

# *The Healing Breath*

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**“REBIRTHING (BREATHWORK):  
IS IT MARVELLOUS OR TERRIBLE?”  
REVIEWED AND UPDATED  
BY  
JOY MANNÉ, PH.D.<sup>1</sup>**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE UPDATED VERSION**

This article was first published in *The Therapist: Journal of the European Therapy Studies Institute*, in Spring 1995. It was inspired by the first Global Inspiration Conference in Sweden in 1994. There, forty breathworkers of all denominations were brought together through Gunnel Minett’s persistence and formed the International Breathwork Foundation (IBF – [www.ibfnetwork.org](http://www.ibfnetwork.org)) whose purpose is to promote breathwork. The IBF has gone from strength to strength. Its annual Global Inspiration Conferences regularly attract over 200 participants. It was because of the IBF that I was inspired to start this journal in 1999, and that the International Breathwork Training Alliance (See Jim Morningstar’s article in *The Healing Breath*, Vol. 4, No. 1 [www.i-breath.com/thb41](http://www.i-breath.com/thb41)) came into being in 2001.

I am republishing and updating this article here because I have been encouraged to make it more widely available. Updating it gives me the chance to show the great advances that have taken place in less than ten years in the field of Rebirthing Breathwork and Breathwork in general. It also gives me the chance to promote a more precise name for Rebirthing (meaning a form of breathwork)

The name “Rebirthing” has never been trademarked, and anyone is free to use it. The more clarity there is regarding what Rebirthing Breathwork really is, the less likely it is to be confused with other therapies or religious practices which may also describe themselves as “Rebirthing.” Leonard Orr is the founder of Rebirthing – meaning Rebirthing Breathwork. I have now started using the full expression “Rebirthing Breathwork” when I mean breathing techniques closely based on Leonard Orr’s “Rebirthing Breathwork.” I have introduced this change systematically into the original article.

I have not changed anything in the original article besides this. Instead I have inserted sections marked ‘Update’ where there is more to be added. New references can be found in the Bibliography.

The original article now follows.

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<sup>1</sup> First published in *The Therapist : Journal of the European Therapy Studies Institute*, Spring 1995.

## **“REBIRTHING BREATHWORK: IS IT MARVELLOUS OR TERRIBLE?”**

Rebirthing Breathwork arouses controversy. It gets into books it should never get into<sup>2</sup> and does not get into books it should get into.<sup>3</sup> It gets accused of things that have nothing to do with it.<sup>4</sup> At the same time it attracts clients from all walks of life and many of its practitioners have additional qualifications in different forms of psychotherapy and counselling. Why does Rebirthing Breathwork generate so many misunderstandings – and so many understandings?

Rebirthing Breathwork’s problems come under the following categories: Leonard Orr, theory and philosophy, irresponsible claims, technique – especially hyperventilation, the inadequate literature, the training of Rebirthers, and client suitability and unsuitability; and I will write about each of these in this article.

My position about Rebirthing Breathwork is that it is marvellous: a truly marvellous method of psychotherapy and of personal and spiritual development. Rebirthing Breathwork can deal with what can be called “Freudian” problems – the yelling, bawling, screaming, emotional problems with parents, relationships, sex, jealousy, envy, power and power-games. It can deal with what can be called “Jungian” problems. Some of these are the same as Freudian problems, but are experienced on a different energy level: less violently emotional and more profound. Other Jungian experiences that Rebirthing Breathwork gives access to include various altered states of consciousness including shamanic states, the energy states which Jung called archetypes, and the Meeting with the Self. Rebirthing Breathwork can also, and effortlessly, take people into deep meditative states comparable to those described in certain ancient religious texts.<sup>5</sup>

Now I am not going to say that Rebirthing Breathwork is always marvellous. That would make a very boring article and it would not be true. The early Rebirthing Breathwork books contain enough hyperbole without anyone adding to it; their valuable and informative parts drown in it. What I hope to do in this article is to separate the marvellous from the terrible. I will also define clearly the conditions under which I think Rebirthing Breathwork is marvellous.

### **TERRIBLE REBIRTHING BREATHWORK: SOME CRITICISMS OF REBIRTHING BREATHWORK**

What is so terrible about Rebirthing Breathwork? This is what Stan Grof has said about it:

Breathing is a powerful tool for changing consciousness, that has been used for millennia in different parts of the world. A technique which util-

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<sup>2</sup> Yapko, 1994, see Manné 1995b.

<sup>3</sup> Timmons and Ley, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Minett, 1994 : 27.

<sup>5</sup> Minett, 1994; Manné, 1994.

ises it is bound to produce impressive experiences and – in general – offer possibilities of change that surpass most that academic psychology has to offer. However, the practical potential of “Rebirthing” contrasts painfully with Leonard Orr’s effort to offer a conceptual framework, ... As long as he continues talking in such terms as “the five biggies” or ‘physical immortality’, and death as ultimate hypocrisy, and combines it with the use of simple-minded affirmations, and emphasis on financial success, he has little chance of being taken seriously. He is bound to attract superficial popularity and turn off people with common sense and basic sensibility – not just the academic circles. The best he can hope for is that his contributions will be respected in spite of – certainly not because of – his intellectual pursuits. (Albery, 1985 : 81f)

There are other criticisms of Rebirthing Breathwork:

Arthur Janov does not appreciate Rebirthing Breathwork one bit and thinks Rebirthers are charlatans who have stolen his ideas.<sup>6</sup> If Janov has produced a well-argued, detailed criticism about either the Rebirthing Breathwork method or Rebirthing Breathwork theory I am not aware of it.

In *Innovative Therapies in Britain*, Windy Dryden<sup>7</sup> has understood Nicholas Albery<sup>8</sup> to warn people not to fall into the hands of the Rebirthers (practitioners of Rebirthing Breathwork). I was surprised. I do not understand Albery’s book to warn against Rebirthing Breathwork and I did not expect anything so casual and unprofessional as that type of dismissal of Rebirthing Breathwork in a book on innovative therapies.

Michael Yapko does not like Rebirthing Breathwork either. In his book *Suggestions of Abuse: true and false memories of childhood sexual trauma* he mentions “a therapy called rebirthing and reparenting ... which involved guiding the individual back in time in order to relive the process of being born”<sup>9</sup> and “a therapeutic process commonly called “rebirthing” in which a therapist tells the client she “must have (had) a traumatic birth”.<sup>10</sup> Yapko is disparaging, but on what grounds? Hardly either scientific or intellectual ones. “Guiding a person back in time”, no matter what the moment in time is, is Regression Therapy, Active Imagination, Rêve Eveillé (Awakened Dreaming), some form of Hypnosis, Neuro-Linguistic Programming or other similar techniques; *I do not know upon what authority it can be called Rebirthing Breathwork*. And when a therapist tells a client that s/he “must have had” anything it is purely and simply bad therapy. Therapist of many schools and techniques who tell clients what they “must have had” are a theme of Yapko’s book. I do not understand why he chooses to take Rebirthing Breathwork for the scapegoat.

I am sure there are more examples that I do not know about.

With the exception of Grof, what the examples above indicate is that *without any respectable basis of knowledge and evidence*: on the basis of his own claimed but sup-

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<sup>6</sup> “A whole cottage industry of rebirthers has grown up around my discoveries, leading to the most dangerous kind of charlatanism.” Janov, 1991, p. xii. See also Manné, 1995b.

<sup>7</sup> Rowan & Dryden, 1987 : 289.

<sup>8</sup> Albery, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> Yapko, 1994 : 62; see also Manné, 1995b.

<sup>10</sup> Yapko, 1994 : 74.

posedly unrecognised paternity (Janov), misunderstanding (Dryden) and anecdote (Yapko); respectable psychologists who write intelligent books are rejecting Rebirthing Breathwork.

The title of this paper shows that I accept that Rebirthing Breathwork has elements that are doubtful and that can and should be subject to criticism. Let us remember that this is true for any form of psychotherapy and for any method of personal and spiritual development.

I cannot meaningfully discuss criticisms that are vague or unfounded, but a criticism that is honestly expressed can be honoured in all of its details. Grof has summed up some of the “terrible” aspects of Rebirthing Breathwork. Grof’s points are (1) Orr’s contribution to Rebirthing Breathwork, (2) the problem that Orr attracts “superficial popularity”, and (3) elements in the conceptual framework of Rebirthing Breathwork such as (i) the five biggies, (ii) physical immortality and death as the ultimate hypocrisy, (iii) simple-minded affirmations, (iv) financial success. I will answer Grof and then I will make more serious criticisms.

## 1. THE PROBLEM OF LEONARD ORR.

There is no use denying that Leonard Orr is an obstacle if not a liability with regard to Rebirthing Breathwork being taken seriously as a marvellous method of therapy.

Orr does unconventional things and expresses unconventional ideas, with much confidence and with, seemingly, a total absence of self-criticism. Among other things, he has given himself a “guru” name, “Young Len Orr Raja”, appointed himself as a guru, and invited people to become his disciples. At the same time, he warns them, “I have high requirements for my devotees, however. One of them is that you have to maintain economic self-sufficiency and tithes to me. Another is that you have to master the basics of spiritual purification.”<sup>11</sup>

Orr is generally recognised as the originator of Rebirthing Breathwork<sup>12</sup> although the first book about Rebirthing Breathwork is co-authored by Orr and Sondra Ray (she leads what might be called the “Loving Relationships” school of Rebirthing Breathwork). Many Rebirthers, myself included, have never had any personal contact with Orr. Many have never read any of his books. I will admit to enjoying the first book about Rebirthing Breathwork.<sup>13</sup> I find lots of it fun, I don’t mind that it is a bit whacky, and I skip the bits I don’t enjoy. I have a sentimental attachment to the first book about a method which I have developed in my own way and which has brought and still brings me so much development and pleasure and allows me to bring the same to others. Moreover, this book does contain a certain amount of useful information, although I think one needs to be trained in philology to find it. But I have not read any other of Orr’s writings. As Grof so rightly says, Orr turns off people who have common sense and basic sensibility. I think I have both, and I have been turned off by him.

In a way Orr is like Freud: Freud wanted to possess and control psycho-analysis; Orr insists on being a “father” for Rebirthing Breathwork. This is whimsical rather than sinful and is certainly not a reason for dismissing Rebirthing Breathwork.

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<sup>11</sup> *Breathe International*, Issue No 58, 1994, p.7.

<sup>12</sup> But see Manné, 1995b on the origins of some aspects of Rebirthing Breathwork theory and practice.

<sup>13</sup> Orr and Ray, 1977.

## **2. THE PROBLEM THAT LEONARD ORR ATTRACTS ONLY “SUPERFICIAL POPULARITY” TO REBIRTHING BREATHWORK.**

Grof accuses Orr of attracting “superficial popularity” to Rebirthing Breathwork. There is a lot to be said about this criticism and I want to take it apart and deal with both elements: (i) Rebirthing Breathwork attracts popularity, and (ii) this popularity is superficial. I will show below that these criticisms treat disrespectfully the needs and choices of people seeking to develop and to improve the quality of their lives.

### **i. Attracting popularity and the new methods**

We live in a time when many elements in our society are changing very markedly with regard to health and therapy. Marilyn Ferguson wrote about this quite a long time ago.<sup>14</sup> Many new methods and attitudes have emerged in the last twenty or so years. A new paradigm is forming.

The interest in and popularity of the new methods is to some extent due to the fact that many of the older methods do not serve people’s needs. They have lost people’s confidence to quite a large extent. Psychiatry, for example, has a bad reputation in many countries, justly and unjustly, so many people who have ordinary problems do not choose to go to a psychiatrist. Freudian and Jungian analysis take a lot of time and money and a certain level of education; a lot of people do not have these qualifications. And at the same time more and more people are becoming aware that they do not have enough “common sense and basic sensibility” to make the way they live their lives as pleasant, comfortable, creative, rewarding, safe and happy as they would like it to be.

Besides this, the new methods are *accessible* to people who are sad and suffering and who have no confidence in, or no access to, the conventional methods, or for whom the conventional methods have failed. The ideas of many of the new methods are not hidden in language that is incomprehensible to most people, nor are they barricaded behind theories, experiences and interpretations that patients and clients have to conform to. Their theories may be simple, but they are accessible and do not seem irrelevant, and, at least with regard to Rebirthing Breathwork, are related to ideas that are accepted in conventional therapies.<sup>15</sup> The basis of many of the new methods is also the basis of humanistic and transpersonal psychology: every person is believed to have worth, to be valuable, innocent, loveable, and to have the potential for self-actualisation. Every life is believed to have meaning. The new methods are friendly and welcoming. Their practitioners are very often warm-hearted, loving and idealistic. This is the new paradigm, and people in large numbers are choosing into it.

### **ii. “Superficial popularity” and the new methods**

Does this necessarily mean that the new methods “attract superficial popularity”. This is an extraordinary value-judgement. If it is true, it is definable. “Superficial” can be given a number. The number of people who undertake *n* sessions and then stop in any of the new

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<sup>14</sup> Ferguson, 1980.

<sup>15</sup> Manné, 1995b.

therapies can be calculated, subjected to statistics and measured. Then we can see whether Rebirthing Breathwork “attracts superficial popularity”, and whether it does so on a larger scale than any of the other new methods – among which one has to include Grof’s own new method of Holotropic Breathwork – which are advertised in *Here’s Health*, *Kindred Spirit*, *Caduceus* and similar good quality popular magazines.

Even if Rebirthing Breathwork, and other new methods, attract superficial popularity, this does not mean that the initial interest in Rebirthing Breathwork is by definition superficial nor that an initial superficial attraction will not become transformed into something deeper. I would imagine that in most cases the initial interest has never been superficial: it usually is not when people are paying for their own therapy.

Finally, if superficial people are attracted, it is the people and not the method that may be criticised. When people are not superficial, they will find benefit in the most unlikely things. When people are superficial, they will be unable to find benefit in the best things.

Grof is an academic and an enthusiast about his form of breathwork. He has critical judgements about Orr and about superficial people. If Orr attracted only superficial people, Rebirthing Breathwork would have expired by now.

### **3. PROBLEMS WITH THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF REBIRTHING BREATHWORK**

Grof has criticised the following elements in Orr’s conceptual framework for Rebirthing Breathwork: (i) the five biggies, (ii) physical immortality and death as the ultimate hypocrisy, (iii) simple-minded affirmations, (iv) financial success.

Orr’s Rebirthing Breathwork psychology is certainly soft psychology: it is easy to understand and even simplistic; but it has solid antecedents in academic psychology and in psychotherapy.<sup>16</sup> It makes many of the ideas accepted in academic psychology available to people in an accessible way. There is no harm in this.

#### **Update**

In the last few years the situation has been much improved. Several good books have been published, most notably *Rebirthing and Breathwork* by Catherine Dowling and *Rebirthing in Light and Love* by Jim Morningstar. Besides this Catherine Dowling, Wilfried Ehrmann, Peter Kane, Joy Manné, Jim Morningstar, and Tilke Platteel-Deur, have advanced the field of Rebirthing Breathwork theory and practice in their articles in *The Healing Breath*. Further, in 2001 The International Breathwork Foundation published a collection of its lectures, edited by Gunnel Minett.

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<sup>16</sup> Manné, 1995b.

## (i) “The five biggies” and

## (ii) “physical immortality and death as the ultimate hypocrisy”

The five biggies are “the birth trauma, the parental disapproval syndrome, specific negatives, the unconscious death urge and other lifetimes”.<sup>17</sup>

### The Birth Trauma

Birth trauma psychology is widely accepted nowadays and academic journals such as *The International Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine* and the *Pre- and Perinatal Psychology Journal* have many articles on this and related subjects. If Orr’s account of it is simple, it is also lively and corresponds to reality. When people re-live their birth, through Rebirthing Breathwork, Voice Dialogue, any of the various forms of Hypnosis, Bioenergetics, Holotropic Breathwork or any other of the now many methods that make this experience possible, they realise that the way in which they interpreted their experience of the event has influenced their lives. As it is always AWARENESS that makes change possible, this new awareness can free them from previous conditioning.

Perhaps for historical reasons, the importance of the birth trauma is exaggerated in people’s view of Rebirthing Breathwork in comparison to the treatment it receives in the literature. Orr explains, “The word Rebirthing Breathwork was originally used because we used redwood tubs to stimulate birth memories and people literally rewrote their birth scripts in the unconscious.”<sup>18</sup> He then adds three other descriptions of Rebirthing Breathwork: “the rehabilitation of breathing”, “any energy experience or change”, “a significant emotional transformation brought about by insights, new thoughts, and understandings of life and oneself”, the last two of which he attributes to Sondra Ray. These last two definitions might describe the effects of any good psychotherapy.

### The Parental Disapproval Syndrome

Orr’s “parental disapproval syndrome” explains that what our parents experienced as children affects the way they brought us up. This is not a controversial position to hold, even in the most conservative schools of psychology, psychoanalysis, depth psychology, counselling, etc. There is a respectable body of research which shows that problem behaviours such as alcoholism, child battering and child sexual abuse, among others, are passed on from one generation to another. Orr’s assertion that the child is born with “divine” energy is supported by the increasing literature about the Inner Child,<sup>19</sup> although

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<sup>17</sup> Orr and Ray, p.58 – 63.

<sup>18</sup> Preface to the revised edition of Orr & Ray, 1983 : xviif.

<sup>19</sup> For books about the Inner Child, see e.g. Bradshaw, Capacchione, Miller, Parks, Stone & Winkelmann and Whitfield.



Orr's view, like that of many of the other writers on this popular theme, may go too far and be unrealistic.<sup>20</sup>

### **Specific Negatives**

When Orr talks about "Specific Negatives", he means the thoughts that people use regularly to criticise themselves. "I'm not good enough," would be an example.<sup>21</sup> Becoming aware of negative thoughts and changing them to positive thoughts is part of the philosophy of many if not all of the new methods for therapy and personal development. Explained in a more sophisticated way, such as "individuation" (Jung), "self-actualisation" (Maslow), succeeding at having only the average amount of neurosis (Freud), it is also a part of the therapies that are more academic in their theories and explanations – otherwise what purpose would these therapies serve? All therapy is about entering a wholesome relationship with oneself.

### **The Unconscious Death Urge**

Orr's *Unconscious Death Urge* philosophy is neither new nor particularly odd. Freud also interested himself in the death urge and the French Freudian analysts who have experimented with Rebirthing Breathwork devote a chapter to this in their book.<sup>22</sup> Orr's case about Physical Immortality, which he asserts is a practical possibility, is related to his philosophy about the death urge.<sup>23</sup> There are some schools of Rebirthing Breathwork which take this idea seriously while others ignore it.

It is a serious criticism of any method of therapy or development that it insists that its members hold to certain beliefs. That risks creating a sect. There are parallels between Orr's dogmatism and that of Freud in this case too, and there is the same danger which is that a dogmatic attitude does disservice to the practice, research and development of a good method.

### **Other life-times**

With regard to other lifetimes, there has been so much literature on this subject by psychiatrists and psychologists including Grof that it is no longer particularly strange.<sup>24</sup>

### **Conclusion about the "Five Biggies"**

I have showed clearly enough that Orr's "five biggies" are not at all outrageous, and that in fact many of them find a place in many of the conventional methods of psychotherapy, while others, past lives in particular, belong to still rather new fields of research.

