

Breathwork and Emotional Empowerment in the Quantum Age

By Nicholas de Castella

Yahweh God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being. Genesis 2:7

There I was in a basement in Sydney lying down with a group of about eight people and being told to take deep, full breaths. I had heard stories about extraordinary experiences during this process and I was eager to see if it would work for me.

I lay down and started breathing. At the time I was an international marathon runner at the Australian Institute of Sport and so I was used to physical exertion. I dove in deep and started breathing like a steam train.

At first I felt a little dizzy and got a bit scared, but this soon passed and I settled into the rhythm of the breath. Next I noticed a series of images flashing across my mind about the everyday events that were happening in my life at the time. I started to feel a soft buzzing in my hands and feet. The buzzing continued to get stronger until it was like a steady current of electricity running through my whole body. I noticed my arms lifting off the mattress involuntarily and my hands tightening. I began to feel stuck, locked in. I recognised this feeling as one that appeared in my life regularly, a feeling of being held back, blocked and restricted.

I started to feel hot and sweaty. I had a weird feeling, as if someone was holding my hands and I could feel the sensation of a wet towel on my forehead. I remembered that I had almost died of a fever when I was a three month old baby and I wondered if maybe I felt like this at the time.

In the fashion of a true athlete I fought the on coming feelings of restriction and they seemed to fight back, tightening my hands and locking me up even more. I felt powerless, like a tiny baby being held down. I was hot and sweaty and my whole body was charged with energy.

The facilitators came over and pushed against my upright arms. This ignited a wave of passion and fury within me. Instinctively I pushed back with all my might. A huge wave of emotion burst forth. A roar from deep inside me came thundering out as I struggled to break free. Suddenly something broke open and a river of relief flooded through me. I started to sob uncontrollably. All the years of pushing and driving my body beyond the pain threshold came pouring out. I cried and cried. I had not cried for years before this as I had believed that it was weak to cry. Gradually the intense feelings of grief subsided and I was left with a soft magical glowing feeling through my whole body. I was peace.

I lay there enjoying the blissful experience. I noticed that my breath felt remarkably calm and easy. Soft waves of joy flowed effortlessly through me as a rainbow of beautiful energy flushed my whole body clean. As I lay there I started to see the seriousness with which that I had taken my life so far and I started to laugh. I had spent years trying to prove that I was good enough and there in that moment I realised that I was OK just the way I was. A lightness descended upon me as I saw the cosmic joke and the great game that this life is.

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Later that evening we had a social gathering, I was standing around chatting when my partner took me aside and commented that I was talking uncharacteristically loudly. Normally at social gatherings I was fairly quiet and reserved but that evening I felt free and open. Happy to be alive, I smiled at her and went on talking.

This was my introduction to Breathwork, and it changed my life. It was in 1989 and I was on a facilitator training weekend. My Journey in personal development had only recently begun and this experience ignited a passion in me to continue to explore the potential of Breathwork. During the 13 years since that first experience I have facilitated thousands of Breathwork sessions and I am still amazed at the extraordinary power of this simple breathing technique to make profound transformation in people lives.

When did Breathwork begin? In modern times Breathwork has its origins in the work of Leonard Orr. In 1962 Leonard, whilst taking a particularly long bath, started to have flashback experiences of his birth. He began to experiment with this phenomenon and to encourage others to do the same. Pretty soon he noticed that the flashback experiences were accompanied by a certain breathing pattern. He called this pattern 'connected breathing' and began to guide others in this breathing technique. At the time Leonard discovered this work there was a lot of interest in alternative birthing practices (people such as the famous Frenchman Le Boyer were exploring alternative birthing practices). Leonard and a good friend Sondra Ray (a midwifery nurse) noted that many patterns present in a person's birth were repeated throughout their life. (For instance, a person born prematurely is likely to be early for appointments). They focused on 're-birth' experiences during Breathwork sessions and named the process 'Rebirthing'.

Other names given to Breathwork processing today are: Vivation, Holotropic Breathwork, Radiance Breathwork, Energy Meditation, Core Energetics and Quantum Breathwork.

How does it work? Our breath is a major source of energy supply. Eastern cultures have explored the power inherent in the breath and speak of the energy as 'chi' or 'prana'. In Latin the word for breath and spirit is the same word 'spirare'. About 16 to 17 times per minute we say "yes " to continuing our life here on Earth and take another breath. We breathe about 10,000 litres a day, oxygenating some 27 trillion (27,000,000,000,000) cells.

