



# A Breath Of Life

**Breathwork  
Seminar  
At UMD  
Dec 1995**

**A BREATH OF LIFE**  
*Transcript of The*  
**UMASS BREATHWORK SEMINAR**  
*(December 12, 1995)*

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So, does everybody here have a navel? If you don't have a belly button, then breathing probably won't help you. If you have a belly button, then you have everything you need to improve your breathing. So, let's start.

I've got about an hour and a half to give you the most important bits. In a short amount of time, I always wonder what can I give people that will be most beneficial. Normally I work with people over a series of sessions, passing on some skills, and exploring some methods.

This is a challenge for me—actually quite a good opportunity. Usually I need a weekend to put out all the information... So, we'll start with birth, because that's when most people learned how to breathe. Does anybody here remember their birth? [*No one raises their hand*]

Of course, everyone carries the memory of birth in his or her unconscious, subconscious. Probably the reason no one remembers it, is that it was such a traumatic event that you have blocked it from your memory. To remember it would be painful—never mind having to re-experience it.

Birth is a near death experience for most people. You live life in the womb for nine months. You're floating. It's wonderful. You're insulated from all the harsh elements. You can't tell where you leave off and where your mother begins; or where your source or the spirit that created you ends and where you begin. The womb is an ecstatic place for most people, but not for everyone.

[*Here the fire alarm goes off, and the group is forced to move from the classroom to another building on the campus!*]

It seems we lost quite a few people in the last 30 minutes! Victims of miscarriage I guess! So, where were we? Yes, right: the journey from the womb to the world.

When the contractions start, you are forced out of your environment and into another. And you think your world is coming to an end. The only world you have known is the sweet warm comfortable world of the womb, and suddenly you're in a cold cruel world!

The change in temperature is shocking. Your sensitive skin rubbed with rough towels. You are manhandled. There are bright lights and harsh sounds; and all these sensations are very new and very intense.

There's a lot of tension in the body, and a lot of confusion in the mind. And it is within this atmosphere that you had to learn how to breathe. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the more comfortable you are when you are trying to learn something, the easier it is to learn—and the better you will learn it.

If you are afraid, if you're tense, if you're upset, and you're trying to learn something, you're not going to learn it as well as you could. So, our first introduction to breathing was at birth, and for most of us it was not an ideal situation, to say the least.

You have to learn to breathe well enough to survive, otherwise the doctor will slap you, shake you, or do something to force you into breathing. I encounter this with people all the time in Breathwork: it's as if they are waiting for me to slap them or shake them into breathing. And this is part of the unconscious memory of birth; it is tied together with the whole original experience.

So, right now you are all doing something right when it comes to breathing, otherwise you wouldn't be alive here today. Everyone can walk, everyone can talk, can cook, dance, or sing. But obviously, some people can do these things in a way that raises it to the level of an art. Breathing is no exception to that.

Actually, just putting breathing on the same level of importance as eating, bathing, or brushing your teeth should make sense. So, the better you breathe, the better your health will be. The more you breathe, the more alive you become. In India and the East, the "science of breath" is an ancient art, an ancient science.

We were talking about the bible before, and first chapter of the first book, Genesis, where this term "the breath of life" can be found. This is connected to an event in my life, an early experience I had in Catholic school (By the way, I'm still recovering from my Catholic education. Nonetheless, I did survive it!)

I was in the first grade; our religious training had begun. The nun was introducing the bible to us. I remember it vividly. The pastor (Monseigneur Bérubé) came into our class. And the nun bowed to him as if he was God! She took a seat with the rest of us children. And the Father Bérubé began talking reading from Genesis:

*"In the beginning" he said, "God formed man from the dust of the earth; He breathed into the nostrils of man the breath of life, and man became a living soul."*

I don't know what happened then, but something hit me, something moved me. Something lit up in me. Maybe it was just the imagination of a five-year-old child, or maybe it was my first calling to the breath. All I know is that I didn't want to turn the page. I was so thrilled, so excited!

I couldn't understand why everybody wasn't excited. I was thinking: "Wait a minute! If God breathed into us in the beginning, then He must still be breathing into us now! This breath, and this one, and the next breath, it's God breathing into me!" My body physically tingled. I was electric.

And I guess I was not able to sit still or be quiet. I was somehow disturbing the class or holding up the show. The nun patted me on the head, she was shaking my shoulders,

telling me to calm me down. She said: “Now Daniel, enough. Listen to Father Bérubé. Let’s turn the page, let’s get on to something else.”

But something clicked inside of me that day. After some time, it faded, and I didn’t give it any more thought. But I realize now, as I look back on my life, that so many events in my life were tied to that original insight or awakening in some way.

I cannot tell you how many times I got the wind knocked out of me growing up. And I had several near drowning experiences. And I loved playing breathing games, having breath-holding contests, and hyperventilation experiences. Kids do things...

Notice what children do instinctively. They move, they laugh, they cry. They do these things at the drop of a hat. Notice that all these things: laughing, crying, and moving: they stimulate breathing. It is no coincidence.

As we get older, as we grow into adults, we succumb to the adulteration process! Family, society, culture, with all their taboos choke the spirit from a child. (I think of this statement from the Jesuits in the Middle Ages: “Give me the boy, and I will give you the man.”

So many things, so many forces prevent us from spontaneously doing flowing with our spirit. We are conditioned and programmed; we are taught that many natural things are not appropriate or acceptable. We learn how to sit down, be still, and shut up. Fewer and fewer natural things trigger spontaneous breathing changes.

You are taught to control your emotions, and to do so, we hold our breath, we inhibit it. A split is created between the flow of emotions and the flow of breath. We block our emotions and our breath. The more civilized we get, the less we breathe, the fewer opportunities there are for the breath to move fully and freely. Maybe that explains the fitness craze: jogging makes you breathe.