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<sup>20</sup> Hillman and Ventura, 1993; Wolinsky, 1993; Manné, 1997, Chapter 16.

<sup>21</sup> Orr & Ray, p. 62.

<sup>22</sup> Jallan, 1988.

<sup>23</sup> Orr and Ray, Chapter 6.

<sup>24</sup> Lucas, 1993; Moody 1975; Stevenson, 1974; Woolger, 1988.

### **(iii) Simple-minded affirmations**

Affirmations are an element in positive thinking techniques, which have a long history. Their efficacy in healing is attested.<sup>25</sup> They form part of the conceptual framework of (almost) all the new therapies. I call them “mental archeology”. As with everything in life, affirmations can be wisely used or stupidly used.<sup>26</sup>

How can it be discerned whether an affirmation is simple-minded or otherwise? I would suggest that the best way is by psychological testing. The usual way to get good quality information is through research. If we have any respect for knowledge, we will wish to avoid making vague accusations. What is simple-minded for one person may work miracles for another: such is the strangeness of the psyche!

### **(iv) Financial success.**

Many, if not all, of the new therapies interest themselves in financial success. Where Rebirthing Breathwork is different is that in its conceptual framework, the Rebirther is obliged to negotiate the fee in accordance with what the client can pay and may also work for nothing. Few people are excluded from Rebirthing Breathwork because they do not have enough money to pay for sessions.

Other therapies too occupy themselves in one way and another with financial success and the problem of money and exchange, and money in exchange for therapy,<sup>27</sup> as so famously did Freud.

## **Conclusions about Grof’s criticisms**

Grof’s criticisms have some value, but only at the most superficial level. When we examine them we come to understand more insightfully the new methods and understand with more compassion what makes them attractive and accessible.

## **TERRIBLE REBIRTHING BREATHWORK –**

### **THE MOST SERIOUS CRITICISMS OF REBIRTHING BREATHWORK**

The criticisms of Rebirthing Breathwork discussed above are *prejudices*. Far more serious criticisms of Rebirthing Breathwork exist. If I (and the many others who agree with me) cannot distantiate the following from Rebirthing Breathwork, we will have to distantiate ourselves from Rebirthing Breathwork. We will have to use the word Breathwork, or some other term, to define what we do and to distinguish and separate ourselves from Rebirthers. I would be extremely sorry to have to do this.

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<sup>25</sup> Achterberg, 1985; Simonton, Matthews-Simonton & Creighton, 1990.

<sup>26</sup> Manné, 1997, Chapter 15.

<sup>27</sup> Lockart et al, 1982.

Many of the criticisms that follow, however, are applicable not only to Rebirthing Breathwork but can be generalised to other new forms of therapy.

The most serious criticisms of Rebirthing Breathwork are (i) the irresponsible claims of healing, (ii) the use of hyperventilation, (iii) the inadequacy of the literature, (iv) the training of Rebirthers, and (v) the lack of information on client suitability or unsuitability.

## **i. Irresponsible Claims Of Healing**

There are claims made in much of the existing Rebirthing Breathwork literature with regard to healing. I will quote only some of the claims in Orr & Ray. This book claims that Rebirthing Breathwork cures hyperventilation.(pp. 80-83) It also contains claims that Rebirthing Breathwork cures various physical illnesses:

“We think of rebirthing as the ultimate healing experience because your breath together with the quality of your thoughts, can heal anything. We have seen symptoms, from migraine headaches to sore ankles disappear as a result of rebirthing. Respiratory illnesses, stomach and back pains have disappeared. Frigidity, haemorrhoids, insomnia, diabetes, epilepsy, cancer, arthritis ... have been eliminated.” (p. 89)

“Some of the physical conditions that have cleared up spontaneously through rebirthing are ulcerative colitis, common cold, backaches, poor eyesight, ... sinus trouble, throat and ear problems, breathing difficulties, respiratory illnesses, ... dermatitis, acne and psoriasis, chronic tension in the legs and body.” (p. 92)

In the same section of the book there is also the disclaimer,

“The purpose of rebirthing is not healing; healing is sometimes a valuable by-product. We take no responsibility for the treatment of any conditions, physical or psychological. We recommend those who have a condition they are concerned about stay in communication with their physician. Rebirthing is not a treatment and no claim is made as to its ability to cure symptoms or reverse illnesses.” (p. 92)

The best chapter on breathwork and illness in the Rebirthing Breathwork literature is Chapter 7 of Minett’s book, *Breath & Spirit*. It is, as usual with Minett, moderate and well-considered.

Many of the new therapies also surround themselves with unsubstantiated claims of healing. This tendency may come from their over-optimism, or from a need to convince themselves of the existence of an attainable state of perfection in which there is no illness. There is a whole genre of literature – from the compassionate, moderate, sensible and well-researched to the extreme, non-researched and accusatory – which tells us that

our illnesses are psychosomatic, that we are responsible for them, and that if we undertake our therapy well, they will go away.

Very many serious Rebirthers, myself included, make no claims at all with regard to the effect of Rebirthing Breathwork on health, and will not make any until there are careful scientific and medical tests conducted to the highest standards to support these claims.

I hope I have sufficiently emphasised the fact that I make no healing claims for Rebirthing Breathwork to continue **safe from being misunderstood** in what I am now going to say.

There are indications that Rebirthing Breathwork could usefully contribute to knowledge of certain breathing problems and probably help to alleviate them. Let me quote from *Behavioural and Psychological Approaches to Breathing Disorders*, an interdisciplinary collection of articles on breathing problems:

“... if changes in emotion, cognition, and/or behaviour induced by changes in breathing ameliorate complaints, then new treatments can be developed that focus on breathing-induced changes to counteract the complaints. Breathing retraining programs are an obvious example; counterconditioning techniques aimed at eliminating hyperventilatory conditioned responses are less so. ...

“The psychology of breathing holds the promise of becoming an important area of study within the new biological discipline of respiratory psychophysiology. Breathing may well be the bridge between psychology and physiology.” Ley (p. 91)

“There seems little doubt then, that breathing changes in response to emotional arousal. ... Events of major emotional impact would be expected to produce greater change in respiration than would events of negligible emotional impact. An explanation of the influence of a discrete, identifiable, emotionally significant life event on respiration would therefore be appropriate. Bereavement provides such an example. Conway (p.244)

“Why do some people react to bereavement with hyperventilation and suffer its physiological and psychological consequences, while others do not? Conway (1989) has suggested that it is not just the occurrence of the event itself, but rather the *failure to express emotion* that is the important factor.” Conway (p.245)

“Allowing and encouraging the patient to cry has been reported to stabilize and slow the rate of respiration; clinical observation suggests that this effect is evident within minutes after crying has stopped, and over a longer term, too (Conway, 1989). Breathing retraining may be easier after feeling has been acknowledged and expressed. Conway (p.248)

*“The breath thus forms a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious systems. By watching it, one can observe an unconscious function at work, learn to exclude interferences, and help self-regulating processes set it.”* Proskauer.( p. 245)

“Throughout the chapters of this volume there has been a reciprocal interaction of breathing and consciousness. ... Breathing-related disorders involve complex interactions of physiological and psychological factors. Of these factors, the emotional processes associated with disturbed breathing are perhaps of most interest to therapists, but for researchers to ignore these processes might now be said to be unscientific as well as inhumane.” Timmons. (p. 288)

This collection also contains articles on Yoga and Reichian therapy, among others, the editors cannot be accused of neglecting important areas of knowledge about breathing – except Rebirthing Breathwork. I think they are justified in neglecting Rebirthing Breathwork because the literature is at present rather poor (see below). Nevertheless it is obvious that Rebirthing Breathwork sensitively used can make a contribution in the appropriate patients, because Rebirthing Breathwork can be so good at giving access to emotions and freeing them.

### Update

Some research on this subject is now coming forward. See Piotr Rajski’s article ‘Rationale for the Use of Conscious Connected Breathing in People with Cancer’ in this volume. See also Urs Baumgartner’s article ‘Admira – A Breathwork Case History with a Handicapped Client. (The Healing Breath, Vol. 2, No. 2. [www.i-breathe.com/thb22](http://www.i-breathe.com/thb22))

## ii. The Use Of Hyperventilation

This is what Orr and Ray say,

“What is called “hyperventilation syndrome” is a natural part of rebirthing. After rebirthing over ten thousand people, we have evolved a new theory of hyperventilation which is unanimously accepted by medical people who have completed their rebirthing. The new theory is that hyperventilation is a cure for subventilation.”<sup>28</sup>

This is nonsense. That is the kindest one can say about it. As I said above, I make no claims that Rebirthing Breathwork cures diseases and I will accept no claims that Rebirthing Breathwork cures diseases unless these claims are based on proper scientific evidence. This does not exist for the claim that Rebirthing Breathwork cures hyperventilation.

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<sup>28</sup> Orr and Ray, 81.

Rebirthing Breathwork is not the only breathing technique whose practitioners may use hyperventilation. To ask a client to hyperventilate is incompetent practice in Rebirthing Breathwork as it is in any Breathwork.<sup>29</sup>

Why? Because hyperventilation rapes the unconscious. The great and serious risk of hyperventilation is that it can bring up from the unconscious material that the client does not have the means to integrate. This is dangerous.<sup>30</sup> Fortunately many people have strong defense systems. Their unconscious defends itself against this abusive kind of attack and instead of letting potentially dangerous material through, it produces the pain of tetany.<sup>31</sup> Engaging in techniques which can be dangerous in the hope that one's defence system will hold out is "cowboyism" and has nothing to do with personal and spiritual development.

### iii. The Problem Of The Inadequacy Of The Literature

There is, unfortunately very little literature about Rebirthing Breathwork that is good: good in the sense of being informative, truthful, sensible, practical, moderate and well-researched, as well as including true, well-presented case histories, and explaining technique and methods. There is, fortunately, now one good book in English, *Breath and Spirit* by Gunnel Minett, and a rather good book in French, Jacques de Panafieu's *Le Rebirth-Thérapie* – although I take strong exception to the claim that Rebirthing Breathwork is hyperventilation that appears on the cover of de Panafieu's book. I am trying to produce some truthful, well-researched information about Rebirthing Breathwork, in this and in my other articles and in my book and in books to come. I hope many others will join me.

Because of this lack of literature, when breathing disorders are studied Rebirthing Breathwork is omitted.<sup>32</sup> This is understandable, if disappointing.

#### Update

I'm very pleased to be able to say that this situation is rapidly improving as is shown in 'An Annotated Book List for a Breathwork Training' published in *The Healing Breath*, Vol. 3, No. 2, [www.i-breathe.com/thb32](http://www.i-breathe.com/thb32) by Catherine Dowling and Joy Manné with Kylea Taylor and Vivienne Silver-Leigh. Catherine Dowling's article 'Modern (Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century-ish) Rebirthing (The Healing Breath, Vol. 4, No. 1, [www.i-breathe.com/thb41](http://www.i-breathe.com/thb41)) is masterly and deserves special mention. I would also like to mention my own book *Soul Therapy* here as the constructively critical approach it takes is important, and I'm even going to say, exemplary!

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<sup>29</sup> Manné, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> See also Timmons, 1994, p.284f.

<sup>31</sup> Manné, 1994; Manné 1997, Chapter 38.

<sup>32</sup> Timmons and Ley, 1994.

#### iv. The Problem Of The Training Of Rebirthers

There is a great deal to be said about the training of practitioners in all of the new methods, as well as in many of the older ones. The problem of how to train people to work with the breath, i.e. breathing therapists, is not limited to the training of Rebirthers. There are a large variety of problems connected with the breath, and many different approaches to these problems. In her own article in the book she has edited devoted to these problems (*Behavioral and Psychological Approaches to Breathing Disorders*), Timmons says, with regard to the training of breathing therapists,

“ ... in research involving a “breathing therapy” element, ... the need for specialist skills has not generally been recognized. The training and experience of therapists are either not described or are, one must say, apparently inadequate. In one recent study, for example, breathing retraining was done by “junior clinical psychologists.” While it is obvious that we cannot teach someone to play the piano unless we know how to play ourselves, we may wrongly assume that because we all breathe, we are therefore qualified to help our clients improve their breathing. Many physical therapists believe, in fact, that breathing retraining of patient populations should be done only by those with a knowledge of anatomy, the mechanics of breathing, and respiratory diseases. Moreover, therapists should ideally be in themselves models of relaxed abdominal breathing. ... Finally, as Lum as often emphasized in his teachings, the single most important characteristic of therapists in this field is *empathy*.” (p. 269)

Besides empathy, breathing therapists are also required to be comfortable in their breathing and not to overbreathe:

“Successful treatment depends a good deal on the characteristics of the therapist. The therapist must be able to breathe in the desired manner and to exhibit a certain amount of relaxation during treatment. ... The therapist who has practiced and, hopefully, mastered the technique of quiet breathing during stressful events will convey a good deal of conviction. Unfortunately, many therapists have a tendency to overbreathe!” Holloway. (p. 174)

Breathing therapists should be capable of supporting their clients’ emotions:

“Allowing and encouraging the patient to cry ... This kind of intervention clearly makes demands on the therapist, particularly on his or her own capacity to tolerate the patient’s expression of emotion.” Ashley V. Conway.<sup>33</sup>

Breathing therapists should also have counselling skills:

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<sup>33</sup> Conway, 1994, p.248.

“Breathing retraining alone, without concomitant psychological counseling, may be ineffective in some hyperventilation patients.” Conway. (p. 249)

I make no claim that Rebirthers are breathing therapists. Nevertheless the trainings of both will necessarily have some things in common as both work with the breath. I will only concern myself with the training of Rebirthers here.

Let me first tell you how I structure my use of Rebirthing Breathwork:

I call what I do “Gentle Rebirthing Breathwork”. When a client comes to me, the first thing I do, as do most therapists, is to take their case history. I begin the first Rebirthing Breathwork session by asking, “Put your attention on your breathing and tell me what happens.” The client is always sitting up, comfortable and relaxed on a sofa-bed in the early sessions, and I am on a chair facing her or him. What I am doing is laying the foundation for competent and solid personal and spiritual development by teaching clients how to be aware of their thoughts, bodily sensations, emotions, instincts, intuitions, and so forth<sup>34</sup> using the breath as an anchor. If the material is too painful, awareness of the breathing provides a means to slow down the process so that integration can take place. What comes up is the same material that presents itself at the beginning of any psychotherapy or counselling: sadness, memories of sad events, anger at parents and other authority figures for hurts received, lack of self-esteem, and so forth. As someone else has said before me, “The breath is the royal road to the unconscious.”<sup>35</sup> I call this method of working “awareness work with the breath” or “analytical breathwork”.<sup>36</sup> The Rebirther needs sufficient skill and knowledge to be able to support the client in dealing with this material: *at the very least*, empathy, comfort with their own breathing, the capacity to do a great deal more than just “tolerate the patient’s expression of emotion”, and appropriate counselling skills (see the quotations above).

When the client has done a lot of work in this way, I invite the client, “Put your attention on your breathing, just observe it, let your body provide the rhythm, and tell me what happens.” The client may be sitting or lying during the session. At this point, connected breathing may take place or it may not. It is a myth that connected breathing is necessary for any of the experiences typically connected with Rebirthing Breathwork to take place.<sup>37</sup> What is important is that the therapist is not pushing but rather is letting the client’s process evolve naturally. The Rebirther needs sufficient skill and knowledge to be able to support the client in dealing with the material that will come out in this way as it may be more emotional and painful. Sometimes the client will relive her or his birth trauma. It is therefore useful for the Rebirther to have elementary skill in midwifery.

With really advanced clients, it is possible to play with the breath and its rhythms. The Rebirther has to be able to support the strong experiences that this brings up.<sup>38</sup>

What does all this mean for the training of Rebirthers? Breath is a language and Rebirthers have to be experts in it. Breath is physical. Its movements in the body can be

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<sup>34</sup> Gendlin, 1981.

<sup>35</sup> See also Proskauer, 1994.

<sup>36</sup> Manné, 1997, Chapter 38.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Manné, 1994.



seen and indicate where energy flows smoothly and where it is blocked. The quantity of breath inhaled and exhaled, the noise of the inhale and exhale, and the area into which the breath goes: head, neck, chest, abdomen, perineum, legs and feet (yes, these too) are all significant for the process of awareness and development. Breath is also a psychological language: its rhythms speak of different states of consciousness.<sup>39</sup> As Rebirthing Breathwork brings up Freudian material, Jungian material, archetypal states, altered states of consciousness, meditation states, and so forth, the Rebirther has to be trained to deal with all of this. When I ran my school, I offered a four year training. Rebirthing Breathwork was the main method taught, supported by Voice Dialogue, Jungian theory, relationships, communication, energy awareness, Bioenergetics, art, dream work, techniques of imagination and suggestion, and Regression. Students were obliged to exchange sessions every week. Those students who had the courage and commitment to finish the training really knew who they were and could take on competently the task of accompanying Rebirthing Breathwork sessions.

In my early Rebirthing Breathwork sessions in London, it so happened that I only worked with people with years of experience. In my training in Rebirthing Breathwork, with Hans Mensink and Tilke Platteel-Deur in Holland, however, I exchanged sessions with other students. Obviously the more experienced the therapist, the better the session was handled, but I also received good sessions from students. A friend, inspired by what I was telling her about my Rebirthing Breathwork experiences, insisted that I should work with her before I had started my training. She was satisfied with my work, and I worked my way through my training. Obviously I give better sessions now. Humanistic and transpersonal therapists are always intent on improving: doing the work is always a learning experience.

From this you can see that there is a real problem with regard to being categorical about the training of a Rebirther. This is no different for any other form of therapy. There is no guarantee that, even after years of training, anyone will become a good psychiatrist, a good psychoanalyst, a good analytical psychologist, a good psychotherapist or a good counsellor.

If the criteria is the length of time one has worked on one's own process, because continuous working on one's own process is a criteria for being accepted as a humanistic or transpersonal psychologist, there are problems too. We may work on our own process, but success is related to grace as much as to anything else.<sup>40</sup>

I have no general solution at present for the problem of the training of Rebirthers, but I am working on a module system of training which may make things clearer. Others too are working on this problem. Together we will surely succeed.

## Update

In 2001 the International Breathwork Training Alliance was formed to deal with the problem of standardising trainings. See Jim Morningstar's article 'New Paradigms for Standards in Breathwork: the Birth of the International Breathwork training Alliance' in *The Healing Breath*, Vol. 4, No. 1, [www.i-breathe.com/thb41](http://www.i-breathe.com/thb41).

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<sup>39</sup> Many articles in Timmons, 1994 support this. See also Timmons, 287.

<sup>40</sup> Manné, 1997.

For a full description of 'breath language' see my article 'Breath is a Language' in *The Healing Breath*, Vol.1, No. 3, [www.i-breathe.com/thb13](http://www.i-breathe.com/thb13).

## **v. Lack Of Information On Client Suitability And Unsuitability**

There are no criteria in the Rebirthing Breathwork literature that define which type of client is unsuitable for Rebirthing Breathwork or when Rebirthing Breathwork is counter-indicated. This is a problem that concerns not only Rebirthing Breathwork but all psychotherapies and methods for personal and spiritual growth without exception, from psychiatry to the most unlikely modern methods and techniques. We have only to read Breggin, Goldstein and Farmer or Yapko – to take just three recent examples – to see demonstrated the problem of therapists trained in every variety of way, from the most to the least conventional, causing problems for their clients rather than treating them.

