiting our minds. We can adapt the first exercises to everything we do, even, for example, “Breathing in, I am passing another car.”⁶

An element that aids concentration in the technique for observing our breathing is “self-talk.” Comparable with the way the commentaries encourage counting, Thich Nhat Hanh says, “When we recognise a deep, slow breath, we can say ‘Deep,’ as we breath in, and ‘Slow,’ as we breath out.”⁷ Good psychotherapy can sometimes be a form of “self-

¹ P. 61.

² P. 61.

³ Pp. 26-27.

⁴ P. 28.

⁵ P. 29.

⁶ P. 42.

⁷ P. 44.

talk” in the presence of a compassionate witness. The meditation on the In- and Out-Breathing is most frequently translated in the form of self-talk: i.e. “He recognises ‘I am breathing in a long breath,’” although the Pali could with equal validity be translated into indirect speech: “he recognises that he is breathing in a long breath.” The early Buddhists who redacted these texts in this language may or may not have intended the use of ‘self-talk;’ the language leaves this option open.¹

The altered state of consciousness of Oneness is a theme that is present in this book. The ancient texts also use the expression “one-pointed” to describe the concentrated mind. The In- and Out Breathing meditation can bring us to various experiences of oneness, all of them induced by the breath. These include the oneness of mind and body,² and the oneness that comes about when we have fully identified a mental formation.³ The Breathing meditation induces other altered states of consciousness including the perception that reality is beyond all ideas.⁴

Throughout the inner work of the Breathing meditation, leading to every step of progress that is made, is the *breath*. It is through the breath that concentration – the essential altered state of consciousness without which no progress can take place – is induced and enhanced.

Breathing is an object of our concentrated mind. We put all our attention on our breath and our mind and our breath become one. That is concentration. (p. 65)

It may seem strange to emphasise the fundamental power of breath in a *Breathing* meditation, because it is so obvious. Nevertheless, when I talk about contemporary Breathwork and the very interesting results it gives rise to in the next section (see also Table 2), I’m talking about the same breath that the Buddhists observe in their breathing meditation, and that contemporary Buddhist teachers focus on when they teach. There is only one breath, even though it has in itself infinite variety, and infinite power.

¹ I am grateful to Professor Johannes Bronkhorst for help with this point.

² P. 50f.

³ P. 61.

⁴ P. 73.

Table 4. Thich Nhat Hanh and *Anapanasati*

| Thich Nhat Hanh | Anapanasati |
|---|---|
| 1. Following the breath in daily life, eliminating forgetfulness and unnecessary thinking | 1 As he breathes in a long breath he recognises, “I am breathing in a long breath.” As he breathes out a long breath, he recognises ... 2 ... a short breath ... |
| 2. Awareness of the body | 3 He trains himself, “I will breathe in experiencing my whole body.” “I will breathe out ... 4 |
| 3. Realising the unity of body and mind | 5 ... calming bodily activity ... |
| 4. Nourishing ourselves with the joy and happiness of meditation | ... experiencing joy ... 6 ... experiencing well-being ... |
| 5. Observing our feelings | 7 ... experiencing mental activity ... 8 ... calming mental activity ... |
| 6. Caring for and liberating the mind | 9 ... experiencing mind ... 10 ... pleasing the mind ... 11 ... concentrating the mind ... 12 ... releasing the mind ... |
| 7. Looking deeply in order to shed light on the true nature of all dharmas | 13 ... observing impermanence ... 14 ... observing freedom from passion ... 15 ... observing cessation ... 16 ... observing renunciation. |

V. Contemporary Conscious Breathing Techniques

We don't know whether Rebirthing is a spiritual experience or not. If Rebirthing is religious, then breathing is religious. (Orr & Ray, 73)

Rebirthing merges the inner and the outer breath, which creates a bridge between the physical and the spiritual dimensions. (Orr & Ray, 77)

Rebirthing is merging the inner and the outer breath to experience the fullness of divine energy in the physical body. (Orr & Ray, 78)

Breathing is certainly religious. In many languages the words for soul, spirit and breath are the same.¹

I, too, am a contemporary commentarist on the Buddha's Teaching – here I am commenting on the practice of the Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing meditation.² I have taught meditation very classically, using various exercises from the Pali texts, although I do not teach it now. I do however, practice and teach contemporary

¹ Minett, 1994, p. 144; Manné, 1997 iii, p. 13.

² See also Manné, 1997 i & ii, forthcoming, i & ii.

breathwork, including both the psychotherapeutic, and the personal and spiritual development aspects of it, in a way profoundly influenced by the meditation exercises in the Pali texts. Techniques from Buddhist practice and meditation are highly integrated into my practice and teaching of Breathwork which I call Conscious Breathing Techniques.¹

My first experience in Breathwork was through Vipassana meditation which began in 1965 and had the privilege to learn from Dhiravamsa. Years later, in 1984, I discovered Rebirthing and had sessions. Rebirthing seemed to me at that time to be a form of accompanied meditation. Gradually over time I integrated meditation and Rebirthing to arrive at the way I work with the breath.² At the time I did this intuitively, but in preparing this paper, and rereading the *Anapanasati Sutta*, I see with much interest that the integration is to some extent systematic. (Table 5 below.) I must admit that it was through preparing this paper that I read the Buddhist commentaries on the Breathing meditation for the first time. I find the similarities between Rebirthing and Conscious Breathing Techniques, and the Buddhist breathing meditation surprisingly strong, and this moves me. Perhaps in some ways we are experiencing now what the early Buddhists experienced such a long time ago.

