

The Experience of Breath

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What is Middendorf Breathwork, The Experience of Breath?
Middendorf Breathwork: Questions and Answers

Student: Why is this work called, The Experience of Breath?

Juerg: The work with breath - more precisely, the movement of Breath - stimulates and initiates experiences that can help us discover, connect with, and understand the life-giving forces within ourselves.

Student: What is breath movement?

Juerg: A breath movement is the movement in and through our body that breathing creates on inhalation, exhalation, and in the pause. Through learning to sense these movements we can experience laws and principles of the natural breath in its undisturbed state: In this way an individual meets his or her own truth and essence, for we are the breath.

Student: Can you say in just a sentence or two, what is the goal of this work?

Juerg: Our work promotes personal experiences that create a shift away from controlling and directing our life processes. Through connecting with the breath movement that comes and goes on its own, we experience ourselves accessing and living a deeper truth. This is the essence of our work.

Student: What actually connects us with that truth?

Juerg: The breath. With full presence I sense the movement of breath, allowing the breath to come and go on its own. This simple act makes the connection. Breath, in its undisturbed state, accesses all levels of existence, which include the conscious and unconscious.

Student: If we let breath stay in the unconscious, not being aware of it and just letting it be the way it is, wouldn't that be the best for balancing and healing? Then we'd be sure breath would not be disturbed or controlled by our will.

Juerg: It is our presence and participation in the process of experiencing breath in its movement, that creates a situation where the unconscious and conscious work

together. When we do not disturb the breath in the way it shows itself, all the possibilities open, reaching through the conscious and the unconscious.

Student: Can you give me a practical example of how these experiences can happen?

Juerg: For this we usually need at least an hour to guide you through experiences that help you to understand some of the scope of this work. But here is a brief and simple example of how you can connect with a breath experience: Sit on a stool, with your feet on the ground. Start circling your pelvis, letting breath come and go on its own. Bring your presence to the pelvis and sense the movement of breath as you circle. When you stop circling, place the palms of your hands on the lower abdomen. You will be able to sense breath movement beneath your hands, With this comes a sense and experience of vitality, power, groundedness, and more. This is not because you think of it, but because the experience makes itself available through the sensation of breath movement.

Student: How do we integrate the experience of breath in our daily life?

Juerg: Experience holds integration. Breath reaches through all levels of being, inner and outer. This is why integration is immediate through an experience of breath. The integration can encompass any day-to-day situation with a deeper inner truth.

Student: Does integration of breath at the same time bring us into balance? If so, how does balance happen?

Juerg: Participation and trust are the keys. For balance to occur through breath, the person needs to participate in the experience by sensing, bringing presence into, and consciously following the breath movement. We understand that breath moves us. Since we do not will our breath, we trust that these movements come from a source with knowledge that can create balance. It is up to us to let these movements unfold and become defined by consciously participating in this process.

Student: I usually find it difficult to participate consciously in the breath process. Do you have a suggestion to make it easier?

Juerg: It is one's conscious acknowledgment that makes this easier. I can make the decision to become conscious every time I realize that I am distracted or realize that I am not present. This is not just awareness. I trust, I am present, and I have a physical sensation of the breath movement all at the same time.

Student: How does breath help in an individual's path of self-development?

Juerg: Each breath experience allows a somatic intelligence to become available and serve as a guide for realizing steps in self-development.

Student: How does somatic intelligence work?

Juerg: Somatic Intelligence becomes apparent through our ability to differentiate breath experiences on the basis of sensory awareness of breath movement. There is, within each living individual, a core of health, unity, and sanity. We call this 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, and the breath can develop and organize this throughout the entire being. Cells, and places or parts of the body that have lost this knowledge - be it through injuries, traumatic experiences, or simply a lack of consciousness - are reprogrammed through the experience of breath, and regroup into wholeness. This process can be called either healing or balancing.

Student: How is the Middendorf Breathwork, The Experience of Breath different from other breath work?

Juerg: In The Experience of Breath there is no manipulation, influence or control. The breath needs to have every possibility available to be able to do what is needed. If we direct the breath with a plan, it can fulfill a plan, but it may not necessarily be the development needed at that moment. The breath that comes and goes on its own, in its undisturbed state, that we consciously experience, will indicate the steps that need to happen. The experience of breath becomes our teacher.

Student: In the Middendorf work, The Experience of Breath, we are asked to let the breath come and go on its own. Isn't this the same as in other practices, like meditation, for example? Or how is it different?

Juerg: There are several practices where attention is given to breath; however, the focus for these practices usually emphasizes the spirit or the emotions.