The most recent edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders, DSM IV*, the widely recognised classification of mental disorders, recognises religious or spiritual problems (V62.89). Luckoff et al. have argued that the present recognised trainings do not equip therapists to deal with these problems. It remains to be seen what contribution Rebirthing Breathwork and Rebirthers can make here and this will depend on how future trainings of Rebirthers develop so that they can treat these problems with sufficient awareness and respect.

### **Update**

This subject is now starting to be treated. Catherine Dowling says sensible things in her book *REBIRTHING and Breathwork*. I am not aware of other places where this problem is discussed.

## **A MINOR PROBLEM: THE TEN-SESSIONS MYTH**

The British Rebirthing Society (BRS) says in its information sheet, that after ten sessions Rebirthees can Rebirth themselves. I did a casual check at the recent (1994) Global Inspiration conference and asked how many of the Rebirthers present or of their clients could in fact do that. The answer was only one Rebirther, and none of their clients. That was the result of casually collected information, but it shows that regrettably the BRS is providing misleading information.

There is already too much misleading information and too many exaggerated claims in the new therapies. It is unnecessary to add yet more.

### **Update**

The British Rebirthing Society still says in its current leaflet: "After a series of sessions, usually 10 - with a Rebirther, you can continue the process by yourself as a regular form of relaxation, transformation and purification."

## MARVELOUS REBIRTHING BREATHWORK:

### WHAT REBIRTHING BREATHWORK IS

I have not yet said formally what Rebirthing Breathwork is.

Rebirthing Breathwork is a breathing technique. In the earliest books<sup>41</sup> Rebirthing Breathwork is called “conscious-connected breathing”, “energy breathing”, “a relaxed continuous breathing rhythm”, even “hyperventilation” – I have already expressed my judgement about the last.

When Rebirthing Breathwork is used – well or badly! – it can bring up repressed memories of suffering, the birth trauma,<sup>42</sup> memories of being in the womb, past-life memories and various archetypal and ecstatic states of consciousness. That is a very great amount for one method to do and is truly marvellous. When Rebirthing Breathwork is *well-used*, it lets the unconscious express itself safely according to its own rhythm. Experiences come up, and because the breath is used as an anchor and as a means of grounding, they become integrated.

### WHAT REBIRTHING BREATHWORK HAS ALREADY ACHIEVED

Rebirthing Breathwork has already achieved a great deal in the fields of personal and spiritual development, humanistic and transpersonal psychology and even medicine.

Together with the work of Leboyer, Odent, Grof and others it has increased awareness that how we are born influences our happiness and well-being throughout our life. This has led to ever-increasing attention to the circumstances that surround birth, and to their increasing normalisation, humanisation and de-medicalisation. Further, because at least some people remember their conception and moments during their gestation during Rebirthing Breathwork sessions, this has contributed to awareness of the importance of these periods of development. The consequence of this is that many people already prepare for conception, and that many couples are aware that the baby is already a participating member of the family during gestation. Also, in part because of the access that Rebirthing Breathwork gives to very early memories, academic psychologists have become interested in exploring the field of very early memories with interesting and convincing results.<sup>43</sup>

The attention that Rebirthing Breathwork pays to relationships is an important contribution too. Life is relationships. Most people have relationship problems, whether it is to do with relating to themselves, their partner, their parents and children, or their work and their colleagues. Rebirthing Breathwork recognises the influence of the positive and negative beliefs people have about themselves and their ability to succeed in relationships, at work, and in life in general. It recognises that these function as self-fulfilling

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<sup>41</sup> Orr & Ray (1977); Leonard and Laut (1983).

<sup>42</sup> If you read French, an excellent survey of birth trauma and breath psychology from Freud to the present day has been written by Irène Abbondio (1994), *Traumatisme de la naissance et souffle dans la psychologie occidentale : manual de référence à l'usage des Thérapeutes du Souffle*, and can be obtained directly from her by writing to Irène Abbondio, Cité Derrière 4, CH – 1005 Lausanne.

<sup>43</sup> See the journals mentioned in ' 3.i above. See also *Primal Health Research*.

prophecies. It provides practical means for working on these in order to create better outcomes.

Finally, we are only at the beginning of learning how to use breathwork in therapy. Rebirthing Breathwork has sensitised people to the importance of the breath as a tool for personal and spiritual development.

*I have given credit to Rebirthing Breathwork here because it is the subject of this article, but I recognise that other new, and older, therapies have made their contribution to all of the fields mentioned above.*

## **GENTLE REBIRTHING BREATHWORK AND THE PROCESS OF PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT**

In these days of the ever greater proliferation of methods, we are faced with the challenge: can we define a good, wholesome, honest process of personal and spiritual development? I propose the following: It is important to work with a therapist who is sufficiently evolved to show us ourselves in the mirror of themselves. The therapist should follow and accompany rather than lead. It is equally important to have a method that permits this to happen. The method should be capable of bringing up the complete range of unconscious material in a safe rhythm of self-discovery. It should give our process the space to develop with the maximum of autonomy and the minimum of external influence.

Breath is the language of the Soul. That is why these two words are the same in so many ancient religious texts.<sup>44</sup> When we find ourselves a really well-trained Rebirther someone who can read the language of our breath in our body, someone who has advanced well on their path of personal and spiritual development so that they do not interfere with our process but truly *accompany* it, then our soul can undertake its journey in all safety and we can discover our Self.

Rebirthing Breathwork, well practised, is one of the methods that can come up to these high standards. That is why it is marvellous.

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<sup>44</sup> Minett, 1994, Chapter 11.

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## About the Author

Joy Manné has a degree in Psychology and a PhD in Buddhist Psychology. She has practised Vipassana meditation since 1965. She was trained in Spiritual Therapy by Hans Mensink and Tilke Platteel-Deur in Holland, 1986-1988. She had four years of Jungian analysis after her Breathwork training. These are the central influences on her practice of Breathwork.

Joy had her own school of personal and spiritual development in Switzerland between 1989-1995. She is a founder member of the International Breathwork Foundation<sup>45</sup> and its Newsletter Editor between 1997-2001. She is the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the peer-review internet journal *The Healing Breath: a Journal of Breathwork Practice, Psychology and Spirituality* available through [www.i-breathe.com](http://www.i-breathe.com). She has written numerous articles, on Buddhist Psychology, Breathwork and the relationship between them, as well as textual studies on the Theravada Buddhist literature in Pali. She is the author of *Soul Therapy* (North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA, 1997) which has been translated into Spanish.

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<sup>45</sup> Information at [www.ibfnetwork.org](http://www.ibfnetwork.org).

# PLACENTA TRAUMA

BY  
NEMI NATH

**Keywords** : breathwork, placenta trauma, birth, birth trauma, disassociation, rebirthing, lotus birth, natural birth, rebirthing, cord clamping, wholeness, holistic, mother, baby, amputation, navel, umbilical cord, uterus, womb.

## INTRODUCTION

This article is a personal sharing and a hidden book review of a book that I have not yet finished reading, that, just hearing about it, touched such a deep core in me that I instantly integrated its content experientially without further reading. It is also about relating, one of my favourite occupations, and it is written in praise and gratitude for Shivam Rachana's work as a spiritual midwife that has improved the quality of life of many mothers, children and families in Australia and New Zealand, where her work is known. Shivam Rachana is the author of *Lotus Birth*.<sup>1</sup> Shivam Rachana is the founding principle of the International College of Spiritual Midwifery. She has been attending homebirth since 1977 and introduced Lotus Birth to Australia. She is a trainer of rebirthers and Tantra and the author of *The Tantric Path*.<sup>2</sup> I will also explain a technique for integrating placenta trauma with case histories, that I believe every breathworker/rebirther will be able to adopt and/or adept easily and to their practice.

## LOTUS BIRTH

During a Lotus Birth the umbilical cord is left intact and connected to the placenta until it separates naturally by itself from the navel. This practice helps the baby to make the transition from living inside the mother to existing independently outside of her body easier. I have known about Lotus Birth for many years, but unfortunately too late to have my own children benefit from this natural and spiritual method of bringing souls onto the planet. When I heard Rachana talk at the Australian National Breathwork Conference (May 2001) my aha! – realisation lights went on and led me into an instant 3-hour session in which I integrated my 'placenta trauma'. I would like to share the content of this session.

## WHOLLY WHOLE: A PERSONAL CASE HISTORY

The first time I encountered my 'placenta trauma' was during my very first rebirthing session, which happened to be about my birth. I saw something being thrown into a white enamel bucket and was not sure what it was. At the time I wondered if it was the pla-

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<sup>1</sup> Reviewed in the present number of *The Healing Breath*.

<sup>2</sup> Available from Greenwood Press, PO Box 233, Yarra Glenn, VIC 3775, Australia



centa, but because I felt so close to it, and the pain of it landing in the bucket was so immense, I interpreted it to be a dead twin that was removed without mention.

The bucket appeared many times in later sessions and each time caused the same amount of separation pain that stayed unresolved. I frequently considered whether the content could be the placenta, but discarded the thought/feeling because I believed that the placenta was a part of the mother, after all in German it is called the Mutterkuchen (mother-cake). The intensity of feeling towards this 'being' in the bucket confirmed my belief that this must be more than an afterbirth, which in 1947 was not much more than a discardable leftover from the birth.

## **My Placenta Trauma Symptoms**

For about half a day after the talk I wandered around pondering what the symptoms of my cord cutting/placenta trauma might be. I was sure that I would have the symptoms because I know my cord was cut immediately, and I realized that I must be attributing the symptoms to something else. During these hours a quite familiar feeling of dread developed in my belly, right in the pit of my stomach. It intensified to the point that I knew I needed give myself a quiet space to explore this experience. Using conscious connected breathing,<sup>3</sup> I was there immediately, in the womb, feeling my placenta and me as one. I reinstated my placenta as a part of me, an external organ, which had a very specific function during the passage from the universe via my father and through my mother's body into my independent existence.... I felt whole and complete, really whole, how I had never felt before... And I thought my session was complete.

However, the feeling of dread returned within minutes, this time slightly to the right of where it had appeared first. When I let my whole consciousness slide into it I became aware of two parts of me. One was the me that I usually identified with, and the other was a slightly smaller me that I also sometimes identified with, but never recognized its separateness as distinctly as now. I was able to slide from one to the other easily. The smaller one appeared not to be embodied and its feeling was that of dreaming in an awake state. The bigger one was the one I usually identify with and live through in my awake consciousness.

## **The Placenta has Feelings Too**

I noticed that the returned feeling of dread came from the smaller part and decided to stay in there to fully experience it. I discovered that my placenta was afraid. This feeling of fear was different from experiencing fear in a part of my body. It is difficult to describe. It was as if my placenta had been a separate being with an intelligence of its own (my earlier thinking that it was a twin), and that it had feelings separate from those of the baby. It had its own separation trauma from me, hence the dread came back after I had integrated 'mine'. I also noticed that the location of these feelings of dread had been in two different places in my belly, as I described above.

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<sup>3</sup> The breathing mechanism used in rebirthing: Dowling, C. p. 1; Begg, p. 13; Manné, 2002.

## The Birth of the Etheric Body

Now I remembered parts of Rachana's talk about the function of the placenta, after the cord had completely dried up and several days after the birth,.... that the etheric body of the baby is still encompassing the placenta for much longer than the time of the physical transfer between placenta and baby, and that the etheric transfer is also interrupted and incomplete when the cord is cut before it disconnects naturally, by itself, from the navel. The etheric body, invisible to the normal physical eye, is a major part of us like the Earth atmosphere is to the Earth.<sup>4</sup> ....I could feel that I still had two separate parts to my etheric body here in current time as a result of the early cord cutting. One was inside the other, like a little balloon inside a big one, and now my task was to have them merge into one.

## Merging My Etheric and Physical Bodies

This part of the session took a long time, more than an hour before I was able to get up. I assisted myself by holding a little soft cushion to feel the small part easier. The merging process was nothing I could consciously 'do'. I had sent out a prayer to ask for this to happen and it began. The sensations of this process were quite physical. Heat built up in my belly and extended up to my neck. Both parts of me had to give up their separate identity. I talked to the smaller part and encouraged it, that it would be bigger afterwards, a lot bigger and I encouraged myself in the same way. It was a loving and divine melting into Me, the real me, I was making love to myself.

There were very funny moments too. I had the sensation of my head sticking out above the two bubbles that were engaged in the merging process. Every now and then my head would slip into the bubble alchemy and the process would stop until my head was above 'water' again. This sensation of having my head above water is still with me today as I am writing the article. It helped me to continue the merging process, which continued even after I had got up from the session.

## What I learned

The effects of the session continued and are still in progress (three months after the event, when I wrote this article). Daily I notice that my perception of reality is different, as I perceive my environment and myself from a Whole Self. This is impossible to describe to someone who has not gone through the process of placenta reunification. Because we have called something whole, that is not whole, our language does not have a word for a 'better than whole'. I will call it wholly whole. 'Whole' simply *feels* different from before. My energy body feels clearer, more aligned and less cluttered, as if I had exchanged a few pieces of furniture for one piece that serves the purpose of all of the previous ones. I am in a permanent state of joy and my heart feels warm and I am constantly in love with myself. I believe this is the state of cosmic joy referred to in eastern philosophies as being our *natural* state of being. Now, one year after the experience that umbilical cord to my

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<sup>4</sup> *Lotus Birth* (p.20). Brennan, 1993. *Hands of Light* is a modern guide to the Human energy field.

joy is still intact, even in intense and emotional situations. I have some grief for what I missed and sadness for all the people who are still missing being wholly whole.

As a rebirther/trainer I have a new ability to perceive the real cause of separation and abandonment trauma started by the cutting of the cord, and how the effects ripple through all we do and effect our ability to relate. To let go naturally of our placenta is to learn how to finish things, how to leave, how to complete in wholeness and move on. It is about knowing when to go and when to start something new. It is about feeling full and coming to the lover in wholeness, and independence with a full heart to give of ourselves.

## WHAT IS 'PLACENTA TRAUMA'?

Placenta Trauma is the trauma associated with the period of birth, commencing at the moment when the umbilical cord is cut and the baby is separated from the placenta, *not from the mother!* This, i.e., the separation from the mother, only occurs when the placenta has come away from the wall of the womb and has been birthed, because the placenta is a part of the baby as I described earlier. Not many people are aware that the placenta is the first organ that 'we' develop when the fertilized egg settles in the uterus. The placenta is usually associated with the mother as it grows on the wall of the uterus and causes a wound when it comes away and is birthed. In our minds it has become a part of the mother's body and is only useful during pregnancy and is shed in its redundancy after the birth of the baby. In Western cultures the cord is cut immediately after the full body of the baby is birthed. In Chapter 2, *Lotus Birth*, Deva Darisha gives a vivid description of the post world war II depersonalisation of society with the introduction of the production line and it's infiltration into the medical systems, in hospitals and overfilled labour wards of the 50s and 60s baby boom.

According to George M. Morley, M.B., Ch. B., FACOG the error of cord clamping was defined very clearly over 200 years ago:

“Another thing injurious to the child, is the tying and cutting of the navel string too soon; which should always be left till the child has not only repeatedly breathed but till all pulsation in the cord cease. As otherwise the child is much weaker than it ought to be, a portion of the blood being left in the placenta, which ought to have been in the child.” Erasmus Darwin (Charles Darwin's Grandfather ) *Zoonomia* 1801.<sup>5</sup>

Indigenous cultures have differing customs about the cutting of the cord and the treatment of the placenta after birth,<sup>6</sup> but... *nowhere* have I ever come across any information of the psychological effects of falsely attributing the placenta to the mother. As a breathworker/rebirther, this is the aspect which interests me most, because this is where our expertise will assist people in healing placenta trauma.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.cordclamping.com](http://www.cordclamping.com)

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 4, *Lotus birth*.

## The Function of the Placenta

The placenta is the first organ that develops when the fertilised egg attaches itself to the wall of the uterus. Its function is to be the bridge between the mother and the baby. It “breathes” and nourishes the baby. “Breathes” because it is responsible for transporting oxygen to the baby.

As I said above, the placenta is a part of the baby and the etheric body of the baby encompasses the placenta. At the time of birth, when the baby has begun to breathe air, the bridging function is no longer needed, and ‘knowingly’ the baby (!) detaches itself from the wall of the womb! The birth of the baby is only complete when the placenta has emerged. This shows that the ‘cut-it-and-discard-it’ procedure is equivalent to an amputation. It seems natural to wait until the placenta’s function is fulfilled and let it come away naturally. It is not, after all, a sick or diseased part of the body.

This process has been called *Lotus Birth*.

The placenta contains vital nutrients and one-third to one-half of the baby’s blood. It is logical to think that if the baby is able to detach its placenta from the womb, it also is able of extracting all it needs from the placenta before discarding it. Hence to wait until the cord stops pulsating is the least we can do to assist this process.

When the cord is cut straight after birth not only is the physical organ cut off but also the part of the etheric body that envelops the placenta. It is known that people who have lost a leg still have an etheric leg that experiences pain as if the real leg was still there. I don’t believe a person ever forgets the leg they once had. In the same way I don’t believe a baby will ever forget its placenta.

The difference here is that no one ever acknowledges the placenta as a lost organ, or more a stolen organ. Moreover, through the shock of being severed, the etheric part of the placenta forms a small separate bubble that continues to exist in its separate state until we actually reabsorb it. Most of us have this somewhat strange occurrence of a part of our etheric body living its own independent existence in isolation and abandonment.

On page 7 in her book, Rashana describes two heart-warming events that occurred during an exchange gathering of lotus birth mothers. A photographer had displayed many beautiful birthing photographs and invited the children, aged six months to eight years, to choose one they liked, of which she would make a copy for them. Each child, apart from one toddler, chose the placenta photo. This is very significant, because a picture of a placenta is not the most pretty sight by any means. New born babies on mothers’ breasts would seem a lot more appealing. The other one is a story of a 2 ½ year old taking her 3 year old neighbour friend by the hand to view her new baby brother. She took him to the placenta bucket and both peered silently, hand in hand at the placenta.

Birthing the placenta and letting go of it is like the shedding of a skin. The physical part dries up and drops away when the etheric transference is complete. This can take two to ten days and the baby’s etheric body remains intact.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Lotus Birth*, page 20

## Why And How This Part Of Birth is Traumatic

We carelessly overlook that the placenta was formed by the fertilized egg and therefore is a part of the baby. By treating it as a part of the mother we disassociate ourselves and others from the placenta – from a part of our- and themselves, as I explained above. Most of us have learned in our inner work that disassociation causes immense emotional pain. Our placentas have been brusquely separated from us at birth. They have been treated as ‘dirty’ and either disposed of like garbage, or “stolen” to be turned into skincare products or to store the cord blood in cord blood banks. Cord blood contains stem cells that are used for transplants<sup>8</sup>. My personal experience and work with clients has shown me that this is a major contributing factor in our feelings of separation, abandonment, violation, loneliness and confusion of identity.

