

## **MODULE 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO BREATHWORK**

### **LESSON 2: THE HISTORY, SCOPE AND STYLES OF BREATHWORK**

From the beginning of recorded history, across many cultures from the East to the West, through ancient Egypt, humanity has sought to define, to explain the indefinable - to attribute to all living things something beyond a mechanical explanation of how the body, the animal, the plant functions - to describe what they felt distinguished the living from the inanimate - the spirit that moved within.

In ancient Chinese texts, it is named as Chi or prana. In the times of ancient Greeks and Romans, such as Hippocrates and Galen it was the vital spark - thought to be taken in through the air.

So began this connection of breath to medicine and spirit. Over time Western medicine became more mechanistic - focused upon only what could be observed and measured directly. As this Western mechanistic and causal orientation to medicine and to science flourished, the knowledge and understanding of life, of breath, of the forces moving within all life, within the human were ignored, forgotten by some, dismissed as superstitious by others.

The breath, to inspire and transcend, moved from the world of medicine to the world of spirituality and transformation. Beginning in the 20th century, awareness and discussion of the power of these "intangible and indefinable" qualities of the breath has returned to the fields of science and medicine. The ancient practices of yoga and breath, of Ayurvedic medicine and breath, the modern marriage of breath and peak performance have returned to the arenas of Western medicine, psychotherapy, and spirituality. As if the disowned/illegitimate child has been accepted, at least provisionally, back into the arms of its extended family.

Breathwork as a form of conscious connected breathing was first put forward by Leonard Orr with Rebirthing in 1974. Later named Rebirthing Breathwork, this work seeks to heal birth trauma memories through the utilisation of a pattern of powerful

conscious connected breathing that activates and releases the emotions of birth trauma and birth trauma breath patterns.

In 1979 Vivation as a breathing technique was introduced by Jim Leonard. Vivation is a technique that focuses upon the breather feeling and tracking the most prominent sensation or emotion in their body. The goal is to utilise the breath to breathe “through” the sensation/emotion so as to integrate. The release of the physiological energy used to contain or manage the sensation/emotion results in relaxation and bliss: integration ultimately results in ecstasy.

There have been many other manifestations of conscious connected breathing. Holotropic Breath Work, which developed independently from Rebirthing Breathwork by Stan and Christiana Grof, also utilises conscious connected breathing. Spiritual Breathwork developed by Dan Brulé utilises conscious connected breathing, with the focus of going even beyond “ecstasy” to connect with the Oneness that we all are. There are many other breath workers and therapists who offer conscious connected breathing as a tool to increase self-awareness, integrate life traumas and bring a new level of health and well-being on an emotional, physical and spiritual level.

### **The Scope of Breathwork**

Breathwork, its study and application, extend from the ancient Chinese practice of Chi Gong (a physical, mental and energetic practice), through the application of Ayurvedic medicine, the spiritual practices of Buddhism, Zen, Taoism, Hinduism, the yogic traditions that began with Kriya and Tantra Yoga. It is infused into the Western practices of psychotherapy, rebirthing, performance enhancement, relaxation, transformational healing and medicine.

### **Benefits of Breathwork**

The nature of modern life has changed the way that we breathe. As we have become more disconnected from nature, desk bound and suffocated with restrictive clothing and more adrenalised, the more shut down and restricted our breathing has become. The disconnection from our natural open and free breathing

pattern is being reflected in our physical health, global epidemic of fatigue and rising cancer rates, as well as our fear-based, reactive and addictive behaviour.

The transformation of the automatic physical process of the breath to a conscious focused purposeful action has many benefits.

It affects our sleep, memory, concentration and energy levels. It is the foundation of mindfulness and for living consciously. Every aspect of our personality depends on our breath. Conscious connected breathing is used to transform and release feelings and patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that create stress and ill health.

**Physical:** Breathwork can be utilised to alleviate, or eradicate specific physical conditions such as asthma, hypertension, depression, anxiety and chronic pain. By freeing our breathing pattern, we are optimising oxygenation of the cells and prevent build-up of toxins and inflammation. Breathwork balances the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system which is necessary for the functioning of the body-mind system. With modern life pushing us in the direction of adrenalised energy, we succumb to the effects of a chronically activated sympathetic response and build-up of free radicals in the system. It improves sleep, memory, concentration and energy levels.

**Emotional:** Breathwork allows us to open up, feel and release emotional blockages which eventually manifest physically. It supports us to feel safe in our vulnerability. Breathing not only improves physical functions, it is also a pathway inward, a bridge between the body, mind and spirit. It is the foundation of mindfulness and for living consciously. Every aspect of our personality depends on our breath. Conscious connected breathing is used to transform and release feelings and patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that create stress and ill health.

**Spiritual:** Breathwork is a simple and universal way to tap into our spirituality and have an experience of the divinity that resides within. This brings us meaning and a deep sense of peace and fulfilment.

**Exercise:**

Review the essay that you wrote before you began this course. Be reminded about why breathwork is important to you.

**Module 1 Assignment:**

1. Research how the breath is referenced in major religious or spiritual texts. Here are some suggestions:

- The Bible
- The Torah
- The Quran
- The Yoga Sutras

2. In your own words please explain:

What is Breathwork?

Why is it so relevant in the times in which we live?

3. List 3 people/movements who you believe are having an impact in the world of breathwork at present.

**Recommended reading:**

Just Breathe by Dan Brulé

21 lessons for the 21st Century by Yuval Noah Hariri (particularly Chapter 21)

**References:**

Just Breathe by Dan Brulé

The Healing Power of the Breath by Richard Brown and Pat Gerbarg

The Complete Breath by Jim Morningstar