Did you know that in Hawaii, they used the term “haoli” to describe the white people. It means “breathless one,” “without breath.” They noticed that the stuffy, rigid, up-tight missionaries didn’t breathe! And the Europeans called those people “uncivilized.” Give me “natural” over “civilized” any day of the week!

Look at yawning. Even yawning is considered inappropriate and unacceptable. We are taught to suppress, to block, to stifle our yawn. [*Demonstrates inhibited civilized yawn.*] And people call that a yawn! What ever happened to this? [*Demonstrates a juicy, ecstatic full-body yawn.*]

We have been conditioned away from some very normal, very healthy, very natural breathing reflexes and responses because of society and culture, and so on. You need to have a good reason to laugh or cry; otherwise you better not do it! And how do you stop yourself from laughing or crying? You suppress your breathing.

When you are a little child and someone says: “Don’t touch that!” You contract. You hold your breath. If you have an intense feeling, anger for example, against some gigantic person. You are so small, you don’t dare vent it [*notice the language: “vent your anger”*] because they can step on you, crush you, easily overpower and hurt you.

So, how do you keep those feelings in? The answer is: by holding your breath. How do you keep pain out? By holding your breath. And so at the same time that we are being socially conditioned to abandon natural spontaneous movement and expression, we are also being conditioned to stifle our spirit, and to restrict our breathing capacity.

By the time you are into your adult years, the things that have become normal and familiar, right and proper... maybe they are not at all natural... Like getting sick, getting stiff, getting tired, getting old, and even dying.

Maybe those things aren’t natural at all. Maybe they happen because our spirit was crushed along with the breathing system, the breathing mechanism. Maybe these things happen because we have become disconnected from our nature.

So, my work has been to get people to open up their breathing, to liberate their respiratory system, to discover some of the power and potential of remedial breathing. I teach people to take some of the inhibitions off of their breathing mechanism. I try to point out some of the flaws and some of the habits and patterns and learned reactions that inadvertently stifle the breath...

[*Someone yawns*]

Thank you! I encourage people to yawn. You know, the greatest complement that people can make to me is to yawn while I am talking. I love it. So please do it more, and enjoy it more!

Have you ever noticed that when one person yawns, very soon, someone else yawns? Why is that? Everyone knows that it happens. We all laugh because we know it happens. But why is that?

Maybe it’s because we have all suppressed our yawn so many times, and they try to sneak out at the first opportunity. We have so many incomplete yawns stuck inside of us waiting to happen, and so as soon as one person yawns, something inside us says: “It’s OK. It’s allowed.”

Notice that we wait to yawn until our body demands it. Yet, in and of itself, it is a very healthy and pleasurable thing to do. So, why wait? Everyone can trigger a yawn. If you do something with the back of your jaw, your throat, you can make a yawn happen. You know how to trigger it. It’s a pleasurable, healthy thing. Do just for the heck of it!

[*Several people begin to yawn uncontrollably*]

Thank you! Thank you! So, I'll tell you what, I'm going to put on the board, as I think of them, I will put what I think are important things for you to take away from tonight.

So the first thing is YAWNING. If you yawned every five minutes for three hours, those three hours would give you enough to write about in your personal growth journal for a week. It's that powerful. It really is, and you just have to try it to see.

It's no coincidence that we have this yawning reflex. What exactly does it do? What's happening when we yawn? It's something very healthy, something very powerful, and very important—biologically, chemically, emotionally, energetically, and spiritually. Yawning is necessary. Nature would not have hard-wired it into our system if it was not vital.

So, yawn to your heart's content! Yawn beyond the level of need, beyond the demand caused by a surplus of something or a lack of something—which is probably the only time people yawn now.

It is quite an exciting discovery to see what happens when you move the yawning reflex off of the level of “demand” onto the level of “extra, optional, luxury.” Play with that.

Now I'm thinking about what is important. What else should I do? I'll take a bit of a leap here, and I'll tell you the three things that I teach everyone who comes to me for individual sessions, or who attends any of my seminars. These are the main things to practice:

The first thing is AWARENESS, breath awareness. And this turns out to be a very ancient technique. The Buddha taught it.

The legend goes that he was a wealthy prince. He had everything in the world, and he let all that go, and he traveled the known world and studied with every teacher in search of the cause of suffering and the cure for suffering. He tried everything, every practice, every technique.

He finally got to the point where he felt that he had done everything humanly possible, he had been everywhere; there was nothing else to do. And so he sat under a big beautiful tree. He sat and he began to watch his breath, he watched his passing thoughts, he watched his feelings and sensations come and go.

And that's how it happened, that's when he became enlightened! He did it by practicing awareness—breath awareness. You could call it meditation. The essence of the Buddha is this quality of “witnessing.” Through it, with it, he had his awakening.

And later when people came to him and asked him: “What were you doing when you became enlightened? How did it happen? He said: “I was sleeping, and I simply woke up. He said, “I was watching my breath.” And so breath-watching became a fundamental practice.

When I learned it, it was called Insight Meditation. There's a center in Bare, Massachusetts that teaches it. It's a wonderful place to go and sit, and to do nothing but watch your breath, for days or weeks. If you do that, you will discover many hidden parts of yourself, and you will shed a lot of psychological baggage.

Breath Awareness is a very powerful thing. When you practice it, you begin to notice some important things. You'll learn things about yourself as well as your breath that you didn't know, things about your mind that you never noticed. There are a lot of benefits. Practicing "Breath Awareness" allows you to derive much more from any breathing exercise or technique you choose to practice.

