

## **WHAT IS SACRED BREATHWORK™?**

**Before Reading Please Note:** This article is for apprentices and trainees only, and is not finished and needs citing of many sources. It is intended only as a guide for apprentices and trainees in an upcoming workshop. Reproduction is forbidden until all sources have been duly noted.

### **Acknowledgement of Sources:**

**Sacred Breathwork™** is a powerful healing and consciousness expanding sacred ceremony developed in a group and community context at Crows Nest Center for Shamanic Studies, in the USA and Europe. It is the product of a 30 year practice and evolving synthesis by C. Michael Smith, Ph.D. (Mikkal.) with major influences from the shamanic heart-path, the analytical psychology of C.G. Jung, the holotropic theory and breathwork technique developed by Stanislav Grof, M.D., from which it has been significantly influenced and departs, and from the practice of focusing on a felt-sense, developed by Eugene T. Gendlin, Ph.D.

### **Mikkal's Definition:**

Sacred Breathwork accesses the sacred, the ontological foundations of being, for purposes of healing, deep worship, growth and transformation. C.G.Jung knew that the "real therapy," as he called it, "is the approach to the numinous" and it is only this that can release from the "curse of pathology." Jung, a shaman for our time, built an entire depth psychology around the sacred and its numinous core, for he knew how important it is for modern people to retrieve relationship with It, and align their lives with it. A spiritual outlook on life is vital to psycho-spiritual health. The numinous core is recognized in the shamanism of the Americas as residing in the heart, the ontological core of our aliveness and being. Black Elk, the great Lakota medicine man said "The Great Spirit dwells in the heart of each creature." Crows Nest's Shamanic Educational programs teach us heart-centered and heart-honoring ways of living and work as healers. It is by and through the heart that we connect with the sacred as our true inner guide and inner shaman. All shamanic healers seek to channel this power for the benefit of others. Within the heart, the sacred dwells, issuing invitation to more life, more healing, growth, and ever greater wholeness.

Sacred Breathwork carries these values forward in a very powerful ceremony. Involving closed eyes, connected breathing, and numinous music in a rite of passage structure. In

sacred breathwork, we open the heart and surrenders to the sacred, to bring us whatever healing or insight we need next on our earth-honoring heart path. We do this within the safe and loving human support of allies, group, and community context.

### **Philosophical Differences with Holotropic Breathwork**

The philosophical foundations of shamanic Sacred Breathwork differ in some important ways from Groff TT model, and affect the breathwork practice and facilitator training process. Rather than basing itself in the field of holographic theory and Bohmian physics, which it also finds useful for some explanatory purposes, it deeply roots itself existentially and practically in the path of the heart and its experiential practices (or 'yogas') that support life (growth and healing) before and after sacred breathwork ceremonies. These specific practices include NGS/DIGS, a method for finding and listening to the ontological core of aliveness (the heart) in which the sacred dwells, and which lures towards growth, expansion, healing, wholeness, and service. Jungian psychologists call this sacred guiding source by various names: "the Self", the "Spiritus Rector," the "Dream Maker," and the "Doctor Within." Shamans and mystics have called it the "Divine Physician" the "Medicine Buddha," the "Shaman Within," the "Great Spirit," or simply the "Tao in the heart."

The system of principles called the "Four Acts of Power" support you on the heart path and better prepare you for sacred breathwork. The Crows Nest method of shamanic journeying secures for you Chief Guide as a safe inner source of wisdom and guidance connected with your higher Self and center of being. Many individuals meet their Chief Guide and other supportive archetypal and numinous figures in the sacred breath process. Shamanic journeying itself is used to explore the cartography of consciousness within the model of the three tiered "shamans cosmos." With this method one can experientially explore and examine virtually any non-ordinary state of consciousness, or any archetype of the collective unconscious mapped out by Jung or Grof. In facilitator training we learn the transpersonal map of the greater cosmos by direct shamanic journeying experience as well as through, sacred breathwork experience, and finally through reading and discussion. Direct experience and reading/discussions are both important ways of learning. Virtually any transpersonal phenomenon or dimension which may arise spontaneously in a sacred breathwork ceremony, can be intentionally found, accessed, and studied through classic shamanic journey work.

Most individuals excluded from cathartic aspects of sacred breathwork for medical or psychiatric reasons, can benefit from special limited participation (meditation, worship, trance-dance, support as an ally), as well as from all the heart-path practices which aim at the same outcomes as sacred breathwork. These differences are significant as theory and philosophical grounding supplies 'lenses' that shape understanding what you 'see' and lends cognitive support and safety in 'holding' what you experience.

