

Breathexperience™

A Somatic Science and Art of Living

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Introduction: The Power of Letting Breath Come and Go on Its Own



We enter into breathexperience™ (Middendorf Breathwork) by simply receiving a moment to allow our breath to come and go on its own through our body. Through sensing and participating in experiencing this breath movement, we quickly find ease in our breath and body, with a sense of well-being that draws us away from aches, pains, and illness. The power of letting breath come and go on its own is instantly accessible for us, and consequently, available in all situations in our daily life. breathexperience™ offers an enormous potential for connecting us to a vast intelligence within our body to heal ourselves.

Who Participates in Breathexperience™?

Breathexperience™ is for everyone, all races, cultural backgrounds, and gender—from children to the elderly, whether with physical symptoms that compromise their quality of life, or whether they suffer unhappiness in their situations. Some are drawn to breathexperience™ because they want to enhance their professional and personal life. Others feel isolated and fragmented, with a loss of their sense of self, and realize that our culture has weakened the sense of their own direction and potential. They are longing for connection with themselves and their own resources to increase a sense of fulfillment. Others seek guidance in understanding themselves as individuals, integrating their emotions, body, mind and spirit. Still others feel stuck in conflicts in their relationships and in search of connecting with partners, family, and community in new and creative ways.

We can connect with our own natural breath movement and continue to find out how breathexperience™ can bring us a sense of wholeness, joy, and creativity.

Growth and Healing in the Breath

Rather than a series of techniques that help to “fix” emotional, physical, and mental problems, breathexperience™ is a comprehensive system—a somatic

practice—which promotes self-responsibility and in depth participation in our growth and healing.

Everyone has breath. We were all given the breath of life when we were born. Rather than taking it for granted because it is automatic, we come to **sense breath movement in our body**, and **participate with presence** in our **breath experience**. In this way we open the doorway to empower ourselves with a sense of fullness, vitality, and well-being.

Having an experience of what lives inside of us that has been previously unconscious or from which we have disconnected, is a most exciting journey, not only for our growth but also for our evolution and transformation.

Some Benefits from Breathexperience™

Since breath follows basic natural laws, we gain many benefits from breathexperience™, for example, some participants report:

- reduction of stress and anxiety,
- emotional balance
- increased stability and flexibility in mind and body,
- clearing of holdings and restrictions in the spine, so that it becomes naturally realigned.
- Balancing of hypo-tension and hyper-tension

Breathexperience™ also builds:

- trust and self-reliance,
- sense of safety in the body,
- increased independence
- less need for an outside resource to “fix” something.

Breath connects us to our authentic Self and our power, and what directions it can take. Breath forms and informs us, and transforms conflicts into life-giving force.

Breath Is More Than Just the Function of Breathing

Breath provides us with more than the substance to live, and it carries a deeper meaning than only the exchange of oxygen. Ancient cultures already knew about the potential and wisdom of a much wider experience and understanding of Breath.

"Breath comes and goes on its own, and in a peaceful rest we trust that the next breath cycle emerges again on its own", says Prof. Ilse Middendorf of

Berlin/Germany. This is the foundation of the Experience of Breath, which she has developed over the past 70 years.

The simplicity of this statement is full of richness and wisdom. It is one of nature's basic principles that we can experience in ourselves and learn about in all living creatures.

Breath as an Experience of Self

The awareness of breath movement encompasses the physical experience as well as the experience of the true nature of Self, as our vitality unfolds. It is our natural breath that we allow to come and go on its own, which sustains the basic rhythms of our life processes. As the work develops, we experience movement that originates from breath as the source of our creativity and an outlet for its expression. We enter a self-analytical process of growth and development. Breath becomes our teacher.

Breath not only reaches our inner world and moves us; it also connects us to the world outside. It brings us closer to each other and breaks down our sense of isolation.

How Can We Learn About Breath?

First of all we need to discover and become sensory aware of how we breathe naturally.

Apart from the chemical exchange which takes place in the lungs and the blood stream, breathing means, above all, movement.

Breath—creating inward and outward movements—an ever-continuing act of filling and emptying—resembles life itself.

On inhalation as we allow air to flow in, the body walls expand. As we breathe out, they swing back to their original position. We have a moment of rest, before the next expansion of our organism allows fresh life to come in. Breathing is a constant, rhythmic movement—like the eternal dip and swell of the waves of the ocean.

This rhythmic process, which takes place naturally in every living being, is the primal life-giving motion itself. If we breathe naturally, this rhythm moves our entire "being"—made up of a collection of forces and processes that interact with each other to form a unique whole.

The unconscious mode of breathing is part of the autonomic nervous system, and accompanies every act of the body—be it physical, spiritual or emotional. Whereas anxiety restricts our breathing, joy permits it to flow freely. Every activity

changes our breath rhythm. When we have worries, fears, struggles, either of an internal or external nature, our muscles become tight and inflexible, and disturb the normal function of our organs, eventually causing illness. We become cramped and tense. These states restrict our natural breathing and are harmful to us.

Our culture still teaches us to treat our bodies as objects, dominated by our will, or what we or others "think" is good for us. We are taught to decide to not trust ourselves—our breath—our own life-giving force. We now need to learn to understand and appreciate our bodies as a collection of forces working together as one, with the breath in it as a source and guide.

