

JOURNEY INTO SPACE.

Introduction to Course.

By Greg White.

From a Franciscan's Prayerbook.

*. . . to know
rather consists in opening out a way
whence the imprisoned splendour
may escape
than in effecting entry for a light
supposed to be without.*

Robert Browning

The course, drawing on both art and science, amounts to a *psycho-neurological alchemy*, person-centred, self-empowering and restorative, in keeping with the spirit of a new psycho-social-spiritual mental health paradigm, gathering pace in our society and throughout the developed world.*₁ This is commonly referred to as the 'recovery model' one contesting the supremacy of the existing diagnostic 'disease-centred' model, formerly establishing the medical doctor as one's central, pre-eminent health arbiter. The recovery paradigm rather identifies the recovering *homeostasis* of the psychiatric patient him/herself as central, as 'the wounded healer'.*₂ And just as globally now, recovering psychiatric patients, as would be 'doctors by experience,' are themselves returning to psychiatric hospitals to help direct and facilitate this practice, so in like manner Greg seeks to encourage you- the 'creatively re-adjusting ordinary patient'- to identify and activate the self-same unconscious archetypal doctor within yourself, and go on hopefully to share that with others.

The methodology- locating and emphasising the positive as well as negative aspects of illness – also fundamentally challenges the conventional polarising Newtonian health philosophy of cogno-centric 'pathology only' cure; simply

ridding ourselves of negative or disease symptoms, rather than firstly viewing them mindfully as the 'painful but meaningful messages' of that archetype. To do so it evokes the more subtle 'inter-being' of mind body and spirit, aware that a cure of body -whilst providing temporary relief- won't necessarily benefit mind and spirit; just as we're presently discovering, religious 'cure of spirit', didn't/doesn't necessarily benefit mind and body.

The patient then goes on to progressively develop a personal practice of much more subtly 'letting symptoms go' and then, to his/her astonishment receives glimpses of that homeostasis, that 'imprisoned splendour' of the poet above. In this course, Greg describes how the 'ordinary patient' herself, can thus gradually regain central responsibility and creative compassionate autonomy for her own wellbeing and again in turn perhaps, as above, stand by in word and deed, a similar suffering/vocation in others. In short, our destiny is to discover we are all doctors by experience and 'out' that in whatever way it authenticates itself.

At the outset, Greg shares his personal suffering and healing experiences; through post-operative cancer, recurring kidney infections, hospital infections, and a near-fatal coronary. Along the way came the painful realisation that the homeostasis- inner orchestrator of such a process, of one's natural, immuno-harmonisation of body, mind and spirit- was not fully sustainable without falling back on first principles, with the restoration of our Complete Breath, or *Pranayama*, as it is known in the East.

First the Bad News.

"Yet each man kills the thing he loves, by each let this be heard. Some do it with a bitter look, some with a flattering word. The coward does it with a kiss, the brave man with a sword"

Oscar Wilde.*₃

A healthy child, even in our culture, starts out (albeit unconsciously) with a waking complete breath. However a close observation of the modern child will reveal it doesn't last long, soon becomes lost to fearful upper chest mouth breathing, it's death knells often to be heard reverberating in supermarkets and other public places.

It seems thousands of years ago things changed dramatically at the time of the ancient Greeks or before, when the great majority of contemporary adult humans became 'potty trained'- consensual –settled-compliant-stressed, and slowly but surely, became 'mouth breathing air bingers', hyperventilating, talking too much, unconsciously addicted to stressful upper chest breathing aka 'fight, flight and freeze' breathing , functionally symptomatic of a runaway sympathetic nervous system.

This breathing is not alone our daily default one for most of our waking hours, but crucially, also when we are asleep or more precisely, striving to sleep. Because neurologically over time, such breathing 'winds us up', stress and tension accumulate in our jaw, back neck and shoulders, inexorably feeding a tendency to dissociate, polarising our consciousness in our head, chiefly our left hemisphere. From a transpersonal, humanistic psychological perspective, this is at bottom the causal factor beneath most modern 'mental illness'. For a scientific understanding of binge breathing, check out Buteyko Breathing and The Bohr Effect, discovered by Christian Bohr in 1904 and laterally by Dr. Constantin Buteyko. 4*

Put simply, from Bohr, Buteyko realised that excessive, stressful, hurried, air breathing, actually equates with less and less absorption of oxygen, since over time our metabolism chronically 'leaks' CO₂, or oxygen receptivity. This

inexorably produces a downward health spiral, creating an increasingly acid environment and leading to greater vulnerability to disease. Over-breathing also desiccates our inner environment, meaning we require much more water and salt to compensate this*₅ One illness of many that thrives in a consistently acid environment is cancer, which notably, according to a lot of reliable research, cannot thrive in a steady alkaline/acidic ph environment.