Other practices or 'yogas' that support this heart path, in addition to those already mentioned, include individual and group dream work, medicine sweats, vision questing, Toltec work, Focusing on a felt-sense, and the principles and practices of heart-centered shamanic counseling. All of these work together to form a cohesive set of practices or 'yogas' for advancing along the heart-path, for healing, transformation, and achieving greater wholeness. Most Crows Nest workshops integrate several of these practices along with sacred breath & dance work, and various methods of soul recovery and extraction. Workshops and 5-day Intensive Retreats may pair up practice themes, such as:

*Focusing and Sacred Breathwork*  
*Shamanic Journeying & Sacred Breatwork*  
*Shamanic Counseling & Sacred Breathwork*  
*Skeletization & Sacred Breathwork*  
*Toltec Recapitulation & Sacred Breathwork*  
*Tribal Dreaming & Sacred Breathwork*  
*Soul Recovery Work & Sacred Breathwork*  
*Birthing Your Red Book & Sacred Breathwork*  
*I Ching (or other divination)& Sacred Breathwork*  
*Ancestral Work & Sacred Breath*  
*Vision Questing, Finding Your Place & Sacred Breath*  
*Worship, Devotion Kirtan, and Sacred Breathwork*  
*The Ontological Core, Focusing, & Sacred Breathwork*

The "ontological core and sacred breathwork" is a workshop theme that focuses on how to apply the principles of the heart (as ontological core), Focusing on a felt-sense, and sacred breathwork in an experiential-phenomenology context, which some transpersonally interested psychotherapists and psychiatrists prefer for working in their tradition-neutral or secular context.

Sacred breathwork is a powerful tool for spontaneous soul recovery and extraction, because it brings more of you "on line" and helps dissolve or remove whatever is in the way of that. In essence, sacred breathwork is a ceremony, a very powerful one, for carrying forward the principles of the heart-centered and earth-honoring path. But it is to be seen as one of a number of important sacred ceremonies that not only heal but sustain your path toward wholeness and service. When one walks a heart-path, of living from your center, where the sacred dwells and seeks to guide you, more of you progressively comes on line, You become stronger, more empowered, you come more into your own, with new sureness and are able to stand your ground, and open your heart generously to others. As You grow more complete and stronger, you are assisted by deconstructing or dissolving old interfering habit-patterns.

The practices of heart-centered shamanism include active techniques for hunting down or stalking old problem patterns that get in the way of your growth and life-forward movement, removing or dismantling them, as well as offering receptive techniques that allow new growth and healing to happen spontaneously. Sacred breathwork is a receptive technique, insofar as you surrender to the sacred as the inner guide and healer (divine physician within) to activate the deep psyche and help you heal or expand in whatever way naturally wants to come up next. Just as there is no cure for the common cold, the body heals itself in time, so the psyche or soul has a self-healing tendency that sacred breathwork supports and helps you connect and align your energies with more consciously and intentionally. Just as medications for a cold simply suppress symptoms until the body can self-heal, so also psychiatry and often psychotherapy are suppressive of symptoms for the sake of calming the patient and making the behavior or experience more agreeable. The underlying wound and its healing is not addressed, but the troubling symptoms are suppressed. The natural healing process is not usually given a chance for self-correction and self-healing. In sacred breathwork, we allow the symptoms to awaken and the deeper wounds and self-healing tendencies to reveal themselves, and support the forward-moving and self-healing tendencies of the psyche to do what they know how to do, without suppression, while contained by loving human community and a safe protocol of ritual wisdom.

Workshops and retreats where sacred breath and dance are offered may be taken for your own enrichment and healing, or for facilitator certification requirements.

Facilitator Trainees spend at least 2 years in a Crows Nest program of study that includes at least 10 sacred breath workshops or ceremonies, with 10 experiences as journeyer, and 10 as ally. In addition there are 2 five day intensive sacred breath retreats required, held each summer, and in various places. Shamanic counselors, mental health professionals, and alternative healers will find a wealth of transpersonal knowledge and ritual wisdom communicated through this training program, even if they do not wish for certification.

You can begin facilitator training at anytime by applying and paying the fees. Any sacred breathwork ceremonies you have participated in through Crows Nest in the past, count retroactively towards fulfillment of the minimum number of breathwork sessions participated in. There are 5 modules of instruction, which repeat themselves in greater depth in the second year of facilitator training, and are explored in great depth in the 5-Day Intensive Retreats.

MODULE I: The SACRED & RITES OF PASSAGE (Ritual Structure & Leadership)

MODULE II: COSMOS & PSYCHE (Cartography of consciousness)

MODULE III: PSYCHOPATHOLOGY & SPIRITUAL EMERGENCY

MODULE IV: NUMINOUS MUSIC, ART, AND GROUP FACILITATION

MODULE V: 2 FIVE-DAY INTENSIVE RETREATS.