Due to poor breathing habits, limiting decisions about ourselves, and suppressing emotional experiences, the average person utilises only about 1 litre of their 6 to 7 litre lung capacity. Dysfunctional breathing habits are known as futile breathing and this is characterised by short, shallow irregular breathes. Futile breathing creates internal stress, confusion, tiredness, illness, and poor results in life generally.

During a Breathwork session our breath is guided back to its natural state: relaxed, rhythmic, flowing, and open. We call this breathing 'Connected Breathing'. Connected Breathing promotes the 'whole body' integration of our physical, mental, and emotional states of being.

As a session progresses we open up the flow of energy in our bodies. Our vibrational rate starts to increase and we seem to 'shift gears' and open the door-way to altered states of consciousness.

Significant events from any time during our life may come to the surface. We may become aware of an event that is currently happening or one that happened years ago, including during our childhood, our birth, our time in the womb and even our conception. The recall of birth associated memories happens in about one in ten sessions. Events arise organically through the process, rather than being suggested as in hypnosis, they may or may not have been consciously remembered. Whatever surfaces is what most needs to be cleared for a particular person at

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that time in their life. The Breathworkers major role is to guide the breath and to create a safe space for the breather to fully process the experience that is arising.

We 'witness' events unfolding like watching a movie. As the event unfolds we reconnect with the thoughts we were thinking and the emotions we were feeling at the time. In the presence of an experienced practitioner, we then have an opportunity to complete the experience. Not all sessions are loud and cathartic, many quiet and peaceful sessions are just as effective for making changes in our lives. Sometimes we make shifts even though it may seem that 'nothing is happening'.

As a past event is reviewed we often gain valuable insights into our lives. During significant life experiences we often draw conclusions to help us make sense of the experience. We may decide 'I wasn't wanted', 'I'm unlovable', 'I'm not worthy', 'I'm bad' and so on. Most of our formative decisions are made when we are children. As children we tend to take on the responsibility for the things that happen as 'our fault'. For example, When a father dies a young child may conclude that "daddy left because I was bad". Many of these conclusions do not serve us later in our lives.

During a breathe these conclusions become consciously recognised. Once recognised we now have the choice to reconsider the decision with an adults' fuller understanding of the situation. For example, one man realised that it was not his fault that his mother was so angry. She was overwhelmed without a husband, after his father's death. He also understood why he feared other women's anger. Now as an adult he did not have to fear their anger anymore.

Towards the end of a session there is usually a profound experience of peace and relaxation. The breath is relaxed, gentle and flowing freely. This phase allows the experience to be integrated.

Each Breathwork session is different. The outline I have presented is only a broad guide to give you a general idea of what happens in a session. Most people experience a sense of relief after a session and this may be accompanied by elation or peacefulness.

Breathwork is based on the principle: 'The Healing is in the Feeling'. This means that until we feel our emotions we heal. We like to say 'you can run, but you can not get away!'. Most of us spend a lot of time and energy fighting or avoiding feeling our feelings. Carl Jung said 'all addictions are substitutes for genuine feelings'. True freedom and empowerment come when we learn to sit with our feelings and allow them to pass through us.

The goal in Breathwork is not to encourage people to become irresponsibly out of control with their emotions. Instead Breathwork gives us a safe and supportive place where we can clear old emotional baggage so that it does not come out in the wrong way at the wrong time, to the wrong person. It is an opportunity to reconnect with our feelings and gain skills for managing our emotions more effectively.

Apart from the breath, the primary tool of a Breathworker is an attitude of love and truth. Breathwork honours the unique, subjective experience of each individual. Changes are made largely through the discovery, recognition and validation of what is, rather than through some 'fix it' mentality. In this way the Breathworker and the client come into a relationship that is mutually honouring, respectful and empowering.

Breathwork in the Quantum Age comes with a highly sophisticated level of awareness of emotional and metaphysical understandings and Conscious Awareness. This level of backup skill was not available when

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Breathwork was first made popular in the 1970's. I have found the work of Louise Hay and John Bradshaw particularly useful for integrating the shifts made during a session.

What outcomes can you expect from Breathwork?

