

To live in freedom, breathe in freedom !

« Go beyond what is breathing, there you will find breath » (Shri Aurobindo)

"Breathing with a capital B" is a universal, dynamic process in which man is included. It manifests itself in us through respiration, apparent as inhalation and exhalation. This is indeed a two-way flow between the inner and outer worlds, a gateway to All. This dynamic process does not belong to us. It is a cycle triggered without any intervention of the mind and sustained beyond our control. Yet we can intervene through voluntary muscles which shrink or expand spaces and impose shapes.

This duality can be difficult to accept at times. What I mean to say is that all our work on breathing, the changes we are seeking and the control we are striving to acquire should never relegate breathing to a possession - under the ownership of the Ego - or a creation of the mind. When breathing loses its natural rhythm and spontaneous dynamism, it loses its linking function and rapidly becomes an ill-adapted response to our needs "here and now".

« A man's life is nothing but a concentration of breath » (Lao Tseu)

Deep breathing is not confined to the chest or diaphragm movements. It involves the entire body. Unicity and balance are the features of healthy breathing. For all parts of the body to live and breathe fully, the chest must be stripped of its armour, the face must allow the passages (nostrils, pharynx, glottis...) to loosen, and the spine must recover its wholeness and flexibility, so as to track the wave of breath as it wells up from the abdomen, travels right through the body and unfurls across the face.

Most of the time the respiratory function proceeds unconsciously under the control of the nervous system in the rachis. Unbeknown to us, it adjusts to all physical, emotional and environmental situations (activity, posture...).

It does so by alternating in:

- rhythm (e.g. slowing during sleep and the vegetative states, speeding up during physical activity, becoming steady or uneven, or even temporarily suspended as in swallowing);
- location (thoracic, latero-costal, clavicular, costal-abdominal, dorsal or pelvic breathing, depending on the relationship and orientation of the movements involved) ;
- range, to match the expiratory requirements at any one time as well as the function to be accompanied.
- And so on...

Breathing espouses a pattern connected with our condition, past history and memory : this is what is termed tangible breath. Behind thus, however, there is intangible breath.

By embodying universal breath in us, breathing indeed provides a two-way flow between the inner and outer worlds. Consequently, if nothing is there to impede this dynamic process, it can remain free and adapt to the reality of both worlds while meeting our needs, intentions, activities, emotional states and relationships. It faithfully shadows our physical life as well as the subtlechanges in our emotional life.

A person's breathing patterns cannot therefore evolve by means of any conditioned learning or by imposing a system but by:

- recovering freedom of the physical support and actualisation site of our bodies and body movements;
- returning the nervous system's capacity to receive informations from both inner and outer worlds;

- producing an appropriate response by controlling the opening-up processes and developments leading to its expression.

To achieve this, breathing must be cleared of the fixed ways acquired unconsciously in the course of our lives, and of its emotional ruts or habits learned through some technique or other (... the "proper way" to breathe ! For whom ? But why ?...).

Who knows only one way to breathe, soon becomes a truly disabled breather.

It is simply a matter of feeding the nervous system with all kinds of experiences to enable it to select here and now, without involving the ego or the mind.

Any conditioning of respiratory pattern, site or rhythm freezes breathing and hence activity, affect and thoughts.

If you want to generate movement from breath, do not begin by setting the breathing pattern.

There are no bad ways of breathing but only inappropriate respiratory responses to the accompanied function or to the state we unexpectedly (with raising of the shoulders) might be harmful to the speaker or singer's voice (because of the effect on laryngeal tension), it is a fully appropriate response for the survival of an asthmatic or someone drowning. As for abdominal breathing, which is quiet and deep, it is hardly liable to convey even gentle feeling let alone passion.

As a teacher, I see my role as a guide in re-exploration rather than the possessor of knowledge who would set a model to be imitated or decide what is suitable for others. Who am I to know what is right for another person or what he might really need ? I only feel capable of observing - without always understanding - what is holding back that person, what in that physical support for breath to manifest itself, might freeze and set constraints, or what is ruled by habit, conditioning and set ideas...

My role then consists in suggesting to each concerned a variety of suitable contexts and environments (situations, postures, activities) for him or her to be able to explore further possibilities, as well as differentiated responses to be memorised.

This also serves to enhance the self-image, filling it out with more clearly perceived spaces and shapes, and the mobility of the parts of the body producing the dynamic process (ribs, sternum, spine, shoulder blades, abdominal wall, nostrils...) is re-discovered. Finally, awareness and differentiation games can be suggested so that the person can feel more clearly his or her basic need and unconsciously adjust respiratory response, renewed at every moment and recreated to suit every requirement.