What particularly concerns me in my practice and teaching of Breathwork? I am concerned with ethics, with developing awareness, with analysis in the sense that it serves awareness, and with freedom for each person to discover their own highest truth. I do *not* teach any particular religious or spiritual path. For me, the breath is the path. It will take each person in the spiritual direction that is truest and most authentic for her or him.

Basic to Buddhist practice, without which the breathwork exercises cannot be undertaken, is the practice of Ethics – *sila*. Ethics is basic to all the Rebirthing and Breathwork trainings I know. It is a goal of the practice of Breathwork to become ever more the ethical being that we each truly are.

In the Buddhist breathing meditations, the first two concern the technique of watching the breath: we are to attend to its length. Of course, one cannot observe the length of the breath without being aware of where the breath goes in the body, so it is hardly surprising that the first four of the Buddhist exercises also concern the body. In Conscious Breathing Techniques, my first step with clients – which I call *Awareness Work with the Breath* or *Analytical Breathwork* – is to get them to watch their breath, and to tell me what is happening. I ask them to tell me because so many people do not have developed awareness. If they do not tell me what is happening – if I do not become a witness to their “self-talk” – they may become absorbed and lost in their own flow of thoughts, and lose contact with the present moment. It is surprising how many people do not realise when their own breath is long or short, where it is in the body, or where it can and cannot flow. Therefore, when I observe a change in their breathing I may ask, “What is happening?” or “Where is your breath now?” This way, I draw their attention to their own breath and body changes and events, and, through the process of attending to their breath, my clients develop awareness. As the Buddhist exercises show, and the commentators acknowledge, the breath and the body are related: they are one. Awareness of the breath leads to awareness of the body. It has to – the breathing takes place in the

¹ See Manné, 1997 i.

² I give a full account of this in Manné, 1997 i.

body. Moreover, attention to the body is grounding: it keeps people in the here and now, present and aware in their body.¹

In Breathwork it is easy for many people to go directly into trance states. Buddhagosa says that the first four meditations lead to the trance states necessary for undertaking the meditations that follow.² Very often people have no foundation into which to integrate the traumas that these trance states may bring to consciousness or the ecstatic states they may bring about. In the early levels in my method of working I avoid having clients going into trance by keeping their attention firmly in the present and by having them sitting comfortably rather than recumbent.

When a person is aware of her/his breath and or body, s/he becomes aware of what is going on in her/his mind, and mostly in the beginning this means becoming aware of their suffering. Once we are aware of where our breath goes in our body, we also are aware of where it cannot go because of various forms of tension. The body moves about, as the Buddhist commentaries say. Of course it does. We know that thoughts of anger, fear, sorrow, frustration, pain, anxiety, all have their own body language. A body racked by these feelings moves around: it tells us that it is inhabited by these feelings – that *we* have these feelings, even though we may be unconscious of them and their source and reason.

These feelings have to be dealt with according to the wisdom of the times. What did the earliest Buddhists do? If we read the *Thera-* and *Therigatha*, the verses composed by the monks and nuns, we see that besides their various meditation practices, they *talked* about their problems. Some examples taken at random from the monks verses show that the monks talked about the problems of being addicted to pleasure-seeking,³ of wavering faith,⁴ of painful past lives,⁵ and of unskilful character tendencies.⁶ Examples taken similarly from the nun's verses show that the women talked about the range of problems related to being a woman, including the problem of being sexual,⁷ of being a possession to be married off at the will of one's parents,⁸ and of ageing and losing one's sexual attractiveness.⁹ They also talked about the grief of losing a child or a husband to death.¹⁰ They talked about the problem of being a servant who is abused by her masters.¹¹ The nun's verses are more personal and contain more references to feelings,¹² as we would now expect – contemporary psychology tells us that women are the experts on feelings and relationships.¹³ These verses testify to the personal problems that the practitioners had, which are also the kind of problems that come up in psychotherapy and certainly in Breathwork. They are the proof that talking about problems helped to work them through, also at the time of the Buddha!

¹ See Manné 1997 ii, pp. 89-93; iii, pp. 16f.

² See above.

³ Thag. 213.

⁴ Thag 246-248.

⁵ Thag 258-260.

⁶ Thag. 423-428.

⁷ Thig 139-144.

⁸ Thig 448-522.

⁹ Thig 252-270.

¹⁰ A daughter in Thig 51-53; a son in Thig 133-138; children and a husband in Thig 213-223, 312-337.

¹¹ Thig 236.

¹² See Horner, 1930. See also Blackstone, 1998 for a most interesting contemporary study of these texts.

¹³ See, e.g. John Gray's many highly popular books.