Since my understanding of this error of perception I have been able to introduce clients to this new theory around the placenta first, and then easily integrate patterns like: “I-am-not-getting-what-I-need-and-want.” “there-is-still-something-missing-in-my-relationship.” “I-get-what-I-want-and-as-soon-as-I-have-it-I-want-something-else.” Just introducing the theory in workshops has been very effective, it seems to set the process in motion and in a very short time placentas are being re-owned. People describe it as remembering something that deep down they have always known.

## Why Is Placenta Trauma Release Important?

...Because nearly all of us were the victims of this mistaken belief during the first hours of our lives: the belief that we are separated from our mother, when in reality we are separated from our placenta; the belief that the placenta belongs to the mother and that the relationship we had with our placenta, the first organ we developed when nestling into the walls of the uterus, is not important. Breathwork/rebirthing and many other therapies have shown us how the first impressions of life imprint in our consciousness and become the reality we live by.<sup>9</sup> Because most of us *have* disassociated from owning our placenta in the ways described above, *we do not recognize this as a malfunction of the human psyche but see it as a ‘normal’ human trait*. It is common knowledge that error builds on error... and therefore, this mistaken belief about this first stage of development of our body must have created a web of illusions upon which we base our concepts of reality, and further wrong beliefs that we are not yet aware of. I find this realisation and the correction of this error of perception an exciting and challenging prospect for mankind.

## Case History Jenny

Jenny had a reoccurring event in her breathing sessions. It was the moment after the birth, when she was put into a crib away from her mother. This event had emerged in connection with many different issues. Jenny and her partner both attended a relationship workshop to help them through their separation. During one of Jenny’s breathing session this

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.milaskincare.com/>, <http://www.cancer.duke.edu/ccbb/cordblood.asp>

<sup>9</sup> Manné, 2002.

familiar event from her birth in hospital came up again. She was cold and wanted to be close to her mother. During previous sessions she always believed that the coldness and fear was the trauma of being kept separate from her mother. Before this session she had heard the talk about placenta trauma and during the session she realised for the first time that the fear and shock had to do with the traumatic severance of her cord and her separation from her *placenta*, not her mother. As soon as she allowed this new understanding in, the fear and shock waves subsided and she became peaceful. Since this process this particular event has not resurfaced in her sessions.

## **PLACENTA TRAUMA AND BREATHWORK**

Birth trauma work is a fundamental part of breathwork. Every rebirthee sooner or later encounters his/her birth trauma.<sup>10</sup> The cutting of the cord is one aspect of birth trauma which, until recently, was the only aspect breathworkers focused on during this phase of the birthing process. Concentration on this particular traumatic experience was stimulated and supported by the advocates of the home birthing movements. They placed a lot of importance on waiting until the umbilical cord had stopped pulsating before severing the baby from the placenta/mother.<sup>11</sup> The placenta has always been perceived as a part of the mother which made the severing of the cord the point at which the birth was seen to be complete, and the beginning of the new relationship between mother and baby to have started. The placenta's common name 'after birth' confirms that.

In the next part of this article I give a more objective overview of my findings from the perspective of the breathwork practitioner. I want to show how important this issue is and what deep reaching effects the integration of placenta trauma will have on society.

## **Working with Placenta Trauma**

In the short time that I have worked with placenta trauma, I have discovered that there are six simple common stages in the process. They are:

1. The stage of recognizing that, if our cord was cut and our placenta discarded, we will have placenta trauma.
2. The stage of acknowledging that we must have the symptoms of placenta trauma and are not recognizing them, and, most likely, are attributing them to something else.
3. The stage of re-owning the placenta as a part of ourself.
4. The stage of reintegrating the lost part of our etheric body.
5. The stage of recognizing and readjusting the errors in many life situations.
6. Dealing with the deprivation syndrome of not being able to have something that is ours (the nutrients from the placenta at birth)

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<sup>10</sup> Grof. See his four stages of birth and related traumas, (p. 102)

<sup>11</sup> Leboyer.

Once the Placenta Trauma concept is understood (*first stage*) it is only a matter of time to recognise the symptoms of the *second stage*. They are usually felt in the stomach. (Mine was a very daunting feeling of dread.)

## **Breathwork Techniques For Placenta Trauma**

From the *third stage* onwards I find it necessary to work with breathing sessions. So far what has worked well for me is to give a talk on the importance and reasons for lotus birth and the relevance to the traumas that are likely to be encountered by not having one. I also elaborate on what current life situations are the most common triggers.

### **Re-uniting with the Placenta - The Client's Perspective**

Once the symptoms are felt clearly in the body, I have the client breathe into the symptoms while holding a little cushion to symbolise and represent the placenta, and to surrender to the feelings that arise. These are likely to be pain of separation, anger and rage for being separated, resentment and betrayal for having something stolen or taken away, fear of loss, joy of being reunited, contentment and fulfillment of being whole and of having found something that was lost.

### **Re-uniting with the Placenta -The Placenta's Perspective**

It is important to switch to experience the situation from the perspective of the placenta as well. Rashana mentioned in her talk that it had become apparent that the placenta has the ability to feel and a certain amount of intelligence. This is concluded from the fact that it exists before the rest of the baby's body forms and that it contains stem cells. The strongest feeling from this perspective is the terror and rage of total abandonment, worthlessness and rejection and the joy and total peace of being reunited and whole. The experience of wholeness is quite overwhelming for some people, all report never having felt this whole before.

### **Reintegrating and Merging with the Lost Part of the Etheric Body**

In the *forth stage* we reintegrate this lost part of ourselves. Again, once the theory of what has happened is understood and the symptoms are recognized, they serve as the entrance into the sessions and the use of a little cushion is a helpful tool. It is only a matter of asking for the etheric body to return and surrender to the merging. The client simply expresses the wish to reunite with the lost part, verbally or in feeling and thought. This part is so close to us, to my astonishment all clients seem to immediately know where to find this part of them. Some clients had to find their lost part in the hospital or where they were born, for others this part was in close proximity. The merging may take some time, fifteen minutes to several hours. I encountered resistance with some clients, a fear of changing into something completely new. The reassurance that each of the two parts would gain and be bigger helped. As soon as the client surrendered the process of merging began, difficult to describe, like coloured ink slowly mixing with water.



The result of this integration brought an even greater sense of wholeness than experienced during the stage of re-owning of our placenta.

### **Case History Jenny**

“During one of my processes in an sweat lodge session I merged with my separated etheric bubble. I don’t remember the issue. I found my bubble above my head , 1.5 to 2 meters. Immediately when I decided to look for it I was there above my head. It was a very familiar feeling and I knew this part of myself. I invited it to merge with me, but encountered strong resistance. I talked to this part and it did not want to come to me, and then I saw the pattern: “it-is-better-if-we-don’t-come-back-together, because-we-won’t-have-to-experience-the-pain-of-separation-again.” This belief was holding us apart. The etheric bubble and I had only a concept of being two parts and coming together meant two parts connecting up. Still talking to the other part I explained that we would merge, not connect, and that merging meant to be *bigger* than before and that there *would not be two things that could ever be separated again*. the merging process began. It was a feeling experience on the cellular level. I could feel the energy in my body changing.... I was changing.

Since this session I could really let go of things... my attachment to things and to people and to the outcome of how things should be. When I relate to people now I don’t have this neediness that they have to be a certain way, so that I can get what I want.”

### **Integration**

The *fifth stage* is the period of time after this session(s), during which the client recognises many life situations where Placenta Trauma has been in action; an integrative period. Sometimes during this period a new/old symptom emerges. Most of us know the immensely frustrating situation in life where we want something that we can’t have or get, and where we spend much energy, sometimes to the point of being undignified, to attempt to get the object of our desire. It could be a lover or an experience or a material object. We also know the pattern of making the wrong choice (see the paragraph on detoxing below). These are Placenta Trauma patterns.

### **Placenta Trauma and Nutrition**

This trauma of wanting one thing and getting another is all too familiar to us. The session work in this *sixth stage* needs to focus on what happened to the nutrients in the placenta after birth, that were truly meant for us and that we never got. We transfer this feeling onto many life situations, often not finding any solutions for the frustration that results from this lack. Eventually we tolerate the situation and make the lingering deprivation “normal” so that we can get on with life.

Travelling the journey of the placenta has brought healing to the people in all the sessions where I have applied this theory. It is not usually a pleasant journey because the places where our placentas land are not the most hygienic and welcoming: compost piles, incinerators, garbage dumps etc. However, no matter where the remains land they re-



enter the cosmic Heaven and Earth cycle eventually and return to us in a transmuted form.

### **Personal Case History Again**

My own placenta's journey was pleasant, so I will share it. It landed in a white enamel bucket from where it was transferred to the hospital compost heap. The hospital was run by catholic nuns who cultivated a herb garden behind the buildings. My placenta remains fertilized the garden and turned into herbal ointments. I still remember their smell. When my childhood injuries landed me in hospital for treatment a nun would come in and apply a herbal ointment to my wounds, after the medical staff had finished stitching me up. Via this detour, the healing and nourishing effect of my placenta returned to me.

### **Case History**

Samsara has battled with very deep-rooted patterns of worthlessness. The integration of this part of her placenta trauma has finally given her the ability to free her creative energy. "I can create something now". She has started developing her writing talent.

Samsara's placenta landed on a garbage dump. It was very unpleasant for her to experience this. However after some perseverance during the breathing session, she stayed with the feelings and saw that the garbage dump had been turned into a hockey field. Being trampled on by the hockey players was her worthlessness. Then she noticed that the players were enjoying their game and that her placenta was contributing to creating this joy. The feeling of contributing to the enjoyment of others brought the release during the session. Samsara now feels that she can contribute something to the world.

### **Case histories from the book *Lotus Birth***

"... I have since come to see that one of the most striking qualities that I have noticed about Lotus births is an absence of 'things to do'; less doing and more being."... (p. 140)

"... However three days after the birth, Maria's nipples were sore, Kian's nappy kept falling off, and the cord was constantly in the way. This turn of events severely tested Maria's patience. 'We both almost reached the point of wanting to cut the cord,' Maria told me. "At his point Kian looked up and took one of our fingers in each hand. He looked at us for some time. He was so still. He then placed first one of his hands, then the other, onto his cord. And we understood. His cord stayed attached for another five days, until he was ready to let go."... (p.142)

### **The Importance of Doing the Work**

Merely understanding the theory of the above mentioned processes does not resolve the placenta issues. It is necessary to find one's individual placenta journey by recognizing ones unique symptoms and taking one step at a time in healing the trauma. I see a place

for this work in all relationship trainings and self transformation workshops, in systemic work and in detox programs as explained below.

T. W. Dowling uses the analogy of a tree in a guided visualisation to assist clients to connect with their in utero experience of baby and placenta. He recognised that: “The simple revealing of aspects of the person’s relationship to their placenta and womb environment had been enough to begin the reordering of their relationship to various aspects of post-natal reality, their home, their sexual partner, their eating habits, their own body in general.”<sup>12</sup>

## **PLACENTA TRAUMA AND DETOXING**

My first aha! during Rachana’s talk was about the importance of integrating my placenta trauma. The second aha! Concerned the lack of nutrients in the organs of the baby when the cord had been cut before it fully stopped pulsating. This provided a missing piece of information for the end of the detox program that I run. It became very clear to me that the first meal at the end of the program triggers the feeling of this lack of nutrients from the placenta after cord cutting.

### **Detoxing**

I regularly run detoxing programmes. A detoxing programme is a 10 day body cleansing procedure that includes juice fasting, a herbal and homeopathic treatment, nutritional supplements like vitamins and minerals, a detox mixture of clay and fibre and the administering of 2 enemas per day. The program also includes breathing sessions and a sweat lodge cleanse to support the emotional cleansing triggered by the somewhat radical physical treatments. One of the results of this method of detoxing is the elimination of thick deposits from the walls of the colon and small intestines. None of the preparations taken stimulate digestive juices, and after 10 days of resting the digestive system, it is very clean and in a very sensitive virgin like state, similar to that of a new-born baby.

### **Problems with re-introducing food after fasts and detoxes**

This is of interest for those who have experimented with such programs. Many people, including myself, have reported difficulties in disciplining themselves about the amounts of food consumed when coming of the detox/fast. For most people it is very difficult to eat only a small amount during the first ceremonial meal and the introduction of food during the following days. Uncontrollable ‘appetite’ or food desires seem to prevail. I have experimented with several techniques to overcome this that proved only partially successful.

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<sup>12</sup> Dowling, T. W., p. 540.

## Nutrition and the Placenta

During Rashana's talk on Lotus Birth it was mentioned that the baby's organs suffer a lack of nutrients when the cord is cut before it completely stops pulsating, and that an etheric transfer from the placenta to the baby continues for the entire time during which the baby is connected to the cord and placenta before it naturally comes away at the moment.

When the cord is cut the transfer of nutrients from mother to infant via the placenta is rudely interrupted. The website [www.cordclamping.com](http://www.cordclamping.com) explains in detail the importance of these nutrients. Once separated from its placenta the baby is put to the breast or in some cases fed a bottle. Its body, however, is still craving nourishment from the placenta. Psychologically it associates its first meal with the 'wrong' food. The baby wants what is left in the placenta and instead receives breast or bottled milk.

My experience has showed me that there is a connection between the cord cutting trauma and the difficulty to control one's appetite mentioned above.

The first meal taken at the end of a detox/fast is usually a very important event. This food is eaten into the 'virgin' stomach and very clean intestines as described above, just like at birth. This virgin feeling activates the 'wrong food trauma'. It creates the craving for the 'missing nutrients' and blocks us from experiencing the real effects of the first meal. Instead we eat more and more in the hope that each further mouthful of food will finally bring the missing placenta nutrients.

### Case History Jenny

Jenny worked on her physical pattern of not digesting and absorbing nourishment from her food. During the session she encountered the frustration of : "I could not digest my food." "I did not want my mothers breast after birth, I wanted what was in my placenta. So much of my blood was still in my placenta. I went into shock and, after reconnecting with my placenta, using a little cushion, I went into a blissful state and remembered that I feel like that when I make cheese (she is learning the cottage industry of cheese making). The work of cheese making sends me into the same bliss state that I was experiencing when in connection with my placenta. (she laughed at this equation) It helped me to understand what feelings in my body to look for that will tell me what foods are right for me to eat." ...What was in the placenta was right for her. When in touch with the placenta her body rejoiced. This has given her a guideline what to 'feel' for when looking for the dietary need of her body. The body had registered that separation from the 'right' food was the normal state, hence her body was not absorbing her food. "Since this session it is so much easier for me to stick to my diet and I know what is good for me."

## Ending the Fast and Placenta Trauma

To deal with this problem a detoxing or fasting program that includes emotional release work needs to include a theoretical module on placenta trauma earlier in the program and then include two days of the food re-introductory phase at the end of the workshop. In my program and others that I know, the first meal is currently taken at the end of the retreat and participants undergo the re-introduction phase of food at home by themselves.

Changing the program in this way would allow enough time, both for the placenta trauma to emerge and to be integrated.

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## About The Author

Nemi Nath began rebirthing in 1981 and was certified as a rebirther in 1983 by Ararah Bhakti Carrisbroke in the first rebirther training in Australia. She established a rebirthing Centre soon after and in 1985 founded Breathconnection, a workshop and training centre for professional rebirthers, which is now one of Australia’s longest standing breathwork/rebirthing schools. Nemi is a trainer member of the AAPR, the Australian Association for Professional Rebirthers since 1983, and has actively supported the International Breathwork Foundation since 1995 as a national coordinator for Australia and member of the integrity committee. She has experienced some of Stan Grof’s and Leonard Orr’s workshops/trainings, and became a yoga teacher in 1987, trained by Alakh Analda. Between 1985 – 1989 she took an energy transformation and meditation training with Adam Davis of I.A.M. Australia. From 1993 - 1999 she made an extensive contribution to establishing breathwork in Russia. Nemi’s current projects are a nationally accredited breathwork training under the Australian Qualification Framework together with 10 Australian trainers from diverse rebirthing backgrounds and, since 1985, the development of a spiritual community at Kaivalya Meru. Her newsletter publication, Breathcollection, has been in circulation since 1988.

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# **RATIONALE FOR THE USE OF CONSCIOUS CONNECTED BREATHING IN TREATMENT OF PEOPLE WITH CANCER.**

**BY  
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**Keywords:** Cancer; Conscious Connected Breathing; Rebirthing; Intuitive Energy Breathing; Circular Breathing.

## **ABSTRACT**

Cancer is believed to have multiple, interacting causes. Many interdependent factors, such as environmental pollution, unhealthy life styles (e.g. tobacco smoking), improper diet, chronic stress, etc., in various combinations can contribute to the development of cancer. Cancer is treated in many ways, but most of them, through failing to take into account the complexity of cancer causes, do not produce satisfying results. This paper offers a rationale for the use of a little known breathing technique as a holistic, complementary treatment of cancer.

Conscious Connected Breathing, known also as Rebirthing, Intuitive Energy Breathing or Circular Breathing is a self-healing skill which originated in the USA in the 70s and was invented by Leonard Orr. Most people can learn it in ten one – two-hours breathing sessions. It is the ability to breathe energy as well as air. It involves merging of the inhalation with the exhalation in a gentle relaxed rhythm in an intuitive way. This method of breathing floods the body with energy, which cleans and nourishes it physically, emotionally and spiritually. One potential result of this way of breathing is relaxation, enhanced contact with one's body, peace and contentment. The advantages of this approach are presented in the context of four hypotheses of cancer, namely metabolic, toxicity, energy and psychosomatic.

## **METABOLIC HYPOTHESIS OF CANCER AND OXYGEN THERAPIES**

The metabolic theory/hypothesis of cancer maintains that cancer cells only grow in the absence of oxygen. According to this theory cancer cells exhibit the *anaerobic mode of metabolism*. This means that they thrive under conditions of high-sugar low-oxygen, but fare poorly under low-sugar high-oxygen conditions.

This hypothesis led to the development of *oxygen therapies of cancer*. In these therapies one tries to introduce sufficient oxygen into the body's cells to reverse the cancer process and “suffocate,” so to speak, the tumor with too much oxygen.

According to Diamond, Cowden & Goldberg (1997), there are two principal types of oxygen therapy, classified according to the chemical process involved. These are *oxygenation* and *oxidation*.

Oxygenation is the process of enriching the oxygen content of the blood or tissues. One oxygenation therapy is known as *hyperbaric oxygen therapy*. It introduces oxygen to the body in a pressurized chamber. Pure oxygen is delivered to the patient inside sealed chamber at high pressure for 30-60 minutes. The patient absorbs concentrated oxygen through the skin as well as through inhalation. Manfred Von Ardenne (1990) who investigated use of oxygen in treatment of cancer patients found it to be most effective when used in combination with regular aerobic exercise, hyperthermia, intermittently induced hyperglycemia, daily administration of vitamins and other agents.