The Middendorf Breathwork is rooted in the sensation of the movement of breath in our body. It is through this sensation, together with our presence and conscious experience, that we come to know not only our body, but also our soul and spirit. In our work we come to understand that a spiritual or emotional experience is never separate from an experience of Self, an experience of body, and an experience of breath. Through the sensation of the movement of breath we have a simple door to access all of this.

Student: So that means the breath is not only a link to the body, but it also connects with the soul. But why is it that the sensation of the movement of breath makes that happen?

Juerg: Physical sensation is the simplest reality that we have. If you want to get in touch with your psyche, soul, and spirit - how do you do that?

Student: Shift my awareness.

Juerg: How are you sure that you have reached the psyche, soul, or spirit?

Student: Well, they have so many different appearances...

Juerg: Yes, there are many possibilities for confusion. But sensation is a reality. I sense breath movement and I am absolutely clear what it is that I sense. That is why sensation is so important to our work.

The sensation of the movement of breath is the connecting element to the psyche, soul, and spirit. Breath encompasses all of these. Breath is like a seismograph for psyche, soul, and spirit. Through the simple sensation of breath movement, the body becomes the reality for psyche, soul, and spirit.

Student: Does this manifest all the time?

Juerg: Yes, with every single breath cycle.

Student: How can I be sure that once I realize my psyche and soul in this way, that I won't be overwhelmed by my emotions?

Juerg: The sensation of the movement of breath is the door to learn to trust and orient ourselves to the principles of the natural breath. We can make the choice to stay with that sensation. This is the key to it all. Through this choice, psyche and soul make themselves available in exactly the right measure to enable us to understand the next step toward balance. The consequence is a healing that lets emotions participate in proportion to what we can consciously experience and integrate with self-responsibility. Spirit is received as a gift.

Student: What if we don't make that choice?

Juerg: Psyche, soul, and spirit, with our emotions, look for something to orient to. If the body isn't there - meaning the decision to stay with the sensation of the movement of breath - we may orient them to something or someone else. If emotions don't find us present in our body, they look for another person or circumstance to bond with. That is what makes for projection and transference. If we stay with sensation of breath movement, projection and transference are minimized.

Student: How about fear?

Juerg: Fear is disconnected power in disguise. If we attend to the fear, we support the disconnection. If our presence is with the awareness of breath movement, this connects the power back to our Self, and we understand what it is. Fear is transformed, and we experience empowerment and integration.

So, for example, if someone feels sad and cries, or is angry, that person can connect with sensation of breath movement, without losing the emotion, but adding sensation and presence.

Student: This is a very interesting concept. It will probably help to create boundaries.

Juerg: First of all this is not a concept, but a natural law that everyone can experience through breath. Secondly, I shy away from the term 'boundaries' because boundaries tend to mean separation. I would say that the emotions find containment. The containment is my body, and the fact that I am sensory aware of

my body brings the experience of Self. I gain definition from within. This is me. I am being moved by the breath.

Student: Do we ever manipulate breath in our breath and movement exercises?

Juerg: We don't influence or manipulate our breath, but initially there are specific movement sequences that we practice, to become aware of how the laws and principles of breath manifest within ourselves.

We offer an invitation to the breath, like a stretch or a particular movement sequence, for example. We listen to the breath. We become aware of how breath responds and develop breath awareness. This is called breath dialogue.

Later, when we have learned more about ourselves through these laws and principles, the dialogue changes, and breath becomes the source of the movements. We are moved by the breath and experience ourselves through these movements. Breath becomes meaningful. Breath shows us our reality.

Student: When do these kinds of movements happen? When we inhale or exhale?

Juerg: They can happen any time during a breath cycle.

Student: What is a breath cycle?

Juerg: A breath cycle holds inhale, exhale, and pause, as well as the transitions between these, which include the transition from inhalation to exhalation, and the transition from exhalation into the pause. The transition from the pause into the inhalation carries the impulse for the new breath cycle to begin again on its own.

Student: I want to know more about this impulse.

Juerg: The impulse at the beginning of inhalation is given to us as a gift. We receive it. This impulse contains the essence of the cycle to be followed. Our task is to allow fulfillment of that essence in our body and our being, through realizing this cycle. If the cycle can be fulfilled in its true form, without interfering by pushing or pulling on our breath, it can create a oneness of the breath cycle. This also lets us experience a oneness of our being. This can happen with any breath cycle, any time. It may not take months or years.

Student: How can we learn this?

Juerg: Through developing breath awareness. Sometimes that can take a while. The more we become breath aware, the more access we have to such fulfillment. It means that we receive the inhalation; follow the exhalation through to the pause, where we trust that we can receive the next impulse, which initiates a new breath cycle.