The monks and nuns not only talked about their problems, they also sat in meditation observing them, until there was a breakthrough. In Conscious Breathing Techniques, during the awareness work I spoke of above, clients become aware of their suffering, tell an receptive and sympathetic witness about it, recognise the cause, and go through some form of catharsis and then integration. This period of analysis is essential at the beginning. It unloads tension and frees energy.¹

My second level is *Introduction to Independent Breathwork*.² When a client is more advanced, it is possible to breath through problems. Leonard Orr, the founder of Rebirthing, says,

The one percent of Rebirthing that is not enjoyable is due to your unwillingness to give up your misery. All discomfort in conjunction with Rebirthing comes with holding on to negativity, misery or pain. ... You can let go of human misery to be a free and natural person. Your human personality can be filled with serenity, joy, health and spiritual wisdom. (Orr & Ray, p.71f)

Gradually at the second level, clients learn to internalise their awareness and analysis. I am required increasingly less as a witness to their self-talk as they learn to be their own witness. They progress to breathing through their suffering, rather than going into it and its causes. This is essential for successful practise of the Buddhist Breathing meditation. In meditation, meditators discipline themselves to maintain their concentration on their breath. They are required to “breath through” the emotions and other experiences that come up and not to be distracted by them. This, however, does not always work. Sometimes the emotional trauma with its concomitant physical phenomena refuses to be “breathed through” even by an advanced meditator. It demands to be worked with and through. Analysis is required for the integration of the problem. In Conscious Breathing Techniques at this level there are both options: sometimes clients will “breath through.” When this is not possible, there are a variety of techniques available for working with and through problems and traumas that come up.³ Once again, at this level, I generally avoid that the client enters trance states through having them sitting rather than recumbent.

By the time the client reaches my third stage of *Conscious Connected Breathwork*,⁴ awareness and analysis have been developed and are available, independence is well established and “breathing through” has become easier and more frequent. Trance states are no longer a problem, and the client may be sitting or recumbent.

I consider my first three stages as essential preparation for such powerful and shamanic contemporary forms of Breathwork as Rebirthing (as it is often practised)⁵ and Grof’s Holotropic Breathwork, both of which I situate in my fourth level. These forms of Breathwork usually lead to trance states and people do their breathwork recumbent.

¹ See Manné, 1997 ii, p. 164 and iii, pp. 15-18 for a further exposition with case histories.

² See Manné, 1997 ii, pp. 164f and iii, pp. 18f for a further exposition with case histories.

³ See Manné, forthcoming i, for an analysis of a meditation case history and some suggestions where the use of Conscious Breathing Techniques would have made a positive contribution to the meditation practice.

⁴ See also Manné, 1997 ii, p. 167; iii, p.19.

⁵ See my discrimination between Traditional Rebirthing and Gentle Rebirthing in Manné, 1995, p. 21; 1997 ii, pp. 163, 167-169.

My fourth, fifth and sixth levels are *Working the Breath*, *Advanced Energywork with the Breath*, and *Advanced Awareness Work with the Breath* or Meditation.¹ Now clients have discipline and concentration and can really “take on” their breath and cope with the bodily and mental phenomena that come up. These clients have the basics necessary to attempt all the Buddhist Breathing meditations. They can do their breathwork sitting or recumbent, according to their preference, and may or may not go into trance.

Table 5 shows the relationship of my method, called Conscious Breathing Techniques, to the Buddhist Breathing meditations.

TABLE 5 *Anapanasati* and Conscious Breathing Techniques

| Contemporary Breathwork Therapy | Buddhist Breathing Meditation |
|--|--|
| Level 1 Awareness work with the Breath/Analytical Breathwork Sitting posture Grounding in the Breath Breath- & body-based awareness and analysis Avoidance of Trance States | 1. As he breathes in a long breath he recognises that he is breathing in a long breath; as he breathes out ... 2. As he breathes in a short breath ... 3. He trains himself to breathe in and out experiencing his whole body 4. ... calming bodily activity... |
| Level 2 Introduction to Independent Breathwork Level 3 Conscious Connected Breathwork Sitting or recumbent; Grounding in the Breath and Body; Body-based, Breath-supported Awareness and Analysis; Transition to Connected Breathing & Trance States | 3 & 4 |
| Level 4 Working the Breath Lying or sitting posture; Grounding in the Body; Breath may be connected; Breathing through Possibility of Trance States | 5. ... experiencing joy... 6. ... experiencing well-being... |
| All levels , with competence and spiritual potential increasing through practice and healing; possibility of Trance States | 7. ... experiencing mental processes... 8. ... calming mental processes... 9. ... experiencing (his) mind... |
| Levels 4; 5 Advanced Energywork with the Breath Level 6 Advanced Awareness Work with the Breath Various Trance states, specially Concentration | 10. ... pleasing the mind... 11. ... concentrating the mind... 12. ... releasing the mind... |
| Level 6 – Going beyond Ego – Various Trance states | 13. ... observing impermanence... 14. ... observing freedom from passion... 15. ... observing cessation... 16. ... observing renunciation. |

VI. *Anapanasati* and the nature of Consciousness

What conclusions can we draw about the nature of consciousness from this Buddhist text on the Breathing Meditation and the practices it recommends? The

¹ See Manné, 1997ii, p. 166, iii, pp.19.

question, what are the human givens¹ for psychotherapy and personal and spiritual development is an important one and I can only give a part of the early Buddhists' and my own answer in this paper. Table 2 contains this part of my answer. It shows the strong similarity between the path the Buddha recommended towards Enlightenment, and the range of contemporary methods for psychotherapy and personal and spiritual development. In a way, these parallels are to be expected. Both are dealing with the human condition, and neither it nor the related problems seem to change over the millennia. In all attempts to develop Consciousness, lay or related to a particular religion, the same themes come up again and again. In spite of contemporary optimism about human moral and spiritual evolution, achieving this seems to be the fortunate destiny of only a very few individuals in any era.

