

# **Practicum in Psychology**

**An examination into**

**Holistic Integrative Breathing**

**By**

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**&**

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## **Holistic Integrative Breathing**

“The purpose of this breathing is to heal, balance, clear, and not to bring up past trauma. You will learn how to continuously breathe from your belly and move your energy through your body. Aromatherapy and positive affirmations, will accompany this breathing process. Ideally, when our bottom three energy centers are clear and balanced and our top three energy centers are clear and balanced, we live in joy from the heart in unconditional love. You can truly integrate alternative healing methods with the traditional and create your own personalized holistic practice to empower and heal yourself.

### **This is for people who want to experience:**

Extra energy, increased mental clarity, a greater ability to solve problems, an efficient and healthier life, more, love, joy, forgiveness, compassion, and freedom, less stress, creative boost and expressing your truth, more balance greater intuition, and a deeper connection with your spirituality.”

*~Dr. Rusty Stewart, Ph.D.*

**Mark's**  
**First Experience**  
**with**  
**Holistic Integrative Breathing**

With the car windows down, I stuck my hand outside the window feeling the air force my hand up and down. I smiled, enjoying the beautiful Fall day. I noticed that we

were running a little late for the workshop we were heading to. What was this that we were going to? I thought back about what inspired this trip.

I was at a picnic a couple weeks before at a friend's holistic healing studio, when I saw a flyer for an upcoming event. I was reading the flyer when Robert, one of the people running the studio and a long-time friend of my tai chi teacher, told me that I would really enjoy this workshop and the facilitator, Dr. Rusty Stewart. The flyer talked about using a type of breathing to increase joy, peace of mind, energy, and a long list of other benefits. Who would not want any of these to increase in life? I felt excited about this opportunity and signed up right away. When I got back to school, I was talking to Amy and thought that she might want to do this too. I asked her and after contemplating it for a week or so, she randomly called me at 1:30 in the morning and told me that she did want to go. I felt excited for the both of us.

Amy said something to me, but I could not hear, the wind was too loud so I closed the window. We started talking about many things going on in our lives. Eventually, the conversation led us to discussing the possibility of taking a psychology class together. The conversation was cut short when we entered the parking lot. We would finish this conversation on the way back.

As we walked into the studio, the workshop had already begun. We tiptoed into the room and got all setup. We were introducing ourselves and mentioned what each of us were passionate about. Essential oils were being passed around, each oil correlating to a different chakra. After finishing applying the oils, Rusty went around the room and smudged everyone. As this was going on it started pouring rain, which was odd because as I peered out the window, it was still bright and sunny outside. I cracked a smile and looked around the room, noticing all the other people picking up on the same thing.

As we were preparing to lay down for the breathing, Rusty demonstrated the deep diaphragmic breathing, pulling the air into the very bottom of our bellies and in a wave filling our lungs until the very top was expanded and then released. I remember thinking, “Wow, that’s really intense breathing! I wonder how long I can keep that up.” The music started. This was the primal drumming breath working specifically on the root chakra at the base of the spine. We were to imagine a red ball of energy there and pull red energy from our feet, up our back, and down the front our body. After a couple of minutes, I felt like my head was expanding and sinking into the floor at the same time. Soon this feeling spread through my head all the way to my toes and I noticed that I was actually circulating the energy through my body.

Before long, I stopped thinking about what I was doing and just observed what was going on. The music shifted. Now we were to visualize a golden ball encompassing the first three chakras. I felt a tingling sensation in my belly. I could actually feel this energy ball in and around my abdomen. The ball of energy slowly grew outward, but it was still mostly focused around the first three chakras. I was now sensing, no more like directly feeling, what was going on around me. I did not only feel Amy’s energy, but I could actually sense what she was going through to a certain degree. I had a sense of her mental and emotional state.

All of a sudden, I felt a strong presence moving around me, it was Rusty. I could feel exactly where he was even though he was five feet away from me. As he came to open my chakras and clear any stagnant energy, I could feel exactly where his hands were around my body even though he was not actually touching me and my eyes were closed. The last thing he did was grab my ankles, I could feel his strong grip around them, but wait, how could that be? I sensed him working on the person next to me, even

though I could still feel a grip on my ankles. Then I remembered that Rusty mentioned something like this might happen. This would be his reiki guide still grounding me even though he has actually moved on.