Of course it is true, that many thousands of years ago, sympathetic breathing occupied pole position for our ancestors, since not then on top of the food chain, often vulnerable and needing to be constantly vigilant. But this is certainly not true today. So whilst the majority continue in our fear/ignorance of our extraordinary human potential for a conscious happy, fulsome *bi-polar compassionate consciousness**₆ derived from a yoga both left/ right brain mindfulness- which Oriental psychology, Einstein (physics) and Jung, Maslow and Grof (psychology) and Browning above, well understood and idealised- we continue to be severely hampered by grasping and aversion tendencies related to fight/flight/freeze breathing.

This amongst other things skews our natural sense of *Chiros* time-the time it takes- currently feeding a social addiction to so- called 'short termism'- identification with *Cronus* time – the time it is- with machines, and our inability to slow down, to settle for less, to be present, fully 'be there' for each other more. Compare this to a contented newly born infant and its natural capacity for presence.

The psychological and social consequences are, that since fearing ego loss- of- control , our ambitions and actions in the world become increasingly grasping, manic, and acquisitive; and particularly, if frustrated, primed for resentment blame and anger. But most commonly in order to fit in, we freeze/repress these feelings, because of our civilised need for attachment to the egocentric illusion of permanent consensual reality. Also we know from primatology, an

unconscious addiction to sex, serves as a palliative to violence.*7 As history well shows, anything or anyone, including our children, disturbing or questioning this *status quo*, invites ridicule or worse.

Addictive upper chest hyperventilation, together with repression, has profound implications for our day- to- day emotional health and intelligence. It prevents us making the simple subjective connexion between fear, anger and acidity and inflammation, deeply undermining our perception and morale, a function of that parasympathetic breathing through the nose from our naval- the third chakra and the centre of courage.

Now chronically lacking courage to fathom our subjective reality, we continue to obsessively look outside of ourselves for the source of the problem/solution, idealise those who appear to salve it and blame 'failing' others, by projecting our fear, anger frigidity, onto them. This is disturbing, indicative that such existential stress levels have penetrated deep levels of the contemporary psyche, impacting on pre-natal, intra-uterine consciousness. Greg demonstrated simply, how we daily unwittingly 'sow seeds' of anger on the out breath/growl and fear as in-breath gasp and how probably a confusion of those, lead to, frigidity, catatonia, dissociation. Existential? It would be naive indeed to believe that somewhere, along the line, particularly the sensitive foetus doesn't pick this up.

As within- so without. For just as hyperventilation if you like pollutes our 'inner metabolic terrain', so does environmental fallout from ever intensifying farming practice and industrial over- production from pesticides and chemicals do so to the outer. We no longer truly value Nature, because we can no longer trust our own, or *vice versa*.

If that isn't enough, the problem now is psychologically compounded by deep ego/cultural resistance to change and ego fixation on 'post natal biographical reality'. Ego started dominating our personality way back when- as toddlers-

we first said 'I am'. Emotionally, the minute the culturally reinforced ego senses the threat, it's almost certain to create mayhem with one's body, ordinary mind and spirit. *'like a drunken monkey leading a wild elephant* ..Buddhist proverb.

The Good News- The Road Back- Pranayama-Conscious Restoration of Para-Sympathetic Nervous System-Winding-Unwinding-Mindful Letting Go To My Childlike Bi-Polar Consciousness.

All the wisdom schools of the world would agree that the *raison d'être* of the human organism is to become whole, be happy, conscious of itself and relating to other humans and sentient beings; to our natural environment, towards a mundane mind-state in the above context, able to *'consciously breathlessly unwind into the jaws of death'*

The hurdle, loss of connexion to our base chakra, the foundation of our being, was/is all along strikingly pre-figured In our own Judaic founding myth, in the religious story of the loss of Paradise, the redemption of which as John Milton tells us, is about restoring what was formerly lost.

The remedy for what's lost is right under our noses, the basic natural tool, the innate compensating calming effect of the **body's natural para-sympathetic nervous system, derived from 'belly breathing'**.*⁷ need of which we insist is masked beneath a delusional plethora of calming addictive licit and illicit institutions, stimulating substances, social habits. One sure way to unmask these is also close up and within, by way of our dreams.

From the outset, previously distressed *Pranayama* participants particularly, experience it's innate relaxing restorative nature. After all, it's one and same breath we breathe nightly, but then obviously since asleep, only periodically

and unconsciously. Since it happens naturally when relaxed and asleep, the best way to first re-introduce ourselves to it is in the prone position. In seriously stressed individuals, the need for Buteykan techniques of nocturnal mouth taping, to inhibit nocturnal mouth breathing, may be indicated.

When lower diaphragm 'belly breathing' is being restored, it's initially experienced and observed to consist of three separate movements, on the inhale inflating lower, then middle then upper diaphragm. When we become slowly but surely habituated to this again, in the sitting and standing positions, and it becomes more integrated, slowly but progressively, because we can gradually reduce the amount and rate of air intake, a remarkable inner integrative transformation takes place in the personality and that 'drunken monkey' starts sobering up.*⁸ High blood pressure is lowered and in Greg's personal experience, with this comes noticeable ease with which old unwanted addictive habits are discarded.

