

[<http://breathworkalliance.com/>]



Every moment of life is precious.
Therefore, every breath is precious.
It is the desire of breathworkers to help human beings
embody and grow in an environment of safety, wisdom and love.
We dedicate our work to promoting personal, relational and planetary wholeness.



eNews Issue #22 April 2014

ARTICLE

Therapeutic Breathwork

by Jeremy Youst



"Everything breathes: breathing is the inspiration of Life within all living forms of reality. All matter is in a continual state of particle exchange. In humans, breathing is the biological basis and spiritual expression that renews life, propels awareness and focuses body-mind functioning in time and space." (1st Principle of Conscious Connected Breathing - J. Youst)

Therapeutic Breathwork is the purposeful application of conscious, connected breathing in one-on-one or group settings, guided by a skilled practitioner and the Spirit of Breath, and held within a sacred container of a therapeutic intention, relationship and community.

The Spirit of Breath in this case refers to the multi-dimensional collective intelligence that naturally seeks harmony, balance and fulfillment, and seems to surround and guide the act of conscious breathing. Working therapeutically with the Spirit of Breath inspires most aspects of the client-therapist relationship, and provides for a heightened sense of safety, honesty, integrity and reality.

For thousands of years humans have found by changing the rate, ratio, volume and flow of the respiratory cycle, there can be experiential and perceptual shifts in consciousness, spiritual awareness, cognition and self-identity. More recently, when applied therapeutically, the shifts experienced in conscious, connected breathing seem to be linked to a deeper sense of inner connection, somatic groundedness, emotional empowerment and psycho-spiritual integration.

Therapeutic Breathwork engages all aspects of body, mind and spirit in its approach to empowerment and healing. The three primary areas of benefit are:

- 1) Body-mind therapy
- 2) Personal Development
- 3) Spiritual Empowerment

Each one of these areas of focus may be engaged within the full scope of a Therapeutic Breathwork session, and therefore requires a unique combination of skills on the part of the therapist. Therapeutic attention may involve a variety of cognitive and psychological tools, goal orientation and coaching skills, familiarity with trauma and PTSD, body-mind as well as affective awareness, and even sensitivity to non-ordinary realities. Regardless of this diversity, however, what makes Therapeutic Breathwork uniquely powerful and integrative

is its utilization of a basic, self-regulating, biological mechanism uniquely fashioned for balancing stressed nerves: the human respiratory system.

On its own, the act of respiration naturally energizes, cleanses, purifies, uplifts and reconnects the human organism to a state of maximum balance as well as higher states of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health. A few full, relaxed exhales naturally helps to release stress and engage the body's parasympathetic ("rest and digest") nervous system. Combining these inherent capabilities with conscious choice accelerates the healing effect by activating a person's awareness and supporting their desire to grow and improve oneself. Therapeutic Breathwork not only enhances these qualities with conscious intent, but also seeks to engage *the intelligence within the breath itself* in order to escort or guide the process of self-discovery, emotional freedom and spiritual transformation.

The first step in this practice is in reminding the body how to breathe an "open, healthy breath", i.e. the natural, relaxed and uninhibited breath most of us began with as infants. Then, by consciously "picking up the inhale", i.e. starting the next breath right away and closing the natural pause or gap, and by letting the exhale flow out, unencumbered and free, the connected or circular breath is established.

This type of breathing initiates an increase in body awareness that often leads to whatever physical, emotional and/or mental patterns are currently preventing a full and easy life and a full and easy breath. How a person breathes reflects how a person lives and responds to their life, and the reclamation of this open, relaxed breathing is crucial to recovering from the long-term effects of stress-related living as well as offering new response patterns to the specific effects of dis-ease, imbalance and trauma.

The first primary component of Therapeutic Breathwork is body-mind therapy. According to current thinking and research, healthy body function is deeply interwoven with and directly connected to our lives, and our day-to-day emotional and mental states. Breathwork as a body-mind therapy immediately addresses the ability to go from restricted breathing to open breathing, from stress to relaxation, from dis-ease to ease, and from personal dysfunction to full, healthy human function. Similar to its physical role, respiration when consciously engaged also sponsors a means to emotionally clarify, purify and integrate subconscious imbalances (sometimes called suppressions) as a way of releasing tension and creating higher states of awareness, balance and performance.

Breathwork as therapy engages a client's past in a way that is relevant to their evolution in two fundamental ways:

1. During the breathing portion of the session *what needs to be addressed MOST tends to show up FIRST.*
2. The clients are ACTIVELY involved and must initiate the conscious breathing process *for themselves.*

Therapeutic Breathwork is empowering. It embraces the idea that the client is in charge of his or her session, and at the body-mind level knows what is needed to assist them on their path of healing and transformation. Even though a variety of styles of breathwork interventions may be used according to a variety of methodologies, the principal focus of the body-mind therapy should be to align with and create a therapeutic plan for addressing the client's presenting issues.

Assisting a client to find an open, healthy breath often begins a process that speaks to how, when and where he or she had to protect (contract) themselves (and shut down their breath) in order to survive the various physical, emotional and mental traumas of their life. A client's story is indelibly engrained in their bodies, but with the energetic activation of the breath in the body, suppressions begin to soften and emerge, initiating a healing process that unfolds into conscious awareness, energetic movement and body-mind integration.