This becomes clear, when we bring our presence and sensory awareness to a particular area of our body. At the same time, we have transposed our Self there. For example, when I place my hands around my ankle, and sense it between my two hands, I am there, with full presence, with my whole Self.

As I am there, my breath movement starts to develop there as well, if I allow breath to come and go on its own. Through this process, we incorporate a particular part of our body into the whole, and consequently we sense our breath growing, expanding, and moving more than ever before.

The Trinity of Sensation, Presence, Breath



Being sensory aware, being present and allowing breath movement in and through the body, are interrelated processes, which we refer to as **Sensation, Presence, Breath**. One induces the other. The development of these processes takes us from an unconscious level of breathing to a composed state of being, where breathing is conscious, yet independent of our controlling will. We experience breath awareness as our present state of being with a sense of Self.

Somatic Intelligence

The relationship between Sensation, Presence and Breath, makes possible our access to an enormous body of knowledge, which we call Somatic Intelligence. Somatic Intelligence comes as we build our presence with the sensation of the movement of breath, coming and going on its own. Somatic Intelligence is not just a cognitive or mind-oriented process. It includes the knowledge of each individual cell in our body.

Within each person we can find a core of health, unity, and sanity—our essence. Each individual cell in our body has the longing to participate in realizing that essence. Each cell actually holds the essence within itself and knows its rightful place in the dynamic of the whole being.

Somatic intelligence is the accumulation of cellular knowledge, which the breath can uncover, develop and organize throughout the entire being. Cells and parts of the body that have lost this knowledge—be it through injuries, traumatic experiences, or simply a lack of consciousness—are harmonized through the experience of breath, regrouping into wholeness. More than just opening the path into our depth, breath also shows us how to evolve from that essence with awareness of Self, in a joyful discovery. We experience our Self as a creative and expressive being, capable of moving our inner world as well as affecting the world around us in our everyday life.

The Natural Laws of Breath

When we enter into breathexperience™, the natural laws of breath become available. As mentioned earlier, the trinity of sensation, presence, and breath hold the following laws or principles:

- Wherever we have presence, sensation and breath participate.
- Wherever we have sensation, presence, and breath joins in.
- Our focus on breath brings sensation and presence.

Breath develops direction that seeks integration and wholeness, and also encompasses complements, such as the receptive and directive or feminine and masculine principle. For descriptions and further examples, refer to Breath Sequences, pages 9-21.

With devotion and an alert mind, we practice the art of becoming breath aware. In a series of effortless movement sequences, we work with stretching/expansion, pressure points, vowel breath-spaces, and movements originating from breath. All sorts of possibilities begin to emerge, together with a growing state of being breath aware.

With inhalation, emphasis is on allowing the air to come in - and we experience expansion. With exhalation, we sense breath moving through our body and we experience connection and direction. This is followed by a peaceful rest, before the next breath cycle emerges on its own. Our orientation changes from a premature and rational interpretation of what we think we are to the experience of an authentic Self. Simplicity, clarity, and trust pave this path.

Breathexperience™ frees us from unnecessary concerns, tensions and prejudices. We can gain an immediate, direct experience of our true nature and the profound joy that comes with it.

Breathexperience in Relationship™: Uncovers, Clarifies, Resolves Conflict, and Restores and Transforms Relationships



We discover that breath not only moves in and through our body, but also from our inner being into our expression in the outer world, and connect us with others. Breathexperience™ can expand into partnerships and interactions with others through breathexperience in relationship™,

developed by Juerg Roffler, Director of the U.S. Middendorf Breath Institute, in Berkeley, California.

Through breathexperience in relationship™ we come to an understanding of the importance of our unique breath rhythm in ourselves and in our relationships.

When we experience participation in the physical sensation of the movement of breath in our body, without interfering with its natural rhythm, we learn that every single breath cycle—*inhalation, exhalation, and pause*—is different. The cycles of breath as different as they are, taken together, create a breath rhythm—like a piece of music. Breathexperience™ connects us to an intelligent source within ourselves that provides us with exactly what we need. However, this connection can happen only when we allow breath to come and go on its own, without influence from our will, and only with our full participation and presence in our experience of breath.

In reality, even the smallest incidents in our life are reflected in the breath rhythm. When I am happy, my breath rhythm is different from when I am sad or angry. When I am physically active, again my breath rhythm is different from when I rest or sleep, etc. My own individual breath rhythm shows my individuality.

The breath rhythm emerges as an important indicator of all conscious and unconscious events within and around us. In breathexperience relationship™, breath becomes both the basis of our orientation, and the opening that shows us what the next step can be in our personal process, and with our partner(s).

The Process of Supporting and Clarifying Breathexperience in Relationship™

As we receive the breath in our body, it becomes more and more substantial. Inhalation, exhalation, and pause create movements in the body that can be physically sensed. When we sense these movements, we not only have a sensation of breath in the body but also an emotional and spiritual experience of ourselves that comes with this sensation. It is through sensation in the body that enables our feelings and thoughts to become real. Once feelings and thoughts have reference through the body, together they support a process of identification of Self. Breath encompasses sensation, feelings, and thoughts. A sense of oneness and a sense of Self can then be experienced.

When entering partnerships, and individual breath rhythms are in tune, so that each one's rhythm is authentic - allowing breath to come and go on its own - recognition of one's own Self develops the potential for a meeting of another's Self. At this point comes an understanding of one's own Self and the other, without either one adapting their breath rhythm. Both beings become involved in meeting authentically. Conflicting parts in the relationship are replaced by an understanding and acceptance of each other's truth. More tolerance and flexibility result. Old patterns drop away as possibilities emerge for new ways of being.