## **TEMPLATE OF A 1-HOUR INTRODUCTORY TALK ON SACRED BREATH & DANCE WORK**

*This is an template of an introductory talk which can be given on the same day of a workshop before the SACRED BREATH day begins. It normally takes about an hour. You can change it, and or fill it in with your particular examples and communicate your own passion about Sacred Breathwork. This outline may also serve as an orienting template of topics, systematically presented, for your own study or training as a facilitator. Each part of it requires much more extensive study, experience, and knowledge.*

### **What is Sacred Breathwork?**

- Sacred Breathwork is a spiritual and psychological container, without dogma, that invites the Sacred within us to do its work of bringing us to greater awareness, wholeness, and healing and that provides safety for the surrender into a state of cooperation with the shaman within (inner healer).
- Sacred Breathwork is an elegantly simple, minimalist ritual using elements that support the healing work in non-ordinary states of consciousness with protection, permission, and connection.
- Breathwork invites non-ordinary states of consciousness (NOSCs).
- Breathwork is important in many spiritual systems.
- Breathwork is used in labor and delivery, in meditation, and in yoga.
- Breathwork is used to control anxiety in therapy and for medical procedures.
- Connected breaths are also used in Rebirthing techniques.
- Prolonged connected breaths help us de-repress and open the heart and body, and tends to strengthen awareness of our normally repressed connections to self, others, the inner shaman, and Mother Earth.
- Breathwork allows Bi-Modal Consciousness, a state of consciousness when both the inner witness and the inner experiencer are present. In this state, one is an observer at the same time one is fully participating and involved in the experience.

### **NOSCs have been used for healing, rites of passage, and for seeking wisdom for thousands of years. NOSCs help us...**

- Tune in differently to parts of self, spirit, planetary & cosmic consciousness
- Access a different part of oneself, or an new dimension of inner depth, or an archetypal potential.
- View patterns—learn how small pieces fit into the big picture
- Have a corrective experience—Trauma, birth, and big changes take place in a NOSC; change and awareness have to take place in NOSCs; since most patterns, from birth to traumatic life-events, begin in a NOSC, one has to return to a NOSC to re-pattern and heal.
- Change life patterns
  - We may want change, but actually, we often we resist change.

- Homeostasis and inertia are strong forces.
- It is paradoxical that in order to change, you have to be with what is without trying to change it. Whatever you resist, persists.

*Give an example from your own process.*

- The inner healer is always nudging us to move along with change, which is the one constant.

### **The inner shaman (inner healer, Spiritus Rector)**

- The inner shaman (or presence and activity of the Sacred) is the most important concept of Sacred Breathwork—an evolutionary life force, present in all of us, sometimes dormant, but always ready when needed or called upon and always there at some level.
- An example of the inner shaman working on the physical level is that our physical wounds heal. The process is fairly automatic, often completely without our conscious attention. The same healing potential is available for the psyche in NOSCs.

*Do a Meet the Inner Shaman (guided journey)*

- The three major healing protocol elements present in Sacred Breathwork are: 'Protection, Permission, Connection'<sup>1</sup>

#### **Protection**

- A safe container provides a simple, familiar (after the first time) structure
- Trained facilitators assist as needed
- The fact that a group of people are entering into a NOSC together often gives a sense of permission to each individual breather.
- Four contractual agreements are made by all facilitators and participants to maintain a safe setting. The basic agreements are:
  - **To stay throughout the whole workshop**—Staying through two Breathwork sessions and the sharing group, and letting their partner or a facilitator know where they are going, if they need some private space during this time.
  - **To keep confidentiality**—It is okay to share with other people what happened in your own experience in the Breathwork, but not to share other people's experiences. We cannot, as facilitators, guarantee that anyone except ourselves will keep confidentiality.
  - **To not cause harm to self, others, or property**—It is okay to feel very angry, express that anger in kicking pillows or screaming as loud as you want, but not to intentionally hurt anyone or anything.
  - **To not involve any other person in our expressions of sexuality**—We affirm that sexuality is an important energy and feeling, but that, even if we came with someone with whom we are intimate in other circumstances, we are

asking you not to extend the sexual expression of sexual feelings beyond the boundaries of your own bodies.

- Enough time for healing (we schedule a long retreat day)
- Careful supervision of each person
- Adequate description (informed consent) about the kinds of experiences that might happen in Sacred Breathwork. Spontaneous and strenuous gestalt sequences of self-healing, gestalt closure, and catharsis frequently occur for the journeyers. (See medical contra-indications).
- Privacy and respect
- Eyes are generally closed—This usually gives a breather a sense of safety and privacy, as well as an inner, rather than outward, focus.
- Needs, wishes, and boundaries are respected.
- There is no requirement that every breather shares his or her experience, even though the opportunity for sharing is presented as a healing opportunity. Sharing in the supporting group helps us with integration of the verbal and nonverbal, and of ourselves with other humans.