Breath is a very subtle thing. It is actually... I think it falls right on the cusp between spirit and matter. Breath, air, it's a gas; it's the subtlest form of matter. When we play with, the breath, we are also playing with energy.

Breath is also sort of the thickest or densest form of spirit if you will. So if you play with the breath, you find yourself able to cross over from one state or dimension to another—matter to energy, material to spiritual. Breathwork is a form of alchemy.

*Breathing is a great way for very materialistic people to grasp a sense of the spiritual. And it is a very powerful way for spiritual people to become more grounded and at home in their physical body and the physical universe.*

If you notice, breathing techniques are often used in hypnosis; and breathing is a powerful tool to reduce stress, and to control or eliminate pain. Athletes and artists employ it to accomplish amazing things. And the everyday benefits of conscious breathing are obvious.

We have all heard these clichés: "If you're angry, stop and take a few breaths." If you're upset, "stop and take a few breaths." If you have something important to say: "first take a few breaths first."

We know these things; they're sort of intuitive. But in our culture, they haven't been taught in a structured way as they have in China, Japan, or India for example, where breathing has developed into an art and a real technical science.

So take that away. Begin the practice of watching your breath. Spend a few minutes right now to notice and observe your breathing. Breath is coming in and breath is going out. Let's explore some of the details.

Don't do anything to the breathing. Don't breathe in any special way. Just let the breath come and go by itself, and tune into it. Watch it. Sense it. Experience it.

How do you know you are breathing?  
What are the feelings and sensations?



What moves when you breathe?  
Shoulders? Belly? Chest? Back?  
What muscles do you use to breathe?  
How does it feel to breathe?  
Are there breath sounds?

Start at the tip of your nose, and notice the sensations there as the air passes in and out. Track those sensations. Meditate on them.

Enrich your experience of breathing by simply observing the subtle and not so subtle details. This in itself is so tremendously powerful. You'll discover some things about yourself and life; and you'll have one of those "ah ha" moments. You'll have an inspiration!

Look at the language. It's no coincidence: "to be inspired," "spiritus, spirare, spirit." It's the animating principle of life. "To expire" to die; "respiration" to breathe again... The secret of life is hidden in plain sight: right under your nose! It is hidden in the language. The Latin word spiritus refers to "the animating principle of life." And the Hebrew "Ruach" "the breath within the breath."

In India, it's called "prana." In China, it's called "Chi." In Japan it's called "Ki." In Africa, it's called "Num." The Polynesians call it "Ha." If you look into the language of almost any ancient culture, the word for breath is synonymous with the word for energy, life, soul, or spirit.

It is so obvious, and yet we take it for granted. We underestimate it. We overlook it. That is why I am involved in breathing. I'm the kind of guy that... my keys are right in my hand or my sunglasses are right on my head, and yet I am looking for them!

It seems that all of my life I have attracted "spiritual seekers." They were looking for the secret of life and how to connect deeply with their Spirit, their Source.... But, duh! It was right under their nose the whole time. The secret to a life of health, of love and peace and joy... It's in the breath! It's breathing!

If you are breathing, you're alive. If you stop breathing you die. How simple and basic can it get! You know, for some people, the obvious things are the last things that they discover. And I'm the first one when it comes to that.

And so, that is the first takeaway: please, become more aware of your breath and breathing. It has benefits beyond belief!

The second thing that I teach people besides awareness—and this is a big part of the formula—is RELAXATION.

There are a number of important reasons for this. One of them being... on the surface, you know, we talk about carbon dioxide, oxygen, nutrients, metabolic waste, toxins...

air, muscles, and all that... that's one level. Another level is the level of chi, ki, prana, energy, spirit. There's something in the air, within the air, symbolized by the air.

I refer to it as "breath energy." It is very subtle. You can't move it with your muscles. You move it with your mind. If your muscles are tense, you block the awareness and flow of this energy... If I make a fist [*demonstrates*], you can see what it does to the circulation: the hand goes white. If I relax my hand, the color comes back because the circulation is restored.

So, on a subtler level, if I have slight tension throughout my body, the energy can't get in to the cracks and crevices. When I relax, and become soft and open enough, the spaces between my cells open up, and the prana, the energy can get in there, into all the cracks and crevices.

So tension/relaxation is a real critical aspect of Breathwork. Now everybody can relax already. But how quickly can you relax? How deeply can you relax? How totally? In the face of what situations and under what circumstances can you relax?

Now we start to go "hmm." It's one thing to relax when your bills are paid and the heat is on in your house, the kids are healthy and safe, you have money in the bank, and everything is right with the world, you feel rested, loved... ahhh! So, easy to relax.

It's another thing to relax when the proverbial "poop" hits the fan, when something terrible is happening, when a train comes crashing into your life.

And what happens at those times? People do one of two things: they either freeze, which is not a very useful response, or in a crisis you'll see people running around like chickens with their heads cut off. Those are the two extremes I've seen in my emergency rescue work.

The person who can relax in an emergency situation, becomes the one who can think clearly and then do something to make the situation better. So, relaxing is a very critical thing. You are about to cross the street and a car almost hits you. Your heart starts pounding, you get sweaty palms, and your knees shake.

Ten minutes later, your heart is still beating fast. Two hours later you're still upset and telling your family about it. Three days later, you're still feeling the effects. You haven't recovered from the shock. You are still experiencing physical, emotional and psychological tensions left over from that shock.

By combining Breathing and Relaxation you can easily and totally recover from things like that, and in just a few minutes! Once you have a few breathing sessions under your belt, there's no reason why you should ever experience undue pain, anxiety, or stress. There's no reason why you can't recover from anything very quickly. There's no reason why you can't accelerate any recovery process.