1. An expanded experience of love.
2. Enriched the experience of being alive.
3. More peace and less stress.
4. Empowerment to create the kind of life we want.
5. Enhanced physical well-being.
6. Loving relationships.
7. Connection with your true, infinite nature.

1. An expanded experience of love.

We are conceived with our hearts open. By this I mean that we are connected to our source, we live in a state of love. Our emotions flow freely through our bodies. Emotions are energy. they are our life-force, they animate us and are the key to feeling the rich experience of love.

When we experience an emotion we can either feel it, allowing the experience to open our hearts, or suppress it and close our hearts down. As we close our hearts to suppress our emotions we lose touch with the feeling of love.

Unfortunately, many of our early experiences in life involve a series of emotional shut downs. These happen in two ways, firstly biologically, and secondly, through social conditioning. Arthur Janov, the Founder of Primal Therapy, suggests that under extreme trauma (such as during our birth) we experience emotions that are so intense that we are unable to process them at that time. As a means of coping with the situation we short circuit the experience in our brain by what Janov calls 'gating'. Gating is a coping mechanism, allowing us to continue to function and increases our chances of survival. Janov proposed that it is important to realise that once an emotion is created, if not fully experienced it gets stored within the cells of the body until a later time when conditions are right for its release.

Through social conditioning we learn to suppress our emotions. We are taught that it is weak to be 'emotional', and that it is strong to 'hold it all together'. Children are generally encouraged to suppress their enthusiasm and vitality. They should 'be seen and not heard', not answer back, be quiet and do what they are told. Boys are taught to be 'strong' and not cry or feel afraid and girls should not be angry.

If we are to be accepted and approved of we must conform and behave according to the parents rules. We learn that authentic expression of ourselves is not acceptable and that we are not going to be loved exactly as we are.

Breathwork has the effect of lessening tension and restoring the open flow of emotional energy through our bodies. A greater flow of energy through our hearts gives rise to an expanded feeling of love. I recently conducted a session with a forty five year old man who had separated from his wife after she had asked him to leave because of his "moodiness". In the session he discovered that under his frustration about his present situation was an intense feeling of love for his wife and his two children. He left the session earnest to let his wife know how deeply he loved her.

2. Enriched Experience of Being Alive.

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Depression is cited as one of the most rapidly increasing diseases of our time, how depressing! The common response is to administer drugs. Whilst this may be useful to assist a person through a crisis it does not address a major cause of depression - suppression!

When we shut down our emotional expression we restrict the capacity for energy to flow through us. Imagine a garden hose with water flowing through it. As you squeeze the hose, the flow of water slows. In a similar way, as we contract and brace our physical bodies particularly our breath, we restrict the flow of emotional energy through us. This dulls our experience of being alive and leads to physical tiredness, discomfort, stiffness and feelings of emptiness and numbness.

Most experiences generate emotional energy. When we don't fully express this energy it does not disappear, but rather, it gets stored in the cells of our body. If for instance, we feel angry about something, but do not express it, the energy of anger will be stored in our bodies. When the same thing happens over and over, the level of annoyance about it will continue to rise as the pool of stored emotion builds.

Holding emotional energy in our bodies is tiring. Emotional energy is always moving, it wants to be released, it wants to burst out. To suppress this energy, we need to hold our bodies in control. Most of us have been gradually holding more and more energy in control and have not realised how much of our energy is spent keeping it all together. We just feel tired.

Dr Jo Horwood MB BS, a General Practitioner who has explored Breathwork, wrote the following:

'My observations of people who are finding life heavy going is that often much of their daily energy is spent in suppressing emotions that they cannot find a way to safely express. For example, the anger of past abuse; the deep sorrow of a child's death; the fear of the unknown future.

Some workers have estimated that as much as 75–80 per cent of our available energy in one day may be used to suppress our feelings, leaving only a small fraction with which to live and create. If this is true, is it any wonder that in a number of surveys, "tiredness" is the most common symptom that people report as the reason they consult their doctor?

I believe that the emotional suppression that we all experience is the single most important issue that blunts our experience of our fully realised, vibrant well-being'.

Breathwork reopens the channels in our bodies for the free expression of emotional energy. Allowing energy to flow through us lights up our whole being. As we release suppressed emotional energy we also gain the energy that we were previously using to hold ourselves in control. Consequently we experience renewed vitality and feelings of aliveness, passion and enthusiasm for life.