### **Permission**

- Breathing itself gives permission for the psyche to enter a place conducive to the work of the inner shaman.
- Sacred Breathwork operates within a large enough cartography that gives permission for whatever wants to happen in the NOSC (except what is covered by the Contract).
- A 'non-doing' type of facilitation and bodywork gives permission to the breather to let the inner healer determine the healing process.

### **Connection**

- A deepened connection is possible—with partners, facilitators, group, parts of self, with spirit, and with one's own inner healer
- There is a general connection with like-minded people who are courageous enough to do this inner work. People who choose Holotropic Breathwork are generally inner adventurers, who have been nudged by circumstances (or their partners) to seek inner work. Many report the relief and joy of finding a community that shares these interests.

### **Ally/Journeyer Dyad**

Reversal of roles allows for expression and support that do not pathologize. Unlike the situation in professional therapy, for example, both parties, in turn, experience the roles of experiencer (journeyer) and supporter (ally).

## **A Jungian Cartography (Summary Form)**

### **BIOGRAPHICAL LEVEL**

#### **Persona**

Dis-identification from social roles and masks, and your own inner masks that hide your truth. The mind (power to think) has an important job to do, but must stop being a tyrant, must learn to become servant of the heart (Self).

#### **Ego**

Center of personal consciousness and ego-identity (formed in domestication), and reality testing functions: thinking, perception, rationality, etc. Need to realize there is a deeper center of consciousness and being than the ego (I).

#### **Shadow** (& Personal Unconscious)

The shadow includes everything that was excluded during our domestication and socialization process. Parts of self and out potentials that were unacceptable are excluded and need to be recovered. This requires identifying the internalized Judge (Critic or Super-ego) and withdrawing of projections (Smokey Mirror). Much of your true and undeveloped self is in the shadow until face and embraced, and included in your wholeness. It is a portal to the deeper, non-biographical layers and contents of the collective unconscious, and hence shadow work comes up early in analysis, and in breathwork.

### **TRANSBIOGRAPHICAL LEVEL**

#### **Grof Perinatal Level: BPM I-IV**

**BPM I** Obstetric: Undifferentated unity in healthy womb, quiescence, bliss

Archetypal Gate to cosmic and mystical unity, bliss

COEX sources: paranoia, hypochondriasis, and space day dream confusion

**BPM II** Obstetric: Toxicity in womb, first spasm, cervix closed

Archetypal Gate: Cosmic Engulfment, hell, 'no exist'

COEX Sources: depression inferiority, helplessness, guilt

**BPM III** Obstetric: death and life struggle for passage through birth canal

Archetypal: death./rebirth struggle, dismemberment, initiation themes,

COEX Sources: powerful sado-masochistic themes, violence, sexual-scatological themes, addictions

**BPM IV** Obstetric: Moment of Birth sudden release and relaxation from built up tension, bond with mother

Archetypal: spiritual liberation, nature mysticism, redemption, salvation, Earthly paradise or garden



The BPMs are a kind of gateway to the archetypes and various levels of the collective unconscious. Shamanic Journeying is another gateway. Vajrayana mandala visualization is another.

### COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS-TRANSPERSONAL LEVEL

- A. **Archetypal Expression Level I:** normally governing the first adaptive-half of life.
- B. **Unus Mundus (psychic level):** interconnexity of phenomena synchronicities, PSI, nature mysticism, telepathy
- C. **Archetypal expression Level II:** governing the second and spiritual-individuative half of life
- D. **The Self experienced with Form:** numinous symbolic form and images
- E. **The Self experienced without Formless:** (Godhead, Source, Brahman), collective unconscious originated, located, and transcended there).

### Grof's Cartography (fyi)

This is a cartography describing the experiences that occur in non-ordinary states of consciousness. A Jungian cartography underlies Grof's mapping of the psyche. For Jung there are in addition to everyday ego-persona, and personal unconscious contents (Shadow), various depths of the psyche that influence the biographical level of the psyche, but which are themselves part of a deeper collective or transpersonal unconscious. Sacred Breathwork activates the collective level of the psyche in promoting healing, and greater consciousness. Grof, as pointed out above, discovered another level between these two large areas, an interface between the personal and transpersonal (spiritual) dimensions that he called "perinatal" (surrounding birth).