Each era has its own vocabulary, its own emphasis, its own way of explaining spiritual values, but as this examination of Buddhist Breathing methods shows, the basic elements that have to be addressed remain the same. Ethics has to be developed. We have to take on our own character and become fully self-responsible about our own psycho-history. We have to take on our spirituality by whatever name we call it. Some speak of our capacity to develop trance states and various other altered states of consciousness, some of our "god-gene", some of our capacity to believe in and seek "the Highest Truth." In Buddhism it is called the quest for Nirvana.

Like the "god-gene," and perhaps the same as it, is our search for paradise: the paradise of Nirvana and being unconditioned, the paradise of Enlightenment, the paradise of knowing the Highest Truth, the paradise implied in all other conceptions of a state of complete mental and physical ease while being human. I call this the paradise myth. This quest is a human given. However we conceive of it, the early Buddhist texts tell us that it is the way of the breath. As there is *only one breath* – however manifold its diversity – perhaps all of us who practise Breathwork today are having similar experiences to the early Buddhists. Perhaps – who knows – we are treading the same path as the Buddha taught so very long ago.

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¹ See Griffin and Tyrrell, 1997, for an attempt to define these.

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Abbreviations

DN – Dī gha Nikaya
MLDB – Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha
MN - Majjhima Nikaya
Ps - Patisambhidamagga
SN - Samyutta Nikaya
Thag - Theragatha
Thig - Therigatha
Tr. - translation
Vin – Vinayapitaka.
Vism - *Visuddhimagga*

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Joy Manné has been interested in Buddhist Psychology since she started meditating in 1965, and interested in combining meditation and contemporary breathwork since 1984 when she had her first Rebirthing experience. She is trained in Spiritual Therapy with Tilke Platteel-Deur and Hans Mensink. Joy is the author of *Soul Therapy* (North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA, 1997) and numerous articles on Breathwork. She is the editor of this journal, and of the International Breathwork Foundation Newsletter.

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THE PULMONARY TREE

by
Hilde Rapp, Ph.D.

Out of the rotting black mass
new gases rise
are breathed in
by green leaves
which in their turn
exhale
gaseous food
for that inverted tree of life
whose roots are in the heavens
and whose crown
embraces our heart
like a triumphal wreath

As we inspire
and expire
we practice each day
how to permit a little more life
and a little more death
until the soul is distilled
from the body
and we are purified
both in life
and in death
the elixir and the stone

The soul soars on thermals
upwards
greeny silver
like the Shekhina
whose spirit nourishes our being
as we shed
like silver rain
the ashes
of the impurities
burnt out by our internal fires
fanned by the bellows of our lungs
working in the depth of our body

Great upcurrents of breath
lift the wings of our being

so we may to hover
over the waters of our imagination
that fluid medium
cupped in millions of tiny spheres
which transmit the elixir of life
across their iridescent surface
to our bicameral heart

In the alembic
of our flaming heart
we breathe new life
into the spent blue black venal blood
until it is
transformed
into the implicate immanent indigo
which receives what is not yet

Energised by new hope
and urgent purpose
our blood issues forth red like a lion
roaring through our arteries
to inspire our feeling hands
to touch
caress
and handle
to give shape to what we may become

As long as we breathe down into our feet
empowering them to listen
to the ground
of our human destiny
we will be inspired
to walk upright
and look ahead with intelligent eyes

Wholehearted
our left receptive chamber
married to our right transmissive chamber
in that conjunctio oppositorum
which is the wellspring and motor
of all human action
we may become
cognisant of those shadows
in which the symbols of our humanisation
are turned in diabolis
unmetabolisable half truths

unmarried meanings
unable to engender inspired deeds
dissipated barren words
ready to be sloughed off
like the dead skin
on the serpents tail
which like the hide
which will not become human skin
is returned to compost

Unusable meanings rot down
to the nigredo of primal matter
starting up a new cycle
in the eternal exchange of gases
filtered by the pulmonary tree

As we breathe
into our bicameral heart
it becomes the organ of discernment
telling apart nourishment from poison
giving hands from grasping hands
listening feet from feet of clay
living signs from empty words
so we may breathe a word
softly
humbly
into the receptive ear of our companions
giving human meaning to what we have accomplished
before we breathe in anew
to begin a new cycle
of inspirations and expirations
until the whole world
is filled with living breath

About the Author

Hilde Rapp works as an independent consultant with individuals and organisations to help them address problems with living, working, and learning in a complex multicultural society. She draws on many different ways of understanding the human condition and she encourages people who work with her to make use of available resources in creative ways. She is Chair of the British Initiative for Integrative Psychotherapeutic Practice (BIIP).

CREATIVE INTROSPECTION – AN INTRODUCTION

by
Joy Manné, Ph. D.

Breathwork is likely to lead to spiritual experiences and, indeed, almost inevitably does for most clients and practitioners. As this is well known (see Gunnel Minett, *Breath and Spirit: Rebirthing as a Healing Technique*, London: The Aquarian Press, 1994), many people come into Breathwork for this very purpose: they are in search of spiritual experiences. All the professional breathworkers I know are actively involved with their own spiritual quest, however they describe it. All Breathwork trainings that I know of include, and indeed are focussed on, the spiritual element, and I do not know how a Breathwork training could be thorough and effective if it left this aspect out. In order to serve their clients' process of development Breathworkers are required to be able to facilitate spiritual development. (See Kylea Taylor's excellent books on this subject, self-reviewed in this issue of *The Healing Breath*.)