This was the first time I had ever been aware of my aura and the energies that connect us all. It took a while for this to integrate for me but looking back it was really the first time that I had ever gotten a glimpse at how interconnected everything in the world really is. As I was in this deep state of consciousness, deeper than any meditation that I had ever experienced before, thoughts kept cascading into my mind answering the very question that Amy and I were asking each other as we pulled into the parking lot. The thoughts “Do an independent study with Rusty. Do an independent study in altered-state consciousness,” kept repeating in my head. This did not even seem like it was me thinking, in fact I was not even sure if at that time I could think in words. I understood this as something giving me a message.

As the music shifted again and Rusty told us to go to our normal breathing again, I felt as if I completely left my body and had a conversation with a spirit or spirits. Quite honestly, I cannot remember exactly because as I came back to my body I forgot everything that happened in that journey and was only left with an impression of what might have occurred. This foreshadowed one of the biggest hurdles I had to overcome in the following semester.

Through all that occurred in this session I had an awareness of Amy and how the boundaries between us had melted, but as I was coming back to my body I had an increased understanding of how necessary the boundaries between us would be as we were integrating what just happened to both of us.

I sat up rather quickly and kept my full attention on my body and the sensations

running through me. I also understood that no matter how much I wanted tell Amy everything that happened; I had to give her time to fully come back to the present moment. As we both stood up and waited in the hallway to use the bathroom, I could sense Amy's need to open up, but something was holding her back. I placed a hand on her shoulder and then gave her a hug, holding her tightly with a sense that we could have held each other forever.

After everyone returned to their spots in the room, Rusty asked if anyone wanted to share their experience. I was thoroughly amazed at how incredible everyone's experience was, but at the same time how unbelievably different they all were. Not one experience sounded the same and yet there was this sense that everyone had a profound experience. As we were sharing what each of us had gone through, the rain started to pour down once again and this time it may have been even brighter outside than the first time it rained. We all had a sense that we were being spoken to.

As everyone was packing up to leave, I asked Amy if she would be interested in doing an independent study along with me doing this type of breathing and studying under Rusty. She seemed as excited about the idea as I was. We then walked over to where Rusty and Robert were talking and patiently waited for a proper time to speak. When we asked if he would be interested in helping us with a study, he answered us with an enthusiastic yes almost immediately. Amy and I were elated with incredible opportunity that was being laid before us.

**Amy's**  
**First Experience**  
**with**  
**Holistic Integrative Breathing**

My journey began with an invitation to a breathing workshop. I went based on an impulse, as my decision to go was made late one night, while I was half asleep. I assumed that regulating your breath must be a form of meditation. But, I had never really meditated before. Was this even something I would be able to do?

During the car ride, the day of the workshop, my friend Mark took his usual place as my attentive listener, as I once again contemplated my growth. Where was I going? When would I find strength in my newfound independence? Who was I becoming? Our discussion turned to the topic of our common interest, psychology. We agreed we would work well together if we were in the same psychology class. Our conversation came to a halt in the parking lot; we were late for the workshop.

They had already begun, so we quietly took our places near the doorway. Dr. Rusty Stewart, the instructor, asked the group to begin with introductions, our name and our passion. I can still hear the sound of my voice on that day, kind of quiet and shaky. Despite my discomfort I felt it in my heart that I was meant to be there. Rusty spoke of passion for nature, the sun was shining and it began to rain.

After a demo of how we would breathe, into our bellies, deep and intense, I thought, “How long could one really keep up that intensity?” After putting on the essential oils, Rusty smudged each of us with sage and we lay down on the ground, closed our eyes and the music started.

“In and out through the mouth,” I thought, “hope I’m doing this right...” Tuning into the affirmations, I concentrated on each statement, while trying to master a continuous breath with no pause between the in and the out breath. I was still unsure of what was supposed to happen. “Keep breathing your doing fine,” said the voice. Time seemed to cease.

My attention focused on the physical sensations that began to come over me. My entire body vibrated. I recalled when I was 17, lying in bed trying to fall asleep. I wasn’t quite awake, but definitely not asleep because I was aware of being in my bedroom. A sinking sensation would come over me and I felt the same tingle I was feeling now.

I wanted to tell Mark.

What exactly was going on? I could hear the man behind me snoring. Am I doing this right? My continuous circulation of breath became easier. My body was completely tingling all over, my head, my face, my arms, my legs. My hands began to clench up. “Deep continuous breathing, your circular breathing is easy now. Let the breath breathe you,” said the voice.

I became distracted from breathing so intensely. My joints hurt so badly. My hands, my knees, my ankles, all filled with, energy? What was going on? Am I doing this right? I was scared. I was in pain. With that, I felt hands gripping my ankles. It was Rusty. His touch cleared the tension from my joints. My arms felt like they were going to levitate and my fists remained clenched with the “crow hands” he had told us about, but the pain and fear were gone.