- While influenced by Jung, Grof developed this cartography from observation and notes on 4,000 NOSC sessions, 2,000 LSD psychotherapy sessions and roughly 2,000 breathwork sessions.
- This cartography applies to non-ordinary states of all kinds, including the NOSC of breathwork and those states often present in the dying person.

### There are three kinds of experiences

**1) Biographical—or 'unexperienced' experience.** This type of experience can include a reliving of any of our experiences after birth where, at the time of the original event, we have encountered too much pain, joy, fear, or intensity to fully experience the event and our responses to it.

- **Omission**—Caring and nurturing that we needed and didn't receive at the time. Examples are feeling abandoned, betrayed, or hungry.
- **Commission**—Things that happened to us that we couldn't fully process at the time. These are usually things that we feel 'shouldn't

have happened to us'. Examples are child abuse, accidents, and illness.

### **Ally/Journeyer partnership changes patterns of relationship**

Codependency patterns can become conscious and available to choice and change. The ally can provide a corrective experience

## **2) Perinatal**

- Perinatal means "surrounding birth." Birth experiences are of anything that happened before labor, during labor, at birth, and right after your own birth.
- Grof has made a major theoretical contribution to understanding the perinatal and the fetal experience of birth.
- Grof's four perinatal matrices are the stages of birth and also apply to any major change in our life after birth.
- A Perinatal or Birth Matrix has an archetypal quality that can overlay even an experience that is not ostensibly about birth (e.g., a major change in life or an experiential process such as in Breathwork.)
- I'll give you an example of the journey through the perinatal stages of BPM I, II III, IV in a major life change after describing each Matrix.

### ***The First [Birth] Matrix (BPM I)***

- This is the stage before labor begins, when the fetus, in a normal pregnancy, is floating happily with everything it needs provided.
- It is the place we all want to go back to.
- In a major life change metaphor: You are living happily and feeling secure in your apartment or womb.

### ***The Second Matrix (BPM II)***

- Labor begins.
- You are feeling overwhelmed, hopeless, helpless, and betrayed by your mother's body.
- The cervix is not dilated, so you have no way out.
- You feel this is an overwhelming problem that will never end and can't be solved.
- There is a sense of timelessness and never-ending entrapment.
- In a major life change metaphor: Your landlord gives notice that your lease will not be renewed, and you feel numb, betrayed, hopeless about finding a place you will

like as well as the one you have. But you can't stay there any longer.

#### ***The Third Matrix (BPM III)***

- This is the stage after the cervix has opened, so the fetus has started down the birth canal.
- There is generally a feeling of getting somewhere, but it usually feels like a struggle, accompanied by powerful emotions.
- Even though there is light at the end of the tunnel, it is still feels very difficult to get out.
- In a major life change metaphor: You begin to have some ideas about how you can handle the situation, and you work hard to find another apartment (or a way out of the problem). It is usually a hard and time-consuming struggle.

#### ***The Fourth Matrix (BPM IV)***

- This is birth itself.
- It is completion of a process, rebirth, and reconnection in a new way.
- In the transition between the Third Matrix and the Fourth Matrix, the aquatic, physically attached and dependent fetus 'dies' in order to become a physically separate, breathing baby.
- In a major life change metaphor: You find a new apartment. You pack up everything and move. It is a huge effort, and there may be grief about leaving, but it begins to feel good to have the process complete and to begin settling down into a new life.

#### **Death/Rebirth**

- If there is difficulty in the birthing process at any stage of our birth, this can affect the way we move through major change.
- Anesthesia at any stage of the birth process may give the message that when the going gets tough, drugs will help it work out (but, alas, in a fog of anaesthesia, you don't remember how it worked out).

### **3) Transpersonal experiences [NOSCs]**

Transpersonal experiences involve non-ordinary states. The more time spent in NOSC, the more you begin to dis-identify with your narrower self-identity, and open to larger, more whole and more embracing identities. NOSC thus promote death/rebirth. Death of what? Death of our false self. Birth of what? Birth of a truer, more authentic self. Transpersonal experiences, in ritual context, are therapeutic and growth producing because move us beyond identification with our "skin-encapsulated egos" (as Alan Watts put it) into transcendence of self and place or transcendence of time (moving into the past or future). These experiences may be colorful, moving, unusual (or unique to each individual and different each time) and feel emotionally relevant to what is going on in your life right now.

### **What is a COEX?**

A COEX is Stan Grof's term for what Jung called a pathological complex. Grof gives it a temporal dimension, and an ongoing theme which can be added to. A COEX is a "system of condensed experiences" which are linked in memory and often in trauma by particular sensations and emotions. Think of a necklace, with the string being a familiar theme, and each bead being an event which repeats that theme in some way, adding to the COEX. An example of a multilayered experience of a COEX would be one that involves both the emotion of fear and the sensation of blocked breathing and constriction in the throat; the physical/emotional memory of the umbilical cord around the neck (perinatal), an incident of being choked by a bully (biographical), and a 'past life' experience of hanging (transpersonal).

