

## **Breathing: The Best Kept Healing Secret – Part 1**

*by Stephen Gooby*

I see folks shy away from an active, conscious breathing practice because, "it's too much work." I see people sleepwalk through life without the slightest awareness of their breathing. I see them unconcerned with how their breathing affects their existence. "Breathing? Come on, I know how to breathe!"

Is that really so?

Breath is the key to life. Renowned integrative-medicine practitioner Dr. Andrew Weil calls breathing, "the master key to self healing." In yoga, breath is the bridge that connects physical and spiritual. In physical terms, breathing is essential to life. One cannot maintain a physical body for long without oxygen, or the life force (*prana*) which it provides.

Breathing, however, is more than a vehicle by which to stay alive. Working with the breath provides many benefits, physical and beyond. Breathwork is truly the most holistic healing modality, working at higher levels in the emotional, mental, and spiritual realms.

**Types of Breathwork** -- Many types of Breathwork are available. Pranayama (energy control) in the Hatha Yoga tradition consists of various techniques, each with a specific purpose. Rebirthing, founded by Leonard Orr decades ago, addresses birth trauma that many in the West have experienced. With Holotropic Breathwork™, Dr. Stanislav Grof has done great work addressing psychological elements. There are others as well.

My training is in Transformational Breathing™, which was developed by Dr. Judith Kravitz. This type accomplishes its manifold healing properties from the spiritual level downward and I feel that her work is the cutting edge of Breathwork.

**Practice Breathing?** -- Watch a happy baby breathe, then examine your own breath pattern. Are you a shallow breather? Do you shut down your breathing almost continually? Do you take in just enough oxygen to live but not breathe optimally? Do you ever think about Breathing? If so, you may want to initiate a conscious breathing practice.

When we cultivate greater breath awareness through daily breath practice, we re-train ourselves to breathe more efficiently, unlearn damaging emotional conditioning, and achieve myriad health benefits. We acquire what yoga trainer Donna Farhi calls, "the essential breath."

**Effects of Breathwork** -- Some physical effects of breathing come intuitively. When we breathe deeply, we relax. Conscious breathing induces a relaxation response that is integral to any meditation practice.

Using specific techniques, breathing can provide the body with energy, cell-nourishing oxygen, warmth, and even coolness on a hot day.

One often-overlooked physical effect of breathing is detoxification. It has been estimated that optimal breathing could account for 70% of our detoxification.

Beyond the physical, Dr. Kravitz has developed techniques to clear deep, negative, emotional and mental patterns that, when present, eventually manifest negatively on the physical level. In a truly holistic manner, she also addresses spiritual patterns. Using her techniques, one can connect with one's "higher self," attempting to clear karmic patterns that manifest on the mental/emotional plane and again cascade down to the physical.

**Resources /Training** --The above merely scratches the surface about why breathing is so beneficial and important. I encourage readers to study further and work with the breath as a practice. Daily, deep, diaphragmatic breathing is absolutely the safest therapy in the world. It goes a long way toward reducing stress and many other conditions.

However, experimenting with breath retention and other advanced disciplines should be attempted only with the help of a properly trained teacher. For example, Holotropic and Transformational Breathing provide very competent professional training. If your Breathwork also involves bodywork, make certain that the individual has appropriate credentials (such as CMT, LMT, DC, or DO). If you pursue a path involving Pranayama, a highly trained yoga instructor is necessary.

All Breathwork professionals are not created equal. Ask about practitioners' training. What credentials have they earned? How much experience do they have? Can they provide references? Can they answer questions articulately, demonstrate technical knowledge, and most importantly, relate concepts at your level of understanding?

Find a practitioner who is willing to offer extensive workshops as an introduction to the breath. Perhaps your physician can refer you to a qualified breath worker.

In Transformational Breathing, I was trained personally by Dr. Judith Kravitz. In Part 2 of this article, I describe more about this Self-Healing system and what it can do.

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