Was this happening to anyone else? I could hear Mark breathing, but I felt so much comfort in not breathing at all. I must have held my breath for minutes. I had this overwhelming desire to cry. Something was telling me to “release, let go....” I saw myself sliding down a rainbow of my opened charkas and had a feeling of pure joy and bliss. My inner voice was so loud. It convinced me that what I was feeling was only happening to me.

Before I knew it, Rusty began to bring us back to the present moment. I needed to cry, to release, but I was holding it in. I didn’t want to go back. This was such a good feeling. I was actually happy for the first time in years. I had no idea why or what was going on but I didn’t want to go back. “This is just the beginning,” something inside told me. And the session was over.

Rusty told us to get up slowly; drink some water. But I couldn’t move. The

energy had stiffened up my joints. I lay there as tears ran down my face. I wanted to tell Mark everything that I had just experienced, but I was drained. After five minutes I tried to get myself up but again, I was too stiff. I had to drink some water. What had just happened? Was it even real? It felt so good yet I needed to cry. I went to the bathroom and Mark followed. I glanced at him from the corner of my eye, he smiled, I looked at him and reached for a hug. I cried harder than I ever have in my entire life...what was that? I felt sick and blissful all at once. I cried and cried until it was my turn to go to the bathroom. I went in and looked at myself in the mirror. My eyes were so blood shot. My face was all red. I knew I was releasing toxins. I had no desire to share with anyone in that room what I had just experienced. I would never be able to find the words. I didn't think they would ever understand. Looking back, maybe I didn't trust myself. Was that even real?

We gathered together again for the group to share their stories. Some had cried, some had had visions, while others were quiet or had little to say. I was surprised by how different everyone's experiences were.

After the workshop, Mark shared with me his idea to ask Rusty to be our mentor in an independent study involving the breathwork. The session we had just participated in was one of the most intense situations I had ever experienced. We had just been talking about taking a psych course together and with Rusty's instant enthusiasm and support, everything seemed to just fall into place.

# **Our study**

**Holistic Integrative Breathing**

**With Rusty Stewart**

**Spring Semester 2004**

When the semester began, we had to identify what we wanted to accomplish. Why did we want to study Holistic Integrative Breathing? How would we reflect the work we did? The possibilities of taking part in this study were not completely clear at this point, yet our intent was focused towards self-understanding and personal healing. Amy's long-term goal in life is to become an art therapist. She saw this experience as an opportunity to work through personal issues so she would be more capable of helping others. Mark's continued interest in altered states of consciousness through natural methods, as well as personal spiritual healing attracted him to this study.

Rusty recommended that we read *Eastern Body, Western Mind: Psychology and the Chakra System* by Anodea Judith. From this book, we gained a basic knowledge of each chakra, their individual characteristics, and the chakra system as a whole.

The chakra system originated over 4000 years ago in India. The word chakra literally means *wheel*, referring to the energy vortexes emanating from the body. Brought to Western culture in the 1920's, the chakra system has become an increasingly popular concept for many somatic beliefs.

The chakra system is composed of seven major integrated energy centers. These centers accept, express and process life force energy. The seven wheels of energy are stacked vertically in the body from the base of the spine to the top of the head. There are also minor ones located in the shoulders, feet, hands and fingertips, just to name a few, but it is these seven major chakras that contribute the most to our states of consciousness. The chakra system and its development have a major influence on our everyday lives and behavior. Each chakra controls different aspects of our being and as a system it makes up who we are.<sup>1</sup>

A healthy chakra is one that allows energy to freely flow through it creating a

balance between the intake and release of energy. When this energy is out of balance the chakra may have a deficiency, excess, or a combination of both. Depending on the state of the chakra, some of the issues may manifest in our lives accordingly. For example, a person with an excess in their throat chakra may dominate conversations without listening to what others have to say. A deficiency may manifest in a person as a shy voice and they may have difficulty in expressing their feelings. Holistic Integrative Breathing is working to achieve an overall balance in the chakras.

To go into detail about the chakra system and the specifics of each chakra would be a dissertation in and of itself. In an effort to give a brief synopsis on this system, the following paragraphs will briefly discuss some of the balanced characteristics that this type of breathing is working to achieve.

