

# METHODOLOGY OF PSYCHIC INTEGRATION IN MODERN BREATHING TECHNIQUES

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One of the aims of integral approach is to be able to accept and integrate within oneself each of the below-mentioned remarkable areas – intentional, behavioral, cultural and social with due respect» (Ken Wilber, *The Eye Of Spirit*. P. 43. Shambala,)

## INTRODUCTION

This is an article about modern breathing techniques (Breathwork), particularly the Western techniques for personal and spiritual development and psychotherapy which I call psycho-techniques, and which include Rebirthing Breathwork, Holotropic Breathwork™, Vivation and free breathing.

In this article, I am going to base my conclusions on postulates based on the following: Stanislav Grof's theory of Holotropic Breathwork™ as well as many other modern schools of psychology (gestalt, NLP, holodynamics,<sup>1</sup> etc.) state that an adult person has a traumatized psyche. As result of these traumas, the psyche functions in uncoordinated ways that do not have integrity. This non-integrity in psychic functioning can be traced through inner contradictions such as: "I want, but I can't." "I want, but I don't know how to do it." "I want, but I don't do it." "I want this and that at the same time." "I don't want it, but I have to do it." In the case of psychic wholeness, the thoughts, feelings and action of people are non-contradictory, coordinated and complementary.

It is thought that the psychic traumas, which people receive in life, leave a trace in their consciousness which comprises the factors which have caused a trauma, as well as the traumatic experience itself. For example, where somebody has been hurt by dog, the trace in his psyche include the indications(factors) of the situation like dog, darkness, concrete street in the city where it has happened, and traumatic subjective experience like pain in leg, feeling of fear and anger. This trace disturbs psychic processes. It may block psychic energy. In the course of time, protective behaviours come into being. In our example, this person comes to avoid this street, dogs, and darkness and he may even come to love cats to give himself a reason to have to avoid dogs. These behaviours frequently trigger the repeating of the previous traumatic experience.

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<sup>1</sup> V. Vernon Woolf, Ph.D – [www.holodynamics.com](http://www.holodynamics.com)

To denote parts of, as opposed to the whole psyche, different terms are used in various schools of psychotherapy: pattern, engram, matrix, holodyne (V. Vernon Woolf, 1995), block, incomplete gestalt, program, among others. Grof uses the term COEX (system of condensed experience).

“A COEX system can be defined as specific constellation of memories (and associated fantasies) from different periods of life of the individual. The excessive emotional charge which is attached to COEX systems seems to represent a summation of the emotions belonging to all the constituent memories of a particular kind.” (Grof, 2001, p. 68)

I shall use the term COEX further in this article.

To resume, the postulates, I mentioned above are firstly that a human being has within his/her personality different COEX systems that contradict each other; his psyche is traumatized, and this leads to the emergence of inner conflicts. Secondly, that breathwork helps to achieve inner integration, i.e. the integration of different COEX systems within one whole psyche. It should be noted that Holotropic Breathwork™ means “the breathwork leading to wholeness.” Kholov has said the same about Rebirthing Breathwork: “Rebirthing is a particularly direct and efficient method to trigger integration.” (Kholov, 2001, p. 45)

### **A NOTE ABOUT MY OWN BREATHWORK EXPERIENCE**

I have had experience of Western breathing techniques for about ten years, both as subject and as therapist. During that period I was trained by the leading breathing-theory teachers in Russia (S. Vseksvyatsky, V. Kozlov, V. Maikov, G. Shirokov) as well as international recognized breathwork teachers, including Leonard Orr (USA) (Orr, 1983) who invented Rebirthing Breathwork; Dan Brule (USA) – one of Orr’s first followers; Nemi Nath (Australia) – founder of the school “Breathconnection”; Jim Morningstar (USA) – leader of a spiritual school, author of *Spiritual Psychology*, and one of first 12 people granted a rebirther certificate by Orr; Cliff Lloyd (England) – exchairman of British Rebirthers Society; and many others besides. I have also communicated in person with Sandra Ray and Bob Mandel (USA) – creators of the LRT (“Loving Relationships Training”), Deike Begg (England) – author of the book *Rebirthing. Freedom from your past*. For the last six years I have been giving individual breathwork sessions in different styles (Rebirthing Breathwork, Holotropic Breathwork™, Vivation). I have conducted trainings in groups orientated both at therapeutic and teaching purposes. I have seen that Breathwork itself has a huge potential for integration, for bringing about wholeness in the psyche. However, my experience of learning and teaching in groups shows that the Breathwork process does not necessarily bring about integration. In fact, integration frequently fails to take place.