So the third thing then, the third part of this formula, is regulating your breath. The third takeaway is to practice Conscious Breathing or BREATH CONTROL.

Now breath control is a generic term, if you open a book on yoga, open it anywhere, you'll probably find something about breathing, and some instructions like: "inhale for the count of four, hold for the count of eight, exhale for the count of twelve," or whatever.

In the military, I learned (and taught others to control their breathing in order to get a handle on our physiology, our emotions, our fear, our panic, pain. We regulated our breathing: inhaling to a slow count of 4; holding the breath for a count of 4; exhaling for a count of 4; holding for a count of 4. Inhaling again to a count of 4, and continuing this way until we had regained control of ourselves.

The "relaxation response," which we were talking about at the last session, last month... Most people who have had any kind of training in relaxation, have been taught to use their breath to trigger bring on a relaxed feeling. By slowing down the breath and breathing low into the belly, we trigger the relaxation response.

I have what many people in the relaxation business would say is a radical approach to relaxation. And I happen to have ten thousand people who have practiced it, and who I've watched perform it, and have seen the benefits and gotten the reports, and so I have a great deal more confidence in it than those who only practice the old proven methods.

Direct experience is much more important than theory or instructions. There is something authentic about direct experience. One experience is worth more than a thousand expert opinions!

I am certainly not against reading books, but you can't learn to swim and you can't learn to breathe from a book. But too many people are taking things from a book and then passing it on without actually owning it, making it their own, having a deep direct experience. Many people are simply repeating what someone else has said. This is happening with the teaching of relaxation.

And it is happening in Breathwork. People have been repeating and passing on certain things, without comparing it to other techniques. They don't have a real personal internal experience of it. So, they go thru the motions, they superficially, artificially do and teach various, rather than allowing something to express naturally and organically from the inside out.

Tai Chi is a great example of that. I'm sure that some ancient master was sitting in meditation, and at some point, he experienced the energy of life starting to move in him. And so, he allowed his body to be moved by the energy. And people looked at him and said: "Wow, isn't that beautiful! Isn't that fantastic! I want to do that." And so, they copied the motions from the outside in, instead of contacting the energy and expressing it directly from the inside out.

A lot of yoga has been passed on that way, and relaxation techniques are now being passed on that way too. So, the only way I can see to really make it come from the inside out, is to support people in discovering, awakening, exploring and developing certain ability within themselves. I guide them into doing it and seeing it, and feeling it for themselves.

So, here's one popular way people have been taught to use the breath to relax: You're told to make the exhale longer. [*Demonstrating a long slow exhale*] If you do that, you can feel yourself sort of relaxing... As you are exhaling, you can feel yourself settling down. I'm not saying that it doesn't work. It works. I know it works. And you don't have to take my word for it: you can try it.

Why doesn't everyone just do that right now? Take in a big breath, and then let the breath out slowly. Purse your lips, so you limit the size of the stream of air; and stretch your exhale out. Let it out gradually, paying attention to how you feel while you do that. Let's do that right now. [*Group practices.*]

So, you can feel a kind of settling. It happens, it works. It is a way of controlling the breath in order to relax. It has worked for thousands of years for millions of people. But in order to let the breath out slowly, in order to slow your breath down, you have to actually hold back some of the breath. You cannot relax completely. If I relax completely, the breath just falls out of me quickly like a reflex. [*Demonstrates a releasing of the exhale*].

To make the exhale long and slow, you have to half hold on and half let go. So, by trying to control the breath and let it out slowly, you are not relaxing completely. You are actually holding on, holding back at the same time you are letting go. You are doing a little of both: relaxing yet holding on. You are holding some of the breath in as you are letting some of the breath out. It's not an experience of complete relaxation. It's not a total "letting go."

Think about this: if you are in pain, do you want a long slow process to get out of it? Or do you want out now? There is a way of using the breath, or releasing the exhale that gives you the ability to quickly get free of pain. Tension and pain are related. You can think of pain as a lot of tension. Pain involves a contraction.

Complete relaxation comes with letting the breath go quickly and completely.

[*Demonstrates the dropping of a shoe, letting gravity take it to the floor, as he demonstrates releasing the exhale quickly and completely.*]

So, you see it just falls out. It's not this: [*Demonstrates slowly lowering the shoe to the floor*] I'm controlling it. It works, yes. But to let go means to let go. We let the exhale go, without controlling it. [*Demonstrates letting go of the breath.*] That's relaxing and releasing the breath.

And now we're into another sort of universal cliché type of thing: you get home from a hard day of work. You've been fighting traffic, you've been really busy, hectic, rushing, stressing, yada yada yada. You finally get home and sit down in your favorite chair... at your own kitchen table, TV, fireplace, whatever. You relax into your chair, and you experience one of these breaths: [*Demonstrates a big soothing sigh of relief*].

That breath comes by itself at such a time. You don't even do it. It happens. This is not a coincidence. It's not an accident. It is a natural reflex. That kind of breath (we call it a 'coming home breath'), it expresses itself, naturally, automatically. You don't think about it. It just happens naturally, spontaneously, as we shift from one state to another.

But why wait? Why not turn that natural spontaneous sigh of relief into a conscious exercise, into a deliberate technique? Why not give yourself that breath deliberately, in order to trigger the relaxation response? [*Demonstrates*.] It doesn't take but a few seconds. [*Demonstrates again*.] But it has profound benefits!

Notice that what I am teaching here is nothing more than a dramatic sigh of relief, with some slight refinements, enhancements. You're snapping the exhale loose. It's not blowing or pushing or forcing. [*Demonstrates blowing exhale out*]. You're letting it out [*Demonstrates the releasing exhale*.]