The first chakra, or root chakra, serves as the foundation for the whole chakra system. With a balanced root chakra we feel grounded, safe, and comfortable in our body with awareness to our physical needs. Its color is red and located at the base of the spine and the perineum.<sup>2</sup>

The second chakra's responsibilities include movement, sensation, emotions, desire and pleasure. All of these characteristics culminate, ultimately, through sexuality. Balanced characteristics include graceful movement, an ability to change as well as emotional intelligence. Its color is orange and located an inch and a half below the navel.<sup>3</sup>

The third chakra is where we find our autonomy and individualization. It is responsible for our physical energy, our will, ego strength, in addition to our self esteem. A balanced third chakra will display itself as confidence without being arrogant possessing a healthy self-esteem. Its color is yellow and is located at the solar plexus.<sup>4</sup>

The fourth chakra, otherwise known as the heart chakra, is the center of the chakra system. Self-love, relationships with others, and compassion are aspects of ourselves that come from the heart. When our upper and lower chakras are balanced, it is through the heart that we are able to approach the world with unconditional love. Its color is green and is located in the center of the chest near the heart.<sup>5</sup>

At the throat we find the fifth chakra. This energy center is the house of communication and creativity. When balanced, communication is concise, with an appropriate sense of timing as well as rhythm. Creativity, in this sense, is pertaining to true self-expression; in other words, living your own life creatively. Its color is bright blue and is located at the throat.<sup>6</sup>

Our third eye is the sixth chakra. This chakra possesses our ability to think symbolically, be perceptive and have a sensitive intuition. Balanced, one would experience a good memory, be imaginative and find ease in remembering their dreams. Its color is indigo and is located at the forehead between the brows.<sup>7</sup>

At our crown is where the seventh chakra resides. This is the chakra through which we find the ability to connect to the higher power we believe in and universal unity. Intelligent and perceptive, people with a balanced seventh chakra have the ability to question even their own beliefs. Its color is violet and is located at the top of the head.<sup>8</sup>

A current runs through this rainbow of energy in two directions, upward and downward, respectively known as the liberating and manifesting currents. Separate in name and function, they are ultimately one current running through our being. When pulling the energy upward through our body to the crown, each chakra, along the way, refines the energy until it is graced with universal understanding. As the energy does a

u-turn from the back of our body and down the front, it progresses through the chakra system and becomes grounded in our physical reality.<sup>9</sup> Holistic Integrative Breathing is just one way that a person may begin to direct this flow of energy and correct imbalances within their chakra system.

Every morning we started the day off with a session. At the beginning of each session, we would apply essential oils to open each of our charkas and raise our energy vibration. Each essential oil resonates at a particular frequency. These frequencies are of a high vibration and the application of them raises our personal vibration. Disease can only exist in lower vibrations and the use of these oils can help fight and protect us from diseases. The set of eight oils we used in our study were specifically chosen for Holistic Integrative Breathing. The following oils were used:

- Niaouli - on the bottoms of our feet
- Peppermint - First Chakra; on the sacrum at base of the spine
- Laurel Leaf - Second Chakra; lower abdomen, an inch and a half bellow the naval
- Eucalyptus - Third Chakra; Solar Plexus
- Goldenrod - Fourth Chakra; center of chest, near the heart
- Spruce (Blue) - Fifth Chakra; the throat
- Frankincense Olibanum - Sixth Chakra; forehead between the brow
- Spruce (white) - Seventh Chakra; the top of the head

Guided by what we read and our experiences, we chose to write in a journal. Taking note of what we were feeling, how life changed over time, personal issues we needed to work through or attachments we had, as well as a comparison of our experiences as a whole. We were to take note of changes in our personalities, attitudes,

and senses as well as to include fluctuations in our frame of mind, focus, and ego.

The CDs that Rusty has put together contain music with a specific rhythm and frequency calibrated for each particular chakra. This music was accompanied by spoken affirmations directed towards easing behaviors and attitudes that are misbalancing the chakra. Each chakra resonates at a specific frequency and color. We visualized the appropriate color depending upon which chakra(s) the breath was focusing on. The combination of the breathing, essential oils, music, and affirmations were used to help resonate the chakra at the appropriate vibration, helping to open it and clear out the frozen energy. This creates balance, keeping the currents flowing consistently through the chakra system.

## Amy's Personal Account

Understanding the necessity of detaching myself from my first experience, was the first of many lessons taught to me through this study. It was easy to understand that no two people would experience the same thing, but I was unaware of the many differences in my experiences as well as the changes in my everyday life that were in store for me. Working with the breath on a regular basis, proved to have more value and benefits than I ever could have imagined and this became increasingly evident as time went on. Finding a common meeting time, a quiet environment, and regulating the breath into our lives was testing, but taught us discipline.