### **Sensory experiences**

Kriyas, spontaneous yogic ansanas, retinal patterns, tetany, tensions, pain, effortlessness of movement, smells) can occur at the beginning of the NOSC and also can accompany any of the other types of experiences during a sacred breathwork ceremony.

### **Yogic sleep states (and hypnogogic and hypnopompic)**

There seem to be meditation states which have actual names in Sanskrit which occur spontaneously and seem to allow energy to move in different ways at different levels. The conscious mind may have to be "asleep" for certain healing to happen. Several of these states seem to occur at times during Sacred Breathwork. The journeyer may also be in a twilight state and yet journeying into other dimensions, a kind of *lucid dreaming* such as has been described in the books of Carlos Castaneda. The ally or facilitator may think not much is going on when it is. Therefore these quiet looking states should not be interfered with in any way.

### **Bodywork**

Sacred Breathwork uses the special kind of bodywork developed by Grof and associates:

- It is not, as we might expect with bodywork, to massage away tension, but the opposite: to amplify tensions that represent material 'half-out' at the end of a session.
- We check in with you at the end of the session. If you report tension, we ask you if you want to work with it.
- If you do agree to work with it, we will hold steady against your resistance while you increase the tension so that the 'half-out' material can surface.
- We strongly suggest trying to work with the bodywork if you have residual tensions or pain at the end of a session, even headache, so you can complete whatever has come up in the session.

### **Recap the possible experiences in Sacred Breathwork**

- Peaceful, meditative
- Beautiful dancing on one's back on the matt (Sacred Breathwork permits ecstatic trance-dancing when space permits, but not when it risks interfering with the experience of other journeyers.
- Struggling, screaming, etc.
- All are not dramatic ones, and sometimes there is no story, but, rather and equally importantly, there is processing of feelings and sensory or kinesthetic expression of energy.
- Sometimes the experience is a 'meta-experience'. Sacred Breathwork intensifies awareness of patterns, as well as provides content in experiences.

*Give an example or use this one: a woman breathed hard for two and a half hours. She said nothing was happening, so she felt she must be doing it wrong. Her experience was of trying so hard to make something happen, and it never working out. I asked if she felt like that in her life as well. At that question, she felt the grief of living that problematic pattern all her life, and she then cried and cried. She said she hadn't cried in 20 years..*

*If there is time, tell your own or read a couple of short stories that will not be scary ones for new participants. Grof's books are rich in examples.*

Many experiences are described by people who have done Sacred Breathwork during many sessions over time. These include physical healing experiences for illnesses such as cystitis, rheumatoid arthritis. There are many psycho-spiritual types of Sacred Breathwork experiences that happen over time, such as receiving assistance from shamanic guides, kundalini movement, spiritual emergency processing, psychic experiences, trauma recovery, healing from depression, finding and making peace with a deceased loved one during the journey, and healing of addictions and PTSD states and trauma.

### **Contraindications for Holotropic Breathwork**

*Describe them (recent surgery, cardiovascular, glaucoma, pregnancy, and bipolar or paranoia diagnoses) and explain why they are contraindicated in Sacred Breathwork. Ask participants to talk to you afterward about anything*

mentioned that is not already on their medical forms and to talk with you afterward if these contraindications are on their forms as well. Have each sacred breathwork participant fill out, sign and date the Medical Release forms, and read them carefully before admitting them to sacred breathwork. The Facilitator will ask for clarity for anything he or she is not clear about regarding medical or psychiatric conditions. Medications for conditions should be taken. For some, people who cannot do the strenuous aspects of sacred breath healing of traumas, may be able to be an ally, or enjoy the worship or meditation and beauty of the ceremony. They simply do not do the journeying-breathwork.

### **Art expression is a valuable part of the post-Breathwork experience.**

- It is the first and non-verbal expression after the inner experience—a way of bringing the non-ordinary into the ordinary.

*Note: Describe the art materials and where the art will be done: mandalas, SoulCollage®, clay, etc. Show examples of my own Mandalas and those of SK.*

- People are often intimidated by art. One doesn't have to be an artist to do this. No one will be judged. Stick figures are fine. Just moving a crayon around on the paper is just fine too.