I use other psycho-techniques as well and believe that the Western breathwork techniques belong to most efficient; they contain huge, as yet unrealized potential. It is this potential that I would like to discuss below.

## THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION IN BREATHWORK SESSIONS

Let's consider a structure of typical breathwork session.

I will distinct several stages in the structure of the session:

- a) General theory – the trainer tells the participants about the history of the technique, the potential results, the patterns of consciousness.
- b) Instructions given by the trainer for the session – the ways of breathing, its duration, the necessary accents, etc.
- c) Breathing session – the participant's independent work following the instructions.
- d) Sharing (there is as well a mandala drawing stage in Holotropic Breathwork™) – sharing what the participants felt during the session. It is this stage that is deemed to be the most efficient for integration.

Now I want to go deeper. The question I will explore is: what is the logic of the integrative process as seen through the breather's perception? I was unfortunately not able to find a model in the literature devoted to Western breathwork techniques, so my colleague (Gennady Shirokov) and I undertook a research project at the St. Petersburg School of Breathwork. It resulted in the following model for the consequences of the integration stages:

Activation of COEX ( pattern, block, engram....)

Generation of link

Diffusion of emotional experience along this link

Generalization of emotional experience

Insight

Let me describe these stages in more detail: the client takes up the position agreed upon (for example lying on a mattress) – and starts the breathing session:

1. The first thing that happens to him when he gets involved in the process is that his energy level grows and the activation of specific feelings or sensation or thoughts occurs as a consequence. That means that one COEX become prominent and captures all of his attention. For example: the breather may feel cold or develop tetany, or become extremely irritated, for example, by the music. Sometimes outward stimuli can activate one specific COEX. (“Certain elements of the setting or specific events during the session can activate a COEX system which has associated features») Grof, p. 69)
2. Next, if the process is working, a link may appear between the local experience and some central problem: an association or a thought will emerge. To give a personal example, cold is what often happens to me and it really is my urgent problem. I feel very cold quiet often in my life.
3. The emotional experience gets diffused along this link: the cold is sensed as if perceived both now and in numerous other situations that are not just recollected, but, rather, relived anew. A person recollects how he was frozen on a

hike in his youth, how cold he was because he was inappropriately dressed, and he goes on feeling cold right now in the process. In this case he finds himself in extended state of consciousness (ESC), when he is simultaneously here and there, in the past and in the present).

4. There may take place a process of generalization of emotional experience, i.e. the client starts going through some aspect on a total scale. The cold becomes total, and the man realizes that the feeling of cold penetrates all his life, that he is cool to his folks, that the girl-friend who he parted from not long ago left him precisely because of his being cold. At this stage what dominates the process shifts from the recollection and re-experiencing of the external factors forming the situation (COEX), to the emotional aspect of the experience, and the person goes through some feeling in an all-absorbing way.. To get to this phase, the client has to allow this emotional experience absorb him completely, and at the same time, this is not so easy to do, as this phase is full of uncertainty – one never knows when it will end. It is a sort of jump into the abyss. However when there is complete surrender, this phase comes to an end: the client exhausts the emotional experience and an exit is found to the next deeper stage.
5. There is then a leap forward which brings with it a global transformation to a new quality. It reveals a new context, insight, the idea that brings the solution to all of the entanglements. For example: simultaneous understanding why I feel cold, how I could get warm – now and in principle, what factors could help me in the past and in what way I could become warmer towards the others and myself in the future. “The positive solution of a problem situation is accompanied by emotional upsurge, inflow of energy” – (Tytar, Alim, 1996)

Now I will compare a typical breathwork session with the above integration model, to find the key points which may be affected to increase the efficiency of the process. In my opinion, a typical breathwork session stimulates just the first stage of the integration process (see above). Something gets activated rather rapidly – one feels ache or compression, or tetany can be felt, or some emotions are activated - pleasure, fault, shame, offence... And this is not followed by deepening of the process.

These are the reasons that the process does not proceed or shift to further stages:

- 1) Low activation. The level of activation is not sufficient to have a link generated. This often happens because the recollected emotions and feelings seem to be unusual and unpleasant, and the breather strives to get rid of them as soon as possible. He or she does this by either releasing the breath, or changing its pattern/rhythm, or removing the initial external stimulus which may be the partner accompanying the session, smell, music or something else that generates the original local emotional experience. This may also be achieved in an intellectual way through shifting the focus onto something else like starting to think of some images, or looking for purely an intellectual positive context, like “all is love”, or just withdrawing from the process through the excuse of sickness, hunger or something similar. Normally the breather/the client does not do it deliberately, he just feels unable to breathe as before be-

cause he suffers from discomfort, or does he may not even notice that he has got rid of the reason of activation, for example, by changing his posture or opening his eyes. In everyday life, in fact, we are always doing this. If we feel uncomfortable while sitting, we change our posture; if we dislike a smell, we air the room; if we dislike our partner – and we are able to – we leave. All the above are frequently used methods for escaping unpleasant emotions in daily life, and they work during breathwork session as well.