On inhalation we experience ourselves receiving the breath - becoming full of breath. The moment breath enters our nose, it can create an experience of substance. Breath becomes *em- bodied!* It fills not only our lungs, and transports oxygen through the blood, it also courses through all of our body by the rippling effect of the

moving diaphragm, and creates breath movement. This process of receiving the breath connects to the part of us that knows how to surrender and allow - our receptive or feminine principle. The acceptance of fullness of breath in my aware body realizes fulfillment of space and initiates transformation: Exhalation begins.

In the process of releasing our exhale, we can become aware of how breath has changed, and how it looks for a place to go - a direction. This part of the cycle allows our masculine principle to come into play. Here, breath supports all kinds of expression. Form and definition develop. At the peak of exhalation, I come to accept the uniqueness of what has become. The realization that I have to let this die initiates the next transformation: I receive Silence.

In Silence after exhalation, the masculine and the feminine hold each other in their fulfillment. Together they connect us with a deep trust and understanding of tolerance for the state of 'not-knowing.' We rediscover our innocence. This is just the right moment to let the impulse emerge for the realization of the next breath cycle.

As we reflect on the principle of a breath cycle in this way, we become aware of a deep and awe-inspiring truth; how all life processes evolve in the simple realization of a breath cycle. Past, present, and future open with our acknowledgment of this way of connecting with ourselves.

Our culture long ago lost this connection; it has been seduced and trapped by the masculine principle and its promises to let us reach almost any goal that our dreams touch. Exhalation rules. We have become producers and performers.

In the enthusiasm of reaching such goals we have forgotten what brought us here. It was inhalation-inspiration! The feminine principle has been left in the unconscious. But to bring balance into our lives calls for allowing the feminine and the masculine principles to work together and complement each other.

All this can be learned from what one breath cycle includes!

Every breath cycle is unique and different. So are we! The continuation of breath cycles creates breath rhythm. Everyone's rhythm is unique - it is different from any other person's breath rhythm.

Student: Can we support each other by merging our breath rhythms?

Juerg: If we plan to merge our breath rhythm with another, we would disturb our own rhythm. Growth of the Self could not develop. Merging of breath rhythms happens accidentally, and can usually be experienced only for brief moments - an opening toward symbiosis: We fall in love, or feel well taken care of, or have a strong experience of bonding.

Student: Isn't that wonderful and desirable?

Juerg: Yes, it is a temporary stimulation for growth, but we need to attend to our own rhythm for genuine long-term personal growth.

Student: When do we realize our own breath rhythm?

Juerg: We are given a breath rhythm that is original when we are born. It is always there and is capable of developing what is needed, depending on the circumstance. This breath rhythm needs to be able to respond and adjust to every influence from the inner or the outer to keep ourselves healthy. If that rhythm is stuck in an unconscious pattern of conflict or resistance, the experience of breath cannot unfold. Therefore, it cannot fully develop. But when we connect with our original rhythm and participate in its undisturbed development, we support opportunities for self-growth and balance.

Student: Why not just work on a conflict or pattern of resistance and eliminate it? Then doesn't breath become free?

Juerg: Resolving conflicts or resistance through the kinds of experience and knowledge that are organized and memorized by cognition has limitations. We may tend to orient more to our understanding of ourselves - our habits, our patterns, and all the intellectual knowledge that we have accumulated about our life processes. How can we then be sure that we have truly reached the roots of the conflict?

Student: I'm sure you are going to tell me that breath will solve the problem!?

Juerg: Yes. Are you surprised? Through breath, in its original rhythm, we access unlimited resources that include much more than the cognitive intelligence. I like to call it a somatic intelligence. We discussed that earlier. Breath develops a healthy organization. That is the reason why we go to the sensation of the movement of breath in its original rhythm first, and not to the conflict. Following this process of breath, the conflict will eventually fall away, like a leaf from a tree in the autumn. We are reconnected to our essence.

Student: It seems to me that Middendorf Breathwork focuses mainly on an inner experience.

Juerg: Middendorf Breathwork starts with connecting to the most inner experience, supporting development toward the outer and beyond. In the beginning, the learning characteristically develops as internal until we understand ourselves more fully, the way we really are. And then the work becomes more expressive. Breath moves us. We understand ourselves through our movements as they are created by the Breath.

Student: That is very nice, but we're not alone on this planet!

Juerg: That's true, we learn that what complements us on our path is what leads us to growth. This includes partnership with individuals and the collective. When we sense the immediate space around us, as well as the extended reality of living on this planet, we learn what it means to become self-responsible. At this point, we realize that our Self has become very tiny within the bigger picture. We are asked to respond not only to our Self and to our partners, but also to a greater power.

[1] Questions by students in training programs. Edited with Margot Biestman, teaching and training staff member of the Middendorf Breath Institut, and Clifford Skoog.

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