### **The Journeyer/Ally relationship**

#### **Partnership**

We'll pick partners after this talk [or after the check-in before the Breathwork begins.] We ask partners commit to follow-up with each other for two weeks after a sacred breathwork sessions, in case things need to be further processed or support is needed, or a psychotherapy referral is needed. This is a safety pre-caution. This contact can be made via email address or telephone number exchange and should happen before a sacred breathwork sessions begins.

- Pick someone you (or your inner child) feels comfortable with at this time.
- Sometimes it works better to pick someone you don't know, but with whom you feel comfortable.
- Other times pairing up with someone you know or came with supports a deepening of relationship. It can be different for the same people at different times in different Breathwork sessions.
- Breathing at the same time with different partners sometimes works well for couples or family members, so that they are in the same cycle with the breathwork day.

#### **Roles and duties of Ally, Journeyer, Facilitator**

- An ally supports and keeps the journeyer safe (using pillows, supporting the breather when he stands up, etc.), gives water when asked, responds to requests from the breather, reminds the breather to breathe if asked.

- A journeyer creates an intention to be willing to cooperate with what happens, asks for what s/he wants, breathes, cooperates with the material that the inner healer brings up.

### **Occasional Triads**

- If there is an odd number of people in the group, three people will partner in a triad. In one session, two people will journey and one will be an ally (and the facilitators will keep an eye out to assist, if needed). In the other session, one person will journey with two allies.

### **Reciprocity as learning tool**

- Being conscious in either of these roles (ally or journeyer) helps us change patterns of co-dependence.
- We can feel into another's experience without 'fixing' them.

*Provide an example here.*

- We can experience reciprocity—full giving and full receiving.
- If either a journeyer or an ally has any questions or concerns, ask the facilitators

*Name the facilitators who are present today to assist.*

### **The Structure of the Sacred Breathwork day**

*Describe how the day will go.*

- The schedule is not exact; it depends on how the group process goes, but here is a general overview:
- Group Check in—You will each have a minute or two to check in with the group about where you are in your psycho-spiritual process in your life right now. You can also share any dreams you may have had last night that might relate to the Breathwork process and how you are feeling about doing Breathwork right now.

**SAFETY CONTRACT** = Agreements to keep safety for the group and individuals—We'll ask for a show of hands to signify each person's agreement to these. Again, they are:

- Agreement to stay throughout the whole workshop
- Agreement to keep confidentiality.
- Agreement not to cause harm to self, others, or property.

- Agreement not to involve any other person in expressions of sexuality.
- There is then a break in which partners check in with each other, make agreements, and the sitter gets a small snack, and the group sets up their mats.
- The next phase is getting settled in, with the designated journeyer for the first session lying down on the mat with eyes closed and ally sitting nearby.
- The facilitators will give a guided relaxation—a simple relaxing of each area of the body before Sacred Breathwork begins.

### **The music then begins**

- The music provides a backdrop to our own inner experience.
- Music has been used for ages in rituals involving non-ordinary states of consciousness. It follows the division of Rites of Passage into three stages 1) Separation from the every-day world of ego = music that is loud, percussive and rhythmic, 2) Descent or initiation into the depths = music that is sacred or numinous, 3) Return and integration with ego, others, and world = music that has earthy, relaxing, natural sounds that gently call you back to earth, world, body.
- We have a different relationship to music in Sacred Breathwork, letting it move us, but not analyzing it.
- If you don't like the music, perhaps it is an opportunity to work with your judgment or anger. Everything is 'grist for the mill'.
- Music covers many of the 'ordinary people sounds' that might distract the breathers.
- Some people never even hear the music and that is okay too.

### **How to Breathe**

- Breathe more effectively (more deeply) and continuously without a pause between breaths.

*Demonstrate how you breathe without a pause between the breaths.*

- Everyone breathes a bit differently. All ways are okay.
- The same person will usually breathe differently at different times within a session.
- Often people breathe until something happens, then spontaneously pause in breathing for a little bit, may even go deeper as they stop the breathing, then begin breathing again as they feel it appropriate. This cycle can happen several times in the course of a Sacred Breathwork session.
- Many systems have certain methods of breathing: in through the nose, out through the mouth, belly breathing, etc. Sacred Breathwork just asks people to breathe without pauses and more deeply.



After a period of time, such as 30-45 minutes, the breath often pauses naturally, and, as mentioned above, the experience will actually deepen still more with the spontaneous retention of the breath. Therefore it is not recommended to continue to remind the breather to breathe after those first 45 minutes.

## **Gestalt--Homeopathic-style Bodywork**

### *Freeing blocked energy by intensifying it*

Bodywork frees up blocked energy by intensifying tensions so the energy can push through and express itself. This is similar to the philosophy behind homeopathic healing. In homeopathy, the physician is trying to intensify the symptoms to mobilize the natural healing mechanisms of the body. In homeopathy and in Sacred Breathwork, there is often a healing crisis manifested by an intensification of symptoms. Healing happens when the external manifestation in the Sacred Breathwork session is equal to the intensity of the original trauma in the psyche (as noted by Grof).