Healthy breathing is always in through the nose and periodically three or four deep complete breaths –slowly, quietly, gently and regularly-are usually sufficient to oxygenate the system and clear out toxins. (70% of to body toxins are clear via breath, exhalation and lower wind). Now as we are 'unwinding' ourselves slowly and subtly, the neurological benefits of integrated lower middle and upper diaphragm and nose breathing –which over time are characterised by more subtle and less air breathing- inevitably allow access to more subtle healing levels of consciousness.

A new mindfulness derives from the calming effect on circular thinking and fight, flight, freeze breathing. Because it first compensates, then compliments upper chest breathing, the body's homeostasis- previously in a relatively parlous state- is gradually restored, and an increasingly less polarising, more balanced, holistic worldview begins to dawn.

However, this is not to say that the restorative spirit will not continue to be

sorely tested by the short-termist collective ego, e.g. the nagging sentiment, 'why is this taking so long' which previously dominated our greater personality. That 'wild elephant' doesn't tame easily and will likely throw all sorts of 'spanners in the works', including illness symptoms, to convince the inner voyager to return to ego surrender. This can be especially so, when and if we accelerate our approach with the Buteyko breathing technique- a more clinical, direct and challenging intervention.

In this context, personally in the darkest hours, Greg found the words of Jesus to Thomas in the Gnostic Gospel consolingly instructive.

" First ye will be troubled, then astonished, then 'liberated'. This an incredibly wise healing template for this and all therapeutic journeys, an insight into how to anticipate the storm, the clearing effect, that inner splendour thereafter.*⁹
How so?

Seemingly Jesus, as later Shantideva*¹⁰, knowing human nature, was also aware of that downward spiral, that true healing starts with that CO₂ draining, troubling ego-denying personal problem which if (a) we breathlessly hang in there with it, let go into it, don't abandon its meaning, acknowledging it as our inner child 'wounded healer' archetype, we'll be (b) astonished to see that consciously staying with breathlessness, the troubling symptoms disappear and (c) we transcend the whole episode. Unfortunately we cannot do that, if we can neither muster the courage or capacity. This is fundamentally where *Pranayama* comes in.

Each time that ego distress/pain happens, knowing from Jesus above that redemption beckons, because 'less pressurised', we learn to spot it is the ego acting up. Having the courage to NOT CLOSE OUT, hang in there, calming the breath defying 'trouble- as -messenger' and gently-regularly- quietly – silently be breathed, from down there at the Third Chakra , our consciousness slips into the right hemisphere and to our astonishment, restores our integrity, and

for now, we let go of those symptoms.

So the good news is that following that template, we won't have to be reminded when to breathe with our wounded healer. Like a GOOD/BAD PENNY the fear, anger discomfort or pain of ego resistance he/she can always be guaranteed to REMIND US!! Thus over time paradoxically, Greg has learned to rather welcome pain and fear as fresh signs of ego resistance to conscious fear of living in the moment/living and dying impermanence, as often cold fearful wounded healer messages of being/not being, on the right path!?*¹¹

To conclude, make absolutely no mistake, one can gradually now readily reconcile the subtle breathless fruits of a resting well-oxygenated organism- subtle breathing ' quietly, calmly, slowly, regularly, -with the ancient dictum of Lao Tzu*¹² transforming our consciousness, making it increasingly more compassionate, subtle, pliable, mindful, playful, opening us to our wholeness and at-one-ment.

Reference.

*1 Echart Tolle. Meaning of 'Mental Illness' <http://youtu.be/0lagC4I7SO0> HSE. Irish Vision for Change.- The Recovery Movement. See Eleanor Longden www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgZHOSxN5cE&feature=share&list=PL31642C6F316BF66D <http://>

*2 The Wounded Healer <http://youtu.be/orxEawi9qro>

*3'Show me the stone the builder rejects; that one is the cornerstone'. Gnostic Gosp.St.Thomas

*4 The Bohr Effect. Buteyko Breathing.

*5 Note how often we get an emergency hospital treatment of a saline solution of water, yet how seldom a medical diagnosis of 'dehydration' and 'salt deficiency'; similarly a capnographic monitoring of co2 leakage as intensive care, but rarely if ever a diagnosis linking said leakage's connexion to threat to organism and/or relative to ph levels.

*6 .The Clinical Equivalent of the Gift of Mindfulness.

. *7 The Bonobo..our nearest relative.

*8 'Breathing' CD by Dr Andrew Weil, Arizona State University.

* 9 Complete breath restored. *

* 10 Listen to Beethoven's Sixth Pastoral Symphony.

*11 Shantideva. 8th Century Buddhist Academic Sage at Nalanda University.

*12 "Blessed is the man who has suffered and found life" Gnostic Gospel Jesus

*13.'The perfect man, doesn't breathe at all'. Lao Tzu.

GW. May 2013.