Another oxygen therapy uses *ozone* and relies on both oxidation and oxygenation pathways. According to Diamond and associates, ozone is used primarily to kill viruses, destroy bacteria and eliminate fungi. Ozone produces important benefits in the human body, including the oxygenation of blood, improved blood circulation and stimulation of the immune system. It can be administered intravenously, intra-arterially, intramuscularly, intra-articularly and subcutaneously. These authors quote research in which ozone was found, i.a., to: (1) selectively inhibit cancer cell growth in tissue culture for cancer of the lung, breast and uterus; (2) enhance the tumor-fighting ability of standard cancer drugs; (3) reduce pain while increasing energy levels and appetite. For instance, practitioners at the Hospital Santa Monica in Mexico have reported a 3-year remission rate of 70% with advanced cancer patients who were treated with ozone, botanicals, nutrition, DMSO (Dimethylsulfoxide), hyperthermia and other natural modalities (p.926).

Diamond, Cowden & Goldberg caution about some adverse effects associated with intravenously administered ozone, such as inflammation of veins, chest pain, shortness of breath, cardiac arrhythmia, etc.

## **CONSCIOUS CONNECTED BREATHING (CCB) AS AN OXYGEN THERAPY**

As indicated earlier CCB is most often used as a method of deep breathing and relaxation. Clients are asked to connect his/her inhalation and exhalation in a smooth rhythm. This kind of breathing intensifies the circulation of oxygen and energy throughout the body. Clients typically report having physical symptoms, such as vibration, tingling, muscle spasms, emotional symptoms that are most often discharged through crying, laughter, angry outbursts or bliss, and, after the cycle is completed, a sense of profound peace and relaxation.

CCB is mainly used as a form of individual psychotherapy or during self-improvement seminars. In this writer's opinion it has a greater therapeutic potential than its New Age reputation (see, for instance, Orr & Ray, 1983). Dowling and Manne (2001) give an extensive list of Rebirthing and other breathwork related bibliography, while some of the studies on Rebirthing are quoted in the master thesis of Heyda (2000). Among these studies the most interesting appears that of Rubin (1983). Rubin investigated cognitive, affective and physiological outcomes of Rebirthing on a sample of students. She reported short and long term improvement in locus of control, self-esteem, anxiety reduction and more positive thinking in the subjects tested. According to her, physiological measurements of air volume exhalation, oxygen and carbon dioxide expiration, pulse volume, pulse propagation time, skin potential response and electromyograph all showed significant changes during the breathing process.

To the best of my knowledge Rebirthing has never been systematically used in treating cancer. There is much anecdotal data that shows that many people respond well to this method of breathing. I myself had one case in which a non-malignant tumor had disappeared after six breathing sessions. I have heard a few anecdotal reports of “cured cancer” from fellow CCB instructors (see, for instance, Manne, 1997).

Regardless of the lack of scientific evidence for its effectiveness, CCB deserves a serious chance as one of the oxygen therapies of cancer. The method is natural, fairly simple and does not require any expensive instruments. It can be done in group settings, which further reduces costs. It is a more natural way of providing cancer patients with oxygen than hyperbaric oxygen therapy or ozone therapy. More important, after mastering the technique patients can practice it on their own, thus becoming more active agents in their healing process.

### **TOXICITY HYPOTHESIS OF CANCER**

“Why is there so much cancer today?” asks Goldberg. “In simple fact, we are being slowly poisoned to death. The list of poisons includes pollution, pesticides, carcinogens in our food, air, water, electromagnetic radiation, tobacco smoke, antibiotics, conventional drugs, hormone therapies, irradiated foods, nuclear radiation, mercury toxicity from dental fillings, diet and nutritional deficiencies, parasites, X rays, toxic emotions, and more.” (Diamond, and assoc.; P.11). Many therapies attempt to treat cancer through detoxifying the body of the patient. Among these are Gerson Diet Therapy, Metabolic-Nutritional Therapy, Biological Dentistry, Chelation Therapy, Kelley Metabolic Therapy and others. What these therapies seem to overlook is that approximately 70% of body toxins are released through the breathing process (Jones, 1982). From this point of view CCB is uniquely suited to respond to the needs of cancer patients as it not only detoxifies the body, but also the mind and emotions of the cancer patient.

This writer who has been practicing CCB since 1983, employed the method in the treatment program for alcoholics in the Day Psychiatric Division in Siemianowice, Poland. Seven 4-week long day treatment programs were offered in 1986-87 to 70 persons. The results of the program were quite encouraging. Self-reported abstinence one year after the treatment ended was above 50%. Many clients reported reduced cravings, which would suggest that CCB had an impact also on physiological level. With the group of co-workers we considered CCB to have had a “vacuum cleaner” effect on the body. The level of detoxification achieved by some of them was of such intensity that they could no longer visit their favorite bars or even associate with their drinking companions (for more details see, Rajski, 2001).

### **ENERGY HYPOTHESIS OF CANCER.**

According to this hypothesis, imbalances of energy, which acts on a deeper cellular level than biochemical, can precede disruptions in biochemical balance and lead to disease. This notion is characteristic for so called “energy medicine” or “bioenergetic medicine” (Diamond, and assoc., 1997, P.1022). It “refers to diagnostic procedures and therapies that use an energy field – electrical, magnetic, sonic, acoustic, microwave, infrared – to

screen for health conditions by detecting imbalances in the body's energy fields, and then correct them." (Ibid.).

It sounds very difficult, but in fact is much simpler. People, who try CCB for the first time, often report that it was their first experience of feeling the energy of the body. As was said, in CCB the client is "flooded" with energy, and even the most alienated persons cannot ignore something so intense. A CCB session not only cleans and restores their energy fields, but makes them more aware that they are, as Manné (1997) refers to it, "energy beings." In the result, they are more willing to consciously take care of the energy of the body by avoiding harmful life styles and practicing "cleanliness."

In this regard CCB instructors typically recommend taking a bath or a shower twice a day, physical work or exercise, vegetarian diet and spending time with a natural, wood-burning fire. All these activities can be practiced by the clients themselves. They can also be seen as detoxification.

## **PSYCHOSOMATIC HYPOTHESIS OF CANCER**

Ever fewer people now question that there is a connection between emotions and cancer. Cancer patients seem to have tendency toward resentment, low self-esteem, inhibition of feelings, especially anger and grief, difficulty developing and maintaining meaningful and lasting relationships (findings of Carl and Stephanie Simonton, quoted in: Minett. 1994). If combined with a loss or accumulated stress, these dispositions may lead to disturbances in the body's immune defense system. CCB, by influencing both the body and the emotions of the patient may prevent these dynamics. It also seems to restore our vitality. The sense of contact with the body and emotions achieved through CCB sessions is impressive.

Relaxation provided by CCB can reduce fear and depression. The expression of feelings, which typically takes place during CCB, helps to release so called "toxic emotions," such as anger, grief, guilt and perceived lack of self-worth. Comfort and the sense of well-being achieved through CCB could help patients to get rid of the negative thinking, thus to create better conditions for a more positive and assertive attitude toward one's own life and treatment. If done in groups CCB provides an occasion for "social connectedness." This was found to contribute positively to longevity of cancer patients (see the landmark study by David Spiegel, which showed that breast cancer patients who underwent support group therapy lived nearly twice as long as women with breast cancer who did not. Quoted in Diamond and assoc., p.459). In other words, CCB could also offer advantages of a weekly support group.

CCB seems also to satisfy and make our clients more aware of their regressive needs. By this I understand the natural desire to be taken care of by somebody which is present to some extent in every sick person. Occasionally, however, it may lead to the situation in which the patient may be interested in maintaining the symptom. CCB appears to be one of the most interesting and constructive ways of addressing the issue. People, who breathe with this method, not only have a chance to achieve a sense of being comforted by someone, but learn practical skills (relaxation, contact with one's own body) and insights that help them to cope by themselves.



## SUMMARY

In summary, CCB deserves serious clinical attention and a part in a holistic treatment of cancer because:

1. It is a natural method of providing the body (tumor cells) with extra volumes of oxygen
2. It helps to get rid of body toxins and so called "toxic emotions"
3. It reduces fear and improves sense of well being
4. It satisfies and makes a person more aware of regressive needs
5. It provides opportunity for "social connectedness"
6. It is easy to master and can be self-employed by a recovering cancer patient.

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## About the Author

Piotr Rajski. M.A., Psychologist. Piotr graduated in 1978 from University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland. In 1982 he met Leonard Orr for the first time and later trained with him extensively (in 1983-4, 1986, and 1990). His Rebirthing formation included also training with other prominent American and European Rebirthers, like Joe Moriarty, Bonnie Nixon, Peter Kane, Sharda and John Paul Collard, Villem Van Diest and others.

Piotr has been a Registered Rebirther with the Association of Polish Rebirthers since 1983 (currently an honorary member of this Association). In the years 1986-87 Piotr ran a program for alcoholics based on Rebirthing. He taught Rebirthing as a part of the Clinical Psychology Practicum in the University of Silesia.

In 1989 Piotr immigrated to Canada. He is chartered with the College of Alberta Psychologists. Currently in private practice in Edmonton, Alberta, Piotr provides training for rebirthers through his Edmonton School of Rebirthing.

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# LEARNING THE TRUE ALCHEMY OF THE BREATH

(for Ananda, Angela, Annick and Alexandra)

by

**Hilde Rapp**

## **On The First Breath**

We are here  
always to remember  
that we are to be human

In order to stay human  
we must not breathe entirely freely  
for were we to do so  
we would become like unto angels

And if angels were to take all the knots  
out of their being  
they would become like unto G'd

And if no one was any longer  
like unto humans  
the work of tzimtzum  
would have to start all over again  
And G'd would have to take themselves  
back a little  
all over again  
( that is to breathe not quite freely)  
so as to make room for our human world

For there needs always to be someone  
with a human heart  
and feeling hands  
who can work  
in the sweat of their brow  
to unfold the splendours of creation

There always needs to be someone  
who can have their breath taken away  
in awe and wonder  
jubilant  
at the ever manifesting miracle  
of what is yet to come...

There always needs to be someone  
whose task it is to go all the way down  
in search of the sparks  
of splendour  
trapped in the mire  
when the vessels broke

that last time  
when too many  
strove to rise upward  
before their time

Our task is not to strive upward  
toward the light  
until we are done  
down here  
with turning dark matter into light

This is why one was sent to show us  
the way down  
down  
down  
into the flesh  
and blood and bone  
of incarnation

I too am here  
to honour my pledge  
to strive  
to become  
ever more  
human

I too  
am here walking this path  
down  
into the farthest reaches  
of dark matter  
until what we call the dark light  
can be lived  
and owned  
and made human

And thus all that is not yet light  
shall be transformed  
in the sweat of our brow  
by our emotional labour  
as we clarify  
and purify  
and distil  
the deepest pain  
until it dissolves

and it is taken up  
and it is illuminated  
by our understanding

Now that I am beginning to remember  
I no longer feel so burdened  
that I am restrained  
from breathing altogether freely!

Perhaps this  
is what Ananda knew he must do  
while in his time  
so many  
strove harder and harder  
to become more and more  
like unto G'd

And this is what I must remember  
in this time  
while so many  
strive harder and harder  
to become more and more  
like unto G'd

I am here to remember  
in this time  
to strive harder and harder  
to become  
ever more human

## **On The Second Breath**

We are here  
always to remember  
that we are to be human

In order to stay human  
we must not breathe entirely freely  
for were we to do so  
we would become like unto angels

And if angels were to breathe all the knots  
out of their being  
they would become like unto G'd

And if no one was any longer  
like unto humans  
the work of tzimtzum  
would have to start all over again

And G'd would have to take themselves  
back a little  
all over again  
( that is to breathe not quite freely)  
so as to make room for our human world

For there always needs to be someone  
with a human heart  
and feeling hands  
who can work  
in the sweat of their brow  
to unfold the splendours of creation

There always needs to be someone  
who can have their breath taken away  
in awe and wonder  
rejoicing  
at the ever manifesting miracle  
of what is yet to come

There always needs to be someone  
whose task it is to go all the way down  
in search  
of the sparks  
of splendour  
which became trapped in the mire  
when the vessels broke  
that last time  
when too many  
strove to rise upward  
before their time

Our task is not to strive toward the light  
until we are done  
down here  
with our human task  
of taking the breath down  
into our human feet

We are here to walk  
in the footsteps  
of creation  
and to work the breath  
like bellows  
transforming dark matter into light

This is why one was sent to show us  
the way down  
down  
down  
into the flesh  
and blood and bone  
of incarnation

This is why  
in the old portrayals  
we see the acrobat  
guarding the portals  
of sacred spaces  
listening  
to what his feet

are whispering into his ears

And that is why  
we wash our feet  
with the living waters  
so that our feet be like two fishes  
bathed in the salty sea of tears  
of that downcast woman  
who knew in her hair  
that like the two kidneys in our belly  
we are to  
dissolve and separate the poison  
from the life giving sparkling water  
pregnant with the breath  
of the G'dhead  
ever inspiring us  
to remember  
in everyone of our ten toes  
why we are here

Now I feel no longer burdened  
that I am restrained  
from breathing altogether freely

Now I know that I too am here  
to honour my pledge  
to strive  
to become  
ever more  
human

To take the resplendent breath  
down  
into the farthest reaches  
of dark matter until the dark light  
can be lived  
and owned

So that disensouled matter  
can be made human  
and transformed  
in the sweat of our brow  
by our emotional labour  
which claims  
contains  
and clarifies  
the deepest pain  
and purifies it  
and distils it  
until it is rendered down  
into pain that can  
be confirmed and named  
and given back to the All  
transformed by human understanding  
while we return  
only the unassimilable residue

through the medium of our organs of respi-  
ration  
unnameable dread  
burnt up  
by a humanised heart  
breathed out  
by humanised lungs  
dissolved  
and washed away  
by humanised kidneys  
digested by human entrails  
and exuded across the boundary of our hu-  
man skin  
but always  
there will be flotsam and jetsam  
ebbing and flowing  
with the rhythmic pulse  
of the mysteries of our sacred blood

It is this  
that Ananda knew  
while in his time  
so many  
strove harder and harder  
to become more and more  
like unto G'd

And it is this that I too  
must remember  
in this time  
while so many  
strive harder and harder  
to become more and more  
like unto G'd

I am here to remember  
in this time  
that we are to strive harder and harder  
to become  
ever more human

## **On The Third Breath**

We are here  
always to remember  
that we are to be human  
and so that we may stay human  
we must not breathe entirely freely  
lest we become like unto angels

And if angels were  
to permit their breath  
to pierce through the knots  
of their being  
undoing the divisions

between the worlds  
they would become like unto G'd  
untied  
unloosed  
unbounded and infinite

And they too  
would fall  
like the one  
who mistook  
his role  
as the messenger  
taking G'ds light from world to world

And as messenger dared to become mes-  
sage  
the brilliance of the message  
broke him  
and the message  
burnt him as it burns all  
who watch with fear and envy  
when they should see  
with love and gratitude  
and it burnt the one  
aflame  
with the dimmed and darkened light  
of all that is no longer accomplished  
as it has been tainted with hubris  
and the work of  
transmitting the message  
has to be begun anew

And this time  
we have been chosen  
invited to become full partners  
in this our covenant  
to work with the G'dhead  
in the living company of all beings  
to restore to  
brightness and fullness  
the mediating splendour  
which embraces and connects all that is  
until all creation shines  
with iridescent beauty  
until all sparks  
tarnished by  
the consuming fire of envy  
will be transformed anew  
into the nourishing fire of love  
that pulsing flame  
at the centre of all that is alive

We must not refuse this partnership  
for if we will not participate  
in this great work  
of the ultimate alchemy of transformation

doing our human part  
in restoring ash and slag  
and cinder and stone  
to flaming liquid gold  
the work of tzimtzum  
will have to start all over again  
and the G'dhead  
would have to take themselves back a little  
all over again  
(that is to breathe not quite freely)  
so as to make room for our human world  
all over again

## II

For there always needs to be someone  
with a human heart  
and feeling hands  
who can work  
in the sweat of their brow  
to unfold the splendours of creation

There always needs to be someone  
who can have their breath taken away  
in awe and wonder  
joyful  
at the ever manifesting miracle  
of what is yet to come

There always needs to be someone  
whose task it is  
to go all the way down  
in search  
of the sparks  
of splendour  
which became trapped in the mire  
when the vessels broke  
that last time  
when too many  
strove to rise upward  
before their time

## III

Our task is not to strive upward  
to become all light  
until we are done  
down here  
with our human task  
of taking the breath  
down  
into our human feet  
letting them breathe in  
the yet unformed  
taking it up into the forge  
out of our inner spaces  
where the work of transformation

will unmake what should not have been  
and remake what should be  
and make anew  
what never yet was  
so as to render unto G'd his due deserts

We are here to walk  
in the footsteps  
of creation  
and to work the breath  
like bellows  
transforming dark matter into light

This is why one was sent  
to show us  
that hard road  
down  
down  
down  
into the flesh  
the blood  
and the bone

And this is why  
in the old pictures  
we see  
the acrobat listening  
to what his feet  
are whispering in his ears

And this is why  
if we know how to listen  
and we harken well  
we will bathe our feet  
in the salty sea of tears  
of that downcast woman  
who knew in her wise hair  
that Luna and Sol  
are like unto fishes  
two foetal feet in the alchemical bath  
twinned kidneys in our belly  
dissolving and separating spirit  
from heavy matter

Prima materia  
washed by sparkling  
living water  
swirling pregnant with the breath  
of the G'dhead  
who inspires  
each and every one  
of our ten toes  
so as to root our soul  
in the living moistened soil of  
that ancestral memory  
where it is recorded

why we are still here

As we are walking on the bare earth  
with our naked feet  
who whisper  
the dewy secrets of the heavens  
in the Dionysian ear of the earth  
while they listen  
to the earth  
as it in turn  
speaks its dark secrets to the soles of our  
feet  
as we are in labour with ourselves  
tilling and harrowing the clods of our soul  
breaking up the words  
letter by letter  
to yield up their meaning  
from Sabbath to Sabbath  
until we are stilled

#### *IV*

Now I feel no longer burdened  
that I am restrained  
from breathing altogether freely

Now I can choose  
to be bound by the covenant  
which confers upon me  
the privilege to know  
that I too am here  
to strive  
to become  
ever more  
human  
and to honour my pledge  
to take the resplendent breath  
down  
into the farthest reaches  
of dark matter

#### *V*

Only when we can tie  
the dark light  
we call our shadow  
willingly  
into the four corners  
of the fabric  
of our incomplete  
and fallible being  
thread by thread  
knot by knot  
binding the light weave of the spirit  
into the dark weft of matter  
can our humanness be lived

and owned  
so as to make hitherto  
disensouled matter  
ever more human  
transformed  
in the sweat of our brow  
by our emotional labour  
which  
claims  
contains  
and clarifies  
the deepest pain

## **VI**

As we labour to symbolise our experience  
Striving to give birth to meaning  
hitherto trapped in raw pain  
we fulfil our share  
of the covenant  
binding us into partnership  
with the G'dhead  
in the arduous task  
of transforming our feet of clay  
into living substance  
as we marry our pain  
with its name  
letter by letter  
and breath by breath

We lift up our face  
to praise still falteringly  
the splendour of what is  
while we learn how to live ethically  
by the light of our human knowing  
augmenting our  
incomplete  
and faulty understanding  
spark by spark  
as we lament all that is still undone  
so as to gain hope and strength  
to struggle on with all  
that must be now be attempted