3. More inner peace and less stress.

When we feel stress we are feeling the effects of an emotion that is stuck or blocked in our bodies. Stress is created by holding our bodies in a braced condition. It is associated with deeper emotions that have not been recognised and fully felt. For example, agitation, restlessness and anxiety are surface expressions of fear, whilst frustration and irritability are surface expressions of anger.

Energy never stays still. Repressed emotional energy puts our body in a state of continual turmoil. Many people try to 'calm' this energy down with medication or meditation. These are at best only temporary, 'quick fix' solutions. They do not address the underlying cause of the turmoil which often reappears after the treatments cease.

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Culturally we tend to divide emotions into 'good' and 'bad'. 'Good' emotions are generally those of joy and peace, 'bad' emotions are those of sadness, anger, and fear. When we make emotions wrong or bad, we tend to attempt to hide them and resist their natural flow. Resisting the flow of emotional energy changes the way the emotion is experienced. Instead of a free flow of energy through us, when we resist our emotions, they feel coarse or rough, and are experienced as uncomfortable. The resistance causes them to be experienced as painful.

Suppressing emotion causes prolonged suffering. As we restrict our expression of emotion, we increase the time it takes for us to release the energy from our bodies and increase the time that it takes to process the emotion. Babies go from screaming rage to joyous giggling in a matter of seconds, but as adults it often takes days, weeks and years to move through traumatic emotional experiences. What this means is that as adults we often linger in emotional 'backwaters' for a lot longer than we need to.

Breathwork helps us connect with and release the underlying emotional energy that causes inner turmoil. As a result we tend to find that we are naturally more at peace with ourselves and others and that our life flows with a greater sense of ease and harmony.

4. Empowerment to create the kind of life we want.

During a session we have opportunities to become aware of the times when we made limiting decisions about ourselves, others and life. These decisions are the basis of our beliefs and usually reside in our subconscious. Though we may be normally unaware of them, they affect virtually everything we do. Holding emotional energy in association with a limiting belief makes it stronger and its effects more damaging.

By becoming aware of the context in which we made a limiting decision about ourselves, and having released the emotional charge on it, we then have the opportunity to make new, life-enhancing decisions. New decisions mean new beliefs, new beliefs mean new actions and new actions mean new results!

5. Enhanced physical well-being.

Poor breathing habits are one of the major causes of physical illness. In his book *'The Oxygen Breakthrough, 30 Days to an Illness Free Life'* Dr Saul Hendler, a respected Medical Doctor, states that improper breathing has been associated with cardiac symptoms, angina, intestinal disorders, headaches and increased susceptibility to infection.

In my experience many illnesses are related to blocked emotional energy. The repressed emotional energy that stays within our bodies wreaks havoc on our immune system by upsetting our inner balance. Studies have shown that a significant proportion of people who developed cancer suffered an emotionally traumatic experience within the preceding year.

In his book *'Primal Therapy - 20 years on'*, Arthur Janov reports that people who participate in regular emotional clearing work experience dramatic changes in their physiology. The results of his studies included reports of lower basal heart rate, normalised blood pressure and lower core body temperature.

I regularly work with people who suffer from severe medical conditions. Many experience profound shifts in their level of well-being after expressing blocked emotional energy. Quite often they discover that underlying their physical illness is an emotion that has not been released.

I have found that emotional releases have assisted in the healing of: headaches, migraines, 'phantom' physical pains (often in the chest or stomach), depressed immune system functioning, sleeplessness, asthma, palpitations, psoriasis, stomach and bowel troubles, disturbed vision, menopausal symptoms and depression.

6. Loving relationships

Having an open our heart is a prerequisite for the creation of loving relationships. Loving relationships arise when we share all that we are, when we commit to a journey of sharing and receiving to the passionate and subtle aspects of heart-felt emotion which includes: our joys, sorrows, fears, hurts, longings and even our open-hearted (non attacking) expression of anger. Sharing emotion is a powerful way to build bridges across the shores of our hearts and souls.

Most of us have shut down our vulnerable emotional expression in relationships. We have been hurt in the past and fear getting hurt again. This guardedness creates distance, diminishing intimacy. It leads to less and less vitality within our relationships and more and more feelings of isolation.

We often think we are afraid of getting hurt again, but what we really fear is feeling the hurt we have already within us from past, unrieved losses. Because of our limited capacity to express our emotions, most of us go through life closing down our hearts and become more and more separate from ourselves and each other.

