

The Crow's Nest Sacred Breathwork (TM) & Sacred Dance Process

A Brief Overview

By Mikkal

I have developed Sacred Breathwork & Dance to help us connect ecstatically with the Sacred through powerful non ordinary states of consciousness, for purposes of worship and renewal, healing of old wounds, exploration of the visionary and archetypal realms of the collective unconscious. It is creative expression of the Sacred through breath, dance, art, poetry and chant.

Sacred breathwork is rooted in shamanism and the soul psychology inspired by C.G. Jung and James Hillman, the theory of the sacred inspired by Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade, and the ontology of Heidegger. It is also strongly rooted in the supporting heart-path and earth-honoring heart practices that I have developed through Crows Nest workshops. Its ritual structure and process are informed by the work of my doctoral mentor Robert L. Moore on transformative ritual process and leadership, and the work by anthropologist Felcitas Goodman, on the role of body postures (shamanic asanas) and ecstatic spiritual and healing states through well-formed ritual process. It bears some marked similarities to the work of Stanislav Grof, but is not Holotropic Breathwork, which is a specific form of ecstatic breathwork developed by Grof. It is however influenced by Grof's prodigious research into both Breathwork and LSD psychotherapy, as well as by techniques. It is also influenced by the study of "archaic techniques of ecstasy" (Eliade) and sacred dance across cultures, from Sufi, Kirtan worship and Sabd yoga, too! Kung Bushmen community ceremony, to modern shamanic dance techniques, such as those developed by 5 Rhythms developed by Gabrielle Roth, and the dance work of the South African shamanic healer, Lyn de la Motte, and the Swiss shamanic healer, Eva Morales. Where possible, special encouragement is given to spontaneous dance and shamanic 'asanas (Goodman 'postures') as forms of journeying and healing process. Sacred Breath & Dance has thus been synthesized from numerous other sources originating with the holotropic technique.

The breathwork theory and procedure is rigorously synthesized in the light of my own thirty years of practice in shamanic healing and teaching it through workshops in USA, Europe, and S. Africa. It has taken shape also through my clinical psychological practice, workshop teaching around the world, and concurrent medical anthropological research into powerful healing systems across-cultures, as published in my books *PSYCHOTHERAPY AND THE SACRED* [1995], and *JUNG AND SHAMANISM IN DIALOGUE: RETRIEVING SOUL / RETRIEVING THE SACRED* [1997, 2007].

The method and setting of sacred breathwork is comprised of 8 major elements which work together in concert: 1) connected breath, 2) ritual context: and ritual leadership protocol (for the facilitator), 3) a safe sacred space/time module with attention to low numinal-ambient lighting, "allowing" space, physical comfort, and natural location (where possible) 4) profound music selection based on numinous & nonspecific evocative qualities, and ritual phase-specific criteria, using high quality sound technology 5) artistic and bodily expression of the process, 6) group-community

processing and long term partnerships, 7) on-going heart-centered and earth-honoring, personal practices that support post-breathwork integration (supporting 'yogas'). 8) An introductory talk covering the theory and practice, the responsibilities of participants, benefits and risks of the sacred breathwork, and assessments for medical and psychiatric exclusions. Safety is the paramount rule

Sacred breathwork is a process best done in group retreat workshop or individual sessions, where it is more powerful and safe (community support and partnerships). Participants alternate in roles as a Journeyer (Grof breather) and an Ally (Grof sitter). The Ally's job is to support, hold space, and protect the space and process of the journeyer above all, and to continue support for some considerable time beyond the breathwork & dance sessions. So they are Guardian as well as Ally. The Ally's focus as compassionate witness, like Grof Breathwork, does not interfere with the Journeyer's process unless safety is at stake. The same is true for the facilitator as Ritual Elder.

This Sacred Breathwork is often blended with classic shamanic journeying, heart-practices, active Toltec work to root out and dissolve long standing problem patterns and lachak heart theory with its protocol of highly active practices (NGS/DIGS and the Four Acts of Power) and very direct core questions for inner work. Focusing on a felt-sense as developed by Eugene T. Gendlin, Ph.D. may also be incorporated. Even our cellular memories in our bodies can open and pour out pertinent wisdom. It is a sacred ceremony in which the Sacred/Divine is intentionally invoked and entered into deep relationship with, for purposes of worship & renewal, and for healing, liberating-insight, or personal transformation.

See Calendar of events for workshop dates in USA and Europe. Most workshops offer two sacred breathwork sessions.

The Sacred Breathwork unquestionably has spontaneous telologic, or, 'holotropic' (moving towards wholeness) qualities, tending to arouse the quest for healing, individuation, union of opposites or whole making. We owe a great deal to Grof for refining this concept and showing us how it can be aligned with in breathwork. We accept it with deepest gratitude. The powerful experience is not for everyone, however, and there are many ways of having deep spiritual experiences through non ordinary states. Some medical and psychiatric conditions make some parts of it unsafe, such as cardiovascular problems, pregnancy, recent surgeries, glaucoma, and serious seizure disorder. At this time there is not a safe container for individuals who suffer paranoid and bi-polar disorders. Although with a safe and extended care model that is adequate, it may become so in the future. Before attending a sacred breathwork event, all participants fill out a medical and psychiatric exclusions questionnaire to insure safety. Some forms of the breathwork may be modified for individuals with specific health problems. Sacred Dance, for example can be used for worship, shamanic journeying, and tremendous growth of selfhood transcending the ego, for some individuals for whom the Grof type breathwork is contraindicated.

This article is intended as a very brief introduction to the topic. For further information, contact us through the www.crownsnestshamanism.com website, and see our calendar of workshops page.