## **VII**

Taking our pain  
into our human  
heart  
and rendering it  
down  
down  
down  
purifying and distilling  
our experience  
sorting  
transforming

naming  
and understanding  
until all that we can learn from experience  
is re-membered  
and only  
the unmetabolisable marks  
of nameless dread  
are left  
like diabol  
of unsymbolised foreign bodies  
waiting to be dissolved  
and washed  
away  
by our kidneys  
breathed out  
by human lungs  
and given back  
unredeemed  
to the All  
as we lift our voice in supplication  
to be relieved only  
of truly unbearable suffering  
while we are given new hope  
and new strength  
to take up again our portion  
of that human suffering  
that can be borne  
and contained  
transformed  
and understood  
and brought to an end  
by human effort and endeavour

## **VIII**

It is this  
that Ananda knew  
he must do  
while in his time  
so many  
strove harder and harder  
to become more and more  
like unto G'd  
And it is this that I too  
must remember  
in this time  
while so many  
strive harder and harder  
to become more and more  
like unto G'd

## **IX**

As we choose to carry  
our share of the burden  
we are helped



by one who is sent down  
to stand in our way  
when we balk at our task  
to walk the hard road  
to renewal  
down  
down  
down  
where we must wrestle with the dark  
to win back each spark of spilt light

And as we become weary  
and as we weep from tiredness  
and as we despair at our impossible task  
and as we want to go home  
into the light  
where there is peace  
and rest  
where all is redeemed  
and all is quiet  
all thirst is quenched  
all hunger stilled  
one is sent to remind us  
that it is not yet time  
to go home  
for the task is not yet done  
and even though we are weary  
the dark messenger will not let us pass

And even though  
a minyan has prayed in unison  
with such purity and fervour  
that the messiah must surely come  
the G'dhead will send a bear  
to remind us that it is not yet time

And the adversary will wrestle with us all  
night  
at the foot of that ladder  
which is not yet ours to ascend  
and even though we be lamed  
and even though we be footsore and re-  
fractory  
and even though Eve's wounded foot weeps  
as a persistent reminder  
of the faultiness of our knowing  
even though we have eaten from the tree  
of knowledge  
it is not for us to eat  
from the tree of life  
but to become a fruit  
on that living tree  
as we ripen  
towards our completion

The foot will not heal

for it is the our tie to this earth  
where we have freely chosen  
to eat from the tree of learning  
so as to mark our obligation  
which ties us into our solemn commitment  
to choose one path from another  
without fear  
for it is the choosing that matters  
humbly and in good faith  
for as long as our learning is not yet done  
all our wrong choices  
are already forgiven

The adversary will stand before us  
and he will show us the next temptation  
which we must accept  
so that we may learn to choose well  
until the G'dhead releases us  
from our labour  
on that last Sabbath when all creation is ful-  
filled

## X

But until this time comes  
I am to be here  
on this earth  
in this time  
to stand under  
the feet of the G'dhead  
until I understand  
how to listen and to harken  
to the Word  
as it becomes flesh  
as the G'dhead steps down  
from the pedestal  
and descends that ladder  
which connects all realms of creation  
where each rung transmits downward  
and receives upward  
those words that can only be known  
by each order of beings  
in their own way

The G'dhead walks before us  
with knowing feet  
a pillar of dust to shield us from the light  
a pillar of light to soften our dark  
a pillar of mercy  
to forgive our failings and transgressions  
a pillar of gravity  
to weight our choices  
a living sign  
of the covenant  
that binds us into the great work  
in human fellowship  
as we walk together

neighbour with neighbour  
on the path  
with learning feet  
as we become  
ever more human  
and ever more ourselves  
you and I  
here  
today  
becoming the word  
letter  
by letter  
until each  
of the six hundred thousand letters  
of the covenant  
is filled with our own living human breath

### **On the Fourth Breath**

I  
And despite knowing all this  
today yet again  
I feel burdened  
by the restraint  
on breathing altogether freely  
and I strain against  
the band of iron  
constricting my breath  
like an unwanted bond  
binding my spirit  
to my body  
gravid  
with its own mystery

I long to let my breath soar upward  
to take me home  
into the light  
liberated  
from my earthly task  
light and free

I breathe into the pain  
encircling the cage of my ribs  
endeavouring  
to render it  
down  
down  
down  
purifying and distilling  
sorting  
transforming  
naming  
and understanding  
this dull ache  
until all

I am capable of learning from experience  
is re-membered  
and only  
the unmetabolisable marks  
of nameless dread  
are left  
like diabol  
unassimilable  
waiting to be dissolved  
and washed  
away  
by my kidneys

Unsymbolised foreign bodies  
breathed out  
by my lungs  
uncomprehended  
to be given back  
unredeemed  
to the All  
as I cry out in supplication  
to be relieved  
of that portion of my suffering  
which I can no longer  
bear to contain  
in the quailing chambers  
of my human heart

II  
And as through a glass darkly  
I re-member  
that one was sent  
to tread  
in the footsteps of creation  
a living signpost  
to that hard road  
down  
down  
down  
into the flesh  
the blood  
and the bone  
where  
like bellows  
the breath  
oxygenates dense matter  
igniting that transforming fire  
which  
as the sparks fly upwards  
renders to ashes  
unlived life  
red dust  
never moistened  
into green and malleable clay  
leaving behind  
a fecund residue of blood and stone

I struggle  
to re-member  
what I once knew  
before Lethe's birthing waters  
rendered me unconscious  
baptising all of us into ignorance  
making us innocent  
like little children  
until  
as we wake  
from our slumber  
we wade through water  
and we walk into the fire  
where we are unmade  
twice reborn  
so that we may forge our own destinies

Only  
when I can willingly  
bind that dark light  
we call our shadow  
into the fabric  
of my incomplete  
and fallible being  
thread by thread  
sinew by sinew  
knot by knot  
corner by corner  
tassle by tussle  
can our humanness be lived  
and owned

Only when I thread  
the silver weave of the spirit  
through the dark weft of my flesh  
sinew by sinew  
muscle by muscle  
skin by bone by blood  
will I properly lay claim to my portion  
of human misery  
so that I may work to complete  
my emotional labour  
as I struggle  
in the sweat of my brow  
to render  
disensouled matter  
ever more human  
as I strive to contain  
transform  
and clarify  
the turbulent afflictions  
of the dark night of my own soul

III

And as we labour

to symbolise our experience  
straining to birth meanings  
breached and strangled  
in a matrix suffused with nameless dread  
we fulfil our share  
of the covenant  
you and I  
binding us into partnership  
with the G'dhead  
in that arduous task  
of transforming our feet of clay  
into living substance

Through dialogue  
borne of human attachment  
honed by emotional attunement  
refined by shared intentions  
we act together to augment the dew  
we ring from that field of language  
moistened by divine breath at dawn  
as we are in labour  
with one another  
and we name the pain  
of birthing one another  
into human fellowship  
conspicifics  
in that speculum  
in which we recognise  
one another  
by our confining hide and our cognisant hair  
learning one another's name  
letter by letter  
and breath by breath  
as verb by verb  
we learn to master  
that most exacting  
language of the heart  
in which we  
mirror one another  
as we truly recognise and reflect  
in the mirror of burning compassion  
one to the other  
who we truly are

And as the words come  
and I lift up my face  
to praise the splendour of what is  
and I find hope  
in what is good  
I make ready  
to take up again  
my portion of human struggle  
finding new strength  
to recognise what still divides  
one from the other  
as we continue to use our difference

to defend our separation from one another  
frightened to celebrate  
the abundance of the diversity of creation  
afraid to combine our voices  
in a choir of hope  
terrified to unite one with the other  
to bear our share  
of adversity  
together  
so we might work in companionship  
to heal the differences that divide us  
by learning their names  
so we may undo their spells  
so that we may  
combine letter and sound  
once more  
into a celebration of the manifold of creation

Suddenly my breath  
Is no longer the unwilling captive  
of a meaningless cavity  
and what was imprisoning cage  
becomes bounded container  
treasure chest  
bodily sanctum  
for my human heart

That ultimate organ  
of learning  
which contains  
transforms  
and understands  
what it is  
we are here to bring into the world  
as we struggle to learn  
how to live ethically  
unveiling  
layer by layer our incomplete  
and faulty understanding  
forging new meaning  
heartbeat by heartbeat  
igniting breath by breath  
flashes of inner fire  
illuminating  
for a split second  
a preview  
of the incandescent splendour  
of the work accomplished  
as deed becomes verb  
and adjective marries pronoun  
as vice is owned and integrated with virtue  
as you and I come full circle  
as each becomes noun  
answering at last  
each to our proper names

#### IV

Tongues of flame  
rain  
down  
down  
as the bolt of Your thunderous voice  
cracks open the earth  
upon which I stand

And as my eyes grow weary  
from the pain of seeing  
as I precipitously  
peer into the swirling chasm  
my head is bowed  
my neck is bent  
and my is back bending  
like a green sapling  
and my ears are open  
beside my feet  
as I too am in the full round of my becoming  
from alpha to omega

And as I listen  
for strains of Your voice  
to rise up from the deep  
to touch me in my trembling middle  
I am humbled  
like the ancient acrobat  
who bends double  
into a perfect arc  
as he harkens deeply  
to what his feet  
are whispering in his ears

Like the acrobat  
I too am now bent  
on passing through my own sacred portal  
where the spark travels freely  
across the gap from foot to ear  
no longer abyss  
swirling with the unformed  
but the generative gap  
in the sparkplug of life  
across which travels  
the energy which marries what could be  
with that which can become

My awakening feet  
are longing to be bathed  
in the salty sea of tears  
of that downcast woman  
who knew in her wise hair  
that Luna and Sol  
are like unto fishes  
two foetal feet

in the alchemical bath  
twinned kidneys in our belly  
dissolving and separating spirit

Prima materia  
each and every one  
of our ten toes  
washed by  
the sparkling  
living water  
of the law  
swirling pregnant  
with the breath of the G'dhead

Rooting our soul  
in that ancestral memory  
generative moist mineral bed  
redolant with occulted meaning  
germinal substrate  
of re-cognisance  
as we labour  
in the salty sweat of our brow  
down here  
now  
treading unshod  
on newly uncovered ground

Our seedling feet  
whispering heaven's dewy secrets  
in the earth's Dionysian ear  
all the while  
listening in turn  
to the earth's dark and fecund discourse  
as the soles of our feet  
tune to receive  
its coded messages  
like a seismograph  
while we are in labour with ourselves  
from Sabbath to Sabbath

Tilling and harrowing  
the clods of our soul  
breaking up the sounds  
letter by letter  
till they yield up their meaning  
in the solemn marriage  
of tongues  
fleshly tongue  
with symbolic tongue  
marrying spirit with flesh and bone  
until we are like unto living signs  
as we become our name  
and the Word is fulfilled in us

## V

Undimmed and undumbed

I no longer  
feel so burdened  
by the restraint  
on breathing altogether freely

I re-member  
that I too was chosen  
to live by Your covenant  
which confers upon me the privilege  
to choose to be bound  
into a community of language  
a community of practice  
and a community of meaning  
in which I too may affirm  
that am here to strive  
to become  
ever more  
human

I too am free to honour my pledge  
to take down  
into the farthest reaches  
of dark matter  
the resplendent gift  
of Your breath  
where those  
who recognise one another as kith and kin  
in Your name  
will affirm their bonds  
with one other  
tying us into the common task  
of becoming  
ever more human  
as we build  
a community of language  
as we build  
a community of practice  
and as we build  
a community of meaning

## VI

And in order to stay human  
We must not breathe  
entirely freely  
lest we become  
like unto angels

And if angels  
were to breathe altogether freely  
breathing the knots  
out of their being  
they would become  
like unto G'd  
untied  
unloosed  
unbounded and infinite

And if no one  
was any longer  
like unto humans  
the work of tzimtzum  
would have to start  
all over again

And the G'dhead  
would have to  
take themselves back  
a little  
all over again  
(that is to breathe not quite freely)  
so as to make room  
for our human world

For there always needs to be someone  
with a human heart  
and feeling hands  
who can work  
in the sweat of their brow  
to unfold the splendours of creation

There always needs to be someone  
who can have their breath taken away  
in awe and wonder and jubilation  
at the ever manifesting miracle  
of what is yet to come

There always needs to be someone  
whose task it is  
to go all the way  
down  
in search  
of the sparks of splendour  
which became trapped in the mire  
when the vessels broke  
that last time  
when too many  
strove to rise upward  
before their time

## VII

It is this  
that Ananda knew  
he must do  
while in his time  
so many  
strove harder and harder  
to become more and more  
like unto G'd

Now  
as I too  
begin to remember

in this time  
while so many  
strive harder and harder  
to become more and more  
like unto G'd  
that I too am not here  
to strive upward toward the light  
I no longer feel so pained  
that I may not  
breathe entirely freely  
until I and you are done  
with our human task  
down here  
taking the breath  
down  
into our human feet  
walking  
down  
down  
down  
the ladder  
of creation  
where angels now fear to tread  
since one in their midst  
lost all sense of direction  
and he climbed upward  
when he should have climbed down  
until dizzied by his unprepared encounter  
with the utter luminance  
of the divine presence  
blinded in all his myriad eyes  
and seared by the fiery breath  
he plummeted to the deep  
like molten lead

## VIII

Now  
I have freely chosen  
to willingly carry my share of the burden  
I understand  
why one is sent down  
to stand in our way  
when we balk at our task  
to walk the hard road  
to renewal  
down  
down  
down  
where we must wrestle with the dark  
to win back each spark of spilt light

As we despair at our impossible task  
weeping from weariness  
wanting to go home into the light  
where all is redeemed  
and all is quiet

one is sent to remind us  
that it is not yet time  
to go home  
to that place  
where there is peace  
and where there is rest  
where all thirst is quenched  
and all hunger stilled  
for the task is not yet done  
and even though we are spent  
the dark messenger will not let us pass

And even though  
we have prayed in unison  
with such purity and fervour  
that the messiah must surely come  
the G'dhead will send a bear  
to remind us that it is not yet time

Now  
I remember  
the one that did come  
to show us  
the way of suffering  
when he too  
cried out in pain  
begging to be released into the light

And like Job before him his flesh wept blood  
as his spirit was nailed into his body  
three spikes of the name  
binding him irrevocably  
into his humanness  
before he like Jonah before him  
went down the ladder  
into the belly  
of the beast  
where he went  
farther than most  
into the very depth of incarnation  
until the adversary  
finally  
stood aside  
to let him to rejoin the light  
for he had fulfilled his covenant  
as he became his name

As his living flesh  
was carded and his blood was sanctified  
as it passed through the eye of the needle  
threshold between becoming and unbecoming  
the silver threads of sparkling light  
of the greening human vine called Adam  
fed by living loam

each leaf inscribed with the flaming letters of  
the law  
each fruit ripened by the fires of the spirit  
were allowed to pass through the sacred  
portal  
now at last wending their way upwards on  
the winding stair  
while the fibers of the coarse dead wood  
of unredeemed matter  
were stripped off  
and returned along the downward spiral  
reentering the inert red dust of the primeval  
deserts of Edom

## IX

But until  
we are fulfilled  
ready to pass through the eye of Ayin Sof  
we shall wrestle  
with the adversary all night  
at the foot of that ladder  
between the realms  
where we may test our boundaries  
to the utmost limit  
until the scales fall from our eyes  
and we are no longer terrified of by greatness  
and we are ready to live our own beauty  
with pride but not jealousy  
with desire but not covetousness  
with justice but not righteousness  
when passion frees us  
in mercy and compassion  
and no longer binds us  
in lust and greed  
and wanton anger  
so we may yield and open  
free from fear of violence

And then the peacocks tail  
will open out like a fan  
and light and iridescent like its feathers  
we too will be ready  
to ascend the arc of splendour  
and we shall see  
with the countless eyes  
of the peacock's tail  
that what was begun  
is now complete  
and all that was not yet light  
has become part and parcel  
of the prismatic ladder  
where light and sound  
matter and letter  
are one at last  
in one glorious dance

of living energy

But now  
we are stumbling still  
faltering and lame  
somewhat footsore and refractory  
as Eve's wounded foot weeps  
persistent testimony  
to the faultiness of our knowing  
for even though we have eaten from the tree  
of knowledge  
it is not for us to eat  
from the tree of life  
but for now  
it falls to us  
to bear witness  
to the greening of the red man  
as we become fruits ourselves  
on that living vine  
ripening  
towards our completion

Our foot will not heal  
until blessure becomes blessing  
wounding becomes Wunder  
and test become testimony  
as we affirm our tie to this earth  
to this kingdom  
where we have freely chosen  
to eat from the tree of learning  
accepting the  
covenant  
tying us into our solemn commitment  
to perfect what is incomplete  
so we may become the jewel  
which crowns the manifest world  
as we are learning how to choose  
one path from another  
without fear  
humbly and in good faith

Without fear  
for as long as our learning is not yet done  
and our masculine knowing  
is not yet married to our feminine under-  
standing  
engendering living knowledge  
the merciful G'dhead  
has already forgiven  
all our sinful choices  
for it is the act of choosing  
which makes us human  
brokering the wedding of bride and bride-  
groom  
so that letter entertwines with sound  
in compassionate embrace

and the written word marries the spoken  
word  
engendering life giving meaning  
in this double coronation  
of our coming to know ourselves as we  
really are

It never was righteousness in word or deed  
that was to establish the kingdom of G'd on  
earth  
but it always was our choosing  
in awareness and humility  
again and again  
how to be ourselves  
in human fellowship with one another  
when communication becomes communion  
as we become one with our name  
that we shall mend what was broken  
and gather what was spilt  
and redeem what is fallen  
restoring us to our true being

And as long as we are not done  
the adversary will stand before us  
showing us temptation after temptation  
testing our knowing  
so that we may at last  
embrace what is unfinished  
and consent  
to that ultimate marriage  
where beauty pierces beast  
and the generative blood of the dragon  
is mingled with the milk of human under-  
standing  
in that ultimate vaccination  
which will inoculate us against  
our dread of not knowing  
and which will inure us  
against our fear of a splendour without  
qualities  
and which will fortify us  
against our terror of end without end  
until at last we cease to run away  
from that which we seek most  
and we finally embrace what we most desire

In that ultimate chalice  
sacrificed white bread and sanctified red  
wine  
sanctified white semen and sacred life giving  
placental blood  
sanctifying white light and sanctifying red fire  
transubstantiate into one another  
so that the bright germ of the sacred intelli-  
gences



implants in the dense alma mater of all  
matter  
forming and unforming life  
as being and unbeing  
and knowing and unknowing are tran-  
scended  
in the flux and lux of ever changing life

All duality is finally overcome  
and the germ of my name  
fertilised by the Name that is no name  
is matured in my body  
until my body  
created perfect and pronounced good  
at the beginning of creation  
is truly fecundated by my mind  
created imperfect  
and incomplete

Unfinished by the G'dhead  
so that I shall work and rework  
the lineaments of meaning  
in the forge of my human heart  
ever in dialogue with the living G'd  
while learning to love my neighbour  
until my body  
given innocent  
and washed at the beginning  
by the swirling waters of the human womb  
becomes one  
with my mind  
gifted by divine inspiration  
cleansed  
by the flaming fires of the human heart  
and tempered to the thirty third degree  
on the anvil of the G'dhead  
into that sword  
which cleaves  
the true names from the false  
as word becomes flesh  
and flesh becomes  
liquid gold  
in that ultimate marriage of meaning  
where the waters of the deep  
and the waters of the womb become one  
and the fire of the heart  
and the fire of the spirit burn with one flame  
as I recognise myself in the face of the  
G'dhead  
no longer object but subject  
no longer creature  
but co-creator  
a self responsible and responsive partner  
in our shared covenant