What happens when children fall over? Usually they cry for a while. Then they get up and get going again as though nothing ever happened. As adults we 'fall over' in relationships (and life), feel hurt and contract, pulling back inside ourselves. When we brace ourselves against the hurt we hold onto the pain. We then get scared of 'falling over' and getting hurt again and so we avoid 'dangerous' situations (intimacy). The problem is not that we experience loss. The problem is that we have lost our ability to grieve our losses.

In relationships, suppressed emotional energy (particularly anger) gets 'acted out', usually in destructive ways. The unexpressed feelings lead to sarcasm, mean comments, irritability and complaining. These behaviours are subtle and tend to hurt others more than when we openly express what we are really feeling. These 'covert' behaviours undermine the level of safety and trust in relationships and encourage guardedness and distancing from each other. Very often we react strongly to an event because it is similar to something that has happened in the past that was not fully resolved. The unexpressed emotional energy from the past comes up. When this happens we say that the situation is 'plugging us in'.

Releasing the underlying emotions through Breathwork clears our 'charge' on an issue and allows us to talk about it in a less reactive and more open hearted way. As we clear repressed emotional residue we find that we become less irritable and more patient, tolerant and compassionate.

Breathwork assists us to feel and express the emotions that we are carrying – the sadness, the anger, the fear (and the joy). As we relearn how to release our grief we move forward in life, with increasingly open hearts and into ever deepening experiences of intimacy and love.

After a series of Breathwork sessions, a thirty year old woman commented: "I felt abandoned and suppressed in many different ways during my childhood and adolescence. Now my aliveness insists on expressing itself and my relationship with my mother especially, is more real, close, spontaneous and supportive".

7. Connection with our true, infinite nature.

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During Breathwork sessions we often experience 'witness consciousness'. In witness consciousness we get to see ourselves from the outside, in a non-attached way. We are aware of our feelings but are not so strongly identified with them (or identified 'as' them). We get to observe our body, thoughts and emotions without our normal associations of being them. For example, we realise the truth is: 'I am feeling anger' not 'I am angry'. This experience directs us towards a deeper awareness of who we truly are.

One of the major benefits of this expanded awareness is that it builds a connection to a centredness that is not affected by the trials and tribulations of everyday life. Being less associated with our body, thoughts and emotions, we do not get so thrown around by what arises within them. The beauty of this is that it enables us to experience a greater sense of aliveness and not be subject emotional 'roller coasters'. As we build an awareness of who we truly are we become less affected by what other people think and find an inner strength and freedom to live our truth.

A healing breath meditation

The healing power of the breath is beyond question. Connected breathing is one of the most powerful ways I know of to induce a deep state of relaxation. Here is a guide for some relaxing breathing:

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable setting, place your hands on your belly.
2. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose.
3. Breathe in all the way down to your belly, feel your belly getting bigger. As your belly fills continue to gently expand your breath into the upper parts of your lungs.
4. Breathe out, focusing on letting go and allowing the air to flow freely out. Continue this cycle of breathing consciously in and out. Focus your attention on the feeling of surrendering and letting go as you breathe out.
5. Focus on connecting the inhalation with the exhalation so that your breathe goes round and round without a pause.
6. Continue breathing for about 5 minutes. This is usually enough to induce a profound state of relaxation and inner peace.

Breathwork offers us life changing transformative experiences on the journey of heart opening and personal empowerment. My experience as a Breathwork facilitator has been that this is a remarkably powerful healing modality that enables people to grow and make changes quickly and easily. I continue to experience feelings of deep satisfaction and joy in seeing the effects of this process on others.

Many people think that the idea of letting go of one's emotions is a scary one. It is very important to ensure that the Breathworker you choose has been professionally trained and is registered with a recognised Breathwork organisation. In a professionally conducted Breathwork session the quality of presence, level of skill and support of the Breathworker provide a rare space in our society where it is safe for us to open our hearts and let go of unwanted excess emotional baggage - and the rewards for facing our fear are well worth it!

Nicholas de Castella, President of The Australian Breathwork Foundation has 15 years experience as a Breathwork practitioner. Founder of Passionately Alive Seminars and author of 'Keys to Emotional Mastery', he conducts Breathwork Practitioner Trainings, facilitates weekly support group meetings and runs a private practice in Clifton Hill.