Breath does not orient primarily to where there are conflicts. Instead, Breath has a memory and maintains the connection through *breathexperience™* with our healthy inner core: it stimulates the whole being to participate, to help create a state of equilibrium, and to spread the knowledge of the healthy core throughout our whole body and being. We can then outgrow our conflicts and shed them, as the dead leaves of a tree in autumn release for the sake of the next year's growth. Life forces that were fragmented and isolated by physical and mental conflicts become available once again for processes of restoring, creating, unfolding, and growth.

In a *breathexperience in relationship™* process based on working with the natural breath, a specially trained facilitator shows the way for couples or small groups to work with one another and makes verbal or hands-on offers to stimulate an experience of breath. This will allow the balancing and self-regulating dynamics of breath to become the source of their movements as they interact. All offers from the facilitator incorporate recognition and analysis of breath rhythm and breath principles. Integration can happen because each participant maintains presence and participates in the process of *breathexperience™*.

Through movements that originate from breath, there are qualities of being which manifest within each individual. These qualities include complements, which we recognize as principles in *breathexperience in relationship™*. Some examples follow: Receptivity in breath movement has direction in breath movement as its complement. Inner breath movement has as its complement outer breath movement; stability is complemented by flexibility, instinct by spirit. These complements become important tools in developing balance. Allowing the breath to come and go on its own, will support any process leading to balance of all complementary forces, since this is a natural breath principle.

Movement that originates from breath is simply the continuation of our inner breath movement being actualized in the world. The body is being moved by the breath, and the Self participates. This leads to breath dialogue in partnership and group. The result is a deeper connection and a more authentic communication on all levels.

What Can We Learn from Practicing Breathexperience in Relationship™?

Some responses from our practice of breathexperience in relationship™ are:

- “It is critical for me to maintain my own breath rhythm when I relate to someone else. It helps me to stay with my Self at times when I take my stand and when I become more flexible and tolerant.”
- “I realize through sensing my breath rhythm, that when I’m too directive I don’t listen to the other person. I want to receive myself and others more. I’d like to give more space to them as well as to myself.”
- “I’m learning how to be with my Self without adapting or merging with my partner.”
- “The important thing in this practice is that I can let my partner be as he is and I can be who and what I am. I feel that we’re separate but can still be connected. In this way I respect myself and my partner.”
- “The amazing thing is that my breath teaches me to love my Self. As a result, I don’t have to give myself up by paying any price to be loved.”

Sequences in Breath Practice

Since breath work is experiential, it is useful to have someone lead us through the first steps to discover our natural breath. Effortless sequences in the beginning are more internal, helping us to become aware of our breath movement by shifting our presence from thinking, to sensing movement of breath in our body. We ask ourselves, “Where do I sense my breath movement?” And “Can I allow the breath to come and go on its own?”

Now let us offer you a taste of the potential that breath can bring. Give yourself some time and let yourself be lead on a journey of exploring your Self through breath, in a way that you might never before have experienced.

We suggest that you choose a quiet place, sitting upright on a stool or an armless chair, preferably with a firm, flat seat. Sit at the front edge of your seat. Sense your feet on the floor, and rest your hands on your upper thighs. Let yourself be carried. This means to receive the floor and the chair or stool as a support, rather than falling or sinking into the seat or the ground. Letting yourself be carried creates a particular state of being that facilitates trust that we can allow breath to come and go on its own. Allowing this breath opens the gate into the enormous body of knowledge of breathexperience™.

Begin your exploration by closing your eyes. Focus inside, bringing your full presence to your breath movement. Without controlling it, let your breath come

and go on its own. With neither expectation nor plan, sense where your breath is moving you. For the next few minutes, continue to simply sense this movement that breath creates, following its rhythmic coming and going—as it naturally happens.

Stretching



Staying connected with the sensation of your breath movement, now start to stretch/expand throughout your whole body—in a gentle, effortless, and spontaneous way. Invite breath movement to enter into your body. Gradually, after expanding your fingers as you inhale, and releasing them as you exhale, also move your hands and arms—actually your whole body—with the natural breath rhythm. All movements are unique; there is no right or wrong way. Explore how breath responds to your movements. As you become more and more breath aware, eventually, you arrive at the moment when breath initiates your movement. You are moving into the acceptance of what is, beyond judgment.

Resonating

Now sit back down again, with eyes closed. For a few moments, focus on your breath, and resonate—collect what has happened to your breath movement as a result of the stretching exploration. Become aware of any changes. Maybe in stretching is there already more space available for your breath?

Resting

After resonating, let yourself rest for a few minutes, in a sitting position on the stool or chair, rocking back and forth a little bit over your sitting bones. This position is to offer you the chance to integrate what changes may have occurred, and to encourage you to not go back into a position of slouching or holding yourself up with rigidity.

Stimulation—Uprising Power of Breath

When you are ready to continue, stand, with feet parallel, hips-width-apart.

Bend your knees slightly. Place more of your weight on the balls of your feet.

Raise your arms loosely to the level of your head. Swing with your arms and trunk forward and down, allowing your inhalation to stream in through your nose, without pulling it in.