Therapeutic Breathwork utilizes a unique combination of innate, somatic intelligence as well as client-centered empowerment, and over a series of sessions leads to feelings of peace, safety and a greater sense of well-being.

As a tool for personal development, the dialogue portion of a Therapeutic Breathwork session aims to coach an individual towards new and healthier levels of self-awareness, intentional living and creative expression. The empowering aspect of this part of the work helps a client to explore new perspectives of personal growth: improved self-esteem and self-acceptance, more effective assessment of reality, life purpose issues, healthier communication in their relationship to their bodies, themselves and others, etc. It also acts as a "safety bridge" and prepares them for energetic bodywork. The client is guided through a variety of techniques and tools that seek to engage and direct their life, creatively and with a sense of meaning and purpose.

This aspect of client support and exploration is considered equally important, and is founded upon the formation of a safe and caring therapeutic relationship. It may involve such methods as biographical inquiry, family of origin story and systems work, voice dialogue, behavioral goals and practice assignments, life skills and purpose work, as well as creating network of support with outside referrals, depending upon the background and skill level of the breathworker. In addition, addressing and affirming a client's intention mentally prepares him or her for deep internal shifts of perspective that often come from the core somatic experience involved in breathwork.

Integral to a successful client outcome may be the need to work in concert with other health practitioners, therapists, couple mediators, and addiction and spiritual counselors, not only for the client, but also for the practitioner in terms of supervision. Breathwork is not meant to replace traditional therapy per se, but can provide a very powerful complement to a client's in-depth healing process. Also, because of the current cultural and professional sensitivity of doing bodywork that involves touch, a Therapeutic Breathworker must be clearly and fully trained in sensitivity to safety, body and abuse issues, as well as receive regular supervision that supports the highest degree of ethics and professionalism.

Self-responsibility is essential in this aspect of the therapeutic process, not only for the client, but also for the professional breathworker as well. Because this method of therapy oftentimes involves a co-creative and empowerment-oriented relationship, the more traditional lines of professional interaction, distance and engagement may be less applicable, requiring the highest degree of self-awareness and self-responsibility on the part of the practitioner. Self-reflection and mirroring becomes an integral part of the process (the issues you must face are often mirrored in your client). First and foremost, therefore, as is often the case in most body-mind therapies, the practitioner must be willing to engage in regular self-work, inquiry and therapeutic self-reflection, individually and in conjunction with outside professionals.

In layman's terms, the essence of this type of mind-body approach is founded upon a "Walk-the-Talk" style and methodology. At the deepest level, what the practitioner has 'real-ized' through his or her own internal process and growth often becomes what is believable and therefore attainable for the client. It is essential, therefore, for a Therapeutic

Breathwork session to be educational as well as remedial, reflective as well as re-evaluative, to utilize a perspective that tempers if not transcends the normal pitfalls of therapeutic interaction, through the engagement of an 'unknown' or spiritual quality and dimension.

Lastly, Therapeutic Breathwork willingly endorses an individual's journey towards spiritual empowerment as an integral part of the healing and self-discovery process. Some research has shown that a natural byproduct of connected breathing is the stimulation of the longer brainwave patterns (long wave Alpha, Theta and even Delta) normally found during various stages of sleep, transcendent or meditative states of consciousness. As the inner intelligence of the client's own body, heart, mind and soul are encouraged to lead a session, the Therapeutic Breathwork practitioner must also be able to attune to and carefully negotiate the activation of energetic and transcendent patterns, as well as the possible presence of what has been called "non-ordinary states of reality".

Frequently during a session, a client will appear to temporarily transcend the normal flow of time-space and experience states or dimensions of deep integration and/or ecstatic reunion with something larger than themselves. The Therapeutic Breathwork practitioner not only anticipates these transcendent states, but must also be able to "midwife" the client in such a way as to encourage assimilation of these experiences into their understanding, and eventually into their daily lives. Because of this, attending to the spiritual aspects of breathwork necessitates an additional facility on the part of the breathwork practitioner that goes beyond normal therapeutic interaction and intervention.

The spiritually transcendent part of this process seems to be an integral part of breathwork, even if it is not emphasized or even consciously recognized or engaged. It may confound some traditional methodologies (and practitioners!), but points in the end to the fact that every client's inner spiritual experience is uniquely their own. A skilled practitioner must have suitable training to be available to and maintain a presence of understanding with a client's inner and intuitive experience, even if they may not fully comprehend what has just happened.

Together, these three aspects of body-mind therapy, personal development and spiritual empowerment make up the core components of Therapeutic Breathwork, and help to identify it as a uniquely powerful and dynamic healing modality. With the current rise and support of professional and ethical standards of breathwork internationally, Therapeutic Breathwork may soon be seen as the cutting edge to healing and personal empowerment as well as an equally effective adjunct to psychotherapy and spiritual disciplines.

~~~~~  
Jeremy Youst is a certified breathwork practitioner and the founder/director of the GPBA accredited Power of Breath Institute in Spofford NH. He has been skillfully facilitating empowerment for individuals and groups for over thirty years. The Power of Breath Institute specializes in delivering high integrity Therapeutic Breathwork training to individuals and professionals who wish to become certified Breathworkers through its 2-year training program. [www.powerofbreath.com](http://www.powerofbreath.com)