We can also fake this breath. We can use it when we are bored, or to communicate impatience. [*Demonstrates*.] We often use it unconsciously, to vent something, to express something. Why not turn it into a conscious technique?

So, try it right now. Let's practice. Take in a breath and then just "let" the breath out. If you listen to this [*demonstrates scratchy breath sound*]: you can hear that my throat is tight. If I do this [*demonstrates open soft breath sound*], my throat is open. That soft open sound is what happens when you yawn.

What a co-ink-i-dink! When you yawn, your throat opens in a way that it normally doesn't open. And it might even make you dizzy to combine those two things: opening your throat while letting the breath move freely in and out through that opening. You might feel some weird feelings. That's a good sign!

It's like a person with emphysema, or if you have COPD... if you sit very still, you won't have any problem breathing. As long as you aren't creating any stress or producing any metabolic demand, you don't notice any problems with the breathing. But as soon as you get up and begin to move, you begin to huff and puff, and your breathing becomes more difficult.

God forbid you have to run up a flight of stairs! You wouldn't be able to keep up with the demand that your body incurs. So, it's not until you walk up a flight of stairs that you realize: "Hey something's wrong with my breathing." As long as you're sitting still, you

never know anything is wrong with your breathing. You go on for thirty, forty years, and then think, “Oh yeah, my breathing is fine.” Huh, you call that breathing?!?

Anyway, when most people yawn... they don't even stretch. Unless no one is looking. And the first thing they do is they cover up the yawn. [*Demonstrates stifling a yawn*] That's like saying, “Oh I shouldn't be alive.” “This is not good, right, appropriate, allowed.” “It shouldn't be happening.”

Who said? When as a little kid in school (me for example) if I allow, and enjoy a full, free, natural, full-body yawn... the teacher is bound to react, and to tell me or give me the impression that it is not allowed, not “polite.”

I think there's a sign, an unwritten law on elevators... well maybe they've taken them all off the elevators, but for the first thirty years from when elevators were invented, they must have had signs that said “no breathing on elevators.”

I dare you to get onto a crowded elevator and see if everybody isn't holding their breath. I have done this research for many years, and I find that it's true. You will never see anyone (except possibly one of my students) allowing and enjoying a full body yawn. We have been taught not to do that.

And when we do yawn, and if you allow yourself to stretch... this is how people yawn [*demonstrates blocking and holding back the yawn*], you don't even let it happen; you stifle it.

The second way is: [*demonstrates freezing during the yawn*]. You are stretching, opening your jaw wide, but nothing is moving. You open and stretch, but no air is coming or going.

So I say combine those things: open and stretch, and also let the breath flow in and out [*demonstrates breathing in and out while yawning*]. It's magical! It is truly magical. You may get dizzy; you may feel funny. All kinds of weird things may happen just from yawning and breathing! Welcome those reactions. You are clearing your system of stale or stuck energy, of toxins.

If just a few yawns triggers uncomfortable or scary feelings, well that means that something is amuck in your system. That's a sign that your life, or the quality of it, is in danger! It is a sign you need to do some remedial breathing: just as you shouldn't get short of breath just by getting out of your chair, or you shouldn't get out of breath just from going up a flight of stairs. If yawning triggers dizziness or uncomfortable feelings, it means that something is amuck in your system.

So, it's a neat thing, and very healthy too, to practice yawning and breathing at the same time. And then just see what comes up...

[*Response from a participant: “Interesting feelings.” “I'm getting dizzy.”*]

Well, are you afraid of being dizzy? Are you afraid of what's going to happen if you get comfortable with being dizzy? Who knows? But this simple practice is alerting you, enlightening you to what's happening inside of you, or waiting to happen the moment you begin to breathe and relax and awaken energy in you.

So the third thing in this "Formula For Transformation" is this practice of Conscious Breathing: doing something deliberate with the breath. Play with it. And I say, don't control the exhale: let it go, release it, like a sigh of relief.

If you are going to start somewhere, I have a general rule for people who want to begin their practice of Conscious Breathing: don't control the exhale. I say leave the exhale alone in the beginning.

Just let gravity do the exhaling for you. Let the elastic tendency in your muscles do the exhaling for you. Let atmospheric pressure do the exhaling for you. It requires no effort on your part. It requires no participation on your part. Let the exhale happen by itself.

Turn to the inhale. Fill yourself up on the inhale [*demonstrates*]. Now, I am full. I have expanded, I have opened. The muscles have been stretched. I have built up some natural internal pressure. Then, all I need to do relax [*demonstrates*], and the exhale just happens by itself.

I don't have to become involved in the exhale. I can let it be a reflex. This way of breathing will begin to trigger what I believe is the true "relaxation response." This total letting go, this uncontrolled releasing of the exhale, when repeated, begins to produce a more profound state of relaxation, of letting go.

You can build on this practice. For example, if you have a pain or you have some muscular tension... As you let the breath go in this way [*demonstrates*] something else in you relaxes automatically. You can develop the ability to release pain and tension very quickly as you develop the ability to release the exhale quickly and completely.

So, you begin to invent your own yoga, which is how yoga came about anyway: somebody invented it. Many people have invented many different forms and styles and schools of yoga. Why shouldn't everyone have their own unique form of yoga? Yoga is a science. You can be your own scientist.

Breathwork is healing art, and anyone can master it. Practice it. Play with it. As you let go and relax, and invite energy, you will be inspired; your intuition will come alive in you. You might invent or discover something that really works for you, and works for others. Then people will flock to you to learn it.