Then let your exhalation stream out through your mouth with a little sound, like a warm wind. Allow yourself to be pushed or grown up, with the uprising power of this exhalation.

The uprising power of breath can bring you a strong sense of vitality, which leaves you pleasantly stimulated and alert.

Keep swinging downward and upward, according to the natural rhythm of your breath. Keep this movement effortless. Go as far down on inhalation as you feel comfortable, and let yourself "grow up" again as far as breath takes you on exhalation. You can experience an uprising power in the exhalation.

Trusting your breath, you will find ease in your movements and will become more aware of your back as a flexible part of yourself.

Resonate

As you resonate, you may feel strongly stimulated and more open to allowing breath to claim more space inside yourself.

Rest

Sensation of the Movement of Breath in the Inner Spaces

As you orient to the sensation of the movement of breath as your guide, become aware of your "lower space," which includes your feet, legs, and pelvis. This area is the base; it contains instinct, earth force, and vital power.

As you grow upward, you become aware of your "middle space," which reaches from your navel to the middle of your sternum (breast bone), where you meet the center of your Self. After you have become aware of yourself, you sense the urge to conclude the process by entering the "upper space," which refines, completes, shapes, and expresses the forces of the other areas. Developing through the three spaces can bring rewards and a variety of experiences such as:

- "I suddenly felt so clear. I understand something of how I can evolve, from the lower space where I felt my vitality in my life, through the middle where I feel more personal, more me, and into the upper where I sense myself more refined. I feel more spiritual there."
- "I've experienced some kind of transformation."
- "I've gained wisdom, growing up through my body by just sensing breath movement. Exciting."
- "I feel one with instinct and spirit."

Vowels and Consonants

Part of the practice of breathexperience™ includes work with vowels and consonants. When you contemplate or receive individual vowels on inhalation, the movement of breath creates specific spaces in the body. Each vowel refers to its own particular breath space or “home.” For example:

As you sit on your stool or chair, contemplate silently the sound of “O” as in “rose,” on your inhalation, and then silently sound “O” in yourself on exhalation. Allow the pause after exhalation. You may recognize when you resonate that the inner part of your middle space has expanded. You might even say that the “O” occupies a particular place, space, or home in your body. After a few breath cycles, without pushing or pulling on the breath, let the sound of “O” float out over the breath, on exhalation. Try this for 5-10 breath cycles. When you resonate, sense what part of your body has developed more space for breath movement from this offer.

Working with all the vowels, one at a time, provides and stimulates breath throughout your whole being. When you contemplate the vowel sound as you inhale, and voice the sound as you exhale, sounds then become rooted, substantial, and full of personal meaning. They reach their intended goal and reflect back into our own depth.

You can also proceed in a similar way with consonants, for example, voice a “p”, allowing your cheeks to fill with air before you let the sound out.

You may discover that while vowels create space for the breath, consonants accentuate, define, center, stimulate, relax, or stroke throughout the body’s cavity. Similar practices are found in some Eastern spiritual approaches, e.g. the mantra-yoga or the sound meditations of the Tibetan Buddhists.

Inner/Outer Breath Spaces



After developing the three inner spaces, you are ready to explore the movement of breath into the outer space. Without pulling your inhalation allow yourself to give in to it, all through your inner space. Your arms and hands can support this process by placing them in front of you, palms facing your torso on inhalation. Begin to release the forces that you have absorbed through inhalation into the space around you on exhalation—into different directions—in front of you, behind you, on both sides, above, and below. Without effort, allow the exhalation to stream from your inner torso through your arms, hands, finger tips, legs, and feet into the outer space. This is the space that not only affects you; it is also the space on which you can act. The breath movement which comes from your lower,

through your middle, and upper spaces, meets the space around you, which you encounter as your partner. You can find yourself in a connection between your inner Self and the world around you.

Change/Transformation

Now sit down again to feel and sense the effect of the whole experience. You may realize something important has grown in you. The possibility of change is the gateway to constant transformation. Through change you can shed the old that is no longer useful to you, leave it to the past, and embrace the present. Breath sequences promoting this kind of transformation lead also to a new posture, which does not only depend on muscular tension, but also on self-knowledge, embracing your doing, as well as allowing your Self to be.

Allowing the Breath to Come and Go on its Own

It takes some practice to let the breath come and go on its own, without controlling or directing it. The challenge of allowing the breath to come and go on its own can be experienced through each phase of the breath cycle—inhale, exhale, and pause. On inhalation, the allowing is in receiving it. On exhalation we are asked to allow direction to happen. In the pause, the allowing is in our trust that the next inhalation comes back on its own. It becomes easier when you give yourself over to the breath and learn to listen to it.

Spinal Roll



With the next experience, begin in a standing position. With eyes closed, become sensory aware of your breath movement, with its natural undisturbed rhythm.

Begin to roll down and forward, one vertebra after another. Start with your head; continue with the seven cervical, twelve thoracic, five lumbar vertebrae, and finally the sacrum with the pelvis, until your torso hangs from your hips, securely supported by your legs, with knees slightly bent.

Let your shoulders and arms hang loosely.

Bring your full presence and sensation to each vertebra as you bend forward and down. Even though you may not be sensory aware of every individual vertebra when you start practicing, offer your presence to the area where you expect a particular vertebra to be. Go down as far as it feels comfortable for you—preferably all the way down—until your spine is hanging down, from your pelvis,

and your hands or arms touch the ground. After a while, begin to grow up again, bringing one vertebra on top of the other, until the head tops this growth like a crown.

