

## **MODULE 2: THE 'ART' OF BREATHWORK**

### **LESSON 3: BREATH AWARENESS**

Breath awareness is the foundation of Breathwork. Most of the time we are not conscious of our breathing, because we don't have to be. Our breath is under the control of our autonomic nervous system that also regulates our heart rate and temperature which maintains homeostasis and balance. It's only when breathing becomes difficult or when we need more of it, do we become aware of its importance.

Before we can start using the breath and controlling it, first we must learn to get to know it, make friends with it, establish a relationship with it.

We need to support the client to develop a level of non-reactivity to the inner experience and the ability to hold intensity, without getting caught up in it.

The more aware we become of the breath, the more we become aware of our feelings, thoughts, habits and posture, giving us an opportunity to make more conscious choices.

Breath awareness is a mindfulness practice and is the first step in breaking out of habitual patterns that stand in the way of accessing our potential. The more breath awareness we have, the more benefits we can gain from all the conscious breathing exercises that follow.

Observe natural breath and dysfunctional breathing habits in your client.

- Posture: The military posture of "belly in, chest out" projects an image of strength and courage or in other cases, a self-consciousness about weight. These can become unconscious chronic postures that block full breathing into the belly
- Ability to relax: Relationship with body. Fear of sexual energy, sexual trauma and self-consciousness can cause people to freeze and contract the pelvic and lower abdominal area. Tension or discomfort due to digestive problems or menstrual problems can also cause habitual holding, tension and contraction

- Restrictive clothing: Bras, tight belts and tight jeans all restrict the flow of natural, flowing open breathing
- Breathing through mouth or nose: Often people with anatomical problems in their nasal architecture e.g. deviated septum or chronic sinusitis develop a habit of breathing through the mouth at rest
- Breathing mechanics: Respiratory rate, volume, location i.e. chest or belly

When we observe these details, all the subtle and not so subtle aspects and patterns, we can trust our intuitive minds to synthesise and collate all the information and inform how the session will unfold.

Throughout this course, we have been delving into the details of conscious connected breathing as a tool for growth, healing and transformation. However, more in-depth training in breathwork requires us to build up our repertoire of other breathing techniques and styles and to understand their effects.

The power of breathwork is that it is a practical tool that can be applied and practiced in all aspects of daily living.

Bringing our awareness to the breath offers us the opportunity to become aware of the physical sensation in the body, our thought patterns, feelings and emotions. It offers us a distance from them, helping us to break the pattern of reactivity and patterns of thinking, feeling and behaviour that do not always serve us. It helps us to be the passive observer of what we are experiencing. Rather than getting caught up in the experience and feeling that 'we are the experience', we can watch from a distance, and thus deepen the sense of self and patterns of thinking that are often driven by the subconscious mind.

The breath is both subconscious and conscious. Therefore, breath awareness creates the bridge between the conscious and subconscious mind.

Breath awareness is an excellent take home practice you can leave your clients with.

The more we practice breath awareness, the more we can build the skill of self-awareness, connection with the body and the ability to respond rather than react to situations.

## **Yoga Nidra**

Although Yoga Nidra is not considered a pure breathing practice, I am mentioning it here as it is an incredible powerful technique to build body awareness and deep relaxation. Yoga Nidra is also known as “awake sleep”. Essentially, it is a guided body scan done in a specific sequence to induce a ripple of slower brain waves in the brain, the alpha and delta waves, where deep healing and restoration of cells can occur.

It is incredibly effective to prepare the body for sleep or to reboot the system when you have experienced sleep deprivation.

It has been said that one hour of yoga Nidra is as rejuvenating as four hours of sleep.

There are many guided yoga Nidra practices on line, but here is a script should you wish to use it with your clients.

### **Sample Yoga Nidra Script**

It is time for Yoga Nidra. You should be lying on your back with the knees slightly bent and supported. Make sure that you are warm enough and that your position is one that will be comfortable for the duration of the practice. It is best that you remain still during Yoga Nidra so that both your body and brain have a chance to fully relax. However, if you become uncomfortable, please feel free to change position. Allow your eyes to close and keep them closed until the practice has ended.

The practice of yoga Nidra is a practice of yogic sleep that will guide you to the hypnagogic state, a state of consciousness between wakefulness and sleeping. Try to remain awake by listening to the sound of my voice. You will be asked to move your awareness to various bodily sensations, emotions and images. Try not to concentrate too intensely as this may prevent you from relaxing. During this meditation, please use and absorb what you need in the moment and leave the rest behind. If the mind becomes overactive with thoughts and worries, just come back to the sound of my voice. Become aware of any sounds you can hear in this moment. Nothing else but what you can hear without strain.

Begin to focus on the most distant sounds that you can hear. Let your sense of hearing radiate outward, searching out these distant sounds and following them for a few moments. Move your attention from sound to sound without labeling the source. Gradually bring your attention to closer sounds, to sounds outside this building, to sounds inside this building, to sounds inside the room.