By 'spiritual' I mean 'seeking for the Highest Truth.' (I've discussed this in my book *Soul Therapy*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California, 1997, Chapter 1.) 'The Highest Truth' is, of course, not limited to any one religion or collection of ideas and practices, nor does any person or religion have the monopoly. I am, however, convinced that living an ethical lifestyle respectful of all life-forms and of our planet is inseparable from any definition of the 'Highest Truth.'

In my experience, and also through my intention, my clients find their own form of spirituality. I find the fulfilment in the privilege of supporting and sharing with my clients their own, autonomous process of discovery of their own vision of and aspiration towards the Highest Truth. In this process, I learn a great deal from them, and my own spiritual beliefs become broadened and enriched.

Recently a client – lets call him John – came to me saying, 'I need to learn how to be spiritual, and I know you can teach this to me.'

Of course I was deeply moved by John's confidence, and very sensitive to the responsibility placed upon me.

After a year of hard work on both sides with ups and downs and moments of impasse and crisis, we both succeeded. An essential aspect of this process were the questions John would ask about certain behaviours and attitudes which both he and I (and many others) would classify as spiritual. One of these question was, 'How do I learn what compassion is?' John truly believed that he did not know, and I also had the idea that he genuinely did not know in his heart, although he could easily have given the dictionary meaning from his head. John understood the meaning of the word, but experientially, could not imagine producing compassionate behaviour in the circumstances that were problematic and where it would be useful to him to have and to apply that vision.

I had the inspiration to use OH cards. I call these 'introspective tools.' In clinical psychology they would be called 'projective tools.' They function by bringing to consciousness ideas and beliefs, and even knowledge. What we are conscious of, we can take responsibility for. I'm pleased to say that I was able to invent an effective focus, the client worked hard, and the exercise was very fruitful and successful.

Although I regularly use creative images of all kinds: cards, words, painting, movement, and so forth to promote creative introspection, this experience made me more consciously aware than ever before of their importance in contemporary spiritual development. This experience made me decide to open the rubric *Introspective Tools* in *The Healing Breath*.

Ever more packs of cards or games come onto the market, many of them very powerful and beautiful. In Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology – into which categories of psychology Breathwork belongs – the terms ‘introspective tool’ or ‘creative image’ to refer to these are preferable to and pleasanter than the rather clinical ‘projective tool,’ with its implications that projections are in and of themselves ‘wrong’ and ‘mistaken’ and have to be rendered conscious and dealt with, rather than acknowledging that they are unconscious contents which are fruitful and informative when brought to consciousness and used correctly. (See *Soul Therapy*, pp. 129-132) I have therefore chosen to use the term ‘creative image’ for these helpful objects, and the classification ‘Creative Imagination’ for this rubric in *The Healing Breath*.

Oh Cards

Oh Cards are a set of 88 cards each with a word on it or occasionally a phrase, and 88 smaller picture cards which fit onto the word-cards while leaving the word visible. To take ten words at random, they include: HABIT, DANGER, SHOULD, GUILT, VICTIM, ROT, CONFUSION, DISGRACE, SUPPRESS, RESIST. Having been scrupulously honest about taking words at random, I notice that the “happy” words are not represented. They are there too, and include JOY, PLAY, and WONDERFUL – to give some further examples. The pictures are in colour and they are beautiful. Each is open to interpretation and people do not always see the same thing. Again to take ten at random: I see a man sowing seeds in a well-tilled field; an alleyway that is blocked off with a notice “Dead End”; a box on a chequered background; two runners on a race track; a plate with lunch or supper on it on a table; an orange form which could be masculine or feminine, behind which is the same shape but larger in pink, then in pink-violet, then in blue-violet against a blue background; a donkey in a desert landscape; a man in a suit in a foetal position in the corner of a room; a bright yellow sun shining on green hills, a forest. The pictures are suggestive and beautifully painted. Some have violent themes: someone is about to get stabbed in the back; a hand is about to be hacked off. Some are overtly sexual but not pornographic or offensive.

Good clear rules for usage come with the cards. These respect Gestalt principles: users have choices and there is no superstitious surrendering ones autonomy to imagined messages, as people so often do with introspective tools. For instance, “Rule 1. “A player may choose to pass, to **not** play the cards drawn. This can be done with or without explanation, revealing the cards or not. A pass may not be challenged. Rule 2. A player may not be interrupted. Rule 3. A player may not interpret another player’s cards. Rule 4. One player may not contradict another’s interpretation of the cards.” I find these rules sane and refreshing, and they undoubtedly promote autonomy!

While the rules and suggested ‘games’ are good, these cards lend themselves to limitless invention and creative exploitation. The exercise I gave John to help him learn what compassion is went as follows. He was to turn up any word card and any picture card, seen or unseen according to what he felt like. Then he was to invent a compassionate thought related to what he saw. Supposing he turned up HABIT and ‘a man sowing seeds on a well-tilled field’ – the first two I turned up at random to illustrate the words and pictures for this article – he might perceive compassion in the habitual relationship between humankind and nature, caring for the earth, tilling the field, being nurtured by the earth. He might also perceive the contrast with the absence of compassion in contemporary farming techniques and the lack of care for our planet. John was to work through the cards in this way, taking a lot of time. After about three months, he had achieved his goal, and was increasingly behaving in a compassionate way in all situations.