If it is not possible for you to go all the way down, what is most important is that you are in your breath rhythm as far as your breath will allow your spine to move. When breath meets a conflict or pain, wait there and sense your movement of breath. Come up a few vertebrae and try rolling down again. Perhaps this time your breath will move through, and you can go deeper. If not, then grow up again, vertebra by vertebra and ask yourself if you can be satisfied with what you can do and be with breath, rather than wanting more and being dissatisfied!

The key for this exercise is to allow the breath to flow freely, at all times, without holding or pushing.

If you allow the breath to come and go naturally, you will experience the effect of a strong transformation. Your inner structure is reorganized, with an understanding that is free from the influence of your mind and ego. Your structure is actually created by the balancing and healing power of your natural breath.

Applying the Principle of Presence, Sensation, Breath

Sit down again in an upright sitting position, and while resonating with your breath, place your hands firmly on various places on your torso, to find out how and where your breath is moving in your body.

You may discover that breath is different in its appearance and feeling in various places on your torso. Also, by staying a while at a specific place and bringing your full presence there, you may experience more fullness and ease for your breath in that place—perhaps a welcome change.

The presence, sensation, breath principle comes into play here—wherever you bring your presence or have a clear sensation of breath, if you allow it to happen naturally, breath will move into this area, clearing and integrating its former restriction. You will feel increased freedom and openness. Even more, depending on what space you are working on, you will learn about the deeper meaning of these changes.

Rest for a while.

How Breath and Movement Come Together

Let us end these sequences with an experience which includes breath and your hands in free play.

While sitting, place both hands on your upper thighs, palms facing the ground. Now open one hand and arm like a flower to the space around you, palm facing out, and fingers fully unfolding. Let your hand/arm spontaneously find its direction and distance. After fully unfolding, bring your hand back to your thigh, and continue in the same way with your other hand. Let a comfortable breath rhythm happen. Alternate between your two hands for quite a while, before you open both hands at the same time to the outside and bring them back together onto your thighs. Each hand may have chosen a different direction and distance in unfolding.

Meanwhile, you may find that not only your hands and arms are involved, but your whole body as well. Continue in this way as long as you feel comfortable. Allow breath to flow freely. Let your inhalation enter through your nose without drawing it in—and let your exhale stream out through your nose or mouth without extending or pushing it out.

By now you realize that you're not controlling your breath any more—you're allowing it to come and go on its own. When breath and movement find each other, your movements have become one with the breath. Inhale, exhale, and pause are in harmony with your movements. Ask yourself, "Is your inhale when your hand goes out or is it your exhale? Do you have your inhale or exhale when your hand comes back?"

After resting, your breath and you are invited into the next step:

Movement Originating from Breath—Into Expression

After having learned to allow breath to come and go on its own, you may realize how breath actually initiates your movement. The breath moves you, rather than you moving your body around unconsciously, with breath having to adapt to your movements. Your breath is able to move you in a way that your soul, spirit, body, and your whole Self wants to participate. You can learn about what is inside of you that calls for expression: a passion or vision looking for fulfillment, sadness, joy, an insight, or an inspiration, etc. You can experience and see yourself in the movement. You are capable of experiencing yourself in this world, recognizing that you are in the primal basis of all moving, breathing life. You are able to feel changes happening within, as breath moves you. You can see your Self, your life, your destiny, in the reflection of your breath movement. You can see the becoming and the being, as well as the possibilities and challenges. You can walk step by step, experiencing your breath and being guided by it. You are able to sense the young within you growing into the mature, and growing older with vitality and courage, without fading away. Sometimes you may find yourself

standing on the threshold between introversion and extroversion, opening yourself to a broader horizon.

Take the next step and embrace your breath, which from now on will not abandon you—or you will notice when it does not carry and stimulate you. In a state of being breath aware, rather than you having to work on staying connected with yourself and your breath, the breath will now call you,

Sequences for Breathexperience in Relationship™

Clearing, Clarifying, Resolving Conflicts, and Restoring and Transforming Relationships

Introduction: Breath Movement and Self

Place your hands on your center in the middle space, with the centers of both palms, one on top of the other. Can you sense breath movement under your hands? You may sense a widening on inhalation, and a swinging back on exhalation—your breath moving underneath your hands.

Leave one hand on your center, as the other hand moves out. Allow that hand to grow wide from the center of the palm through the fingers, at the same time as you sense breath movement on inhalation growing wide under the hand on your center. As your exhale happens, your hand facing the outer space releases and moves back a little toward your hand on your center. After several breath cycles, place the outer hand back on your center, and let the other hand explore in the same way—growing wide and swinging back.

As you continue, allow both hands to leave the center to explore the outer space. After this exploration in sitting, you can continue in standing.

Resonate by placing both hands, one on top of the other, on the center in the middle, under your breast bone. Sense breath movement under your hands. Can you sense your inhale, exhale, and pause—cycle after cycle—in the breath that comes and goes on its own? These cycles, each one different, make up your unique, individual breath rhythm.

Rest.

Breath Rhythms in Partnership

The next step asks you to be with a partner.

Sit in front of your partner, each of you reflecting your own breath movement— inhalation, exhalation, pause—placing your hands on the center of your middle.