Without opening your eyes visualise the four walls of this room, the ceiling, the floor, your body lying on the floor.

Visualise your body lying on the floor, the position of your body, your clothes, your hair, your face. Become acutely aware of the existence of your physical body lying on the floor.

Become aware of your natural breath, become aware of your natural and spontaneous breath that moves in and out of your body without any effort. The natural breath flows in through both nostrils. Notice the feeling of the breath as it comes in and out of your nostrils. There is a sense of coolness as you inhale the breath. Follow this feeling into your nose, your sinuses, the back of your throat, into your lungs. There is a sense of warmth as you exhale the breath. Feel this warmth on your upper lip as you breathe out. The natural breath flows through both nostrils during the inhale and the exhale. Allow your breath to become longer and slower. Take a long slow inhalation, followed by a longer slower exhalation. Make your exhale even slower - notice the slight pause after the exhale. Slow inhale, even slower exhale, and pause. Feel the urge to breathe in bubble up inside of you. When you need to inhale, please do so. Long slow inhale, longer slower exhale, and then pause where the body is neither breathing in nor out. Please continue breathing in this way. Now go back to the natural easy breath, releasing any control over the inhale or exhale.

Also say to yourself, "I am practicing yoga Nidra, I am awake and relaxed."

The practice of yoga Nidra begins now. At this moment you should make your Sankalpa or intention. The Sankalpa should be a short, positive statement in simple language; try to discover one naturally. Please state your Sankalpa clearly and with awareness three times. The Sankalpa you make during yoga Nidra plants a seed in the fertile soil of your mind to bring about transformation and healing.

We will now begin a systematic journey of sensory awareness throughout the body. You will move your awareness to different parts of your body as soon as you hear them named. Please say the name of the part to yourself and feel that part of your body but do not move any part. The practice begins on the right side.

Right hand thumb ... 2nd finger ... 3rd finger ... 4th finger ... 5th finger ... palm of the hand ... back of the hand ... wrist ... forearm ... elbow ... upper arm ... shoulder ... armpit ... waist ... hip ... thigh ... knee ... calf ... ankle ... heel ... sole of the foot ... top of the foot ... right big toe ... 2nd toe ... 3rd toe ... 4th toe ... 5th toe.

Left hand thumb ... 2nd finger ... 3rd finger ... 4th finger ... 5th finger ... palm of the hand ... back of the hand ... wrist... forearm ... elbow ... upper arm ... shoulder ... armpit ... waist ...

hip ... thigh ... knee ... calf ... ankle ... heel ... sole of the foot ... top of the foot ... left big toe ... 2nd toe ... 3rd toe ... 4th toe ... 5th toe.

Now go to the back of the body ... right heel ... left heel ... right calf ... left calf ... right thigh ... left thigh ... right buttock ... left buttock ... lower back ... middle back ... upper back ... the entire spine ... right shoulder blade ... left shoulder blade ... back of the neck ... back of the head.

Top of the head ... forehead ... right temple ... left temple ... right ear ... left ear ... right eyebrow ... left eyebrow ... middle of the eyebrows ... right eye ... left eye ... right nostril ... left nostril ... right cheek ... left cheek ... upper lip ... lower lip ... both lips together ... chin ... jaw ... throat ... right collarbone ... left collarbone ... right side of the chest ... left side of the chest ... upper abdomen ... navel ... lower abdomen ... right groin ... left groin ... the pelvic floor.

The whole right leg ... whole left leg ... whole right arm ... whole left arm ... the whole face ... the whole head ... the whole torso ... the whole body ... the whole body ... the whole body.

Now imagine the whole body becoming light. As though your body could float away from the floor and toward the ceiling. The head is light and weightless, the limbs are light and weightless, the torso is light and weightless, the whole body light and weightless. You are rising higher and higher away from the floor.

Imagine your body becoming heavy. Feel the heaviness in all parts of the body, each part is becoming heavier and heavier and heavier. The head is heavy, the limbs are heavy, the torso is heavy, the whole body is heavy. So heavy that it is sinking down into the floor.

Awaken the experience of cold in the body, the experience of chilly cold. Imagine being outside in winter without enough clothing. You feel this chill permeating your entire body. Now allow the sensation of warmth to spread throughout the entire body. Remember the feeling of heat in summer when you are out in the sun with no shade. You feel heat radiating onto your skin, heat all around the body.

Recollect the experience of anxiety, intense anxiety, and worry. Feel this stress in your mind and body but do not concentrate on its source. Create the experience of anxiety as clearly as possible.

Now allow the feeling of complete calm to envelop you. Manifest the experience of calm in your entire mind, body and emotions. You are relaxed and aware, you are completely calm.

