

July 2001 Special report

Just a quick note to say that I met with Butyka at his Moscow office. Let me say that getting to him was difficult. He is like an old soldier who has been fighting a lifelong battle against the great institutions and their army of politicians and status quo protectors. On the telephone he struck me as tired and depressed. His voice is extremely low and rumbling. His speech slow and flat. Frankly, he sounded dead or near dead, dark, almost black.

But when I met him, I found a clear blue eyed 77 year old man. It took an hour to move beyond his defenses (all of his remarks seem to be in reply to some earlier or repetitive attack. He states unequivocally that deep breathing is death! That oxygen is hellfire of the devil and that CO₂ is heavenly nectar!

He is singularly focused on the physiological level of breathing, has little concern with the anatomical aspects, emotional or psychological levels, and considers what everyone else does as based on fantasy. His breathing is barely perceptible, except when on rare moments he becomes animated. His kindness is definitely perceptible. He is as honest as the morning sun. He doesn't pull punches. He rails against any idea that deep breathing could have any kind of benefit, but not for a moment did his "against ness" go beyond beliefs and theories to touch the one expressing the ideas. (I told him quite early on that we have opposite ideas and approaches)

He made it clear that no one in America has his authority or permission to teach or speak on his behalf. He also distanced himself from the Australians and British who teach his method. He made it clear that breath holding is not his method, that sub-ventilating is not his method, but in pressing him for what exactly is his method, he told me it would take three years to know with certainty! I asked him for an idea that would at least point someone in the direction of his method, and all I got was "deep breathing is death" When I asked him what he meant exactly by hyperventilation, he demonstrated remarkably deep open mouth breathing, with no effort, and with a soft open throat, a deep belly movement and soft pliable chest activity.

At the meeting was his chief medical scientist (a very clear, bright and healthy guy), and his leading trainer--a not so young rather hag/witch-like staunch defender protector spear throwing, quick to resist lady. The single specific response I got from Buteyka concerned what to do early in an asthma attack: that is increase the CO₂ level in the blood. He sees asthma as a good thing, the body trying to protect itself from hyperventilation, an attempt to preserve CO₂ by constricting the various breathing passages, etc. Also, we agreed completely that the pharmaceutical industry has taken the treatment of asthma out into the wrong direction. Although they use certain medications, the Buteyka people

point out that in most cases the medications only make it more difficult for the body to heal itself.

I am rambling here... just reviewing my thoughts on our meeting. Buteyko's office is filled with charts and graphs of co2 levels, ventilation rates, length of pauses after the exhale, and associated theories based on these parameters. Another specific point I got from him was that the problem of hyperventilation relates to the fact that one breathe not in proportion to the metabolic needs. Anything more than that is hyperventilation. And hyperventilation itself to him, means blowing off too much c02.

Butyka sneezed a dozen times in the first ten minutes of our meeting. His defender quickly pointed out that he had just returned from some far place. When the sneezing re-occurred, she asked him in Russian what was happening. He told her it must be allergies. I told him, with my deep breathing, I have not had a single cold or illness of any kind in 26 years. I told him my Chinese teacher, Master Hu Bin, has been practicing "deep breathing" for 75 years and is nearly 100 years old now. When I demonstrated deep breathing, he called it slow breathing that was not blowing off co2.

I got a chance to feel his back, shoulders, belly and chest while he talked. The man is very healthy. He conserves his energy, that is for sure. He moves slowly, speaks slowly, wastes no energy whatsoever. He has had a number of assignation attempts (9) and has scars on his head and face to prove it. The medical establishment in the USSR outlawed his method from 1860 to 1985. Now, the leading medical people have nothing against his method, but they will not support him except in private. He reminds me of one of the Hopi elders that I met in 1980. He is like an immovable stone, a rock that sits and weathers the sun, the rain, the cold, the storms without budging, without compromising. His breath really seems to reflect this life posture. He is someone who has hunkered down and doesn't plan to budge. He believes that like the doctor who first started washing his hands before surgery, someday his theories will be accepted. One thing is for certain: his methods have worked and are working with thousands upon thousands of asthma sufferers.

He is a legend in Russia. But what exactly is his method? well...it is very expensive to learn and takes three years. However, it is interesting to note that he treats many people for free. He works with people everyday and most of them cannot afford to pay him anything. I joked that some of the assassination attempts were probably by parents who were afraid for their children. The thought of taping a child's mouth shut still rocks me. He said that is an extreme measure, but in some cases can save the child's life! He also said that woman with asthma make the best mothers. They are intuitively fighting the dreaded disease called deep breathing! Buteyka invited me to spend a month with him in training. I was tempted, but I think I'll pass.

From Russia with love,
Dan
(Guchu Ram Singh)