On inhalation, one hand moves into the outer space with the palm turned out, and releases on exhalation. Then alternate with the other hand, and finally both hands. Work with your partner starting with eyes closed, and when you are ready, let your eyes open. The goal is to sense, maintain, and stay connected with your own breath rhythm while you are realizing your partner's breath rhythm that is different from yours.

Can you stay with your own breath rhythm at the same time as seeing and being aware of our partner's breath rhythm? Can you see inhalation, exhalation, pause as you sense your own inhalation, exhalation, pause—in its individual rhythm?

When you are able to be in your own breath rhythm and see another's breath rhythm, each allowing breath to come and go on its own, you are setting the stage for meeting in a relationship that eliminates conflicts. Instead, you are feeding into the creative process of truly getting to know one another. If you are able to enter the relationship with awareness of each one's breath rhythm, in a state of allowing rather than controlling breath, you are able to accept the person and situation in the way they are. You are without any projection, nor expectation, and without planning an agenda for what should be in this relationship. You open yourself to the freedom of being in and creating a clear and satisfying relationship. If you live like this, there is no place for feeding conflicts. Instead, there may be agreements and disagreements, similarities and differences, as well as questions and answers. You are practicing tolerance and flexibility when you let people be as they are. Joy, fulfillment and gratitude are some of the benefits.

Walking with Your Breath Rhythm and Meeting Other Rhythms

This next sequence is for a group.

Stand in a room with others. Each person place your hands on breath movement in the center of the middle, sensing and being present for the movement of breath under both hands until you realize your breath rhythm.

Then extend one hand into the outer space, mirroring breath movement of the hand on the middle. Is your rhythm at ease? Does it have a good flow? Is your inhalation full or are you pulling or extending it? Does your exhalation have a clear connection or direction, without pushing or fading away? Is there a pause, where you trust and wait for the next inhalation to come back on its own?

When you are in your own breath rhythm, begin to walk through the room, meeting other breath rhythms. Realize that your breath rhythm changes from reasons coming from within or from outside sources. Now and then stop in front

of another person. Does your breath rhythm change when you move into a partnership or relationship?

Each breath cycle is naturally different from another. When you are in a relationship, can you maintain your own breath rhythm, while seeing another's breath rhythm?

Now move away and walk with yourself for a few minutes, sensing if your breath rhythm changes after leaving the relationship.

After being with your own breath rhythm for a little time, enter another relationship, and continue as in the previous steps, until you have met two or three partners.

Separate and resonate on your own, first standing, then sitting.

Choose one of the partners you have worked with that was meaningful for you. Share your breath experience with your partner. Did your breath rhythm significantly change?

- as you entered the partnership?
- as you were in the partnership?
- as you left the partnership?
- what did you learn about yourself in this experience?
(See Case Stories: Martha and Peter, page 21).

Practice Breath Rhythm in Everyday Events

Walk and meet other people along your way—on the street, grocery store, or a social or professional gathering. Ask yourself some of these questions:

What do you recognize in your breath rhythm before you meet?

Does it change when you draw closer or meet?

Can you stay aware of your breath rhythm in various settings with different people?

With whom do you hold your breath?

Is your inhalation fulfilled or overextended? Can you allow it? Is your exhalation complete, pushed, or does it seem to disappear? Is your pause restful or do you run through it?

Are you drained as you leave, or enriched?

You can be stimulated by a responsive breath rhythm when you meet others. You open yourself into a world which may stimulate others to sense you and themselves more consciously. With practice, you may find how much your breathexperience™ affects your mood and your relationship to your Self and

others. The following are some examples of benefits possible from breathexperience in relationship™:

- Fewer judgments
- More intimacy
- Openness to new ways of thinking and feeling
- Different perspectives
- Recognition and clearing out of old patterns
- Higher quality of listening
- Responsiveness rather than reaction
- Sense of ease and well-being
- Consciousness
- Clarity
- Curiosity
- Authenticity
- Depth and understanding of Self and others
- Equanimity
- Equality
- Confidence
- Acceptance
- Less need to compromise the Self
- Compassion
- Less need to control Self and others
- Vitality
- Identification and letting go of old patterns of behavior

Breathexperience in Relationship™: Two Case Stories

Melissa and Florence

Joseph was our facilitator. We were asked to prepare ourselves by stretches and stimulations with breath before coming to meet one another in breath and movement with our own breath rhythms.

I, Melissa, came to meet Florence with gestures that signaled that I wanted to relate to her. After a while I recognized that she was working with breath movement on her own, not seeming to want to relate to me.

Joseph asked me to stop moving and to place my hands on my center in my middle, wait there until I sensed breath movement under my hands, and allow breath to move me from there.

When I moved back into relationship with Florence, there seemed to be more of a dynamic flow, with each of us being in our own Self, each with our breath rhythm. Our dialogue seemed lighter, with more receptivity and

direction. We were separate from one another but also had a strong connection. It felt to me as if I were expanding my Self.

When we shared our experience verbally, I realized that up until Joseph made his offers, in the beginning my movements were not really initiated by my breath and I didn't sense my Self in it. Florence said she was not really interested in relating to me when I made gestures or offers to her at first, because she sensed I was not connected to my own breath. Therefore, she was trying to work with her Self. After I had come to truly sense my Self in my own breath rhythm, then she became interested in a dialogue with me because each of us could be authentic.