In the beginning, we focused on the Journey of the Drums Breath (root chakra) and the Joy Breath (chakras 1, 2, and 3). We then spent time with the Cosmos Breath (heart chakra) and The Divinity Breath (throat chakra). Occasionally, we worked with the Vision Breath (third eye chakra).

At the start, I was very attached to the first two breaths. I felt that I was the most out of balance in my first three chakras. Over time, through learning the basics of the chakra system and experiencing all the breaths, I've begun to understand how connected the entire system is. In order to truly experience all the possible benefits of the breathing, I had to detach myself from the idea that I needed to concentrate my efforts on only half the system.

I was also caught up in my thoughts and my body, trapped by my ego and mind chatter. My journal entries were very descriptive of the sessions in and of themselves.

My focus was on the distractions I heard outside and in the room or how I wanted to improve the situation for the next time.

In the beginning, I paid close attention to my physical sensations. Pain is an indication of stuck energy, so I took note of the areas in which I had any sort of discomfort. During the sessions, I needed to cover myself with a blanket because my hands and feet would get cold. After about the third session, I stopped getting the crow's hands. I learned to control the energy by not breathing so intensely and was able to experience the same sensations and benefits by breathing with less effort.

Lack of sleep played a major role in how deep of a theta brain wave state I could reach. This has since changed. I am able to feel very close to falling asleep but still remain aware of the affirmations. I may get up from the session without much recollection of what I have just experienced. The only thing I can compare this to is waking up from sleep and not being able to remember my dreams. There have been times during a session when I actually fell asleep, meaning I had dreams and was unaware of the affirmations being spoken.

I drew pictures of the energy fields I felt around my body. One time, I felt an energy current running up through my feet and body and out through my head. The energy then split above my head and circled downward around my left and right sides. When the energy reached my feet, it would turn back upward and repeat the cycle. During one session with the vision breath, I felt circles of energy around my wrists and ankles. I had visions of my entire body spinning around along the ground, with my third chakra as the pivot point during a session while doing the joy breath. Another time, I saw myself curled up in the fetal position where my third chakra is located on my body.

Attached to the physical and mental experiences of each session, I was not completely aware of the emotional and spiritual changes taking place in my life. The meetings with Rusty, as well as reading, redirected my attention and writing focus. What were the issues that I needed to work on? Did we notice anything different between the times we were able to do the breath regularly compared to the times when we were not? What changed about our day? Were we more motivated or have more energy? Did our attitude or mood change at all? Did we have a clearer mind frame? Did we notice a change in eating habits? Were our senses more in tune? Could we recall dreams more easily and were they becoming more vivid?

I began looking at my past to connect my chakra development with my current issues and future growth. Our history suggests why some of our current problems have manifested in our lives presently. I was strongly aware of one of my weakest characteristics; my addiction to food. And not just food, but the act of eating or not eating which gave me a sense of control. I began to closely examine my addiction to love; giving love, being loved as well as my dependence on security. I also gave attention to my fear of change, fear of judgment from others, and my fixation on the past and future.

I also saw the breath as a vehicle. I would start off breathing deeply and continue with a shallow breath or no breath at all. I used the deep breath to get me to a deep theta state and the shallow breath would keep me there. There were also times during the breathing that I became an observer of my thoughts instead of caught up in my mind chatter. I started to notice that when I got up from the joy breath I would be laughing or from the vision breath, I'd be very light headed with my sense of vision highly

accentuated. With these observations I also noticed a stronger awareness of the present moment during the sessions as well as in everyday life.

I can remember running around in my back yard at age five in my bathing suit and looking at myself, thinking I was fat. I compared my body to that of my cousin and my little sister. Both were healthy, but super thin and I was average. This observation would have been around the time my fourth chakra was developing. I was comparing myself to the people I saw around me and admired. This was when my food obsession began. I learned at an early age that I could control what I looked like on the outside if I ignored what I felt on the inside. This neglect is characteristic of a first chakra deficiency and therefore affects the foundation of my entire chakra system. I objectified my body and disregarded its signals and importance. With age, this disregard continued. I saw little value in my body because I disliked it so much. By age twelve this effected my third eye development because I was unable to really see myself as thin, distorting my self-image.

During the study there was a period of time in which I over exercised, over ate or under ate and just plain obsessed over my body image. I noticed a major disruption in my mood and attitude. With this behavior, I became depressed and insecure. The breath helped me to bounce back from this. These obsessive actions were not only messing with my physical health, but my mental and spiritual health as well. Participating in the breathing has helped to increase the value of my physical body through increasing my spiritual awareness.