Then  
the Go'dhead  
with infinite grace  
and tender compassion  
releases us  
from our labour  
on that last Sabbath  
for  
at last  
all that was fashioned  
in those six days of creation  
has grown to completion  
and the son of the earth  
(Adam – adama)  
is at last  
in love with the daughter of the tree of life  
(Eva-Hava)  
and the enmity set between them  
by the serpent  
has been vanquished  
in the belly of the dragon  
that matrix in which matter and spirit  
finally recognise one another  
as transforms of one another  
ever bound  
in dialectical process  
on the cosmic wheel  
of solve et coagula  
where the dense is inspirited  
to become subtle  
and the subtle condenses  
to become pregnant and heavy  
with ever new possibilities of manifestation  
and there is no more adversity  
between creator and created

As shin becomes shem  
the four prongs of the name  
interpenetrate all categories  
piercing all four worlds  
suspending and transcending all diversity  
uniting in one all encompassing matrix  
the myriad manifold  
of all that is  
and all that was  
and all that shall be

When all names may be known  
and all names may be given voice  
in living speech  
all meaning will again be held  
in the hands of the living G'd  
and what is already light  
and what is not yet light  
will be one at last  
and death shall have no dominion

for the tree of knowledge  
and the tree of life  
have again become one  
as life which can be figured out through hu-  
man understanding  
is married with life which is unfathomable  
ineffable ground of all existence  
hub of all wheels  
chariot and chakra  
where dancer and dance are one and the  
same  
and all is motion  
and all is still

### X

But until this time of no time comes  
in this place which is no place  
in this dance which is perfect stillness  
I am to be here  
on this earth  
in this time and this place  
to stand under  
the feet of the G'dhead  
until I too come to understand  
how to listen and to harken  
to the Word  
as it becomes flesh

I am here to listen  
to the footfalls of the sacred  
as the G'dhead steps down  
from the pedestal  
and descends the ladder of the covenant  
which connects all realms of creation  
rung by rung  
ever in dialogue  
with one another and with all beings  
ever in the midst of creation  
transmitting downward  
and receiving upward  
modulations of sounds  
each with its own measure  
on a precise prismatic scale  
forming into words  
known by each order of beings  
in their own tongue  
from which they are  
continually translated into the green lan-  
guage  
the language of innocence and experience  
which yields that perfect parsing tree  
which reveals the deep structure of all lan-  
guage  
that ultimate thesaurus of all living knowing  
where being and knowing and speaking are  
one

where the divine presence  
perpetually mediates  
between the word of G'd  
and the language of the birds  
translating between the angelic tongue  
and the human tongue  
and the calling of the beasts  
who are only dumb to those that are deaf

And always  
the G'dhead walks before us  
with knowing feet  
a pillar of dust to shield us from the light  
a pillar of light to soften our dark  
a pillar of mercy  
to forgive our failings and transgressions  
a pillar of gravity  
to weight our choices

And always the prismatic ladder  
spans earth and sky  
like a shimmering rainbow  
vibrating to the sound of the music of the  
spheres  
fragrant with the perfume of the garden  
emblem and living sign  
of the covenant  
that binds us into the great work  
in human fellowship

And as we walk together  
neighbour with neighbour  
on the path  
bearing our portion  
with learning feet  
angels before us  
and angels behind us  
angels above us  
and angels below us  
we become  
ever more human  
as we are ever in labour with ourselves

You and I  
here  
today  
together  
we labour in the sweat of our brow  
to become the word  
letter  
by letter  
until each  
and everyone  
of the six hundred thousand letters  
of the covenant  
is alive

with  
human breath  
and each and everyone of us  
knows his or her own name

And only when  
I can stand my knowing feet  
on my crowned human head  
will I no longer need to understand  
will I no longer stand under the feet  
of one who knows on my behalf  
but I shall at last stand upright  
in the place of my unique calling  
no longer bystander  
but standing by every one  
as I stand together  
with you  
and you  
and you  
each of us fulfilling our unique obligation  
as you and I  
jointly participate in our shared stewardship  
of this our earth

Only then will we be ready to be crowned  
And only then  
will the angel with the flaming sword  
stand aside  
for I shall at last face him without fear  
and he will let me pass  
to ascend that winding rainbow stair  
from alpha to omega  
which leads from real world to royal world  
to the ultimate throne of all four emanations

Only when we have really achieved all that  
together  
joined in word and deed  
can we expect to be allowed to remain  
without being sent back  
to complete yet another task  
on the way to becoming ever more human

And only then will we be met  
by that culminating eagle  
under whose wings of sheer splendour  
we may at last complete  
what was begun  
with each spiritual circumcision  
which has marked our covenant with the  
G'dhead  
according to our own particular ancestral  
rites  
when we gave our skin or hair or word  
as mark and token  
of our pledge to become ever more human

in an ongoing dialogue  
with each other  
in partnership with our G'd

Only when we are full to the brim  
our human skin bursting with fiery wine  
are we finally ready to spill our sanctified  
blood  
into the lap of the G'dhead  
that exquisite holy vessel  
sought in the quest for the Holy Grail  
that ultimate container of all liquid life  
now healed and made whole  
again  
after the longed for  
laboured for  
finally accomplished  
restoration of the worlds  
tikkun ha olam

Now the holy vessels  
can and will  
hold the holy light at last  
without breaking ever more  
for they have been made strong  
by our covenant  
marrying what is human with what is divine  
as we have freely consented  
to the sanctification  
of our blood  
through the fortifying blessing of the Spirit

Now Divine Spirit and human blood are one  
Holy Blood  
the divine nucleus returned  
to each enucleated  
physical red blood corpuscle  
drop by drop  
and spark by spark  
its divine respiration has been restored  
and the G'dhead  
is alive in every cell of my body  
their name inscribed  
in the very marrow of my bone  
generative matrix of all human respiration  
where the bodily messenger is daily made  
anew  
charged with exchanging living breath  
with exhausted exhalation  
carbon dioxide and mercury  
transformed second by second  
into oxygen and gold  
in that ultimate mystery of the blood  
where every grain  
of the salt of the earth  
becomes wisdom

Sanctified blood  
returned to the San Graal  
from which it came  
made whole again  
restored to its real essence  
sang real  
sang royal  
contents turned vessel  
and red turned gold  
as we are at last ready  
to see our face reflected  
in this ultimate cup  
from which shines forth  
G'd's countenance  
microprosopos mirrored in macroprocopos  
as the lesser and the greater assembly  
are singing in unison at last  
and all discord  
and all bars to redemption  
are finally overcome

Only when we have accomplished all that  
you and I  
and we are resolutely joined together  
in heart and mind  
to overcome pain and suffering  
only when we no longer visit upon one an-  
other  
flood famine pestilence and war  
as we finally cease to be  
negligent husbands of a troubled earth  
and we refrain from inflicting  
injustice iniquity and inequality  
and we are truly ready to  
celebrate diversity  
as lion lies with lamb  
and there is no more sacrifice  
for we are ready at last to walk  
with gladness and joy

to that ultimate circumcision  
which relieves us  
of our human sheath  
as we no longer need an organ  
of separation and respiration  
because we feel safe at last  
to be clothed in nothing  
but sheer glory and joy

Then the resplendent  
winged messenger of the air  
will meet us  
and take us to that place that is no place  
which is without beginning  
and without end  
where each of us will stand uncloaked  
rejoicing in the face of our own truth  
naked and trembling  
ready to relinquish  
the boundary of our human skin  
as we let go of what has divided us from G'd  
and from one another  
we shall be cloaked in our entirety  
in sheer shimmering sacred breath  
luminous with love  
given up to bliss  
juissance

And only then  
will all names cease  
and only then  
will it be  
that all that is  
is  
I

*Hilde Rapp*  
16 May 2002

## **EXPLANATORY NOTE ABOUT THE POEM:**

This poem is a sustained meditation on what it is to be human. It draws on the rich mystical tradition of the kabbalah as it has been successively interpreted by the mystical strands of three great religions of the book. The kabbalah has in addition increasingly embraced the foundational principles of Eastern mystical practices.

Although the poem refers to G'd or the G'dhead this should not be seen as expressing a religious belief in a Divine being, but rather it should be seen as a radical commitment to the necessity of agreeing a shared transpersonal reference point which gives meaning to our own understanding of ourselves as partners in a dialogue which

serves to establish our human identity in terms of psychological, social, political, spiritual and cultural meanings.

Although the poem makes use of the notion creation in traditional biblical terms. It is important to stress that this poem relates to an enquiry into how we make meaning of the human condition. This enquiry avails itself of symbolic vehicles for understanding our inner development as thinking, feeling and acting beings. It does it no way relate to any scientific enquiry into how the physical cosmos may have found its current form, which should be seen as orthogonal to it. This poem has nothing whatsoever to say which bears ion the current debate between adherents of creationism or Darwinian evolution.

The poems makes some use of kabbalistic concepts. All kabbalistic work is a sustained effort after interpretation. While there are some conventional understandings of kabbalistic terms, each new interpreter imbues them with additional meanings and uses the elements of the tradition to engender novel ways of understanding who we are and what we are here to do. In this sense there can be no claims to truth, only to the authenticity and sincerity of a quest for human understanding through ongoing dialogue, interpretation, translation and transformation.

## Selected Glossary terms:

A brief note on some of the Kabbalistic terms used, drawn from the Hebrew language (transliterations into Roman script vary in different reditions):

**Kabbalah:** (Receiving) The body of mystical Jewish teachings. The forth level of in depth understanding of the **Torah** the Teaching or Light) contained in the **Five Books of the Moses** and the oral law which elucidates these texts which are seen as the spiritual blueprints of creation.

The **Kabbalah** has been significantly influenced by mystical Islam, especially **Sufism**, and especially since the renaissance by mystical Christianity, especially the **Rosicrucian Enlightenment**. In many ways it has been the spiritual meeting ground of the great religions of the book all of which have developed their own kabbalistic texts and practices.

**En Sof:** (Endless World, World of the Infinite). The first world of Divine Light from which sprang all subsequent emanations. The world of perfect balance between the endless imparting of the creator and the endless receiving of creation in which the Divine and the human, the perfect light and the not accomplished light are in perfect union with all being and all beings

**Tsimtsum:** (contraction, concealment) This refers to voluntary restriction, restraint, retraction of the Divine Light in the Endless World of En Sof. The divine process of self limitation by which all entities and beings can come into separate existence to participate in the manifold diversification of finite forms of being.

**Shin : ( s )** one of the three ‘mother letters’ in the Hebrew alphabet, which expresses the sound ‘s’ and which has the numerical value 300. At is most general it symbolises the process of becoming, of the dynamic movement of the soul from its divine foundation via the unaccomplished state of human incarnation to the accomplished marriage of divine

being with human meaning , when it may be written with four strokes or teeth rather than the usual three

**Shem:** (name) The secret or mystical name both of the G'dhead and of each human being in the sense of our 'true self', 'divine essence or nature'. That which defines our ethical core which, when fully realised, will lead us to become 'beings of light', reunited with the Divine in **En Sof**

**tikkun ha olam:** (**tikkun:** repair, restoration, redemption, healing) **ha olam:** (of the world) Tikkun refers to the moral and physical effort of the principal human quest to accept our fallibility, to learn through our mistakes. This means opening ourselves to receiving Divine forgiveness and compassion so that we in turn may support the learning of others by passing on this positive energy to our fellow beings so that in time beauty, truth and love may become the governing principles of life. It was through hubris, through aspiring to enlightenment and illumination without learning from experience that both angelic and human beings and the human world came to grief in that first 'fall' because we lacked the strength and discipline to be worthy vessels or containers for the Divine light. The vessels broke and the divine light was spilled. The task of tikkun is to gather the lost sparks and to return them to their source.

### ***About the Author:***

**Hilde Rapp** has a life long commitment to fostering and furthering social renewal and regeneration through practical engagements with individuals, groups and organisations. This includes working with the community, the public and the private sector in the fields of health, education and commerce as a consultant, psychotherapist, supervisor, and writer. She also plays a leading role in national and international committees and initiatives committed to fostering the values, knowledge and skills which will resource individuals and organisations to face the challenges of managing change in a complex multicultural society.

## BOOK, CASSETTE AND CD REVIEWS

**Shivam Rachana** (compiler) ( 2000), *Lotus Birth*. Australia: Greenwood Press, Steels Creek. Foreword by Michel Odent.

**Staunton, Tree** (ed) (2002), *Body Psychotherapy*. East Sussex: Brunner Routledge, Advanced Theory in Therapy series Editor: Keith Tudor

**Pert, Candace B., Ph.D.** (1997), *Molecules of Emotion: Why you Feel the Way you Feel*. London: Pocket Books.

**Lynn Grabhorn** (2000), *Excuse Me, Your Life Is Waiting: The Astonishing Power Of Feelings*. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads.

**Dan Brulé**, 1. *The Principles of Breath Therapy*, from Breath and Breathing programme # 112; 2. *Breath Energy Exercises* (The Basic Series) from Breath and Breathing programme # 101; 3. *The Power and Potential of Conscious Breathing*, Breath and Breathing program #38, recorded live in New Orleans March, 2002-06-03; 4. *Spiritual Breathing*, Breath and Breathing program #31, Recorded live in Yellowknife, in August 2001. Four CD's and accompanying transcripts, *produced by Dan Brule/One Sky International*.

**Dennis Lewis** (1998), *Breathing as a Metaphor for Living: Teachings and Exercises on Complete and Natural Breathing*. 2 cassettes. Boulder, Colorado: Sounds True.

**Shivam Rachana (compiler) ( 2000), Lotus Birth. Australia: Greenwood Press, Steels Creek. Foreword by Michel Odent.**

This is a most extraordinary and challenging book. It will encourage everyone who works with birth trauma to go deeper in their own healing (see Nemi Nath's article in this THB), and that of others, and all caring medical and birth professionals to rethink their procedures.

It begins with an Introduction by Shivam Rachana. I would love to quote all of it, but you will have to read it yourselves. It describes her journey to understanding that babies mind when the cord is cut:

Reported reactions of babies to having their cords cut included: 'gaspd, shuddered, screamed, cried louder, whimpered, wringingn of hands, began crying.' (p.9)

and to her discover of a way of birthing that leaves the cord to separate from the baby naturally. Perhaps we should remember that even today everyone concerned in the birthing of babies still does not *know* that babies feel pain!

In Chapter One, 'Womb ecology becomes world ecology', Rachana explains the many reasons why we should let the placenta and baby separate naturally. These include that the placenta nourishes the baby even after birth, that it is a means to a full incarnation of all the bodies: physical, emotional, mental, etheric and spiritual; and that – perhaps most importantly of all: the placenta is part of the baby! It is a part of the egg that becomes the baby which separates off to fulfil its feeding and protecting functions. How

can we imagine that it is so unimportant as to be separated from the baby arbitrarily! And let us also remember that this gives the baby time!

Chapter Two is an exploration of the psychohistory of childbirth practices in Western culture: including how medicalised birthing practices happened and also how gentle birthing has been claimed by women. Chapter Three describes 'a natural approach to the third stage of labour' and is by Dr Sarah Buckley who explains the biophysical advantages of not cutting the cord too soon and discusses cord cutting practices among various groups of people. Chapter Four, 'The placenta and cord in other cultures,' by Anand Khushi, continues the latter theme and includes how various cultures treat the umbilical cord after it is cut.

In Chapter Five, 'Lotus Birth and the psyche, Soni Stecker considers the psychological implications of interference with the birth process. She writes about cord and placenta symbolism; placenta issues including control and supply; cord issues including bonding and separation; and in contrast to all of that, the integration that takes place during a Lotus Birth. Renuta Potter contributes a section on 'Placental psychology' to this chapter.

Chapter Six is a personal contribution by Dr Christopher Millar of 'Matters of life and birth.'

Chapter Seven contains sections on their personal experiences in this field by Pacia Sallomi on 'the benefits of Lotus Birth,' Alice Scholes on the Lotus placenta, Clair Lotus Day on 'Keeping the unity of pregnancy, Jeanne Parvati Baker on 'Lotus Birth fully bloomed;' Jennifer VanLaanen-Smit on 'The right time to let go.' After reading this you will be well able to manage a Lotus Birth for yourself, with the right health professionals. Chapter Eight contains 'Parent's stories:' and contains various parent's experiences. Chapter Nine contains Midwives experiences.

The book is well referenced and there is a list of recommended reading.

This book is a MUST. There is an article 'Placenta Trauma' by Nemi Nath in this edition of *The Healing Breath* was inspired by this book.

Joy Manné, PhD

**Staunton, Tree (ed) (2002), *Body Psychotherapy*. East Sussex: Brunner Routledge, Advanced Theory in Therapy series Editor: Keith Tudor**

Therapists may find this book "an enormously useful resource – stimulating, comprehensive and responsible" as Professor Samuels says in his foreword, but it is certainly not always easy reading. From the series *Advancing Theory in Therapy*, edited by Keith Tudor, it is aimed at professionals and postgraduates, not trainees or students. Four of the ten contributors are past or present tutors at the Chiron Centre for Body Psychotherapy (UK) and collectively they are all strongly influenced by Freud, Reich and Jung.

The reader gets an overview of the historical development of body psychotherapy, beginning with the relationships between the three influential figures mentioned, and the work of more recent neo-Reichian practitioners, such as Gerda Boyensen, David Boadella, and Alexander Lowen.

The Editor, Tree Staunton, humanistically oriented, has worked at the Chiron Centre for twelve years. She makes it clear in her introduction that body psychotherapy disassociates itself from other body "therapies" such as rebirthing, rolfing, shiatsu, Alex-



ander and Feldenkrais, I guess in order to bring itself in from the long-standing professional cold, in psychotherapy circles. (I have observed a similar growing concern for professional acceptance, in the Breathwork field in recent years).

Nick Totton's analytic approach in Chapter 1. explains Reich's theoretical framework, and his own personal intellectual psychotherapeutic journey away from and back again to Reich's ideas. His discussion of transference and counter transference issues in body work will be useful for anyone working with the body in a professional capacity.

Bernd Eiden describes the Reichian scheme of character structure, with diagrams illustrating the various body types as interpreted by later neo-Reichians, the development of Vegetotherapy techniques to release muscle armouring, and then the current scene in the body therapy field. Eiden's involvement in politics in the 70's, leading to the setting up of the Chiron centre, and its connection to other well known theorists, Lowen (bioenergetics,) Pierrekos (Core energetics) makes interesting reading.

The editor's dense and complex chapter on sexuality (3) and body therapy first clarifies the different ideas on sexuality of the three founding fathers. Reich's concept of removing blocks in physical energy expression is seen as limited, because sexual energy is recognised nowadays as containing psychic energy, and love is rehabilitated somewhat... She explains the body therapist's way of working inter-relationally and the resulting different dynamic to that of other therapists. Difficulties for the body therapist include transference and counter transference, which can create a different way of being in therapeutic relationship dealing with sexual awareness, as well as with regression during physical closeness, or alternatively, the client's yearning when touch is not given.