Recently I gave a woman who cannot make good relationships with men the following exercise: she was to take a word card and place a picture on top – both cards chosen at random, or consciously as she preferred and to think in a meandering way about men in that context. For example, supposing she chose DANGER and ‘an alleyway blocked off at the end with a “Dead End” sign’. Then her associations might include exploring masculine vulnerability, her demands on men and her ability to relate to their vulnerability, the fact that neither her father or her brother are able to be vulnerable with her, and so forth. The important part was to be “meandering” and not to produce swift, intuitive associations, which might risk being superficial. I cannot say how she has got on, as I only gave the exercise recently, but I will not be surprised if within a few months she will be in a profound relationship with a man, free of conditioning and stereotyping.

I’ve used OH Cards very successfully for several years now, in all sorts of circumstances: to aid communication, to free the mind to make associations, in a mandala formation to integrate a series of Breathwork sessions when therapy came to an end, and so forth. Their usage is only as limited as one’s imagination. I thoroughly recommend them.

Oh Cards can be obtained from Moritz Egetmeyer, Postfach 1251, D-79196 Kirchzarten, Germany. Tel + 49 7661 6362; Fax + 49 7661 6312.

E.mail OH-Publishing@t-online.de.

Internet <http://home.t-online.de/home/OH-cards>

BOOK REVIEW

Larry Rosenberg with David Guy, *Breath by Breath: The Liberating Practice of Insight Meditation*, forward by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Shambala, Boston, 1998. ISBN 1-57062-335-X

This is a book about how to use the breathing exercises of the Anapanasati Sutta which Larry Rosenberg calls “a kind of Buddhist science of breath”. (p. 20) It came out after my article ‘Only One Breath: Buddhist Breathwork and the Nature of Consciousness’ was completed. It has a forward by Jon Kabat-Zinn who says:

“It is commonly said that the ancient peoples of the north have many words to describe the subtleties of what we refer to as ‘snow,’ and that those of the forest have hundreds of words for shades of green. Anybody who meditates knows that the same might be said of the breath. Each breath is its own universe. ... No two breaths are the same; no two moments are the same. Each one is our life. Each one is infinitely deep and complete in itself. The challenge here is to embody and live this awareness, ... to find our own way, breath by breath, to taste silence and discover liberation within each and any breath.” (p. xi)

All Breathworkers of whatever discipline would agree with this.

LR has studied meditation with Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and Thich Nhat Hahn. In his introduction, ‘Finding My Way’ he describes his encounter with the *Anapanasati Sutta*. His teacher, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explained to him that “the breath was the ideal vehicle for teaching Buddhism in the West; it didn’t carry the cultural baggage that mantras, koans, and other methods do.” (pp. 3-4) Rosenberg describes the sixteen contemplations (see Only One Breath) and their usage in this down-to-earth way, “You can use the sutra as a training program or as the description of a process, but however you use it, you can’t force these steps. They will happen in their own time; you can’t bring them about. You can prepare the ground, certainly, and make a sincere effort, but ultimately your body and mind do what they want, and you won’t have much say about it.” (p. 5)

Rosenberg gives his own translation of the breathing meditation which is not identical with mine. Although his is not quite a literal translation, the sense is right when, for example, he says “Sensitive to the whole body, I will breathe in ...” (p. 8), and that was the Buddha’s intention when he insisted that his teaching was to be conveyed in the words that come naturally to the teacher – *sakkaya nirutti* – rather than rigidified into passages learned by rote. (Vinaya II 139)

Chapter 1 concerns “Breathing with the Body” and concerns the first four breathing meditations. LR gives a background to the breathing meditation exercises and shares his experiences in practising them. He discusses technique, including the importance of a stable sitting posture, whether or not eyes should be open, what mindfulness is – “like a mirror, which does not judge what it reflects” – and the relationship between mindfulness and intimacy and how this is good for relationships. (p. 16-18)

LR really understands the breath and all its symbolism. He is always practical and sensible, and also inspiring. Here are some examples:

On the relationship between breath and life: “When we focus on the breath, we are focussing on the life force. Life begins with our first breath and will end after our last. To contemplate breathing is to contemplate life itself.” (p. 19)

On “our life-long conditioning to control:” “We’re terrified of chaos ... Our tendency is to ride the breath, push it along, help it out, especially when we hear that ... it can lead us to enlightenment. All that is like a clarion call to the ego, which begins to tell the breath how to be. ... That isn’t the instruction. The instruction is to let it be, to surrender to the breathing.” (p. 21)

On the breath’s potential, “If you’ve sat with the breath for even a few minutes, you’ve seen that this practice is an open invitation for everything inside you to come up. You see your wild mind, ...” (p.21)

On Breathwork experiences, “For some people, breathing isn’t a terribly pleasant process. A lifetime of faulty breathing, often accompanied by emotional blockages, has made the breath an unattractive object of attention ...” (p. 25)

On the relationship of breath and body, “the conjunction of mind and body, with the breath as the meeting place.” (p. 32)

On breath and life, “The act of breathing begins our life as we come out of the womb; in our last moment, when we cease breathing, our life is over. It only makes sense that the breath should also have a profound influence on all the moments in between.” (p.40)

There is a section on ‘Varieties of Breathing.’ (p. 31)

LR gives a good, clear description of the walking meditation, pointing out that the Buddha said it was important to develop mindfulness in all four postures: sitting, standing, walking and lying down.” (p. 28) The classical Buddhist meditations are presented, including the meditation on death. He is always practical: method follows suggestion, plentifully illustrated by examples and coloured with stories of personal experiences and mythology.