Thus it often happens that the breather reaches some stage of activation and stops there. But simply through the contact with the COEX he acquires some energy, and, in general, develops a positive attitude to breathwork.

- 2) Sometimes the reason for poor or insufficient activation is the breather's mistrust and fear of showing a certain emotion, if, for some reason, he believes that the trainer or other group participants may treat his expression negatively.
- 3) Sometimes the reason is the breather's prejudices. For instance, in the case of tetany, (severe muscle spasms), if the client/breather is a medical doctor, he may believe that tetany is harmful in all situations, and that its only cause is hyperventilation. He therefore fails to consider any other options, for example that his clenched hands show that he suppresses his emotions severely, in particular those that he is feeling that moment. Were he able to give way to his emotions – in this case, his anger – and allow them to overwhelm him, it would lead to relief and breakthrough.

The inhibitory effect can also be caused by breather's ideas about what should be involved in the process, for example, the breather is expecting to go into other worlds, or to have transpersonal emotional experience, etc. These ideas and expectations prevent the breather from using what is available here and now, such as feeling of coldness; the sounds produced by the other breathworkers; tactile contact with the sitter. He will think that these sensations are very ordinary and thus unworthy of his attention.

- 4) Sometimes the intensity of emotional experience is the problem. Then the breather may go so far astray that he is unable to function as an observer any more, and thus his ability to comprehend the things around him weakens considerably.
- 5) The process may stop at the stage of generalization of emotional experience because of the fact that the breather fails to surrender himself to the process entirely, while at this stage, in order to achieve insight, one has to surrender to this state exhaustively.

Thus, for the process to proceed from one stage to another, the following is needed to happen to the client:

1. Permanent activation – through the breathwork and also through the external stimuli.
2. Permanent observation of what is going on within: i.e. the emerging sensations, emotions, feelings, images.
3. Perceiving and treating any external factors as parts of the process.
4. An active search for links between the states being activated.

5. Flexibility in search of a correct context.
6. The ability to surrender totally to the emotional experience at the stage of generalization.
7. Willingness to accept any solution of the problem.

### **HOW CAN THE BREATHWORKER INFLUENCE THESE STAGES?**

1. The breathworker should set a precise format for the process and give precise directions, and should follow it at all costs. It is good practice to create a clear format so that the breather can identify whether or not he is following it even from his deepest altered states of consciousness. The format should comprise the pattern of breathing to be followed, directions for the intensity, the position of the body, the duration of the process, and the possibility to move in space. Other format-related factors are important too: the participation of the partner, the group, subjects (anything from material world can be included to the process, for example clothes or toys or mirrors could be used for special type of activation); synthesis of techniques, change of breathing style in the process and many others. It is helpful to inform the person who is working to master the techniques when he goes off the format.
2. By handling available parameters (music, bodily work, breathing) so that they lead towards greater activation.
3. By setting orientation to accept all the outward factors as parts of one's internal process, not the hindering external conditions that must be removed tacitly.
4. By setting a context supposing that every emotional experience has its sense, and a person may find it, the same way like the links between the COEX activated in the process and the topical life problems.
5. By setting a context supposing that the purpose of the process is integration.
6. By creating the atmosphere of trust for any revelations of the participants.
7. By communicating and demonstrating different integration options.
8. By developing reflexivity during the sharing, so that breathworkers were more attentive to the session details during the subsequent processes.

Thus:

<b>Process Facilitation Methods</b>	<b>Typical reasons of process inhibition</b>
Clear-cut format plus extra activation through available parameters	Low activation as a consequence of suppression
Creation of atmosphere of trust	Low motivation due to distrust and unwillingness to express one's thoughts sincerely
Orientation at acceptance of everything that takes place, search of one's own explanation of surrounding things	Restricting views Rigid expectations
Context aimed at integration and cultivation of reflexivity	Too intense emotional experience with loss of observer's qualities
Orientation at acceptance and giving away	Inability to surrender to the process entirely

### **CONCLUSION:**

The experience of St. Petersburg School of Breathwork leads to a conclusion that the probability of integration may be enhanced substantially, and this may be affected using the above methods.

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