Begin to concentrate on the space in front of your closed eyelids. Imagine before you a transparent screen as though you were at the movie theatre. The screen is as high and as

wide as the eyes can see. Concentrate on this mind screen and become aware of any phenomena that manifests within it; colours, patterns and light. Whatever you see is the manifesting state of your mind. Continue your awareness of this space but do not become involved, practice detached awareness only. If any subtle images make themselves known, simply notice them without directing the images. If thoughts occur let them come and go but continue watching the dark space, continue this with detached awareness. Now, several different things will be named, and you should envision them on the level of emotion, memory, and imagination as best you can. Jump from image to image as soon as you hear it.

red desert ...

peacock feather ...

Buddha meditating ...

doctor's office ...

a good night's rest ...

full moon ...

your reflection in a mirror ...

foggy morning ...

waiting for results ...

sun shining overhead ...

bouquet of flowers ...

tall tree ...

receiving help from others ...

cool clear water ...

making appointments ...

a relaxing afternoon...

laughing with friends...

a warm embrace...

burning candle ...

temple on a mountain ...

path in the woods ...

vibrant sunset ...

taking a deep breath ...

cat stretching ...

a beautiful garden path...

your favourite song...

the sound of my voice...

your body lying on the floor ...

It is time to repeat your Sankalpa. Please repeat the same statement made at the beginning of the practice three times mentally now.

Come back to the feeling of your breath flowing in and out of your nostrils. Maintain your awareness of breath and at the same time develop your awareness of your physical body. Your body is relaxed and lying on the floor. Feel the container of your skin and the clothes and props that are touching you. Notice the heaviness of your body as it rests on the floor and take your awareness into all the points that are touching the floor; the back of your heels, thighs, buttocks, shoulder blades, arms, hands and head. Do not open your eyes yet, but visualise the surrounding room. Imagine where you are in the room and the other objects that are around you. Lie quietly until you feel ready to move. Start by slowly moving your hands and feet, take your time, there is no hurry. When you are sure that you are fully awake, gently open your eyes. Please roll over to your right side. Stay on your right side for a few more moments. Use your hands to press yourself up from the floor and let your head come up last.

The practice of yoga Nidra is now complete.

### **Exercise:**

Get your client comfortable with their bodies and inner world. Guiding them to notice and become aware of their thoughts, feelings, sensations and emotions throughout the session.

Guide breathing with attention, wilfully and deliberately, supporting the development of a very conscious relationship with the breath. Observing the movement and flow of air, action of muscles, and resulting sensations. Encourage the focus on these details of the experience and to keep turning inwards to look, listen and feel.

In this exercise, we are letting the autonomic system regulate the breathing, all we are doing is bringing our attention to it, bringing our conscious attention to an automatic function, linking conscious to unconscious.

This exercise can be guided sitting in a chair in a relaxed posture that 'embodies dignity' maintaining a relaxed awareness or lying down. Hands can rest on the lap, palms facing up or placed gently on the belly.

Remember that when you are guiding this practice, you are probably dealing with someone that is caught up in layers of mind activity and relaxation is a process.

Asking someone to place their 'feet on the floor', helps them to feel their body, get grounded and come into the present moment. A deep breath followed by a sigh will help with this.

You can play around with the 4 dimensions of focus here

- Broad outer: 'Keeping your eyes open, bring attention to the broad environment around you, becoming aware of everything at the same time, engaging all your senses.'
- Become aware of the room you're in, the colours. Tune into the different layers of sound, notice if there's a scent in the air.'
- Narrow outer: 'Now narrow your focus, hone in on just one thing, a sound, a leaf on a tree and keep your focus there.'
- Broad inner: 'Close your eyes now and turn your attention inwards noticing your whole body at the same time, all your sensations.'
- Narrow inner: 'Now narrow your attention on just your breath. Without controlling the breath in any way, simply enjoy its natural gentle rhythm, just watching, just observing. Feel the sensation of the breath in your nostrils, the cooler air of the inhale vs the warmer air of the exhale. Feel the breath passing down the back of your throat. And feel the gentle rise and fall of your belly as you inhale and exhale. Notice the texture of your breath, its natural rhythm or pattern. Notice if you are feeling any restriction or tightness. Notice the nature of the inhale and exhale. Which is longer? Notice the gaps and pauses between the breaths.'

Some prompts:

- Choose a point of focus of the breath, whether that is the breath in your nostrils or the belly.
- As soon as you notice a thought, simply notice what the thought is and without judging it, getting annoyed with yourself or engaging the thought, gently guide your awareness back to the feeling of the breath.
- Don't fight what is coming up inside you whether it is a thought, emotion or sensation, simply be the neutral watcher and keep returning your attention to your breath.
- Stay alert, keeping a relaxed awareness, feeling the turbulence of your mind settling and allowing yourself to rest in your StillPoint.



Breathwork is both a science and art. And as with any art form, the fundamental skills should be learned, understood and practised before it can be used in more fluid and creative ways.