Chapter 2 is called “Breathing with Feelings” and describes the 5th – 8th breathing meditation. Here LR has a lot to say about the relationship between rapture and reality. Meditators can get into ego fantasies of rapture. Cleaning the toilets is a cure for that. On emotions he says, “Emotions arise because you are not mindful of the feelings.” (p. 59) He has many perceptive things to say about feelings, including the problem of identifying with them (p. 64), and again, practical advice with good clear methods for dealing with them, (p. 66) including sound advice on dealing with fear. (p. 72)

Chapter 3 is called “Breathing with the Mind,” and describes the 9th – 12th breathing meditation. It includes how to deal with its defilements, the *kilesas*: greed, hatred and delusion. LR especially advises, “The point is to change our mind from a battlefield, where we’re always fighting these states, or getting lost in them, to a place of peaceful coexistence. Then these visitors, these guests in consciousness, don’t have such power.” (p. 88) Excellent advice indeed! There is also advice on meditating with joy and rapture. Ethical practice is fundamental in Buddhism. LR describes the *silas* or ethical commandments of Buddhism as “intelligent guidelines to warn us of areas where we typically create problems for ourselves.” (p. 104) In the Anapanasati Sutta, as in all Buddhist texts ethics comes first. Practice will achieve nothing unless the ethical base is thorough. This chapter also considers the problem of attachment.

Chapter 4 is called “Breathing with Wisdom” and describes the practice of the last four breathing meditations. The first of these meditations concerns impermanence. As LR says, “Even on the simple in-and-out breath, the law of impermanence is clearly evident: no two breaths are the same.” (p. 117) Impermanence is closely related to suffering in Buddhist teachings, and as LR points out, it is how the mind reacts that makes the difference between pain and torment. (p. 120) With the teaching on impermanence and suffering is closely connected the teaching on what is not the self – *anatta*. About this, LR quotes Buddhadasa, who said so insightfully “There is no doubt that the breathing is taking place. Can you see that there is no breather to be found anywhere? The body is empty, the breath is empty, and you are empty.” (p. 3) LR explains how it is to empty the mind (p. 132) and how to practise with emptiness (p. 136).

Chapter 5 is called “The Condensed Method: Breathing with the Way Things Are.” Various ways of practising are described here, and importance is given to the need to be flexible. One can compare what is said in this chapter with the last chapter of Wilfried Ehrmann’s article in this journal.

Chapter 6, “Breathing with Daily Life,” teaches how to bring breathing awareness into normal life rather than keeping it outside it, only for retreats. Again, LR is so sensible and unpretentious. Chapter 7, “Breathing into Silence,” teaches how to value silence, to appreciate it when “nothing happens” in Breathwork (p. 191), and to arrive at “silence in action” when there is “doerless doing ... you *just* wash the dishes, just vacuum the floor.” (p. 194)

There is a full translation of the Anapanasati Sutta in the Appendix.

As I read this book and prepared my review, I was struck time and again by the similarities between the advice LR gives to people practising meditation-breathwork, and the advice any Rebirther or practitioner of Conscious Breathing Techniques might give to their clients. Again and again it is the same advice. So much is similar with regard to method and technique, advice and purpose in what meditation teachers and Breathworkers do. I also remembered how eclectic the Buddha was. Before his enlightenment he studied with the various teachers of his time and was familiar with and accomplished in their methods. I have no doubt that were the Buddha alive now, he would be doing the same: studying the available methods and choosing with good sense what worked best on the path to enlightenment. After all, there is only one breath.

Joy Manné, Ph.D.

AUTHORS REVIEW THEIR OWN BOOKS

The Breathwork Experience: Exploration and Healing in Nonordinary States of Consciousness by Kylea Taylor. Hanford Mead Publishers, Santa Cruz, California, 1994. Soft Cover, 192 pp. \$16.95. ISBN #: 0964315807

My intention in writing this book was to provide a clear, concise, and complete description of breathwork using examples from actual breathwork experiences in participants' own words. I wanted to discuss the theories of Stanislav Grof, M.D. and the opportunities in breathwork for healing trauma and assisting recovery from addiction.

The work of Stanislav and Christina Grof has changed the ordinary and nonordinary lives of thousands of people all over the globe. One of them was me. I began participating in breathwork in 1984 and could not find much about it in the library. Ten years later, there was still no introductory book about breathwork providing information on the process and theory and answering some of the common questions asked by people, who have never done breathwork or who are just beginning to participate. I wanted to honor Stan and Christina's work by writing a short introductory book about Holotropic Breathwork that was designed to respond to different levels of interest and involvement. I wanted it to be appropriate for those who have never done breathwork; for those who were in the midst of ongoing breathwork sessions; and for people who wanted to know about breathwork because their friends, family, and co-workers were participating. The book also became a basic description of the breathwork process for therapists whose clients have become interested in breathwork. It was designed to answer the questions of when, how, why, and with whom breathwork can play a part in transforming lives.