Not more than a year ago, I had just broken up from a long term relationship that lasted almost three years. I have just begun to really live on my own and be happy with

my independence, but it has been hard. I had been in and out of relationships since I was fifteen. At age 22, I had no idea of who I was without loving someone else. Love was my greatest talent.

At that time, I was doing nothing with my life other than loving him. He took everything I gave him, twisted it around and controlled me with manipulation, but I have to admit that part of me allowed him to do so. Unfortunately, this is a common pattern in many of the relationships I have had. My weak will and the fact that I am easily manipulated results in a low self esteem. These characteristics manifest themselves as problems with my digestive system and are reflected in my poor posture. All of these attributes are symptoms of a deficient third chakra.

I held off breakup with him because of my fear of change, reflective of a deficiency in my second chakra. My dependency on this last relationship had come to such an extreme point that I was unable to socialize in crowds without my boyfriend there with me. This social anxiety was also a manifestation of this deficiency.

My emotional dependency on this relationship, his ability to control me with his jealousy and then our break up, fueled my tendency to control men with sex. These actions led me to discover that not only did I have a deficiency, but an excess as well in the second chakra. This excess may also be reflected in my body as knee troubles and ovarian cysts as well as numerous other problems in the area of my reproductive organs.

I sometimes have a fear of speaking to others, which I understand as an indication of a fifth chakra deficiency. This goes hand in hand with my feelings of inadequacy which reflect a deficient third chakra. I noticed a difference right away on the day we

first did the throat and heart breaths. I was speaking to a professor, which because of his position of authority, I found intimidating. In reality, he is in no way an intimidating person, but I still had the tendency to look down at my feet when talking to him or stumble over my words. On this day when I spoke with him I was articulate, clear headed and grounded. I felt great with the recognition of this change and my self esteem went up as a result.

There was a period of about two weeks in which we did not breathe at all. During that time, I noticed an increased awareness of the present moment as well as a heightened sensitivity to the energy inside of me and the energy exchanges with other people. Because I was noticing an increase in energy awareness, my ego talked me out of returning to the breath. At this time, I began to have little motivation for life and would spend extra time in bed sleeping. This would normally have been characteristic of my tendency towards a state of depression, but I felt so much happiness with the act of dreaming. Rusty brought to my attention the fact that when we are dreaming; we are completely in the moment. It was easy for me to reach a state of being present in the moment while sleeping and I was forming an attachment to this avenue.

When we got back on track with the breathing, I was surprised with how my energy level increased, my mental clarity improved and my motivation escalated. It was at this time in which I was able to really see the difference between when we were disciplined with the breathing and when we were not.

After this study, I had a heightened awareness of actions and emotions which helped to bring about change in my behavior and attitudes. All though these behaviors have not completely gone away, over the past four months, by incorporating the

breathing into my life I have experienced an increase in mental clarity, more confidence, concise articulation, vividness in my dreams and an improved ability to remember my dreams. The changes in behavior I noted above, could have still taken place over this period of time with normal growth and maturity. Being able to compare what I experienced during the time with the breath in my life to the period of time without doing the breath, is evidence to me that I would have remained stuck and fixated on my issues if this opportunity had not crossed my path. Without the breath, reading, and talks with Rusty, I would have remained unaware of my own strengths and ability to create change within myself.

## **Mark's Personal Account**

I had always suffered problems with concentration and focus. After a period of

time dealing with and suffering from drug abuse, these problems exponentially grew. By the time that I had realized how bad my condition was getting, I had enormous difficulty keeping my attention on even the easiest of things, like paying attention during a conversation. With all my will I wanted to be able to just hear what people had to say, but at that point I was only able to listen to 25-50% of what they were saying. It was like my mind was revving at 9000 rpm and stuck in neutral. By the time I was ready to walk away from drugs, I couldn't even stay aware of what I was thinking about. I was in a world of my own and thought many times that I was permanently stuck in that condition.

After recognizing and accepting my problem, I was searching for some way to "fix" it. I read many books on meditation and slowly I was gaining more awareness to the moment, but still my mind chatter was overwhelming most of the time.

By the time I began the Holistic Integrative Breathing, I had already started practicing tai chi and chi kung. As I was learning more about the chakra system and grounding energy, I came to the realization that it was not that I had done permanent damage to my mind, but rather lost my ground, pulling all my energy in the higher chakras and not concerning myself with the downward or manifesting current.