So, these are the three things. I call this a Formula for Transformation:

1. Awareness
2. Relaxation

### 3. Breathing.

I have tried so many self-improvement techniques, so many spiritual methods: starting with TM, and the EST Training, and Buddhist meditation, and firewalking, and rebirthing. And in everything, when I look at what causes transformation, I see one of these three things at work.

If you are truly transformed by a technique, by a movement, by a teacher, by a religious experience, by anything, it seems to me that one of these things are taking place.

So, the first thing, Awareness for example: if you suddenly become aware of something that you weren't aware of before, your whole life can be different from that moment on. A new insight or realization is going to cause a real transformation. You suddenly see something for the first time or in a new way... now a transformation begins.

You simply become aware of something you weren't aware of before, and it causes you to re-think and re-identify yourself in a way. So, I see that in every transformation that has ever taken place... And I challenge anyone to come up with a transformation where a new awareness or a change in awareness wasn't part of the transformation. I think it is always involved.

The second thing, Relaxation: It's a spiritual principle. "Let go and let God." If you go for surgery, what do you do? "Whatever the doctor says, you do." You sort of surrender, you allow something to happen, to be done to you. And then when it's over, you're better. Sometimes. Every transformation has this element of letting go of something, or letting go somehow.

Some relaxation comes at a time or place where there wasn't any before, and due to that, a transformation can occur. You suddenly say "oh the heck with it" to something. You relax about it, and something new comes to you. Surrender is part of every religious philosophy and practice, and look at how much transformation occurs thru letting go into religious experiences.

And the third thing is breathing. Certain breathing patterns trigger and support transformation. Something changes in the way you breathe when you go through a transformation. When you go thru a transformation, something in your breathing changes. You breathe easier when you have a breakthrough in consciousness. You breathe easier when you relax and let go.

We talk about having an "Inspiration!" You know, a great "ah hah!" The breath is intimately tied into transformations. (*Intense emotions shake the breath—crying laughing, chanting, speaking in tongues—these things happen in association with intense breath changes.*) So, I call this a formula for transformation: to focus or expand our awareness while breathing consciously and relaxing deliberately.



Now let me talk about the body and breathing. So we don't have to get too esoteric. You can connect it to some very obvious things. This is kind of how we are set up here (drawing on the blackboard) Here is the diaphragm. Give or take.

The diaphragm is the biggest muscle in the body. Hmm... the biggest muscle in the body. Think about that: the main breathing muscle happens to be bigger than any other muscle. Do you think that is an accident of nature?

When the diaphragm contracts, it flattens and seems to move downward; when it does, the inhale happens: air comes in. At the end of the exhale, the diaphragm relaxes back into its dome shape, like an open parachute. [*Dan is drawing on the blackboard*]

I'm exaggerating the anatomy here, but on a deep inhale, when the lungs are filled with breath, the diaphragm looks like that. And when we empty our lungs, the diaphragm looks like that. Does everyone follow me so far?

When we inhale, the diaphragm "moves" downward, displacing all the organs in the abdomen, and so the belly pops out. When we exhale, the diaphragm "moves" up and the belly button travels toward the spine. This movement creates a wave in the body. Diaphragmatic breathing is very important. You need to practice it. It should be your unconscious automatic way of breathing.

Now here is a theory: this range of motion that the diaphragm has—the excursion rate—as its called in medical circles... my theory is that it would not take too much scientific study to confirm that the greater the diaphragm's excursion rate, the healthier you will be.

And people whose excursion rate is limited, so that the diaphragm remains flat all the time, or maybe it just ripples weakly when they breathe, this is not a healthy person. Someone whose diaphragm relaxes completely on the exhale and contracts powerfully on the inhale—this is a healthy person.

Now when we exhale out all the air, there is always a certain amount of air left behind in the lungs. This is called our residual volume: the amount of air that's left in our lungs after a complete exhale. Residual volume: it's what's left over.

Well, the greater our residual volume is, the smaller is our reserve capacity. And, if there is a lot of air left over in the lungs, then the next inhale will in a way be diluted, right? So in other words, each inhale will be less oxygen rich than if we empty the lungs more with the exhale. It is very important to exhale completely.

It's like a glass that is three quarters full of dirty water; when you add fresh water, the result is a glass full of semi-dirty water. If we don't exhale fully, the pure air that comes in is polluted by what's left over from the last incomplete exhale.

People who walk around with a high residual volume have a lot of CO<sub>2</sub> and other waste products constantly lingering in their system. Metabolic wastes remain in the system, so the nerves are constantly being irritated to the point that we become numb and insensitive, and grow accustomed to an unhealthy state. They become de-sensitized to dis-ease.

If you have a low residual volume, you have a greater reserve capacity, right? And reserve capacity is another medical term used in this whole respiratory thing. The greater your reserve capacity is, the more shocks your system can take, and the greater stress your system can tolerate, and the more energy is available to meet sudden challenges.

If you have a certain reserve capacity and suddenly you are struck with a great demand, you can handle it. And if you don't have a lot of reserve capacity, the slightest thing will irritate you, overwhelm you. The slightest thing will cause you to get sick; the slightest thing will disturb or interfere with your immune system—because you lack sufficient reserve capacity.

So the greater reserve capacity you have, the healthier you will be. And that has to do with how empty you can make yourself after an exhale. If you look at many of the exercises in yoga, they train people to become very empty after the exhale.  
[demonstrates]

Extend your exhale like this... focus on emptying yourself, emptying yourself, then sort of hang around in that empty point. Hold the breath out and postpone the inhale for a time, remaining empty, maybe even squeezing a bit more air out. Then relax and let the breath come back in. Practice that. It's a very beneficial exercise.