A facilitator will check in with the journeyer, who may say, "I feel okay, but I still have a little pain in my shoulder right here." The facilitator might respond, "Would it be okay with you to work with that a little bit? I would put my hand right there, and you could breathe into that place and then, when you're ready, you would push against my hand, intensifying that symptom." The journeyer might say, "Okay," and then the bodywork would begin.

### **Journeyer may Use of the word, "Stop!"**

You are in control. Even if you have given us permission to do bodywork, if you say "Stop!" we will stop and renegotiate with you what will happen next.

**Facilitator gently whispers the words "Stop, Stop, Stop!"** in the journeyer's ear, when needed to temporally intervene and assist the journeyers back into a safe position, when needed.

### **Safety is the first priority.**

### **How do you know when you're done??**

- There is usually a curve to the session: energized breathing, which brings up material; cooperating with and processing the material; and then a gradual return to the ordinary state of consciousness.

- If material is 'half-out', the person may choose to ask for bodywork and some processes may get more intense at the end of the session, before tapering off.
- Many people know when they feel 'done'; if you have some doubt, check in with facilitator.
- One question to ask a participant to ascertain if they are "done" is: "If you were to get up now, would you be able to interact with your peers and go to the sharing group (and then drive home)?" Most people who are "not done" would say, "No, I better stay on the mat a while longer."
- Most sessions last about two-three hours. The music will continue for three hours. If you finish early, you are welcome to stay and quietly listen to the music. Occasionally, a session may last longer than three hours.

### **Going to the bathroom**

If you have to use the bathroom as a journeyer, your ally can help you there, wait outside and guide you back to your mat. If an ally has to use the bathroom, the ally should raise a hand until a facilitator can substitute as an ally while he or she is away from the journeyer.

### **Keeping the Silence**

Talking brings us back to ordinary consciousness and is different than the sounds made in a Sacred Breathwork process, which can be very loud, but, even so, can contribute to the non-ordinary state experiences of others in the room.

*Optional: we have silence from start of first session until dinner; talk away from common areas if necessary, whisper if we need to talk.*

### **Lunch**

*Explain how that will work.-skipping and alternating meals.*

Second Sacred Breathwork session—Journeyers in first session become allies in second session and vice versa.

### **Dinner**

*Explain how that will work.*

### **The Sharing Group**

This group is the first opportunity to begin integrating your non-ordinary experience into ordinary life by telling others about it. Please come to the group even if you are tempted to not come (because you want to be alone, or are too tired or some other reason). The Sharing Group is designed to complete the group and individual process for the day and you will be missed by others if you are not there.

If you cannot attend for some reason, please let your sitter or the facilitator know where you are. Remember your CONTRACT-agreement to stay for the whole workshop.

*Check for questions or concerns.*

*Supervise the picking of partners.*

**About C. Michael Smith, Ph.D. –MIKKAL**

Mikkal has been in private practice as a clinical psychologist and Jungian psychotherapist for more than 30 years. The theoretical foundations of sacred breathwork originate with his books *PSYCHOTHERAPY AND THE SACRED* (Chicago: CSSR Press, 1995) in which he demonstrates the power of the active use of sacred resources in healing serious mental disorders across cultures and historical eras. His second book, *JUNG AND SHAMANISM IN DIALOGUE* (PAULIST PRESS 1997, TRAFFORD 2007) laid the foundations for a synthesis of Jungian psychology which informs all the heart-path practices including sacred breath and dance work. His doctoral mentorship with Jungian analyst Robert L Moore on Ritual Process and Leadership has strongly influenced his books, his clinical and teaching practice. A Cherokee-Metis (part Dutch and Scotch), he has spent 16 years under the mentoring of the Cherokee-metis medicine woman Ai Gvhdi Waya, and 8 years with the Taita Iachak, (Quechua shaman), don Alverto Taxo. He is currently founding director of Crows Nest Center for Shamanic Studies, USA and Europe, where he teaches. In addition to lecturing at the University of Chicago, the Chicago Theological Seminary, and Argosy University, he has taught workshops and led retreats in shamanism and Jungian psychology at Centre Trimurti, in Cogolin France for three years, at the Institut Ressources [PNL] in Brussels Belgium and at Crows Nest in Paris and Ardesche, France. For more information or contacting him, see [www.cmichaelsmith.com](http://www.cmichaelsmith.com) and [www.crowsnestshamanism.com](http://www.crowsnestshamanism.com)