Grounding myself became one of my biggest concerns. After my first experience, I found difficulty feeling my root chakra and keeping my attention on the breathing. As the semester progressed, I could sense that my root chakra was beginning to open, but the more it actually opened, the more I became aware of how closed it really was. In the latter weeks of our study, a breakthrough of sorts occurred. I noticed a deeper connection with my first chakra while doing the breathing. At other times in the day when I was practicing some chi kung movements, I could pull the energy from my upper chakras, fully sensing the energy passing through each chakra and all the way out my feet as if it

was plowing a pathway down the front of my body. By the time that I was finished the exercises, my feet felt like they were made of lead.

Since the beginning of this study, I have noticed some interesting clues into my personality. As I was going through a major awakening two years ago, something in the way that I thought shifted. All of a sudden I was tapping into the collective unconscious and did not even understand what I was doing, let alone how I was doing it. It was like I had been using all my strength to keep these floodgates at bay and when I finally was tired of keeping them close, an explosion of knowledge rushed through me. The things that were being shown to me were of such a deep level that they were beyond my ability to fully comprehend their meaning. At the same time though it seemed as if I now had two minds, one rich with a beautiful ability to tap into deep levels of consciousness and the other fighting it, trying to make “sense” of it all.

There seemed to be two distinct personalities developing within me at different paces. The one side of me that was growing seemed like one that had a deep perception of the world and yet humble, understanding that “I” was not the one coming up with these ideas. The other was a child no more than 15 years old, unable to cope with the world around him and wanting personal credit for everything that had occurred, thinking that this may finally bring about acceptance. The irony is thick and painful.

As I was remembering (or being given depending on how you choose to look at it) this new perspective of the world, I came to find safety in it. Throwing myself into this new realm let me escape many of the pains that I was suffering. Learning as much as I could about the spiritual became an obsession of mine. I allowed my ego, riddled with shame and pain of childhood, identify with this spiritual being. Unknowingly, this

directly led to an outward arrogance. When I would be in conversations with adults, I quickly noticed how impressed they were with what I was able to talk about and the manner in which I could articulate myself. This only fed into my arrogance.

I looked for any possible way to leave my body with the intent of “going home.” I gave up on the physical world thinking that this was not a realm of real importance. I developed a strong interest in shamanic journeying, which seemed to come easily to me. Realizing this, I soon found a new way to feed into my spiritual addiction. This did not last too long as I soon felt something was wrong. I had a sense that I was imposing my will upon the incoming messages, creating imagery of what I *wanted* to experience and not what the spirits were giving me. I began to have faded interest due to the feeling that my journeys were being tainted. I was getting hints that there was a factor getting in the way of the true messages, but I was still in denial that I was causing it.

Even when I started with the Holistic Integrative Breathing, I was feeding into my spiritual bypass. It was one more method for me to go “out there.” But through our discussions with Rusty in our meetings and reading *Eastern Body, Western Mind: Psychology and the Chakra System*, I slowly began to understand what was going on with me. I have an excess in both my sixth and seventh chakras. Through the course I began to identify with my lower chakras, body, bringing up childhood issues that I must deal with. In fact, it was not until we began to write this paper that I realized just how unconsciously

programmed much of my behavior really is, due to issues I largely ignored throughout my life.

When things first started clicking for me, two years ago, it was during the short weeks of spring when all the trees and flowers were blossoming. Driving in my car to work, I was overwhelmed by the beauty of nature and tears flooded my eyes in the joy of these moments. In the beginning stages of meditative practices, our thoughts are too powerful due to the control we have given them in the past. As we bring ourselves into the moment, the beauty that we are surrounded by awes us, and our thoughts naturally cease. All of us have experienced this at some time in our life, generally when we see or experience something spectacular, like seeing the Grand Canyon or any other landscape that takes our breath away. There is a sense of peace and joy in those moments.

When my mind was spun from all the after-effects of my drug abuse, all I wanted was to have the ability to keep my mind still and be alert... not to be a slave to my own mind chatter. I used meditation to suppress my thoughts. "Stay in the here and now. Only through not thinking can this occur," I used to believe. While staying in the moment is extremely important, I used it as a way to deny my thoughts and emotions. Any time that a thought or emotion would arise that I did not like, I would thrust myself into silence, denying that this was a part of the "real" me. "I'm feeling sad... NOPE that's just an illusion, come back to the moment and you'll be fine." Spirituality became my biggest means of denial, further splitting the two aspects of my personality.

I practiced keeping my mind still, but the harder I tried to feel that bliss again, the more I entered an almost numbed state. The journey of our study helped me to understand that being in the here and now means being able to observe thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations without placing a judgment on them.