Roz Carroll explains the subtleties of biodynamic massage with and without body therapy (chapter 4) and shares emotionally charged moments during her personal massage, in sessions with clients. She gives a historical overview of the development of massage by Gerda Boyeson, Norwegian physiotherapist turned psychotherapist, who widened the Reichian focus from muscle structure to the rest of the body, using a stethoscope to listen to internal bodily reactions during therapy.

I enjoyed Babette Rothschild's clear explanation (Chapter 5) of ways in which body therapists deal with problems of touch intolerance in clients suffering from trauma. She includes practical approaches to post-traumatic stress where touch is contraindicated. Body awareness, movement and muscle toning techniques are the alternatives, and their use is well illustrated with case histories and a detailed transcript of a therapy session.

Margaret Landale's chapter on the use of imagery (Chapter 6) in body oriented psychotherapy connected to Jung, Robert Assagioli and Winnicott, and to more recent neuro-scientific work. Catharsis was once the aim of body psychotherapy, but its drawbacks are now recognised, and using imagery is a less overwhelming way of dealing with newly released bodily tensions.

Phillipa Vick (chapter 7) introduced me to the principles of Hakomi therapy developed by Ron Kurtz during the 1970's which seem to amalgamate Buddhist mindfulness, with reframing "core beliefs" positively, into a transpersonal therapy. Vick embraces the works of Jung, Welwood, Gendlin, and also the concept of Energy, as described in Eastern texts. She alludes briefly to Wilber's spectrum of consciousness, dismisses Chakras and does not convey the profound, expanding experience of transpersonal psychotherapy, which others have written about with greater clarity. As she appreciates,

this type of work is difficult to describe, and I had to struggle to follow the application of Hakomi in her energy work with three clients, which seemed devitalised in the telling.

The history of energy work and mysticism continues in *Subtle Bodywork* (Chapter 8) by Rose Cameron, moving from transcendental meditation through to Yoga and the martial arts, to recent Quantum physics. We get a birds eye view of Alchemy, (which has not in fact “faded from our consciousness” as she says, but is alive and kicking in the training of transpersonal psychotherapists at the Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy Education, London) She finally arrives at the well established premise that our breathing affects our energy field. As she rightly says: “When we stop breathing in and out properly, we stop pulsating with the rhythm of the life force. This also affects us spiritually, as we effectively shut the door on Tao” which was for me a welcome recognition of the importance of the breath in working with clients.

I was grateful for a captivating and controversial read, on body psychotherapy and regression. (Chapter 9) Although Roger Woolger is influenced by Reich, he has moved away from what he considers a narrow approach, and his regressional body therapy is closer to transpersonal psychology and allied with modern Russian research into Kirlian energy. Past Life work is Woolger’s speciality, and the graphic case histories he supplies in this chapter (9) convey his enthusiasm while he takes seriously understanding soul, and recognising the difficulty of acceptance of this kind of work in Western society.

In the last chapter (10) Nick Totton considers the future for body psychotherapy and its professionalisation, while accepting that it consists of diverse models which may be difficult to reconcile under one theoretical umbrella. The Editor’s Afterword pursues the same issues as Nick Totton, of bringing theory and clinical application together when they are represented by such varying models as are portrayed here.

As with animals, each body therapy species is different, and each maintains its individuality. Overall unity and agreement would seem to present difficulties at present. However, the fact that such diverse therapists have contributed to this book suggests a strong inclination towards gaining professional acceptance of body therapy in all its forms.

**Vivienne Silver-Leigh**

**Pert, Candace B., Ph.D. (1997), *Molecules of Emotion: Why you Feel the Way you Feel*. London: Pocket Books.**

Candace Pert is a neuroscientist. In this book she establishes the biomolecular basis for our emotions and shows “how the chemicals inside us form a dynamic information network, linking mind and body.” (back cover quote)

This book is part scientific explanation, part biography. In the biographical part her relationship with the cut-throat, unscrupulous, money-and-fame grabbing competitive world of the scientific community is revealed in all its “gory,” especially where winning awards seems to have a higher value than doing the research, and where women are frequently pushed out of the way for the men. In the scientific part she explains her research which I will not summarise. She explains it well and makes it exciting.

I am not competent to judge the science in this book, nor Pert’s claims about her own achievements. What I will concentrate on in this review is how the information it contains is relevant to breathwork. Her relationship with breathwork started through her

interest in Norman Cousins' work on healing through laughter: laughter releases endorphins which may lead to greater health. So does breathing. Pert says: "I'd decided to have my third child at home. Instead of laughter, my magic bullet had been breathing, which is a surefire, proven strategy for releasing endorphins and quelling pain." (p. 167) There she perceived that the receptor science she was so interested in could lead to a new way of understanding and treating illnesses. (p. 168). Laughter, of course, is a form of breathwork (there is a laughter exercise in Kundalini yoga which is based on breathwork). These discoveries led her to suggest that the "nervous, endocrine and immune systems are functionally integrated," or, simply put, that mood influences health and disease! Thus she defined molecules of emotion.

In Chapter Seven, *The Biochemicals of Emotions*, she discusses what emotions are and how many there are (pp. 131f) and whether they begin from the mind or the body. She explains the current state of knowledge about the location of peptide receptors and what that implies for consciousness. Her conclusion is that there is no objective reality, but rather that "emotions are constantly regulating what we experience as "reality," and that "The unconscious mind of the body seems all-knowing and all-powerful and in some therapies can be harnessed for healing or change without the conscious mind ever figuring out what has happened." (p. 147)

She explains the body as an information network and shows how our conscious minds can play a role, for example, through conscious breathing. (p. 186) The body and the mind are one, interconnected organ; intelligence is located "not only in the brain but in cells that are distributed throughout the body." Mental processes, including emotions, can no longer be separated from the body. (p. 187) There are implications for health, one example being that the quality of our emotions make us more or less likely to succumb to viral infections. Basically the immune system can be altered through conscious intervention.

The saddest part of this book is the endless lack of altruism in the scientific community where the quest for fame, glory and money is central. In Chapter Ten, *Child of the New Paradigm*, Pert tells how she discovered a potential cure for AIDS and how corruption in the highest levels of the scientific establishment prevented further research. This led to her leaving university science for the private sector. Misadventures there, including having financial support for her remedy for AIDS stopped – because it was "too good" – set her onto the spiritual path of self-discovery. She started to explore her part of the responsibility for her lack of success and was thus led to alternative and complementary medicine. Because research into peptides is also research into consciousness she had some very interesting experiences: a yogi placed his diagram of chakras over her diagram of "the two chains of nerve bundles located on either side of the spinal cord, each rich with many of the information-carrying peptides ... and we saw how the two systems overlapped." (p. 245) She began to talk to the "new paradigm" crowd: Bernie Siegel, Stan Grof, Stanley Krippner, Fritjof Capra, etc. and at the same time managed to retain her position in the scientific community. She explains it this way:

The ability to accept very diametrically opposite points of view is due, I believe, to the fact that I'm a woman. Because women have a thicker corpus callosum – the bundle of nerves that bridges the left and right brain hemispheres – they are able to switch back and forth from the rational, or

left brain, to the intuitive, or right brain, with relative ease. With fewer nerves connecting the hemispheres, men tend to be more focused in one hemisphere or the other. (p. 247)

This book has very interesting discussions on the relationship between mind and body, and consciousness. Pert points out that the medical model is least effective in dealing with unhealed feelings.

I believe that happiness is what we feel when our biochemicals of emotion, the neuropeptides and their receptors, are open and flowing freely throughout the psychosomatic network, integrating and coordinating our systems, organs and cells in a smooth rhythmic movement. Health and happiness are often mentioned in the same breath, and maybe this is why: Physiology and emotions are inseparable. I believe that happiness is our natural state, and that bliss is hardwired. Only when our systems get blocked, shut down, and disarrayed do we experience the book disorders that add up to unhappiness in the extreme.” (p. 265)

And further:

... when emotions are expressed – which is to say that the biochemicals that are the substrate of emotion are flowing freely – all systems are united and made whole. (p. 273)

I cannot but remark here that breathwork of various kinds: rebirthing, conscious breathing techniques, Holotropic Breathwork™, and so forth; is an excellent, safe and natural means of allowing emotions to become expressed!

Pert goes on:

The mainstream misses a lot by excluding touch, by ignoring the fact that the body really is the gateway to the mind, and by refusing to acknowledge the importance of emotional release as a mind-body event with the potential to supplement or even sometimes replace talk cures and prescription pills. (p. 275)

She joins the discussion on what “energy” is:

When stored or blocked emotions are released through touch or other physical methods, there is a clearing of our internal pathways, which we experience as energy. (p. 276)

In Chapter Thirteen, Truth, Pert gives an eight part program for a healthy, whole and conscious lifestyle. First of all comes *becoming conscious*. In this section there is a meditation for releasing the beta endorphin, which is the most potent endorphin, from the pituitary gland. Her second step involves *accessing the psychosomatic network*. Here she talks about “memories stored in the receptors of (y)our cells” (p. 289) and the importance of releasing them. Her third element is *tapping into our dreams*; her fourth *getting in*

*touch with y(our) body*: “your mind, your feelings are in your body, and it’s there, in your somatic experience, that feeling is healed.” (p. 293). Her Fifth element is *reducing stress*, for which she recommends TM, Vipassana, and self-honesty: “... tell the truth. ... not just that it’s the moral thing to do, but because it will keep you on a healthy path and disease-free!” (p. 295) The sixth element is *exercising*; “Yoga is a particularly health-enhancing form of exercise. Any kind of conscious breathing accompanied by relaxation and body awareness is yoga.” (p. 296) Seventh is *eating wisely*, and eight is *avoiding substance abuse*. An excellent program, very well explained. This chapter ends with a discussion of what healing really is and how it happens.

There are two appendixes, on ‘Prevention-Oriented Tips for Healthful, Blissful Living;’ and ‘Bodymind Medicine: resources and Practitioners’ – this is very complete: if only one had the time to try all of the methods she recommends.

There is a Glossary.

This is an excellent book, well-written, easy to read, exciting. It gives the scientific explanation for what breathworkers and their clients have seen and experienced. Anyone who would like to do research into the biological bases of the benefits of breathwork can start here.

Pert says that she never planned to become a “scientific performer” or someone who educates “practitioners in the alternative health movement” but saw herself as always working in the scientific world of laboratories and research. I think she has not understood the process: it is the *alternative* world that most frequently educates the scientific community, showing them where new information is coming forward and new experiences are being repeated. Once it has overcome its resistance, the scientific community then performs the service it is subsidised by the public to perform: It investigates the phenomena and explains how it happens and thus moves what was once alternative into the realm of the scientifically proven.

**Joy Manné, PhD**

**Lynn Grabhorn (2000), *Excuse Me, Your Life Is Waiting: The Astonishing Power Of Feelings*. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads.**

This is an appropriate book to review after Candace Pert’s book on the Molecules of Emotion. Increasingly science shows that we are energy beings, and that we have some responsibility in the kind of energy we vibrate and create. Grabhorn says,

“It’s all energy. That’s all this world and universe is. You can either be its master of its victim. By leaning to control the tenor an flow of your electromagnetic energy, you are learning to take control of your own destiny, steering your ship wherever you desire.” (p. 305)

The basic message of this book is that it is not *thoughts* that are creative, but *feelings*. Its basic teaching is how to generate positive energy and control one’s life through the use of intention, creative imagination and self-control over our feelings.

This book is really great fun to read. The author is realistic and unpretentious. I'm going to play with its exercises in areas where I have problems and see how they change. All self-help books help, in any case!

**Joy Manné**

Dan Brulé, 1. The Principles of Breath Therapy, from Breath and Breathing programme # 112; 2. Breath Energy Exercises (The Basic Series) from Breath and Breath programme # 101; 3. The Power and Potential of Conscious Breathing, Breath and Breathing program #38, recorded live in New Orleans March, 2002-06-03; 4. Spiritual Breathing, Breath and Breathing program #31, Recorded live in Yellowknife, in August 2001. Four CD's and accompanying transcripts, *produced by Dan Brule/One Sky International*.

Dan's lively voice is unquestionably the main asset of his CDs, which I listened to while reading the accompanying transcripts, although the pace is rather fast. I was riveted until near the end of the *Breath Energy* exercises, when I could not keep up with his account of an odd exercise I had never tried, which involves inhaling partly via the mouth and partly via the nose, with a closure of a valve which I did not know I possessed, at the back of my mouth. This is probably easier if you are a deep sea diver, as Dan has been. I realise, in fact, that you also need to be as passionate as Dan is about breathing to get the best from these informative CDs.

I am sure there will be many who know nothing at all about Diaphragmatic breathing, for example, which he explains in intricate detail, in the Basic series of breathing exercises... He deserves an academy award for making this well known breathing technique sound so important and vital to our lives, as well as describing it so clearly.

Back to the beginning, to the *Principles of Breath Therapy*, and the content of these tapes rather than the focus on Dan's voice. I was interested to learn about his work in the Soviet Union at the Academy of Science, where he has been working for over ten years. Others will appreciate information about the way we limit our breathing after our arrival into the world, later needing to heal our faulty breath in order to get back to optimum health.

Five necessary conditions for Breath Therapy, which I have not seen anywhere else, cover The Technique, The atmosphere, The Teacher, The mind of the breather, and Something else. All breathing techniques, from rebirthing to eastern methods are acknowledged as giving you certain results if you practise. But for all of them, you must also be in a comfortable room, with good ventilation and what Dan calls a "psychic atmosphere" which will bring about healing. For beginning therapists this is all useful information, and welcome reminders for the experienced.

The teacher or breathing guide's own presence is an important ingredient in the process of passing on skill, awareness, and energy which together create successful breath therapy. The level of consciousness in the therapist is joined by the principle of "something else," grace, a mystical factor, which overrides a poor teacher and awful conditions, and can give a wonderful experience. I am reminded of the times I thought I had given a rotten session, when I had not felt particularly positive towards the client, who stunned me afterwards by saying gratefully what a wonderful experience it had been. It is this un-

known quality, this magic, and you never know when it will occur, which you could call the spiritual in breathwork, and which Dan explains in simple language...

You can accompany Dan through a variety of breathing techniques: diaphragmatic breathing, 20 connected breaths, reverse respiration, equalising the flow, and more. You need some of his passionate dedication, care and attention to detail, and practice, to reach Breath mastery, and ultimately, Self mastery.

### **3. The Power and Potential of Conscious Breathing, Breath and Breathing program #38, Recorded live in New Orleans March, 2002-06-03**

In this live talk you can hear the audience laughing at Dan's performance as he expands on what it is like to be born, coming into an unfamiliar world. Dan also dramatises and illustrates his ideas about conscious breathing with interesting personal stories about his upbringing and his early involvement with the rebirthing movement and how it has evolved since then. He has a wealth of experience and is obviously deeply committed to working with the breath, probably more than anyone else I have heard.

But not everyone will like his excited, fast moving speech. I found I enjoyed his explanations of breathing states and how they happen, because it is not new material for me and I was simply getting a different perspective on the subject. But I tried these two CD's on someone with very little knowledge of conscious breathing and she was highly critical and could not listen to it, as Dan's voice made her anxious. The sound track is in fact poor, and having been recorded from tapes onto CD's. so this perhaps is not a good introduction to breathwork, but best for someone like myself who is intrigued by Dan's intricate knowledge of breathwork.

My friend felt that the accompanying transcript needed proper editing, so that she could get the information she wanted in a concise way, and she would have valued a synopsis of the content of the CD's, rather than the unedited chatty "you know's" included, which makes the subject seem less serious and somewhat amateur as well as unstructured. There are gems of information, but also a great deal of unuseful material for someone who wants to find out more about breathwork. This informal style, asking questions to the audience "What the heck happens?" may work in the USA, whereas we here in the UK expect a more serious treatment of a subject to do with healing and transformation.

### **4. Spiritual Breathing, Breath and Breathing program #31, Recorded live in Yellowknife, in August 2001.**

This talk again sounds spontaneous and the transcript is full of "Wow" and "Ooh that scares me!" and many anecdotes about Dan's work. Having heard him in person, I know that he can hold an audience for several hours, by his depth of knowledge and vitality, but you do have to be prepared to accept his particular style of delivery. Dan tells his personal story about his relationship to breathing and spiritual growth, then rather suddenly he gives instructions about how to breathe to gain spiritual awareness. Keeping up with him is not easy. I had to take breaks from listening, although returning was worth it because every now and there is a gem of information.

Dan advocates consciously feeling Forgiveness, gratitude, love, respect, joy as well as allowing everything to be as it is. Not an easy requirement for most of us, I am afraid, and at this point in the talk I began to feel somewhat irritated. I agree with him that positive thinking can be nurtured, and breathing is a very healing process for many people ( I

am a Breath practitioner myself,) I nevertheless think that care is needed not to make conscious breathing sound like a panacea for all emotional and mental distresses, and that listeners need to know that there is still a place for the talking therapies.

However, you get an easy, accessible introduction to the whole idea of spiritual breathing practices, illustrated by Dan's own personal spiritual revelations. He enthuses, "When you get to the centre of your self, you pop up in the same place that I pop up, when I go to the centre of my self.", and I know what he means, but I find this simplistic and slightly irritating, good perhaps for young children, or the uneducated. He sounds at times a little like a priest urging his flock to come back to God now. This is the stuff of inspiration, not of academic learning, and I am not entirely happy with it, but there will be many who will enjoy it.

**Vivienne Silver-Leigh**

**Dennis Lewis (1998), *Breathing as a Metaphor for Living: Teachings and Exercises on Complete and Natural Breathing*. 2 cassettes. Boulder, Colorado: Sounds True.**

Suppose you wanted only one tape about breathing that gave you everything, good explanations on how breathing works with a variety of good graded exercises so that you can develop your breathing, and all of that spoken to you in a voice that is agreeable to listen to. Well, this is your set of cassettes.

Lewis explains the fundamental relationship of how we breathe to how we live. The relationship between our breathing and our state of consciousness is fundamental. He is straight forward: doing breathing exercises is not enough: we have to educate our perceptions and develop a new way of thinking. He gets rid of mythology: there is no one "correct" way to breathe.

Breath language is a theme that has interested me over the years. Lewis explains that anger results in shallow in and out breaths, grief in spasmodic breathing, guilt in restricted breathing; boredom in shallow, lifeless breathing, and so forth.

The exercises are excellent. We are especially advised that we cannot truly inhale unless we can fully exhale.

These cassettes are useful for anyone interested in Breathwork. All breathwork and breathing work professionals, whether they work in Rebirthing, Conscious Breathing Techniques, Breathing Work (remedial breathing) or teach meditation can suggest them to their clients to work with. The first part of the exercises on Side Three are an excellent way to introduce Vipassana breathing practices as they are so helpful in teaching the necessary breath awareness which is so difficult for so many people.

There are diagrams of how breathing functions.

Lewis is the author of the excellent book *The Tao of Breathing* (San Francisco: Mountain Wind, 1997). His new book *Boundless Breathing* is due out 2003. Look out for it.

**Joy Manné, PhD**