I learned that when I was trying too hard to make offers (perhaps to be liked or to be good—an old pattern), or if I wanted something from another to fulfill what I could not offer to myself, the dialogue could not be enriching for either of us. I realized that when I was in my Self respecting my own natural breath rhythm, and allowed the breath to move me, the communication could be dynamic and I could be more authentic in my expression.

Martha and Peter

I, Martha, made a conscious decision, after a workshop in breathexperience in relationship™, to choose a relationship in my everyday life, in which I would devote 10 minutes to being breath aware and in my own breath rhythm. I was to be aware of my breath rhythm before going into the relationship, how it was when I entered, then when I was in the relationship, and when I left the relationship.

My husband, Peter, and I were having dinner together. I was with my Self and could sense my breath rhythm as I approached the table. Peter started to complain about spots on the silverware, frustration with his computer, and my being out too much. Immediately I sensed my knee-jerk reaction and an internal dialogue began, "Why does he have to be so critical? Why is he so much invested in putting me down? Why does he always have to complain?" Since I had devoted myself to being with breath rhythm for 10 minutes, just as immediately I came back to sensing movement of my breath and its rhythm. The pattern of reaction began to shift to fascination of how calm I felt inside, without a need to counter a perceived attack. I simply sat quietly and was happy inside. Not getting his usual reaction, my husband asked, "So, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," I replied, "I feel great."

"Well, why are you not talking?" he asked, seemingly perplexed. I could sense him holding his breath.

"I'm sorry you had a hard time today," I said.

Peter said, "Yes, me too. And so where were you?"

I told him a little of my day, and though he continued to complain, I didn't take it personally, nor did I sense that it was my responsibility to "fix" his problems. I realized that the number of times was very high that I reacted and took personally what he said to me, which limited our relationship and caused pain to both of us. My Self In allowing my unique breath rhythm, I realized other possibilities. My heart opened with more empathy, I had alternatives, such as asking questions of him, responding from what was true for me, sitting quietly, leaving the room, etc. When I left the table I continued to sense my breath rhythm. It had a lightness and flow. The feeling of not being stuck was so liberating.

Hands-On-Breath Dialogue



As a complement to breath and movement work, to deepen your understanding of yourself through breath, you can make individual appointments with a practitioner.

Together the client and the practitioner develop what we call "breath dialogue," which encourages the client to allow breath movement to develop throughout the whole body. This is important because breath movement supports and reflects the process of a healthy body's capability of self-regulating responses to the shifts that occur in an alive and vibrant body. If breath is allowed to come and go on its own, it can clear through the client's habitual patterns or muscle restrictions, which have interrupted this natural process. Using the same principles as in breath and movement work, the goal of hands-on-breath dialogue is for clients to recognize from within, how the power of their own breath movement can initiate possibilities for healing.

The client lies on a low padded table, wearing comfortable clothes. The practitioner asks the client to let him or herself be carried and to allow breath to come and go on its own, without trying to control or direct the breath. The client is asked to be fully present in sensing movement of breath as it changes.

Awareness of breath dialogue begins with the practitioner's hands meeting the client's breath movement, until a natural rhythm is established. Both practitioner and client are involved—each one in his or her own breath rhythm, neither

merging nor adapting. This nourishes growth and self-responsibility. The practitioner offers presence, easy stretches, or gentle pressure to the client's breath movement. The client is responsible for what can develop through his or her own sensing and participation in the experience.

The client's breath movement guides the practitioner to the next offer, rather than the practitioner making a plan or agenda. The client's natural breath responds to each offer in its individual way. This presents a situation in which breath dialogue is determined by the intelligence of the natural breath, respecting the client's capacity for integration. Clients can recognize and sense a new form of growth.

Some responses are:

- "I feel fuller;"
- "a sense of openness, welcoming;"
- "A place around my liver opened up and my breath is softer, stronger;"
- "I've expanded into myself. When I'm expansive in my body, I'm in touch with feelings which are congruent with thoughts and physical sensation. In that state, it's a feeling of being One;"
- "I see myself as a separate being and at the same time in union with my surroundings."
- "On my inhale, I receive matter, when I exhale I give back what I received as a creation. Then I come into the pause where I am protected within that which created me (my Godliness and a greater power beyond me)." Ilse Middendorf
- "The most important experience for me is that I can allow myself to completely enter a new breath cycle fully receptive. With the conclusion of a breath cycle I release myself. I'm empty, and ready for the new. When I'm in that state of being, I'm completely open. There are no worries, no fears. I'm using the immediate reality to heal and to define and give direction for the future. In that moment the Self shines through—with authenticity. As the Self grows, I realize both the importance of Self and the not importance of Self." Juerg Roffler



Background History



Professor Middendorf began practicing her work in 1935. Her interest in movement and dance brought her into contact with a group of people known by the name of “Mazdaznan.” Their main purpose was to develop a healthy body education, with a strong emphasis on principles of nutrition and methods of breath. Ilse was trained in these particular breath exercises and in a form of massage for the nervous system. Her success as a somatic teacher was not enough for her.