In certain cases when powerful emotions, that I would have normally viewed as "bad," would arise in such force that I could not just cut them off by attempting to stop

thinking about them, I allowed myself to stay with that emotion and not judge it. On one occasion when confronted on some of my behaviors, I became overwhelmingly depressed. I was in such emotional pain, but this was not because of the issue I was confronted with. This was directly bringing up repressed sadness of my childhood. I could actually sense dark energy, which I could only describe as grief, pouring out of my heart. What was odd was that during this whole time I was able to sit back and explain how I felt, but there seemed to be no attachment with the feeling. I had no real urge to cry or act out in any way, nor did I want to fight it. The only thing that I noticed was an extreme heaviness in my heart. I sunk to my knees unable to muster the strength to stay standing. I was very lucky to have Amy there to talk to while I was experiencing this. At least I was able to have someone listen to this purging with a compassionate heart.

Through insight from our meetings with Rusty as well as the process of opening the chakras as a result of the breathing, I was able to integrate experiences, like the one mentioned above, with the realization that being in the present moment can only occur when we *fully* experience all emotions, thoughts, and sensations from a non-judgmental observer point of view. Ahhh, this is what all those Buddhism books I read were pointing to. Keeping a still mind was not an end, just a means to get us closer to the observer. While we are observing, we do not judge and therefore do not feel the need to repress “bad” emotions because that is just a label and nothing else. Some emotions may be uncomfortable if we let them, but they are never “bad” nor are any “good.” Everything we experience is what it should be. It is when we fight what we are experiencing that we submit ourselves to pain and suffering.

Doing the Holistic Integrative Breathing, reading *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, and our many conversations with Rusty has given me a new direction in my life.

Through the whole process I have been getting more in touch with my needs and aspects of myself that I need to heal. At the beginning of the study, I thought I was already well on my way to a healthy and balanced chakra system. As I now am writing I am beginning to see just how out of balanced I really am, but with that I feel more secure with myself than before. It is paradoxical, but there seems to be security in understanding my insecurity and safety in my vulnerability.

## **Conclusion**

Before our study of the breathing and the chakra system in relationship to

psychology, we both used traditional psychological diagnosis's to give excuses to behaviors and emotions that we believed, caused disruption in our lives. In some way, we were trying to shift responsibility off of ourselves and on to our genetic dispositions. It was easier to believe that we were predisposed to these undesired aspects of ourselves than it was to take responsibility for the change we wished to see in our lives.

When we look at psychology today, it seems that most people and even some psychologists and psychiatrists, approach therapy with the attitude that the therapist is working to “fix” what is wrong with the client, similar to how a doctor would fix a broken arm. This cannot be further from the truth. It is only the clients that have the ability to correct their own lives. Fitting people in boxes, by labeling them with a diagnosis, and leading them to believe that the only way to fix their problem is through prescription drugs, is by no means an answer. If the clients are the only ones who have the ability to heal themselves, then there cannot be a hierarchical relationship where only the therapist knows best. At best, all the therapist can do is help facilitate the client's own person growth and healing by sharing their wisdom and experience as well as techniques like Holistic Integrative Breathing that resonate with that particular client.

If there is one point that really stood out throughout this semester, it is how everything is truly connected in this world. We cannot focus on healing one chakra without effecting the others. We cannot point to one particular aspect, like the breathing, oils, music, self reflection or the affirmations, as being the particular thing that “caused” our personal growth this semester. In a “true” academic study, we would be attempting to isolate each of these components to see if they actually contribute to our growth. Each one of these was instrumental to our growth, but it was through the combination that a

synergetic healing took place. Even though both of us were working towards bettering ourselves before the semester, we can honestly say that this study has greatly accelerated our healing process.

Through the consistent use of breathing, many of our issues surfaced and we are confronting them head on. Through this process we are taking the power and negativity away from them, forcing them to surface so they no longer dictate our subconscious behavior. Through the Holistic Integrative Breathing, we have been able to move these energies. Even though our unwanted behaviors, emotions, and attitudes have not completely gone away, we have begun to heal them through only natural means. This new found path of natural healing has given us great confidence that we are on our way towards better health and well being. We believe that the results of this alternative healing process are more effective than what any other form of therapy would be able to accomplish for us.

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<sup>1</sup> Judith, Anodea. (1996) Eastern body, western mind: Psychology and the chakra system. Celestial Arts Publishing. pp. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 52 - 53.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 106 - 107.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. pp. 170 - 171.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp. 228 - 229.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pp. 298 - 299.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. pp. 352 - 353.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. pp. 406 - 407.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pp. 14 - 16.

### Images

Figures 22-4 and 22-20 Illustrated by Jos. A. Smith

Brennen, B. (1987) Hands of light: A guide to healing through the human energy field. Bantam Books.