There's another connection to breathing, for example in martial arts. Notice that all the forceful movements, breaking bricks, and that sort of thing, is connected to the breath. The advice is to exhale when striking (shouting out loud is a way to exhale). You can add energetic force with the exhale

So first you inhale, which pushes your diaphragm down, right? Your diaphragm is here [using blackboard], and then you exhale quickly, and when you do, the diaphragm "bounces" back up. It acts like a pump. You have a tube, a vessel—your torso—and the diaphragm pumps energy thru the body.

When you exhale quickly, your diaphragm draws energy up from the earth. When I exhale, my feet feel closer to the ground, and I can feel myself... I can feel my feet getting sort of tighter to the ground. Now it's harder to knock me over. And if I continue to do that, I become more and more rooted, grounded in the earth with every breath.

Breathing affects us on many levels: emotional, psychological, mechanical, structural, spiritual. The Chinese say that we are a merging of heavenly and earthly energies.

When we breathe in a circular rhythm, connecting inhale and exhale, energy is turning in a circle inside. It is flowing up the spine and coming down the front. We are drawing energy up from the earth and drawing energy down from the heavens; and they are mixing and merging in us.

You can also connect breathing to meditation and visualization. You can imagine that as you are breathing in you are drawing light into you, and as you exhale, you are getting rid of wastes. You can use your imagination together with the breath: it's a very powerful thing.

Any questions so far? Yes.

***Does it make any difference whether you breathe through your nose or your mouth?***

The nose is meant to breathe through. It has hairs that filter dust; it has tissues and structures and channel and condition the air. So normally, you should breathe through your nose.

But, if you begin to run, (unless you have trained yourself not to) whether you like it or not, you're going to start to breathe through your mouth. If you become emotional, you're going to breathe through your mouth.

So there are times when the breath itself will tell you whether to breathe through your nose or thru your mouth. If there is one lesson that I really try to... that I would like everyone to experience... is to learn to breathe from the breath itself.

I have an idea that the breath is a living thing, with intelligence. It's alive, and you can learn directly from it. The first step is to watch your breath, see what your breath does by itself. And begin to cooperate with it, rather than lay some artificial rules onto it.

Let's talk about emotions for a minute. When you're afraid, your breath is here [*demonstrates holding breath high in the chest. "Uptight"*]. And when you're in a panic... "I can't breathe. I... I can't..." Everything really jams up, freezes: your mind, your body, and your breath. You've seen people in that state. And so, you try to relax them. We even use the words "calm down."

They are way up here, [*demonstrates being off balance, ungrounded*]. They can't take in a breath because they haven't let the breath out! So, you try to get them to relax, let go, breathe, calm down.

Most people avoid that place, that state. They wouldn't ever want to be trapped up here [*demonstrate panic posture*]. They would never let themselves become that afraid. They are often more comfortable with something on the other end—anger.

With anger, the breath is down here [*demonstrates*]. So, if the breath is stuck down here... nearer to empty than full, you get into different feelings, something else. These two extremes—very full and very empty—are fun to play with. And we play with them at my workshops. It's important to explore because our breathing can get stuck in different places, in different ways, under different circumstances.

Here's an experiment to see your own pattern and tendencies. We're going to take ten or twenty big breaths very quickly, like this: [*demonstrates*]. Everyone do that now. Go!

Now you see, I was able to pick out three people... Let's say that this is the breath: [*draws a wave using blackboard*].

This is the inhale, very deep, as big as possible [*illustrates*]. Some people just did this (*illustrates forced high peak on inhale*), a couple of people just did this (*illustrates forcing, pushing toward low point on exhale*).

So you see where you are comfortable and where you struggle thru these phases, on this scale, is no coincidence. I can tell a lot about your personality, about your relationship to yourself and to life, by watching you take a few breaths. And that can be a scary or embarrassing thing about Breathwork.

If you look at the expression on a person's face, you can tell something about them: if they're happy or sad or whatever. Listen to the person's tone of voice and you can also draw some conclusions. Look at their body posture, you can tell some things.

We consciously and unconsciously read people thru these things. And if you actually ask a person a question how they feel, who they are, they can give you an answer, and maybe know something about them. However, people often hide or disguise their true feelings or they try to project a certain image to create a certain impression. They are not always honest with these expressions.

Breathing is a more pure form of expression. It truly reflects a person's moment-to-moment state. Breathing patterns are like fingerprints: unique. Your breathing pattern is different from everyone else's.

And with practice, you can learn to read the breath. You can often get better information about someone by observing their breath than by observing their facial expressions (We often smile to be polite when meeting someone. It doesn't mean that inside we are actually pleased or happy to meet them!)

Breathing reveals more about a person than their posture. And it is often better than a psychological evaluation, questionnaire or survey, where people say: "I like this, I don't like that." "I'm this way, I'm that way," and so on. Breathing is pure, honest, real. Very few people have learned to disguise their breathing pattern.

When I was a child entering high school, a nun gave me a book on handwriting analysis. And I'm looking through the book, and going "wow! You can look at my handwriting and you can tell all these things about me!" And I didn't like what it said about me, so I changed my handwriting!

I don't want people to know what's going on inside of me! If they knew, they wouldn't love me, or they'd put me in jail—which they did, but that's a story for another day! Anyway...

Facial expressions: we've all been socially conditioned to control them... If you're a bank clerk, and you think that the person at the counter is an asshole (excuse my language), you still have to smile, and talk politely, and say "thank you."

So, we've learned to disguise these things. Tone of voice, facial expressions, even our words... they are not true indicators. Posture is no exception. We force ourselves into weird—or "proper" contorted postures to please others or defend ourselves against them. We try to hide or project feelings or attitudes. And certain postures can become fixed feature of our personality.

