



Sitting by the fire and reading while observing silence

Mother Ganga was bearing away with her?

At about 5.30, the day's programme was brought to an end with a round of sharing with Heike. Many of the participants who had had their Breathwork sessions reported amazing experiences. One of them said that for the first time he experienced thoughtlessness, despite intense body sensations, expressing his fervent gratitude to his facilitator. Another said that his whole life had flashed before him and he was gripped with intense joy. Many said they went into a deep state of relaxation.

### Breathwork

My session with Bhavin Shah was scheduled for post dinner. With a light meal inside of me, I waited in suspense to discover what this momentous technique actually consisted of. Bhavin gave me some very clear and useful tips. The inbreath had to be active and sharp, like one would sniff at food. The outbreath was passive and had to naturally release itself like a sigh. The metaphor of a fountain was used, where the water was suctioned up and then allowed to flow down naturally. There had to be no pause between the inbreath and the outbreath, and the breathing had to be from the chest and not, as I had expected, from the diaphragm. Most importantly, Bhavin explained that releasing the outbreath naturally gave the energy needed to fuel the inbreath. I was asked to surrender to my personal deity and to take a sankalpa about something I wanted to manifest.

And then I was off. Thanks to Bhavin's excellent guidance, I found it relatively easy to keep up with the connected breathing. Almost as soon as I started the breathing, I could feel my upper body, particularly my hands and palms, tingling and vibrating. As I continued with the breathing, the vibrations became more and more subtle, until I could feel them flowing within me smoothly like water. As the rhythm built up, an exhilaration unfolded and I felt that I could do this forever. After half an hour though, I found that I was relapsing into momentary sleep, only to be tapped out of it by Bhavin. Back I would return to the breath until the next lapse would occur. This continued for quite a while and this time, Bhavin did not interfere. I would sleep, wake up, breathe and sleep again. When I found that Bhavin was not waking me, I decided that perhaps I had breathed enough and stopped the exercise, and lay still for a while, enjoying the sensations rippling through my body.

It was a most exhilarating session, although I had no extraordinary experience. But then, as Heike said, God is very ordinary and looking for experiences is counter-

One of Leonard's central principles is that Breathwork has to be taught on a one-on-one basis. He had therefore brought a team of practised Breathworkers to help him. They included his young and beautiful wife Ellvi, a senior German breathworker called Heike Strombach, Ciara Longman from Australia and three from India, Rajendra Kulkarni, Bhaavin Shah and Chitra Kaul. A seventh was chosen from the team of participants on the spot, Supriya Roy, since she had done the required 10 sessions.

As there were about 21 of us, each facilitator had to do three sessions. With just a short introduction to Breathwork, which he describes as conscious continuous breathing, Leonard waved us right into the practicals. While the first seven went for their sessions, the rest of us were told to read extracts of one of his books, *The Owner's Manual* (about the human body which we inherit without knowing anything about it), while sitting around a fire. For Leonard, working with the elements such as water, fire, earth and of course air, is crucial to the purification needed to achieve physical immortality. The earth element is brought in through fasts and exercise, while water through dips in an available water body or a bathtub. Our enterprising event manager, Vijay Dhiman, speedily addressed himself to the task of gathering firewood as well as finding a container to safely burn it. In the meantime, the rest of us sat in circles, read the book and got a little acquainted with each other, as well as Leonard's philosophy.

At 3.30 pm came a welcome part of the programme – a dip in Mother Ganga. As we swooped and dipped inside the holy river, who could say what part of our conditioning

productive. Bhavin too pointed out that being blissed out was as good as it got.

The next day was probably the most unusual way of passing time while at a workshop. We were to observe silence, fast and sit around a fire all day. That was it. No sessions, nothing. Some of the breathworkers showed up to sit around the fire and keep it going, but soon left us to our own devices. What I found was that most of us took responsibility for keeping the fire burning, scouting around twigs and leaves, feeding the fire with ghee and camphor and arranging logs and twigs. Mercifully, reading was allowed so after a long time, I found myself actually blessed to spend a morning doing nothing more than reading. Our indefatigable Vijay managed to arrange for juices, which was to be our sole nourishment. The morning passed on leaden feet as the fire and smoke on a pretty hot day, caused our eyes to smart. As afternoon eventually arrived, the group around the fire steadily diminished. Many went into the adjoining hall, lay down on the carpet and went to sleep. I went to my room and had a bath. By 5 pm, Vijay brought us our third juice, and taking that as a signal to free my body of the fire purification, I beat a hasty retreat, determined to make it in time for the Ganga Aarti. Bhavin had told me that a minimum period of six hours was required before the fire and by my estimate I had put in the required quota of time.

The third day, fortunately, the sessions resumed and this time, many of us used our spare time more creatively, by returning to our rooms, chatting in groups, or even in river rafting and shopping. Leonard had told us that sitting by the fire would get our energies to move and sure enough, several reported excellent experiences. Many saw visions, received messages from the gods and had out-of-body experiences. My own was pretty much a repetition of the earlier one of quiet and placid joy.

Says Bhaavin, "Some of my rebirthees got in touch with ecstatic energy through bodily sensations while others got most fulfilling astral visions. Leonard calls Rebirthing 'a biological experience of God' which it very much is."

Chaitanya Aggarwal from Bhopal states that his life will henceforth be divided into two categories – before Rebirthing Breathwork and after!

Says Heike, "What makes Leonard's energy so special is his love for all people, as well loving himself enough to take care of himself." She suggests that self-love is all we need to master the practice.

In the morning before the sessions resumed on the third day, Leonard spent a little time with us, and took us through four or five different types of breath which we were asked to practice without fail. One was a four-set cycle of four short breaths and one long breath of continuous connected breathing, others were variations of anulom vilom breathing and so on.

Soon it was time for the final sharing which also spelt the end of the workshop. It was undoubtedly the most unstructured workshop I have ever attended, but the breathwork made up for all of it. The technique is excellent and I can well imagine that it will bring about deep healing. Leonard says it will also heal our various traumas and rid us of the unconscious death urge. Unlike many who participated in the workshop, I was not there to attain physical immortality. I am happy with the present system, where we live, die and take on another body, in a different country, perhaps in a different gender. Why hang on to the same body forever and a day? However, what did make sense to me was to learn to free oneself of the natural degeneration of the body, and choose one's time to go rather than have it decided for you. So yes, I will be breathing, connectedly and consciously!



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