Ilse was searching for the essence of a person’s Self within these movements, and for a medium to relate to that essence or to create a connection to it. An intuition from her childhood and her deep conviction made her want to follow the path of breath, and what it had to teach her. Ewe Warren, a dancer, taught her about the unity of human expression by means of movement, breathing, and meditation. A Jungian analysis furthered her personal and professional development. C.G. Jung mentioned the psychological root of the world of breath and Gustav Heyer emphasized it. Cornelis Veening and Margarethe Mhe intuitively knew about the potential of breath, and elaborated on their original insights along a “breathing-psychological” path. They made clear that connecting with breath in depth meant connecting with the essence of Self and its creative and inspiring nature. Veening became a very important teacher for Ilse, supporting her over a long period of time in the search and development of her own work. In 1965, after many years of research and practice, she founded the Institute for The Perceptible Breath in Berlin, Germany, to train practitioners in her artistic form of breath education—which she now calls The Experience of Breath. Since its inception, her work has achieved international attention for its

effectiveness as a process leading to therapeutic, artistic, and personal growth as well as a way to support the healing and re-balancing processes of one's self as a physical, emotional, and spiritual being.

In her mid-nineties, Ilse still lives and works in Berlin, Germany. She has maintained a full schedule—leading workshops and training practitioners throughout the world. In June, 2005 she is holding The Experience of Breath Congress in Berlin.

In 1986, Advanced Seminars of Berkeley, California sponsored the introduction of Professor Middendorf's work to the United States. She came with her close associate, Juerg Roffler, returning often to the U.S. to conduct workshops and training seminars in The Experience of Breath.

The U.S. Middendorf Institute for Breathexperience™

In 1989 Juerg Roffler directed the first professional training program leading to certification of Middendorf Breath teachers. Practitioners of that first class have graduated and are practicing throughout the U.S. Every other year another group of trained practitioners joins them.

To support the increased interest in breathexperience™ in the U.S., the Middendorf Breath Institute of San Francisco was founded in 1991. In October 2001, the Institute moved to Berkeley, California, and is now called The U.S. Middendorf Institute for Breathexperience™. In 1992 Gryta Coates joined Juerg to become the first member of the teacher-training team. In 1996, the team expanded to include Margot Biestman and Faith Hornbacher as teacher-trainers. In 2005, after Gryta's departure from the team in 2004, to continue developing her work with breath, the Institute added Marty Barclay and Nell Smyth to join the teacher-training team with Juerg, Margot, and Faith in Berkeley.

Since its inception, the Institute offers on-going weekly classes, workshops, retreats, and a three-year course of professional training, leading to certification as a practitioner. Private sessions with certified practitioners are also available.

The Breath Center of San Francisco (BCSF) was founded in 1995 as a non-profit organization for the advancement of Middendorf Breathwork in North America. Its purpose is to raise the level of awareness of breathexperience™ to the general public, by offering workshops, demonstrations, and printed material to the general public, providing scholarships, and to support breath practitioners in the community.

In 2003, in response to a growing need, Juerg introduced breathexperience in relationship™, a program which he has developed to uncover, clarify, resolve conflicts, and restore and transform relationships. Presently (2005) he offers workshops for the public and a two-year training program for post-graduate certified breath practitioners.

In 2005 the U.S. Middendorf Breath Institute is experiencing expansion, with centers opening in Sausalito for the North Bay, with Margot Biestman, director, and in Palo Alto for the South Bay, with Faith Hornbacher, director. Both Margot and Faith offer classes, individual sessions, and a one-year program in breathexperience™ for personal growth. Additional certified practitioners will soon offer classes in specific areas of interest for the public, in the central Institute in Berkeley.

Biographies:



Juerg Roffler is Director and founder of the U.S. Middendorf Breath Institute, The Experience of Breath, in Berkeley, California. He was a former instructor in the professional training program at the central institute in Berlin for many years before coming to the United States. In 1986 Advanced Seminars invited Ilse Middendorf and Juerg Roffler to introduce The Experience of Breath to the U.S. in Berkeley, California. In 1991 Juerg founded The U.S. Middendorf Breath Institute in San Francisco, now in Berkeley. Juerg has developed The Experience of Breath further in its natural evolution—breathexperience in relationship™, a program to uncover, clarify, resolve conflicts, and restore and transform relationships. Besides his active role as director of the central institute in Berkeley, he is an author, and also maintains his private practice and conducts breathexperience™ workshops on a regular basis throughout the United States, Europe, and other international locations.



Margot Biestman, M.A. is a certified practitioner of Middendorf Breathwork, and member of the training and teaching staff of the U.S. Institute for Breath Experience. She has a private practice in Sausalito and Sonoma, CA. She is also an author and artist, and has extensive experience in education for 40 years with people of all ages. Currently she offers weekly classes in “Breathexperience™ in Everyday Life” and workshops in “Breathexperience in Relationship™: Clearing, Clarifying, Resolving Conflicts, and Restoring and Transforming Relationships”. She has just opened a branch of the Institute for Breathexperience™ in Sausalito, where she plans to offer a one-year training program for those interested in breathexperience™ for personal growth. Patricia Morris, a certified breath practitioner, will be part of the program’s teaching team. For more information visit: www.breathexperiencemargot.com

Juerg and Margot, together with other members of the teacher-training team have participated as breath therapists in a research study at the Osher Clinic for Integrative Medicine at UCSF, San Francisco, for patients with chronic low back

pain. They were both founders and members of the Board of Directors of The Breath Center of San Francisco (BCSF), a non-profit organization for the advancement of The Experience of Breath. Currently, they serve as members of the Advisory Board.

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Cover Design and Illustration by Faith Hornbacher

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