The way you breathe says a lot about the way you live. How you breathe says a lot about who you are. Your relationship to life is reflected in your relationship to the breath. Emotions that are going on inside of you are being constantly reflected and expressed in your breathing pattern—whether you are aware of it or not.

The way you breathe when you are afraid is different than the way you breathe when you're angry. The way you breathe when you're in the middle of an orgasm is different than the way you breathe when you're studying for an exam.

The way you breathe when somebody is calling you a stupid jerk is different than the way you breathe when somebody says: "you're wonderful, I love you." But at those times, we don't look at our breath. We're focused on the situation, on what's being said, on what's happening around us, or on our thoughts.

The way you breathe when you are in pain—and some of you have already made that observation—the way you breathe when you're in pain is different than the way you breathe when you're not in pain. Obviously, the way you breathe when you're upset is different than the way you breathe when you're calm.

The yogis had a secret. And they've been pointing to it for thousands of years: every psychological state, every emotional state, every physiological state, has a corresponding breathing pattern. Our state affects our breathing, and our breathing affects our state. One affects the other, and it's a two-way street.

That means that you can turn those states around with your breath. If you want to be calm, breathe a calm way. You want to be upset? Breathe in an imbalanced, chaotic a way. You want to feel joy? Breathe in a joyful way. You can use various conscious

breathing exercises and techniques to put yourself into various physiological, psychological, and emotional states.

It's exciting when you discover and develop the ability to control your mood or your state. It's quite exciting to find that you actually choose how to be, how to feel, what to experience in each moment of your life. You are not a victim! You are not a machine!

Somebody steps on your toe: you don't have to automatically punch them in the nose. Conscious breathing creates a bit of space to choose your response in the moment. By getting a handle on your breath, you get that ability to choose to respond this way or that way at any time, in any situation.

Anything else? Any other questions?

***What about when you are concentrating... you are holding the breath... You find that you're not breathing...***

You're not breathing when you concentrate. Yes. Right. Great observation! And so, breathe in those moments. Get your breath moving, get it flowing. Your mind will respond in kind.

I was in the military and my job was rescuing people... I have always been rescuing people. But anyway... I noticed that, as a reflex, when you become afraid, you hold your breath.

But it never made sense to me, because everything else I studied about the body and about the human system helped us to survive. Breath-holding often seems to be an unnatural reaction.

Holding your breath when you need to think clearly doesn't make sense. If you need to think clearly, you need to be feeding your brain oxygen. And if you need to move, you can't be tense or holding your breath because that makes you rigid.

So, where did this reflex come from, to hold our breath when we're afraid? Does anyone know? I'm still wondering, but I know it doesn't belong there. Yes?

***Well, if you hold very still, maybe somebody won't see you.***

Bingo! Yes! If I stay perfectly still, I'll be OK, yeah. Mice, rabbits, and other animals use this as a survival tactic. And in some cases, it works. That's a very good observation. And that observation should cause you to breathe. If you suddenly notice, "jeez, I've been studying this book and I ain't been breathing," hopefully, what you will then do is breathe!

***What about snoring?***

I used to teach CPR. I loved talking about this, cause at one point I wanted to write a little book about all the colloquial ways we talk about complicated medical things... And I was trying to find the medical definition, an explanation for things like the hiccup, the yawn, snoring, and so on.

When people snore... if you're lying on your back—and in CPR, one of the first things we learn is to tilt the person's head back [*demonstrates*]. This lifts the jaw and pulls the back of the tongue away from the throat.

When your tongue is relaxed, the tongue sort of falls to the back of the throat and makes that snoring noise. If you lean forward or tilt the head up and back, the tongue no longer blocks the airway.

And so with some people, in the middle of the night, you've heard them do this: [*demonstrates stoppage of breath during snoring*]. After some time of not breathing, something happens inside of them, something is triggered to get them to breathe again.

You don't stay awake at night seeing what it is that makes you breathe. You trust it. You go to sleep at night and you know that, "if I stop breathing somebody will tell me, something will happen." Well, wouldn't it be great if you could stay awake and discover what that is that causes you to breathe!

And I don't mean just when you go to bed at night, but I mean in life, in general. You can use the breath as a bridge to the source of your life. Where's my breath coming from? What is the source of this life in me?

Once you begin to study your breath and become more aware of your breath, you naturally move along a spiritual path. It's no coincidence: breathing is a spiritual thing happening in the physical body.

So what you don't notice... like this [*demonstrate stoppage of the breathing*] When that happens, something in the brain says, "Hey, wake up! Cough! Turn over! Do something!" And it gets louder and louder, until it makes you move or do something.

But what's not functioning for us, or if it's functioning, we're just not aware of it, is the subtle cues, that say, hey for the last thirty or forty years you have been breathing at a fraction of what's possible. It's not until you begin to get illnesses that you wake up. But by then no one connects the illness to something like a lifetime habit of inefficient breathing.

There are a lot of other causes... But as you get more and more aware of the breath, you suffer from fewer and fewer issues and illnesses. And so, when I get up in the morning, the first thing that I do is to feel what's happening with my breathing.

I feel through my body with the breath, and if anything, out of the ordinary is happening, like the feeling of a slight cold coming on, then I can get rid of it with breathing before I

get out of bed. I haven't had a cold or anything like that since 1976. Not the flu, not the sniffles, nothing like a cold. I know it is connected to breath awareness and conscious breathing.

If you catch it early, it's like anything else... If you feel a common cold coming on, and you feel it when it's still early, it's easier to manage. You pop a few pills, take what you take, do what you do... then you can ward it off. And you don't end up with a full-blown serious illness.

And so now, we are ready for the workshop. It's time to practice.

For more information visit: <http://www.breathmastery.com/>

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