



Sibella Circle Member & Visionary Leader

THE POWER OF AWARENESS

A Journey Through Breathing

By Catherine Dowling

Every year or two I get a cold which turns into a cough which turns into bronchitis.

Until it hurts to breathe, I don't pay much attention to my breathing on a day to day basis. Same is true for most people who don't suffer from breathing disorders. Unless it affects our quality of life, we take breathing for granted. Yet we do it-- inhale and exhale

–20,000 or so times a day. I found that figure astonishing when I first read about it. Is there anything else we do that frequently, ever?

We breathe for the most part unconsciously. But at any time we can take control of the process and make changes to it. That makes our lungs unique among organs. I found it hard to believe that something we do that often and over which we have both conscious and unconscious control would not have greater significance than I was aware of. We all know the oxygen we taken in keeps us alive. We learn that in school. So I went back to my high school biology books where I found that approximately 70 percent of our body's waste is excreted through our lungs. I also found that breathing affects all sorts of physical conditions from Renaud's disease to blood pressure. A very close family member suffered from emphysema. This explained not just the terrible wheezing in her chest but the fatigue and debilitation that so badly affected the quality of her life before she died.

Then I became an armchair traveler. Through books and the internet I travelled east—to yoga and meditation and the martial arts. It seemed like the eastern parts of the world had a breathing technique for every occasion. And not just for physical health. Breathing was implicated in emotional states such as stress and anxiety as both hero and villain. I learned that when we breathe fully into the base of our lungs, stress decreases. But when we let our breath go shallow over long periods, stress levels increase.

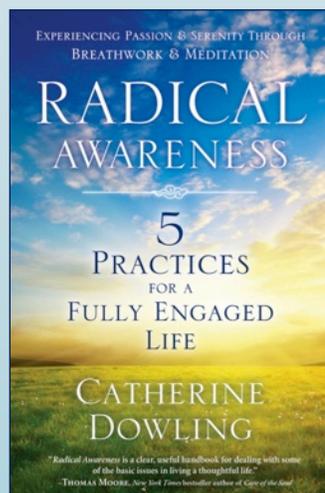
On the way back home through North America, I discovered that breathing expands inner awareness to the point where it becomes a form of psychotherapy. Deep breathing in the right setting can allow us to experience memories, emotions, belief systems that, like our breathing, we've not paid much attention to. Some ways of breathing contribute to feelings of joy. Other ways of breathing work like an accelerant on anger. And finally back in Europe, I discovered a scientific study that brings my journey full circle. Certain breathing techniques, according to the research, significantly boosts the immune system's fight against cancer.

I can't say I practice breath awareness in all its myriad forms every day. But awareness of breathing and the physical and psychological power of breath Awareness has the power to change the way we feel and the way we respond to life.

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