I was trained in a particular style of breathwork: Holotropic Breathwork, I realize that the breath is used in many other techniques and models, and the experiences that a breathwork participant derives are similar no matter what technique is used. Although in this book I am writing about inducing nonordinary states using the breath, and specifically about the technique of Holotropic Breathwork, much of the information is relevant to other nonordinary state work. It may be useful also to those working with other breathwork systems, using shamanic techniques, and to those whose nonordinary states occur spontaneously.

For people who have been participating in breathwork already, it contains information about how to work with the images, feelings, and issues that are coming to consciousness, how to support oneself during this period, and how to add supportive therapy to the therapeutic process of breathwork. There are chapters with special information on issues related to post-traumatic stress, childhood sexual abuse, and recovery from addiction.

I have interspersed examples from actual breathwork experiences (written in participants own words) into the description of Grof's cartography of the psyche. I have tried to select examples of breathwork experiences which are proportionally representative of a normal group of workshop experiences.

Breathwork participants report physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual healing effects which they consider to be highly significant therapeutic events in their lives. I make a distinction between therapeutic and therapy. The breathwork I describe does not

have specific objectives. It does not require a therapist, though it is therapeutic. Participation in breathwork workshops does, however, enhance the ongoing psychotherapeutic process as an adjunct to professional therapy. Facilitation of breathwork requires considerable experience and special skills.

My own inner tunneling through the sensory, biographical, perinatal, and transpersonal domains described by Grof has allowed me to surface in unimagined new places. I have emerged and re-emerged from continued exploration to move upon new landscapes: geographical, intercultural, interpersonal, philosophical, and vocational. Not the least surprising horizon was the vision of writing this book. The experiential work I have done with the Grofs showed me that trusting the process is a principle that applies to ordinary life as well as to breathwork workshops.

The Ethics of Caring: Honoring the Web of Life in the Professional Caring Relationship by Kylea Taylor. Hanford Mead Publishers, Santa Cruz, California, 1995. Soft Cover, 288 pp. \$20.95 ISBN #: 0964315815

Jack Kornfield wrote in his foreword to *The Ethics of Caring* that it "provides unique help to volunteer and professional caregivers who want to sort out confusing ethical dilemmas in seven categories including love, truth, insight, and oneness as well as the more well-known ethical issues of money, sex, and power."

One of the most important concepts of the caring professions in modern times is the idea that the caregiver herself and what she brings to the caring situation as a person is more important to the outcome of the care than the choice of technique she employs in giving the care. The caregiver must have the ability to travel deeply and empathetically with the client into uncharted and often frightening territory. In order to navigate effectively, the caregiver must have familiarity with the territory, understanding of the difficulties and the pain that may be encountered, and most of all a sense of trust that it is indeed safe and ultimately healing to travel through these areas.

This book has been written to be used as a text in training breathwork practitioners, massage practitioners, hypnotherapists, ministers, hospice workers, and therapists. Practicing professionals can also use it as a self-reflection. Professional training which incorporates emphasis on self-examination and inner exploration could enable caregivers to gain the familiarity and confidence in these explorations which are necessary to hold the light for others.

From ten years of doing my personal work in nonordinary states and working with clients in Holotropic Breathwork workshops, I noticed that some people, who never thought they would get off the track of right relationship, were confused and puzzled when they found themselves in an ethical pitfall trying to crawl out. I realized that ethical issues pertain to longings, feelings, and motivations which resonate at our very core. Our drives toward (and away from) money, sexuality, power, love, truth, inspiration, and oneness are the most powerful forces in our lives. I realized that nonordinary states of consciousness exacerbated the impact of transference, countertransference, and all our deepest longings and motivations. These drives, without a lot of awareness and self-inquiry, intrude in one way or another into our relationships with clients. I came to believe that a close examination of ethical issues and of our personal relationship to them

could be more than merely learning a set of external rules and finding ways to protect ourselves from the perils of legal prosecution. I believe that internal reflection using a self-inquiry model can give us precious insights into ourselves and our sacred relationships with our clients—insights which may be as deep as those we receive from any other part of our training or education.

The Ethics of Caring provides a model showing how the fears and longings associated with seven areas of life experience, (money, sex, power, love, truth, insight, oneness) can provide some navigational tools for dealing with the deep and often confusing interaction between client and caregiver. It particularly addresses those instances (therapeutic breakthroughs, abreaction, regression, altered states, shamanic states, ecstatic states, and peak experiences) where we as caregivers spontaneously encounter, or help to induce through specific techniques, intense and profound experiences in our clients. These extraordinary shared experiences in the context of the therapeutic relationship can bring to the surface compelling fears, needs, and longings in both the client and the caregiver.

In *The Ethics of Caring*, I present the consideration of ethics from this new perspective. I have drawn examples from my own experience and that of others who have so generously told me their stories. These include both clients and caregivers alike, who have wounded or been wounded in some way because of the powerful forces involved. Also, I have drawn examples, where possible, from what literature is available on the subject and have tried to be careful to give credit when such is the case. I hope this model, which recognizes spiritual longings and the psychospiritual phenomena of an expanded therapeutic paradigm, will widen our range of ethical choices as professionals, narrow the scope of ignorance, and support the delicate, individual process of ethical development.

About the Author

Kylea Taylor, Ph.D. is trained in and teaches Holotropic Breathwork™. She is the editor of *The Inner Door*.

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